
Cultural conflicts, dilemmas and disillusionment among the San communities at Platfontein

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Abstract

This article examines the cultural conflicts, dilemmas and disillusionment among the San communities at Platfontein in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. A critical review of written texts, interviews, observations and focus group discussions with the community knowledge-holders shows that the community's new Westernised lifestyle in the midst of the capitalist society at Platfontein turns the collective spirit, human relations, mutual reverence, sincerity and self-confidence that existed before their contact with Westernised societies into unusual selfishness, individualism, impiety, dishonesty, greed and disregard for others. The conflict between the communal hunter-gatherer culture and the alien individualist mode of existence has created serious dilemmas and moral conflicts in the community. The Westernised mode of existence has alienated the community from their human nature, their natural environment, their productive chores and their communal life. The community has an undefined, unclear and controversial understanding of their own racial identity. The San refer to the black and white races that have historical relationships with them as Others, which in turn has an Othering effect on the San themselves. The causes of moral and psychological conflicts, identity crises, dilemmas and disillusionment are power relations related to ethnic and racial politics, colonial discourse and identity politics. The researcher recommends that to achieve harmonious relationships with other communities and among themselves, the San need to redefine themselves and other societies that have historical ties with them.

Keywords: identity politics, disillusionment, dilemma, alienation, Othering, San, Platfontein, interpellation

1. Introduction

Informal and constructive means of conflict resolution are not exclusively attributed to the so-called "civilised" Western societies. The conflict resolution mechanisms of hunter-gatherer societies have recently attracted the attention of anthropologists and other scholars who pursue constructive ways of creating conflict resolution mechanisms. According to Ury (1990:229), "the most studied group of contemporary hunter-gatherers are the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert." They are mostly known as "San" in anthropological discourse. Their traditional means of conflict prevention and conflict resolution have been widely studied and appreciated by many scholars (Lee 1968, 1979a, 1979b; Biesele 1978; Dyer 1985; Ury, Brett & Goldberg 1985; Ury 1990, 1995). In the words of Ury (1990:388), people "who live in far more technologically advanced societies have much to learn from this so-called simple but in many ways more socially advanced society." Scholars argue that the San community's primary focus is on conflict prevention rather than on conflict resolution. The conflict management system, most of the time, addresses the healing of emotional wounds, the reconciliation of

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conflicting interests, the recompense of infringed rights and the retention of the balance of power hierarchy that existed before the conflict.

The foraging San communities of the Kalahari Desert were forced to occupy the arid land because of continuous pressures from dominant Bantu-speaking communities of Southern Africa and the occupation of the coastal areas on the southern tip of the continent by white settlers and colonisers. Until the second half of the 20th century, the !Xun and Khwe lived a hunter-gatherer mode of life in Angola. Their strained relations with other black communities may be due to complex power relations across millennia. The discord between the San and other black communities seems to be more extreme than the enmity the San community felt for colonisers and the settlers. When some black communities were fighting the Portuguese colonisers in 1975, some of the San fought on the side of the colonisers. After the Portuguese abandoned the San community to their fate when Angola became independent in 1975, they were made to fight in support of the South African Defence Force. For economic reasons, they were forced to engage in an armed conflict that had international implications related to the Cold War. This article is not directly concerned with the San community in the Kalahari Desert; it is related to the San community at Platfontein in South Africa, who originally came from Namibia and Angola accompanying the South African Defence Force in 1991. Due to continuous contact with alien cultures, their engagement in meaningless wars and periodic migrations and relocations, the community's knowledge of its traditional conflict resolution mechanism has been severely weakened. At present, they are not engaged in any violent conflict among themselves or with other communities. There are, however, non-violent cultural, moral and psychological conflicts within and between communities that are assessed in this study.

2. Methods and theoretical framework

This study is limited to the analysis of the cultural conflicts, dilemmas and disillusionment among the San community at Platfontein. Data related to these themes was collected from the subjects of this study, community leaders and field researchers of the community, mainly through participant observation, oral discussions and interviews as well as from manuscripts and printed collections of personal memoirs, pamphlets, periodicals, electronic media, articles and books. The collected data was analysed based on the theoretical frameworks suggested by some tools in the fields of language and the humanities: the stylistic technique, the Marxist approach, the deconstructivist approach and Pan-African theories. The stylistic approach helped the researcher to analyse the implications of the type of language used by the respondents, their political stance and whether it inflamed, minimised or eliminated conflicts. Some concepts of the Marxist approach relating to ideology, interpellation and alienation were found to be ideal ways of scrutinising the effect of power relationships in dominant societies on their victims; the relationship with the colonial masters; and the San community at historically attested times. The deconstructive approach helped to assess thematic concerns peculiar to misunderstood, disoriented, impoverished, dispossessed and victimised groups of people. Through this approach, the implications of issues that are taken for granted as universal truths were scrutinised. It was also possible to demonstrate the invalidity of established norms and relationships that seem to be "naturally" correct: the implications of self-contradiction within the San community at individual and group levels, the significance of ahistorical themes and the meanings of the silences and gaps in discourses. Pan-African

theory helped to discover the impact of white supremacy on the ideological makeup of the San community at Platfontein.

