

Culture Sketches

Case Studies in Anthropology

THIRD EDITION

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CULTURE SKETCHES: CASE STUDIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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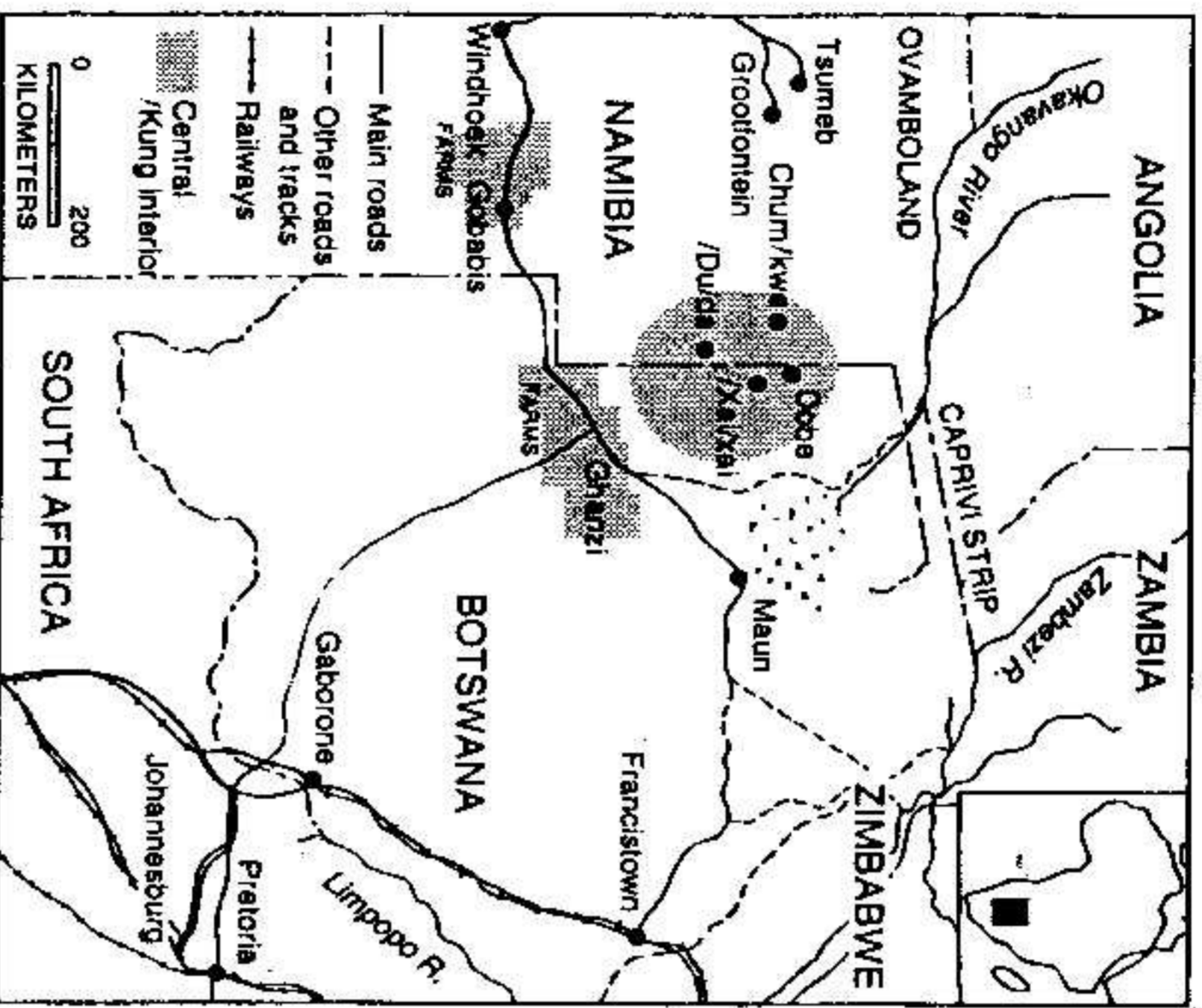
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*for Rebecca and Jenna
my first students, and my best teachers*

The Ju/'hoansi

Reciprocity and Sharing



The Beginning

In the world there is life. Why did death come to the world?

"When the moon died, it returned to life again, to pass again across the sky. 'Everyone will do as I do,' said the moon. 'When a person has died, don't think that he will just die and lie there. . . . Take heed, follow what I, the moon, do: I die and then live again, and die again only to live again. Everyone should do as I do.'

But the hare contradicted the moon. 'No!' he said. 'A person is born and he must die also. . . .'

The moon argued with him, and said, 'Watch me. I'm going to die and then I'll come alive again. Watch me and learn, and then we can both do it.' But the hare refused. So the moon split his mouth open. The hare became the split-mouth hare that people chase.

The moon and the hare argued with each other, and harangued each other. The moon said, 'Take my advice . . . a person will die and yet return!' But the hare refused, so the moon took a hatchet and split his mouth. Then the hare scratched the moon's face! That's why you can still see marks on the moon's face, because the hare scratched it and the scratches festered. When the hare

had spoiled the moon's face, the two of them separated. They spent the next day separate, and the day after that. That's how their anger rose and they fought, chopping each others' mouths and clawing each other's faces." (Biesele 1976:321-322)

Introduction and History

The San are a hunting and gathering people living in southern Africa. Their nearest neighbors are a herding group, the Khoi, with whom they shared for centuries most of southern Africa west of the Eastern Cape. San are a varied people in terms of looks and language, and include people living in Angola, Botswana, Zambia, and Namibia.

