

YUP'IK MASKS • BUSHMEN HEALING RITUALS • CELTIC ROOTS

# Shaman's Drum

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Yup'ik Nepcetaq Mask

photo by Barry McWayne

*Agayuliyararput: The Yup'ik Way of Making Prayer* by Ann Fienup-Riordan

*Today We Sing! Healing Rituals of the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen* by Thomas Riccio

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# *Today We Sing!*

## *Healing Rituals of the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen*

text and photos by Thomas Riccio

My first contact with the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen was at an environmental fair in Durban, South Africa. Their booth, which displayed a variety of folk crafts made by !Xuu and Khwe refugees, was sandwiched incongruously between a cotton candy stand and a display of swimming pool filters. Because of my interest in indigenous cultures, I stopped at the booth, where I met Catherina Meyer, the Afrikaans director of the !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Trust.<sup>1</sup>

Catherina, who had previously worked in a similar capacity with the !Kung Bushmen in Botswana, had established the !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Trust to help these political refugees preserve their cultural identities as they adapt to the social and economic realities of contemporary South Africa. We spoke about how, under the ever-increasing influence of Western culture, marginalized indigenous groups often begin to devalue their own traditions and values, including their arts.

I mentioned that much of my theater work over the last several years has been with indigenous groups and that I was preparing to conduct a performance workshop in Zambia.<sup>2</sup> My work has taught me that traditional performance arts are both a code and a pathway to ancient ways of living, and that they can be used to affirm the wisdom and unique world views of indigenous peoples. After two meetings with Catherina, I submitted a proposal to organize a theater workshop for !Xuu and Khwe

refugees at the Schmidtsdrift refugee camp, located about seventy miles north of Kimberley, at the edge of the Kalahari Desert.

Several months later, while working in Zambia, I received a telephone call from Catherina telling me the !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Trust had accepted my proposal. The workshop would be sponsored by the Trust and by the South African Defense Forces (SADF), which managed the refugee camp, but direct funding for the project would come from a Northern Cape Tourist Association grant, which had been offered with the expectation that we would develop a "tourist show." The association thought a show would help the Bushmen and would also draw tourists to the economically stagnant Northern Cape region. I wasn't thrilled with the idea of creating a sideshow for tourists, but I accepted the offer, knowing that everything in Africa is negotiable.

In the past, I had been able to prepare for indigenous performance projects by examining anthropological records and oral history transcriptions in order to learn about the culture's cosmology, history, rituals, and ceremonial beliefs. However, I soon discovered there was almost no written material on these small bands of Bushmen.

Until the early 1970s, the !Xuu (pronounced with a prefix click, followed by "kone") and Khwe lived in the southeastern parts of Angola and along the Namibia and Botswana borders. Unlike the better-

known !Kung, who are primarily desert nomads, the !Xuu and Khwe were traditionally semi-nomadic horticulturists, who originally inhabited semi-desert, forest, and river terrain. The !Xuu and Khwe have some basic cultural similarities, but their traditions and histories are distinct. They have separate languages, and they had no contact with one another prior to the 1970s.

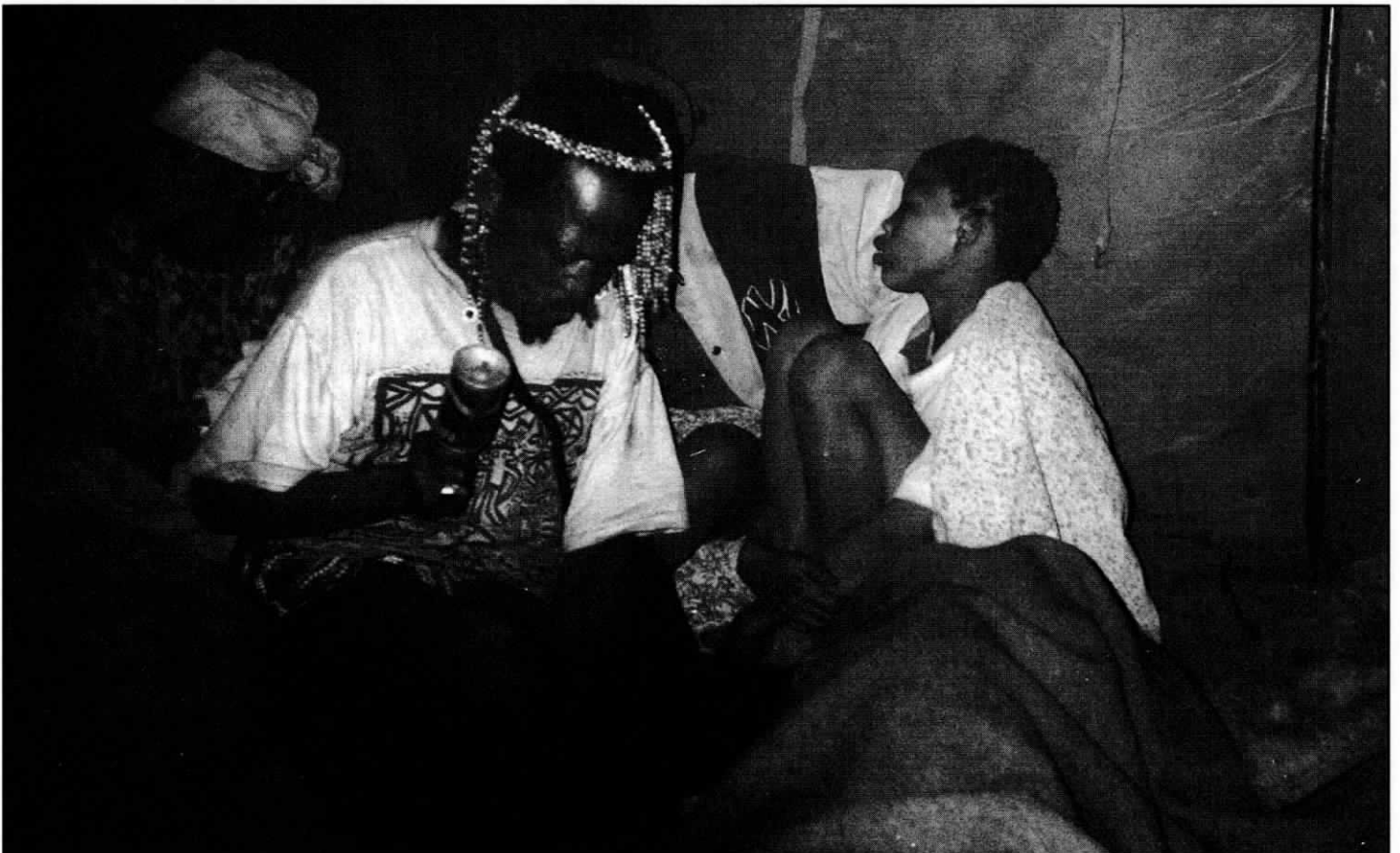
When I arrived at the Schmidtsdrift camp in late April, 1994, I was surprised to find that about 2,000 !Xuu and 2,500 Khwe had been settled together at the same isolated desert camp. Although there was some social and ceremonial interaction between the two groups, they lived together at the camp by force of circumstances rather than by choice.<sup>3</sup> In deference to the wishes of the two groups, the army had provided them with separate residential areas, but both groups shared an open common area, which contained a clinic, community hall, school, store, and administration building, as well as the cultural project's two trailers.

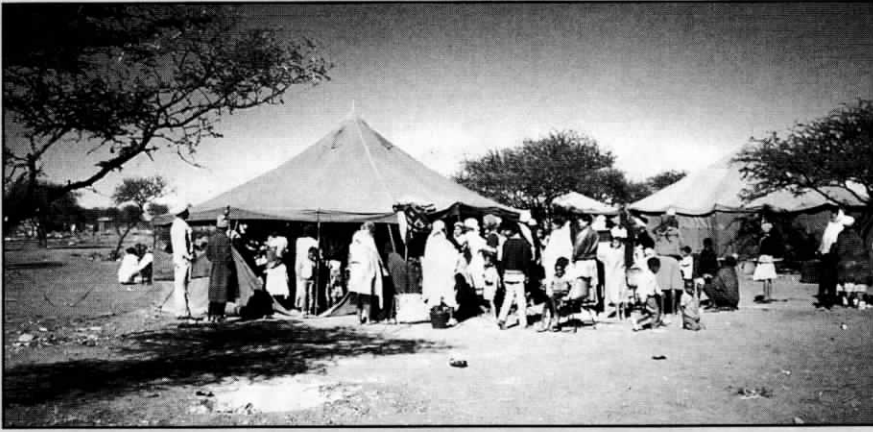
In order to minimize potential tensions between the !Xuu and Khwe, Catherina had selected eight of the "best" performers from each group and had arranged to hold the theater workshop at a neutral location—inside one of the cultural project trailers. To encourage participation in the project, each participant was to be paid about \$35 per week.

