

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE SAN SOCIETY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

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**ABSTRACT** The Central Kalahari San, living in the central part of Botswana, practice divorce and remarriage frequently. Most people have experienced marriage more than twice in their lives. The rate of polygamous marriage is rather high, and moreover, a kind of love-relationship called *zaku*, which is usually recognized openly, is widely seen in this society. Four examples of social clusters united by marriage and other sexual relationships are here examined and analyzed to see how those sexual relationships affect inter-personal relations and residential grouping. This is done in order to clarify an aspect of the principle of San social integration.

**Key Words:** San; Hunter-gatherers; Marriage; Love-relationship; Social integration; Botswana.

### INTRODUCTION

It has been pointed out that the characteristics of hunter-gatherer society lie in the flexibility of the inner structure of the society as well as the small size of the entire population (Lee & DeVore, 1968; Tanaka, 1980). Their life, which depends completely upon hunting and gathering of wild animals and plants, is accompanied by high mobility. Usually 10 to 20 families gather together constituting a nomadic residential group (camp). In the case of the San<sup>(1)</sup>, this residential group repeats frequent fission and fusion and is closely related to the movement for acquiring food. This fluidity of the residential group is a key point in the maintenance of their society, one which being sustained by the egalitarian principle has no differentiation of class (Tanaka, 1971, 1980).

Though the residential group thus is a fluid and temporal one, its formation is not a random process. The duration and size of residential groups are determined primarily by ecological factors such as the seasonal change of food resources. On the other hand, group membership is basically determined by kinship factors based on descent and marriage. The actual group, however, is not always formed by acknowledged kin members. It frequently includes those individuals in love-relationships (called *zaku*, to be discussed below) and other personal relationships such as friendship.

This paper aims to clarify some aspects of the formation and integration of the Central Kalahari San<sup>(2)</sup> society through the study of marriage and extra-marital sexual relationships, and the analysis of the residential group.

## THE CONCEPT OF GROUP IN THE CENTRAL KALAHARI SAN

It is generally said that "primitive" peoples have few abstract concepts, especially the hunter-gatherers. San society consists of very concrete and direct relationships between humans and/or with the natural world. A community consists of several hundreds of people who know each other and are usually related by kinship bonds of some sort. People know each other's position in the kinship network and become friends when they come to good terms. Usually those who are close relatives or close in age tend to form good company and the closeness of this kind offers a basis for the formation of the residential group. However, the organization of kinship is underdeveloped and descent groups are not formed. One traces their ascent equally through father and mother, but the range of actual recognition of kinship stops within very close circles. Those who lie beyond this range are only recognized as being related. The small scale of their society, their way of life based entirely upon nature, and their pragmatic and optimistic way of thinking reflected in a lack of concern for time and history, may be closely related to their lack of ancestor worship and descent groups, and to the very concreteness or immediateness of their social relationships.

The smallest unit of San society is the family and several families make up a residential group which we call the camp. The family and the camp are the only two social groups which actually exist within San society, though they do not have definite terms to designate them. In the /Gwi<sup>(3)</sup> and //Gana dialects, !kao is used to designate a group, but this is used only for distinguishing one group from another, i.e., "my !kao" or "someone's !kao". The term therefore does not designate a specific group. Also, this term is relative to the situation in which it is used. It can also be used to designate a family, a whole group of people who live together (camp) or to distinguish /Gwi from //Gana or the Central Kalahari San from the neighboring people, according to the situation.

Because the camp is a very fluid and temporal unit made up of from only one to as many as 20 families at a time, it is very difficult to clearly delineate it from other camps, even though most of everyday life is carried on at this level. On the other hand, compared to the camp, the family is a very clear unit. In spite of this, the San do not even have a term for it. From this fact it appears that the San do not have a concept of family similar to ours. In the kinship terminology of the Central Kalahari San, mother's sister is called mother and father's brother is called father, so that one has many fathers and mothers. This means, moreover, that one has more grandfathers and grandmothers and brothers and sisters. Thus according to this terminology, the number of close kin amounts to several times more than the actual number of members in the residential group. Such a reference system naturally determines the framework of their social behavior.

