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(Essays in Honour of Lorna Marshall)

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FROM FORAGERS TO FARMERS:

THE JU/WASI OF NYAE NYAE¹ THIRTY YEARS ON

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The region in the northwestern Kalahari known as Nyae Nyae, which the Ju/wasi and their ancestors may well have occupied for as much as 23,000 years, is today intersected by the Namibia/Botswana border. In the Republic of Botswana, Ju/wasi are defined as citizens and rural dwellers. Many live as clients for Herero or Tswana pastoralists who first established cattle posts in the western Kalahari in the 1920's. Many own cattle themselves and plant small gardens. Compared to the Ju/wasi and other San peoples working on Black or White-owned farms, or to their kin just over the border, they live healthy and productive lives, and their population is rising steadily.

In South African-controlled Namibia, the Ju/wasi live in the tiny "Bushman" homeland called Bushmanland, dependent on welfare and an inadequate cash economy provided by the administration and the army. Drinking, ill health, and apathy permeate their lives, and their population is in decline.

When Lorna Marshall and her family first visited the Nyae Nyae in 1951, the Ju/wasi there were self-sufficient, independent hunter-gatherers, living in fine balance with their harsh environment and isolated from the outside world. Although there had been occasional contact between Ju/wasi and Europeans since the turn of the century, at first with explorers and hunters and later with German soldiers as they pursued the remnants of the Herero population across the thirstlands in the aftermath of the German/Herero wars, the Marshalls were the first Europeans many of the Ju/wasi had ever seen. Today Tsamko remembers how he hid from their trucks, terrified at these strange "lions on wheels" as they roared through the bush.

On Christmas Eve 1959, the South African flag was raised at a place called Tshum!kwi, and the first Bushman commissioner, Claude McIntyre, took up residence in a tent underneath the giant baobab tree. Over the ensuing years, the settlement at Tshum!kwi expanded as the people gradually gave up gathering and hunting and living at their traditional waters - being at first attracted by the promise of a new and better life; then held by welfare handouts and the few jobs available; and, finally, trapped and overwhelmed by the rapid and radical changes in their lives. /Toma, the Marshalls' main informant, describes how it began:

When McIntyre first came, he found us at Gura in the winter. He talked to us strongly and said he was going to make a settlement at Tshum!kwi and we should come and help him. He said he was going to teach us new things like gardening and working for money and raising goats, and teach us how to live in one place. He said our children would go to school and some day he would bring us cattle. He left us with our thoughts. At first we didn't want to go to Tshum!kwi but we talked about it and decided it was a better life for us and we would learn to live like other people. So we came to Tshum!kwi in the hot season before the rains.

McIntyre was aware of the history of decimation and dispossession that had occurred for the San peoples in southern Africa. He knew that the Nyae Nyae in Namibia would be reduced and that what was left would be the last land any San people occupied independently. He also knew they were in danger of losing even this land, that unless they developed themselves, they would suffer the abject poverty and dependency of other San peoples in Namibia. His plan was one of self-development, of helping Ju/wasi help themselves develop a subsistence economy based on animal husbandry and horticulture. His efforts were a partial success, but in the end they were overwhelmed by numbers. As immigration increased, gathering and hunting became impossible - the land could not support the population.² The goats, earned by working on fences and roads, and the produce of family gardens were rapid-

ly consumed by hungry relatives, and dependency by the many on the few multiplied.

In 1970, a year after McIntyre retired, Bushmanland was officially established, and the Ju/wasi lost 70 percent of their traditional hunting territory. McIntyre was followed by a rapid turnover of commissioners, none of whom had his vision or cared much about the Ju/wasi's future. His superiors in the Department of Native Affairs had not believed that Ju/wasi could develop themselves and had withheld material support. By contrast, in the 1970's, money was poured into Bushmanland, and there was a rapid buildup of infrastructure. In 1969 none of the Ju/wasi held jobs - within a year, however, sixty-eight were working for the administration. More people with cash meant a widening circle of dependents, and the basic tenet of Ju/wasi life - reciprocity - began to crumble along with its correlate of self-esteem. Bushmanland came under the jurisdiction of Nature Conservation in 1977, which meant that Ju/wasi were forbidden to kill certain animals (such as giraffe and roan antelope) and, with the exception of the wild pig, to hunt from horseback with spears. By the mid-1970s, no one was living out in the bush; the entire population was concentrated in a heap at Tshum!kwi. In less than two decades, the gathering and hunting life was ended.

