

The South Africans believe that SWAPO's 'ideological framework is based on Communism', but exploits what are described as 'the existing norms and infra-structure of the democracy of South-West Africa.' There follows a list of 20 'existing institutions' said to be used by the organisation. Top is the *Windhoek Observer*, its editor, the outspoken Afrikaner Hannes Smith, and his political editor, Gwen Lister. The weekly paper, which was temporarily banned by the South African authorities recently, has been found on dead fighters and in SWAPO bases, say the minutes. The list includes hardy annuals like Amnesty International, the International Red Cross, Jehovah's Witnesses, foreign media and TV, the Council of Churches of Namibia, 'priests of the Roman church', Methodists and Anglicans and draft dodgers. Also singled out for comment is the use of terms like 'Namibia' and 'guerrillas' by the Press, the public and government departments, 'in other words, the recognition of the language of the revolutionary'.

'What is really disturbing', say the minutes, 'is the damaging of military equipment by military personnel which could indicate sabotage, particularly if the negative attitude of certain conscripts is taken into consideration'. Here, 'political convictions do play a role'. There is a warning about 'the increasing use of dagga (marijuana) and drugs, especially among conscripts, which makes such people susceptible to manipulation by the enemy'. And also: 'All forms of immorality'. Though not spelt out, this would refer to sexual relations between white soldiers and black Namibians. The role which women play in spying, the officers were warned, should not be underestimated.

At one stage, the minutes talk of attempts by SWAPO to confirm co-operation of the Republic of South Africa with 'Project Forrester' and how to compromise it. This seems to refer to South Africa's aid to Jonas Savimbi, whose UNITA rebels are fighting the Angolan government. One aspect of this co-operation is the removal of valuable timber from Angola on trucks driven through Namibia to finance Savimbi's activities. Not surprisingly, attempts have been made to plot the work of Soviet bloc spies in the region. In Zambia, Angola and Botswana, they have detected 93 Russian and 61 East German 'suspected agents'. The CIA, Britain's MI6 and the West German intelligence services are 'constantly trying to collect information', they complain. The South Africans are clearly worried about the monitoring of their troop movements by American and Soviet satellites. In this state of paranoia, no one is beyond suspicion. Foreign visitors, who under cover of scientific or anthropological research, 'commit subversion', must be watched.

ed. Brian Wood
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7. The gods must be crazy, but the state has a plan: government policies towards the San in Namibia and Botswana

Richard Lee

SUMMARY:

This paper gives a report of the experience, since 1960, of the !Kung San people in north-eastern Namibia and Botswana. It documents the history of South African intervention in the San's lifestyle and living arrangements which involve intensive militarisation and a 'hearts and minds campaign' designed to present SWAPO as the enemy of peace and progress. The !Kung San are being militarily trained to seek out and fight SWAPO combatants. Richard Lee contrasts this with the situation of the !Kung San in Botswana, indicating the developments associated with class consolidation in the Botswana economy and the consequent, comparative neglect of San interests. Despite certain difficulties, the !Kung San in Botswana are better placed to defend their interests in the future. By contrast, the Namibian !Kung San are in a rapidly deteriorating situation. The violent attack of South African moral and political propaganda, the racial ideology and economic devastation will do inestimable devastation to the !Kung San culture and survival. In conclusion Richard Lee calls for support for the !Kung San Foundation in Namibia but more importantly, for a SWAPO victory which would guarantee a considered and democratically defined plan for the !Kung San's future.

The recent box-office film, 'The Gods must be Crazy', is an amusing but thinly disguised piece of South African propaganda in which a peculiar element of South African white mythology receives prominent attention. I refer to that 'noblest of noble savages', the Kalahari Bushmen. After the extermination of the Bushmen inside South Africa, the South African popular consciousness then adopted 'the little brown men' as a kind of mascot embodying the timeless values of a lost world. The notion that there are Bushmen in the 1980s that have remained untouched by 'civilization' is a cruel joke. The so-called 'Bushmen' (now commonly referred to as the San) have been the subject of a century of rapid social change and especially in the last 20 years have been forced to endure all the 'benefits' of South Africa's *apartheid* policies in Namibia.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the current situation of the San and how they have been affected by South African repression in Namibia, and to explore the contrasting policies for 'minorities' in the neighbouring Republic of Botswana. I will focus on the !Kung San, a former hunting and gathering people who live in north eastern Namibia and north western Botswana along a strategic border area. I have worked with the !Kung for over 20 years.