In pre-colonial times, San population was estimated at up to 300,000. However, the arrival of the Dutch in the mid-1650s resulted in the near-decimation of the San people. By the 1850s, Dutch expansion and settlement caused conflict between the groups, escalating into bitter warfare. Systematic genocide of the San by the Dutch led many to fear for their survival as a people.

The group that has been studied most extensively is the Ju/'hoansi of the Dobe area, who are by now most likely the most thoroughly documented foraging society in the world. (Lee 1984) The Ju/'hoansi were formerly referred to as the !Kung, but Ju/'hoansi is their preferred referent and is now widely used in accordance with their wishes. The term San is a broader appellation, used to describe a group of foraging peoples living in southern Africa and sharing language features. (Lee, 1993)

Hunting and gathering peoples around the world find their traditional ways of life threatened, at best, and lost, at worst. Band and tribal societies have been transformed by the "world system." (Lee 1993) However, their current ways of life are informed by all that has gone before.

The Dobe Region

The Dobe area is situated in the northwest portion of the Kalahari Desert and has been home to hunters and gatherers for thousands of years. It is a grouping of ten water holes, arranged in three sections. To the north along a dry riverbed is a peculiar outcropping of granite and limestone with a large foragable area. In the south is one major water hole with several smaller seasonal watering places scattered around it. The center region contains the Aha Hills, made up of several low ranges. This area lacks surface water and thus contains no permanent settlements. These three regions taken together span an area of about 3000 square miles.

Several hundred years ago, San developed trading relationships with peoples to the east. In the late nineteenth century Tswana cattle herders came to the Dobe during the summer rainy season to graze their cattle, hunt, and trade. Tswana relied on San as trackers and butchers, helping to transport the game back to the east when the summer rains ended. It was at about this

time that European hunters too came to the Dobe region to secure furs and ivory.

Within the Dobe region currently, the largest group of non-San are the Herero peoples, pastoralists with thousands of head of cattle in their herds.

Access to water is a problem in the northern part of the Kalahari, and permanent water holes are not sufficient for the San's needs. They depend too on seasonal water holes, depressions between the dunes that fill after heavy rains. Some are small and hold water for only a few weeks; others are up to three hundred feet long, holding water for months on end. A small source of water is that which can be found in the hollow interior of some trees; in an emergency, there are roots that can be dug up and their moisture extracted. The San plan their movement around these changing sources of water, spending the rainy summer months near the seasonal water holes, and the wintertime close to the permanent sources.

Plentiful and varied game provide the San with good hunting. They can name over 250 animal species available to them in their environment. Warthog, wildebeest, giraffe, antelope, and other hooved mammals are the most abundant game. Although lions, leopards, and cheetahs are hunting in the same environment, Ju/'hoansi appear not to be fearful of them. They sleep out in the open, even without protective fires, and do not consider themselves in jeopardy.

There are also more than one hundred species of birds in the Dobe area that are hunted for food. Of particular value is the ostrich, whose shells, once the eggs are eaten, can be washed and used for water containers. Reptiles and amphibians are present too, but there are no fish. Insects, although not a part of the diet, provide poison for arrow tips.

The Ju/'hoansi divide the year into five seasons, characterized by differing patterns of rainfall. Although there is a general pattern to the precipitation—rain predominates in the hot summer months and is scarce in the winter—there is considerable yearly variation, resulting in great unpredictability. Consequently, they must be continually adaptive, prepared to accommodate high-rainfall years, low-rainfall years, and extensive variation from region to region.

Settlement

A Ju/'hoan encampment consists of grass huts arranged roughly in a circle, constructed around an area of clearing in the center. Because mobility is the hallmark of Ju/'hoan life, these huts are constructed quickly and rarely used for more than a few months at a time. Camps are located near water holes, and the conventional area that a group exploits is one that can be accomplished in a day's walk, round-trip, in any direction. The Ju/'hoansi houses reflect the season in which they are built. During the dry season, sites are located near dependable sources of water. Huts built for use during the rainy season are constructed with thickly thatched roofs to provide shelter from the punishing rains. During times of the year with less extreme weather, camp is often set up

without building shelter of any kind. A fire may be built, the group sleep, and the next day move on.

In addition to huts, other structures are erected to store belongings to keep them both out of sight and out of reach: arrow poison must not be accessible to children and dried strips of meat must be kept away from the dogs.

Characteristic of traditional camp construction was the circular arrangement of huts or sleeping position: the Ju/'hoansi faced one another. In more recent days, as cattle have become important, some encampments not only are more permanent, but also are oriented with the hut doorway facing the cattle compound, rather than another hut.

Subsistence

The foraging Ju/'hoansi can provide for themselves a bountiful and varied diet. Plant foods are plentiful and nutritious and make up the majority of their diet. Women have an intricate and complex knowledge of their plant environment, distinguishing more than a hundred varieties of edible plants from those that are poisonous or otherwise undesirable. A single gathering foray can result in fifty pounds of food, easily enough for ten days' sustenance. Most important in their diet is the mongongo, a protein-rich nut found abundantly on trees near every water hole. In addition to their high nutritional value and availability, mongongo nuts are also easily stored and not often affected by seasonal or environmental variation.

