15. From foragers to fighters: South Africa's militarization of the Namibian San

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We know SWAPO. They won't kill us. We'd share the pot with SWAPO.
- a !Kung elder at Chum!kwe

If we go, the Bushmen will go with us.
- South African commander of !Kung army base

Generations of students in anthropology and social science classes have been introduced to the Kalahari San (Bushmen) as examples of hunter-gatherer societies. They are told that the hunting or foraging way of life was once the universal mode of human existence. Many of the case studies anthropologists use to illustrate their lectures were carried out 10 to 50 or more years ago before the penetration of European colonialism and capitalism. Too often, what they are not told is what these hunter-gatherers are doing today.

Several of the papers in this volume document the political mobilization of the foraging peoples in the face of threats to their land base and cultural identity.

The !Kung San of Namibia have not yet mobilized and the threat they face is not to their land but to their very lives. Since the early 1970s, some of the !Kung have been drawn into the military orbit of the South African Defence Forces. Their militarization, ostensibly to fight against the freedom fighters of SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) illustrates in graphic terms the techniques used by South African imperialism to preserve at any cost the interests of capital in southern Africa.

The goal of this paper is to document this militarization and to show that just as history does not stand still, neither does the subject matter of anthropology come to an end when the last hunter-gatherer lays down his bow. The challenge to anthropologists is two-fold, to understand
the dangerous realities facing native peoples, and also to do something about them.

**The San as hunter-gatherers**

The devastating impact of European 'civilization' on the small-scale societies of the non-western world is well known. The Aborigines of Tasmania and the West Indies, the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland, and the Xam Bushmen of South Africa were all exterminated by land-hungry European settlers before 1900. Hundreds of other aboriginal
societies in Canada, the United States, Australia, and South America, having survived the initial onslaught, have continued into the present but with reduced numbers and a shrunken land base. In a very few parts of the world favoured by extreme isolation, hunting and gathering peoples managed to survive into the mid-twentieth century with their numbers, social organization and economy essentially intact.

The interior !Kung San of the northern Kalahari of Botswana and Namibia (South West Africa) were one such people. Living at a ring of pans and natural springs around the Aha Mountain range and surrounded by a belt of waterless uninhabited country 50–150 kilometres wide, the 1,000 interior !Kung San were almost entirely unknown to outsiders until the 1950s.


As a result of these two long-term projects involving over thirty scientists from a variety of fields, the interior !Kung San of Nyae Nyae, Dobe, and /Xai/xai are now among the best-documented hunter-gatherers in the history of social science.

Far less well known to the world, however, are the traumatic events that have overtaken the !Kung in the 1970s after the bulk of the anthropological studies were completed. Starting out as the most isolated hunter-gatherers in Southern Africa, the !Kung San have been drawn by the South African Army into the middle of a shooting war. Having survived for thousands of years in the desert the !Kung’s very physical survival is now threatened by the South African military machine.

The San and apartheid

The mineral-rich territory of Namibia, also known as South West Africa, has an area of 318,000 square miles and a population of 1.5 million. Its major exports include copper, nickel, uranium, diamonds, fish and karakul sheep furs. Germany ruled South West Africa from 1885 to 1915. After the First World War, South Africa took over the colony under a League of Nations Mandate. During the 1920s and 30s South Africa
moved thousands of White settlers into South West Africa and developed a thriving economy based on the abundant natural resources and a plentiful supply of cheap black labour. Following World War Two when all the mandate powers turned their mandates over to the jurisdiction of the United Nations Trusteeship Council, South Africa alone refused to relinquish its control over South West Africa. It continued to administer the colony as if it were a fifth province of the Union. With the complicity of a number of multi-national companies including Canada’s Hudson’s Bay Company and Falconbridge Nickel, South Africa continued to exploit the mineral, fishery and agricultural wealth of South West Africa.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s the people of the country petitioned the UN, the World Court and international public opinion for redress for their intolerable situation. Only token support for their struggle was given by the West, while inside the country peaceful protests were met by more and more violence and repression.

