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"Our Health Was Better in the Time of Queen Elizabeth": The Importance of Land to the Health Perception of the Botswana San

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INTRODUCTION

"Please tell us about your experiences with good health" we encouraged an old man in New Xade. He shook his head and stated deploringly that no, he could not say anything about good health because he had been removed from the place he belonged. He was only able to say something about health in the place where he used to live before. There he enjoyed good health because he felt free in mind, he knew the land, and his ancestors were there. This response came from a San who had recently been relocated from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) to a government settlement. It explains why the land-health relationship has assumed increasing attention in our study, which had originally been designed with a different focus. The scientific purpose of our study was to investigate the concepts of 'good health,' illness and healing among the San people. Its practical purpose was to create a better understanding of health and illness perceptions and behaviour among the San in order to contribute to improved culture sensitivity in the Botswana health care services[1)]. Access to land and land use rights emerged as essential prerequisites for health for the San. This became particularly clear through the loss of land experienced by the San who were involuntarily removed from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) during our field work. In this article, we will present and analyse how loss of land influences the San perception of health.

Important to our analysis is the fact that our informants almost unanimously stressed their hunting/fishing-gathering background and their ancestral ties to the Kalahari bushveld or the Okavango River banks[2)].

Our informants talked about their history in terms of three different 'times.' The furthest back they could recall was "The time of Queen Elizabeth.". Then came "The time of Seretse," followed by the more recent years that had so far been given no particular name. The time of Queen Elizabeth was the period before Independence in 1966. England had taken on Bechuanaland rather reluctantly in 1885, after several requests by Tswana chiefs and the London Missionary Society, in order to fend off

the Boers (Tlou and Campbell 1984). They did not consider the land valuable enough to be made a colony, and consequently made few investments and created little infrastructure. For the San groups, this consequently left them largely to themselves with few restrictions on their hunting/fishing-gathering activities. However, they did not only remain free-roaming groups, but also became almost serf-like laborers on Boer farms in the border areas neighboring South Africa and South-West Africa (Namibia) and at cattleposts owned by the different Bantu groups. It was a position at the very bottom of the social ladder, and has remained the fate of many San until today.

The first president after independence, Sir Seretse Khama, wanted the San to be part of the development of the new Botswana. In order to create an alternative to farm labor and a nomadic lifestyle, new settlements were established with housing, boreholes and eventually some health services on the outskirts of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), which was set apart to protect the game and the lifestyle of the hunter-gatherers. The San were now encouraged to settle permanently and voluntarily, start raising goats and cattle, and send their children to school. Those who complied often found it difficult to change from hunting to herding, and nutritious roots and other edible plants soon became scarce around the settlements. Hunting was regulated by seasons and licenses, but up until the early 1980s the San could hunt quite freely provided they used their traditional weapons. However, seasonal hunting with modern weapons by other Batswana and white trophy hunters was beginning to disturb their traditional hunting grounds.

Sir Seretse Khama died in 1980. After his passing, in the early 1980s the Government of Botswana, supported by the Norwegian Development Cooperation (NORAD), embarked on a program of poverty alleviation among a target group defined by the government as Remote Area Dwellers. This term did not single out the San as an ethnic minority group distinct from others, but targeted them equally with other poor and remotely located people such as the Bakgalagadi (Saugestad 2001). The building of new and improved settlements outside the CKGR was now intensified, and people were strongly encouraged to resettle, although still on a voluntary basis. It was argued that in the new settlements the San and their children would become modern educated citizens, and receive modern health care services; by sticking to their old way of life they would be bypassed by development, remain in poverty, and become nothing but a curiosity for tourists and anthropologists. As game became scarcer near the settlements hunting regulations were more heavily enforced, and licenses were also required by the San, although special quotas were allotted to those living inside the CKGR. Poaching was (and still is) punished by several years in jail. Although the government and NORAD were genuinely concerned that the San people were lagging behind in development, rumours soon started to circulate that the discovery of rich diamond ores[3)] and the desire to attract rich foreigners for hunting were the real reasons behind the plan to 'develop' and relocate the San.

Thus we can conclude that during the past few decades the grip on the San of

Botswana has slowly been tightened. They are caught between the encouragement, and to some extent the wish, to become modern citizens and the desire to maintain an identity and tradition that is strongly linked to the land they feel is theirs. This land is threatened by many forces. The most recent and dramatic land controversy is the removal of San from the CKGR.

In January 2002 a number of Botswanan government trucks drove into the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, in order to remove the last remaining San and Bakgalagadi from their traditional hunting/gathering and agropastoral grounds and relocate them in a few large settlements just outside the reserve's borders. Bore holes were closed up and houses torn down. Bundles of straw and sticks were loaded onto the trucks for use in building homes in the new location. People who did not come voluntarily claimed they were dragged onto the trucks, and there were said to be instances in which family groups were split up, with husband and wife/children relocated in settlements far apart. However, a very few people managed to remain behind, while a few others put their relocation funds together and bought pick-up trucks to travel back[4)]. In the subsequent debate in the international press[5)], those remaining San soon became a symbol of the struggle for indigenous land rights and the claimed suppression of them by the Government of Botswana.

