

Journal
of
Namibian Studies

History, Politics, Culture

20

Otjivanda Presse.Essen

Who owns education? Schooling, learning and livelihood for the Nyae Nyae Ju | 'hoansi

Jennifer Hays*

Abstract

The Ju |'hoansi are one of the linguistic and cultural groups in southern Africa known collectively as the San. Like other indigenous groups, they have very low enrollment rates in the formal education system. This article describes one attempt to address these issues for the Ju |'hoansi: The Nyae Nyae Village Schools, in which children are educated in Ju |'hoansi language and live with their families for three years. However, despite these efforts, the Village Schools students drop out when they transfer to the mainstream education system in the fourth year. This article discusses three theoretical approaches to indigenous education and the problems faced by Ju |'hoan students in the public schools that they join after their first three years of schooling. Based on 18 years of research on the Village Schools, and the educational dynamics for marginalized groups in southern Africa, this article argues that the Ju |'hoansi express pedagogically sound opinions about the way forward for their education and development, and they make strategic decisions based on realistic economic options available to them.

Introduction

There is no specific word for 'teacher' in the language Ju |'hoansi.¹ As in many languages the words for 'teach' and 'learn' share the same root: *nxaro*. The word *kxao* means 'owner' – in the sense of having both a right to something, and responsibility for

* Jennifer Hays is an Associate Professor in Social Anthropology at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. She has been working with San education and indigenous rights issues in southern Africa since 1998, both as an academic researcher and as a consultant and coordinator for government and non-government organizations in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. E-Mail: jennifer.hays@uit.no

A similar version of this article was published in French, in the journal *Cahiers des la Recherche sur l'Éducation et les Savoirs* under the title "À qui appartient l'éducation ? Les Écoles de village et les Ju |'hoansi de Nyae Nyae, Namibie" (2016, 15, pp. 27-51). I would like to thank the editors of that issue, Marie Salaün and Bruno Baronnet, and an anonymous reviewer for comments which improved this article. Others who have provided comments or information include Megan Bieseles, Melissa Heckler, Sidsel Saugestad and Velina Ninkova. I of course take full responsibility for the content of the article. Research on which this article is based were supported in part by the European Research Council project SOGIP (ERC 249236), directed by Irène Bellier at EHESS in Paris, France, and by UiT The Arctic University of Norway, in Tromsø.

¹ The vertical line | represents the dental click sound, made with the tongue against the back of the upper teeth (similar to "tsk"). Ju |'hoansi is the name the people use for themselves and their language; Ju |'hoan is the corresponding adjective.

it. The word the Ju|'hoansi use today for 'school teacher' is *nxarokxao* which translates directly as 'owner of learning'. The concept of 'ownership' is very salient today in the world of development practice; 'community ownership' of projects – including education – is considered the key to sustainability. But what does this mean, in practice? How does a marginalized community 'own' their education processes?

The Ju|'hoansi are one of a number of linguistic and cultural groupings in southern Africa who are known collectively as San.² Throughout southern Africa, the San are generally considered to be the original inhabitants of the region. Formerly hunters and gatherers, today they live primarily in small, scattered settlements in remote areas, as squatters on the fringes of urban areas, or as farm workers. Residing mostly in Botswana and Namibia (with smaller numbers in South Africa, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe), the San participate only marginally in national politics and the cash economy. While other groups in southern Africa have also experienced dispossession and violence, and some remain economically, politically, and socially marginalized, the San are at the very bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy across the region.³ One of the most important aspects of their marginalization is educational. Across the southern African region, the San participate in the formal education systems at far lower rates than other ethnic groups, and the vast majority stop going to school before receiving qualifications. In Namibia, where the case study described in this article is located, Ministry of Education statistics consistently indicate that San enrolment in formal education is far below the national average and that the numbers decline sharply in the higher grades.⁴

The reasons for this extreme educational marginalization – which is directly linked to political, economic, and social exclusion – are numerous and intertwined. They include a lack of mother tongue education for San communities, severe social stigma, poverty, cultural differences between home and school, and unfriendly and poorly-equipped schools and hostels. This paper will examine one effort to address some of these issues: the Nyae Nyae Village Schools. The Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi are fortunate to have a much greater degree of autonomy than most other San – they are the only group today which has access to and control over part of their original territory, in the form of a wildlife

² They are also sometimes called 'Bushmen' or in Botswana, 'Basarwa'. All of these terms are 'outside' labels and none is better or worse than any other. In this paper I use the term 'San' when referring to the over-arching group. In general people prefer to use their own group names where possible, and here I use the term 'Ju|'hoansi' whenever referring to this language group.

³ James Suzman, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia. Vol. 4: Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa*, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2001; Ute Dieckmann, Maarit Thiern, Eric Dirx and Jennifer Hays, *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014.

⁴ For example 2010 survey found that San students attended at a rate of 67% in the lower primary phase (Grades 1-3); 22% in the upper primary phase (Grades 4-7); 6% in the junior secondary phase (Grades 8-9); and less than 1% in the senior secondary phase (Grades 11-12) (Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), *Education Statistics 2008*, Ministry of Education and Culture, Windhoek, 2009:40; see also Laurentius Davids, "San Language Development for Education in Namibia: Progress and Challenges", *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 5 (2), 2011: 126-134 (127).

conservancy and community forest.⁵ In several villages,⁶ children in grades 1 to 3 are taught in the Ju|'hoansi language, and they stay in their home villages or with relatives. This mother-tongue educational initiative has received a great deal of attention, but nonetheless, after 25 years, children from the Village Schools still do not complete their education in the mainstream government school, to which they transfer in grade 4. Why not? How this question is answered, and which reason is made central to the explanation, depends on the perspective from which one begins. This paper will look at three major theoretical approaches to indigenous education and examine how they are 'in play' in the discourses surrounding the Village Schools and the difficulties that the Ju|'hoansi students have in the mainstream government schools.

The data and arguments presented here are based on research with the Nyae Nyae community in particular, and on San educational issues in southern Africa in general, over a period of 18 years. I visited Nyae Nyae for the first time in 1998, and in 2001 – 2002 I spent a year conducting anthropological field work with the Ju|'hoansi, focusing in particular on the educational choices that the Ju|'hoansi were making as individuals and as a community. After receiving my PhD in 2007, I continued to visit the Nyae Nyae on a yearly basis, and in 2010, I was asked to lead an evaluation of the San Education Programme for NAMAS, which was supporting the education ministry in running the Village Schools.⁷ In 2011 I worked with a team of researchers from the Legal Assistance Centre in Windhoek, on a national study of the San and their access to livelihood options;⁸ this included research in Nyae Nyae as one of the major field sites. In addition to this work with the Nyae Nyae community specifically, since 1999 I have worked as a short- and long-term consultant for a number of local and international organizations on education and indigenous rights issues in Botswana and Namibia. The arguments that I am making in this article are informed by long-term ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, participant observation, meeting attendance, document study, media reports, and practical collaborative efforts with NGOs, government and communities in southern Africa.⁹

⁵ In Namibia, a 'conservancy' allows for control over the wildlife resources in the area; a 'community forest' allows for control over plant resources.

⁶ The number of village schools has fluctuated. There were originally three schools, this number later increased to five, and currently there are six. Schools periodically close and reopen depending upon water and food availability, movements of elephants, and other factors.

⁷ Jennifer Hays, Rodney Hopson and Willemien le Roux, *Evaluation of the Namias-Supported San Education Project in Tsumkwe, Otjozondjupa, Namibia*, Evaluation for Namibiaforeningen (Namibia Association of Norway/NAMAS), 2010.

⁸ Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot*.

⁹ See Jennifer Hays, *Owners of Learning: The Nyae Nyae Village Schools over Twenty-Five Years*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016.

