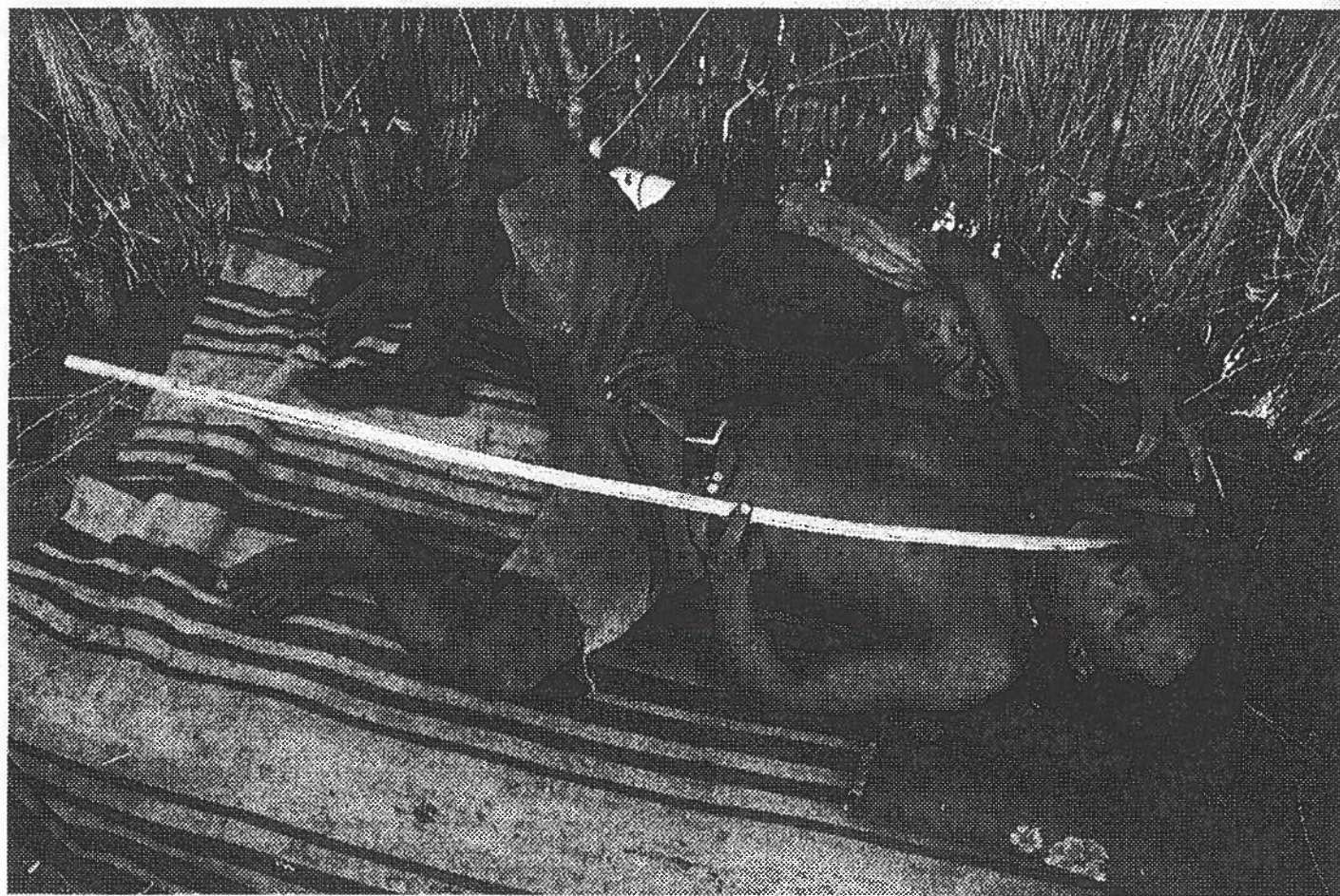


THE ANCIENTS RETURN



The plan to implement UN Resolution 435 in Namibia next month sheds a new light on the nation's oldest inhabitants.

The Ju/wa Bushmen of eastern Bushmanland in northern Namibia have been, like other Namibians, cut off for a century (since the German occupation) from participation in the decisions affecting their lives. They have lived through generations of administrations whose communications have somehow "missed each other", bypassing not only people on communal lands like the Ju/wasi but also those with traditional hierarchies and now, second-tier governments.

Internally, Administration communications have been "missing each other" as well,

too often falling into the cracks between departments and benefiting citizens not at all.

Suddenly, now Ju/wasi face both the challenge and the opportunity of taking part in a political process watched eagerly by the eyes of the world. But here is the question: can a small minority with a hunting and gathering heritage, a recent history of isolation and non-enfranchisement in affairs which concern them, and a problematic present situation of militarisation and economic underdevelopment, transform itself quickly enough to take advantage of opportunities offered by national changes now sure to come?

Members of the Ju/wa Farmers Union, a community self-help organisation, have

been "on the road", travelling the bumpy tracks of eastern Bushmanland to bring news of the international peace agreement and 435 to far-flung communities of Bushmen for discussion and deliberation. One of these communities, called //xaru, was profiled in *Leadership* (First Quarter 1985) in an article called "Plight of the Bushmen" by John Marshall and Paul Weinberg. The story of a confrontation between Administration police and the Ju/wasi of //xaru community, who were installing a water pump at their borehole, ended the article. The Administration's attempts to prevent the installation of the pump foregrounds the "plight" of the people discussed in the rest of the article.