METHODS, INFORMANTS, AND FIELD WORK

The study on which this article is based was conducted in Ghanzi and Gumare districts in Botswana over a period of two months in March and September/October 2002. It is a multi-sited study in Marcus' sense of the word (Marcus 1995). In search of the meaning of the concept of 'health,' we interviewed a total of 56 self-ascribed San (31 males and 25 females) of different ages (17–87 years) in 17 different communities. The informants and communities were chosen to provide as wide a variety of people and settlements as possible. We interviewed people in Ghanzi Township, in the mission settlement of D'kar, in New Xade on the border of the CKGR, in other settlements most of which were founded in "the time of Seretse," and in the town of Shakawe and some nearby settlements along the banks of the Okavango river. We also went to the area around Dobe where some of the early studies of the San were made (Lee 1979). We interviewed San farm workers on three different farms owned by white people and one cattlepost owned by a Motswana. Thus, our informants had a variety of adaptations to their environment: from having recently been removed from the CKGR to living in old or somewhat newer settlements (New Xade).

The fact that none of the San languages we encountered had a word for 'health' or 'good health' came as no surprise to us[6)]. 'Health' may to some extent in itself be a modern term, resulting from the medical profession's colonisation of people's life-worlds, and thus it is possible that indigenous languages have expressed wellbeing and absence of sickness or impairment in different ways. As it turned out the closest we could come to making our San informants talk about 'health' was asking for a

'good life,' but as the conversation unfolded it was easily understood that it was the health aspects of 'good life' that were our focal point.

Our tool was the qualitative interview, recorded on tape and combined with observations during our stay at the interview sites. The interviews were free conversations of 1–2 hours duration, but with a check-list at hand in order to make sure that the same topics were touched upon by all informants. We made use of translators, one during the interviews but three in total to cover the five different San languages that our informants spoke. The translators transcribed the tapes following the interviews. There are many problems attached to such a method, one of them being the multiple biases that may enter in the process of translation. But overall we were satisfied with our translators and felt that they took their job seriously and served, not only as translators of words, but also as cultural intermediaries who helped us understand the meaning behind the words. They were also good at making contact with informants, explaining the purpose of our study, and making them feel reasonably secure in what for them must have been a somewhat strange situation.

We recruited most of our informants through key people we contacted beforehand: healthcare personnel, settlement chiefs, etc. From there on we used a 'snowballing' method, asking the people we interviewed to recruit others. Our translators also helped us with contacts. Thus we believe that our sample, although not representative in the statistical sense of the word, gives a good coverage of the different modes of life among the San in the districts of Ghanzi and Gumare.

We arrived in the Ghanzi area in early March 2002, only a few weeks after the dramatic relocation of the San from the CKGR had taken place. This was rather coincidental, because our study had already been planned and timed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health long before the plans for relocation were made publicly known. However, as it turned out these happenings became an important backdrop for our informants' reflections on 'a good life.'

LOSS OF LAND AND LIFE CLOSE TO NATURE

Several of our San informants clearly expressed that they felt their health/life was better before, "*in the time of Queen Elizabeth.*" However, we know little about the health of the San in Queen Elizabeth's time. Most likely they were exposed to rough health hazards such as thirst, hunger, and attack from wild animals. Furthermore, their access to modern health care was limited. One may therefore assume that parts of the Government's 'development policy' have contributed to the health of the San. There are, however, no data that can strengthen or weaken this hypothesis, as ethnic groups are not identified in Botswanan health statistics. Potential health-promoting factors include stable access to water, food rations to children, immunization programs, health posts, and schools in the settlements. Both in the settlements and on the farms there are some San who advocate that a good life requires integration into modern society.

A woman in her thirties, living in a squatter area in Ghanzi, emphasises the

positive aspects of moving the San to town where they will obtain better health care and schooling. A headman in a settlement argues: "*In the wild, especially when there is no rain, you want life, so now it is much better, because even if someone goes out into the wild, he will come back here because he knows that there is life in the village.*"

A woman of 35 in the Tsodilo Hills says: "*You know, the government is trying to develop our lives .... Maybe the people of Kalahari Game Reserve, the government has seen that they are suffering. That is why the government has relocated them to New Xade.*"

Others express ambiguity in weighing old versus new life with respect to health. A recently relocated man in New Xade reflects over his old life without a water source: "*When I was still young, there was no water, we survived by burying some of the fruits called* mogorogowane *so that they rot, so that we got water out of them. There was no water. That life was not good for us.*" He praises the values of being out there in the veld, but admits: "*It was dangerous. Sometimes as I was out there, lions will approach me and I will shout all the night and in the morning I go back home."* In spite of the hardships and dangers out in the veld, he denies that his children will have a better life and health in New Xade: "*That I won't understand. It has been said that when an elephant crosses the river to the other side, it is no more a big elephant as it used to be, but now it is a small elephant. That means our dignity has been left behind where we come from. Now, here we are small elephants. There is nothing that will be of any good, even if the children can go to school, because back there, their grandparents died there….*"

This man leads us from the few 'modernists' to the dominant experience among our informants: The loss of land is the major threat to the health of the San people. Thus the CKGR issue, which at the time of our fieldwork was a topic in which 'everybody' involved themselves with strong emotions, became a symbolic case that threatened their very identity as San. The CKGR issue is, however, not the only threat that present-day San experience.

