8/Coping with Life: Religion, World View, and Healing

In previous chapters we have seen how the Ju/'hoansi manage to make a living from their semidesert environment, and how they organize their groups, arrange marriages, and deal with conflict. But like all people, the Ju/'hoansi live in a world of uncertainty, inhabited by forces beyond their control. Like all people they must face illness, misfortune, and the ultimate loss—death. Like others, the Ju/'hoansi seek to counteract these forces and gain what control they can over their lives. Death is inevitable. But the meaning people attach to death, its causes and aftermath, is culturally given. Without meaning, without culture making sense of things, life would be impossible.

The system developed by the Ju/'hoansi to make sense of their world involves forces beyond the natural order. Their universe is inhabited by a high god, a lesser god, and a host of minor animal spirits that bring luck and misfortune, success and failure. But the main actors in this world are the *//gangwasi,* the ghosts of recently deceased Ju/'hoansi. The *//gangwasi,* not long before the beloved parents, kin, and friends of the living, hover near the Ju villages, and when serious illness or misfortune strikes, it is almost always the *//gangwasi* who cause it.

The Ju/'hoansi are far from defenseless in the face of these malevolent spirits. They have many spells, herbs, magic formulas, and practices for restoring health or good fortune. And if these fail, the Ju have the powerful tool of *n/um,* the spiritual medicine or energy given by gods to men and women. Armed with *n/um,* specially trained healers are able to enter trances and heal the sick. They go to the *//gangwasi* and cajole, plead, argue, and, if necessary, do battle with them to make them give up their grip and leave the living in peace.

The healing trances take place at all-night dances, the major ritual focus of the Ju/'hoansi in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. There are both men's and women's dances, and new manifestations of *n/um* with new rituals are constantly appearing as young healers experience revelations during dreams, trances, or illness.

Though deeply immersed in their own world view, the !Kung are pragmatic about other belief systems, or as they put it, about other forms of *n/um.* They are interested in and fearful of the witchcraft practices of their African neighbors. And they take a similar view of the disease theories and treatments brought by the Europeans. They may seek out both kinds of medicine when circumstances warrant it.

In this chapter we will begin by sketching out their world view and their theory of misfortune. We will then go on to look at two medicine dances in detail: the Men's Giraffe Dance and the Women's Drum Dance. Finally, we will look at

the way Ju/'hoan beliefs are attempting to accommodate the ideas and practices of the Blacks and the Whites.[1]

THE WORLD OF THE *//GANGWASI*

My introduction to the // *gangwasi* came in the winter of 1964. In early July I returned to Dobe after a month's absence to find that misfortune had befallen the people. Entering the village, I found Kasupe, the popular Dobe man whose relatives had figured prominently in the Marshall studies, lying in front of his hut surrounded by people. A curing ceremony was in progress even though it was the middle of the afternoon. While Kasupe lay prostrate, a small group of women sang and a healer worked over him, rubbing his body with sweat and moaning in a rising crescendo punctuated by sharp, high-pitched cries.

From his wife I pieced together what had happened to Kasupe. While out hunting two weeks earlier, he shot at and wounded a small duiker. Giving chase, he ran right into a steel trap set by the Herero for a lion. The jaws closed and tore deeply into his ankle. The pain must have been excruciating. Summoning all his strength, he pried open the jaws of the trap and freed his leg. Bleeding profusely, he staggered back to Dobe and collapsed.

I examined the wound. It was badly infected, wrapped with pieces of rag caked with dirt and blood. Fortunately, no bone seemed to be broken. The healer paused to rest while I peeled off the makeshift bandages, washed the wound, and applied a fresh dressing.

