

Connecting the connected: The inheritance of social ties among the Ju/'hoan Bushmen and the Enga of Papua New Guinea

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Background

For some 95% of human history there was little material property to inherit. Parents or corporate groups wishing to further the success of their descendants could only seek to pass on knowledge, social ties and land rights. Here I will investigate the inheritance of social ties in two societies in which there is no accumulation of material property: The Ju/'hoansi Bushmen of the Kalahari desert and the Enga horticulturalists of Highland Papua New Guinea. The Ju/'hoansi represent one of the most strictly “egalitarian” societies known in the ethnographic record, enforcing both ‘equality of opportunity’ as young people start out in life and ‘equality of outcome’ throughout the life cycle. Those who seek to possess more material goods, food, or status are leveled by other group members (Wiessner 2005). The Enga, in contrast, are an “egalitarian” society in ideology; all men start out in life with equal opportunities, for example, access to land, social support, financial support to procure a bride, and then are challenged to excel and make a name creating ‘inequality of outcome’. In reality however, within the sphere of the large exchange networks it was almost impossible for anybody but the son of a competent leader to succeed his father (Wiessner 2006).

All results will be preliminary as none of the data presented was collected for the questions being asked in this workshop. For the Enga, it will be possible to collect a much larger and more comprehensive sample. For the Ju/'hoansi, no further work can be done because *hxaro* exchange has died out.

Society and sample

The Ju/'hoansi Bushmen

The Ju/'hoansi population of some 2000 considered in this study inhabit N.W. Botswana and N.E. Namibia (Biesele 1993; Howell 2002; Lee 1979; Lee and DeVore 1968; Marshall 1976; Shostak 1981; Wilmsen 1989). Until the mid- 1970s Ju/'hoansi

subsisted primarily through foraging. When living as foragers, the Ju/'hoan bands inhabited a territories with enough food and water to sustain a band in the average year. Each Ju/'hoan man and woman inherited access to the territory of his or her mother and father and claimed a strong hold by assembling kin with similar rights and jointly occupying the land. Spatial and temporal variation in resources, including the availability of water, was high. To buffer from environmental and social risks, the Ju/'hoansi engaged in a system of exchange called *hxaro*.

Hxaro exchange had two components. The first was the delayed roughly balanced exchange of gifts that gave information that *hxaro* partnerships were alive and well. The underlying relationship was one of commitment to mutual support in times of need. The average Ju/'hoansi in the early 1970s had 16 *hxaro* partners (range 2-42) who were well-distributed in space within a radius of 200 km, over people of different ages, sexes and abilities. When in need a person would pack up his or her family, visit a partner and reside in their camp for as long as necessary. Census data collected by Richard Lee for 1967-8 and myself for 1973-4 indicates that 93% of all extended visits recorded were made to *hxaro* partners (Wiessner 1981; 1982). The average Ju/'hoansi spent 3.3 months a year living in the camps of partners.

Spheres of *hxaro* waxed and waned throughout the life cycle. *Hxaro* was done with consanguineous kin inherited from either parent or formed during a lifetime with siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles etc., but only with affines in exceptional cases. Because of rules for exogamy, it was extremely rare that spouses shared the same *hxaro* partners. Young people began their reproductive career with an average of 13 partnerships, enough to see them through hard times. When the first of their children mature to marriageable age, Ju/'hoansi doubled their spheres of *hxaro* to an average of 24 partners. With old age and decreased mobility and productive capacity, elders narrowed *hxaro* spheres narrowed to an average of 12 partners. Ju/'hoansi marriages were arranged and *hxaro* played a major role in locating spouses and contracting marriages. Ju/'hoansi sometimes describe 1-2 years of travel to visit *hxaro* partners and try to find suitable spouses for their offspring (Wiessner, in press). Finally, *hxaro* partnerships were linked together to form chains that wound for hundreds of kilometers through the Kalahari and tapped into the broader trade networks of southern Africa. Ju/'hoansi who were well

connected in *hxaro* had a better chance of acquiring desired material possessions from afar: beads, metal, pots etc.

Inheritance among the Ju/'hoansi involved knowledge and skills passed from parents to children in daily life, rights to areas of land jointly held with others, and social networks. *Hxaro* partnerships were inherited as parents aged and passed some of their partnerships on to their children. After death children took the parents possessions, gave them to remaining partners and asked that the relationships be continued. Because partnerships of the deceased could be carried on by a number of their descendants, the inheritance of a partnership with a family by one child did not preclude the inheritance by other children in the family as well. As can be seen in Table 1, approximately 45% of the average Ju/'hoansi's partnerships were inherited and 55% formed during their lifetimes with parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and other family members.

