

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

A Bushman's land is worth many cattle in the bush

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Dear Peter:

Words, especially names, can be important artifacts of colossal movements in a society's history, just like the rocks back home in my native state of Wisconsin show scratches from the grinding scrape of glaciers long since melted.

In the Associated Press stylebook I used as a newspaper reporter in the United States, "black" is defined as acceptable in all references in an American news article for the word **negro**, while reporters are warned: "Do not use **colored** as a synonym." Each change in terminology reflects growing self-awareness and assertion in a political struggle for equality. When I left the newspaper pressroom in San Diego last year, the newest discussion on nomenclature was whether to use "African-American" instead of black. Each new word of self-definition by a minority group is a political statement of resistance to dominant white culture.

In a similar tug of words, the expressions designating the hunter\gatherers living in Botswana's desert regions carry highly-political connotations. In one government guidebook on Botswana, I read that the old-fashioned term "Bushman" coined by the white Boer farmers is derogatory. "Basarwa," the book said, is a better name for these original inhabitants of Southern Africa, since it's a word coined in the dominant language of Setswana spoken by the majority ethnic group in Botswana. I dutifully used the term "Basarwa" until I arrived in the remote farming town of Ghanzi, in the northwest of Botswana, where a large population of Basarwa is located. After raising his eyebrows more than once, a Danish volunteer development worker finally interrupted me mid-sentence. "Don't call them Basarwa," he said. "It's a word used by the dominant Batswana culture meaning 'lowest of the low' or 'servant.' They loathe that word." Soon afterward, a local Bushman confirmed his dislike of the word with vehement shakes of his head. "We live in the bush, why not call us Bushmen?" he said.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

On a continent predominantly populated by agricultural peasants and nomadic pastoralists adapting themselves to a modern cash economy, hunter/gatherers like the Bushmen have a difficult position. Marginalised first by the white settlers, who usurped their traditional foraging areas and paid them little or nothing for herding cattle, the Bushmen now struggle for recognition in the black majority Tswana societies that also traditionally used the Bushmen in the same manner. They're on the lowest rung in Africa, with little social organization or education to fight for their rights. In traditional Bushmen culture, everyone is considered equal -- man or woman, old or young -- so no one person leads the group. Decisions are made by a consensus after a great deal of discussion, with harmony encouraged and conflict avoided.

Social and economic subjugation has led to the cultural breakdown among the Bushmen. A pervasive ethnic prejudice in Botswana society operates to denigrate the Bushmen, who are viewed as primitive, passive and lazy. The Bushmen are despised by many people, including some in government positions making decisions regarding the access to land and water and the building of physical facilities in Bushmen settlements. Discrimination in high places is delaying or in other ways obstructed Bushmen development. The educational system has also systematically attempted to acculturate Bushmen children by denying any "mother-tongue" language use in school, enforcing the use of Setswana and English. Although Botswana, by promoting one national language, is trying to avoid the inter-tribal conflicts that have ripped apart other African countries, unity has meant suppressing Bushmen culture. Finally, as in the case of other indigenous peoples around the world, the profit-motive of others has made their lives bitter. Not only has cattle raising displaced the Bushmen from their traditional lands, but current land pressures continue to push Bushmen to the fringes of Botswana society.

These blows have sapped the Bushman's self-respect and contributed to a high rate of alcoholism in his society. Poverty in income, skills and confidence exacerbates his lack of access to land, education and political power. His future looks grim.

Perhaps the most studied people on earth, Bushmen have been examined by outsiders for almost a hundred years. Since the early 1950s, hundreds of field researchers have arrived to document the mode of living among this oldest ethnic group of Southern Africa. One wry government report in the 1980s wondered if there were more anthropologists than Bushmen in Botswana. Academics use the word "San" to describe these original inhabitants of this region, who have left traces of their existence as early as 30,000 years ago in the Stone Age. The Bushmen have never called themselves "San" in their vocabulary, so they also view that name as an artificial label imposed on them. The majority live in Botswana and Namibia, still speaking three different distinctive "click"

languages. Many work on cattle posts or farms as laborers. Almost no one remains in the small family bands living on gathered roots and nuts or wildlife hunted on the veld. The pure Bushmen existence has disappeared and what remains is quickly fading.

To avoid any reference to ethnicity, the government uses the acronym "RAD" when speaking about the Bushmen, which stands for Remote Area Dwellers. While there are many different ethnic groups that makeup these impoverished people targeted for government assistance, Bushmen make up the majority of the approximately 60,000 RADs in Botswana. The term RAD seeks to diffuse the mounting tensions between the dominant Batswana (the plural for Tswana people) ethnic group and the Bushmen minority.

