

1/The Ju'hoansi

Lee, Richard (1993) *The Dobe Ju'hoansi* 2nd ed

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INTRODUCTION: A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

The inhabitants of these parts are a much finer race of Bushmen than we had generally met with. Freedom and the enjoyment of their own game for food and the skins for clothing are the main causes. They acknowledge no chief and are in the habit of defending themselves against oppressors and intruders either from Lake Ngami or the Namaqua region: in former times they have often combined to resist marauding parties sent out by the Batwana and other tribes. Their minds are free from apprehension of human plunderers, and the life they lead is a comparatively fearless one. The population is numerous, and they are more attached to each other than in other parts.

James Chapman (1868)

Not far from the border of South West Africa . . . is a group of caves . . . visited by few white people. The journey involves a long and arduous trek across sandy country through which no road passes and a competent guide is essential. . . . The country in the vicinity of these caves is probably the least known in the whole Protectorate and Bushmen and the wild animals have it to themselves.

Anthony Sillery (1952)

Chapman in the 1860s and Sillery almost a century later were referring to the same fabled people—the !Kung San of the Kalahari Desert, fierce and independent, unknown to the outside world until recently. And I was going out to find them. The !Kung, or Ju'hoansi as they call themselves, were virtually unknown to scientists until the 1950s, and now, in October 1963, I was on my way to !Goshe, a waterhole in northwestern Bechuanaland, to make a year-long study of them.

I had traveled a long way from North America: by plane from Berkeley, California to my home in Toronto; from there to Nairobi, Kenya, where I met my friends and collaborators Irven and Nancy DeVore and their family. We then traveled by Land Rover over half the African continent, arriving in Botswana in August. Irven DeVore and I, along with Adam Kuper, surveyed the northwestern Kalahari for two weeks looking for a suitable study site, without success. Then, after the DeVores had returned to Harvard, I came back to the Kalahari with two Land Rovers and two African assistants, determined to find the elusive !Kung. The area west of !Goshe appeared to offer our last hope for success.

Hour after hour, our Land Rover ground slowly in four-wheel drive through the deep sand. On the threshold of a great adventure, I retraced in my mind the steps that had brought me to this place. In the early 1960s there had been a renaissance in evolutionary studies in anthropology. Fueled by the Leakeys' fossil discoveries



!Kung at the mouth of /Twiababa caves.

in East Africa, by new dating techniques, by archeological finds and nonhuman primate field research, and by the rediscovery of long-disregarded nineteenth-century classics in evolutionary social anthropology, there was a new and growing interest in studies of the evolution of human behavior. I was part of the generation of anthropology graduate students excited by the prospects of a new interdisciplinary synthesis in anthropology, a new view of humanity's beginnings based on the firm data of archeology, physical anthropology, and ethnography.

What particular circumstances had brought me to the Kalahari? The piece of research that had captured *my* imagination was the study of contemporary hunting and gathering peoples. Few people live this way today, but 12,000 years ago, foraging for wild game and plant foods had been the universal mode of human subsistence. (The term *foragers* or *foraging peoples* is a convenient shorthand for groups with this kind of adaptation.) Our ancestors evolved as foragers, and all basic human institutions—language, marriage, kinship, family, exchange, and human nature itself—were formed during the two- to four-million-year period when we lived by hunting and gathering. Thus the study of the surviving foragers—the San, Inuit (Eskimo), Australian aborigines, and others—had much to teach us.¹

¹Although the preceding paragraph accurately reflects the view about foragers and human evolution prevalent in the 1960s, today I would be more cautious on what this material can and cannot teach us about our species' distant past. Some of these changing perspectives are set out in Chapter 12.

On the road to the Dobe area.



But in order to be able to learn their lessons, we have to exercise the utmost caution. In dealing with a people as exotic as the !Kung, we have to be careful to avoid the twin pitfalls of racism and romanticism. First, foragers like the !Kung are not “missing links”; they are as human as we are, and their histories are as long as the histories of any other human group. And second, nowhere will we find foragers today living in Pleistocene conditions, that is, as hunters living in a world of hunters. All foragers have been in some contact with nonforaging peoples, some for a very long time. There are no “lost” continents or lost tribes (Wolf, 1982), and even the Ju/'hoansi whom I was on my way to visit had been known to exist and had been named in the nineteenth century.²

If one takes these pitfalls carefully into account, there is still much to be learned from contemporary foragers. In fact, it is their very humanity that has made people like the Ju/'hoansi and other foragers so important for science. These peoples, despite their cultural and geographic diversity, have a core of features in common, and this core of features represents the basic human adaptation stripped of the accretions and complications brought about by agriculture, urbanization, advanced technology, and national and class conflict—all of the “advances” of the last few thousand years.

How do they make a living? How do they organize their communities? How are they able to settle conflicts in the absence of chiefs? These central questions could be studied directly if (and it is a big if) I could find the right people—leading independent lives, getting their own food, and settling their own quarrels. In the 1860s all interior Ju/'hoansi had lived this way. Even by the 1950s there were still many who did. But this was 1963, and the winds of change were sweeping Africa. Could such an adaptation survive in the jet age?

After many hours of driving we suddenly came upon signs of human settlement, and at sundown we pulled into !Goshe, a row of mud huts that stretched for a mile along a sand ridge. A dozen men, women, and children came out to greet us. The San people of !Goshe were friendly and open. I stammered a few words of greeting in Ju/'hoansi and passed out tobacco, which they eagerly accepted. However, as I soon learned, most of the !Goshe Ju worked for their Bantu-speaking neighbors, herding their goats and cattle. They dined on milk and meat, and politically they were subject to their overlords, the aristocratic Tswana. Were there any waterholes, I asked, where Ju people lived without Blacks and cattle? There was one, they told me, about a full day's travel to the west at a place called Dobe, near the beacon that marked the border with South West Africa. My assistants, Enoch Tabiso and Onesimus Mbombo, and I decided to go to Dobe first thing the next morning.

A WATERHOLE CALLED DOBE

October is the hottest month of the Kalahari year, and by nine a.m. the sun was already a hot disc high in the sky as we drove our Land Rover into the dry pan of Dobe, cut the engine, and waited in the pool of shade by the truck. After ten

²In 1971, a Philippine millionaire claimed to have found a lost tribe of foragers living out of touch with the rest of the world for 500 years. The “gentle Tasaday” became the world's most famous foragers, with TV specials and *National Geographic* spreads, until a 1986 expedition exposed crucial aspects of their story as a fraud (Berreman, 1992; Lee, 1992c). The irony is that over a dozen authentic southeast Asian hunter-gatherers had been ignored by the media, probably because they wore blue jeans, had transistor radios, and regularly interacted with their agricultural neighbors.

