

5/Kinship and Social Organization

One day in March 1964, I was visiting a !Xabe village, when Hwan//a, a woman about my age who was married to one of the Tswana Headman Isak's three sons, playfully began to call to me, "Uncle, uncle, /Tontah, come see me."

Puzzled, I drew closer; until that time the Ju had referred to me simply as the White Man (/Ton) or the bearded one, *Tsikoie* (*Mandavo*, in Herero). Hwan//a smiled and said, "You are all alone here and I have no children, so I will name you /Tontah after my *tsu* /Tontah who is dead, and, as I have named you, you shall call me mother."

Pleased, I asked Hwan//a to tell me how she decided on the name /Tontah. She explained that I was a European, a "/ton," and the traditional Ju name /Tontah sounds like it. Since her late *tsu* had no namesake, she decided to name me /Tontah to do honor to him and to my exotic status.¹

It was hard for me to think of the young and attractive Hwan//a, not yet 30, as my mother, but I was happy to have a name other than White Man.

This was the famous name relationship—the Ju/hoan custom of naming everyone after an older person according to a repertoire of personal names. I had read about it in the writings of Lorna Marshall (1957) and I was excited to be named in this way.

The name stuck. Soon people all over the Dobe area were calling me /Tontah, and I began to sense some of the possibilities of the name relationship when a very beautiful woman, on whom I had a terrible crush, playfully said, "Your old name called me *tsiu* [wife], so I will call you *mi!kwah*, my husband."

But there was more to come. A few weeks later, back at the Dobe camp, I was sitting in the shade working on some notes when N!eishi; his son ≠Toma, the hunter; and N!eishi's ex-wife, the redoubtable //Gumi; approached me with some ceremony and sat down.

"*Mba*," N!eishi began, calling me by the term "father," a not uncommon form of greeting, "*Mba*, we see that you are all alone here; your family is far away, and we too are all alone. We have no family. No one pays attention to us. So from now on I am your father, and //Gumi here is your mother, and ≠Toma is your older brother. From now on call me '*mba*.'"

¹Often elders have several people named after them. Years later I was to meet another namesake of the late /Tontah, a prominent member of the /Gausa group that was studied by the Marshall family and featured in many of their films. This was /Tontah, the husband of N!ai of *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*. This younger /Tontah, a man in his fifties, took our name relation seriously, befriended me, and taught me much about conditions on the Namibian side of the border (see Chapter 12).

//Gumi broke in. "And you call me *aiye*." She used the vocative form for mother, the first word every Ju infant learns, like *mama* in English.

"And call me *!ko/ko*," added ≠Toma, using the vocative form for older brother.

With my limited language, I signified my pleasure with the turn of events. Here was a whole family to be a part of, one with genealogical links throughout the Dobe area. It did not seem to bother anyone that I was named from one family and adopted into another. And with great cordiality people in the distant villages began to instruct me in what I was to call them.

But soon things got very complicated. My knowledge of the kinship terminology was minimal. A few people were calling me by kin terms that flowed from their genealogical connection to my own "parents," N!eishi and //Gumi. And a few others were using kin terms because they were related to other /Tontahs through the name relationship. But many others were using kin terms that made absolutely no sense to me, either as genealogical kin or namesake kin. It was clear that I had a lot to learn about the kinship system and social organization in general.

The process of discovery is the subject of this chapter. After describing the group structure of the Ju, we will enter the fascinating world of Ju/'hoan kinship and its principal genius stroke: the name relationship.

The Ju/'hoansi commonly live in camps that number from 10 to 30 individuals, but the composition of these camps changes from month to month and from day to day. In essence, a Ju/'hoan camp consists of relatives, friends, and in-laws who have found that they can live and work well together. Under this flexible principle, brothers may be united or divided; fathers and sons may live together or apart. Further, during his or her lifetime a Ju/'hoan may live at many waterholes with many different groups. Given their flexible lifestyle, and lacking a system of state organization as we know it, what principles *do* the Ju rely on to give their life stability and coherence?

As in all other prestate societies, the central organizing principle of Ju/'hoan life is kinship. Kin terms are applied to everyone, related or not, and kin ties extend to the very borders of the known world. Kinship provides the structure of everyday life and enables the society to reproduce itself socially from generation to generation. But the multifold principles of kinship do not constitute an invariant code of laws written in stone, but instead a whole series of codes, consistent enough to provide structure but open enough to be flexible. I found the best way to look at !Kung kinship is as a game, full of ambiguity and nuance. The game of kinship has a serious side to it, but it is also fun, providing lifelong opportunities for deep play.

JU/'HOANSI LIVING GROUPS

In recent years the Ju/'hoansi have had two kinds of living groups. The first kind has a coherent internal structure, is usually fairly large (10 to 30 members), and is economically self-sufficient; most are based on hunting and gathering. The second kind is attached to Black cattle posts. These groups are usually units of one or two families whose menfolk work on the cattle; sometimes they are larger, composed of 30 or more individuals, and sometimes smaller—as small as a single Ju woman married to a Herero man. I call the first kind of grouping a *camp*, a close translation of the Ju term *chu/ o* (literally, "the face of the huts"), and the second I call a *client group*, reflecting its dependent status in relation to the Blacks.

