

CHAPTER 2
COMPLAINT DISCOURSE, AGING AND CAREGIVING AMONG THE JU/'HOANSI¹
OF BOTSWANA.
With 2018 Update

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Old people have long complained: it is an old thing. Even if the child did everything for them, they would complain (Koka, age eighty).

This chapter explores the social basis of care giving discourses among the Ju/'hoansi of southern Africa. It looks at how a particular cultural system reproduces the social relations of care for elders, and examines the language through which care is negotiated. These forms of speech locate caregiving in gender, family, and community relationships. They also reproduce the ideology of caring for elders in both its public and domestic realm and legitimate this behavior so that it is experienced as "natural."

Despite the changes in economic and social life that the Ju/'hoansi have experienced in the last twenty-five years, caring discourse appears to be autonomous in the Dobe area, in the sense that it is constructed within the culture itself, with very little influence from state agencies (legal, health, educational, military, social services) or non-Ju/'hoansi religious philosophies.²

THE JU/'HOANSI OF THE DOBE AREA

The Ju/'hoansi (an approximate English pronunciation would be "juntwasi") of Botswana and Namibia are one of the best known and documented gatherer-hunter peoples in the world. Although their history of contact has been a complex one, some have lived as relatively isolated foragers³ well into the 1960s. As gatherer-hunters, the Ju/'hoansi can provide insights into a way of life that was, until 10,000 years ago, a human universal.

Studies of the Ju/'hoansi have been carried out on a wide variety of topics by over a dozen investigators including project A.G.E. described by Fry, et al. web book Part 1. The Dobe area, where the majority of these studies were undertaken is a line of eight waterholes in the northern Botswana and as recently as 2007 has supported a population of between 1000 to 1200 people of which, approximately 85 percent are Ju/'hoansi and the remainder pastoralists, mainly of the Herero ethnic group. Our more intensive studies in the mid-1980s of aging and caregiving covered both the Herero and the Ju/'hoansi but the present chapter focuses on the latter people and is updated where possible with new information from brief field visits by Lee in 1999, 2001 and 2005.⁴

During the 1960s the majority of Ju/'hoansi lived in small camps of about fifteen to thirty people, often centered around a core of siblings, their spouses, and children. The groups relied on wild food products for the bulk of their subsistence needs and moved three to six times a year in search of food and water. These camps were characterized by egalitarian social relations and the widespread sharing of foodstuffs--the typical features of a small-scale communal social formation. The language and kinship system were intact and fully functioning.

Missionizing has had little influence in the Dobe area. Indigenous religious practices included belief in two major deities (a high god and a lesser, trickster god) and ghosts of ancestors called *gangwasi*. Trance dancing maintained the health of the community and was used to cure individual sicknesses. At some camps the all-night dances took place two or three times a week. A woman's drum dance was also prominent.⁵

After 1968, conditions began to change rapidly. In 1968, the first store opened followed by a school in 1973 and a health post and airstrip in 1978. During this period the Ju/'hoansi began to shift over to small-scale livestock and crop production and settle into semi-permanent villages. Cash became a common medium of exchange which co-existed with the traditional regional gift exchange system called *hxaro*.⁶ Migrant labor, livestock sales, and craft production became sources of cash income. In addition, some young men were drawn across the border into the South African military, where they earned high salaries as trackers in the war against the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO).⁷

While HIV/AIDS has had a devastating impact on Botswana and Namibia in the last decade, the Ju/'hoansi on both sides of the border have had very few cases, likely because of the high status of women which has empowered them to insist on condom use. As reported in research by Lee and colleagues, Ju/'hoansi women refuse sex to partners unwilling to comply (Lee 2006). Thus the tragic pattern of ill or dying parents cared for by grandmothers and young children is not evident in the Dobe area or in Namibia.

By the mid-1980s, in their dress and economy, the Dobe Ju/'hoansi came to resemble the lifestyle of many impoverished southern African peasants. They received drought relief in the 1980s, and bags and containers from overseas countries littered their villages. Their children went to school, but the majority usually dropped out in the early grades. More recently a few have gone on to high school and have become literate in other African languages and in English. By 2007 Namibia had a Ju member of parliament and strides have been made to create a written form of the Ju language, develop curricular material in that language and create a resource center and local schools with materials in Ju/'hoansi (Biesele 2007) In the Dobe area people now seek health care at local clinics or from mobile health units, and they often spend their modest incomes on transistor radios, European-style clothing, tea, sugar, tobacco, and beer.

On both sides of the border old-age pensions have been introduced adding to the prestige of seniors who now have independent access to cash. But problems have also arisen as drinking establishments (*shebeens*) have sprung up luring pensioners to spend their money while waiting for transport back to remote villages. Health workers in Namibia have expressed worries that the nexus of cash and alcohol may be especially dangerous for accompanying family members who may be having unprotected sex while under the influence of alcohol and risk bring STDs or HIV into the local communities (Lee 2006).

Their transition to an agricultural way of life has been far from successful. In the mid-1980s, over half the families lacked livestock, and even the "affluent" herders numbered their stock in the range of ten to twenty head of cattle. Foraging declined in the mid-1980s with the introduction of drought relief but bow and arrow hunting has once again increased in Botswana, encouraged by the Game Department (Lee and Rosenberg: 1993). Over the past two decades the

knowledge of Dobe area elders about the environment, seasonal variation and their technical advice about hunting and gathering became highly prized as younger community members intensified foraging activities (Lee and Biesele 1991; Biesele 2007).⁸

On a deeper level the Dobe Ju/'hoansi are struggling--not without success--to adhere to the values and beliefs of their ancestral culture. It is this cultural context which has continued to generate the motifs, themes, and rationales about aging and caregiving which are explored in this chapter.

AGE AND CHANGE IN JU/'HOANSI SOCIETY

Like most foraging peoples, the Ju/'hoansi were not interested in and did not keep track of chronological age. Birthdays and anniversaries were not social markers and age segregation has been noticeably absent. Major life transition hallmarks existed at the younger end of the age spectrum distinguishing among infants, children, adolescents, and adults. No ceremonies marked the onset of old age or menopause, but all elders (including those without children) carry the honorific *na* in their names which means "old," "big" or "great." No ritual occasion marks the moment when one becomes *na*, usually in one's mid to late forties; certainly, everyone fifty or over is called *na*⁹.

Old age is divided into three broad categories. All elders are *na*, while those who are very old but still functioning are called "old/dead" *da ki*, a term that designates extreme old age and one that is also a joking term. A sick or decrepit elder may be referred to as "old to the point of helplessness" *da kum kum*. *Da ki* and *da kum kum* do not denote a sharp decline in social status. Unlike many societies described in this volume (see Glascock section I and Barker section VI), the frail elderly are not a particular butt of ridicule or a source of fear and anxiety.

It should be noted that growing old and the changes that accompany it are a constant topic of conversation and a source of humor. Linking sexuality and aging seem to make the best jokes and much of campfire discussion features endless stories about decline in sexual prowess, especially among men. Post-menopausal women also delight in engaging in broad sexual joking (Lee 1984).

Although the Ju/'hoansi do link old age with degeneration, elders are also associated with generative and life-giving activities, as Biesele and Howell have pointed out in their analysis of a beautiful folktale of a grandmother/granddaughter relationship (1981). Similarly, elders are felt to have special powers which permit them to eat certain foods (e.g. ostrich eggs) considered too dangerous for younger people to consume. Elders with physical infirmities have taken strong leadership roles, as for example, the case of four blind seniors whose decision-making advice and curing roles were very influential in the political and social life of one water hole in the 1960s (Lee 1968:36). Death is not exclusively connected with old age. Historically, the Ju/'hoansi have had a high infant mortality rate, and now tuberculosis is prevalent in the Dobe area. Thus, death can and does occur at any age.

