

Film Guide *for An Argument About A Marriage*

Background and Synopsis

In 1955, several Boer farmers used threats and promises to persuade two !Kung bands to work on their farms. They promised to pay the people, and to bring them home after a year; but when the year was over, the farmers refused to let them go. The people began to plan their escape.

/Ti!kay, the leader of one of the bands, led his people off the farms one morning. They traveled up the middle of the road, stopping at a store to demand goods the farmers owed them. The farmers set out after /Ti!kay's group as soon as they discovered the escape. They held the women and children at gunpoint and brought them back to the farms to work, but /Ti!kay and his son-in-law Tsamgao evaded the farmers and returned home to Nyae Nyae.

One of the men who escaped with /Ti!kay and Tsamgao was Crooked /Qui. When the farmers captured his wife, he returned to the farms to protect her and help the other women. While on the farm, Crooked /Qui began living with Baou, who was /Ti!kay's daughter and Tsamgao's wife. Baou had her first child by Crooked /Qui.

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≠Toma was the leader of the other band. He led his people off the farms at night, keeping away from the roads and hiding during the day. All of them managed to reach home safely.

/Ti!kay told the Expedition about the plight of his wives and children, and asked the Expedition to get help from the government of South West Africa. The Expedition did so, and the police forced the farmers to let /Ti!kay's people go. The Expedition then brought /Ti!kay and his group back to Nyae Nyae in their trucks. Three years had passed since they left home.

≠Toma's people were pleased to see the new arrivals. They were impressed by the goods which /Ti!kay's people brought with them, but they knew there would be trouble, for both Crooked /Qui and Tsamgao wanted to live with Baou. Baou was deeply obliged to Crooked /Qui for supporting her during the years on the farm, but she knew she could not marry him. Crooked /Qui was already married, and was doing bride service for Kxao /Gaisi, his first wife's father. Kxao /Gaisi lived in ≠Toma's band. If he married Baou, /Qui would have to leave Kxao /Gaisi, move to /Ti!kay's group, and do bride service for /Ti!kay. Kxao /Gaisi would never allow this, and /Ti!kay would never allow Baou to marry /Qui unless /Qui did bride service for him.

Furthermore, Tsamgao felt that he deserved to live with Baou. For the past three years he had continued to do bride service for /Ti!kay, even though his bride was living with Crooked /Qui. Tsamgao had fulfilled his obligations to /Ti!kay, so he felt entitled to live with Baou. Baou avoided contention by living with her parents, but her problem remained an issue between the two bands.

Tensions finally erupted several weeks after the exiles returned. /Ti!kay flew into a rage and accused /Qui of seducing his daughter, and insulting him and his family. He threatened to kill /Qui. Kxao /Gaisi, /Qui's father-in-law, defended /Qui against /Ti!kay's threats, even though he could never accept a marriage between /Qui and Baou.

Baou protested that when she began living with /Qui, she expected never to see Tsamgao again. Now, she said, she would not be forced to live with a man who had abandoned her. The women

of the two bands insulted each other: !U, ≠Toma's wife, accused /Ti!kay's people of stinginess; and N/aoka, /Ti!kay's wife, accused ≠Toma's people of shameless begging.

/Qui admitted that he had always intended to ask /Ti!kay outright for Baou's hand. /Ti!kay was astonished at this: was /Qui crazy, he wondered, to think of negotiating with him as though they were equals? /Ti!kay insisted that Baou should live with Tsamgao, even though Tsamgao had abandoned her and /Qui was the father of her child. Furious, /Ti!kay threatened to take a woman from ≠Toma's band by force if Tsamgao remained without a wife.

At this critical moment ≠Toma intervened. By diplomatically changing the subject he managed to dampen the conflict, but Baou's problem remained unsolved. Tsamgao continued to do bride service for /Ti!kay, hoping that Baou would return to live with him. /Ti!kay continued to smolder until, almost two years later, Baou and Tsamgao were reunited.

Transcript of the Film

/Ti!kay: When I catch you eating with her again, I'll kill you. You don't believe me? I'm telling you!

/Qui: I only visited. I went home to eat.

/Ti!kay: Come on. Let's settle it with arrows.

Kxao /Gaisi: He talks about using arrows. I have arrows.

/Ti!kay: Soon I swear I'll kill you.

Kxao /Gaisi: If it weren't for the Marshalls, /Ti!kay wouldn't have wives of his own.

/Ti!kay: Screw the Marshalls!

N/aoka [/Ti!kay's wife]: When the men ran away, the farmers chased us with horses.

Kxao /Gaisi: Why must we listen to a man who thinks only of himself?

Baou: Was I supposed to starve? The farmers didn't feed women. I can make up my own mind about a man who left me to starve.

≠Toma: The farmer's lady might have fed the women. The farmers wouldn't let her. Forget what happened on the farm. We can't discuss a marriage in anger. We must listen to reason.

/Ti!kay: He [/Qui] won't forget; he's still sniffing at her.

N/aoka: since we came back all they do is beg.

/Ti!kay: Why don't you [/Qui] ask me or my daughter so I can tell you "NO"?.

N/aoka: Do you realize you're fighting over a baby? Fighting over a mother and a child?

Kxao /Gaisi: Somebody wants a fight.

!U: He went back and took care of her and now he wants his baby.

/Qui: Yes, and we want things all arranged.

/Ti!kay : How can you talk to me about marriage? You've lost your mind.

/Qui: I'm only saying you can decide about this.

/Ti!kay (to group): He's too deficient to keep the wife he has. [To /Qui] You're insane! Crazy! I shouldn't even listen to a lecher. Did you ask your father-in-law? Your wife? Even when you wear pants among these naked simpletons you're still nothing.

