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NATURE, CATTLE THIEVES AND VARIOUS OTHER MIDNIGHT ROBBERS

Images of People, Place and Landscape in Damaraland, Namibia

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PhD

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1997

A NOTE ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs presented in Chapters 1 & 2 were originally reproduced in colour. Due to the high costs of colour reproduction, this copy contains only low-quality black and white photocopies. Full colour reproductions can be viewed at the Main Library of the University of Edinburgh. The original mounted colour photographs are the property of the National Art Gallery of Namibia and may be viewed in Windhoek at the Gallery by prior appointment.

Permission to borrow the exhibition will be extended to all genuine exhibitors.

The original landscape photographs presented in Chapter 7 are also of low quality in this thesis copy. Individuals interested in viewing the original photographs will find them lodged with the National Herbarium of Namibia in Windhoek (after January 1998), along with copies of all the matched photographs from this study. Alternately, originals can be viewed or obtained from the author at the following address:

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A NOTE ON DAMARA - NAMA ORTHOGRAPHY

Standard Damara-Nama orthography recognises the following signs to designate 'clicks':

/ Dental or alveolar affricate.

ǂ Alveolar stop.

//Lateral affricate.

! Palatal or retroflexive stop.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the social-economy of pastoralism in Damaraland, a former homeland of Namibia. It focuses on communal livestock farmers and their families, their strategies for coping with drought, poverty and a legacy of political oppression. By combining ethnographic, historical and ecological research methods the author achieves a multi-faceted view of pastoral practice in relation to land tenure, environmental change, political history and rural development.

As part of a wider critique relating to past ethnographic representations of Namibians, the author presents a collection of over 200 photographs made by sixteen individual 'informants' from his central fieldwork area of Okombahe. These photographs form the basis for a discussion of identity, social relations, mobility, reciprocity, poverty and politics in rural Damaraland as well as theoretical considerations pertaining to visual representation generally. This ethnographic material is contextualized by exploring the historical experience of the inhabitants of Okombahe in relation regional economic, social and political processes.

In order to survive in this unpredictable arid environment, communal livestock farmers, practice an opportunistic strategy of coping with drought based on flexible property relations. This thesis researches the impact which pastoral practice and communal settlement has had on this environment. The history of vegetation change in the vicinity of communal settlements in Damaraland is explored using a combination of methodologies including matched ground and aerial photography. The author concludes that this research validates recently revised theories pertaining to dryland ecology which posit that such environments are highly resilient: vegetation change associated with communal land use in Damaraland has come about primarily as a result of long term climatic fluctuations rather than because of unsustainable exploitation by communal farmers. This is shown to have important implications for contemporary development policy.

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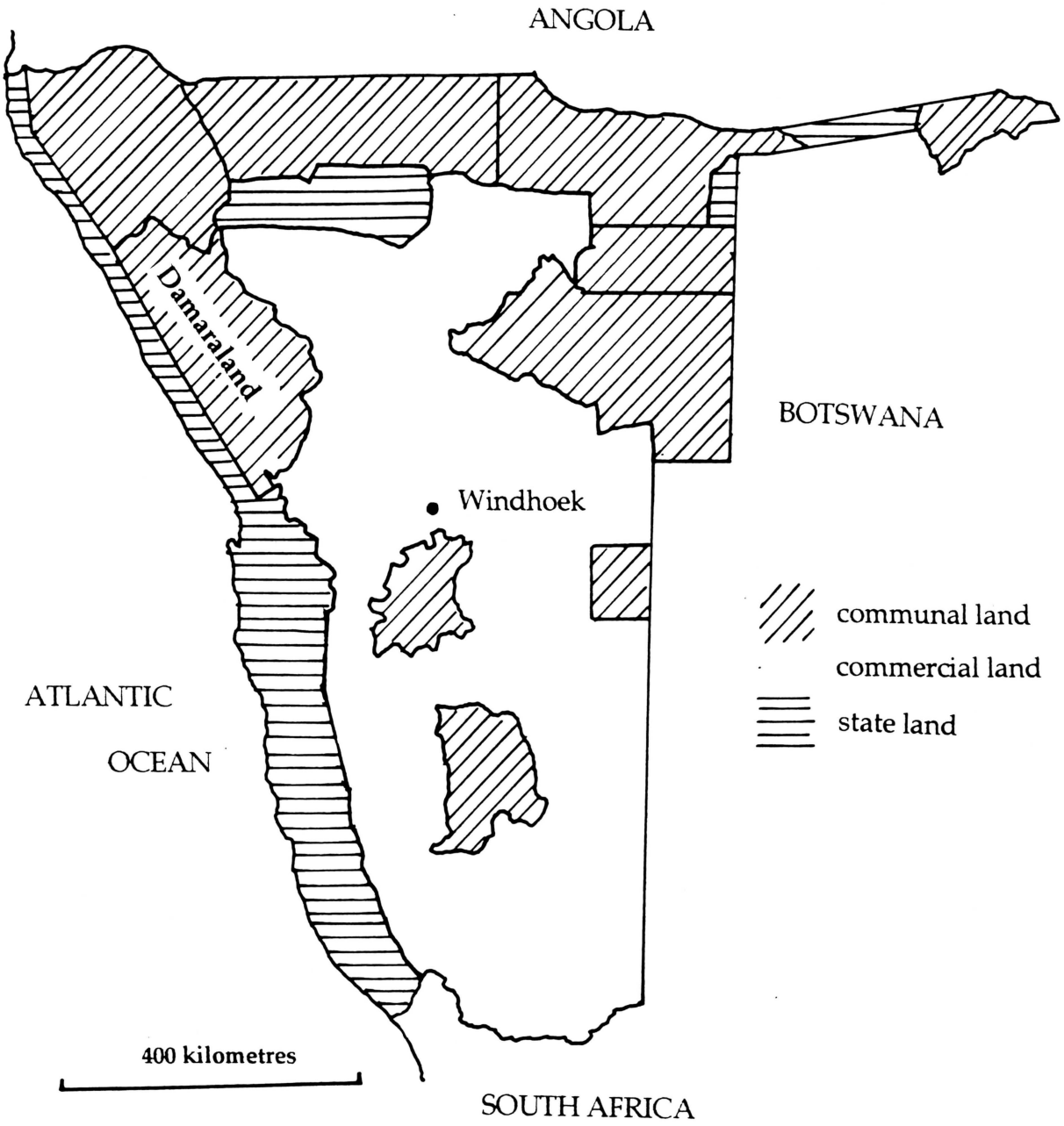
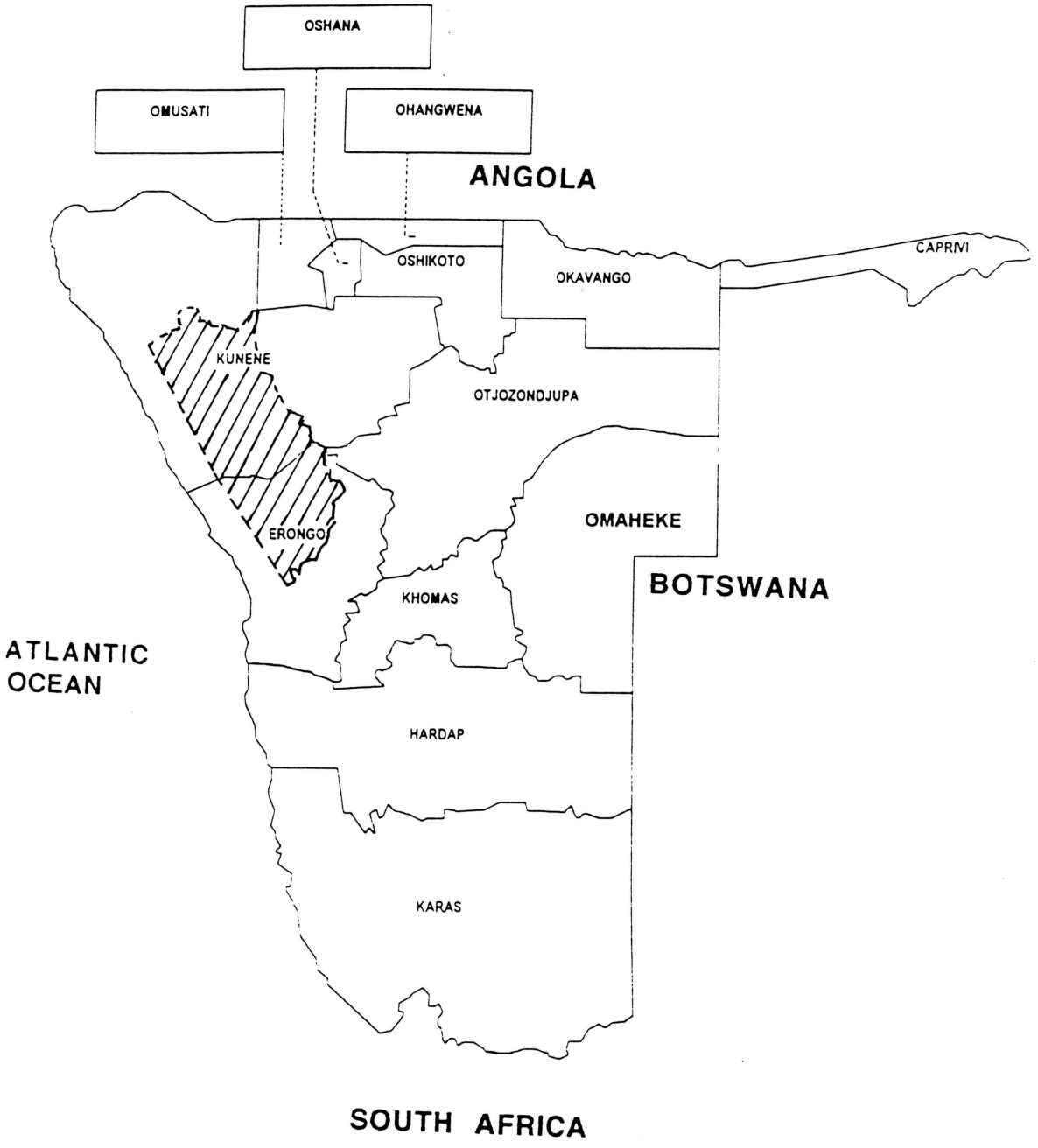
Finally, without the insight, support and fortitude of Hillary, this project would have remained an unfathomed dream.

This thesis is dedicated to Hillary and Zoë Rohde.

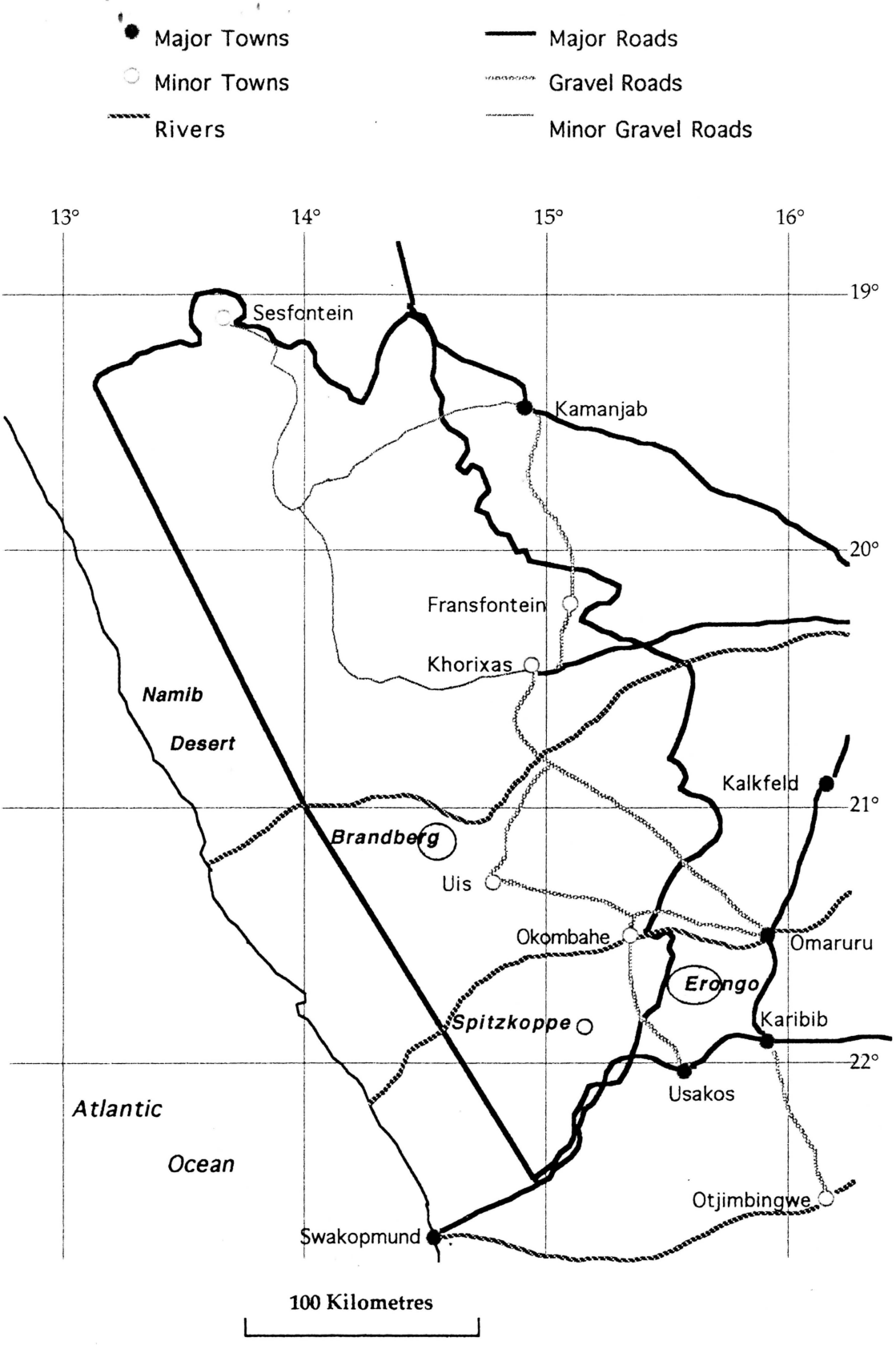
MAP # 1A - NAMIBIA: ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES
Homelands circa 1970



MAP # 1B - NAMIBIA: ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES
Regions 1992

