

THE MEAT FIGHT

A Study Guide

Photographed and directed by John K. Marshall

Edited by Frank Galvin

Production Assistants: Timothy Asch, Marilyn Wood

Produced by Documentary Educational Resources, Inc., 24 Dane Street,  
Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Filmed on a 1957/58 expedition led by Laurence K. Marshall  
and sponsored by the Peabody Museum of Harvard and the  
Smithsonian Institution.

Study Guide by Seth Reichlin\*

---

\*My thanks are due to John Marshall, Frank Galvin, Timothy Asch, and Lorna Marshall, who provided information, insights, and criticism about the film. John Marshall and Frank Galvin helped identify the people in the film; Lorna Marshall provided unpublished genealogies; Richard B. Lee gave permission to reproduce maps and figures, and to cite one of his unpublished papers. I am indebted to Curriculum Development Associates of Washington for a grant to produce this Study Guide.

Documentary Educational Resources is a non-profit curriculum development corporation. First established in 1966 as The Center for Ethnographic Film Studies, its name was later changed to the Center for Documentary Anthropology. Documentary Educational Resources was formally incorporated in 1972.

Our purpose is to provide large numbers of films and film study guides on single cultures, to be used for teaching anthropology.

Extra copies of this Study Guide are available at \$0.74 each. We give a 10% discount on orders of 20 or more, and a 20% discount on orders of 100 or more. For further information about **D.E.R.** films, study guides, and projects, please write to us at the following address:

24 Dane Street  
Somerville, Massachusetts 02143

A free copy of our catalog will be sent on request.

#### **D.E.R. Staff**

##### **Directors:**

Timothy Asch  
John Marshall

##### **Academic Consultant:**

Napoleon Chagnon

##### **Production Manager/Film Editor:**

Frank Galvin

##### **Distribution:**

Jean Carroll  
Barry Levine

##### **Researcher/Editor:**

Seth Reichlin

---

© Copyright 1974 by Documentary Educational Resources, Inc.

Not to be reproduced without the written permission of the copyright holder.

## PART I: SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM

### A. General

One afternoon in the wet season, N:amshi<sup>1</sup> shot his first large antelope, a hartebeeste. When a rainstorm obliterated the animal's tracks, N:amshi returned home to seek the help of his uncle, Young #Toma<sup>2</sup>. The next morning, Khan//a, a hunter from another band, found the animal and began to distribute the meat among his people. Word of the distribution spread to the other bands at !O, and N:amshi and Young #Toma arrived to complain. They sat patiently at the edge of the crowd, waiting to present their case.

Young #Toma began to speak, pointing out that N:amshi's arrow had killed the hartebeeste, and that the meat was needed for N:amshi's initiation ceremony. Piqued, Young #Toma called Khan//a a thief. At this point #Toma Word, a skilled mediator from a third band, stepped into the dispute. He tried to establish whose arrow had really killed the hartebeeste. Young #Toma insisted that it was N:amshi's, but Khan//a's cousins claimed that they hadn't known that. Khan//a became furious, stopped distributing the meat, and had to be led away by one of his cousins. As he leaned against a tree and sulked, #Toma Word upbraided him. "You're making things worse by getting angry," he said. "You let the people decide what to do about the meat." Demi, Khan//a's old father, agreed with #Toma Word: "We know we mustn't fight about this. I'm ashamed because my son got angry."

The dispute was finally settled after Khan//a expressed his contrition. Young #Toma gave a shoulder of the hartebeeste to N:amshi, and #Toma Word suggested that Demi take charge of distributing the rest of the meat. Demi reluctantly agreed to do so, and handed the first piece of meat to #Toma Word's wife.

---

1. For the pronunciation of this and other names, see the *Pronunciation Guide*, below, page 24.

2. See the Kinship Diagram, Figure 1, page 7.

B. Dialogue<sup>1</sup>

Narrator: In the afternoon of the day he found the dead hartebeeste, Khan//a distributed part of the meat to people in his band. It was already being cooked and eaten when Young #Toma and his nephew N:amshi arrived. Young #Toma and N!amshi sat at the edge of the group, waiting to present their case. As Khan//a brought wood for the fires, his people continued cooking and eating the meat, conspicuously ignoring Young #Toma. Young #Toma began to present his case.

Young #Toma: The meat belongs to N:amshi. He was given the arrow and he shot the animal with it<sup>2</sup>. We must have the meat for N:amshi's initiation ceremony<sup>3</sup>. This man only found the animal; how does he claim the meat? He is cooking meat that belongs to N:amshi. He is a thief.

Narrator: #Toma Wörd; leader of a third band, began to mediate the conflict.

#Toma Wörd: If the arrow was given to N:amshi, we know the animal belongs to him. Whose arrow was found in the animal?

Young #Toma: It's exactly as I say. It was the arrow given to N:amshi.

Narrator: Khan//a became furious, threatening that no one would get meat. He was led away from the group. Khan//a's cousins claimed no responsibility in the matter.

Cousin: We just went along to help Khan//a bring back the meat. We know nothing of this.

1. The Meat Fight was filmed before portable sound-synchronous equipment was widely available. Because of this, the sound track had to be compiled from a number of tapes, recorded at various times. Experts on the Bushmen have agreed that the composite sound track sounds almost exactly like a real conversation in a :Kung camp. The subtitles have been prepared from notes taken by anthropologists during the "meat fight".

2. The "marking" ceremony, symbolizing a boy's entry into manhood, is performed when a boy kills his first large antelope. For more information on this ceremony, see the film by J. Marshall, A Rite of Passage (1969).

3. Young #Toma is referring to the usual rule for determining who owns meat. See below, Part II, page 15.

Narrator: #Toma Word reprimanded Khan//a for his anger.

#Toma Word: You're making this worse by getting angry. You let the people decide what to do about the arrow. Let them decide about the distribution.

Khan//a: I don't want any of the meat. Those who helped me fetch it won't get any either.

Cousin: That may be, but I still helped my cousin in good faith.

#Toma Word: The owner of the arrow owns the animal. When someone else tracks it, they share the meat, but they cannot distribute it themselves.

Narrator: Demi apologized for his son's behavior.

Demi: We know we mustn't fight about this. We can work this out peacefully. I'm ashamed because my son got angry.

Narrator: Young #Toma gave a shoulder of the animal to N!amshi.

Khan//a: I'm not angry about the meat, I'm angry at being called a thief. I didn't know whose arrow it was. I thought it belonged to strangers.

Narrator: N!amshi returned to his band, carrying the hartebeeste's shoulder, which would be used in his **initiation ceremony**.

Khan//a: Of course I want N:amshi to have his shoulder, but what made me angry was being called a thief.

Narrator: With the means of distribution still in doubt, people began to take meat for themselves. Demi complained about the situation.

Demi: I know people are very jealous. I am too old and sick to help. I am old and I have malaria.

Narrator: #Toma Word listened to Demi, agreeing with him.

#Toma Word: Meat should be properly distributed; otherwise there will be endless jealousies. Demi should take responsibility. It was his son who found the animal.