In 1978 when John Marshall returned to Tshum!kwi with anthropologist Pat Draper, the Ju/wasi were living lives of hunger and illness bordering on despair. Although the birth rate had doubled, it appeared that the population was far smaller than it should have been. In the same year, the South African Defence Force began recruiting young men to fight in their war against the military wing of SWAPO (the South West Africa People's Organization), which had been struggling for the liberation of Namibia since 1966. The comparatively tremendous influx of cash from army wages increased the alienation of those on the periphery of the sharing network. The underlying tensions from the intimate, face-to-face existence of former days had surfaced in a turmoil of anger and resentment. Jealousy was heightened from the inequity between

haves and have-nots. Too many people were living too close together with nothing to do but argue and fight. In the old days, people lived in small bands of up to thirty, and conflict was resolved by moving apart. Now, nearly a thousand people seemed glued to each other. Much of the welfare rations of mealie meal and sugar was being made into beer, and drunkenness exacerbated the tensions. As /Qui said, "The fighting was always there, now the liquor lets it out." With the drastic decline in nutrition and the unsanitary conditions of sedentary living, resistance to disease was low. Despite the presence of a modern clinic, intestinal and respiratory diseases, malaria, and "sudden fever," claimed many children. Tuberculosis was rife amongst young and old.

People now say Tshum!kwi is killing them. N!ai made up a song about her life there:

Now people mock me and I cry. My people abuse me.
the white people scorn me. Death mocks me. Death
dances with me.

Thirty Years On:³

To get to Bushmanland today, one drives north from the town of Grootfontein, amidst lumbering army trucks headed for the Angolan border, then due east past seared farmland to the high wire fence of Bushmanland itself. At the gate, one is required to sign in, stipulating the number and color of passengers in the vehicle. For several hundred kilometers along a rough road choked with white dust, the only signs of human habitation are the army camps of western Bushmanland populated by !Kung soldiers and their families, refugees from the Angolan/Portuguese war. The limitless, flat expanse of bushveld is broken by the occasional glint of windvanes above a bore hole. Western Bushmanland was never part of the Ju/wasi's traditional hunting territory, for the sands are deep and the water table, except in the few silted river valleys, is inaccessible without modern technology. Game and

bushfoods are very scarce and a poisonous plant, called gifblaar, predominates. Ju/wasi gathered and hunted in the east along the limestone ridge where the water table is shallow and the pans (both permanent and semipermanent) are strung out for several hundred kilometers. Grazing there is good and there is no gifblaar. Valuable waters and bushfoods (including the important staples of tsi and mangetti nuts) were lost to other homelands when the South Africans extended their policy of "separate development" to Namibia.

A good way further down the road one passes Tsjeka, one of the five army camps occupied by the Ju/wasi. They are separated from the !Kung because of conflict between the two groups. Ju/wasi are afraid of being swamped by their larger and more aggressive neighbors and resent their presence. The khaki tents give way to open bush once more, then the great black baobab at Tshum!kwi appears like a mast on the horizon. Two of the government-built housing projects, begun in 1978, lie on either side of the road - concrete, tin-roofed huts enclosed by a wire fence and bizarrely decorated with murals of wild game. (If a Ju/wa was responsible for planning an American suburb, would he decorate the houses with dollar bills and airplanes?)