Table 1. Mean number and percent of hxaro partnerships for fifty-nine Ju/'hoansi by kinship relationship (total number of partnerships=955)

<u>Partnerships started during lifetime</u>	<u>number</u>	<u>percent</u>
Close kindred Members*	7.4	46%
Friends/affines	1.4	9%
<u>Inherited partnerships</u>		
Gt-grandparents descendants	2.5	16%
Gt-gt-grandparents' descendants**	1.5	9%
Inherited –not on genealogy	3.2	20%
Total	16	100%

*Close kindred members include: parents, siblings, children, grandparents, parents' siblings, siblings' children, and parents siblings children, full and half.

** Adequate genealogies on great-grandparents' descendants was available for only 13 out of 59 Ju/'hoansi in the sample.

The sample used here comes from a study of *hxaro* conducted between 1973 and 1975 with 59 adults yielding a total of 955 *hxaro* partnerships (Wiessner 1981). Each person was asked to list his or her partners, their kin relationship, their attributes, and place of residence. Then a tally of all possessions of the household was carried out to examine the correlation between *hxaro* partners listed and gifts received. There was a high correlation between the two: 69% of a Ju/'hoansi's possessions were received in *hxaro* from listed partners and another 27% were made, and 4% bought or obtained from people in other ethnic groups.

Only 28 Ju/'hoansi in the sample had parents or children who were also interviewed about *hxaro* and thus eligible for use in this analysis. Parents with unusually

wide spheres of *hxaro* are over represented, because sampling was done by camp. As my previous studies have shown, Ju/'hoansi who were skilled at hunting, healing, and *hxaro* exchange had an average of 84% of their children residing with them while the unskilled had only a 31% of their children as co-residents (Wiessner 2002:426). Ju/'hoansi with narrower spheres of *hxaro* were thus less like to have their children represented in the sample.

The Enga

The Enga, of Papua New Guinea number about 300,000 today (Brennan 1977; Feil 1984; Lacey 1975, 1979; Meggitt 1965, 1972, 1977; Talyaga 1982; Waddell 1972; Wohlt 1978). Until approximately 300 years ago when the sweet potato was introduced to Enga by local routes, they subsisted as hunter-gatherers or shifting horticulturalists. The sweet potato released many constraints on production, most notably it allowed people to produce a surplus “on the hoof” in pig populations for the first time (Wiessner and Tumu 1998; 2002). As a result of opportunities and turmoil set off by extensive population shifts to take advantage of the new crop, large ceremonial exchange systems were constructed in Enga. The largest of these, the Tee ceremonial exchange cycle, involved some 40,000 people and hundreds of thousands of pigs by the time Europeans entered the region in the 1930s. Leadership emerged hand in hand with ceremonial exchange. Despite fierce and open competition, the organization of the Tee cycle was largely in the hands of great leaders in each clan who passed their position on to one or more of their sons through inheritance of knowledge and social ties, if and only if the sons were capable. Though Enga men and women could work hard and strive to make a name and manage wealth, it was almost impossible for them to break into to the top level of Tee Cycle organizers (Wiessner 2006).

The Tee cycle provided benefits for everybody in that it stimulated production , provided a time to feast and socialize, and provided wealth that could be used in bridewealth, child growth payments or war reparations. Tee organizers enjoyed the privileges of polygynous marriage, of recruiting more household labor than others and of being relatively immune to violence because people did not want to injure those who organized the flow of wealth for the benefit of all.

Enga inherited land, knowledge, a few valuables, and networks of social ties. Clan land was parceled out to individual families who could then pass it on to their children, or to close relatives if they had none. However, land also belonged to the clan in that individuals could not give land to men from other clans. Meggitt found that 'big-men' (*kamongo*) did not own more land than ordinary people (Meggitt 1974:191). Knowledge was passed on from parents to children, in men's and women's houses and in ritual. Men and women inherited a very few precious items for exchange such as pearlshells or ceremonial axes from their parents, but were not allowed to wear or display these unless they attained an appropriate position of high status.

Enga inherited the social and political networks necessary to organize the Tee cycle gradually over years when they accompanied their fathers on journeys year to coordinate the 250+ clans involved in the Tee cycle (Wiessner 2006). Capable sons rose in influence as their fathers declined with age. But becoming a *kamongo* involved more than inheriting social ties and knowledge. A successful *kamongo* had to be able to recruit and organize others for intensive household production and had to have skills in oration and mediation for organizing the Tee Cycle. Any one clan could accommodate several *kamongo* and so the success of one son did not preclude the success of another. In some families three sons could replace their father while in others, none might be competent .

A son of a kamongo was only expected to succeed his father in the event of his father's death or when he became old. ...the son of a kamongo was in a better position to succeed his father because he had the knowledge of how to become a kamongo and people already expected him to do so....The father did not specifically choose a son to succeed him. It came as the result of a natural process. As time went on and a kamongo's children grew up and developed certain attributes. When the people saw these they began to conclude that a certain son would certainly succeed his father. (Suilya Kanopatoakali, Kalia clan, Wakemale village)

Seven reasons are given by Enga given for inheritance of leadership by capable sons.

b **Knowledge.** The sons of *kamongo* had access to knowledge that others did not have.