In the isolated border regions, however, peoples such as the !Kung were only peripherally involved in these events. Until the 1930s the !Kung San were a single people moving freely from east to west in search of food and friends. In 1965 a fence was built along the Botswana-Namibia border dividing the population into what the !Kung themselves called the ‘Boer San’ and ‘British San’. As was the case with so many African peoples, the imposition of colonialism led formerly united groups to follow different historical paths.

As its claim to South West Africa (SWA) was increasingly being called into question at the UN, South Africa sought to strengthen its grip on the border regions and to establish a colonial infrastructure where none had existed before. South Africa built a series of government stations in northern SWA in the period 1960-5 and all the !Kung in Nyae Nyae were summoned to come and settle at a station called Chum!kwe with the promise of free rations and medical care. In the first few years of the settlement some 700 people were gathered in, far more than had been expected, and the South Africans were faced with the problem of whom to accept and whom to exclude. The neighbouring Botswana Blacks were rigidly excluded and their cattle and other livestock were shot on sight if they were caught straying across the border from the Botswana side. But how were they to distinguish between !Kung from SWA and !Kung from Botswana when in their eyes all !Kung looked alike, were related by kinship, and all moved freely back and forth?

The South West African Department of Native Affairs had compiled
data on !Kung geographical place names in Botswana (BP) and SWA. The administrators hit upon the idea of using these data to determine who was a bona fide SWA !Kung and who was not. When !Kung men and women reported to the settlement’s office for their weekly ration of maize meal, the clerk looked them up in these data; if they qualified as a resident of a waterhole on the SWA side of the border they were issued a metal dog-tag; each was stamped with a unique number and had to be presented each time food was handed out. If their place did not happen to fall in SWA, they were told, in the words of one informant: ‘You are not our Bushmen. Go back to BP side; the British will take care of you.’

The strong !Kung institutions of sharing and gift exchange initially foiled this crude attempt at Divide and Rule. A lively trade in dog-tags sprang up on both sides of the border. Dog-tags bearing specific numbers were frequently passed from hand to hand as Chum!kwe residents offered their BP relatives a month or more of Boer hospitality at the settlement scheme.

Gradually the South Africans instituted a system of payments for wage-labour and phased out food hand-outs; the traffic in dog-tags declined but visiting and sharing of food rations continued despite the ban on BP !Kung.

In the mid-1960s other techniques of domination were introduced by the South Africans. A Dutch Reformed Church missionary-linguist was sent to Chum!kwe. To gain the confidence of the !Kung at first he simply handed out food and medical care. Later he began to preach the gospel in the !Kung language and to be openly hostile to !Kung traditional healing dances, calling them the work of the devil. Next a school was opened offering instruction in the lower primary grades. !Kung was the language of instruction with Afrikaans, but not English or Oshiwambo, offered as a second language (Oshiwambo is the majority language of Namibia). The exclusive use of !Kung and Afrikaans was part and parcel of the system of domination. (1) It opened up an exclusive channel of communication for ruling-class (i.e. Afrikaner) ideology. (2) It limited communication between the !Kung and their Bantu-speaking neighbours in other parts of South West Africa. (3) It limited the !Kung ability to listen to radio broadcasts in English or in African languages from the countries of Black Africa which offered alternative political viewpoints to those of Afrikanerdom.

Once the full apartheid apparatus was in place other developments followed quickly. Religious instruction for adults and children became part of the programme of the Chum!kwe school and some of the gospels
were translated into !Kung. Christian ideas were a long time in taking root among the !Kung, but in September 1973 the Windhoek newspapers reported mass conversions at Chum!kwe, as many !Kung renounced the old ways and embraced Jesus Christ as their saviour.

