



JU/'HOANSI, THEIR NEIGHBORS, AND I

Social genius also seemed needed in the racially and ethnically complex world of modern Botswana in which the Ju/'hoansi found themselves. Though I had thought them quite insular in their remote communities, I found that many of them spoke several other African languages fluently. Their dexterity in switching codes to suit the many different cultural situations they faced made them seem positively “cosmopolitan” to me. It gave the lie to the classic anthropological trope of isolated, reified “cultures.” Features of, and differences among, the neighboring cultures were topics of perennial interest and comment. Much of this commentary centered around the wealth and resource disparities that, to the Ju/'hoansi, were all too salient in this multicultural environment. It caused me to think much more about the long history of the San peoples with white and black herders and farmers, the centuries-long fluidity of their subsistence strategies, and the wrongness of the notion of an uninterrupted history of pure hunting and gathering.

One of the folktales I heard often from the Ju/'hoansi concerned the relationship of the world of hunter-gatherers to that of herders and agriculturalists. I began to think I might work toward an integration of the folk history in Ju/'hoan oral literature with key truths about their multicultural past. In general, in Botswana, the hunter-gatherers spoke Khoisan or “click” languages, did not have chiefs or headmen, and talked of themselves as having “red” skin. They talked of agriculturalists and pastoralists, like the Tswana and Herero, as “black people.” Aside from the observable differences in skin color, the “black” peoples mostly spoke Bantu languages and were organized into hierarchical chiefdoms. They also made stricter boundaries, in general, between men’s activities and those of women.

The folktale about the relationship between the Ju/'hoansi and their black neighbors centered on the difference between the kinds and amounts of resources the two groups had. It was the story of the ancestor /'Oma /'Oma, supposed brother of “Jiso” (Jesus), about whom I had heard from the woman known as Di//xao Goat Foot. The relative wealth of their Herero and Tswana neighbors, for whom many of the Ju/'hoansi worked as laborers, was a constant topic of comment. Such

wealth disparity is a social conundrum addressed widely via folklore in similar situations in southern Africa. Called variously by Afrikaner and European collectors “The Pulling of the Riems,” “Tug-of-War,” and “Scraping the Pot,” the story addresses the question of how this observed inequity came to exist. Di//xao’s version contained many elements of the various versions I heard. I can summarize it in English as follows:

’Oma ’Oma, a Ju/’hoan man, had the first cattle and herded them alone, but they had no kraal (corral). A black man came and asked whose cattle they were. The Ju/’hoan man said they were his but agreed to herd them back to the village with the black man to spend the night. One of the cows had given birth, so the black man said, “Let’s milk her and taste the milk.” *’Oma ’Oma* was afraid of the cow, so he asked the black man to tie her up with a leather riem (thong). The black man told *’Oma* to wash the pot so they could cook the milk and eat it together. But *’Oma ’Oma* refused, saying the other should drink the milk and he would scrape the pot. Then *’Oma ’Oma* gave the black man a leather riem that was tied to a piece of (sansevieria fiber) string. The two of them pulled on its opposite ends. It soon broke, and the black man got the riem, while *’Oma ’Oma* got the string. The black man said he would keep the cows and the Ju/’hoan man would be his servant. *’Oma ’Oma* had to go off and eat little things like the three kinds of wild raisin berries, and the black man began to cultivate sorghum and maize and ate them along with beef and milk.

I puzzled over *’Oma ’Oma*’s role in his own and his people’s apparent downfall. When I asked people why he would accede so easily to the black man having the benefits of agriculture and herding while he and his descendants did not, the answers varied greatly. Some came with good-natured laughter over what a fool *’Oma ’Oma* had been, while some contained the very interesting statement that *’Oma ’Oma* “did not think it was right to eat the meat of an animal that does not run away from you.” Several of my Kauri friends felt strongly about this idea, which I thought might be related to maintaining a respectful balance between a hunter’s ability to kill and his prey’s ability to get away.

Later I was to pursue in earnest the implied spiritual dimensions of the relationship of Ju/’hoan hunters to their game. I had read that in the ideology of some other hunter-gatherer groups in the world, certain game “gives itself up” under certain conditions to the people as food. But at that time I focused on understanding how the folktale expressed the uneasy balance my Ju/’hoan friends maintained with their richer neighbors. (And were trying to maintain with me as well: in my notebook in early July 1971, talking about *’Oma ’Oma*, I asked about

the wealth disparity between the Ju/'hoansi and white people. I wrote, "I've gotten this several times: 'Bushman first were out front but white people have caught up and passed them.'" It was around this time, also, that I learned that a Ju/'hoan word used sometimes to refer to white people was the same word I had heard them use to refer to black people: *!xomh*, or "carnivores," with the implication that both groups were seen as preying upon the Ju/'hoan people. (The word Ju/'hoan, in contrast, carries connotations of "real people," "plain people," and "ordinary people.")