The San spend most of their time outside the huts. They use their huts only for sleeping at night to escape from the coldness of the winter or from the scanty rain which falls in the summer. Moreover, usually only the nuclear family sleep together in a hut. Children over 10 years old prepare their own common sleeping place; boys and girls separately. Infants maintain intimate relationships with their parents, es-

pecially with their mothers, until they reach about three years of age, or until the next child is born. They then begin to play with older children. By the time they reach 10 years of age, they quickly become independent of their parents and cut themselves off from the family bond. With these loosely-knit family ties, divorce and remarriage can take place much easier. As a result, more in-laws are added to one's circle of kin, since real fathers and mothers, who live separately, are classified as fathers and mothers as well as their fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law. In-laws are indicated by adding the suffix *-fu*, thus father-in-law is *ba-fu-ma* while real father is *ba-ma* and mother-in-law is *gie-fu-sha* while real mother is *gie-sha*.

Though the family is an autonomous unit of economic production, consumption, and reproduction, it has a very fluid and elastic nature. Thus, when we look at it over a long time span, we can say that not only the economic life but also child-rearing is done by the society as a whole.

### PLURAL MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

The rate of polygamous marriage is quite high in San society. In 1967, I observed 10 cases (18.5%) of polygamous marriage out of 54 cases of marriage. Of these polygamous marriages, the case of one man having two wives was most common ( $n = 9$ ), and only one man had three wives, but in later research one man was recognized to have had 4 wives.

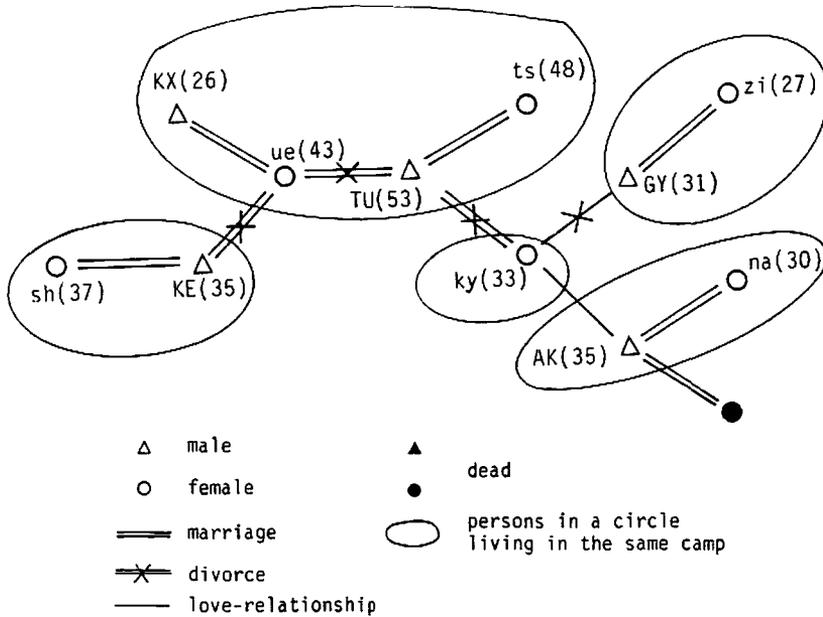
As it has been said, family ties are very loose, the nuclear family is not always the unit of child-rearing, and the structure of the society as a whole makes divorce easy. On top of this, the procedure for divorce is very simple. In the most extreme case, one can get a divorce simply by leaving the area and one's partner behind. Though the rate of divorce is quite high, there are not enough cases for statistical treatment. It is therefore more practical to follow the transformation of a group by showing the actual cases of divorce and remarriage in order to analyze the principle of social integration.

Considering this problem from economics alone, the division of labor by sex is indispensable to the self-sufficient economy of hunter-gatherers. In this sense, the family, with the division of labor by husband and wife is an important unit of daily life. Unless one is very old or an invalid, he or she is not likely to remain single, but will remarry soon after being divorced or separated by death. As a result, the rate of remarriage is as high as that of divorce.

