Introduction

The San (Bushmen, Basarwa, Khwe) of southern Africa are some of the best-known people and best-documented people in anthropology. Residing today in six countries in southern Africa (see Table 1), the situations—including those involving human rights—facing the San today are diverse.

Long an icon of popular culture, and a fixture in anthropological textbooks and films, and, more recently, a subject of anthropological and political controversy, the contemporary San peoples are framed in contradictory ways. To some they represent the image of 'pristine' hunter-gatherers, a way of life like that of humanity's ancestors, a picture of authenticity in a world of false values. To others, they stand for the opposite, Apartheid's most oppressed victims, marginalized minorities called into being by centuries of subordination and more recently by the forces of global capitalism.

Neither of these polarities begins to capture the realities of today's San people. Numbering close to 100,000 in Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, the San present a wide spectrum of social, economic, and political conditions. Some continue to hunt and gather part time, while most others work for low wages on the farms of blacks or whites in southern Africa. While many San continue to experience injustice and cultural loss, this is tempered by success stories, examples of political mobilization, and a new spirit of community resistance. It is a tribute to San resilience and cultural strength that they have overcome many obstacles in an effort to retain their languages, cultures, and religious beliefs, even if circumstances have forced them to give up their mobility and foraging systems.

The work of scholars, development workers, and activists chronicles the ongoing struggles for human rights and well-being as well as some of the progress, defeats, and victories that are writing new chapters in the history of the San. The paper also addresses changes that are on-going among the San, including rising HIV/AIDS rates, shifts in health, fertility, and mortality patterns with sedentarization, and transformations in education, social organization, and local-level development.

In this brief report, an attempt is made to provide a brief overview of the status of the San as of 2003. The discussion is not exhaustive; there are issues with which the San and their neighbors are concerned that are not dealt with in much detail, and readers are referred to some of the recent literature (see, for example, Suzman 2001a, b; Robins, Madzudzo, and Brenzinger 2001; Saugestad 2001; Cassidy, Good, Mazonde, and Rivers 2001; Lee, Biesele, and Hitchcock 2002; Hitchcock 2002; Sylvain 2002; Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa 2003). This report was written specifically for the
Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association in an effort to bring the Association and its members up to date on what the San were facing in southern Africa.

Land and Resource Rights

In some areas of the world where indigenous peoples were displaced from their ancestral areas, prospects are brightening for land and resource rights restitution to indigenous peoples. Some progress is being made, for example, in Australia, Canada, Greenland, New Zealand, and South Africa. These small successes have been achieved through (1) negotiated settlement, (2) government legislation, (3) using customary international and national law, and (4) court action. Some progress was made in South Africa in recent years, through negotiated settlement and court action. By and large this has not been the case, however, for San residing in Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, or Zimbabwe.

In 1999 South Africa saw the restoration of land rights and benefits to the =Khomani San in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. Recently, in October, 2003, the 3,000 Nama of the Richtersveld area in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa won a landmark legal case in the Constitutional Court of South Africa that stipulated that (1) indigenous people had land and mineral rights over their territory, and (2) laws that dispossessed them were 'racial discrimination.' As the court rules, "While in the past indigenous law was seen through the common law lens, it must now be seen as an integral part of our law." (Alexkor Ltd. And Another v the Richtersveld Community and Others, Constitutional Court Case 19/03, 14 October, 2003).

In the Richtersveld case, a South African state-owned mining company, Alexkor, contended that not all 'physical removal' of indigenous people from the area constituted land dispossession, especially if it happened before the cut-off date of June 13, 1913, when the Native Lands Act of South Africa became law. (Moyo 2003:4-5). When the land was annexed, the company argued, the community lost whatever rights to minerals it might have had. The government contended that indigenous-law ownership ceased with annexation of South Africa by the British in 1847, and that this loss of rights was not a dispossession as envisaged in the Act. The South African government also contended that there was no specific 'intention' to discriminate in the appropriation of land. It also argued that the laws that terminated the community's rights were not racially discriminatory, and therefore fell outside the ambit of the Restitution of Land Act of South Africa, passed in 1994. The Constitutional Court disagreed with these arguments and the Legal Resources Center won the case on behalf of the Nama in an important decision for indigenous peoples' rights.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve Case, Botswana