Narrator: Demi finally agreed to distribute the remainder of the meat. Demi gave the first piece of meat to #Toma Word's wife; and thus the meat was distributed to the three bands living at !O.

### C. Shot by shot synopsis

The following synopsis is designed to help open up The Meat Fight for study by different people with different research interests. By identifying, as far as possible, each person who appears in the film, this synopsis should enable anyone to use The Meat Fight as data for studying !Kung social organization and conflict.

In the synopsis, the numbers of the form x:y are footage counts: they refer to the number of feet and frames elapsed from the first frame with the title "A Documentary Educational Resources Production". The first frame with the title "The Meat Fight" is 3:27, and the first frame with a picture is 46:33. To save space, parts of the screen are abbreviated as follows: L= left, C = center, R = right; U = upper; FG = foreground, MG = middle ground, BG = background; and X = extreme.

\* \* \*

Shot 1 46:33-58:27 As Khan//a fills an ostrich eggshell with water, Gao Medicine, /Qui Umbilicus, and Khan//a's cousin discuss how to distribute the meat. (Khan//a is in the center at 48:25; Gao Medicine is behind Khan//a; /Qui Umbilicus is at the far R; Khan//a's cousin is 2nd from the R.)

Shot 2 58:28-69:13 N!amshi and his uncle Young #Toma sit on the sidelines, watching. (N!amshi is behind Young #Toma at 59:00; Young #Toma is at RC; Big /Gaishay is in the UL, facing the camera; Demi is in the X lower R, back to camera.)

Shot 3 69:14-102:12 Khan//a brings in wood and adds it to the fire. (Khan//a's cousin is in the RC at 77:00. Demi's wife is smoking at 82:00. Gao Medicine is bending over at 96:00; Khan//a's cousin is in the UL, wearing a cap.)

Shot 4 102:13-115:04 Young #Toma presents N!amshi's grievance. (Young #Toma is at L, 103:00; Old /Gaishay from /Ti!kay's group is at R.)

Shot 5 115:05-131:39 Khan//a stirs meat cooking in a pot. (Khan//a, C BG, 117:22; Young #Toma, lower R FG.)

Shot 6 132:00-146:34 #Toma Word enters the dispute.

Shot 7 146:35-167:00 Young #Toma continues to argue. N!amshi sits by, watching. (Young #Toma, LC, 149:00; Old /Gaishay (/Gishe?), X R. N:amshi, X R, 165:00; Big /Gaishay, 2nd from the R.)

Shot 8 167:01-198:33 Khan//a becomes furious, stops distributing the meat, and is led away by his cousin #Toma. (#Toma, R, 174:30; Khan//a, L. Khan//a, XL, 198:00; Khan//a's uncle, R.)

Shot 9 198:34-211:31 Khan//a's cousins defend Khan//a. (#Toma, R, 210:00; another cousin, L.)

Shot 10 211:32-226:35 As #Toma Word watches, Khan//a is restrained by Gao Medicine. (Khan//a, R FG, 217:02; Gao Medicine, L FG. #Toma Word, X UL BG, 218:04.)

Shot 11 226:36-242:39 Khan//a pouts, while #Toma Word upbraids him for getting angry. (#Toma Word, L, 228:00; Khan//a, R.)

Shot 12 243:00-249:00 Khan//a's cousin defends Khan//a.

Shot 13 249:10-276:08 #Toma Word reminds the people of the rules for distributing meat. (#Toma Word, lower L, 258:00; Khan//a, UR. Black Bo, 261:00. Khan//a's cousin #Toma, LC, 267:00; Khan//a's other cousin, RC. Demi, C, 270:00; Young #Toma, XR.)

Shot 14' 276:09-287:05 Demi counsels restraint. Young #Toma hands a shoulder of the hartebeeste to N!amshi. (Demi, lower L, 277:00; Young #Toma, UC; N!amshi, off screen.)

Shot 15 287:06-297:37 Khan//a sulks, angry at being called a thief.

Shot 16 297:38-301:11 N!amshi walks away with his part of the **animal**.

Shot 17 301:12-309:08 Khan//a continues to complain to #Toma Word. (Khan//a, L, 309:00; #Toma Word, R.)

Shot 18 309:09-335:35 Black Bo starts to take meat. (Black Bo, L, 315:13. Gao Medicine, X lower L, 317:00; Khan//a's cousin, 2nd from the L, MG. Khan//a's cousin #Toma, C EG, 321:00. Black Eo, L, 335:00; Gao Medicine, RC.)

Shot 19 335:36-344:19 Demi complains' about the way people **are acting**.

Shot 20 344:20-352:33 Demi tries to get out of the dispute by claiming he's sick. (Demi, C, 347:20; Tsamgao (husband of Bau), XL FG; /Qui Umbilicus, XL BG.)

Shot 21 352:34-356:14 Close-up of Demi's hands.

Shot 22 356:15-365:00 Demi continues to speak.

Shot 23 365:01-392:12 #Toma Word agrees with Demi, and suggests that Demi determine how to distribute the meat.

Shot 24 392:13-415:32 Demi considers #Toma Word's proposal and agrees to it. (Demi, L FG, 402:00; #Toma Word, LC BG.)

Shot 25 415:33-420:26 Close-up of #Toma Word. -

Shot 26 420:27-437:27 Demi hands the first piece of meat to !U, #Toma Word's wife. She hands the meat to a relative, who hangs it in a nearby tree. (Demi, 422:00. !U, 424:00. :U's relative, 435:20.)

Shot 27 437:28-451:29 Demi gives meat to Tsamgao -(Bau's husband), who hands it on to someone off screen. (Demi, 447:20. Tsamgao, 451:00.)

Shot 28 451:30-472:20 !U takes her share of the meat down from the tree, and leaves the scene. As she leaves, Khan//a's brother runs after her and gives her another piece of meat. (!U, 1st R, 452:00. Khan//a's brother. 463:00. !U, 2nd L, 468:00.)