N!ai: I'll have no part of these wretched, jealous people. I'm sick of it; let's get our firewood.

Kxao /Gaisi: He calls me poor! A fool with useless things and no one's respect.

Kxao /Gaisi: Are you [/Ti!kay] going to ask for my son-in-law? You tell me you're an important man. You should tell your own people, if you have any.

/Ti!-k-ay: All right, I'm telling you now, /Gautscha people! If Tsamgao goes without a wife, I'm going to get him one of yours. All it will take is one little arrow. Just one little arrow and we're finished with it.

≠Toma: When we act like ourselves these things don't happen. When I brought my people back, I went to them at night. I went to them secretly. I went to Kxao /Gaisi at night. I said we should go back to /Gautscha, secretly. He said there would be rain and water.

!U: They're too stingy even to share fire.

≠Toma: We said we would go far the first night; hide in the grass; travel on no road. I came back secretly with my people. I also brought /Gishay with my little sister and my wife.

Narrator: Although the question of Baou's marriage was buried temporarily, ill feeling persisted between the two bands. There were later outbursts, particularly between /Ti!kay and Kxao /Gaisi. /Ti!kay continued to blame ≠Toma's people for his daughter's predicament, until, almost two years later, Baou returned, to Tsamgao.

How Did The Participants React To This film?

On the evening of October 1, 1972, John Marshall showed *An Argument About a Marriage* to /Ti!kay, ≠Toma, /Qui, Kxao /Gaisi, and a number of other people who appear in the film. The next morning he interviewed /Ti!kay and /Qui about their roles in the film. The following transcripts have been prepared from tapes of those interviews. The translation is by Kernel Ledimo, the Bantu interpreter who accompanied all the Marshall Expeditions. The transcripts are slightly abridged, and most of Ledimo's grammatical errors have been corrected.

Interview with /Ti!kay, October 2, 1972

John K. Marshall.[JKM]: what was this argument about?

/Ti!kay [TK]: I didn't want /Qui to marry my daughter Baou, because /Qui's mother had the same name as Baou. Besides, Baou was engaged to Tsamgao, so I didn't want /Qui to marry her. It's a custom of the Bushmen that nobody can marry a person who has the same name as his mother. That's why I was angry, and I wanted to chase /Qui away. And leave Baou alone, so she could marry Tsamgao.
That was all the trouble when we lived at !0.

JKM: What happened on the farm, when you were all on the farm together?

TK: When I went to the farms [with the Expedition] I found that /Qui had married Baou. Baou had a daughter. I asked "Whose daughter is this?" They said it was /Qui's daughter. Then I got very angry. That same morning I separated them and they didn't sleep together.

When I came back to !0, /Qui still wanted to marry Baou, even while Tsamgao was there. I wanted Baou to return to Tsamgao; that's why I got angry. I chased /Qui away from Baou. Because I don't want bad things. I don't want people doing senseless things. That was the reason for my fight.

JKM: Did Tsamgao want to marry Baou? Had he always wanted to live with her?

TK: Yes. He loved her. She was his wife because he fed her before they went to the farms. All the time.

JKM: Did /Qui ever talk to you about marrying Baou?

TK: No, he didn't speak to me. He just did it by himself.

JKM: Did /Qui think that he and Baou and your wives were ever going to come back from the farms?

TK: I don't think they thought of coming back. But I wanted my children.

JKM: Were you surprised that /Qui thought he could have two wives?

TK: Yes, I was surprised. I was very surprised that /Qui could marry a woman who had the same name as his mother. If /Qui intended to marry, he should have gone out to another family and married someone with a different name.

JKM: Why were you quarreling with Kxao /Gaisi during that argument?

TK: I didn't quarrel with Kxao /Gaisi. We agreed that /Qui should not marry Baou. We were saying the same thing: that /Qui did wrong by marrying Baou. Kxao /Gaisi didn't want his daughter Khu//ga to be married along with the other woman [Baou].

JKM: But in the middle of the argument, Kxao /Gaisi was sitting on the ground, pointing at you and shouting at you. Then he turned and talked to the /Gautscha women.

TK: I was talking to Kxao /Gaisi, saying "You! You were afraid of the farmers, of thee Boers, so you didn't go fetch your children, so I went. I brought your child for you. You say I shouldn't stop /Qui from doing bad things?" That's what we were talking about.

JKM: Did Kxao /Gaisi think that you were wrong in stopping

TK: I don't, really know. Kxao /Gaisi didn't exactly know his own ideas.

JKM: Did Kxao /Gaisi say that /Qui should be left alone?

TK: Yes.

JKM: He did?

TK: Yes. He asked why I was talking to /Qui.

JKM: If you had permitted the marriage, where would /Qui have lived? He was living, as he was supposed to, with Kxao /Gaisi. Can a man live with two sets of parents-in-law at once? How can a man marry two women and do bride service for two different families?

TK: He may manage it, living with one set of parents for some time, then moving to the other set for some time. That's the only way.

JKM: Do you have to be an important person, a "heavy" person, to have two wives?

TK: Yes. You have to be a good hunter. You have to hunt very hard

to feed both wives.

JKM: Do you think that /Qui was a sufficiently good hunter to attempt such a thing?

TK: No, he's not strong, not a good hunter. He couldn't support two wives. Now he's unable to support one wife. A man who has two wives should be a strong man, a good hunter who can feed two families.

JKM: Well, that's helped a lot. I understand things much better.

Interview with /Qui
October 2, 1972

JKM: Will you tell me what the argument was about, so I can understand it better?

/Qui: The whole trouble was about /Ti!kay's daughter. They didn't want me to marry her. That's what the trouble was, and we quarreled. Then, after quarreling, I left Baou. I have altogether left her now; I have no intention of marrying her.