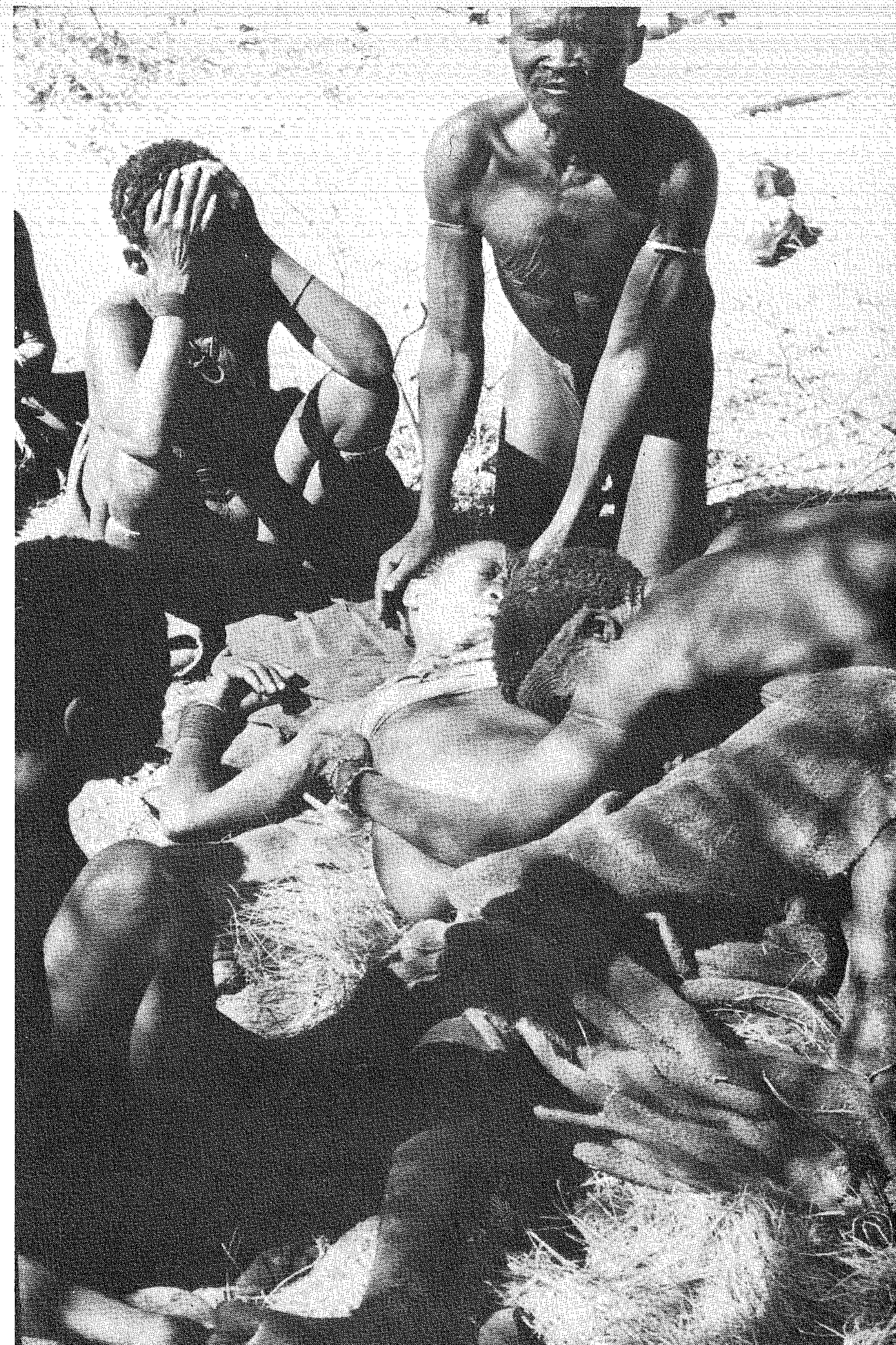
As I sat with him, he seemed to be resting peacefully, and some of the color started to come back into his face. I returned to my camp to unpack.

An hour later, ≠Toma//gwe burst into my hut crying, "/Tontah, come quickly, Kasupe is dying!"

I leapt up and followed ≠Toma//gwe at a dogtrot. Entering the camp, I saw a dramatic scene. Kasupe lay unconscious, totally drained of color, while his wife sobbed and his young children wailed. N!eishi was already entering into a trance and working on Kasupe, rubbing him, moaning and screaming. ≠Toma//gwe soon followed him, and the two old men worked over Kasupe for an hour, pulling out imaginary substances from his body and casting them away, standing up and going to the edge of the camp and speaking to themselves, and talking rapidly to each other in fragments of sentences that I could not understand. When Kasupe started to moan they redoubled their efforts until the air was pierced with shrieks and gurgles. Kasupe seemed to be breathing easier when they finished, but he was still a very sick man.

What had caused the relapse? And what were we to do with Kasupe? The nearest hospital was over 200 miles away. That evening N!eishi, ≠Toma//gwe, and I sat down to discuss the possibilities.

[1]Some of these topics are also discussed in Katz (1982), Lee (1967), Marshall (1962, 1969), and Woodburn (1982). A major study of Ju/'hoansi-!Kung religious practices by Lorna Marshall will soon be published (Marshall, in press).



N!eishi and ≠Toma//gwe treating Kasupe on the day of the crisis.

≠Toma//gwe began. "It is not the leg that is killing Kasupe. I'm not sure, but when I was working on Kasupe I saw dead N≠isa. If not her, then another dead one is trying to kill him."

"How did you see her?" I asked.

"When we are *!kia* [in the trance state] we always change into something else. We can see things ordinary people can't. Today I saw dead N≠isa near Kasupe with an angry face."

"How do you mean, you 'change into something else'?" I asked.

"Your mind goes blank. You don't feel any pain. The ground seems to be spinning. We are different, a little bit like a ghost ourselves. And if the dead are there we can see them. We call them the *//gangwasi.*"

"Why is it that the dead come back to bother people?" That seemed the next logical question.

"I don't know why N≠isa is bothering Kasupe. When she was alive she was just a normal person, on good terms with Kasupe. But all the dead were good when they were alive. It is when they die that they turn bad.

"Sometimes God himself kills people; sometimes it is the *//gangwasi,*" ≠Toma//gwe continued. "All we can do is try to cure the sick ones. If we fail, then we know that the *//gangwasi* were too strong for us."

I wanted to ask more questions, but I also wanted to get to the matter at hand. "What do you think of Kasupe's chances?"

"We don't know," ≠Toma//gwe replied. "We try to chase N≠isa away, but she just comes back again. We chase her here and she reappears elsewhere."

N!eishi added, "Someone should go to Chum!we to fetch Kasupe's relatives. There are many big healers there among his kin, and it's important that they see him dying and take charge of him. If he dies with us, then his people might blame us."

I replied, "I don't know about *//gangwasi.* I only know that leg wound shouldn't kill a man. I can fix the leg with my medicines, but you will have to handle the *//gangwasi.*"

Both sets of healers did their jobs well. The next day Kasupe sat up and asked for food. The healers saw no signs of N≠isa, and his leg began to heal. Three months later he was hunting again, and he was still living 25 years after (well into his seventies).

