

ISSUES:

## "TRIBE":

## A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS

by

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In 1974 we authored an essay entitled "Tribe and Tribalism" which recommended that the term "tribe" be dropped from scientific usage by anthropologists because of its pejorative connotations associated with non-European peoples and because the term is arbitrarily, rather than systematically applied. The essay was submitted to the *American Anthropologist* for consideration in its "Brief Communications" section which offers anthropologists the opportunity to exchange ideas in print. The essay was rejected by the then acting editor, Robert Manners who wrote:

*"Some time ago a distinguished physical anthropologist concerned about all of the confusion relating to the use of the word race recommended that we stop using it and substitute ethnic group. Well, it never caught on, and now ethnicity and race tend to be sharply distinguished -- even if the distinction was, once upon a time, not so sharp. I think your plea to destigmatize "tribes" by referring to them by some other name would meet with the same success. Maybe your views should be aired for discussion by anthropologists, but I'm afraid that the American Anthropologist... is not the place for such airing."*<sup>1</sup>

Despite Manners' conclusion regarding the futility of "destigmatizing" the term "tribe," the fact is that increasingly anthropologists and other social scientists are abandoning the term altogether and substituting the terms ethnic group, culture, or people.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise increasing numbers of scholars are putting

quotation marks around the word "tribe" or are using the phrase "the so-called tribal societies."<sup>3</sup> Still others are presenting a critical review of the term "tribe" before abandoning it or using it in the text in modified or altered form.<sup>4</sup> The term "primitive" has undergone a similar evolution in recent years.<sup>5</sup> If this trend prevails, Manners' prediction of a few years ago appears to be away from the current flow of history rather than with it.

Still the terms "tribe," "natives," "primitive" and other negative references to non-western, formerly colonized peoples are still very much with us in the popular and scientific literature. Such terms are often accepted unwittingly by the academic community and by the general public because as yet there has not been any real sustained debate concerning their abandonment or continued use. It is time to review the ideological currents flowing around the use of the word "tribe"; it is time to examine the historical context in which the term "tribe" emerged; it is time to test the scientific value of applying "tribe" only to colonized peoples, especially non-Europeans; and finally it is time to consider the association between the idea of "tribe" and the phenomenon of racism in modern society.

*The Recent Literature: a review*

For years anthropologists have been troubled by the term "tribe" because of its lack of discreteness and precision in describing the societies of non-Western peoples.<sup>6</sup> They have been disturbed further by the widespread and generally uncritical application of the term to societies ranging from simple hunting and gathering bands to complex state-level societies. "Tribal" peoples are thus found among the Mbuti forest bands of Zaire and in the Inca empire of South America. Anthropologists have no doubt felt uncomfortable that definitions of "tribe" which have focused on a commonality of language, culture, history, and territory could also be applied to European societies. In 1969 P.H. Gulliver defined "tribe" as "any group of people which is distinguished by its members and by others on the basis of cultural-regional criteria."<sup>7</sup> Could this definition not be applied to Europe as well as Africa; to English-Americans as well as native Americans? But in Europe the Basque question or the "civil" war in Ireland are not described as "tribal" problems, while Africa is analyzed continually as being beset with problems of "tribalism" from Biafra to Angola.

Increasingly, however, there are articles which have challenged the traditional use of "tribe" and place the term correctly in the historical context of the rise of the state and of colonial expansion, or contemporarily, Western neo-

colonialism.<sup>8</sup> African writers like Mafeje have noted the European origin of the ideology of tribalism and its extension to African peoples only after the rise of the colonial era. Furthermore, the term "over-simplifies, mystifies and obscures the real nature of economic and power relations between Africans themselves and between Africa and the capitalist world."<sup>9</sup>

Others have noted the close relationship between the discipline of anthropology and colonialism and find it wholly consistent for anthropological terminology to reflect the vocabulary of colonial administrators in the use of words like "tribe," "natives," and "primitive peoples."<sup>10</sup> While colonial empires have crumbled, colonialist terminology lingers on, perhaps because, in many cases, neo-colonial relations have replaced the old-fashioned direct colonial presence. European and American scholars who have examined the history of the use of "tribe" and who are aware of the contradictions involved in any modern application of the term have, by force of logic and candor, abandoned it. Morton Fried in "The Myth of Tribe" considered the facts and came fully and determinedly to the conclusion that 1) tribes were a by-product of the evolution of the state, 2) it is time to dispense with the myth and acknowledge tribes for what they are, that is, products and servants of the state.<sup>11</sup> Ronald Cohen has acknowledged in an unpublished manuscript that there are negative and pejorative meanings associated with "tribe" and has recommended that "such ethnocentrism is best dropped and consigned to the dustbin of moribund terminology."