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 below, show the relationships united by marriage, divorce, remarriage and the love-relationship. Fig. 3 is a case in which the conglomeration by marriage and a love-relationship was the biggest. This figure shows that 15 men and women were related to each other either by marriage or by having had a love-relationship at one time or another in their lives. With the exception of the 7 persons on the fringe of the figure (xz, AO, an, ta, KO, NY, SE), all have been married more than twice. Although the idea of sex and sexual relations among the San is not inhibited, sexual behavior itself belongs to the private part of their lives and is practiced secretly. Therefore there may be some hidden love-relationships which the author was unable to reveal. Also, considering the San's lack of emphasis for things in the past, it is

possible that not all of the previous legal marriages are represented in this figure. It is especially difficult to ascertain past sexual relationships where no children were born. This figure also contains young people such as *am*, *AO*, *an*, *ta*, *KO*, *yk*, *KR*, *te*, who have the possibility of extending such relationships in the future.

Even though there are not as many people involved as shown in Figs. 1-4, there



KX, ts, etc. indicate personal names.  
 Capital letters show males and small letters females,  
 figures in bracket show estimated ages in 1984.

Fig. 1. Relationships united by marriage, divorce, remarriage and love-relationship in the Central Kalahari San (1).

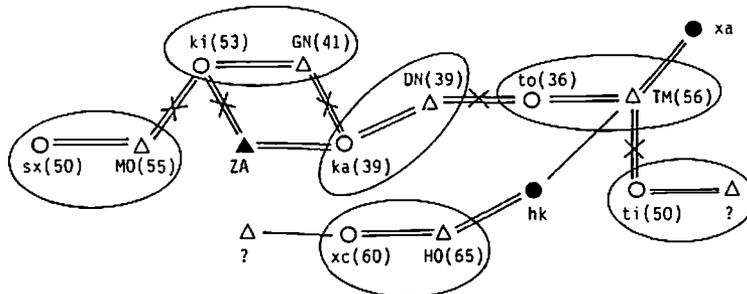


Fig. 2. Relationships united by marriage, divorce, remarriage and love-relationship in the Central Kalahari San (2).

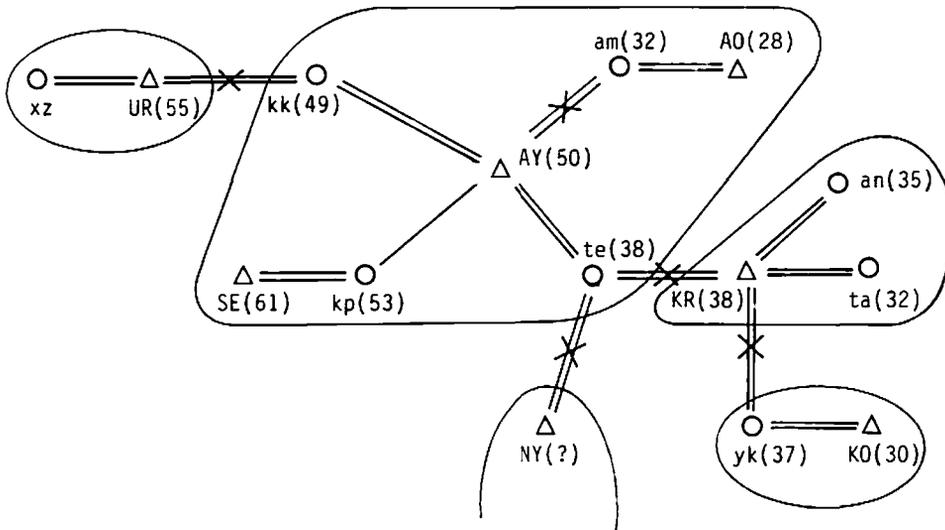


Fig. 3. Relationships united by marriage, divorce, remarriage and love-relationship in the Central Kalahari San (3).