Before I made the 12-hour trip to Ghanzi in the back of a pickup bouncing over a miserable, sandy track crossing the Kalahari Desert, I stopped in at the Applied Research Unit in the Ministry of Lands, Local Government and Housing. Sociologists and other researchers in this department have produced excellent investigations into the living conditions of the Bushmen. I thought the director might have some objective background information on how the Bushmen now earn their livelihood, with the traditional hunting and gathering all but disappeared. I hoped for help, but we had words instead.

"If it was up to me, no journalists would write anything on the Basarwa," the director, Moshe Setimela, said with a scowl. As the government's chief sociologist, he coordinates the research into the social impacts of government policies. "There are many people other than Basarwa in the remote areas, but everyone wants to write about Basarwa. I don't mean to sound like I'm on-guard, but some journalists like to make sensational and false stories about the Basarwa. They make issues where there aren't any and create discord to undermine society." With that outburst, he began dialing the Office of the President to ascertain whether I should apply for research permission before writing anything on the topic. Fortunately, the line was busy. What angered him about the reporting by journalists on the Bushmen issue? I asked.

"The government's effort to help the Remote Area Dwellers has been described as genocide by French journalists," Setimela said, pointing to a bulletin board filled with business cards. Stabbing a finger at one card, he spoke disparagingly about a Kyoto University professor who advocates allowing the Bushmen to have land and resources to continue their hunter/gatherer mode of living. "These people are poor and they need help, but some foreigners seem to feel they should be preserved like a tourist attraction," Setimela said. He angrily resumed dialing the president's office again, but the line was still busy. He continued, hot on his theme: "Do you have cavemen in the United States? No! We in Botswana have the Basarwa and we want them to progress, too. We're only trying to bring them up to our level of

living." After a third attempt to dial up the presidential office with sharp jabs of his finger, he replaced the receiver. I tried to assure him that I simply wanted to clarify the misconceptions of an idyllic, untouched life created by popular movies in the United States.

"Oh, you're talking about 'The Gods Must Be Crazy'?" he raged. "That showed a simplistic picture of Bushmen, as if anybody hadn't seen a Coke bottle before. When you go up there, you'll see schools and clinics and houses. Yet that movie portrayed them as ignorant and naive." Pissed off again, he made a last try to call the president and create a bureaucratic road-block for yet another irritating writer on the "Bushman question." Thankfully, the line was still busy. Then, to his credit, Setimela began pulling out report after report produced by his researchers on the local Basarwa settlements. After handing me a stack of five or six, he regretfully waved me out of the office. "Call the Office of the President and ask them if you need permission to write about this sensitive topic," he said. I left quickly before he dialed again.

I made the trip up to Ghanzi, near the border with Namibia, to see how some 12,300 RADS or Bushmen live. About 5,100 are now in seven government settlements, totaling 247,000 hectares or approximately 2 percent of the Ghanzi district's surface area. The Bushmen, on the other hand, make up 43 percent of the district's population. If land equates to political power, the Bushmen have little. Had it not been for the government resettlement plan, the Bushmen today would have no access to land at all. On the other hand, the Bushmen would still have their traditional land were it not for the government's policy of allocating new cattle ranches and resettling the Bushmen.

Ghanzi has the feel of a small Oklahoma panhandle town, hot and dry and dusty and laid out in large dimensions, with rattling pickups and huge diesel flatbeds rumbling down wide gravel roads. Wire mesh fences demarcate enormous vacant lots littered with broken-down machinery and cinderblock buildings, while donkeys and goats graze along the roadside. Floating over the town is the clatter of borehole pumps straining to pull water from 500 to 800 meters below ground. The Bushmen walking past are shorter than most Botswana citizens, with nutmeg-colored faces, high cheekbones and glittering black eyes. The Bushmen might be mistaken for Mexicans in an American cattle-ranching town, except for their pepper-corn hair and their conversation, which sounds unlike any language I have ever heard. The rapid clicks of the local Nharo dialect of the Bushmen language sound as if the words are reluctant to come out and instead try to jump back down the speaker's throat, only to be bitten in two and expelled with sharp-smacking clacks of the tongue.

Outside the Gantsi Crafts gift shop, the clicking Nharo

language of the Bushmen can be heard amongst the gathering at the shop's front gate. The non-profit organization, a cooperative established by Danish volunteers in 1983, buys handicrafts made by the Bushmen. All proceeds go directly to the local craft workers, with a small surcharge on the traditional artifacts to cover rent and administrative costs. Inside the showroom are ostrich shell necklaces, decorated bags, dolls, beadwork, thumb pianos, tobacco pipes, bows and quivers of arrows. In glass display cases are the finer items of traditional Bushmen life - not for sale. In the corner, a small hut displays a traditional campsite equipped with the household items for processing veld foods gathered by the band.

