

"services." In our discussion of *hxaro* (Chapter 7), we saw how the essence of *hxaro* was to resist the idea of exact equivalences, focusing instead on the value of the *social* relationship with the *hxaro* partner.

Putting a price tag on a healing removes it from the communal sphere. Payment for healing validates the healer in a different way, marking the value of his treatment by price, and the higher the price, the better the treatment. But once the healer has been paid, it is difficult for him or her to turn around and "do it for nothing." When a healing is done for pay, it, in effect, belongs to the individual who paid for it, not to the community at large.

Not all healers share this view, however. Many continue to heal other Ju as they always have, for free. They deplore the fact that some of their fellow healers are holding back.

The Ju/'hoansi are rapidly entering the cash economy (see Chapters 10 and 11). The debate among healers illustrates graphically how individuals attempt to grapple at the level of consciousness with the wrenching changes that accompany the shift from a community-based economy to an economy based on the impersonal forces of the marketplace. It is this theme that we will address in the final chapters.

9/ The Ju/'hoansi and Their Neighbors

Starting in the 1920s and especially since the 1950s, the Ju/'hoansi have shared the Dobe area with Herero and Tswana pastoralists. These were tribal peoples, speaking Bantu languages, whose lives were not so very different from that of the Ju. The Herero and Tswana grew crops, kept livestock, and made iron tools. However, their social systems, like that of the Ju/'hoansi, were based on kinship, and neither people had developed markets, monarchs, or elaborate craft specialization.

The Tswana lived in chiefdoms with the beginnings of internal stratification, and the Ju/'hoansi were immediately accorded a position at the bottom of the social scale, but in the Dobe area the San were not enserfed or enslaved; nor were they propelled into the cash economy.

Though subordinate, the San were not simply servants of the Blacks. In the early days, Tswana and Ju men hunted side by side, each with bow and arrows, and in recent years Tswana and Herero women have been observed gathering wild plants alongside Ju women in times of drought.

Since the time of the first Black visitors in the nineteenth century or earlier, the Ju/'hoansi have been exposed to several important innovations: the use of metal tools and containers, the smoking of tobacco, and the raising of livestock and planting of crops. They adopted the first two with enthusiasm: iron tools and cooking utensils are universals among the Ju/'hoansi, and everyone smokes tobacco when they can get it. In fact, the two innovations are combined in the Ju's favorite smoking device, an empty rifle shell obtained from the Blacks with tobacco stuffed in one end and a grass stopper in the other. But the more basic economic changes of agriculture and livestock production did not take hold. By 1960 the Ju/'hoansi still remained largely hunter-gatherers without herds or fields. They have, however, established social and economic ties with the Blacks, and these ties are the subject of this chapter.

The chapter introduces the Herero and Tswana, details their interactions with the Ju, and explains how the lives of the Ju/'hoansi have been affected by living as hunters in a world of nonhunters.

INTRODUCING THE HERERO AND THE TSWANA

The Hereros are the largest group of non-!Kung in the Dobe area.¹ They are superb pastoralists, and their cattle herds number in the thousands. They also practice

¹The Herero are composed of two main branches, the Herero proper and the Mbanderu, or eastern Herero. It is the Mbanderu who comprise the bulk of the Herero population in the Dobe area.



Herero and !Kung women.

agriculture. They live in dispersed hamlets of two to six houses built around a cattle kraal. They practice a system of double descent with an individual belonging to both his or her father's and mother's lineages. Women enjoy relatively high status and frequently own and inherit cattle. The women wear a characteristic dress adapted from the early German missionaries: full-length, gaily colored dresses with many underskirts and petticoats and a matching three-cornered headdress or *tuku*.