A simple digging stick is the only tool required for gathering. It is sufficient for digging up roots and tubers as well as ferreting out burrowing mammals. It can also be used as a carrying pole, slung across the shoulders with the load tied on.

Transporting the food that has been gathered requires more elaboration. A large suede cape, called a kaross, provides the most useful means for carrying both food and firewood by forming a sturdy pouch close to the body. Because it is worn close to the body, it is very efficient for heavy loads. Children too are carried in the kaross, which also doubles as a blanket at night. Leather pouches, net bags, and infant slings are among the other carrying devices so important to the Ju/'hoansi, who rely on containers that can allow them ease of mobility while carrying hundreds of small food items daily.

The Ju/'hoansi follow a very specific pattern in their exploitation of the environment. Richard Lee, an ethnographer who has studied the group extensively, says bluntly, "the !Kung typically occupy a campsite for a period of weeks and eat their way out of it." (1984:44) They do this by venturing out from the campsite in increasing rings, walking further each day to find food. Gathering is done in two ways: some people stay closer to camp and gather all edibles they can; others venture farther afield looking for those things that are particularly appealing. (This leads to longer walking distances each day, as closer supplies are used up.) By pooling their resources at the end of the day, all people have not only enough, they also have a variety.

Even though hunting provides a minor portion of the Ju/'hoansi diet (roughly 30 percent), meat is nonetheless a valuable commodity. Although its scarcity may explain its value, it has been suggested (Lee 1984) that the sociality it occasions may be of even greater importance. Meat provides more than protein; it also provides social opportunity. The killing of a large animal is followed by a commensurately large feast enjoyed by all. Distribution of cooked meat is an arduous affair; it is portioned and reapportioned until everyone has received the amount deemed satisfactory.

Bows and arrows, spears, knives, and ropes are the most reliable tools for hunting. Dogs can be useful, especially in cornering prey and keeping it at bay until it can be speared. Animals need not be out in the open to be fair game. Many are pursued in their burrows by use of a special tool equipped with a hooked end for just this purpose. Older hunters with less agility rely on snares to net unsuspecting hare, guinea fowl, and small antelope.

Essential in successful hunting of this sort are refined tracking skills, possessed amply by the Ju/'hoansi. Not only can hunters tell what sort of animal has made a track, and how many have passed by; they can also determine its sex, age, health, diet, as well as speed and time of travel. For example, the placement of tracks in relation to trees indicate whether the animal was seeking shade from afternoon sun; the amount of sand or twigs in the depression of a hoofprint can indicate how long ago it was made.

Egalitarianism

Despite the Ju/'hoansi appreciation for meat, displays of enthusiasm for a successful hunt—and successful hunter—are tempered by the importance of maintaining egalitarianism, which necessitates the avoidance of undue praise for an individual and that person's accomplishments. As Lee (1984:49–50) explains: “Insulting the meat is one of the central practices of the !Kung that serves to maintain egalitarianism. Even though some men are better hunters than others, their behavior is molded by the group to minimize the tendency toward self-praise and to channel their energies into socially beneficial activities. As a result, the existence of differences in hunting prowess does not lead to a system of Big Men in which a few talented individuals tower over the others in terms of prestige.”

In a story that has become perhaps the most widely cited example of this practice, Lee tells of how he learned this lesson, after mistakenly calling attention to his own largesse, despite his best of intentions. His accurate study of the subsistence economy of the Ju/'hoansi mandated that he not interfere with their food procurement in any way. Thus, Lee gave Ju/'hoansi only tobacco and medical supplies in return for their time and talk. His own large supply of canned goods seemed, to him, a glaring inequity in the face of the Ju/'hoansi larder, which was empty by the end of the day.

As he prepared to leave the Kalahari, Lee was determined to provide, as a going-away feast, an ox of such grand proportions that it would provide at least

four pounds of meat for every man, woman, and child in attendance. Satisfied that he had found such an animal, Lee was very pleased with himself indeed.

It was not long before word of the purchase began to spread, and people began to approach him for confirmation of the rumor. Lee was only too pleased to confirm that he had, in fact, purchased a large and well-known animal from a neighboring group, and was indeed planning to slaughter and serve it to the Ju/'hoansi. He waited for the delight and gratitude he felt he surely deserved but was taken aback by the reaction with which he was met instead. One by one, individuals approached him to offer nothing but chastisement for the pitiful specimen he intended to serve. A close friend implored him to explain his stinginess: “What has happened to change your heart? That sack of guts and bones . . . will hardly feed one camp. . . . Perhaps you have forgotten that we are not few, but many. Or are you too blind to tell the difference between a proper cow and an old wreck? That ox is thin to the point of death.” (1979:15)

Lee was demoralized, and day after day, as the feast drew nearer, warned that of course he must serve the beast, since it was already paid for, he not to expect much of a festive evening to follow, given the sorry offering that would surely send people home hungry. The feast came and went, and indeed the ox was fat, and served the people for two days and nights of revelry. But the while the Ju/'hoansi were eating they were proclaiming their disdain for the thin, wretched ox. Realizing that he had been fooled, but not sure why, Lee pursued the matter. Finally he was told that the people had been acting in the characteristic manner, the way in which all hunters are treated despite the bounty they might bring home. An informant explained, “Yes, when a you man kills much meat he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, as



he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can't accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. This way we cool his heart and make him gentle." (1979:156)

Social Organization

"Camps" or bands are the traditional form of Ju/'hoan organization. They usually contain between ten and thirty members who live and move together for the majority of the year. Although membership is flexible, it is not random. Individuals are kin to one another, and it is a core of related elders around whom the band is centered.