Economically the !Kung were introduced to the ‘value’ of wage-labour and the importance of consumer goods. Transistor radios, Western clothing, powdered milk and commercial baby foods became popular items in the Chum!kwe store. With the new consumerism and exposure to racist advertising, the !Kung rapidly grew to be contemptuous of their own personal appearance. The Chum!kwe storekeeper reported to Lee that hair-straightening and skin-lightening creams had become the most popular items and the store could barely keep them in stock because of the great demand. Much of the remaining !Kung income went into ingredients for brewing home-brew beer. The Chum!kwe settlement in the late 1960s became the site of marathon drinking bouts, brawls, and absenteeism and child neglect caused by drinking. (It was the devastating effect of the drinking that the !Kung claimed drove them to religious conversion; a good example of the capitalist system providing both the cause of the corruption and its ‘cure’.)

The full apartheid system also made provision for political ‘leaders’ to be appointed from the native community. The traditional !Kung had lacked all forms of chieftainship or headmanship; what leaders there were exerted their influence in subtle and indirect ways; in a strongly egalitarian society they could persuade but not command. The new leaders appointed by the Native Affairs Department therefore had little credibility with the people and there was a rapid turnover of the occupants of these positions.

The San inhabitants of Chum!kwe enthusiastically took to the ideas of free food and medical care but remained, in general, suspicious or uncertain about the security of their new life and about the Afrikaners’ long-term intentions. An indication of this reserve was the continuing importance of the SWA !Kung attached to maintaining links with their hunting and gathering relatives across the border in Botswana. Rarely a month passed when there weren’t 40 or 50 Chum!kwe residents paying visits to their kin at the Dobe area waterholes.
The struggle for liberation

The !Kung San are only one of a dozen ethnic groups in the territory of Namibia. The bulk of the population is made up of Bantu-speaking peoples such as the Ovambo, Kavango, Kwanyama, and Herero, as well as the Khoikhoi-speaking Nama, Damara and other groups. San people like the !Kung in fact constitute only about two per cent of the black population of the country. And in many ways the fate of the !Kung under the apartheid system was vastly different from that of their compatriots.

While the !Kung enjoyed some material benefits from the South African occupation, the great majority of the people of Namibia were moved into overcrowded reserves from which they were forced in ever-increasing numbers to migrate out in order to find work in the mines and ranches of the territory. The low pay, harsh working conditions and lack of political freedom, coupled with the illegality and intransigence of the South African regime, drove the working people increasingly towards militant nationalist political organizations as their main salvation. After years of unsuccessful peaceful appeals to the South African regime, it became clear to the bulk of the people that armed struggle was the only way that Namibia could become free. In 1966 SWAPO – the liberation movement representing the vast majority of the Namibian people and recognized as their authentic representative by the UN and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – initiated an armed liberation struggle with a series of attacks on South African military installations in the Caprivi Strip. Since then SWAPO has won the support of the great majority of the people in the urban centres and larger reserves. Most Western observers agree that if a free election were held in Namibia SWAPO would get between 70 and 90 per cent of the vote.

With the opening of the resistance movement South Africa’s occupation tactics entered a new phase. In many parts of the Third World European powers have tried to hold on to colonies and neo-colonies by force. From the British experience in Malaya, the French and later American experience in Indo-China and the Portuguese in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, the Western powers gradually have built up a textbook of counter-insurgency warfare techniques to attempt to stifle or forestall the coming to power of progressive and popular revolutionary movements in the Third World. This kit of techniques now came into play with the South African occupation forces of Namibia. The
story is eerily reminiscent of the use that the American Special Forces units (Green Berets) made of the Montagnard tribesmen of the strategic central highlands of Vietnam.

Paramilitary tracking units.

After a decade of experience administering the San settlement at Chum!kwe the South African Police, (SAP), around 1970, began the wholesale incorporation of some of the bands into paramilitary tracking units directly involved in the anti-guerrilla war. The SAP chose the most isolated and politically least sophisticated of the bands, and they set these units up in isolated border posts where they are 'protected' against outside influences, and are virtual prisoners of the army, dependent on them for their water and their weekly rations and for other supplies.

These units are spaced at camps, 40–60 kilometres apart along the border fence and they follow a regular routine. Every morning two trackers set out from each post, one to the north the other to the south, scanning the sand for fresh tracks. Two trackers meet in the middle of the sector, compare notes, and may spend the night camped on the road. The next day they return to their respective posts, and another set of trackers set out. Thus any incursion into the territory is reported to the Police within hours.