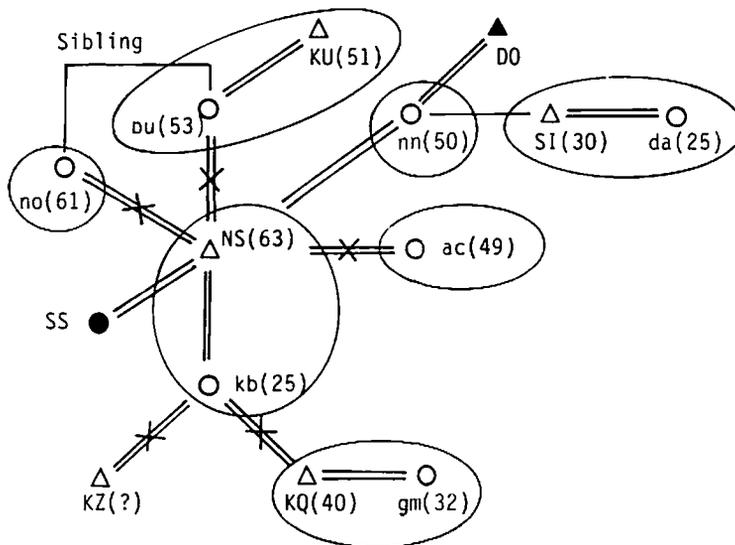


Fig. 4. Relationships united by marriage, divorce, remarriage and love-relationship in the Central Kalahari San (4).

were many other cases involving up to 7 or 8 persons united by marriage and other sexual relationships. Most importantly it can be seen from these figures that it is rare to spend all one's life with only one mate.

In the following section, we will look more closely at the relationships in Figs. 1-4, focusing on those formed by marriage and divorce.

## RELATIONSHIPS CENTERING AROUND THE HEADMAN

## Case of TU

TU in Fig. 1 is one of the central persons in the camp. He is half San and half Kgalagadi. His father is Kgalagadi, one of the subtribes of the Tswana. TU inherited a few goats from his father, and a small garden where he cultivates maize and watermelon. He leads a nomadic life with the other San most of the time but stays a little longer near his garden during the rainy season to plant and harvest. Those who share the same camp with him are given a small bit of goat meat and maize. In San society, where the principle of equal sharing is enforced by everyone, the existence of a man with resources, however small, and one-way distribution of them from him to all others, is indeed a peculiar relationship. In a society where there is no leader, TU has come to hold special status within the camp. At the start of implementation of the sedentarization policy by the government in 1979, he was appointed formal headman of the ≠Kade settlement by the government, as might be expected by his somewhat unique position in the area.

At one time he had three wives. His first wife *ts* has been married to him for more than 30 years, thus their relationship is quite stable. She gave birth to 4 children but the first and second sons died. The second wife *ue* has a son who is about 25 years old, so it can be estimated that she has already been married to TU for more than 26 years. She was young and attractive looking and it seemed that she would remain in his house as his second wife. However, she left TU in 1973 and got remarried to KE, becoming his second wife. She bore a son by KE but the son died and she moved back to live with TU again. Though TU condemned her at first, she was eventually allowed to come back. Again in the late 1970's, she left TU and went to live with KX, a man still in his twenties. What draws our attention to this particular relationship is that the families of TU-*ts* and KX-*ue* live together in the same camp separated only by several meters. Furthermore, they have maintained close contact in spite of these past events.

*ky* became the third wife of TU in or around 1970 when she was only about 17 years old. She was too young to get along well with the other middle-aged family members and would often go back to her natal home. She miscarried her first child and after that was unable to become pregnant for a long time. This seems to be one of the reasons why she left TU. She later bore a child by him but returned to her natal home after 10 years of married life. After that she began to live by herself in her parents' camp. She is said to have had a love-relationship with GY at one time,<sup>(4)</sup> but with AK at present. She is now a mother of 4 children, but we were unable to confirm exactly who the father(s) of her third and fourth children were. As it is said that no child was born between GY and herself, the father of her third child may be either TU or AK and the father of her fourth child AK.