In Botswana, San and Bakgalagadi who had lived in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve were fortunate in their legal efforts to retain their land rights. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve, the second largest game reserve in Africa, was set aside in 1961 for purposes of protecting habitats and the people that utilized the resources and lived in the region for generations. In 1986, the Botswana government decreed that the people of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve had to move out of the reserve. This event set in motion a whole series of efforts by Central Kalahari residents and support groups to try and get the Botswana government to reverse its decision. A Negotiating Team of CKGR residents and supporters was formed in 1996 and attempted to engage the Botswana government in discussions about the future of the CKGR, to no avail.
By early 2002, nearly all of the residents of the reserve, who had numbered well over a thousand in the 1980s, had been relocated by the Botswana government and District Councils to two large settlements in areas on the periphery of the reserve. There the resettled people were eking out an existence and living on government rations and what was left of the compensation payments that they had received.

The Botswana government argued officially that the reason for the resettlement was to ensure that local people in the Central Kalahari could benefit from development opportunities and services provided by government. Officials also argued that by being outside of the reserve people could participate more easily ‘in the life of the nation.’ However, judging from interviews, many of the people living in the resettled communities felt that they were worse off after the relocation than they were before when they lived in the central Kalahari.

In February, 2002, the G/wi and G//ana San and Bakgalagadi of the central Kalahari region of Botswana filed a legal case in the High Court of Botswana in an effort to get the Botswana government to reverse its decisions to require residents of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve to leave the reserve. The High Court dismissed the case on a technicality, arguing that the case had not been filed properly. The case was appealed successfully, and now it is likely that a new legal case will be heard in the High Court of Botswana in early 2004.

One of the most contentious issues surrounding the Central Kalahari Game Reserve relocation issue in the late 1990s and into the new millennium was whether or not the main reason behind the relocation was the government’s interests in promoting the exploitation of minerals, especially diamonds, in the central Kalahari (Taylor and Mokhawa 2002). Some organizations argued vehemently that the reason the government chose to remove the residents of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was to make way for mineral prospecting. Other groups argued that diamonds were not the major reason that people were removed, that the reasons were more complex. The debate continues today, while the San and Bakgalagadi who had lived in the reserve remain hopeful that they will some day be able to return to their ancestral lands and have a chance in the future to be able to benefit from the resources and economic opportunities (e.g. tourism) in the reserve.

Subsistence Rights and Land Rights

In 1979, the San and other peoples in Botswana who derived their livelihoods from wildlife and wild plant procurement, were recognized as having hunting rights under the Unified Hunting Regulations. The subsistence hunting licenses, known in Botswana as Special Game Licenses (SGLs), were done away with in 2002. Now, the only way that the San can get access to wildlife for subsistence purposes is for them to establish a community-based organization (CBO) with a constitution and management board and request the Department of Wildlife and National Parks to grant the organization the rights to the wildlife in their area. This granting of rights to wildlife resources does not, however, imply that people have land rights to the community-controlled hunting area.

The problem facing the San and some other rural people in Botswana is that they have not been able to obtain secure land and resource tenure rights. The reasons for this situation are complex, but they are due in part to the fact that the Botswana government and the District Land Boards and Councils have been unwilling to grant land rights to groups who make claims on the basis of customary rights and traditional livelihoods. The efforts to lay claim to ancestral territories on the basis of ‘indigenousness,’ the notion that San peoples were ‘first comers’ or were ‘native to the areas where they lived,’ have been
rejected by the Botswana government, which does not accept the argument that the San or any other
group is indigenous. The Botswana government holds that all citizens of the country are indigenous.

In 2003, the Minister of the Ministry of Local Government of Botswana, Margaret Nasha, discussed the
issue of land rights under the new land policy in the country. She categorically rejected the idea of San
having special rights different from other citizens of Botswana, and said that the San have the same
rights to apply to the Land Board for land as other citizens do.

The Tribal Land Act Amendment Act (1993) made it possible for people to get land anywhere in the
country, not just in their home districts. This is fine, except for the fact that the only people who can
afford to apply for land in another district, which they then have to develop in a two year period,
including providing water and fencing, are people with substantial means. What this means, in essence,
is that those people who do not have sufficient capital cannot afford to obtain land in districts other
than their own. It also means that people in Gaborone who have good jobs or investments can afford to
establish land rights in other places, thus out-competing local people for land.