At the heart of my theater work with indigenous groups is the desire to help



ABOVE: *In the morning after a successful healing, Khwe healer Manfred Kapinga leads people in a joutcay or "cooling down" dance.*  
BELOW: *!Xuu healer Machai Mbande chants and rattles during a healing for a woman who is lying covered by a military blanket.*





Refugees are housed in canvas tents at the Schmidtsdrift camp in South Africa.

### Nomads Caught in a Harsh Political Landscape

In the early 1970s, UNITA (the Cuban-backed socialist freedom fighters of Angola) entered the !Xuu and Khwe homelands, and suddenly the Bushmen were thrust into the middle of the Angola bush war. After UNITA came to power in 1975, it launched a haphazard land redistribution program, and the Bushmen became targets of a clandestine operation to "remove" them from their lands. Although the !Xuu and Khwe numbered only a few thousand, and they fought with only spears and poison arrows against AK-47s and mortars, they proved more resistant than the UNITA soldiers had expected.

At the time, the apartheid South African government in Pretoria was mounting a secret guerrilla war against UNITA, and the South African Defense Forces (SADF) began recruiting the !Xuu and Khwe as trackers and scouts for their operations. The !Xuu and Khwe were able and brave fighters, and they soon became known as the fabled "Bushmen Battalion." Because they were indispensable to the South African clandestine war effort, the SADF moved their families to Southwest Africa, which was then a protectorate of South Africa.

By 1990, however, mounting international political pressures had forced South Africa to drop its secret war against communist Angola. When the socialist-inspired independence movement in Southwest Africa won independent nationhood for Namibia, the !Xuu and Khwe soon found themselves unwelcome in either Angola or Namibia.

During the fall of 1990, the SADF resettled the members of the Bushmen Battalion and their extended families "temporarily" at the Schmidtsdrift military reserve. The refugee camp, which

soon turned into the only "home" for many of the remaining !Xuu and Khwe, is little more than a sea of army-issue brown tents, without shade from the hot sun. Except for the store and school (a series of trailers), the camp has no electricity. The water and sewage facilities are inadequate and overtaxed, causing dysentery, skin rashes, TB, and a variety of other ailments that come with living in close quarters. The limbo of refugee status has created a current of underlying anxiety and depression. The government has provided the !Xuu and Khwe families with small monthly living allowances (about \$90 US), but that has accelerated alcohol abuse, which has spread like a cancer, aggravating the disintegration of family, culture, and values. The !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Trust was established to facilitate autonomy and cultural adjustment.

Now, following the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa, the !Xuu and Khwe people have found themselves unwanted even there, because of their association with the SADF. They have faced increasing pressure from the Tswana people of South Africa, who claim the Schmidtsdrift camp as part of their ancestral land. The influential Tswana have been unflinching supporters of Nelson Mandela, and since his election, they have begun to pressure him to return their land and to remove both the military and the Bushmen. The Bushmen still want to return to their ancestral homes, but the post-civil war chaos of Angola and the ill will between South Africa and Namibia make an amicable return unlikely. The !Xuu and Khwe are now nomads on a political and cultural landscape of which they have little understanding.

them express themselves on their own terms, so I usually start by interviewing participants about their lives, interests, and traditions. In practical terms, the interview sessions help elicit understanding, purpose, and strategy for creating performance together. They also give me insights into the individual participants and let me observe how they use their bodies, voices, and imaginations.

As our group gathered for the first day of interviewing, I immediately noticed that all the participants wore oversized or ill-fitting clothes, donated by either international aid agencies or the South African Army. I encouraged the participants to talk about their traditional stories, social dances, and old ways, but they were also eager to talk about camp life and the toll it had taken on the people.

Some talked openly about their frustrations of being confined to the camp. After thousands of years of independence and self-sufficiency, they were now prohibited from either hunting or cultivating on the surrounding desert lands. The !Xuu and Khwe had become partners in misery.

"We do not feel happy about being here and we do not feel welcome in South Africa," lamented Ndala Mutenya, a !Xuu participant.<sup>4</sup> A Khwe participant named Mohera Kuwiq concurred: "In Namibia, we could eat, but here only the ones that have jobs can eat and survive."

"We want to take care of ourselves," added George Dikosi, a Khwe. "In Namibia, we could hunt. There were all kinds of foods in Namibia and Angola, but there is nothing here."

"Our hearts are not happy here and we do not know who will help us," said !Xuu Machai Mbande.

There was a sense of defeat and fatigue about them as they talked about their old ways and how they missed their homelands. Despite their anger and frustrations, the participants appeared glad to share their traditional stories, songs, and dances. The subject matter varied—a clumsy monkey fetching water, a young woman laughing at an older man's awkward advances, and a lion following an unsuspecting man—but the dances, stories, and songs offered the participants a respite, a way of forgetting their present troubles.

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On the second day of interviewing, during our midday break, several participants requested permission to get some things they needed in order to show me some "special dances." Before long, they returned to the trailer with some small drums and a number of rattles made from cans

filled with desert pebbles. Several persons returned with colorful, beaded headpieces and elaborately decorated belts with pouches and knives attached. I began to sense they were something more than simply the best performers at the camp. When they also returned with a host of relatives and friends, I asked Fernando, our translator, what was happening.

It turned out that seven of the fifteen workshop participants were healers and the other eight were their assistants. I was delighted, because in many respects, the methods, functions, and objectives of indigenous performance are similar, if not parallel, to those of traditional shamanic ritual. Indigenous performance reaffirms place, continuity, and community, and it facilitates balance between the human, animal, spiritual, and ancestral worlds. What the traditional shaman/healer/doctor addresses as a specialist, indigenous performers address in lay and communal terms.

Without any announcement, Machai Mbande suddenly began shaking a rattle in each hand, dancing, and singing to himself. Drums and several sets of rattles picked up Machai's beat, and they were joined by women clapping three distinct counter-rhythms, creating a complex polyrhythmic texture. Machai led the song, while others sang chorus and a few women added sporadic, high-pitched bird calls.

As the small trailer filled with music, Machai began shaking his shoulders, hips, and head. Others joined in with individualized versions of the same dance. Soon all but a few were shaking at the shoulders and hips as they shuffled across the floor. Later, Machai explained to me that this shaking activates the spinal fluids and nerves, thus releasing "heat" to the rest of the body and inducing a "good feeling."

The dances seemed to take the dancers to some other place—a place deep within their cultural identity—where they were happy. Suddenly, at a signal from Machai, the singing and dancing stopped. One small, older woman named Silenga, who was wearing a beaded headpiece, continued to dance and sing. Her eyes were closed and her face was relaxed. She seemed to have entered an altered state of consciousness.

While several participants moved outside the trailer to smoke homemade pipes, Machai and George Dikosi gave the other women instructions to bring Silenga "back." A few older women gathered around her and held her as she shook. Although only a small woman, Silenga resisted the other women with some strength, and it was a half hour before she stopped



*Workshop participants demonstrate traditional songs inside the cultural project trailer.*

dancing. I knew that I had witnessed much more than a workshop demonstration.

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The interviews on the third day turned into an outpouring of stories about the Bushmen's plight as refugees (see sidebar). Both !Xuu and Khwe told me how one day they were shot at by soldiers and how, when they fought back, the bombs came. Then they were forced to leave their homelands and to move into the refugee camp. They felt the camp was a prison, and most wanted only to return to their homelands in Namibia and Angola.

Despite their frustrations, they maintained a sense of resignation and acceptance. I had heard that passive acceptance is part of the Bushmen way, and that one reason they have survived for so long is that they have accepted and moved with change rather than resisting it.<sup>5</sup>

Their stories and comments overwhelmed and disturbed me; I felt like a helpless witness, watching the breakdown and dissolution of a proud and ancient culture. The atmosphere was so heavy that I suggested we return to demonstrating dances and sharing stories, as we had done the day before. George indicated that he was hesitant about singing his songs because the !Xuu did not know the Khwe language or style of clapping—even though he and the other Khwe had made attempts to learn the !Xuu style. The !Xuu responded that they had been too shy to learn.