What had healed Kasupe? I'm sure it wasn't the penicillin alone. Equally important was the fact that his family and campmates had stuck by him and the healers of the camp had protected his life with their healing energy.

High God—Low God

The Ju/'hoansi have not one origin myth but several. In one version, in the beginning, people and animals were not distinct but all lived together in a single village led by the elephant—K"au and his wife Chu!ko. A large body of myths revolve around the cast of characters inhabiting this village, including jackal, dung beetle, python, kori bustard, and many others.[2] In many of the stories a central character is the praying mantis, a trickster god who is always getting into scrapes and who usually gets caught and punished. The fact that the Ju/'hoan word for mantis is *//gangwa* has led some observers to conclude mistakenly that the San worship the mantis. In fact, the heavenly *//gangwa* is only remotely connected to the mantis.

[2]Biesele (1976, in press) has made a major collection and analysis of Ju/'hoan myths.

The Ju/'hoansi have two major deities, a high god called *//gangwan!an!a* (big big god) and by other names, who is sometimes connected with the elephant K"au in the myths; and *//gangwa matse* (small *//gangwa*), the trickster god. The Ju/'hoansi volunteered the information that the English word for small *//gangwa* was Satan. How they made that connection, I do not know.[3]

There are varying opinions about the nature of these two deities. In some myths, the high god is portrayed as good and the lesser god as evil. In others the roles are reversed. Some Ju regard big *//gangwa* as a creator, remote and inaccessible, and see small *//gangwa* as the destroyer, the main source of death. Others insist that it is the high god who is both the creator and the killer. Whatever its ultimate source, the Ju do agree that the main agency that brings misfortune is the *//gangwasi,* the spirits of the dead.[4] Not *all* deaths are caused by the *//gangwasi.* If someone has lived a long life and died peacefully, they may simply say, "*n! a m a*"—heaven ate her or him. But in most serious illness or accidents, *//gangwasi* are involved.

The healers in trance see the *//gangwasi* in a variety of forms. To some they look like real people. You can touch them and feel their flesh. To others, they appear like smoke, transparent and ephemeral. One healer described them as having only one leg, standing in midair. Some *//gangwasi* speak to the healers and give details of why they are there; most remain silent.

How Ancestors Become Enemies

What drives the dead to injure the living? This is a question I asked many Ju. Some said they didn't know why; others said it was in the nature of the *//gangwasi* to do so. There were a number of ways of propitiating the dead so that their spirits would not come back. Ensuring that they have a namesake in the name relationship (Chapter 5) is one such method, but it doesn't always work. Even spirits with namesakes have been known to bother the living.

For whatever reasons, not all *//gangwasi* are equally malevolent. Some never come back to make trouble, while others are major sources of misfortune. In a similar vein, some people during life led successful lives relatively free of care, while the lives of others were filled with suffering and misfortune. The Ju/'hoansi themselves were not sure why this was so. There seemed to be conflicting opinions on the question. For example, a man named Kumsa≠dwin (Kumsa "dog") first argued that *//gangwasi* don't bother those who behave themselves, but later he reversed himself.

"We don't see the *//gangwasi,*" Kumsa said, "but we know that they expect certain behavior of us. We must eat so, and act so. When you are quarrelsome

[3]There are many puzzling aspects of the High God/Low God dichotomy. In some myths there is only one god, leading me to wonder if the split isn't of recent origin.

[4]For a discussion of this question, see Marshall (1962, 1969) and Katz (1982:34–57).

and unpleasant to other people, and people are angry with you, the / / *gangwasi* see this and come to kill you. The / / *gangwasi* can judge who is right and who is wrong.

"But," Kumsa continued, "although / / *gangwasi* watch over people, we feel that people should try to settle their differences among themselves. Because sometimes the / / *gangwasi* try to pick fights among people."

"Doesn't this contradict what you were saying earlier, that the / / *gangwasi* don't like people who fight?" I asked Kumsa.

Kumsa replied, "No, we have one story. The / / *gangwasi* don't like us to fight, but they also make us fight.

"You see," he continued, "people have different types of / / *gangwasi*. One may have bad / / *gangwasi*, another may have good / / *gangwasi*. People want good / / *gangwasi* so you wake up in the morning and your heart wants to kill meat. Your / / *gangwa* will help you in hunting.

"But you have no choice in your / / *gangwasi*. You can't control them but must accept what they give you."

As Kumsa finished speaking, one of the listeners was visibly skeptical. "I don't know about these questions of good / / *gangwasi* and bad / / *gangwasi*, and not being able to control them. All I know is if I want something of my / / *gangwasi* I just ask for it."

It is not surprising that the Ju/'hoansi hold seemingly contradictory views on these matters. The sources of good and evil and of luck and misfortune have been a topic of speculation of every major world religion. And the answers they give have not been conspicuously more successful than those of the Ju/'hoansi in unraveling the ultimate mysteries of life and fate.

The best answer I received on the question of why the living bother the dead came from Chu!ko, a vigorous woman in her sixties and an experienced healer.

"Longing," she said. "Longing for the living is what drives the dead to make people sick. When they go on the road that leads to the village of the / / *gangwasi* they are very, very sad. Even though they will have food and company and everything they need there, they are not content. They miss their people on earth. And so they come back to us. They hover near the villages and put sickness into people, saying, 'Come, come here to me.'"