Text by Megan Biesele, photographs by Paul Weinberg



A Bushman ponders the complexities of Resolution 435 at a meeting of the N#ama!os community.

(Opposite) Playing the bow in N!lwaha!os.

Would bureaucratic red tape and decisions taken by remote officials continue to subvert the Ju/wa communities' efforts to survive on what they understood was "their own" land? Or would success for the Ju/wasi in the confrontation at //xaru herald a new era of positive precedents in Bushmanland and mean the beginning of a new spirit of gallant little communities?

Happily, the pump at //xaru was installed, along with quite a few more at other n!ores (traditional territories) in Bushmanland. Today, 13 groups of people have re-established their communities at their ancient places and are busy building a stable subsistence with a mixed economy of hunt-

ing-gathering, small-scale cattle raising and handicrafts. Some seven more groups plan to be back on their land before elections take place in Namibia.

In a development parallel to that of the Aborigines' "outstation" movement in Australia, since 1982, Ju/wasi have been gradually leaving the Administration's settlement at Tsumkwe and going back to their n!ores with vigorous determination to hold onto their ancient land.

From Tsumkwe, now known by Ju/wasi as "the place of death" for its alcohol-related violence, its desperate poverty and its social disorganisation, some 500 people have gone out into Bushmanland with the help of an

organisation called Ju/wasi Bushman Development Foundation, begun by John Marshall and his associate Claire Ritchie, and they have built up small stock-farming communities in the hope of a better future for their children.

As in much of Namibia, the population has been squeezed into a small percentage of available land. In the country as a whole, 70% of the population lives on 30% of the land. From an ancient foraging territory of some 45 000 sq km Bushmanland was reduced in 1978 to 6 000 sq km, an area sufficient to support only 162 people by hunting and gathering alone. At present some 2 000 people live in and around army camps scat-

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(Opposite) A Ju/wa soldier with his family, Tsumkwe.

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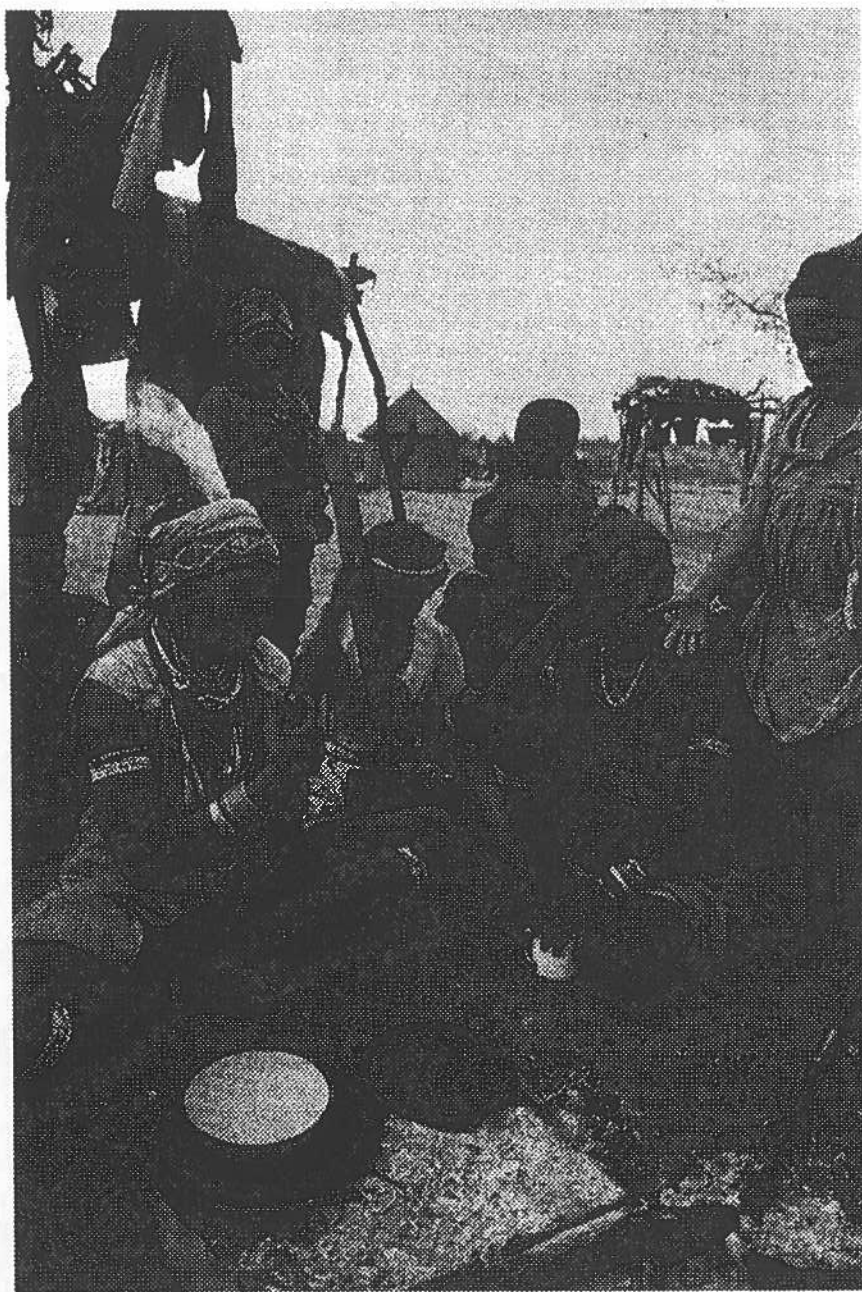
Since 1984 those in the new communities have organised the Ju/wa Farmers Union, a democratic governing body charged with decision making about the cattle resources made available through outside contributions and increasingly now, Administration subsidies. In recent years, the union has also begun to take on more general political functions as a representative body, acting in the absence of a traditional "headman" as a com-