Scholars and educators around the field of African studies have played a leading role in re-thinking the continued use of "tribe" in writing and teaching. Paden and Soja's volume, *The African Experience*, an introductory text in African studies, rejects the term on the grounds that it is pejorative, too simple and relates only to the colonial period in African history. Finally they conclude:

*"Perhaps the most serious deficiency in the concept of 'tribe' from the viewpoint of social science is the inadequacy of 'tribe' in dealing with contemporary ethnic and even modern identity groups, especially those groups which are emerging in the large urban centers of Africa. Ethnicity seems a more appropriate concept than tribalism, detribalism, super-tribalism or retribalism in dealing with urban phenomena."*<sup>12</sup>

Specialists in education have also comprehended the impor-

focus with the observation that between 450 BC to 241 BC the term was still used to refer to the twenty peoples then conquered by the Romans. After 241 BC Rome expanded again to come to establish military control over some thirty-five "tribus." Central to these "tribus" were their *tributary* status which obligated their representatives to pay *tribute* to the central authority.

*The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* states that "tribute has its source in political power" and that "unlike other forms of fiscal revenue, however, tribute refers only to the standing obligations of political groups which are *not fully incorporated into a conquering state* and which in return for the payment of an impost are permitted to retain a *modicum of self-government*" (italics ours). The definition was given elaboration with the following examples: "weaker tribes," "African Negro tribes," "hunting tribes," and "distant tribes." <sup>16</sup> This expanded definition suggests that a "tribe" is not only politically subordinate, but also is remote or removed from a given central authority. In either case a sense of inequality is quite certainly implied, and no where is inequality maintained in the absence of force.

Still another source gives additional clarity to this review by noting the archaic verb, "to tribul," meaning "to oppress, press, afflict, to bring tribulation upon, to distress, harass." "Tribulation" itself refers to a "condition of great affliction, oppression or misery, persecution, distress, vexation, disturbance of life." No doubt related are the medieval "crushing machines" known as tribulages, and a "tribunal" identified as a "judgement seat or raised throne." The same source also notes that a "tribe" is a group of people living in a "primitive or barbarous condition, under a headman or chief" and that the term may often be "contemptuous." <sup>17</sup> With these remarks it must be considered that "tribe" is a group of relatively low status and occupies a peripheral position to some central power as its basic reference point. A "tribe" is also an irregular source of tribute under force or threat of force by the same ruling hierarchy.

Several other terms are built upon the "tribu-" root, such as "contribute" and "distribute," both of which may refer to portions of responsibility or reward either coming from, or going to, a distinct group of people. "Distribute" may also mean "to divide and place in classes, or other divisions, or to classify" giving us a reminder that a "tribe" is always a part and never a whole socio-political system, at least in the perception of those who belong to the dominant political order. The word "attribute" relates to some sort of quality

tance of the words we use and have produced several articles of outstanding pedagogical value. Rich's article entitled "Mind Your Language", was written for teachers of African studies and stresses a re-evaluation not only of "tribe" but other terms in common use related to descriptions of Africa and Africans like "jungle," "pagan," "hut," "Bantu," and "Black Africa." 13

In short, not only has the question of discarding the term been raised, but concerned scholars and teachers have begun action against those who persist in the colonial mode of expression. We would like to be identified with this growing trend of progressive scholarship and we present the following evidence for wider consideration and discussion of the modest proposal to drop "tribe" from serious academic studies of peoples around the world.

#### *The Etymology of "Tribe"*

As we have seen above, the term "tribe" suggests much more than one might first suspect. For this reason it is appropriate to probe the etymology of the word in search of the origins of other implied connotations. A popular dictionary indicates that the prefix "tri-" in the term "tribe" is derived from the tri-partite division of the early period of Roman Empire into the three political sub-divisions of the Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans. The term was applied in this way until about 450 BC when the Empire was expanded to include other subordinate peoples. While the root of "tri-" remained, the word assumed a more distinct political character reflecting "a local division of an aboriginal people" which was "often disparaging" in its application to a "class or set of persons." 14

These same themes are also expressed in another common collegiate dictionary which considers "tribe" as "any aggregation of people, especially in a primitive or nomadic state, believed to be of a common stock and acting under a central authority, as of a chief." 15 This definition makes the political character of "tribe" much more explicit in the use of "primitive" and "nomadic" which must be taken as relative to a people which could not be described by such terms, that is, "civilized" agricultural peoples. Furthermore this definition hints at the hierarchical nature of "tribe" in a wider socio-political framework in the reference to a "tribal" chief. Mention should also be made of the idea that "tribes" are only "believed" to be of common stock in the eyes of the outsider.