They acquired this knowledge by accompanying their fathers on trips to organize the Tee

cycle. It was also said that father did not give their sons valuable advice when others were present.

(2) **Social ties.** The Sons of *kamongo* inherited social connections and Tee partnerships that were strengthened by a long history of exchange.

(3) **Marriage connections.** Parents arranged marriages in Enga. *Kamongo* married their sons and daughters to the children of *kamongo* for their first marriages, creating a limited circle of power.

(4) **Homeland security.** Travel was dangerous owing to inter-clan warfare. Only those who had long established networks for protection could travel widely and safely. Some Tee managers traveled through more than 50- 100 clans over a period of one to two years to organize a Tee cycle.

(5) **Limits on public speech.** *Kamongo* told rivals from ordinary families to “shut up:” should they try to get up and speak in matters concerning the Tee Cycle. If aspiring men tried to speak in other clans, the *kamongo* would send word down the line to get their associates to ask them “Who were they that they could stand up speak of the Tee Cycle in public?”

(6) **Public demand.** The public looked to the capable sons of *kamongo* to follow their fathers and *Kamongo* in other clans preferred to work with the families of well-known leaders.

(7) **Labor.** *Kamongo* attracted more followers to work in their households including war refugees or men and women who had never married who became “servants” (*kendemane*) and young people who came to work in the households of *kamongo* in exchange for knowledge and possible contributions to their bridewealth (Wiessner and Tumu 1998).

The sample presented here was collected in 2006 in 11 clans. People were first asked to name the family of the most renowned leaders in the past. For each of these leaders it was asked if their fathers and grandfathers had been *kamongo*. One prominent *kamongo* was then selected for each clan and his genealogy collected over three generations.¹ Additional information requested included the *kamongo*'s wives, whether or

¹ Selection was done on the basis of availability of complete genealogical information from the people present in the interview..

not his wives were daughters of *kamongo*, whether his sons became *kamongo*, who they married, and whether spouses were their daughters of *kamongo*. In most cases, the first generation lived before contact with Europeans, the second generation experienced first contact and the third under the Australian Administration. With this data it is not possible to detail the networks of the individuals involved, only to see: (1) how many sons and grandsons of leaders succeeded their fathers and (2) if they married the daughters of other Tee organizers, (3) how many of their sons survived to adulthood.²

Analysis

What percent of children inherit their parent's social networks and position?

For the Ju/'hoansi, the sphere of *hxaro* was scored relative to the mean for their age group, whether a person had less than the average number of partners, the average number, or more than the average number for that age group. Then their position was compared to that of their parents: whether they had a sphere of *hxaro* wider than their parents, about the same as their parents, or narrower than their parents. Table 2 gives the results. Though the sample is small, it is based on a very solid knowledge of every person involved.

² It will be possible to collect much more extensive genealogies and data in the future.

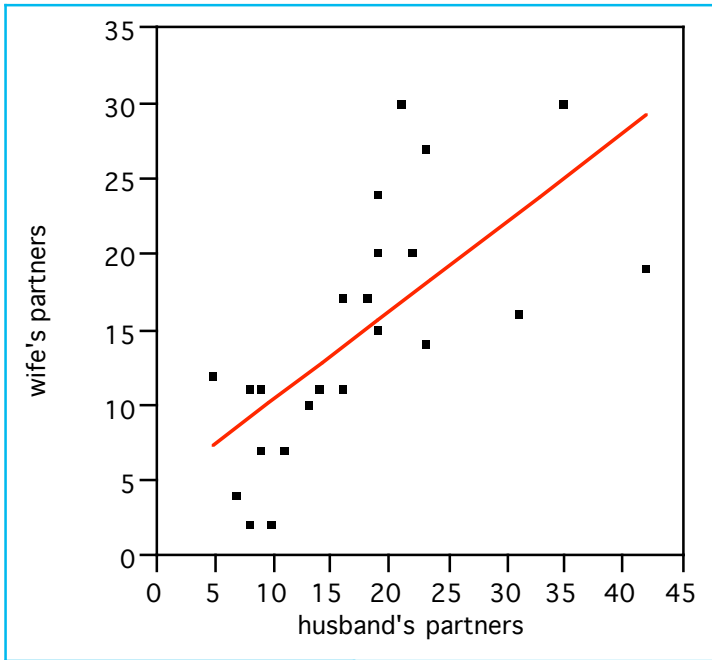
Table 2. Spheres of *hxaro* of Ju/hoan parents and children compared.