In the realm of sociopolitical power, Ju/'hoansi elders have had limited prerogatives. Traditionally, they commanded control over defining kinship relationships. A senior person, male or female, has the right to decide who fits where in the kinship system and to determine an avoidance or a joking framework for social interactions. This system of seniority gives elders power within the social universe, but it does not constitute a gerontocracy. Before settling down, the Ju/'hoansi were, for the most part, without property and could not wield the threat of disinheritance to encourage compliance. In 1995 an adult daughter of an elder with cows was asked how cattle ownership affects the quality of care, she responded by saying that "it hasn't changed things. We took care of our elders then and we still take care of them" (Richard Lee field notes May 1995).

However, this mother of six children also indicated that at her passing her eldest child (female) would inherit her cattle and that she alone among her siblings anticipated receiving her mother's property, because she saw herself as the principal caregiver. But she also stated that she might decide to share her inheritance with her siblings (Lee *ibid*).

How property and inheritance will, in the long run, influence personal relationships including eldercare, is still very much in the process of being worked out. Sedentary life has brought changed patterns in subsistence and marriage customs which may also create significant changes in the lives of Ju/'hoansi elders. In the past, old people, by dint of their personal authority,

attempted to construct marriage alliances which seemed sensible to them, but young people often refused such arrangements thwarting the intentions of their seniors. An emerging pattern of bride wealth¹⁰ in lieu of bride service and an increase in informal inter-ethnic liaisons has made marriage a contentious issue in the Dobe area.¹¹ At the same time elders have argued that they see no real change in their own lives as a result of a movement away from bride service towards bride wealth, and that receiving a cow at the marriage of a daughter seems to be equivalent to having a son-in-law's hunting skill at their disposal.

Another arena of personal authority for elders has been their role as healers. Richard Katz, who had done fieldwork among healers in the Dobe area in the late 1980s notes, that the social status of certain elderly healers was very high (personal communication 1995). These old men are "the healers' healers" and it is their experience and their strength in not being overpowered by the forces with which they work, that commands respect. In a culture where boasting of any kind is frowned upon these senior healers are permitted to talk about their skill and achievements. Not all old people develop the power to heal--to sing, dance, go into a trance, and "pull sickness" out of others. Those who do can often go on until they are quite old, teaching other healers and participating in healing the community at large. Katz has described the charismatic energy of some elderly healers and their aura of exceptional strength and spirituality (1982). Later research indicated that while some elders say that they are strengthened by their access to *num* (medicine), others have found that healing is very wearing and hastens the aging process (Katz, Biesele and St. Denis 1995). By 2007 a consensus among researchers was that Ju/'hoansi healers continue to be viewed with the respect described above but that the temptations of payment for services may complicate the situation (Katz, Biesele, Guenther, Lee personal communications 2007)

THE 1986/1987 PROJECT

The discussion which follows is based on field research (participant observation, formal questionnaires, and open-ended, unstructured interviews) with the Ju/'hoansi in 1986, 1987¹² and updated as described above.. It also makes use of the accumulated work by anthropologists who

have worked with them since 1963. We were, thus, often able to compare our informants' retrospective accounts with field descriptions of observed behavior over a period of three decades. Until recently, however, there has been very little systematic research on aging in Ju/'hoansi culture.

In 1964, 9 percent of the population was over sixty.¹³ By 1986 the figure was 12.5 percent, with 7.5 percent over age sixty-five. In addition, the birth rate has risen. As of 1986, almost 40 percent of the population was under fifteen years of age. Thus at the time of our field research, 48 percent of the population was between fifteen and forty-nine and supported both. In stark contrast to the rest of southern Africa where the AIDS epidemic has shortened life expectancy, the Dobe area's rates have remained stable (Lee 2006.)

This project focused on the social experience of aging and caregiving as mediated by (1) narratives of neglect and abandonment, (2) the concept of entitlement, and (3) the social organization of care.

NARRATIVES OF NEGLECT AND ABANDONMENT

To the observer, Ju/'hoansi elders appear to be hale and hearty¹⁴ and well integrated into the social life of their community. Frail¹⁵ elders are embedded in caregiving networks of several on-site carers, who provide for their needs. Yet the discourse used by elders to describe their situation is often one of unrelenting complaint and blaming. In general, the most common response to the question, "Who looks after old people?" is "Their children." But when we stepped outside the normative system and asked elders, "Who looks after you?" the response was very frequently, "No one. Can't you see that I am starving and dressed in rags?"

Elders frequently complained about the neglected state they were in and told lengthy tales about the deficiencies of those who should be caring for them but were not. While neglect discourse took on a variety of forms, two common styles will be examined here. One is the nagging style and the other is broad melodrama¹⁶.

The first style is typified by Chuko, age seventy-two, at the time of the interview. In the mid-1980s, Chuko lived with her husband, her daughter, and her son-in-law all of whom shared in

the caregiving. Yet Chuko described herself as neglected because she stated that her three half-brothers and their children did not provide for her.

The care that she received from her daughter, son-in-law, and husband was scarcely acknowledged. Chuko asserted that caregiving had deteriorated in the present. She maintained, that in the past, children were collectively responsible for all elders.

When I say the past was better I mean this: before, the child listened to his/her parents¹⁷.

When children went out to play and an adult who saw an elder ailing came upon them, he scolded them for letting the elder die of thirst and ordered them to attend to [the elder]. Today an adult will merely look and say or think: "Let his/her children take care of him/her." And even the children themselves are not caring by nature.

She then reiterated her complaints against her half-siblings.

Two of her brothers agreed to be interviewed, and they defined themselves as being caregivers to their sister and pointed out that they sent food and water to her via their children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, Chuko maintained a persistent pattern of complaint. Far from not wishing to seem a burden or a dependent, she went out of her way to publicly blame her brothers and their families as being delinquent caregivers. Her form of expression was often a quiet oration to no one in particular.

Chuko's complaint discourse can be interpreted in a variety of ways. She may have been detecting changes in the distribution of social obligations that have accompanied settlement, and may indeed have picked up a drift away from sibling care towards a more nuclear pattern. Her family and her brothers had lived together in the past in a traditional sibling core unit, but at the time of the interview, the brothers lived on the other side of Dobe. Two of these brothers have many children, grandchildren, and elders to care for and may well have been preoccupied with their immediate situations. The third sibling is often dismissed as a person with no sense who cannot be relied on. Thus, Chuko may be complaining about a new experience of social distance which has fractured horizontal sibling bonds and is delimiting caregiving responsibilities within

the nuclear family. But while the Ju/'hoansi may talk constantly about the importance of adult children, they also mobilize other caregiving networks by means of eloquent complaint.¹⁸

Anthropologists consider the Ju/'hoansi to be "...among the most talkative people in the world. Much of this talk verges on argument, often for its own sake, and usually *ad hominem*...." (Lee 1979:372). Thus Chuko's stream of complaints is not viewed within the culture as unusual or as a particular attribute of old age¹⁹.

Complaining is an important leveling discourse and a medium for the expression of a variety of complex feelings (Wiessner 1983). In describing the circumstances leading to and the aftermath of the deaths of three elders, Wiessner (1983) noted vociferous complaints about the adequacy of care in all cases, even in a family where adult children and more distant kin were doing everything they could, including purchasing and slaughtering goats, and holding healing ceremonies. "These accusations," according to Wiessner are part of "the rhetoric of reciprocity which pervades San life" (1983:1). Guenther has called this discursive pattern "an expressive version of foraging," with a number of elements which include entertainment, rhetorical persuasion and acoustical bonding (2006.) Complaining is a public exhortation to keep goods and services circulating: It warns against hoarding and is thus at the center of the foraging way of life.

Complaining rhetoric may also have been part of Chuko's individual efforts to keep herself visible. Just as Jewish elders in Barbara Myerhoff's study of a seniors' drop-in center used narration and "competitive complaining" (1978:146) as a performance strategy to mark their continued presence in the world, so Chuko's constant hum of words may well be her way of saying, "I'm still here."

No competing legitimate discourse to the ideology of sharing has thus far emerged among the Dobe Ju/'hoansi. There is no language yet which expresses a world of personal needs which might be at odds with obligations to others, and there is very little leniency shown to those who may have many conflicting obligations. Those who have attempted to limit the circle of reciprocity when they switched from foraging to agro-pastoralism have found it difficult to explain why they were not sharing their crops or killing their goats and cattle to meet the needs of their kinspeople (Lee 1979:412-14).