3. Cultural conflict

The analysis of moral issues revealed in the respondents' assertions and some documents demonstrates the presence of contrasting moral values among the San before and after their migration to South Africa. This is evident in the responses of Jansu Jim (Sibongo 2014d), Tomson Moronga (Sibongo 2014j), Moshani Sibongo (Sibongo 2014i) and John Mushamba (Sibongo 2014e) to the interview questions posed by a field researcher named Hanzie Sibongo. Similar concerns are also mentioned by Karina Shiwarra's respondents Sorofina Tsiohimba (Shiwarra 2014c) and Elisa Kiyanga (Shiwarra 2014a). All the answers to the interviewers' questions and documents directly or indirectly show that the new way of life in a capitalist society destroys the communal spirit, humane relations, reciprocal reverence, sincerity and self-confidence that existed before their contact with Western society. Elderly respondents feel that their contact with Western society has corrupted their way of life at Platfontein with torrents of selfishness, individualism, wickedness, insincerity, covetousness and disrespect. The moral degeneration that existed during their stay at Schmidtsdrift continued after their arrival at Platfontein.

The moral values of the San people before their contact with colonial powers in Angola and Namibia were characterised by the clan's ownership of the means of production: mainly the hunting and gathering grounds, the natural division of labour, communal ownership or the fair allocation of the products of nature. The most important moral value of the San people was a communal spirit. According to the work of anthropologists Lee 1968, 1979b; Biesele 1978; Dyer 1985; Ury, Brett & Goldberg 1985; Ury 1990, and the respondents' views, the San community used to work together; plead to the San God and the ancestral spirits together for daily necessities and health; get together in community meetings to settle disputes; dance in the same rhythm; commemorate initiation rituals; design accoutrements for their rituals; paint their bodies with the same potion from the same natural bowl; and drink the same potion in the same quantity. Since they were not cognisant of the Western mode of life, which values a person based the extent of accumulated wealth, they did not have the greed and egoism that can lead to serious disputes. All clan and family members were aware of their social and familial duty. Humane relationships, respect, reliability and modesty existed among the clan and family members. When the San people lived in Angola and Namibia, the respondents argue, the youth used to respect the elderly. The elders in turn used to keep their word and lead their clans with wisdom, modesty and politeness. In contrast, today elders are not respected by the youth in Platfontein, as stated by respondents such as Dala Filismano (Sibongo 2014b), Kantsja Mbambi (Sibongo 2014g), Jansu Jim (Sibongo 2014d) and Dennis Moyo (Sibongo 2014c) in answer to the interview questions posed by Hanzie Sibongo. There are incidents when the youth beat their own parents when the elders refused to give money to their children on pension paydays, as witnessed by Karina Shiwarra's (2014) respondent Elisa Kiyanga (Shiwarra 2014a) and in the focus group discussion lead by Hanzie Sibongo on 7 April 2014 (Sibongo 2014a). Elders are neither respected nor listened to nor obeyed by the young generation. Elders are not comfortable with the moral degeneration of the youth. They remember the "good old days" with excessive nostalgia and reverence (Kamama Mukuai (Sibongo 2014f); Matumbo Dikua (Sibongo 2014h)). This

seems to be caused by the clash between the communal culture of the San people and the modern capitalist mode of production that bases itself on individualism and egoism.

After the San people were exposed to the white colonisers' infrastructure such as courts, police stations, a conventional army and churches in Namibia and Angola and later on in South Africa, their moral values such as respect for old people, a sense of collectivism, respect for human beings, commitment to living in conformity with nature and determination to fight the alien forces, have gradually melted away. The unbridled desire for money and material possessions makes the young people unsympathetic and negligent towards familial relationships. On the contrary, they have been infected with greed, egoism, insincerity, wickedness, thievery, robbery and violence. The virtues of the past are imprinted in the memories of the old people rather than on the examples of practical experience of the community today.