The group of San people near the Tsodilo Hills have been moved away from their holy mountain, according to them on the grounds that tourists should not be bothered by eager souvenir sellers. The Tsodilo Hills, now a UNICEF World Heritage Site, are holy mountains in the Kalahari San tradition (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989). The site is situated in the northwest, close to the Namibian border. For thousands of years San people have engraved their beliefs, dreads, and dreams on the mountains. For a long time a group of San stayed close to the mountains, which they saw as the home of their ancestral spirits. In 1995 the Botswana Government moved their settlement to a more distant place. The importance of the mountains in the San spiritual world is manifested in the name of the Tsodilo Hills in the local San language Ju!hansi: *nxum,* which means soul, life, potency, vital power. A 40-year-old man reflects: "*When we were young, our grandparents told us these hills belonged to us. Today we know that these hills belong to the museum people.*" A further dimension was added to the trauma by the fact that other tribes (the 'black

people') were allowed to remain close to the mountains: "*The government has moved us from the hills where we were staying. People of other tribes were not moved. The government left them there. The government knew that the Basarwa have no powers.*"

The River San we interviewed along the northern shore of Okavango, near Shakawe, were deeply concerned with a current rumour claiming that the government planned to move them away from the river in order to develop their original habitat for tourism. A man of 40 in Sekondomboro states: "*The Batswana look down on us. We do not have jobs, they only employ Batswana or other tribes. Today we are in a big problem. We have no cattle, goats or donkeys, which means we are suffering. The government has taken away our animals that we used in the past for hunting and eat. Now the government have taken the animals. Now they are in the parks. The animals are in the parks.*"

The extent of self-perceived health loss among the San groups varies according to the dimensions and topicality of the land-loss trauma. The health loss is expressed most intensely among the San who were recently, many reportedly by force, removed from their habitat in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. A woman in her 30s, now in the process of moving back to the CKGR against the government's orders, says about relatives who have already returned: "*If all the government wants is to take them out by force, they will be shot, they rather die there.*" Another relocated woman close to 80 says about the young San planning to return to the CKGR: "*They are not allowed to go back. When you take the road to Central, the police will stop you and beat you up and they will take you to prison.*" Longing for land, dignity and freedom is one force driving people back to their habitat. Another is a combination of loyalty to and fear of the ancestors. The same old woman explains why the young people feel obliged to go back: "*Those ancestral spirits came to them and troubled them and said: How can you leave us at Central*?"

The strength of the loss of land/loss of health experience seems to decline with time spent in the new habitats, settlements and farms. We do, however, sense that the CKGR relocation operation has awakened suppressed land-loss trauma and identity crises among the San. Asking a man of 50 in a settlement how the current relocation policy may affect the San, he answers: "*That destroys their whole life. You cannot be taken away from the place you are used to, from your life, to a place where you have no life.*" He associates the trauma of relocation with AIDS: "*This is what the white people calls AIDS. Because if something is done to you that you don't want, your blood doesn't function well because your heart is always painful, and because of that your blood becomes dirty and you get dirty illness.*" He continues: "*It causes pain in my heart, and other Basarwa as well, because those people could have been helped where they were. They are our relatives. It is our home.*" A man over 70, also living in a settlement, judges the relocation to be: "*The main thing that causes talking by heart*[7] *... during the Queen's and Sir Seretse's time, there was nothing like to be pushed around, as if you are being used for business. Today you are pushed here, tomorrow that place is someone's. Then tomorrow, you are pushed*

somewhere else, as if we are being used."

As documented above, there seems to be one huge loss in the health account of modernization: The loss of land. The majority of our informants seem to have suffered major losses in quality of life and identity as a consequence of loss of land. What might be the reason for this huge impact of land loss on San public health? Our research material indicates that loss of land implies loss of San values/resources essential to San identity and health: Freedom; natural, cultural and spiritual resources; moral and social values; dignity; and security.

LOSS OF FREEDOM

Loss of land implies loss of freedom, as expressed by a man in his 50s in a settlement: "*But you are here in this world. There is nowhere that you can say: Here I am free. Those thoughts are bringing pains into your body ... the pain that I feel because of this country of mine is great, and this country no longer belongs to me.*" For the San who have recently been relocated he fears: "*Those people are going to be sick now, because now they are living under someone's control, unlike when they were on their own.*" The San 'cry for freedom' is heard in three dimensions: Space, release from constraints, and political influence.