One woman in her early sixties, a very vociferous complainer, relished denouncing all and sundry for their failure to share. One day, while following one of the research team members while he was packing up camp, she delivered a blistering tirade against his stinginess. Back and forth from tent to truck they trudged, the anthropologist silent, carrying bundles of goods, Nuhka on his heels, yelling at him. Suddenly, she stopped and like a scene in a Brecht play, she stepped out of character, altered the tone of her voice and calmly announced, "We have to talk this way. It's our custom." Then she stepped back into character and resumed her attack.

The Ju/'hoansi have a name for this type of discourse: It is called *hore hore* or *oba oba* and can be translated as "yakity yak." In the case above, Nuhka stepped out of character to break the tension of the verbal assault she had mounted. In other cases, the tension can be broken by a joke which leaves "...the participants rolling on the ground helpless with laughter" (Lee 1979:372). Neglect discourse is, thus, not peculiar to elders but may be invoked by anyone at any time to decry real or potential stinginess. However, elders will frequently avail themselves of the opportunity to complain. In contrast to Chuko's nagging style, others recount their complaints with great theatrical flare.

Kasupe, age seventy-four, a skilled storyteller, responded to the question of who looked after him by denouncing his entire family. First, he attacked his children.

My own children do not look after me. See the clothes I am wearing--these rags I'm wearing--I get them from my own work, my own sweat. None of them have done anything for me. Because they do not look after me, I, their parent say they are "without sense."

He went on to discuss his future prospects:

I do not know who will take care of me when I am old and frail. Right now I can manage;

I still have some strength. But as I grow old, I cannot point out a child--a person--about whom I can say, "This one will take care of me." Perhaps I will perish.

Warming up to his tale of woe, Kasupe also denounced his brothers and sisters. In fact all of his relatives were dismissed as being uncaring. To illustrate the depths of their perfidy, he launched into the following story.

Here is proof of the uncaring nature of my children. I will tell you a story. I'd gone hunting with some Herero [men] and we had split up agreeing to meet later at a certain point. Those Herero warned me that they had set a trap in the direction I was headed. I went on but because it was dark, I could not see and was caught in the trap. It grabbed my ankle. I stayed there and my wife and children were following me. None of them came to see how I was. I was only helped by you Gakegkoshe [the Tswana/Herero translator] and Tontah [Richard Lee, an anthropologist.] You helped me heal and saw to it that I got better. None of [my family] came to see how I was doing. It was only you. Even my brothers and sisters in Southwest [Namibia] did not come to see how I was doing.

At this juncture Gakegkoshe turned to me and said in English, "A big story." And indeed it was.

After the interview concluded, Richard Lee and I returned to camp, fetched a copy of the book, *The Dobe !Kung* and returned to confront Kasupe. There on page 105 of the book was a photo of Kasupe "on the day of the crisis" lying on the ground surrounded by family and Ju/'hoansi healers. The text also included a lengthy account from Lee's field notes describing Kasupe's wife and children sobbing and wailing as community members worked on curing him. Lee administered some penicillin. The next day Kasupe began to improve, and within three months he was hunting again (Lee 1984:104-106).

Feeling some glee in having caught Kasupe in a "lie," we laid the evidence out before him. Here was the story and photograph of his family and community making heroic efforts to save his life. Kasupe's only response was to break out into a loud, long, thigh-slapping laugh which was immediately echoed by the Ju/'hoansi audience and the anthropologists.



Kasupe laughing after telling his story, with his friend/Twi seated

Kasupe was completely unabashed and expressed no regret at having “accused” his relatives of neglect, abandonment, and death-hastening behavior. Whether there was any "truth" to his narrative was quite irrelevant. His version of events made a good story. It was gripping and dramatic; he was impressive as he told it. The listener was captivated by "the utterance" (Eagleton 1983:115).

Kasupe had expresses what "might" happen if caregivers were not to do their duty. He described aloud what the world would be like should the caring system not be reproduced. His narrative allowed his audience to imagine the dire scene of family neglect. By negative example, he restated the social contract of caregiving obligations. His laughter, and the audience's laughter, did not mean that the complaint lacked seriousness, only perhaps that he had been topped by a

better story this time. But the complaint was important: the Ju/'hoansi system of mutual responsibility and caregiving requires constant lubrication, and complaining greases the wheels.

TALES OF “REAL” ABANDONMENT

In a more serious vein, Xoma, a respected elder, who was not given to extravagant rhetoric, pointed out that there were indeed cases of real abandonment in the past. He explained the circumstances of an abandonment in a previous generation:

They'd leave him/her and go off, because they didn't know what to do with him/her. Naturally, they had no truck, no donkey, nothing. And they were also carrying her/his things on their bodies. Sometimes they'd try to carry him/her where they were going. Someone else would carry his/her things, if there were many people. But if the people were few, or if there was only one man, they didn't know what to do with the old person. They would admit defeat, leave him/her, and go.

It is likely that there have been cases of death-hastening among the Ju/'hoansi in the past. We do not have any sustained ethnographic account of such behaviour comparable to Hart's encounter with the Tiwi custom of "covering up" (see Introduction, this volume²⁰).

The *Ju/'hoansi*, themselves, use the equivocal term *na a tsi*, (to leave in the bush), which implies abandonment. As Xoma's dispassionate analysis implies, "burden of care" was often not a metaphor but a concrete description of physically carrying a frail elder on one's back. When this was the only means of transportation, there were likely to have been times when the coping skills of the caregivers were stretched to the breaking point, and the elder was abandoned in the bush.²¹

Settlement has made a difference in eldercare. In the mid-1980s, we found incapacitated elders being scrupulously cared for by kin and community. The conditions of a settled lifestyle, the availability of soft foods and access to vehicles in cases of medical emergencies, all make it easier to care for frail elders today in comparison to thirty or more years ago. Furthermore, settlement has

meant that Ju/'hoansi practices are now more closely scrutinized by the state than they were in the past. The presence of a legal apparatus and police in the Dobe district have likely influenced community thinking on abandonment of elders.

The question of what constitutes "real" abandonment was a thorny problem for the researchers and we have found no easy answers. About 90 percent of our informants said that they knew of no cases of elders being abandoned in the past. Many described cases of young people carrying frail elders on their backs from water hole to water hole until they died "in our hands." Many others said that they had never heard of old people being abandoned.

But a few informants recounted explicit stories describing elders being left intentionally to perish. A consistent element in these accounts was that those associated with death-hastening activities were always close relatives--a spouse or children. This finding is consistent with Glascock's discussion (in Part I) that the decision to abandon an old person is almost always made within the immediate family, although in the Ju/'hoansi case, elders do not appear to be part of the negotiations. What is unknown but nevertheless very important in these discussions of euthanasia is how long the elder was incapacitated before the decision to terminate life was made. It may be that among the Ju/'hoansi, if close family members have been seen to be caring for a decrepit elder for a very long period of time--a culturally acknowledged but unexpressed statute of limitations comes into play and abandonment is permitted, especially if it is *not* presented as a premeditated action.

The discourse of neglect is thus quite complicated.²² It is used to describe cases in which "real" abandonment may have occurred. It is used as a social regulatory mechanism to reinforce sharing and caregiving. It is used as a vehicle to tell a good story. What is most apparent about this discourse is that it is words and words alone that have up until very recently been the main social regulators of behavior. The Ju/'hoansi themselves have no legal/police system with which to coerce behavior or punish offenders.

ENTITLEMENT

“Old people in this country are just brushed to one side, like rubbish, past our sell-by date” claims Alfie Carretta, lead singer of the Zimmers a group of 40 British pensioners. In 2007 the group created a sensation reinterpreting The Who’s song “My Generation” from the perspective of seniors (Toronto Star, A3, June 9 2007)

Ju/’hoansi elders do not see themselves as burdens. They are not apologetic if they are no longer able to produce enough to feed themselves. They expect others to care for them when they can no longer do so. Entitlement to care is naturalized within the culture: Elders do not have to negotiate care as if it were a favor, rather, it is perceived of as an unquestioned right.