Unlike the filmic Bushmen, the South-African-controlled !Kung in Namibia - if we are to believe recent South African press reports - are fierce and war-like, loyal to their white

masters and hateful of SWAPO, while the !Kung of liberal capitalist Botswana are portrayed as peaceful and picturesque, though disadvantaged and isolated, and in need of being drawn into the national political and educational mainstream. These contrasting images are the outcome of two decades of intense social change in which the formerly remote !Kung have been the subject of national and international attention, not the least of which has been the growth of the San into a minor industry for writers, film makers, journalists and anthropologists.

How are the !Kung surviving the press of all this attention? I will consider Namibia first, then Botswana, and finally try to situate our findings in the context of the symposium.

Namibia

!Kung speakers comprise over half of the estimated 21,000 San in Namibia. The majority of the San live as farm labourers in white areas. About 30% of the 11,000 !Kung live in Bushmanland, a tiny 'homeland' set aside for Bushmen under South Africa's *apartheid* policies for Namibia.

In 1960, the !Kung of Nyae Nyae became involved in an intensive 20-year campaign by the South Africans to settle and 'tame' the 'wild' Bushmen. Tsum!kwi, a waterhole with about 45 people resident in the 1950's, ballooned to a resident population of between 700 and 900 by 1965. Weekly distribution of food rations kept the people glued to Tsum!kwi in spite of the lack of training programs or real job opportunities. Through the 1960s, as I continued my fieldwork across the border in Botswana, I heard tales of life at Tsum!kwi: the fights and free-for-alls, the home-brew parties, the on-and-off jobs, the missionary activities. Periodically when the rations ran out or when the white administrator became angry with the !Kung, the store and food depot would be closed and the people would immediately evaporate back to the bush or drift across the border to the Dobe area which received an average of 150 Tsum!kwi visitors a year.

The government policies vis-a-vis the San went through two phases after the 1960 creation of Bushmanland. In phase one, the South Africans supported the San on welfare and made missionary efforts in their direction. The Reverend C. Weiche of the Dutch Reformed Church, who spent over 15 years at Tsum!kwi, made few converts, but he did translate the Gospels into !Kung and he is acknowledged by the !Kung and others to be the best foreign !Kung linguist. !Kung language primers were produced and a !Kung medium school opened at Tsum!kwi, with a classical 'Bantu education': reading, writing, simple arithmetic, Bible study, and Afrikaans as the second language. Chronic deficits, lack of job opportunities, and the absence of any real development were characteristic of the Tsum!kwi settlement scheme up to 1985.

A new phase began with the militarisation of the San. Through the early 1970s the militants of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) made steady progress, winning more and more Namibians to the cause of liberation and expanding the armed struggle deeper into Namibia. In 1974-75 South Africa made some major decisions about the future of Namibia: first, they increased vastly their military presence in Namibia; and, second, they Namibianised the conflict by recruiting South West Africans into ethnic battalions. Third, they attempted to move the country towards 'independence' through setting up puppet political movements, a manoeuvre which if successful would leave SWAPO out in the cold.

The !Kung San have been seriously affected by all these decisions. The result has been a thoroughgoing militarisation of Namibia and of San life in particular. The army is now the

largest employer and the *de facto* administration in most of northern Namibia, especially Bushmanland. South Africa now maintains an estimated 100,000 troops in Namibia and still occupies a part of southern Angola.

In 1975, the 31 Battalion, the Pied Cow Battalion, was formed at Base Omega in the eastern Caprivi. The core of the unit was a group of Vasakela !Kung who had worked with the Portuguese army in Angola and who were recruited en masse into the South African Armed forces. Local !Kung and other San groups were also recruited. Base Omega now contains over 3,000 San, about 800 of whom are soldiers and the rest dependents. It is a base for launching attacks into Angola and is a prime stop for journalists touring the war zone. Omega is a propaganda showplace for the civic action programs of the SADF and gets enthusiastic reviews from the tightly controlled South African press. The following is a typical example:

Deep in the dense Caprivi bush a colony of Bushmen are being taught a new culture and a new way of life by the White man. More than a thousand Bushmen have already discarded the bow and arrow for the R1 rifle and their wives are making clothes out of cotton instead of skin. Gone are their days of hunting animals for food and living off the yield. They now have 'braaivleis' and salads with salt and pepper while the men wear boots and their ladies dress in the latest fashions. Their children go to schools and sing in choirs The men are being trained as soldiers while their womenfolk learn how to knit, sew, and cook. Well-built wooden bungalows in neat rows are their homes although some of them still prefer to erect shanties next to them . . . It is an open camp and the people may come and go as they please, but most of them prefer to stay.