Originally the San enjoyed freedom of space. They learned to value the freedom to move around in the Great Thirstland (Kalahari) or along the Okavango River without fences, borders, or constraints. A woman in her 30s, relocated from the CKGR, is very unhappy with her new life in New Xade. One main reason is "*the pollution.*" She claims that most of her relatives have died since they were located in New Xade:

> *Q: Have they died after they came here?*
> *A: Yes, because they came to a place with a lot of air pollution.*
> *Q: Here?*
> *A: Yes, because here they live too close to each other, but there (CKGR) they lived at some distance from each other.*
> *Q: In which way did they get sick when coming here?*
> *A: TB because of the air pollution.*
> *Q: How is the air polluted?*
> *A: The air is polluted by cattle, a lot of vehicles and people who are crowded.*

An old man, also recently relocated, tells of some young people making their way back to the CKGR against government orders, taking the risk of being caught by the police and put in jail. He emphasizes the claustrophobic feeling among the relocated San by saying: "*Here they are just in a squeezed, tight place. They are in a place which is very small. They are not free to go around, like what it used to be like in Central Kalahari. They feel like they are in a prison camp.*"

Another informant standing nearby confirms another aspect of lost freedom, the

deep feeling of being restrained and controlled: "*They say it affects them just like they are in handcuffs, as she demonstrates [*another bystander wearing great bracelets brings her arms strongly together and pretends trying to break loose from the illusory handcuffs with all her might, but in vain*]. It is as if you have tied a donkey around its front legs in order to control its movements. So how will they survive in such a situation?*"

The third aspect of lost freedom is lack of political influence. There is a widespread feeling of powerlessness when it comes to the destiny and future of their tribe. A River San man of 50 says: "*We do not know if the government knows us. We feel like he has thrown us away.*" Others are concerned by the lack of San representation in political bodies. It holds true for the River San: "*When you look in these* kgotlas*, there are no Basarwa, only other tribes ... They cannot take our words to the government. They ignore everything we say.*" The lack of 'political self' is likewise felt by the Tsodilo Hills San: "*We have nothing to say, because the government moved us from there (the Mountain). So we are just accepting anything that the government is advising us to do nowadays.*" People in the settlements share the feeling of political impotency: "*The most painful thing is that we, the Basarwa, do not control things that are said to be ours, which causes bad health .... The government is controlling our life, yet there is no Mosarwa in that government. It is very painful.*" The loss of space and political power is also related to reduced access to natural resources. A 50-year-old River San makes his living by fishing and gathering in the Okavango delta close to the Namibia/Botswana border: "*The Government has made the border and my father's territory is on the other side of the river. This affects my health, because I am not feeling free to go where I can get fish in the river.*"

LOSS OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The freedom to hunt has been restricted by game regulations and severe punishment for poaching, but the people who had been living within the CKGR were allowed special licences for limited quantities of certain animals. A man in a settlement is concerned about the health of the relocated San because: "*This body of humans is cured by meat from wild animals. That is why they don't get ill time after time. Now as they are brought to a new place, they are only going to be eating* papa *(maize-porridge,) which they are not used to in their body, and that will cause them to get sick.*" Although gathering is in principle allowed everywhere, in practice people living in the settlements experienced the swift deterioration of their traditional food sources, and often had to walk very far to find anything to eat. A young women in Okavango says: "*In the past it could take me just half an hour to fill my dish, today it can take the whole day because there are many people gathering in the river, and they have finished the fruits in the river.*" Not only the river habitat but also the land surrounding the settlements has been depleted, according to a man in Dobe: "*The sun is very hot and the places where we are*

gathering these wild fruits is very far. And we have to carry those fruits on our back and they are very heavy .... We are not hunting, because the Government has stopped us to hunt .... That is what is killing us here, as you can see, we are all thin because of that." Loss of land also leads to lack of local competence necessary for gathering and hunting. This local competence includes both geographical and botanical konwledge. Some of our informants expressed a fear of getting lost in the bush surrounding their new settlement. Others had difficulties in searching for and identifying new roots and fruits. Ironically, the farm workers were better off as far as gathering was concerned, since there were fewer people living together and the farmers rarely placed any restrictions on gathering.

LOSS OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

Many of the most essential cultural resources in the San tradition are related to the mastering of the land. Among prominent cultural competences are reading animal tracks, preservation of water for dry seasons, hunting and gathering skills, and medicinal use of remedies from plants and animals. Disintegration of these competences not only threatens their food security, but also causes the San cultural self to crumble. Two young men who were relocated from the CKGR represent cultural skills lost in transition. Asked about anything in the San tradition he was proud of, a man of 23 answered: "*I was hunting when I was there. I was using bow and arrows and some dogs too. And here there is nothing like hunting .... I have given up. I do not know what to do .... Because of this relocation, we do drink heavily so that we can forget some of our problems.*" Another man of 19 told us proudly and with shining eyes (in contrast to a more apathetic attitude during most of the interview): "*I have killed an eland. Felt very happy. I have killed a very big famous antelope, from horseback with spear.*"

Singing and dancing are strong elements of San cultural life. Parts of this tradition are connected to the land, as music and dancing are offered as thanksgiving for a good catch. The healing dance (Katz 1982) is strongly associated with land, as the aim is to bring the healer in contact with the ancestral spirits who are embedded in the land. Loss of land may therefore reduce the sustainability of the healing dance. A contributing threat may be the condemnation of San rituals by the new 'rulers,' in particular farm owners and churches. We heard reports of farm owners who prohibited the healing dance on their farm, but ordered the San to sing and dance to entertain parties they brought in to hunt fenced-in game. A man in a settlement with strong influence from a Dutch missionary church claimed that: "*The church said our beliefs are of the Devil.*" This is, however, ambiguous as the same church arranges a highly reputed San traditional-dance festival every year. The devaluation of San cultural resources has had far-reaching effects. When asked to give an example of something to be proud of in her cultural heritage, a young woman on a farm, without hesitation, said: "*I don't know. I only appreciate things at my house that I have bought.*" She lived under very poor conditions, in a house with

corrugated iron for roof and walls.