In 1968 there were 18 camps ranging in size from 4 to 34 people, and 16 client groups with a range of 1 to 44 people. The mean size of camps was 17.8; client groups were about half as large, with a mean size 8.6. In 1968 about 70 percent of the Ju lived in camps and 30 percent in client groups. Camps were usually based on hunting and gathering, although several owned cattle and/or practiced agriculture. Client groups, by contrast, were always dependent on cattle herders for milk, meat, and grains.

The basic traditional Ju/'hoan living group is the camp, a noncorporate, bilaterally organized group of people who live in a single settlement and who move together for at least part of the year. The camp is a flexible but not a random assortment of individuals. At the center of each camp is a core of related older people—usually siblings or cousins—who are generally acknowledged the owners—*k'ausi*—of the waterhole. Around each waterhole is a bloc of land—the *n!ore*—which contains food resources and other waterpoints and which is the basic subsistence area for the resident group. The *k'ausi* are generally recognized as the "hosts" whom one approaches for permission when visiting at a waterhole. The *k'ausi* are simply the people who have lived at the waterhole longer than any others. They include both male and female kin and their spouses. The name of one member of the core group through time becomes associated with the camp as a whole, and the camp becomes known by that person's name. An example is ≠Toma/*gwe chu/ to* (≠Toma/*gwe's camp*) at Dobe.²

The *k'ausi* provide continuity with the past through an association with a waterhole that may extend over 50 years or more. Rarely, however, does this association go back as far as the grandparent generation of the oldest *k'ausi*. To put it another way, the half-life of a core group's tenure at a waterhole can be estimated at 30 to 50 years (Lee, 1972:129). A second integrative role for the *k'ausi* is the genealogical focus they provide. A camp is built up gradually through time by the addition of in-marrying spouses of the core siblings. These spouses in turn may bring in *their* siblings and their spouses, so that the basic genealogical structure of the camp assumes the form of a chain of spouses and siblings radiating from the core, as shown in Figure 5-1. At a given time the camp is composed largely of persons related by primary ties: almost every member has a parent, a child, a sibling, or a spouse to link him or her to the core.

Let us examine the process of group structure by looking at the evolution of a single camp, the Dobe camp (Figure 5-2). The core siblings, //Koka and her younger brother N!eishi, moved into Dobe around 1930. After the former owners died or moved away, they became the *k'ausi*. They brought in their spouses (3, 4, 5), and the children of these marriages (6, 7, 8, 9) later brought in their spouses (10, 11) to live at Dobe (segments 1 and 2). After N/ahka (11) had been married to /Xashe (6) for several years, her entire family joined her at Dobe, including her six brothers and sisters (13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18), her parents (19, 20), her maternal grandfather (21), and her mother's brother (22). Later, when two of her siblings (17, 18) married, their spouses also came to Dobe (23, 24) (segment 3).

²This leader is *not* in any sense a headman. Lorna Marshall (1960:344ff) originally argued that ownership of each waterhole resided in the person of a band headman, who was always male and who inherited his position patrilineally. My research indicated that no headman existed either among the Dobe or the Nyae Nyae !Kung, and subsequently Marshall revised her view accordingly and retracted the headman concept (1976:191-195). (See also Chapter 8.) In the 1970s, the Botswana state formalized the office of village headman as an elected position.

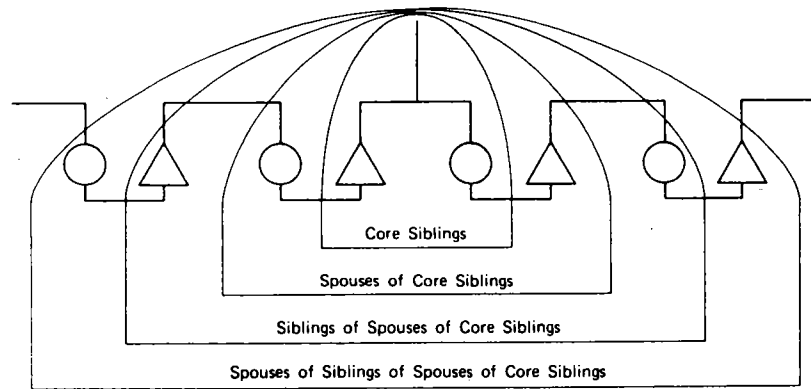


Figure 5-1. Groups are formed through chains of siblings and their spouses, and their siblings and their spouses.

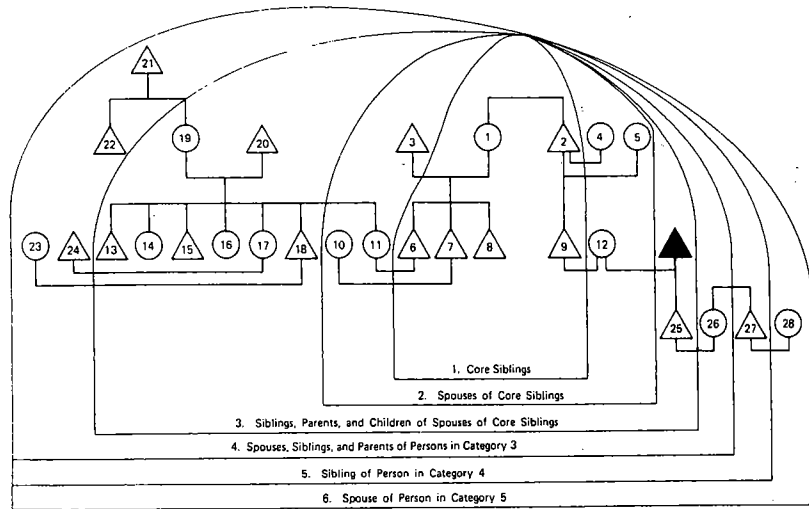


Figure 5-2. The evolution of the main Dobe camp to 1964.