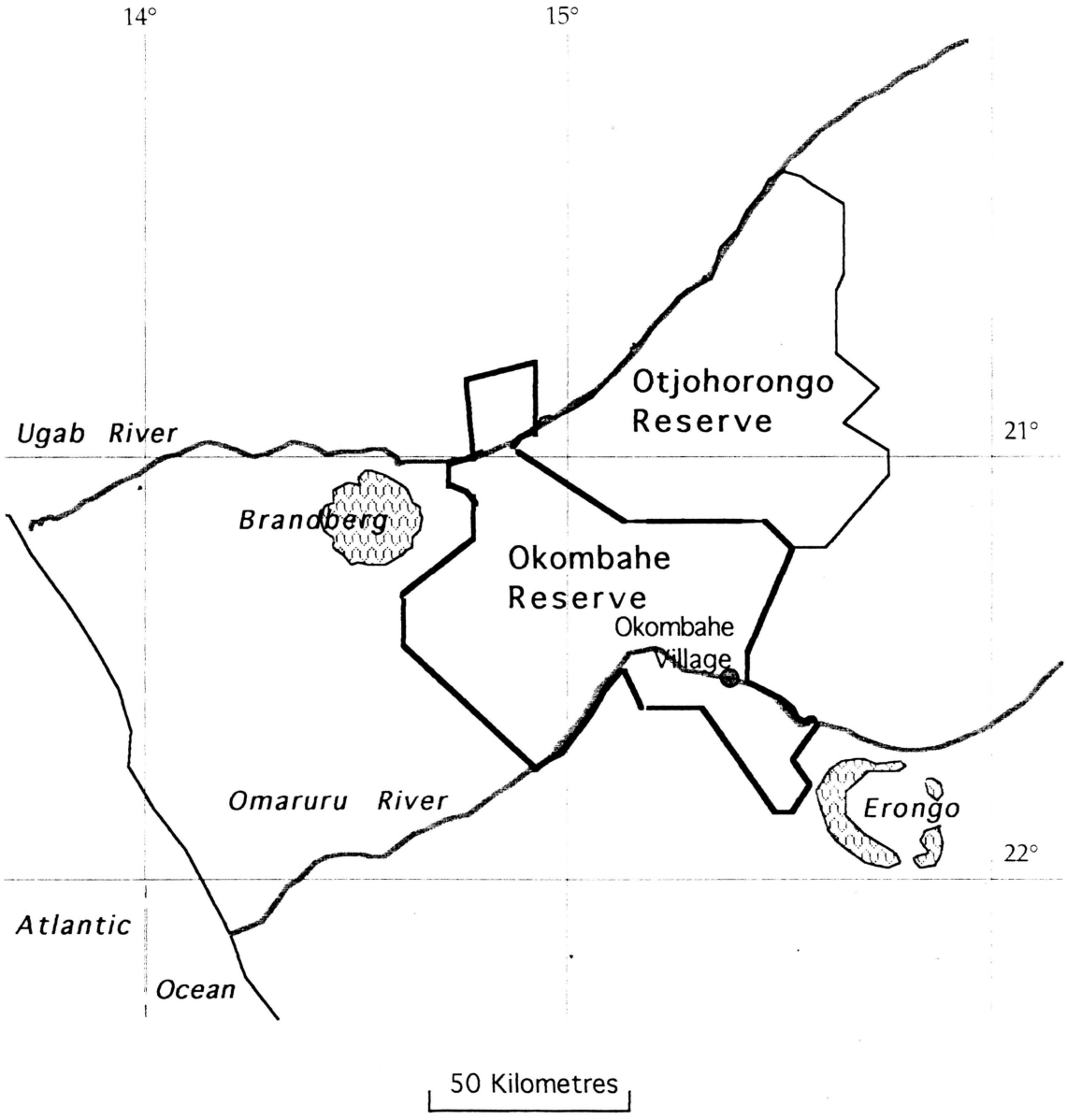


MAP # 2 - DAMARALAND



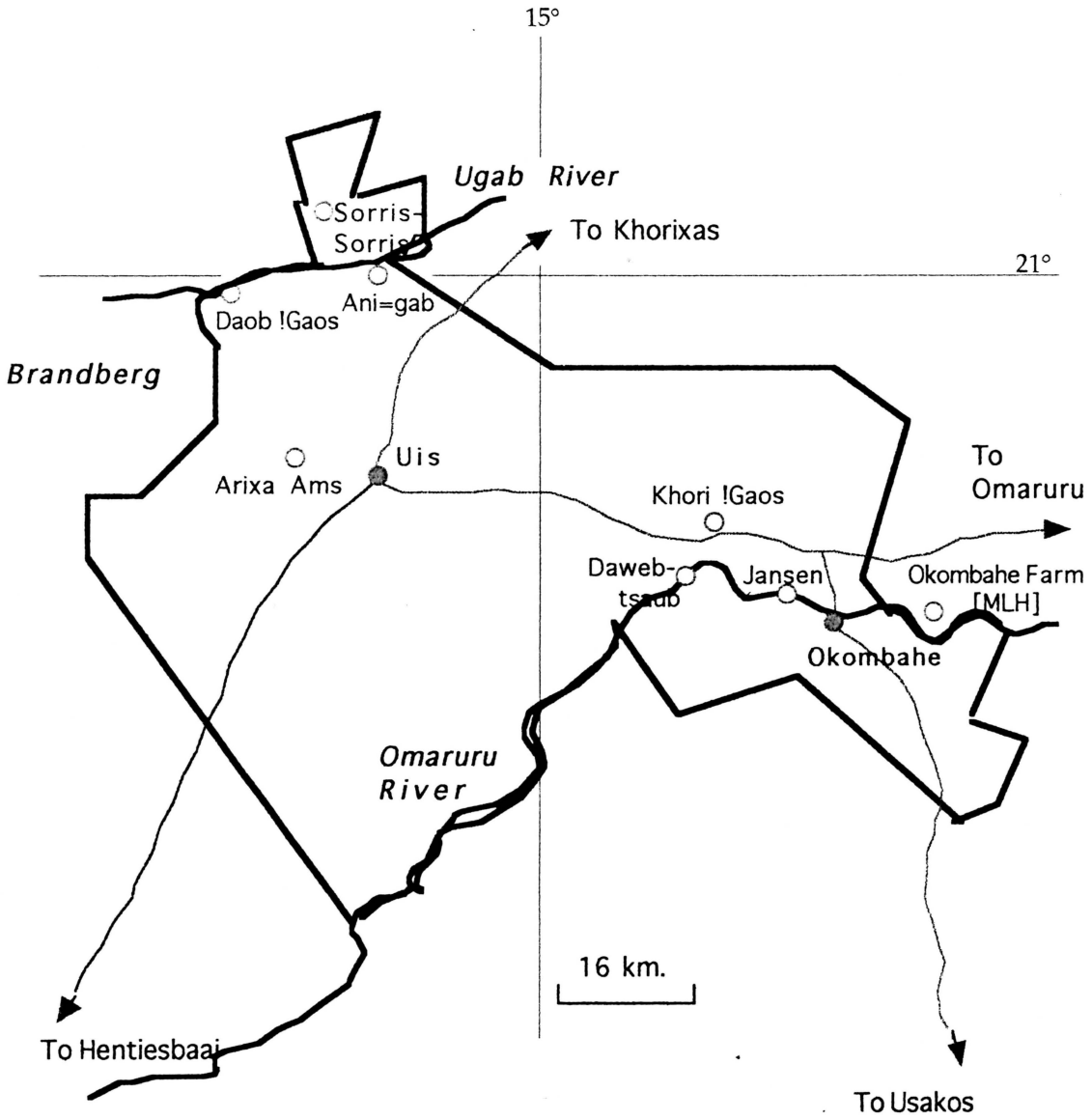
MAP # 3 - OKOMBAHE RESERVE

[Circa 1955]



MAP # 4 - OKOMBAHE & UIS WARDS

[OKOMBAHE RESERVE BOUNDARY]



INTRODUCTION

I play the game, in other words, the game of pretending there's an order in the dust, a regularity in the system, or an interpenetration of different systems, incongruous but still measurable, so that every graininess of disorder coincides with the faceting of an order which promptly crumbles.

Italo Calvino in *Time and the Hunter* (1967: 30)

One of the most notorious social experiments of our time came to an end with the South African elections in April 1994. A dress rehearsal for this event had taken place four years previously when Namibia, a virtual colony of South Africa, achieved independence. Of all the excesses of colonialism and apartheid, it is perhaps the creation of 'homelands' - countries within a country defined by race and ethnicity - which characterise the extremes of bigotry and oppression inherent in Southern Africa's recent history. With independence, Namibia's homelands officially ceased to exist. The legal props which imprinted a racist ideology on the landscape were superseded by new administrative regions in 1992 and the homelands, along with their names, were consigned to the annuls of history. In spite of this political transformation, the homelands persist in many essential respects: for the people who continue to live in these communal areas, daily life continues in much the same way as it did before independence. Social and economic change has been gradual and political transformation has come as a mixed blessing.

This thesis is about one such former homeland. It focuses on livestock farmers and their ability to cope with recurring drought and colonialism's legacy of poverty. Its ultimate purpose involves uncovering the complex relationship between culture, social history, environmental change, and development in the sparsely populated semi-desert area of western Namibia recently known as Damaraland. A variety of ethnographic, historical and ecological research methods were employed for this purpose, each of which presented different problems to be solved, and served to illuminate communal life and pastoral practice in this former homeland from a number of different perspectives. An understanding of how ethnographic, historical and scientific discourse has influenced the thinking of policy makers as well as the lives of communal inhabitants is central to my approach.

It is almost impossible to live or work in Southern Africa today without some awareness of what might be called a 'politics of representation'; the culture of apartheid itself was only the latest and most institutionalised form of a cultural imperialism fostering this consciousness. The fact that 'reconciliation' has succeeded in promoting a peaceful political transition does not obscure the persistence of deep structural inequalities affecting the majority of Namibia's population. And while the political and geographic framework of the homelands has been dismantled and the racist stereotypes which acted as props to apartheid's social and economic oppression have lost their power, the rhetoric of 'nation building' has yet to effect a deep change in this consciousness of ethnic identity. In writing about Damaraland, the paradox inherent in the act of presenting an authoritative account has necessarily become a recurrent theme in this thesis. The naturalising tropes of representation, whether expressed in visual images, descriptive narrative or empirical research are so entrenched in our culture, that they have become conflated with knowledge and cognition in complex ways. Perception itself is paradoxical: 'there is no vision without purpose. . . the innocent eye is blind' for the 'world is already clothed in our systems of representation' (Mitchell, quoted in Duncan & Ley 1993:4). Furthermore, the presentation and production of knowledge of the 'other' is inherently a temporal, historical and a political act (Fabian 1983:1): the history of Namibia is replete with illustrations of this fact.

The title of this thesis is meant to draw attention to the paradox (and irony) inherent in the act of representing the interests of others, of describing places and constructing histories. "Nature, cattle thieves and various other mid-night robbers" were words used by a prominent Damara government politician to characterise the causes of poverty and social fragmentation which beset one of the oldest settlements in Damaraland, Okombahe. These three images are a coded short-hand, honed by a long history of discourse employed to construct Damara identity.

'Nature' refers to the unpredictable desert environment in which the Damara live, where a subsistence economy based on hunting, gathering, herding and migrant labour has depended on the ability of people to move within a landscape according to the exigencies of climate beset by drought. Colonialism placed severe restrictions on the mobility of native populations and the environmental effects of this have been the subject of debate among planners and politicians throughout the colonial era, typified by predictions

of environmental collapse and desertification. Today, the legacy of this discourse has important ramifications in the social and economic development of former homeland populations.

The Damara have been referred to as 'cattle thieves' (amongst other things), since the early European traders and missionaries marked their presence in the landscape during the 19th century. Livestock theft amongst the Damara themselves has become a signifier of the 'cultural and moral disintegration' of Damara communities in much the same way as their characterisation as slaves and servants served to consolidate their inferior social position in the past.[1]

'Various other mid-night robbers' encompasses all the indigenous forces of social upheaval and inter-group conflict which have long been held responsible for the marginalisation of the Damara- speaking people.[2] Implicit in this portrayal of marginalisation at the hands of 'others' is the disavowal of responsibility for this state of affairs by the dominant power of the day, whether by the colonial regimes of the past or by representatives of the present government.

While such images seem to convey an essential 'grain of truth' about the Damara, they conceal more than they reveal. It is perhaps unfair to appropriate the remarks of this Damara politician out of context: they are extracts from a speech which opened an exhibition of photographs made by fourteen photographers from Damaraland. This exhibition was the culmination of a project I had started as part of my field research; it has ended up as a core element in this thesis - the photographs themselves are reproduced in the first chapter. In basing my ethnographic research squarely within the context of visual representations made of and by the Damara themselves, I was confronted by the paradox that 'the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled" (Berger 1972:7); that the way we see the world is dependent on what we know and believe. The opening speech from which the title is derived is discussed at length in

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[1] A similar constellation of images have been employed to characterise those labelled 'Bushmen' in Namibia. Robert Gordon's historical critique of the 'Bushman myth' (1992) raises many parallels with the ongoing process of the construction of Damara ethnicity through the interplay of policy, economics and academic discourse as they mesh to shape the future of these people.

[2] In post-independent Namibia, it is politically correct to categorise previously designated 'ethnic groups' according to language. However, since these language groups correspond closely to previous ethnic terminology, and as ethnic distinctions within language groups become politically relevant, this practice has begun to lose its potency in political discourse.

Chapter 3, and serves to illustrate one of a number of ways in which discourse is generated from this paradox.

Unlike previous studies of Damaras, the partial ethnography presented in this thesis draws its ultimate authority from photographic images made by the Damara subjects of this study and their comments on them. To this extent, the photographers and all those who took part in the production of the photographic exhibition are co-authors of this ethnography. Both images and comments provide a basis and pretext for discussing the nature of visual representation itself, the history of representations accompanying the formation of Damara identity and the impact which this history has on the politics of development in the present. The use of self-representation through photographic images presents numerous opportunities for ethnographic analysis, any one of which might comprise the subject of a thesis. My use of this methodology is constrained by my research objectives and therefore the photos serve as a means to convey the diversity and richness of communal life in relation to more global concerns surrounding the pastoral economy in general and environmental issues affecting policy and development in particular. These photographic images of people, place and landscape provide a framework from which to discuss the social and environmental history of Damaraland and their relationship to land tenure reform and pastoral development.

Damaraland: Socio-political Background

Although Damaraland no longer officially exists, this communal area of western Namibia which recently comprised the Damaras' 'tribal homeland' has changed very little since Namibia's independence in 1990. This vast semi-arid area (48,000 square kilometres: larger than Denmark; one and a half times the size of Lesotho) wedged longitudinally between the Namib Desert to the west and the predominantly white owned cattle farms which occupy the central savanna plateau to the east, continues to support an impoverished rural population of 30,000 people including several thousand livestock farmers and their families (Maps 1 & 2). It bears many of the hall-marks of Bantustans throughout southern Africa: dependence on migrant labour and the burgeoning of rural settlements into rural ghettos are obvious signs of the gross inequalities fostered by a prolonged and bitter history of colonialism. It is impossible to discuss, let alone understand the lives of

Damaraland's inhabitants without continual reference to this history suffused with the imposition of colonial ideologies and indigenous resistance.

Crossing the border between the communal and commercial farm areas reminds me of that elusive moment which occurs in the daily experience of falling asleep or waking up: our mental state has obviously changed, but the transition itself remains obscure and hidden from consciousness. A similar mental boundary exists in the geography which separates communal and private property, imprinted on the landscape as an artefact of history, separating two inter-connected worlds, dividing wealth from poverty, private property from communal space, a stolid order built on institutionalised force separated from a structured chaos, peripheral and dependent. The crossing has no border posts, sentries or signs; at most it is marked by a cattle grid or a gate opened across the gravel surface of a dusty road.

Depending on where you cross and the time of year, the transition is more or less apparent: in early spring before the rains begin and especially during periods of prolonged drought, the dry standing grass within the neatly fenced commercial farms gives way immediately to bare earth, sand and rock within the old homeland. Infrequently, good summer rains erase this visible difference, sweeping the landscape in a continuous sea of grass and ephemeral flowers. A more or less sparse canopy of thorn scrub or mopane woodland flows uninterrupted across this implausible border, and rapidly thins as it stretches westwards into the communal heartland towards the Namib Desert. The widely dispersed, shaded commercial farm houses on one side are juxtaposed by clusters of rusty shacks, like ovens, baking in the intense glare of the desert sun, on the other. On the communal side, fences cease or are neglected and vandalised - the country is open to the meandering whims of donkey cart tracks and foot paths, an infinite number of short cuts and detours through the bush, dividing and converging in a loose web connecting each place to place.

Having entered the communal area, there is no mistaking the transition. Isolated farm houses and tin shacks, clustered settlements, villages and a few small towns are scattered across a vast and open landscape of undulating plains interrupted by granite intrusions, or broken mesas of Karoo sediment and sheet lava; the eroded remains of the coastal escarpment echo a violent past of continental collision and division. A

tracery of water courses and fan-shaped catchments grow into westward tending rivers, dry throughout most of the year but yielding cool water from bore-holes and wells, sustain homesteads and villages with their flocks of goats and sheep, some cattle, donkeys and small gardens.

Damara place names throughout much of Central Namibia attest to a pre-colonial history when Damara-speaking people inhabited this area as pastoralists and hunters-gatherers, migrating between water-holes and pasture land depending on unpredictable yearly rainfall. By the mid-nineteenth century when European traders were busy exploiting and decimating Namibia's large herds of game, elephants and ostrich, the Damara inhabitants in these western areas had already retreated to the more inaccessible mountains of the Khomas Hochlands, Erongo and Brandberg, at least partly as a defence against their more organised and aggressive Herero and Nama neighbours. /Â ‡Gomhes, (more commonly known by its Herero name Okombahe) became the first permanent settlement ceded by the Germans to the Damara in 1894. A fluid population of up to one thousand inhabitants lived here then, being drawn from groups of Damara living as far away as Otjimbingwe, Brandberg and Sesfontein, along with varying numbers of Nama and Herero. During the next seventy years this tiny enclave was to grow by stages into a "Native Reserve" of 1,800 square kilometres in 1923, enlarged to 4,200 square kilometres in 1947. By 1964, the Odendaal Commission, which was responsible for fixing the new tribal 'homeland' borders of 'grand apartheid', expanded this area to its present size by incorporating it with three other native reserves (Otjohorongo, Fransfontein and Sesfontein), state land and 223 commercial farms into what became known as Damaraland. After independence, new regions were delimited splitting Damaraland in two, the northern half being included in the Kunene Region and the southern half in Erongo.

The Construction of Damara Identity

The Damara are an anomaly amongst the ethnic groupings of Namibia. Ethnographic classification place them in a pivotal position between racial categories of Bantu, Khoe and San; in economic taxonomies, they fall between foragers, herders and agriculturalists: they are black, like Bantu-speakers but speak Khoekhoe (Damara-Nama) and are known to have practised pastoralism, hunter-gathering, trading and to have been

subjugated, at one time or another, by their more powerful neighbours as slaves and bonded labourers. As a result, the Damara are conceptualised as a melting pot of an ancient underclass, a proto-type of the rural proletariat, as an historically disempowered, dispossessed residual cultural category.[3] At the same time they are typified as an adaptable people who quickly embraced Christianity and Western education; they are thought to be easily acculturated in their emerging roles within an expanding colonial and global economic system and to whom ethnic intermarriage was always common and incorporative, status notwithstanding.[4] The Damara have been variously described as the true aborigines of Namibia (Möller 1974:153), as ancient skilled metal workers (Wikar *in* Mossop, 1935:13), early traders and organised hunters (Alexander 1967 [1838]:133), as the dispossessed slaves of the pastoral Nama (Vedder 1938:35), and as a recent example of colonial ethnogenesis - 'the Cinderella people in Namibia's history" (Venter 1983:43). The scant literature concerned with the Damara people is set within the context of colonialism and written by non-Damara observers, often by direct agents of colonial power. Taken together, the defining characteristic of these representations is precisely a lack of definition; the tragic irony of this is not lost on the Damara themselves. "We grew up stupid" or "Our Damara people are sick" typify self-representations of unease resulting from the problematic experience of integration within the Namibian social economy. Much of what fashions this Damara self-identity today is the result of at least two centuries of subjugation associated with negative characterisations inherent to both indigenous and colonial discourse.