Our discussion quickly turned to exploring issues between the two groups. Although the two groups had been in the same camp for four years, the theater project

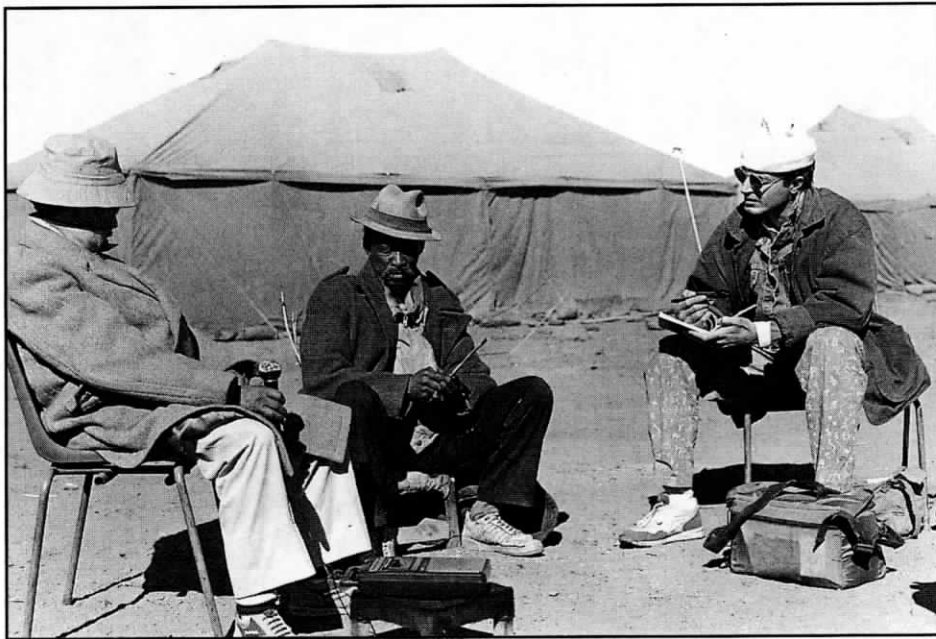
was one of the first attempts to get them to work together. Without any prodding, the gathering turned into a kind of informal town hall meeting, where the spiritual leaders of the two groups exchanged thoughts and shared concerns for the first time.

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On the fourth day of interviews, the performance project suffered a serious setback when our able translator, Fernando, accepted more lucrative employment as a crew boss for laborers on a local ranch. We wasted most of the morning trying to find a replacement who could speak English and both native tongues, and we finally settled on using two translators.

Each of the new translators spoke only Afrikaans and his respective native language fluently; neither spoke English. As a consequence, the interviews became absurdly torturous. I would ask a question in English, and then Catherina would translate it into Afrikaans, passing it on to Luis—who translated it into !Xuu—and to Lerrato—who translated into Khwe. By the time the respective group members had finished discussing the question amongst themselves, and their answers had been translated into Afrikaans and then into English, I had sometimes forgotten what I had asked. It was nearly impossible to maintain a train of thought or to ask for clarification.

The situation was further aggravated by the fact that Luis, our new !Xuu translator, had been educated by Catholic missionaries and had become a deacon with the local church. Luis had totally abandoned his !Xuu culture, and he disdain-



Luis Samba translates as Machai Mbande and Thomas Riccio talk during an interview.

fully viewed the traditional !Xuu as “heathens” in need of salvation. On more than one occasion, I witnessed the !Xuu healers answer one of my questions at great length, demonstrating key points with gusto. Then, with a disapproving shake of the head, Luis would translate their long answer into a short sentence in Afrikaans, which Catherina would translate for me. Lerrato, who spoke some !Xuu, confirmed my suspicion that Luis was censoring discussion of their “savage ways”—deleting whatever he found to be un-Christian.

The success of the workshop was further undermined by the lack of young participants. The group members were all thirty-five to seventy years old, and the young people apparently blamed the elders and the old ways for the current difficulties. The youngsters despised the traditional elders and openly taunted them, laughing at them through the trailer windows. In some respects, the young people were merely embodying the ever-pragmatic Bushmen instinct by moving headlong into modern, Western culture. Still, it was disheartening to see the younger people show such disrespect for their elders.

Despite all the difficulties, the healers never lost interest in sharing their performance and healing traditions. The healers I worked with understood that their cultural traditions were fading with them and that there was no going back to the “old ways before the war.” However, it troubled them that their young people—having been born and reared either in conflict or in camps—had no experience or knowledge of the old ways. The objective of our per-

formance work became increasingly clear—as Machai put it: “To tell the Bushmen way for the young people who today do not understand the importance of it.”

Although our project had been funded to develop a tourist show, I became more and more convinced that the Trust needed to abandon that idea. I could see that the culturally traumatized Bushmen were struggling with so many fundamental survival issues that pushing them into performing for tourists would be ill-advised and exploitative. Before I presented my case to the Trust, I had feared that they might send me back to Johannesburg in short order. To their credit, the Trust not only agreed with me but also continued funding the workshop and my research.

The workshop quickly shifted gears from developing a performance to gathering material for a “possible future performance.” Although the stories of the workshop and of the healers are intrinsically connected, and the workshop eventually culminated in an informal performance before a small group, the remainder of this article will focus on the healers and their healing practices.

As our work together continued, the healers began inviting me to attend their healing rituals, which were held at night. This evolution of my involvement was natural, for the !Xuu and Khwe view performance and healing as linked, if not one and the same. By day, the healers learned to use performance to step outside of their predicament, in order to observe, understand, and adjust to the traumatizing events in their lives. By night, I attended their

healing rituals, observing and documenting how they used their traditional rituals to do much the same.

Knowing I would attract attention just by being at the ceremonies, I chose to go without a translator and to simply watch, taking notes so that I could ask questions later. In order to explore the healers’ insights into their healing practices, I tried to set up interviews with the healers after attending their ceremonies. For the sake of this article, I have chosen to include accounts of three ceremonies led by different healers in order to give a sense of the variety of healing styles. The accounts focus on key segments of the ceremonial progression: the beginning and middle of George Dikosi’s ceremony; the middle and ending of Machai’s healing; and the “cooling down” closure dance following a ceremony led by Khwe healer Manfred Kapinga. Over the eight weeks of our workshop, I continued to interview and talk informally to the healers on a daily basis.

In order to highlight the particular ceremony and to provide the most cohesive responses to the questions I asked, I have incorporated, condensed, and organized comments from several conversations with the healers into composite interviews.

Shortly after I began attending healing rituals, I was assigned a new translator and assistant, Wentzel Katjara. This was a stroke of good fortune because Wentzel, a Khwe soldier who had just returned from border patrol duty, not only spoke English, Khwe, and !Xuu but also had personal knowledge of traditional healing practices. Wentzel’s father, since deceased, had been a well-respected healer. As the interviews progressed, Wentzel became increasingly interested in his people’s traditional methods of healing, and he often qualified responses and probed more deeply into the interview inquiries. I am deeply indebted to his assistance and insight.

#### *Activating the Healing Heat: George Dikosi’s Ceremony*

The first healing ceremony I was invited to was conducted by George Dikosi. I arrived at the ceremony at about 10 P.M. to find about forty people gathered in a large tent. Although the majority of the healers in the camp were men, the participants at this ceremony—and all the others I attended—were mostly women. When I later asked George about the preponderance of women at the ceremony, he responded, as if I had asked an obvious question, “Women carry life.”

Those attending the ceremony were seated on blankets in a circle around George

and his patient, who were in an open area at the center, next to the fire. I was surprised to see that George wore no special regalia. He was barefoot, wearing only a torn pair of dark pants and an old T-shirt.