LOSS OF SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

Ancestral spirits play a major role in the spiritual life of the San as well as their daily life. The ancestral spirits provide guidance in hunting and gathering as well as in moral and social affairs. They help provide health through the healing dance, and by the healing power of the sand from their graves. And perhaps most importantly, the ancestral spirits are safeguarders and distributors of luck and protection, or of misfortune and revenge. A poetic dream of his ancestors' benevolence is relived by a young relocated San man: "*When I was still living on top of them* [i.e. near their graves] *... the ancestral spirits of my father and grandmother can cause animals like wild dogs to chase some antelopes or springbok and they will kill that springbok just in front of my home, and I will take that animal and skin it and eat it.*" Many relocated San fear punishment from their ancestral spirits left behind in the CKGR, as expressed by a young man: "*I have thrown them [*ancestral spirits*] away now that I am so far from them. That means I have caused bad luck on my side.*" An old woman among the relocated explains why young people try to get back to the CKGR: "*They miss them* [the ancestral spirits] *so much, because when someone is ill, they just go to the grave and take some sand and wash with it and be healed.*" Fear of the ancestors' revenge was also present among San who had been removed from their original settlement near the Tsodilo Hills. They experienced this as a severe trauma, which gave some of them nightmares and made them worried that their ancestors would punish them for their desertion.

A demonstration of the moral regulatory power of the ancestors is given by an old River San. As a young man he participated in hunting for hippos with spears, from the *mokoro* (wooden canoe). We responded with astonished disbelief and asked if this was not extremely dangerous. He answered: "*The method we used to protect ourselves is that when the husband is out hunting, the wife will live in the camp. She has to stay in the camp, waiting for him until he comes. If she is playing around, having beer with friends, it is dangerous for her husband who is hunting in the river. If the women cannot behave in a good way, the husband can be injured. The hippos can be allowed by his ancestors to kill him.*"

For many San, such close communication with ancestral spirits is but a vague memory. A man in his 60s is now living in a village on the northern bank of the Okavango that is inhabited mainly by San who originally came from just across the border in Namibia. He grew up in the bush following the traditional lifestyle based on hunting and gathering: "*In the past it was good for me, because I could make some fire and talk to my ancestors, telling them this morning I am going hunting for them, and even find honey for feeding my family or sharing with them. For today, now, it is difficult to do it.*"

LOSS OF OPTIONS TO COMPLY WITH MORAL/SOCIAL VALUES

One of the main tasks for the ancestors is to hold in trust and pass on the moral heritage of the San. Many of the fundamental moral and social San values are founded in the original use of land. This holds true for sharing, keeping peace, protecting the environment and lack of property. Removal from traditional hunting and gathering grounds and relocation to settlements, farms and squatter areas both tend to disrupt these land-rooted values.

The value of sharing among the San is well documented in anthropological literature (Marshall 1976, Lee 1979) and exemplified by this River San: "*If you go for fishing and cook the fish alone and eat it, then the ancestors can be angry with you, asking why you did eat that fish alone instead of giving it to your parents.*" In settlements, however, there may be little to share. An old man in a settlement remembers bygone days when they could follow the rain and gather wild nuts and berries: "*The nuts of that Morama will then be roasted and you will share them with your family, we will eat and be satisfied, then we will start to sing and dance.*" Today, however, being restricted to the settlement means that the amount that can be gathered from the surrounding bush is insufficient. And when there is something to share, such as food rations for malnourished children, TB patients, etc., there are too many people around for the most needy to benefit.

An old traditional healer emphasises the importance of peace-keeping to good health: "*People with a healthy body are people who stay with others harmoniously, without quarrels, in good cooperation with each other. Just as we were staying in olden days, by the time of Elizabeth and Seretse. They were good, and we were healthy.*" But now, living in a crowded settlement with scarce resources makes both sharing and cooperation difficult: "*By the time of the Queen, it was good, but now, even if you have killed a bird or a chicken, it must be identified, even if you have killed it at your own place .... You can't even go for fire wood somewhere — it is an offence.*" Concern over the prevailing tensions and conflicts in the settlements, which are in sharp contrast to the "commandment" from their forefathers, is widespread. A man in his 50s living in a small settlement close to the Namibian border states: "*When we are staying in a village like this, and we are always quarrelling or beating each other, the ancestors will become very angry to you, and they can cause the illness to you.*" A man aged close to 80 in the Okavango, complains of bad health and ascribes his illnesses to a quarrel with his mother a long time ago: "*I think it is not good to quarrel with my mother, because the ancestors can punish me.*" People complain that life in settlements and the poorer areas of Ghanzi has brought about envy and witchcraft, and that the traditional San value of keeping peace is impossible to uphold. This is at least partly because the traditional method of conflict solving by splitting up the group and moving away is no longer an option.

A third land-based San value, probably essential to survival in former times, is ecological responsibility: "*When a place becomes sort of dirty, we move to the other*

side of the bush. Not meaning that we have thrown this place away, but so that the dirt should be cleaned by air and nature. And we will keep on moving from place to place, taking care of our environment by doing so. Even some of the roots we dig out and eat, we replant that stem, so that next season it should produce another root for your child." It is difficult to maintain this tradition of sustainable environmental management while living in a crowded settlement with scanty vegetation and restricted freedom of movement.