These older, central group members are generally thought of as the people to whom the resources "belong." However, the role of the elder is more one of guardian or host of the land and water than one who has formal ownership since there is no individual ownership of property among the Ju/'hoansi. When an encampment is established around a water hole, the land that surrounds it and the bounty contained therein are owned by a kin group. Although permission must be asked of the elders in order to avail oneself of the resources, it is rarely refused. The older members of the camp or band have simply been associated with the resources longest, so it follows that theirs would be the strongest ties. Women and men who function in this capacity also provide the basis for the kinship ties that create the group. The original central members are siblings, who bring their spouses into the group. Their children and their spouses are added as the years go on, with no tradition of unilocality. Both men and women function equally as core elders of the group.

Relations among these groups are maintained in balance by reciprocal visiting. Acquiring rights to territories is accomplished through birth (one has rights to parents' territory) and also through marriage (through which there is claim to the spouse's territory). Additionally, visiting between siblings and in-laws acquired through one's children's marriages extend an individual's rightful territory.

Kinship

The flexibility of the Ju/'hoan living arrangement is the key to its success. Membership of the group changes often. Yet flexibility must still have something beneath to give it stability. Among the Ju/'hoansi that is provided by kinship ties.

The band is, at base, a "unit of sharing," which demands peace and cooperation among its members. (Lee 1984:61) It must also be balanced in terms of numbers of productive adults who can provide food and labor, and young, dependent members who cannot. Thus, the composition of the group will change as patience wears thin; it will also shift as the number of children becomes too large to support, or too small to ensure a future.

When arguments escalate to the point at which they may jeopardize the cooperation and harmony of the group, the Ju/'hoan penchant for going off and visiting kin in another group functions as a sort of "safety valve." Lee (1984) observes that it is more often the depletion of patience than the depletion of food resources in an area that causes some to move on and re-group.

The Ju/'hoan system of kinship is extremely complex, and presented quite a challenge to ethnographers attempting to understand both how people reckoned their connections to one another, and also the functions served by their associations.

All kinship relations among the Ju/'hoansi are of one of two types, either "joking" or playful relationships, or "avoidance" relationships, based on "fear" or more accurately, respect. One's actions with a joking relative are characterized by comfort, relaxation, and familiarity. With some (for example, grandparents) there is a great display of affection. With others (such as peers, and especially those of the opposite sex) there may be an element of flirtation, and even outright bawdiness. However, with avoidance relatives, manners are refined and more aloof. The relationship between parents and children falls into this category, demonstrating the authority parents have over their children, and the respect children are expected to show their parents. Parents-in-law and children-in-law are also avoidance relatives, and it is the mother-in-law/son-in-law and father-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships that are the most severely constrained. Although custom forbids conversation between them, in practice they usually do speak to one another. (Lee 1984)

One unique feature of the system is the relationships forged by special naming practices. There are very few names found among the Ju/'hoans because children are supposed to be given names of their ancestors. Since everyone must be named for someone, many people have the same name. Ju/'hoansi have only a single name (not a "first" and "last" name), and thus rely on nicknames to identify individuals. The sharing of a name with someone else engenders a special kinship relation with that person, carrying with it host of other connections, all based on the coincidental sharing of the same name. Thus, for example, a woman married to a man with a particular name calls any man with that name "husband." If your mother's name is the same as another person's mother, you and that person are siblings because you are children of the "same" mother.

These relationships forged by naming have a direct impact on marriage rules: one may not marry a person with the same name as one's parent or sibling. If you are a woman whose father has a common name and, in addition, have several brothers with common names as well, fully half the population may be eliminated as marriage partners solely on the basis of their names.

Marriage

Traditionally, marriages are arranged for children by their parents, who begin to contemplate their children's marriage partners soon after the babies are born. Parents whose children are betrothed to each other in ear-

childhood may exchange gifts for ten years or more before it is time for the children to wed.

There is a rigid system of rules guiding the universe that defines an appropriate marriage partner. Incest taboos extend beyond parents and siblings to what we would term first and second cousins, as well as aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. Beyond these proscriptions based on ties of blood and naming, individuals belonging to the avoidance categories of kin are likewise eliminated. This severely restricts the number of potential spouses.

Once the proper kinship and name relationship has been settled, there are personal characteristics that parents also consider necessary in a marital partner for their child. Parents are especially cautious in choosing sons-in-law who must be good hunters, not given to fighting, and belong to a friendly family who enjoy participating in exchange. To this end, couples may begin their lives together in adolescence, with the chosen boy coming to live with the "bride's" family for as much as a decade, hunting for them and remaining under close scrutiny.