JKM: What happened on the farm?

/Qui: when we were on the farms, I lived with Baou and I wanted to marry her. Her name sounds like my mother's name, but still I decided to marry. We all fell in love. Then we stayed together.

JKM: Did she want you on the farms? Did she want to live with you and have a child?

/Qui: When we were on the farms, /Ti!kay and I talked about the matter. I said I would find some money to pay in front of the police. The police agreed with /Ti!kay. They said I should pay because I had done something very bad. I did pay some money, and I thought the matter was finished. But when we came here [10], /Ti!kay still had it in mind, and he started the quarrel. But I wanted to explain to /Ti!kay that since I had already found myself guilty and paid him some money, he should stop bothering about the marriage.

JKM: Why did the police think you did something wrong?

/Qui: Because it was bad to marry a woman who had the same name as my mother. They said we had better stop the marriage then and there and marry someone else.

JKM: The police were what? White?

/Qui: No, Black [Bantu].

JKM: What do they know about not marrying someone with the same name?

/Qui: They knew it was bad to marry someone who has the same

name as your mother, because you have to name your children with your mother's name. It will be difficult to name your children because they will have the same name as your wife (see below, section C-1).

JKM: The police were Bushmen?

/Qui: No, they were Black people.

JKM: Did you ever expect to come back from the farm to Nyae Nyae?

/Qui: Yes, I felt that I would come back.

JKM: when did you think that you would come back?

/Qui: I didn't know how I would come back; I just wanted to. When I saw your mother and father I was pleased. They asked me to come to my country.

JKM: How long did you live with Baou?

/Qui: About thirteen months.

JKM: How do you think Baou felt when /Ti!kay separated you two?

/Qui: Baou and I both thought that we had done something bad. I felt it was bad; I should not have done it. When the people said we should separate I thought it was quite all right.

JKM: Did you feel that you were doing something bad during all the thirteen months that you lived with Baou?

/Qui: I knew it was bad, but it's always that way with a man: you know it's bad, you can see it is, but you continue to do it.

JKM: Did Baou feel the same way?

/Qui: We all knew it was bad, but we just continued to stay together. After we went to the police, we realized very well that it was bad. I agreed to pay some money.

JKM: Whom did you pay?

/Qui: /Ti!kay.

JKM: How much?

/Qui: 3 rand [about \$7.50]. I gave him some clothes: a coat. I also paid him with a flashlight. I gave him three rand; I didn't have much money.

JKM: If you and Baou felt you were doing something wrong, why

did you do it so long?

/Qui: We knew it was bad, but we just continued it. We stayed so long, knowing it was bad.

JKM: Were you worried about having a child?

/Qui: Yes; that's why I paid /Ti!kay. I know I made the woman get "sorry"; that's why I paid the money. On the way back here, when the old man [/Ti!kay] wanted to fight me, I couldn't fight him. I decided instead to tell him, "No, I am no longer married to your daughter. I've done with her."

JKM: Did you worry about what Kxao /Gaisi would think?

/Qui: I knew Kxao /Gaisi did not like it, so I told him, "Yes, it is bad. I will pay and finish this marriage." I finished the marriage and told Baou that she was my younger sister and that it wasn't good for us to marry. She had another husband.

JKM: What did your wife Khu//ga think?

/Qui: She didn't like it at all.

JKM: Did you live with both Khu//ga and Baou in one house?

/Qui: Yes.

JKM: How did Baou and Khu//ga get along?

/Qui: They had a "misunderstanding" all the time. Khu//ga was not happy at all. She kept on quarreling.

JKM: Did you love Baou very much?

/Qui: No, I didn't love her very much.

JKM: Then why did you do it?

/Qui: I was a man. When we came back, I stopped it.

JKM: You were excited by her? You wanted to make love with her?

/Qui: No, I wasn't so much excited, because I had another wife. I just loved her and stayed with her [Baou].

JKM: She didn't make you very excited?

/Qui: She didn't excite me, no.

JKM: Did you ever promise Baou that you two would be married?

/Qui: No, I didn't promise her anything.

JKM: Did you ever promise that you would feed her and help her on the farms if she would live with you?

/Qui: Yes, I thought so. I thought of helping her, treating her very well and helping her in living.

JKM: Did the farmers give food to people who weren't working?

/Qui: Yes.

JKM: Then Baou didn't need you to help her get food; she had food given to her by the farmers?

/Qui: She was getting a little food and my food was a bit more. I helped her by giving her some food. But this whole affair was finished on the farms. When we came here we came to live in peace. We had forgotten about what we did.

JKM: Did Baou think she was ever going to get back home again?

/Qui: None of us thought we would come back. We thought we would stay for good.

JKM: When the argument happened, that I made a film of, Kxao /Gaisi and /Ti!kay were arguing. What were they arguing about?

/Qui: They were talking about our mistake. They were not quarreling with each other; they were reminding each other what to do.

JKM: But at one point Kxao /Gaisi was sitting on the ground and shouting at /Ti!kay. What was he shouting about?

/Qui: Kxao /Gaisi was telling /Ti!kay to stop fighting, because the affair was all over, done, finished. /Ti!kay should stay peaceful, stop fighting.

JKM: What did /Ti!kay say?

/Qui: He kept on quarreling.

JKM: Why?

/Qui: He was quarreling; he said "Why are you talking to me?" He said I should just have kept quiet because we finished it on the farms. The women were talking... /Ti!kay followed me. He wanted to hit me. He kept on quarreling, and I felt very afraid of him. He continued to quarrel. He hated me. But I wondered why, because I had stopped living with his daughter.

JKM: One further question: did you name the child?

