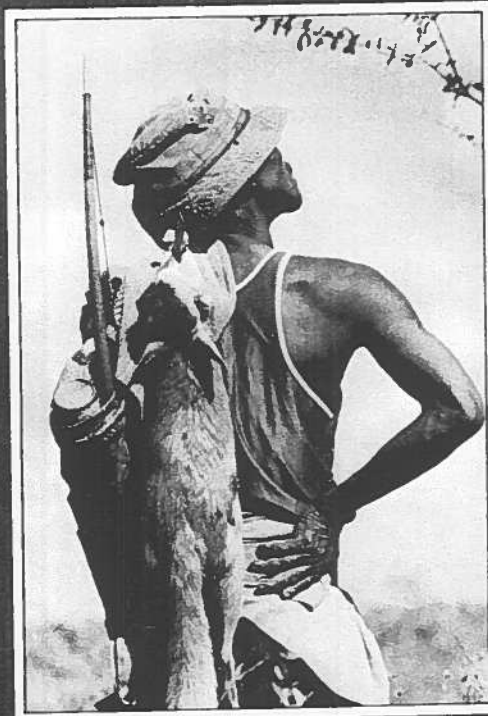


1990
Marshalltown: E07

Megan Bieseck
photos Paul Weinberg

SHAKEN ROOTS

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THE BUSHMEN OF NAMIBIA

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SHAKEN ROOTS

TEXT BY MEGAN BIESELE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL WEINBERG

An EDA Publication

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Foreword

The Bushmen, Africa's first inhabitants and last hunter-gatherers have been struggling for many years to hold on to their land and to survive.

Dispossession by both black and white settlers and the South West African Administration has left less than 10% of the Bushman population with access to land. Survival today depends on cash wages from a few government jobs and from farm labour. The army, once the largest source of employment for the Bushmen, demobilised its Bushman battalions with the implementation of Resolution 435. Under the auspices of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative, those Bushmen with land are learning skills in cattle farming and vegetable gardening. Making and selling crafts is also becoming a source of income as the Bushmen search for ways to adapt to a market economy.

Bushmen of today find themselves at the bottom of the pile in the struggle for a new Namibia. Historically they have been maltreated and exploited. Yet they are regarded as 'the children of nature', 'the beautiful little people'. The mythology is endless. They are nearly always represented in the media as pristine and natural. Yet for decades they have been Namibia's underclass — landless and desperate.

The persistence of the mythology is a barrier to our understanding of a people in transition. Through text and pictures this book seeks to come to grips with the situation facing the Bushmen of Namibia today.

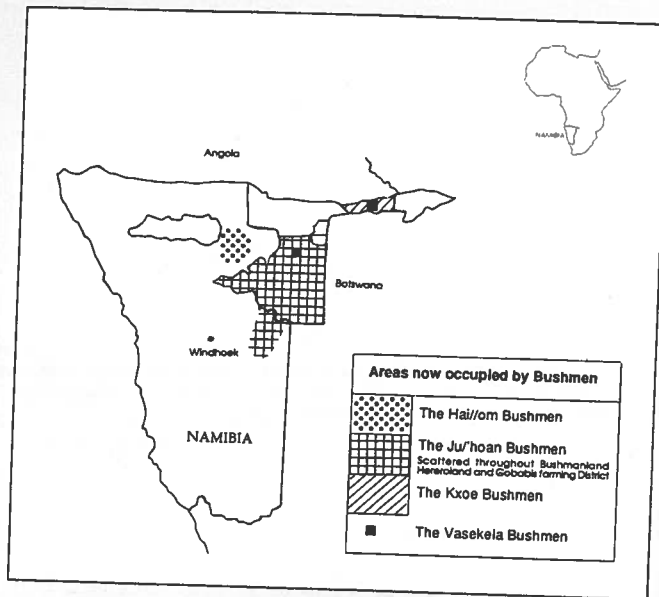
The trees are ours, and the elephants are ours. This is our land. Our things we make come from it — ostrich beads, our bows and arrows.

/Kaece Kxao, N//haru#han, Eastern Bushmanland.



When I pull this bow I feel very happy. It reminds me of the days when we lived well hunting and gathering and life was fine. Then the white man came and took our land. What life is this?

Ou Jacob #Oma, Pos 13, Hereroland.



THE BUSHMEN OF TODAY

Until the 1950's several thousand Bushman people were still hunting large game with poisoned arrows and gathering wild food in the westward extension of the Kalahari basin in Namibia. This area provided a last refuge for the Bushman people, hunted as vermin since the first arrival of Dutch settlers at the Cape in 1652. In the Kalahari basin they were able to continue their ancient way of life, living in small, mobile bands of about 40 people, each one centered on and supported by the resources of a *n!ore*, the Ju/'hoan Bushman word meaning 'the place to which you belong', or 'the place which gives you food and water'. Bushmen have lived around these *n!ores* for as long as 40 000 years, practicing one of the most ancient and simple human technologies on earth.

In the past 40 years, however, life has changed drastically for Namibia's Bushmen. In the mid-1960's the Odendaal Commission recommended to the South West African government that the West Caprivi and Bushmanland be designated as 'homelands' for all the people classified as 'Bushman' in Namibia. Ironically the proclamation of 'homelands' has meant the loss of vast areas of land traditionally used by the Bushmen. The process of 'legal' dispossession, which predates the decision to establish homelands, signalled the end of the hunter-gatherer way of life for the vast majority of Namibian Bushmen. Beginning in the 1950's the Department of Nature Conservation began to expropriate large sections of the traditional hunting lands for game and nature reserves. The process began with the Hai//om Bushmen being driven from their lands to make way for the Etosha Game Reserve. Around the same time the Kxoe Bushmen lost their land on the Kavango River when it was proclaimed a nature reserve. In 1968 the Department of Nature Conservation expropriated the West Caprivi for a game reserve. About 6 000 Ju/'hoan people were evicted from the land they had lived on for centuries.

In 1970 Bushmanland was established. For the Ju/'hoan Bushmen it meant the loss of 90% of their traditional land of Nyae Nyae, and all but one of their permanent waterholes. Southern Nyae Nyae, about 32 000 sq km, was expropriated by the administration and given to the Herero as Hereroland East.

Northern Nyae Nyae, about 11 000 sq km was first incorporated into the Kavango homeland and then proclaimed the !Kaudum Game Reserve in 1982. One of the last acts of the Interim Government of National Unity was to confirm the expropriation of the !Kaudum Game Reserve.

Today 33 000 people classified as 'Bushman' in Namibia have no land on which to hunt, gather or produce food and are increasingly without work. Without land they have resorted to employment in the army or to ill-paid work for white and black farmers. The vast majority who have been unable to get employment squat near places of work, dependent on the wage earners. This has been the pattern

for so long now that new generations have grown up without the skills to hunt and gather. Malnutrition and disease led to a 5% decline in the population classified as 'Bushman' in the 1970's.

Today, the classification 'Bushman' is a wastebasket into which many sorts of people living on the lands of others or on communal lands — not only those readily identifiable as Bushmen from their appearance — have been dumped. Between 1982 and 1986 over 3 000 people were assigned this classification. For the administration this has been an easy way to label those who did not fit neatly into any ethnic category.

The Ju/'hoan people of Eastern Bushmanland, called Nyae Nyae, have been more fortunate. Some 3 000 out of the total population of 33 000 Bushmen have retained ties to a fragment of their land. For the past generation they have been the only people in Namibia who have hunted and gathered for their living while learning new farming skills. They are also the only people classed as 'Bushman' who still have real residential ties to their foraging territory.

Nyae Nyae stretches north to south along the Namibia – Botswana border between the Kavango River and the Eiseb Valley. Originally it extended over approximately 50 000 sq km. Hunter-gatherers need more than 37 sq km per person to sustain a stable population in this area. An uplift in the rock formation brings water to the surface in Nyae Nyae. Clearly visible on a geological map, the uplift makes Eastern Bushmanland rise like an island in a sea of sand. Twelve permanent and nine semi-permanent waterholes make the communal land habitable.

