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**Title:** Social change Among Bushmen of the Eastern Ghanzi Ridge.

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SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG BUSHMEN OF THE EASTERN GHANZI RIDGE.

Location: White-owned cattle ranches on the eastern portion of the Ghanzi Ridge, Botswana.

Ethnic composition: G/wi, G//ana, Nharo Bushmen.

Pre-settlement culture: Hunting and gathering bands, each occupying and exploiting the resources of recognised, defined territory. Although politically autonomous, bands formed loose alliances for trading, mutual support in times of drought, and visiting. The band was an open community without exclusive qualifications for membership. It was egalitarian and was ordered by a consensus policy.

Leadership was ephemeral and non-authoritarian; it rotated among band members.

Members were linked by bonds of real and fictive kinship. The kinship system provided a framework for the ordering of relationships and for social control within, and between bands. In its operation it was augmented by several mechanisms for avoiding and dispelling tension.

The economy of the band was characterised by the versatility of exchange-media, a high rate of exchange and reciprocation transactions between members, and by value-assessment in terms of recipients needs. The economic system tended to maintain equality of access to resources and to equalise the distribution of commodities and services among members, despite seasonal and local

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environmental differences and individual variation in strength and skill. In its nature it was facilitative and egalitarian, rather than competitive and stratified.

White settlement: White cattle ranchers from northern Cape and Transvaal settled on the Ridge in the 1890's. The first party was forced to leave their wives and children in the hands of local Bushmen for over a year. Relations between settlers and Bushmen appear to have been unusually friendly.

Some 30 farms of approximately 10,000 morgen each were leased on quit-rental. Development consisted of sinking a well, building a house and clearing a small area for the cultivation of mealies, beans and sorghum. Bushmen were the only available labour, which was required for the herding and management of cattle, ploughing, planting and reaping, general farm and household duties. The settlers were under-capitalised, mostly poorly educated, and far from markets for their produce. Rinderpest decimated their herds at the turn of the century. They formed a poor, isolated and almost closed community.

Each ranch had a population of Bushmen well in excess of its labour requirements. The Bushmen continued to hunt game and gather esculent plants (which were supplemented by farm rations and well-water). They maintained their band organisation, amending territories to coincide with farm boundaries. The band and the rancher lived in a symbiotic

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relationship - the rancher obtained labour and much local knowledge; the Bushmen obtained a permanent water supply, widened and stabilised their subsistence-base and enjoyed a measure of protection from incursion and exploitation from Bantu-speaking peoples.

Although the Bushmen had, in fact, been ~~dis~~possessed of their land, they did not perceive this for many years. They were free to continue in their traditional cultural patterns with very little obvious or irksome disruption. There was no overt competition nor clash of interests between them and the ranchers.

Later settlers in the 20's and 30's did well as cattle speculators. The technology of ranching gradually became more complex, and, in the process of rationalising operations, more exacting demands were made of labour and the symbiotic balance began to tip. In the late 1950's and early 1960's the ranching area was greatly increased and some 150 ranches were accurately surveyed and sold with freehold title. Some fifty new families trekked to Ghanzi.

The land, held on freehold title, could now be used as security for loans and the freer availability of capital combined with the arrival of the 'new trekkers' who neither understood, nor felt any obligation towards the Bushmen, brought radical changes:

1. Ranches were fenced, putting cattle-herds out of work;

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2. More costly, higher-yielding stock were introduced. These required more skilled handling and Bantu-speaking labourers were imported;
3. Engine pumps over boreholes replaced hand-cranked well windlasses and here, too, skilled labour was required.
4. Cash wages became increasingly common, attracting more and more Bantu-speaking labour into the area.
5. The 'new trekkers', because of their South African experience, preferred black workers to Bushmen.
6. Ranches were subdivided into paddocks and stocking density rose, depleting the supply of esculent plants.
7. The fences, the increase in the size of the ranching area, the larger numbers of hunters with high-velocity rifles (and the influx of trigger-happy South Africans), combined to eradicate most species of antelope in the ranching area.

The Bushmen then began to realise that they had been dispossessed of not only their land but also their living. Real unemployment rose to about 75% in 1964. Rationalisation and competition combined to motivate ranchers to reduce the number of unemployed Bushman squatters on their land and the communities which once had forty to eighty members were reduced to a few (sometimes single) households. From stable, settled and largely self-regulating communities, they /had changed

had changed to small, impermanent clusters of kin economically wholly dependent on the rancher. There is a good deal of movement between ranches as squatters and sacked employees are eased out. Newly-arrived strangers are not easily absorbed into the small residential groups and therefore tend to set up their own, separate clusters of shelters.

The nucleating factor in these residential groups is the bond of kinship and the great majority of the groups which were analysed had been founded by close kin. Interpersonal relationships are ordered after the traditional kinship model, but the effectiveness of the system is attenuated by the small size of the groups and the consequent inability to mobilise a substantial body of public opinion to give weight to decisions and social sanctions. The breakdown of economic interdependence and patterns of reciprocity further vitiated the traditional system of social organisation.

The number of effectiveness of means of defining, perceiving and expressing social identity declined sharply. The ranch Bushmen are a despised, disadvantaged minority who today have little solidarity among themselves and are minimally integrated in the social, political and economic life of the district.

The Kgalagari, Herero and Tswana labourers generally receive higher wages and usually fill positions of authority on the ranches. They are better able to communicate with

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the 'new trekkers' than can the Bushmen and can manipulate the relationship between rancher and Bushman with a good deal of freedom. Exploitation of Bushmen by Bantu-speaking labour is common and unemployed squatters are frequently taken on as serfs by the blacks. With the notable exception of those ranches having homogenous Bushman labour forces, the Bushman groups on most farms manifest the symptoms of the culture of poverty syndrome. As labourers they are lazy and irresponsible and are not motivated to improve either their skills or their own lot. Drunkenness and violence are endemic. Their lack of solidarity has inhibited protest but recently ranch Bushmen have begun to express a vaguely and incompletely formulated notion of wanting their own land.

The Botswana Government has very recently shown some interest in the problems of the Bushmen. Considerable undirected social change has been brought about by developments in the country and the Government evidently intends to intervene to control future change. It seems to me that development policy should aim at bringing the ranch (and other) Bushmen to the stage where they have the knowledge and ability to determine their own future within the nation. Before this can be done the lethargy and disinterest symptomatic of their culture of poverty shall have to be counteracted. This might be achieved by establishing a series of settlements, the number and location of which would have to take into

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account such factors as ethnic diversity and distribution, and the availability of such resources as esculent plants, grazing, browsing, shelter and potable groundwater. The capacity of the vernacular systems of social organisation appears to be limited to a maximal community of about 100 and settlements should not exceed that size. It also seems that a period of paternalistic protection is an essential phase of development. Settlements would require protection from incursion and exploitation by blacks. Instruction in economically valuable skills is unlikely to meet with much success unless the self-confidence of the disaffected and demoralised Bushmen is rebuilt. This calls for participation by individuals with superhuman qualities of patience, sympathy, empathy, humility, imaginativeness and generosity of spirit.

Dr. George Silberbauer.  
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