/Qui: No, the child was named N/aoka [that is, after /Ti!kay's wife].

Questions Raised by the Film

JKM: Did you all live together on the farms: you, and /Ti!kay's two wives?

/Qui; Yes.

JKM: What did N/aoka and N!ai [/Ti!kay's wives] think of the affair when they were on the farms?

/Qui: They disliked it.

JKM: Didn't they try to stop it?

/Qui: Yes, they wanted me to stop.

JKM: But they couldn't stop you from living with Baou?

/Qui: I didn't admit that I married her. I told them that we were just living together. [Laughs.]

JKM: But did they try to stop it? Did you ever talk to /Ti!kay's wives about it?

/Qui: Yes, we talked about it. They told us that we were not doing good, because the girl had the same name as my mother.

When /Ti!kay came to the farms we talked about it. We went to the police, and they said no, it was very bad for a !Kung person to take two wives. They said it was a bad thing and we stopped it.

JKM: Why didn't N/aoka and N!ai go to the police before?

/Qui: Because they didn't know how to go to the police.

JKM: Didn't they talk to the farmer about it?

/Qui: I don't think so.

JKM: Is that because they thought they'd never get back to their own country? At least Baou had a husband, someone to live with her. Was that it?

/Qui: Yes, that's it. We didn't think we'd ever come back. When we saw your parents we got very happy. We knew we would be coming back to our country; and we did come back, happy.

JKM: Thanks. I understand it better.

/Qui: Thank you.

A. Under what circumstances was this film made?

In 1964 about 45 thousand Bushmen were living in the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa (Lee 1965:12; see figure 1) . Most of them worked on European farms or Bantu cattle posts, but about 20% of them were full time hunters and gatherers (ibid.:21) *An Argument about a Marriage* was filmed in Nyae Nyae, a part of South West Africa where until 1955 all the !Kung Bushmen pursued this traditional occupation.

The life of these !Kung Bushmen changed dramatically after 1955. In that year many of them were recruited to work on European farms around Gobabis, South West Africa. The farmers refused to let them leave, and many of the people did not return to Nyae Nyae until 1958. Then, in 1960, the Nyae Nyae !Kung were resettled at Tsumkwe, South West Africa (see figure 2), where there is a government post and a mission of the Dutch Reformed Church. The government has been trying to teach the !Kung to herd goats and raise small crops of corn, but the change to a new way of life has been difficult (ibid.:32; L. Marshall 1965:273; Young and Marshall 1974; and see below, section B).

Because of the changes which have taken place since 1955 (and especially since 1960), this Study Guide sometimes uses the convention of the "ethnographic present": that is, some descriptions of the !Kung refer to them when they were studied, not as they are now. In particular, the discussions of dispute settlement and marriage customs are based largely on data collected before 1958. On the other hand, the discussion of the role of the !Kung in the economy of southern Africa is based on the information available in August 1974.

An Argument about a Marriage was filmed at !0, about 30 km northwest of Tsumkwe, South West Africa (see figure 2). !0 lies, in a forest of mangetti trees [*Ricinodendron rautenii*], which provide a tasty and nutritious nut (Lee 1968, ~969a). Three !Kung bands were living at !0 when *An Argument about a Marriage* was shot: /Ti!kay's, based at Khumsa; ≠Toma's, based at /Gautscha; and Old /Gaishay's, based at N/am Choa (see figure 2 for the location of these camps). Until late 1957 the Expedition had lived with ≠Toma's band at /Gautscha, but the mosquitos there forced them both to move north to Tsumkwe. Tsumkwe was also infested, so the Expedition continued on to !0, bringing ≠Toma's band with them in the trucks. Because mangetti trees grow only on sand dunes, the only water at !0 was that which the rains had left standing in hollow trees. There was enough for about half the people, so the Expedition trucked in water to give to the rest.

1. How typical were the experiences of ≠Toma and /Ti!kay?

As late as the 1950's, many South West African farmers engaged in the practice of "blackbirding". Farmers used to enter a Bushman area in trucks, pass out tobacco, and try to convince people to work on their farms (Thomas 1959:14-21). Sometimes recruiting was not difficult. During the late 1940's some !Kung people went to the farms by themselves, and stories of prosperity there drifted back to relatives in Nyae Nyae via the visiting network. These stories must have persuaded some people that life on the farms was at least worth trying.

But if the Bushmen were reluctant to come, the farmers enticed them with promises: they promised, for example, to pay /Ti!kay and to cure ≠Toma of wounds he suffered when a buffalo gored him. If the Bushmen still refused work, the farmers might threaten to steal the children or kill the men. We have no evidence that violence was actually used to recruit ≠Toma's and /Ti!kay's people, but the farmers did use guns to recapture /Ti!kay's people when they tried to escape. Sometimes it was the farmers who kept Bushman laborers on the farms; more often, it was the two hundred miles of waterless country which separated the farms from Nyae Nyae.

The experiences of ≠Toma's and /Ti!kay's bands are rooted in the history and politics of the labor market in South Africa. A brief review of pertinent developments should make it clear why this is so; those who are interested in South African labor policy should see the informative book edited by M. Wilson and L. Thompson (1971). The story begins in 1913, when Black Africans in South Africa were restricted to segregated Reserves, and forbidden to buy land from Whites (M. Wilson 1971:52). A closely similar law was passed in South West Africa in 1922 (R. First 1963:111).

The South African Government allotted only 13.7% of the land to the Reserves (Kuper 1971: 438), although they contained most of the population of the country. Poor climate combined with inefficient agriculture to make the Reserves increasingly dependent on the White areas of South Africa for food (M. Wilson 1971). At the same time, changes in the tenancy laws created a large landless proletariat which depended on wage labor for survival (see M. Wilson 1971 for details). The mines and factories of South Africa have become increasingly dependent on this Black proletariat, while the Native Reserves are increasingly dependent on the income of migrant workers.