The sand surrounding and isolating Nyae Nyae is deep and without surface water. In this region, the water-table lies between 300 and 1 000 meters below the surface. For many years the waterless approaches to Nyae Nyae protected the Ju/'hoan inhabitants from being shot and enslaved, the fate of so many other Bushman people in Namibia.

In contrast to Nyae Nyae, Western Bushmanland — two thirds of the homeland created in 1970 — lies in the deep sand sea. Water must come from deep boreholes requiring expensive pumping engines. The cost of fuel for pumping makes subsistence farming impossible. Bush foods and game are scarce. *Gifblaar*, a plant poisonous to cattle, is very common.

It was in Western Bushmanland that the South African Defence Force (SADF) chose to locate its 'Bushman' battalion headquarters and bases. Bushmen from Namibia and those displaced by the Angolan civil war were recruited into the army as trackers and infantrymen for the offensive against Swapo in Angola. Thousands of Bushman people lived in Western Bushmanland until the elections in November 1989, supported by the relatively high salaries of war. Now with the war over, people have

nowhere to turn. Some are reportedly trying to eat grass in a desperate struggle to survive.

As the first free elections in Namibia signalled the successful end of the liberation war approximately a quarter of the Bushman population — 9 000 out of 33 000 — were fully dependent on salaries and services provided by the SADF and the South West African Territorial Force.

Most of the Bushmen who made a career of army life over the last decade are Barakwengo, Hai//'om and Vasekela people from the northern areas and from Angola. Now, as the wages of war dry up the soldiers and their families squat in a kind of numbness. They have no land and no homes.

"My future?" one man said, "I don't see a future."

Other ex-soldiers are more fortunate. Ju/'hoan Bushmen from Eastern Bushmanland around Tjum!kui have land to return to, and families who have stayed on the land to develop and possess it. /Kaece /Kunta, whose people live at the permanent waterhole at /Aotcha settled by #Oma Stump, welcomed the end of life in the army when the war ended. /Kaece /Kunta has no regrets as he recalls his war experiences.

"They told us we would be getting on a plane in Rundu. We had to fly at night because when you fly into Angola in the daytime they shoot you down. The flight is about 1 000 km. When we arrived there, they told us to be very careful of going out in the open, because planes were flying over and shooting from the air. It was here that we saw fighter planes for the first time in our lives. The white people lined us up and we stood there and looked at them. Then the white people said, 'Hey, Bushmen, you must watch out for those planes: if they see you they'll shoot you dead' — and after that we knew.

"When we were on the ground later, we were very much afraid, because the planes were searching for us up in the sky above. They shot at us terribly, pursuing us relentlessly. Three trucks full of white people were hit by shots from the planes. One of the trucks was blasted into pieces as small as sand.

"People were also throwing handgrenades. These bombs are certain death and even to speak of them is to speak badly. The only reason we lived through it is we were taught how to be careful. If this had not happened, none of us Bushmen would have returned. All our thoughts were put to living through it.

"We saw the villages of the dead, those who had been killed, and their dead children. We saw the skulls of dead people, and those of children who had died. When you walked through these villages, you were stepping on death, the corpses of dead people. It was horrible. You had to step on them and they

just crumbled to dust.

"If hunger gripped your middle while you were on these 'ops' and you hadn't seen food for three days, and then you had a chance to eat, you couldn't eat the food because it all tasted like death. If you were too weak to work, they'd prick your one shoulder with a needle, then prick your other shoulder, so you'd have strength to work well.

"Every day they were shooting at us with mortars. The only thing was to get into the trenches. You dig a big hole that you can get into up to your eyes. Then you lay big tree trunks across the hole, not small tree trunks but big ones, firmly in the sand. That's how you would live to go home.

"Also while you were walking there you had to be careful of 'foot bombs'. If you stepped on them they'd tear up your legs so there'd be only a stump left, a terrible stump.

"So they kept shooting at us and shooting at us, so we had to dig the trenches even deeper. We were taught to dig down into the heart of the sand. There their bombs couldn't hurt us. Until they shot the bombs of gas; those could kill us all.

We saw many things that clearly were not right. We saw the bones of dead people, things belonging to Swapo, which they told us to bring back to show that we'd killed someone. The hair, the clothes, the skulls of Swapo we had to carry back to them. If you saw someone lying dead you were supposed to turn his body over and take his guns. The stench was terrible. When you hadn't had anything to eat but just spent the day doing that, at night when you lay down to sleep you thought you were going to die. People did die because the wind of death had entered them, from turning over the bodies.

"I was afraid, but not too much. All I did there was kill black people, and I didn't like that. I don't ever want to have to kill another person and see his blood. I want to get out, and what I want to do is buy cattle and go to live with my father at /Aotcha. I want to get out, get my pay, buy cattle, and go to live with my father. My father is the one who taught me to hunt, long before I went into the army. Today my father is old, and I must go and hunt for him.

"My parents didn't agree when I first wanted to go into the army. But I went in anyway — I thought it was just plain work. It was only later that they began killing people. The whole time I was in Angola, all I thought about was staying alive long enough to get back to my family."

DEATH BY MYTH

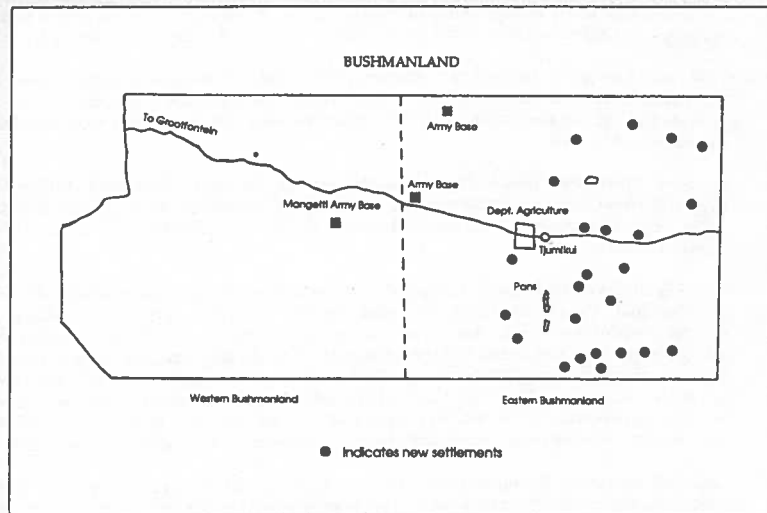
There are two kinds of films. One kind shows us as people like other people, who have things to do and plans to make. This kind helps us. The other kind shows us as if we were animals, and plays right into the hands of people who want to take our land.

Tsamkxao #Oma

One of many pernicious myths about Bushman people, exacerbated by films like 'The Gods Must Be Crazy', is that they still live in a desert never – never land without unfulfilled desires. The reality is that all but about 3% of the Bushman people in Namibia are completely dispossessed and must struggle unrelentingly to survive. Whether they do so on white-owned farms, on Herero or Kavango cattle posts, squatting at the edges of towns, or living in dependence on police or the army, their ability to control their own lives is very limited. As a people with a long history as hunter-gatherers, everything in their background conditions them for dependency on people they perceive as stronger.

Traditionally, the Bushmen had no leaders, believing that a person who set himself up as better than another was without shame and harmful to group life. Nurturant and undemanding of their children, they promoted tolerance and downplayed ambition. Thus they suffer today not only from exploitation at the hands of more arrogant peoples, but also from the social legacy of a life that once worked when land was limitless and competing people few. Bushman people can be fairly characterized as those who have again and again stood aside as stronger forces muscled in.

"Where your mother and father die is where you stay. Our government is the same one which we have always had. That's how we were made, to be in our land and stay there. I'm not a person who knows the names of years, but I know that back when the Germans were fighting their war, we had already been here since the times of our fathers' fathers. Where were the Afrikaners then? Even Windhoek was long ago Bushmanland, and Okakarara, and Etosha Pan — these were all Bushmanland."



A N!ORE IS A PLACE YOU DO NOT LEAVE

The trees are ours, and the elephants are ours. This is our land. Our things we make and wear come from it — our ostrich beads, our bows and arrows.