The idea that the settlements developed under the Remote Area Development Program, of which
currently there are 64, are in the hands of local people is inaccurate. In fact, virtually all of them have
seen other people from the outside moving in to them, often bringing with them their cattle and other
domestic animals, or starting small shops. The San who apply for land in these places often have
difficulty getting business licenses, whereas other people, who are not San, seem to have little trouble.
What this means, in effect, is that San are treated differently by Land Boards on the basis of their ethnic
background, which is illegal under Botswana law.

In Botswana, the National Policy for Agricultural Development (NPAD) and the Fencing Act have the
potential of dispossessing even more people than the Tribal Grazing Land Policy, which the World Bank
estimated displaced between 28,000 and 31,000 people. The total amount of land allocated to
commercial ranches under TGLP was 335,000 hectares. There were commercial areas in Central,
Kweneng, Ngwaketse (Southern), Kgalagadi, Ghanzi, and North West Districts. Now, under NPAD, it is
estimated that there will be 539 ranches, each of which will be 6 by 6 km in size (36 sq km, or 3,600
hectares). Most of the ranches (over 90%) that will see dispossession will be in the Western Central
District sandveld and the Botletle River region of Botswana.

Judging from comments made in consultations and interviews with the media, San in Botswana are not
asking for special rights - they simply want to be treated like other citizens of Botswana. It is not just San
who have lost access to land in national parks, game reserves, national monuments, or commercial
ranching areas, but other people as well. The difference is that San, when they apply for water rights or
for grazing rights, usually do not get the water rights or land rights allocated to be them by the Land
Boards.

Some reports (e.g. the assessment of the Remote Area Development Program of Botswana, done in mid-
2003; see BIDPA 2003) argue that the reason San do not get land is because San do not know the correct
procedures for applying for land. This assumption is false. San have been applying for land at Land
Boards since their inception in Botswana 1970, as can be seen, for example, in the efforts of Ju/hoansi
San to apply for land at Dobe and /Xai/Xai in Ngamiland (North West District) in the early 1970s. Similar
efforts were made by Tyua San in the Nata River region in the mid-1970s. Even today, the San in rural
areas in Botswana have yet to get a formal water right allocated to them, in spite of the fact that they
have followed all of the procedural steps necessary and have gone so far as to form community trusts under the Botswana government Community-Based Natural Resource Management legislation.

In 1999, the Trust for Okavango Cultural and Development Initiatives (TOCaDI), a San support organization, began assisting San communities in North West District to dig wells and drill boreholes and seek water rights from the Land Boards. As of mid-2003, water rights had been obtained by several San communities in northwestern Botswana, but the agreements had not been acted upon, pending final approval by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the North West District Council. It remains to be seen whether or not the North West District Council will grant de jure (legal) land and water rights to the people of Ngamiland. The various San support organizations, including TOCaDI and the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa, continue to push for full rights to land and resources to be granted.

The Status of San in Namibia

In 2001, it was estimated by the government of Namibia's Emergency Management Unit (EMU), between 17,000 and 22,000 of the country's estimated 34,000 San were dependent on food aid (James Suzman 2001a:7). In the Nyae Nyae region of Namibia, populated primarily by Ju/'hoansi San, there was hunger in 2002. This year (2003), the Namibian government has supplied mealie meal in order to offset nutritional problems. The mealie meal has helped alleviate the hunger, but some people have experienced difficulties and have asked that additional commodities be provided (e.g. pulses, oil). An additional concern of the Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae has to do with the impacts of wild animals, notably elephants, on their water points and gardens. The large numbers of elephants in the Nyae Nyae region reportedly are wreaking havoc on water pumps, gardens, and fences around people's homes.

A significant concern of San and other peoples residing in northeastern Namibia over the past several years was the possibility of the establishment of a large refugee resettlement facility with as many as 21,000 refugees in the M'Kata region of Tsumkwe District West in the area where the Ju/'hoansi, !Xun, Mpungu, and Vasekele San reside. The proposal to move the refugee camp from Osire in central Namibia stemmed in part from complaints by commercial farmers in the area. In March, 2003, the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees based in Namibia met with donors who have supported refugee programs in the country. The UNHCR Representative informed the donors that there had been a change in the refugee situation in Namibia, brought about by the end of hostilities in Angola and the signing of a Peace Accord between the government of Angola and UNITA, the main opposition group that has been involved in armed struggle in the country.