The lack of property cherished in a nomadic lifestyle takes on a different perspective in settlements in which comparisons with better-off neighbours, some of them from other ethnic groups, create a feeling of deprivation. The San become influenced by the consumer society where identity and respect are partly constructed by goods. We may remember the woman on the farm, whose only pride was things she had bought in the shop.

LOSS OF DIGNITY (SELF-ESTEEM)

For the San, personhood and land have been interconnected for thousands of years. Identity, self-esteem and dignity were constructed through the interactions between people and land. Personhood was developed in congruence with survival skills, social norms, moral values, and spiritual beliefs — all associated with the land. Loss of land must therefore be expected to impose a threat to identity and self esteem. We remember the elephant that became smaller when it was moved to the other side of the river. Many of our informants expressed extremely low self-esteem on behalf of themselves and the San people. Being suppressed, or even just the feeling of being so, leads to (self) stigmatisation. Two of our young informants used sand as a metaphor to describe the low value of the San. A woman of around 30 in Ghanzi township says: "*We are just like sand and people step upon us*." A man on a farm, in his early 30s, states: "*From my point of view, there is nothing that the Basarwa can be proud of, because everybody, black and white, are just looking down upon a Mosarwa, just like sand.*" When we ask a young relocated woman how she felt they were received in New Xade, she answers: "*They do not welcome us at all. They just look upon us like wild animals, maybe because we are coming from the bush.*"

For some, the loss of self-esteem approaches self-effacement. A man of 21, feeling lost and locked in an isolated settlement close to the Namibian border, has sweet memories of participating in a dancing contest in the capital. He says he would like to live a modern life in Gaborone: "*Because the health there is very good and the water is good and nice. When I can stay there I could change colour and will be white like them* [pointing at the authors]*.*" Another young man living on a farm responds to the question of what good health is: "*When the farm owner accepts you, even if you fail to do the work.*" The self-stigmatization may even escalate to self-demonizing, as in a young woman in Ghanzi. She claims repeatedly that the San are nothing, and then concludes: "*We, the bushmen, are also the devils*."

The loss of dignity is enforced by the experience of discrimination. There are numerous reports of harsh discrimination against the San, both from the government and 'the black people.' A young man in Dobe gives an everyday example: "*Many people in Botswana are discriminating the Basarwa. We are staying here and the water tap is very far from us. But if it was the black people or any other tribe, the tap will be just in the village or near to us. But because we are Basarwa, we are getting water from a far distance.*" A man in Bere uses anatomical observations to make his point: "*As you can see the Batswana are fat and we the Basarwa are thin. The Batswana are always running in front of us and take everything.*"

LOSS OF SECURITY

The sum of the losses presented above is a profound, collective feeling of insecurity. In spite of moving the San to what may seem like safer locations, places with health facilities, running water, food rations for children and the poor, many of our informants still express a concern that they are in a more dangerous situation than during their previous (semi)nomadic lifestyle. This attitude was clearly visible even among those who had lived for a long time in settlements and on farms. There were three main reasons for this.

Firstly, there were dangers related to their perception of living near strangers in crowded places, such as cattle dropping their dung all over the place, not being able to go out hunting and gathering if food gets scarce, and being forced to eat rations of food unfamiliar to them.

Secondly, the perception of increased danger referred to the loss of control over their situation and a feeling of being 'owned' by a government that many of them perceived as hostile to the San people. The fact that they were taken against their will from their ancestral hunting grounds was seen as one proof of this. Of course life in the veld implied many hazards and hardships. Nevertheless, you had some kind of personal control over your destiny: "*Living in the veld can be disadvantageous to one's health, but then you will be on your own survival, unlike being used by someone like a politician. If you are out in the bush, you control yourself.*"

The rumours and fears about being moved once more, and the loss of basic food supplies, both contribute to the loss of security. A River San around 50 says: "*It is not good to me the way the government is planning to move us to the other place, because we are adapted to this environment, and we get food from the river. When we are far away from the river, then we will be starved or die from hunger.*" The strain of working hard for almost nothing on farms or cattleposts owned by high government officials (and other rich Batswana) is another experience that many San have in common. For some, the loss of security approaches apocalyptic dimensions. A man in his 50s experiences the 'development' from Queen Elizabeth's time to today as a descent from Heaven to Hell: "*By the Queen time Elizabeth, I did not feel the pains I am feeling now. Before the rains came we were immunized by an injection. That is why there was no illness, but now the people are being killed, so*

that the Basarwa tribe should exist no more, so that only those who have taken the land from us should remain alone."