Though she has lived separately from TU since then, the bond between them is not completely severed and they behave in such a way which suggests their past emotional attachment. Both TU and *ky* condemn one another of, but they sometimes speak of one another as if they were still partners. It can be thought that the young age of *ky*'s

children unite them, but even taking this into consideration, there is a peculiar condition characteristic of the San concerning marriage and divorce.

## PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE FROM *ZĀKU* RELATIONSHIPS

### Case of ZA

ki, in Fig. 2, was the first wife of MO, but after the birth of 5 children MO disappeared suddenly. He went to Menoatse, 100 km to the east of ≠Kade, and there got married to sx. ki remained and married ZA. This was 20 years ago. Now, GN and ka, married in the early 1960's, have two children. A curious situation arose in 1971. ZA and ki quarreled frequently and ZA often visited ka's hut. In those days ka's husband was absent having gone to Kxaochwe, 50 km south of ≠Kade. The cause of their quarrel is thought to be ZA's unfaithfulness to ki. The relation between ZA and ka was open and widely known to all including his wife. There is an openness in San society which permits such sexual relationships. It seems that there is not a lot of open jealousy among co-wives. Also as we have seen, frequently the divorced man and woman live close together in the same camp.

The relationships such as we see between ZA-ka in Fig. 2 and GY-ky, AK-ky in Fig. 1 is called *zāku*. The word *zāku* has a very broad meaning and can be used to denote a temporal sexual relationship or to emphasize the intimate relationship between a man and woman where no sexual relationship exists, as well as an openly recognized love-relationship. Moreover, the word can be used to denote a relationship between more than two or three individuals. For example, it includes the spouse of the man or woman in a love-relationship. It is said that these three or four persons are in a *zāku* relationship. The word *zāku* thus has diverse meanings. In this paper, however, I want to restrict its usage to denote the relationship between a man and women having a constant sexual relationship. As is known from such words *shieku* (taking from each other or marriage), *maku* (giving to each other) and ≠*āku* (hitting each other or to quarrel), *-ku* is a suffix which expresses the meaning "each other". Thus *zāku* means "in the relationships of *zā*". The woman in a *zāku* relationship is sometimes called *zāshi* and the man *zāma* (the suffix *-shi* meaning female, and *-ma*, male).

Having recognized the relationship between ZA and ka and observing their behavior, I found that GN, the husband of ka, visited the hut of ki while ZA was away hunting or on a visit to another camp. This can be said to be a kind of spouse-swapping. Although it is not known when the *zāku* relationship between these two couples began, it did not last long after I took notice of it, for both spouses divorced their partner and got married to their *zāku* partner. ZA died in 1974 at the estimated age of 34.

### Case of DN

DN's life had been rather unhappy. His mother had a cleft palate caused by here-

ditary syphilis<sup>(5)</sup> and DN was born with a weak constitution. After he got married to to, his right leg became paralyzed and was unable to walk. During 1967 and 1968, when I first conducted research in this area, his right leg became completely paralyzed and he had to crawl. He was terribly emaciated and naturally unable to hunt. He depended on his wife to, her parents and his own parents for food. In this miserable condition, he was in a depressed psychological state.

TM, on the right hand of Fig. 2, had married xa soon after he divorced his first wife ti, sometime before 1965. After xa died in 1975, he took DN's wife to, as his third wife. to's father and TM belonged to the same generation and they were intimate friends. It is said that this was the reason why TM and to could marry without much difficulty. DN's right leg had miraculously healed in the meantime, and when I came back to the field again in 1971, he was able to walk and go snare hunting. Around 1976, he married ZA's widow ka. Having recovered his health he was able to go hunting with the other men and was married again. Needless to say, he was in a good state of mind.

From our point of view, it would be natural for DN to have ill-feelings toward to, her father, and TM, who took his wife away when he was sick. However, after having married ka, DN and to's father lived together in the same camp and DN now has daily contact with TM and to, who live in a camp only 50 meters away.

### Case of HO

HO is an old man who married xc after the death of his wife hk. He had a son by his first wife, but according to informants, HO is a childless man and the boy was fathered by another man. The author could not specify who the real father of that boy was. This suggests that there is another couple in a *zāku* relationship in Fig. 2.