We Ju/'hoansi are people who have lived in our *n!oresi* for a long time. We didn't know the thing called a horse, and we made fires and did all our work without burning the tortoises and other tiny things. There were no white people's trucks driving around in our *n!ore*, here on our land. When these things came, their people saw us as nothing-things. So they shut off the land with fences and the eland died against the fences so that today our children are dying of hunger. There are no eland left, the wire has killed them all. And that fence between here and Botswana has also killed many animals. This was the work of governments. We once had our own government which kept us alive but this new government which has come in has killed us.

/Kaece Kxao, N//haru≠'han, Eastern Bushmanland.

Isolation from the outside world ended abruptly for the Ju/'hoansi when Native Administration of their area began in 1960. There was a migration of all bands to a single administrative centre called Tjum!kui, where they were given a school, a clinic, a church, a large jail, and some small jobs.

Some 900 Ju/'hoan people believed the administration's promises to teach them gardening and subsidize stock-raising, and an area which once supported 25 people by hunting and gathering was overwhelmed. A government-subsidized bottle store, unemployment, and the local disappearance of bush foods under heavy human pressure combined to turn Tjum!kui into a rural slum. The Ju/'hoansi called it 'the place of death'.

In the late 1970's a movement began among some families in Tjum!kui to return to the *n!oresi* from which they came. Tsamkxao ≠Oma and his father ≠Oma 'Stump' took their people back to /Aotcha, location of the only permanent waterhole now left within the shrunken borders of Bushmanland. Black /Ui took his family to N=aqmtjoha, and Kxao 'Tekening', the artist, took his to N=anemh. They began to work

in earnest to hold onto their land. Now 25 new communities have returned to their families' old places. "We must lift ourselves up, or die!" people tell each other.

The Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae have started a new life as farmers. They still rely a great deal upon hunting and gathering as they make the difficult transition to small-scale stock raising. But they know the land left to them does not permit a return to hunting and gathering alone. Life in such a transition is not easy and they struggle against many things: against lions that kill their cattle, and elephants that trample their gardens and wreck their water pumps; against unhelpful or hostile officials who believe them incapable of development. They also struggle within themselves to adapt the cultural rules and values that underwrote the old foraging way of life to the very different one of agriculture.

Ju/'hoansi know that without more intensive food production they are doomed to remain wards of some government, dependent and vulnerable. Tsamkxao #Oma is the chairperson of the newly-formed Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative, a body which ties all the communities together to support the farming effort. Since 1986 Tsamkxao and the representatives from the 25 new communities have worked to make the co-operative a democratic organization responsible for many decisions about development. But as Tsamkxao said, "The Farmers' Co-op is coming into government things much later than everyone else: the Boers took hold of things first. Now it's very late and we have to get going."

Namibia is on the eve of independence. What will happen after the elections is a matter of intense interest to members of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative. They have been asking representatives of the various political parties visiting Bushmanland what the discontinuation of AG-8, the legislation by which the present ethnic boundaries were set up, will mean for them. Even Swapo, which has the broadest political base in Namibia, will inherit the legacy of apartheid after the election. What will be possible for the large number of Namibians who, like the Ju/'hoan Bushmen, depend on communal land for their sustenance?

At the time of the November 1989 election in Namibia, the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative was ratifying its first constitution, #*Hanu a N!an!a'an*. Representatives from the 25 villages travelled the rutted dirt tracks of Eastern Bushmanland to hold informational meetings and explain the new document. Written by a committee of Ju/'hoansi and hired scribes in English and the Ju/'hoan language, the constitution is intended to inject legal strength into ancient Ju/'hoan concepts of communal land holding.

"Our Ju/'hoan land of Nyae Nyae is now small and we are many. We need the strength of unity under law to keep the land that remains to us. We need the strength of thought under written law to use the resources of our land for our individual well-being and our common good.

"In the past we ruled ourselves with the Right of the *Kxa/ho* and the *N!ore* Law. The *Kxa/ho* is the land and all the resources God has placed in Nyae Nyae. The Right of the *Kxa/ho* permits all Ju/'hoansi to travel and visit freely throughout Nyae Nyae. All Ju/'hoansi can hunt and follow game anywhere in Nyae Nyae. Under the Right of the *Kxa/ho*, all Ju/'hoansi can drink the waters of Nyae Nyae.

"The *N!ore* Law gives the right of residence. Persons inherit the right to reside permanently in *n!oresi* from their mothers and fathers. Our forebears created the *N!ore* Law to prevent conflict. These Statutes embody the Right of the *Kxa/ho* and the *N!ore* Law because these principles have kept the peace among us and served us well.

"Today Ju/'hoansi are people dispossessed of land and the right to own land. Without land on which to produce food to eat and without work, too many Ju/'hoansi die of hunger and disease. The Council of the cooperative must become the mothers and the fathers of the dispossessed, and give them *n!oresi* on which to live."

Representatives of the Farmers' Cooperative know that media coverage of what they are now trying to do is essential. They want to make the point in Southern Africa that there are similar groups of people in other parts of the world. Australian Aborigines, and North and South American Indians are also struggling for land rights and self-determination. Tsamkxao #Oma, the coop chairman welcomed a journalist recently saying, "We're glad you're here because newspapers are very important to us. I went to a conference in Cape Town last year and I found that many people there had never even heard about us. Newspapers will help us inform people, and they may be a way to help end discrimination. These days we cannot accept that our children have to hear words like 'bobbajaan' and 'kaffir'."

Easily mythologized, Bushman people have captured the interest of popular media like film, TV, and glossy magazines. But their real voices have been obscured by the loud clamour of the myths in which they are enshrined. Silenced by the voice-overs, not only of film narrators, but also of neighbours and governments and even of well-meaning friends, they have gone on communicating to each other but not to the world outside. Bushmen have been seen both as a sort of fairy-folk, floating over the landscape with no concept of property and no need for solid resources, and as bloodthirsty poachers with a killer instinct. Romanticisation and denigration can amount to the same thing in the end, a kind of death by myth. or by misinformation.

The Nature Conservation forces of what was once the South West African government were succeeding in taking Bushman land right up until the last days before UN Resolution 435 was implemented. Dreaming of a future revenue-generating tourist industry, the conservationists have sequestered huge swathes of what once was the well-known and reliably productive *n!ores* of the Ju/'hoan and Kxoe

Bushmen. Tsamkxao spoke of an area of Nyae Nyae where Ju/'hoansi have lived for as long as anyone can remember, the permanent waterhole of Gura, where Nature Conservation and the Department of Government Affairs have joined forces to promote safaris and trophy hunting at the expense of Farmers' Coop plans for the area.

"Something we've known for a long time is that the antelopes of Gura were ours, our fathers' fathers' sustenance. And the water there has been our source of life. Even I, when I was small, washed myself at Gura and drank the water there when I was thirsty. At that time I didn't know of a single European or Afrikaner who had been there. This government which calls itself 'Bushmanland' is talking about my things! Why should other people make money here from our animals? We have been here a long time: don't the Nature Conservation officials know they are just small children?"

Officials do seem to be neglecting an important source of information about the environment by not listening to the Ju/'hoan hunters. These people, with their long history of stability in the area have a great deal to contribute to conservation planning. Many generations of information about animal and plant species and their interactions 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 could profit from an infusion of older wisdom. Bushman folklore and religion contain evidence of a very ancient and healthy respect for natural resources, and an ethic of conservation which is thorough-going and socially sound. In fact, seeing these people as natural conservators may be a good way to appreciate what they can contribute. As a /Gwi Bushman, Compass Matsoma, of neighbouring Botswana said recently, "We are the only ones who can live with animals without killing them all."

Not only tourists and hunters but also eager pastoral peoples now wait at the shrunken borders of 'Bushmanland' for opportunities to move in. Descendants of survivors of the German Herero Wars at the beginning of this century, when General Von Trotha issued his famous genocide order to kill all men, women and children, have been living as refugees in Botswana. With the coming of independence, many now hope to return across the border and settle on the rich pastures and relatively abundant waters of the Nyae Nyae area, one of the last areas not yet overgrazed in Namibia.

But the Nyae Nyae people say "People shouldn't think they can ruin one area by grazing too many cattle and then move onto someone else's land and ruin that too. We will keep the numbers of our cattle small. We think not only of today but of tomorrow and the day after that."