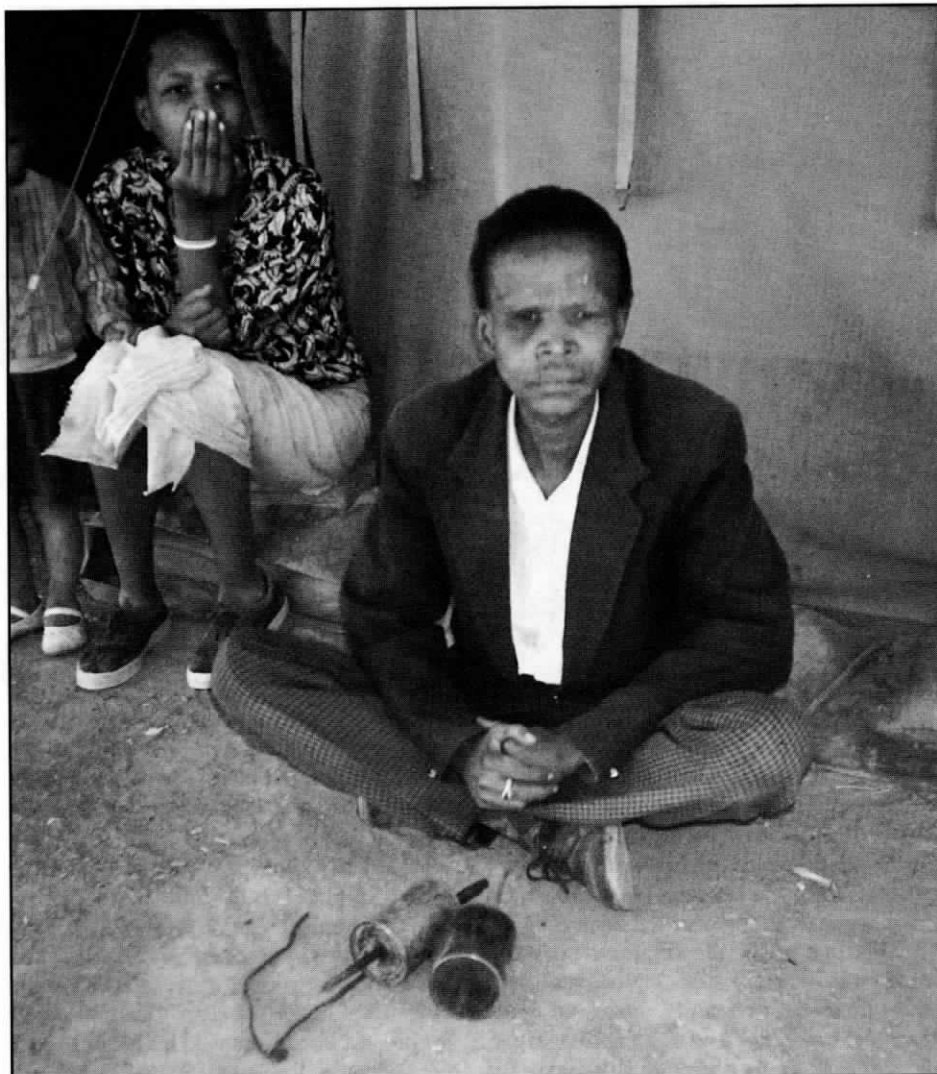
As soon as I entered the tent, George welcomed me by anointing my brow with a "red powder medicine." He did the same for everyone entering the ceremony. The procedure, which he refers to as "wiping," served to make me a part of the group and also protected me from any sickness that might "jump" from the patient. The group immediately made room for me in their inner circle. As we huddled close together against the cold desert night, I felt very comfortable, as if I were with family.

I was soon to learn that the songs and progressions George used were unique to his way of doing things. His ritual used no drums—only rattles, hand-clapping, and singing—but the rhythms and counter-rhythms were still dense and complex. The women's voices laid a rhythmic undertone, while George and the other men sang counter to and over the women's voices.

An open area around the fire allowed George some movement for dancing and healing. The sick woman—George's older sister—lay partially wrapped in a blanket, with her naked back toward the fire. Near her back was a covered plate with some red medicine in it. Next to the plate was a homemade knife (shaped from an automobile brake shoe) about ten inches long.

The rhythmic, hypnotic pattern of the music, combined with the flickering light of the fire and the focused attention of the participants, transported me to a place between realities. The overwhelming sensation I experienced was of losing myself in the event, as if my individuality was secondary to the collective event that was unfolding. The cyclical music spun and distorted time—yet somehow the events of the healing progressed subtly, in well-measured steps. There was a slow, inexorable accumulation of energy. Occasionally, the songs would stop in perfect unison—a testament to the relaxed, yet highly sensitized, focus of the group. Then, after a brief pause, or sometimes seamlessly, another voice would begin another song—and the song cycle continued.

Several times during the healing, George went to his ill sister, listened to her back, and then massaged her with his red powder medicine mixed with cooking oil. At one point, George worked intensely on one spot, pressing the tip of his stick-and-tin-can rattle into the woman. Slowly pulling the rattle away from her, he examined its tip intently. Carefully, he took off some-



*Khwe healer George Dikosi sits in front of his tent with a pair of tin-can rattles.*

thing invisible—the "illness"—and put it into his plate of medicine, quickly covering the plate with a white cloth. The woman began breathing deeply. After turning her over, George felt her neck, head, and stomach, and then he paused, staring silently at something that only he saw. The singers were witness to his every gesture and movement, and the intensity of their singing seemed to rise in support.

After working with his sister for quite awhile, he sat down and began to sing, as if calling on powers within himself to address the sickness. His eyes rolled white and his body shook as he bolted onto his feet and began dancing around the fire. His shoulders and hips shook back and forth quickly and sharply, activating the heat necessary for healing.

George then began to work on two infants—the grandchildren of his sister—who were cradled in their mother's arms. The two infants were being treated because they had eaten from the same bowl as their

grandmother. Using his red medicine, George massaged their stomachs, pausing occasionally to "see" into their bodies. He felt their necks and heads, then chased away something invisible surrounding them.

The healing included several two-to-five minute breaks. During these breaks, some participants conversed and laughed among themselves, while others lit cigarettes and pipes and passed them around. George talked to one person and then another, sometimes telling what seemed to be jokes. Beer cans were passed around, and each person took a sip, a new practice adopted at the camp.

The healing ceremony was clearly as much a social gathering as it was a spiritual event. Of course, for the Bushmen—like other indigenous people—these two spheres of human endeavor are not mutually exclusive. Social interaction is healing, and healings are as much for the community as they are for the sick persons.

Such breaks occurred during all of the



Community members watch a dancer release excess "heat" after a successful healing.

healings I witnessed. George later told me that these breaks serve as release valves to control the heat used in the healing. Building the heat enables the healer to hear the spirits and see the sickness better, but too much heat can overpower the healer.

After one break, the singing resumed, but George sat very still. His assistant, a young man about twenty years old, sat down next to him and began to massage his neck. Soon, George stood up, talking to something only he could see, his body shaking with dance.

Going to the plate of red medicine, George removed the white cloth and picked up the knife. He went over and knelt next to his sister. Lifting up his shirt, he used his rattle to pound the knife several inches into his exposed stomach. Then he pulled the knife out of himself without leaving a mark or any blood. It was hard to believe what I had seen. Was it a sleight-of-hand trick or something I simply imagined amidst the chanting, the flickering light of the fire, and the whorls of thick smoke?

Then, George dipped the knife into the red medicine and wiped the knife on his sister's neck. Using his rattle as a hammer, he pounded an inch or so of the knife into her chest. The singing ebbed and flowed in an aural sea of human energy, surrounding and supporting the healing process. It was unlike anything I had ever known.

George took the plate of medicine over to the infants. Kneeling in front of them, he once again lifted his shirt and pounded the knife into his stomach. This time, I got a

closer look, and I clearly saw him pound the knife several inches into his stomach and then pull it out without leaving a wound. As with his sister, he wiped the infants' necks with the knife and tapped it into their stomachs.

After these intense actions, George called for a short break, in order to release the buildup of heat during the healing. After the break, George renewed his healing work with increased intensity. The healing culminated at dawn with the sick woman rising and singing with the group. Her renewed vigor was met with a series of celebration songs. After an hour-long "cooling down" dance, George declared the woman and her grandchildren fully healed.

#### *The Interview with George Dikosi*

The day after the healing, I was able to interview George about the healing ceremony. He arrived wearing an oversized, dark suit and with his hair combed back. He said he was tired, but that he felt very happy because his sister and her grandchildren were healed.

*Where does your healing tradition come from?*

My healing tradition is Bushmen in origin. It is given by god,<sup>6</sup> just as White doctors were given their way by their god. It is for me the same way as it was in the old and traditional times.

*How did you become a healer?*

When I was a boy, I dreamt many times of a red powder that came from the palm

tree.<sup>7</sup> In the dream, I gave it to a man who was sick, and he became healthy. After the dream, my mother's brother, my uncle, taught me how to be a doctor.<sup>8</sup>

After the first dream, I went into the bush and made a rattle. Inside the rattle, there is a lucky bead which was given to me in my dream. When I was in the bush, the songs and dances of the old people came to me. After a time, I returned to the village and got people together to sing.

After my uncle died, he continued to teach me more in my dreams and now people call on me to be a healer. In one dream, he came to me and said, "George, George, wake up!" Then he gave me some red powder. My uncle took some and rubbed it on his own eyes, and I did the same and now I can see.

*What is the red powder that you use?*

The red powder is made from the stems of palm leaves, pounded and mixed with oil. The powder is massaged on a wound, and a rattle is used to extract the sickness.

Each healer has his own specialty medicine, and each develops his own way of working with it. Some doctors have many kinds of medicine and prescribe according to the specific need. I only use two kinds of medicine for healing—one is the red powder and the other is a plant I found by the river near here.

When a person becomes sick, I rub the red powder on them and they become well. I rub it on the part of the body that has the sickness, and then I can see the sickness. If the person has spirit illness, I rub the powder on a mirror and then I rub some on my eyelids for the ability to see the spirit illness. I see the illness in the mirror.

*Do songs help the healing?*

The community helps the healing to be successful by singing. There are old songs and new songs, and they must be used for specific purposes. I listen to the songs and the community. When the singing is nice, my heart is happy and the singing makes the healing good. If the singing is not good, I will go slowly.