Loss of land takes you into a new country, not only geographically but also in terms of thoughts, values, social norms, and technologies. You are confronted with other tribes, modern lifestyles, and strange challenges. Many San have undergone an extreme degree of change in a short time. That imposes cultural stress and sometimes nostalgic idealization of the past: "*By that time, before mixing with other tribes, there were not so many diseases. We didn't suffer from any diseases which are so many today.*"

DISCUSSION

Coetzee (1968) writes in his novel *Foe*: "If we devote ourselves to finding holes exactly shaped to house such great words as Freedom, Honor, Bliss, we shall spend a lifetime slipping and sliding and searching all in vain. They are words without a home, wanderer like the planets, and that is the end of it." Perhaps health is another such homeless word, especially among the San. It is not health in Western linguistic terms, the biomedical connotations of which we have explored. Our informants have shared their experiences and meanings on what contributes to or takes away from quality of life, or 'good life,' among the San.

The San are not living at either of two extremes, either in their original life in the bush or integrated into modern society. Most of them are at different transitional points between the two extremes. Nevertheless, for the majority, land emerges as a crucial prerequisite for a good life, and loss of land as a major threat to well-being. In the following section we will:

- try to understand the impact of land loss in the perspective of common, universal definitions of health;
- try to understand the impact of land loss mediated through loss of personal and cultural self;
- argue that certain land rights appear to be a *sine qua non* for the future health of the San.

Our findings indicate that loss of land results in severe loss of health. We have not performed an epidemiological survey. Consequently we are not able to give a precise, quantitative account of health and disease in the San population. We will however discuss the San potential for health from the perspective of universal definitions and theoretical models of health.

The World Health Organization (WHO 1946) defines health as an ideal state: "Health is a state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity." Most humans live far from this utopian, heavenly state, but few people on Earth seem to be left as far behind the WHO goal as the San.

According to the *social medical explanation model* (Seedhouse 1986), "Health is equivalent to the state of the set of conditions which fulfill or enable a person to work to fulfill his or her realistic chosen and biological potentials." Impoverished living conditions as well as loss of freedom and self-esteem reduce the possibility for the San to fulfill their potential.

Parson's (1951) analysis of roles states that health involves effective compliance with expected or normal roles. Health in this sense becomes a prerequisite and a resource for maintenance of the social system. The San are in a Catch 22 situation, caught between contrasting role expectations in the traditional and modern worlds. It is difficult for them to identify and fulfill 'normal roles' and thereby obtain health.

Parson's role analysis of health and disease has been criticized for being too loyal to the system. It preserves existing power structures and social hierarchies (Wolinsky 1980). Kelman (1975) opposes the system loyalists by introducing a more rebellious definition: "Health is the capacity for human development and self discovery and the transcendence of alienating social circumstances." There is little trace of a Kelman-inspired health concept in the San statements we have studied. With a few exceptions, their suppression, stigmatization and harsh living conditions have drained the capacity for personal as well as political revolt.

San health also seems to be endangered according to the *adaptation model*. According to Dubos (1960): "Health and happiness are the expressions of the manner in which the individual responds and adapts to the changes that he meets in everyday life." For many San, the changes have been so rapid and vast that they may have overloaded their capacity to cope. For some of the CKGR-relocation victims, the change has been so abrupt and intense that a breakdown in adaptive mechanisms may be the outcome.

Maslow (1968) advocated that ultimate health is obtained through self-realisation. Man must search for meaning on his own grounds and live in accordance with his own values, skills and free dispositions. Also in relation to this existentialist model, the San seem to have a severe health handicap. Self-realisation is difficult when you are close to losing yourself.

Loss of land results in loss of health via loss of self-esteem. In the 1940s, General J.C. Smuts, then prime minister of South Africa, considered the Bushman "mentally stunted" and "a desert animal" (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989). There is an abyss between Smuts' statement and the declaration of Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana: "Dignity, like freedom and justice, is the common heritage of all men." Those who hold power in Botswana claim that their policy toward the San is in accordance with Seretse Khama's vision. The establishing of San settlements, as well as the relocation project, both aim at integrating the San into modern, developed society. The San are to have equal access to progress, education, health care, clean water, protection, and support from society. The price of these potential fruits of development has been loss of land.

The present controversy over the rights to CKGR is in its essence a meeting of

two different world views. To the Tswana, the Kalahari Desert is a landscape which has not yet been (permanently) settled or exploited. It is seen as part of Botswana's common land which may be freely used for various profitable purposes in the name of development — tourism and diamond mining being the most likely uses. To the San, however, the Kalahari is a space filled with history and meaning. Each group has had its traditional wandering areas where stones, hills and trees tell stories about the past, and for some of them also the present. Basso describes how for the Apache Indians "history sits in places." He calls this "place making," a transformation of landscape as nature into a social construction with meaning which gives continuity and identity:

> For whenever members of a community speak about their landscape — whenever they name it or classify it, or tell stories about it — they unthinkingly represent it in ways that are compatible with shared understanding of how, in the fullest sense they know themselves to occupy it. (Basso 1996: p.74)

The issue of identity thus becomes crucial for the understanding of the link between land(scape) and health. Bender supports this view and wants to "… broaden the idea of landscape and understand it to be the way in which people — all people — understand and engage with the material world around them, and if we recognize that people's being-in-the world is always historically and spatially contingent, it becomes clear that landscapes are always in process, potentially conflicted, untidy and uneasy" (Bender 2001: p.3).