In the "good old days" there was no reason to be greedy to obtain the daily necessities of life, which were acquired from the natural environment. Every member of the society was free to hunt animals and gather plants for food. Men used to work together to defeat the forces of nature that could challenge the wellbeing of the community. Money was not a crucial part of earning social honour. Meneputo Manunga, an elderly healer, remembers that "in the early days, the San people's hands were always busy. It was not like today, when the people have nothing to do ... They [the children] did not learn to ask nature for food" (Winburg n.d.:14). In the new Platfontein community, Meneputo Manunga admits: "If you have money, life is easier than it was before. If you do not have money or you do not have a veld in which to find food, you have nothing. You are a person without breath while you are alive" (Winburg n.d.:14). Thus, people have started to crave money more than anything else. All the members of the community are doing their best to acquire this tantalising demigod. Some are attempting to engage in commerce. Others toil in factories and plantations, while still others struggle to be elected as elders so that they can earn money. Moreover, members of the community are involved in theft, treachery, favouritism and other fraudulent practices for money. The culture of the hunter-gatherer is corrupted as people gradually try to adopt the lifestyle of the colonisers and settlers.

The youth acculturate into the Western culture by taking drugs and excessive drinking. This is revealed in the responses of Kadike Mbangu (Dixon 2014b), Latsia Sihangi (Dixon 2014c) and Mariana Kameri (Dixon 2014d) to the interview questions posed by Kasivi Dixon. Many respondents said that there are no taboos at Platfontein. Things which were forbidden in Angola and Namibia are now practised by the youth at Platfontein. The loss of traditional moral values causes dishonesty, greed, pessimism, alienation, deterioration and lack of self-confidence. Members of the community, mainly elders, are well aware of the consequences of the rapid acculturation. They are mesmerised by the harsh realities of the existing situation and their nostalgia for the "glorious past". Due to the loss of traditional culture, the moral fabric of the community has been severely damaged. The clash of cultures creates a deterioration of the moral values that maintain peace and security among the members of the community. As a result, there is lack of harmony among family members, mainly between the elderly and the youth.

3.1 Conflict between social being and social consciousness

The relationship between social being and social consciousness in the hunter-gatherer lifestyle before the San had continuous contact with white and black people in Angola and Namibia was without serious conflict. As a classless society, people used to work for themselves. Under such circumstances, social consciousness objectively and directly reflects social being; members of the community do not have contradictory interests. After the San community lost their ancestral land and became soldiers who fought proxy colonial wars against other black people, a contrast between social being and social consciousness emerged. After that historical episode, their land and other material wealth were gone forever; thus, their share of consumption fell extremely low. Those soldiers who were engaged in supporting their colonisers in subjugating other communities lost their lives for the sake of getting daily necessities of life for the warriors and their families. Other classes, the owners of the ancestral lands, have developed a different social consciousness; they regard the Western type of land ownership as normal. The San communities were not in a position to control their own destiny. They were not actors, but acted upon. They were interpellated (convinced) to consider other black victims as sources of their problems. Hence they engaged in armed conflicts, fighting proxy wars that had no relevance to their strategic interests. Thus, the conflict between social being and social consciousness is evident among the San community at Platfontein.

4. Conflicting religious beliefs

Religion is one of the crucial elements of culture for the San community, like many other communities. Currently, the community is in transition from one faith system, which mainly favours the role of the San God and ancestral spirits, to Christianity. The transition marks a major identity shift that could be characterised by multitudes of social, behavioural, ethical, moral and cosmological issues. As is recorded in the *Wildebeestkuil* DVD (n.d.), some elderly people like Baita Dumba, Machai Bandje and João remember the significance of the San God, the ancestral spirits and the healing and rites of passage rituals performed in the trust and honour of the San God and the ancestral spirits. The elders nostalgically recall the San God and the ancestral spirits; however, they express their frustration when they come to understand the difficulty of going back to the indigenous faith system. Others, like the !Xun San healer Meneputo Manunga, are frustrated when they realise that their traditional faith system has been crushed by Christianity, the religion of the industrialised Western society that can tantalise the hungry community through monetary aid and material supplies. The community seems to have been systematically assimilated through derision, material provision and intimidation and adopted the new religion through systematic encouragement. Some elders are confused about the situation: officially, they are Christians but still have some reverence for the traditional faith system. Some, like Meneputo Manunga, are unhappy about the expansion of Christianity at the expense of the traditional religion. Still others try to appreciate the two conflicting faith systems, but these conflicting moral values confuse the people.