As new cattle herders, Ju/'hoansi face many challenges. The primary one is the confrontation with their own tried-and-true means of organizing their work. While hunting with poisoned arrows is a most individualistic pursuit, sharing of all food was customary. Keeping cattle and planting dryland gardens

involves a new negotiation of labour processes and products. Ju/'hoansi spend a lot of time talking about this.

A dark side coexists with the exultation and excitement of new beginnings. Alcohol undermines Ju/'hoan spirit as it does that of so many African communities. People in Eastern Bushmanland do not seem to be chronic alcoholics at this stage. Distance from bottle stores and poverty have protected most of them. But many brew beer from sugar and yeast on pension day, and when the bottle store was still open in Tjum!kui it caused immense social disruption.

Just after the independence election, Ju/'hoan people took their first public stand acknowledging that excessive drinking is a community problem. At a meeting of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative, strong feeling arose over the issue of the social disruption caused by home-brewed beer.

"Those who drink are the ones who cause anger and fighting. Those who don't drink just sit quietly... We're not saying don't drink at all, but just drink slowly and wisely... I think we should say to ourselves, I have work to do before I drink. First I'm going to do my work."

"When you drink, you shouldn't go around thinking like a Boer and telling people that you are a big shot. If you do that, someday people will become angry with you and their hearts will grow big against you. You don't go saying you're a chief. Instead, you sit together and understand each other. None of us is a chief, we're all alike and have our little farms. So when you drink, just think clearly about it and talk to each other about being careful. We've been told now, so let's be smart about drinking. Let's not fight. Let's start today to talk to each other about drinking and help each other." (Dabe Dahm.)

The bottle store at Tjum!kui, which once did big business on army pay day, has been closed.

Back on their land after living in town with the problems of alcoholism and unemployment, Ju/'hoansi can once more be dignified examples for their children. "We are people who have our work," they say. Children see their mothers and fathers engaged again in productive activities they know well.

A sense of purpose again pervades life in Eastern Bushmanland. Enthusiasm to take part in building a new Namibia runs through the meetings of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Coop.

"At first we had no leaders, but now we're making leaders because these days we're getting strong." (Tsamkxao #Oma.)

"For us, when we're truly feeling alive, maybe when a lot of rain has fallen, our hearts leap upward and we say, 'A-a-ah! That cloud sitting up there in the sky!' Then you're a 'real person' and you feel like clearing and chopping out a field. Next you get seeds to plant, and you plant them and cry out, 'Oh! I wish I could hurry and plant more with this good rain! I wish I were even stronger!'"

"Then the things come up and you say, 'Hey! Have these things actually come up?' And your heart is happy and you make a little thorn kraal around your garden and you say 'Hey!' (!'Uu Dabe, Tsamkxao's mother.)"

"If the children got good schooling? Some of them could get work in hospitals, medical work; some could teach children in schools; some could be police; some could work in offices and do secretarial work; there'd be men's work and women's work. Or they could have stores or some could learn to work on machines, machines that build trucks, or machines [welders] that work with fire. These days people don't just do one thing but do lots of kinds of things. Some could go to work for the government in another area, maybe in water works, in water detection and borehole drilling."

"Others could learn how to take care of cattle: some could be cattle people; some could learn about the diseases of cattle; some could learn how to vaccinate cattle, and others could learn about pasturage. They could learn about the grasses which are good for cattle and the grasses which make them sick..."

"If they had a chance to learn these things, they'd know how to do them. My heart burns for them to learn. That's how our work would really go forward." (Tsamkxao #Oma.)

NOT KNOWING THINGS IS DEATH

The importance of knowledge in obtaining a living is very much present in the minds of the Ju/'hoan Bushmen. Once they had to be able reliably to tell the difference between poisonous and non-poisonous plants and to judge the likelihood of crossing paths with a worthwhile animal at a given season of the year. They had to know how to make riems, rope, string, sinew thread, carrying bags and nets, stamping blocks, aerodynamically effective arrows, and much more, all from natural materials. The word for 'owner' (*kxao*) in Ju/'hoan most deeply means 'master', in the sense of one who knows, or knows how to use. To own property is to be its steward; to own an area of land, a *n!ore*, is not to possess it exclusively but to use it well.

"A big thing is that my food is here and my father taught me about it. I know where I can drink water here. My father said to me, 'These are your foods and the foods of your children's children.' If you stay in your *n!ore* you have strength. You have water and food and a place."

"We have been taking care of our *n!ore*. Other Bushmen in this country have no *n!ores* to take care of. White people deceived them and they have no *n!ores*. Even in Windhoek there are Ju/'hoansi who have been robbed of their *n!ores*. But we are where our fathers' fathers lived." (Nyae Nyae Farmers' Coop meeting, Bushmanland.)

When things change greatly in one generation, sometimes older people teach children, and sometimes children are in a position to teach adults. *Kxao* / *Ai!ae* of *N#anemh* says to his boys that the way to keep your *n!ore* is to develop it.

"I hold my cattle in my left hand, and my garden in my right hand, and together they give me life."

"It's your place, your only place, where you stay. The land over there belongs to other people."

New ideas and new concepts have flooded into Nyae Nyae in one generation. Has there been enough time for Ju/'hoansi themselves to change sufficiently to participate in the coming independence? Events like UN Resolution 435 and free elections and the final end of apartheid have suddenly overtaken them with many of them not knowing what is really in store.

Like other Namibians, Ju/'hoan Bushmen have had their geographical isolation deepened by the apartheid policies of South Africa and before that, as long as a century ago, by the original German colonial administration of *Südwest*. They have lived through decades of administrations whose com-

munications have somehow missed them because, being egalitarian, they did not have identifiable chiefs.

"Today things are changing. The government of this country is changing too. Other countries like America have spoken and said the government must change. America - *n!ore*, England - *no!re*, Germany - *no!re* and Japan - *no!re* say that Namibia should have its own say, that all of us in Namibia should have our say." (Nyae Nyae Farmers' Coop meeting, Bushmanland.)

Suddenly, now, Ju/'hoansi face both the challenge and the opportunity of taking part in a political process watched eagerly by the eyes of the world. But can a small minority with a hunting and gathering heritage, a recent history of isolation and exclusion from affairs that concern them, and a problematic present situation of economic underdevelopment and militarization transform itself quickly enough? Can the Ju/'hoansi hold on to what remains of their ancient territory and also take advantage of the new opportunities of freedom? An egalitarian culture which has always underplayed leadership is faced with the necessity of selecting leaders to participate in the new politics. As at the South African Cape three centuries ago, when leaders were called into being among Bushman groups warring for their lives with the Dutch colonists, Ju/'hoansi are now creating leaders to meet the challenges of the present:

"We're learning not to take the suggestions of just anybody about what we should do. We'll elect someone who comes from our own *n!ore* to work for our interests. This Cabinet [of the interim government] which has only told a few people what it's doing, not everybody works that way, only to put its own people into office. They're looking for people they can run as they like, people whose brains are short." (Nyae Nyae Farmers' Coop meeting, Bushmanland.)

In 1988, news of the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the promise of free elections in 1989 startled the Ju/'hoansi into a realization of the magnitude of possible changes. Since September of 1988 the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative, a grassroots community organization in Eastern Bushmanland, has been holding informational meetings about Namibian independence at far-flung villages. Black /Ui at N=aqmtjoha welcomed the arrival of the discussion team:

"I thank you all. I thank you for this talk which comes from far away to us. But one thing that gives me pain is that long ago I never heard anything like this, but only today am hearing it. Today my heart is happy with what I have heard. News is life."

Before the effects of the UN election information process were felt in Bushmanland, the Farmers' Coop tried to explain elections to people who had no word for them in their language. Many had never even heard the Afrikaans word *verkiezing*.

"An election means to come to an understanding about a *n!ore*."

"An election means that you give praise to the person who will sit in the chair of leading, the head person."

"An election is where you plant your feet and stop."

The talks about elections and other democratic concepts were held in villages of grass or mud houses with no protected public gathering place. The sun beat down at the edges of whatever patch of shade could be found large enough to shelter the village people and the bakkie-load of travellers. Children bounced on their mothers' laps and people of all ages sat close together, often with their legs crossing those of their neighbours. The chairperson of the Farmers' Cooperative, Tsamkxao #Oma, constantly encouraged others besides himself to speak.