Since the 1890's the Rand mines have been the most important employers of native labor in South Africa. The Witwatersrand Native Labor Association (WNLA), a semi-private recruiting agency, manages most of the migration of workers between the mines and the Reserves. Through an elaborate network of recruiting posts, WNLA contracts workers in the Reserves to mining companies in the Rand. WNLA transports the workers to and from the mines, where they are legally required to work until their contracts expire. WNLA's counterpart in South West Africa is the South West Africa

Native Labor Association (SWANLA). When diamonds and copper were discovered in South West Africa, SWANLA's predecessor organized and maintained a recruiting network which drew thousands of workers from the Reserves to the mines. As we shall see below, the South West African mines contributed to the shortage of agricultural labor which developed there in the 1950's.

The expansion of industry in South Africa in the late 30's and early 40's produced a serious shortage of farm labor. Wages on the farms were far lower than wages in mines and factories (F. Wilson 1971:146); and despite restrictive legislation, many Africans left the countryside for the cities. The demand for labor in manufacturing rose much more rapidly than the demand for mine workers in those years (Houghton 1971:34), so WNLA was forced to look further afield to find workers for the mines. In 1943, for instance, WNLA signed a contract with SWANLA, under which WNLA was allowed to draw off workers from the Ovambo and Okavango Reserves in northern South West Africa (First 1963:133). These Reserves had traditionally supplied the farmers of northern South West Africa with labor. These farmers were already competing for labor with the diamond and copper mines in the southern part of South West Africa, and the extension of WNLA to South West Africa exacerbated their problem. Under pressure from the farmers, SWANLA agreed in 1948 to supply WNLA only with laborers who were not needed in South West Africa. But the shortage of farm labor persisted. The

Working conditions of farm laborers in South West Africa were wretched, and SWANLA found it difficult to recruit them. Native workers preferred overwhelmingly to work in the mines (First 1963:134; see also SWANLA 1950). To make matters

worse, a SWANLA commission found in 1948 that the surplus labor of the Reserves had already been depleted, presumably by the mines of South and South West Africa. The men on the Reserves were now fully employed, and still there was a shortage of farm labor (First 1963:133).

But SWANLA operated only in the Reserves. The !Kung Bushmen were still free in 1948; it was not until 1960 that they were placed in the Tsumkwe Reserve (Lee 1965:32; L. Marshall 1965:273). From the farmers' point of view, then, the Bushmen were an untapped labor pool. Unable to obtain workers through the regular recruiting channels, they resorted to "blackbirding". They took their trucks, drove into Nyae Nyae, and "recruited" labor themselves.

2. What is the current status of the Nyae Nyae !Kung in the national economy?

The !Kung people of Nyae Nyae are peripheral to the native labor recruiting system. They have been resettled: in 1960, in a reserve at Tsumkwe, South West Africa. But there is no recruiting post in the Reserve, and the !Kung people are not allowed to leave the Reserve to sign up for work. They cannot work in neighboring Botswana, either, for there is a high fence along the frontier, patrolled by the South West Africa and Botswana police.

So the !Kung people who appear in *An Argument about a Marriage* now stay inside the Tsumkwe Reserve. Most of them work for the Government, building fences and roads, or improving the water-holes. ≠Toma is a professional administrator, paid by the Government to represent the Tsumkwe community. A number of people have been given cattle, and a few men work as trackers for the police or the army.

These !Kung people know that their hunting and gathering days are over, and that their future lies with the larger economy. For them, as for all peoples on the edge of the Kalahari, the “larger economy” means cattle, for ranching is the basis of the economy in this dry land. Khoisan people [Bushmen and Hottentots] have always excelled in herding other peoples’ cattle. So the problem for them now is not lack of skill, but lack of land, water, and capital.

!Kung Marriage

1. Why couldn’t Baou marry /Qui?

a. It would have been incestuous.

Throughout their interviews with John Marshall, both /Ti!kay and /Qui insisted that it was wrong for /Qui to marry a woman named Baou. To see why, we must take a look at how !Kung names work, and how the !Kung define “incest”.

The !Kung Bushmen in Nyae Nyae use only 87 names: 46 for men and 41 for women (L. Marshall 1957:7). Because there were over 600 people in Nyae Nyae in 1957 (L. Marshall 1960:328), many people had the same name. There were dozens of “≠Toma’s”. for example (L. Marshall 1961:238). “A man invariably names his first-born son for his father (that is, the child’s FaFa), and his first-born daughter for his mother (that is, the child’s FaMo) If he has more than one wife, he names the first-born son and daughter of each wife for his father and mother, respectively. ... A man usually but not always names his second-born son after the child’s MoFa and the second-born daughter for her MoMo. Subsequent children are usually named for the siblings of their father or mother, or for the spouses of those siblings” (L. Marshall 1957:7). From these rules it follows that a person can have the same name as someone else in his own generation or his grandparents’ generation. But he can never have the same name as a parent or a child. The !Kung say that it would be “madness” for a man to name a son for himself or a daughter after her mother (L. Marshall 1957:7).