The most important deterrent against successful Christianity is the religious implication of the rock art around Platfontein. The rock art, which consists of human, animal and various geometric figures, has deep symbolic and religious meanings. According to Williams (n.d.) as recorded in the *Wildebeestkuil* DVD, "Each rock engraving was a reservoir of power; the animals have this power and when they hammer them into the rock, they will nail down this power in creating a spiritual place." Regardless of the power of this religious and cultural

reservoir, Christianity as an element of the superstructure of the powerful Western society has crushed traditional belief. Trance dance, which was associated with the healing power of the San God, seems to lose its authority to clinics, which are regarded by some people as holy places.

5. Alienation

According to Marx and Engels (1932), alienation (estrangement) is a psychological condition of individuals, groups and social conditions in which the members do not have power to control or alter their fate within the categories of human relations. Alienation disturbs natural and cooperative human interrelationships. It detaches human beings from their human nature, from their social relations, from the fruits of their own labour and from their environment, as is succinctly expressed below:

Alienation ('Entfremdung') is the systemic result of living in a socially stratified society, because being a mechanistic part of a social class alienates a person from his and her humanity. The theoretic basis of alienation within the capitalist mode of production is that the worker invariably loses the ability to determine his or her life and destiny, when deprived of the right to think (conceive) of himself as the director of his actions; to determine the character of said actions; to define their relationship with other people; and to own the things and use the value of the goods and services, produced with their labour (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>).

The alienation discussed above is related to the situation of the proletariat in the industrialised societies of the Western world, which is bound to objectives and side-tracked by practices in favour of the bourgeoisie. In their historical relations with the colonialists in Angola and Namibia, the black communities in Southern Africa and the former apartheid rulers of South Africa, the San communities at Platfontein did not have a “worker versus bourgeoisie” relationship. There are, however, certain similarities between the alienated life of the worker in industrialised societies and the alienated lifestyle of the San community at Platfontein versus the Western colonial powers.

5.1 Alienation of the San community from its natural environment

The San community at Platfontein is alienated from its natural environment. The social organisation of a hunter-gatherer community demands a wide area of land for hunting, gathering and ritual practices. Such land possession seems to have gone forever, due to the capitalist mode of land tenure that contradicts the communal mode of life. The community is forced to live within small fenced plots of land that separate them from other communities and landlords. Sometimes when they leave these confined spaces to fetch firewood or water, they experience harassment by the owners of the land. Such confinement contradicts their previous way of life. Members of the community regard the fence as a physical and moral barrier that deters them from communicating with other communities and from the fruits and beauties of nature. The communities feel that that they are in jail; the modern capitalist way of land ownership treats members of this community like “birds in a cage”.

The confinement deters the community from deciding the kind of work they should be engaged in in order to sustain their life; the alienation from their environment forces the San

community to turn themselves into housemaids, wardens or industrial workers around Kimberley. Under such circumstances the people cannot control the products of their labour. They are forced to adapt a capitalist way of life, which is at the other extreme to the life of hunter-gatherers in the development of human society. The conflict of the two separate cultures (hunter-gatherer and capitalist modes of production) results in trauma, despair and non-violent inter-community and intra-community conflicts. The spatial restriction denies the daily food necessities of the community. They cannot practise healing rituals; they cannot go to look for herbal medicines that used to be prepared from the leaves, bark, roots, shoots and seeds of trees during the “good old days”. After their lands were inhabited by other “white” and “black” people, the San were encouraged to get medication in clinics and hospitals. The traditional healers like Maneputo Manunga complain that the healing wisdom that used to be transferred from generation to generation was suddenly disrupted within her lifespan:

I come from a long tradition of healing, as it was taught to me by my ancestors. In my lifetime, this tradition has been broken. As we moved through the wars in Angola to Namibia to South Africa, there has been no-one to whom I could teach my healing work. The healers who were men went to war. The healing hands were silenced as the White soldiers set up a clinic for the San people and told them to use it (Winburg n.d.:20).

The alienation from the natural environment is the source of all other types of alienation experienced by the San community. It is also a source of cultural degeneration and moral corruption.

5.2 Alienation of the community from productive work

In previous times, the community used to toil hard to earn the necessities of everyday life. Those who worked harder used to consume more and were able to marry. Currently, the hardworking hands are either stilled by the lack of a job or made to toil with little or no reward. The once proud hunter-gatherers are turned into idle consumers who look for philanthropy from donors, archaeologists and other researchers. This shatters the psychological and moral values of the community. The psychological conflict of Maneputo Manunga, a healer who should be considered a living witness of the dying San community’s traditional culture, is caused by the clash of the two cultures:

[I]n the early days, the San people’s hands were always busy. It was not like today, when the people have nothing to do. When the war came, the white people fed our children in the camps, while the men were fighting. They did not learn to ask nature for food. These days, you buy things you need to survive. If you do not have money or you do not have a veld in which to find food, you have nothing. You are a person without breath while you are alive (Winburg n.d.:14).