Damara identity is the joker in the pack of theoretical and ideological arguments surrounding the anthropology of Southern Africa. The construction of Damara ethnicity highlights the permeable 'fuzziness' of classifications which distinguish between foragers and herders (Barnard 1992: 27-8; Smith 1992:86), Khoisan and Bantu (Schapera 1930; Malan 1980:14; Nurse *et al* 1985:277-8), pristine aborigines (Lee 1979:1) and a historically determined proletariat (Wilmsen 1989:286; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990:489-507), the deep structure of culture as a "foraging ethos" (Barnard 1994:8) versus class analysis based on relations of production (Wilmsen

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[3] These categories have been marked out in detail within the so-called Kalahari Debate (Lee & Guenther 1991; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990. See Barnard 1992b for a full bibliographic summary of this debate.

[4] The acculturation of Damara has been commented on by ethnologists such as Vedder (1928; 1938), Köhler (1956; 1959) and Schmidt (1986; 1990).

1989:20). While this overview of theoretical debates merely skims the surface of contemporary academic controversies, it is possible to locate some aspect of Damara social and cultural history squarely within many of these conceptual categories in turn. Damara identity is continually affected by other's representations: their position within the larger regional and global web of power continuously impinges upon the reproduction of Damara self-image. Nevertheless, the persistent reproduction of a negative image is in itself an indication of a certain continuity of denial, a framing of cultural discourse within dominant ideological limits. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the constructed dichotomy of racial classification and cultural process within ideological discourses which define and create marginality. Unlike the espousal of homogenising nationalism, which seeks to undermine difference in the cause of a larger unity, it is pertinent to address difference from a hermeneutic (Damara) point of view while pointing out that the anomalous position of Damara identity is axiomatic to outmoded but persistent ideologies underpinning national and regional discourse.

If we accept the view of cultural identity as fluid, "subject to the 'play' of history and representation, plural and diverse, if not actually divided, and unified only by those retrospective processes which *narrate* them as unified" (Hall 1996:v), then the dichotomy contained within stereotypical images of Damara identity might be seen as indicative of wider ideological forces which focus on conflicts arising out of power inequality and economic subordination on the one hand and inherent cultural or ethnic 'dispositions' on the other. Narratives which focus on the 'problem' of Damara maladjusted acculturation, manifesting as alcoholism, laziness, domestic violence, marital instability etc., portray the Damara as victims of overarching structural constraints wherein 'race' or 'ethnic character' is dressed up as cultural dispossession: 'culture' is understood as a response to victimisation and marginalisation. Positive images of Damara identity likewise rely on a narrative in which acculturation is the defining positive cultural attribute: christianization, education and loyal service to higher authority for example, are the result of shedding negative indigenous cultural ascriptions (based on poverty, subservience and powerlessness) and the assumption of western modernity, albeit as marginal participants. Hence, the 'culture of poverty' narrative persists as the main prop for a problematised contemporary Damara self-image.

It is ironic, that the discourse surrounding 'ethnic identity' in Namibia has tended to conflate 'culture' and 'race' in the case of almost all other groups including those marginalised darlings of anthropologists, the Bushmen. San, Khoe and Bantu have all been accorded a racial position within a 'tribal paradigm', a 'mode of production' or a 'mode of thought'. The Damara however are lost within these neat systems of classification and are therefore assigned a position similar to that of blacks in Britain "where Asians have 'ethnicity', African-Caribbeans have 'race', a formulation consolidated by the long-standing belief in the cultural vacuity of black life" (Alexander 1996:12). The ascription of 'Damaraness' as stemming from the loss of culture through both pre-colonial and colonial marginalisation focuses both ethnicity and racial classification in a negative definition of culture, an absence of definition, a residual category of neither this nor that.

If it is true to say that "cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid. . ." (Said 1993:68), it is also valid to point out that the construction of identity and difference, whether this is in the form of race, ethnic character or class (based on relations of production), testify to ideologies which have cultural correlates. Culture is seen as an integral ingredient in the construction of identity which, understood as the conscious maintenance of difference through the creation and maintenance of boundaries, also becomes a symbol of difference. The freedom of the individual to move within this grid of cultural, ethnic or racial differences is dependent on the degree to which equality of status and consensus within relations of power exist. It is not my intention to portray the Damara in terms of anthropological debates concerning culture and ideology, but rather to identify and locate the present influence which these exercise in processes of social change taking place in former Damaraland. To the extent that cultures become reified and inscribed within essentialist, racist or liberal notions of cultural difference, the Damara, precisely because of their anomalous position within discourses of difference, have remained on the side-lines of ethnic disputes. Patently, this has not prevented Damara individuals from being embroiled in the heavy racist and ethnic politics of southern Africa. Rather, it has been the chief mechanism for the reproduction of their marginal status.

Language as a cultural marker is another flag which the Damara have been unable to hoist alongside that of other ethnic groups. Today, it is considered politically correct to refer to 'Damara-speakers' in the rhetorical

idiom of post- apartheid Namibia. However, they share this language with 'Nama-speakers', who claim this language as their own as one element in a whole set of residual boundary markers. Furthermore, until recently, the lack of a standard Damara-Nama orthography and an education system dominated by Afrikaans has resulted in few publications in this language; even the government's weekly newspaper (*New Era*) which prints articles in every major Namibian language carries nothing in Damara/Nama. Since independence in 1990, a mass literacy campaign promoting both Damara and English has only just begun to have significant effects in this regard.

In spite of all this, a seemingly disproportionate number of Damara individuals play important roles in national politics, serving as ministers, party officials, and high ranking civil servants under the ruling South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). Apart from indicating the extent to which the forgoing generalisations obtain in the politics of identity, this observation raises the issue of class formation within the national polity. While ethnic politics continue to generate heat within the both local and national political discourse, the ending of apartheid has opened up the possibility of class mobility to black Namibians. In this regard, there is little to differentiate the class interests of whites from those of a rapidly emerging black elite, which inevitably includes many Damara individuals.

The recognition that culture, ethnicity, race and class are themselves cultural constructs implies that they are also subject to negotiation, resistance and subversion. Complex manifestations of this were recorded in the study area as generational, gendered and class oriented responses to rapid socio-political changes. Differences in styles of language, dress, and preferences with regard to music and dance served as external objectified standards within rural Damara 'communities' commonly considered to be homogenous by outsiders. The constant creation and reworking of 'style' in response to contemporary media influences, consumerism, a variety of church denominations, and the residual signs of the colonial past embodied in the manners of the older generation are all indications of the extent to which the outside world has impinged on such rural populations. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to elaborate on such differentials within Damara communities, the whole idea of community, and what it actually means to its 'members', is crucial to it.

The idea of kinship and its relation to community is also central to any analysis of Damara community, as is the function of reciprocity and

property relations, and the conceptualisation of spatial boundaries and inter-group identities. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate these in depth. What is essential however, is to contextualise the economy of pastoralism within a sociological analysis based on such a framework of ethnographic research, in order to elucidate generalised micro-level practices in relation to government policy and development initiatives.

History and the Meaning of Place

One of the approaches which I take in untangling the skein of cultural, social, economic and political factors which underlie the response of communal farmers to development is by contextualising the history of Okombahe in terms of the socially constructed and competing meanings of place, both as narratives and embodied experience.

Places are obviously more than analytical anthropological constructs. "They are politicised, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions" (Rodman 1992: 641). They are created through experience, through living. Places are narratives in their own right, not just features of locals' and geographers' narratives. Places come into being through discourse, arising from both subjective, phenomenological experience and decentred, objective conceptualisation. "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings." (Said 1993: 6) These ideas, forms, images and imaginings grow directly out of the unique reality experienced by each inhabitant and the web of shared and contested meanings which this creates between people and places. The narrative forms which arise out of the experience of forced removals, the creation of homelands, political exile, and internal migration are common globally and at the same time find unique expression in the histories of individuals and places. It is the contest over this multivocal Damara history which animates both the ethnographic and the empirical research presented in this thesis.

The second approach which I employ to understand the meaning of place is through the structuring of space in terms of property relations. As Ferguson observes,

> property is not a relation between people and things. It is a relation between people, concerning things. And if property is always a social relation, one can state as a corollary that property is always structured - always, everywhere, property is structured (1990:142).

This structure is implicated in everything from personal identity to leadership and political consciousness, from livestock farming practices to migration and drought coping strategies. To a large extent property relations in Damaraland are flexible and uninstitutionlised, forming a core of 'common sense' practice which renders them invisible to external observers.

Typical of Damara property relations is a land tenure practice which is crucial to the ability of farmers to survive in this semi-desert area, riven by frequent and prolonged droughts. In common with many other people living in communal areas throughout dryland Africa, the Damara have been blamed for causing land degradation and unsustainable use of natural resources due to a land tenure system which leads to uncontrolled overgrazing. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to examine the actual impact which Damara farmers have had on the environment and to argue that like other aspects of property as social relations, land tenure has evolved as an appropriate and sustainable response to environmental, economic and political circumstances. This 'objectivist' analysis of the relation between Damara farmers and the environment forms a counter weight to a critical, interactive ethnographic approach using visual and narrative expressions of Damara self-representation to discuss place, property and social interaction.

Land Tenure, Pastoral Development and the Environment

In Namibia today, one of the most emotionally charged and politically difficult issues of social and economic reform is land ownership; approximately 4,000 white farmers continue to own nearly sixty percent of all utilizable agricultural land. During the past seven years it has become evident that the government does not intend to press for radical change in this regard. Its powers to appropriate and distribute private land have been used on only a minor scale; a small number of commercial farms have been purchased in order to resettle destitute and landless people, and financial assistance has been provided to some members of a small emerging black elite to purchase their own commercial farms. Meanwhile, as rural,

communal populations grow, increasing demands are put on scarce natural resources raising concerns about long-term environmental damage. The long over-due communal land tenure reform act has yet to be passed. Given these limitations underlying the extent to which land reform might address the social and economic problems facing the populations of former homeland areas, planners and policy makers have been forced to look elsewhere for solutions.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address national development policy debates, these formed the background to my study. Since my field research was designed to find answers to questions directly relating to the lives of communal farmers, government initiatives concerned with drought relief, desertification, natural resource management and land tenure reform affected the formulation of such questions. How do communal farmers cope with recurrent drought? What, if anything, regulates the practice of land tenure arrangements? How important is the livestock economy to this rural area? What is the relationship between social networks based on kinship and reciprocity and the ability of farmers to migrate during drought? What effects do social stratification, migrant labour, weak local political leadership and urban migration have on this scattered rural population? As I began to find answers to some of these questions, I began to understand the extent to which national programmes and local development initiatives were steeped in discourses which seemed alien to Damaraland's rural population. Furthermore, it seemed that many dubious assumptions were being put forward by planners regarding environmental degradation, inappropriate farming methods, unstable land tenure systems and Damara social organisation.

Today the hiatus occasioned by the collapse of Damaraland's Bantustan administration is slowly giving way to new political and economic structures heavily influenced by centralised state control. The under-funded and weak Regional government plays only a minor role in the burgeoning of rural development projects, an expanding tourist industry, conservation programmes and long awaited land reform. A new generation of development initiatives couched in terms of 'sustainability, 'community based natural resource management' and 'participatory planning' are in many ways as alien to this communal population as their more overtly oppressive predecessors. As the tools of policy, these concepts are well intentioned and to a large extent benign. The tragedy lies in their inability to

address not only the deep poverty of the area, but to simply engage with it in the first place.

This dysfunctional situation has come about as a result of several factors - high on the list of these is a severe limitation in central government capacity coupled with a fragmented socio-political structure at the local level, creating large gaps in the chain of communication necessary for effective policy implementation. This is further complicated by a failure of policy makers to recognise the innate 'common sense' or 'indigenous knowledge' which regulates communal life and makes it possible for communal inhabitants to survive in this harsh environment. This was brought home to me forcefully on several occasions, one of which will serve as an example of what I am talking about.

In October 1995, I attended a 'farmers day' in Okombahe, along with about eighty local men and women who were addressed by veterinary and agricultural advisors, most of whom were white and had worked in the commercial farming areas prior to independence. The meeting took place in the dining hall of the old age home known locally as Blau Berg, (or ' blue mountain' because it is the largest structure in the village and painted blue) built by the Bantu Administration in the 1960s to house 'retired' Damaras sent here from other parts of Namibia: it is now a derelict shell, the vandalised heart of this rural ghetto.

It seemed fitting that the speaker who opened the meeting did so with an over-head projection depicting wealth disparity in Namibia: the poorest fifty-five percent of the population 'own' three percent of Namibia's GDP; the richest three percent 'own' seventy percent of national wealth. Even those illiterate people who couldn't understand this visually abstract formulation, presented in the form of pie-charts and graphs, knew that they fell into a category well below the average annual per capita income of $N280 (£47)[5] of the poorest fifty-five percent. What these statistics fail to take account of is the equally wide disparity of income existing within Okombahe itself: my own research suggests that the meagre GDP of Okombahe (and Damaraland generally) is similarly divided between the few *relatively* wealthy and the many *absolutely* poor.[6] The implications of this

[5] Throughout this thesis an exchange rate of N$6 to £1 has been used. During fieldwork, the exchange rate was approximately N$5.6/£1; rapid devaluation in the wake of South Africa's political transition resulted in an exchange rate of N$7.7/£1 during 1996.

[6] Absolute poverty is measured against the minimum food requirements "necessary to maintain a person's physical efficiency" (Iliffe 1987:2). The occurrence of undernutrition in

disparity, in appreciating how the poor actually survive, are rarely even guessed at by outsiders.

One after another, these experts gave lectures on various aspects of animal health, rangeland management and supplementary livestock feeds. Much of this information was either irrelevant to communal farming conditions or already part of the basic knowledge of communal farmers. To crown it all, one advisor used the 'teach a man to fish' parable to explain the purpose of a new rangeland management initiative proposed for the Okombahe area.[7] Many farmers were perplexed by the purpose of this development programme, others found it patronising and offensive. After all, these skilled communal farmers had managed to survive extreme climatic, environmental and socio-economic conditions through ingenuity and hard work which few commercial farmers could possibly withstand. The cultural divides engendered by 100 years of colonialism live on in the mental landscapes of many Namibians, between ethnic and 'racial' groups, and between rapidly emerging socio-economic classes. The potential tragedy facing the inhabitants of Damaraland is that the limited efforts of well intentioned government and donor agencies to rectify the hardship, inequalities and lost opportunities of the past will fail because of the false assumptions engendered by the difficulties in bridging this gulf.

The outcome of this farmers' meeting in Okombahe was indicative of the misunderstandings which commonly arise when outside advisors attempt to introduce development to rural farmers in Damaraland. Development policy is informed by a specifically western way of knowing: "like 'civilisation ' in the nineteenth century, 'development' is the name not only for a value, but also for a dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us" (Ferguson 1990:xiii). Implicit to the production of this kind of knowledge is the perpetuation of a 'cultural' imperialism in the form of centralised bureaucratic and state power. It is cultural in the sense that it is based on a global economic structure which grew out of colonialism, and continues to address a colonial legacy, having become generalised and claiming legitimacy as a model of how (other) people experience the world: it seeks to order the way the world should work on this basis. Past ethnographic representations are implicit to

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children is a wide-spread indication of absolute poverty in Damaraland where the incidence of child stunting is one of the highest in Namibia at forty-five percent (Rohde 1993:25)

[7] While few if any of these dryland farmers knew the first thing about fishing, most of then are steeped in biblical imagery, and so this metaphor was not entirely out of place.

the functioning of this discourse: characterisations of Namibia's ethnic groups were a product of and a prop to imperialist ideologies resulting in Apartheid. In spite of the demise of these overtly racist policies since independence, Namibians are still subject to similar forms of misrepresentation under the guise of development paradigms which seek to regulate and define social reality in terms of an objectivist division between humans and their environment. Development in the form of conservation policy and land tenure reform are often little more than tinkering around the edges of the huge social and economic disparities inherited from colonialism. This is indicative of the impotence of the government's socialist agenda in the face of the overwhelming force of the late twentieth century capitalist global economy and illustrates the way this dominant ideology disguises itself in politically acceptable forms. "Like 'goodness' itself, 'development' in our time is a value so entrenched that it seems almost impossible to question it, or to refer to it by any other standard beyond its own" (1990: xiv). As Barnard points out in relation to Bushmen development initiatives, the perceptions and meanings of development objectives "in the context of [local] cultures may be very different from their context in the planners' world view" (1995:2).