The duties of the trackers also include frequent visits to !Kung villages inside Botswana. The South Africans have instructed them to tell nothing of what they may know of troop movements on the Namibian side but to observe closely any unusual behaviour on the Botswana side. The result is that the Namibian San exploit their kin ties, and the trust explicit in them, to feed information to the South Africans. This is bizarre behaviour by !Kung standards; they expect other !Kung to engage in greetings and share fully news of what they have seen of interest along the way. Just as the !Kung and other hunter-gatherers place a high value on sharing and reciprocity of food, so do they emphasize sharing and reciprocity of information. When this is interrupted the fabric of !Kung society is threatened.

The final solution? the military takes over

The second phase of militarization has been the actual recruitment of the San into the South African Defence Forces. This has been accompanied by a virtual replacement of civilian by military administration
as the whole of northern Namibia has been declared 'an operational' zone.

1975 marked a turning point for South Africa. Its colonial rule of Namibia was doomed and it sought to 'Africanize' its regime by creating puppet institutions of government through 'elected' black leaders from the ten non-white homelands into which Namibia had been divided. This resulted in the Turnhalle negotiations for independence under the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). The puppet nature of the Turnhalle leaders is very apparent and this internal settlement attempt, bypassing SWAPO, has never achieved any credibility outside South Africa, except in the Reagan administration in the USA.

South Africa also sought to Africanize further its anti-guerrilla war by training puppet troops to do more of the actual fighting themselves. After 1974 !Kung soldiers were recruited directly into the South African Defence Forces. Although paramilitary tracking units continued to exist, the bulk of the !Kung recruits were put into regular army units at special bases where they were issued automatic weapons and taught to use them. As a result the !Kung have begun to die in increasing numbers in skirmishes in the Caprivi Strip and in incursions into Angola.

Two South African battalions are manned largely by 'Bushman' troops. Battalion 31 was set up in the Caprivi Strip in 1974, composed of both !Kung and Barakwengo, or River 'Bushmen'. And in 1978 Battalion 36 was created with headquarters at Chum'kwe, in the heart of the Marshalls' Nyae Nyae area. In 1980, 31 Battalion (also known as Base Omega) had a strength of 600 Bushmen soldiers and 250 white officers. In addition 700 women, 1,200 children and 200 older dependants also live on the base (Poos 1980:47). 36 Battalion's numbers are lower and instead of a single base, the soldiers and their dependants are spread out at 20 smaller camps at boreholes dotted throughout Bushman land (Heitman 1980:14).

For a number of years South Africa's secret war and its manipulation of the San and other ethnic groups was unknown to the outside world. In late 1977, however, the South African Defence Forces made known for the first time the existence of their secret Bushman military bases in the Caprivi Strip and took South African newsmen on a tour of some of them. The picture presented provides a chilling account of forced acculturation and how it is packaged by the media:

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 'braaives' 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.

A handful of South African soldiers started the Colony some time ago, attracting the children of the veld to a secret Army Base where they are teaching them the modern way of life. ‘The most difficult thing to teach them is to use a toilet,’ the Commander of the Base said. Money and trade is something completely new to them but they are fast learning the White man’s way of bickering.

In their small community they now have a store, hospital, school and various other training centres.

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.

Medicine is also something new to them. It is estimated that Bushmen in the area were dying at a rate of 35 a month whereas they now have an average of three deaths a month. Most of them died of disease and by the hands of witchdoctors. It is an open camp and the people may come and go as they please, but most of them prefer to stay.