The needs of elders are not defined as being markedly different from the needs of anyone else. The material aspects of caring for elders was uniformly defined by our informants as providing *da, gu, msi* (firewood, water and food). These are the basics of life which are procured and shared among all members of the community. Obtaining these necessities in the past has not been especially onerous, requiring on average twenty hours of work a week in food gathering, from the active population, but today those with herd animals work longer hours. Thus elders have not been experienced as a particular economic burden or a category of people with "special needs."²³ In fact, in terms of health care, elders are both givers and receivers of care. Even with the arrival of government health workers in the district, healing dances continue to flourish, giving elders a prominent role in community life.

One rarely hears an old person express appreciation for the care which s/he receives and one never hears elders express the desire to live alone in order not to burden the family with caregiving obligations. The desire to live alone is classified as a form of mental illness. "Only a crazy person would live alone," said one young informant.

The following story illustrates how old people make demands. In the middle of a hot afternoon in 1986 Gumi²⁴ was sleeping in her house next to a small fire. I had never met her before, but she was Richard Lee's (Tontah) social mother and they had had a close relationship for over twenty-three years. At first sight Gumi, age 83, looked to be very frail, weighing perhaps sixty pounds. Her daughter Sagai, spoke to her by cupping her hands and shouting about four inches

from her ear. Although Gumi had awakened from a sound sleep and had not seen her "European" son for six years, she immediately tuned into the situation, greeted her visitors, and established their place in the kinship system.

Throughout the interview, Gumi gave alert responses to our questions. At the same time she launched her own demanding harangue for gifts: "Give me some medicine...Well, I got some clothing...Tontah, *hxaro*²⁵ mi cosisi (give me things). Give me beads....Give me clothing."

At one point during the lengthy interview, her daughter interrupted the steady flow of demands and laughingly said, "Oh, stop going on and on about *hxaro*." Gumi was completely undeterred: "No! No! You tell Tontah that I want to still talk about *hxaro*. Hey, give me things."

When we returned to Dobe, we were asked how Gumi was faring. We described her situation and her persistent requests for gifts²⁶. Two elders glanced at each other with knowing looks when we mentioned the demands for *hxaro* and one said, "Even as old as she is, she still knows how to talk nicely. Her thoughts are still sound."



The elderly Gumi Na clasping the hand of her visiting "European son," Richard Lee, as her daughter Sagai looks on

What I had experienced as demanding ingratitude was culturally interpreted as a sign that Gumi was in good mental health. She "talked nicely" in the sense that her words were considered to be appropriate to a gift exchange situation in which she was an active participant. The ability to make demands is a signal of social connectedness, and a symbol of entitlement. For some, entitlement to care flows directly from the parent/child relationship. Tasa, age sixty-five, described this process of socialization:

When a child is born you teach that child to care for her/his parents throughout the time the child is growing up, so that when the child is older s/he will willingly care for his/her parents. But if that child has a crippled heart, is a person with no sense, that will come from inside her/him and s/he will neglect the parents.

As Tasa pointed out, childrearing practices provide no guarantee of filial caregiving performance. Many of our informants felt that, ultimately, nothing could be done to compel a child with "no sense" to act appropriately.

Others, however, argued that direct sanctions from the spirit world would occur in cases of filial neglect. According to Gai Koma fear of ancestors underlies elders' entitlement to care. "We feel under an obligation [to care for our parents] because they brought us up. We've drained all their energies. After they die, we would be left with bad luck if we had not cared for them. We could fall ill." Many concur that there is a link between elder care and the role of *gangwasi* (the ghosts of ancestors) but the relationship between the two worlds is not clear cut. *Gangwasi* have both a punitive side and a charitable side.

The *gangwasi* are not interested solely in elder care but in all phases of human interaction and their messages to the living are remarkably contradictory. They visit misfortune and sickness on the living to punish but they also "long for" the living and wish to take them with them to the villages of the dead simply because they are lonely for their loved ones (Wiessner 1983; Lee 1984:107-9). Thus, the reasons for a caregiver's illness or death may be explained either by negligence or devotion; their poor performance may have provoked ancestral anger or their good deeds may have unleashed yearnings among the *gangwasi* to be reunited with their loved one. This

ambiguity about motives of the *gangwasi* ultimately lodges the obligation for caregiving in the land of the living.

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF CAREGIVING

Caregiving is normatively described as being the responsibility of all adult children. All but one informant said that the responsibility should be shared equally among all the children.²⁷ No elder thought the responsibility was linked to gender or that daughters should be or were doing more than sons. According to Nahka, a woman with many children and grandchildren, feminization of caregiving is not a social norm:

In my household, both my sons and daughters help me. The care they give balances so that I see no difference. I don't think girls are more caring than boys. [Is this the same for others at Dobe?] Yes. I give the example of Nai who has no daughters but the care that her sons give her is of the same quality as that which I get from my children.

Most caregivers subscribed to this version, but a few women felt they were doing more than men. Gumi's daughter, Sagai, was particularly angry with her brother, Toma, and fought with him about his lack of attention to their mother. On the other hand Toma felt that his sister had not been sufficiently attentive when their father was ill and dying.

For our informants it was not gender which divided the population between active caregivers and delinquents but rather a personal quality or quirk. An elder noted, If you have a child and that child has a good heart, regardless of whether s/he is male or female, s/he will look after their parent.

Nothing can be done to force a child to be a good caregiver. If a child fails to do his/her duty then others are expected to pitch in, especially if the old person has no children. The situation of Chwa is illustrative.

Chwa was in her late eighties at the time of the interview, had poor eyesight, good hearing, and could still walk. She had no children and lived with her co-wife²⁸ Bau and their husband both of whom were in their early eighties. Throughout our discussion, neighbors dropped by with food and water. Chwa entered a conversation which compared past caregiving of the elderly to the current situation. One of her neighbors commented that she had never heard of elders being left in the bush in the past. Chwa stated that she had "...heard of people carrying those who were sick on their backs from village to village," but "today, people do not look after the old sufficiently." Two of her neighbors immediately disagreed and took turns affirming that the young do *nabe nabe* (care for) the old.

Chwa, however was adamant. She pointed out that her nephew Tsau, was derelict in his duty. (Tsau is her brother's son, a man of about sixty, married and living at another village.) "He wants to," she went on, "but his wife won't let him. But those who do take care of me are this Nisa here [an elderly neighbor] and that woman there, my co-wife [Bau], while our husband tends the cattle."

She then proceeded to recount this positive description of care, one of the very few, that I had ever heard from an elder.

Once, when I was very sick, I was burning with fever, she [Nisa] poured water on me, and then she held me in her arms. These women, Nisa, Tankae [an elderly neighbor], and my co-wife cared for me. I slept in their arms...my heart craved bush food and these women collected it for me.

I turned to one of the collectors and asked, "What made you think of doing that?" And Bau, Chwa's co-wife, using her hands for emphasis, responded: What is there to think about? You see an old person. She is your person. She can't walk. She can't do it for herself, so you do it.

Thus, although Chwa has no children of her own she was firmly anchored in a responsive caregiving network. These ties can be quite distant, in kinship terms, as in the case of Chwa's network. Chwa's neighbor, Nisa, calls Chwa elder sister although they have a very remote kinship connection. She and other caregivers use the word *ju* to express an affiliation which incorporates

a mixture of sentiment based on ethnicity and residential proximity and is expressed in quasi-kinship terms.

The caregiving role for someone who is "your person" is naturalized and it is not feminized.²⁹ Caregiving is explained as a quality of human, not female, nature. We have observed male and female carers providing food, firewood and water, although the foods may represent a gendered division of labor, with men hunting and women gathering. Government drought relief food will be carried to elders who cannot manage to go to the relief trucks themselves by any of "their people." Both men and women also care in other ways. Massage is an important service rendered by carers. Both men and women will gather the plants and nuts used to prepare the ointments which are used during massage. Women are more likely to provide other, smaller services for female elders, like grooming hair but both men and women spend time visiting, talking, and drinking tea with elders. In the delicate area of toileting old people, there did seem to be a gender link. Male caregivers would take responsibility for guiding male elders in and out of the bush and female caregivers would look after the needs of women elders.