Fieldwork

The core of my field research took place between February 1995 and April 1996. During this time I spent just over twelve months living in the small farm settlement of Jansen just outside the village of Okombahe. Previous to this I had visited the area during field trips to Damaraland as part of my research into issues of land tenure and migration in response to drought during the years 1992, 1993 and 1994.[8] When I returned to Jansen in 1995, I did what I imagined anthropologists were supposed to do in "those ritually repetitive confrontations with the Other which we call fieldwork" (Fabian 1983:149): I 'hung out', made friends, followed up acquaintances made on previous visits, attended meetings, spoke with officials, struggled to communicate in Damara and as far as possible tried to make myself useful to my neighbours. I worked in gardens, accompanied herders to the veld, gathered wild honey and veld foods with friends, helped neighbours collect fire-wood and taxied them to and from the village.

[8] See Rohde 1993; 1994.

Much of my time was spent sitting in the shade, listening to gossip and domestic conversation, sharing cigarettes, beer and food and asking an inordinate number of questions about everything I could think of. In other words, my 'research' was more involved with making and maintaining personal relationships than pursuing a predetermined set of objectives. I developed strong relationships with a variety of men, women and children, starting with the extended family who generously allowed me to make my permanent camp next to their homestead. I felt privileged to be called 'uncle', 'older brother', 'son' and 'gorilla man' by three generations of the Pietersen household and through them was given access to the social lives of school children, young adults, my middle aged contemporaries and elders. From time to time I camped at other outlying settlements or visited friend's relatives in the urban townships in the surrounding commercial farm areas.

At the same time, my interest in the ecology of this semi-arid environment grew. Like everybody else, I began to long for rain and when it finally came was amazed at the dynamism and beauty of the landscape, transformed from a drought-stricken desert into a luscious prairie land. Annual grasses and flowers appeared as if by magic and within a matter of weeks set seed and began to dry. Bare trees and shrubs produced foliage, flowers and fruits which were gathered and eaten, or brewed into alcoholic drinks. I began collecting botanical specimens and was gradually able to identify the area's major tree, shrub and grass species. As a respite from constant socialising, I began to explore the veld, searching out the sites of archival landscape photographs and conducting vegetation surveys. As a result of this, I began to understand the phenology of important tree and shrub species and at the same time to developed a patchwork of insights into the history of local vegetation change.

Having begun my field research with an unstructured, open-ended approach, by the time I left Okombahe the major themes of this thesis had been consolidated. Without having consciously planned it, these grew out of my interest in photography. During the early stages of my fieldwork, I realised that my ability to photograph the people and landscapes of Damaraland was severely limited, by both my ignorance of what I was seeing and by my lack of photographic skill. So when the idea of providing cameras to friends and acquaintances came to me by chance, I realised that this would provide me with an ideal medium to discuss many aspects of the personal and social experiences of the people around me. In a similar vein,

the use of archival landscape photos became a starting point for looking into both social and environmental history.

When the time finally came to commit myself to writing about all of this, many compromises had to be made; some of the most important aspects of my personal experience had necessarily to be omitted from this account in the interests of structuring a thesis which combines several research disciplines. As Fabian warns: "these disjunctions between experience and science, research and writing, will continue to be a festering epistemological sore" in the discipline of anthropology as long as researchers disavow their personal relationships with the people they are writing about (1983: 33). To the limited extent that I have engaged in ethnographic discourse, I have tried to evoke the expressive poetics of personal encounters, which might otherwise only be accessible in fiction, through visual imagery and my involvement in its production.

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts which roughly correspond to the epistemological styles of ethnography, social history and environmental history.

Part I is concerned with issues of ethnographic representation and is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 explores the practical and theoretical issues raised by the work of sixteen Damara photographers. A description of the events which led to these photographs being shown as an exhibition precedes the presentation of the photographs themselves. These images form the chapter's core and provide a basis for the theoretical analysis of the physiological, cognitive, and political interpretations of visual representation. In Chapter 2, I discuss the work of each photographer from a critical and personal perspective; the photographs provide a basis for exploring social, economic and cultural aspects of Damara experience and provide a pretext for ethnographic description. The politics of representation, expressed in both historical and contemporary discourse surrounding Damara identity is the subject of Chapter 3.

Part II examines the social history of Okombahe. The meaning of place, as a socially constructed and continually evolving locus of meaning is analysed in three chapters which examine the historical experience of the inhabitants of Okombahe in relation to regional economic, social and

political processes. Chapter 4 examines the first fifty years of Okombahe's existence as a settlement (1870 to 1920) in the context of colonial incursion and consolidation using a critical collation derived from the research of several Namibian historians. Chapter 5 brings this history into the present tense by tracing the responses of Okombahe's pastoralists to cyclic climatic patterns and the evolution of the 'reserve'/'homeland system'. Contemporary socio-economic conditions in Okombahe village and its outlying settlements are made comprehensible through this historical contextualisation in Chapter 6.

Part III summarises my research into the environmental history of the arid and semi-arid areas of western Namibia, within the semi-desert savanna transition zone, also classified as part of the Nama-Karoo Biome which dominates the vegetation of western Damaraland. Chapter 6 is a detailed account of four sites which illustrate the problems of constructing environmental history using matched ground photography as a methodology for ascertaining vegetation change. The results of an overall analysis of 38 photo sites (based on 49 matched photographs) which were surveyed during fieldwork lead to the formulation of several key questions in relation to vegetation change and to human impacts on this environment. Chapter 7 focuses these questions through the use of matched aerial photography, rainfall data and the social histories of six communal settlements including Okombahe. Several conclusions are drawn which have important implications on prospective land reform legislation as well as other government policies pertaining to social and environmental issues.

Finally, a conclusion draws all the strands of this research together and makes suggestions as to how this information might ultimately reflect on the daily lives of communal farmers and their extended families, who, against great odds, survive in this former homeland with fortitude, dignity and humour.

PART I

ETHNOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS

CHAPTER 1
PHOTOGRAPHY, FIELDWORK ANDETHNOGRAPHY: "HOW WE SEE EACH OTHER"

Such is the photograph: it cannot *say* what it lets us see.
Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1993: 100)

Yet it might be that the photographic ambiguity, if recognised as such, could offer to photography a unique means of expression.
John Berger in *Another way of telling* (1989: 96)

'How we see each other' was the title of an exhibition of photographs which were made by sixteen individuals and their families living in the area of my fieldwork between February and April 1995. This exhibition and the photo project from which it arose, were one aspect of my fieldwork which had the general purpose of presenting an ethnography of the predominantly Damara speaking inhabitants of Okombahe. These photos form the core of this chapter. The presentation of this visual material is preceded by a short discussion of some of the theoretical and practical considerations which I find most persuasive as a justification for eliding the ethnographic norm of representation through writing. This theme is taken up with somewhat more intensity in the concluding section of this chapter where I explore the theoretical possibilities which lend photographic representation legitimacy as an ethnographic idiom, a discursive medium which because of its association with colonialism and objectivist approaches to ethnography is only rarely acknowledged in the discipline of anthropology.

Photos and Fieldwork

Anthropology and photography have followed parallel and intersecting courses since their origins in the 19th century (Edwards 1992:1-16). On the one hand this concurrence can be thought of as a means whereby anthropology appropriated and used the still photograph as a tool in its evolving enterprise and on the other as a history of "the significatory frameworks whereby (photographic) images are endowed and closed with meaning" (Pinney 1992: 90). Part of the richness of the photograph resides precisely in the indeterminacy of its meaning in the shifting context of

production and consumption. Still photographs embody the relationships between photographer and photographed, elucidating the social processes inherent in the creation and consumption of images while at the same time eliding a strict definition of the image's meaning. Likewise, culture (and the study of culture) which "is a contract between creators and consumers" (Barthes 1993: 28) can only be explored through an approach which recognises this plurality of meaning.

Recent critical approaches to the use of photography in colonial and ethnographic discourse have examined the ideological purposes underpinning this use of visual 'evidence' (Pinney 1992:74; Marcus 1994:38). Ethnographic methodology itself has:

> strangely anachronistic echoes, harking back to the classical credo that 'seeing is believing'. In this it is reminiscent of the early biological sciences, where clinical observation, the penetrating human gaze, was frankly celebrated (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 8).

The very act of perception itself is an acquired and hence a cultural skill, a cognitive process which involves the construction of a personal world as part of a shared communal and cultural one.

> Human beings do not read the environment the way a computer reads a diskette, nor do they simply see it through a veil of pre-arranged words and symbols. Rather, in understanding and constructing their environments, they use prelinguistic capacities for perception, categorization, memory and evaluation, and when they do formulate their understandings in terms of words and symbols, they may use them in ways that are creative and idiosyncratic (Ingham 1996:54).

Perception, sight and vision do not exist in isolation, they arise in a world of movement and behaviour, through interaction and exploration. Learning to see is usually achieved so unconsciously at an early age that its immense complexity remains hidden from us. It is this ocular unconscious which both enables and modifies our vision of the world. "Its power... lies precisely in the biological ease of vision which naturalises what is in fact a cultural construct" (Kliem 1995, quoted in Hayes 1996:9). It constitutes a kind of second nature, a visual habitus which gives support and coherence to an invisible subjective whole. "It is insufficient to see; one must look as well" (Sachs 1995: 111): it is this 'second nature' inherent in 'looking' which

determines and informs so much of the photographic material related to ethnographic representation.

On the other hand, poststructuralist and deconstructionist writers (e.g. Burgin 1982, 1986; Pinney 1990, 1992) idealise both the sensate and ideological filters through which we perceive the human body and its material relations, as a *tabula rasa* inscribed with arbitrary semantic categories:

> Outside of discourse or the splintering subject or the floating sign there is, for them, no enduring objective world. Rejecting all traffic with reality as brute 'positivism' - as a matter of physical properties imposing themselves on passive subjects - they are unreceptive to the idea that material facts have any role at all in human experience. Yet there is undeniable evidence that biological contingencies constrain human perception and social practice, albeit in ways mediated by cultural forms (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:40).

The history of culturally mediated materialities - the human body, physical objects - is the temporal interface between physical 'facts' and social values, where collectivities emerge as dispositions and common practice.

Until recently, the 'ethnographic gaze' of the photographer has been reproduced in the form of images depicting 'natives', 'ethnic groups' or exotic 'others' almost exclusively by outsiders, usually by white, European males.[1] I decided to turn this situation on its head by giving cameras to the Namibians among whom I was living. I hoped that they would show me

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[1] Notable exceptions to this include studies of Navajo film makers (Worth and Adair 1975); Chalfen's interest in 'home-movie' making in the USA(1975); and Hubbard's selection of photographs made by native American youth (1994). During the last five years or so, self-representation has become wide-spread in both still photography and video media: the Guardian's publication of photos taken by people living rough on the streets of London and the BBC's Video Nation are obvious examples. I know of several experiments similar to the Okombahe Photographer's Project: The Cornwall Young Women's Photography Project organised by the Falmouth based photographer Valerie Reardon involved women living on low-incomes who were interested in using the medium of photography to explore female identity (Reardon 1994); the Pavilion in Leeds, one of the few centres for women photographers in Britain which has produced critical work starting out from a position similar to that of the Okombahe project, but developing the expressive and critical sides of photographic representation to a greater extent (Chaplin 1994: 112-123); and Wendy Ewald's work form Gujurat where she taught rural school children how to develop and print their own photographs (Ewald 1996). During the 1990s photography as an educational tool has become almost commonplace: programmes developed by organisations such as Glasgow's Street Level Gallery have included projects and exhibitions by groups as diverse as women on probation, school children and social workers. Similar projects have been organised by the Photographers Gallery in London (Wombel 1997) and the Edinburgh based photographer Kenny Bean, who has worked with school children in Leith and Nepal.

something about how they looked at themselves and their world. What meanings would be generated from this intersection of gazes taken one step closer to the source of my interest? Would this enable me to interpret their expressive visual sense, their world of spatial and social relationships?

The photographic images which open this account were produced and contextualized by people from Okombahe; they constitute an 'insiders' view of daily life. They portray the concerns, values and aspirations of 'ordinary' men and women from youth to old age and at the same time, provide a wealth of detail relating to material conditions and social interactions. These photographs and their author's comments articulate a narrated world, one in which seeing, no less than saying, implies a constructed reality of intelligible relationships. As a whole, the images create a multi-vocal discourse about life in Okombahe, arising from both conscious and 'taken for granted' realities of everyday living.

By opening my account of fieldwork through the images and narratives of the people who form the subject of my study, I hope to avoid (for the time being) some of the problems inherent in writing ethnography. The complicated business of representation and the construction of 'knowledge of the other' is thrown back onto the 'subjects' themselves, who address the viewer and reader directly. The act of 'othering' becomes a symbolic 'selfing'; in this sense the politics of representation are confronted at the outset. The method in which anthropology constructs its object says as much, if not more, about ourselves and our society as those about whom we write (and photograph). I am not disclaiming the empirical value and authority of ethnographic representation *per se*, but it is essential to acknowledge the inherently political nature of ethnographic discourse, which after all, in Namibia has a particularly nasty history.

The story of the photography project lends itself to an experimental approach to writing ethnography, first of all by its implicit recognition of the complex matrix of representations which are generated in and around rural Damara speakers. It is multi-vocal in the primary sense of incorporating diverse individual representations and narratives; it is dialogic insofar as many aspects of the project involved negotiation between myself and photographers relating to the objectives of the project and interpretations of individual photographs; it is reflexive from the point of view of the photographers, their subjects, myself as an active participant and the public at large in response to the photographs mounted as an exhibition. Both the

images and the photographer's comments on them open the possibility of rethinking the issue of distance and otherness, and directly address questions concerning cultural space, the sense of temporality and narrative authority. An attention to the process of the project as a whole, rather than to the photographs themselves, as artefacts, contributes to a resolution of some of the problems of writing ethnography and representing 'others'.

Another reason for introducing an account of Okombahe through photographs is that my fieldwork there coincided roughly with the course of the photography project which took a year to complete. Many of my friends and neighbours became involved and it was one of the ways in which I was able to establish active, reciprocal relationships with people during the time I was trying to learn the Damara language as well as all the other unspoken languages of social interaction relating to status, identity, personal space, humour, emotion, exchange, trust. . . all articulated by various degrees of the visual and the verbalised. The story of the project follows not only my personal narrative of fieldwork, but also the story of the project to its completion as an exhibition held at the National Art Gallery in Windhoek. The shared reality of this experience (and reality must be shared to become real) provided a grounding from which I began to understand social and cultural processes relating to broader themes of property relations and development which will be explored during the course of this thesis.

The Photo Project: Methodology

Prior to arriving in Okombahe, I had visited many farms and settlements across Damaraland as part of my research into farmers' responses to drought and issues related to land tenure generally but I rarely stayed in any one place for longer than a few weeks. I was therefore looking for a base where I could stay for an extended period of time, somewhere that was in the heart of a farming community, somewhere with shade and a source of clean water, a place where the problems of alcohol abuse were minimal and a situation which would afford me some privacy. I had first visited Jansen, a small settlement 5 kilometres down river from Okombahe, in October 1992 when I had been taken there to see a garden project and was impressed by the relatively lush fruit trees and productive vegetable plots adjacent to the dry river bed of the Omaruru. I re-visited Jansen several times during the following two years, camping beneath the dense Prosopis trees and striking

up a friendship with a young man who it later transpired was well known to be an inveterate liar and petty thief. However, in my innocence, I determined to make this my base and so arrived with Annatjie, my interpreter, a young Nama woman from the south, late one summer's evening and set up camp within 50 yards of what was to become my adapted family.

Over the following days and weeks I met the heads of all the families in Jansen and began to introduce myself to people living in scattered settlements along the river and make occasional forays to Okombahe. I interviewed farmers and counted livestock and began to look for people who would be interested in taking photographs. The process of selecting photographers was rather *ad hoc* : I wanted to include as wide a range of people as possible in terms of age, sex and circumstance, but it hardly seemed to matter where I started. I had no way of judging the suitability of potential photographers and left much of the selection up to chance and my shaky instincts.

At this stage it was nearly impossible to convey the reasons behind my eccentric offer of a free camera, film and processed prints although I tried to explain that my research involved finding out how people saw the world around them, through photographs. I said that life in Okombahe was in many ways unique and unknown to the outside world; that as photographers they should think about how they would like to portray their personal experience of rural life and finally that their photos might eventually be exhibited in Windhoek. I presented individuals with the opportunity to use a camera (most had never done so before), and to photograph whatever subjects interested them. I emphasised that their finished work would be shown to a wider audience of people who would otherwise never begin to imagine what life here was really like. I also suggested that personal, informal photographs were just as interesting as consciously posed images, and that they should consider concentrating on subjects which conveyed the flavour of their immediate circumstances. It is difficult to know how much of this was taken to heart.