Bushmen from all over the district line up many mornings to sell their craft work here, relying on that tiny income to buy food for their families. Unfortunately, says Danish volunteer Lise Sandersen, the cooperative has over-bought too many items that can't be sold on a sluggish market. As the manager, she purchases only a few things from the steady stream of Bushmen.

"It breaks my heart when I can't pay them anything," said Sandersen, who had been a museum curator in Denmark before she came to Ghanzi last fall. "The Bushmen are starving. Literally starving. The cattle eat all the leaves, so they can't identify their forage foods like tubers and buried roots. And even if they could, they aren't allowed on land that's now private. Nor are they permitted to travel distances, so after they gather nuts and roots in one small section, that's finished and they can't go elsewhere."

The Bushmen were better off under the British, before Botswana's 1966 independence, since the colonial government left the Bushmen alone. After that, Sandersen said, cattle-raising became lucrative and outsiders -- both white and then black -- took the land in the Ghanzi area.

The name Ghanzi comes from the Bushman's word for a one-stringed musical instrument with a calabash as a resonator. The first white settlers arrived in Ghanzi in 1874 as a group of six Boer families led by Hendrik Van Zyl, an ex-member of the South African Republic Parliament. A ruthless and brutal man, Van Zyl took it upon himself to seek revenge on the Bushmen for the alleged murder of a Boer boy who was part of a group traveling through Ghanzi to get away from British authority in South Africa. Van Zyl put out word that he was giving a party for the Bushmen, with free tobacco and brandy for all. After a number of Bushmen arrived over a few days' time and were housed in a special stockade, he ordered them tied up and then marched to the spot where the boy had died. There, Van Zyl shot 33 Bushmen dead. Van Zyl was later killed in 1880 by Bushmen, some say in retaliation for his slaughter of their kinsmen.

After Van Zyl's death and at the height of the great scramble for colonies in Africa, Germany claimed Namibia to the southwest. Thousands of Herero people fled Namibia in 1905 from the Germans' war of extermination, only to invade another "unoccupied" area north of Ghanzi in Botswana's Ngamiland. The Bushmen were virtually enslaved by the Herero pastoralists, who used them to herd cattle on the land where the bushmen had lived in such complete harmony with nature that they were hardly noticeable. Suffering an irretrievable loss of land, many of the Bushmen migrated south to the Ghanzi area.

With the rebellious South African Boers starting up a friendship with the Germans, the arch-colonialist Cecil Rhodes had no trouble in convincing the British to assist in settling more white farmers in Ghanzi during the 1890s as a buffer to German expansionism. Of the original 37 white families, however, many drifted away until only 11 farms were left occupied in 1910. By the 1930s, more settlers had arrived to claim land, although they struggled to survive in the isolated, desert environment. Based on a close family intimacy, the relationship between a Bushman and a settler was not simply one of master and servant. Wages were rarely paid when labor was exchanged for goods. The Bushman became an integral part of the farming economy and moved with his family onto the large cattle ranches, while continuing the old ways of foraging and hunting for game.

The displacement continued in the 1950s with the establishment of about 200 more ranches. These were supplemented with some fifty more ranches in the 1980s under the Tribal Grazing Lands Policy that promoted the privatization of vacant expanses of land. Most ranches are 6,000 to 7,000 square hectares, with a few 10,000 square hectare farms. Consequently, the Bushmen were more or less forced into serfdom to the new landowners who typically compensated their herders with minor food rations and low wages. Then as drought set in and costs increased, cattle owners cut back on the number of herders and unemployment rates went up. The situation deteriorated, with Bushmen being declared squatters on the land that was once their own. A government program convinced the unwanted people to move to "service centers" and eventually built settlements where hundreds of Bushmen still remain. Their employment prospects have improved little since then. One 1985 government survey found only 260, or 28 percent, of 915 Bushmen living on the farms in the Ghanzi District were actually employed on these farms. Of these, 61 percent earned between 5 pula and 30 pula a month. When questioned about the low wages, the farmers hastened to point out to the researcher that some people do receive rations, usually in the form of bags of maize meal and sometimes sugar, tea and tobacco. Another survey in 1988-89 found 70 percent of the employed Bushmen earning between 20 pula and 60 pula a month. The most recent survey found monthly wages between 10 pula and 40 pula, with an average of 25 pula, along with rations. Current

unemployment in the Ghanzi area hovers around 24 percent.