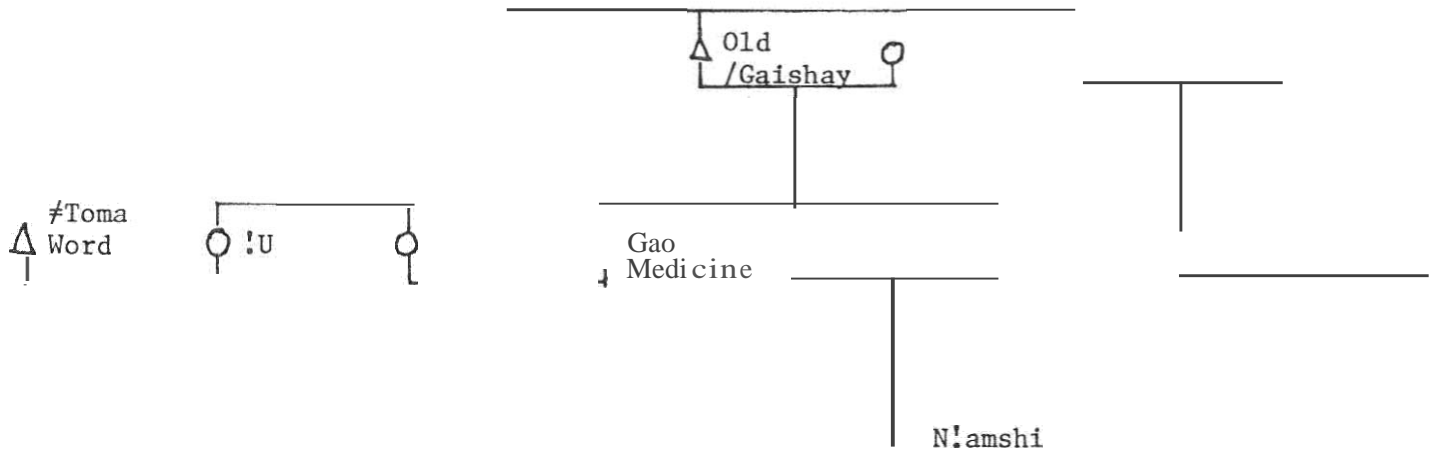
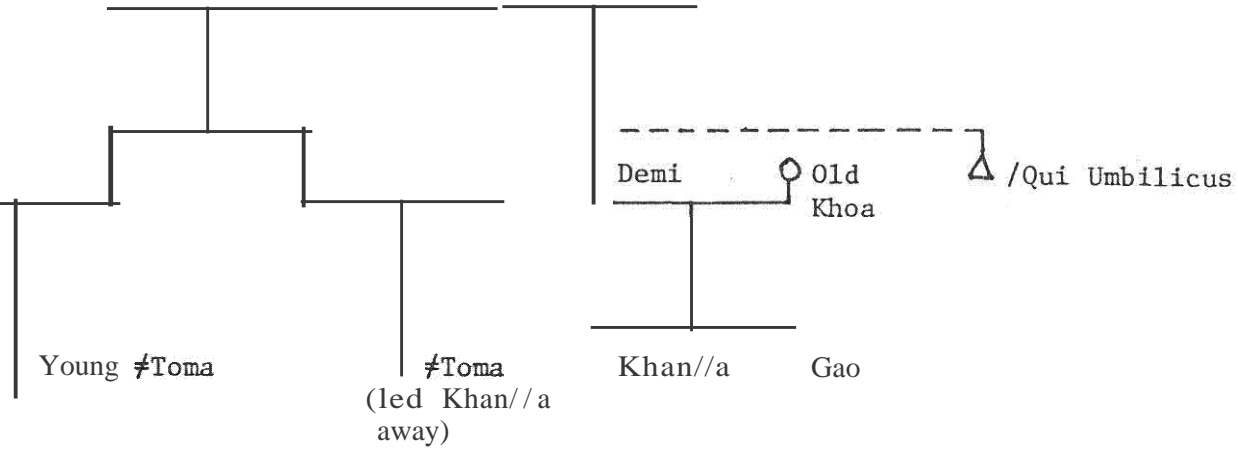


Figure 1: Kinship network of the people who appear in The Meat Fight.  
Source: unpublished data of L. Marshall, used with her kind permission,



= man

0 = woman

= dead man

● dead woman

— marriage

— = sibling tie

, - - - 1 half-sibling tie

## PART II: QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE FILM

### A. General

#### 1. Under what circumstances was this film made?

In 1964 there were about 45 thousand Bushmen living in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa (see Figure 2)1. Most of them worked on European farms or Bantu cattle posts, but about 20% of them were full-time hunters and gatherers (see Figure 3)2. The Meat Fight was filmed in 1958, in a part of South West Africa where the !Kung Bushmen all pursued this traditional occupation (see Figure 3).

The life of these Bushmen has changed dramatically since that time. In 1960 they were resettled at Tsumkwe, S.W.A., where there is a government post and a mission of the Dutch Reformed Church. The government is 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 difficult3. Because of the changes that have taken place since 1960, this Study Guide uses the convention of the "ethnographic present": the descriptions of the !Kung here refer to them as they were in 1958, not as they are now.

The Meat Fight was filmed at !O, about 30 km northwest of Tsumkwe, S.W.A. !O is in a forest of mangetti trees4, which provide a tasty and nutritious nut. Three !Kung bands were collecting nuts there when The Meat Fight was shot: #Toma Word's, based at /Gautscha; /Ti:kay's, based at Tsumkwe; and Old /Gaishay's, based at N/am Choa6. The Expedition had been living with #Toma Word's band at /Gautscha, but the mosquitos there forced them both to move north to Tsumkwe. Tsumkwe was also malarial, so the Expedition continued on to !O, bringing #Toma Word's band with them in the trucks. Because mangetti trees grow only on sand dunes, the only water at !O was that which the rains had left standing in hollow trees. This was enough only for /Ti:kay's and Old /Gaishay's people, so the Expedition trucked in water to give to the members of #Toma Word's band7.

1. Lee 1965: 12

2. Lee 1965: 21

3. Lee 1965: 32; L. Marshall 1965: 273. For a film about these changes, see Young and J. Marshall 1974.

4. Ricinodendron rautenii

5. Lee 1968, 1969

6. See Figure 4 for the location of these base camps; see Figure 5 for the location of the three bands at !O.

7. I am indebted to J. Marshall for this account of the 1957/58 expedition.

2. How did N!amshi find out that Khan//a was distributing the hartebeeste he shot?

N!amshi's band (led by ' /Ti:kay) was living less than a mile from Khan//a's at !0 (see Figure 5). !Kung people often visit friends and relatives in other bands, so the news that Khan//a was distributing a hartebeeste must have spread rapidly to all the people living at !0.