There was very little that could go wrong in operating the disposable 35mm cameras: a shutter button, film winder with frame numbers and a flash button are the only movable parts. It seemed necessary to stress that they should be kept clean and out of the heat. After a few minutes of instructions regarding lighting, framing and the use of the flash, the

photographers were ready to start. They were given between two and four weeks to complete the film of 24 frames and many were given a second camera after having discussed the results of the first film. Altogether I distributed twenty-four cameras to sixteen people, although it would almost be more accurate to say that twelve families participated: in many cases the cameras were shared either by a husband and wife or by several family members, but in all cases I have credited the work to the person or couple responsible for the camera. Nine women and seven men took part. The ages of the photographers ranged from twenty-two to seventy with an average age of thirty-four. The photographs were made between February and June of 1995.

As each batch of films were completed they were processed and the prints returned to the photographers. We discussed technical issues such as lighting and framing and I then recorded comments on each photograph which were for the most part given in Damara and later transcribed into English with the help of a translator. As far as possible, I let each author's narratives develop without too much direct prompting. I might ask: "Who are these people?" or "Why did you take this picture?": I wanted to avoid the temptation of pursuing my own narrow agenda in the hope that each individual photographer would elaborate his or her own motivations and interests. An unfocused discursive quality pervades the narratives which emerged. Discussion often took place in the context of a large family gathering where stories were told by and about the people depicted in the pictures - hilarity and jokes spilled over into serious considerations of the hardships of daily life; emotion and irony were intermingled in accounts of friends, family and personal histories. This viewing of the photographs became a social event in itself. The books of snap-shots from earlier films are often present in subsequent photos: the business of looking at themselves and each other through these photographs was active and ongoing.

The Photographs

The editing of over 500 photographs for an exhibition required a similar process of dialogue. On the one hand this took place between me and each photographer as we discussed the various merits of each image in relation to its visual clarity and subject matter, on the other, during the final

selection process it became my own internal dialogue as I lived with the photographs and through them re-lived my relationships with the photographers themselves. Regardless of my intentions to present each photographer's work directly and unmediated, my subjectivity is inevitably manifest in the final result.

The construction of the exhibition was conceived as a compromise between the demands of displaying them in a public space and the constraints of placing the narrative content in the form of a book. Thirty-nine images were chosen to be enlarged and framed, based on their visual quality and clarity of subject matter. Again, this selection was made in consultation with the photographers, who in some cases left the final decision up to me. From the remaining images, I chose approximately 200 which together with their narratives conveyed the themes important to each photographer. In only a small number of cases have the images been cropped.[2]

Considering the cheap equipment and the photographers' previous lack of experience, many of the photographs are remarkable for their formal sophistication. A subtle low key personal quality runs through much of the work; at the same time one is struck by the sensitivity and directness of both the subjects and their photographic treatment. In contrast to many contemporary images of rural Africa, these do not portray an exotic 'other', nor are they angst ridden images of poverty or startlingly bizarre juxtapositions of colliding cultures. Neither do they depict the urban romance of unpeopled wildernesses which comprise so many contemporary images of Namibia. They are deeply embedded in and contextualized by the personal lives of their producers. While many of the photos fulfil our aesthetic expectations of what constitutes a 'good' composition, they also pose a critical counterpoint to the slick professional images which we have come to expect in a world awash with photographs.

The norms which organise our evaluation of photographs concern not only uncovering the meaningful intentions of the photographer, but placing this meaning within the context of the prevailing time - in it's aesthetic, political and cultural present. Postmodern critics such as Victor Burgin assert that the message, mood or feeling of a photo does not depend on

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[2] Two portraits made by Linda Axakhoes were cropped to accentuate the diamond shaped frames of the originals; two of Albert /Haseb's photos were enlarged and cropped in order to give definition to their subjects. In total nine photos were altered for similar reasons.

something individual and mysterious but rather on our common sense knowledge of typical representations of prevailing social facts and values: only through its position within an ongoing discourse can a photograph yield a meaningful impression (1982:41). "In other words, the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the possibility of meaning" (Sekula 1982:91). But the reading of a photograph as text cannot be exhausted by reference to semiological systems of interpretation. The ability to perceive is born out of our subjective experience of a world which has common structural elements - vision is learned through imitation and affinity, bodily experience and memory (Sachs 1995:103-4).

Implicit to the entire process of how we see each other, is a continual negotiation of meaning across social and cultural space, involving transitions from the personal to the public, between rural and urban, periphery and centre, all mediated by images and informed by ideology (Appadurai 1986: 360).

> By the end of the nineteenth century, black identities in South Africa were being shaped less by either indigenous or mission intentions than by the gathering forces of the colonial state. Whatever their local meanings, bodies, dress, and 'life-style' were made over into signs of gross difference; into the distinctions of race, gender, and culture by which Africans were being incorporated into the lowest reaches of a rising industrial society. (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 44)

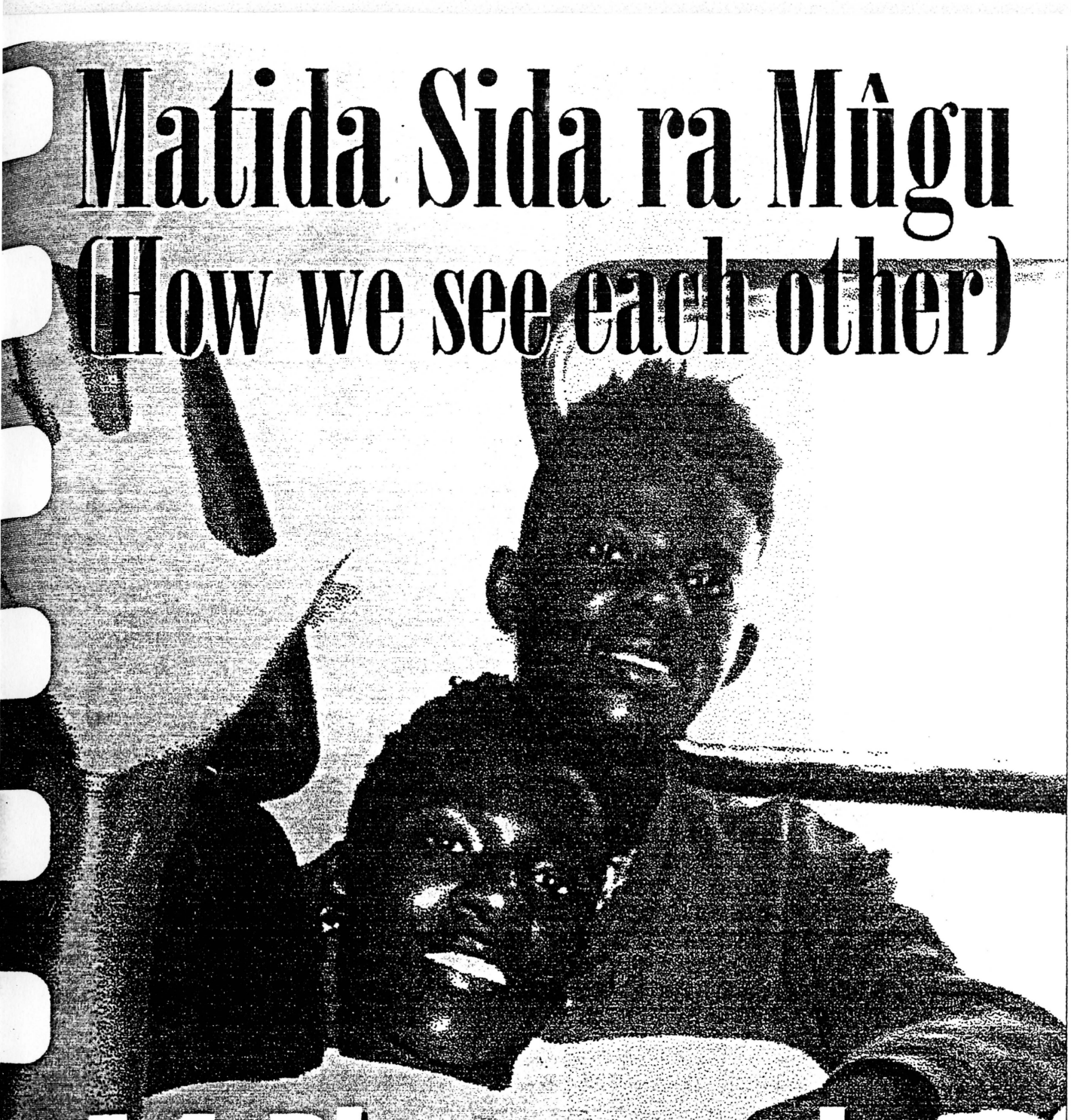
Many of the photographs from Okombahe function as reminders of subjective experience, of emotional bonds which defy history, ciphers of memory which encapsulate subjective experience outside of time (Ingham 1996; Berger 1989). The exhibition is thus a medium through which to investigate the nature of representation (and photography), specifically in relation to the people of Okombahe but also as a reference to more general theoretical concerns. The title of the exhibition, *Matiba sida ra mûgu (How we see each other)*, refers literally to the photographers but obviously has metaphorical connotations about fieldwork, anthropological accounts and representation generally.

The high point of the photo project was the opening night of the exhibition, held at the National Art Gallery of Namibia in the capital Windhoek. A chaotic mix of Namibian social and cultural worlds met here on equal terms: I shall never forget the surprise and excitement on the faces of the photographers as they confronted the images and narratives of their

personal lives in this distanced, genteel and sterile context - the safe mediated world of the urban art gallery. Issues of race, ethnicity, aesthetics, poverty, power and their representations were both implicit to the social occasion and explicitly reflected in the photographs themselves. This was one of the defining moments in a process which had initially been conceived of as an experiment in fieldwork methodology but which took on a momentum of its own when it entered the public arena as a collective representation of contemporary rural Namibian life. Many of the photographs consciously focus on social and economic issues, others are more closely concerned with personal relationships. They convey an honesty and creative playfulness in the expression of personal identity and sense of place in what might otherwise be seen as a fragmented, transitory and impoverished community. And while these images can be seen to be a product of a specific historical and cultural context they carry a resonance which speaks of and for the majority of Namibians today.

* * *

Matida Sida ra Mûgu
(How we see each other)



14 Photographers from Okombahe

February 24 - March 15, 1995

National Art Gallery of Namibia

Presented by the National Art Gallery of Namibia and the Franco Namibian Cultural Centre



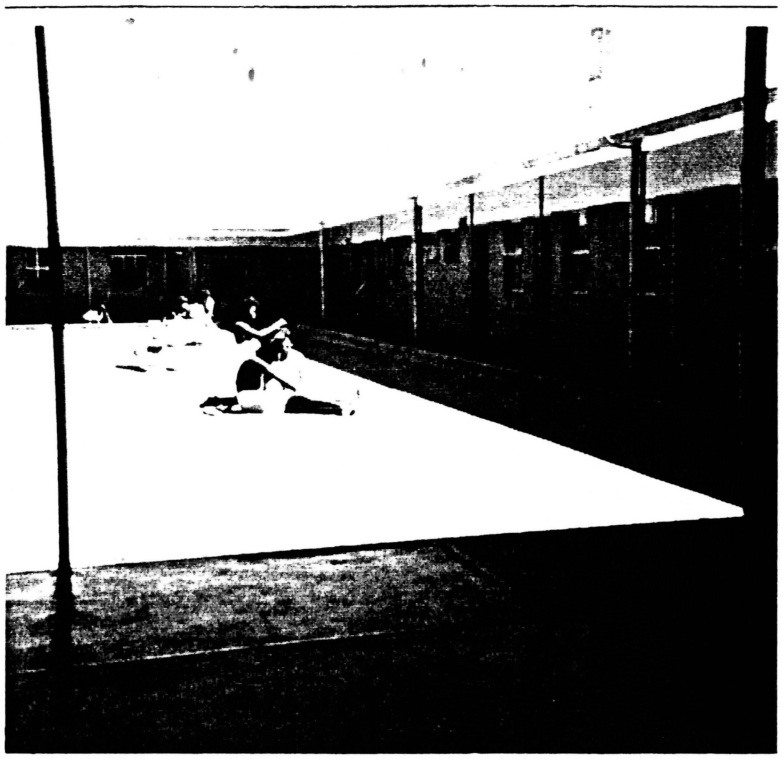
Albert /Haseb

1. These guys were from a wedding, laying down enjoying themselves, drinking, singing in the back of the car.



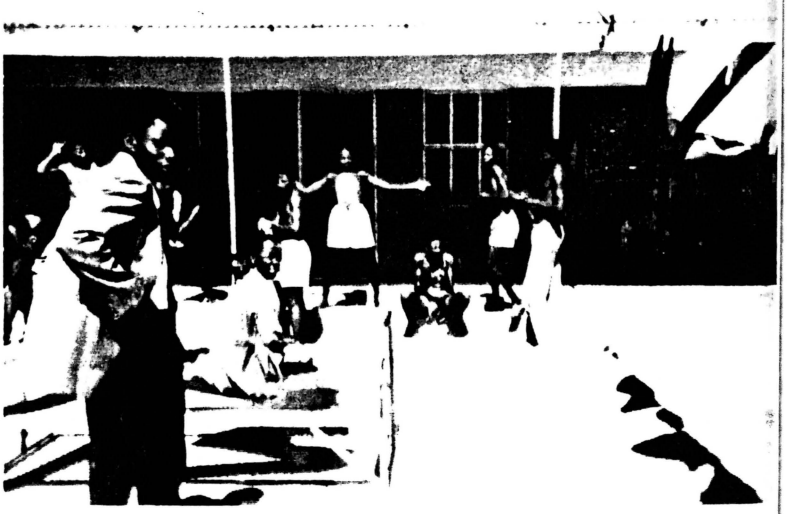
Albert /Haseb

2. The same car full of the wedding party.



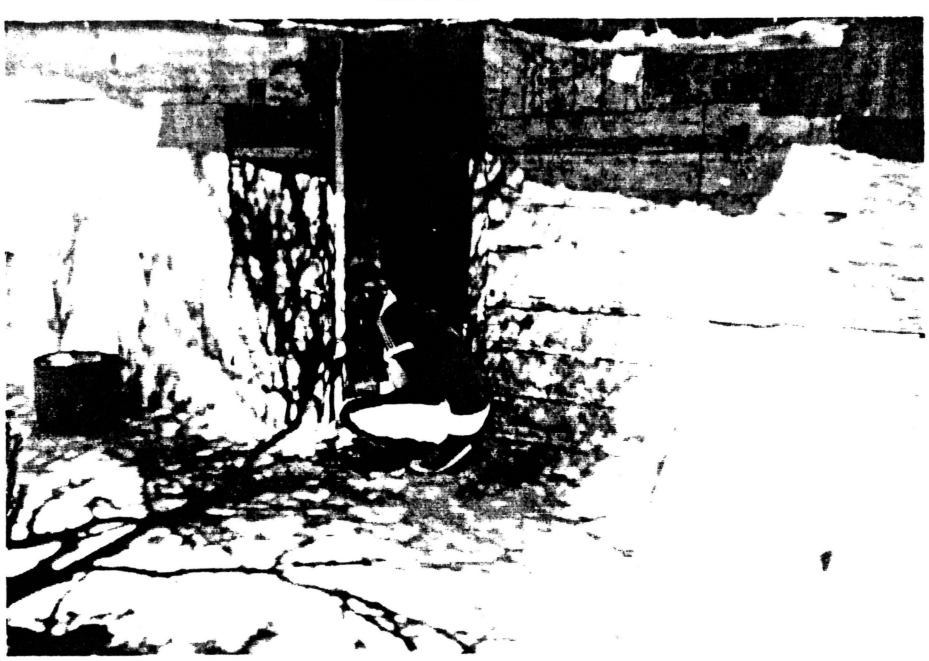
3. The girl's hostel. There are two halls for the girls; one is very clean. These are the elder girls, many have boy friends. This is the other hall, the girls are busy doing each other's hair and getting ready for school the next day. I just wondered, why is one hall so clean and the other not? You can see girls laying around, their beds are outside. They are just running after a nice time! Maybe they were having a long night and didn't feel like getting out of bed in the morning so they brought their beds outside to continue lying down.

4. In the washing room at Diabasen High. The guys are complaining about high paying hostel fees and having to bath in wash-hand basins. Why don't they repair the showers? Matambo from Omaruru is looking up at me. The naked guy at the back nearly flopped when he saw me with a camera.





5. The boys hostel. After their 'shower', they are siting outside, singing and getting ready for lunch, wondering about what kind of food they will get today.





6. This guy is putting electricity into his house by connecting by connecting a supply from his neighbour. His name is 'Autsago' or 'Aobeb', a friendship name meaning "a person who gives'.