## ZĀKU AND FRIENDSHIPS

### Case of AY

kk in Fig. 3 had long ago married UR and gave birth to a daughter. But when UR got a second wife and went to live with her on the farm in town, kk married AY. AY and SE are good friends although they are widely separated by age and belong to two different language groups, the //Gana and /Gwi respectively. The families of AY and SE live in the same camp.

What attracts our attention here is that there is a *zāku* relationship between AY and SE's wife kp. It is rather rare even in this society to have a love-relationship with the wife of one's intimate friend. The actual sexual relations seem to be restricted to the time when SE is away for hunting or when visiting another camp.

Although it is difficult to say whether the strong friendship between SE and AY or the *zāku* relationship keeps the two families together in the same camp, it can at least be said that their friendship and the *zāku* relationship are not exclusive, but rather complementary to each other.

am is the daughter of kp's sister. She was betrothed to AY at about the age of 12 or

13 and got married to him when she reached 18, as his second wife in 1971. She still behaved childish and took great pleasure in playing with young single girls. As a result, her married life lasted only two years and she did not give birth to a child. After spending 5 years by herself she got married to AO around 1978 and subsequently gave birth to three children.

#### Case of KR

KR married rather early for most San men, at the age of 20, and moreover, took more than one wife. He had 4 wives by the age of 25. He is about 150 cm tall, which is very short even for short San men. He has a rather boyish face which makes him look young for his age. It is difficult to say how he could have had 4 wives while still so young. It can only be said that he was very earnest in making love to women and that he is probably the type of man who attracts a women's favor. He is neither especially good at hunting, a hard worker, nor from a particularly good family.

KR is now middle-aged and seems somewhat tired with life. He says that "Women are *tau tau* (tiring)". He sometimes appears with scratches on his face, said to have been given to him by one of his wives. Some of his wives have left him. He had sexual relations with NY once but she became the third wife of AY, and yk married KO.

### THE MAN WHO HAD 6 WIVES

#### Case of NS

This is the account of a man, NS, recognized to have had the most wives in the ≠Kade area. NS first married no and then took her younger sister, bu, as his second wife (see Fig. 4). At about the same time, he also married ac and nn. He lived with these 4 women for a long time. When I first met NS in 1967, no and her sister bu had already left him. bu married KU and no was living by herself.

NS took ss as his fifth wife in the early 1970's and then took kb as his sixth wife at the end of the 1970's. kb divorced KZ earlier and then was married to KQ. Recently she divorced KQ. About the same time that ss died (leaving behind small children), ac also left NS. Now, ac is living alone with her youngest son in the camp of her eldest son. As she is still young, she will probably remarry.

In this case also, it is quite difficult to say why NS was able to marry so many women. Unlike TU (Fig. 1) and TM (Fig. 2), he is neither a man of special social standing nor good at hunting. He does not have any goats or a garden. For women it seems there is no economic or social merit for which to marry him. Of course, marriage bonds are not formed on economic or political merit alone. It is especially so in the egalitarian society where material culture is simple and little value is put upon it, and also where there is no political authority or power. After all, it seems to be the individual character of a man which makes him amorously approach so many women. It is admirable to see such a man who is one of the oldest in the community, energetically making such efforts to get young women.

NS had two children with his first wife no, and two more with his second wife bu.

5 children with his third wife **ac**, one child with his fourth wife **nn**, two children with his fifth wife **ss** and one child with his sixth wife **kb**: making 13 children in all. Two of them died during infancy, and 5 have already married.

There is no evidence that he had to make any extra effort to bring up these children. This is one feature characteristic of the San. Men do not work extra or even think of working extra to feed their wives and children. They do not appear to plan things out so as to be able to support such a big family, even though they may possibly have many troubles from having so many dependents.

Figure 4 shows another *zāku* relationship between **SI** and **nn**. **NS** and **nn** have been married for more than 30 years and it seems that there is no longer any sexual relationship between them. This was interpreted from **NS**'s constant visits to **kb**'s hut. So it seems quite natural for **nn** (estimated to be over 50 years old) to comfort herself by having a young lover.