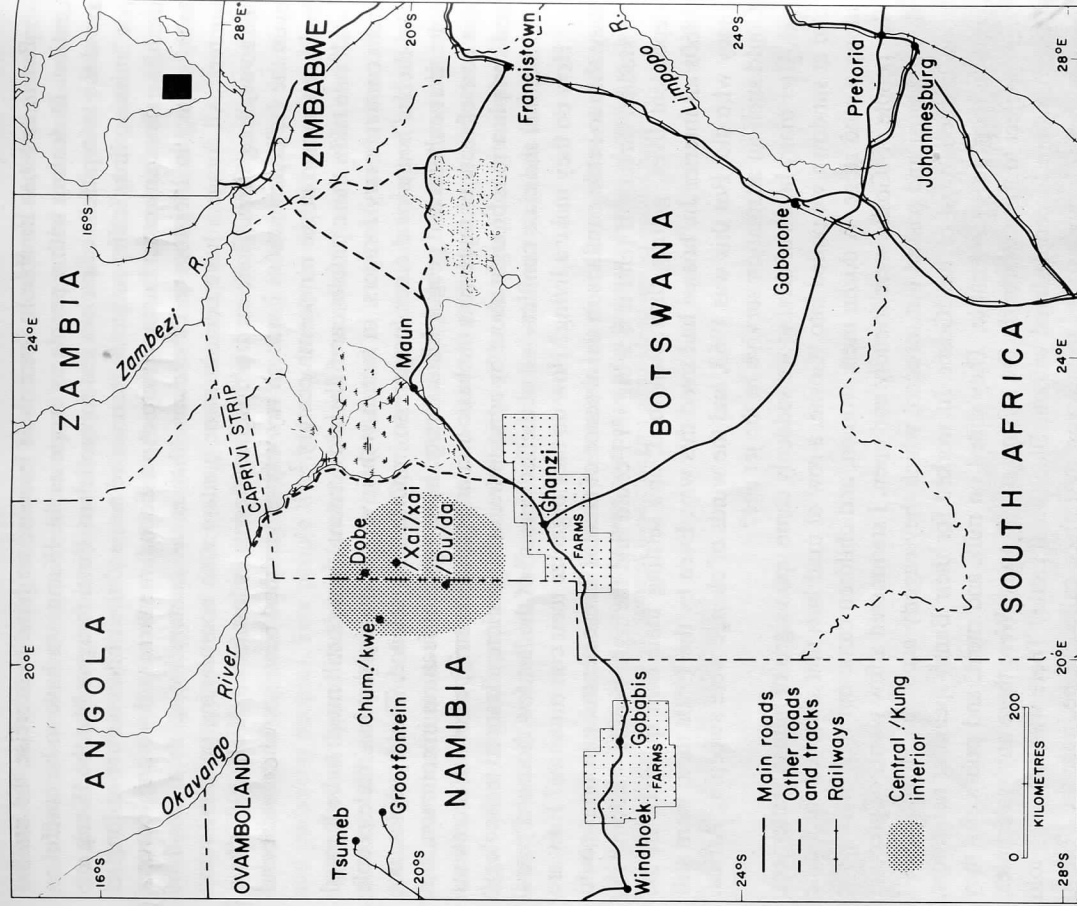


Figure 1-1. The Dobe area in southern Africa.

minutes a cluster of brown figures dressed in leather appeared 100 yards away and stopped in the shade at the pan's edge, waiting silently. We approached them, and I warily sized them up. They were all short, the men about five foot two, the women well under five feet. Their brown skins were deeply seamed with lines from exposure to the sun. They were dressed in sueded leather, the men in tight-fitting breechcloths, the women in beaded aprons and soft skins. Both sexes were naked above the waist. The women were handsomely adorned with necklaces, arm bands, and hair ornaments of beads made from ostrich eggshells. Both sexes wore their densely curled hair close cropped, and as I observed them more closely I saw that their high foreheads and cheekbones were etched with geometric lines of tattooing that showed up blue under their golden skins. Each of the men wore a bow and quiver

in a sling over his shoulder, and two of them had spears in their hands, but on the whole they seemed friendly enough. After a few minutes, Onesimus broke the silence with greetings in Tswana. Then, in my one sentence of !Kung, I asked "*a /ku re o a juwe?*" (What is your name?) of each in turn.

"*Mi o #Toma*," responded the first, a small, wizened man in his sixties with a sardine can key hanging from his ear.

"*Mi o #Toma*," said a handsome young man in his thirties wearing a shredded western cloth cap.

"*Mi o N!eishi*," replied a barrel-chested man in his late fifties whose deep-set eyes smiled in a sea of wrinkles.

"*Mi o Tinlay*," a handsome middle-aged woman with full lips spoke next.

"*Mi o //Koka*," said a very old and spry woman in a leather *kaross* that seemed too big for her.

"*Mi o //Gumin'a*," said a tiny, dignified old woman with a twinkle in her eye.

Finally a young woman with a baby at her breast and a four-year-old at her side said, "*Mi n! a o Sal // gai*."

The nine people who came out to meet us were core members of the Dobe camp, a strongly independent group of people who, we later learned, had been associated with the waterhole for over thirty years and who preferred to live on their own in the "bush" rather than share a waterhole with cattle and goats.

#Toma//gwe and the men of Dobe.



They were related to one another as follows (Figure 1-2).

//Koka and her younger brother N!eishi were core "owners" of Dobe along with their spouses—the formidable old ≠Toma//gwe (≠Toma sourplum) and the diminutive //Gumin'a (Old //Gumi). ≠Toma//gwe and //Koka had three married sons in their thirties who were away hunting with their wives and children, while //Gumi and N!eishi had a married son and a married daughter—the younger ≠Toma and Sa//gai, who were present to greet us.

I asked them if I could come and stay with them and learn their language, and after much discussion they agreed. Would they be interested in learning English in return? This question, when it passed through the interpreters, was greeted with gales of laughter. ≠Toma//gwe chortled no, that the sounds the Europeans made were much too difficult for him. I replied that we found their click sounds impossible to pronounce. This was met with puzzled but sympathetic looks. Imagine any-one finding clicks difficult, they seemed to be saying!

As the tension eased //Gumin'a asked for *shoro*, the Ju word for tobacco, and the others joined in. When we gave them some of the strong leaf tobacco they favored they pulled out what appeared to be Western-style commercial briar pipes, which they lit with flint and steel kits. The pipes, in fact, turned out to be homemade replicas of our pipes, complete to the last detail, including a contrasting mouthpiece carved in black wood.