After the long, low buildings of Tshum!kwi school, the road continues straight as an arrow to the Botswana border and one of the several police posts that lie along it, occupied by Ju/wa border guards and their families. Turning off to the south, however, along the roughly graveled main street of Tshum!kwi, one passes the store and the clinic, the church of the Dutch Reformed mission, and the small army camp, to the administrative center clustered round the baobab - bungalows for the White officials, offices, police station, and courtroom. The small number of Blacks in Tshum!kwi, who work for the police and the school and who run the store, are sequestered in an area behind the school, far from the center. Scattered around the nucleus for an area of twenty-four square kilometers are the kwana (villages) of the Ju/wasi, varying in size and consisting of traditional scherms

(grass shelters) and the round, thatched, Tswana-style huts. On the southern edge lies the third and largest of the government housing projects, near the road that leads eventually to the pans of /Gautcha and Nyae Nyae. It is here that the band from /Gautcha with whom the Marshalls first made contact - #Toma's people - live. The positions of most of the thirty-two-odd settlements reflect the direction from which their inhabitants migrated to Tshum!kwi.

There are no formal leaders or headmen amongst the Ju/wasi. Individuals are respected for personal qualities, one of the most important of which is diplomacy - the ability to mediate and settle disputes. #Toma, looked to as the informal spokesman for the /Gautcha band, exemplifies this quality and, indeed, is called #Toma "Word". John Marshall was named for him just as Lorna and Laurence Marshall were named for #Toma's parents, Di//khao and Tsamko. The giving of names is important, for it enmeshes everyone into the network of exchange relationships, necessary to the gathering and hunting existence. Strangers who are not kin can thus be incorporated, but must then bear the ensuing obligations. John was part of #Toma's family, therefore we were directed to set up our camp next to his kwana.

Kin relations, in fact, were what we had come to study, to build up the genealogies started by Lorna Marshall in the 1950s. We wanted to know what was happening to the Ju/wasi; to collect information about health, diet, birth, and death; to understand why the population was not growing. The concern that grew out of Marshall and Draper's visit in 1978 had resulted in the National Science Foundation grant for a team of anthropologists, demographers, health experts, and others. But the grant was withdrawn by the State Department because of the American government's attitude in dealing with South Africa at the time - the "hands off" policy under Carter. An additional explanation was that "the Bushmen are fighting for the South African army against SWAPO"! Ironically, now sentiments have reversed themselves. The former reasoning, however, was why just the two of us arrived at Tshum!kwi

in the middle of 1980, a little low on expertise - we were filmmakers not anthropologists - and why we stayed for two and a half years.

After nearly a year of being swamped by growing boxes of file cards (defended from the depredations of mice and termites), when /Gunda asked John, "#Toma 'Xosi,' you have lots of cards. You have lots of writing. What are you doing?" we were hard put to find an answer. And when #Kxao "Lame" asked thoughtfully, "Do you think you will get as far as Bo 'Sugar's' houses this year?" even though they were just a few hundred yards away, we did not know that either. It dawned on us that counting people, figuring out why they were so few, was not enough. The impersonal and objective collection of data had turned into an obvious need for direct involvement and constructive action.

Ju/wasi were in limbo with no clear way forward and no way back. The gathering and hunting economy had collapsed. Skills were being lost, and people did not want to return, even if they could have, to a harsh existence where "God was stingy with children," to a life that most perceived as marginal and insecure. #Kxao "Lame", #Toma's brother-in-law, summed up what most felt: "It took me all my youth to learn how to hunt and what does it help me? I don't want my son to be a hunter. I want him to go to school."