!Kung people who share a name feel a certain kinship with each other; they feel that they partake of each other’s “essence” in some way (L. Marshall 1957:22; 1965:259). In fact, names provide the basis for a comprehensive system of fictive kinship. Using this system, Ego reclassifies most other !Kung according to their relation to people who share his or her own name. The complex and subtle

rules by which Ego does this have been well described elsewhere (by L. Marshall [1957]), so for our purposes it is enough to point out that a man always applies the term //ga to a woman who has the same name as his mother. !Kung rules of marriage forbid a man to marry such a woman (L. Marshall 1959:343). 1959:341343). Baou had the same name as /Qui’s mother (see L. Marshall 1960:332 for /Qui’s genealogy). He therefore called her //ga and should not have married her. As ≠Toma once explained, “If you marry your mother’s namesake, it sounds as though you are marrying your mother” (L. Marshall 1959:343).

b. It would have violated the rules of bride service.

Had there been no problem with bride service, Baou could probably have divorced Tsamgao and married /Qui. Divorce is common and easy among the !Kung (L. Marshall 1959:358), and even Baou’s name would not have prevented her from marrying /Qui. In the past, several other men in Nyae Nyae had married women with the same name as their mothers (ibid.:344); so apparently the rule against marrying your mother’s namesake was not followed as strictly as other incest taboos. But both /Ti!kay and Kxao /Gaisi opposed /Qui’s marriage to Baou. To see why, we have to examine the institution of bride service.

When a man marries, he always goes to live with his wife’s parents. According to L. Marshall, this rule is never broken: “We heard of no deviation from it. A boy or a man of any age, an important medicine man, all go to live with their bride’s parents, in first marriages and subsequent marriages, whatever the age of the bride” (1959:352). Men in bride service are expected to provide their parents-in-law with meat. The parents of girls speak of this constantly: “We are old,” they say, whether it is true or not. “We need a young man to hunt for us. Our daughter’s husband must get us something to eat” (ibid.:351).

A man must remain in bride service until his wife bears three children. Since girls are married young (see L. Marshall 1959:350), a man may have to wait five or six years before his wife’s first child is born, and several more for the next two. To spend ten years in bride service is not unusual. When it is over, a man may finally choose where he will live: he is now considered a full adult, an able and responsible head of a family (ibid.:352). He may also contract his own subsequent marriages. This rule was the source of /Ti!kay’s astonishment in the film when /Qui asked him for Baou’s hand. Because he had not finished bride service, /Qui was of insufficient status to negotiate a marriage directly with /Ti!kay.

Sons-in-law are perhaps the most important economic assets of a !Kung family. The !Kung people have few material possessions, and constant gift-giving tends to distribute them fairly evenly throughout the population (L. Marshall 1961:243). But sons-in-law provide something permanent: status and economic security for their parents-in-law.

Let us first see how they provide economic security. The !Kung

insist that parents-in-law depend on their sons-in-law for food (L. Marshall 1959:351). But this cannot be strictly true. Women provide 70 to 80% of the diet of the !Kung (L. Marshall 1960:335; Lee 1968). Besides, girls always marry young, often when they are five or six (L. Marshall 1959:350), so a father-in-law will rarely be too old to hunt for himself. Finally, a man in his first few years of bride service depends on his father-in-law to help him find game in unfamiliar territory (L. Marshall 1960:339). If anything, sons-in-law depend on their parents-in-law for food. We need to look deeper, then, to see how bride service insures economic security for parents-in-law.

Rain in Nyae Nyae is scarce and spotty (Story 1958:6). Rainfall varies widely from region to region, and from year to year within a region (Lee 1965:136). As rainfall varies, so do wild plants, the staple food of the !Kung. A region may be rich in food one year and nearly barren the next. It follows that people need to be able to exploit the resources of several different regions in order to have enough to eat and drink in all years.

To exploit the resources of a region, one must have legitimate access to them. Access to food and water can either be inherited or acquired through marriage. In each region of Nyae Nyae there lives a "core" of lineal descendants who "own" (*kxei*) the food and water in their region' (Lee 1972; L. Marshall 1960:344ff). Ownership is inherited by both men and women, so that all people have the right to exploit the resources of the territory where either of their parents was born. These inherited rights are inalienable; no matter where you decide to live, you always have the right to the resources of your home "territory".

If you are not an "owner" of food and water in a territory, you can still exploit the food and water there if you marry an "owner". Then, you and your close relatives (siblings and parents) acquire the right to collect food and take water in that territory. In turn, a person who marries one of your close relatives gets the same right, as do his or her close relatives. Thus in any given territory there is usually a core of "owners" related by blood, and several chains of affines (see figure 3).

People exercise their rights to food and water by visiting. If one region is having a bad year, people make extended visits to their "connections" in other territories. Visiting distributes people more or less evenly with respect to food and water; or, looking at it the other way, distributes food and water more or less evenly to all people

(L. Marshall 1960:345; Lee 1965:139). We can therefore view bride service as a system of exchange, in which each !Kung band gives up men in return for access to food and water. As in other societies described by Marcel Mauss in his classic, *The Gift* (1967), bride service among the !Kung ties social groups together with bonds of mutual obligation.

The bonds of exchange also explain how bride service increases

the status of fathers-in-law. While they are in bride service, sons-in-law are required to give their fathers-in-law a large portion of the meat of every animal they kill (L. Marshall 1961:238). Meat has as much political value to the !Kung as nutritional value, for distributing meat creates favors which must be reciprocated. Meat is to the !Kung what "gravy" is to American politicians: it repays favors and creates new debts.

The more meat a man distributes, the more closely his family is bound in the web of favors and obligations. And the more favors a man is owed, the greater his family's security and influence. The !Kung have a word which describes this: they say that distributing meat increases the "weight" of a family. Clearly, then, the more sons-in-law a man has, and the longer and better they hunt for him, the more meat he will have to distribute, and the "heavier" his family will become. So we can also view bride service as a form of reciprocal exchange in which daughters are exchanged for an increase in the status and security of their fathers' family.