## CONCLUSION

Here we have seen the integration of San society through the sexual union. On the one hand, having no descent groups, status differentiation, class, and leaders, the bonds of parent-child and siblings play an important role in the integration of the society. On the other hand, however, the flexibility of the group's repeating fission and fusion appears to function greatly in the maintenance of society (Tanaka, 1971, 1980). As we have seen in this paper, various sexual relationships such as marriage and the love-relationship also play important roles in determining the framework of the group and in uniting people. It is natural that current relationships determine one's place of living, but in the San's society, past relationships also function as a medium of relating oneself to others and play an important role in making generalized reciprocity work well.

The *zāku* relationship, taken up separately from marriage, offers another problem to be discussed. Restricting the meaning of this relationship to the use in this study, i.e., the love-relationship between a man and a woman, the question needs to be asked: How does the *zāku* relationship differ from proper marriage? Since there is no descent group to which a child must be affiliated and no property to be inherited, neither the problem of affiliation nor inheritance arise here. Children, while they are still infants, are brought up mainly by their mothers and gradually become independent of both parents. Fathers also cuddle and play with them, but they are not necessarily the child's own biological father. Fathers-in-law who also live with them provide such attention, as well. The real difference between a *zāku* relationship and marriage is coresidence. However, considering the fact that a man in a plural marriage often moves from wife to wife visiting, the *zāku* relationship can be regarded as an extension of marriage.

The significance of the *zāku* relationship lies in the uniting of two or more married families through sexual relationship. That is, it enables the formation of such a group as shown in Fig. 5(a), and avoids the formation of miscellaneous groups of men and women practicing random marriage as in Fig. 5(c). Another such case can be seen in

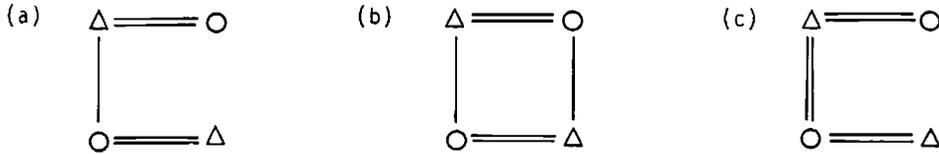


Fig. 5. Principles for uniting families.

the relationships between **ZA-ki** and **GN-ka** [see Fig. 2 and be schematized in Fig. 5(b)], although in the end the two families separated.

It was shown that the rate of plural marriage in the Central Kalahari San in 1967 was 18.5%. Among the 21 families in Fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4, there are only three cases (14.3%) of plural marriage, that is **kk-AY-te** and **an-KR-ta** in Fig. 3 and **nn-NS-kb** in Fig. 4. As far as can be seen from these figures, most of the San married more than twice in their lives, many of them practicing plural marriage. This is also the impression got from our interviews. We recognized many cases of *zāku* relationships which complicate marriage relations.

Among 21 families, 18 were simple families. None of the three polygamous families recognized, were stable for a long period of time. This can be confirmed when we look at all the polygamous families recognized over the last 17 years. There are only a few cases of stable plural marriages which lasted to the end. Most such marriages eventually turned into simple marriages. It is true that most of the San marry more than twice in their lives, but if we look at this from a synchronic perspective, they can be said to be mainly practicing simple marriage.

In class structured societies, to have plural wives in many cases has become the symbol of power, prestige, authority and honor. In hunter-gatherer societies, however, where there is no class, polygamous marriages cannot be thought of as having the same social significance. As we have seen of the men who had many wives, personal disposition or character played an important role. This is further confirmed by remarks of many San that, "it is best to have only one wife".

Plural marriage itself can be a very realistic solution to the demographic problem of an unbalanced sex ratio. Assuming that the same number of men and women live to marriageable age, but that women marry approximately 5 years earlier than men and live longer, it comes to be that there are more eligible women than men. As we have seen, it is difficult to live singly in this society. It can be said that the women left out of simple marriages are absorbed into the system by polygamous marriage.