Speaking a southwestern Bantu language, the Herero migrated south from Angola several centuries ago into what is now central Namibia. Growing strong from a combination of extensive cattle pastoralism and raiding, the Herero were a powerful and populous presence in southwest Africa when the German colonists arrived in the 1880s. But the Germans, through force and trickery, steadily encroached upon the Herero lands. Finally, in desperation, the Herero arose in 1904 and killed some of the colonists. The Germans used this as a pretext for an all-out war of extermination. By the end of 1905, 60 percent of the estimated 80,000

Hereros had been killed by the Germans or had died of thirst in the Kalahari trying to escape the war. Several thousand survived the trek across the desert and sought refuge in the Tswana chiefdoms to the east, in the British sphere of influence. There the Herero survivors rebuilt their herds. It is the descendants of these refugees who form the bulk of the 250 Hereros who now live in the Dobe area. Work on the Herero cattle posts provides a major source of employment for the Ju.

The BaTswana, one branch of the powerful BaTswana chiefdoms, are the overlords of the region. Although numerically small in the Dobe area, they are large cattle-holders and until recently dominated the administrative posts at both the chiefdom and the national government levels. In the Dobe area they live in dispersed hamlets similar to those of the Herero (who in fact adopted their house type from the Tswana). Elsewhere in Botswana, the other Tswanas traditionally live in large towns of up to 20,000 people.

Tswana language, social organization, and, especially, legal code provide models for the Ju/'hoansi and other subject peoples to adopt. The court, or *kgotla*, of the Tswana headman has been an important element in dispute settlement since the 1940s.

The first Tswana reached the Dobe area in the 1870s on brief hunting expeditions. By 1900 the area had been allocated to two powerful Tswana families in a kind of feudal tenure, one receiving the area north of the Ahas and the other the area to the south. Some decades passed before the first Tswana settled in the area.

In addition to these immigrants, there are small numbers of two other Bantu-speaking peoples in the Dobe area: the Mbukushu and the BeYei. Both live in the nearby Okavango swamps and are known collectively by the !Kung as *Goba*, a term generally applied to all non-Herero, non-Tswana Blacks.²

Actual settlements of the Dobe area by outsiders only began in the 1920s, and even by 1948, when a headmanship was established, the total number of non-!Kung residents probably was under 50. Since 1950 the numbers have steadily increased. Their presence has affected the Ju in several ways. The Herero and Tswana immigrants have built homesteads, deepened and fenced off the waterholes, hired Ju men as laborers, and in some cases have begun to court and marry Ju women. We will look at each of these impacts in turn.

ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

As the Hereros and Tswana came with their cattle to settle most of the waterholes of the Dobe area, major ecological changes occurred. First, they deepened the wells to ensure a water supply for their stock, and fenced off the deep pits to prevent the cattle from falling in. The !Kung have benefited in some ways from this work: it gives them a cleaner and more abundant water supply. But the presence of cattle has had the effect of lowering the water table and of turning once-verdant *melapo* into dustbowls.

²American Blacks, interestingly, are classified as whites by the Ju. Japanese are called Machapani or the "ju/'hoan/onsi" (the San Europeans).



Ecological change: !Kung men watering Herero cattle from a deepened well.

The effect on vegetation and insect life has also been considerable. The cattle and goats have destroyed the grass and leafy shrub cover within a three-kilometer radius of the permanent waterholes, and a cover of thorny runners and bushes has replaced it. Also, each cattle post has a massive permanent population of houseflies that people learn to tolerate. Farther afield, grass cover and game still persist, and here one can see the northern Kalahari environment as it used to be.³

Cattle and goats don't compete directly with humans for edible plant species. Animals cannot ingest, for example, the famous mongongo nut. Much of the Ju/hoansi vegetable diet remains accessible to them despite the inroads of the cattle. At one waterhole, however, the cattle are a real menace. For reasons unknown, the cattle of /Xai/ xai have developed a taste for human clothing and will eat your laundry right off the line if left untended. Washing is jealously guarded, and some of the Ju have stockaded their camps to keep the marauders away. No one has suggested a plausible explanation for this puzzling phenomenon, which has been the subject of several cases in the tribal court. The local Tswana and Herero believe it is sorcery. The Ju and I were inclined to agree.