This fraught interethnic environment was complexly linked, of course, with both the colonial history of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the apartheid of nearby South Africa. I encountered plenty of conundrums myself in my dealings with Herero people and a few Tswana people in the Dobe and the Kauri areas. Because I knew so little of these other cultures, some of the interactions were not easy ones. My experiences with them ran the gamut from cordiality to hostility, with lots of other things in between. I had a genuine, rewarding friendship with an immensely tall and stately Herero woman named Enama Haradi. I occasionally retreated to her quiet, sturdy thatched home to be taken care of when life with the highly sociable, gregarious Ju/'hoansi had tired me out. I spent some nights with her, sometimes having deep conversations about topics like South West African politics. (Other times we giggled about men we liked.) We spoke together comfortably in Ju/'hoansi, the language we had in common. In other situations, especially those where I had to interact with Herero and Tswana men, I did less well: I often had occasion to thank my stars that I was working primarily with the gender-egalitarian Ju/'hoansi.

The contradictions among ways the different ethnic groups, including whites, viewed each other at that time in that part of Africa were stark and ever-present. I often found myself overcompensating for what I perceived as the southern African "legacy of apartheid," which permeated many daily interactions among people of different groups. There seemed to be a lifelong unease that came to the San from being at the bottom of the social ladder in almost every circumstance. I thought I saw it most markedly among men who had been to Johannesburg for work. These were "men," I wrote, "who have been to the [gold]mines and are afraid to meet my eyes."

Sometimes these difficult social distances made me feel ineffably lonely. I was facing huge social challenges daily and had few opportunities to discuss them, or be comforted. I spent a great deal of my energy on trying to arrive at interpretations of the social discomfort I was feeling, so as to understand it and accept it better.

I realized . . . that what I want (to give *and* get) is consideration and sympathy, and all I get in that direction is exaggerated respect—same word as “fear,” in Ju/’hoan. Lots of “yes, ma’ams,” which don’t please me any more than the “hey-yous” I get. . . . And yet the respect-fear seems insurmountable. I feel truly alone. I don’t think anything can break this barrier, given my position here as employer, doctor, store proprietor, owner of a vehicle. . . . If I were only a visitor, perhaps.

In addition to the admitted gulf existing between me and the Ju/’hoansi, there were gulfs between me and other local peoples. It was also becoming clear that the relationships between individuals and their groups, whether Ju/’hoansi, Herero, or Tswana, were vastly more different from each other, in each cultural context, than I had ever dreamed they might be. I seemed to be in a long, detailed mystery novel, where I had to guess mightily at the motivations of individuals as to their relations with others in their own groups, with people in other groups, and with myself. I was perpetually on my toes, trying to find the right balance between being open to people and protecting myself from what, in my low moments, felt like opportunistic exploitation by some of them. Yet, overriding any shortcomings I may have felt in any of these peoples’ treatment of me, was the sense of guilt I carried because of my relative wealth and privilege.

The journals I kept in the years leading up to my arrival in Africa revealed I had long been dealing with similar questions of self and other in regard to my own culture. I knew I had been, in my kind, observant father’s words, “a funny combination of confident and unconfident.” How right he was turning out to be, I thought, in the glaring light of the several very different Kalahari cultures—all well versed in producing tough and well-adapted individuals—which shone upon me for those eighteen months of my first fieldwork.

One of fewer than a handful of white people living in the huge expanse of Ngamiland west of Maun and Ghanzi at that time, I stood out like a sore thumb. Taller than all the Ju/’hoansi but shorter than all the Herero, I was puzzling to people: a woman of child-bearing age with no child or husband, driving a vehicle and riding horses bareback and in possession of medicine and (relatively) endless food and other supplies. So I was a constant focus of gossip and speculation, the butt of jokes both gentle and not so gentle, often called stingy even when I was aware of being overgenerous.

I was above all trying to share as well as I could according to local expectations of sharing, and of necessity I often failed miserably at that. My nonfood supplies were supposed to (but didn’t) last me eighteen

months, and most of my food I had to truck in periodically. Whenever food was being eaten, I felt immense social pressure not to eat the whole plate I had been given, but to politely pass it on half-eaten, to be gratefully finished by someone else. Old !Xuma several times took me aside and, in what appeared to be a rare gesture among Ju//hoansi, said, "You're not eating well enough: you're passing your plate on to other people too soon. Maybe you should let me bring your plate to you in the kitchen instead of eating with all of us by the fire." The pressure, of course, came largely from myself; it was much, much later that I finally learned that the Ju//hoan definition of a good person included not only just giving to people, but also, when in need, "just asking people for things."