(Windhoek Advertiser, 19 September 1977)

Analysis: counter-insurgency warfare for the eighties

This account – and many others like it (e.g. Poos 1980; Heitman 1980) – shows clearly that the South African Army is embarked on a major overhaul of the social, economic and cultural life of the San. It is also clear (according to the UN Council for Namibia) that the transformation of the San is part of a much larger South African plan: to create loyal malleable allies for South Africa out of indigenous ethnic groups of northern Namibia. The main means for achieving this goal is to combine civil and military action so that the army becomes the main agent for social change. By militarizing large segments of the population, the South African army becomes at once the government of the area, the main employer, the main or sole source of health care and education
From foragers to fighters

and the dominant source of ideology. The pattern among the San has been repeated elsewhere in Namibia. Under the rubric of 'Namibianization' battalions of soldiers along the lines of 31 and 36 have been set up in East Caprivi, West Caprivi, Kavango and Ovambo ethnic areas and the techniques used are remarkably similar to those employed among the !Kung (IDAF 1979). The overall goal of the South Africans will be all too familiar to those who lived through the Vietnam era. In the words of one South African correspondent:

Winning the trust and the 'hearts and minds' of the local population [in Namibia] is the most demanding task of the South African Defence Force, but it is winning. The army also has the support of 2,000 Bushmen, experts in bush survival, the support of the SA Air Force when needed, and an elaborate and well-equipped war machine.

(Fischer 1977)

Let us look at the South African strategy in more detail. Drawing a leaf from the Maoist and Leninist theories of revolutionary warfare, counter-insurgency planners seek to turn the techniques of mobilization and political education to their own advantage. It is recast under the heading of psychological warfare. Anthropology (unfortunately) plays a major role in this activity. In 1977 Die Suidwester, a Windhoek newspaper, reported that

Major Van Niekerk has been leading a team of 16 ethnologists in the South African Army in the research of cultural aspects of the people of the Kaokaoveld, Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi to develop better understanding among the members of the South African army of the traditions of these groups. (UN Council on Namibia 1977:23)

A 90-page psycho-war kit for the Army was drawn up partly based on Major Van Niekerk's findings. It was entitled 'Guide for Psychological Action', and its use was restricted to senior officers. Another kit was issued to enlisted men. Dennis Herbstien of the Sunday Times, examining the psycho-war guide kits, writes:

The manual for national servicemen says the 'insurgents' are trying to set up a communist regime - disregarding the fact that SWAPO's main internal support comes from the Anglican and Lutheran Churches. Young soldiers are warned that in the developed countries the communist technique is to soften up morals and values from within by 'enslaving the youth to drink, drugs, pornographic literature and pop music; by encouraging free sex, even across the colour line, and discouraging attendance at church'; and 'by cultivating an unnecessary guilt feeling towards the black man'.
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The 'psych-ac' officers watch for tell-tale signs of 'communist' influence and send regular reports to headquarters on the psychological situation of the troops.

Not surprisingly, soldiers mixing with the locals should be prepared to answer delicate questions like: 'who are the terrorists, SWAPO or the whites?' and 'why do they (the whites) assault us?'

Senior officers are told in their guide to 'retain or regain the support of the Africans'. For example, they should protect 'spirit mediums' and provide sporting facilities. 'Ceremonies and martial music in the operational area . . . raise the morale of the population and demonstrate continuing presence.'

In more sinister vein, it suggests 'the display of deceased insurgent leaders' bodies to the population, among whom they had built up a reputation for invincibility. Care should be taken, however, not to create martyrs.'

The guide recommends a 'regard and surrender policy, which has proved a success even among the most sophisticated black tribesmen'. It is a vital weapon in the armoury of psychological warfare.

The guide says all attempts to influence the locals must be based on the truth, 'insofar as the population can appreciate the truth'. It also recommends the 'planned rumour' spread by undercover agents. 'Even if its authenticity is sometimes doubted by the target, and its origin is impossible to fix', the guide says, 'the rumour will rapidly spread if it was well chosen and put out at the right time.'

(Sunday Times, London, 3 April 1977 as quoted in UN Namibia Bulletin No. 2. 1977)

Because the San population is relatively small and isolated compared to the other Namibian groups, the South Africans can exercise an even more total control over every aspect of the lives of the San.