Children, regardless of sex, were enlisted in caregiving as well. Sometimes the special relationship of grandparent/grandchild was used to mobilize care. This relationship is quite expandable into an inclusive kinship mode, which draws in distant kin. Elders, for example, may invoke the "name" relationship so that children with the same name as the old person will be regarded as grandchildren and available to perform services like fetching water, if they are willing.³⁰

The web of caregiving, thus, moves well beyond the limited confines of the nuclear family³¹: It is located in kinship/community ideology. It is not sentimentalized as a form of self-sacrifice.³²

Elders are independent and autonomous (as are all members of the community) in the sense that can do what they wish when they wish. Able-bodied elders forage, fetch water, visit, trade gifts, make crafts, dance, sleep, and eat whenever they choose. They live wherever they choose and do not face fears of pauperization with old age or the struggles of living on a "fixed income." Their old age is not filled with anxieties about personal security such as Sagner describes for those

elders living in the region's townships (2002)³³: Ju/'hoansi aged have no fears about interpersonal violence, robbery or abuse They do not lock themselves in their houses at night. Their conversation is not filled with talk of the "agony of loneliness" (Hillebrant 1980:408), or the difficult decisions about whether to sell their homes and lose a whole way of life in order to seek a diminished but more secure living environment (Draper and Keith 1992).

Frail Ju/'hoansi elders are enmeshed in a network of caregiving. The eight frail elders we interviewed had between four and eight people looking after them for a total of forty-four people undertaking frontline elder care responsibilities. In Canada, a recent estimate suggests a caregiver ratio of one personal support person to 10 residents in a care facility describing it as "laughably inadequate" within a context of caregiver "burn-out," leading to "substandard, uncaring service" (Bennett 2007).

In Dobe, even those who were extremely weak were not segregated from the social landscape. We observed a situation in which Dau a very sick elder, who slept almost all the time, was placed in the center of social life. Around him gathered family and neighbors who chatted, smoked and cooked together. Nearby his son hacked up the carcass of a kudu, and the old man's wife, Koka, stirred the cooking pot, children played, and an infant nursed. As the meat cooked, his wife lifted his head every few minutes and fed him a morsel of food. He chewed silently, his eyes shut. When he was done, he rested his head on the blanket. In the meantime, his wife chatted with those at the fire. Both the old man and his caregivers were rooted in a social matrix which undoubtedly eased the burden of care and perhaps enhanced the quality of this very frail person's last days.

CONCLUSION: THE PARADOX OF SHARING AND COMPLAINING

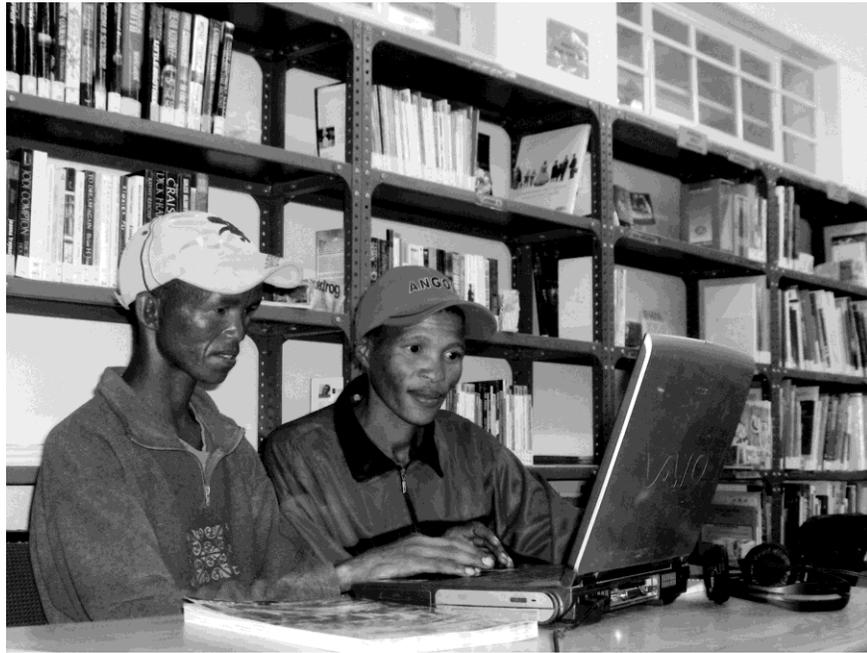
By North American standards the material situation of the Dobe Ju/'hoansi is poor, but the social circumstances of elders is quite positive (see also Draper and Keith 1992; Draper and Harpending 1994). They have personal autonomy, respect, and a great deal of control over the immediate circumstances of their lives. They live in a culture which strongly values caregiving and support. Old people participate in social, political, economic, and spiritual life. They may

regret growing old and ask someone to pull out the first few grey hairs, but they are also equipped with rich cultural resources for articulating their concerns, fears, and anxieties and for ensuring support.

Yet the Ju/'hoansi complain all the time. They are cranky, funny, and loud. They live in a moral universe of high caregiving standards, in which the ideal seems to be that every person is directly obligated to meet the needs of every other person all the time. But since such a perfect world is impossible to obtain, they find ample justification for their complaints of inadequate caregiving. Furthermore, personal preferences, personality conflicts, old unresolved grievances enter into the caregiving equation, making it far from an ideal universe. There is always someone who is not doing enough. And there is always someone ready to denounce that person in terms which are not pleasant or polite.

The cultural forms which reproduce respect and care for elders through complaint discourse reflect deep patterns in Ju/'hoansi culture. Boasting, self-aggrandizement or displays of pride are strongly discouraged as behaviors which impede sharing and may lead to violence. Thus, it is not polite etiquette but "...rough humor, back-handed compliments, put-downs and damning with faint praise" (Lee 1979:458)--the rhetoric of complaint-- which is in constant use to constrain potentially dangerous behaviors. Complaining is the only social arena in which the Ju/'hoansi are competitive and it is hardly surprising that elders are so good at it, they have been practicing their whole lives.

These discourses have not abruptly unraveled with changes in material culture like the appearance of transistor radios, cassette tape players, and bicycles. In other words, cultural formations are resilient and contrary to the highly romanticized myth presented in the South African film "The Gods Must Be Crazy" the world is not turned upside down by the introduction of a minor artifact of Western society.



Ju/'hoan trainees at work transcribing their “legacy collection.” On the right is Fridirick /ti!kae (Tikae) and on the left Charlie /ui (Twi.)

In fact, in a collaborative project with the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia, Biesele is working with local youth to transcribe close to 40 years of audio materials including folk tales, hunting stories and healing narratives, much of it from elders, onto computers to create an archive of materials for the Ju/'hoan people and scholars around the world (2007.) In a recent publication she describes the trainees hard at work trying to transcribe a particularly complicated narrative from a healer. The trainee sighs aloud and says: ‘If only /Kunta Boo [the raconteur on the old sound file] were here to help explain all this to us so we could get it written down right.’ At that very moment Biesele and the young trainees looked up to find that very elder and his wife standing in the doorway of the resource centre.

The couple stayed in the village of Tsumkwe and worked for two solid weeks in the resource center. As they were leaving to return to their remote village, one of the young trainees “was moved to read a speech he had written, which contained the words: ‘We young people could never have done this work correctly without you, our elders’” (Biesele 2007).³⁴

The Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari drink soda pop, are learning how to use computers and are still conducting trance dances, still complaining about those who do not share, and still caring for their elders.