The political content of "tribe" is brought in sharper

Europeans came to "civilize" actually developed the ruling classes of the colonial countries into the rich and powerful forces they became. <sup>19</sup>

"Tribes" and "tribalism" are outgrowths of the state, and in the modern era they are outgrowths of colonialism. The colonial powers encouraged the separation of ethnically and linguistically different peoples to facilitate their administration. Naturally the colonialists were mindful of the political strategy of divide-and-rule to prevent colonized peoples from uniting against their common foe, that is, foreign domination and rule. And to add the "Catch 22" element, post-colonial countries today are often analyzed in Europe and America as being beset with problems of "tribalism" and they consider this as an explanation of the root cause of the state of underdevelopment. This in turn feeds back into racism, for it is those "primitive" people who are forever involved in "inter-tribal" conflict and are therefore not part of the "civilized" world.

To be sure, contemporary African, Asian, Native American, and some Latin American peoples do not live in a world free of conflict but the foundation of their problems can be traced most fundamentally to exploitative political and economic systems. These observations represent just some of the several reasons to discontinue using a term which carries these meanings.

*From "Nations" and "Kingdoms" to "Tribes"*

In reviewing the literature on the history of Africa, it is instructive to note that the word "tribe" seems not to have been used to refer to African peoples prior to the colonial period. In *South Africa Under John III, 1521-1557*, Welch observes that the words "nation" and "people" were used by 16th century writers, while 20th century authors employ the referent "tribe" to people who could hardly have become more "primitive" over four centuries. The following passages drawn from this book point to the evolution of the concept from the 16th to 20th centuries.

1576 "The people of this *country* (the Inhambane area) are of Mocaranga *nation*, a *nation* friendly to us." <sup>20</sup>

1948 "Was Mocaranga our modern Makalanga, the generic name of all the *tribes* along these great rivers from the Zambesi to Delagoa Bay? It seems likely because even today the name is applied to a large number of *tribes* in that part of Rhodesia

or character *inherent* to a person or thing suggesting a fixity in a system of "tribal" classification. Finally the now rare verb "to retribute" means "to retaliate on one, or to recompense, or repay," with all of this sounding like a very thinly veiled warning to keep in your place or suffer the consequences. In any case, this brief etymological tour makes clear that "tribe" has connotations of a long history of contempt, oppression, insult, and degradation and in no way can anthropologists or other social scientists concerned with freeing people from ethnocentric perceptions consider that equality is implied, not to mention respect for the common humanity of "tribal" and "non-tribal" groups of *Homo sapiens*.

### *The Politics of "Tribe"*

From the discussion of the derivation of the word "tribe" it is apparent that the reference has been to characterize peoples who have been made politically subordinate, chiefly through conquest. As ancient states expanded into empires they absorbed weaker peoples and in effect "tribalized" them by extending political and military rule over them. When European states expanded in search for the markets and materials requisite for the industrial revolution, they colonized and "tribalized" peoples all over the globe. European colonialism ultimately achieved virtual monopolization by force of arms following the formal declaration of "war" against African peoples in the infamous Berlin Congress of 1884-1885. Stemming from this base, the ideology of racism (of which "tribe" is but a part) was developed. Racism is an idea which provides moral, intellectual and even "scientific" justification for the domination of one people by another. Racial classifications emerged full-blown during this same general historical period which conveniently placed European "races" at the apex of human development. Their "civilized" nature "naturally" made them dominant over non-European peoples. The racist scholarship of Buffon, DeGobineau, and Chamberlain was typical for the era.

Though many anthropologists may disagree, the term "tribe" enjoys a close association with the rise of European colonialism and its racist ideology. It is important to note that many of today's "tribes" were once considered "nations" by Europeans with whom they wanted to establish diplomatic and commercial relations. It was colonial subjugation which transformed "nations" into "tribes" in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it was racism which characterized "tribal" people as "savage," "uncivilized," "backward," and "heathen" having a variety of distasteful dispositions. Of course the truth of the matter is that the "backward" areas which

(Zimbabwe) which adjoins the Portuguese territory."<sup>21</sup> (*italics ours*).