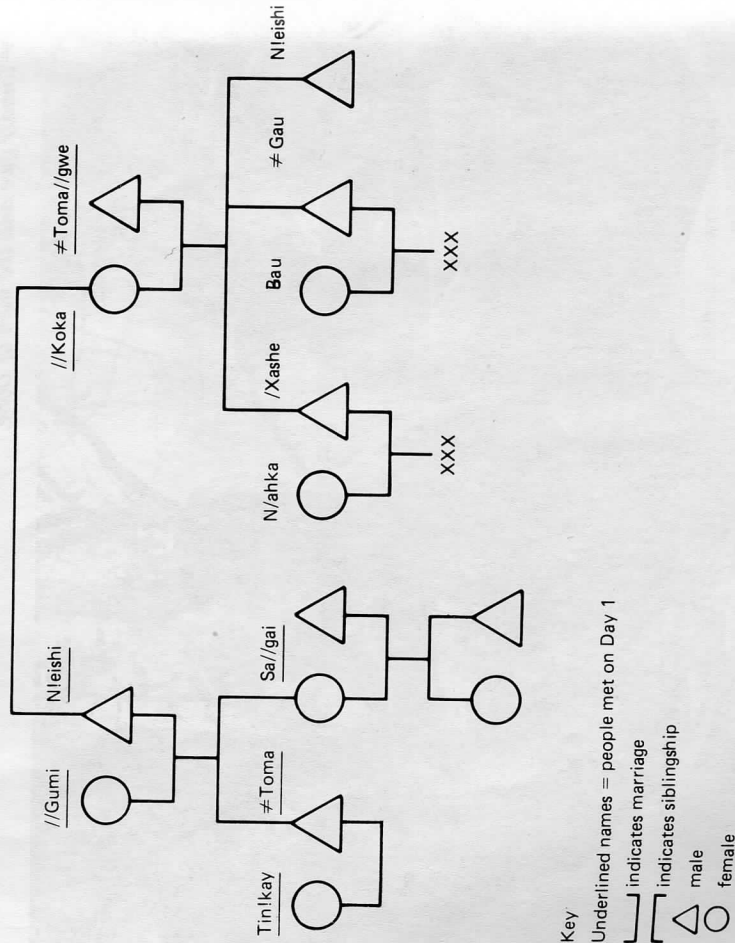
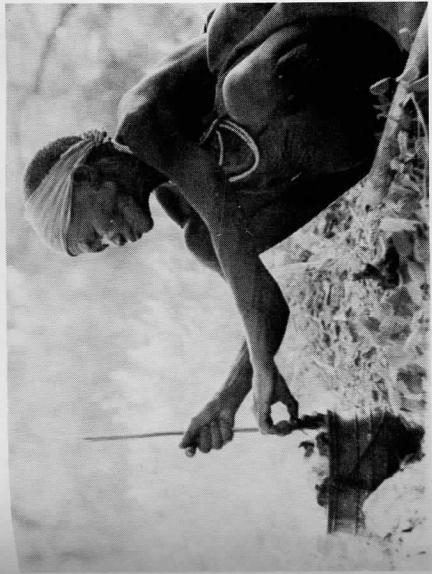


Figure 1-2. The Core of the Dobe Camp.



//Koka cooking meat.

As the odor of strong tobacco swirled around us, we talked and talked—of where I was to camp, where to draw water, where the wild foods were—and passed pipefuls of tobacco around at frequent intervals as the sun rose in the sky. Finally, when the details were settled and we were about to disperse, ≠Toma //gwe indicated to the interpreter that he had one more thing to say.

"Some years ago," he began in a voice that was both warm and scolding, "a man called Mashtalo, his wife Norma, and his children came to live at a place called /Gausha to the west.³ Many good things happened," he continued, "to the people of /Gausha as a result of Mashalo being there: blankets, clothes, pots, knives, beads all came their way. But none of this good fortune reached us in Dobe. We were sad and just lived. Now that you have come, our hearts are glad. Now we have a White man of our own. We waited so long. It's about time that you've come. We expected good things from you, so don't disappoint us. And another thing," his voice was rising in pitch, "if you have anything to give away, give everything to us, not to those other people." His hand gesture indicated points east, west, and south, covering most of the known !Kung villages.

I was floored by this last speech. With extraordinary aplomb, the old man had managed to welcome me while criticizing me for not coming sooner; and admonish me to be generous while baldly stating that *he* for his part was going to keep everything for himself!

Stunned, I got back into the truck and headed off to pitch camp. Clearly this fieldwork was not going to be a piece of cake. The people were friendly, but not pushovers, and they seemed to have at least some of the personality quirks that afflicted people in urban society. ≠Toma certainly lived up to his nickname: the sourplum. Yet there was something likable about ≠Toma's frankness. I thought to myself, I'm going to like it here.

In the evening I reflected on the day's events. So these were the Ju/hoansi !Kung of fable and legend. Now, brought face to face with an all-too-human reality

³A reference to the family of Laurence and Lorna Marshall, who had conducted fieldwork at Nyae Nyae in the 1950s (see Ch. 2 pp. 10-12).



Sa//gai and her son
≠Toma.

it was a conscious effort for me to conjure up the grand theories of human evolution that had set my odyssey in motion. The Dobe !Kung seemed so familiar. ≠Toma//gwe, with his sardine-key earring, infectious laugh, and rudeness, reminded me of a crotchety great-uncle of mine back in Toronto; and N!eishi with the broad shoulders and deep chest reminded me of my own father (much later, in fact, N!eishi adopted me as his son).

It became clear that an enormous task lay before me—to make sense of the thriving contemporary !Kung culture with all its complexities and contradictions. I had to count the people, learn their language, find out what they ate and what ate them (both physically and spiritually), and make sense, if possible, of the paradoxes of generosity and selfishness that seemed to lurk beneath the surface of their lives. The building of evolutionary theories would have to wait for the time being, on the back burner.

I was to spend the better part of the next ten years trying to unravel these and other paradoxes the !Kung presented. But for the moment I turned to the immediate task of pitching a tent to protect us from the onrushing heat of the October Kalahari.

2/The People of the Dobe Area

When Dutch explorers reached the Cape of Good Hope in the seventeenth century, they found two kinds of people living there. First were the numerous cattle- and goat-herding peoples, whom the Dutch named the *Hottentots*, a term that mimics their strange (to the Dutch) click-filled language. These people called themselves *Khoi* ("people"), the term they are known by today. Second were the non-herding peoples, similar in language and appearance to the Khoi, but who kept no livestock, instead living on wild plants, animals, and shellfish. The Khoi called them *Sonqua*, or *San*, a Khoi term that means "aborigines" or "settlers proper." Because they were elusive and shy and lived in much smaller groups than the Khoi, the Dutch named them *Bosjesmans*, that is, people of the bush—*Bushman*—a term by which they were known until recently to the rest of the world. Although widely used, the term *Bushman* has both racist and sexist connotations. Recognizing these problems, many researchers have agreed to call them the *San*, and I would urge my readers to do the same.¹

For thousands of years the Khoi and the San occupied most of southern Africa west of the Bantu-speaking peoples in the Eastern Cape. But as White settlement expanded north in the eighteenth century, bitter conflicts arose with the native peoples, conflicts that escalated into genocidal warfare against the San. By the late nineteenth century the San had been virtually exterminated within the boundaries of the present-day Republic of South Africa, and most writers of the day spoke of them as a dying race. As exploration pushed farther north, however, the grim obituary on the San proved, happily, to be premature. In the security of the Kalahari Desert, thousands of San continued to live as hunter-gatherers in relatively peaceful proximity to a variety of neighboring Black herders and farmers. By the mid-1950s, physical anthropologists, linguists, and archeologists had begun to map out the numbers and distribution of the living San. They are now estimated to number more than 50,000, a figure that appears to be on the increase (Table 2-1, Figure 2-1).

¹The term *San* is not without problems of its own. Some point to this Nama term's negative connotations, meaning "worthless" or "no account." And the term *Bushman* has its advocates among anthropologists and others. *San* leaders themselves are divided over the term *Bushman*. At a recent meeting reported by Megan Biesele, one said he never wanted to hear the term used again in post-apartheid Namibia. Another argued that the term could be ennobled by the way in which they themselves now chose to use it. However, as *Pan-San* or *Pan-Bushman* political consciousness grows in southern Africa, we assume a general term will emerge. Until then, *San* will be used in this book when a general term is needed, and until something better comes along.