munication channel to the Administration on such issues as control of tourism and the local school. Community pressure has closed the Tsumkwe bottle store and with it, the single violent chapter in the story of "The Harmless People", as Ju/wasi have been called in a world-famous book of that title.

Small cattle herds have been built up as part of a mixed subsistence strategy which also includes hunting (with "traditional" weapons like bow and arrow) and gathering. A concerted effort to live off the land has brought with it a stout kraal of poles and a *mangel* (a cattle enclosure) for each community, an agreed upon schedule of cattle man-

agement and shared work responsibilities, and a careful plan for the use of bulls and milk. Ju/wasi have established dry land and, in some cases, irrigated gardens at the new communities and work hard on them. Life in such a situation is hard, but in most cases the people are adamant about not returning to Tsumkwe with its meagre handouts. "We must lift ourselves up or die!", the people say to each other now, and a new spirit of possibility is palpable in the cheerful, though struggling, communities.

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In many areas, the Administration (through its Department of Governmental Affairs charged in the absence of a second-



tier government in Bushmanland with the welfare of its inhabitants) has followed the initiatives begun by the new communities. *Landbou* has installed windpumps and provided kraal wires, the Health Department has, at some periods, opened a monthly mobile clinic, and old-age pensions have been distributed to the new communities by the local Commissioner. But problems of communication and purpose have remained between the Ju/wasi and Nature Conservation officials on issues of predatory and nuisance animals like lion and elephant. It is ironic that the conflict should lie between Nature Conservation and Ju/wasi, but it is here that

the separation between Ju/wasi and the decision making which affects their lives is most visible and most painful. Nature Conservation provides a case in point illustrating the Ju/wasi's pervasive inability, so far, to achieve participation in either local or higher-level governmental communication.

Basically, there is an unsolved contradiction in conservation thinking in Bushmanland between valuing animals and valuing people. Trophy hunting with no return to the Ju/wasi has recently been instituted in their area, so that white outsiders with guns may hunt for sport what Ju/wasi with bow and arrow are forbidden to hunt for food.

Levels of predator and elephant populations have been artificially raised through a system of open pans established by the Department of Nature Conservation, and Ju/wasi battle to protect their cattle from lions and their drinking water from elephants. The conditions they face in doing this have been so adverse that they are sometimes referred to as *agtertrekkers*, stock-keeping pioneers in a hostile frontier environment and the last people to begin farming in Namibia although they were its first inhabitants.

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(Below) Young children of !Kung descent play near an army camp where many of their family work. The !Kung people are from Angola, fought for the Portuguese administration against the MPLA, and many now serve in the SA Defence Force.



licences for rifles with which to shoot problem lions, and who are not helpful in culling problem predators themselves. Efforts at conservation here seem directed solely at revenue-orientated trophy hunting and game tourism, none of which benefits the local people. As the chairman of the Ju/wa Farmers Union remarked recently: "Why should a white man with a gun be allowed to come here and shoot what I may not shoot with a bow and arrow?" Some of the tourism impinges negatively on the people's lives in the form of reduced meat animal supplies and gawking tourists who regard the Ju/wasi communities as picnic spots and photo opportunities.

All this frustration has helped to put the Ju/wasi "on the road" to something new. Today they are asking hard questions about future changes which must inexorably come into their lives. Will 435, with its promise of "one person, one vote", actually result in the inclusion of these oldest Namibians in processes affecting their daily lives? Or will the legacy of apartheid, with its tragic promotion of mistrust among ethnic groups, continue to haunt Ju/wa attempts to take their place in an enlightened political environment? And where do communal lands fit into the concept of one Namibia? The answer to apartheid is to scrap it, but what about the people who are living off the land

and have no other source of sustenance?

In practical answer to these questions, let's take a look at a series of community meetings held in Bushmanland in September of last year.

We are at Chokwe, a community of about 30 people, on September 9 1988. The chairman of the Ju/wa Farmers' Union, Tsamko Loma, enters the small village of grass and mud houses and politely greets men and women who are working on various small jobs and handicrafts sitting by their fires in the cool morning sun. "My older sisters and brothers, my aunts and uncles, hello," he says. "I see that you're in the middle of work you're doing, but we're here with some im-

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portant news. Could I ask you to gather together in one place so that we can have a discussion?" After men, women and children are settled in a rough circle under a shady tree near the centre of the village, he begins: "I've come to bring news from Windhoek and from Tsumkwe, and I have come to hear your response, so we can all talk together about what it means to us".