On the other side, in 1955, \neq Toma (9) married a 45-year-old widow, Tin!kai (12), who brought her adolescent son (25) to Dobe. Around 1960, the son married a woman (26) who, in turn, brought her younger brother (27) along. Finally, in 1964, the last link was established when 27 married and brought his wife (28) to Dobe.

Of the 28 persons in the Dobe diagram, 6 are cores and another 6 are spouses of cores; 9 more members are the siblings, parents, and children of the in-marrying spouses; and 7 are more distantly related. All camp members, however, can trace their relation to the core through the primary ties of sibling, parents, offspring, or spouse.

Do core groups tend to be dominated by males or females? An older theory of band organization, traceable to Radcliffe-Brown (1930), put male siblings at the center of groups. In the Dobe case, however, the core group is composed of siblings of *both* sexes, and this is typical of the core groups in the Dobe area as a whole. An analysis of 12 camps in 1964 showed that a brother and sister formed the core in 4 cases, two sisters and one brother in 2 cases, and two brothers and one sister in 1 case. In addition, 4 camps had cores composed of two sisters, and 1 had a core composed of two brothers. These combinations are to be expected in a strongly bilateral society such as the Ju/!hoansi, and the results serve to emphasize the futility of trying to establish whether the Ju have matrilineal or patrilineal residence arrangements.

What makes camps change in numbers and composition? Short-term processes of three kinds set people in motion: exhaustion of local food resources, visiting and receiving visitors, and conflict within the group. In actual practice, it is often difficult to distinguish between each of these causes. When an argument breaks out in a camp, suddenly the food resources of another area become more attractive. Ju love to go visiting, and the practice acts as a safety valve when tempers get frayed. In fact, Ju usually move, not when their food is exhausted, but rather when only their patience is exhausted (see also Chapter 8).

In the longer run, processes that affect group composition include residential shifts at marriage, the adjustment of sex and dependency ratios, and the adjustment of overall numbers. In the first instance, the marriage of a boy to a girl usually results in the boy taking up residence in his in-laws' village. This practice, known as bride-service, is discussed in Chapter 6. But frequently the boy's brother or sister and their spouses may also join him for weeks or months, and occasionally his parents as well. Thus entire families may come together at the time of a marriage, and not just the bride and groom.

When a group's dependency ratio—the proportion of dependents per 100 able-bodied producers—gets too high or too low, steps may be taken to bring this ratio back into line. For example, if a camp has many young children to feed, this creates a burden on the working adults. One or more of the young families may be encouraged to hive off and join other camps where the dependency ratios are more favorable. Similarly, a group with few or no young children may see its future in jeopardy and take steps to recruit a related family with young children to take up the *n!ore*. By these means the reproduction of the groups is perpetuated and the burden of work effort is evenly allocated throughout the area.

In spite of these mechanisms, however, groups don't survive indefinitely. Each decade some disband and their members distribute themselves among their kin in other camps. For example, of the 16 Dobe-area camps in 1964, 10 were intact in 1973, while 6 had disbanded, and 6 new camps had come into being.³

All this visiting, shifting, and adjusting of numbers will make sense to us when we realize that the Ju camp is a unit of sharing. The food brought into a camp each day is distributed widely so that each member receives an equitable share. Thus, it is crucial that the people in the camp get along well together. If arguments break out,

³I'm sure that a certain amount of group disbanding occurred in every decade, but I now believe that the groups were more stable in the past than they were in 1963-1973, a period leading up to major socioeconomic changes (see Chapters 10, 11, and 12).

then sharing breaks down, and when that happens the basis for camp life is lost. Only when one or both of the feuding parties leave or when they settle their differences can the sharing be restored.

The dynamic of Ju/'hoan camp life is thus composed of work and leisure, harmony and conflict, and group solidarity interspersed with periods of group fission.

THE KINSHIP SYSTEM

We have said that kinship is the central organizing principle of societies like the Ju/'hoansi. The purpose of this section is to spell out the particular features of the Ju/'hoan kinship system and to get you inside the system so that you can see the world around you as the Ju see it.