2018 UPDATE: FIRELIGHT AND COMPLAINT

In the last decade, ongoing research has expanded our understanding of elders and complaint among the Ju/'hoansi, and various aspects of change and their affects on elders are currently being explored. An article by anthropologist Pauline Wiessner (2014) who works in both Botswana and Namibia has offered important insights about the role of complaint in the social fabric through a novel analytical lens. Based on field trips in 1974, 1998, 2005 and 2013, Wiessner analyzed 122 daytime conversations and 52 nighttime conversations situated around the campfire. Her research corroborates the cultural predominance of complaint discourse but with an important distinction: during the daytime verbal sanctions ---what this chapter has called complaint discourse and what Wiessner calls CCC “criticism, complaint and conflict”--- frame the content of about two-thirds of conversations (Wiessner 2014.)

However, Wiessner found that at night when people were gathered around their fires, complaint discourse was rarely deployed and instead extended and uninterrupted story telling predominated. Storytellers let go of daytime scolding and entertained their audiences with narratives accompanied by “gestures, imitation, sound effects, or bursts of song that brought the characters right to the hearth and into the hearts of listeners” (Wiessner, 2014: 14033. The imaginative, adventuresome and mellow qualities of firelight talk appear to provide an important counterbalance to the, often, harsh daytime language of complaint. This distinction remains a feature in current Ju/'hoansi culture as stories about local politics, trance dancing, trucks, elephants, and adventures in town are recounted around the fire.

Old Age Pensions

Old age pension payments continue to play a major role in the wellbeing of seniors as well as the community as a whole, as the cash economy grows in importance. Seniors' pensions are considered to be especially generous in Namibia (approximately \$84 USD per month) where the start age is 60 compared to 65 in Botswana (approximately \$40 USD per month). Le Roux a Botswana citizen, community activist and educator recounts that the mechanics of getting to a distribution point may pose a major hardship for seniors, especially those with disabilities (2018 personal communication).

WEB SPECIALS: 1. HelpAge video: “Namibia: Delivering Pensions to Remote Communities.”

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/hrbiojest%40gmail.com/FMfcgxvzKktTfFRPzQcVCDgMhcSKgQrQ?projector=1>

2. For documentation about pensions in Botswana and Namibia see the following:

[http://www.pension-watch.net/country-fact-file/botswana/;](http://www.pension-watch.net/country-fact-file/botswana/)

<https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/RessourcePDF.action?id=53950>

These cash pensions provide staples that are shared among family members and are a feature in the organization of social relationships and residence patterns (Wiessner 2018a.) Adult children and grandchildren arrange to live near their elderly parents in multi-generational extended families that jointly share the proceeds from pensions. Sharing can also entail some combination of economic resources such as food aid, small craft production, sale of the medicinal plant devil's claw, gardening, and wage work on government road maintenance projects (Lee

2018.) Hunting and gathering still accounts for a large percentage of household economies in Nyae Nyae region (Namibia), especially in outlying villages (Lee 2018).

ELDERS, MARRIAGE AND EDUCATION

As the chapter has explained, deference to elders or filial piety has never been a rigid practice among the Ju/'hoansi. In the past, the ability of elders to arrange marriages was frequently overruled in practice. In the last few years, according to Wiessner, "elders have more or less lost control of marriage, but not always." Furthermore, this chapter's previous speculations about a drift away from bride service towards bride wealth have not been borne out. Instead, a third option has emerged. Young couples tend to set up informal households, without parental consent, and may or may not marry later (Wiessner, personal communication, September 2018).

Yet, elders continue to play an important and valued role in educational projects including the three decades old Nyae Nyae Village Schools initiative (Hays 2016) and the more recent pre-school Playgroup projects in several Nyae Nyae villages (Heckler 2018 personal communication). Readers of the chapter will note that the Ju/'hoansi Transcription Group produced mother-tongue educational texts based on stories by older members of the community.

The focus on mother-tongue Ju materials and schools, in or as close to communities as possible, presents a sharp contrast to the circumstances of many indigenous peoples around the world. Especially cruel were the often-abusive colonial residential school systems that separated children from their families and were hostile to indigenous languages and cultural practices. The Ju/'hoansi and long-time collaborators, the Kalahari Peoples Fund and more recently TUCSIN (The University Center for Studies in Namibia) have created a framework which seeks to keep children and adolescents in contact with their traditions and language. The "Bush School" is a term used to describe a traditional social pattern, whereby, elders' knowledge of foraging and

culturally appropriate caregiving is transmitted, by example, and remains highly valued. “Town School” is the term used for classroom settings where didactic single subject competitive learning is the norm (Hays 2016). Elders also support Town Schools and they participate in various numeracy and literacy pre-school educational exercises in attempts to stem high dropout rates (Heckler 2018).

AGE STRATIFICATION

Given the comparatively lengthy birth spacing and small group size for much of the year in their pre-settlement past, the Ju/'hoansi have had a long history of mixed-age social relationships. Seniors, adults, adolescents and children interacted on a daily basis. Stereotypes about different age cohorts were not a prominent feature of Ju/'hoansi social life, unlike patterns of sharply delineated age segregation common in modern large-scale societies where concepts like “generation gap” speak to distrust between generations. In North America, for example, elders may fear teenagers as potential threats to person and property, while teens may stigmatize old people as embittered and out of touch with modern culture.

These kinds of negative stereotypes have not emerged among the Ju/'hoansi with settlement. However, with characteristic sardonic wit, there is a phrase still in use by the Ju/'hoansi that describes adolescents as *kadi kxausi* “owners of the shade.” This is an affectionate put down referencing the large amount of time spent by teens apparently doing nothing.

Settlement has brought shorter birth-spacing intervals and increases in family size. This demographic pattern coupled with the introduction of electronic devices may portend a movement towards a more age-segregated “youth culture.” Wiessner describes tendencies in that direction at a fireside trance dance in which storytellers held the rapt attention of villagers, except for adolescents (2014). With their cell phones in hand they physically moved away from the firelit

dance into the darkness, participating in that well-known ritual of modern life of trying to find a phone signal and in doing so, literally, separating themselves from the group.

On the other hand, educator Melissa Heckler and colleagues attended a healing dance saw a teenager using his cell phone to film the elders' fireside dance. Unlike the distancing behavior described above, Heckler interpreted this to be an expression of appreciation, affirming the value of cultural traditions among a younger generation (Heckler 2018 personal communication.)

AIDS AND ALCOHOL

In much of southern Africa, the AIDS epidemic has forced elders into the role of full-time caregivers to young children in the face of high mortality rates among the parental generation (Henry et al 2017.) This is not the case for the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae region of Namibia and the Dobe region of Botswana. The remoteness of Ju/'hoansi settlements and the continued high status of women, who feel confident in refusing unprotected sex, safeguard the community (Lee 2018.)

Alcohol availability, while negatively affecting people of all ages, especially in town, has a specific connection to seniors because of pension distribution systems. Seniors may find it difficult to get to pension distribution points and once there may find themselves marooned for days on end trying to arrange transportation home. Unfortunately, these difficulties are often exacerbated by the easy access to alcohol, especially in the town of Tsumkwe where there are 40 or more *shebeens* (home brew pubs) for a population of about 1000 Ju/'hoansi (Lee, 2018).

These tensions around alcohol were captured by anthropologist Richard Lee in the responses he got when conducting surveys about Ju/'hoansi attitudes towards bush life versus town life in 2010 and 2013. Lee was surprised by the ringing endorsement for bush life: 97% of informants were in favour of the bush in part because town life was so strongly associated with alcohol troubles.

Informants said bluntly:

“There is no alcohol or drinking in the bush.”

“I love the peace and quiet of the bush: the sounds of nature vs. the sounds of alcohol-fuelled squabbles” (Lee 2018: 172).

CONCLUSIONS FROM A 2018 PERSPECTIVE

Remarkably, the Ju/'hoansi have held onto large components of their hunting and gathering way of life, especially in rural villages and have not exclusively embraced farming and livestock-raising (Lee 2018). There are new elements in their culture, from cell phones, to old age pensions, to schools, to the manufacturing of fair-traded crafts for overseas high-end markets. Some have partnered with anthropologists, educators, and development workers in local, regional and international settings (Biesele and Hitchcock 2011). Their spiritual life now includes the presence of Christian missionaries. Prospectors roam the Kalahari looking for diamonds and more recently searching for the rare earth, coltan, used in manufacturing circuit boards for electronic devices. A group of Herero cattle-herders illegally cut a cordon fence and moved into the southern Nyae Nyae region in 2009. Their cattle were confiscated but legal efforts to remove them have been unsuccessful.