"When they first encountered each other, the Bushmen really accepted the white man quite easily and welcomed them, because both were so poor they had a symbiotic relationship of sharing," said John Hardbattle, a cattle rancher who manages five farms in Ghanzi. "They saw a better period coming with the white man, who brought things like sugar and tobacco. There was still a lot of land, so the Bushmen could go when they wanted and live off the land or choose to work for the settlers. When the gap between whites and blacks and the Bushmen increased, the problems started. Before the (whites) were not better off, but suddenly beef prices jumped at independence and the supposed Bushmen squatting problem came up. Underline that word "supposed." They no longer wanted the Bushmen who supported them through the hard years."

Hardbattle, who talks in a low and earnest tone, feels the pain of that betrayal keenly. His father, Tom Hardbattle, was an ex-London policeman who fought in the South African war at the turn of the century and could not bear returning to city life. Instead, he migrated across the Kalahari Desert to start a cattle farm in Ghanzi. Hardbattle's mother was a Bushmen woman. Laurens Van Der Post, a South African writer who single-handedly created the world's interest in the Bushmen through his books, describes Hardbattle's father and his affinity for the Bushmen:

"As if battle with the physical desert were not enough, Tom was soon in battle of another kind. He began to live openly with Bushmen women. Such public opinion as existed in that remote world, in the shape of the Calvinist outlook of his pioneer neighbors, was profoundly shocked. That sort of thing was bad enough done on the sly, but done openly was unforgivable. Tom refused to let public opinion create a sense of shame in him over something that appeared perfectly natural to him... Tom never disowned the children of these unions. He gave them a proper education and provided as well as he could for their future in the desert. Finally, he alone in that part of the world openly championed the Bushmen and fought the rules and regulations which seemed to him unjust to them."

John Hardbattle was shipped off to Britain to be educated at the age of 15, but he returned to Ghanzi in 1975 at the age of 30 to reclaim his heritage as a Bushman and a cattle rancher. As the modern-day champion of the people his father loved so well, Hardbattle is trying to prepare the Bushmen for the future, while preserving some of their culture.

Hardbattle believes the white farmers, as well as the Bushmen, suffered an injury to their very identity in the 1970s

when the government began encouraging Bushmen to move from the farms to the 400 square kilometer relocation settlements. "Families had worked together for decades, but when the Bushmen were put into the settlements, the bonds were broken with the farm families that had been there for generations," Hardbattle said. "Some of these people moved off with sore hearts, while a lot of the farmers who had treated them kindly lost a connection with their own background when they lost touch with the Bushmen."

(There's an ugly, insulting Afrikaans word that white racist South Africans used to insult those who seemed to sympathize with Africans, like Tom Hardbattle did. They would call them a "Kaffir-Boetie," or "African brother." When a white settler boy grew up with his playmate, and even later employed the childhood chum on his farm, sometimes they would remain friends. Those few whites who continued these friendships were called this name, the equivalent of "nigger lover." The very presence of such a vicious word back then proves to me that some whites did treat Africans with a modicum of kindness and empathy. Such a relationship was possible in those early days of Ghanzi.)

There was no forced removal of squatters off the huge farms. Instead, there were many meetings in which the advantages of the settlements were extolled. Trucks came on a designated day to transport the Bushmen away. Misgivings among those relocated ran so deep that a group of several hundred Bushmen is said to have stopped along the road to the Hanahai settlement and refused to continue until a government social worker persuaded them otherwise. That social worker, Johnny Swartz, played another role in Bushmen politics years later.

By 1982, drought conditions affected substantial portions of the country and about 39,000 Remote Area Dwellers across Botswana began receiving a monthly ration of 12.5 kilograms of corn meal, 3.5 kilograms of beans and a liter of vegetable oil. This subsidy, which up to 90 percent of the RADs were dependent upon, continued until 1990 when the government discontinued this drought-relief program. It was then that Bushmen who had grown used to receiving food aid began facing hunger. In the months afterward, district officials in Ghanzi received a confidential memo asking them to investigate rumors of starvation in the area. Although outright cases of starvation were difficult to find, local government insiders say that the overall mortality rate went up in the Ghanzi District, with hospitals having greater numbers of people dying because of opportunistic diseases that overwhelmed the malnourished patients.

Today, the government settlements can still be grim places of hunger, since the land is soon exhausted of natural foods to be harvested. Traditional staples such as the black morama bean do not respect boundaries, so conflicts arise such as the fight over last year's tremendous crop. The Bushmen picked all the nuts



of one area, then continued into the traditional harvesting ground on private land until a farmer chased them away. Being bottled up in a settlement has toppled the balance of Bushmen society. In a culture where harmony is demonstrated by the proximity of families' huts, homes in the settlements have spread farther and farther apart. Once it was only a few meters, but now the distance can be almost a kilometer between homesteads.