In order to do this we have to build up our kinship picture in three phases. We start with the kinship terminology as we usually think of it, a genealogical diagram with *ego* at the center and the terms she or he applies to all kin. We'll call this the normal kinship, or Kinship I. Next we will introduce Ju personal names and the name relationship and show the rather different set of kin terms generated by this method, which we'll call Kinship II. As we look further into the name relationship a problem emerges between the rules of Kinship I and Kinship II: the latter seems to destroy the sense of the former. Just when you are beginning to despair, we introduce the key that resolves the contradiction and unlocks the secret of Ju/'hoan kinship. This key is the principle of *wi*, which I call Kinship III. As you grasp the inner meaning of the *wi* principle, a new sense of the beauty and coherence of Ju/'hoan kinship begins to emerge. Armed with that sense you will, I hope, be able to see the !Kung world as they themselves see it.⁴

Kinship I

Let us begin by introducing the kin terms for the immediate family. We will present the English-language equivalent first, then the anthropological short form, and then the Ju/'hoan kin term.⁵

	Short Form	Kin Term
Father	F	<i>ba</i>
Mother	M	<i>tai</i>
Son	S	<i>!ha</i>
Daughter	D	<i>≠hai</i>
Older Brother	OB	<i>!ko</i>
Older Sister	OZ	<i>!kwi</i>
Younger Brother	YB	<i>tsin</i>
Younger Sister	YZ	<i>tsin</i>

⁴This presentation draws upon my own data and also the analyses of Marshall (1976) and Fabian (1965). An expanded version of this discussion is found in Biesele ed. 1986.

⁵We will be using English kinship terms, not because they always fit Ju concepts (they don't) but as an aid to students' understanding.



Women and girls participating in a joking relationship.

So far the kin terms follow our system, in that there are separate terms for F, M, S, and D, that is, F≠FB, M≠MZ, S≠BS, and so on. The Ju differ from English usage in the kin terms for siblings. There are separate terms of OB (*!ko*), OZ (*!kwi*), and younger siblings of both sexes are lumped under the term *tsin*. Furthermore, sibling terms are different, as we shall see, from cousin terms.

Let us consider next the terms used to apply to grandparents and grandchildren.

Father's father	FF	<i>!kun!a</i>
Mother's father	MF	
Father's mother	FM	<i>tun, mama</i>
Mother's mother	MM	
Son's son	SS	<i>!kuma</i>
Daughter's son	DS	
Son's daughter	SD	<i>tuma</i>
Daughter's daughter	DD	

The term *!kun!a* means literally "old name" and refers to the fact that male children are preferentially named after their grandfathers. The term *!kuma* means "small name" and is a reciprocal of *!kun!a*. The term *tun* for "grandmother" also has a reciprocal form, *tuma*, that is, granddaughter. These pairs highlight an important principle

of Ju/hoan kin terms: almost all of them have an older–younger reference depending on the relative age of the speaker. In a society like the Ju/hoansi, with few social statuses, relative age is one of the few status distinctions that can be made. Older–younger reciprocals are found in several other kin term pairs: *tsu–tsuma*, *//ga–//gama*, *tun!ga–tun!gama*.⁶

Next we consider the terms for the relationships we call in English aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, and nephew. I will give you these terms now, but remember that these will have to be modified later when we introduce Kinship II, the name relationship.

Father's brother	FB	<i>tsu</i>
Mother's brother	MB	
Father's sister	FZ	<i>//ga</i>
Mother's sister	MZ	
Father's brother's son	FBS	<i>!kun!a or !kuma</i>
Mother's brother's son	MBS	
Father's sister's son	FZS	
Mother's sister's son	MZS	
Father's brother's daughter	FBD	<i>tun or tuma</i>
Mother's brother's daughter	MBD	
Father's sister's daughter	FZD	
Mother's sister's daughter	MZD	
Brother's son	BS	<i>tsuma</i>
Sister's son	ZS	
Brother's daughter	BD	<i>tsuma</i> (man speaking)
Sister's daughter	ZD	<i>//gama</i> (woman speaking)

Careful study of these tables will reveal one important principle of !Kung kinship: the principle of alternating generations. For ego's *own* generation and for the *second* up and down, ego will generally use the *!kun!a–tun* pair of terms. But for the *first* generation up and down, ego will use the *tsu–//ga* pair of terms. To put it another way,

ego's own generation	
ego's grandparent's generation	are <i>!kun!a, tun</i>
ego's grandchildren's generation	
ego's parental generation	
ego's children's generation	are <i>tsu, //ga</i>

Following this principle, which pair of terms would ego use for great-grandparents and great-grandchildren? If you answered *tsu–//ga*, you are correct.

The principle of alternating generations relates to another principle of kinship: joking and avoidance. All Ju kin relations are either joking (*k'āi*, "to joke" or "to

⁶The Ju have a universalistic kinship system in that every single person in the society can be linked to every other by use of a kin term (see Alan Barnard, 1976, 1978, 1992a: ch. 15). The only exception to this rule, and the only nonkin term of address, is *≠dara*, meaning "equal." It is used for people of the same sex who are so close in age that an older–younger pair of terms can't be used. *≠dara* also means "friend."



Kumsan!a and his small name, *Kumsama*; they are in the *!kun!a–!kuma* relationship.

play") or avoidance (*kwa*, "to fear" or "respect"). And all of ego's kin fall into one or another of the two categories.