Ju/'hoan marriages sometimes have a stormy beginning, presumably due to the tradition of a "marriage-by-capture" ceremony in which the bride is forcibly removed from her hut and presented to her groom. Because all first marriages are arranged by parents, the couple involved have had no say in choosing a partner. Girls who are very displeased with their parents' selection may protest violently—often kicking and screaming during "capture" and running away at the conclusion of the ceremony—which can sometimes result in the dissolution of the arrangement. Even if the protests are ignored and eventually stop, Lee (1984:79) suggests that this behavior is "eloquent testimony to the independence of !Kung women from both parents and husbands." In fact, more than half of all Ju/'hoansi first marriages end in divorce. Subsequent alliances are forged by the couple's own desire to be married to one another and are generally very stable.

Relations between divorced individuals is usually quite amicable, with former partners living near one another and maintaining a cordial relationship.

Connection and Conflict |

The nature of marriage in Ju/'hoan society is uniquely adapted to this highly mobile society in which broad access to resources ensures ample food, and flexible band membership can provide "escape." Marriage is the major form of alliance formation between groups of Ju/'hoansi, and friendly relationships with in-laws are crucial to survival. Given that mobility is a key feature in Ju/'hoan life, in-laws in other groups provide the assurance of another home when resources (and tempers) wear thin. A good marriage and good relations with in-laws are the best assurance of both individual and group survival. An individual will never go hungry, and the group will never be riven by conflict from which one participant cannot literally simply walk away.

Lee (1984) has pointed out that without either material wealth or the aspiration for high status to generate conflict, it is usually marriage and sexual relations that provide the stage on which both conflict and alliance is played out.

In fact, there has been some speculation that the very young age at which girls were traditionally betrothed and married (sometimes as early as eight or nine) was in part to forestall conflicts arising in these two domains. Early marriage prevented rivalries among too many suitors. Moreover, if a girl were married before she became interested in courtship, it would be unlikely that she would have extramarital affairs. These conflicts are of no small significance: the most likely cause for a dispute which ends in murder is arguing between men over their affections for the same woman.

Talking and Telling Tales |

Marshall (1976:351), referring to the Ju/'hoansi as "the most loquacious people," suggests that one useful strategy in maintaining peace and diffusing tensions is talking. People engage in conversation all day long and well into the night. They talk as they work, as they eat, as they gather around the fires with their children at night, as they visit with other families. Often, people who have hunted or gathered separately during the day will recount in exhaustive detail the tracks of animals, amounts of berries, abundance of certain plants. They then plan the next day's activities. Where might there be game? To whom will they give nuts? Songs pepper the conversation and can be used as a disciplinary measure or to head off a conflict by warning an individual to correct inappropriate behavior. They compose songs specifically for this purpose, walk to the edge of the camp at night, and sing their disapproval.

In addition to the informal conversation that drives so much of Ju/'hoan daily life, there is a rich tradition of storytelling among all the San. Most of these tales are set in a long-ago past, when people were not yet real humans, but animals, and many strange things that would never happen today were commonplace.

In some places, a few individuals are expert storytellers, known for their skills and set apart from others in this talent. Among the Ju/'hoansi, however, it is old people who are storytellers—and every old person rises to the occasion. Rather than gathering children around the fire to teach them the ways of the Ju/'hoansi, elders are more content to spend time telling stories among themselves. Children listen informally; young adults do so with perhaps a little more intent. But storytelling is largely an activity "of a small group of old people getting together for some real grown-up enjoyment." (Bieseke 1976:307) This is not because the older Ju/'hoansi have no other way to fill what are increasingly emptier hours: storytelling is not "something to do when you are old" (because there are few other things to do) so much as "something that you do when you are old" (that is, a welcomed privilege bestowed by age). (Bieseke 1976:307) As one storyteller succinctly put it, "the old person who does not tell stories just does not exist." (Bieseke 1993:20)

Leadership and Combat |

It is clear that harmony is the linchpin to an adaptive Ju/'hoan life. The members of each band must cooperate and share within their corporate group. Marriage

must establish strong and warm ties between families in different encampments so that a pattern of reciprocal visiting is established, allowing movement between bands for personal or subsistence reasons.

The apparent harmony among the Ju/'hoansi, not enforced by external authority, has been of great interest to outside observers. Richard Lee (1984) has endeavored to explain the ability of the Ju/'hoansi to establish the order and peace that come only "from the hearts and goodwill of the people themselves." (p. 87)

It seems logical to ask the question, Who is responsible for seeing that permission to hunt and gather in a territory is requested, and granted, and the balance of territorial use maintained, and disputes settled if access is denied?

Early accounts of the Ju/'hoansi suggested that there was, in fact, the familiar role of "headman" or "big man" among the Ju/'hoansi. (Marshall 1976) This, in fact, is not the case. Although individuals in each group do emerge in leadership positions, these are informal and based not on an inherited right to such status, but rather owing to a modest demeanor, interpersonal skills, and successful handling of past conflicts.

Although harmony is certainly the hallmark of traditional Ju/'hoan life, conflict—sometimes fatal—does occur. Ju/'hoansi themselves describe three spheres of conflict: arguing, fighting, and deadly combat.