WORK RELATIONS

In 1968 there were 4500 cattle and 1800 goats in the Dobe area, and over 95 percent of those were in Tswana and Herero hands. These large herds could not be managed effectively by the Blacks themselves because they were so few in number, and so, many Ju men were brought into service as cowherds. The Ju, usually men between the ages of 15 and 25, but some much older, would work with the cattle owner, take their meals with the Herero family, and sleep in the Herero hamlet. Each worker was given a donkey to ride, a store-bought outfit of shirt, pants, and shoes, and a blanket to sleep on. If he was married, he could bring his wife and family to live with him. The wages, if any, were minimal, but at the end of a year's service, if his work was satisfactory, the herder might receive a female calf of his own as payment. If the calf survived to maturity and proved fertile, the offspring were also his, and with luck they could form the basis of a small herd. Because of high bovine mortality, however, this rarely occurred. The real advantage of employment for the Ju herdsman was not the long-term benefits, which were risky at best, but rather the short-term gain of being able to offer his relatives hospitality at the cattle post.

The Herero and Tswana lived in kin-based societies like the Ju/hoansi, and they placed a high value on offering hospitality to visitors and neighbors. Every Ju in the Dobe area had a son, nephew, or other relative working for the Blacks, and all the San paid regular visits to one cattle post or another to drink the milk.

The milk is never taken fresh. It is always poured into large gourds or calabashes containing a yogurt-like bacterial culture. It may be taken as whole sour

³In an ironic reference to the prevalence of cattle and their accompanying pests, Edwin Wilmsen titled his book on the Kalahari "Land Filled with Flies" (1989). However, in so doing, Wilmsen ignored the large stretches of the Kalahari, like the Dobe and Nyae Nyae areas, that were cattle-free zones until this century.

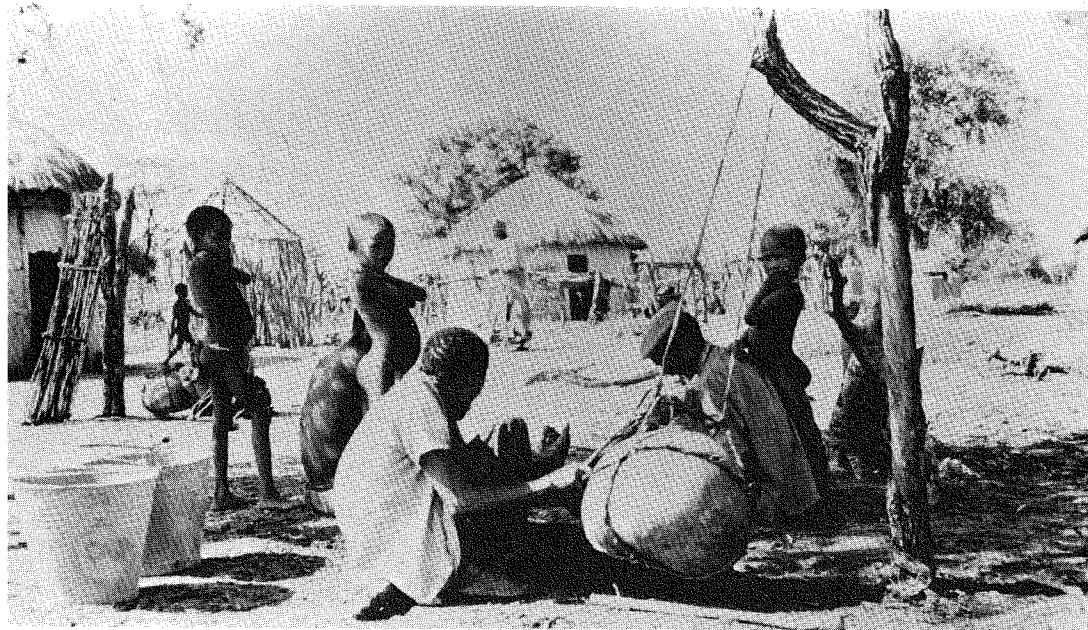
milk, or the cream may be taken off to be churned into butter and the skim sour milk drunk. I found the whole sour milk (in Herero, *kamaihi*, in !Kung, *ku n'um*—literally, ripe milk) a tasty and refreshing drink like buttermilk. An Herero neighbor delivered a bottle of it to our camp every day. The skim milk, by contrast, was sour in the extreme, and only the hardy could enjoy it.