Approaches to indigenous education

The experiences of the Ju|'hoansi and other San are by no means unique – patterns of indigenous exclusion from education systems are the subject of a large body of literature. Research-based explanations over the past several decades for indigenous peoples' dismal success rates within mainstream formal education can be divided into three general strands. The dominant approach in the mid-20th century assumed that school failure among indigenous and other minorities was the result of cultural deprivation – the blame was deflected from the school environment and placed on the 'deficient' and 'impoverished' culture and home life of the students. In reaction to this trend, the approach of cultural discontinuity promoted the understanding that indigenous children starting school are equipped with the foundations of language(s), culture(s), values, skills and knowledge learned from their home communities, which differ significantly from the learning elements of the mainstream schools.¹⁰ This perspective recognizes these cultural foundations as legitimate, valuable in their own right, and as disadvantaged in mainstream systems – which almost invariably reflect the communicational cultures and value systems of more powerful groups. In southern Africa, these include locally dominant ethnic groups, and European colonizers.

An emphasis on cultural discontinuity prioritizes micro-level interactions between students and their families, on the one hand, and 'the school' on the other. While describing an important aspect of the problem, cultural explanations do not provide a full answer to the questions surrounding the indigenous students' persistent low level of performance in schools. Structural inequality theories take a macro-level approach, examining broader social patterns. Many different possible angles are subsumed within this label. Terry Huffman identifies three basic assumptions underlying structural inequality approaches, all of which are relevant to the case described here: first, that the challenges faced by indigenous peoples are the result of "historically produced social structural conditions"; second that the educational institutions reflect and reproduce the power relations in society at large; and finally that indigenous peoples and other

¹⁰ See e.g. Murray L. Wax, Rosalie H. Wax and Robert V. Dumont, *Formal Education in an American Indian Community: Peer Society and the Failure of Minority Education*, Prospect Heights, Waveland Press, 1964; Courtney Cazden, "Problems for Education: Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment", *Daedalus, Language as a Human Problem*, 102 (3), 1973: 135-148; Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974; idem, "Speech and language: On the origins and foundations of inequality among speakers", in: Dell Hymes, *Language in Education: Ethnolinguistic Essays*, Washington, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1980, 19-61; Henry Trueba, Grace Pung Guthrie and Kathryn Hu-Pei Au, (eds.), *Culture and the Bilingual Classroom: Studies in Classroom Ethnography*, Rowley, Newbury House Publishers, 1981; Frederick Erickson and Gerald Mohatt, "Cultural organization of participation structures in two classrooms of Indian students", in: George Spindler, (ed.), *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982: 132-174; Susan Philips, *The Invisible Culture: Communication and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*, New York, Longman, 1983; Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

minorities are actively making decisions, and resisting the processes of marginalization that are being replicated in the school system.¹¹

All of these approaches are currently 'in play' in various efforts to explain and address the problem of 'drop outs' in the Nyae Nyae community. Regardless of which perspective one might adopt as a researcher, a full understanding of the situation requires a consideration of the various ways in which all of these perspectives interact and influence decision-making processes. This is particularly true for a community that has had such a disproportionate amount of external attention from researchers, activists, government officials, and development workers. It should be noted that, although cultural deprivation theories are virtually nonexistent today in academic literature on indigenous education issues, they did not disappear so quickly from the public discourses surrounding San education, and in this particular case, Ju|'hoansi education. The sections below provides a brief background of the people, the area and the Nyae Nyae Village Schools project, before going on to take a brief look in turn at each of these approaches to education in the Nyae Nyae area.

Background and context

The Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi live in northwestern Namibia, in what is now the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. Previously known in anthropological literature as the *!Kung*, the Ju|'hoansi are among the longest residing ethnic groups within Namibia. Archaeological evidence in the general region indicates habitation at least 4,000 years ago by the same cultural group;¹² genetic, historical and oral-historical evidence all support this time depth estimate. Ethnically, linguistically, genetically and culturally distinct from their Bantu neighbours, the Ju|'hoansi of Nyae Nyae were living primarily as hunters and gatherers up to the middle of the 20th century.¹³

¹¹ Terry Huffman, *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap*, Lanham, Altamira Press, 2010: 73.

¹² Andrew B. Smith, "Ethnohistory and Archaeology of the Ju|'hoansi Bushmen", *African Study Monographs*, Supplement 26, 2001: 15-25.

¹³ The famous Kalahari Debate, which revolves around the question of whether the San in the Kalahari who were contacted by the early researchers lived as relatively isolated, autonomous groups before contact with outsiders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or whether they had been in subservient relationships with outsiders since the time of the Bantu migrations to the south a millennium or two ago. This has been thoroughly debated in the literature (Edwin N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989; Jacqueline S. Solway and Richard B. Lee, "Foragers, Genuine or Spurious? Situating the Kalahari San in History", *Current Anthropology*, 31 (2), 1990: 109-146; Richard B. Lee and Mathias Guenther, "Oxen or Onions: The Search for Trade (and Truth) in the Kalahari", *Current Anthropology*, 32 (5), 1991:592-601) and the general consensus is that San communities and individuals occupied a variety of environmental and social niches long before European contact, and that they continue to do so (Richard B. Lee and Robert K. Hitchcock, "African Hunters and Gatherers: History and the Politics of Ethnicity", in: Graham Connah, (ed.), *Transformations in Africa: Essays on Africa's Later Past*, London, Leicester University Press, 1998: 14-45; Robert Gordon and Stuart Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, 2nd edition, Boulder, Westview Press,

Over the past half-century the Ju|'hoansi have experienced extensive attention from anthropologists, development workers, missionaries, and the representatives of two national governments. Under colonial South African rule (1922–1990, as South West Africa) the government implemented an apartheid system and established 'Bushmanland,' which included what is today the Nyae Nyae area. From 1966 the South West Africa Peoples Organization (SWAPO) fought a guerilla war for independence. The colonial army established a military base in Tsumkwe, incorporating the Ju|'hoansi into their bush war against SWAPO, and making efforts to settle them. They encouraged people to move from their remote territories to the town by distributing food and providing other services (including a school). Recognizing the devastating social and health consequences of this move, the anthropologists and development workers involved helped the community to form the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (NNFC)¹⁴ and to move back to their territories, or *Inoresi* in Ju|'hoansi.¹⁵

The pre-independence school in Tsumkwe was primarily staffed by military personnel. As was the case with most schools for non-whites during the apartheid era, the educational philosophy relied upon rote learning and corporal punishment, and the content was often irrelevant to the learners. Unlike what was done with many Bantu languages, however, no effort was made to incorporate the Ju|'hoansi language or to provide a bridge to the language of instruction – which was Afrikaans. At that time, there were no other educational options. Attendance of Ju|'hoan children at the government school in Tsumkwe was low and inconsistent, and almost all children who did begin school dropped out, citing physical abuse and poor conditions at the hostel and school; most long before attaining any certificates.¹⁶

Independence was achieved in 1990, the country was renamed Namibia, and English became the official language. The new independent Namibian government was committed to reforming the education system. Corporal punishment, which had been common, was outlawed immediately, and some progressive educational ideology was introduced both by returning exiles and expatriate consultants, including concepts such as 'cooperative learning' and 'learner-centered classrooms', which influenced approaches to teacher training in the new Namibia. Mother tongue education was also prioritized. As a result of linguistic work sponsored by the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative, a Ju|'hoansi

2000; Mathias Guenther *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ It was first named the Ju-Wa Bushman Development Fund, and later changed to the NNFC.

¹⁵ For more background on this history see Megan Biesele and Robert K. Hitchcock, *The Ju|'hoan San of Nyae Nyae and Namibian Independence: Development, Democracy and Indigenous Voices in Southern Africa*, New York, Berghan, 2011, and Gordon and Sholto-Douglas, *Bushman Myth*.