Some songs are meant to be sung slowly, others quickly. Songs tell me their will. They direct what I should do.

*How did you learn to sing and dance?*

I learned how to sing and dance by watching my uncle dance. I learned to sing his songs. My uncle's spirit gave me a song which goes: "People should come to me if they are sick." It is a song calling people to come to me.

Sometimes when a man dies, his spirit



gives us a song when he goes to heaven.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes I teach the others the song, and we will remember that man's gift when we sing that song in the future. The spirit of the man who gave the song will hear it when we sing it.

Sometimes I get a new song when healing. If people like that new song, they take it and sing it.<sup>10</sup>

*Do the ancestors come to the healing?*

The ancestors help me. I call on them and they come to help. But it is not always the same ancestors. They tell me what to do and how to heal the person. It is these spirits that help me with everything I know. They are the ones that help me to remember and see.

*How do you heal?*

When the person is lying there sick and the people are singing, I can hear god. It is with the support of god that I heal. The voice of god comes with the singing and tells me what to do. The women assist me with their clapping. When it starts feeling nice, I begin singing and dancing. Then I can see the sickness of the person through the darkness.

*What was wrong with your sister at the healing last night?*

She had illness in the chest. A witch doctor—someone from around here—bewitched her. Her physical sickness was because of spirit sickness.

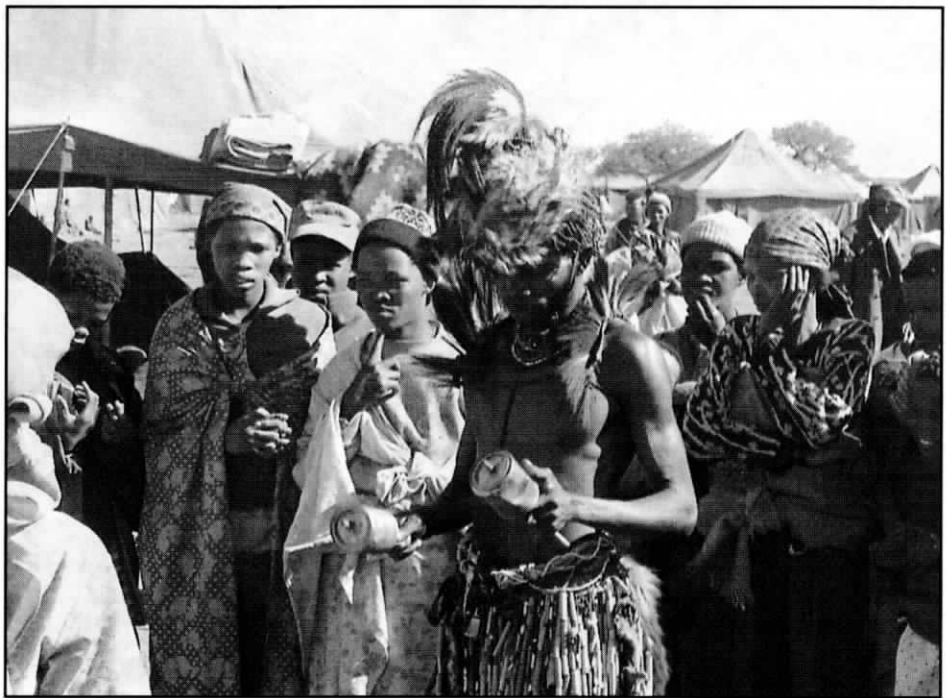
*Do bewitchings happen often?*

It happens often that people are bewitched. Sometimes witch doctors bewitch people because they like to eat their meat. They wanted my sister to die and be buried, so they could dig her up and eat her.<sup>11</sup>

Sometimes a father or mother, or other relative, will come to tell me someone is ill and to ask for help. I use my mirror [an old car mirror]. I rub red powder on it and put a coin underneath the mirror to "pay the mirror." Then I breathe on the mirror and I can see into the person's body.

Sometimes, I see a bad doctor saying, "Ah, I'm hungry. I don't want to eat pap, I want meat. I see that man has a nice wife—I want to eat her!" The next day, that person is dead. When the person is buried, the witch doctor digs her up and eats her. He likes human meat. I do not know why.

Sometimes, I see a bad doctor in the mirror taking the patient's spirit and putting it into a tin can. The bad doctor stores his bad medicine powder in the tin. Then the bad doctor puts his finger in the tin and stirs it, calling that person's name, and then



*Shaking his rattles, Manfred Kapinga leads a "cooling down" following a healing.*

leaves the tin open. When such things happen, I need to do a "big sing" all night, until the sun comes up. If that witch doctor comes into the circle, I will point him out and he will begin to shake because he has been found out.

*Did you see in your mirror the bad doctor who bewitched your sister?*

I did not see the witch doctor's face in the mirror. I just saw his back.

*How do you heal someone who is bewitched by a bad doctor?*

I pull out the sickness with the point of the rattle, and then I pull the sickness from the tip and throw it away. The disease taken out is like a bead. I put it into a plate of red powder and hide the plate.

*Explain how you used the knife. Was it also to "pull out" the sickness?*

I used the knife point to kill the illness that I could not pull out. I had to pound the knife in with the rattle in order to kill the illness. I killed it, and then she went into the bush to vomit out the sickness.

*Why did you pound the knife into yourself?*

To take my own blood and give it to my sister and her grandchildren. God told me that my blood has power. (He lifted his shirt and showed me where the knife had gone in. There were no scars or marks.)

*Why did you wipe the knife point on her neck?*

There was a string of sickness around

her neck that I could see. I wiped the knife point on her neck in order to cut the string. A witch doctor put the string there to make her die. If I had not cut the string, she would have been unable to breathe.

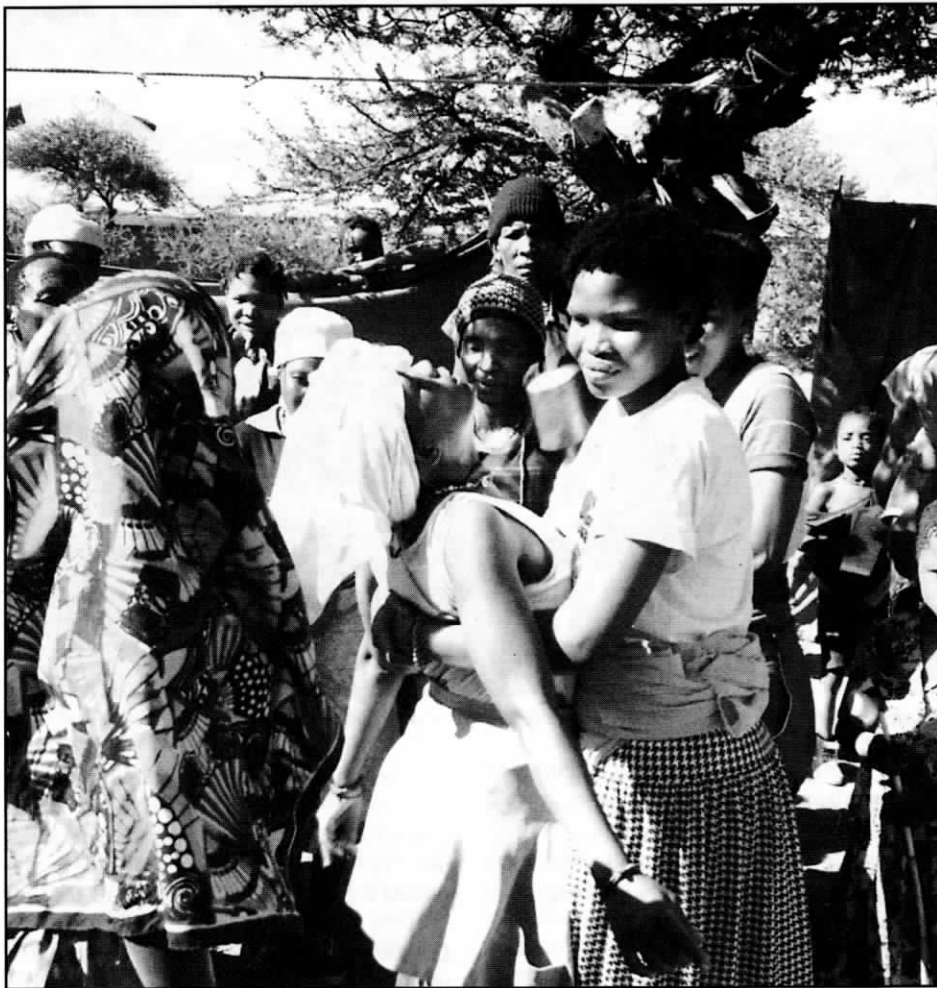
*Do you do anything or dress specially to prepare for a healing?*

I do not prepare. Last night, it was cold, so I wore a shirt. I usually wear only pants and no shirt. Any pants will do. I put on old clothes, so the red powder will not soil my new clothes. I used to wear beads with fringes that moved when I danced, but I do not have them anymore, so I do not use them. My work is just as effective.