It is not surprising that among people who so enjoy talking and verbal jousting, arguments would ensue. Talking about food may lead to arguing about meat distribution. Talking about gifts may engender arguing about exchange. Often a conversation starts out as joking, only to escalate into something more serious as tempers flare. This culminates in a "talk," the rapid-fire hurling of insults, often sexual in nature, which may itself become a "fight."

Fighting involves two individuals, male or female, physically grappling with one another. They last only a few minutes before others pull them apart and hold them back until they calm down. Although wrestling and hitting may have occurred only moments before, after the two are separated they often joke with one another about their behavior. Matters are not always resolved so quickly, but there is ample opportunity for simply going away for a cooling-off period.

The potential for the most serious violence exists among men between the ages of twenty and fifty, who will resort to using poisoned arrows if pressed beyond their limits. The poison employed is very potent and is fatal as often as not.

Hxaro Exchange

The Ju/'hoansi effectively employ talking and joking to avert the escalation of a fight, but perhaps the most important mechanism for maintaining goodwill is the *hxaro* exchange, a system of gift giving, which not only fosters friendly relations, but also serves to circulate goods and even maintain environmental balance.

The essence of *hxaro* is exchange between individuals that is not as immediate as barter: one person gives an item to another, and in the future an item

is returned. The exact nature of the item—its equivalency in value—is of lesser importance than the consistency of give and take maintained in the relationship between the people involved. In attempting to learn the rules for *hxaro*, anthropologist Lee presented an informant with a series of questions as to the acceptability of items for exchange: In return for a spear, would five strings of beads be sufficient? Four? One? His Ju/'hoan informant laughed at Lee's desperation to understand the rules, saying, "I see what your problem is! . . . you don't understand our way. One string, five strings, any return would be all right. You see, we don't trade with things, we trade with people!" (1984:98)

All Ju/'hoansi are eligible to enter into *hxaro* together with the primary pathways emanating from a husband and wife who exchange with their children, who exchange with their spouses, who then exchange with their own parents, thus solidifying bonds between families whose children have married. All manner of items are exchanged in *hxaro*, from glass beads and other craftwork to arrows, spears and knives, and even dogs. The only items restricted from *hxaro* exchange are food and people.

As visiting plays a central role in Ju/'hoan mobility and social ties, it is not surprising that *hxaro* exchange is a focal point in any visit. Not only does such gift giving extend established relationships, it can also serve as a safety valve for diffusing conflict; going off to do *hxaro* can function as a valid excuse to leave a group when involved in escalating dissension. Further, *hxaro* ties established with other groups allow Ju/'hoansi to effectively exploit the environment by relocating when food sources become scarce in one area while remaining abundant in another.

Religion and the Supernatural

Gods

The Ju/'hoansi have no single explanation for the origin of life on earth. They tell stories about a time at the beginning of the world when people and animals were the same, and all lived in one village under the guidance of an elephant, sometimes thought of as the "higher God." Many of their stories about their "lesser God" portrays him as a trickster, someone who is a practical joker of grand proportion, always leading people astray and causing trouble in the village.

Ghosts

The Ju/'hoansi have successful strategies for coping with their environment and their relationships with one another. However, as in any human group, they have little or no control over natural forces. Ju/'hoansi fall ill and die; adversity of all sorts is no stranger. They have devised ways to explain and understand these circumstances, and as is often the case, their explanations transcend the forces of nature.

It is the ancestral ghosts—the *gangwasi*—who are responsible for most of the illnesses and other misfortunes that befall their living kin. *Gangwasi* wait

near the villages and send their destruction. It may seem surprising that a people who, in life, live harmoniously together would attribute such evil intent to their loved ones once dead. The Ju/'hoansi explain this by saying that it is death that turns people bad. All people are good when alive. They believe, in fact, that the great affection that people feel for one another in life is what motivates their spirits to send illness and death to the loved ones they have left behind. For although the *gangwasi* have all they need—food, and clothing, and the company of other *gangwasi*—they do not have those they love the most. It is the intense longing to be reunited with their dearest kin whom they have left behind which compels the *gangwasi* to send illness and death.

Admittedly, not all *gangwasi* harbor the same degree of malevolence toward their living kin. Many Ju/'hoansi live their lives relatively free from misfortune; others seem to meet sorrow and adversity at every turn. Although this is difficult to explain, some Ju/'hoansi postulate that it is misbehavior on the part of the living that engenders the ill will of their own kin's *gangwasi*. One man suggested, ". . . we know [*gangwasi*] expect certain behavior of us. We must eat so, and act so. When you are quarrelsome and unpleasant to other people, and people are angry with you, the *gangwasi* see this and come to kill you. The *gangwasi* can judge who is right and who is wrong." (Lee 1984:107-108) Thus, avoidance of *gangwasi*'s censure can also function as an effective measure of social control, acting to reinforce adherence to shared social norms.

The Ju/'hoansi are far from helpless in defending themselves against the malevolent entreaties of the *gangwasi*. They possess a wide array of magical spells and healing herbs with which to counteract the *gangwasi*'s attack. The most potent item in their armamentarium, however, is *num*, the healing energy that enables indigenous healers to enter a trance, and while in this state, effect a cure.

Healing

Lee (1984) asserts that the Ju/'hoansi are not overly given to philosophizing about their gods and ghosts except at the prodding of an anthropologist. They are, however, quite concerned with the threat of illness and death and have devoted much time and energy to addressing these challenges.