¹⁶ Ulla Kann, *Where the Sand is the Book: Education for everyone in the Nyae Nyae area*, Consultancy report for the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation in Namibia (NNDNF) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), 1991; Joachim F. Pfaffe, "Educational Psychology and the Psychology of Marginalized Peoples: The Village Schools Project", *School Psychology International*, 16, 1995: 43-58. 1995.

orthography was ready for development by Namibian independence in 1990.¹⁷ This preparation, combined with the new government's commitment to mother-tongue education during the first three years of school, resulted in the acceptance of the Ju|'hoansi language under the Namibian Basic Educational Reform Programme (BERP) as the medium for a pilot project in curriculum development for five years (1991–1996). A number of researchers and educationalists contributed to the early design and implementation of this mother-tongue education project, called the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project.¹⁸

Individuals working within the government also found ways to promote flexible alternative approaches, while still remaining within national policy – something that required careful navigating in the post-apartheid political terrain.¹⁹ Although the Ministry accepted the educational logic of mother-tongue education, and was enthusiastic about including a San language in the BERP, they were also wary of a project that might appear to be providing 'special' or 'separate' education. Separate education, in which non-whites were denied access to quality schools and education in English, was one of the cornerstones of the apartheid system. In newly independent Namibia, as in post-apartheid South Africa during the same era, it was important that neither the goal, nor the result, of an education project be perceived as isolating a particular ethnic group, or providing inferior education. This concern is evident in Ulla Kann's emphatic statement in her initial consultancy report for the Village Schools; the first point under the section heading "Link with the Ministry of Education and Culture" reads:

The intent is to prepare the Ju|'hoan children and adults for participation in the national education system. The intention is *not* to develop a separate education system for the Ju|'hoansi.²⁰

It was decided early on that the education ministry should ultimately take over the project, to ensure long-term financial sustainability. Education is generally considered the responsibility of the state, and donors will usually not fund education projects indefinitely. Participation in the mainstream system had to be a central goal in order for

¹⁷ Patrick Dickens, *English Ju|'hoan, Ju|'hoan English Dictionary*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation, 1992; idem, *Ju|'hoan Grammar*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation, 1992; idem, *A Concise Grammar of Ju|'hoan with a Ju|'hoan-English glossary and a Subject Index*, Köln, Köppe, 2005.

¹⁸ See Kann, *Sand is the Book*; Megan Biesele, *Texts for Self-Literacy in Nation-Building: Ju|'hoan Curriculum Consultancy Report*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1992; idem, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju|'hoan*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993; Melissa Heckler, *Oh Place Where we have Played, Stay Well: An Indigenous Village Learning Environment. Report on 1990 Pre-school Pilot Project*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1992; idem, *Ju|'hoansi Literacy Report*, Report submitted to the Kalahari Peoples Fund, 2002; Pfaffe, "Educational Psychology"; Magdalena Brörmann, *The Village Schools Project in Nyae Nyae, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia. Annual Reports*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1993-1994.

¹⁹ Roger Avenstrup and Patti Swarts, 1999. "Towards Equitable Diversity in Education: Move Towards a Paradigm Shift", in: Wim Hoppers, Jeanne Moulton and Amina Osman, (eds.), *The Dynamics of Non-Formal Education, Volume II*, Johannesburg, ADEA Working Group on Non-Formal Education, 1999: 1-13.

²⁰ Kann, *Sand is the Book*: 25 (emphasis in original).

the project to be accepted by the new government – this included both the transition of the students to the government schools, and the ultimate transfer of responsibility for the project to the ministry. It also meant having certified teachers at the schools. Given the low formal qualifications of Ju|'hoansi community, the task of training Ju|'hoansi teachers in order to have mother tongue instruction was extremely complex. Key individuals at the Ministry of education recognized this, and the “Task Force for Teacher Education Reform” worked out how cultural competencies, educational background and teaching experience of Ju|'hoan teacher trainees could be evaluated in order for them to be considered equivalent to the national entry level requirements for teacher training.²¹ This accommodation by the government, combined with the linguistic and anthropological work that had already been done, and the existence of a community cooperative, allowed for the creation of an innovative mother tongue education project for a hunter-gatherer community. The project was, and still is, unique in southern Africa.

The Nyae Nyae Village Schools 1990 – 2015

The initial vision of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project (VSP), was to build on the holistic approach to education that already existed in the Ju|'hoan community, in order to help the pupils access ‘modern’ skills. A major focus of the Village Schools was on providing schooling closer to home which would incorporate the language, knowledge and skills from Ju|'hoan communities, *and* which ultimately would prepare children to be successful in the government schools. Emphasis is on increasing the self-confidence of both learners and the communities so that Ju|'hoan children can enter the local English-medium government school (Tsumkwe Junior Secondary School, TJSS) in Grade 4 with the basic skills necessary to succeed there, and a firm grounding in their own culture. The ‘cardinal objectives’ of the Village Schools Project, as described in early annual reports and other documentation are: (1) To use Ju|'hoansi language as the medium of instruction; (2) To train Ju|'hoan teachers as educators of their own people; (3) To develop a relevant curriculum and curricular material in consultation with communities; (4) To continue building school facilities close to villages so that the young learners can learn and live in a familiar environment during their first three school years; and (5) To enable Ju|'hoan children to attend government schools in Grade 4 as confident and critically-thinking learners.²² Since the beginning of the project, there has been an emphasis on the last objective: entry into the government schools in Grade 4. In the post-apartheid social and political environment the desire for equal access to education and for students to integrate into the mainstream system outweighed arguments for education in their own communities beyond three years.

²¹ Patti Swarts and Roger Avenstrup, *Report on Preliminary Survey of Education for Bushman-Speaking Learners*, Windhoek, Namibian Institute for Educational Development (NIED), 1995; see also Hays, *Owners of Learning*.

²² Brörmann, *Village Schools Project*.

Initially the project was funded by a variety of government donors; responsibility for administering the funds and the project was with the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, a non-government organization based in the capital city, Windhoek. In 2004, the Village Schools Project was taken over by the government, and the Village Schools (no longer a project) became government schools. However, these schools – located far from a town, staffed by (still) uncertified teachers, and using a language that was not fully developed for educational purposes – were very different from other government schools, and the Namibian Ministry of Education recognized that administering them would be a challenge. The Norwegian organization *Nambiaforeningen*, known as NAMAS (Namibia Association of Norway) agreed to support the government in their running of the schools. Training and salaries of the teachers were provided by the government, and NAMAS provided technical support to the ministry, the teachers, and the principal – and continues to do so at the time of writing.²³

It became apparent early on that the transition of students to the government schools was problematic. Although many learners attended the Village Schools (the numbers have generally ranged from about 95 to 190 over the years), the Ju|'hoansi learners from the Village Schools generally do not complete their education at the central government school in Tsumkwe. For many years, up to 70 children from the Village Schools have registered for grade four in Tsumkwe at the beginning of each school year. By the end of the school year, few of them have been left, and only a handful of students register for grade 5. No Village School student has yet completed a grade past 7.²⁴

From the perspective of outsiders observing or involved with the project, including government officials, donors, evaluators, and others, the fact that Village Schools students do not make the transition to the government schools well is often seen as a failure on the part of the Village Schools Project.²⁵ The teachers receive much of the blame for this. This paper does not describe in detail the situation of the Village Schools teachers, which is complicated in a number of ways: none of the Ju|'hoan teachers have achieved the formal qualifications required by the government to be employed as a teacher in Namibia; they are in a difficult social position vis-à-vis their communities; there has often been a lack of logistical support for them, including method of payment, transportation, and coordination of their schedules.²⁶ Many have continued to work as teachers, despite the pressure and the complications.

²³ For a more detailed description of the transition to the Ministry of education and NAMAS' role see Hays et al., *Evaluation*, and Hays, *Owners of Learning*.

²⁴ Bruce Parcher, pers. comm. The (very) few Ju|'hoansi who have made it to secondary school (which starts in grade 8), began their school career in the government school in Tsumkwe or elsewhere – not in the Ju|'hoansi-language Village Schools.

²⁵ See e.g. Joachim F. Pfaffe, *Field Study on the Actual Situation Regarding the Teaching and Learning Environment of Ju|'hoan communities in Tsumkwe and Gobabis Districts, Namibia: Report on a Short-Term Consultancy from 06-27 July 2001*, GTZ Project Report, 2001.

²⁶ See Hays, *Owners of Learning*.