For a woman, here is how the kin universe is divided:

Joking Kin	Refers to	Avoidance Kin	Refers to
<i>!kwi</i>	OZ	<i>ba</i>	F
<i>tsin</i> (female)	YZ	<i>tai</i>	M
<i>!kun!a</i>	FF, MF	<i>!hai</i>	S
<i>tun</i>	FM, MM	<i>≠hai</i>	D
<i>!kuma</i>	SS, DS	<i>!ko</i>	OB
<i>tuma</i>	DS, DD	<i>tsin</i> (male)	YB
		<i>tsu</i>	FB, MB
		<i>//ga</i>	FZ, MZ

And for a man, the universe of kin divides as follows:

Joking Kin	Refers to	Avoidance Kin	Refers to
<i>!ko</i>	OB	<i>ba</i>	F
<i>tsin</i> (male)	YB	<i>tai</i>	M
<i>!kun!a</i>	FF, MF	<i>!ha</i>	S
<i>tun</i>	FM, MM	<i>≠hai</i>	D
<i>!kuma</i>	SS, DS	<i>!kwi</i>	OZ
<i>tuma</i>	SD, DD	<i>tsin</i> (female)	YZ
		<i>tsu</i>	FB, MB
		<i>//ga</i>	FZ, MZ

A person's behavior is very different toward joking kin compared with avoidance kin. With a joking relative one acts in a relaxed fashion and speaks on familiar terms. The fact that *!kun!a* and *tun* fall into this category highlights the affectionate relationship that exists between grandparents and grandchildren, a quality that is found in many cultures, including our own. But unlike our own, the Ju/hoansi take the kin terms for immediate relatives and extend them widely. The terms *!kun!a* and *tun* will be applied to dozens of people, and the feelings of affection are also widely extended. People in the *!kun!a-tun* category who are unrelated are not only treated with affection but, if they are of appropriate age, they may be prime candidates for marriage.

Toward an avoidance relative one must show respect and reserve, and one will often use the second person plural as a form of address (The Ju/hoansi make the same distinctions between familiar and formal that in French are represented by *tu* and *vous*). The fact that one's parents (and children) and one's parents' siblings fall into the avoidance category is indicative of the authority that parents exercise over their children. People in the avoidance relation may *not* marry, even if they are unrelated. In extreme cases, such as mother-in-law/son-in-law avoidance (see below), the two parties in theory may not even speak directly but must use a third party as intermediary. Many of these relationships, however, can be warm and friendly as long as proper reserve is shown in public.

Among joking relatives, too, there is a considerable range of behavior. Toward your own grandparent you can be affectionate, but you may not engage in overt sexual joking. With an unrelated *!kun!a* or *tun* of the opposite sex you can engage in bawdy joking of the most overt kind, called *za* (see Chapter 8).

Finally, it is worth noting that the principle of alternate generations implies that if you avoid person "A" you will generally joke with his or her parents and children, and if you joke with person "A" chances are you will avoid his or her parents and children. All of a person's kin will fall into one or the other category. There are no neutrals.

These same principles apply to "affines," relations through marriage, which we now consider. The affinal terms are as follows:

AFFINAL TERMS:

	Short Form	Kin Term	Joking or Avoidance
<i>Woman Speaking:</i>			
Husband	H	<i>!kwa</i>	J
Husband's father	HF	<i>≠tum</i>	A
Husband's mother	HM	<i>/otsu</i>	A
Husband's brother	HB	<i>tun!ga</i>	J
Husband's sister	HZ	<i>/otsu</i>	A
Brother's wife	BW	<i>/otsu</i>	A
Sister's husband	ZH	<i>tun!ga</i>	J
<i>Man Speaking:</i>			
Wife	W	<i>tsiu</i>	J
Wife's father	WF	<i>≠tum</i>	A
Wife's mother	WM	<i>/otsu</i>	A
Wife's brother	WB	<i>tun!ga</i>	A
Wife's sister	WZ	<i>tun</i>	J
Brother's wife	BW	<i>tun</i>	J
Sister's husband	ZH	<i>tun!ga</i>	A

AFFINAL TERMS: (Continued)

Man or Woman Speaking:

Son's wife's father	SWF	} <i>n!unba</i>	J
Daughter's husband's father	DHF		
Son's wife's mother	SWM	} <i>n!untai</i>	J
Daughter's husband's mother	DHM		

Note that the !Kung joke with spouses and with spouses' siblings of the same sex as their spouse. This is because a man's wife's sister (or brother's wife) is herself a potential wife, and therefore a joking relation is allowed. The same holds true for a woman and her husband's brother or her sister's husband.⁷ Relations between men and brothers-in-law and women and sisters-in-law, however, are tinged with respect. (An important variation is discussed in Chapter 10; see *Swara* and the *Sarwa*.)

The most heavily weighted avoidance relations occur between a man and his mother-in-law and between a woman and her father-in-law. Here even direct speech communication is not supposed to occur. (In practice it frequently does, however.)

Summing up the presentation of Ju/hoan kinship, so far one can see that it makes a logical, internally consistent whole. Kinship analysts classify the Ju/hoan system as an "Eskimo" type of kinship, in that it has terms that separate the nuclear family from collateral relatives. Fathers are distinguished from father's brothers, mothers from mother's sisters, siblings from cousins, own children from nephews and nieces, and so on. If this system has a familiar ring, it's not surprising. North American English kin terminology (and that of most European languages) is also of the Eskimo type. The Ju/hoansi make many of the same distinctions that we do.