When asked about the ownership of land in the early 1950s, Ju/wasi used the term chi ma /oa, a thing of insignificance. Today they are beginning to recognize the importance and economic security of owning land and livestock. Those who have visited relatives, or worked themselves, on Black or White-owned farms know what happens to people without land. They are also aware of the power and prestige of their pastoral neighbors and keenly feel the low esteem in which others hold them. "Bushman" is a derogatory term in all languages, for it means, in effect, people who own nothing. The Ju/wasi have a parable about a tug-of-war in

which God gave them a grass rope and the Black people one made of hide. The grass broke and the Ju/wasi inherited the "things of the bush," while the Black people inherited the cattle and were rich. "We who were made first, have come to be last. And those who were created last, have come to be first. Even though they arrived later than we did, Europeans and Bantus have come to be ahead of us."⁴

It is paternalistic to wade in and decide a people's rights for them. It is a moral obligation to ask them what they want and to help them achieve it. There is, as yet, no organized Ju/wasi group to voice their wants, but in constant discussions at Tshum!kwi, many people made clear the way they wanted to go forward. Those born before the changes wanted to stay on their own land and have cattle. Some young people, especially those connected with the army, seemed to want to become part of a national identity in a wider world, and they should have that choice. But the majority wished neither to embrace a "western" lifestyle, nor "disengage" from the present; they have a renewed and different sense of belonging to their land and holding on to it. #Toma's son, /Gaishay, who represents his people in the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance⁵, has traveled to many places outside Bushmanland, is fluent in Afrikaans, and, while DTA was still in power, owned a car complete with chauffeur. He, however, describes himself as a "Plattlander Bushman". He means that his heart belongs in the bush, where he was born, as opposed to the fast new world of three-piece suits and expense accounts.

Many Ju/wasi gained experience working with cattle on Black or White-owned farms, and since 1973, some were able to purchase cattle from a herd maintained by the administration. There was no attempt, however, at management. Ju/wa cattle ran wild, unprotected from lions and hyaenas, and were indiscriminately slaughtered for food and cash. Theft of these unbranded cattle was frequent. In 1981, thirty people owned cattle, but only four were milking them occasionally. Again, demands from hungry relatives pressured attempts to develop anything. Clearly nothing

would work in Tshum!kwi itself, and the idea evolved for people to disperse into small groups back to their traditional waterholes, where they would be able to supplement the products of cattle husbandry with a little gathering and hunting. A cattle fund - which eventually became formalized as the !Kung San Foundation⁶ - was established to help people buy tools and equipment (including donkeys and carts for transportation) and cattle for those who had none. Four groups were initially started, close enough to Tshum!kwi to benefit from the clinic and the school and to allow old people to continue getting their rations of mealie meal and sugar.

In fits and starts, and not without tremendous struggle, the first group - #Toma's people - got going at /Gautcha. The huge pan at /Gautcha had been dry for a long time, but the two waterholes there are permanent. Besides predators, the two biggest problems to be faced were, curiously enough, elephants and termites. The former destroyed the thornbrush kraal several times, and the latter ate the first houses. The people moved and started again. Tswana-style huts were erected, and a bigger, tougher kraal built. I had been doing diet surveys at Tshum!kwi, asking people from different settlements what they were eating each day. My notes looked like a litany - mealie meal, or mealie beer, over and over again. Very often the answer was "nothing." Many children existed on sugared water and candy from the store. Doing a diet survey at /Gautscha, however, was different; going there from Tshum!kwi was a lift. People were excited and proud of their achievements; the "heavyness" of Tshum!kwi had been left behind. Most important, they were eating well. They were drinking fresh milk and soured milk churned in hollow gourds. Women were gathering again, and men hunted small game. It was a joy to see porcupine and bushpig on the menu!

Another small group led by Kxao "Tekene" (the artist who had painted the safari murals for the administration houses) was started in the north at N#ani hm, where they had the advantage of a handpump put in during the seventies boom. The "Black" /Qui led his group west to N#amtchoa where there was also a well.

N#amtchoa became the show place. It is built on open savannah, the half-circle of mostly traditional-style scherms blending into the golden sea of grass, with a magnificent, closely spaced, pole kraal for their cattle behind - a testament to much hard work and determination. They also built a mangel for veterinary inspection and hollowed out a log to hold lick - a substance purchased by the fund to improve the milk yield.