Although the communities do often complain about difficulties with the teachers, the overwhelming majority of complaints from both children and adults in the Ju|'hoan community are *not* about the Village Schools; they concern the government school in Tsumkwe. Moreover, these complaints have remained remarkably consistent in my research, in formal interviews and casual conversations, observations of meetings, and other fieldwork over the years. The following section provides an overview of the relationship between the villages and the town of Tsumkwe, which is crucial for understanding the dynamics of the children's transition from the village schools to the mainstream government school in Tsumkwe.

The villages and Tsumkwe town

Tsumkwe town, located at the centre of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, has an estimated population of 2000; roughly the same number of people live in about 35 scattered villages within the Conservancy borders (see map 1). All of the Conservancy members, and the vast majority of village residents, are Ju|'hoansi. Only conservancy members and their dependents are allowed to live in the conservancy itself, outside of the Tsumkwe municipality – which is not technically part of the Conservancy. Tsumkwe town is the location of all the shops in the area and many small informal businesses, the health clinic, the police station, a tourist lodge, a number of churches, all government offices (including the Traditional Authority, or TA²⁷), the Nyae Nyae Conservancy offices, and the government schools: Tsumkwe Primary School, (grades 1-7) and Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School (TISS; grades 8-12). At least half of the residents of Tsumkwe are non-Ju|'hoansi, and include government employees (at the school, clinic, police station, and government offices), development workers, religious leaders, and people from neighbouring areas who have set up small businesses in the town, selling products that they make, grow or procure from other areas and bigger towns.²⁸ These small businesses include the unofficial drinking places known as *shebeens*, which are seen as very problematic by Ju|'hoansi and non- Ju|'hoansi alike.²⁹ Tsumkwe is the seat of economic and political activity in Nyae Nyae, and there is a regular flow of people circulating between the villages and the town. Villagers often come to Tsumkwe to engage in

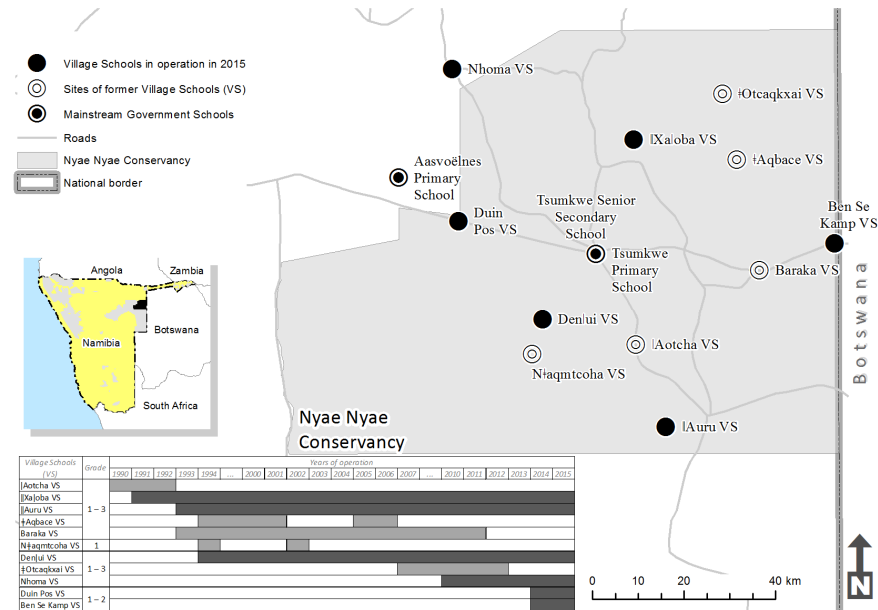
²⁷ The Traditional Authority (TA) is a local leadership structure that is officially recognized by the government. The Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi have their own TA, including a leader or 'chief' recognized by the government. There are 4 other San groups in Namibia who have such leaders. See Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot*, for more information about the structure and the Ju|'hoansi TA.

²⁸ Gaining accurate statistics about this is extremely difficult, primarily because of the difficulty distinguishing between a 'resident' of Tsumkwe and a 'visitor' (Richard B. Lee, personal communication, 21 March 2015). A general rough estimate is that about half of the Tsumkwe population at any given time is Ju|'hoansi; however this fluctuates greatly depending on food availability, the movements of animals, the numbers of children at the school, and other factors.

²⁹ Polly Wiessner, "Owners of the Future? Calories, Cash, Casualties and Self-Sufficiency in the Nyae Nyae Area Between 1996 and 2003", *Visual Anthropology Review*, 19 (1-2), 2004:149-159; Biesele and Hitchcock, *Ju|'hoan San*; Lee, *Dobe Ju|'hoansi*.

financial transactions – shopping, selling their crafts, or collecting (and spending) their pension money.

Map 1: Village Schools in Nyae Nyae Conservancy



Other than those at the Conservancy offices and the TA, which employ only Ju|'hoansi, virtually all of the official positions of authority, influence, or economic power reside with non- Ju|'hoansi. Some Ju|'hoansi are employed in town as tour guides, shop assistants, cleaners, or in other positions. One Ju|'hoansi woman is employed at the school hostel as a matron, but all of the other positions at the school are non- Ju|'hoansi. These employees live in Tsumkwe and support as many relatives as they can with their salaries. Others come to town to engage in 'piece work'³⁰ or selling handicrafts for cash, usually to buy food at the shops in times where bush food is scarce.

Recent surveys focusing on food security, economic options, political involvement and social support networks have consistently found that the Ju|'hoansi: have greater food security in the villages than in Tsumkwe; *also* depend on government food rations and store-bought food available in Tsumkwe (bush food cannot meet all dietary needs); are socially and economically marginalized within the town; and overwhelmingly state that they prefer life in the villages and choose to live there if they are able to.³¹ These

³⁰ One-time small jobs performed in exchange for a small fee.

³¹ Lee, *Dobe Ju|'hoansi*; Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot*. In Lee's 2010 survey, 95 out of 98 Ju|'hoansi clearly stated that life was better 'in the bush' (Lee, *Dobe Ju|'hoansi*: 224).

findings closely match my own over the years. Ju|'hoansi – especially those who are not employed in Tsumkwe – consistently express the sentiment that one is more vulnerable in the town because of the need for cash, the dearth of bush foods around the town, problematic relations with other residents of Tsumkwe, and the presence of shebeens. Although those who are employed in Tsumkwe have fewer problems, most people say they prefer to live in the villages.

Traditional skills, such as hunting, tracking, gathering, and healing, and the associated knowledge are still in general use, and are transmitted from generation to generation. These are valuable today as marketable skills, and a direct subsistence technique. In a few villages, there are tourism projects – some community owned and some connected to larger tourism ventures – which allow people to earn some money while staying in their own village, by demonstrating their traditional hunting and gathering skills. Some individuals are also employed as trackers by trophy hunters who buy the right to hunt animals within the Conservancy.³² One of the most consistent sources of income is the gathering of medicinal plants that are purchased by companies who export them to Europe.³³ When asked whether traditional skills are important, a very consistent reply is, yes: “because it is our culture, and because we get food from it”.³⁴ This economic value of hunting and gathering skills in the Nyae Nyae community is central to understanding people's educational choices – a point to which I will return at the end of the paper.

The economic and social tensions between the villages and the town, described above, are also central to understanding the relationship between the Village Schools and the Tsumkwe schools. Although early training of the Village Schools teachers emphasized the value of, and made efforts to build upon, traditional Ju|'hoan education and culture,³⁵ comparable efforts have never been made at the government school in Tsumkwe to sensitize the teachers there to the different learning styles of the students, or to their culture in general. As the responsibility for the Village Schools passed to the government the cultural element received far less emphasis in the mainstream teacher training programme.

In summary, today, in the Village Schools, learners are attending classes in a Ju|'hoan environment – their fellow students, the community in which it is embedded, and the teachers are all Ju|'hoansi (or in the case of the teachers, at least speak the language). This option is only available for three years, however. In order to continue with schooling in grade four, children must move to Tsumkwe, where they are among many other ethnic groups. These other groups enjoy a higher social status than the Ju|'hoansi, whose culture is heavily stigmatized among the mainstream population. Most Ju|'hoansi children find it very difficult to cope with this shift from a safe, accepting home environment

³² The Conservancy is allowed to sell a specific quota of game animals to trophy hunters each year.