TABLE 2-1 ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF CONTEMPORARY SAN

Language Group	Botswana	Namibia	Angola	Zimbabwe	South Africa	Total
1. Central Tshu-Khwe, /Gwi, etc.	33,000	5,000	2,000	2,500	2,000	44,500
2. Southern !Xo, etc.	4,000	1,000	1	1	500	5,500
3. Northern Ju/'hoansi, !Kung, etc.	8,000	20,000	2,000	1	2,000	32,000
	45,000	26,000	4,000	2,500	4,500 ²	82,000

¹Less than 100²Most of this number are in San military units, plus dependents brought from the Angola/Namibia war zone.

WHO ARE THE SAN?

The San are a cluster of indigenous peoples in southern Africa who speak a click language and who have a tradition of living by hunting and gathering. They are to be distinguished from the Khoi, whom they resemble physically, by the Khoi's possession of livestock, and from the Bantu by marked physical, linguistic, and cultural differences.

San come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Many are short and pale-skinned, while others are tall and dark-skinned like their Bantu-speaking neighbors. This variability has prompted a rough division of the San on physical grounds into the "Yellow" and "Black" San.

The Black San include peoples in southeastern Angola, western Zambia, and eastern Botswana who speak languages of the *Tshu-Khwe* group and whose economy is based on mixed herding, farming, foraging, and wage labor. It also includes the Nama- and (formerly) !Kung-speaking Hei//kum in northern Namibia. The Black San are genetically indistinguishable from surrounding Bantu populations, and it is likely that their gene pools have been augmented by the influx of Bantu-speaking refugees from the colonial wars and raiding of the nineteenth century.

The Yellow San are found in southern Angola, western and central Botswana, and northern and eastern Namibia. They speak languages of three different language families: the Northern !Kung, the Central Tshu-Khwe, and the Southern !Xo. (A fourth language family—the //Xam—is virtually extinct in South Africa).² Linguistically diverse, they are physically similar to one another: short, pale-skinned, deep-chested, with straight foreheads and small, almost delicate faces and jaws. The latter are the distinctive features of *neotony*—the retention of infantile traits into adult life—a trend that is found to some extent in all modern populations of *Homo sapiens*. Economically, the Yellow San include full-time gatherer-hunters (increasingly rare), mixed farmers and herders, and since the 1960s, a growing number of farm and migrant laborers.

The numbers and distribution of the contemporary San are shown in Table 2-1, updated for this edition.

²The !Kung language group in turn has three subdivisions: northernmost are the !Kung proper, found mainly in Angola, also known as the Vasekela; centrally located are the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia and Botswana, the subjects of this book; and southernmost are the ≠Dau//keisi or MaKowkow (literally, "northern people," a reference to their position relative to the populous Nharo, located in the Ghanzi and Gobabis districts (see Figure 2-1)).

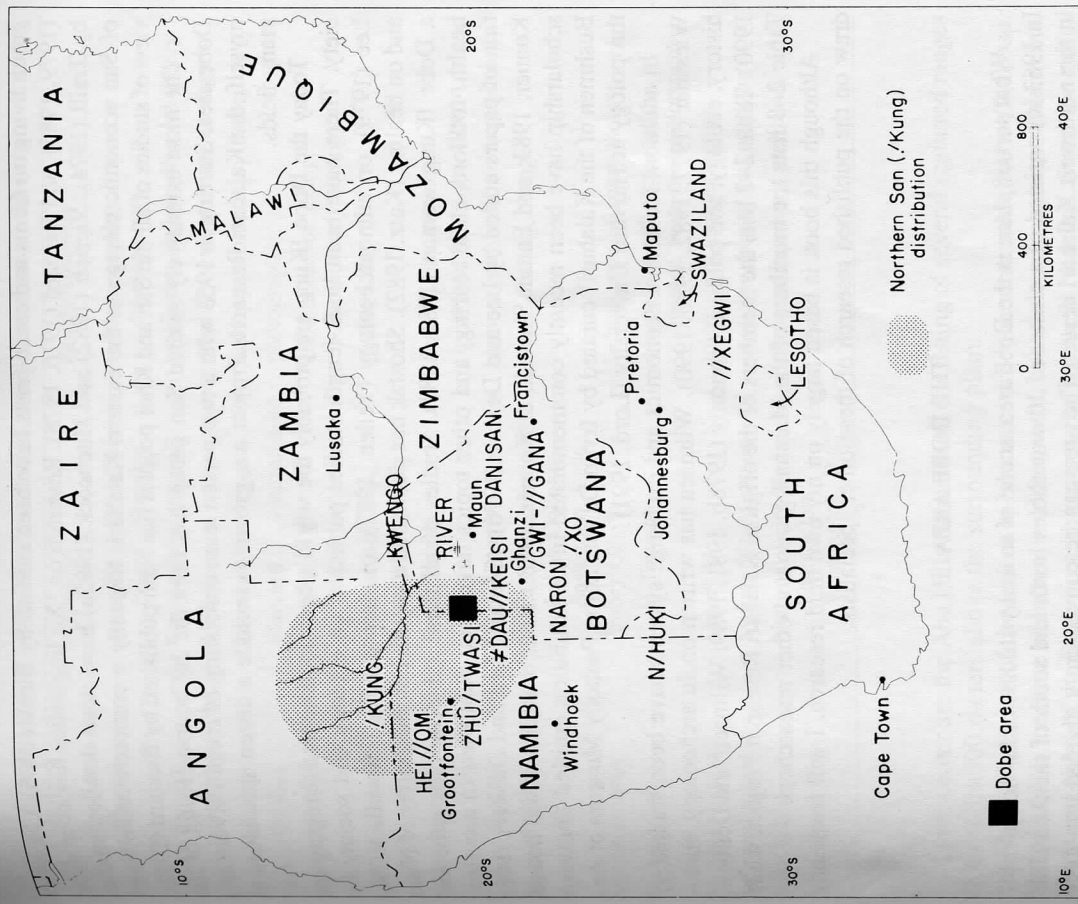


Figure 2-1. The Distribution of the San in Africa.

STUDIES OF THE SAN

Modern ethnographic studies of the San begin with the expeditions of Laurence and Lorna Marshall and their family to the !Kung of Nyae Nyae in 1951. Their many field trips since 1952 have produced a distinguished series of books (see L. Marshall, 1976, in press; and E. M. Thomas, 1959) and films by John Marshall (see film guide, pp. 161-64). The more southerly /Gwi San of the Central Kalahari have been studied by Silberbauer (1965, 1981), Tanaka (1980, 1991), Cashdan (1977, 1983, 1987, 1990), and Kent (1989a, 1989b), while the southernmost of the contemporary San, the !Xo, have been studied by Heinz (1966, 1972), Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1972), and Sbrzesny (1976). The Naron (Nharo), a populous, settled

group living on farms and cattle-posts have been studied by Bleek (1928), Guenther (1979, 1986), and Barnard (1976, 1978). Research on !Xo linguistics has been done by Traill (1974). Vierich (1982) and Hitchcock (1982a) have done detailed studies of San economic change in the eastern Kalahari. Recently a comprehensive overview of studies of all the San and Khoi peoples has been published by Barnard (1992).

The most extensively studied San group has been the Ju/'hoansi-!Kung of the Dobe area. Starting in 1963 with a two-person team consisting of Irven DeVore and myself, the Kalahari Research Project has grown to include a dozen specialists in many fields.