Other volumes illustrate the same point. Blake<sup>22</sup> refers to several of the West African "kingdoms" in the writings of the 15th and 16th century travelers, while 20th century terms for the same people, then colonized, were "tribes." For example, in speaking of certain early Portuguese explorers of the African continent, Blake writes as follows:

*"Their forefathers had thought of ancient Ghana as a vague inland kingdom centered about the western branch of the Nile, with the rich, mysterious kingdom of Timbuctu as its great commercial emporium."*

*"Called by our merchants, 'Ghenhoa' wrote the Moor, Leo Africanus...this kingdom extends about 250 leagues..."<sup>23</sup>*

In the literature of the 18th century, before the era of great European colonial expansion to the interior of Africa, the term "tribe" similarly was not in evidence in the writings of Europeans about Africans. Mungo Park, writing of his travels to Africa in the 1790's,<sup>24</sup> referred to the Feloops, the Jaloofs, the Foulahs, and the Mandengos as "nations" and "states." He spoke highly of them in terms of their appearance, personality, and intelligence. The sense of European superiority which was to follow in the European writing of the 19th and 20th centuries, can not be said to characterize the writings of this earlier period. As European colonialism advanced, however, a dramatic shift was witnessed in the attitudes and the actual terms used to describe the peoples who were coming under the colonial yoke. The term "tribe" appears frequently as do the related words "primitive," "natives," and "savages."

In a book by Lengyel<sup>25</sup> dealing with the French colonialization of the Woloff of Senegal, the term "tribe" appears in its classic relationship of dominance and subordination.

*"This tribe was then under the orders of a Moorish queen, who in turn, received orders from a domineering Moorish chieftain, Mohammed El-Habib, with headquarters in the desert country on the right bank of the Senegal River. His kingdom was called 'white' because it was inhabited by Moors and Berbers. He was also master of the swift-moving Braknas and Dwaish desert tribes."<sup>26</sup>*

Note that the Moorish kingdom was considered to be "white." This reflects the fact that "tribes" are, by use, if

not by definition, considered to be groups of "non-white" peoples who are subjected to "white" rule. Eventually the French defeated the Moors and the Woloffs came under the authority of the French.

In the literature written by the well known African explorers, Stanley and Livingstone, the term "tribe" is used frequently, Livingstone, as a missionary took frequent note of the "heathen tribes."<sup>27</sup> Livingstone also uses the term "tributary" in the sense of subordination of a group of people to a larger power. He wrote, "they report the Cassanges to be tributary to the Matiamvo."<sup>28</sup> Stanley was more concerned with the actual suppression of African peoples. In writing of the anti-colonial revolt of the Mahdists in the Sudan in the 1880's Stanley said:

*" The Soudan has been the scene of the most fearful sanguinary encounters between the ill-directed troops of the Egyptian government and the victorious tribes gathered under the sacred banner of the Mahdi; and unless firm resistance is offered soon to the advance of the prophet, it becomes clear to many that the vast region and fertile basin of the Nile valley will be lost to Egypt, unless troops and money be furnished to meet the emergency."*<sup>29</sup>

Such attitudes became characteristic of 19th century writers concerned with the quick suppression of African peoples, especially those who were offering considerable resistance to the European colonizers. Typical is *The Matabele Campaign, 1896*, written by Colonel R.S.S. Baden-Powell, who served as a British spy and later founder of the paramilitary organization, The Boy Scouts. The sub-title of his book is "Being a Narrative of the Campaign in Suppressing the Native Rising in Matabeleland and Mashonaland." Although both of the nations, Matabele and Mashona, were of highly complex political organization with their own separate histories of conquest, Baden-Powell typically referred to them as "tribes." Another book of the same period and area in Africa by Brown<sup>30</sup> gives a blatant example of the colonialist mentality of the time in a chapter devoted to the "Race Problem" which begins with the words, "A primitive race must serve its conquerors or perish." Brown continues by saying that

*" the survival of an inferior race when pressed upon by civilization lies mainly in its capacity to acquire intelligence and in its possession of what the world calls*

To summarize this section, the case can be made that writings prior to the era of European colonialism characterized the peoples contacted by European explorers as peoples living in "nations," "kingdoms," and "countries." This period lasted roughly from the 15th to 18th centuries when slaving began to reach its peak. The colonial period of outright conquest and subjugation of markets, people, and lands brought a shift in terminology and the evolution of the term "tribe." A parallel pattern in the evolution of political relationship, terminology, and attitudes can also be documented for North and South America where European settlers colonized territory and transformed Native American "nations" into "tribes."