³³ In particular Devils Claw, used for arthritis.

³⁴ Fieldnotes, October 2011.

³⁵ Biesele, *Texts for Self-Literacy*; Magdalena Brörmann, *Quarterly reports on the Village Schools Project in the Nyae Nyae area*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1991-1993.

to an often hostile school and hostel environment, where bullying, beating, and theft are reported to be commonplace, and almost all of the children leave before the end of their first year at the school.

The project has experienced a number of changes over the past 25 years, in particular in the support structure for the Village Schools, and related shifts in emphasis and approach to teacher training. Changes in key outside individuals (employed by the NGOs involved) have also meant changes in overall philosophy and approach to the situation at various intervals over the years.³⁶ Appearing as a constant theme throughout the life of the project, however, is the consistent failure of children to continue their education at Tsumkwe school. The following quote of a Ju |'hoansi father summarizes the problem, and comments on the difference between the situation today and that prior to Independence (when he was growing up). He also relates schooling to employment:

Those years, the problem was that people didn't want us to attend school, only to work. Now we are supposed to attend school, and there is no work. But there are also so many problems with the school, and our children keep dropping out. What can we do?³⁷

This sentiment 'What can we do?' was constantly repeated in interviews I have conducted over the past 15 years. The Ju |'hoansi express a desire for improved access to education – for very many reasons. The government also expresses a desire for them to remain in school up to higher levels. Several NGOs have supported this effort, which has also been the focus of attention from researchers, media, and others. How could all of this attention, and collective desire, for improved educational access on the part of so many stakeholders not be successful? The remainder of this paper explores answers to this question, employing the different theoretical frameworks described above to compare the varying perspectives among different stakeholders about the root causes of the problems – and how they should be approached.

“They have no rules”

[T]hey are not used to rules. They have no rules and then they come to the hostel and they find there are rules about when they have to go to sleep and get up, when they can eat [...] they are not used to this and it makes them feel like they are in jail.³⁸

The most dominant responses by government officials that I have interviewed over the years as to what barriers the San face in the education system is that the parents 'do not understand the value of education' and do not force their children to go to school; this is connected to a general lack of discipline. The former principal of Tsumkwe Primary School (2006–2014) provides an example. In interviews in 2010³⁹ and 2011⁴⁰

³⁶ See Hays, *Owners of Learning* (2016) for a full description.

³⁷ Fieldnotes, April 26 2002

³⁸ Tsumkwe Primary School principal, interview July 2010.

³⁹ For an evaluation of the NAMAS San Education Programme; Hays et al., *Evaluation*.

I asked him why he thought the Village Schools Learners were leaving Tsumkwe school. Both times, he provided me with a long list of reasons. In particular, the principal emphasized the lack of structure that the children experience in their villages, as illustrated in the quote above. When I asked him in 2011 about complaints we had received from children that they were being beaten or being ill-treated at the school or hostel, he said:

[T]hey are not used to being told 'do this, do that' and they don't want to be treated like the others, they want to be treated special. If they don't do their homework, they are supposed to get punished, but the Village School kids, they don't like being punished.⁴¹

He also blamed the Ju|'hoansi Village Schools teachers, for not teaching consistently or giving the children enough homework; they were not strict enough, and were characterized as lazy and unqualified. The parents received a good portion of the blame as well, for being "difficult to contact" and not encouraging their children to come to the school – a common discourse among school officials responsible for San education throughout the region. The learners were said to find it difficult to interact with other children at the school; "they don't adapt to the environment." The age of the Ju|'hoansi students was also identified as a problem; the principal said they sometimes started in grade four when they were 17 or 18 years old.

None of the reasons given by the Principal indicated that there were problems at the Tsumkwe Primary School itself; the reasons were located firmly with the Ju|'hoansi and their communities: the Ju|'hoan teachers, the attitude of the parents, problematic aspects of the culture and undesirable effects on the children. These are all reasons that are commonly cited by others in positions of authority as explanations for why the Ju|'hoansi children drop out of school. According to this perspective, where there is a change to be made, it is generally supposed to take place within the home culture of the student (which includes the Village Schools), not at the school in Tsumkwe.

The principal's responses include the recognition that cultural difference makes adaptation difficult, and that structural issues such as poverty and social stigma affect children's school participation. He noted, for example, that the children do not have school uniforms, and may be embarrassed to attend school in clothes that are dirty or torn. He also said that they are sometimes perceived as "backwards" by others in the town because they do not have cell phones and TV in their villages; he said this lack and the resultant bullying interfered with their "adaptation process". What makes his perspective representative of the cultural deficiency approach, however, is that ultimately the blame – and the focus of finding a solution – is squarely on the community itself. The Ju|'hoansi are the ones who are lacking, and who must adapt.

⁴⁰ For a regional study on San livelihoods; Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot*.

⁴¹ It is worth noting that this principal was fired in 2014 following accusations of abuse. The previous principal, a woman, was also fired because of misconduct. Although it is not official practice, it is commonly believed by both school employees and others that the principals and teachers assigned to Tsumkwe schools were those who were being 'punished' for bad behavior elsewhere.

When asked what he thought would improve the Village Schools pupils' attendance at Tsumkwe, the principal proposed first the provision of school uniforms.⁴² But he put the primary responsibility on the Village Schools teachers, saying that they must enforce rules "so that the learners know what they are going to be exposed to at Tsumkwe." The parents must be "made aware that it is important for the learners to study and become educated", and they must support their children. Finally, he suggested, the age of entry must be restricted at the primary school, which seems like a logical proposition. It is important to recognize, however, that the high age of entry is a *result* of the drop-out rate, rather than a *cause*; furthermore, no alternatives were suggested for the students who are too old but still want to take classes. The only change that he suggested could be made at Tsumkwe Primary School was that the teachers could be more friendly and understanding of the Ju|'hoansi children. He had no suggestion for how this would be done, nor did anything change in the following years.

As the principal of the school where the Village Schools children were supposed to transfer in grade 4, he was the person who was in the position to have the most control over the circumstances that might prevent them from staying at Tsumkwe Primary School – cultural, structural, and logistical – but as this was not where he perceived the root of the problem to be located, no efforts were made at Tsumkwe school to address these concerns.

"The kids' decision"

We want them to go to school, but the kids themselves don't want to. We try to get them to go, but it is the kids' decision.⁴³

It is interesting that the principal's report highlighted the Ju|'hoan youth's resistance to rules, being told what to do, and being punished. The characteristics of autonomy and tolerance of individual will, and lack of punitive discipline, are highlighted throughout the ethnographic literature on the Ju|'hoansi. Beginning with the Kalahari Research Project in the 1950s, the socialization processes, child-rearing approaches, learning and teaching styles among the Ju|'hoansi and other San groups have been a primary or parallel focus of a great deal of research.⁴⁴ This body of research has revealed a

⁴² Although this is often suggested as a solution, the provision of school uniforms has not been a consistent part of the budget at any point over the years. Periodically, ad-hoc contributions have allowed for the purchase of school uniforms, which are used but quickly stolen, lost, exchanged, and worn out. There is no evidence that having a school uniform will solve the many problems associated with attendance at the Tsumkwe schools.

⁴³ Ju|'hoan father and member of the Village Schools Committee, at a community meeting in 2002.

⁴⁴ Including Patricia Draper, *!Kung Bushman Childhood*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, Harvard University, Department of Anthropology, 1972; idem, "Social and Economic Constraints on Child Life among the !Kung", in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de DeVore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 199-217; Melvin J. Konner, "Maternal Care, Infant Behaviour and Development among the !Kung", in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de DeVore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 218-245; Lorna Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976; Mathias Guenther, "From Hunters to Squatters: Social and Cultural Change among the Farm

number of consistent themes including: a general discouragement of competitive and aggressive behaviour; a tolerant child-rearing style that respects individual mood, will, and personality; an absence of physical punishment; and an informal socialization process in which children and adults interact freely.