Most of the 21,000-plus refugees in the main UNHCR refugee camp at Osire and in the smaller camp at Kasava had said in interview carried out in February, 2003 that they wished to be repatriated to their former homes in Angola. The repatriation of the Angolan refugees was initiated in June, 2003. It is anticipated that this process will serve to reduce the pressure to establish a new refugee camp in Tsumkwe District. But as of November, 2003, the Namibian government had yet to rescind officially its plans for establishing a new refugee camp in Tsumkwe District.

Challenges continue to face the San with respect to land and resource rights in Namibia. There have been thousands of people dispossessed in the past several years as labor laws have come into effect, and people on commercial ranches and farms have begun to reduce the numbers of workers and their families. It is estimated, for example, that several thousand people lost their residence rights in the Gobabis Farms region of eastern Namibia. Large numbers of dispossessed San are found today in places
such as Gobabis in eastern Namibia, attempting to eke out an existence doing odd jobs and seeking help from their neighbors.

There are some potential bright spots, however. An innovation in Namibian development is the concept of the conservancy. A conservancy is an area of communal land where communities have some control over natural resource management and utilization. They do this through a statutory body that is recognized officially by the government of Namibia, a conservancy committee. While there have been over a dozen conservancies established in communal land in northern Namibia, some of which are in the hands of San communities, there are threats to the long-term viability of these conservancies because of population growth, in-migration of other groups, and possible changes in land tenure.

In West Caprivi, the Namibian government announced in 2002 that the West Caprivi Game Reserve would be turned into a national park, the Bwabwata National Park. There will be restrictions placed on where people can live in the national park and on the kinds of activities that they can pursue there. For example, people will not be allowed to keep cattle in some parts of the new national park, and there will be limits placed on agricultural activities. The Khwe and !Xu (Vasekele) of West Caprivi are concerned that they will not receive the benefits that they have been promised in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Vision for Caprivi plan and that they potentially will be excluded from decision-making in the new national park.

Another potential threat facing the Khwe, !Xu, and other San in Namibia is the proposed construction of a dam on the Okavango River near Popa Falls. This dam potentially would have significant impacts on down-stream populations and habitats, not only in Namibia but also in the Okavango Delta region of Botswana which supports sizable numbers of people including many San. At present, the plans for building this dam are on hold for economic reasons, but the Namibian government hopes to go ahead with the facility at some point in the not-too-distant future. The governments of Angola and Botswana and various non-government organizations have protested the Namibian government's plans for the dams and other water projects on the Okavango and the Cunene Rivers in Namibia, as have organizations such as the International Rivers Network (IRN), Greenpeace, and the Okavango Wildlife Society in South Africa.

As many San in Namibia say, "We are people who suffer." The San feel that they are marginalized minorities who have less access to rights and resources than other groups in Namibia. They are concerned about the trend even in community-based natural resource management in Namibia, which they see as having potential benefits but which increasingly to them appears to be overseen by other groups or individuals who reap the majority of the rewards. If current trends continue in Namibia, some San believe, they will face further problems in terms of lack of access to natural resources and development programs. It is for this reason that the San of Namibia have sought the assistance and support of organizations such as the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa, which collaborates with them in efforts to promote San rights. Without collaborative, participatory, community-based development and education programs in Namibia and the support of government and non-government organizations like the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa, the San will continue to be marginalized, dispossessed, and poverty-stricken, facing a future with little hope.

The Status of San in Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

Less is known about the current status of San in Angola, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but recent efforts to collect information as part of the Regional Assessment of San in Southern Africa (see Suzman 2001a,
Robins, Madzudzo, and Brenzinger 2001) and the work of WIMSA provide some insights. The San of Angola were seriously affected by the conflicts in the country that lasted for decades. Some San moved across the border as refugees into Zambia and Namibia, while a few San went to Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The areas where San live today in Angola are ones where the infrastructure has deteriorated and there are sizable numbers of land mines, making travel and work in the fields difficult. Major efforts will need to be made by the Angolan government and non-government organizations to address the constraints facing the San and their neighbors in southern Angola. The same is true for the 1,000-plus San in Zambia.