Chu!ko's answer made sense to me. She also spoke from experience. Recently widowed after forty years of marriage, she had nursed her ailing husband for months, going into small trances almost nightly and pleading with the / / *gangwasi* to spare him. Chu!ko's view, corroborated by others, made the process of death a struggle between two loving sets of relatives, one living and the other dead, each wanting the individual for themselves. The dying and those who survived them could take comfort from the sense that, whatever the outcome, the person would be in the bosom of loving kin.

Whatever the nature of their gods and ghosts, the Ju do not spend their time in philosophical discourse in the abstract (except when anthropologists prod them). They are more concerned with the concrete matters of life and death, health and illness in their daily lives, and at this level they have evolved an extraordinarily effective method of social healing based on the principle of *n/ um*.

N/ UM AND THE GIRAFFE DANCE

N/ um[5] is a substance that lies in the pit of the stomach of men and women who are *n/ um k"ausi*—medicine owners—and becomes active during a healing dance. The Ju/'hoansi believe that the movements of the dancers heat the *n/ um* up, and when it boils it rises up the spinal cord and explodes in the brain. The *n/ um k"au* then feels enormous power and energy coursing through his or her body. The legs are trembling, the chest is heaving, the throat is dry. And strange visions flood the healer's senses.

As one healer put it,

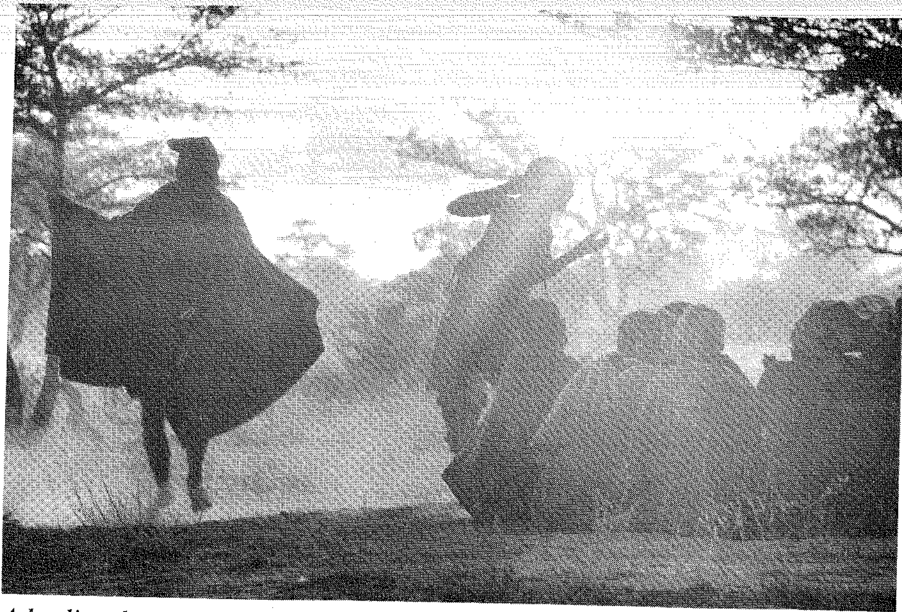
> *N/ um* is put into the body through the backbone. It boils in my belly and boils up to my head like beer. When the women start singing and I start dancing, at first I feel quite all right. Then in the middle, the medicine begins to rise from my stomach. After that I see all the people like very small birds, the whole place will be spinning around, and that is why we run around. The trees will be circling also. You feel your blood become very hot, just like blood boiling on a fire, and then you start healing.

After a period of disorientation, the healer begins to move unsteadily toward the dance fire. He or she lays trembling hands on the chest and back of a person and begins a series of moaning lamentations punctuated by loud shrieks the Ju/'hoansi call *kow-he-dile*. She or he then moves to the next person and the next, repeating the action until everyone in attendance, men, women, and children, have received supernatural protection. If sick people are present at the dance, the *n/ um k"ausi* will pay special attention to them, spending up to an hour working on one person, rubbing back, chest, forehead, legs, and arms with magical sweat. With the very ill, teams of up to six healers work in relays on several parts of the body at once. It is during these trances that the / / *gangwasi* appear to the people.

In addition to their ability to see the dead, the healers have other healing skills. They are able to put *n/ um* into the bodies of sick people and novice healers in the form of sweat. They can pull *(≠twe)* sickness out of the bodies. Like shamans elsewhere in the world, the describe these substances as having the physical form of needles, arrows, pebbles, and slivers, which only the healers can see. Third, they have the ability to speak to specific / / *gangwasi* and argue with them. Lastly, they have a host of secondary skills involving knowledge of dietary prescriptions and prohibitions. As they put it, "we can tell the people how to eat properly."

Though not a central part of their ritual, the Ju men routinely walk in fire and handle live coals without burning themselves. It is mainly the less experienced healers who do this. They walk in fire because, as one told Dick Katz, "Because *n/ um* is hot like fire it makes you want to jump in. Because you don't know what is fire and what isn't. But only the young ones without brains do this" (Katz, 1982:122).