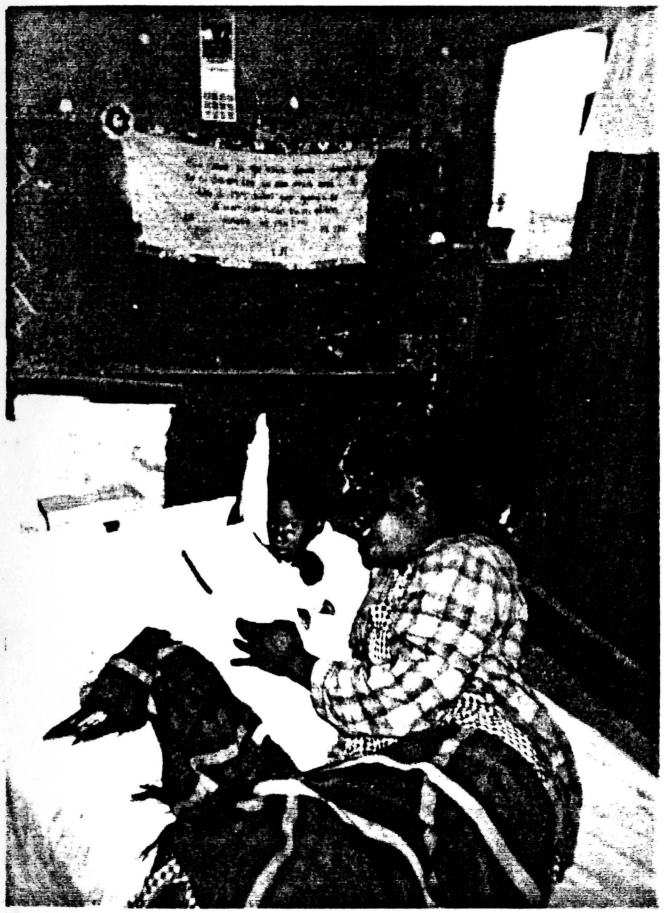
7. These are the workers building the Agricultural Centre. They are just starting set the foundations. Two workers are from Sesfontein. I could tell from their dialect of Damara.



8. At the bottle store. This man is working there, putting on boxes of empty bottles, and as I was talking to him he was telling me a lot of shit, saying: "Last week I was asking you for a cigarette, after you had just been to the shop, and you told me you didn't have one, but I'm sure that is what you were buying in the shop, and today you have the nerve to ask me for one! Well, I don't have one and you can just go your way..." and so I just decided to take his picture. But he said "Don't take a picture of me again!" We call him Ou =Naeb which means either dove or loser.

9. This baby is one of triplets, but her two brothers died on the way to hospital in Omaruru. This is the mother (Alma but we call her Tamaties) and the father (Michael). I took this picture through the window. On the wall they have hung a few words which have been taken from the scriptures - can you see the pictures on the wall? Michael also painted the designs.

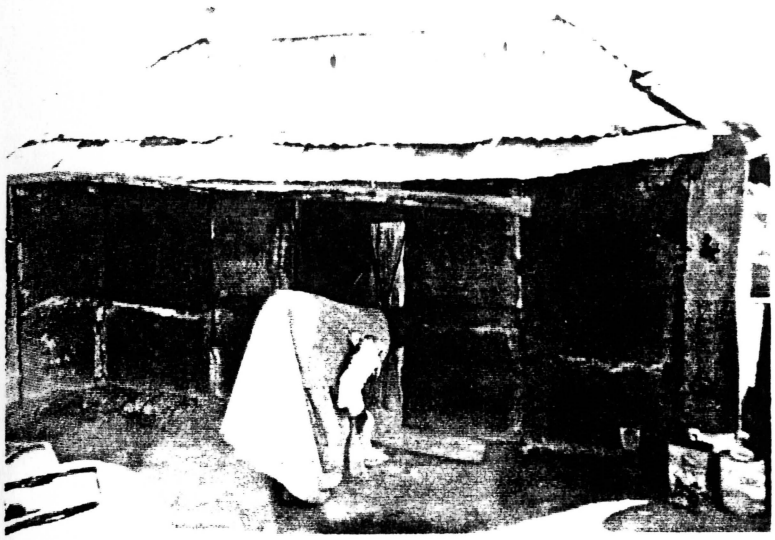




10. Michael's wife Tamaties inside their house: the outside of the house is build with tins, and the inside is covered in clay and cow shit. The embroidered cloth on the wall is another quote from the scriptures.

11. This is Massie, her son and Sylvia. I was eves-dropping on them while they were talking about me. Sylvia, my girl-friend who is pregnant with my child is saying: "If Albert leaves without telling me, I will take a cup and punish him on his head when he returns!" But Massie warned her: "You must be careful - see this child of mine - Where is his father today? He is no longer here".





12. Near the 'People's House. This old woman was cleaning and cooking, and I talked to her a little and quickly took he picture. The moment she saw me do that she became angry saying, "Why are you doing that? Maybe you are a spy!"



13. Then I asked her "What are you cooking in the pot? I am so hungry: could you please give me a little bit of maize meal, even just on a spoon?" Then she said "This is my pot, which I cooked for myself - go to hell!" An old man who was there beside her was also angry.

14. These kids are playing house - you can see the bed where one of them was sleeping, and one is cooking with sand in tins and another has a shop selling sugar, maize meal, soap fish tins and so on.





Albert /Haseb

15. Ouma Basaura (little batsaui) and an old man (I forgot his name) at the shop. The old man was collecting wood and Ouma Basauru was selling fat cookies, and they came together here from different directions.



Albert /Haseb

16. Michael is fixing a radio/tape machine.



17. Telling a nice story and laughing. Ben and a friend of mine from Otjiwarango called Kasubi (shorty).



18. Tiakodle and Size. Tiakodle is a joker who will say something to you to make you angry, then something to cool you down again, he is that type of man. Tiakodle is the name of a famous soccer player, so he called himself that. We call this one Size because he is so fat. You can see how red their eyes are, from drinking the day before.



19. At the bottle store. A relative sister of mine, Tilas who lives in Windhoek. Friends sitting in the shade telling each other old stories and new stories, about boy-friends and many people which they all know.



20. Nobel's brother-in-law Baseth is singing the music of Michael Owos-oab. The song is about the football game when the Kaiser Chiefs took the cup for black Africa. The woman is a relative of mine, named /Obes (beggar), and she was busy drinking the pocket of this man, telling him, "there is no liquor, what should we do now?" To which he will reply, " Don't worry, I will get some and we can share love", then she will say, "Then you must buy a little more liquor", which they do...



21. Nobel's place: Erwin is drunk and Nobel's small son Pukkie is playing in the back of the car. Erwin is singing along with the guy in front about black Africa saying "Yeh, take the cup!"

22. This guy takes care of Damara's house, the school teacher who lives near me in Blauberg. He didn't believe that my camera was real, or took good pictures. I asked him for a cigarette, and after he gave me one, I decided to take a picture of him. He couldn't believe that the first photo would come out, and as he was rewinding a tape I asked him for another cigarette, and he said, "What? From this packet? It is finished, man. I paid for this alone!"





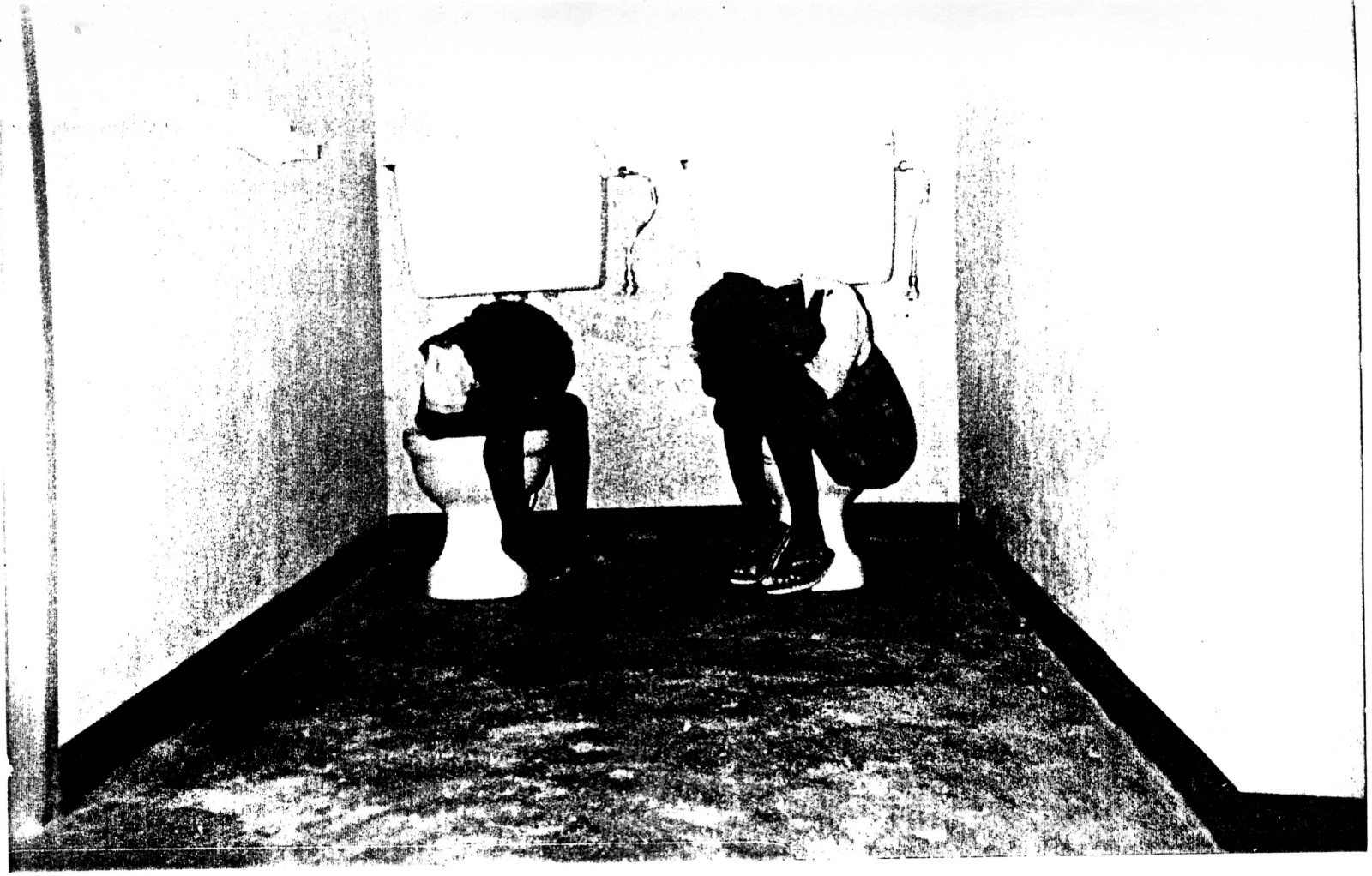
23. This guy came to my house on Sunday morning. He accused me of chasing his girl friend the night before, but he only heard this from someone, and he got my name wrong, so I told him he was wrong and to go and look for that guy somewhere else. But he was still busy saying to me that next time he won't waste time talking, he will just start fighting. I don't know his name, but his girl-friend works at the bottle store and is very pregnant.



24. These two guys were coming from Michael's house, dancing, dancing, singing.



Albert /Haseb 25. Looking into the bottle store. The old lady in front is called Skattelay (Always disaster). She is arguing with the owner of the bottle store saying " Why should this other old lady get Zorba (a type of liquor)? Why can't I get? Both of us are old ladies, and both of us will pay the moment we get our pensions, so what kind of difference are you making between us? I must get that Zorba, otherwise I will start fighting her outside.



Christine Maletsky

1. I took this picture to show how we teach the children in the kindergarten how to use a toilet. In the past, there were no toilets, and the children would run to the bush, hide under trees and squat down there. I was teaching Pala and Katherine how to use the toilet when I took this picture - they were surprised and shy.



2. This woman is helping her mother; it is the /Narin household and they are my neighbours. It is Saturday morning and they are cleaning the area around their house of rubbish. Since there is no rubbish bin it is piled up in one place so that anyone who wants to, can pick through it for something that might have a little value.

3. These two are my neighbours. In this picture they are returning home with fire wood and their dog which also follows them. If there is no wood, then there is no life at home, so you must go collect it in the veld before you can cook. Sometimes you can be so hungry and there is nothing for the fire and you must go a long way to find good dead wood: it takes a long time. Sometimes you can hurt yourself when breaking off dead branches.





4. This is the kindergarten where I work. I didn't plan to pose this picture, but when the children saw me with the camera they all sat down and looked at me, so I just took their picture.



5. This man is a 'one-liner' called !Guri-haseb. He always stays alone, without a woman or even grandchildren. He is living through his garden. He is always clean and tidy and in his house you will never find anything dirty. The reason I came here was that I wanted to taste one of his garden fruits. It was in the night and as I entered his house he was tuning the radio. He started to explain something to me like this: " Do you know that your life-time is in your own two hands?" He pointed to his hand and said " your money is here: if you know how to use your hands you will never be hungry. He is the sort of man who will not depend on others.



6. This is Gideon, my grandfather in my mother's kitchen. He is sitting in the smoke, trying to make the fire hot so that the water will boil for coffee. He isn't worried about the smoke, in fact he is also smoking his pipe. My younger brother Dion forced himself into the picture.



7. It is Sunday morning and my mother and I are preparing to go to church. We must wash ourselves, but since we don't have a bathroom we must wash in a basin of hot water. Here my mother is throwing the bath water away, while her grandchildren watch.

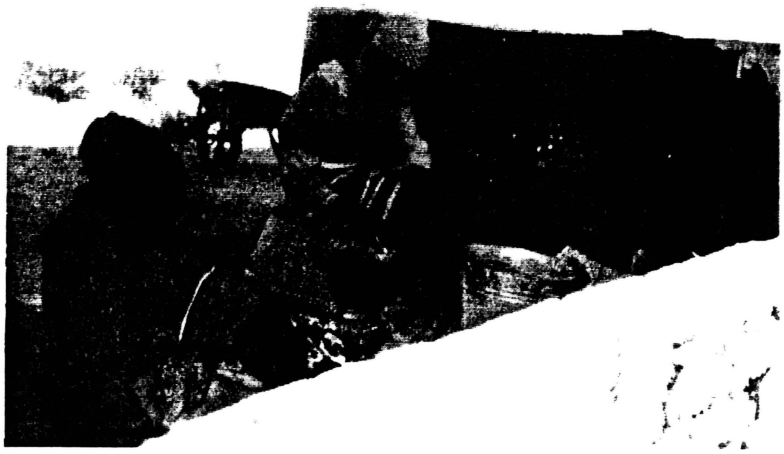


8. Our parents and grandparents are teaching us how to survive if there is no food by collecting food from the veld. Here my mother is preparing some veld food, bosui, to make bread. It is grass seed gathered from ants' nests and it must be cleaned of stones, sand and husks. This is done in two stages by first removing the course material and then separating out the different kinds of seeds. The chickens are just standing there waiting for the waste to be thrown away. When this is baked like bread, it has a nutty taste. Sometimes we also fry it in a little oil and this also tastes good.



9. If you grew up on a farm, you would be interested in this picture. It has been very dry and the horses are thin. The day was nice, cool and cloudy, and because of this I thought it would make a nice photograph. The horses stopped to watch me, but the owner, who was just behind them didn't want to be in the picture.

10. My sister took this picture of me and the children. I wrapped a blanket around myself and am busy preparing coffee.





11. It is cold in the morning but the children are enjoying themselves by the fire. They aren't worried about having warm cloths, but just get up quickly, help me make the fire and wait for some warm coffee.

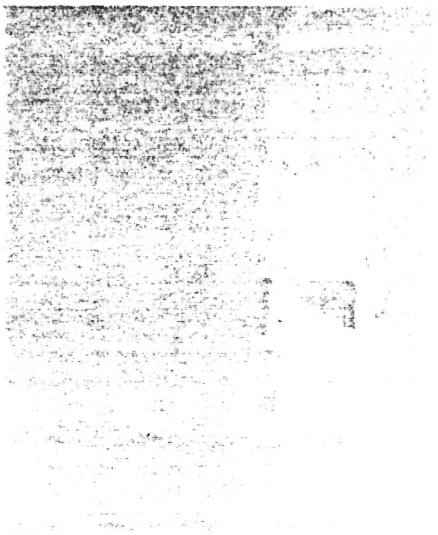
12. This is my only surviving grandmother, Maro Fistos (mother's small sister Fistos). She came to our house and asked for a little sugar; there is no-one else whom she can ask. We are the only people who will take care of her, although she also looks after one of her grand daughters who stays with her.





13. Ou Mika is my neighbour and advisor. He is looking at my wedding photographs. Whenever I have problems in life, he helps me talk them out. My father is dead and my mother is alone.

14. This small cupboard contains glasses and other things which were my wedding gifts. Someday, if I get a better life, I will give them to my mother or my sister - then I will remember that day I was praying and I started with this, now look what I have.





15. My husband took this picture of my sister braiding my hair. White people, they have long hair and they don't know what its like for us. We use panty hose to tie the ends of the braids together.



Christine Maletsky

16. Muenda is my good friend. She is visiting me and telling a story. I wanted to have a picture of her. [Muenda is a Herero name meaning 'visitor']



Christine Maletsky

17. My uncle's kitchen. He is preparing some coffee for me. This cigarette won't leave his mouth - "His life is there, without it he will feel alone".