Issues as small as how to keep tourists from swimming in the drinking water dams to ones as large as securing legal title to their land have been under long discussion at these meetings.

The Nyae Nyae area communities are preoccupied with how to ensure that they are included in talks about conservation and other issues concerning them. Great resentment is felt toward government officials who travel all the way from Windhoek to Tjum!kui, a distance of 750 kilometres, ostensibly to consult with the Ju/'hoan communities, but actually only to meet with the white officials at the comfortable Nature Conservation rest camp, and then go home. The public nature of communication has become a *vita* issue, and it came to a head in early March 1989 with the arrival of an SADF public relations team at /Aotcha.

Huge armoured vehicles swept into the tiny village of mud houses. Uniformed men with submachine guns silenced the usual hubbub. The army was pulling out of northern Namibia, campaigning as it went for the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), SWAPO's main opposition. "Watch out for the Hyena" (Swapo) and "Vote for the Eland" (DTA) were the condescending folktale slogans the soldiers offered. "The eland is the animal without deceit: you are the eland."

The Ju/'hoan hunters' sign for eland antelope horns is a 'V' made with the first and second fingers. This also happens to be the adopted hand sign for the DTA. In a further twist of irony, which the soldiers couldn't have known about, but which made an even harder puzzle for the Ju/'hoansi to unravel, "Eland" is an ancient clan name for many Ju/'hoansi in the area. Hyenas, on the other hand, are thought of as outcast animals who are always up to no good. Some people were taken in by this overwhelming

symbolism, but others remained skeptical. "Swapo has never done anything to us; why should anyone call them hyenas before hearing what they have to say?" said one man.

Ultimately, the public relations meeting at /Aotcha was a bit of a rout because the officer in charge refused the people's request to tape the session. The message brought by the SADF that day was hardly secret, but since it could not be taped, the people regarded the communication as a "theft". Unfortunately for the army it didn't know that the Ju/'hoansi call tape cassettes *axusi*, their word for oracle disks. Oracle disks are thrown down on the ground like dice and are said to reveal the future by the pattern they make. These disks are traditionally made from eland hide and are thus associated with the eland's herd sociability and supposed guilelessness.

Playing with strong symbolism can ultimately backfire, as it did resoundingly during the last feverish days of election campaigning in Bushmanland. Dabe Dahm, a Farmers' Cooperative representative at the village of //Auru, had thought for a year about the DTA's use of the eland to represent its party. Having observed violent drunkenness and clear intimidation of potential voters by the DTA campaigners, he said, "Today my shame is piled high. My people's name from long ago, 'the people of the eland', has been rubbed in the dirt and stolen by politicians who will never do anything for us. All they want is to give other people our land."

The same day at Dabe Dahm's village people spoke of the loss of the actual eland on which they once depended. Many adults remembered a time when eland were abundant in their area.

Most Ju/'hoansi believe that the drastic reduction in eland numbers is due to the game fences. No studies have been carried out in Namibia to prove or disprove this idea. But studies by wildlife ecologists in neighbouring Botswana show that the fences caused the deaths of large numbers of game. Regardless of their decline in numbers, eland live in folklore and inhabit people's minds and a move to try eland domestication in Nyae Nyae is gaining support. Ju/'hoansi see eland farming as a sensible alternative to the kind of abuse of grazing resources they have seen destroy the productivity of adjacent areas such as Eastern Hereroland. The eland is adapted to the area, it does not suffer from the effects of *gifblaar*, and it can sustain itself on water-bearing plants such as desert cucumbers and juicy roots when water is scarce. Some Ju/'hoan people have worked on the farms of Afrikaner people in the Grootfontein area who keep eland and other game on their farms, and they know what a fine candidate the eland is for management as a herd animal.

"We don't want our land to be a nature reserve, because we also want to farm cattle. But we want wild animals too. If there are too many cows, they will eat up all the grass, so that the wild animals will not

have enough to eat. If we want both wild animals and cattle, the cattle must be few. We should protect all the things that are in our *nlores*."

"Trucks with hunters shooting from them have chased away the animals we had here, trucks and the fences that have been built. Long ago you saw all the animals here, even eland. But today there's not a single eland. Even ostrich eggs you don't see, because the ostriches too are stopped by the fences. We don't want this, we want the fences taken down so that wild animals will come back and be close to us as before."

"If Ju/'hoansi had strength, maybe they could think of catching lots of eland, and maybe roan antelopes, and farming with them. But until after the election we will have no strength. The white people still have all the strength in this land. Maybe after the election we could do it... Long ago the eland used to cross Nyae Nyae according to the season, but one season the fence was closed on them and on their calves, and they haven't returned."

It's clear that the policies of the South West African state with their paternalism and emphasis on separation have angered the Ju/'hoansi for a long time. In particular they resent being left out of communications. Ju/'hoansi call themselves 'the owners of argument', and 'the people who talk too much'. For them, it's important that issues be discussed and debated by everyone so that ill-will doesn't fester in someone left out of the talk.

Boo Kaqece at G#aing#oq said, "Everyone should gather together in one place to make agreements. Talking separately isn't right. It could cause fighting."

The idea of representation for their voices in government is catching on among the Ju/'hoansi at the same time as they are realizing the power of the printed word. As Tsamkxao told one group meeting under a thorn tree, "One problem is that we have no scribe. We have no-one who is 'the owner of the mail'. So let the children help us. Let the children go to school, learn, and know. Let's make a plan. Let's let everyone know that we have someone with a writing-stick. Let's have a scribe, a writer, a translator. Let's not be without these."

None of the language of democracy, in fact, seems terribly new among the Ju/'hoansi, rather it is age-old. These are the people who gravely said to anthropologist Richard Lee over a decade ago:—"We have no headman, each one of us is a headman over himself." The concept of "one person, one vote" fits right in with Ju/'hoan ideology, and among these sexually egalitarian people one doesn't even have to add, as would be necessary in many parts of the world, "and a woman's vote is just like a man's."

Tsamkxao illustrated democracy at one meeting, at a place called //Xa/oba, talking about collective strength and the responsibilities of the people's representatives: "I thank the old people who have spoken, but we also need to begin to hear from the young people about their *n!ores*. Everyone must work together. Do you see these sticks in my hand? If you pick up lots of sticks, you can't break them. But one stick alone breaks easily. So we want things from now on to be done on paper, legally, beginning with meetings where everyone comes together to listen. We don't want a Ju/'hoan representative who just stuffs news into his own ears and doesn't speak to us. If you speak for a group of people to a government, and if you speak badly, it doesn't just affect one person. It affects everyone. When you do something, all your people should have a way of learning about it. Political parties are for letting people know things."

One of the things Ju/'hoansi are letting people know now is that they suggest legal institutionalization of something like their old *n!ore* system. They know it has been successful over a long span of time, and see it as the basis for something that could work in Namibia's future. It would mean a new kind of survival for them, too, not the traditional one, but a creative one, their own special contribution to nation-building.

In 1989 Namibia had good rains. By March, Bushmanland was lush and green. One evening, as lilac-breasted rollers tumbled after insects against cumulus clouds lit with a pink glow by the setting sun, an historic meeting began at Nyae Nyae. After generations without meaningful talk with outside political forces, representatives of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Coop met with officials of Swapo, the party which will construct the Namibian land tenure systems to come. With the two groups sitting on the grass in a rough circle of about forty people, including onlookers, the Coop presented a document stating its goals with regard to land and representation. Written in the Ju/'hoan language and translated into English, the statement calls for a democratic national system with regional autonomous government in Nyae Nyae based on current and longterm residence.

Ju/'hoansi know they are the last Bushman people in Namibia to have an unbroken contact with even the small fragment of land that is still theirs. And they know these ties to land are their main resource: "Where your mother and father are buried is where you have your strength."

The Ju/'hoansi of Eastern Bushmanland are the lucky ones. But they are planning carefully to share their land and a chance to make an independent living with other Bushmen in Namibia. The election and the talk that preceded it has begun to give these isolated people a sense of the altruism needed to create a nation.

"I said to the Administrator General, 'Will you help us since our *n!ore* is small? Hereros have taken part of it and !Kaudum is another part gone.'