But unlike American kinship, the Ju/hoan kinship system makes extensive use of personal names in structuring kinship, and it is to names and naming that we now turn.

Kinship II: Names and the Name Relationship

Among the Ju/hoansi there are a very limited number of personal names in use. Only 35 men's names and 32 women's names were in use in the Dobe area in 1964. Names are inherited from ancestors according to a fairly strict set of rules. Every child must be named for somebody. A first-born son is supposed to be named after his father's father, and the first-born daughter after her father's mother. Second-born children are supposed to be named after the mother's father and mother's mother, and additional children are to be named after father's brothers and sisters and mother's brothers and sisters, in that order. More distantly related kin, and affines, may also provide names to a family. Parents may *never* name a child after themselves.

All Ju/hoan names are sex-linked. A man and a woman may never have the same name. Further, the Ju have no surnames. The result of this naming is that each man's name may be inherited and shared by up to 25 other men, and each woman's name by up to 26 women. Table 5-1 lists the 35 men's names in use in the Dobe area in

⁷If a man dies his brother may inherit his wife; this practice is called the *levirate*. Similarly, if a woman dies her sister may inherit her husband, a practice called the *sororate*.

TABLE 5-1 MEN'S NAMES LISTED IN ORDER OF FREQUENCY

Most Popular Names	Number of Men with That Name
1. ≠Toma	25
2. K"au	24
3. Kashe	15
4. /Ti!kay	15
5. /Twi	14
6. /Gau	14
7. /Tashe	12
8. Bo	11
9. /Kan//a	11
10. Dam	9
11. !Xam	9
	<u>159</u>
Percentage of all men with 11 most popular names = 74%	
<i>Other Men's Names</i>	
— /Tishe	6
— N//au, N!eishi, ≠Gau	5 each
— Debe, Tsaa, Tsau, //Kau	3 each
— Hxome, N//u, /N!au, /Tontah (!), ≠Daun, !Xoma, //Koshe	2 each
— Ko/tun, Kum/to, N!ani, Tsama, /Tan!au, /Tuka, /Tushe, ≠N//au, !Kaha	<u>1 each</u> 56
Percentage of men bearing 24 less popular names = 26%	
n = 35	

1964, and Table 5-2 lists the 32 women's names. It is interesting to note that almost 75 percent of all the men have one or another of the 11 most popular men's names, while 73 percent of all women have one of the 12 most popular women's names.

Since the Ju/hoansi have no surnames, there is a real problem in sorting out one ≠Toma from another. The Ju get around this by using nicknames extensively, usually highlighting, or spoofing, some characteristic or quirk of their owners: ≠Toma short, Bo tall, Debe big belly, N!ai short face (of John Marshall's film *N!ai*) are some examples. The leader of Dobe camp is ≠Toma//gwe—≠Toma sourplum, referring to his liking for the fruit but also nicely capturing his acidic personality. East of Dobe, many men and women have nicknames given to them by Herero and Tswana, nicknames such as Kasupe, Kashitambo, Kopela Maswe, and others.

What is the relation between people bearing the same name? If your name is ≠Toma, for example, you are likely to find about 24 other ≠Tomas in the population, all of whom claim descent from the same original ≠Toma and claim to be related to you. All ≠Tomas older than yourself you address as !kun!a (old name) and all ≠Tomas younger than yourselves you address as !kuma (young name), regardless of what your genealogical connection is and even if you have no discernible genealogical connection at all.

In reckoning kinship, the possession of a common name thus leapfrogs over the genealogical ties and creates close kinship even with distant relatives. Similarly,

TABLE 5-2 WOMEN'S NAMES LISTED IN ORDER OF FREQUENCY

Most Popular Names	Number of Woman with That Name
1. N!uhka	26
2. Chu!ko	23
3. N≠tisa	19
4. /Twa	16
5. //Kushe	15
6. N/ahka	14
7. Di//kau	13
8. N!ai	13
9. Hwan//a	11
10. Karu	10
11. /Tasa	9
12. //Koka	8
	<u>177</u>
Percentage of all women with 12 most popular names = 73%	
<i>Other Women's Names</i>	
— Bau, Sa//gai, Tin!kay, //N	7 each
— Chwa, /Toishe	6 each
— Kun//a	5
— Kwoba	4
— //Gau	3
— Be, Kxore, N//au, ≠Tabo	2 each
— !Ku, Kxamshe, /Tam, /Xia, //Kau!kobe, //Gumi, //Nsa	<u>1 each</u> 67
Percentage of all women bearing 20 less popular names = 27%	
n = 32	

anyone with your father's name you call "father," anyone with your wife's name you may call "wife," anyone with your son's name you may call "son," and so on. And you will be called various kin terms by others according to what your name means to them.

The name relationship has an important bearing on marriage arrangements. A woman may not marry a man with her father's or brother's name, and a man may not marry a woman with his mother's or sister's name. Thus, for a man, if your mother has a common name and you have several sisters with common names, up to 50 percent of all the potential spouses may be off limits to you. For example, a man named ≠Toma will be ineligible as a spouse for the approximately 50 women with fathers or brothers named ≠Toma. And if his mother is a N!uhka and he has sisters named Chu!ko and N≠tisa, another 68 women will be barred from marrying him.