*The Native American case of "Nations" to "Tribes"*

In the 20th century documents the terms "tribe" or "native tribes" appear quite regularly, while the words "nation" or "country" have virtually disappeared. The following quotations represents the common distinction made between European "nations" and "Indian tribes."

*" The European nations intruding themselves into the world of the Indian had two practical problems to solve. First they must occupy the land and defend their occupation against the indigenous tribes and other European powers. In the second place they found it prudent to devise procedures by which title to land could pass in an orderly manner from Indians to Europeans." <sup>34</sup>*

In the East the original "white" settlers made treaties with the "Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy" and later the newly created United States of America negotiated treaties (later to be broken) with the Iroquois "nation" and the Cherokee "nation." In the West, prior to the massive expansion of "white" settlers, the U.S. government entered into treaties with the Sioux "nation," the Blackfoot "nation" and the Apache "nation." In every case, after the Native American "nations" were subjugated militarily and politically their status was changed to that of "tribe." In the American Southeast the Native American groups which attempted to emulate the "white" man's ways by adopting Christianity and codifying their laws such as the Creek, Choctaw, Chicksaw, and some Cherokee, were termed the "civilized tribes." In the West, the heroic resistance of the Native American groups failed in the late 19th century and "nations" were turned into "tribes" such as when the Dakota, Sioux, and Apache were

*stamina. Intelligence and activity will triumph while stupidity and indolence, accompanied by the vices of civilization, will result in destruction. Furthermore unless a primitive people can be made useful to their conquerors, the latter will inevitably crowd them to the wall. Throughout human history progress has resulted from the forcible encroachment of nations of superior characteristics and customs upon races of lower development."*<sup>31</sup>

Throughout Brown's work the words "intelligence" and "civilization" are equated with the "conqueror", the European power with which the American, Brown, obviously identified. Conversely "indolence" and "stupidity" are traits of "lower races." For good measure Brown adds that

*"without the employment of radical measures, there is little hope for the rapid improvement of those tribes which are thoroughly satisfied with their depraved condition."*<sup>32</sup>

Anthropologists were hardly immune from the view of distinct cultural and linguistic groups in Africa and elsewhere as "tribal" peoples. An early work of Werner states that the

*"'interest in the subject races of the British Empire should be especially keen in the Mother country....' 'The present series is intended to supply in handy and readable form the needs of those who wish to learn something of the life of the uncivilized races of our Empire. It will serve the purpose equally of those who remain at home and of those who fare forth into the world and come into personal contact with the peoples in the lower stages of culture'."*<sup>33</sup>

Part of Werner's book on the *Native Races of the British Empire* has a chapter on "Inhabitants" which is fully devoted to the "classification of tribes," which was, no doubt, a difficult task given the lack of congruity with ethnographic reality. In many, many cases the colonial power itself simply imposed a "tribal" label and classification upon peoples not previously known by that name. The same pattern of transition from "kingdoms" to "tribes" may also be seen in Werner's book in his reference to the Mohalanga as "a powerful kingdom in the 16th century." The "kingdom" of the Mahalanga had vanished in the 20th century but had appeared as a "tribe."

"pacified" and placed on reservations.

In early times in North America the words "country" and "nation" were used in reference to Native American peoples. For example, at the time of the arrival of Europeans in Virginia in the early 1600's one account tells of Lenape (Delaware cultural grouping) reaction.

*"It was we who so kindly received them on their first arrival into our country. We took them by the hand and bid them welcome to sit by our side and live with us as brothers, but how did they requite our kindness?"* <sup>35</sup>

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), effectively a colonialist agency, was established to deal with "tribal" affairs and to oversee the "civilizing" effort of the government to "uplift" the status of the "Red man". Within a few years, "nations" which had been at war with the United States government were transformed into "tribes" subordinate to, and dependent upon, the state. Today Native American "tribes" are so dependent upon the federal bureaucracy which administers their affairs that some have even come to have a vested interest in prolonging the "tribal" system. They must, in some cases, remain "tribes" in order to make certain demands of the Federal government regarding land or natural resources. Were they to lose "tribal" status they would join the large mass of American poor and unemployed without the "special benefits" bestowed upon them by patron-client relationship which emerged through colonial conquest.

Thus, in North America as in Africa and elsewhere, the practitioners of the colonial system sought to justify their exploitation of the indigenous people which was maintained by force and cemented into place by the ideology of "tribe." The current use of the term and others which have had a similar origin, helps to perpetuate the racist myth of European superiority over groups which are rapidly eradicating such stereotyping by force of their own actions and initiatives.