(Windhoek Advertiser, September 1977)

Perhaps the biggest PR coup for the SADF was a cover story on Omega in *Soldier of Fortune*, the American mercenary magazine (May, 1980). The !Kung of Nyae Nyae and Dobe live some 200km south of the Caprivi strip and were not immediately affected by the liberation struggle. From the early 1970s !Kung trackers were recruited to patrol the border with Botswana on a daily basis, but there were few if any contacts with SWAPO. That is why the subsequent militarisation of Bushmanland is all the more unjustified. In July of 1978 the SADF formed the 36 Battalion with headquarters at Tsum!kwi. The formation of 36, now called 203 Battalion, is documented in John Marshall's film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980).

The coming of the army was the economic boon that the people of Tsum!kwi had been waiting for. The pay was fabulous, starting at R120 per month and currently between R300 and R600. Some 150 !Kung men between the ages of 20 and 50 have flocked to the army, in all about 40% of the adult male population of Bushmanland. It even included some !Kung from the Botswana side of the border.

The SADF Ethnology Department, advised by Dr. Kuno Budack, a German doctor resident in Namibia, set up Battalion 203 in an unorthodox manner. Whereas Omega is essentially a fortified village or strategic hamlet of the Vietnam or Rhodesian variety, the soldiers of 203 are spread out at seven different bases each consisting of 60-80 !Kung soldiers and dependents and their white officers. The army now dominates the life of Bushmanland; and in their never ending flow of PR the army portrays their activities as simply a good-hearted program in social development. Writing in *Armed Forces*, a South African military magazine, one journalist wrote:

From its inception 36 has a multiple mission to perform: to raise and train a light infantry battalion from among the Bushmen; to provide area security for Bushman-

land; to provide work opportunities for them as they enter the cash economy. Of these, the development role has consistently grown in importance . . .

(Heitman, 1980)

An interesting and, to anthropologists, unusual rationale is offered for this massive program of forced acculturation. Responding to the charges that the SADF is destroying San culture by its militarisation, Commandant Hall of the SADF has said:

I have been accused that I am interfering with noble tribal members, but there is nothing noble about people who are riddled with sickness. The Bushman in his natural state had no proper (behoorlike) tribal system – only a reasonable desperate day to day existence. We are busy changing their lives drastically and we are reacting thereto by attempting to give them skills and values. It is a responsibility which we must accept and do something about. If the Bushmen must eat our food, have good money in their pockets and buy our products, we must give them new values. It will be disastrous not to do it. These values are those of health, hygiene, education and the use of the ground. I like to believe that we are succeeding. I came to the Caprivi as an ordinary soldier. Now I am a sort of headman and father confessor to them. They come to me for advice and to solve domestic problems. I have already several divorced couples, but I usually listen to their stories and say that they must come back the next week. In nine out of ten cases they become reconciled. This undertaking has become my whole life. When the Defence Force withdraws, I would not like to see these wonderful people sinking back to their aimlessness, but it could easily happen.

(Volksblad 9/6/80)

Politically the people of Bushmanland have been drawn into South Africa's Bantustan game plan for a neo-colonial Namibia. The territory has been divided into ten 'ethnic homelands' plus a large white area. Each one is a mini-state with administrative organs, police force, ethnic regiment, and representation in the territorial pseudo-government led until recently by the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). Bushmanland's DTA representative was Geelbooi (Yellowboy) Kashe, the Minister for Water Affairs in the DTA 'government'. Minister Geelbooi until recently lived in a grass hut in front of which he parked his chauffeur driven Mercedes while in Tsum!kwi. Like all DTA ministers, Geelbooi has a white 'advisor', euphemistically called a 'secretary', who does most of the talking on the Minister's behalf. Judging from the South African media, Geelbooi Kashe is a loyal supporter of the South African army's magazine:

If the lives and future of my people were not threatened, it would never have been necessary to carry arms, to be on guard continuously or be involved in any military training. Now, however, our lives, the guarantee of democracy for my people and the continuation of our ethnic culture, are threatened by evil forces. Because of that, our lives, democracy and culture have to be defended at all costs and with whatever means and authority that can be mustered. *The need for the presence of a territorial force in Bushmanland should be evident to all – such a military presence is a guarantee of safety and stability . . .*

The giraffe has his kick, the lion his teeth, the tiger his claws and the buffalo his horns to frighten off the enemy. We, the Bushmen, we have our Territory Force! The Bushman welcomes the presence of 203 Battalion in Bushmanland – the Battalion is the Bushman's horns, teeth, claws and kick! (emphasis in original)

Not all the !Kung agree with Geelbooi. In *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* ‡Toma n!wa, a star of the classic film *The Hunters* and former Tsum!kwi headman, expressed support for SWAPO and grave misgivings about South Africa's intentions:

SWAPO won't kill us. We're good with SWAPO and good with these soldiers too. . . . We're good people. We'd share the pot with SWAPO. But these soldiers are the owners of fighting. They fight when they play and I fear them. I won't let my children be soldiers, the experts at anger. The soldiers will bring the killing, this I know.