He then outlines a recent trip to Windhoek to learn about Resolution 435, during which he and two other Ju/wa men spoke with government officials and individuals from several organisations, including the Council of Churches in Namibia. He tells about seeing Dirk Mudge on television,

along with the head of police and Administrator-General, Louis Pienaar, all discussing the recent international peace talks and 435. He tells about speaking to an official of the Agriculture Department who has told the three men that Bushmanland and its government-installed water infrastructure "now belong to the people," and that they must take responsibility for its maintenance and protect it from elephants. He tells of travelling directly from there to a Department of Governmental Affairs office in the Tinterpalast, Windhoek, famed "Palace of Ink" where the Administration has its headquarters. Told there that in the absence of a second-tier government, the Bushmen really had no say at

all in the administration of Bushmanland, Tsamke put his head in his hands and sighed. All this he tells the Chokwe people, along with the need he sees for people to resolve to be active on behalf of their own future.

A young man named Hau asks to be recognised. Hau is wearing a SADF army cap and boots and speaks Fanagalo from his time in the Johannesburg mines which recruited him from Botswana, just across the border from Namibia's Bushmanland. His wider perspective on personal and community rights and his communications skills come into play for his new community now, as he details for his relatives the governmental ar-



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rangements and laws by which the Ju/wasi have lost so much control. He adds that recently the Chokwe community took a complaint to the Commissioner that tourists had been bathing in their water troughs, even washing their clothes, and in the process fouling with detergent the water drunk by both people and elephants. "Don't they realise that human beings live here? They didn't even come by to greet us before jumping into our water supply."

Excitement erupts around this issue as other people connect this lack of control over local resources with similar issues such as tourists taking photographs without permission, tourists paying low prices for handi-

crafts after being told that the price was higher, and army personnel driving through the area shooting game indiscriminately and throwing beer cans behind them. The children are listening open-mouthed. A woman named Di//au says that it is time for all the communities to work together to protect the region from this kind of exploitation. "Didn't our fathers and their fathers die here?" she demands. "How can we let these unmannered people step on their graves? We have to cry out for our nlores."

Another man is angry that no help and no hearing seem to be available from either local or national officials. "They are employed to be the 'owners of helping', and we trust

them at first, but soon they come to seem like jackals."

At two other communities that day the information is passed on and discussed. Having a forum in which to air their grievances seems to lighten the people's hearts and the atmosphere becomes that of a festival of sharing ideas. Hau from Chokwe has decided to accompany the truck going to the next two communities and he and the other Farmers Union members receive gifts of fresh spring hare meat at one place and of kudu biltong at the next. In the hungry, dry time of September, these gifts are very welcome.

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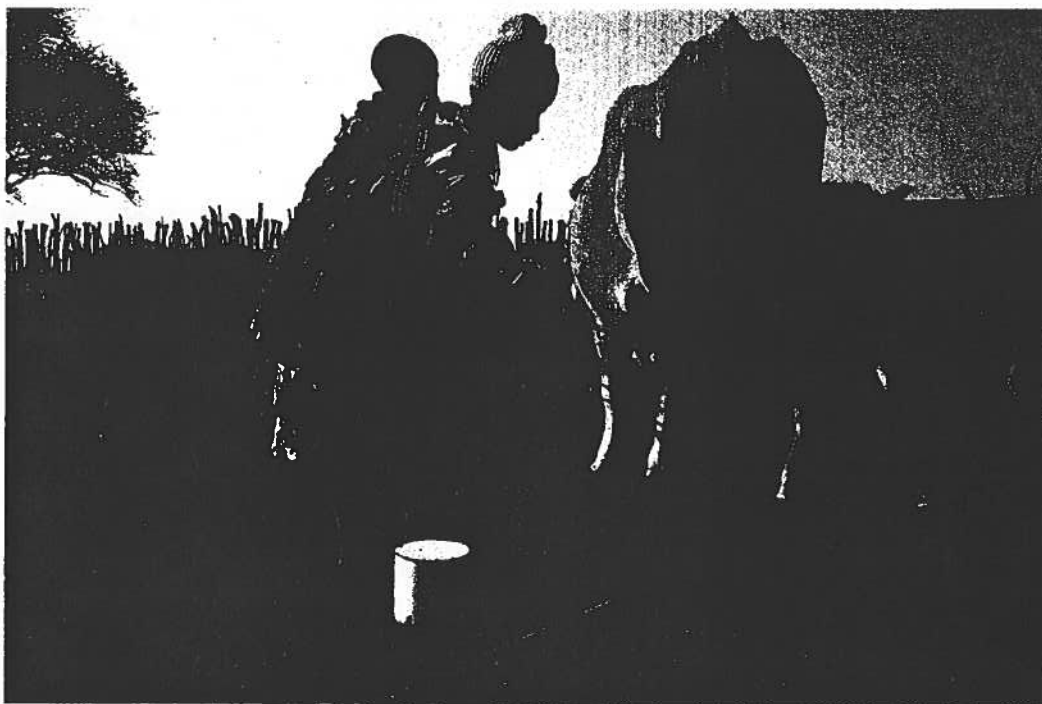
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(Above) //Dipchau, chairperson of the Farmers' Union in //Gauthcha, milks a cow.