Another benefit of the Herero presence was the distribution of meat. Cattle from the large Herero herds sometimes fell prey to lions, leopards, or wild dogs. Whatever meat could be salvaged from the kill was distributed to the Ju. More frequently, especially in the spring, the cattle would eat an attractive but highly poisonous plant called *mogau* and would die from the effects. The meat was unaffected by the poison, and the Ju received the bulk of it. There were periods at /Xai/ xai when the consumption of beef from this source considerably exceeded the meat produced by the !Kung's own hunting efforts.

Although many Ju men worked for Hereros on the cattle and lived with them for years, few succeeded in becoming pastoralists in their own right. For most, working for the Blacks and being part of a client group was a phase in their lives. After a while they collected their families and possessions and returned to rejoin a parent's camp, a move which sometimes might take them only a few hundred meters away.

For some, the work relation evolves into a kind of clientship, which could be a lifelong relationship. The client and his master live side by side, their children grow up together speaking each other's languages, and for the Ju client a process of deculturation may begin. The Ju may begin to identify more closely with Herero than with Ju/'hoansi. In some cases this kind of co-residence and friendship leads to the marriage of Ju and Blacks.

Ju/'hoansi churning butter at an Herero village.



INTERMARRIAGE

In 1968 a small but significant number of Ju women, about eight in all, were married to Herero and Tswana men. In addition, there were many more cases of Herero and Tswana young men having affairs with married and unmarried Ju women. There were no Ju men married to Black women, although we did hear of a few affairs involving Ju men and Herero women.

Ju women marrying Black men faced a number of problems. First, there was the question of status difference: marrying a Black man was definitely a step up. As one Ju woman put it, "I married our masters." Second, there was the question of translating between the norms of the two kinship systems. How the Herero relatives would accept the Ju woman was one concern, but equal in importance was the question of how the Ju relatives would accept their Herero in-law. Finally, there was the question of the children: Would they be raised as Herero or Ju/'hoansi? Who would decide?

From the Herero point of view, marrying a Ju woman had advantages and disadvantages. Dobe was a frontier area with few amenities. The Herero settlers were far from the main Herero community. It was hard to convince a prospective Herero bride to come out to the Dobe area, far from relatives and friends. The Ju/'hoansi, by contrast, were right there and used to the rigors of bush life. In fact, they found life on a Herero cattle post downright luxurious. Second, marrying a Herero involved elaborate negotiations and the payment of a large bride price; no similar payment was required for a Ju/'hoan bride. Third, the Ju girls in their later teens were attractive and vivacious and were reputed by Ju and Herero boys alike to be good lovers.

But there were disadvantages as well. The Ju girls, though undeniably attractive, were by Herero standards free spirits. Herero gender relations were patriarchal, or at least more patriarchal than the egalitarian Ju/'hoansi. Despite their lower status in the eyes of the Herero, the Ju girls were not about to conform to the subservience and deference expected of them by their Herero in-laws. This was often a source of friction between Black husbands and their Ju wives.

The question of bride price was also a double-edged sword. The dilemma it created is discussed by Gutayone, a Tswana man who married a Ju woman and then found unexpected complications.

When I married /Twa, at first we were very happy together. We loved each other and she worked hard around the house. But later when we had a fight she would go away and live with her people for weeks at a time. We always made up, and continued to live together well, but then I had a terrible thought: if we had children and had a fight, what would stop her from taking the children and leaving me flat? Nothing!

Soon after that the matter came to a head when /Twa became pregnant. But what to do? I discussed it with my family, and my mother suggested we pay her people bride wealth (*bogadi*) for her. This would ensure that any children born would belong to our lineage. But another problem came up, who to give the *bogadi* to? /Twa was an orphan. Her parents and older brothers were dead. In our custom you give it to the lineage (*loshika*) on behalf of the girl's family, but the Ju have no such unit. Each family is independent. /Twa's closest relative was a man named Kumsa, her mother's brother. My father and I went to him and said, "*Mi ≠tum*," using the !Kung term for father-in-law, "today I want to pay you *bogadi* for your child /Twa and for the child in her womb and for any future children."