[5]The *n/ um* of the healing dance is just one of many forms of *n/ um*. The word has a wide range of meanings for the Ju. *N/ um* can mean medicine, energy, power, special skill, or anything out of the ordinary. Menstrual blood, African sorcery, herbal remedies, a vapor trail of a jet plane, tape recorders, and traveling in a truck at high speeds are just a few of the contexts in which the word *n/ um* is used.



A healing dance at sunrise.

How effective are these healing practices? Are the *n/ um k"ausi* actually able to heal the sick by pulling out substances and by driving away the spirits of the dead? In thinking about this tricky question it is important to keep in mind that the !Kung healers operate with the same odds that medical doctors do: over 90 percent of all illnesses are self-limiting and would go away even if left untreated. With these kinds of odds to start off, the !Kung healers, like our own, have a high success rate.

The healing dances at which these performances take place are the main ritual activity of the Dobe Ju/'hoansi. They occur from once a month to several times a week, depending on the season, the size of the camp, and other factors. The presence of sickness is not the only reason for dancing. These dances serve a social as well as a sacred function. In fact, they are in many ways like a party—a time for relaxing, socializing, and letting off steam. The sacred and healing purposes of the dance do not seem to be spoiled by the socializing; in fact, they may be aided by it. The Ju/'hoansi say the stronger the singing, the better the *n/ um*.

The sacred dance fire is lit after sundown, and the women singers arrange themselves in a circle around it. Around the women, the men dance, beating a circular path in the sand several inches deep. There is a strict division of labor in the dance. The women sing and tend the fire, and the men dance and enter trances. Occasionally a woman will dance with the men for a few turns, and very occasionally a woman healer will enter a trance. However, the men insist that it is the women who are crucial to the success of the dance. Without their strong sustained singing, the *n/ um* cannot boil and the men cannot heal.

The *n/ um* songs, sung without words, have beautiful complex melodies. They include several versions of Giraffe and older songs, such as Gemsbok, Eland (my

favorite), Mongongo, Rain, and several others. When I first saw Giraffe danced with its intricate melodies and rhythms, I assumed that it was a very old dance, going back beyond the memories of people. I was surprised to learn that, far from being old, the Giraffe Dance was invented by a man named /Ti!kay, who was still alive at Chum!kwe. He gave Giraffe and two other dances to the people after //Gangwa had come to him in a dream. The basic dance form, however, must be very old. Prehistoric San rock paintings show people performing the same steps (Lewis-Williams, 1981).

The first few hours of the dance are relaxed and sociable. Then, nearing midnight, one or more men begin to show the signs of trance: glassy stares, intense footwork, and heavy breathing. They start to sweat profusely. The other men call to the women *gu tsiu, gu tsiu*—"pick it up, pick it up," and the women sing louder and more intensely. First one healer and then the others fall into trances and begin to cure. An ordinary dance might continue until two or three in the morning. On a good night the music and the singing will be so powerful that the dance is still going strong as the sun rises. On very special occasions a dance will go all night, right through the next day, and end the morning of the third day.

Becoming a Healer

Every young Ju/'hoan man aspires to become a healer, and a surprisingly large proportion of the men achieve this status. *N/ um*, the Ju say, is not the exclusive possession of a few. It was given by //Gangwa to all Ju/'hoansi. Almost half of the adult men have achieved the *!kia* (trance) state, and about a third of the women.

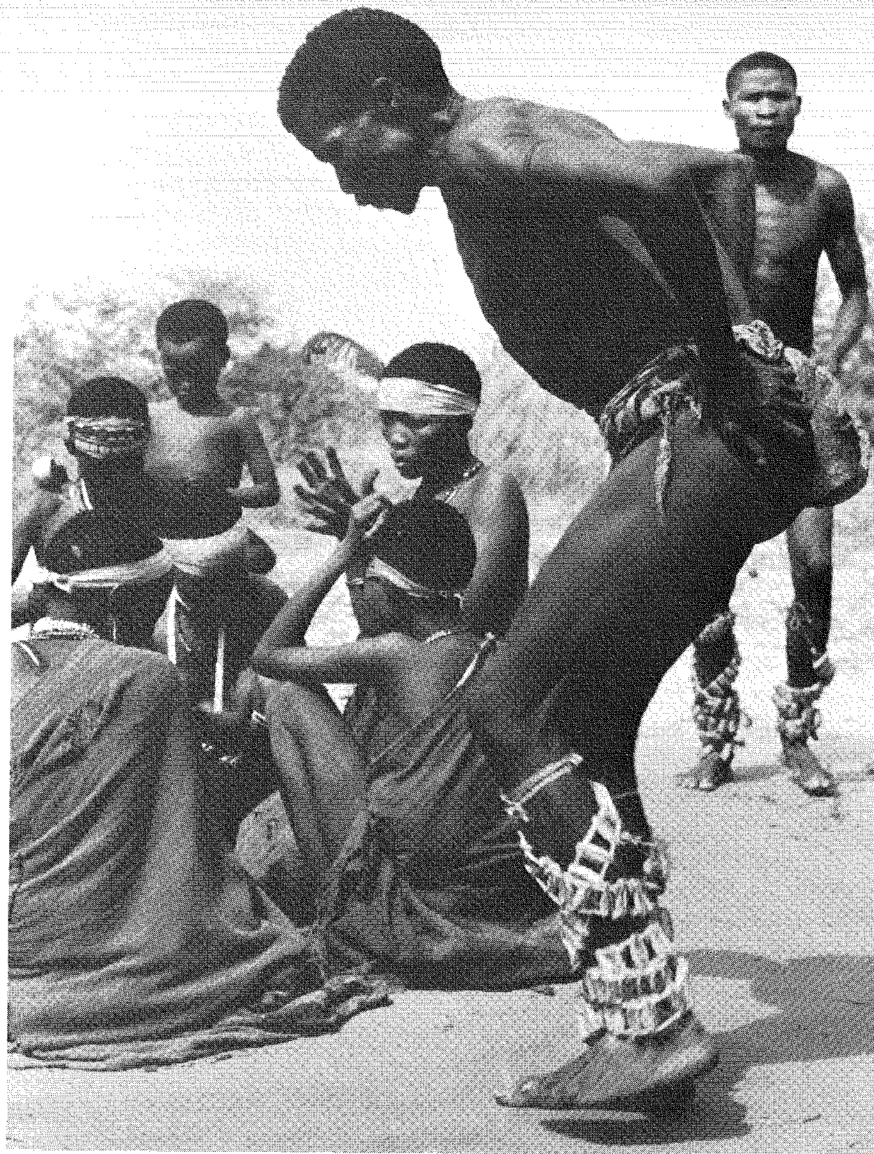
In seeking *n/ um*, a young man must undergo a long and difficult training process. First he must find someone to train him—his father or uncle if they have *n/ um*, or a nonrelated *n/ um k"au*. The Ju/'hoansi discourage the very young or immature from seeking *n/ um*. They say that achieving the *!kia* state is extremely painful and should not be undertaken lightly. At dances the novices can be seen dancing intensely, staring straight forward and not engaging in the social chatter of the dance. The teacher will usually go into a trance himself and then work on his pupil, rubbing sweat into key centers: the chest, belly, base of spine, and forehead.