My food-sharing dilemma was not made any easier by the perilousness of the food supply in both my camp and traveling situations. I had always been okay when I could get some protein for breakfast, but in remote areas that was often not possible, and my emotions and social competence suffered predictably. Sometimes I felt fragile and worried that I might blow up at people without real provocation. Yet, often enough, some abundance, some windfall or kind gift of sustenance, would miraculously show up to save my day. I seemed to have landed in an adventure-filled land between the extremes of existence, whose oscillations, though painful, were becoming almost reliable. The down days were dreadful, but sometimes the up times helped to build my confidence for long stretches in between.

JULY 4, 1971

Late in the afternoon, I've just realized it's the Fourth of July. What a laugh. Chicken barbecues on a Sunday afternoon at home. And relatives visiting, and accidents on the highways. Here at Dobe the food has run out. In fact all over Isaak's [the local Tswana chief's] kingdom there is precious little to eat. Nobody even has a goat to sell. I myself had nothing to eat today but a little piece of biltong and some sour milk.

Yet in my journal around that time, I also wrote about important discoveries that kept quietly occurring.

The other night I heard singing from the direction of the Bushmen's houses. I thought there might be a dance starting, so I went to join it. But the fires were unattended and dying, and the people were all inside. From one rondavel some mild singing was coming. I knew who was sleeping there—a couple, and a bachelor, and a married man whose wife wasn't there. All in their blankets on the floor of a small rondavel. Singing before they went to

sleep. Suddenly I saw with great clarity the impossibility of such a scene in my own culture. Such quiet, unassuming companionableness, such acceptance of what it means to be human. . . . I have been impressed too by the way all ages of people get along together. Young people are treated as if they were people too, and older people take an interest in them that is sincere and never belittling.

Then there was a day of easy multicultural harmony. We were whiling away the hot part of the afternoon listening to a woman playing the *g//oaci*, a lutelike instrument. A man named David Muhakaona, half Herero and half Afrikaner, was visiting.

[David Muhakaona and Kha//’an N!a’an] lay together comradely on a flattened carton listening to *g//oaci* music, Kha//’an lying behind David and resting his head on David’s outstretched arm. The freshening of the wind in the late afternoon, the coolness and possibility of dances and amazing closeness and even transport as we sat on the hill and heard Xoa//’an play, and I sat in a circle with everyone and felt not one bit afraid [that I would be asked for anything]. . . . Kha//’an bent down and gave Boo a dried steenbok skin. Boo, delighted, said he would make a Christmas *coana* [loincloth]. Kha//’an [who had taught me skinning] told him with great pride how I had skinned the steenbok, my first, by a sliver of moon [at night] and a fire.

But the rapid, unpredictable alternation of good days and bad days, of the need to be open with the need to create a protective circle around myself, were the elements of the basic vulnerability that underlay my fieldwork experience. I was living outdoors in all weather, with minimal privacy, for more than a year, with people whose language and ways and environment I was learning as a baby learns—with frequent mistakes. It was utterly exhausting—and utterly revealing. Each time I was cast down by unexpected adversities, I had to somehow bootstrap myself back up using the new knowledge I had gained.

What, in fact, *was* I doing here? I felt I was somehow on the forward edge of human experience: after all, no one with my own particular history and sensibilities had lived in the Botswana desert with this particular group of still-sometimes-foraging, click-speaking individuals, who like all humans seemed sometimes mellow and sometimes completely contrary. That I was there at that moment with those people was little more than a historical and academic accident, yet there I was, with my remaining months stretching out both way too short and way too long before me. Everything I needed to learn and to do in the time that was left had to be woven into the fabric of the unrelenting exigencies of liv-

ing life each day—including my own needs and those of the growing crowd of new people at each community I worked in.

My event calendar, notebook, and journal for the period from August 7 to August 15, 1971, recorded a concentrated week of extreme ups and downs. I had left Kauri for a while, planning to spend up to five days at G!o'oce, near !Aoaan, where I understood there to be a relatively new women's drum dance tradition. I wanted to see dances and record interviews with women healers there for my National Institutes of Mental Health assignment—that of providing complementary information on women's trance to the research on male healers carried out by Richard Katz. After that the plan was for me to leave =Oma !Oma and !Xuma N!a'an ("Old !Xuma," the same person as !Xuma N!aeba) at Dobe to visit their people for a while.