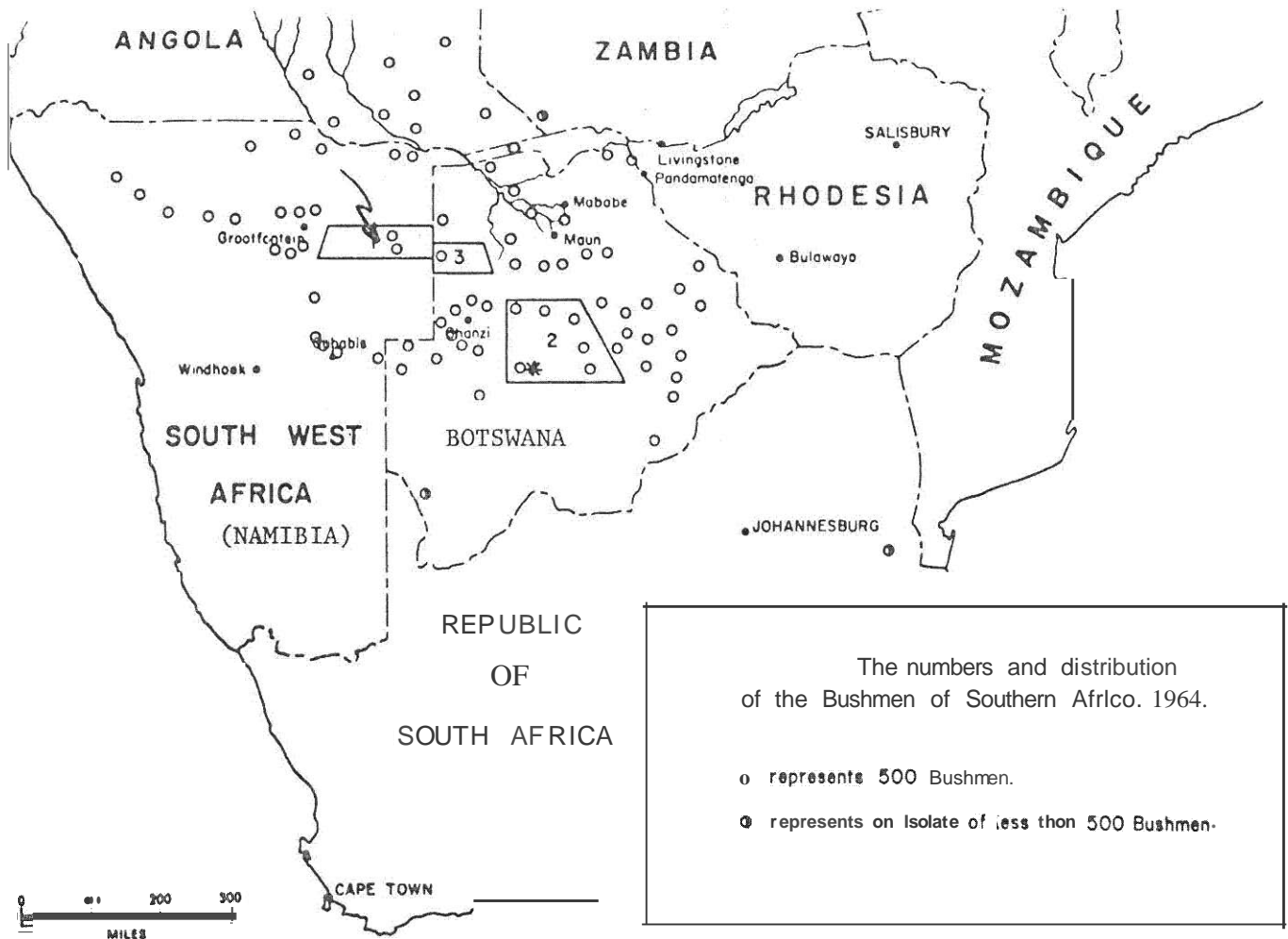


Figure 2: The numbers and distribution of the Bushmen in southern Africa, 1964. The arrow marks the location of !O, where The Meat Fight was filmed. After Lee 1965:14; used with the kind permission of the author.

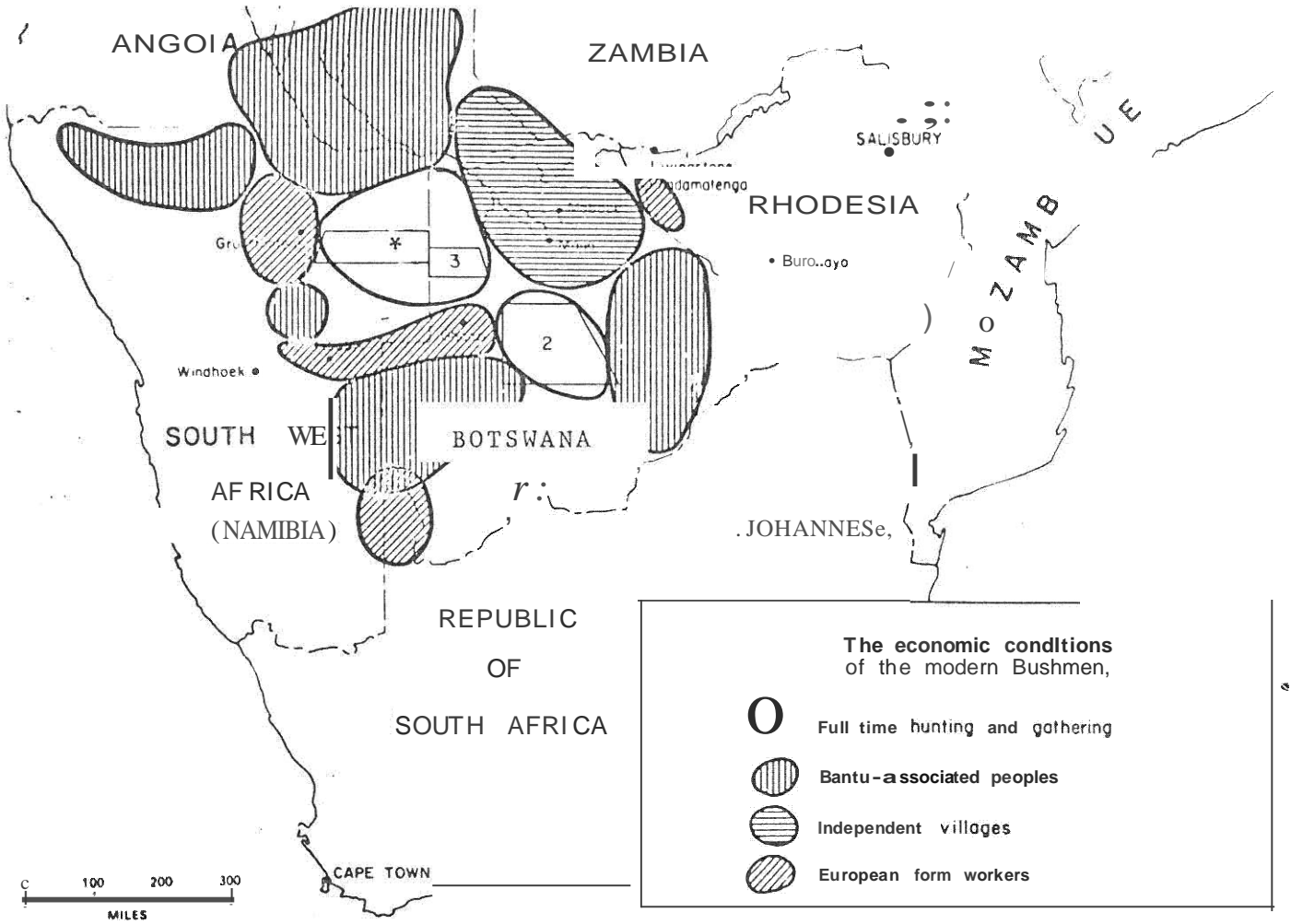


Figure 3: The economic conditions of the Bushmen in 1965, The star (\*) marks the location of !O, where The Meat Fight was filmed. After Lee 1965:23; used with the kind permission of the author.