Kumsa replied, "I don't know what you are talking about. What is this thing? What would I do with cattle? I live in the bush."

I said, "Cows are useful. You can keep them with the herd of the Blacks, who will take care of it for you."

After much talk, Kumsa finally agreed, and we transferred a heifer from our herd to that of a Herero near where Kumsa was living. Later Kumsa sold it and used the money to buy a donkey and a saddle and clothes. But we were satisfied. His acceptance of the cow meant that we had a right to /Twa's children if a dispute ever came up."

Whether Gutayone's fears were justified, I can't say, but his two sons, now in their thirties, have both been raised as Tswanas and think of themselves as Tswanas. Both, however, married Ju girls when they grew up. In general, children of these mixed marriages grow up speaking both parental languages, but their identity was firmly with the dominant group. The boys tended to marry Ju girls and the girls tended to marry Herero, but the numbers were too small to make any definite statements.

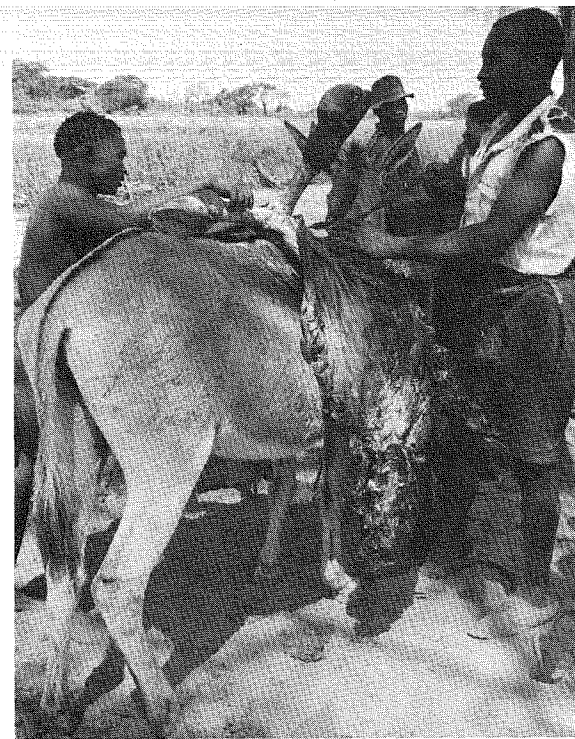
SWARA AND THE SARWA

One area of potential tension in Black-San (Basarwa) marriages, or for that matter, in all interethnic marriages, is the relationship between the husband on the one hand and the brothers and male relatives of the wife on the other. The husband from the dominant group in effect takes a woman away from the subordinate group, a potential bride for some local man. Resentment, open conflict, or worse could ensue unless some special steps were taken to smooth over this tricky relationship.

The Herero and Tswana use a special kinship term, *swara*, to apply to brothers-in-law created by intermarriage. This term and the behavior associated with it have proven so popular that the term is used informally as well for brothers-in-law among Blacks and Ju themselves. *Swara* is a term associated with behaviors of extreme, almost exaggerated cordiality. Greetings are accompanied by jovial handshaking and backslapping, and sometimes include bawdy joking. The term is also used by a Herero with any Ju man whose sister he is sleeping with, the implication being, "This is not just a casual affair, we are almost brothers-in-law." This joking and cordiality is quite out of character for Ju/'hoan brothers-in-law. As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the *tun! ga-tun! gama* relationship, referring to wife's brother or sister's husband (man speaking), is an avoidance relationship, not a joking one. Ju men related this way are supposed to show respect, not joviality.

What then is the function of the term *swara*? The widespread use of the term evidently fulfills a need in interethnic relations for defusing the anger between a wife's brothers from the subordinate group and their sisters' husbands from the dominant group. There is, however, an important hidden agenda in the use of this term. The term *swara* is used reciprocally: both Blacks and Ju call each other *swara*, implying that *either man could give his sister in marriage to the other*. When Ju and Blacks call each other *swara* they are sharing a joke: "You gave me your sister today, I may give you my sister tomorrow."

This of course is not true. Despite the apparent reciprocity, the dominant group will not give sisters in return to a subordinate group. It would be unthinkable for a



Herero giving cow's meat from a lion kill to the !Kung.