In Zimbabwe, the Tyua San in Matabeleland North Province are facing difficulties, as well, though in their case these difficulties are not so much conflict-related as they are poverty, inflation, and landlessness, situations not unlike those facing other Zimbabweans today. In the past, the Tyua were exposed to warfare, especially in the 1970s and in the early 1980s after independence when the government of Zimbabwe cracked down on people in Matabeleland who were accused of being 'dissidents.' Some Tyua left the area, moving into Botswana, and a number of San went to Bulawayo and Harare and to neighboring South Africa and Zambia.

Today, the Tyua are attempting to respond to the pressures they are facing through labor migration, local-level organizing, and some of them are taking part in conservation and development activities under the government of Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). With fewer tourists and safari hunters coming in to their areas because of the uncertainty in Zimbabwe, however, they are not making as much money as they did in the 1990s, and they are having to turn to alternative ways of earning a living.

Education and San

In southern Africa now as in much of the world, indigenous peoples like the San are where possible taking an active role in educational projects for their young people. Closely associated with many of these projects are attempts at cultural heritage preservation and local language development. In some cases NGOs as well as anthropologists and linguists have become part of educational support teams to provide professional training to local teachers as well as to community members concerned with heritage and language development.

Themes from a recent conference (Research for Khoe and San Development, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana, September 9-12, 2003) exemplify the increasing role of indigenous people in the ownership and development of local cultural materials in tandem with educational projects. Reports from Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa at this conference brought in the experiences from a number of situations where community involvement in education is having positive results in terms of school attendance and outcomes.

Many groups of San are acknowledging the importance of mother-tongue education for at least the first three years of school. These groups value developing skills of critical thinking as well as promoting retention of endangered languages and heritage. Following the consensus of most international educational experience, the trend among San educational projects is to insist on mother-tongue instruction until the basic skills of literacy are gained, at which point those skills can be generalized for us in whatever national language or languages may be most useful (English in most of Southern Africa at this time).
One such project has been going on among the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoan San of Namibia for more than a decade. Since Namibian Independence in 1990, an imaginative and comprehensive Village Schools Project (VSP) has provided a matrix for the creation of a broad range of local-language curriculum and enrichment materials. There has been a large participation of community members of all ages in the production of materials. The VSP has as well tried to honor the very effective means of learning and child socialization long practiced by the Ju/'hoansi and other San. San societies have valued equality and sharing highly, and in the VSP their children's learning has taken place in a hands-on, informal, narrative- and experience-rich environment, involving children of all ages with local teachers and many adults.

The experience of the Village Schools Project has been instrumental in convincing the Namibian educational authorities to promote Balanced Literacy, an international reading and writing program that matches the egalitarian values of the Ju/'hoan and their deep belief in the value of children and their work. Among some participants, as well, there has been the realization that genuinely creative literature and non-fiction learning materials must be provided for readers beyond the first few years, to enable an actual literate tradition to develop. Observers of this and similar projects caution, however, that different peoples the world over have different attitudes and uses for "literacy". In this view, literacy should not be regarded as a monolithic concept but seen from an ethnographic point of view as to how it develops locally.

Practically speaking, local language committees have taken on the challenge of providing user-friendly orthographies of these phonetically complex languages, often with the help of professional linguists and anthropologists. Linguists have also sometimes been in a position to provide grammatical training in linguistic methods to young San who may contemplate becoming scholars of their own languages. In a few cases, computer literacy and the use of digital media have also become available to San educational projects, where technological empowerment has quickly increased political effectiveness for the surrounding communities.

This said, it is important to note that the structural violence often afflicting San in the larger societies in which they live, continues to have deleterious effects on their education as on other areas of life. Interethnic strife is frequent in school contexts, and is often sufficient to contribute to San student absenteeism and educational failure.

However, though there remain many areas where San still have little access to educational opportunities, the places where they do are having an impact on their chances for the future. The governments are noting the successes of integrated programs that are at least partially under the control of local San communities, and a conceptual space may be opening for pro-active efforts to reverse earlier, dismal school statistics regarding San populations. NGOs such as WIMSA, the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa, have done a great deal to provide secondary and tertiary educational options to some San students, who are then effective models for other San to emulate.

Appendix 1. AIDS and the San: How Badly Are They Affected?

Richard Lee and Ida Susser

Ninety percent of the San people of Africa live in Botswana and Namibia, two nations that rank, first (38%) and fifth (22.5%) respectively among the nations with the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world.
Located at the epidemic's epicenter how are the San coping as the crisis in Africa enters its third decade?