*"Tribe" in the commercial mass media*

As we have now seen in our review of the etymology and history of the word "tribe" there are common connotations of subordination, remoteness, inferiority, and often of blatant racism. In this section we examine items drawn from the contemporary journalistic usage of the word "tribe" from the three geographical regions of Asia, Africa, and North America.

Our concern here is to see the common factors underlying the choice of the word in this cross-cultural study of popular culture.

#### Asia

On June 3, 1975 President Ferdinand E. Marcos, ruler of the Philippines announced "tribal peace dialogues" with the sixty "tribes" in the "least-favored segments of society." "The President spoke at a meeting with 47 *tribal leaders* from two western provinces. Other sessions are expected to follow, apparently as a reaction to some unrest among *semi-primitive tribes* in northern Luzon." (italics ours). Opposition from Luzon arose over plans to build a hydro-electric facility which would flood ancestral homes.<sup>36</sup> In this case there is a slight degree of local autonomy but it is clear that these peoples are subordinate to the central ruling hierarchy in Manila and the euphemism of "semi-primitive" peoples suggests a basic contempt for fellow Philipinos.

A clipping from the Temburong District of neighboring Brunei features the headline "Borneo tribes go wild over their color TV" referring to the "remote," "isolated" Iban and Murut "tribesmen" of the nation.<sup>37</sup> The use of the term "wild" hints that these peoples are something less than full-fledged "civilized" humans, who, no doubt, could never respond enthusiastically to some new visual sensation.

Moving further westward to Malaysia we learn that "Malaysia seeks primitive tribe's aid vs. Communists." The "primitive" and "long-neglected" "jungle tribe" of the Orang Asli in Perak state is valued in its tracking and guiding skills which the Malaysian government wants to use in the suppression of a rapidly growing Communist insurgency. The 150,000 Orang Asli are "scattered" across "almost impenetrable jungle areas" having, "until recently, little knowledge of the outside world and their lives were untouched by the developments that have made this a modern country." In an effort to win them to the government side the Malaysian government has sought to raise them from "second-class citizens" with improvements in health and agriculture and change their traditional weapons for modern small arms to make "a first line of defense against the spreading Communist guerrilla threat."<sup>38</sup>

This item is even more explicit than those above in view of the direct manipulation of a "tribal" people by the domestic policy of a state government. The transparent opportunism in the use of the Orang Asli represents the classic sort of autonomy tolerated by a central authority in

need of tribute or soldiers.

Still further west we learn that "growing insurgency in the north-eastern *tribal states* of Mizoram and Nagaland is worrying the Indian government." (italics ours). "Rebel activity has been a perennial problem in Mizoram and Nagaland which are the homes of hardy tribal people who are ethnically different from the other people of India. With sophisticated arms and military training in China these 'rebels' have fought the Indian police and military for three decades with sporadic attacks and assassinations on both sides." <sup>39</sup> In this case the "tribal" people have intensified their opposition to the Indian government with outside aid from China, which may perceive the people from Nagaland and Mizoram acting in the furtherance of foreign policy from Peking. Whatever the case the "tribesmen" are still peripheral to either power and remain to be manipulated by their relative isolation and subordination at the very frontiers of state authority.

Finally we can turn to Pakistan which, under the administration of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, has recently abolished the nation's "system of tribal chieftains." This move was considered the most radical reform during his five years in office. The local chieftains drew their great autonomy from an administrative system dating back to the Mughal dynasty of 1526-1857, which was essentially feudal in its organization. The "tribal chieftains" of Punjab and Baluchistan controlled their own armies, taxation system, jails, and justice. <sup>40</sup> As a constant challenge to a modern centralized system Ali Bhutto could no longer tolerate the "tribal" rivals to his power who frequently rose up in "tribal insurgency." This dialectic change in the socio-political order shows that a "tribal" system of organization is not accidental or spontaneous but is part of a well-organized system of indirect rule which seeks local, regional, and ethnic divisions to insulate any central administration from organized resistance. However, when state societies gain fuller power and authority a "tribal" model of administration becomes obsolete and must be reduced or destroyed.