Three other cattle posts were started and, over time and for various reasons, failed. Such projects are not overnight panaceas. The group cooperation and planning needed to maintain a cattle post is difficult to achieve for a culture where everyone is equal, where all are bosses and no one a worker. The traditional life of the Ju/wasi was extremely individualistic, each person self-sufficient. Hunters relied on each others' individual competence, but a hunt was never an organized team effort. Ju/wasi say wryly, "lions hunt better than we do." During the hunt, it was essential that no one appear to be the leader, and much time was spent talking and arguing, tuning the fine balance of relationships so that no one felt belittled. The groups that have gotten together to build a cattle post, and have persisted, have achieved no mean feat.

Nor are the groups isolated from outside problems. As conditions at Tshumikwi worsened, there was an apparent ripple effect on the cattle posts. /Gautscha was started with 53 people and 43 cattle at the end of 1981. By the end of the following year, 101 people actually lived there. Most of the increase was due to "squatters" - relatives who had come to live off, but not to help with, the cattle post. The situation inevitably increased tensions and brought about conflict, and the importation of liquor from Tshumikwi made things worse. The saddest result of this tension was the death of /Qui. "Short" /Qui (described in Elizabeth Marshall Thomas' eloquent book The Harmless People) was one of the gentlest of men and, before he lost one leg due to a puff adder bite, one of the most skilled hunters. In July 1982 he was stabbed in the stomach in a drunken brawl at /Gautscha and died later in the Grootfontein hospital.

The alcohol problem had skyrocketed after the opening in Tshumikwi of a liquor store. One hundred-sixty soldiers were earning up to R.600.00 a month (approximately \$690.00), and much of it was spent on hard liquor. After one army pay day in October 1982, R.715.66 worth of liquor was purchased over a four and a half hour period, vodka and brandy being the most popular and often downed immediately, like water. Those injured from fights swelled attendance at the clinic, as did those with self-inflicted, poisoned arrow wounds - evidence of the despair and frustration. If the sounds that characterized life with the Ju/wasi in the 1950s were the clapping and chanting of the great curing dances, or the gentle, almost inaudible music of the mouth bow, today they are angry shouts and blows, and a woman wailing endlessly in the bush.

When adults lie around drunk, children go hungry. They are also faced with role models of violence, low self-esteem, and hopelessness. After keeping a continuous account of births and deaths for our first eighteen months, the death rate had exceeded the birth rate. Nine out of the twelve babies born in 1981 at the three government housing projects died that year. One baby suffocated under its mother who was sleeping off a drinking bout. Her enraged husband accused his mother-in-law of negligence, threw her to the ground, and stomped on her with his heavy boots. She was taken to the hospital in a coma and died six months later. I mention these horrors only to make very clear what is happening to the Ju/wasi. So many people imagine them as if they were still living in the gathering-hunting past. This image is the fault of those photographers and filmmakers (not a few of whom visited while we were there) who look with disappointment at the changes and proceed to pay people to take off their clothes, put on their skin karosses and eggshell beads, and "act like Bushmen." This misrepresentation does deep disservice to the Ju/wasi and does not in any way aid them in their struggle. Films like the South African feature The Gods Must Be Crazy, which did well at box offices in France, Japan, and elsewhere, have been used by those who wish to promote the Ju/wasi as a tourist attraction and add fuel to the drive to make eastern Bushmanland a nature reserve.

There are several threats to the future of the Ju/wasi. First, the concept of a homeland puts everyone of the same ethnic group in the same place. If the initial plan, so far not pursued, to move all of Namibia's "Bushman" peoples into Bushmanland is implemented, the Ju/wasi's efforts at self-development will be swamped. Large number of Angolan !Kung are already there (the army is unlikely to take them with them when they eventually leave), and a group of Hei//om have been pressing the government to be allowed to settle there with their cattle. Eastern Bushmanland is the only part of the homeland that is viable for development without enormous expenditure, and it is too small to support an increased population.⁷ Conversely, the dismantling of the homeland system, inevitable with independence for Namibia, will mean that the good grazing land of eastern Bushmanland will be open to all cattle owners, particularly to the Hereros - whose large herds are overgrazing their own homeland to the south. The Ju/wasi will have no priority in an independent Namibia. Though they had little choice, their involvement with the South African Defence Force has put them in the same position as that of the Montagnards of Vietnam and the !Kung in Angola - they are on the wrong side, and they are a tiny minority.