Since their contact with the “white” people in Angola and Namibia, they have been alienated from productive practices (hunting and gathering), a way of life their ancestors had practised for millennia.

The productive endeavour of the San community is an external existence, independent of and alien to them; they have no say over the circumstances in which they toil and how their productive labour is structured. This seriously affects their mental and physical wellbeing. Their lack of power over the type of work they like to be engaged in and the way they should

do it transforms their ability to work ingeniously into passivity. The youth even descend to engaging in destructive practices such as drug addiction and excessive drinking. The absence of jobs leads them into activities that are directed against families; against their own physical and mental wellbeing; and against inter-community and intra-community harmony and peace. Their alienation from work makes the youth forget the traditional skills of hunting, gathering and healing while at the same time they are unable to acquire other modern productive skills. This diminishes their self-worth and psychological satisfaction.

Before their arrival in South Africa, they were not independent actors; they were turned into objects of action. They were acted upon by social and political forces that were beyond their power and knowledge. These victims of history were not only alienated from productive processes but also interpellated (misguided) and abused to fight battles that were not only useless to them but also caused hostile relations with other victims of history. They were forced to support international imperialism in suppressing other “black” communities that share a similar cultural, racial and social background. This creates social alienation, which reduces people to human objects who cannot exercise every aspect of their human nature.

5.3 Alienation of the people from themselves

Like any other human society, the San people should not have been parted from their proactive endeavours to fulfil their inherent human potential. Their aspirations to undertake activities that advance communal survival and psychological satisfaction can be demonstrated by the emotional bonds among the members of the community. The San community had to objectify their intentions and creativities that could make them subjects. They were not able to perceive the ends of their actions as purposeful endeavours. Rather, they have been subordinated to the external demands imposed upon them by other people. They have been interpellated to hate themselves and their own race; live for other people; hate the enemies of other people; love their own inveterate enemies; speak and advocate the language of other people; fight the adversaries of other people; and worship the gods of other people. Under the existing historical circumstances, their essential nature as human beings is not yet actualised. They are interpellated (falsely convinced) to behave in ways detrimental to their own future relations with other communities, economic benefits and identities. Like any other people who are interpellated in ways contrary to their own true human nature, the San community has to redefine itself in order to maintain its true identity and maintain peaceful coexistence with other communities.

6. Disillusionment

As perceived in the words and deeds of the community elders at the time of data collection, they are cognisant of the exploitative nature of the outsiders who visit the community: colonisers, historians, archaeologists and other researchers. Before they render any information about the San community, the elders ask questions about the significance of the research and how it relates to the community and try to make sure of the honesty and integrity of the researcher. During some of the interview sessions in Kimberley they asked me to explain why I ventured to collect the data; before the elders offer any piece of information, they want to know who the researcher is; why he or she needs to know about the community; what effect it could have on the community; and when and how the researcher will

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communicate with them about his or her findings. They also expressed their concern that researchers, after they get the information they need, do not come back and tell the people about the outcome. This shows that, at the least, the community leaders are sceptical and have a clear understanding of the ethical responsibility of researchers. Until they are satisfied that they come for good reason, they suspect guests. This shows the exploitative nature of the existing developed world structure, which steals knowledge from exotic societies. The community elders understand that they hold knowledge that is worth giving to those who deserve it and denying to those who do not. They also expect returns to the community for the time they spend giving information and sharing knowledge; they offer information if and only if they are convinced that the researcher can bring positive returns to the community.

The elders of the community are aware of the rights and responsibilities of the San community as citizens of the world. They know how the community has been misunderstood by other societies because of communication barriers. In response to an interview, which is recorded in the Wildebeestkuil DVD (n.d.), Mario the elder summarises this concern:

The thing is that for centuries other people have seen us as being far from all other people; not part of the world; but living alone. But we want to be part of the world. We want to be part of every one and we want to contribute in order to be a part. We see ourselves just like any other people. So we must be a part.