On the morning of August 7, I was at !Aoaan filling a drum of water for the trip to G!o'oce. A tall Herero named Gideon came to me asking if I could check on a woman of his family who was acting strangely, suddenly babbling nonsense. He requested that if I thought she was ill, I take her with me to her relatives at Xaxa, near Kauri, from whence she could get transport to the Sehitwa hospital for medical treatment. So it looked like I might be driving, not east to G!o'oce, but from the Dobe-Mahopa area through /Kae/kae to Kauri, going first south and then eastward on the diamond cutline. (Everyone in the area usually knew with precision what my movements with the precious truck were likely to be, and I was always barraged with requests to take people places they wanted to go. Most of these I had to refuse for lack of room, but I felt that medical emergencies were different. Since I had room in the Land Rover, having dropped off =Oma and !Xuma and some other travelers in the Dobe area, it was going to be hard to refuse this request. We planned to check on the woman the following day, and I was hoping she might somehow be better by then and not even need to go east with us.) But first Gideon and I went back to Dobe to finish some small exchanges and join a short hunting trip I had been invited on and didn't want to miss.

AUGUST 7, 1971

While [Gideon] was at Dobe, I borrowed his horse and galloped through the abandoned Harvard camp to the border, and back. Tci!xo gave me some Bushman sandals and I repaired the thongs with a strip of eland hide //Xukxa N!a'an gave me. In the afternoon I went hunting with Dabe, Tsa'a, and =Oma—as far as the border only, because they were going across. [Though at that time the international fence consisted of only a few strands of barbed wire, I was, unlike the Bushmen, not allowed to cross into what

was then South West Africa unless I went through an established border post]. We walked very quickly to the fence two kilometers away, and beyond the fence [my companions] took off running into the tall grass. On the way to the border we had met Kopela and Kapanje and /Ui and their families returning exhausted from Com!au with mongongo [nuts]. They were sweating and very tired. . . . N!hunkxa sat down in Baq'u's shadow while =Oma gave the newcomers some tobacco.

In the evening there was meat—hyenas had killed a cow at !Xubi and the meat was very cheap, so I bought enough to feed the whole village for four shillings. . . . In the night a bull came crashing into the village through the thorn fence. Surprisingly, I was the only one to wake up and see him standing in the moonlight about twenty feet from where I was sleeping on the sand. I woke N!hunkxa and we chased him out.

AUGUST 8–9, 1971

The beginning of the disasters. . . . There was only a little mealie meal left that had been supposed to last me and !Xuma our week at G!o'oce, since there is none at the store now. Kopela came and asked for it. I said I couldn't leave it with him, I had nothing else to eat, and would therefore leave him some (unground) mabele (grain sorghum) instead. He said, "Why don't you take the mabele yourself, you can have it ground by someone." This seemed pretty unjust to me, especially as I had just brought his village some fifty rand or so from the sale of artifacts in Maun, so there was money around. [At that time British and South African currencies were both in use near the border as well as the new Botswana Pula.]

Then we noticed a flat on the Land Rover. By the time we fixed it and were pouring petrol, my nerves were already getting frayed. A very confused trip to =Kabe and !Xubi worsened it, especially as at !Xubi it became obvious that I would have to change all my plans and take the Herero lady immediately to the hospital. [I found out later that there were several cases of encephalitis in Ngamiland at that time—her confused speech was a symptom.]

There was a giant medicine and tobacco rush on me at !Xubi [at the same time as I was assessing the situation of the sick woman], coupled with a fantastic din of Bushmen demanding things. . . . We put the sick woman, obviously suffering from some sort of brain damage, into the Land Rover. Her escorts and their baggage, including a gourd of sour milk and three wine bottles full of clarified butter, were stowed aboard.

We drove down through the Aha Hills to Huwetju. We left the Herero cooking lunch and set off to see the cave. We walked a long way through scratchy grass and brambles through the broiling midday sun. But we never found it. It had been years ago that both Jimmy [the musician, who

was traveling with us] and Kha//'an N!a'an had seen it, and the brush had grown up so that they lost their bearings.

Came back very tired and hot, glad for a good meal, the only one, really, since leaving Kauri. And, as it turned out, the only one until getting back to Kauri. Drove on towards /Kae/kae. On the way, several minor things went wrong with the car, all of which I was able to fix, thank goodness. Some question of whether we would have enough radiator water to reach /Kae/kae, but we did, me with a completely black face from scrabbling around in the sand under the hot Land Rover.