#### *Cooling Down the Healing Energy: Manfred Kapinga's Joutcay Dance*

Towards the end of my interview with George, the wind started blowing in our direction, carrying with it the sound of distant drumming. When I asked about the drumming, George informed me that it was probably the cooling-down dance—or *joutcay* (literally "today we sing," implying a successful healing)—for Manfred Kapinga's healing ceremony. The ceremony had begun about 9 P.M. the night before; it was now midday with a high, hot sun.

From our interviews, I had learned that healing ceremonies often end with cooling-down dances, which are used to dissipate the heat raised during the healings by the healer and, to a lesser degree, by the participants. The length of cooling-down dances varies according to the healer's style



*Held in the arms of an assistant healer, a "moon-sick" woman lapses into trance.*

and how much heat was generated. Manfred, who was known for his highly physical style and his use of several drums and multiple dancers, tended to create much community heat during the ceremony, so his cooling-down dances often lasted for many hours. In contrast, George did not use drums or other dancers during the ceremony, so his style made for considerably less collective heat and consequently required a shorter cooling-down period.

George took me over to Manfred's ceremony, and I was granted permission to observe. About one hundred people were gathered for the cooling-down dance. There were several drummers, many children, and much excitement. The healing, which had culminated at daybreak, had been successful but very difficult. I was told the man had nearly died, but that Manfred had brought him back to health.

At the center of Manfred's cooling-down dance was a vibrant, young dancer named Mbûto Mohera. George explained that the eighteen-year-old dancer was a healer in training, and she was dancing in a state of ecstasy to celebrate the successful healing.

Mbûto was the focal point and pacesetter of the dance. She was entertaining the audience with her fluid, uninhibited, and almost erotic dancing, but she was also cheerleading the group with her indefatigable energy and her antics. She would variously make faces, tease people, and administer blessings by wiping heated powder medicine across children's foreheads or wrists.

As Mbûto danced, Manfred attended to the patient, who was resting under a tarp, to assure that the sickness would not return. Some people sat around the perimeter watching the dance, but the majority of people in attendance participated directly in the cooling-down by dancing, singing, drumming, or clapping. Children alternated between participating and running off to play.

Because I was still a little-known figure in the Khwe community and I stuck out, I soon became the focus of Mbûto's attention. First, she took my baseball cap and created a dance mocking me—making faces, going cross-eyed, and acting arrogant. Later, she took my watch and danced

defiantly inches away from my face, sticking out her tongue and rolling her eyes up, to the great amusement of those gathered. Her actions and my goodnatured response went far to familiarize the community to my presence and personality, and helped break down social and cultural barriers.

The joviality of the dancing shattered momentarily when a middle-aged woman carrying a stick entered the compound. People scattered and screamed as the woman began swinging her stick at anyone who got in her way. At first, I thought the woman was involved in a domestic squabble and that she was after someone in particular. However, George explained that the woman, who was "moon-sick," had probably heard the drumming and come to be cured.<sup>12</sup> Without much perturbation, another woman—an assistant healer from inside the circle—went to the sick woman, took her stick, and embraced her reassuringly. Others helped remove her jewelry, shoes, and outer clothing to make her more comfortable. When they brought her into the circle, she began to shake and dance convulsively. Lapsing into a trance, she danced until she became calm. Within an hour, the circle had healed her, and the cooling-down came to an end.

#### *The Interview with Manfred*

Even after I had attended several of Manfred's healing rituals, it was a few weeks before I was able to interview him about his work. Like the other healers in the camp, he was always very busy, because there was much sickness. He did not have the time to join our theater workshop.

I was eventually able to interview him the day after watching him conduct a sixteen-hour-long ceremony for a man who had been suffering from the early symptoms of tuberculosis. The man had been diagnosed by the clinic as having TB, but—suspicious of Western medical treatments—he had asked Manfred to conduct a traditional healing for him and his son, who had eaten from the father's bowl and was now feeling "sick in the lungs."

Prior to the ceremony, the man had been so weak and sickly that he could barely sit up. His son seemed somewhat less severely affected. At first, Manfred had to lift them into a seated position in order to massage them and pull the invisible illness from them. However, as the ceremony progressed, the man and his son were soon able to sit up on their own for treatment. With each successive ministrations, the patients began to breath noticeably deeper.

Although the sickness of father and son could be explained by Western medicine,

Manfred saw it rather as a symptom of moral and social ills. The father and son had done wrong, and that is why they had become sick. Their physical ailment was the result of a spiritual imbalance.

During the ceremony, Manfred sacrificed a goat and a chicken for the patients, and after the sacrifice, both the father and son were able to stand and smile, to the delight of all the participants. Although I was never able to confirm that they were cured according to Western medical criteria, such confirmation was unnecessary for the man, his family, and Manfred. Following this healing, Manfred danced nonstop for six hours to celebrate and to dissipate the heat created during the healing.

The next day, when I asked Manfred how he had become a healer, he first said he did not remember for sure. Although only twenty-eight years old now, he had been a healer for twenty years—since he was a child. Then, he noted that he had started healing after hearing a song in a dream. The song told him how to sing and dance, and that he must become a healer.



*Manfred dances in his healing costume made from zebra, jackal, and bush cat skins.*

*How did you learn to heal?*

When my dreams started, I saw a man and he gave me something. It was a spirit man, like an angel, and he gave me everything I needed to use. In the dream, I saw a sick man, and the angel gave him medicine and then showed me what plants and roots to use, which roots to boil and steam.

*Do the spirits come to you today to help you in your work?*

When I need to heal someone, I ask the spirits what to do, what medicines to use, and whether the person must be healed or not. The spirits tell me.

*Who are these spirits?*

They are the spirits of god. There are two different kinds of spirits that I can see—one good and one bad.

The color of the good spirit is like the wind from the world side. It is white and feels very good, like a sign.

The color of the bad spirit is very dark and like a cloud. I see the cloud everywhere now, in my sleep, in my tent. It tells me about the sickness at the camp and in the world. The spirits tell me every day who is sick. My dream tells me about what is going to happen.

I am not afraid when I see the bad spirit, but when I do, I know that the person is bewitched. I ask the bad spirit what he wants. Usually, the bad spirit tells me that someone wants to make the person sick.

Because the bad spirit can make me sick,

I must stop and ask god and the good spirit to protect me. God tells me how to protect myself and gives me things to wear to protect myself. These are gifts from god.

*Did god give you the costume that you wear for healing?*

Yes, what I wear when I heal came to me in a dream. The dream told me everything: what to do and how to use the costume. Now, when I heal, the costume knows everything that is happening.

The zebra (skin) I wear on my chest is the horse of the spirits. The zebra is a beautiful animal, and it must not be killed; it must die in its own way.

The jackal and bush cat are for my hat. The bush cat has a beautiful color and gives me the ability to find things. The jackal is an important spirit that gives me the ability to speak to things.

The skirt I wear is made from a reed that is only found in my homeland in Namibia. It has a nice color, and it makes a sound that pleases the spirits.

*How do singing and dancing help the healing?*

The songs make me happy, and they call the spirits to come and talk to me. The spirits like to hear the song and see the dance. The spirits teach me new songs—how to make the words and how to use them. During the healing, it is important to have sounds that are pleasing.

The songs do not make the people heal;

the people must also dance. In our tradition of healing dance, we must shake to make heat for healing. If the people want to dance, they do.

*How do you heal?*

A sick person comes to me in a dream, and then, the next day, the person will come to me. My dream tells me what has happened and how to help the person.

Sometimes, it takes two or three days before I can do a healing, but it depends on what the spirits say is wrong with the sick person. Sometimes, they tell me I must do the ceremony the same day with the family's help. Then, I must start that night to help, and the sick person's family must get the wood for the fire immediately.

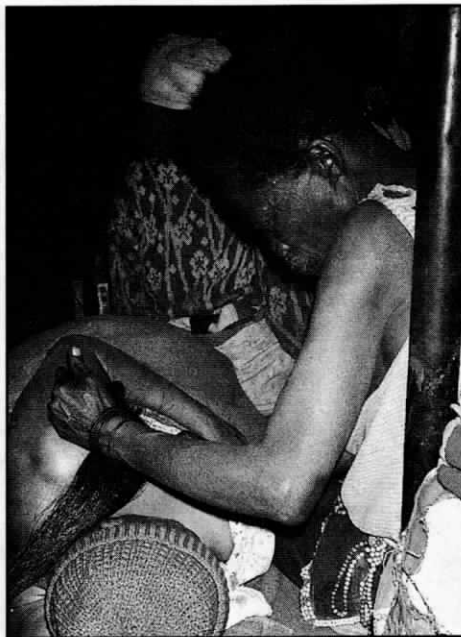
*At the healing last night, why were the man and his son sick?*

The sick man's dead uncle was angry with him. The man and his son had been treating the dead uncle's brother—their own father and grandfather—very poorly, and the uncle cursed the men from the world of the dead.