"I also told him, 'The people who once worked in the army today have no work and no other strength. How will we help those people?'

"I said, 'The people called Vasekela — we still haven't met together to talk with them. I understand that they may be allowed to stay in Western Bushmanland and make gardens. We must ask how they are going to do that without water.'

"We want to help everyone we can. It's important that we who are the Ju/'hoansi have our own government and do our own work. We have only a small place, but we want to go to the Gobabis farms and find our people who long ago were taken away. We want to get them and bring them here. Can we find a way to help everyone?

"We have received money from the 'owners of helping' [aid funds] and we have dug boreholes for more water in our small land. The !Kaudum people are many, and many others are on police-posts that will now die, or in Gobabis. We who are representatives of the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative are like people planting a tree. We should realize that we are not just one small thing but are starting something big. The work will go on, even beyond our deaths. The boreholes will be there." (Tsamkxao ≠Oma.)

The Dispossessed



N/aisa leads blind Oma, N/aute, Kavango.



In the old days we lived as hunters with the animals. No one ploughed then.

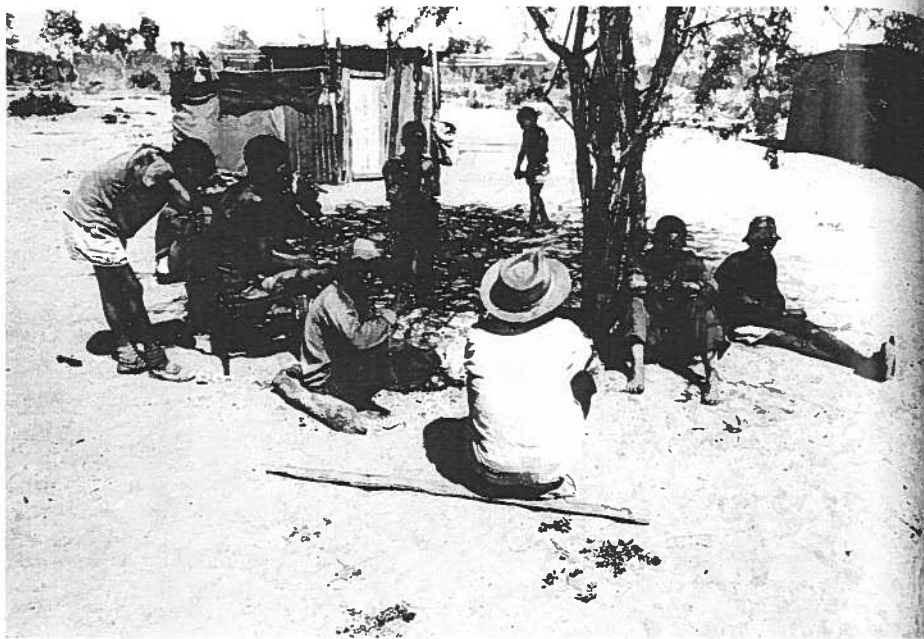
We lived as hunters — with a bow and arrow and an assegai. Then the law came that we couldn't hunt.

Now we are unsure of our lives — we have always known hunting as a way of life.

Dumba, an elder of the Kxoe Bushman Community.



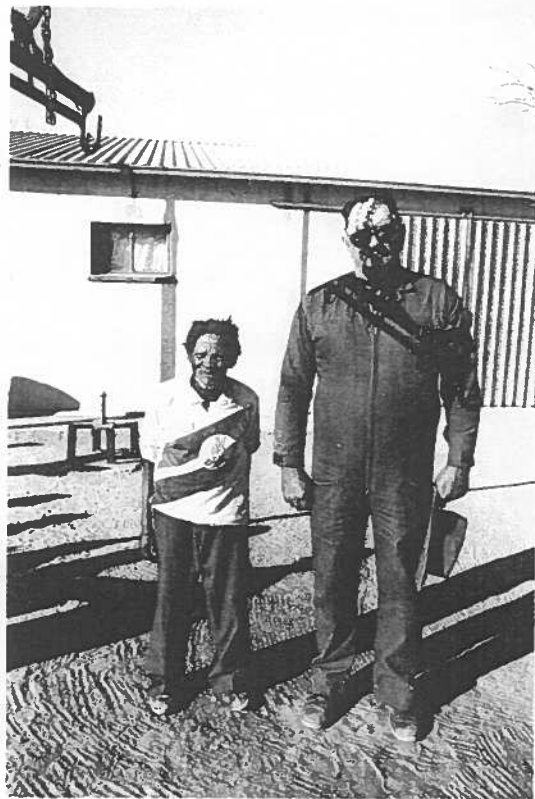
Young Kxoe Bushmen, Kavango River, West Caprivi.



Hai//om ex-soldiers and unemployed men Tsintsabis.

Why do we have to live like this? What have we done wrong? Growing up as a child I used to know the taste of meat. These days we do not even get to smell it very often.

Jan Seringboom, Tsintsabis.



Agerob and Mr Hentjie Barnard on his farm, Gobabis farming district.



Branding and de-horning, Gobabis farming district.



A Herero women and the Ju/'hoan family which works for her.



Ju/'hoan domestic worker, Kavango.



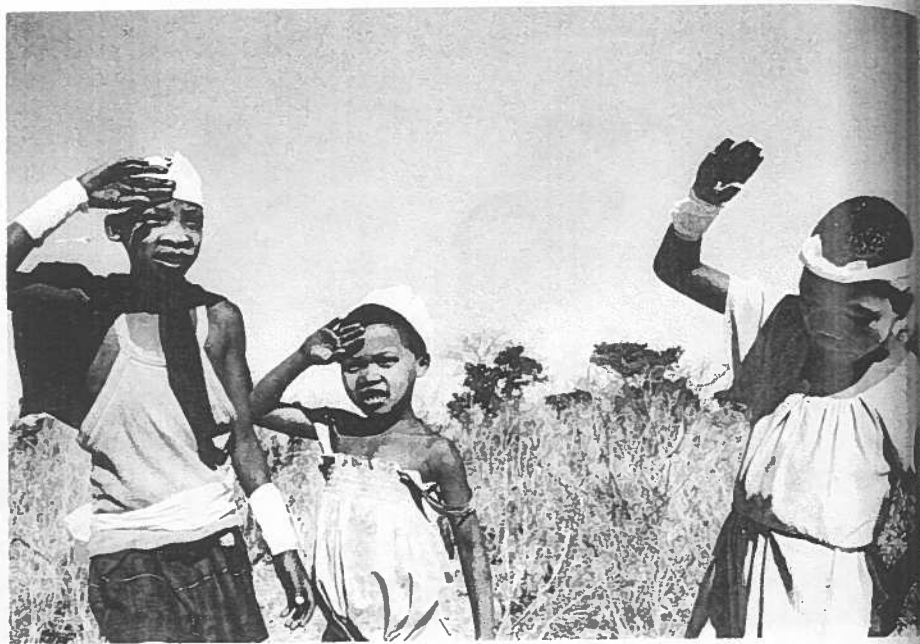
Waiting for demobbing, Mangetti.



Prayer parade.



Ex-soldier, Tsintsabis.



!Kung (Vasekela) children play cadets.



Dancing the Melon Dance, Gairna School, Gobabis farming district.



Langman comforted at the funeral of his youngest child, Epikuru.



Leaving Gobabis en route to Hereroland.

Bushmanland



Hunting, N=ama Pan.



So I asked the man, what do you mean that we should go where there's only a borehole surrounded by rocks and no natural water? If that borehole dies we'll have to leave. I have cattle, the cattle will die; and I will die. I won't move to a well where you can't count on the water. The thing to do is to move back to /Gautscha. God's water, /Xu's water, is there and I can dip it up and give it to my cattle. That's where I'm going to return and settle. That's what I told him. That's what I told the whites.

≠Oma N!oa born 1913 - died 1988.



Those who say we should share our land with others shouldn't think they can come here looking for money. We say, 'Just because this place is a land of lions and other animals does it mean other people can make money here?' They say we have no government and we agree, asking what help have we ever received from any government?