To become a healer is a grand aspiration of many, and the Ju/'hoansi believe it is a status accessible to all. Nearly half the men and one-third of the women are acknowledged as having the power to heal. Although this power is not restricted, neither is it gained without great hardship and pain. Those who are too young, or too immature are discouraged from attempting the long apprenticeship required to become a healer. The apprentice receives lessons from older, established healers who go into trance to teach the novices, rubbing their own sweat onto the pupils' healing centers—their bellies, backs, foreheads, and spines. The novices require frequent breaks, because it takes time for those less experienced to be able to manage the intense pain that is engendered by the healing power. They can only go so far; then they must rest, gather their resolve, and go on a little longer.

Healing is most often accomplished in the context of a *!kia* dance beginning at sundown and continuing through the night. These are held several times a week and are attended by all who are in the camp. Although designed to effect healing, these dances accomplish other things. They provide a unifying experience for the whole community as well as an outlet for grief, tension, hostility, and fear. *!kia* is the "primary expression of a religious existence and a cosmological perspective." (Katz 1976:286)

The *!kia* depends on the activation of *num*, which resides in the bellies of the women and men who are healers. When they dance, in preparation for entering a trance state to effect a cure, the substance heats up and, boiling, travels up the healer's spine to explode with therapeutic power in the brain. One healer described it as "[boiling] in my belly and . . . up to my head like beer. When the women start singing and I start dancing, at first I feel quite all right. Then, in the middle, the medicine begins to rise from my stomach. After that I see all the people like small birds, the whole place will be spinning around, and that is why we run around. The trees will be circling also. You feel your blood become very hot, just like blood boiling on fire, and then you start healing." (Lee 1984:109)

Women healers have a special medicine, *gwah*, in their stomachs and kidneys. In the Drum Dance, their legs tremble and they enter the *!kia* trance state. As they dance the *gwah* travels up the spine as *num* does, lodging in the neck. To gain the *gwah* power, women chop up the root of a short shrub, boil it into a tea, and drink it. They need not do this before every Drum Dance; the power they secure from the tea consumed at the beginning of their healing career is so strong that it lasts a lifetime.

Melvin Konner (1987), a medical anthropologist who investigated the healing practices of the Ju/'hoansi before undertaking his own medical training in the United States, writes, in a compelling account of his time spent in both medical systems, of the great power in the Ju/'hoansi men's healing ritual:

"Women sit in a circle around a small fire, clapping in complex rhythms and singing in a yodeling way. Men with rattles strapped to their legs dance around in a circle behind them, always in one direction, steadily, monotonously. Through a combination of dance, concentration, listening to the music, and practice, some of these men enter altered states of consciousness—trances—in which healing by the laying on of hands is believed to be possible.

In these trances the men take great risks and experience great pain—especially when they are learning. Their souls may leave their bodies never to return. Injury, pain, and death are part of the expected risk of learning to heal. Physically, when in trance, they may injure themselves by running at full tilt into the pitch-dark savannah, or by pouring glowing red coals over their heads. Furthermore, the medicine itself is said to boil up in the flanks of each healer, and this effect, essential for healing power, is said to cause a pain like no other. Spiritually, they believe that their souls leave their bodies when they are in this state. As mature healers they can use this phenomenon to advantage, arguing in the spirit-world on behalf of the ill person." (p. 374)

Konner (1987:373-4) writes of the *!kia* lessons, "the best insurance against the risks is the support of the community of healers. Trusting in your

fellow-healers, especially your teachers, you can let go psychologically and spiritually; they will pull you away from the coals or prevent you from running into a tree; they will teach you how to turn the pain in your flanks into healing power; they will slowly bring your soul back into your body."

This seems as though it could be said of the Ju/'hoansi in more realms than healing. Lee (1984) has characterized them as a people with a sense of their own importance, a people of biting humor and, above all, the deepest regard for one another.

The Ju/'hoansi Today

Lee (1993) describes changes in traditional Ju/'hoansi life beginning as early as the 1970s. By now, those anticipated changes—and many others that were not foreseen—have taken hold. The people who, in 1963, had never heard of Africa, the continent on which they lived, are now thoroughly familiar with the vicissitudes of governmental control. Thirty-five years ago, three-quarters of the Ju/'hoansi were hunter-gatherers, unfamiliar with schools, stores, clinics, and airstrips. Modern Ju/'hoansi life includes all these and more; sedentarization, resettlement, militarization, apartheid, and a market economy have all been at work over the last several decades.

In 1965 the Ju/'hoan of Botswana and of Namibia were cut off from one another by the construction of a fence at the border. Climbing the fence was the only way for Dobe Ju/'hoan to continue foraging in Nyae Nyae, the Namibian land adjacent to the Dobe, as they had previously done. In the mid-1970s, the houses built around the cattle kraals came to be more permanent settlements than they had previously been. Several schools were built, and boreholes for water were established. However, severe drought towards the end of the decade led to the institution of a government-run food program, further undermining Ju/'hoansi independence. (Lee 1994) The 1980s brought government restrictions on hunting. As a result, the Ju/'hoansi could not survive solely on their own foraging or herding; they had little choice but to depend on supplemental government rations. By the 1990s Lee (1994) describes Ju/'hoansi villages as all but unrecognizable. Dwellings are no longer conical grass huts, arranged in a close circle to represent the interdependence of the people, but mud-walled houses distributed in a long line, attending more to their property, the herds, than to their neighbors. The change in their traditional foraging diet—most significantly the reliance on refined carbohydrates and domesticated meat and dairy products—has resulted in previously unknown hypertension and heart disease. The addition of alcohol and cigarettes has greatly exacerbated the problem.