The major and most imminent threat to the Ju/wasi's future, however, is the administration's plan to turn eastern Bushmanland into a nature or game reserve. The reasons for this plan, whether economic (to develop a tourist industry), military (to create a buffer zone), or for the conservation of giraffe and elephant migration paths, are irrelevant and insufficient when considering human lives. A game reserve would preclude development. The administration has made it clear the Ju/wasi would not be allowed to live at their traditional waters with livestock, or to plant crops. They would be allowed to hunt, but only on foot with bows and arrows.

Since those Ju/wasi born after the 1960s no longer know how to hunt and gather, proponents of a nature preserve have suggested that these skills be taught to children in school. A "special

class" of tourists will be taken for nature walks, but, out of the thirty-four jobs available as guides, only eight will be filled by Ju/wasi. Ju/wasi will be encouraged to manufacture crafts to sell to these tourists and to put on their traditional curing dances. In addition to wild animals, the main attraction will be "real Bushmen" as part of the fauna. The nature reserve will maintain a few Ju/wasi in a museum. Where will the other two thousand go? To settle them at expensive boreholes in western Bushmanland, land they do not know, will be equally artificial and destructive.

What is happening now in Tshum!kwi is a blueprint for what would happen to all the Ju/wasi if they were finally dispossessed. What is happening at the cattle posts is an example of what their future could be if they are allowed to keep their land. Despite the predictions of a hostile administration that the cattle posts would collapse after we left, /Gautscha, N#ani hm, and N#amtchoa are flourishing today - two years later. Their struggle has been immense, but these Ju/wasi have proven that it can be done and that others can do it too. Ju/wasi need time. They need to hold on to their land. From countless books and films, many of us have benefited from their past experience, their continuing uniqueness. If they are to have a future, they need our help now. Reciprocity works both ways.

I have nowhere else to go. Nothing else to do. No other way to make a living. You all - if I go back to Tshum!kwi, it will be the end of me.
"Black" /Qui at N#amtchoa, 1982.

NOTES

¹The term Ju/wasi is what the people call themselves. Ju means person, wa means correct or proper, and si is the plural suffix. Ju/wasi can be translated as 'the well-mannered people who speak correctly.' Their language is that of the central !Kung dialect. For convenience I have extended Lorna Marshall's definition of Nyae Nyae to include the Dobe and /Kai /Kai areas as defined by Richard Lee. In all, the Ju/wasi's traditional foraging territory covered some 45,000 square kilometers.

²Traditionally the area around Tshum!kwi supported between twenty to forty people for six months of the year. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the depletion of game was aided by outside hunting parties, often including officials of the Namibian administration.

³In July 1980, John Marshall and I arrived at Tshum!kwi. We lived and worked with the Ju/wasi there until December 1982.

⁴Megan Bieseke, "Aspects of !Kung Folklore," in Kalahari Hunter Gatherers, eds. R. Lee and I. DeVore. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976:322.

⁵The DTA, an alliance of political groups, won the internal constituent assembly elections held in 1978 (boycotted by the majority of Namibians) and governed, in theory independent of Pretoria, until 1983 when the office of the Administrator General was reinstated.

⁶The !Kung San Foundation, Cultural Survival, 11 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

⁷There are various estimates for the total number of "Bushman" peoples in Namibia. The most recent are: 11,500 (1979) - Richard Lee; 26,000 (1980) - Phillip Tobias; 39,100 (1982) - Kuno Budack.

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