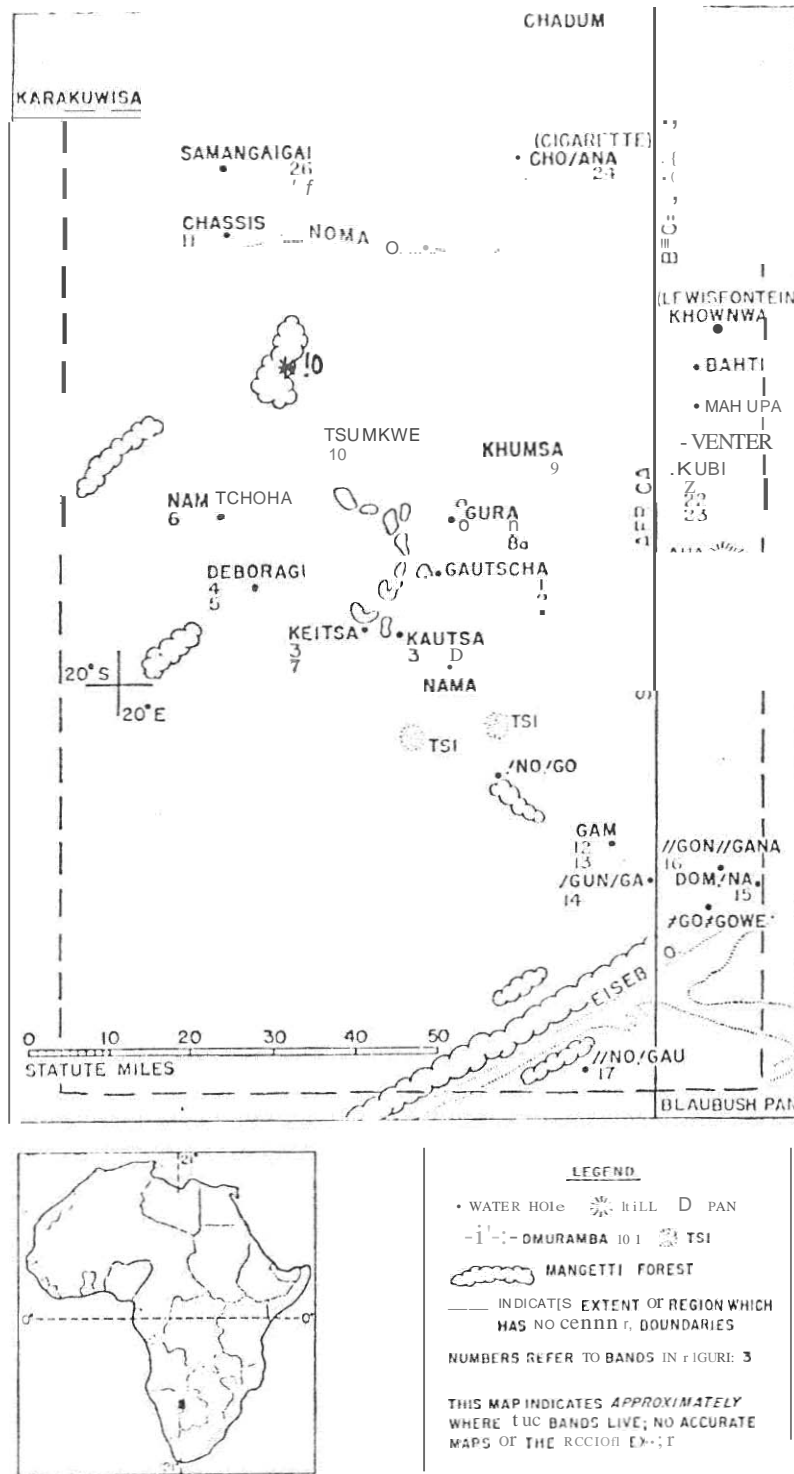


Figure 4: Map of the Nyae Nyae region. The star (\*) indicates the location of !O, where The Heat Fight was filmed. After L. Marshall 1960:326; used with the kind permission of the author.

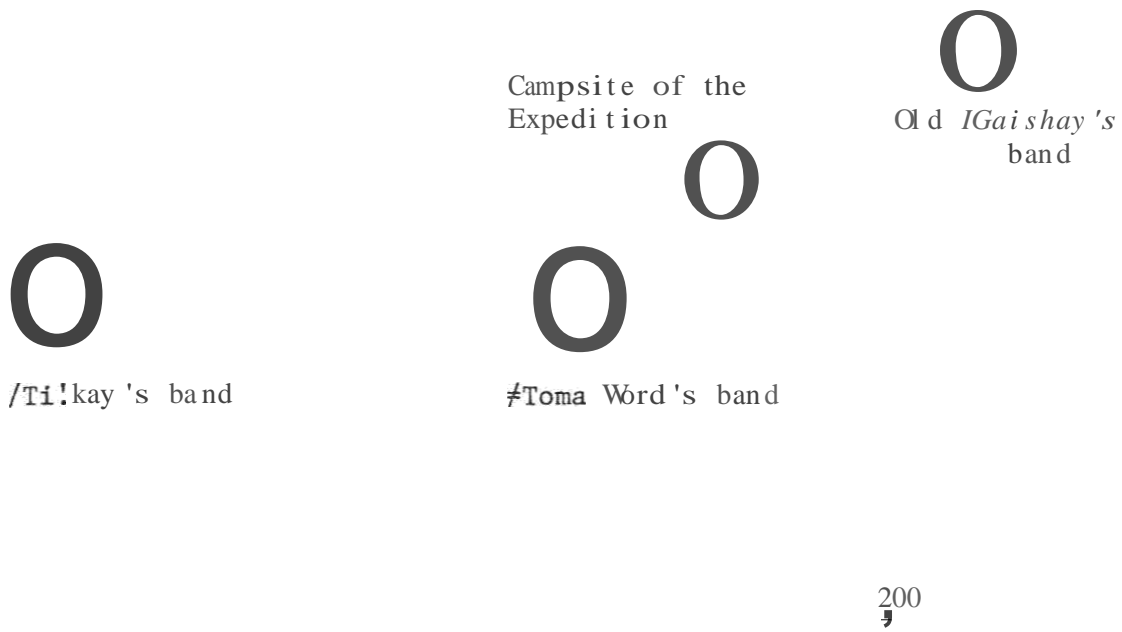


Figure 5: The location of the three bands living at !O when The Meat Fight was filmed.



## B. Resolution of conflict among the !Kung

### 1. How do the !Kung usually distribute meat?

The !Kung divide their food into **two** main categories: foods which belong to the individual and his immediate family, and foods which must be shared by everyone. Wild plants, which make up about 70% of the diet of the !Kung<sup>1</sup>, are in the first category, as are small animals like birds, tortoises, lizards, grasshoppers, and snakes<sup>2</sup>. These foods belong to the person who gathers or finds them: they may be shared with other people or families, but they do not have to be<sup>3</sup>.

Plants and small animals can be gathered by individuals, but big game<sup>4</sup> must be hunted by organized parties of **two** to five men. Hunters stalk big game animals on foot and shoot them with arrows coated with slow-acting nerve poison. Hunters may have to track a wounded animal for days after they have shot it, finishing it off with their spears when they finally catch up to it. They eat the liver on the spot, and carry the rest of the animal back to camp<sup>6</sup>.