Today the Dobe !Kung are probably the world's best-documented foraging society. There have been book-length studies published on ecology and society by Lee (1979), on ethnoarchaeology (Yellen, 1977), on demography (Howell, 1979), and on healing (Katz, 1982). Shostak has published a superb autobiography of Nisa, a Dobe !Kung woman (1981, 1983). Studies of all these subjects, plus genetics, health, folklore, child rearing, and other topics have been published in a collection of papers edited by Lee and DeVore (1976). (See also Lee and DeVore, 1968; Konner, 1983; and Eaton, Shostak, & Konner, 1988.) Both branches of Ju/'hoansi scholarship have been recently commemorated in an exhibition entitled "Ju/wasi: Bushmen of the Kalahari" curated by Irven DeVore at the Peabody Museum of Anthropology at Harvard University (Lord, 1991).

In addition, Ju/'hoansi economics and exchange systems have been studied by Wiessner (1977, 1982, 1986, 1990). Wilmsen has written on Ju archeology, ethnohistory, ecology, and political economy (1978b, 1981, 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow, 1990). Table 2-2 lists the members of the original Kalahari Research Project, while Table 2-3 lists the members of the Marshall group and other researchers.

Although this book is based largely on my own field research, I will frequently draw on the published research of these other specialists.

THE DOBE AREA

What sort of place is the Dobe area, scene of so many studies of Ju/'hoansi life? In 1963 it consisted of a cluster of 10 waterholes north and south of the Aha Hills in the northwest Kalahari desert. The area can be conveniently divided into three divisions. The more northern waterholes are strung out along the length of the !Kangwa Molapo, a 100-kilometer-long dry river valley that has its source in the Nyae Nyae area of Namibia and wends its way eastward through Botswana before disappearing in the desert west of the Okavango swamps. Unlike the rest of the sandy Kalahari, the !Kangwa Molapo traverses an area of limestone and granite outcrops. The Ju/'hoansi name for the area, *N'umsi*, meaning "the region of rocks or stones," reflects this geological oddity. In addition to the permanent waterpoints, the !Kangwa valley has a hinterland of gathering and hunting areas to the north, east, and west of about 3000 square kilometers.

South of the Ahas a smaller dry river valley, the /Xai/ xai Molapo, forms the main axis of settlement, with its one major waterhole at /Xai/ xai Pan and a hinterland containing many smaller seasonal waterpoints to the west, south, and east.

TABLE 2-2 THE HARVARD KALAHARI RESEARCH GROUP

Name	Affiliation	Research Interests
Megan Bieseke	Nyae Nyae Development Found., Namibia	folklore, ecology, development
Alison Brooks	George Washington U.	prehistory, anthropological theory
Nicholas Blurton Jones	UCLA	ethology, evolutionary ecology
Irven DeVore	Harvard U.	ecology, evolutionary theory
Nancy DeVore	Harvard U., Anthrophoto	photography
Patricia Draper	Penn State U.	child behavior, aging, evolutionary ecology
John Hansen	Witwatersrand U., Johannesburg, S.A.	pediatrics
Henry Harpending	Penn State U.	demography, physical anthropology, Ju, Herero
Nancy Howell	U. of Toronto	demography, evolutionary ecology
Richard Katz	Saskatchewan Federated Indian Colleges, Saskatoon, Sask.	ritual, healing, change
Melvin Konner	Emory U.	infancy, evolutionary theory
Richard Lee	U. of Toronto	ecology, social organization, history, anth. of development
Marjorie Shostak	Emory U.	life history, gender studies
Stewart Truswell	Sydney U., Australia	medicine, health and nutrition
John Yellen	National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.	ethno-archaeology, prehistory

In the center are the Aha Hills themselves, consisting of several scattered ranges of low hills 100 meters above the surrounding plain.

About 70 percent of the Ju live in N'umsi, while the remainder live at /Xai/ xai. The Aha Hills, because of lack of surface water, contain no permanent settlements. About one-third of the Dobe area lies across the border in Namibia. Since the building of a border fence by South Africa in 1965, this western portion of the area has been cut off to the gathering and hunting Ju.

Together, the three regions of the Dobe area in both Botswana and Namibia comprise an area of about 8000 square kilometers (3000 square miles). The area's features and its waterholes are shown in Figure 2-2.

EXPLORING THE DOBE AREA

After my initial contacts with ≠Toma // gwe and his kin, I built a camp at Dobe. The !Kung suggested several spots that didn't appeal to me, and so I picked a pleasant grove of trees on the edge of a stony pan. All was well until the first rains

TABLE 2-3 THE MARSHALL GROUP AND OTHER KALAHARI RESEARCHERS

Name	Affiliation	Research Interests, Ethnic Group(s)
<i>Marshall Group:</i>		
Laurence Marshall	private, Cambridge, Mass.	general anthropology, Ju/'hoansi, etc.
Lorna Marshall	private, Cambridge, Mass.	ethnography, Ju/'hoansi, /Gwi
John Marshall	Documentary Educational Resources, Watertown, Mass.	film, anthropology of development, Ju/'hoansi, /Gwi
Elizabeth Marshall Thomas	private, Peterborough, New Hampshire	ethnography, literature, Ju/'hoansi, /Gwi
Claire Ritchie	private, England	development, film
<i>Other Scholars:</i>		
Alan Barnard	Edinburgh U.	social anthropology, Naron
Alec Campbell	Botswana Society, Gaborone, Bot.	archeology, rock art, ethnography, development
Elizabeth Cashdan	U. of Utah	history, behavioral ecology, /Gwi-/ /Gana
James Denbow	U. of Texas	Iron Age archeology, Botswana, Zaire
James Ebert	James Ebert Associates, Albuquerque, New Mexico	archeology, ecology, remote sensing, Botswana
I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt	Max Planck Inst., Seewissen, Germany	human ethology, !Xo
Mathias Guenther	Wilfrid Laurier U., Waterloo, Ontario	social anthropology, change, folklore, art, Naron
H. J. Heinz	private, Maun, Botswana	social anthropology, parasitology, change, !Xo

came. We woke up one morning ankle-deep in water, with the Ju standing at the door of my tent laughing until the tears came to their eyes.

Packing quickly, we moved our camp with its sodden bedding to a better-drained location, and I proceeded with my work. The first order of business was to get a sense of the immediate area. On foot, by truck, and, later on, donkeyback, I spent the better part of two months visiting each waterhole in turn, counting the people and getting a sense of the economic basis of each locale.

The !Kung population in 1964 stood at 466, with 379 residents and 87 seasonal visitors. There were also some 340 Blacks with their cattle residing in the area (Table 2-2). Although Ju/'hoansi occupied all the waterholes, each grouping had its own distinctive features.