It is important to acknowledge that the Ju|'hoansi of Nyae Nyae and other San are no longer living the autonomous hunting and gathering lives that were described by early researchers who worked with them from the 1950s to the 1970s. More recent research has found, however, that although the situation for the Ju|'hoansi is rapidly changing (and the behaviour of some is beginning to shift to accommodate this) the deeply held values that maintained social harmony and survival in the past still affect current relationship patterns.⁴⁵ The high level of respect for individual autonomy is one example.

Those who work closely with the Ju|'hoansi (and other San) – including teachers and other government officials, researchers, development workers, and Ju|'hoan community members themselves, often observe that Ju|'hoansi parents practice a much more tolerant – and less punitive – disciplinary style than that of their Bantu or European neighbours. This ‘lack of discipline’ is seen by most school officials (including those like the Principal described in the previous section, and those who are more sympathetic) as reflecting both poor (or lack of) parenting, and a lack of interest in school. The desire of children to be somewhere other than school, is almost never considered to be a legitimate excuse for irregular attendance by outsiders involved in the project. Most non-San argue that this is exactly why they must be forced to go, either by their parents or by the government.

Anthropologists have described the characteristics of Ju|'hoansi culture outlined above as having an internal logic consistent with the groups’ subsistence strategies, knowledge transmission, and social organization. Megan Biesele links the general lack of prescriptive rules for social conduct to the overall preference for “detailed familiarity with the pattern of relationships” rather than generalizations. This is communicated through the countless forms and versions of oral narratives, in which “no one final answer is given to the question of how to behave; rather, the consequences of good and bad choices are delineated in many contexts”.⁴⁶ Mathias Guenther describes a general

San of Ghanzi, Botswana”, in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de DeVore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 120-134; idem, *Tricksters and Trancers*; Richard B. Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979; idem, *Dobe Ju|'hoansi*.

⁴⁵ Melissa Heckler, *Field Notes and Lessons from the Ju|'hoansi of the Kalahari*, unpubl. manuscript, 1991; Megan Biesele, *Eating Crow in the Kalahari: Leveling Lessons Taught by the Ju|'hoan Bushmen to their NGQ*, unpubl. manuscript in possession of author, 1993; Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers*; Willemien Le Roux, *Torn Apart: San Children as Change Agents in a Process of Assimilation*, Windhoek, WIMSA, 2000; idem, *The Challenges of Change: A Tracer Study of San Preschool Children in Botswana*, The Hague, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2002; Jennifer Hays, *Education, Rights and Survival for the Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi: Illuminating Global and Local Discourses*, PhD dissertation, State University of New York, University at Albany, 2007.

⁴⁶ Biesele, *Women Like Meat*: 55.

approach to personality across San cultures that is highly respectful of individual differences and personal autonomy, and suggests that this tolerance is adaptive, as “individualism is allowed free rein in the child so that a wide range of personalities is created across the different families and bands”.⁴⁷

Such approaches are found to be common among small-scale egalitarian groups with foraging lifestyles.⁴⁸ Alan Barnard has argued that the ideology and economic strategy of sharing “persists among part-time and former foragers” and is linked to a variety of other social ideals, including the closely guarded and strongly enforced egalitarianism and respect for autonomy.⁴⁹ These attitudes also apply to children – other than discouraging physical violence and boastful behaviour, attitudes towards children and their behaviour are generally extremely tolerant of individual will, personality, and actions. Guenther suggests that this tolerance contributes to the development of personal autonomy and self-evaluation by internal – rather than external – standards.⁵⁰

I have frequently noted that Ju|'hoan children and adolescents who described themselves as ‘going to school’ may choose not to attend school on a particular day, or for a week or longer. The label ‘drop out’, applied by the school officials and others to students who had begun the school year but stopped attending, is rarely a self-ascription. The sporadic school attendance of Ju|'hoan youth is in keeping with their general approach to participation in daily activities. Although the Ju|'hoan children do not seem to see this irregular attendance as problematic, their teachers and the principal do have a problem with it, and children who attend irregularly, or who leave for a while and then come back, are ultimately informed that they can no longer attend the school. Children often indicate feelings of surprise or indignation when describing this dynamic.

For children who have been raised in a tolerant community that respects individual decisions about how they spend their time – and trusts them to make good decisions and to become competent adults – the transition to an environment where they are expected to be in the same place at the same time every day is met with resistance. This is one of many identifiable cultural discontinuities – including language discontinuity – that clearly play a role in the decision of Ju|'hoansi children not to attend Tsumkwe school. The original vision of the Village Schools was to bridge these cultural gaps by familiarizing children with school culture, while also incorporating their own culture and language into school. However, in the absence of similar bridging efforts on the part of Tsumkwe school, the Village Schools cannot simultaneously maintain their dual goals of

⁴⁷ Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers*: 51.

⁴⁸ See Barry S. Hewlett and Michael E. Lamb, (eds.), *Hunter-gatherer childhoods. Evolutionary, Developmental, and Cultural Perspectives*, New Brunswick, Aldine Transaction, 2005; David F. Lancy, (ed.), *The Anthropology of Learning in Childhood*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2010.

⁴⁹ Alan Barnard, “The Foraging Mode of Thought”, *Senri Ethnological Studies*, 60, 2000: 5-24 (7).

⁵⁰ Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers*.

validating local culture *and* preparing children to participate in a system so unlike their own.

Although Ju|'hoansi parents and other adults do refer to factors related to cultural and language discontinuity, interestingly, these are *not* the primary reasons that the Ju|'hoansi children themselves give for leaving Tsumkwe Schools. They usually focus on more concrete and identifiable issues, of which there are many.

“There are always problems”

We try hard to give children education [...] We need our children to go to school, we need them to help us. We try hard, and it makes us sad. Every year we send our children [to Tsumkwe school], and there are always problems.⁵¹

Interviews with students and parents over the past 15 years have yielded a long list of reasons for leaving school. While some of these were specific to particular incidents (for example, a witchcraft scare in 2002 caused a surge in the numbers of drop-outs), most of them were ongoing issues that I, and others, have heard from students year after year. A number of the most consistent reasons relate to how they are treated at the school (or at the hostel if they stay there). Harassment by other learners, usually from other ethnic groups, is frequently reported; this includes name-calling and teasing, physical abuse, and theft and destruction of property. Some of this is very likely ethnically motivated. The San are heavily stigmatized across the region and these broader power relations are replicated in the school; students report being harassed because of who they are.⁵² Complaints of verbal and physical abuse by teachers or the principal are also regular;⁵³ usually these are cited as punishment for being absent, late, or not having homework done. Ju|'hoan students often claim that they were ‘kicked out’ of school for various reasons, such as returning late to the hostel or smoking. Sometimes, the reasons have to do with school infrastructure; over the years many learners have cited a lack of beds or blankets at the hostel, or a lack of chairs in the classroom, as their reason for leaving school.

Other reasons relate to poverty. Food is, not surprisingly, very often the central determinant of individual choices. At the Tsumkwe Primary School hostel they are supposed to receive food. However, food availability at the school and hostel is sometimes a problem, and if there is not enough food there (or if they are not able to access it because their plates and utensils were stolen, for example), learners return home. If the option is available, students generally prefer staying with relatives who live in Tsumkwe to living in the hostel – the critical factor is whether or not there is enough

⁵¹ Ju|'hoan mother at Den|ui, field notes February 6, 2002.

⁵² Suzman, *Assessment*; Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot*.

⁵³ There have been several government investigations that I am aware of (and perhaps others that I am not); specially in 2002, 2005, and 2014; these have yielded evidence that led to the dismissal of principals or teachers following accusations of abuse of students or misconduct. At the time of writing (2015) an investigation of abuse and theft by a TPS teacher was in process.

food at the household. Food availability in the villages depends on the season, but the village is generally considered by Ju|'hoansi to have higher food security. If one knows how to get food from the bush, it is all around in the villages – while in Tsumkwe town, where the bush food has been depleted, one is dependent on others, or on access to cash. Another important reason is that, in the villages 'people will share with you'.⁵⁴ Not having enough food at the hostel or school was often cited as a reason that students leave Tsumkwe school.