The elder clearly reveals the extent of the San community's isolation from other communities around the world. The more a certain community lives away from other communities, the more misunderstandings arise. Mario underlines the significance of inter-societal communication in facilitating peaceful coexistence and mutual interdependence. He also states that the San community is endowed with its own wisdom to share with other communities; the San are not merely passive recipients of the knowledge of other communities. This shows the San community's desire to integrate with other communities. The speaker also demonstrates his concern about acculturation, which is the subjugation of the San community's culture by other cultures. He underlines the importance of mutual sharing and interdependence. If such a view were widely held among all members of the San community, it would be a source of peaceful coexistence. This view of the enlightened elder, however, seems to contradict the views of the majority of the elders; they remember the time of their aloofness as a golden age.

One important point of disillusionment is related to the elderly people's awareness of their cultural degeneration and its negative consequences for conflict resolution. In the focus group discussion led by Dixon on 29 May 2014 (Dixon 2014a), elders stressed that the institution of traditional conflict resolution that had been very successful in Angola and Namibia did not exist at Schmidtsdrift and Platfontein. In Angola and Namibia, the community had great respect for the elders and the elders were also very supportive and honest. Currently, they experience power rivalries because they feel that leadership can earn them money and other benefits. Other members of the community, therefore, do not know whom they should support or ignore. The discussants argue that the law of the land (the formal law of the Republic of South Africa) should be blamed for all this ambiguity and confusion. In the words of field researcher Dixon, the elders hold that: "The law of the land has made us to change our traditional law and we do not know what to do and the most important thing that is destroying our life is this law of the land and now children are not respecting us" (Dixon 2014a:26). This shows that the elders and other community members are disillusioned about

one of the components of the superstructure (the formal law) that has shattered their culture of conflict resolution.

Another very important reason for their disillusionment is their awareness of the impossibility of returning to “the good old days” as well as their determination to adapt themselves to existing historical and political circumstances. They regret their current situation of landlessness and the disruption of their indigenous culture. They do not, however, blame other communities for their problems. They feel that the return of their ancestral farmland at Platfontein, though a very small thing, has a great deal of significance. They understand the power dynamics in South Africa.

7. Redefining and reclaiming identity

The identity of a certain group of people is related to how they understand themselves, who they are, their origin, their rightful place among other communities and how other communities perceive them. The incongruence between how people see themselves and how the same group of people is understood by other groups has been a source of conflict across millennia. There is a general societal tendency for a dominant group to attach certain negative attributes to fragile societies and dehumanise the victims. Most victims of history have had some negative stereotypes attributed to them before they were dominated or persecuted. Identifying and confronting such negative attributes is of prime importance for mutual understanding among communities. The San community is misunderstood by other communities as alien quixotic survivors of an ancient people; as people who live a lifestyle that is far from modern people’s mode of life; as people who used to believe in different gods; and as advocates of colonialism and white supremacy. This demands a change of awareness of the true identity of the San community at Platfontein at both inter- and intra-community levels. In order to facilitate the transition of perception by other communities, the San community has to reassert its true identity in terms of the racial, ethnic, historic, cultural and political factors that have shaped them.

One important identity of the San community that needs to be clarified is their racial identity, which is important both at the time of apartheid and in the contemporary South African political conditions. In most official documents and forms that require a person’s identity, he or she has to indicate whether he or she is black, white, coloured or “other”. In this context, the need to define the San community’s identity is very important. How do they identify themselves in terms of racial category? How do other communities perceive them in terms of their racial identity? The San at Platfontein do not have a clear-cut view of their own racial identity. In their responses to interview questions, all members of the community referred to other people as “white” or “black”, distancing themselves from both, as is clearly indicated in the responses of Hotrie Conrade (Dakane 2014a) , Sabella Paul (Dakane 2014b) and Sussana Ngongo (Dakane 2014c). In the war stories of what they experienced in Namibia and Angola, they narrate how the white and black men treated them. In any of their discourse related to white people, the San never include themselves in that category. Moreover, they refer to other non-white African communities using third-person referents such as “they” or “the black people”; they exclude themselves from the black race. This shows that they are unconsciously or consciously Othering the black communities. This creates and widens the psychological and moral rift between the San community and other black African societies. Similarly, the San do not subsume themselves in the white community. They tell

stories of what is done to them by the white people using the pronoun “they.” The white people are also Others to the San community.

Then could the San community fall into the racial category of coloureds or Griquas or “other coloureds?” They cannot be categorised into any of these racial groups since these imply a mixing of the black and white races. In all of my interview communications and in any discourse available to this study, the San community have never identified themselves as coloureds or Griquas. They seem to feel that they are just themselves: the San community, the indigenous inhabitants of the land, the reservoir of primordial wisdom and the victims of modern history. In a real sense the San community’s refusal to be labelled as a racial entity may be justifiable. This, however, contradicts the real historical and political circumstances of South Africa.