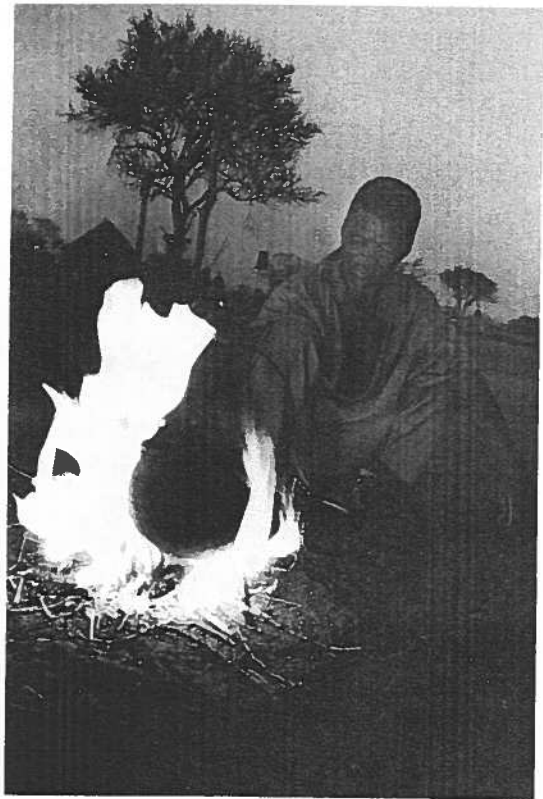
Tsamkxao ≠Oma, son of ≠Oma N!oa, born 1941.



Bushmanland.



Killing a spring hare, Nsama Pan.



/Aotcha at dusk.



Sunset, //Aqri=ah.



Poisoning arrows, //Auru.



Playing bow, N//oaq'osi.



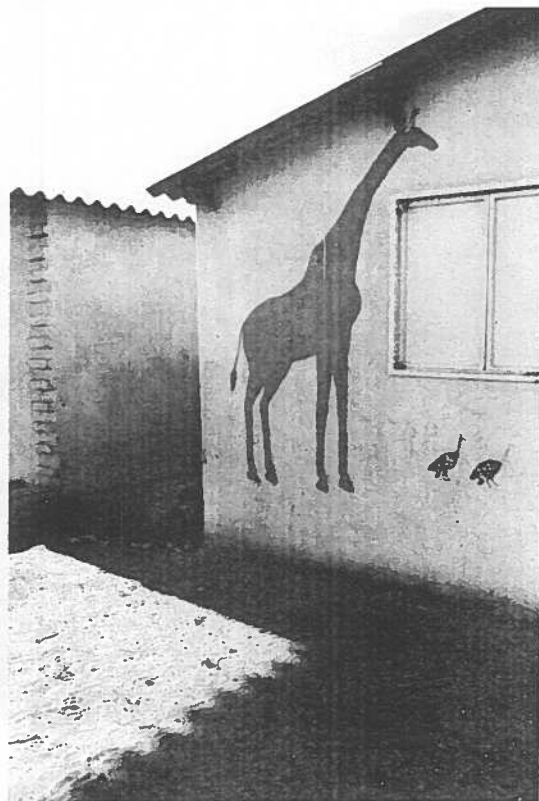
Tjum!kui.



G'aqa /'hana, star of 'The Gods Must be Crazy'.



Location, Tjumlkui.



Tjumlkui.



/Aotcha.



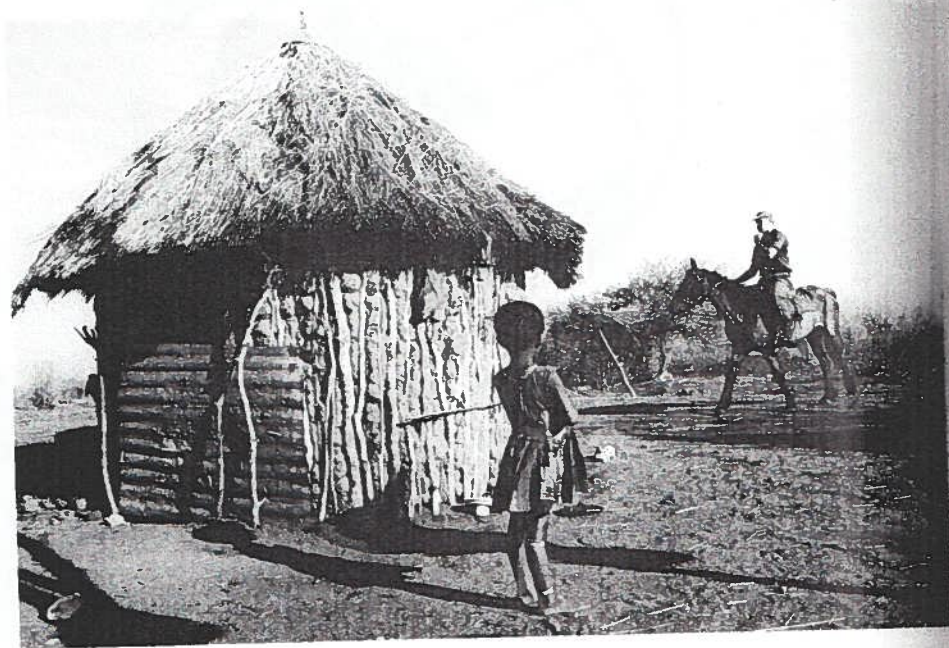
Craftwork, /Aotcha.



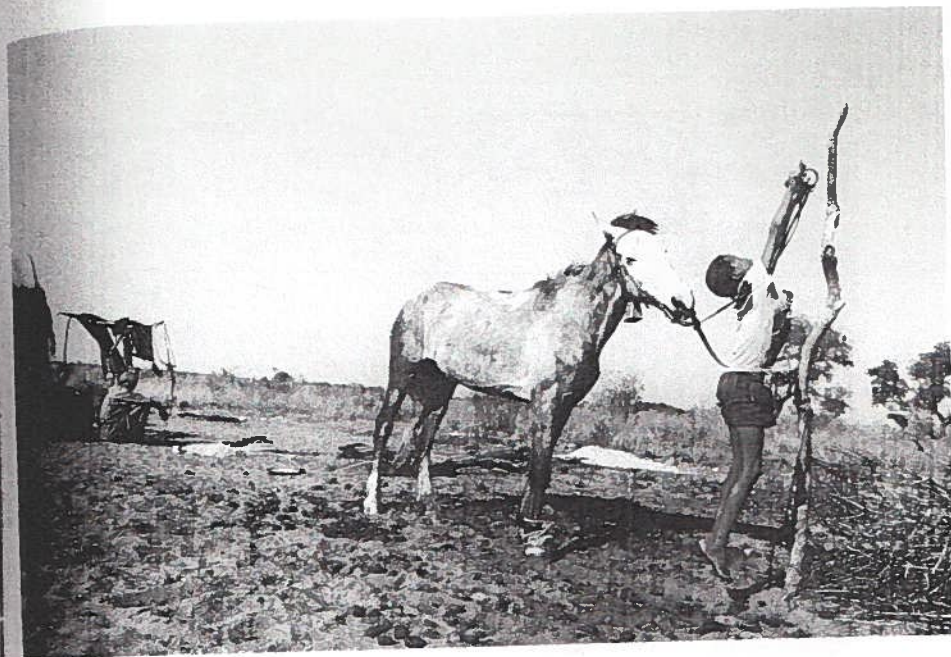
Gathering, //Aqri=ah.



A new water pump, //Aqri=ah.



Army patrol, /Aotcha.



Aqri-ah.



Playing a traditional game, //Aqri=ah.



N'haru=han.



Early morning, /Aotcha.



Trance dancing, /Aotcha.



Week-end festivities, Tjumlkui.



Sharing a pipe, Tjumlkui.