In a 1991 socio-economic survey Setimela gave me, an objective picture of the Bushmen's misery is sketched out in their answers to government polls. Out of 100 RADs living at Ncojane Farms, the newest set of cattle ranches carved out of the traditional Bushmen lands south of Ghanzi, more than half of those questioned by the researcher said they didn't want to leave. Considering their condition at the present locations, where they're beset by shortages of food, firewood and water, the author of this particular report was surprised. "It's quite clear that there are specific reasons why RADs would prefer to stay where they are presently located. First, they do not hope to get a better deal at their destinations as regards their means of subsistence. Second, if their possibilities of making a living on freehold farms are very poor, their opportunities in villages are even worse... (with) extremely bad living conditions for those residing in villages," the researcher concluded.

Even the Bushmen's arid and unproductive settlements fail to be secure from outside exploitation. While the Bushmen are restricted in their access to other land, often other people encroach on land set aside for use by the settlements' residents. In particular, there are problems of other people's cattle overgrazing the communal land, and destroying residents' crops and houses. The drilling of a borehole to provide a reliable water source for the settlements led to a scattering of the Bushmen when other Batswana and their cattle invaded the land for the water. As the Bushmen accumulated their own cattle, they found their land already overgrazed by other people's herds. The settlement of Chobokwane, for example, is completely surrounded by overgrazed cattle posts from Kalkfontein cattle owners. Bushmen communities in New Xanagas and West Hanahai repeatedly requested permission from the Ghanzi District Council to fence their own grazing land but continue to be turned down. An anonymous official working in the district office cynically said West Hanahai people would never get their fence, since the influential neighboring farmers find it too easy to let their cattle wander into Bushmen land.

Now, in this increasingly depressing story of the Bushmen's dispossession, I should account for the efforts made by the government on their behalf. Local authorities, including the Ghanzi District Council, tried to replicate Batswana villages for the Bushmen. No wonder the government officials feel frustrated, because in their minds they have provided the necessary

ingredients for development in the settlements. Boreholes were drilled and communal water taps put in. Schools were built and Parent-Teacher Associations were started. Health clinics were stocked and staffed, after the formation of village health committees. The traditional Batswana kgotla meetings were held to inform the Bushmen community about these programs. Cash subsidies were paid for clearing land and tilling with government-provided plows and donkeys to plant government-provided seed. But when I asked a resident in the East Hanahai settlement what the government had done for him, he told me "nothing."

The Bushmen see the clinics and schools, the nurses' quarters and the teachers' homes. They see the educated civil servants living in the settlements while earning money at jobs given to them by the government. The infrastructure built there in East Hanahai, they believe, is primarily to help those outside people, not them. The Bushmen are quite discerning in their observations: The community gets one stand pipe for all its water needs, while each white house for a teacher or nurse has running water. And all the salaries are earned by the government workers; all the nice homes are inhabited by them. "Who's getting the benefits?" they ask. "Not us."

There's a new word that's crept into usage in the Nharo Bushmen language, a rare occurrence in a tongue that has been spoken in the same manner for more than a thousand years. The word is "politeek," a corruption of the English word "politics." It means "much talk without any action." A Bushman I met outside of Ghanzi, near the settlement of D'Kar, helped me understand the working definition of the newly-coined word. "My first father was cheated and his father cheated, so you can't expect much of anything except talk," he said bitterly. "The hunting was taken away and the [game] wardens arrest you for killing animals. Now that we're settled, there's no means of living. And the government stopped giving us food, so there's nothing to eat. That's politeek."

If the Bushmen needed a vocabulary lesson on the word "politeek," they received one during a struggle to keep three large farms allocated specifically for them outside of Ghanzi. One of the three farms had already been reserved in the 1970s under the Basarwa Land and Water Development Scheme, which was the same program that created the four Bushmen settlements of East Hanahai, West Hanahai, Rooibrak and Groot Laagte. That farm, designated NK 173, stayed reserved but nothing was done to develop it for the Bushmen. In February 1990, the Ghanzi District Council officially leased that farm and two others for a total of 20,000 square hectares on behalf of the Bushmen.