In South African political conditions where racial identity becomes crucial, having an undefined identity may lead to reciprocal misunderstanding between black and white. If they do not identify themselves as “black”, it may be difficult for them to claim the benefits and entitlements of Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996: section 9(2)) and the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (RSA 1998). They are legally required to categorise themselves as one of the race groups.

Another type of identity worth discussing is national identity. There is no doubt that the San community at Platfontein are South African nationals. From the discussions and interviews, however, it is clear that they are suffering from nostalgia. Most of their memories, mainly of the senior generation, are connected to Namibia and Angola; they are highly nostalgic about the “glorious past”. Because of the strange life they live inside the fences at Platfontein, they feel that they are in exile, not in their own homeland. Some of them of course argue that no one has the right to challenge their legal status as South Africans.

Some leaders of the First People at Platfontein were engaged in colonial wars waged against other destitute people in Angola and Namibia who were fighting for their freedom. This creates a huge rift between the San community and other black people in Southern Africa. As has already been argued, the San community should not be blamed in any way, for they were alienated from themselves as a people who were not in full control of their destiny. Moreover, they were interpellated by the ideology of the colonisers; they were physiologically, morally and psychologically controlled by other people. If the people who fought for freedom understood the alienation of the San community, there would be no reason to have any grudge against them. Others would only pity the San as the First People who are victims of historical circumstances.

One basic issue worth assessing is the degree of mental colonisation of the members of the San community at Platfontein. One way of doing this is to evaluate the community’s language preference for formal communication purposes; from this it is possible to evaluate their relationship with the black and white cultures and communities. In the observation of the researchers, the communities speak !Xun and Khwe among themselves. This signifies their determination to maintain their own identity regardless of the discrimination they experience from other communities. This is an important step in decolonising the mind, a concept reiterated by Ngugi (1986) and other Pan-Africanist thinkers.

On the other hand, their attitude to the two dominant South African languages, Afrikaans and English, seems to have historical and political associations and may have its own impact

on their relationship with other people in South Africa. The children were seen studying Afrikaans comfortably in their spare time. At formal meetings and forums, the community leaders, who can speak English and Afrikaans, demand translators when they communicate with people who can only understand English. Some individuals seem to abhor the use of English for reasons that demand further research and investigation. A typical example of this is one community leader's refusal to deliver a speech in English at the consultative writing retreat comprising research staff of the Institute of Dispute Resolution in Africa, the field researchers and San community leaders held at Roodevallei held from 10-13 July 2014. In his introductory speech about the significance of the workshop, Mario Mahongo stated that he was aware of the international significance of the English language as medium of communication. However, he declined to speak English for reasons he did not want to state explicitly. This happened in a situation where other scholars who speak Afrikaans as their first language spoke in English without any hesitation. This might be connected to the political, social or historic relationships of the San community with the Afrikaans- and English-speaking communities. The San elders' preference for Afrikaans seems to be a conscious political decision. This implies that the members of the San community feel that the Afrikaans-speaking community in South Africa is historically friendlier than the English-speaking community. It may also show that the San community wants to demonstrate its alliance with the Afrikaans-speaking community in the violent and non-violent conflicts between Afrikaans and English-speaking communities in the country. Is the preference for Afrikaans over English based on justifiable grounds, or is it because of ideological interpellation? The answers are debatable, but are not, however, the concern of this paper. That concern is the future pragmatic effect of this grand political decision on the First People, who seek their own legal, moral and psychological space in the current political, social and historical situations of South Africa. In order to minimise misperceptions of these First People and integrate them with the wider South African community, they may have to either align themselves with the demands, aspirations and political ideology majority of South Africans or at least remain neutral in such grand political decisions. Otherwise, it might adversely affect the mutual understanding between English-speaking South Africans of British descent and other South Africans who prefer English to Afrikaans for whatever reason.

The researcher believes that the abrogation of English as a formal medium of communication, at any cost, is a political decision that can be justified neither by the current political situation in South Africa nor by the practical lifestyle of the fragile people at Platfontein, who demand much support from individuals as well as governmental and non-governmental institutions that favour the English language. It also seems contrary to the most important catchword of South Africans at this time: forgive and forget. It may also bring these First People into conflict with international communities that advocate English as an international language. The researcher suggests that the community should work hard to study its own history critically in order to distinguish between truth and myth, historical fact and ideological interpellation, as well as the existing power dynamics in the country. Then they can redefine themselves and take a pragmatic political stand that truly reflects their history and helps them integrate with other South African nationals in particular and black Africans in general.