!Goshe was the easternmost settlement in the area. With a population of 75 Ju and 30 Blacks, !Goshe was also the most acculturated of all the Ju settlements. The Ju had lived with and worked for the Blacks for decades, herding their cattle and tending their fields. Some !Goshe families had acquired herds of their own, and a substantial portion of their diet now consists of milk, meat, eggs, and grains. When

TABLE 2-3 (Continued)

Name	Affiliation	Research Interests, Ethnic Group(s)
Robert Hitchcock	U. of Nebraska	development anthropology, ecology, archeology, history, Eastern Basarwa, Botswana, Namibia, etc.
Trefor Jenkins	South African Inst. for Medical Research	genetics, medical research, nutrition, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa
Susan Kent	Old Dominion U., Richmond, Virginia	ecology, archeology, nutrition, settlement patterns, theory, !Xo, /Gwi
Harriet Rosenberg	York U.; Toronto	social anthropology, aging
George Silberbauer	Monash U., Melbourne Australia	social anthropology, ecology, /Gwi
Jacqueline Solway	Trent U., Peterborough, Ont.	social anthropology, development anthropology, kinship, gender, Bakgalagadi
Jiro Tanaka	Kyoto U., Japan	ecology, ethnography, change, /Gwi
Helga Vierich	U. of Alberta, Canada	ecology, social change, development anthropology, Eastern /Twa
Pauline Wiessner	Max Planck Inst., Seewissen, Germany	archeology, ethnoarcheology, exchange systems, Ju/'hoansi
Edwin Wilmsen	U. of Texas	archeology, political economy, nutrition, history, theory, Ju/'hoansi, Herero

I arrived they were already relatively sedentary, having occupied the same villages for over five years. Their relative wealth set !Goshe people somewhat apart from other Ju/'hoansi. They tended to marry amongst themselves, yet they still participated in reciprocal exchanges with other Ju who visited them, often giving a bag of grain in exchange for a wild product. Among the Ju and Blacks alike, !Goshe was famous as a center of ritual and medicine. Healing dances were held frequently (almost daily at times), and a !Goshe woman named /Twan'a pioneered the introduction of the important women's healing dance—/Gwahtsi (see Chapter 8).

Traveling west up the !Kangwa Valley for eleven kilometers (seven miles) one arrived at the waterhole of !Kangwa *ma tse*—small !Kangwa. With a population of nine !Kung and a few Blacks, it was little more than a cattle-post suburb of !Kangwa.

Five kilometers farther to the west was !Kangwa, the major settlement in the !Kangwa valley. The community takes its name from the !Kangwa Rock Spring, an abundant and perennial source of clear, cool water. !Kangwa was the administrative center or *kgotha* of the District, the headquarters of the Tribal Headman and the Tax Collector. At !Kangwa the 72 Blacks outnumbered San, and the Ju/'hoan



Lee exploring the Dobe area on donkeyback.

had close ties to Bate, !Kangwa, and Dobe, and the camps saw a constant stream of visitors from west and east. Subsistence was based on about 75 percent gathered and hunted foods and about 25 percent grains and milk. Mahopa people also had attempted to plant their own crops, with varying degrees of success.

A crossroads, !Xabi was a small waterhole three miles east of Dobe, occupied principally by the family of the Tswana Headman, his Herero wife, and his Ju clients: population 10 !Kung, 12 Blacks.

South of !Xabi was !Kubi, a populous waterhole in the forests at the base of the Aha Hills. The population of 65 Herero provided employment for the 23 Ju/'hoansi residents. These Herero arrived after 1954 as a result of a major shift of population in the western fringes of the Okavango swamps. !Kubi, it turned out, has been the site of hunter-gatherer life for tens of thousands of years. The Middle Stone Age prehistoric site of ≠Gi, excavated by John Yellen and Alison Brooks, lies only 2 kilometer from !Kubi Pan (Brooks and Yellen, 1979; Yellen and Brooks, 1988). In the early 1960s the !Kubi Ju maintained close ties with the Ju of Nyae Nyae and had extensively intermarried with them. The !Kubi waterhole was also famous locally for its Marula nuts, and it was and is the only source of Baobab fruit and Tsimba beans in the northern Dobe area.

The most interesting of all the waterholes for me was /Xai/ xai, which lay 28 kilometers (17 miles) south of /Kubi across the Aha Hills. The 117 Ju and 67 Blackbills were dispersed in ten villages around the perimeter of the /Xai/ xai pan. Each of these villages had access to a hinterland for gathering and hunting. In general,

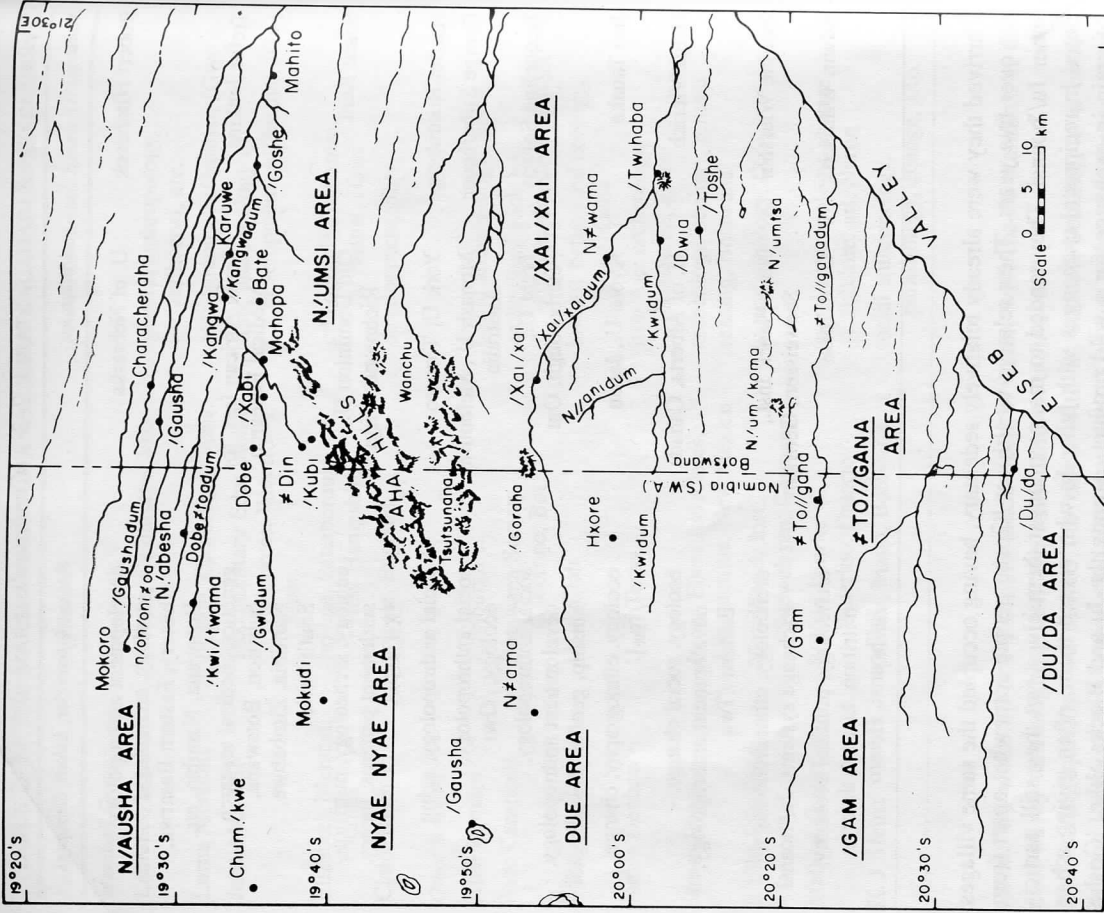


Figure 2-2. The Dobe area and surrounding regions.

population of 36 subsisted by a combination of working for the Tswana headman, herding the Blacks' cattle, and gathering and hunting.