Many !Kung I spoke with during field trips in 1980 and 1983 shared ‡Toma's sentiments.

The game park

In the byzantine world of South West African politics, the latest threat to Bushmanland comes not from the military but from an entirely different quarter. The Game Conservation Department has proposed that the eastern half of Bushmanland be turned into a game park and the entire population of Nyae Nyae !Kung be moved to western Bushmanland, an arid, poorly-watered and unpopulated wasteland. This plan would remove the Nyae Nyae !Kung from ancestral lands, and be a serious obstacle to development of a cattle economy for the !Kung. It would also provide, in the opinion of some observers, a free-fire zone for the military.

The massive removal of the whole !Kung population would be quite in keeping with South African racial policies of eliminating 'Black Spots' by moving populations at will. This basically insane plan (there is no other word to describe it) has been opposed by John Marshall, an American film-maker and anthropologist, who returned to Tsum!kwi to do two years of applied fieldwork between 1980 and 1982 in collaboration with Clare Ritchie. They have worked extremely hard to put forward an alternative plan of decentralising the !Kung by encouraging them to move back to their traditional lands *with* their cattle, to hunt, gather *and* farm in these new settlements, a plan that strongly resembles the out-station movement of central and western Australia. By late 1983 five bands had been reconstituted this way, living on their land but with continued access to schools and clinics.

So far the out-station movement can be counted a modest success, but the Game Park Proposal is very much alive. As recent press reports indicate, the fate of the Tsum!kwi !Kung is hanging in the balance. (*Windhoek Observer* 7/7/84, *Rand Daily Mail* 5/7/84, *Windhoek Advertiser* 5/7/84).

Botswana

Military considerations have come increasingly to dominate South African policy toward the San. Thus, it is a refreshing contrast to turn to Botswana, a country with a small standing army, a stable government, and a commitment to multi-racialism. This does not mean that San policy in Botswana is without problems; there are plenty. But the problems are of a different order of magnitude from those faced by the San of Namibia.

There are 30 – 35,000 San in Botswana, and about 4,000 of these are !Kung speakers. Before independence in 1966, only one member of the colonial government was involved in research and policy recommendations regarding the Bushmen. George Siblingbauer's pioneering Bushman Survey Report of 1965 was directed entirely to the /Gwi of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and to the problems of Bushman 'squatters' on the Ghanzi farms. The !Kung of the North-west District where Dobe is located played a peripheral role in government concerns, a situation that continues to the present day.

In the euphoria following Independence little attention was paid to the San or other minorities. First, the new government of Seretse Khama had its hands full trying to

develop an international posture independent of South Africa, and second, the government was reluctant to single out any ethnic group for special treatment, least of all a despised minority such as the San whom the Botswana call the Basarwa.

This attitude was to change dramatically after 1974 when the government reversed its position of benign neglect and founded a small sub-department in the Ministry of Local Government and Lands entitled the Bushman Development Office (BDO) with a staff of one. The BDO's budget was minuscule but it did symbolise government recognition that some consideration had to be given to the special problems of the very isolated cattleless people. This essentially admirable aim has characterised the service ever since. After going through several terminological changes, The BDO became what it is now called, the Remote Area Dwellers Programme - RADP. This became a high profile program with real gains for the Remote Area target populations. Well digging, school hostels, agricultural assistance were some of the main RADP activities through the 1970s.

The major impetus to the formation of the RADP, it now appears, was the implementation of the Tribal Grazing Lands Policy (TGLP). This vast exercise in commercialisation of land tenure was designed to take the land out of tribal tenure and reallocate it to individual wealthy Botswana for large-scale cattle production. Much of the land earmarked for these ranches, however, was land held by the groups of foraging San. The Policy threatened to turn Remote Area dwellers into squatters on the land they had traditionally occupied for centuries. It was the desire to ensure an orderly and if possible just turnover of land from communal to private ownership that prompted the creation of the RADP.