Any one of these elements alone or in combination could upset the ecological, economic, political or social balance of Ju/'hoansi life in the region. But countervailing these potentially destabilizing tendencies are a daily life, with roots in traditional ecological knowledge within a culture that still highly values sharing and tolerance and its old people. Part of the current body of knowledge of 20 and 30 year-old Ju/'hoansi comes directly through the generations from elders and is seen on the ground through an increase in foraging and the continued importance of bush

food in the diet in the Nyae Nyae region (Lee 2018: 172-175.) Additional research is needed to explore the situation of Ju/'hoansi elders in Botswana.

NOTES

The field research upon which the bulk of this chapter is based was carried on in Botswana between May and July 1986 and January and August 1987. The "we" used here refers to a team of investigators, research assistants and translators. The investigators included Richard B. Lee, who interviewed in the Ju language, Meg Luxton and Harriet Rosenberg, who used translators. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Nandi Ngcongco, Dorothy Molokome, and Leonard Ramatakwame of the University of Botswana; Makgolo Makgolo, M. A., of Gaborone; and Gakekgoshe Isaaka and Gai Koma of the Dobe region. In addition, Megan Bieseles, consulted with this project. We thank her for the careful translation/transcriptions she made of interviews she conducted in Ju/'hoanis in Namibia.

The investigators wish to thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for providing funding for this project, "Aging, Caregiving and Social Change in an African Population," file number 410-84-1298.

A version of this chapter was presented to the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Zagreb Yugoslavia, July 24-31, 1988. I appreciate the insightful comments made by Christine Gailey and Richard Lee at that time.

In addition, I would like to thank Patricia Draper, Mathias Guenther, Richard Katz, Robin Oakley and Polly Wiessner for their gracious assistance with this version. Finally, thanks go to Richard Lee, for gathering additional information for this project while doing research in Namibia in the spring of 1995.

1. The Ju/'hoansi are also known by the terms !Kung San, or the !Kung Bushman in anthropological and popular literature. The word Ju/'hoansi is the people's name for themselves and means "the real people." In the years since this article first appeared, the Ju/'hoansi like many other indigenous peoples of the world have come to political consciousness and are engaged in a

variety of political and economic struggles. The terms “!Kung” “San” and “Bushmen” are moving into positions analogous to “Indian” and “Eskimo” in North America where they are often replaced by “First Nations” and “Inuit” as indicators of pride in cultural identity. The spelling “Ju/’hoansi” was worked out in collaborative efforts between the people themselves and the linguist Patrick Dickens in the late 1980s. The term “Ju” means person or people.

Their language contains clicking sounds which are unique to the Khoisan and neighboring languages of southern and eastern Africa. In addition the language contains glottal stops and nasalizations. Anthropologists, in committing their words to writing, have developed an orthography, which has recently been revised, to approximate a rendering of these sounds in English.

There are four major clicks: dental, alveolar, alveopalatal and lateral. In this paper, only one click is marked. This is the dental click indicated by a slash. In English it sounds like the mild reproach “tsk, tsk”. Nasalization is indicated by an apostrophe. Thus the word Ju/’hoansi might be approximated in English as “juntwasi” with a soft “j” as in the French “je”, a dental click on the “t” and a nasalization of the “a.”

2. Influences from Herero practices have been observed among the Ju/’hoansi. The issue of burial practices is discussed in note 17.

3. By foraging I mean a mode of subsistence entirely based on wild food sources, without agriculture or domesticated animals, except for the dog.

4. In 1999 and 2002 Lee and colleague Ida Susser visited the region while doing research primarily on HIV/AIDs. Follow-up research on that topic was undertaken by Lee in 2005.

5. See Katz 1982, Katz and Biesele 1987.

6. See note 24.

7. See John Marshall's film, “Nai, the Story of a Kung Woman” for a vivid depiction of for

the effects of militarization on the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia.

8. On the Namibian side of the border, some elders have fared less well with rapid social change. When the war ended in 1990 and Namibia became independent of South African rule, a group of approximately 4,000 Ju/'hoansi, including family members of those who had acted as scouts and soldiers for the South African military were relocated to Schmidtsdrift, near Kimberley South Africa (Steyn 1994). This newly created community has had significant difficulties and the elderly have been particularly affected: Many were bored, dependent, marginalized and perceived themselves to be largely worthless within the framework of changed values and circumstances (Steyn 1994:37).

9. In the mid-1990s, herd ownership amongst the Ju/'hoansi was set-back by an outbreak of cattle disease which resulted in the slaughter of cattle in the district.

9. However, there is a social convention, not understood by the anthropologists, whereby some younger adults in their 30s are called *na*. It may be a combination of the personal magnetism and social stature of a particularly sober and thoughtful member of the community that earns this honorific or some other life experience that is significant to the community.

10. Bride wealth is a common part of marriage arrangements among pastoralist peoples in Africa. The bride's family is given cattle and/or other property to mark the marriage exchange. Customarily bride wealth is related to the bride's residence with the groom's family i.e. virilocal residence. Should the betrothal or the marriage fail, the cattle are returned. Furthermore, if the relationship produced children, their custody would normally reside with the father and his family.

By contrast, bride service is associated with the groom's responsibility to move to the bride's family (uxorilocal residence) and to provide subsistence for his in-laws for a specified period of time, often several years. In marriage systems where the age at marriage for females can be very young, bride service offers a structure whereby the bride's parents can be assured that their daughter is being well-treated and that their son-in-law is a good provider. If a divorce should

occur, any children would normally remain with the mother and her family.

¹¹ As some young women find themselves locked into restrictive arrangements (especially problematic is the new pattern of paternal child custody at divorce within bride wealth systems), many women have chosen to avoid marriage altogether (Lee and Rosenberg 1993; see also Draper 1992).

13. The destruction of cattle herds in the mid-1990s undermined the trend towards toward bride wealth and thus the issue remains in flux (Lee 2007 personal communication.)

12. Fieldwork was conducted at the three main villages of Dobe, Xai Xai, and Kangwa and to a lesser extent in the smaller villages of Mahopa and Goshe. The 1986 population of Ju/'hoansi in the region was 663 of whom 83 people were sixty or older. The research team interviewed 90 percent of the elders and about thirty caregivers.

13. The Ju/'hoansi themselves do not mark chronological age. The ages used in this essay represent estimates made by the demographer Nancy Howell during field work in 1968 (see Howell 1979) and revisions made according to census updates by Lee during field trips in 1973, 1983, and 1986-87.

14. In 1967-68, Trusswell and Hansen (1976) conducted a health survey of the region. They found Ju/'hoansi elders to be remarkably fit and not suffering from high blood pressure or other stress-related illnesses. More recent research indicates that changed diet has produced elevated blood pressures in the population (Kent and Lee, 1992; Hansen et al., 1993).

15. We divided the elderly into five categories of functionality: one was the most fit and five represented those who were completely dependent. "Frail" refers to those in categories four and five, twelve people.

18. Readers interested in cross-cultural explorations of complaint discourse are directed to

Michael Wex's historical/linguistic study of Yiddish (2005).

17. The third person singular is not gendered in the Ju/'hoansi language. Thus the English terms "his/her" or "she/he" is used in the text to translate the speaker's usage. While "he/she" may seem awkward to some English-speakers it is consistent with the Ju/'hoansi language which does not distinguish between male and female in the third person singular just as English does not in the third person plural "they" but French does in the forms "ils/elles."