Eight kilometers south of !Kangwa, at the base of the Aha mountains, were the Bate villages, home of 41 Ju and 29 Blacks. The Ju kinship links were to !Kangwa and Mahopa, and many relatives liked to visit Bate in the fall to eat the delicious Marula nuts for which Bate was famous.

Three separate waterpoints constituted the Mahopa waterhole, strung out in the bed of the !Kangwa River. With a population of 65 Blacks and 2000 cattle, Mahopa was a major center for Ju employment as herders for the Blacks. The 33 Mahopa Ju

TABLE 2-4 POPULATION OF THE DOBE AREA BY WATERHOLE, 1964

	San & Resident	Marginal	Total	Blacks
!Goshe	75	0	75	30
!Kangwa Matse	9	0	9	—
!Kangwa	36	0	36	72
Bate	41	3	44	29
Mahopa	33	10	43	65
!Xabi	10	0	10	12
!Kubi	23	25	48	65
/Xai/ xai	117	30	147	67
Dobe	35	0	35	0
Other	0	19	19	0
	379	87	466	340

villages on the east side of /Xai/ xai pan gathered to the east, villages on the north side had a northern hinterland, and so on. Not far from /Xai/ xai to the east were the legendary caves of /Twihaba, one of the geological wonders of Botswana that Sillery spoke about with such awe (see Chapter 1).

/Xai/ xai had been a meeting place for well over a century, and probably much longer. Bands from the four corners of the !Kung world traditionally gathered there in the dry season to trade, dance, and arrange marriages. Today this history is reflected in the far-reaching ties that /Xai/ xai Ju maintain with Ju to the north, west, south, and east. Later in my stay with the Ju/'hoansi I was to live at /Xai/ xai for fourteen months.

My tour of the area brought me back to Dobe, my spiritual home for the first fifteen months of my fieldwork. I named the region the Dobe area in honor of my adopted waterhole. A small, inaccessible spring deep in a rock cleft provided the sole source of water for the 35 Ju of Dobe, the one waterhole in the 1960s with no non-!Kung or livestock resident. Centered around the families of 70-year-old //Kokan/ a and her younger brother N!eishi, the Dobe camps consisted largely of more conservative Ju who preferred to live on their own rather than herd cattle for Blacks. They remained on good terms with Blacks at Mahopa, where they frequently visited to ask for some milk, the staple of the Herero diet. These handouts supplemented a diet that, during the 1960s, varied from 85 to 100 percent gathered-and-hunted foods. Vast mongongo forests lie within a day's walk north and west of Dobe (see Chapter 4).

A HISTORY OF CONTACT

As my work continued, I began to get a sense of the recent history of the Dobe area. Later, archaeologists added information on a much deeper time scale.

From the archeological record, the Dobe area has been a hunting and gathering stronghold for literally thousands of years. Middle Stone Age materials 20-40,000 years old have been found at ≠Gi and elsewhere (Yellen and Brooks, 1988; Brooks and Yellen, 1992). The Later Stone Age of the Dobe area shows remarkable conti-



The main Dobe camp, spring 1964.

nity from at least 3000 B.C., and possibly as early as 18,000 B.C. Yellen and Brooks have reported unbroken deposits of Later Stone Age materials underlying or close to contemporary Ju/'hoansi villages. The Dobe area Ju/'hoansi themselves have no tradition of being refugees from other areas.

Throughout this period, hunters and gatherers pursued their way of life with no evidence of agriculture and minimal evidence of domesticated animals. Some recent writing, however, has argued that the Dobe area !Kung, far from being hunters and gatherers in the past, were pastoralists and tribute-paying subjects to Bantu speaking, Iron Age overlords. A lively and sometimes acrimonious debate has sprung up around these opposing viewpoints.³

While the issues are complex, it should be possible to resolve the question one way or another. For example, if such a history of domination and alternative subsistence existed, it should be expressed archeologically through the presence of Iron Age sites within the Dobe area or a strong element of Iron Age trade goods such as iron and/or ceramics on the Later Stone Age sites. Despite considerable efforts to find such sites, there is simply no evidence of Iron Age occupation of the Dobe area before the twentieth century (Yellen and Brooks, 1988; Brooks and Yellen, 1992).

However it is true that after about 500-800 A.D., potsherds and iron fragments are found on Dobe area sites; does this denote overlordship by outsiders? The problem is the quantities of these exotic goods are minute; at one excavation (Wilmsen 1978b), of the 384 potsherds found only 32 were sub-surface finds, all of them thumbnail-sized. Similarly only eight fragments of iron were found in subsurface contexts spanning a period of over 1000 years. This handful of potsherds and iron fragments in stratigraphic contexts with the finding of several thousand stone tools on the same site. The paucity of Iron Age material can hardly be taken to denote Iron Age domination of the area. Rather than domination, the picture is

³ Wilmsen (1989), Denbow and Wilmsen (1986), and Wilmsen and Denbow (1990) have argued that the Dobe !Kung were pastoralists and serfs of the Bantu in the past. Yellen and Brooks (1988), Jacobson (1990), Wiessner (1990), Solway and Lee (1990), and Lee (1991) have made the case for the Dobe !Kung as persisting hunter-gatherers.

consistent with a pattern of hunters and gatherers going about their business and engaging in intermittent long distance trade with distant Iron Age peoples. Such trade is noted in Ju/'hoansi oral histories in which desert products such as furs and ivory were exchanged for iron, (later) tobacco, and possibly agricultural products (Solway and Lee, 1990; Lee, 1991).⁴ The oral traditions of both Dobe and Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi state that iron arrowheads only came into general use during the lifetimes of the grandparents of the present generation (Marshall, 1976:146; Lee, 1979:133). This view is corroborated by historical evidence: the German explorer Schinz found Ju/'hoansi not far from Nyae Nyae still using bone arrowheads in 1886 (Schinz, 1891:357):

The area seemed to be very thinly settled. Nevertheless from time to time we did meet scattered Bushmen hordes. . . . The people who visited us at this occasion called themselves the !Kun San. . . . The entire dress of these poor root diggers consists of nothing more than two small furs to cover their private parts and buttocks, and instead of ostrich egg-shell beads their arms and legs are adorned with grass ornaments.

The weapons consisted of a hefty throwing stick, [and] a medium-sized bow with arrows made of thin Phragmites reed, *the poisoned tips of which were made not of iron, but of carefully worked bone splinters, which in this part of South West Africa was frequently made of eland antelope* (Schinz, 1891:357; emphasis added).⁵

Similarly, the argument that the Dobe area residents were pastoralists in the distant past also does not bear up under scrutiny. Only one "cow" bone has ever been found in an undisturbed Dobe area context, a bovine maxilla (upper jaw) fragment at a depth of 63 centimeters, /Xai/ xai (Wilmsen, 1978b). Surely if they had been pastoralists in the past, evidence of more than a single bone would have been found, and in loose sands such items can move up or down relatively rapidly, making historical inference strictly on the basis of depth extremely chancy (Yellen and Brooks, 1988; Ebert, 1989). Furthermore archaeozoologists who study faunal remains note that it is hard to distinguish domestic cows' teeth from the teeth of African Cape Buffalo, which also occurs in the region (Yellen, 1990c:516).⁶ So on archeological as well as historical grounds, the case for the pre-colonial Ju/'hoansi as autonomous foragers is holding up remarkably well (see also Lee and Guenther, in press).