(Opposite) Petrus Kgau waters his garden in the community he established at //xabashe.

the information meeting has had to be postponed because key members of the group are away looking for food in the bush. Those who stayed behind to watch the cattle ask the travellers to return another day soon and invite them to rest awhile and listen to old //au play the //guashi, a 5-stringed instrument made from an oil tin. Tsamko says that //au's oldest brother, now dead, also played this instrument beautifully, and that //au's two sons also "have a little of this". A group of maybe 35 people sit in the shade of a tree for several hours, chatting and listening dreamily to the old man's mournful playing. Tsamko makes plans to have a tape of //au's music with which he can travel around to the

other communities.

At another place, the all-important meeting is postponed for one day as a young man there has been drinking and has become confused and belligerent. People's attention is upon keeping him from hurting himself or someone else and they ask the travellers gravely to come back when the people can pay better attention. The drunken youth is swearing roughly in Afrikaans. "He learned this from the soldiers," says his father. The travelling group has to leave but the meeting at this place the following day is outstanding for its clarity and spirit. Willingness to be involved, for a change, is evident in people's faces and in their talk. Many of their com-

plaints centre around misunderstandings with the Nature Conservation officials.

There is great disappointment over what people had thought was promised compensation for elephant tusks found in the bush and brought in by Ju/wasi. People understand that all such trophies "belong to government", but they also ask: "If you lose your wallet and I find it and bring it back to you, isn't that better than if I hide it from you? And if you have promised a reward for it if it's found, shouldn't you pay it? Otherwise why should I bother?"

People are battling to understand the wisdom of Nature Conservation's actions. "Why don't they understand that we are con-



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cerned with our environment too?"

The answer seems to lie in Ju/wa/Administration relationships over the years. Aren't the officials neglecting an important source of information by not listening to Ju/wasi? Indeed, interested observers such as the Ju/wa Bushman Development Foundation ask whether integrating the Ju/wasi who, after all, have a very long history of environment stability in this area, into conservation planning, might not be a very smart move.

Many generations of information about animal and plant species and their interaction should not be discounted simply because they have been passed on orally. The written tradition of scientific study in this area is

young by comparison and perhaps could profit from an infusion of older wisdom. Bushman folklore and religion contain evidence of a very ancient conservation ethic which is thoroughgoing in their culture.

Why not enable the Ju/wasi of tomorrow to connect the shreds of that conservation tradition with their new life circumstances? And why not maximise the gains that are clearly to be made by harnessing the people's motivation through consulting them about the environmental future of their area? As one man put it: "If Nature Conservation is going to make all the decisions and all the money from rare animal species we've hunted all our lives, why shouldn't we try to kill

and eat as many of them as we can? But if Nature Conservation would include us in the process and in the profits, we are ready to make deals with them, for instance, about special protected areas in our n!ores."

Tsamko adds that the disaster of the Red-line fence, whose erection led to the deaths of thousands of giraffe and antelope, including elands, could have been prevented if the Ju/wasi has been consulted. "Sure we understand that they wanted to stop the spread of cattle disease and keep us from selling cattle commercially at the same time. But they didn't have to do that at the expense of the game we rely on for our lives."

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(Above) Children skip with a rope made out of game sinew.

(Opposite) People dance at IlGauthcha. The drum is a relatively new acquisition to the community, and is not strictly a "traditional Bushman" instrument but borrowed from other African cultures around them.

area as regards both trophy hunting and tourism. Yet these revenues do not go back to the local communities, though exactly this was once promised the Ju/wasi by the then Minister of Agriculture and Nature Conservation, Andreas Shipanga. "Why couldn't the Ju/wasi have a control gate of their own at Tsumkwe," asks Tsamko, "with a system of guides set up to conduct tourists in a dignified way through our area, and a daily fee which would go into our development projects?"

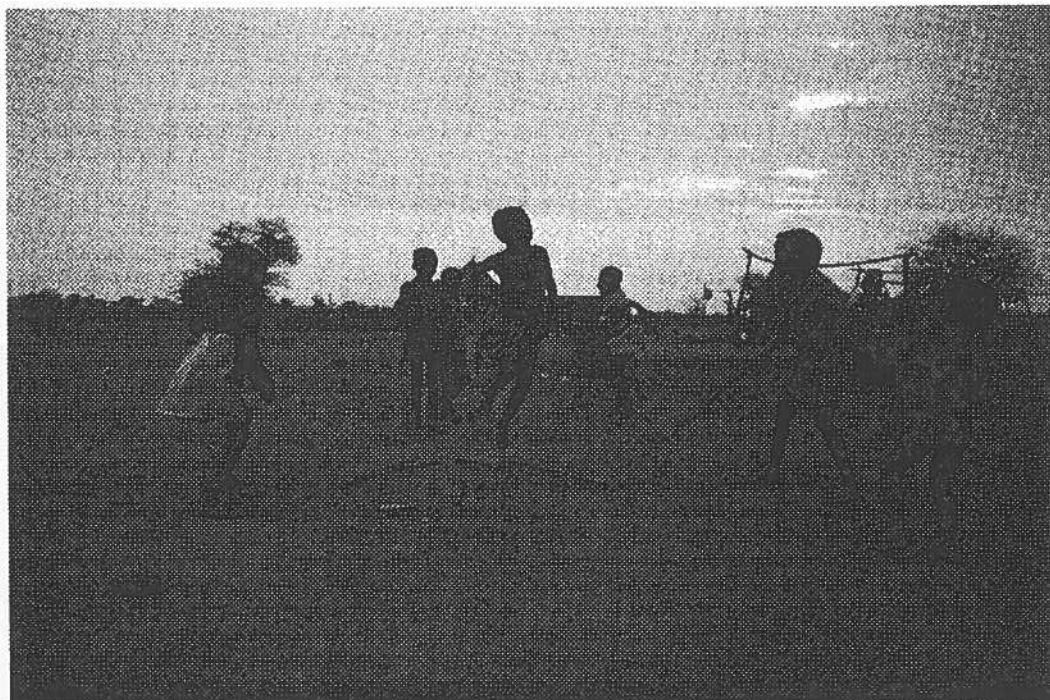
At present, also, there are not only tourists and hunters, but eager pastoral people waiting at the shrunk borders of Bushmanland for opportunities the future may