The animal belongs to the person who arrow killed it. Several arrows may be fired into an animal at the same time, but **men often arrange beforehand who is going to "own" the animal.** There is much giving and lending of arrows, so a hunter can in effect choose the person who will own the animal he shoots. **It is not always to a man's advantage to own an animal: since** the owner is expected to give generously, he may get less meat than some of his relatives. In theory, the owner of the animal is always responsible for distributing it; but because distributing meat requires sensitive political instincts, older relatives usually take over when a young man owns an animal.

---

1. L. Marshall 1960:335; Lee 1968:33

2. The following section is based largely on L. Marshall 1961: 236-241, to which the reader should turn for more details on meat sharing. This article includes a case study of the distribution of an eland to more than a hundred people.

3. **When game is scarce, small animals are defined as "game" and must be shared** (J. Marshall, Bitter Melons (1972); Reichlin 1974a:6. See also L. Marshall 1961:236.)

4. Kudu, eland, gemsbok, wildebeeste, springbok, hartebeeste, warthog, ostrich, and giraffe.

5. For details, see J. Marshall 1958a, 1958b; and L. Marshall and Calvin 1966.

6. **If the animal is very large, the hunters send back to camp for help in carrying it.**

**Meat is distributed in a series of "waves". The carcass of the animal is first cut into five or six large pieces, which are given to the owner of the arrow, the giver of the arrow, and the hunters. The second wave radiates out from the five or six people who received large cuts of meat in the first wave. Kinship determines who gets meat in the second wave: a man is required to give the best meat he has to his wife's parents<sup>1</sup>; and to give as much as he can to his parents<sup>2</sup>, his wife, and his children. He saves some of the meat for himself, which he may later share with still other people. Meat is generally given raw in the second wave of distribution.**

Finally, everyone who received meat in the second wave **gives meat again, to his or her parents, parents-in-law, children, brothers and sisters, name-relatives<sup>3</sup>, friends, and visitors. Meat given in the third wave of sharing may be cooked, and everyone living in or visiting a band gets at least a small piece.**

2. What was special about the meat distribution in this film?

The circumstances which led up to the "meat fight" were unusual in one major respect: Khan//a claimed for himself the hartebeeste he found, instead of trying to discover whose arrow had killed the animal. Khan//a later insisted<sup>4</sup> that he thought **the arrow belonged to "strangers", but this story seems rather contrived. Each !Kung man makes his arrows in a distinctive way<sup>5</sup>, so that if Khan//a had not been able to identify the arrow himself, he could easily have asked an older relative or someone from another band. N!amshi's band, for instance, was living just fifteen minutes' walk from his own (see Figure 5). Besides, there were no real "strangers" in the area around !O**

1. For details on the obligations of marriage among the !Kung, see L. Marshall 1959, passim.

2. !Kung men are required to live with their wife's parents for some time after they marry. A man commonly marries a woman from a different band, so that he usually ends up distributing meat mainly to his wife's family, not to his own.

3. That is, people who have the same name. The !Kung use less than 90 names, and people who share the same name feel a certain kinship (see L. Marshall 1965:259).

4. Shot 17; see above, page 3.

5. L. Marshall 1961:238; L. Marshall and Galvin 1966

6. For a discussion of the meaning of "stranger" to the !Kung, see L. Marshall 1959:337-8.

in 1958: Bantu had not yet penetrated the area with their cattle, and there were no European settlers. In short, Khan//a seems to have tried to take advantage of his good fortune by not inquiring too closely about the arrow.

Whatever Khan//a's reasons for keeping the hartebeeste, his decision profoundly disturbed the normal meat distribution. Even if Khan//a had recognized N!amshi's claim to the animal as soon as N!amshi arrived, the meat **still** could not have been distributed according to the rules described above<sup>1</sup>: the first and second waves of distribution had already passed, and some of the meat was being cooked for its final distribution. Therefore, no rules specified what was to be done with the meat **in this case**.

3. How do the !Kung manage to settle their disputes so peacefully?

The Meat Fight shows the remarkable ability of the !Kung to settle disputes, without violence and without any formal political organization. Several social, economic, technological, and psychological features of !Kung society help them to do this:

a. Disputes are settled flexibly.

Disputes between !Kung are handled in a much more ad hoc way than disputes between, say, Americans. In America, and in the more highly organized African societies<sup>2</sup>, disputes between people are referred to courts, which try to fit them into fixed categories of right and wrong provided by the **law**. In order for courts to settle disputes this way, their judgments must be enforceable; so courts are only effective in societies where a political hierarchy places one person's decision **above another's**.

!Kung society is almost completely egalitarian: no !Kung person has direct power over any other<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, there are strong unwritten laws which guide !Kung behavior: laws, for example, about sharing meat<sup>4</sup>, about giving and

1. page 16      2. See, for examples, Gluckman 1940, Schapera 1940.

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

4. See above, pages 15-16.

receiving objects<sup>1</sup>, and about serving one's parents-in-law<sup>2</sup>. In this system, violations of unwritten law cannot be corrected by appealing to higher authorities; they have to be settled among equals.

Ultimately, a consensus is required to settle a dispute between !Kung. The raw material of consensus is public opinion, and the root of public opinion is the unwritten law. A good leader, like #Toma Word, is a man who can manipulate public **opinion on an issue in such a way that a consensus is reached.**

Public opinion about an issue depends largely on the unwritten laws: it turns against a man like Khan//a, who violates them.<sup>3</sup> But public opinion also depends on self-interest. !Kung people do not like to feel cheated, and will protest if they feel they are getting less than their fair share<sup>4</sup>. It follows that a political leader like #Toma Word can put together a consensus in two main ways: (1) he can bring public opinion to bear against an offender by appealing to the unwritten law; and (2) he can offer compromises which appease the interests of both sides in a dispute.

He can also try to balance public opinion based on law against public opinion based on self-interest. This how #Toma Word approached the settlement of the "meat fight". His strategy was to invoke public opinion against Khan//a, by establishing that it was indeed N:amshi's arrow that killed the hartebeeste. Khan//a did not deny this, so #Toma succeeded in showing that Khan//a had violated the rules. The adverse opinion that #Toma generated made it possible for N:amshi to take his part of the animal. #Toma's next problem was to decide what to do with the rest of the meat. He could not compel Khan//a to give it all to N:amshi's people; this would have been highly unpopular among Khan//a's relatives, as his cousins suggested strongly<sup>5</sup>. Besides, to deny Khan//a meat would violate the rule that men who help in the hunt are given a major share of the meat. #Toma Word's solution was a compromise: by having Demi distribute the meat, Khan//a and his cousins were sure to get a large piece of it. Thus #Toma Word succeeded in building a compromise which recognized both N:amshi's legal rights to the meat, and the political interests of Khan//a's group.

Because public opinion generally runs against a person who violates the unwritten laws, the consensus solution to a dispute will generally tend to run against the violator. There is,

---

1. See below, page 19.

2. L. Marshall 1959, passim

3. L. Marshall 1961:232

4. *ibid.*:231; 1960:351

5. See their comments in Shots 9 and 12 (above, page 3).

therefore, a strong incentive for a !Kung person to follow the unwritten *laws*. In summary, disputes among the !Kung are settled by public opinion rather than *law*; but *law* is a major input to public opinion.