As it has often been pointed out, the flexibility of their society is the key to maintaining it. We have seen in this paper that the same flexibility is at work in the domain of sexual relationships. That is, while the San maintain a system of simple marriage, they often practice divorce, remarriage, polygamous marriage and even the *zāku* relationship in a way which does not harm the marriage system itself.

In many other societies, divorce, remarriage, plural marriage, and love-relationships are usually the cause of severing personal relationships. In the small-scaled San society, however, where the complete severance of relations is impossible, people seem to be controlling their natural feelings of jealousy and love.

Although it was impossible to fully understand the inner feelings of the people, in this study under the limitations of our anthropological approach, we can say that, from the information we have, the San are making great efforts to maintain their society by utilizing the complex network of inter-personal relations whether they are of kinship or sexual nature.

As the problems concerning sex belong to the private realm of one's life, even in the San society where such matters are quite open, it is difficult to accurately grasp the entire situation. The information used in this paper comes from 6 field surveys I carried out between 1967 and 1984. The demographic materials used in this study were of a preliminary nature and need to be supplemented by further research.

In 1979, the Botswana Government enacted "The Remote Area Development Programme" which included the ≠Kade area. Since then, changes in economic life, sedentarization and a concentration of the populations have occurred. With these changes, the principles of group formation have also undergone change. By taking such tendencies for change into consideration, we might be able to find new clues for the analysis of the integration and formation of social groups, a subject which is left for further investigation.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** I wish to express my gratitude to all the people and institutions who supported me in carrying out this study. In the performance of the research in the first period (1966-68), I relied heavily on studies performed by the Hokkaido University Kalahari Scientific Expedition Party; in addition, the Kyoto University Primatological and Anthropological Expedition for Africa accommodated me in many ways. The second investigation (1971-72) was supported by a grant from the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health to Dr. Irvén DeVore for "Studies in the Organization and Adaptation of Hunter-Gatherers Groups." This grant was administered by Harvard University. The Third investigation (1974) was supported by a grant from the Japanese Government's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to the Primate Research Institute of Kyoto University. The fourth (1982) and fifth (1984) investigations were supported by the Grant-in-Aid for Overseas Scientific Research from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Japan. The Government of the Republic of Botswana kindly issued a research permit and made my original field work among the San possible. Thanks are due to Dr. Trefor Jenkins, Professor of the South African Institute for Medical Research, University of the Witwatersrand. Thanks are also due to the officials of the Botswana Government for their cooperation and hospitality. I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to many //Gwi and //Gana friends for their generosity and patience.

## NOTES

- (1) The San: The name "Bushmen", as is known from their history, was given to them by the white immigrants who called them with contempt, "Bushmen" meaning "primitive men who live in the bush." At the meeting of anthropologists, archaeologists, linguists, historians, and human geneticists, which was held in Johannesburg in June, 1971, it was agreed to employ the name "San" to denote the physical characteristics of the so-called Bushmen. We follow that usage in this paper.
- (2) Central Kalahari San: In the Central Kalahari Game Reserve area, two linguistic groups //Gwi and //Gana, which are communicable to each other, live side by side and practice inter-marriage. Since it is impossible to treat them as separate groups, we regard them as one and use the name Central Kalahari San for them.

(3) A characteristic of San language is the frequent use of click sounds. The Central Kalahari San distinguish four kinds of click sounds and they are expressed as follows:

/: dental; ʘ: alveolar-palatal; !: palatal; //: lateral

(4) This information was acquired by K. Sugawara in the same research team who remained in the field after I left in September, 1984. I owe much of the demographic data to him.

(5) There can be seen many cases of non-venereal syphilis in this area which is transmitted by contact other than sexual intercourse. The spirochaete of this disease has a weak tolerance to penicillin, so in 1972 penicillin injections were given to all residents in this area. Also the treatment has been done since 1983 at the clinic which was established there. As a result, the frequency of appearance of this disease has decreased sharply.

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—Received July 20, 1988.

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