Another identity crisis related to acculturation is the naming of people. When the San were proud hunter-gatherers with their own indigenous religious faith, they used to name their children using explanatory (symbolic) nomenclatures that were relevant to their traditional

way of life. This is demonstrated in the !Xun healer Meneputo Manunga's many names, given to her at different stages of her life by her loving parents: "I was small when I was born, so they [parents] called me *Tjini*. Then I become *Bambi* as I was as lithe as a little springbok. When I was older, I loved making dolls from natural material I found in the veld. And so my name became *Meneputo*, the doll" (Winburg n.d.:4). This local naming is not restricted to Meneputo Manunga. Her relatives were also given names related to their everyday activities and behaviour:

- her father's name *Manunga* means someone who makes good traps for catching birds;
- her first uncle on her father's side is *G'toma*, efficient hunter of springhaas;
- her second uncle on her father's side is *Gerimbe*, one who should not hunt a lion;
- her mother is *Ngamba Tsikela*, one very swift at healing rituals;
- her grandfather on her mother's side is *Litongwha*, someone who is unchallengeable by the extreme heat of the sun;
- her first uncle on her mother's side is *Mujalo*, a frequent carrier of heavy items;
- her second uncle on her mother's side is *Ngungoo*, an adept porcupine hunter;
- her elder sister's second name is *Kadimba*, a cross and talkative person.

Most of these names are connected to courage, stamina and endurance to challenge the forces of nature in the life of hunting and gathering. The other names sometimes encourage or discourage certain conduct by the individuals who bear the names. They are strongly connected with the culture and identity of the !Xun community's philosophy and cosmological beliefs and assumptions. Hence, the names should be regarded as the fingerprints of the San community which embody the mind-sets, beliefs, norms and moral values of the community.

Unfortunately, such naming styles now seem to be discouraged. In order to make comparisons, the researcher attempted to verify the first names of the members of the San community at Platfontein. The first names given to individuals in the last 30 to 40 years can show the extent of acculturation, since the San community's frequency of contact with other communities was very high at this time. The randomly selected names, mostly of the elders, field researchers and respondents in the current project, include: Antonio, Sabao, Max, Mario, Jack, Dominca, Josephine, Elisa, Albertus, Denis, Annie, Sabella, Joyce, Anna, Rebekka, Albertus, Jim, Tomson, John and Susanna. Most of the youngster's names and some of the elder's names are, in one way or another, Western Christian names. This contradicts the view that the San community as an independent social entity has to integrate with other world communities to maintain its identity. The names of the people are cultural reservoirs of the communities they represent. Changing the San names into Westernised Christian names is like burning down the moral museum of the San community; it is part of the subtle ideological dominance that forces third-world communities into one central Western mode of thought, which is known as "logocentrism" or Eurocentrism. The San community has to maintain its identity by giving local San names to its children, and the world has to embrace these names.

8. Summary and conclusion

Due to the continuous pressures from settlers and other indigenous people of Southern Africa, unstoppable migrations and relocations, cultural and ideological influences, violent

regional and international political pressures, dire hunger and their frequent contact with Westernised people, the San community at Platfontein have experienced severe cultural conflicts. The acculturation turns their communal spirit, humane relations, honesty and self-worth that existed before their contact with Westernised society into something completely contrary. This caused lack of respect of the youth for adults, the elimination of the cultural wisdom of the adults, lack of reverence for each other, absolute dissatisfaction of the youth and greed for material possessions. The different types of dilemma and moral conflict are the consequences of the incongruence between the communal hunter-gatherer culture and the alien capitalist way of life. The new eccentric way of life has alienated the community from their species (human nature), their native environment, their usual productive engagements and their collective life. The community are sufficiently misguided to lose self-worth. They have unclear ideas about their colour identity, which is a very important issue in South Africa. They refer to both black and white people as "Others". They misunderstand other black communities as enemies; on the contrary, they align themselves with settlers who have dehumanised the San for hundreds of years. In short, they were brainwashed to look down up on themselves, to hate their own race, to fight against other victims of history, to support their own historical enemies and to fight proxy wars. They are currently suffering dire moral and psychological conflicts, identity crises and dilemmas related to ethnic and racial politics and colonial discourse. In order to achieve harmonious relationships with other communities and among themselves, the researcher recommends that the San redefine themselves and other societies that have historical ties with them. Other communities and authorities shall also understand the plight of the San community and assist their redefinition and integration with other South African communities.

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