*How did the spirits help you with this healing?*

When I started the songs, the spirits took their time. We sang many songs until god gave us the spirit.<sup>13</sup> Then we knew which songs to sing to heal the person.

When the songs come from god, you can see the man getting better. God comes



LEFT: Machai demonstrates one of his "special songs" during an interview session.  
RIGHT: Machai uses his hands and a tail whisk to treat a woman during a healing.

to you in the songs, and you keep singing until the man gets better. For the man, I made some new songs, and the spirits were happy. They told me that I must use these songs again to heal the sick people. Everything you do comes from the spirits.

The spirits told me to sacrifice a goat and chicken. Sometimes the spirits say a chicken, cow, sheep, goat, dog, buck, or whatever. They tell me, and I do it, because it is tradition. Then the family and everyone who comes eat the chicken and goat. But the sick persons must not drink the blood of the sacrificed animal. Instead, I wipe the blood over the bridges of their noses and across their cheeks to their ears and throats.<sup>14</sup>

*Why must you dance and sing after the healing is over?*

We continue dancing to finish and celebrate the success of the night. The sick man and his son were healed, and they were resting in their tent, but we danced, waiting to hear from the family. The family members must test the patient before they are satisfied with the results. If the sick man will drink, it is a sign he is better. Then the family is happy with the healing.

#### *Pulling Out the Sickness: Machai Mbande's Healing Style*

During my eight weeks at Schmidtsdrift, the healer I got to know the best was Machai Mbande. Of all the ceremonies I witnessed, his healings were the most heartfelt. This is not to say that the other healers were not compassionate and sensitive, but Machai's

style seemed less aloof and more personal. He was always aware of every person, every coming and going, and he would often leave the center of the circle to greet or wipe people. I always felt welcome at his ceremonies and part of his family.

Compared to the other healers, he was more spontaneous and emotionally demonstrative. His style engendered an intensity and depth of feeling, and his ceremonies were emotionally moving. His healing methods were also less formal, almost casual, which created a relaxed atmosphere.

At first, Machai appeared resistant to my interest in healing. Whenever I asked about attending one of his healing ceremonies, he would give me wrong directions or incorrect nights. It was frustrating, but then I thought about what Bushmen would do in such a predicament. For several nights, I went to his part of the camp and listened for hours in the desert darkness for the telltale sounds of ceremonial music. For three nights, nothing happened.

On the fourth night, I heard the songs of a ceremony, and I followed the sound to a tent. I cautiously entered the tent and sat down. Machai, who was dancing to heal a young boy, turned to me, smiled broadly, and anointed me on the forehead with his medicine. Later, he said, "I wanted to know if you were serious about healing." Thereafter, he always gave me an honored seat within the healing circle, and he even invited me to pick roots and herbal medicines with him and his assistants.<sup>15</sup>

When I interviewed Machai, he took great patience with me, explaining the de-

tails of his healing process in elementary terms that must have been frustrating for him. I will forever be thankful for his generosity of heart and spirit.

Machai—who was now in his fifties—related that he was seven or eight years old when god told him that he must become a healer. The old doctors who knew the ways of healing agreed to teach him. He studied healing for many years with one of the old doctors, whom he called "uncle."<sup>16</sup> After Machai became a man, his uncle led him to a sick person and said, "Take the sickness out of him. You are ready." After his uncle died, Machai took over for him.

*What did your uncle teach you?*

When I was a boy, the old men and my uncle told me everything. My uncle went to my house and wanted me to go with him to learn how to heal and to learn about medicines. That was when I was eight. I lived with my uncle for nine years as his apprentice. He taught me what to use and what not to use, what is good and what is bad. He taught me how to go into the bush and look for plants, and how to put the plants into water and give them to people.

He also taught me how to "see" the sickness—it looks like a stone. It takes a long time before you can see it. I must have much heat before I can see it.

*How do you get heat?*

By singing and dancing. I make heat when I shake, and the people help me with their songs to get enough heat. The dances make it happen, but you cannot predict it—it just comes.

When the heat comes, I see where the sickness is in the person—in the stomach, back, throat, or wherever—and I must take the thing out of the sick person. When I see it in the body, I massage around it until it is ready to be pulled out. Sometimes, I must mix oil with the medicine and rub it on the wound before the stone will come out.

The stone can be any color—red, green, blue, black, or white. If it is red, the person is close to death. White ones around the person's heart mean the heart is weak. Sometimes I can see the disease moving around the heart, and I massage the heart until I can pull out the sickness.

When I take out the sickness, it makes my hands feel cold. When I throw the sickness away, my hands get warm again.

*What sickness do you see the most?*

Ordinary sickness—sore eyes, leprosy, diarrhea, TB, colds. Sometimes I see bewitched sickness. If the person becomes suddenly ill, I look into the mirror to deter-

mine whether it is witchcraft or regular disease. Today, many people are bewitched, and the healer will see it.

*Are there bad doctors in the camp?*

There are no longer any bad witch doctors in the camp—they got rid of the bad witch doctor that was here, and now there is no more bewitching.<sup>17</sup> There were two witch doctors, but one killed himself in Namibia.

*If the witch doctor is dead, how are people still being bewitched?*

Maybe some people here don't know about the spirits and are careless about what they are thinking. The spirits work through them, and the people don't know what they are doing. Only the old people know about the good and bad spirits.

*How does a healing begin?*

If a man is sick, his relatives come to me. But they must give me something to begin, and then I give the person some medicine and tell them to come back tomorrow to see the reaction. This is called *doemoe*, the taking of the medicine. I mix the medicine with oil and rub it in the shape of the cross anywhere that the person hurts.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, if somebody is trying to bewitch the patient, I can chase it away. I rub the powder on the sick person's face in a line from the upper lip to the ear and from the tip of the nose to the forehead.

*What happens when you see the sickness?*

When I find out, I tell the people. I put oil and medicine on the body, where the illness is. Then I massage it until I can pull it out. Sometimes the sickness is like sand. If it is like a stone, I pull it out at dawn.

*What do you do with the sickness?*

Sometimes I see the sickness as a black stone, and it is very heavy. Everyone sees it once I pull it out. Then I throw it into the fire, and only I can see it shooting away. It looks like a glowing beam of red light flying away.

I can see the sickness with my eyes. By the time the sun comes up, I can see the disease around the person's body, moving around like a breath, like steam.

When the person is healed, that person will get up and eat something, go to work, or walk. I put a bit of medicine on the piece of cloth (a pendant) I wear, and then I use it to wipe the medicine on either side of the person's throat for protection.

*Do you wear anything special for healings?*

I wear a beaded hat when I am ready to



*Machai Mbande*

dance. God has told me to wear the beads when I am ready to heal other people.

*Do you use a special song for healing?*

Not just one song but many songs. The group decides what songs. Some songs tell me what is wrong with the person. The people must help, and it must be a happy feeling for me to be able to see what is wrong with the person.

As I dance to take out the disease, one man will play the drum until he is tired, and then another will take over and drum until he is tired, and so on. The people choose what songs they must use. But when the sun comes up, there is a special song. Then everyone sings to tell the disease to "come, come, leave, leave." I start this song for the healing.

When I finish, I can tell the people if the person is healed or if the person is going to die. When I do not know, I tell them in song that I do not know.

#### *Machai's Ecstatic States of Healing*

The last time I saw Machai work was at a particularly difficult healing, where he did something that I had never seen him or any of the other healers do. He was healing two women, one of whom had scabs on her body and was visibly in pain. He sat that woman up in the firelight and massaged her with his medicine. Then, after he laid the woman back down, he saw something in the air which he addressed as if talking to a person.

Instantaneously, the singing and clapping of the attending women became more

intense. Machai put his rattle to his forehead and staggered backwards into a sitting position. As the women continued clapping and singing, he stared transfixed at something opposite him. He seemed afraid. The clapping and singing intensified. The entire tent seemed focused on supporting Machai, and I felt my heart go out to my friend. He was confronting something that he alone saw, but all of us felt.