bring them. Herero and Kavango cattle-keepers hope to move their ever-increasing herds into this, one of the last areas not yet overgrazed in Namibia. What will a possible scrapping of AG-8 by the Administration, by which the present ethnic boundaries were set up, mean for a voiceless people such as the Ju/wasi? And what, after that, will 435 and its consequences mean for them unless they very quickly become actively involved?

In this, the Ju/wasi resemble a number of other groups on communal lands in Namibia, people like the Topnaars and the Himba who, like the Ju/wasi, have no second-tier government and no effective voice.

Much is unclear about the future, but it is clear to the three Ju/wa men who travelled recently to Windhoek in search of information, that if they are *not* involved in the decision making, the decisions *will* be made for them by others who perhaps know nothing of their needs and desires.

"Namibia belongs to all" is a slogan often heard, but in the wake of apartheid it is the height of cynicism to think such a vision will be easily implemented. In the future, will the "stepchildren of Namibia" (a term sometimes used for the Bushmen) receive a part of the inheritance, or will they be left out of the process? Such questions raise further ones about the morality of development, in



(Above) Children skip with a rope made out of game sinew.

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particular, questions about "special pleading" for tiny minorities like the Ju/wasi who, because their long-successful, traditionally egalitarian society "had no leaders", were left out of the second-tier roster and became wards of the State under the Department of Governmental Affairs?

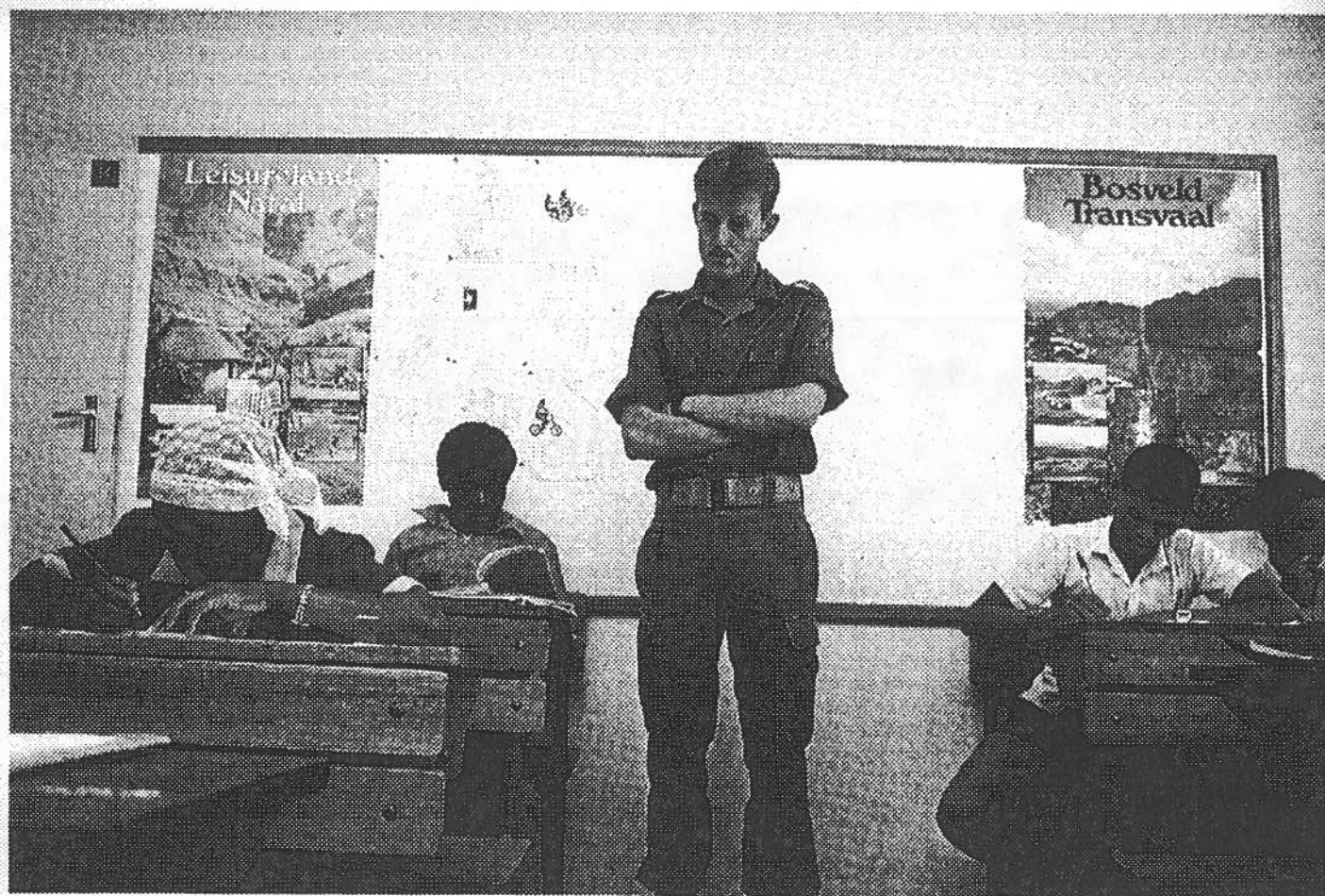
The big question, again, is can they develop fast enough? Their hope, and that of their union and foundation, is that in the information age, in the light of disastrous 19th and 20th century examples of how peoples like them on other continents became utterly lost, and with a little help from concerned friends, they can, and will, develop that fast.