	<u>Children's <i>hxaro</i> sphere relative to parents</u>			<u>total</u>
	<u>wider</u>	<u>similar</u>	<u>narrower</u>	
<u>Parents with:</u>				
Wide sphere	0	7	9	16
Average sphere	1	6	1	8
<u>Narrow sphere</u>	3	1	0	4
Total	4 (14%)	14 (50%)	10 (36%)	28 (100%)

Of the most capable, only 7 out of 16 (44%) children could match the *hxaro* spheres of their parents. The Ju/'hoansi say that this is because success in *hxaro* requires social competence, economic competence to attract partners and a reputation for generosity. Not all children had those gifts.

Ju/'hoansi double their spheres of *hxaro* as their children approach marriageable age, largely by taking over partnerships from their aging parents. *Hxaro* ties are said to form the backbone of the quest for spouses. In figure, 1 number of *hxaro* partners for husbands and wives are correlated. The results do suggest that parents with wide networks are successful in marrying their children to spouses whose families are also well-connected.

wife's partners By husband's partners



— Linear Fit

Linear Fit

Summary of Fit

RSquare	0.469757
RSquare Adj	0.444507
Root Mean Square Error	6.015669
Mean of Response	14.65217
Observations (or Sum Wgts)	23

Analysis of Variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
Model	1	673.2637	673.264	18.6045
Error	21	759.9537	36.188	Prob>F
C Total	22	1433.2174		0.0003

Parameter Estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob> t
Intercept	4.3914445	2.689311	1.63	0.1174
husband's partners	0.5929567	0.137472	4.31	0.0003

What percent of the sons of Enga kamongo inherit their fathers' social networks and position?

Table 3 gives the results for the 84 sons of *kamongo* in the database who survived to adulthood. Four sons of *kamongo* not included in Table 1 were murdered or killed in warfare. The first category, *kamongo*, applies to top leaders and organizers of exchange. The second category, wealthy men, applies to men with productive households and many pigs who did not have the social competence, skills in oration and mediation to become *kamongo*. The Enga directly specified this. It should be noted that one *kamongo* in the sample, Takime, was a woman who paid bride wealth for 11 “female husbands” to increase her household labor force. She later procured male husbands for these women. Female *kamongo* are rare in Enga.

Table 2. Status of sons of *kamongo*.

Sons of *kamongo* who became:

<u>Status</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<i>Kamongo</i>	32	38%
Wealthy men	11	13%
Ordinary men	41	49%
Married the daughters of <i>kamongo</i>	38	45%

(Marriages were arranged by parents. Men were married at the age of 25-30 and women between 15-20.)

A few points should be noted. First, there are lines of *kamongo* that die out because no sons can “replace” their father. We would not pick up these with the methodology we used. We did encounter one case of a *kamongo* who had fallen to the status of ordinary man owing to cheating in ceremonial exchange. Second, in four cases inheritance of ‘*kamongoship*’ went to a grandson when sons were not capable. Third, in our interviews about 41 *kamongo* of 11 different clans in the past, only one *kamongo* named did not have a father whose father was a *kamongo*. In this exceptional case, the person was a right hand man of a major *kamongo*. After contact with Europeans, the new

wealth and positions provided by the Colonial administration allowed the sons of ordinary men to become *kamongo*. Consequently, competition became runaway, leading to the demise of the Tee cycle.³

Enga say that parents make equal efforts with each child to pass on their social networks that bring wealth for distribution and status, but that some children have the social and economic competence to take over, while others do not. The Enga seek to help the most promising of their sons by marrying them to daughters of *kamongo* in other clans for their first and second marriages, though subsequent wives may be the daughters of ordinary men who will plant gardens and raise pigs. Forty-five percent of a *kamongo*'s sons were married to the daughters of other *kamongo*, keeping information and influence within limited circles and tapping into the essential private networks of well-connected women, ties that cross-cut clan boundaries. Of the sons of *kamongo* who became *kamongos* themselves, only one did not marry a daughter of a *kamongo*, and some married up to four.

Summary and conclusions

Social networks can secure alternate residences, support, access to wealth for distribution, and opportunities to marry competent and well-connected spouses. Both among the Ju/'hoansi and Enga where marriages were arranged by parents, being well-connected greatly increased chances of marrying sons and daughters strategically. Nonetheless, among the Ju/'hoansi and Enga, there is a remarkably similar percent of children (ca.60%) who did not have the social and economic competence to inherit their parents ties and make them work. Since social and economic competence are likely to be related to IQ and other genetic factors, in contrast to the findings of Bowles and Gintis (2002), inheritance of behavioral attributes might have played a stronger role in reproducing the structure of social status and economic privilege before accumulation of material wealth played a major role in human societies.

³ Because open competition for the top had become the norm during the Colonial era, Enga interviewed were really shocked to realize that they could name no *kamongo* who was born to an ordinary man prior to contact. However, sons of women from ordinary families who married *kamongo* could replace their fathers.

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