The military bases function as 'total' institutions. San women and children are brought into the camps along with the men and are given a comprehensive package of programmes ranging from sewing and cooking lessons to weapons training and martial arts. In their isolation these camps are closed societies like the 'protected villages' or 'strategic hamlets' set up by the Americans in Vietnam, or more recently by the Ian Smith regime in pre-1980 Rhodesia. The ostensible purpose is to 'protect' the inhabitants from the guerrillas but in reality the goal is to prevent the inhabitants from giving support to the freedom fighters. The nature of one camp, Omega, as a total institution is ominously spelled out in a report in the 'South African Digest', an official government publication:
Omega, the Greek word meaning 'last', is an appropriate choice of name as it is here that the Bushmen community has finally found a permanent, secure home.

Much more than just a military training centre, the base is the centre of a large-scale development programme for the whole Bushman community, instigated by the Defence Force. [emphasis added] (Fourie 1978)

As part of this 'development programme', Omega Base has been equipped with a school, and child care and personal hygiene are taught at the local hospital to San women. Instruction in farming methods, occupational skills and religion are provided. For recreation there are sports and film shows. South African Defence Force personnel are involved in this programme, though Omega Base Commandant Piet Hall is quick to point out that 'it is not their idea to fully Westernize the Bushmen so that they lose their identity. The children are regularly taken into the bush to encourage them to retain their natural instinct and acumen, and their culture and ancient customs are kept intact.'

This 'humanitarian' stance of the South African forces towards the San – wanting to introduce them to Western practices while simultaneously preserving certain San customs – does not mask the explicitly military purposes to which the San are put. The article continues:

It seems only natural . . . that the SA Defence Force should apply the Bushmen's age-old talent for survival warfare to the task of outmanoeuvring the enemy at short range – quietly, ruthlessly and efficiently.

Only the times have changed, with the bow and arrow having been replaced by rifles, mortars and other modern weapons of an infantry unit. But their approach stays the same, and the setting is still the familiar wilderness of the border zone, where their acute sense of direction, tracking ability, knowledge of the bush and far sight make them perfect guerrilla fighters. (Fourie 1978)

The parallels to Vietnam should be spelled out. In the central highlands of Vietnam and in Laos entire tribes of Montagnards numbering thousands of people were wooed by the Special Forces and by CIA operatives during the 1960s. Some, like the Mnong Gar studied by the French anthropologist Georges Condominas (1957), were badly displaced by the war and their forest environment repeatedly bombed. Others were herded into refugee camps in the Kontum area and were attacked first by the Viet Cong and later by their American protectors during and after the 1968 Tet Offensive (Fitzgerald 1972). In both the Montagnard and the San cases whole communities of women and chil-
Children are brought into the war zone; thus not only the men of fighting age, but entire societies faced and are facing the threat of injury and death.6

The parallels to Vietnam were not lost to the American mercenary magazine Soldier of Fortune. In a leading article on the 31 Battalion they called the Bushman the 'Montagnards of South Africa' (Poos 1980).

The containment and subsequent militarization of the San is basically a continuation of the policy of Divide and Rule at a more sophisticated level. The 'development programme' at the San settlements and bases stems from the apartheid policy of Separate Development based on strictly enforced ethnic lines, and is simply another example of what South Africa is doing elsewhere in Namibia. In the case of larger more settled groupings like the Ovambo or Herero, this separate development assures, among other things, a steady supply of labour out of the reserves and into the foreign-owned mines, industries and farms. It is worth noting that the militarization process of the San also represents a systematic drawing in of their labour power – as trackers, landmine detectors, and counter-insurgency forces. In earlier times, because of their small numbers and nomadic way of life, it was difficult to incorporate the San into colonial labour patterns with any reliability. Now, with the South African-monitored programme of settlement and containment, the San become a valuable – and predictable – source of labour.

SWAPO has been highly critical of South Africa's use of the San and has protested against their actions at the United Nations.

Mr Theo-Ben Gurirab, SWAPO Chief Representative at the UN, accused South Africa of using the San as 'landmine sweepers' against their will. He went on to say:

The Bushmen being traditionally hunters are being used by South Africans as trackers. In the process they become victims of landmines and guerrilla ambushes. It is really tragic that South Africa has to go so low as to use people who are not conscious of what they are doing for her war efforts of aggression in Namibia.