If /Qui had married Baou, both /Ti!kay and Kxao /Gaisi would have lost the security and status of a son-in-law. /Qui was already married to Kxao /Gaisi's daughter Khu//ga. If he married Baou, he would have had to live with /Ti!kay, and Kxao /Gaisi would have lost the services of a son-in-law. Moreover, if /Qui and Baou had married, Tsamgao would probably have married a woman from another band, and /Ti!kay would have lost the services of the husband he had presumably chosen for Baou. Neither /Ti!kay nor Kxao /Gaisi could countenance such a marriage.

2. Could /Ti!kay really have taken a woman from ≠Toma's band by force?

L. Marshall writes: "Marriage by capture is spoken of fairly frequently by the !Kung in conversation. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and I questioned a number of informants about it and we are convinced that wives are not acquired by this means at present.... Nowadays the idea of capturing wives appears to be enjoyed by the men as a fantasy" (1959:348). In short, probably not.

Conflict Resolutions Among the !Kung

1. Was this a typical argument?

Yes. According to Lee (1969b, 1972) and L. Marshall (1959:361), adultery often provokes serious fights. L. Marshall states that "a husband is considered to be quite within his rights by !Kung rules of conduct if he kills a man who sleeps with his wife" (*ibid.*); and case histories show that this right is sometimes exercised. Lee reports that adultery was the cause of four of the 22 homicides in the Dobe area since 1920 (1969b); and L. Marshall reports one actual homicide and four near misses, all provoked by adultery (1959:3 61-2).

The argument about Baou's marriage was also typical of /Ti!kay's approach to conflicts. Unlike ≠Toma, /Ti!kay led his band by virtue of descent, not natural ability. /Ti!kay had inherited from his father the rights to the important Khumsa waterhole. The !Kung say that a person has the right to take water from a waterhole if he or she is related by blood or marriage to the "owner" of that waterhole; in this case, /Ti!kay (see above, section C). Many people depended on /Ti!kay for access to food and water, so /Ti!kay had a group of followers with whom he could behave rather freely. /Ti!kay was erratic, self-centered, jealous, and provocative (L. Marshall 1959:362; 1961:245), in many ways a man ill suited to lead; but his inherited status enabled him to express these qualities without losing his following.

Thus, several weeks before the argument about Baou's marriage, /Ti!kay stirred up another controversy in which he and Kxao /Gaisi nearly came to blows. Lame Kxao had been sleeping with !Ghia, the second wife of one old Kxao. Responding to public pressure, Lame Kxao stopped seeing !Ghia and apologized to Old Kxao. The affair seemed to be over, but /Ti!kay (who was !Ghia's MoBr) kindled it again. He claimed that, when Lame Kxao "insulted" !Ghia he also insulted him (/Ti!kay) - exactly what /Ti!kay said about /Qui and Baou. Kxao /Gaisi, as he did in this film, accused /Ti!kay of picking a fight. /Ti!kay flew into a rage, insulted Kxao /Gaisi, and started for his arrows. A serious fight was barely averted when /Ti!kay's half-sisters pulled him away from Kxao /Gaisi and held him down (L. Marshall 1959:361-2).

2. What would have happened had ≠Toma not intervened in the argument about Baou's marriage?

!Kung fighting takes place at three distinct levels of intensity: "talking", sexual insulting, and physical violence. A "talk", as L. Marshall describes it, is an outpouring of verbal abuse, delivered in an accentuated style quite unlike the usual babble of conversation in a !Kung camp (1961:233-4).

In one such "talk", ≠Toma's wife !U accused another woman of diverting a gift from its rightful path. In a loud and clear tone she recounted Khuan//a's faults, while Khuan//a's family denied each charge in turn. The "talk" lasted about twenty minutes, until Khuan//a gave up and walked away (ibid.:233).

Arguments not resolved by "talking" may escalate to the next level, sexual insulting. Sexual insults are affectionate when two people stand in the "joking relation" with each other, but deadly when they do not (Lee 1969b; J. Marshall 1968; L. Marshall 1957:19-22). The !Kung say they "fear" (*koa*) to joke with the wrong person, in the same way that they "fear" a lion or a mamba (L. Marshall 1957:22). Sexually insulting the wrong person, says Lee, can lead directly to physical violence (1969b).

Physical violence was rare among the !Kung studied by L.

Marshall (1961:246), but somewhat more common among those in the Dobe area (see below, section 4). According to Lee, Dobe men wrestle and fight with fists, and in serious fights they may shoot poisoned arrows at each other. There is no antidote for arrow poison, so when fights approach this stage, bystanders usually step in (L. Marshall 1959:362). Most fights seem to be stopped before someone is killed: L. Marshall reports only two fatalities (1960:336, 351), and Lee reports 22 between 1920 and 1970 (Lee -1969b; see below, section 4).

The argument about Baou's marriage was conducted at the first two levels: "talking" and sexual insulting. Examples of "talking" are provided throughout the film by the women:

"Since we came back all they do is beg," said N/aoka. "I'll have no part of those wretched, jealous people," exclaimed N!ai. "They're too stingy even to share fire," !U muttered. Kxao /Gaisi also took a few jabs at /Ti!kay: he said, for example, "Ti!kay tells me he's an important man; he should talk to his own people, if he has any." Like other "talks" described in the literature, these remarks have to do with stinginess and bad judgment, not sex.

But /Ti!kay escalated the fight by sexually insulting /Qui. "Today you will die with an erection," he shouts in the original sound track. "You big prick!" counters /Qui. After trading a few more insults of this nature, /Ti!kay sums up: "Two wives would need -three of you!" These were fighting words, for /Qui and /Ti!kay definitely did not stand in the joking relation. Judging by /Ti!kay's character and other !Kung fights, it seems likely that /Ti!kay would have tried to shoot /Qui if ≠Toma had not intervened.

