

A study on how resettlement affects funerals among the Central Kalahari San

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Research background

The |Gui and ||Gana San were relocated in 1997 from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve by the Botswana government. This study describes continuities and changes, especially with regard to funeral practices among the Central Kalahari San in the process of their transition to a post-foraging society under the resettlement program, which was implemented 30 years after their sedentarization. San societies are changing because of influences such as sedentarization. Though such social changes have been the focus of many studies, there have been very few studies about funerals. Further research is necessary to analyze funerals among the San from an anthropological perspective.

Research purpose and aim

The aim of this study is to analyze how resettlement affects funerals among the San. I have interviewed San people and have collected narratives detailing how funeral customs are changing and being maintained. I researched for 3 months in New Xade and used anthropological research methodologies, interviews, and observations.

Results and achievements by fieldwork

Because of sedentarization, funeral practices among the San have been changing for several decades. When they lived inside the game reserve, their funerals were very simple. When people died, the body was covered with a blanket and buried under the ground at the person's house. However, in recent years their funeral practices have been changing and have become influenced by Christianity and Tswana groups.

When people die, the San lay the remains in state in the mortuary at Ghanzi for a few days as relatives and friends gather for the funeral. The body is buried with a coffin. The government pays funeral costs including the cost of keeping the body in the mortuary for a few days and the cost of a coffin. If the family of the deceased

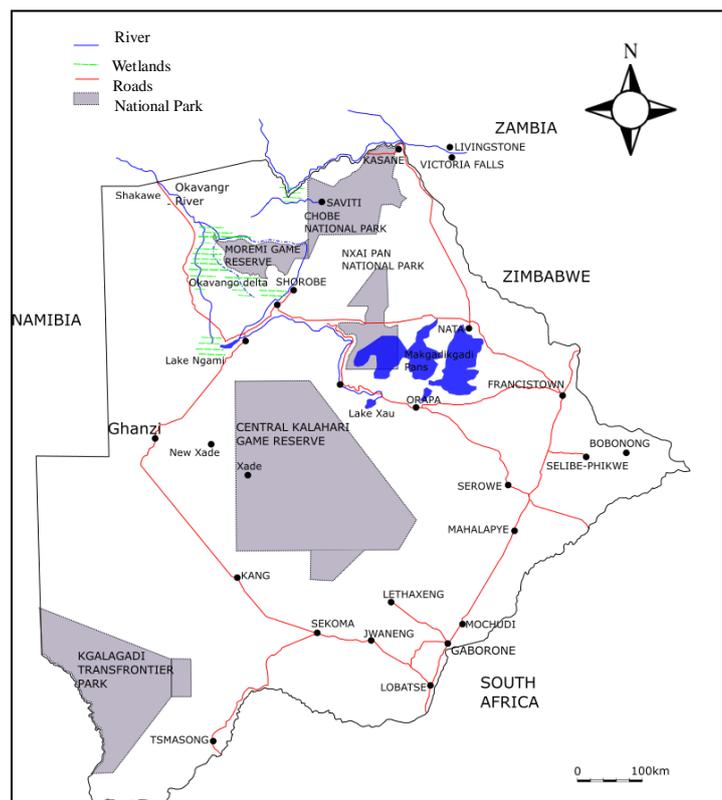


Figure 1. Map of Botswana

chooses, they can buy a more beautiful coffin and keep the body in the mortuary for a longer period.

Thus, the process of funerals, how long the body is kept in the mortuary, how beautiful the coffin is, and what foods are served at funerals shows the financial power of the family. In addition, funerals become occasions to recognize cultural identity because of the social importance of attending funerals and because the bodies are buried along ethnic lines.

Implications and impacts on future research

This research focuses on funeral practices, but the social and familial implications of why this style of funerals is chosen have not been analyzed. With respect to these issues, in the next study I will try to examine why the San so easily accept a different style of funeral from the Tswana, even though funerals and death are generally regarded as very important events and as moments that define social space, social identity, and views of death.



Picture 1: Coffin in mortuary at Ghanzi



Picture 2: One of the scenes at a funeral



Picture 3: Preparing for funeral



Picture 4: Graveyard at New Xade