These ancient people . . . are lured with tobacco, dagga (marihuana), the meat to do the dirty job . . . Since they always walk in front of patrolling soldiers in most cases they receive much of the punishment intended for the racist soldiers. Their population being small, our concern is that they might be exterminated. (Gurirab 1977)

In the field SWAPO has paid particular attention to the problem of the San and has tried to avoid injuring them. In July 1980 one of us (Lee) interviewed San of the Dobe area of Botswana. At least 20 Botswana
San had crossed the border and joined the SADF (an unfortunate fact in light of Botswana’s staunch support of SWAPO and the liberation struggle), yet informants could not name a single San killed by SWAPO.

On the other hand seven cases of homicide were reported in the period 1978-80 in which !Kung killed other !Kung in the camps, usually in drunken brawls. The weapons used were army-issue bayonets, knives and guns. The homicide rate generated by these figures is about five times as high as the homicide figures for the same !Kung during the period 1920-55 (Lee 1979:397-8). This is compelling evidence for the brutalization of the San; the South African military training teaches hand-to-hand combat and strongly encourages ‘macho’ behaviour in the recruits.

While SWAPO has been careful not to injure the San, they have also not been particularly successful at educating the San about their goals. Most !Kung Lee contacted in 1980 said they had never seen or talked to a SWAPO. They reported only one encounter. A unit of San soldiers had captured a SWAPO militant in an attack, and as they were guarding him he spoke to them (in Herero):

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.

But it looks like the South Africans have put all of you to work for them. There are so many of you how will it be possible for us to avoid killing you when we attack the Boers?

Under the expanding conditions of the war and South Africa’s increasing use of puppet troops it is clear that the relatively low San casualty rates must give way to a much more deadly form of combat in the future.

But it would be a mistake to think of the San as simply victims of South African guile. Nor are they all involved in South Africa’s counter-insurgency forces. There are San who have joined SWAPO, though as SWAPO members their identity is based on national and not ethnic divisions and they are Namibians rather than Barakwengo or !Kung. SWAPO, as a political as well as a military organization, has extensive educational campaigns throughout the country and among all sectors of the population. As difficult as it is to penetrate the contained settlements of the San, there is every reason to assume that SWAPO is also present here. John Marshall’s film, N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman, filmed in mid-1978, graphically portrays the militarization of the San and shows the actual formation of 36 Battalion. But in one scene, a !Kung
elder speaking in !Kung tells Marshall 'We know SWAPO. They won’t kill us. We’d share the pot with SWAPO.'

What’s to be done

Anthropology came into its own largely in the late nineteenth century, when Western industrial nations were beginning to administer colonial empires in their search for new sources of raw materials, cheap labour and markets. Early anthropological studies provided colonial administrations with valuable information they could turn to their own use in controlling local land use, labour supplies and commodity production. As a child of imperialism, anthropology’s intellectual and ideological underpinnings are much the same as the Western tradition of which it is a part – a tradition which has been concerned with the politics of domination and control, and with the ideological concealment of this fact. As an example anthropologists and sociologists have always been more comfortable with the study of ethnicity than with the study of class, and with the concept of acculturation than with the concept of capitalist penetration. On the other hand many individual anthropologists have grasped the larger issues and have put their energies to work on behalf of oppressed Third and Fourth World peoples.

The South African regime, in pursuit of its policy of Apartheid and Separate Development, is attempting to channel and ‘freeze’ local communities in ways which keep them artificially divided. To the extent that anthropologists continue to respond to the San (or Ovambo or Herero) merely as San (or Ovambo or Herero), tacit support is given to the South African policy of Apartheid.

The people of Namibia, under the leadership of SWAPO, have made it clear that they are fighting as Namibians for control of their nation, and not as San for control over their San communities or as Herero for control over their Herero communities.