/Kae/kae was a sad place [for me] to be, because of all the interesting Bushmen there that I just can't get involved with because I have work to do elsewhere. Again I was deluged with demands and reproaches, and felt almost faint from emotional tiredness.

Kha//'an N!a'an was giving me a goat, so we went to his daughter's village. . . . But what to do with a full-grown billy goat? We bound its legs and tried to stuff it, too, into the Land Rover. Finally it was decided that Kha//'an would drive it with his other goats to Mahopa, and that another day I would kill it there.

Drove about twenty miles east of /Kae/kae along the new diamond road, and stopped, very tired, to camp. We helped the sick woman out of the truck to a bed by the fire, and all fell asleep. Jimmy woke me when the moon was still high to say that the woman was dead.

Her husband was absolutely silent. We decided to press on. In the freezing cold of 4 AM we loaded the corpse into the back seat [she was very tall, like most Herero; rigor mortis had set in, and so her feet had to stick at least a foot out the window] and headed for Xaxa, her home, about twenty miles south of Tsau.

The only thing good about that grisly ride was that we saw a gemsbok, my first, a thing that truly astonished me by its size and power. It wasn't a thing like a little steenbok that leaps and is gone. It was a thing like a flesh and blood unicorn, so big it wasn't hid by the bushes, covering fantastic amounts of ground with no sense of effort at all. We could see it running for a long, long time.

The bad things about the trip were: no coffee, and nothing to eat all day; horrible cold until a few hours after dawn, when all blazing suns of hell let loose; driving and driving and bush-bashing for miles and miles until even now, a day later, when I close my eyes I see thorn bushes coming at me; the radiator boiling so many times I lost count; running out of petrol and having no pipe to siphon with; the back door of the truck falling off; everything in the truck spilled by the jostling; and arriving absolutely spent at the Herero village to deliver the body and not even being offered a cup of water for my pains.

Worst of all, in order to deliver Jimmy where he was going I had to go to two new Bushman villages. One was !Au N!a'an, a place where I had wanted for ever so long to arrive calmly on horseback to work with the old people, but instead arrived against my will in a boiling Land Rover at the end of my rope. . . . [And] people started asking me, as we arrived there, for rides back to !Aoan!

Anyway, there were still some thirty miles to do before Spirit Voice, and all I could think of was getting there and going to bed in my own house. Of course there were lots more complications before I got home, but finally, at sunset, having been driving these awful roads with no food to speak of for fourteen or more hours, I pulled in to my camp thinking about making pizza or baking a cake in my anthill oven.

Imagine my joy at finding that G/aq'o Glusi [G/aq'o "Stomachs," he of the extremely concave midsection, who was supposed to be watching the camp for me] had kindly sold the contents of my kitchen! Including the flour. Sugar was gone, both brown and white, and everything had been gone through. . . . I summoned my last energy and made spaghetti sauce and ate it and fell into bed.

AUGUST 10, 1971

My house in a shambles and my heart filled with resentment not only against the [ransackers] but also against myself, for having been so innocent. Today it is Bushmen who have taken advantage of me and shown me how thin the veneer of respect is between us [but also how very hungry everyone is at this time of year, at the tail end of winter]. The last three days have been an endless nightmare of wrong connections with people. . . . Today, the morning after, is bright and sunny but I am all ashen inside, with a bad taste in my mouth and in desperation where to go from here.

The Land Rover, home at last, sags in the sun on a punctured tire. The spare is flat too. The back door fell off on the trip to carry the dead Herero woman home. Inside the truck the last shilling's worth of sugar has tumped over, and a giant spider sits guard on the last gritty sausage. The snakebite antivenin has broken open and spilled. There is a layer of sour milk and of beef-smelling, melted clarified butter, spilled from the dead woman's gourds and bottles, over the floor of the luggage space.

The only water in the camp is dirty, sickness-bringing stuff from the well. I didn't ask to have it brought, but the guy who brought it is hanging around demanding that I pay him a pound, an outrageous price. My kitchen has been rifled—the guy who was watching the place claims to have "sold" things to some people who wouldn't take no for an answer. The flour and eggs I was fantasizing baking a cake with were (quote) "eaten by a dog" [and they may have been, but I had no way of knowing whether this was

true or just a way for G/aa'ō to protect his family from being accused]. All the dishes, every single solitary dish, is dirty. The termites have ravaged the rondavels in my absence, and the sound of them nibbling away at them in the night wears at my nerves like Bushman requests.

The most unsettling thing, though, is the inside of my house. The books in the bookcase have been looked at, then put back upside down. The beads have been fingered. The fragment of mirror I have has been smeared by a greasy hand. I'm not sure, but I think my bed may have been slept in. It is unsettling because I think how much they must envy and resent me for having these things. . . .