19. This is the cat my uncle was calling. He will sell these bottles at the bottle store and buy more sugar for brewing tambo. Each bottle brings 10 cents.

20. This is another relative. After my uncle gave him one glass of tambo, he started helping so that he would get more: so in that way they are helping each other.

21. Enjoying tambo -don't disturb!



18. Our fathers, and even our husbands are not always able to just go buy cigarettes at the shop - there is not so much money for that. They buy tobacco and roll it in newspaper. My uncle is lighting his cigarette with wood from the fire - matches are not needed because the fire is there and it is easy.







Christine Maletsky

22. This is my mother's father, the only grandfather left alive. The old people have many problems. His pension money didn't come for several months so he collected empty bottles to sell and here he is tying them in a bag. His father was a German and his mother was a Damara woman. Those Germans who came during the war were making babies with the Damara ladies and that is how he was born - that's why he is lighter than us.





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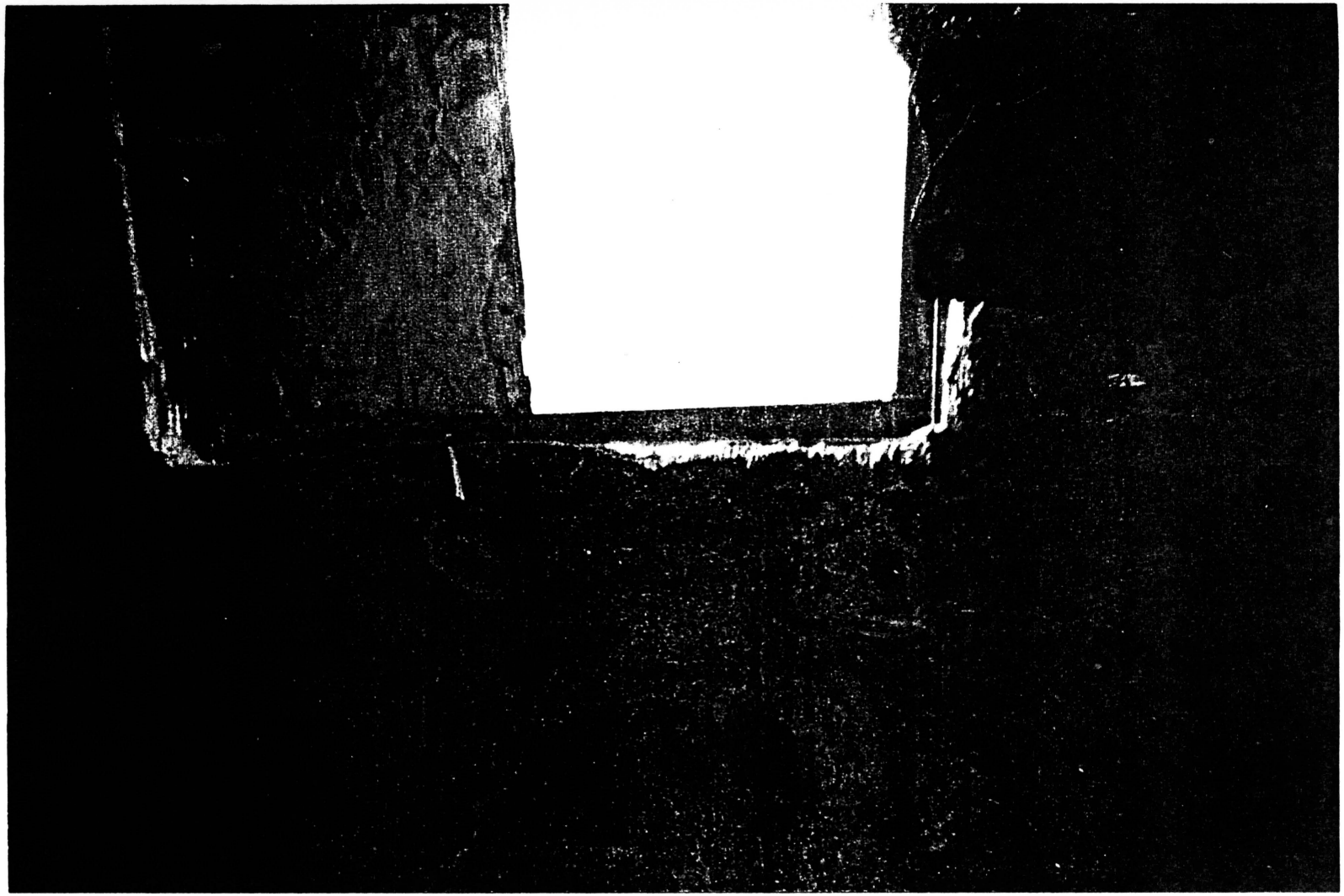


Christine Maletsky

23. I took this picture so that I can remember, someday when I am standing on my own feet and having a good life - when I am sitting down on my own chair, in a nice house built with bricks and proper windows - I will remember that once I stayed in a house like this one. Even if I close this window, it will sometimes fly open in the night waking me and giving me a fright. Even if I put up a curtain it just blows up and doesn't help at all.



1. It was a cold morning and I was busy to make breakfast. The fire is beginning to burn and I am putting the pot on for tea water.

2. Queenie is drinking tea.



3. Before leaving for the veld we are checking the stock so that we can keep back any which might give birth that day.





4. This is one of the small lambs which I have marked on its ear. I was showing Queenie how to catch them.



5. Queenie is helping Willemina milk the goats early in the morning.

6. Willemina and Queenie are all ready for a day in the veld. She has her panga and they are protected from the sun.





7. I am in the veld only 2 or 3 weeks after the rain started. It is already turning green - I am so happy and am looking fat myself.

8. In the veld.





Willem Hoeseb

10. Willemina is waiting for the stock to come to this pool in the veld. When they finish drinking she must take them home so that they don't wander in the wrong direction.



Willemina Hoeses

9. After the rains came, the river flowed and filled our well with sand, so there is no water for the goats and sheep at home, but in the veld, we know the places with pools and we are taking our stock there to drink.



11. It is nice for Willem to be with his young rams.





12. After the rain, the veld flowers are blooming and it is a very nice place.

13. Coming home.



14. I was very very happy with one of my rams -he has died now but he was chief, and left many good off-spring. I am giving him my hat in this photo!



15. Today Willem must take me to Okombahe so I can catch a lift to Omaruru. I plan to call my family in Khorixas to let them know we are all fine and to hear their news. It has been a long time since I have seen my people there.



16. Going to see a dealer about selling my goats later this year.



17. Queenie



18. Early in the morning Willemina and Queenie are warming themselves in the sun behind our house.





Willem Hoeseb

20. Willemina and Queenie are going by donkey cart to collect the drought fodder in Okombahe. The donkeys are wanting to run!



Lucia /Goagases

1. Ignatious and the daughter of my girl who works at the take-away. These are grandchildren who stay in Okombahe.



2. We are preparing tsau - It took us one day to collect all these seeds, we went by donkey cart far in the veld to find this.

3. This is me but it looks as if I am drunk - I don't remember who took this picture.





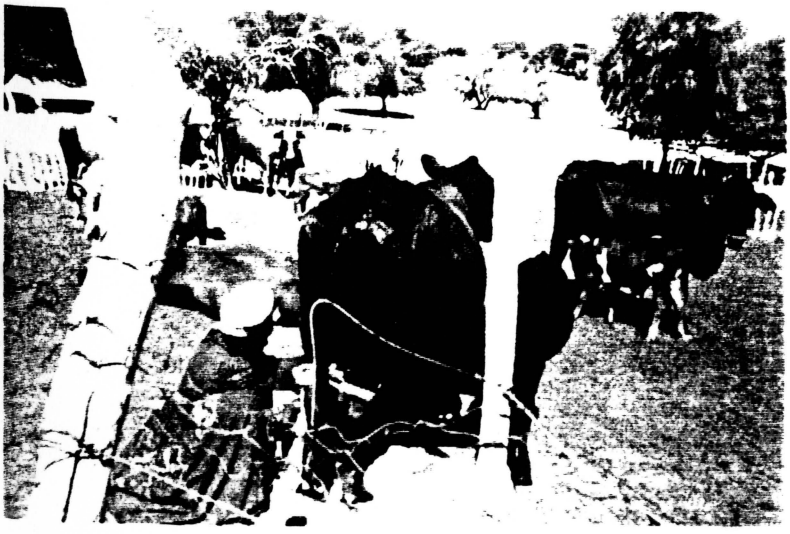
4. Tekla and Ananias our goat herder, dancing (/gais).



5. These are two of my grandchildren - one lives in Okahanja with her mother, the other (Didi) in Swakopmund.



6. My husband Johannes.



7. Augustinus and his wife are our neighbours. They are milking their cows. They sometimes sell their milk, or give it to relatives.

9. Johannes and Khotat, the men of our place.



Tekla /Goagoses

1. Portrait in the river. Tekla, Flora, Angelika and Si=khaio



Tekla /Goagoses

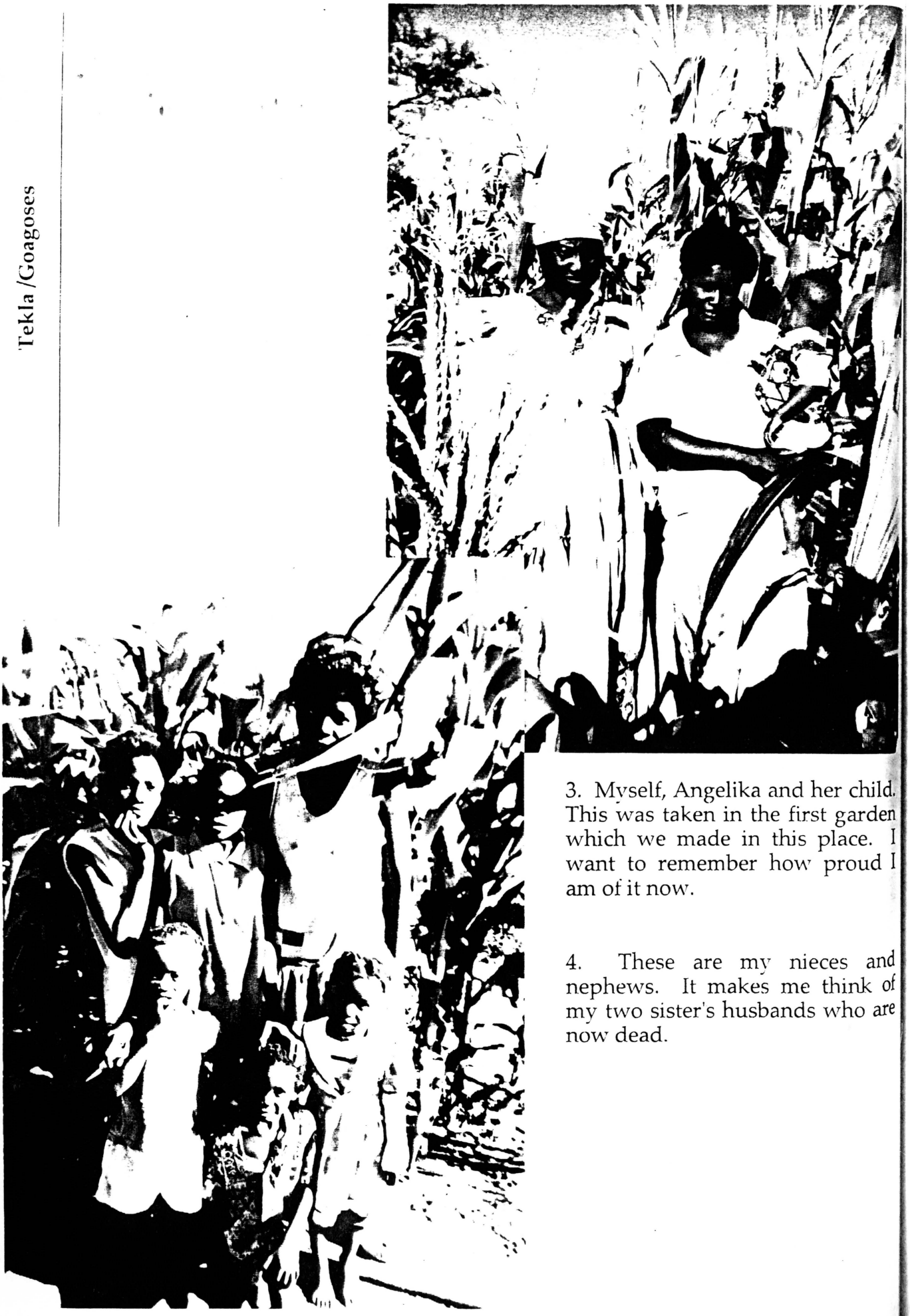
2. My father, Johannes and Uncle Martin.



This is my uncle Martin. I took
is because until now we don't
ave any photos of him.



6. Angelika



3. Myself, Angelika and her child. This was taken in the first garden which we made in this place. I want to remember how proud I am of it now.

4. These are my nieces and nephews. It makes me think of my two sister's husbands who are now dead.



7. This is my husband my sister in law and my nephew at our home in Jansen. Most of the photos from this film are pictures of my family - I have never had a chance to have their photographs before now.



8. This is our neighbour from across the river. When I saw him standing beside the donkey cart it looked so nice to me. I took this picture so that one day when he is gone, I can remember: this is Polis who was my neighbour. He is an Ovambo speaking guy.



9. This is Angela who is also my grandmother with two of her grandchildren. If someone ever asks about any of King David Goreseb's children, I can show them this picture of his first born.

10. This is my grandmother Fistolene and my brother's son. I took this to show my grandchildren how my grandmother looked.

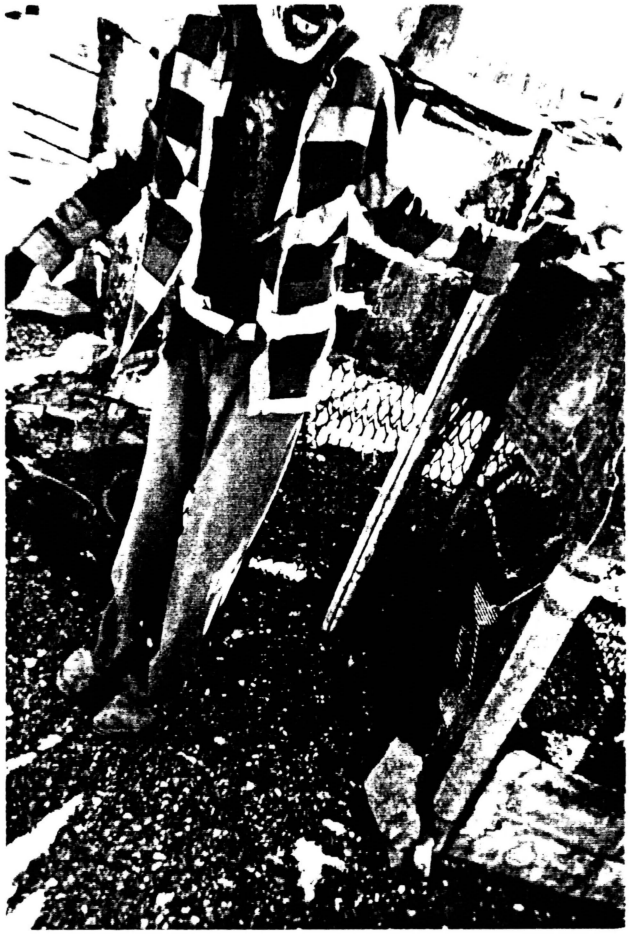


11. This is our traditional dancing '/gais'. Some people are dancing without clothing but here we are just demonstrating: Ananias our worker is wearing a loin cloth in front and back and I am shaking a tin rattle.



12. Lucia took this picture so that I could fool you into thinking that I also own a radio - if someone asks you, tell them it is mine! But it really belongs to Lucia.

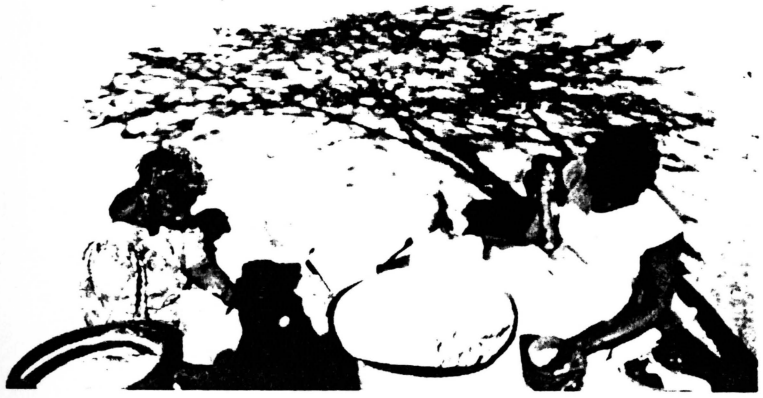




13. This is my father, Johannes: he always laughs. Our family is scattered all over Namibia, so if some of them come here someday after his death, I can show them this picture of my father.