3. How did ≠Toma settle the argument?

Disputes between !Kung are generally handled in a much more flexible way than disputes between, say, Americans. In America, disputes between people are referred to courts, which try to fit each case into the fixed categories of right and wrong provided by the law. In order for courts to settle disputes this way, their decisions must be enforceable, so courts are only effective in societies where a political hierarchy places one person's judgment above another's.

!Kung society is almost completely egalitarian; that is, no !Kung person has direct power over any other³. At the same time, strong unwritten laws guide !Kung behavior; laws, for example, about sharing meat (L. Marshall 1961:236ff), about giving and receiving presents (ibid.:244), and about bride service (see above, section C). But because the !Kung have no political hierarchy, these unwritten laws can only be enforced by public opinion.

Ultimately, a consensus of public opinion is required to settle a dispute between !Kung people. The root of public opinion is unwritten law, but self-interest also contributes. It follows that a mediator like ≠Toma can settle a dispute in two main ways: (1) he can bring public opinion to bear against an offender by appealing to the unwritten laws; and (2) he can offer compromises which appease

the interest of both sides in a dispute. A good leader, like ≠Toma, is a man who can manipulate public opinion on an issue in such a way that a consensus is quickly reached.

Glimpses of this technique can be seen in *An Argument About a Marriage*. When ≠Toma entered the dispute, he was faced with the problem of calming /Ti!kay. How could he do this? Since /Qui, not /Ti!kay, had violated the unwritten laws, public opinion must have been running in /Ti!kay's favor. So ≠Toma gently called attention to /Ti!kay's shortcomings. By describing his own successful escape from the farms, ≠Toma threw /Ti!kay's bungled plan into high relief. "If /Ti!kay had managed things right," ≠Toma seemed to be saying in the most diplomatic way possible, "the whole problem would never have come up. Tsamgao would be living happily with Baou, and /Qui would be living happily with his own wife." Evidently ≠Toma's approach was successful: /Ti!kay stopped fighting and the argument was temporarily brought under control.

!Kung people probably do not settle disputes as self-consciously as this discussion suggests. To a large extent they have internalized the value of peace, so fighting appears to them morally repugnant, not just politically inexpedient. Wrongdoing, said /Ti!kay in a cooler moment, means "making crooked arrows and fighting" (L. Marshall 1961:245).

4. Are the !Kung usually successful in settling disputes?

Yes, according to L. Marshall. She writes: "During seventeen and a half months when I lived with the Nyae Nyae !Kung, ... I personally saw four flare-ups of discord and heard of three others which occurred in neighboring bands All were resolved before they became serious quarrels. ... We considered, judging from that sample, that the !Kung managed very well to keep tensions from turning into hostility" (1961:246).

Richard Lee, however, reports that serious fights and even homicides are not rare among the !Kung. He saw 33 fights during his six years of field work, and informants told him about 22 homicides which occurred between 1920 and 1955 (Lee 1972). There are several possible explanations for the difference between Lee's and L. Marshall's accounts. First, Lee studied a different !Kung group. His subjects, in the Dobe area (see figure 1), have been under the jurisdiction of the Tswana headman since 1948; the Nyae Nyae !Kung, on the other hand, were politically independent until 1960. The net effect of Tswana authority is unclear: there has been only one homicide under the new system, but other changes in !Kung customary law may have occurred as well.

Second, Lee studied a group of !Kung who were considerably more acculturated than those studied by L. Marshall. Many of the Dobe people raise livestock and work for the Bantu, and others have begun to drink (J. Marshall, pers. comm.) There is some reason to believe that !Kung violence increases under these conditions: ≠Toma told J. Marshall in 1972 that his own people had become more vio-

lent in the twelve years since they began raising livestock at Tsumkwe (J. Marshall, pers. comm.) *An Argument about a Marriage* also suggests how rapidly economic conditions lead to new and changing social and serious disputes.

Finally, ≠Toma may be responsible for part of the difference between Lee's and L. Marshall's accounts of !Kung violence. Marshall's conclusions are based on what she saw at /Gautscha, where ≠Tomals followers lived. His excellent leadership may have helped make Nyae Nyae a more peaceful place to live.

Pronunciation Guide

Word:	Closest equivalent:
Boer	BOOR
! Kung	KOONG
/Ti! Kay	TEE-kay
Tsamgao	TSAHM-koh
Nyae Nyae	NY NY
/Qui	KWEE
Baou	BAH-oo
≠Toma	TOH-ma
Kxao /Gaisi	KHOW KY-see
!U	00
N/aoka	NOW-ka
N!ai	NY
!O	OH
//Kushay	KOO-shay
Khumsa	KHOOM-sah
/Gautscha	GOUT-sha
N/am Choa	nahm CHO-a
//ga	GAH
kxei	KHAY
//ei	KAY
Dobe	DOH-bay

Footnotes

An Argument About a Marriage was filmed in 1958, before portable sound synchronous equipment was widely available. Much of the dialogue was recorded during the argument itself, but many of the othersounds were recorded in other places and other times. The subtitles were compiled from recorded dialogue, and from notes taken during the argument.

Bushmen of the Kalahari (Young and Marshall 1974) has several shots of the screening... (continued on next page)

Even children can refuse to do as their parents ask them, and they usually get their way (Harpending 1972:79). See also the films by J. Marshall, Debe's Tantrum (1972) and The Wasp Nest (1973).

A better film for studying how the !Kung settle disputes is The Meat Fight (J. Marshall 1974). The accompanying Study Guide (Reichlin 1974) discusses conflict management in much more detail, using the film as a case study.

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