But at a certain point one often sees the novices leave the dance and sit down at the edge trying to "come down" and regain their composure. They may reenter the dance, only to step out a few minutes later. I asked N!eishi, an experienced healer, why the novices always stop at this point. He replied, "*N/ um* is not an easy thing. It is extremely difficult. As the *n/ um* starts to build up inside you, the pain is intense. You are gasping for breath. You feel as if you are choking. The boys are afraid; they fear what will happen to them next."

"What are they afraid of?" I asked. "The pain? The unknown? The *// gangwasi?*"

"Death," replied N!eishi.

The state is indeed painful, as I discovered on my one attempt to enter *!kia*. On further questioning the healers I was able to get a better sense of what they feared. It seems that there is both a psychological and a physical barrier, on the one hand involving maximum physical exertion and on the other an acute fear of loss of control.



A !Kung healer working himself into a !kia *state.*

What *is* this barrier? I think the best way to understand it is to compare it to "the wall," the phenomenon marathon runners experience around mile 19 of a 26-mile run. You reach a point beyond which it seems physically impossible to go. If you do go on and finish the race, it is because you have tapped into physical and emotional resources you didn't know you had.

Achieving *!kia* for the first time seems to involve a similar kind of breakthrough. The young dancer must punch through his pain and anxiety by force of will to reach a new level of experience. This, I think, is what *!kia* and *n/ um* are about. Even the most accomplished healers go through periods of doubt. As one man put it to Dick Katz,

> *N/ um* is hot; mine is hot too. Others who say it is not have deceived you. Those without *n/ um* may look at those who do *n/ um* and say, "Why can't I do like that?" Now if I tell them that it's very painful, they say, "Oh, you're just fooling me. I still want to do *n/ um!*" But then when they start, they see how painful it is, and then they stop because they fear it. This is how it was with me. I thought they were kidding me when they told me how painful *n/ um* was. I tried *n/ um,* and it was so painful that I stopped. And I even stopped going to dances for years because I feared *n/ um.* Only after I got married did I try *n/ um* again. This time [the pain] again came up in me, but I passed through it, and then *n/ um* came to me. Now I have *n/ um.* (Katz, 1982:119)

Entering *!kia,* however, is only the first step. Once in the trance, the novice's perceptions become acutely disoriented and his behavior becomes wild and erratic. He will run off into the bush, gashing himself on branches or thorns, or worse, dance through the *n/ um* fire itself, showering burning coals in every direction. The healers say that the young ones are still afraid of *n/ um;* they can't control it and must be restrained. The teacher, now aided by other men and women, force the young man to lie down. They massage his body vigorously, always from the extremities to the torso, and on the torso towards the stomach, symbolically working the boiling *n/ um* back into its resting state in the pit of the stomach. (John Marshall's excellent film on the trance dance, *N/ um chai* [1969] has a long sequence of a young trancer being aided in this way.)

With time, most of the men overcome their fear of *n/ um;* they learn to control its effects and to make it work for them. (About a third of those who achieve *!kia,* however, do not continue on to become healers.) For those who succeed, the path is opened for them to explore new levels of reality and to perform a useful function for the community and for their families. Although they worry that the novice trancers will hurt themselves, parents are delighted when offspring become healers for, as one mother said,

> It is all right when they try to throw themselves into the fire. It shows the *n/ um* is strong in them. This is good. If he has *n/ um* he can take care of his children. If I am sick he can heal me.