The principle of the name relationship has a certain logic to it, and it is obviously of great benefit in tying society together by making close kin out of distant strangers. But it should be clear that it is a great *destroyer* of the logic of the standard kinship system we outlined on pages 64-69. In fact, the two systems are often completely at odds.

To illustrate, let us take the not infrequent case of a man who is named after his father's or mother's brother and not for his father's or mother's father.⁸ His FB becomes his *!kun!a*, a joking term, and his FF becomes a *tsu*, an avoidance term. Now what about his FBS, who ordinarily would be a *!kuma*? He now must become a *tsuma* if the principle of alternating generations is to hold. In short, in up to half the cases ego will find himself out of step with Kinship I and out of step with his brothers and sisters, who will joke with those he avoids and who must avoid those he jokes with.

But the problem doesn't stop there. The name relationship also introduces complications into the marriage market. For instance, consider the case of a young man named ≠Toma who finds an attractive young woman named Chu/o. She happens to have the same name as his *tun*; this makes Chu/o not only a joking partner but also highly eligible as a spouse for ≠Toma. But wait! The attractive woman's father's name happens to be ≠Toma as well, and this makes our young ≠Toma strictly off limits to her. His name system makes her an eligible spouse; her name system makes him *verboten*. Whose view is to prevail? When such an impasse occurs, the Ju say *sa ge a // kemi*—"they are in the middle"—that is, they are halfway between the joking and the avoidance categories. In such cases avoidance takes priority over joking and a marriage is unlikely to occur.

Because so many Ju/hoansi share the same names, this sort of problem crops up again and again. Given these contradictions between the "normal" kinship of system I and system II generated by the name relationship, how can we go about finding out which system takes primacy, or at least how the two systems interlock?

Kinship III: The Principle of *Wi*

The method I first used to tackle this problem in the field was to interview many people and ask them to give me the kin terms they applied to each of up to 30 relatives. This task proved extremely time consuming and frustrating. At first everything went smoothly with each informant: father was called *ba*, mother *tai*, older brother *!ko*, and so on, as they should be in Kinship I. Other kin were called *!kun!a* or *tun* if they had ego's grandfather's or grandmother's name, or *!ko* if they had ego's brother's name, as they should in Kinship II. But every informant had many kin whose terms of address *did not make sense either in terms of Kinship I or Kinship II!* Each older Ju/hoan could rattle off terms for all his or her kin without hesitation, but when I asked why they used a particular term the answer made little sense to me.

I resolved that there must be some additional principle or principles that were escaping me. After months of muddle, the clue came when I asked the following question of !Xam, a 70-year-old /Xai/ xai man: "When two people are working out what kin term to employ, how do you decide whose choice is to prevail?"

"In our way," !Xam replied, "it is always the older person who '*wis*' the younger person. Since I am older than you, I decide what we should call each other."

I had heard this argument before but hadn't grasped its full significance. The Ju/hoan concept of *wi* is an interesting one. I had understood it to mean "to help" or "to assist"; now I learned that it also had the sense of exercising authority. !Xam explained that relative age was very important in Ju/hoan kinship. In a society with no

⁸Lorna Marshall's data show that only 51 percent of the Ju/hoansi are named for grandparents (Marshall, 1976:244).

chiefs or headmen or ranked statuses, relative age was one of the few bases for status distinctions. It was crucial in determining who should choose the kin terms to be used.

As I explored the concept of *wi* further, its full meaning began to dawn on me. In fact, its use constituted a third principle of Ju/hoan kinship, on a par with Kinships I and II. The principle that elders chose kin terms for juniors, when combined with the name relationship, make kinship appear quirky and unpredictable. Yet these choices made perfect sense when you grasped *wi*'s inner meaning. Finally, after months of plodding along, I finally felt that I had cracked the code; this is what I wrote in my fieldnotes in March 1969:

Wi is the great rattler and destroyer of systems. Because for the first half of your life you have to take all your elders' various *wis* according to *their* lights, not yours.

But then turning around [in midlife] you take these well-established *wis* and impose them on your juniors of various names in ways that have little meaning to them *just as your wis originally had little meaning to you!*

Thus *wis* seemingly devoid of logic keep getting passed on and such neat rules as alternating generations from either Kinship I or Kinship II can never get going.

Against this trend toward nonlogical *wis* there is the continuing refreshing of kinship with terms drawn from real parents, real siblings, real *!kun!as* and later, real spouses and real in-laws. These give the individual's personal *wi* system a semblance of order, especially with his or her juniors (Fieldnotes 21/3/69).

Moments like this in fieldwork are wonderful; with this new insight, I found that the seeming confusion surrounding Ju/hoan kinship was replaced by clarity. As the smoke cleared, I was able to further unravel the system.

First, learning the system is a lifelong affair. Your kin universe evolves as you grow. As you pass through marriage, the birth of your children, and later their marriages, you add new names and new twists to the application of kinship terms.⁹ Take the simple fact of growing older. Since elders determine the kin term juniors apply to them when you are young, everyone is older than you, and you play an essentially passive role in the game of kinship.

For instance, if your name is /Gau and an older woman named N!uhka marries a /Gau, she will call you *mi !kwa*—husband—or *mi !kuma*—small name—and this term will stick even if you have no N!uhka's in your kindred, or if you do have a N!uhka to whom you would apply a different name.