Herero or Tswana girl to marry a Ju/'hoan boy, and none have so far. Therefore the term *swara* is a mystification hiding a basic inequality behind a show of equality and reciprocity.

But the most fascinating aspect of the *swara* relationship has yet to be mentioned: Where did the term come from? It is not a Ju/'hoan word; nor is it Herero or Tswana. In fact, it does not appear as the basic term for brother-in-law in any African language.⁴ The term *swara* is of Afrikaans origin, the language of the Boer settlers of South Africa. It is a direct descendant of the Afrikaans word for brother-in-law, *swaer*, related to the Dutch term *zwager*. This derivation opens a very interesting area of explanation of how the term came into being in the first place. The modern Afrikaners oppose intermarriage with "non-Whites," and until recently a White could go to jail in South Africa for even sleeping with a non-White, but their ancestors did not share this abhorrence of "miscegenation." On the contrary, history tells us that the Afrikaner men actively sought liaisons with San, Khoi, and Bantu women on the frontier. Since both the term *swara* and the associated behavior are not indigenous to either the San or the Herero-Tswana, it is reasonable to assume that the term and the behavior had their beginnings with the Boer frontier settlers of earlier times. Marrying a woman of the local people turns a potential enemy into a

⁴In some it appears as a secondary term, but its derivation is the same as for the Ju/'hoansi (see text).

brother-in-law. And your children tie you together even more strongly, but the tenseness of the situation must be papered over with cordiality. One can imagine the term *swara* traveling down through generations and spreading throughout southern Africa, as men of one society moved into territory held by another. The tension of hostility versus friendship remains in the *swara* tie, as does the remarkable ambiguity between equality/reciprocity on the one hand and inequality/hierarchy on the other.

10 / Perceptions and Directions of Social Change

Despite their history of contact with Whites and Blacks, the Ju/'hoansi were still relatively isolated when I first encountered them in 1963. They had very hazy notions of the world beyond their periphery. For example, no one I spoke to in 1963 had ever heard of Africa. They were surprised to learn that they lived on a large body of land called Africa. They *had* heard of South Africa, however. They called it *Johanni*, after Johannesburg, the place where the mine laborers went. More striking was the fact that none of the Ju were aware of the Atlantic Ocean, which was less than 800 kilometers (500 miles) due west of Dobe. I asked them if they knew of a body of water that was so large that if you stood on one side you couldn't see the other. After much discussion they pointed north to the Okavango River, rather than west to the Atlantic.

But a third experience brought home to me how unfamiliar the Ju/'hoansi were with the ways of the wider world. In 1964 I hired Koshitambo, one of the most sophisticated and well-traveled Ju/'hoan. He had made frequent trips to Maun, the tribal capital, as a valet to the local headman, Isak; he loved to make jokes in Setswana and Herero; and seemed to be as knowledgeable about the world as any Ju. I agreed to pay him £10 for two months' work, a reasonable sum in those days, and on pay day I handed him an envelope containing two crisp £5 notes. Koshitambo looked puzzled and appeared upset, but I thought nothing of it and went on with my business. Ten minutes passed, and I caught a glimpse of him sitting forlornly at the edge of the camp, the £5 notes in his hand.

"What's the matter?" I asked Koshitambo.

"Oh, nothing," he said, hesitating.

"Yes there is, I can see something is wrong."

"Oh, /Tontah," Koshitambo finally blurted out, "/Tontah, you disappoint me. You said you were going to pay me ten monies, but instead you have paid me only two!"

It took fifteen minutes and all my limited linguistic powers to explain to Koshitambo that those two scraps of legal tender indeed constituted "ten monies" and not just two. The idea of money, of paper money, of different denominations of paper money, and of convertibility all had to be carefully put across before a pale smile broke on Koshitambo's face and he pocketed the money.

Despite the changes, the Ju/'hoansi entered the 1960s with their kinship, productive, and land-tenure systems relatively intact. They gave birth, raised their children, married, grew old, prayed to their gods and buried their dead in ways that were similar to what they had done for hundreds of years. This is certainly not to