Having inadequate clothes, shoes, toiletries or other necessary personal items, is another major reason students say they stop attending school (this is also a reason for other students bullying them). Ju|'hoansi students have said that they stopped going to school because of a lack of school books, exercise books, pencils, and other necessities. One year several complained that they were required to cover their books, but that they did not have access to paper or to money to buy book covers; they got into trouble for that, so they left. Lack of transport is another frequently-cited educational obstacle. Students who take the opportunity to return home for a weekend are often unable to return to school in time; or in some cases they are unable to get transport home regularly so they eventually go home and stay there.

Social reasons can also cause students to leave school. Students who do not have siblings or other relatives at the school generally do not stay there alone; such students report that they feel lonely and vulnerable at TJSS. This is especially the case for girls, who are usually in the minority in a group transferring to the government school. Illness or the death of a family member may cause students to miss a substantial portion of school, after which they might not be allowed to return. Marriage and/or pregnancy are often cited as a reason for girls; some young men also give marriage or parenthood as a reason for stopping their formal education process. This is connected with a general problem with age. Students who are too old, or who assume adult roles (like marriage and parenthood) are no longer allowed to attend the primary school.

Recent studies have found that San communities *do* want to obtain the advantages that formal education could provide, including greater economic opportunity and an increased voice in decision-making processes that affect them.⁵⁵ But as this long list of problems illustrates – access to this system seems to remain beyond their reach. In addition, although education is often touted as the 'key to a better future', receiving a school certificate by no means guarantees a job; unemployment is a problem throughout

⁵⁴ Hays, *Owners of Learning*; Lee, Dobe Ju|'hoansi.

⁵⁵ Le Roux, *San Children, Hays, Education, Rights and Survival*; Maarit Thiem and Jennifer Hays, "Education", in: Ute Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014: 523-546.

the country. In Tsumkwe, most jobs are held by non-Ju|'hoansi – even when there are qualified Ju|'hoansi who apply.⁵⁶

Recognition of the ways in which macro-level historical, social and economic forces still shape realities today – is central to a full understanding of the obstacles that Ju|'hoansi confront in their effort to gain entry into the mainstream educational institutions. These obstacles cannot be addressed by simply trying to ‘convince parents of the value of education’ – they are well aware of the value. Although the provision of a few years of mother tongue education at schools in their home villages is better than no such option at all, it is not nearly enough to overcome the deeply-embedded discrimination and related social and economic barriers that the Ju|'hoansi face in mainstream institutions. Furthermore, the Ju|'hoansi cannot be expected to address structural discrimination on their own – it has to be addressed as a society-wide problem, at numerous levels – at the government school.

I would like to emphasize, however, the way in which the Ju|'hoansi *are* taking ownership of their educational processes. In an insecure economic environment, people are holding on to their time-tested subsistence strategies, and simultaneously exploiting other avenues as they can. They also have very clear ideas about their educational needs and potential approaches. These perspectives are very often left out of the discussions around education in Nyae Nyae, but should be central to any effort to understand the problem or to propose solutions.

“I am using the bit that I got”

Although I'm not that educated, I am using the bit that I got from it. I am working at the Living Museum, and I'm doing the health training workshop. I also hunt with a bow and arrow.⁵⁷

Like many others, this young man has wrested some important skills from the limited educational opportunities that he had, including basic English and literacy skills. Today, he draws upon those abilities as the opportunities arise, while at the same time maintaining his ‘bush’ skills. He is representative of others in his community, who are exploiting all of the available opportunities that they can. Given the current dearth of formal employment opportunities in the area, the numerous obstacles they face in the town of Tsumkwe, and the preference of people for staying in the villages, it is not at all obvious that obtaining formal educational qualifications would provide better social or economic opportunities for all Ju|'hoansi. As noted earlier, the Ju|'hoansi of Nyae Nyae also express a strong desire to maintain their traditional skills and knowledge – because it is their culture, and because it is how they survive. It is the Nyae Nyae community that

⁵⁶ See Jennifer Hays, Maarit Thiem and Brian Jones, “The Otjozondjupa Region”. in: Ute Dieckmann et al., (eds.), *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014: 93-172.

⁵⁷ Interview with a young Ju|'hoan from |Xa|hoba village, 2011. In the Nyae Nyae Conservanc people have the right to hunt for their own use, using traditional methods; hunting with guns is not allowed.

owns this kind of learning, and they clearly express an interest in maintaining that ownership for as long as they have the opportunity. This is something that only they can do – they are not dependent upon anyone else to show them this knowledge or tell them how to communicate it to their children.

Simply recognizing this is not enough however – the Ju|'hoansi themselves say they want and need access to formal education opportunities and are frustrated because there are so many problems with this. They are not silent on what they want – they request educational options that are flexible enough to accommodate learners' various social and economic needs; that are self-initiated, and that take into consideration the real economic opportunities available to community members. One solution proposed by the Ju|'hoansi, with remarkable consistency, is to have education in the villages up to higher grades, so that the children will be older and better prepared when they go to Tsumkwe school. Although this has never been accepted as a legitimate solution by government or others (largely because of the difficulty with training enough teachers, and also because of fears of separate or unequal education), in effect many children are 'implementing' this themselves. Students will very often repeat grades in the Village Schools in the hope that they will be better prepared for Tsumkwe school. Ultimately they become too old to enter the mainstream school; which is unwelcoming for Ju|'hoansi students at any age. Nonetheless, despite severe stigmatization, cultural barriers, and a seemingly endless list of reasons why they are not able to stay in the government schools – the Ju|'hoansi are finding ways to own their own learning processes, gaining access to the skills as they can, in a manner that suits their own circumstances and needs and allows them to maintain their individual autonomy.

Conclusion

Currently, the dominant approach to education for the Ju|'hoansi and other San is one based on the idea of 'cultural deprivation' as described in the first section of this paper, and the onus is on the Ju|'hoansi themselves to solve the problem by 'forcing' their children to come to school. The Village Schools was an effort to get beyond this, and to build upon Ju|'hoansi culture and bridge the gap to formal education created by cultural discontinuity, so that more Ju|'hoansi could participate in the national education system. What the Village Schools Project initially underestimated – and what is still not taken into consideration – was the enormous barriers that structural inequality create for peoples like the Ju|'hoansi in formal education systems. When this reality goes unchallenged, the result is approaches to education that serve primarily to reproduce the existing social hierarchies in which Ju|'hoansi are at the bottom.

In an analysis of the structural barriers Navajo youth face in school, Donna Deyhle concludes that the decision to leave school can be seen, "as a rational response to irrelevant schooling; racism; restricted political, social, and economic opportunities; and

the desire to maintain a culturally distinct identity”.⁵⁸ The structural barriers that confront Ju|’hoansi and other San students are common among indigenous groups around the world, and their responses can be recognized not only as a problem of ‘dropping out’ but as refusal to participate in a system in which they know that they and their communities are at a severe disadvantage. Far from being unconcerned about education, Ju|’hoansi children and communities are taking active ownership of the opportunities available to them. Faced with the choice of relinquishing control over their own lives in an uncertain economic and social environment, Ju|’hoansi, as a community and as individuals, are choosing to maintain their autonomy, flexible economic options and their cultural identity.