The council invited a group of non-governmental organizations to assist in developing the farms, including the Rural Industries Innovation Centre, the Forestry Association of

Botswana, Permaculture, Cooperation for Research, Development and Education (CORDE), and Thusano Lefatsheng, a local self-help program. All but one of the groups did aid work in the district before being asked to help develop the three farms. After meeting with council and government officers, the groups decided to pool their resources as a consortium to better plan the farm development strategy. The farm lands, however, were valuable property and a year later, others became interested. Among those who wanted the farms were Anderson Chibua, the former Ghanzi District commissioner and the head of a large commercial cattle syndicate, and Johnny Swartz, the former Bushmen social worker who became the member of parliament for the area. Labour and Home Affairs Minister Patrick Balopi, who already owned a farm adjacent to NK 173, was also rumoured to have an indirect role in the maneuvers for the farms. But it is not rare for huge herds in Ghanzi to be owned by important people. Botswana President Quett Masire, for example, has seven Ghanzi farms registered in his name, with two more held by his brothers.

After preparing a range ecology assessment of the farms and hiring a full-time coordinator to organize their development, the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) gave \$180,000 to the Botswana government earmarked for drilling boreholes and the needed fencing of the lands. After a year of planning, the NGO consortium learned in February 1991 the government wanted to take the farms away from the Bushmen to allocate to influential interests. After an unsatisfactory meeting with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing, the NGOs found higher government officials refusing to see them. The local papers and a BBC reporter reported on the story and all hell broke loose. First, MLGLH officials insisted that the council should reallocate the ranches, and warned the foreigners to stop meddling. To justify the action, the central government officials alleged the NGOs were never formally invited to the area by the Ghanzi District Council and that the organizations had gone behind the government's back in obtaining the NORAD funding. These officials argued that the consortium should cease all involvement in Ghanzi. Council documents show a clear invitation by the government while a Ministry of Finance investigation showed a government approval of the NORAD funds.

NORAD representative Vid Kun Isaaksen fired back, warning Botswana Vice President Peter Mmusi that Norway might cut off all funding to Botswana if the government took the farms away from the Bushmen. He later backed off somewhat in a formal letter by offering a compromise that an equal amount of land could be given to Bushmen elsewhere, if the three farms were reallocated. Succumbing to international criticism, the Botswana government reversed itself and directed that the land be guaranteed for the Bushmen. The consortium, however, was dissolved last month after the government's ill-will doomed the group to failure. A few members, like Permaculture and Thusano Lefatsheng, continue to

work on isolated projects in the area. The three farms are still allocated to the Bushmen, but if they are not developed in the next four years they will be reallocated. Without the NGO consortium, the district council lacks the money and expertise to develop the farms, so eventually the powerful will prevail.

"My ex-patriate comrades in the consortium were naive," says Samora Gaborone, who was CORDE's representative in the now defunct consortium. "They didn't see what was going on. They came from a first world democracy and expected to find democracy here. But the big guys wanted the land. There are class divisions and the San/Bushmen people are at the bottom." Keeping the Bushmen uneducated and landless guarantees cattle owners cheap labor, which keeps production costs down and maximizes profit, he said.

One government civil servant, who took part in the highest-level of government discussions about the Bushmen ranch issue, agrees with Gaborone's assessment. He claims Botswana authorities feared the "local institution building" the consortium began to promote. "The NGOs were creating what the government perceived as a threat, because they were teaching Bushmen to demand their rights," said the civil servant, who asked not to be named to protect his career and his family in Botswana. "If they were teaching the Basarwa to demand better wages, they might also think about how they were being governed." The government's obvious manipulation in favor of cattle owners over the Bushmen is "corruption by omission, rather than by commission, but it is still corruption," he said.

Another member of the consortium, Francis Johnston of Thusano Lefatsheng, says there is now an unspoken agreement between the NGOs and the government to not talk about what happened in Ghanzi. "It's a shame the big cattlemen wanted that land," said Johnston, a Scotchman who was the secretary of the former consortium. "They could have ranches elsewhere, like in the Tuli Block. But the Bushmen can't go elsewhere for land."

Bushmen expressed fatalism about the scandal. "If we don't get the farms, so what?" a Bushmen community leader asked. "Why argue about not getting something when we never had it before?"

Ironically, even if the consortium had survived, it would be an uphill battle to inspire the Bushmen to improve their lot. Recently, the Canadian-funded group Permaculture tried to interest the Bushmen in building improved low-cost housing. All materials and instruction would be provided for free. The Bushmen refused, because their first question was "Who is going to pay us to do this?" Although the development worker tried to explain that the homes would be in their own interest, the Bushmen were not interested. In a community where everyone is hungry, according to Bushmen reckoning, every hour of the day is better spent walking the veld looking for food. The most foolproof and

beneficial projects can fail if they take time to implement, since the Bushmen need immediate returns to ensure survival.

Another word that has a great deal of meaning to some of the Ghanzi District bushmen is kuru, which in the Nharo dialect means "to create or make something." The word became flesh when an Afrikaner missionary founded the Kuru Development Trust in the settlement of D'Kar, about 40 kilometers to the east of Ghanzi.