THE WOMEN'S DRUM DANCE

In recent years a new dance has been gaining in popularity among the Ju/'hoansi. Beginning at the turn of the century and centered at the !Goshe waterhole, the Women's Dance, *!Gwah tsi,* has been spreading rapidly. It was unknown to the Marshalls during their Nyae Nyae fieldwork in the 1950s. It reached Chum!kwe during the 1960s, and since then it has taken on the character of a social movement, gaining new converts every year. During the 1980s it even exceeded the Men's Giraffe Dance in popularity.

In *!Gwah tsi* the roles of the Giraffe Dance are reversed. Women dance and enter trances, and men play a supporting role, beating complex rhythms on the long

The Women's Drum Dance: !Gwah tsi.

drum that is the central symbol of the dance. Dances may be held weekly, and when the new form reaches a settlement, dances may occur nightly as new women join in. Typical dances involve 8 to 12 women, and several drummers working in relays. Two, three, or up to eight women may *!kia* at any one dance. Men enjoy the dance as drummers and spectators, and they may assist the women who enter trances.

Dances begin at nightfall, the sound of the drums summoning the people. The women arrange themselves in a semicircle, with the drummer off to one side. They sing the *!Gwah* songs and accompany the drumming with contrasting hand-clapping rhythms. Instead of dancing in a circle like the men, the women dance in one place with short steps, swaying from side to side. The onset of the *!kia* state is heralded by a bout of intense trembling in the legs. The woman staggers and is held up by the other dancers. After a few minutes the woman collapses into a full *!kia*.

The women say that the *!Gwah* medicine lies in the stomach and the kidneys. When they dance, it rises in two routes, up the chest and the backbone, and when active it lodges in the cervical vertebrae. In *!kia* the woman is rubbed and massaged by the other women, but no healing of the kind commonly seen in the Giraffe Dance occurs in the Women's Dance. This is a major difference between the two forms.

Women entering *!kia* for the first few times seem to experience the same kind of pain and anxiety as the men do, but not to the same degree. They do not run off into the bush or try to fling themselves into the fire. They do behave erratically and thus require supervision. Frequently at this stage the helping women will cover the *!kia* woman's lap with a blanket and change her pubic apron. They say they do this because when a woman falls in *!kia* she is likely to expose herself.[6] The pubic apron of experienced women may be changed as well.

[6] *!Kia* experiences may also be symbolically connected with sexual arousal and orgasm.

The *!Gwah tsi* is not primarily a healing dance as such, but rather a dance for introducing women to *!kia* and allowing them to go deeper into *!kia* in a supportive context. As one woman put it, "Most of us are just learning to *!kia*. We are new at entering it. It is like school for us. But the older ones do *kowhedile*."

This is true. After a period of training, many women go on to become healers. At special healings, women healers are now active, performing the laying on of hands and the pulling of sickness and seeing the *//gangwasi*, just as the men do. Often men and women healers work in teams on seriously ill people.

The source of this power, the women claim, is the *!gwah* plant, a short, stiff, unidentified shrub. The roots are chopped up and boiled, and the tea drunk. It is only taken initially and not before every dance. So the active principle of the drug, if any, is not a prerequisite to *!kia*. I suspect that ingesting the infusion has a psychological rather than a psychochemical effect on the initiates.

The Drum Dance appears to have first entered the Dobe area from the east around 1915. The drum itself was borrowed from the Mbukushu, a Bantu-speaking farming people living in the Okavango swamps. The co-founder of the Drum Dance was a woman named /Twa, who was still alive in the 1960s. /Twa was generally acknowledged to be the most powerful healer, male or female, in the Dobe area. I interviewed her in 1964.

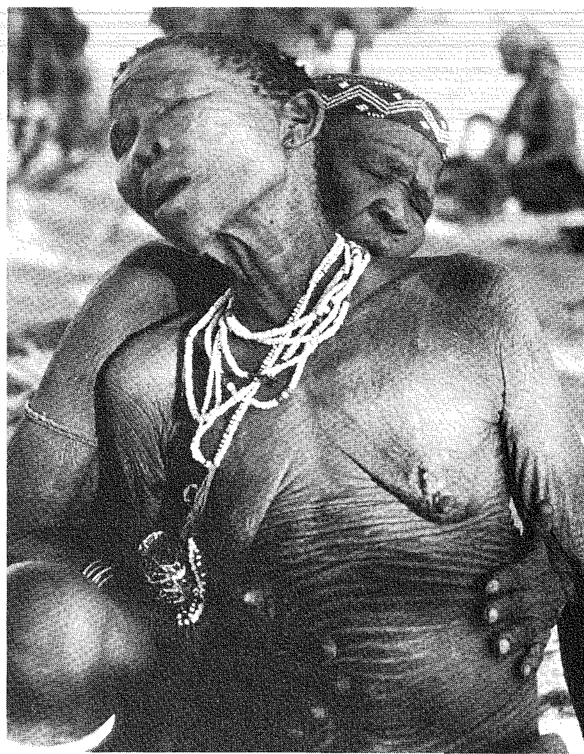
"The Drum Dance started with the Mbukushu, where my father was working," /Twa said. "The Ju/'hoansi used to build them for the Mbukushu, so when it came here we knew how to make them. The one who was responsible for bringing it here was my husband, /Gau, who was traveling around. We started Drum together."