The time of greatest opportunity is now

and the people's awareness of national and world politics is growing daily. At the same time the Ju/wasi, through a combination of academic and media circumstances, have become well-known to many nations outside of Africa. *The Gods Must be Crazy* and its sequel are only two of a huge number of films which have been made about a people who capture the hearts and imagination of the world as perhaps no other has in history. World opinion will surely say that these most senior Africans should not be grudged some extra help in connecting their rich past with a meaningful future, or at very least in being enabled to survive.

In considering developments for the fu-

ture, the Ju/wasi should not be seen naively as just hunter-gatherers making a transition to agriculture. Instead, they must be seen as a people underdeveloped by processes of recent history in southern Africa who are reaching for the privilege of being a *developing* people. Back in the Fifties, when Ju/wasi are popularly considered to have had some of their "first contacts with civilisation", many of them and their hunter-gathering neighbours were already heavily involved in mixed economies and in serf-like relationships with pastoralists. More recently, the problems of their "contact history" have been greatly exacerbated by their unwitting involvement in a civil war in their area.



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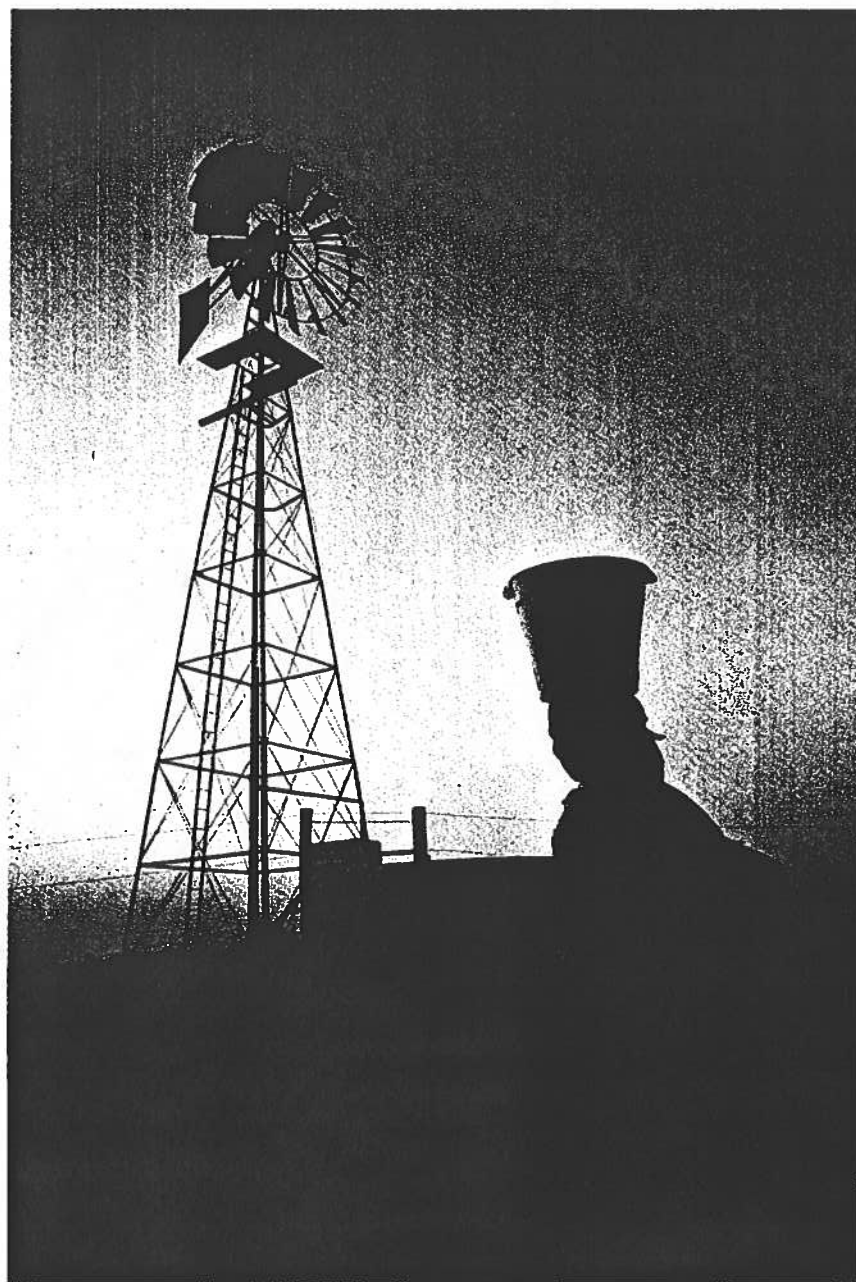
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(Opposite) A soldier teaches a class at the school in Tsumkwe.