Braam La Roux walked into the Kuru offices with long, easy strides. A bearded man of large stature and probing blue eyes, the reverend resembles my Sunday school conception of the old testament prophet Jeremiah, who was "a voice crying in the wilderness." La Roux is a firmly positive man who would rather talk about the Bushmen's accomplishments at D'Kar than about political controversy. "Journalists aren't liked around here, but rather are viewed with suspicion because they've been writing negative things," La Roux told me at the beginning of the interview. "That creates a negative reaction by the government, when we would rather a soft and positive approach. If you're going to write about the Bushmen, write to support the Bushmen, rather than try to stir the waters."

D'Kar was originally purchased prior to Botswana's 1966 independence by a Namibian farmer who was emotionally moved by the Bushmen living destitute and defenseless in Ghanzi. The farmer gave the 3,000 hectare plot to a small Namibian reformed church, which in turn called upon La Roux and his wife to take charge of the farm in 1982. At that time, the people living at D'kar were perceived as part of the "squatting problem" besetting the district. La Roux remembers the 80 or 90 Bushmen he first found at D'Kar as very poor, jobless drunkards who had been evicted from other local farms. "In a helpless situation, people take the few thebes [Botswana's equivalent of pennies] to buy drink," La Roux said.

(I want to pause for just a minute to note that alcohol is a major factor in the social breakdown of the Bushmen. The introduction of homemade beer, called khadi, by the black Africans on the farms was a new and pleasurable addiction for the Bushmen, who traditionally brew no alcoholic drinks. Not only do many Bushmen squander their money on khadi, but their drinking has turned a normally quiet and peaceful people into belligerent, fighting drunks. The alcohol breaks down the cultural injunctions against physical aggression, causing mistrust among groups and dissension in families when the alcoholic head of household diverts buys khadi instead of supporting his wife and children.)

All the busy activity at Kuru springs from the Bushmen's own initiative, which is supported by technical advisors. Of the nine technical staff at Kuru, four come from the local area. A few women formed a sewing group, and now there are several producing

school uniforms and dresses. Some men experimented with tanning animal hides, and now there are two tanneries at Kuru. Others, working with leather to create shoes or saddles, formed a workshop where aspiring artisans are trained. The guiding policy of Kuru is that the development trust should not own any businesses, such as the tannery or a bakery. All enterprises should be independently viable before they ask for help from the trust in equipment and training. Among other activities, Kuru hosts a raucous, stimulating pre-school program for almost 50 tots, adult education classes in English and an art studio where litho prints, oil canvases and mixed-media cloth wall hangings are created by Bushmen. Each enterprise appoints delegates to the Kuru Council, which holds a weekly meeting to discuss issues that arise in the 800- to 900-member community. When a new project is proposed, the council and technical staff discuss it before submitting any recommendation to a general public meeting. In D'Kar, these town hall talk sessions can be tediously long, since everything said must be translated into English, Setswana, Nharo and Afrikaans. These sessions, however, are entirely congruent with the Bushmen's open and egalitarian society in which collective decisions are taken after everyone has expressed his or her opinion several times over.

"They're trying to change things for themselves, creating their own jobs making things that are important and useful in the world now, not just handicraft things from the past," La Roux said. "They're starting to believe in themselves." That self-confidence springs, in part, from the fact that D'Kar is the only freehold land that really belongs to the Bushmen. The first important step La Roux made at D'Kar was to help the Bushmen understand they own the land and that ownership means taking on the responsibility to address the poverty problems there.

Gaishe Joseph, a board member of Kuru Development Trust, explained his anger and hope eloquently: "At first we believed the things we were told. Things will be better for you and your children, they said. They told us we should send our children to schools, and that we would be cared for by our children once they were also civilized, like those who had gone to school and could read and write. We waited for that day. We could not always understand, but we believed that things would get better and the things our old people taught us could not help us any more.

"Now some of our children have gone through the schools. They came home, and they did not find work. They can also not do the things our old people taught us, because they do not know the veld and the animals. For a long time we were angry and we still are. We have lost everything. Our land, as well as our beliefs. We see that we will have to do something ourselves. Maybe if we could start our own school, where our children can learn our old values, our language, and maybe to work with their hands as well as with their heads, like in the other schools, we will again

stand up. Kuru is for us. We have to do it ourselves, that is what the word means. Other people will help us, but one day our children will do things themselves, as we had done it ourselves very long ago."