!Toma Word's solution to the "meat fight" was rather like Henry Kissinger's solution to the fighting between Syria and Israel. In neither case was there a higher authority to enforce a settlement, so that both settlements were diplomatic rather than legal<sup>1</sup>. !Toma Word and Henry Kissinger seem to be effective precisely because they are not bound by the rules: they can use their considerable diplomatic talent to invent new and creative solutions to conflicts.

#### b. Deterrents to violence

By itself, the lack of *laws* and government does not explain why the !Kung settle their disputes so peacefully. The opposite is usually true: societies which "lack central authority often rely heavily on violence to settle disputes between people<sup>2</sup>. What is it, then, that deters the !Kung from violence?

##### i. The network of favors and obligations

The !Kung of Nyae Nyae are caught up in a tight network of favors and obligations. We have already seen that meat must be shared by everyone<sup>3</sup>. Objects, too, pass from person to person. There is much giving and lending of hunting arrows<sup>4</sup>; musical instruments circulate freely<sup>5</sup>; and ornaments given to one band quickly make their way to people in all other bands<sup>6</sup>. According to L. Marshall, "everything a person has may have been given to him, and may be passed on to others in time"<sup>7</sup>. Gifts are never refused, and must always be reciprocated<sup>8</sup>. Thus a !Kung person always owes things to others, and is owed things in return. These mutual obligations may help to deter conflicts between people<sup>9</sup>.

1. For a discussion of the difference between legal and diplomatic solutions, see S Hoffmann, *The State of War* (1965).

2. A number of case studies have made this point; see Chagnon 1968, Koch 1974, Fortes 1940:242, and Evans-Pritchard 1940:278.

Van Velsen and Van Wetering (1960) reached similar conclusions **in a cross-cultural survey**.

3. See above, page

4. L. Marshall 1961:238

5. England 1968

6. L. Marshall 1961:241

7. *ibid.*

8. According to Demé, quoted by L. Marshall 1961:244. The classic book on the social function of gift-giving is Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1967).

9. Murphy (1957) and Van Velsen and Van Wetering (1960) suggest

that reciprocal obligations like these can reduce violence.

A !Kung person's most important rights and obligations involve food and water. !Kung country is divided into territories, each of which includes a waterhole and the plant foods within reach of it<sup>1</sup>. Access to these territories is based on kinship. Anyone may exploit the resources of a territory if he or she is related by blood or marriage to a resident of that territory<sup>2</sup>. **Because there is extensive intermarriage among the bands in Nyae Nyae<sup>3</sup>**, the people in one territory usually have relatives in several other territories<sup>4</sup>. This means that one person can usually exploit the resources of a number of different territories.

Every territory has enough food and water to support some people throughout the year, but the number varies from territory to territory and from year to year within a territory. If one territory is having a poor season, people exercise their rights to the food and water in other territories by making long visits to their relatives<sup>5</sup>. Because people generally have relatives in many other territories, this visiting has the effect of distributing people more or less evenly with respect to food and water; or, looking at it the other way, distributing food and water more or less evenly to all people<sup>6</sup>. Were it not for this network of rights to food and water, the residents of a territory might die of thirst if their waterhole dried up in a bad year? There is thus a very strong incentive for a !Kung person to keep on good terms with his relatives in other territories: he might have to depend on them for survival some day. Realizing this fact may help explain why the !Kung resort to violence so rarely.

## ii. Weaponry

Modern nuclear diplomacy relies heavily on the strategy of deterrence. "If we can destroy Russia even after they launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike against us," the classic line of reasoning goes, "then the Russians will be effectively deterred from launching that pre-emptive strike."S By a quirk of technology, the !Kung find themselves playing an analogous game. The most powerful weapon of !Kung hunters is the arrow, coated

1. L. Marshall 1960:330

2. *ibid.*:345

3. L. Marshall 1959:335

4. L. Marshall 1960:353

5. Lee 1965:137

6. *ibid.*: 139; L. Marshall 1960:345

7. There are only three permanent waterholes in Nyae Nyae; the rest go dry occasionally (L. Marshall 1960:336).

8. The best statement of this theory is by Thomas Schelling in his book, Strategy of Conflict (1960). Schelling's analysis is **still** central to Pentagon planning.

with a nerve poison for which no antidote is known<sup>1</sup>. !Kung men are also extraordinary trackers: they need to be in order to reach a wounded animal ahead of the vultures and jackals<sup>2</sup>. The !Kung are adept at tracking humans as well: in Nyae Nyae, a man's footprints are as familiar as his face<sup>3</sup>.

So, like ourselves, the :Kung are never really safe. A bomb can always be dropped on us; and a :Kung person can always be tracked by an enemy and shot fatally with a poisoned arrow. The !Kung themselves are aware of this possibility; as one man said during an argument: "Just one little arrow; that's all it will take to settle this:"<sup>4</sup> So, like us, the [Kung know that fighting can lead to certain death. Knowing this may help deter them from using the ultimate weapon to settle disputes.

c. Peaceful values

The :Kung do not settle disputes as self-consciously as the foregoing 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 one man, means "making crooked arrows and fighting"<sup>5</sup>.

:Kung parents raise their children in ways that may help them to be peaceful adults. Children do not compete with each other in games<sup>6</sup>, and parents are quick to stop aggressive play between them<sup>7</sup>. "Achievement behavior which entails rivalry

---

1. See L. Marshall and Calvin 1966 for more information about this poison.

2. See J. Marshall 1957, 1958      3. L. Marshall 1961:246

4. /Ti:kay, in An Argument About a Marriage (J. Marshall 1969a)

5. /Ti:kay, quoted by L. Marshall (1961:245)

6. Harpending 1972:90-93. Konner (in press) argues that the lack of competition in children's games has an ecological basis. !Kung bands are small (about 21 people each (L. Marshall 1960:328»), so there is little chance that a child will have many age-mates to play with. As a result, !Kung children usually playing in widely mixed groups (as in the film Baobab Play (J. Marshall 1974a»). Meaningful competition requires that the players in a game be of roughly equal ability, so it would make no sense for !Kung children to compete with their playmates. For more on child's play, see the film, Children Throw Toy Assegais (J. Marshall 1974b), and the accompanying study guide (Reichlin 1974c).

7. Harpending 1972:79

is actively discouraged by the !Kung. They have strong cultural values against boasting, self-aggrandizement, and setting oneself above others. Children are not encouraged to evaluate their performance against that of other children" 1. !Kung parents are very permissive with their children<sup>2</sup>. They never punish them, and do not expect them to work until they are married<sup>3</sup>. Children, for their part, are generally well-behaved, respectful, and obedient<sup>4</sup>.

3. Are the !Kung usually so 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. Of the seven, four were flare-ups of sexual jealousy • ••, Two were very minor disagreements about going somewhere; ••• none were about food. We considered, judging from that sample, that the !Kung managed very well to keep tensions from turning into hostility<sup>5</sup>.

L. Marshall heard of only two homicides. A man once shot and killed another for stealing honey<sup>6</sup>. The other homicide involved #Toma Word's father. He and another man got into a fight. The young son of the other man, trying to protect his father, shot and killed #Toma Word's father with a poisoned arrow<sup>7</sup>.