#### *North America*

The determination of "tribal" affiliation in North America is as confusing and arbitrary as we have seen elsewhere. The BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) map of "Indian" reservations looks very much like that of the Bantustans of South Africa insofar as generally tiny spots or isolated territory are considered to have some sort of ethnic or

historical homogeneity. In a long news special published in the *Christian Science Monitor* <sup>41</sup> one is made aware that there are "recognized tribes" and "terminated tribes," not to mention "all other tribes." The BIA identified 47 "tribes" for educational purposes, but acknowledges 92 other "recognized tribes." Some "Indian" specialists estimate that there are some 200 "tribes" still active in the United States. Generally speaking there is little news of these other Americans, with principle exceptions being the occasional bizarre incident, or various forms of opposition to the federal authorities. In the main, Native American groups are among the most oppressed communities in North America with extremely poor educational facilities, poor health and housing, and general social neglect and exploitation. Many find themselves trapped between the paternalistic "security" of reservation life and the uncertainties of marginal unskilled labor in the cities.

With the rise of the "Red Power" movement especially articulated in the growth of AIM (American Indian Movement) there have been takeovers of government offices and occupations of former "tribal" lands from which the original inhabitants have been evicted. Some of the better known cases in recent years have been at Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge, and at Gresham, Wisconsin. <sup>42</sup>

In a little known, but typical land case between Native Americans and legal opponents the following exchange is cited. <sup>43</sup> Members of the Western Pequot "tribe" of Connecticut were suing Ms. Eleanor Drake of Ledyard, Connecticut for the return of 68 acres which they claim belong to reservation lands. With a great sense of irony Ms. Drake said, "they're not going to stop. You give into them here and they'll keep right on going." Obviously ignorant of the pre-colonial history of her "native" Connecticut, Ms. Drake's comments typify those found throughout the country. Neighboring Rhode Island has had a number of similar suits involving the Narragansett "tribe." Most of the suits revolve around the 1790 Indian Non-Intercourse Act which set aside a section of the state for reservation land in return for federal "protection" which made it illegal for anyone to purchase or deed Indian land without federal permission. <sup>44</sup> The position of political suzerainty and territorial isolation is quite clear. It should not be forgotten that the Narragansetts were defeated in military struggle with the colonialists and that force is at the very core of the relationship with non-Indian Rhode Islanders of today.

The transition to "tribal" status is particularly clear

in the case of the Iroquois Nation which made treaties with the representatives of pre-Revolutionary America. Only when they were subjugated by military force and legal chicanery did they gain the status of "tribe." Article 1, section 8 of the United States Constitution states that "the Congress shall have power to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian *tribes*" (italics ours). The idea of being subordinate and distinct is fixed in this sacred American document. Of course, at the time this document was written and signed the areas outside of the original thirteen colonies were virtually unknown to the European outsiders. When contact was made, for example with the Seminoles <sup>45</sup> or the Sioux <sup>46</sup> it was clear that the native Americans were willing to have nation-to-nation relations and that it was only by force that this relation was changed. Thus, a common pattern in present-day disputes revolves around the matter of sovereignty and authority in both internal "tribal" disputes and with disputes between Native Americans and those of European or non-American ancestry.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the *tributary* status of "tribal" people is brought out in the case of the Pamunkey people of the state of Virginia who still give an annual payment of a deer carcass to the Governor of the State ever since their subordinate status was fixed in 1646.<sup>48</sup> A non-cash tributary system is also in effect in Seattle, Washington which shares its catch of commercial salmon on a 50-50 basis with its Indian people.<sup>49</sup> The nearby Klamath of Oregon have also come to terms regarding hunting rights between their people and the Oregon Wildlife Commission which represents state authority.<sup>50</sup>

#### Africa

The commercial and popular press on Africa is probably the worst in terms of racial stereotypes and racist simplicities. Within the general debasement of African realities in the Western press, the lowest examples may be found on journalistic travel pages. The following selections are not unusual.

*"East Africa has delighted visitors for years with comfortable hotels, starkly beautiful landscape, primitive tribesmen and millions of wild animals."*

*"The native tribes live as they have for thousands of years, little disturbed by the march of progress."*

*"Urbanization and industrialization are making primitive places harder to find."* 51.

In another report we find these words:

*" First one should not spend too long in Nairobi. Although a delightful little city, it is not only a gateway of Africa, but in conflict with it. Leave Town to the wild, bush, villages, smoke, smells, and animals ."*

A special recommendation is to go to "exotic," "unspoiled" Zanzibar where "there are only 30 Europeans on the island, and you." 52 In this material the image of backward, indeed deliciously backward, Africa is carefully cultivated. The people are considered as mere natural decoration and it seems that there is a sense of sadness that the nations and their economies are beginning to develop. This "human zoo" image is particularly widespread because few non-Africans travel to Africa except for business or tourism.