Bibliography

- Avenstrup, Roger and Patti Swarts, 1999. “Towards Equitable Diversity in Education: Move Towards a Paradigm Shift”, in: Wim Hoppers, Jeanne Moulton and Amina Osman, (eds.), *The Dynamics of Non-Formal Education, Volume II*, Johannesburg, ADEA Working Group on Non-Formal Education, 1999: 1-13.
- Barnard, Alan, “The Foraging Mode of Thought”, *Senri Ethnological Studies*, 60, 2000: 5-24.
- Biesele, Megan, *Texts for Self-Literacy in Nation-Building: Ju|’hoan Curriculum Consultancy Report*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1992.
- Biesele, Megan, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju|’hoan*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Biesele, Megan, *Eating Crow in the Kalahari: Leveling Lessons Taught by the Ju|’hoan Bushmen to their NGO*, unpubl. manuscript in possession of author, 1993.
- Biesele, Megan and Robert K. Hitchcock, *The Ju|’hoan San of Nyae Nyae and Namibian Independence: Development, Democracy and Indigenous Voices in Southern Africa*, New York, Berghan, 2011.
- Brörmann, Magdalena, *Quarterly reports on the Village Schools Project in the Nyae Nyae area*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1991-1993.
- Brörmann, Magdalena, *The Village Schools Project in Nyae Nyae, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia. Annual Reports*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1993-1994.
- Cazden, Courtney, “Problems for Education: Language as Curriculum Content and Learning Environment”, *Daedalus*, 102 (3), 1973: 135-148.
- Davids, Laurentius, “San Language Development for Education in Namibia: Progress and Challenges”, *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 5 (2), 2011: 126-134.
- Deyhle, Donna, “Constructing Failure and Maintaining Cultural Identity: Navajo and Ute School Leavers” in: Terry Huffman, (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap*, Lanham, Altamira Press, 2010: 97-119.
- Dickens, Patrick, *English Ju|’hoan, Ju|’hoan English Dictionary*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation, 1992.
- Dickens, Patrick, *Ju|’hoan Grammar*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation, 1992.

⁵⁸ Donna Deyhle, “Constructing Failure and Maintaining Cultural Identity: Navajo and Ute School Leavers” in: Terry Huffman, (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap*, Lanham, Altamira Press, 2010: 97-119 (98).

- Dickens, Patrick, *A Concise Grammar of Ju/'hoan with a Ju/'hoan-English glossary and a Subject Index*, Köln, Köppe, 2005.
- Dieckmann, Ute, Maarit Thiem, Eric Dirkx and Jennifer Hays, *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014.
- Draper, Patricia, *!Kung Bushman Childhood*, Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, Harvard University, Department of Anthropology, 1972.
- Draper, Patricia, "Social and Economic Constraints on Child Life among the !Kung", in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de DeVore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 199-217.
- Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), *Education Statistics 2008*, Ministry of Education and Culture, Windhoek, 2009.
- Erickson, Frederick and Gerald Mohatt, "Cultural organization of participation structures in two classrooms of Indian students", in: George Spindler, (ed.), *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982: 132-174.
- Gordon, Robert and Stuart Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, 2nd edition, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000.
- Guenther, Mathias, "From Hunters to Squatters: Social and Cultural Change among the Farm San of Ghanzi, Botswana", in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de DeVore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 120-134.
- Guenther, Mathias, *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Hays, Jennifer, *Education, Rights and Survival for the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi: Illuminating Global and Local Discourses*, PhD dissertation, State University of New York, University at Albany, 2007.
- Hays, Jennifer, *Owners of Learning: The Nyae Nyae Village Schools over Twenty-Five Years*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016.
- Hays, Jennifer, "À qui appartient l'éducation ? Les Écoles de village et les Ju/'hoansi de Nyae Nyae, Namibie", *Cahiers des la Recherche sur l'Éducation et les Savoirs*, 15, 2016: 27-51.
- Hays, Jennifer, Rodney Hopson and Willemien le Roux, *Evaluation of the Nammas-Supported San Education Project in Tsumkwe, Otjozondjupa, Namibia*, Evaluation for Namibiaforeningen (Namibia Association of Norway/NAMAS), 2010.
- Hays, Jennifer, Maarit Thiem and Brian Jones, 2014. The Otjozondjupa Region. in: Ute Dieckmann et al., (eds.), *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014: 93-172.
- Heath, Shirley Brice, *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Heckler, Melissa. 1991, *Field Notes and Lessons from the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari*, unpubl. manuscript, 1991.
- Heckler, Melissa, *Oh Place Where we have Played, Stay Well: An Indigenous Village Learning Environment. Report on 1990 Pre-school Pilot Project*, Windhoek, Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia, 1992.
- Heckler, Melissa, *Ju/'hoansi Literacy Report*, Report submitted to the Kalahari Peoples Fund, 2002.
- Hewlett, Barry S. and Michael E. Lamb, (eds.), *Hunter-gatherer Childhoods. Evolutionary, Developmental, and Cultural Perspectives*, New Brunswick, Aldine Transaction, 2005.
- Huffman, Terry, *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap*, Lanham, Altamira Press, 2010.

- Hymes, Dell, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.
- Hymes, Dell, "Speech and language: On the origins and foundations of inequality among speakers", in: Dell Hymes, *Language in Education: Ethnolinguistic Essays*, Washington, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1980, 19-61.
- Kann, Ulla, *Where the Sand is the Book: Education for everyone in the Nyae Nyae area*, Consultancy report for the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation in Namibia (NNDNF) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), 1991.
- Konner, Melvin J., "Maternal Care, Infant Behaviour and Development among the !Kung", in: Richard B. Lee and Irven de Vore, (eds.), *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976: 218-245.
- Lancy, David F., (ed.), *The Anthropology of Learning in Childhood*, Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2010.
- Lee, Richard B., *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Lee, Richard B., *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 4th edition, Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2013.
- Lee, Richard B. and Mathias Guenther, "Oxen or Onions: The Search for Trade (and Truth) in the Kalahari", *Current Anthropology*, 32 (5), 1991:592-601.
- Lee, Richard B. and Robert K. Hitchcock, "African Hunters and Gatherers: History and the Politics of Ethnicity", in: Graham Connah, (ed.), *Transformations in Africa: Essays on Africa's Later Past*, London, Leicester University Press, 1998: 14-45.
- Le Roux, Willemien. *Torn Apart: San Children as Change Agents in a Process of Assimilation*, Windhoek, WIMSA, 2000.
- Le Roux, Willemien, *The Challenges of Change: A Tracer Study of San Preschool Children in Botswana*, The Hague, Bernard Van Leer Foundation, 2002.
- Marshall, Lorna, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Ministry of Education and Culture, *Education Statistics 2008. Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)*, Windhoek, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009.
- Pfaffe, Joachim F., *Field Study on the Actual Situation Regarding the Teaching and Learning Environment of Ju/'hoan communities in Tsumkwe and Gobabis Districts, Namibia: Report on a Short-Term Consultancy from 06-27 July 2001*, GTZ Project Report, 2001.
- Pfaffe, Joachim F., "Educational Psychology and the Psychology of Marginalized Peoples: The Village Schools Project", *School Psychology International*, 16, 1995: 43-58.
- Philips, Susan, *The Invisible Culture: Communication and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*, New York, Longman, 1983.
- Smith, Andrew B., "Ethnohistory and Archaeology of the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen", *African Study Monographs*, Supplement 26, 2001: 15-25.
- Solway, Jacqueline S. and Richard B. Lee, "Foragers, Genuine or Spurious? Situating the Kalahari San in History", *Current Anthropology*, 31 (2), 1990: 109-146.
- Suzman, James, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia. Vol. 4: Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa*, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2001.
- Swarts, Patti and Roger Avenstrup, *Report on Preliminary Survey of Education for Bushman-Speaking Learners*, Windhoek, Namibian Institute for Educational Development (NIED), 1995.
- Thiem, Maarit and Jennifer Hays, "Education", in: Ute Dieckmann et al., *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two Decades after Independence*, produced by the Legal Assistance Center and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, Windhoek, Meinert, 2014: 523-546.
- Trueba, Henry, Grace Pung Guthrie and Kathryn Hu-Pei Au, (eds.), *Culture and the Bilingual Classroom: Studies in Classroom Ethnography*, Rowley, Newbury House Publishers, 1981.

- Wax, Murray L., Rosalie H. Wax and Robert V. Dumont, *Formal Education in an American Indian Community: Peer Society and the Failure of Minority Education*, Prospect Heights, Waveland Press, 1964.
- Wiessner, Polly, "Owners of the Future? Calories, Cash, Casualties and Self-Sufficiency in the Nyae Nyae Area Between 1996 and 2003", *Visual Anthropology Review*, 19 (1-2), 2004:149-159.
- Wilmsen, Edwin N., *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.