Robert Hitchcock (1979) has documented abuses, and how in implementation, the TGLP has fallen far short of expectation. Despite the good intentions of RADP, pressures within Botswana society are leading to class formation and a scramble for land. Especially in the eastern districts, the interests of Remote Area dwellers take second place to the interests of wealthy cattlemen (but at least they're not being shot at and killed in combat.) The Dobe area in north-western Botswana has a very low priority in the RADP's plans. In the 1982-3 fiscal year, the North West District absorbed only 2% of the budget of the RADP. RADP helped the !Kung dig one well and improve a few others. The Dobe !Kung now have a mixed economy comprised of roughly one-third foraging, one-third farming and herding, and one-third cash economy. (Most of the cash comes from sales of crafts and migrant labour.)

Botswana is simply not in a position to engage in welfare colonialism, to pump the amounts of cash into the San economy that characterised the infusions in South African controlled Bushmanland. There will be no chauffeured Mercedes for the village councilors of Dobe. And this is a blessing. The pace of change for San at Dobe and elsewhere in Botswana is quick but at a pace that can be absorbed. Though the class structure of Botswana is crystallising rapidly around them, the survival of the Botswana San is not at issue.

The future of foragers

Where are the San heading and what can we do about it? The situation in Botswana is critical but not serious, but the same cannot be said of Namibia, where a tragedy of Vietnamese proportions may be in the making. One of the points that puzzles and concerns me is the absence of any real political movement among the San of either Namibia or Botswana. The awakening of political consciousness has been the key to the

mobilisation of band and tribal peoples in many parts of the developed and developing world. The Australian out-station movement, the Dene nation of Canada and the many recent political movements in the Pacific and among the Indians of North, Central, and South America are examples of the coming into being of modern struggles for self-determination. If there are any signs of this among the San, it would be a valuable development.

South Africa, to its lasting discredit, is manufacturing a persona for the !Kung not to satisfy the !Kung need for gaining the means of determining their own future, but rather to fulfil South Africa's own need for loyal black allies. The Army's propaganda is creating an image of the San that is bloodthirsty to say the least. 'We'll get you, SWAPO' screamed one recent headline, and the text continued, 'A Bushman's hate for SWAPO will give you the shivers . . .' said Commandant Botes. 'They hate SWAPO because they enslaved them and took their daughters for prostitutes' (Johannesburg *Sunday Tribune*, 1/3/81). Another dispatch called them 'the little men with the big kill rate', and yet another calls them 'agile little brown men with razor sharp senses and a killer instinct' (*Sunday Times* 11, 1979). The army propaganda unit is constantly trying to drum up animosity between San and Blacks, when in fact the historical and contemporary record shows a basically friendly relation between Blacks and San (cf. R. Gordon 1983). In short, the current militarisation of the San is not a good-hearted civic action program. The military is not simply teaching the !Kung cooking, sewing and hygiene. To say that what the military is giving to the !Kung is a new life, a chance to come into the modern world, is to make a mockery of social change and a travesty of development.

What can be done? Several things. We can support the !Kung San Foundation in Namibia, a division of Cultural Survival, and the Kalahari Peoples Fund in Botswana. These organisations are working to ameliorate the conditions of San life, within the parameters set by the regimes currently in power. This may be the best we can hope for, for the Botswana San, but in the long term the best thing that could happen to the San of Namibia is a SWAPO victory. SWAPO has earned the right to come to power in Namibia. It has widespread popular support, it is staunchly non-racial and it is recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Namibia people by the UN, the OAU, and by a large majority of the world's governments. SWAPO militants are systematically trained to see their struggle in class rather than ethnic or racial terms. Because SWAPO members emphasise that it is a social system that needs to be destroyed and not an individual or a person, a government in their hands would be the best hope for the !Kung.

What about the possibility of reprisals against the San after a SWAPO victory? Some people have asked me, 'Don't you think that because the !Kung supported the South Africans they would be victimised by SWAPO once it came to power?' I don't believe this will happen. Many !Kung support SWAPO and some San are fighting in SWAPO's ranks, though they are not identified as such. The SWAPO leadership also realises that the San are not the only people fighting alongside the South Africans, and that the South African Army has a regiment of every major ethnic group. As a SWAPO militant, captured by a detachment of San soldiers, told them, 'We are not after you Bushmen. We are only after the South Africans. We don't want to hurt you, because you and we should be working together. This country belongs to us all'.

Because SWAPO phrases its struggle in class rather than ethnic terms, I am confident that when it comes to power in Namibia the San will be treated well and will be able to maintain their cultural identity. If we truly want to see justice done in Namibia and Botswana, for all the people and not just the San, we should work to end the war and to hold free and fair elections in Namibia.

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