Richard Lee, however, reports that incidents like these are not rare. He saw 33 fights during his six years of field work, and informants told him about 22 homicides that occurred between 1920 and 1955<sup>8</sup>. There are several possible explanations of the difference between Lee's and L. Marshall's accounts. First, disputes along the !Kung that Lee studied have been under the jurisdiction of the Tswana headman since 1948. There have been almost no homicides under this system, but we do not know what other changes in !Kung law may have occurred as well. Second, Lee studied a group of !Kung who were considerably more

---

1. Harpending 1972:90

2. L. Marshall 1960:341

3. Lee 1968:36

4. L. Marshall 1960:340-1

5. L. Marshall 1961:246

6. L. Marshall 1960:336

7. L. Marshall 1960:351. No doubt this incident helped to make #Toma Word the peace-loving leader he is.

8. Lee 1969b. Lee discusses these findings in detail, but his paper has not yet been published.



acculturated than those studied by Marshall: some of them raise livestock, and others have begun to drink<sup>1</sup>. Also, the :Kung Lee studied compete for water with the Bantu and their cattle; water rights are not disputed in Nyae Nyae<sup>2</sup>. One could argue that serious disputes tend to arise more often under rapidly changing social and economic conditions<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, #Toma Word may be responsible for part of the difference between Lee's and Marshall's descriptions of :Kung violence. Marshall's conclusions are based on what she saw at /Gautscha, where #Toma Word's band lived. #Toma Word could settle disputes far more serious than the "meat fight"; so the lack of violence at /Gautscha may have been due mainly to his excellent leadership.

\* \* \*

---

1. J. Marshall, pers. comm.      2. L. Marshall 1960:337  
3. For a good example of this, see the film by J. Marshall, An Argument about a Marriage (1969a). #Toma Word's and /Ti:kay's bands were recruited to work on farms in South West Africa. When the farmers refused to let them leave, /Ti:kay and his son-in-law Tsamgao escaped, but they left Tsamgao's wife Bau behind. Bau moved in with another man, /Qui, and had a child by him. Bau finally returned to Nyae Nyae, and in the film, /Qui, Tsamgao, and /Ti:kay argue bitterly about whom she should live with. #Toma Word manages to defuse the argument before the principals begin to fight.

This dispute would never have occurred if the farmers had not held #Toma Word's and /Ti:kay's bands captive.

PART III: PRONUNCIATION GUIDE AND REFERENCES

**Pronunciation Guide**

'N:amshi	NAHM-shee
har tebeeste	HAR-te-beast
≠Toma	TO-ma
Khan//a	KHAHN-tlah
Demi -	DEM-ee
!O	OH
!Kung	KOONG
Gao	GOW
/Qui	KWEE
/Gai shay	GUY-shay
/Ti:kay	TEE-kay
Bo	BO
Tsamgao	TSAHM-ko
!U	OO
Nyae Nyae	NI NI
Tsumkwe	CHOOM-kway
/Gautscha	GOUT-sha
Nam Choa	nahm-CHO-ah
manget ti	man-GET-ti
Dobe	DOH-bay

The exact pronunciation of the four !Kung clicks is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

/ The dental click, produced by pulling the tip of the tongue away from the back of the upper teeth. This is **same sound as the "rch, tch" which English speakers** use to express disapproval.

The alveolar-palatal click, produced by withdrawing the tip of the tongue from the roof of the mouth. A hollow popping sound is produced.

// The lateral click, produced by pulling the sides of the tongue away from the teeth while holding the **tip** against the alveolar ridge. Speakers of English make this sound when clucking to a horse.

The alveolar click, produced by pulling the tip of the tongue away from the alveolar ridge.

•

---

1. The description of the clicks is from Lee 1965:7-8.

References

Chagnon NA

1968 Yanomamo: The Fierce People. New York, Holt Rinehart and Winston.

England N

1968 Music among the Zhu/wa-si of South West Africa and Botswana. PhD thesis, Department of Music, Harvard University.

Evans-Pritchard EE

1940 The Nuer of the Southern Sudan. In Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:272-298.

Fortes M

1940 The political system of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. In Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 239-271.

Fortes M and EE Evans-Pritchard

1940 African Political Systems. London, Oxford Univ. Press.

Gluckman M

1940 The kingdom of the Zulu of South Africa. In Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:25-55.

Harpending, P Draper

1972 !Kung Bushman Childhood. PhD Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Harvard University.

Hoffmann S

1965 The State of War. New York, Praeger.

Koch KF

1974 The Anthropology of War. Reading, Mass.; Addison-Wesley Module **Series**.

Konner MJ

in press Maternal care, infant behavior, and development among the Zhun/twa (!Kung) Bushmen. In RB Lee and I DeVore, editors, Studies of Bushman Hunter-Gatherers; Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Lee RB

1965 Subsistence Ecology of the !Kung Bushmen. PhD Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Berkeley.

1968 What hunters do for a living. In RB Lee and I DeVore, editors, Man the Hunter. Chicago, Aldine; pp 30-43.

Lee RB

1969a !Kung Bushman subsistence: an input-output analysis. In A Vayda, editor, Environment and Cultural Behavior; Garden City NY, The Natural History Press; pp 47-79.

1969b !Kung Bushman violence. Paper presented at the 68th annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans.

Marshall J

1958a The Hunters. Film, produced by LK Marshall.

1958b Man as a hunter. Natural History Magazine, 67:292-309, 376-395.

1969a An Argument about a Marriage. Film, produced by Documentary Educational Resources (DER).

1969b A Rite of Passage. Film, DER.

1972a Bitter Melons. Film, DER.

1972b Debe's Tantrum. Film, DER.

1973 The Wasp Nest. Film, DER.

1974a Baobab Play. Film, DER.

1974b Children Throw Toy Assegais. Film, DER.

Marshall L

1959 Marriage among !Kung Bushmen. Africa, 29:335-365.

1960 !Kung Bushman bands. Africa, 30:325-355.

1961 Sharing, talking, and giving: relief of social tensions among !Kung Bushmen. Africa, 31:231-249.

1965 !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. In JL Gibbs Jr, editor, Peoples of Africa; New York, Holt Rinehart and Winston; pp 241-278.

Marshall Land F Galvin

1966 !Kung Bushman Hunting Equipment. Film, DER

Mauss M

1967 The Gift. New York, WW Norton.

Murphy R

1957 Intergroup hostility and social cohesion. Amer. Anthro., 59:1018-1035.

Reichlin S

1974a Bitter Melons: A Study Guide. Somerville, Mass.; DER.

1974b Film Notes to Children Throw Toy Assegais. Somerville, Mass.; DER.

Schapera I

1940 The political organization of the Ngwato of Bechuanaland Protectorate. In Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:56-82.

Schelling T

1960 Strategy of Conflict. London, Oxford University Press.

Van Velsen HUE Thoden, and van Wetering W

1960 Residence, power groups, and intra-societal aggression.  
Int. Arch. Ethnog., 49,2: 169-200.

Young Rand J Marshall

1974 Bushmen of the Kalahari. Film, National Geographic Society.