For years the Drum Dance was confined to !Kangwa and !Goshe, and the main practitioners were /Twa, her two daughters, and the people of !Goshe. Starting around 1960, it began to spread west, reaching /Xai/ xai and Chum!kwe in the mid-1960s. When /Twa died in 1972 at an estimated age of 85, the dance had spread throughout the area and was rapidly supplanting the Giraffe Dance as the major Ju/'hoan ritual. At !Goshe today the women have even begun to admit men as trainees in a modified *!Gwah tsi* that contains elements of both male and female rituals.

Other forms of new rituals appear from time to time among the Ju/'hoansi. A /Xai/ xai man named /Gaugo left the area to work on a contract as a mine laborer in Johannesburg. He experienced a revelation there and rested and brought a highly entertaining new dance form back to /Xai/ xai in 1967. Called Trees Dance, it involves a male leader barking orders in Fanagalong, the mine jargon, at a chorus line of women. The structure and premise of Trees Dance are strongly reminiscent of the famous Mine dances held in the mining compounds on Sundays. /Gaugo's male helpers at the dance are called "Bossboy" and "Foremana." The people of /Xai/ xai danced Trees Dance for days on end in 1967–1968.

THREE MEDICINES: ONE BLOOD

Earlier I mentioned that the Ju/'hoansi, though immersed in their own beliefs, are aware of and receptive to other theories of illness and health. Their Black neighbors, the Herero, Tswana, and Bayei, have well-developed beliefs in sorcery, and the Ju have been struggling to accommodate these within their own explanatory system.



/Twan!a putting n/ um *into her pupil Chu!ko.*

They are less impressed with European theories of disease causation, but they have easily accepted the efficacy of European medicines, particularly antibiotics.

/Twan!a, the most charismatic of the Ju healers, told me,

> People were created by //gangwan!n!a with different things to use, different skins, and different medicines. The Blacks have their medicine in divination and sorcery, the Europeans have their medicine in pills and steel needles, and the San have their medicine in the form of *kowhedile*. Different medicine, very different ways of living. But when you cut any one of them their blood flows the same color.

During the time of my fieldwork, there had been no Western missionary work among the Dobe Ju/'hoansi, and thus there had as yet been no ideological attack from that quarter on Ju beliefs. The beliefs of the Blacks have offered a far more fundamental challenge to the Ju/'hoansi. Sorcery, the belief in the ability of one person to consciously do harm to another by magical means, explains misfortune in a very un-!Kung way. Central to Ju/'hoan belief is the concept of the // *gangwasi* as an external threat. The ghosts attack, and the living must unite to defend themselves. Thus the healing dance involves the whole body of the living in a struggle against an external enemy—the dead. Sorcery (and witchcraft) beliefs, by contrast, seek the source of misfortune *within* the community. A spouse, a kinperson, or a neighbor could be causing illness knowingly or unknowingly. Such beliefs set kin

suspicious camps and break down the solidarity of the community.

This new explanatory system now competes with the older theory of misfortune for dominance in Ju/'hoan thought. The struggle has put a great deal of strain on Ju social relations. Among the more acculturated Ju there is more interpersonal hostility, especially between the sexes. Beliefs in sorcery affect the Ju/'hoansi in several major ways. Some injuries and illnesses are interpreted to have been caused by Black sorcery. In other cases, Ju have sought out Black diviners who, in return for payment, have diagnosed the source of illness as coming from living relatives of the Ju/'hoansi. For further payment, the diviners will take appropriate countermeasures.

The flow of culture is not just one way. The Blacks are also impressed with Ju healing techniques and believe in their efficacy. Blacks frequently ask Ju healers to do a healing on their sick, and this type of work is usually accompanied by payment in cash or in kind.

That raises an interesting question: When Ju healers diagnose Blacks' illnesses, which theory of disease causation do they employ? Do they see the source of illness in terms of the dead or the living?

There is some evidence that they use both theories. Blacks are not adverse to concepts of misfortune deriving from ancestors. In fact, a new syncretic form of explanation has emerged that combines sorcery and Ju theories. A Ju/'hoan who is ill may accuse a Ju/'hoan neighbor of not propitiating his // *gangwasi* properly and of allowing them to bring sickness. Thus the source of illness remains the same—the dead—but a new element of human agency is introduced.

This kind of explanation is still not widespread, but it is becoming more common and may indicate a new, privatized theory of disease causation, congruent with new forms of private property and wage earning, where ownership is much clearer and the importance attached to sharing declines.

Another very important aspect of the changing conceptions of health and illness among the Ju/'hoansi is the new professionalism of the healers. /Twan!a was one of the first paid healers. She has received goats, blankets, clothing, and money for her healing work with the Blacks. Other Ju healers have followed suit, even traveling to commercial farming areas in Botswana to perform healings for San and Black workers.

But their very success has put new strains on the healers in their relationship to the community. In the past, *n/ um* was freely given, and the rewards to the healers were manifold and diffuse. Personal satisfaction, the love and respect of family, and the gratitude of those they had "saved" are some of the positive themes mentioned by healers in interviews. But the interviews contain another theme, a recurrent complaint about other Ju/'hoansi: they are *chi dole* (bad, strange) because they take the medicine for granted and don't pay for successful treatment. ≠Toma zho, a famous /Xai/ xai healer (see Katz, 1982:177–195), has started to make regular trips to the Ghanzi farms to cure and dance because at /Xai/ xai "people haven't paid me anything."

When two cultures come into contact, the problem arises of translating values from one to the other. This translation concerns tangibles—for example, how much tobacco for one antelope hide—but it can also concern intangibles like healing

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

[1]The 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.