Then he went totally limp, collapsing on the ground with exhaustion. Incredibly, the intensity and complexity of the clapping and singing increased. Two women—his wife and an assistant—moved to him and rubbed his face and torso, as he lay there helpless. Suddenly, he jerked back into a stiff sitting position, as if something was pulling on his every nerve ending. He sat there in a transfixed state, and a shock wave rippled through the entire group. The singing and clapping stopped abruptly, and everyone paused motionless.

Something unexpected and powerful was running through all of us. I was overwhelmed, almost dizzy with fear, concern, and expectation. I began to cry, holding back sobs, my throat thick with emotion. Others in the group seemed similarly affected. Several of those still standing staggered to a seated position.

Something out of the ordinary was happening. Both Machai's wife and his assistant went to him and held him tightly as if to protect and save him. Machai's body and face went limp. For several minutes, the anxious crowd was absolutely quiet.

Slowly, as if returning from death or from another place, Machai softly began to rattle and sing to himself. Then he stopped, holding his head as if in pain. His wife and assistant unbent his legs and massaged them. Still seated, with his eyes still closed, Machai began to shake for heat. Machai's wife and assistant—who also kept their eyes tightly shut, as if to protect themselves from whatever was assailing him—continued to work on his body. Finally, after several anxious moments, Machai began to sing with renewed strength and to stretch himself.

The group began to sing again, joining Machai's singing. Then, the woman who had been drumming went over to him and forcibly lifted him to his feet. It was a spontaneous, unexpected, and powerful moment. Machai struggled to stay standing, shaking and convulsing as the group sang and clapped in encouragement.

I had the feeling that Machai had put himself in danger for the sake of the community. But now he was back in business. With his hips and shoulders shaking with

heat, Machai danced over to an opening in the tent and threw out something visible only to his sight. The singing and clapping turned hopeful and joyful. Another healing had worked, and songs of thanksgiving would be sung in the morning.

### *The Future of !Xuu and Khwe Medicine*

For over twenty years, beginning with the trauma of war, followed by the loss of their homelands, the !Xuu and Khwe have suffered greatly. Their ancient ways have been disrupted by a complex political reality beyond their control. Following the ways of their ancestors, Machai and the other doctors have responded to the repeated shocks of change and turmoil the only way they know how. They are using their accumulated cultural knowledge and traditional shamanic methods to treat and heal the physical, emotional, and spiritual illnesses brought on by their plight.

While some outsiders might question the ultimate efficacy of their traditional healing practices, I have seen George, Manfred, Machai, and the other healers work miracles, offering hope and healing to their people in ways that outsiders could never do. The !Xuu and Khwe healers provide an important healing and cultural service that may need to be supplemented—but should never be replaced—by Western medicines.

The traditional healers I interviewed were confident that the healings they performed in the camp were as effective as those they had conducted in their homelands, even though they often had to use “substitute” medicines. They showed a willingness to adapt to new conditions. George was encouraged by the fact that more people were becoming healers in response to the increasing need. Manfred credited his effectiveness to an increase of knowledge he had gained through working with other healers.

Following cooperative healing models pioneered in many parts of the world, the !Xuu and Khwe healers could be encouraged and trained to work hand-in-hand with Western doctors. Based on their involvement in our theater workshop, I believe that the healers would welcome such cooperative work. In the meantime, the !Xuu and Khwe healers should be encouraged to continue practicing their traditional healing dances. At stake is nothing less than the survival of their people.

### Notes

1. The !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Trust is a private, not-for-profit group created to help the !Xuu and Khwe people. Its board in 1994 was comprised of local busi-

ness people, military and church officials, an anthropologist, and two Bushmen soldiers.

2. Although I was trained in Western theater methodologies, I have spent much time working with Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimos and Athabaskan Indians at the University of Alaska, where I presently teach, and I have organized performance projects with a variety of other indigenous people, including the Sakha of central Siberia, Greenland Inuits, Tamils, Zulus, and tribal groups in Zambia.

3. The tensions between the two bans are due partly to the difficulty of their situation but also partly to historical, racial, and cultural differences. The !Xuu are physically and culturally similar to the !Kung: they have almost Asiatic skin and facial features, and they tend to be small in stature. In contrast, the Khwe (or Barquana) have had much more contact with the Bantu tribes. In addition to adopting some Bantu customs, the Khwe have intermarried and are consequently larger and darker skinned than the !Xuu.

Although the Khwe consider themselves Bushmen, owing to the fact that both Blacks and Whites refer to them as such, the !Xuu perceive the Khwe as Blacks, because of their intermarriage with Bantus. To outsiders, such racial and cultural distinctions may seem minor. However, in South Africa, such distinctions are significant. Interestingly, both groups despise the anthropological term “San” or “San People” and much prefer “Bushmen”—because as Fernando, our translator, explained, “We live in the bush!”

4. Regarding names, I have tried to follow the personal preferences of the workshop participants. Some, such as Ndala Mutenya and Machai Mbande, preferred to use their traditional names; others, such as George Dikosi, preferred to use the new names given them on their South African identity cards.

5. The relative passivity of the Bushmen has historically made them easy targets for expansion into their lands. Successive invasions of Bantu tribes migrating from the north and White settlers coming from the west and south have pushed the Bushmen into the most remote parts of their once-large hunting areas. Today, there is no place left to push them.

6. The Bushmen's sense of god is not monotheistic but rather encompasses a general spiritual force that motivates and inspires their actions.

7. Of the healers I interviewed, only George used this red powder, which he had brought with him from Namibia. He was concerned about running out of powder and was experimenting with local substitutes.

8. Each healer I interviewed received his calling through dreams, which typically occurred when he was between eight and fifteen years old. However, all were also related to healers.

9. When I asked George to sing a song from a dead man for the tape player, he refused to do so unless he was paid 50 rand—“because those songs do not come cheaply.” Later, he sang a song that came from his brother-in-law, plus a few other songs given to him by his dead children. He said he had a song for each of his dead children: “All I have left of them are their songs.”

10. New songs come to healers by way of dreams and during healing ceremonies. In both cases, the song is understood to be a gift from god for a specific purpose. However, once sung, the song may become a part of the community repertory.

11. The belief that bad doctors may put death curses on people in order to eat their flesh is found among various tribes of sub-Saharan Africa. The belief is that, because evil is a negative force and cannot replenish itself, bad doctors must eat the flesh of others in order to replenish their power.

12. George told me that this woman and a few others, who suffered from severe menstrual bleeding and

cramps, became “moon-sick” for a few days each month, before the full moon.

13. “Getting the spirit” is not something the logical mind can explain, but it appears to involve an affective feeling of the participants becoming connected to one another. The coming together of the human community is a prelude to the coming of the spirit. Sometimes, the spirit comes quickly; at other times, it might take a few hours of dancing and singing to prepare for the receiving of the spirit. My impression was that rhythm seemed to open the pathway to the spirit. As the community became unified and focused through synchronized rhythms, a perceptible energy would sweep through the group, linking each member ephemerally.

14. The patterns used in “wiping the blood” varied from healer to healer, but there were certain basic similarities. Wiping was usually performed around the face, neck, and chest. My understanding was that those areas were where illness usually entered or affected a person, and the wiping of the blood was intended to provide protection against the illness. Healers would also wipe persons as they entered a ceremony, in order to protect them and prevent the illness from jumping from the patient onto them. Oftentimes, as the eradication of the illness became more imminent, healers would move through the gathering and wipe people again as an added protection.

15. The medicines that Machai had used formerly were unavailable at the camp, so he was experimenting with various roots and plants which grew alongside a nearby river. He also met with local Tswana healers to learn about the medicinal powers of local plants.

16. Oftentimes, “uncle” refers not to a blood relative but rather to someone who is like a relative. I could not discern whether the uncle Machai referred to was an actual relative or not.

17. The camp's White medical doctor later told me that in 1991, shortly after the Bushmen came to the camp, a man was killed after being accused of being a witch doctor. Several healers accused the man of killing a young boy in order to eat him. Attention was drawn to the suspected witch doctor because his words suggested he was doing the bewitching. Several healers also identified the man in their mirrors, and one healer saw the man in a dream.

The man accused of being a witch doctor disappeared. He was eventually found in the desert hanging upside down, with his arms and legs tied behind him to a pole, in the style Bushmen use to carry a killed impala. According to the autopsy and military investigation, the man had first been tied up and exposed to the desert sun for several days. Then, stones had been piled on him, crushing his chest, believed to be the seat of his bewitching powers. As far as I could ascertain, the man was never given an opportunity to defend himself against the accusations, and the murderers were never found.

18. A few “charismatic” Christian groups were active in the camp, and they often blended traditional African and Bushmen beliefs into their ceremonies. In turn, they may have had some influence on traditional ceremonies. However, Machai was not a Christian, and, as far as I could determine, applying the medicine in the “shape of the cross” was a traditional procedure, not the result of Christian influence.

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