SWAPO’s commitment to national unity rather than ethnic divisions is clearly expressed in its Constitution, adopted by the meeting of the Central Committee, August 1976 in Lusaka, Zambia. Among the ten basic aims and objectives which SWAPO espouses, the following are of special note here:

2. To unite all the people of Namibia, irrespective of race, religion, sex or ethnic origins, into a cohesive, representative, national political entity;
3. To foster a spirit of national consciousness or a sense of common purpose and collective destiny among the people of Namibia;
4. To combat all reactionary tendencies of individualism, tribalism, racism, sexism and regionalism.

(SWAPo 1976)

The theoretical challenge posed to anthropologists is also a contradiction. With our use of the culture concept we claim our expertise in the study of specific cultures. Yet to advocate the preservation of a specific culture places us on a politically shaky footing. We can only begin effectively to use our knowledge and skills on behalf of our 'cultures' if we learn the lesson that the late Amilcar Cabral sought to teach to the people of Guinea Bissau, a lesson summed up in the phrase, 'die a tribe to be born a nation'. Only then, by supporting the national political struggles of peoples in Namibia and elsewhere can we regain our role as students of humanity for the party of humanity.

Notes
1 Quoted from N!ai: the story of a !Kung woman, a film made by John Marshall, and shown on US Public Television April 1980.
2 A different rationale for the settlement station at Chum!kwe is offered by Lorna Marshall (1976:60-1).
3 Prior to the formation of SWAPo on 19 April 1960, the anticolonial activities of the Namibian people were largely uncoordinated localized strikes and petitionings. During the early half of the 1960s the main task of SWAPo was to establish its presence throughout the country with the formation of local branches. The launching by SWAPo of an armed struggle was accompanied by an intensification of political mobilization of the people with the creation of mass-based organizations for women, youth and workers. Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the struggle has escalated with stepped-up military operations by SWAPo in the north, nationwide worker and student strikes and massive public rallies. The political work of SWAPo is discussed in more detail in Hurlich and Lee (1979).
4 See for example Christian Science Monitor, 25 September 1980. Recent developments in Zimbabwe provide an instructive parallel to the Namibian situation. After seven years of armed conflict, the first genuinely free and fair elections were held in late February 1980. With a strong voter turn-out, the ZANU and ZAPU wings of the former Patriotic Front - the internationally recognized liberation movement in then Rhodesia - received 88 per cent of the vote, leaving no doubt about where the support of the majority of the people had been all along. Given the massive support which SWAPo enjoys inside Namibia, there is every reason to anticipate a similar outcome should free elections be held.
5 The DTA takes its name from the old Turnhalle gymnastics hall - built in the early days of German SWA - in which these negotiations took place. The DTA
is at base a continuation of South Africa's policy of enforced ethnicity, as from its inception it focuses on 'population groups' in Namibia rather than on unifying national interests. In addition to the whites, the ten other 'population groups' correspond to the ten homelands or reserves established by the South African regime: the Damara, Bushmen, Nama, Tswana, Caprivi, Kavango, Basters, Coloureds, Herero/M'banderu, and Ovambo.

6 Studies of the impact of the military on the life of the Montagnards are not easy to find. Two such studies are *The Montagnards of South Vietnam* (Minority Rights Groups, 1974), and the massive US Army Compendium *Minority groups in the Republic of Vietnam* (Schrock et al. 1966).

7 In December 1980 the government of Botswana passed the Foreign Enlistment Bill, a piece of legislation expressly designed to prevent recruitment of Botswana citizens into South Africa's armed forces. For other recent developments see Poulton 1981.

8 Another form of brutalization is the systematic mutilation of the corpses of SWAPO combat victims by white officers for the edification of their San recruits. One soldier's relative gave Lee the following account:

   On one patrol the soldiers ambushed a SWAPO unit. The white officer shot and killed the leader. The rest escaped. The officer then made the three !Kung soldiers fire into the body of the dead man. Then the officer cut off the dead man's penis and stuffed it into his mouth. After photographing this the whites and the San went back to camp.

9 Cabral's ideas deserve careful study by anthropologists. For good introductions to his writings see Cabral 1969 and Cabral 1973.

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