The number of articles reporting "tribal" clashes, "tribalism," "tribal" war, "tribal" revolts, "tribal" superstitions, and "tribal" practices are so numerous that they need no specific documentation. In any case, virtually all reflect ethnocentric and frequently derogatory appraisals of what is nothing more than cultural difference and economic deprivation derived from decades of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation.

During the writing of this paper we have been exposed to a classic case of the role of "tribal" people in a settler colonial context. The immense internal contradictions in South Africa reached a boiling point with protracted urban insurrections and rioting continuing for many months through much of 1976. Naturally it was the repressive conditions of the apartheid system of "racial" segregation which brought the tensions into existence, but the South African racist system sought to manipulate the upheaval by using "tribalism." The revolt began in the Soweto township for urban African workers who had the least "tribal" identity since they live far from the "native reserves" and are much more conscious of their exploitation in terms of oppressed classes. Nonetheless a United Press feature from Johannesburg reported "black tribesmen, led by angry Zulus, rampaged through Soweto and attacked residents and black militants..."<sup>53</sup> The press made no mention of the carefully cultivated "tribal" consciousness of the "reserve" Zulus, nor did the press comment upon the fact that the Zulus were deliberately trucked

in by the South African authorities directly to Soweto for this expressed purpose. These same Zulus were armed with knives and clubs, an offense for which hundreds of urban ghetto residents of South Africa have already been shot on sight. Here is "tribalism" at its classic worst and this final example serves to illuminate the social, economic, and political realities which underlie the concepts of "tribe" or "tribalism" where ever or when ever they may be used to divide an oppressed people by a power with superior physical strength.

### *Conclusions*

We have presented material from historical and contemporary documents to explore the implications and connotations of the word "tribe" in scholarship, popular writing and journalism. While the term "tribe" has been criticized correctly for its lack of scientific clarity, we have found a striking uniformity in the application of "tribe." It is used exclusively in reference to subject and colonized peoples, and in concert with racist stereotypes has been part of an ideology which enabled ruling nations and classes to maintain their domination. The overwhelming burden of evidence leads to the conclusion that the term "tribe" be abandoned on the following grounds:

1) We have seen that increasing numbers of scholars are questioning or have already abandoned the use of "tribe." They have done so because the term lacks scientific preciseness and it carries with it perjorative meanings. As anthropologists we are aware of the impact of language on thought, and the habitual association of "tribal" peoples with non-European "natives" and "primitives" represents the continuation of dangerous racial myths.

While we are aware that some anthropologists use "tribe" to signify one stage of cultural development in human evolution, we recognize that this usage does not enjoy wide currency either in the discipline of anthropology or in wider scientific and popular circles.

2) We have traced the etymological origins of the term "tribe" to Roman colonial expansion and have noted that from its beginnings the root "tribus" referred to conquered peoples away from the centers of "civilization" at the peripheries of the empire.

3) We have shown that prior to the rise of colonialism, many of today's "tribes" were the "nations" and "kingdoms" of the past with whom the Europeans and Americans negotiated on a state to state basis. Only after these people were

subjugated was "tribe" applied to them. With the concomitant rise in racist ideology, "tribal" peoples came to be stereotyped as "inferior, backward, heathen and uncivilized" from the loftiness of the European and American colonial perspectives.

4) Today, years after the end of formal European colonialism in Africa, Asia and the Americas, the colonialist term "tribe" is still applied to non-western peoples. The shameful contemporary reality is that a term born in colonialism and nurtured in racism is still used uncritically in scientific and popular literature. We have shown how the use of "tribe" in the mass media has led at times to misleading and distorted accounts of news items regarding non-western peoples.

We are forced to conclude from the preceding that there is no scientific basis for the continued use of the term "tribe". Further, since the term carries negative and derogatory connotations, as relics of an historical era, colonialism, now formally passed, there are no contemporary grounds for the continued use of "tribe." At best the term is obsolete.

We therefore propose the simple substitution of the terms; "culture," "ethnic group," "society," or "people," all of which carry a similar social scientific meaning without the colonialist and racist referent.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

### Contributions:

We are soliciting articles to Volume VII, Number 2 (Winter 1977) and 3 (Spring 1977) which will be built around African Philosophers and Medical Practices respectively. These numbers will not be special issues but a collection of a wide range of articles examining aspects of African philosophical thought; and medical theory and practices, indigenous and alien, past and present. As much as we welcome articles from specialists in our proposed areas of investigation, we will hesitate to accept those that are not readily intelligible to the lay reader.

Deadlines for submission of articles to Volume VII, Number 2 and 3 will be February 10, 1977 and April 15, 1977 respectively.