The bad part for me today is that I realize I have been deluding myself absurdly, thinking all was sweetness and light between me and the Kauri people. It is precisely this feeling of cold light dawning on a hangover, raw pain deep somewhere inside and a dull fury at the person who has already left the rumpled sheets and gone, that makes me see that my own relationships with other people are to blame. . . . Nobody loves a victim because she brings it upon herself.

Yesterday's final scene might have been averted had I not been too polite to ask for a cup of milk from the Herero. When we were pulling in to Xaxa in the early afternoon, after driving 150 horrible grisly kilometers through the bush, having got up at 4 AM when the woman died by the campfire, I thought that the most awful thing I could imagine was that in my exhaustion, the Herero would not offer me something to eat. It was worse than my imaginings—not only did a bevy of lamenting women in full sail [their voluminous Mother Hubbard dresses] climb into the truck, but when we got there I was offered not even a chair, much less a drink of water. I was so tired I almost fell asleep on the ground right before their eyes. And yet I was too polite to ask for anything. I think I was mainly astonished, figured they were deranged by their grief, or something. And [it] did not stop there. I staggered out to the car. They wanted tobacco, medicine, a tire valve, money to borrow. I wondered whether, even if I had had command of the Herero language, I could assert my rights in a balanced way.

Today I am at the end of some rope. I want to pull in my extended hands and somehow, someday, get back to work. Trying to be open to people here could kill me. But I am gnawed at by a feeling that if only I knew how to use this extreme situation I might cure myself . . . and *go home whole to my own people*.

At the time, acknowledging that I *did not know* what to do next was the closest I could get to a resolution of this exhausting event. I reflected that one of the most difficult things about returning the dead Herero woman's corpse to her relatives was that not a single person thanked

me for bringing her home. I had limited experience of Herero etiquette in this. But I had already puzzled over a pattern I saw among Ju/'hoansi of not thanking me for things I gave them or did for them. As often as not, a gift from me would be accepted silently and then I would be upbraided for something *else* the person had wanted but I had not brought. It took me a long time to learn not to expect thanks, to understand that the kind of sharing the people did was based on insisting that people do what they *should* do as good people—share what they had with those who didn't. Thanking people appeared to be not only superfluous to the Ju/'hoansi but an indication that one was surprised that someone would actually do what they were supposed to, or had been asked to, without acknowledgment.

Later called “demand sharing” by archaeologist Nicolas Peterson and “tolerated theft” by Nicholas Blurton Jones and others, this pattern, I came to see, was basic to the long survival of the Kalahari hunter-gatherer bands in their land of scarce resources. It was a pattern that guaranteed the most equitable distribution of resources, no matter how scarce these resources were. Individuals in their bands were socialized to share in certain ways because their lives—and the lives of everyone in their group—depended on participating in that group's accepted patterns of sharing. Group survival was the absolute requirement for individual survival.

So it was much later that I found some balanced perspective on what had seemed the pillage of my camp by hungry people while I was away. I could eventually reflect that G/!aq'o G!usi had been acting not exploitatively or irresponsibly but in complete accord with his own upbringing as an egalitarian person. I had put him in an impossible position by expecting him to have the social resources to say no to his relatives about selling my supplies. And if it had been Herero or Tswana who wanted to buy them, it may have been even more difficult for G/!aq'o to refuse.

Eventually, too, I could also laugh at the discovery that not all the mess of the bookshelves in my house had been caused by human beings. Some of the books on the plastered shelves had actually been eaten—upwards from their bottoms—by termites! (The worst book damage was done in this way to Karl Marx's *Capital*, eaten all the way to the top line of type, so that the book title, but no longer any of the text, could be discerned. All that was left of the book was an uneven triangular chunk about the size of a fat half sandwich. I imagined Marx too could have found humor in this.)

At the time, though, I was rubbed raw by the experience. Here's what I think kept me from “using this extreme situation to cure my-

self," as I wrote in my journal during my initial desperation. It was the knowledge that I had not only to keep my head on straight and act socially responsible during the rest of my time in Africa but to somehow produce a worthwhile PhD thesis out of the whirlwind of impressions I was trying to process. It all seemed simply too much to ask of myself in this short time. I think it was around the time of this stressful trip with the Herero woman's corpse that my journal and my event calendar (and maybe even my notebook at times!) began to merge inextricably with each other. I felt completely caught up in daily exigencies, and I despaired of ever disentangling enough "data" from them to be able to show my face again at Harvard. The writings, however, recorded just enough pleasant and serendipitous experience that I managed to keep going, as my event calendar for the same day as my previous journal entry (August 10, 1971) shows.

