

“A Kalahari Family, Part 5: Death by Myth”

a film by John Marshall

84 minutes

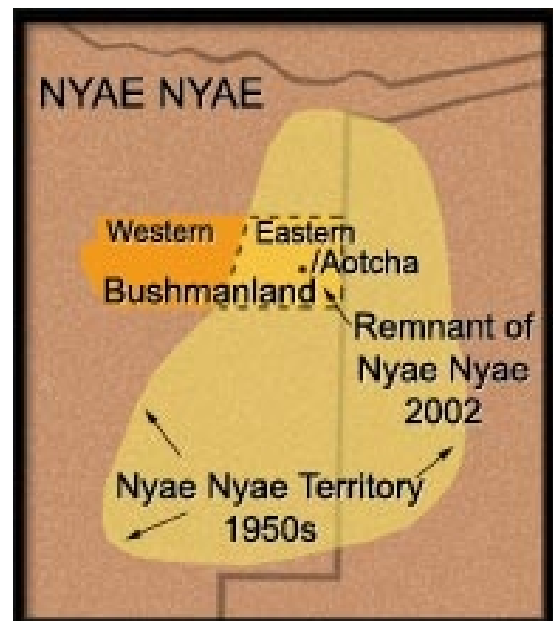
DESCRIPTION

Encapsulating 50 years of Namibian history, *A Kalahari Family* represents a lifetime of documentation, research, and personal contact with the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae by filmmaker John Marshall. Viewers learn the extraordinary story of the Ju/'hoansi, beginning with their experiences as independent, self-sufficient hunter-gatherers, continuing through the wrenching changes as they move into the overcrowded and unhealthy town of Tjum!kui, and culminating with their attempts to return to the land where they attempt to establish viable farming settlements.

Principally, *A Kalahari Family* is a story of struggle against the myths and misconceptions that are held about "Bushman" and the outside economic interests that try to exploit them. Most importantly, the series provides the Ju/'hoansi with an opportunity to speak for themselves and to counter the stereotyped notions of "wild, primitive Bushmen" with images of the real work Ju/'hoansi are carrying out in Nyae Nyae and the development they have accomplished.

Part IV, "Death by Myth," begins in 1992, when Namibian independence begins to attract unprecedented levels of international aid for the Ju/'hoansi. However, people complain that the development foundation no longer services their farms. This film documents the shift in policy from farming to wildlife management and cultural tourism. As John Marshall and the Ju/'hoansi attempt to rally support for farming, we witness the power of the "Bushman myth." This mythical belief that Ju/'hoansi are born to hunt and uniquely capable of living in harmony with nature denies the Ju/'hoansi the humanity to change their economy and survive on their own.

Ju/'hoansi endure their cattle being killed by lions and their water pumps destroyed by elephants. In 1994, Ju/'hoansi vote unanimously to dismiss the directors of the foundation, but their actions do little to stop natural resource development or the money pouring in to implement it. In 1996, with promises of great wealth, Ju/'hoansi vote to establish a nature conservancy. What did they really understand about the policy they were endorsing? The film ends in the year 2000 when the Ju/'hoansi conservancy members receive a meager 75 Namibian dollars (approximately \$10.50 US) each—their profit from two years of trophy hunting that they have sponsored on their traditional lands. As more farms fail, many people are forced to return to the squalor and disease of Tsumkwe (also spelled Tjum!kui).



NAMES TO KNOW

People

Ju/'hoansi= the people also known as “Bushmen” and “!Kung San.” They were among the last Africans to live a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle

John Marshall (“Longface”)= the American filmmaker who has been documenting the Ju/'hoansi since 1951

/Ui= one of the men who was hired by the federation to travel around the Ju/'hoan settlements to teach people how to irrigate their farms and manage their water supply. For unknown reasons /Ui was fired in 1992 by Axel Thomas. In 1996 /Ui was murdered in Tjum!kui leaving his son and wife to fend for themselves on their failing farm.

G?kao Dabe=one of the men whose farm was ruined by elephants. He is shown surviving on melon seeds. By the end of the film he is beginning to recover and build his farm back up.

Kxao (Moses)= the young Ju/'hoansi man who was elected as manager of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative.

Places

Namibia= the country in southern Africa, where most of the Ju/'hoansi live. Namibia gained independence from South Africa in 1990 after years of bloody warfare

Nyae Nyae= traditional Ju/'hoansi territory, which has gradually been given away to others and reserved as game parks for wild animals:

Tjum!kui= the town that serves as the administrative post of Nyae Nyae. This is where most Ju/'hoansi now live. Tjum!kui is overcrowded, impoverished, and disease-ridden. Furthermore, alcoholism is rampant. Many Ju/'hoansi survive by working on the farms and ranches of wealthier people. Women often work as maids and cooks, or they pose for tourists.

Bushmanland= The homeland that the colonial South African government created for the Ju/'hoansi in the 1970s. It contains 7,000 square miles, but only the eastern third has water and is habitable. In essence, the government expropriated 70% of Nyae Nyae from the Ju/'hoansi. Forevermore, an economy based on hunting and gathering will be impossible in the region.

Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (NNFC)=A grass-roots organization formed by Ju/'hoansi people in 1986 who wish to escape the unhealthy lifestyle in Tjum!kui, the town. Johan Marshall, the filmmaker, has played a key role in forming this cooperative.

Baraka=the center for international development efforts in Nyae Nyae. The many NGOs and donors who come to Baraka often impose their own vision of development on the Ju/'hoansi people.

TIME-LINE

1950s: Ju/'hoansi still hunting and gathering; first visited and filmed by John Marshall

1960s & 1970s: many Ju/'hoansi moved to **Tjum!kui**, the administrative center of Nyae Nyae. The children did not learn how to hunt or gather. The South African colonial government began allotting pieces of Nyae Nyae to other groups, including white ranchers and Herero peoples (another, more powerful and wealthier ethnic group).

The northern part of Nyae Nyae was declared the Kaudom Game Reserve where no hunting was allowed. Southern Nyae Nyae was allocated for the Herero ethnic group who raised cattle. Only a small portion of the original 30,000 square miles of land that the Ju/'hoansi had occupied was designated as a homeland for people classified as *Bushmen* by the South African government.

1981: Many Ju/'hoansi living in the town of **Tjum!kui** wished to leave due to overcrowding, poverty, and disease. John Marshall and others formed the **Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNFN)** to help Ju/'hoansi families move to their traditional lands within the area called "Bushmanland.." Because they could no longer subsist on hunting and gathering, they would farm and raise livestock. However, in the 1980s the South African Administration began working to establish a game reserve in eastern Bushmanland, the last fragment of Nyae Nyae occupied by Ju/'hoansi. Within the game reserve Ju/'hoansi would be required to live by hunting and gathering as *children of nature* – they could raise no crops and own no livestock or pets.

1986: The **Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (NNFC)** was established as a grassroots Ju/'hoan advocacy organization run by Ju/'hoansi themselves (it is basically a reformed version of the NNDNFN, and operates under the guidance of John Marshall). The primary objectives of the NNFC were to create a Ju/'hoan council to represent the Ju/'hoan people of Bushmanland to the government, to inform the people of government policies that could affect their lives, and to block the creation of a game reserve in Bushmanland.

Late 1980s, 1990: The government (now the Namibian government, which had gained independence from South Africa) gave up the idea of a game reserve, but began to promote trophy hunting in eastern Bushmanland. Although less of a threat than a wildlife reserve, trophy hunting still has the potential to undermine the Ju/'hoan agricultural settlements. To attract more lions and elephants into Bushmanland – to eventually sustain trophy hunting and tourism – the government began to drill more boreholes for wild game and to restrict access to water within the Ju/'hoan village settlements. In a very short space of time elephants and lions did migrate to Bushmanland, with many following the roads into Nyae Nyae. By 1988 there were an estimated 400 elephants in Bushmanland where there had been none a few years before. The elephants regularly destroyed people's wind pumps and water tanks. Lions also wreaked havoc on the Ju/'hoan farms, feeding on livestock. According to Nature Conservation regulations, Ju/'hoansi were not allowed to kill lions even if they posed a threat to the people. In fact, Bushmen were not allowed to hunt with guns and/or on horseback within Bushmanland. A man caught killing a giraffe with a gun on horseback could spend years in prison.

Many of these efforts were funded by international donors. In Nyae Nyae alone, international donors spent approximately 17,681,951.09 Namibian dollars (over \$2 million US), between 1988 and 1999 to support development efforts.

Early 1990s: Development priorities shifted from supporting the development of a mixed agricultural economy to the pursuit of income generation from natural resource management and tourism. These development initiatives are deepening the dependency of the people in Nyae Nyae on activities such as tourism that are subject to the uncertainties of the world economy and international political trends. As a result, many of the farming communities that flourished in the 1980s no longer received the technical assistance they needed.

1993: many Ju/'hoan farms begin to collapse. However, increasing amounts of money begin flowing into the area along with well-paid international development workers, researchers and academics. Very few jobs were created for the Ju/'hoansi, although more and more desperate Ju/'hoansi settled around **Baraka** (the center for international development projects) in search of employment and handouts.

1996: the US Agency for International Development (US/AID) and the World Wildlife Foundation funded the **Nyae Nyae Conservancy** in Eastern Bushmanland, promising the J much income from cultural and eco-tourism and trophy hunting.

2001: the **Nyae Nyae Conservancy** generated an income of \$120,000 (NAD) equal to \$11,650 (US), primarily from trophy hunting. In 2001, the Conservancy spent \$60,000 (NAD) on staff salaries and expenses at Baraka, including vehicle maintenance. The 800 Ju/'hoan Conservancy members received a meager \$75 (NAD) or \$10.50 (US) each, as their share of the profits from trophy hunting. The Conservancy income was far too little to support the development efforts of the Ju/'hoansi. Without a means to sustain themselves, many Ju/'hoansi were forced to move back to the drunken squalor of Tjum!kui.

The project headquarters at Baraka have been completely trashed and non-Ju/'hoan Foundation employees have moved to offices in Tjum!kui.