At the opposite end of the Ghanzi District, another Afrikaner missionary is hard at work in the settlement of New Xanagas. I thought it odd to meet yet another man raised in apartheid South Africa expending his life's energy in the desert for people slowly being absorbed into an uncaring, uncontrollable world. But Gawie Joubert, who once carried a gun as a cop to enforce racist laws, has undergone a dramatic change since his days in South Africa. "Blacks were nothing to me when I was a policeman," Joubert reflects now. "There was a negative feeling that I had about black people that grew from my job as a South African policeman, because I was dealing with criminals and thieves. Then I found Jesus and I couldn't go back to what I was before. I died to my old life and was born into this new one, here in Botswana." Just like religion made a personal difference for him, Joubert believes God helps Bushmen gain more confidence in themselves. The basic question in working with Bushmen, he said, is how to build self-respect in an overwhelmed people.

After his sudden awakening to the injustice around him, Joubert studied theology and became a reverend in the Dutch Reformed Church. Joubert, who has worked at New Xanagas for five years, remembers a development aid group showing him a list of 35 different projects that he could start. "One by one, I crossed them off, because none of them would work here," Joubert said. "The sun is too hot, while we have a frost as well. That eliminated most agricultural projects right there." Instead, Joubert established an innovative 25 hectare prickly-pear cactus farm. Each Bushmen family involved has a 40 meter by 40 meter square plot partially shaded by thick netting. There the cacti are grown and goats kept penned. The ultimate goal will be the commercial production of Cochineal (*Dactylopius coccus*), a tiny insect which is used for production of carmine dye. This deep purple dye is utilized in food coloring, cosmetics, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. At world market prices, Cochineal brings well over \$90 per kilogram. The prickly pear on which the insect feeds can be used for a variety of purposes, including food for people and livestock. In South and Central America, prickly pear fruit is made into jams and jellies and the tender leaves eaten.

Every project to aid the Bushmen that I saw in Ghanzi District had its flaws. Every person who talked about the Bushmen's fate as a people spoke in discouraging, pessimistic words or else had vague hopes for the future. After an hour of prodding, John Hardbattle confessed he really didn't know what a good development project would be for the Bushmen. Yet, when our conversation moved on to the Bushmen's sense of spirituality, Hardbattle did see a bright spot in a grim reality. In the same

way as Joubert, Hardbattle says the Bushmen must struggle to believe in themselves again, but that salvation will come not from western Christianity but from the Bushmen's traditional beliefs. "Bushman are a very dynamic people because of the trance dance," he said, in his explanation of the all-night dancing that seemingly imparts supernatural powers to the adept to heal sickness and see danger from afar. "They have that trance which lets them believe in themselves. With the power they have through the dance, they'll survive. It's the one thing that does pull the community together, because trance dances are a common experience for all Bushmen in Namibia and across Botswana."

I was fortunate to see a famous dancer perform at Hardbattle's farm one evening. The traditional doctor began stamping his feet as he circled the bonfire, each step making the rattles wound around his lower legs hiss. A circle of six or seven women began to clap in an unsquare rhythm impossible for me to imitate. As the man danced a stuttering staccato around the fire, the track in the sand grew deeper and the stamping heavier. He began singing. A chorus of women echoed his high-pitched wail that wriggled through the still night air. No longer stamping, but rather prancing, the dancer's chest glistened with sweat as he danced closer to the fire's edge. At the end of each dance, the man cried out "Tutu," a word Hardbattle translated as "the power the dancer feels building inside his body." Despite the deep cultural significance of the dance, the dancer himself joined with the women and the larger group sitting in the shadows outside the circle of fire in irreverent laughter during the night. Most of the dances represented animals, such as a gemsbok with its long horns prancing on the veld. A few had comic references to hunters who forget to load their guns, or heavy downtown traffic in the capital city. I stayed for three hours at the fire -- almost in a trance myself -- before I left at 1:30 a.m. The dance, not performed for my benefit, went on until dawn.

"Call him a trance dancer, a shaman or medicine man, because of the changing times he is emerging as someone special," Hardbattle said. "These beliefs are getting strong these days, with young men getting interested. The word worship doesn't apply, since it isn't the worship of a deity but more of a social event, with laughter and gaiety. It's too confining to call it prayer, since it's much more and much older than Christianity."

I'm encouraged when I think that the ultimate hope of the Bushmen may rest not with a specific income-generating project or with a specific promise of land, but in the reaffirmation of their beliefs both in the supernatural and in themselves. Let me end with one last word, kuriqa qaimae, which is increasingly used by the Bushmen and perhaps shows their own optimism. It means: "This year is not a good year for me, but next year may be better." Usually heard in times of drought when game dwindles, Bushmen now use it to refer to all of life. Sincerely,