As remote area-dwellers San communities occupy out-of-the-way areas with limited access to major highways and population centers, a factor that should lower their seropositive rates below national averages. However, working in the opposite direction as a factor is that since most San occupy lower rungs on the social ladder, their poverty and vulnerability makes them more prone to infection. A third factor is the gender egalitarianism documented for some San groups such as the Ju/'hoansi. Women's autonomy and assertiveness should provide at least in theory, some protection against the widespread patriarchal practices driving the epidemic among dominant ethnic groups, practices that have resulted in women in southern Africa now comprising 55-60 per cent of the infected population.

Since 1996 Richard Lee and Ida Susser have been working on HIV/AIDS capacity building prevention projects in collaboration with the Universities of Namibia and Botswana. The work has provided the opportunity to assess the HIV/AIDS situation among the Ju/'hoansi. We worked on the Namibian side of the border in 1996, 1997, 2000, and 2003 and in 1999 and 2001 on the Botswana side of the border. A short account of the situation follows.

Although no formal monitoring of HIV rates has been done among the San, by 2001, estimating from fragmentary data, 50-100 cases had emerged. In a total population of 2500, this number converts to a three to six per cent seropositive rate in persons 15-49 years. Compared to Botswana's 38% and Namibia's 22.5%, remarkably, this rate is about 60-90 per cent lower than national averages.

How are we to explain these much lower AIDS rates among the Ju/'hoansi? Isolation must play a role. Far from the urban centers and truck routes, the Ju/'hoan areas experienced low levels of interactions with outsiders. However since the 1990s a succession of civil servants, soldiers, workers in tourism, and traders, almost all male, have found their way into the interior. Additional factors for the low rates must be sought.

Long before the AIDS crisis, ethnographic fieldwork in the 1960s and 1970s documented women's high status and freedom of action among the Ju/'hoansi. Young women could and did veto marriage plans. Women's voices were heard in the tribal councils. They provided 70 percent of the food and this economic autonomy was an important source of their strength.

Nevertheless we need to ask to what extent the rapid changes in recent decades have affected San women's ability to retain control of their sexuality and their life choices?

Tsumkwe was once a remote San village; it is now the administrative center for the San region. The townsite includes a clinic, police station, stores, and rows of cement houses reminiscent of South African Bantustans. There is also a co-ed boarding school and a Safari Lodge opened in 1997.

In 1996, officials of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (now called the Nyae Nyae Conservancy) agreed to allow us to conduct research on AIDS. They were well aware of the nature of the disease, its lethality, and mode of transmission. But instead of implicating men as the main vectors of the disease, in their view AIDS was introduced among them by Ju/'hoan women! Given that it was the local women who had sexual relations with male outsiders from high HIV-areas, their perceptions were accurate if incomplete. At Tsumkwe it was common knowledge that non-local men --road crews, traders, civil servants--drank at
many home-brew bars or shebeens and then had liaisons with San women. Drinking was widely seen as the major problem.

Clearly Tsumkwe as the main center for the spread of HIV has a certain history; in the 1980s South African army units were based there, later replaced by border guards and other administrative personnel, posted far from home and seeking the local nightlife. A good quality gravel road from central Namibia and an airstrip further increased accessibility. On the Botswana side of the border, Qangwa, the administrative center plays a similar role, though on a much smaller scale.

The Ju/'hoansi we spoke with contrasted the drinking and sexual exchange at Tsumkwe with the situation in the surrounding villages. One informant, at Dobe, a teenage girl, said: "There is no AIDS here, but I know they have it at Tsumkwe. The girls over there told me not to sleep with the boys because they have that disease there. I am afraid of AIDS at Tsumkwe."

Informants at Dobe in 2001 could name only three women who they believed had died of AIDS. All of them lived at Tsumkwe. Through interviewing at Tsumkwe itself in 2003 we were able to compile a list of 17 San people who were commonly believed to have died of or were living with AIDS.

In contrast to Tsumkwe and Qangwa, other, more remote San villages had fewer outside visitors and home-brew shops. Dobe, in Botswana, 20 km. west of Qangwa and only two km. from the Namibia border, had a resident population of about a dozen men from outside: border guards and livestock inspectors. We undertook a house to house survey of all seven villages at the Dobe waterhole in July 2001, asking whether anyone in that village was incapacitated or had experienced bouts of debilitating illness. The survey revealed not a single case of any illness resembling AIDS in the village of Dobe with a population of 175 people.