18. This trend may be what Pat Draper detected in 1987-1988 while doing research, in the Dobe area for project A.G.E. (see Fry et al. web book this section). She reported that the Ju/'hoansi seem to have an "extreme cultural preoccupation with parent-adult child relationships" (Draper and Buchanan 1992:1). Oakley, in a comparison of Draper and Rosenberg's research on eldercare, reviewed Rosenberg and Lee's field diaries and found that 33 of 39 elders interviewed by Lee stated that without adult children "they would be as good as dead" (1992:29). Oakley distinguished between these normative responses and the empirical evidence collected by Rosenberg and Lee which indicated that caregiving networks centred on spouses, co-wives, siblings, namesakes, or more distant kin were significant sources of support. Oakley also noted that support networks play significant roles in eldercare in other cultures citing Wentowski (1981:600) among others who has argued that "the presence or absence of informal support...[has] been recognized as a crucial predictor of the well-being and autonomy of older people." Nevertheless, these networks are not infallible, as the work of Wiessner (1983) demonstrates.

¹⁹ Makoni and Stroeken (2002) in discussing complaint discourse in a South African township argue that it is seen as a linguistic signature of aging. But this is not the case amongst the Ju/'hoansi where complaining cuts across generational lines.

20. Simmons (1945) accounts of abandonment, based on the work of Ratzel for South African populations (1894 II:275) and Bleek for the Naron (1928:35) are unreliable, although often repeated in the literature. Bleek's account of rough treatment and abandonment is repeated

almost verbatim by Schapera (1930:162) but is gentler in its moralizing tone. Versions of Bleek's account are also repeated by Hewitt (1986:31). Mathias Guenther, who has done extensive fieldwork with the Nharo or Naron (of the Central Kalahari) has noted that previous German sources (Hahn, 1870:122; Reimer, 1907:111) offer similar unreliable visions of abandonment; whereas, Almeida (1965) describes a very tender scene of eldercare among Angolan Bushmen (Guenther, personal communication, 1994). Ratzel's encyclopedic work is like many 19th century social evolutionary anthropological projects, in casting the "less evolved" Bushmen in crude racist terms at the bottom of a social evolutionary ladder.

21. Wiessner (1983) has given the example of an old woman, whose social position in the Xai Xai water hole was weak, in that she was from a distant area, had few relatives in the camp, and her son was absent when she became ill. Xai Xai residents let loose a chorus of complaints about the inadequacy of her care, but no one in the community took direct responsibility to provide for her needs or mount a healing dance for her. The circumstance of her death were very painful: Old Bau became delirious, accused people of starving her and ran into the bush to gather for herself, where she died.

The accusations surrounding this death had a very different tone from the every day discourse of complaining invoked in cases of impeccable care. This was a time when complaint did not generate the bonds of reciprocity as it was supposed to and the community was shocked. While other deaths in the water hole were followed by a short cathartic mourning period which included soon-forgotten charges of neglect, the impact of Old Bau's death on the community lingered in an unresolved fashion for months (Wiessner 1983). This was the kind of outcome that Kasupe may well have had in mind when he wove his tale of callous abandonment.

22. Acculturation to Herero beliefs about death and burial seem to have influenced Ju/'hoansi perceptions about death and abandonment. One traditional way has been to collapse the hut around the person who died in camp or to dig a shallow grave and leave it unmarked if someone dies on the trail. Wiessner (1983) describes a more complicated burial ritual including a

deep grave, specific attention to the orientation of the corpse in the grave, ceremonial activities when the body is moved from the house, rituals for the mourners, eulogies and gravemarkers. The post-mortem period is not marked by lengthy ritual grieving as it is among the Herero but by complaint discourse as a way of reframing social relations and restructuring traditional trading relationships.

The Herero, by contrast, have elaborate funerary rituals (Vivelo 1977:127-129) and seem to have been particularly offended by what appeared to them as the casualness of some Ju/'hoansi practices. In discussion with the Ju/'hoansi in the mid-1980s it seemed as if their own funeral customs were being viewed from the Herero perspective and that statements about the abandonment of elders might be referencing "improper burials."

Suicide among the elderly was treated by informants as an incomprehensible notion.

23. Nor have children been viewed as economic burdens. Until quite recently, children did not participate in subsistence activities until their teens. With settlement and the acquisition of goats and cattle, children now do more work.

24. Old women among the Ju/'hoansi are thus quite different from the passive "Dear Old Grans" described as commonplace among old women in a long-term geriatric ward "...who cheerfully surrender [their] autonomy and "...potential to challenge..." (Evers 1981:119-20).

25. *Hxaro* is a gift exchange system for "circulating goods, lubricating social relations, and maintaining ecological balance..." (Lee 1984:97). Receiving *hxaro* implies that you will also give it. See also Wiessner (1977).

28. The term "demand sharing" has been used to describe this rhetorical/economic form of narrativity (Guenther 2006).

27. She said that it was the duty of the first born "...the one who cracked your bones..." to look after an aging parent.

28. Polygyny occurred in about 5 percent of marriages among the Ju/'hoansi in the 1960s and 70s. In most socially sanctioned forms, men will take two wives, although cases of more than two have been reported historically. Occasionally, irregular polyandrous unions have also been reported.

29. In Western societies, where elder care is predominantly done by unwaged women workers in the household and women in the waged workforce, expressing the experience of caregiving in ungendered language poses a problem (Finch and Groves 1983). For example, a young man, in trying to articulate his experience in caring for his lover with AIDS found that: ...the closest model with which to compare my seven months with Paul is the experience of *mothering*. (My mother brought this home to me....) By this analogy I mean the cluster of activities, characteristics, and emotions associated with the *social role* of motherhood. Whether performed by women or men, mothering--and its analogue within the health care system, nursing--involves intimate physical care of another being, the provision of unconditional care and love, the subordination of self to others, and an investment in separation (Interrante 1987:57-58). First emphasis (mothering) is mine, second emphasis (social role) is the author's.)

In this context, only the gendered term, "mothering", was found to be able to convey the intensity of commitment Interrante had felt. Interestingly, his insight is substantiated by a footnote referencing three feminist theoreticians--Dinnerstein, Chowdrow, and Eherensaft all of whom have analyzed the social construction of female caregiving.

Mothering carries with it the meanings of long-term unconditional support. "Mothers" are people who do not abandon no matter how demanding the circumstance becomes. Mothering is thus not only a feminized metaphor for caregiving, it is also highly idealized and sentimentalized.

30. Draper (1976) and Shostak (1981) have pointed out that children are raised in a very non-authoritarian manner and were normally not expected to work or do anything for adults that they did not wish to do. Even today, with settlement and the beginnings of a pastoralist economy which often utilizes child labour, many parents say that they cannot make children perform work

if the children refuse. Children are still seen as not owing any special deference to adults.

31. Gubrium (1987:31-35) describes the conflict which follows an elder's creation of a caregiving network which is perceived to be competing with the rightful caregivers--the adult children. Maida, the old person in question, is described as rejecting her "own" children, whom she has accused of not being her "real" children because they have placed her in a nursing home against her wishes. Maida formed close bonds with a small group of co-residents who have constituted themselves as a "family" including the designated the roles of "baby" and "grandma." Both Maida's children and the health professionals identified this alternate caring network as a "problem." The mother's actions were interpreted by the children as a repudiation and described as a sign of mental confusion. The health workers found the group to be cliquish and divisive to equitable caring on the floor. Thus Maida's stepping outside the discourse of filial caregiving was construed as a contentious and threatening counter-discourse.

32. Self-sacrifice is not always considered admirable in caregivers in the North American context. Gubrium's 1987 account of a support group for the families of Alzheimer patients reveals a strong counter-discourse to expressions of wifely devotion. Caregivers are warned not to burn themselves out and to be "realistic" when assessing the burdens of caregiving. One pointed expression of this counter-discourse was: "Dear, you're not an old man's lover; you're an old man's slave." (Gubrium 1987:31).

33. The article by Draper and Keith (1992) elaborates on the contrast drawn here between the feelings of personal security among Ju/'hoansi elders and the fears and painful choices of elders within a North American community.

36. For a full description of the many facets of this project see Biesele (2007) which includes a description of the projects, and materials already published or available on-line and those in development. Local people have been working with scholars from North America and Europe collaboratively to develop an authoritative "legacy collection" of curricular material in Ju

for local schools, new materials elicited from elders and the transcription of older audio materials from Biesele's previous research.

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