What is the Ju/'hoansi's view of their own history? Contrary to these views, the Dobe San were convinced that their ancestors were a distinct people who lived on their own by hunting and gathering. When the area was opened up after 1870, Blacks and Whites arrived within a few years of one another, but Ju/'hoan elders insisted that when outsiders finally came to their area in the last century *it was Whites who came first and the Blacks only came after*. When told of the views of Wilmsen and Denbow (1990)—that their ancestors had been herders and serfs for centuries—the Ju/'hoansi were offended. In response, the elders characteristically posed a rhetorical question: how could their ancestors, they wondered, be portrayed

⁴ On this point, see also comments by Jacobson (1990:131) and Wiessner (1990:135–36).

⁵ Translated from the original German by Mathias Guenther. The Ju/'hoan bone arrowheads that Schinz collected can be found in the collections of the Basle Museum, Switzerland.

⁶ Given the importance attached to this piece of bone, it would be desirable to examine it more closely. Unfortunately, through no fault of the original excavators, the specimen in question was lost in a lab fire.

as long-time serfs of Black masters when these same Blacks only arrived within the last three generations (Lee, n.d.)?

Another contention of recent writing is that the Dobe Ju/'hoansi were early victims of colonialism. The reason they are hunters and gatherers today is because nineteenth-century European hunters and traders swept through their area, taking everything of value and reducing them to penury.⁷ Their position as egalitarian hunters in the twentieth century, in this view, is a product of their poverty and the inroads of capitalism, and not a tradition traceable to their own indigenous past. But contrary to this view, the historical evidence shows that Dobe lay far off the beaten paths of nineteenth-century mercantile activity. Almost all the known explorers consistently bypassed the area as they crisscrossed the continent in search of wealth (Lee and Guenther, in press). It enjoyed a brief period of prosperity in the late 1870s—when White hunters decimated the elephant herds—and then resumed its marginal status which it held well into the twentieth century.

Distance, isolation, and the reputation for fierceness of the Ju/'hoansi themselves probably account in equal measure for the profound ignorance of the Nyae-Nyae-Dobe areas prior to the present century. Here and there intriguing glimpses are found. The explorer and trader James Chapman, who went toward the Dobe area in the 1860s but never reached it, characterized the Ju/'hoansi-!Kung as "a fierce and independent people who possess no cattle" (Chapman, 1868 II:13). Writing of the southern Ju/'hoan speakers of the Ghanzi area (known as the MaKowkow), Chapman presents this very positive image of the mid-nineteenth century !Kung, noting that the !Kung's military prowess kept invaders at bay:

The inhabitants of these parts are a much finer race of Bushmen than we had generally met with. Freedom and the enjoyment of their own game for food and the skins for clothing are the main causes. They acknowledge no chief and are in the habit of defending themselves against oppressors and intruders either from Lake Ngami or the Namaqua region: in former times they have often combined to resist marauding parties sent out by the Batwana and other tribes. Their minds are free from apprehension of human plunderers, and the life they lead is a comparatively fearless. The population numerous, and they are more attached to each other than in other parts (Chapman 1868[1971] Vol. 1:165).

The first non-San to penetrate the area (in modern times) were European hunters and Tswana herders. From the 1870s on, the herders came to trade, hunt and graze their cattle. After some initial shyness, the Ju were quickly incorporated into the Tswana tributary system. The Ju acted as trackers for the Tswana and helped butcher the meat, and when the summer had passed they acted as porters carrying the season's take of their new overlords back to the east. A Ju/'hoan man describes this period:

The type of work that we !Kung entered then was called *ni / i / wana /ha* ['shoulder meat-carrying yoke']. The country was teeming with game, and the Tswanas came

⁷ A position spelled out in Wilmsen (1989) and Wilmsen and Denbow (1990). See also Schrire (1990) and Gordon (1984). The counter-case for the historical integrity and autonomy of the Ju/'hoansi-!Kung has been made in Solway and Lee (1990), Lee (1990b: 510–12), Lee and Guenther (1991, in press). Readers interested in the debate are encouraged to consult this literature.

on horseback with guns. They put us under the carrying yoke. We had to carry the meat that they shot from the kill sites back to the camps; and then at the end of the summer hunting season, a line of porters would carry bales of *biltong* [dried meat strips] back to Tsau. Then there they would be paid off in balls of *shoro* [tobacco], which they carried back to the West. We !Kung also did our own hunting, and brought the hides and *biltong* in for tobacco.

From the late 1870s, European hunters from the south also came to the Dobe area to seek the rich resources of ivory, rhino horn, and fur-bearing animals. Some men had affairs with Ju women, and the descendants of these unions today live at !Kubi. (It was not until the 1950s that the first Europeans lived for any length of time in the interior.) In Ju/'hoan oral history the period 1870–1920 is sometimes called the time of *Koloi* (Tswana-wagons), a reference to the oxwagons that the Tswana later brought with them on their annual trips.

The largest number of non-Ju in the Dobe area today are members of the Herero people. The Herero are southwestern Bantu-speakers who have a long history in the territory of Namibia. During the tragic war of 1904–1907, thousands of Herero were slaughtered by the Germans. Several thousand Herero escaped across the desert and were given asylum in the then-British colony of Bechuanaland (Botswana). After 1920 the ruling Tswana gave a few families of Herero permission to settle in the Dobe area, and this event marked the beginning of a new era for the Dobe Ju. These contacts are discussed in Chapter 9.

European presence in the Dobe area, apart from the early hunters, occurred at an even later date. The first government patrol to reach Dobe from Bechuanaland dates from 1934. The area really became known to outsiders when the Marshall family began their studies of the adjacent Nyae Nyae area in 1951. Even after the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi had been settled on a government station at Chum!kwe (now spelled Tjum!kui) in 1960, the Dobe people continued to live in relative isolation. During my first year in the field only about one truck every six weeks reached the Dobe area. Although the Ju/'hoansi of Dobe had seen many Whites, I was the first to live in their area, and this fact created a certain bond between us.⁸ The major changes that occurred after 1970, after my main fieldwork was completed, are detailed in Chapters 10 and 11.

⁸Strictly speaking, I was not the first White. A man named Venter (called Fendare by the !Kung) lived with his Nama wife at !Kubi for some years after 1927. Also, although a number of anthropologists worked in the Dobe area after 1964, for the first year I was there on my own. Irven and Nancy DeVore rejoined me at Dobe only after October 1964.

3/Environment

The Dobe area quickly became fiercely hot and drowsy, with hanging heavily in the air. Bird activities. There were the staccato turtle doves, the sharp, high-pitched *kooweel* of the grey loerie the ant dung beetles and other exotically stingless bees hovered about warthog tracks were everywhere be heard grunting to each other.

At midday, the land was a quart of body water per hour people rested. At dusk the bus animated. Firewood was gathered pots. As night fell the firelight dogs, huts, and trees.

But my favorite time was on a canvas folding chair and incredibly bright, light enough to display the likes of which of points of light. Literally the dred that the reflected city light the Milky Way *!gu !ko!kemi*, head with dozens of patches of

The habitat intrigued me. wherever I went in those first questions. "What kind of plants? What animals eat it? Does it of work. They were superb birds. My knowledge of the environment

The Dobe area is part of the section by the Botswana-Namibia Desert. The first impression where the sky dominates the surrounding plain, and from of brush and savannah stretching server is surprised to find in