Felt overwhelmed and moved slowly. Had only two creative urges left—to organize the disorder of the camp, and to be alone all day. I washed all the dishes, which was a pile. I was knocking down termite dirt [from the walls of my house] when someone came up on a donkey. I thought "Oh damn" . . . but it turned out to be Philippus (Muhakaona), whose half-white, half-Herero father, David, had visited at Kauri the day we listened to the *g//oaci* music. I had met David and Philippus earlier in Dobe at Herero Christmas before Mel and Marj left. Philippus couldn't have turned up looking for work at a more perfect time. Me with two flat tires and the prospect of another trip to the Dobe area to pick up !Xuma and =Oma again, not knowing whether I trusted anyone at Kauri to watch the camp. . . . He was heaven sent. We had tea and talked about South West Africa. Then he fixed the punctures and I washed my hair and made mongongo fudge [using Nancy Howell's Kalahari cookbook] and finished organizing everything. Things seem a little bit more possible now. I think when I go back to pick up the people at Dobe I'll put cotton in my ears when the going gets rough.

AUGUST 11, 1971 (event calendar)

Last night I told Philippus that the world was round and not flat. Boy, was he surprised.

Tonight he asked me why India was red. (He once saw a map of it, lying between two bright blue oceans, in a stereopticon picture.)

My mind, of course, went back to the mysterious expanse of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the middle of southern Africa, on the map in my parents' bedroom. How similar our conceptions were, Philip-

pus's and mine, due to the same kinds of limitations on our geographical experience!

This morning I made a nice, calm trip to Tsau. I can't imagine why everything went off so well. Philippus patched two tires and we got off pretty early, did our shopping, had a pleasant visit with the Herero, drew water, bought fresh meat, + back by about 1 PM. I ground the meat and had a goatburger for lunch. Various dealings with people—medicine, beads, rides, clothes washed, etc.

In the late afternoon P[hilippus] and I got on his donkeys and went to Kauri to talk to some people about tomorrow's trip [back to !Aoan to pick up =Oma and !Xuma and resume our plan to work with women healers]. A very pleasant time. We talked all the way there about Herero customs—one interesting thing occurred to me about the different cow medicines and how the milk or meat of various cows is taboo to certain classes of people. It seems like the cow medicines function for them much as Bushman food avoidances do. [I had a theory that these “avoidances” helped to spread out the availability of certain foods among the population during lean times]. I should think about this more. I also asked him about how the Herero first got cattle, and he told a story much like the Bushman one. [Both emphasized the relative ineptitude of the foolish /'Oma /'Oma.]

[Philippus said] that the central fire in a Herero village symbolizes the sacrificial altar of Abraham and Isaac—he didn't know whether they had a fire before the missionaries—I'm sure they did and this is a syncretism. Anyway, they still sacrifice sugar, mealie meal, etc. to this fire (for the dead), and use its ashes as symbolic medicine. The dead, and the strength of cattle, both are implied in the fire.

We visited around at a couple of [the Kauri] camps. Turns out =Oma One-Eye took a wife while I was gone (Di//xao the bead lady gave her away). Tonight will be their second night together. N=amce and his wife have made a dry-season shelter of their own separate from the others. I asked why, and he said there were too many people sharing his food, so he decided to live separate. [N=amce had a few cattle he raised from calves given him for work with the Tswana, so he is seen as someone who can be asked more often for food. He and his wife did seem a little sad to have moved away from the rest of the Kauri people.] On the way back to camp on the donkeys, we smelled a faint but lovely flowering of trees in the dusk.

AUGUST 12, 1971 (event calendar)

All day trip to the west. =Oma One-Eye helped me find a bush shortcut to the Nokaneng road. Met Kachambungu, Enama Haradi's brother, at Nokaneng, gave him a lift to !Aoan. The wind was at our back, so the radi-

ator boiled over repeatedly. The car drank two jerry cans full of water for a one-hundred-mile trip. Reached !Aoan after dark and refilled jerry cans and pumped up a tire. Made it then to !Xuma's village, where tire gave out and we decided to spend the night.

A drum dance was in progress. One of the elephant songs that goes with drum dancing is the weirdest, most interesting Bushman song I've heard. [A small, slight man] was doing *tara*, a shaking solo dance. The women were standing up and clapping vigorously. The drum was the side of a jerry can, played by various young men. [The man] later came and, instead of curing, crossed people's upper lips and temples with *sa* powder. I hoped he would do me because it is so soothing and magical to me. But he didn't.