When the government shut down the food distribution programs in the 1990s, the Dobe Ju/'hoansi were ill prepared to cope. Attempts to recapture hunting skills were somewhat successful, but when the government reinstated food distribution, they were abandoned. Lee (1993) comments that the

government's changing practices left the Ju/'hoan unable to predict what future policies might be. It became increasingly apparent that the government of Botswana was "anti-San." (Lee 1993:157) Schools forbade Ju/'hoansi children to speak their language and allowed teachers the use of corporal punishment, unheard of among the Ju/'hoansi. More ominous was a policy of displacement, with Ju/'hoansi land being sold to local ranchers.

The Namibian Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae faced an even more desperate situation. In 1970 the government of Namibia established "Bushmanland," designated to be a "homeland." The result was the loss of from 70 percent (Marshall and Ritchie 1984) to 90 percent (Bieseke 1990) of the Nyae Nyae, and with it all the resources there. One thousand Ju/'hoansi were resettled into an area that previously supported 275. Because it was impossible to survive through traditional means, the government provided rations. The resulting "enforced idleness and unaccustomed crowding" (Lee 1993:161) exacted a great price. Rising alcohol consumption, family violence, and the disruption of egalitarianism left the community in disarray. In the 1980s, further disruption was planned: government conservationists began to lobby for declaring the Nyae Nyae area a game reserve, excluding all herding, farming and foraging activities. An additional part of the plan was to have several Ju/'hoansi "dress up in traditional clothes, dance, and sell curios to the wealthy tourists who were to flock in droves to the spectacle. (Lee 1993:162) The plan was eventually abandoned, owing not only to local protest, but to the horror expressed by international media.

Warfare between South Africa and South West Africa drew the Ju/'hoan in. In response to South Africa's attempt to impose apartheid on Namibia, a counter-insurgency movement was mounted, and Ju/'hoansi men were recruited into the military. At its peak, the army had seven hundred Ju/'hoan soldiers, resulting in the Ju/'hoansi's being "one of the most heavily militarized peoples in Africa. (Lee 1993:161)

In 1990 Namibia gained its independence from South Africa, but this proved not entirely positive for the Ju/'hoansi. The new country was poor, and the end of the war meant a loss of livelihood for the hundreds of Ju/'hoansi soldiers and their families. Moreover, the dismantling of the apartheid system led to local ethnic groups with hundreds of cattle moving into "Bushmanland" to take over the grazing land and waterholes.

The Ju/'hoansi have responded with the help of the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNFN), a group founded by anthropologists John Marshall and Claire Ritchie in the early 1980s to help preserve Ju/'hoansi land rights. Lee (1993) reports that the initial impetus behind the NNDNFN was the Ju/'hoansi themselves, who were determined to take back their traditional lands. The NNDNFN helped raise funds for the Ju/'hoansi to purchase cattle and drill waterholes, under the auspices of a cooperative they organized, the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative (NNFC). Still, it is a struggle for a foraging people who were then subject to decades of colonialism to re-emerge as successful pastoralists or farmers. Bieseke (1990:25) cites one man as posing this poignant rhetorical question:

Why do we have to live like this? What have we done wrong? Growing up as a child I used to know the taste of meat. These days we do not even get to smell it very often."

The Dobe Ju/'hoansi in neighboring Botswana have paid close attention to the events in Namibia, and Lee (1993) reports that they have met with NNFC. He observes:

The Ju/'hoansi are enduring but not unchanging; they are adapting to the world system as fast as they can. Their newfound political and technical skills augment a formidable array of knowledge and practices inherited from their foremothers and forefathers: their language, kinship and naming systems, rituals and mythology, subsistence practices, and above all, their ironic sensibility are the firm bases on which they are constructing their future. (1993:174)

Lee goes on to note that the modern-day Dobe Ju/'hoansi commitment to a system based on reciprocity and egalitarianism remains unwavering. Underpinning whatever changes may come to pass is the belief that all Ju/'hoansi are entitled to life's necessities, simply because they are Ju/'hoansi. While social leveling mechanisms limit the accumulation of wealth and power, the belief that no one should be denied the basics of food, care, and community ensure that no one falls below an acceptable standard. He is hopeful that what the future holds for the Ju/'hoansi is a life within which the interests of the modern world system and the communal mode of production and management may work in concert.

For Further Discussion

Hunting and gathering societies find their ways of life threatened. People who two or three decades ago maintained traditional lifestyles, now find themselves fully drawn into the market economy, affected not only by institutions such as schools and hospitals, but also by militarization, civil war, sedentarization, resettlement, and governmental control. The Ju/'hoansi tradition is that of egalitarianism and reciprocity. Richard Lee reports that the Dobe Ju/'hoansi still hold these values above all else. Do you think they will be able to integrate their belief that no one should be denied the basic necessities of life with the demands of their modern situation? Why?/Why not?

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