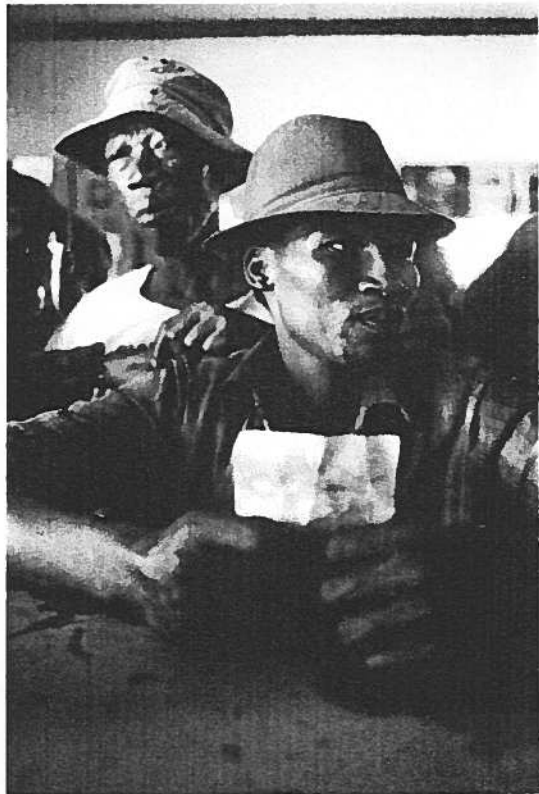
Playing the g//oaci, N=aqmtjoha.



Playing the dongu, //Auru



Skipping game, /Aotcha.



Buying liquor, Tjum!kui bottle store.



Tjum!kui.



Weekend pass.



Drunken fight, !Aoz'a village.



New village, //Aqri=ah.



Cutting poles for a cattle kraal, //Aqri=ah.



Kxao /Ai'ae at work in his garden.



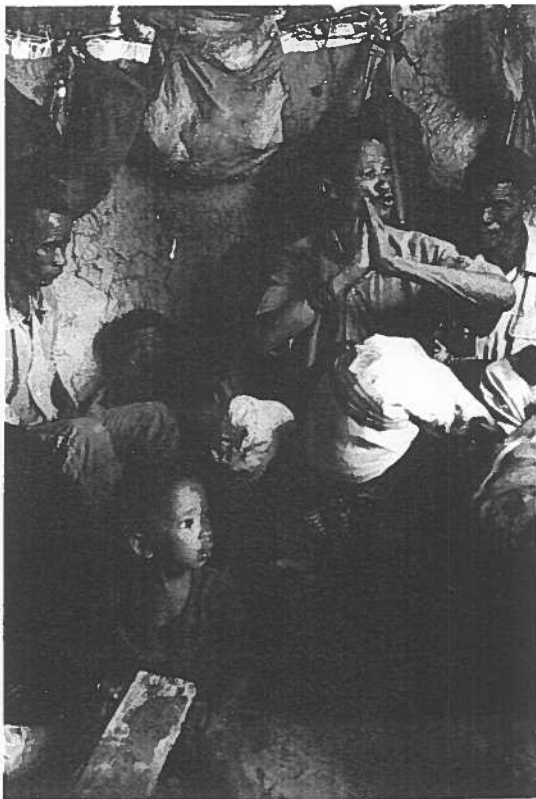
Kxao /Ai'ae, the gardener, at the end of a day.



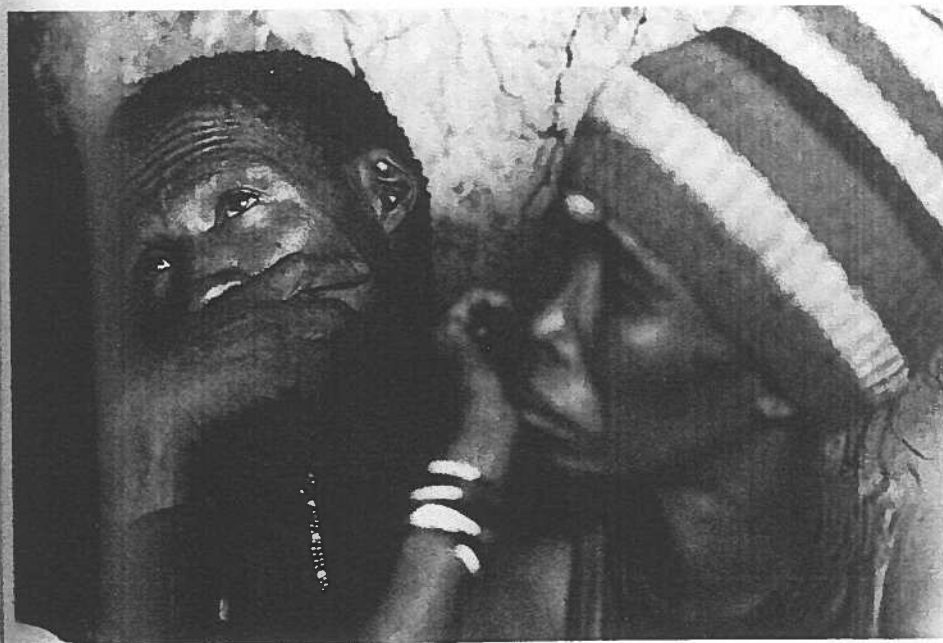
Cattle farming, !Auru (above), /Aotcha (below).



!Auru.



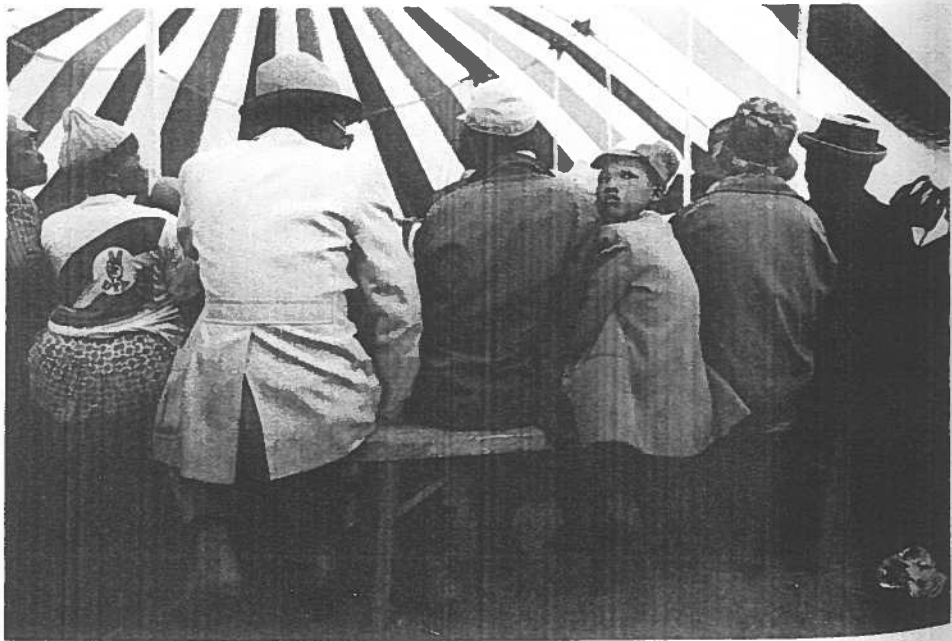
Nyae Nyae Farmers' Co-op meeting, //Auru.



Listening, //Auru.



Discussing Resolution 435 at N#aqmtjoha village with Tsamkxao #Oma and Megan Biesele, project director of the Ju/hoan Bushman Development Foundation.



DTA meeting.



SWAPO meeting.



UN elections. //Auru.



Waiting for the UN mobile election unit, //Auru.



N=aqmtjoha.



Father and son, /Aotcha.



Washing near N-ama Pan during a hunt.



Dusk, //Auru.



United again after years of separation, !Ae-ǀa.

Pronunciation of Clicks

The 'click' symbols /, //, !, and # stand for consonants in the Khoisan languages similar to those in the Nguni languages.

They are as follows:

- ♦ / – a sucking sound behind the teeth corresponding to the Nguni 'c';
- ♦ // – a sucking sound at the side of the mouth corresponding to the Nguni 'x' and the sound used to urge on a horse;
- ♦ ! – a popping sound, like a cork coming out of a bottle;
- ♦ # – a sharper popping sound.

For ease of pronunciation, 't' may be substituted for / and #, and 'g' may be substituted for ! and //.

Note on terminology

The words 'Khoisan' or 'San' have become the academically acceptable terms for referring to the Bushman. However in the Namibian context the word 'San' has derogatory connotations for the Bushman. Therefore we have adopted the more commonly used and acceptable word Bushman.