[One man] told me he had caught [his wife] with another man. He had discovered them by their footprints in true Bushman fashion. He had fought with [his wife] . . . and had taken the case to (Tswana Chief) Isaak at !Aoan. He retold this at the fire with great drama and enjoyment, very publicly. I slept in !Xuma and N=aisa's house.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 13, 1971 (event calendar)

Good thing I didn't know at the time today was Friday the thirteenth, or I would never have got through it creditably. I was pretty frightened at the thought of all the responsibilities and emotional pitfalls that loomed for me. N=aisa prevailed on me to move her worldly goods plus a drum of water from Mahopa to Dobe, where she is setting up housekeeping. So after fixing a flat we went to !Aoan to fill the drum and buy tobacco. Back at Mahopa we collected artifacts, did endless medicine, passed out tobacco . . . next to drop off N=aisa's things at the new Dobe village. Then the scary part—to =Oma !Oma's village to see if he or his father, Kasupe, was still mad at me [I had blown up at Kasupe earlier for hounding me for something]. Turned out a nice visit there, though (especially as I was bearing tobacco and the makings for a small feast.) I was quite busy conserving my energy—afraid to really go all out to anyone because I knew I still had a lot of the day to get through. So we feasted, and people gave me the things they had been working on to [graciously] thank me for things I've given them—I got a baby-carrying skin made from a young gemsbok's hide, a bow and arrow, some ostrich beads. [I remember feeling, oh, at last, I've made it at least a little way into their system of reciprocity.]

[The battered wife I had been told about] had a fabulous shiner and ugly scratches on her head and hip. [Her husband] hit her in the eye with a shoe, she said. I was really shocked at the violence with which he seemed to have reacted, also surprised he hadn't found out about this love affair sooner. Of course Marj knew of it ages ago, and had told me.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 1971 (event calendar)

A fast and not in the least painful (except arduous, as always) trip to Kauri. The wind was in our face so we only boiled once. Got back about midafternoon. Philippus had cleaned up the whole camp beautifully and seemed happy to see us. I had a bath and then did some little sewing jobs with leather while people cracked mongongos, played the musical bow, and cooked some goat and ate. Too tired to do much else but read after I had put things away. =Oma and !Xuma came to my house to visit and to tell me they thought Philippus was all right even if he was a Herero, so they didn't mind if he stayed.

I came to feel that the multicultural challenges I encountered during my fieldwork, like those the Ju/'hoansi themselves faced with grace and humor, ultimately presented me with further dimensions for the growth of social understanding and flexibility. I felt I was trying to emerge, not from a single bubble, but from a cluster of bubbles, each with a secret code that, if I found it, could help its membranous surface to clear.

I was (and am still) asking myself questions about the ethics of work like mine and Mel and Marjorie's, which involved us in such intimate knowledge about the lives of the Ju/'hoansi and others with whom we shared that slice of time. It is shocking to me now to reflect that it was only recently, many years after our fieldwork, that the American Anthropological Association adopted codes of anthropological ethics, some now written and enforced by indigenous peoples' organizations. In the arena of ethics, in areas like compensation, resource sharing, and protection of informants' intellectual property rights, I was greatly underprepared for fieldwork by my time in grad school in the late sixties. I'm also sure there was a course in field methods I should have taken but didn't.

For a while I privately blamed my professors for not having prepared me better for work in the field. Yet, seeing the immense daily, personal challenges to the field-worker that old-timey, long-term, full immersion presented, I could hardly hold them responsible. I wondered whether I myself would ever be equal to the task of preparing younger students effectively. I do wish I had been better prepared in the area of professional ethics. But in hindsight I would not have wanted to deprive students of the transformative adventures by which they might learn for themselves. I came to regard the raw and revealing events of fieldwork as an opportunity for personal growth I would have had in no other version of my life story. Friends said later that the adventures and mis-



Figure 7.1. Philippus and =Oma. © Megan Biesele.

takes I experienced in the course of those first eighteen months surely helped expand my patience, empathy, and cultural understanding.

Thinking about it myself, I decided I would have to somehow unify my research with what I hoped would be my change towards being a more tolerant and understanding individual. This was a tall and preposterous order, but at the time it seemed the only way I could go forward. I also felt I would have no choice but to include, in my eventual account of what I had learned, the painful adventures by which I learned it.

AUGUST 15, 1971

[S]uddenly now I can see the time I am spending here not so much in terms of tediously arrived-at data but of a radicalizing experience that is of infinitely more value than research. And Harvard be hanged—or better, changed.