Our next task was to understand why the disease which was rampant elsewhere and despite the presence of outside men, had apparently NOT found its way to Dobe, a village with many single women 15-24, the most vulnerable age group. Our findings do suggest that Ju/'hoan women differ in their sense of autonomy from women of other ethnic groups. Women and young girls among the Ju/'hoansi revealed a greater degree of confidence in sexual negotiation with men, a sense of their own empowerment, than did the Owambo or Herero women.

For example, we asked a young Ju/'hoan woman at Baraka in 1996 whether she would ask her husband to use a condom. She stated emphatically that, "Yes, I would ask him, and if he did not agree, I would refuse sex." Ju/'hoan women saw no particular advantage to the female condom, saying if they wanted a man to use a condom they would simply ask him to use a male one, distributed free at the local clinic.

In a group discussion with young married women in Dobe in 2001, one of us (Susser) asked the women if they would be able to make use a box of male condoms. "Give us some and we will teach our husbands how to use them" they said. While this does not indicate whether actual behavior-change would follow, the remarks of Ju/'hoansi women expressed a sense of entitlement and straightforwardness with respect to sexual decisions, which was not evidenced among the Ovambo women. Nor was there the atmosphere of status striving and peer pressure to engage in unsafe sex that we observed among Windhoek high school and university students.

When we interviewed young men in Dobe in 1999, their responses corroborated the women's views. They talked as if women had the power to turn down sexual advances and they said that if a young
woman were to accept such advances, they would see that as representing the opportunity to marry her, again in sharp contrast to the attitudes of young Owambo men. However, this picture is complicated by the fact that relationships with outside men do exist at Tsumkwe, men who have more money and power than Ju/'hoan men. In these liaisons non-Ju/'hoan male attitudes and power relations are likely to expose Ju/'hoan women to risk of HIV.

In our most recent research at Tsumkwe in July 2003, we found variable patterns of sexual behavior in evidence. Some women we interviewed were thoughtful and prudent about the risks and would insist on condom use by boyfriends. They expressed the view that liaisons with men from the outside were particularly dangerous. On the other hand they did acknowledge that there were Ju/'hoan girls and young women, some as young as 14, who frequent the shebeens and engage in casual sex with outsiders.

University of Toronto student Donna Bawden spent a month at Tsumkwe in August-September 2003 and added considerable detail to the picture of risky sexual practices on the part of several young Ju/'hoan women. What we don't know is whether the risk-taking group comprises 5, 10, or 50 per cent of the Ju/'hoan women in the vulnerable age groups. Whatever the levels, these findings indicate that without a serious attempt at intervention, the rates of HIV among this San group, while still below national levels, are sure to rise in the coming years.

References


Suzman, James, ed. (2001b) An Assessment of the Status of the San Namibia. Windhoek, Namibia: Legal Assistance Center.


Table 1. Numbers of San in Southern Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Size of Country</th>
<th>Number of San</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>1,246,700</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>581,730</td>
<td>47,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>824,290</td>
<td>32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1,221,040</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>752,610</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>390,580</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5,016,950</td>
<td>93,475</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: Data obtained from James Suzman, An Introduction to the Regional Assessment of the Status of San in Southern Africa (Windhoek, Namibia: Legal Assistance Center, 2001) p. 5, from the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), and from Chennels-Albertyn, South Africa..

Table 2. Data on Southern African Development Community (SADC) Countries Population Size, Area, and Numbers of Languages Spoken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population Size (July, 2003 estimate)</th>
<th>Size of Country (square kilometers)</th>
<th>Number of Existing Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Angola</td>
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<td>1,246,700</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>1,537,267</td>
<td>581,730</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Congo</td>
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<td>2,345,410</td>
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<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>1,861,959</td>
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<td>Malawi</td>
<td>11,651,239</td>
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<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1,210,447</td>
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<td>Mozambique</td>
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<td>Namibia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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<td>390,580</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOTALS  

205,876,030 people  
9,277,545 sq km  
446

Note: Data obtained from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), The World Factbook (2003), and Ethnologue, Volume 1: Languages of the World, Barbara Grimes, ed. (Dallas, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2000)