(Left) Collecting water from one of the many boreholes the Bushman Foundation has established in Bushmanland.

"We thought our young men were being offered a job of work, like any other job (by the SADF). The only difference was the salaries were much bigger. But we came to see it was a job of anger, and of killing, and of deception. The SADF said they were helping us but we found out we were helping them instead. Most of us have asked our children to come home."

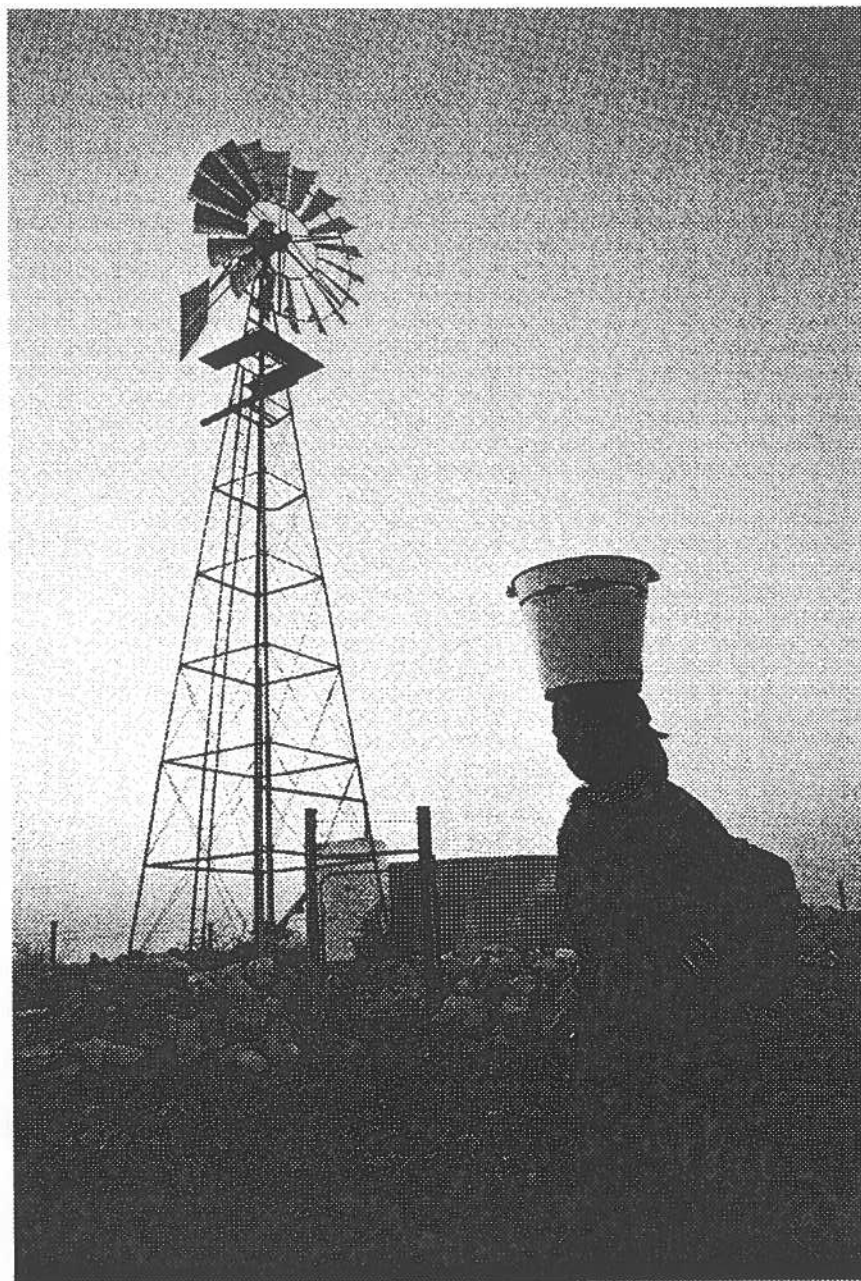
Can the Ju/wasi recover quickly enough from the disruption caused by their military experience and from the dependency and paralysis caused by their political and economic experience, to take advantage of Namibian independence when it comes? Can they and others like them on communal lands in Na-

mibia, who practise a strenuous form of mixed subsistence supplemented by a very few wage jobs for some members of some communities, be integrated into a process of nation-building which should include all Namibians?

Even Swapo, if it comes to that, will inherit the legacy of apartheid. As it is a legacy of separation between peoples, of false, mixed and confused communications, and of distorted power relationships and values, the main task facing a new Namibian government would seem to be one of bridge-building and confidence-building. Will the Ju/wasi, by their own efforts and through the efforts of those with whom they must co-

operate in the future, manage to learn a "new" language of democracy? All they can say right now is that they are on the road to freedom and they are trying to arrive.

Megan Bieseke holds a PhD in anthropology from Harvard and has been working with the Bushmen for 15 years. She is currently project director of the Ju/wasi Bushman Development Foundation and lives at /Gaupscha Pan in Bushmanland, northern Namibia.



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