The faith of the San is often compared to that of the Australian aborigines. Both have been nomads in a desert-like landscape, both have lost most of their land and are minorities in a nation ruled by others. Reid (1984) has edited a volume which clearly demonstrates the enormous burden of illness that rests upon the Aboriginal communities and the complex physical, economic, political and cultural causes behind this. "Health to the Aborigines," she concludes," is not a simple matter of a prudent lifestyle or good diet. It is the outcome of a complex interplay between the individual, his territory of conception and his integrity: his body, his land and his spirit." Thus the San are not alone in their social suffering (Dædalus 1996) but share a faith with minorities elsewhere who have experienced loss of land and a process of resettlement in which they have had very little to say about their own future.

Our findings show that it may not so much be the material and subsistence aspects of being removed from their land that are of importance to our San informants' perceptions of good life/health, but rather the symbolic and cultural values that are lost when ties to the land are severed. Removal from the land represents a transplantation of their socio-cultural heart. Contrary to the Tswana majority who tend to see the "bush" as a wild and dangerous place and the village as a safe haven, the San see the Kalahari Desert as their home and the village as a hostile, overcrowded place where their health and well being are at stake. Thus the comment made by several of our informants that "*our health was better in the time*

of Queen Elizabeth" refers to the fact that in those days they were left more alone, free to roam where they wanted and able to live off the land to a much larger extent. Being more or less forcefully moved to permanent settlements and restricted from hunting detaches them from that particular area of land which is their source of 'good health' and — in the widest sense of the term — a 'good life.'

The anthropological discussion of whether or not the San are indigenous to the area and whether or not they have been 'pure' hunter-gatherers (Wilmsen 1989) is being used by the Government of Botswana for its own purposes in the current relocation debate. The government argues that the San are not indigenous people, that no ethnic group should be favoured before others, that talk about ethnicity is racism and tribalism, and that hunting/fishing-gathering, if it ever occurred among the San in its pure form, is not a viable lifestyle in modern society. Also, should they always be kept underdeveloped so that anthropologists and tourists may ask questions and take pictures?

Since there are very few San left in Botswana (and their numbers are rapidly declining) for whom hunting/fishing-gathering has until recently been the main source of livelihood, there is a clear need to bring in supplementary arguments to support their cause. One such argument is 'health' — or in their terms, what makes a 'good life.' The San concept of 'health' is first and foremost based on people's *knowledge* of the land and their *feeling of belongingness* to it. Such a feeling implies a sense of coherence which, according to Antonovsky (1979), is an essential prerequisite for health. The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable. For the San, radical change, partly brought upon by force, destabilizes their sense of coherence and thereby imposes a threat to their health. Giddens (1991) has introduced another concept that may contribute to the understanding of the land loss/ health loss phenomenon: ontological security, a sense of continuity and order in events. Ontological security is necessary in order to cope with daily life and prevent chaos. When a sense of continuity and predictability is broken, as for the San, people perceive themselves to be in a high-risk situation, which raises uncertainty and fear.

We have demonstrated that loss of land has led to loss of personal and political self. Cultural self, however, seems to be the last stronghold. This is reflected in our informants' answers to questions concerning what values the San hold in high esteem and would like their children and grandchildren to carry into the future. Traditional songs, ritual dances, moral values such as sharing and consensus making, and skills and knowledge related to gathering and hunting are the most prevalent responses.

By recognizing the need to keep (and protect) a sense of coherence during the transformation of the San into 'modern' Batswana citizens (which is what the government wants), one could argue for the need to retain a close link to the land of their ancestors. This is no longer so much for the purpose of hunting/fishing-gathering, but rather to enable them to comply with basic values and thereby obtain

'health' in the widest sense of the word — a good life. Such an argument could be compared to the tribal land to which all the Tswana groups belong and have rights, regardless of whether or not they actually use it for subsistence. Such a feeling of belongingness to the CKGR is clearly expressed by most of our informants, even by those who have not been removed from the CKGR and by fourth-generation farm workers in the Ghanzi area who no longer remember for certain where their ancestors used to hunt and gather. Holding such values strengthens the San's mental and physical health, while the loss of such values leads to the illnesses of 'development' (TB, AIDS, alcoholism) and a feeling of being 'nothing.'

The experiences of other indigenous peoples, such as the Aborigines and Native Americans, indicate that land rights and self-determination are fundamental to the cultural and medical survival of these populations (Durie 2003, Chavkin and Wise 2002). The social-medical prospects for the San appear to be gloomy. There are, however, seeds of hope and health in the Kalahari. A man in his 50s, deeply depressed by the CKGR relocation project, nevertheless proudly states "*We are still dancing, and it will never end*." By admitting the San certain land rights, the government of Botswana can bring the healing dance to a happy end.

NOTES

1) The study was done as part of a NORAD supported collaboration between the Research Unit, Ministry of Health, Botswana and the Department of General Practice and Community Medicine, University of Oslo, Norway. The point of view presented in this paper is, however, the sole responsibility of the authors.
2) The so-called River Bushmen.
3) One such field inside the reserve borders, in Gope, was later recognized officially.
4) Some of these people were later arrested and the cars confiscated on the grounds that they had been driving without a license.
5) Led by an outside NGO, Survival International (SI).
6) The languages were Naro, !Kung, Ju!hansi, BugaKhwe and AniKhwe.
7) 'Talking by heart' is a metaphor for being depressed.

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