Now let's say that this N!uhka becomes a grandmother and a baby N!uhka is named after her. You will now apply the term *tsiuma*—small wife—or *!kuma*—small name—to the baby N!uhka! The kin tie that originally had no logical basis gets perpetuated and, more importantly, *begins to develop a logic of its own*.

As you get older, more and more people are born after you, and for these juniors you are in the driver's seat; you may establish the appropriate term in light of your situation. The older you get, the more "control" you have over your kinship, until at the end of life you will have *wied* everybody in the kin universe. In fact, when I asked a very old man how old he was, he replied, "All the people who *wied*

⁹The kinship system is such a wonderfully complex affair that certain older people, usually women, become specialists in keeping track of how everyone is related to everyone else. I used to sit in amazement as Sa//gain!a rattled off names, terms, and rationales for dozens of kin pairs.

me are *kwara* (dead), and all who live I have *wied* [that is, I am the oldest person around].”

A second aspect of kinship and the life cycle is the changes that take place at marriage. When a man marries, new vistas of kinship immediately open up. If I marry a *N≠isa*, then:

- 1) all women named *N≠isa* could call me husband (*!kwa*);
- 2) all husbands of *N≠isas* could call me brother or co-husband (*!gwaba*);
- 3) all fathers and mothers of *N≠isas* could call me son-in-law (*≠um*);
- 4) all siblings of *N≠isas* could call me brother-in-law; and so on.

Whether any of these terms are actually used depends on what the older person wants to do, but kin terms flowing out of marriage names, because they are reciprocal, are among the most popular of the name-relation kin terms.

/TONTAH MEETS /TONTAH

Armed with my new knowledge, my new name, and my new kinship network, I plunged with enthusiasm into the world of Ju/'hoan kinship. Every day, new relationships were unfolded as people from distant waterholes explained their ties to me. Women named *Hwan//a* called me son, men named *N!eishi* did the same. *Sal//gais* and *≠Tomas* called me brother. Because I was a new person and genealogically a child, young and old alike *wied* me. Soon I was engulfed in a dense network of kin ties and obligations. In only one respect was I lacking kin ties. My name, /Tontah, was a rare one, being shared with only two of the 250 men in the greater Dobe population (see Table 5-1). Thus encounters with my actual *!kun!as* were few and far between.

It wasn't until my second field trip that I really came to understand what having a namesake meant. I was visiting a group to the south of Dobe, and I was told that farther on there was a very large camp of San led by a man named /Tontah. He had heard about me, his namesake, from visitors from the north, and he was anxious to meet me. Would I come down and visit him? When we arrived at his camp at /Du/ da, my *!kun!a* was standing by the road waiting to meet me. /Tontah was a tall (by Ju/'hoansi standards), good-looking man in his forties with an open face framed by a short goatee. I liked him immediately. He greeted me with some ceremony and said, “Come, let us go to the camp to meet *our* people,” placing a particular emphasis on the word *our*. He was living with his wife's family, so most of the people were his in-laws. In fact, they turned out to be *our* in-laws.

“And here is *our* father-in-law and mother-in-law,” he said, introducing me to an elderly smiling couple. “And here is *our* brother-in-law,” pointing out a handsome young man whittling a spear. “And here is *our* wife, *Hwan//a*,” said my *!kun!a*, presenting me to an absolutely stunning woman in her late thirties with almond eyes and a disconcertingly direct gaze. I noted that her name, “*Hwan//a*,” was the same as that of my “mother.” This put us into an ambiguous situation, intimate yet respectful at the same time.

“And here are our children,” /Tontah continued, pointing out first a fourteen-year-old girl as striking as her mother, then an eight-year-old girl and a five-year-old boy.

Wanting to play my role as namesake to the hilt, I sat down to talk and said to the eight-year-old, “Daughter, I am thirsty, give me water to drink.” In a twinkling an



Hwan//a, the wife of /Tontah.

ostrich egg canteen was produced and a cup of passable water poured. Refreshed, I spent the afternoon talking with /Tontah about the other members of his large camp—actually three semicontiguous camps of over 100 people—and how *we* were related to them. At the end of our talk my *!kun!a* made a comment on Ju/'hoan kinship that has stuck in my mind:

“If your name is /Tontah,” he said, “all /Tontahs are your *!kun!as*. All who /Tontahs birthed are your children. All who birthed /Tontahs are your parents, and all who married /Tontahs are your wives.”

Which is more important to the Ju/'hoansi, I wondered, the genealogical tie or the name relationship? It is difficult to answer this question, but one line of evidence may be useful. I was both given a name relationship and adopted into a Ju/'hoan family. Most of the other anthropologists, scientists, and filmmakers who have worked with the Ju—now over two dozen in number—have only been given namesakes, and that

alone, the Ju feel, is more than sufficient to plunge them into the kinship network. The strength of the name relationship and of the principle of kinship in general is illustrated by the experience of a British film crew from the BBC. Within an hour of arrival at Dobe in July 1980, the entire party had been given Ju/hoan names and had been "adopted" by their namesakes, who proceeded to call them by their Ju/hoan names for the rest of their stay and who never even bothered to find out what their English names were.