14. & 15. I took these pictures just to show foreign people how we use the veld food tsaui (grass-seeds gathered from ants nests). Some people use tsaui to make tambo, others cook it to eat like maize meal. I learned to gather tsaui from my mother and father when I was small, as we often gathered and ate it. It can be cooked with milk or without milk by pounding it and frying it in a pan with oil. The ants are biting us when we collect tsaui; sometimes there are also snakes in the ants nests. This is how the tsaui is cleaned - first we winnow out the stones and then the sand. We have now stored some of this our house.



16. Khotat is preparing honey. First of all, after taking the honey combs from the bees' nest, we are preparing it in hot water. Then we have to press out the raw honey from the combs and put this sweet liquid with the tambo and then it makes a very tasty and strong drink.



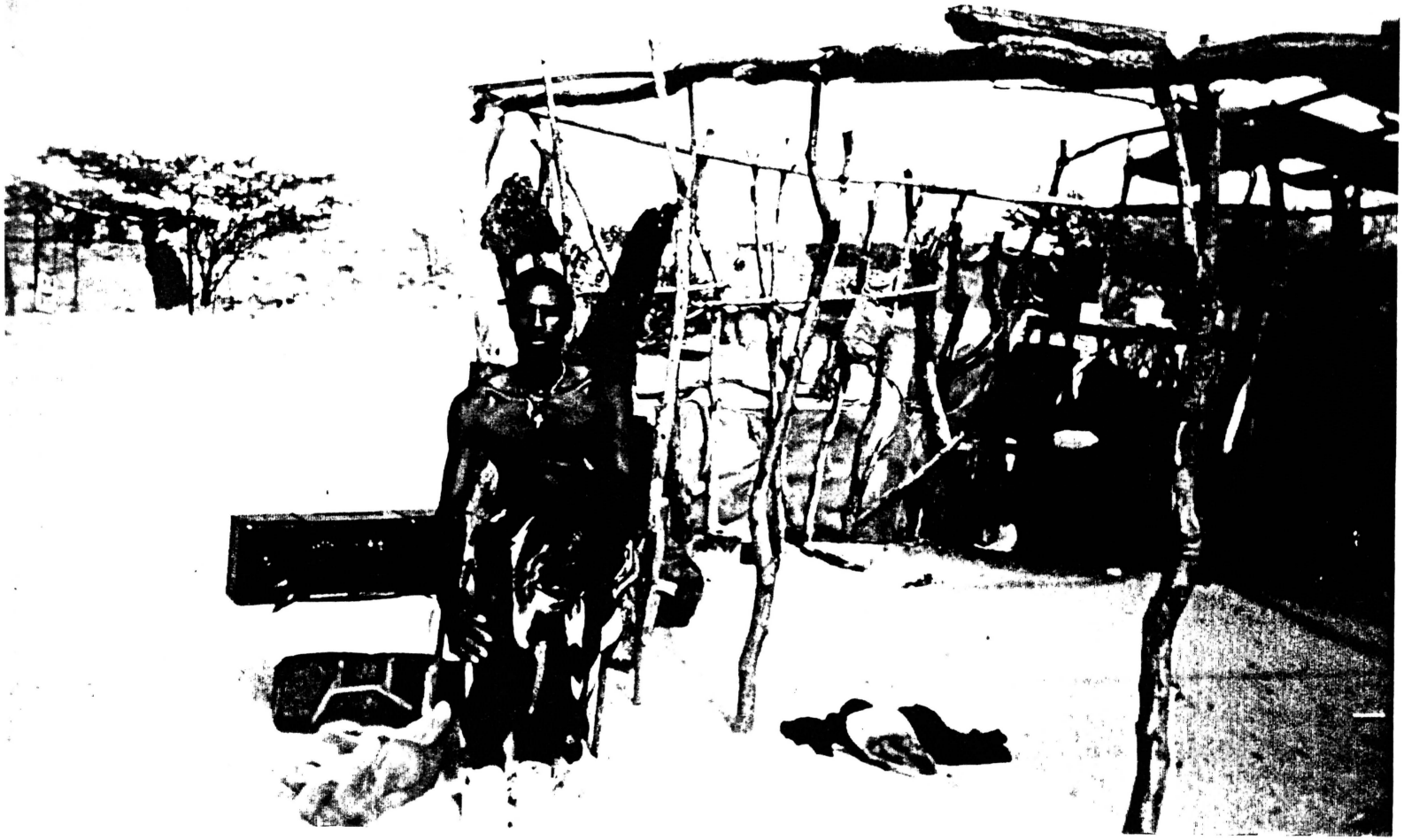


17. This is how I am milking our goats.



Tekla /Goagoses

18. My family - we took this just to show the people how beautiful our river is looking. You can see the big green Ana trees in the background, and the sky was full of nice clouds.



Christolene Goses

1. My husband is the owner and main character of the house. I wanted a picture of him so that people would know how he is living; that he is farming with goats and has a dog. I put the tape machine there to make the picture even nicer.



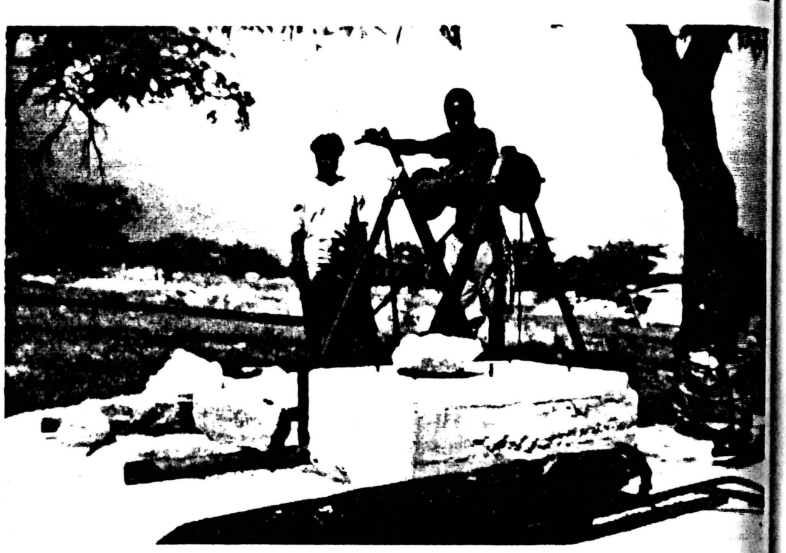
Christolene Goses

2. (Bernardo) This picture shows how I make my business, in order to have a little food in my house. I have a horse cart with which I go to the bush and cut wood. You can see the weapon with which I cut it- an axe. I sell it in Okombahe. Some people pay me by account at the end of the month. If I make the cart full, I can ask $N20. Asi made this picture - the two guys are friends who help me to load and unload the wood. This is also a story about water problems: whenever I go away from our farm, I take 2 twenty litre plastic containers to bring back water from bore-holes along the way back to my house.

3. This is my friend Gerson at an old mine near Pawkwab. It was last used to provide gravel to make the bridges on the main Uis road and this is where it was loaded onto the lorries.



4. & 5. This is an old spring where our ancestors took their water. Later on, miners made it into a deep well. It is an interesting old place.









6. The moment I saw this boy riding towards my house I wanted to take a photo of him in the green veld, it looked so nice - another day I will remember that our people were riding donkeys like this.

7. Milking goats is usually work for women. Here I am showing my man how to milk, so when I am not here and he wants some milk, he knows how to do it. He must hold the goat with one hand, put the cup down like that and milk the goat with the other hand, which he is doing in this picture.



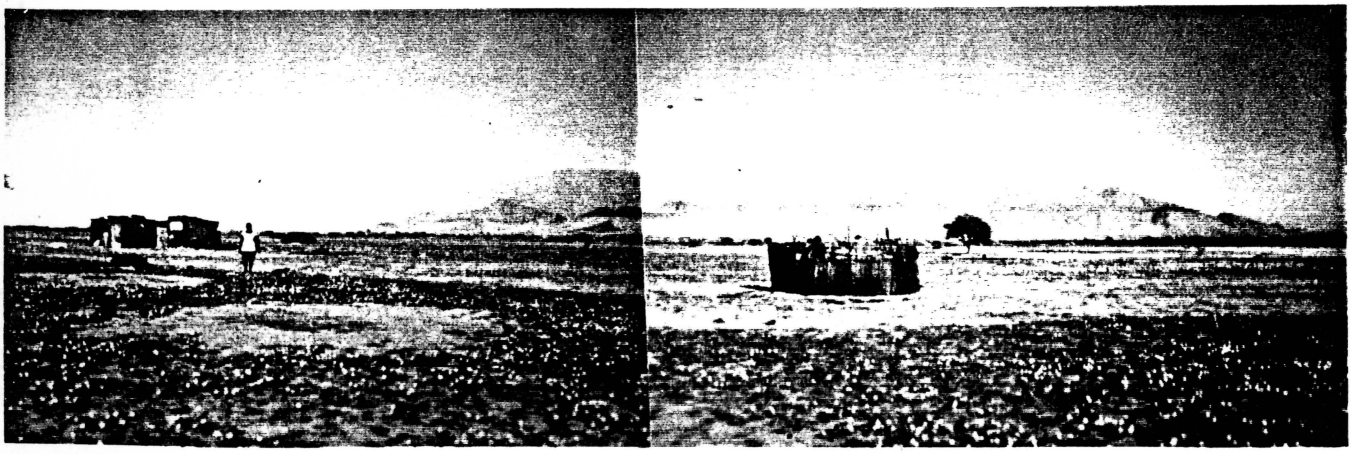
8. This is a picture of the showing how the children do some small jobs, they are separating the kids from their mothers, which is done each evening. Mapere, Desmond, Bianca, Maureen (Hos). The name Hos comes from when she was a baby and her parents were whispering 'hos, hos, hos' to make her quiet.

9. We visited Bernardo's family near the Brandberg. This man is making a donkey cart for me and Bernardo. Now it is nearly finished- the sheet metal body must be bolted onto the frame. The maker is called /Unob, which in English means 'nameless' maybe because he was the kind of guy who always refused to tell anyone his real name. He is not a relation and only just moved to Arixa Ams.





10. Ouma Lydia and Sydney. This is how an old Damara lady gets up in the morning: she milks the goats, makes porridge for the grandchildren, feeds the dogs and then lights her pipe.



11. /Uno's wife near her new house and kraal. She refused to let me take a picture of her up close, but I decided that the place was nice and that I wanted a picture showing how the house was made and how far it is from their kraal.



12. & 13 This is my friend Lydia and her son Sydney at Arixa Ams near Uis. I wanted to take a picture of her outside her house but she said: "I want you to take a photo of us in my own house, even if it is bad and I haven't got anything. Other people can see the kind of places in which the Damara people are living.



14. Red Pepper. This is my mother's garden in Okombahe. We grow these red peppers and other food too. This is my mother's brother, Secatius. I gave him this job to pick the ripe peppers so that he should dry them and save them for me. Sometime, I will go to travel somewhere, like Walwis Bay, then I can sell them in the township. This is our life.





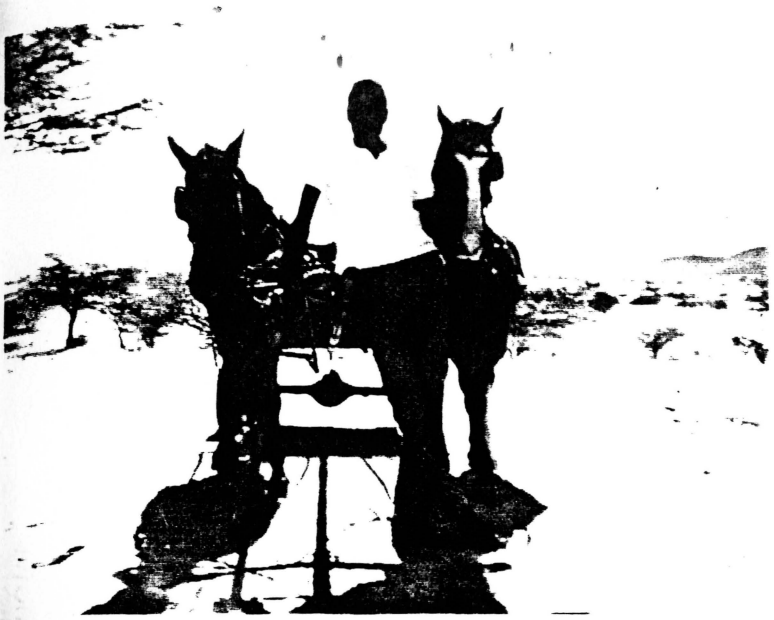
15. Do you know what this is? It is an abas (gourd used for making sour milk). My mother (who is standing here with her hired helper) plants them in the garden. If they grow up and are plentiful she will have many goats from them. Before, a goat was worth 60 rand and she could trade one abas for a small goat. Then, the price of goats was not so high, before the auctions came to Okombahe. Now, if she gives two abas she will easily get one goat in return, maybe a young goat ready to breed. She is taking them from the garden to her house where she will dry and clean them and then they will be ready to sell.

16. These are my parents who are developing themselves and living through their garden - that is why I made this picture of them in their garden.





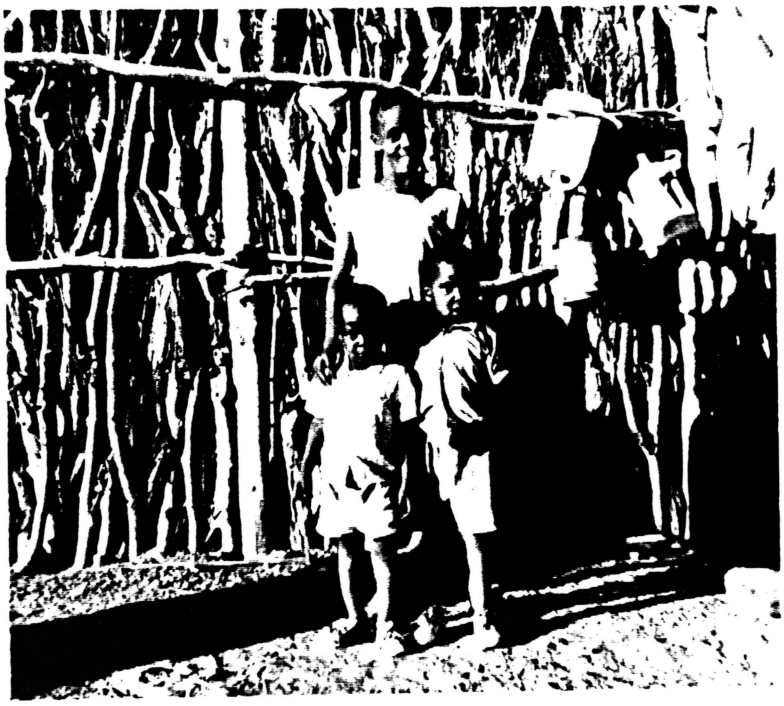
17. This is the same: Secatius is picking ripe red peppers and the other man is digging crops.



18. (Bernardo) When I was delivering wood, one of my customers took this picture of me standing with my horse.



19. Bernardo was just leaving on his horse to trek cattle with some other men to David Wes. Because of this work we are able to eat through this time of struggle.



20. My sister Salonica's children at their post in Heinz. I want people to know I have a great family.



21. These two guys in the front are my relatives. They are very naughty, but in fact, we understand each other, or at least, I understand them. They will punish someone, I can say they are 'beaters' - tough guys. All of them are problems, but I made a picture of them the moment they came to visit me. That was the day I was giving them advice about their trouble-making, and I took their picture in case one day they are missing or lost because of their crimes, I should remember what they looked like. After I gave them advice, they agreed to mend their ways, and recently, I haven't heard that they have been causing trouble, so maybe they are cooling down now.



22. Bernardo's Makais (big mother), Magdalena with her children Gisella and Gersom. This family is making money only from the poka (alchohol) which Magdalena distills from tsaui - this provides all the income for the family's food.



Diana Gawanges

1. Rosa, Roxette and Lotte at the restaurant. I was just going to buy some cigarettes.

2. My mother is washing clothes in our yard. She is always complaining about aches in her legs, but when she washes she won't sit down and later she will complain - I took this picture to show her why her body aches.





4. This man was fighting with his wife. I took this picture the moment his wife fell down on top of my mother. The fight was about beer - the man didn't want his wife to drink, although he was drinking himself: he was selfish.

3. This was a terrible day! The children dug up the sweet potatoes and when my father came home he was so angry with them - here he is trying to re-plant them and his grand daughter is helping him to dig holes.





5. Ben, Lucky, Alo and Theo were standing around outside the restaurant in the afternoon smoking. The difference between smokers and drinkers is that smokers stand around in groups and talk, while drinkers sit separately and watch the scene or quarrel.



6. Drying onions at Michael's shop. They were grown in the Rossing garden project. One woman wanted a hike from the gardeners so she decided to help them.

7. Today, my mother killed a chicken and the children are plucking it. As they were doing this, another chicken was looking at what was happening and this struck me as tragic and funny.

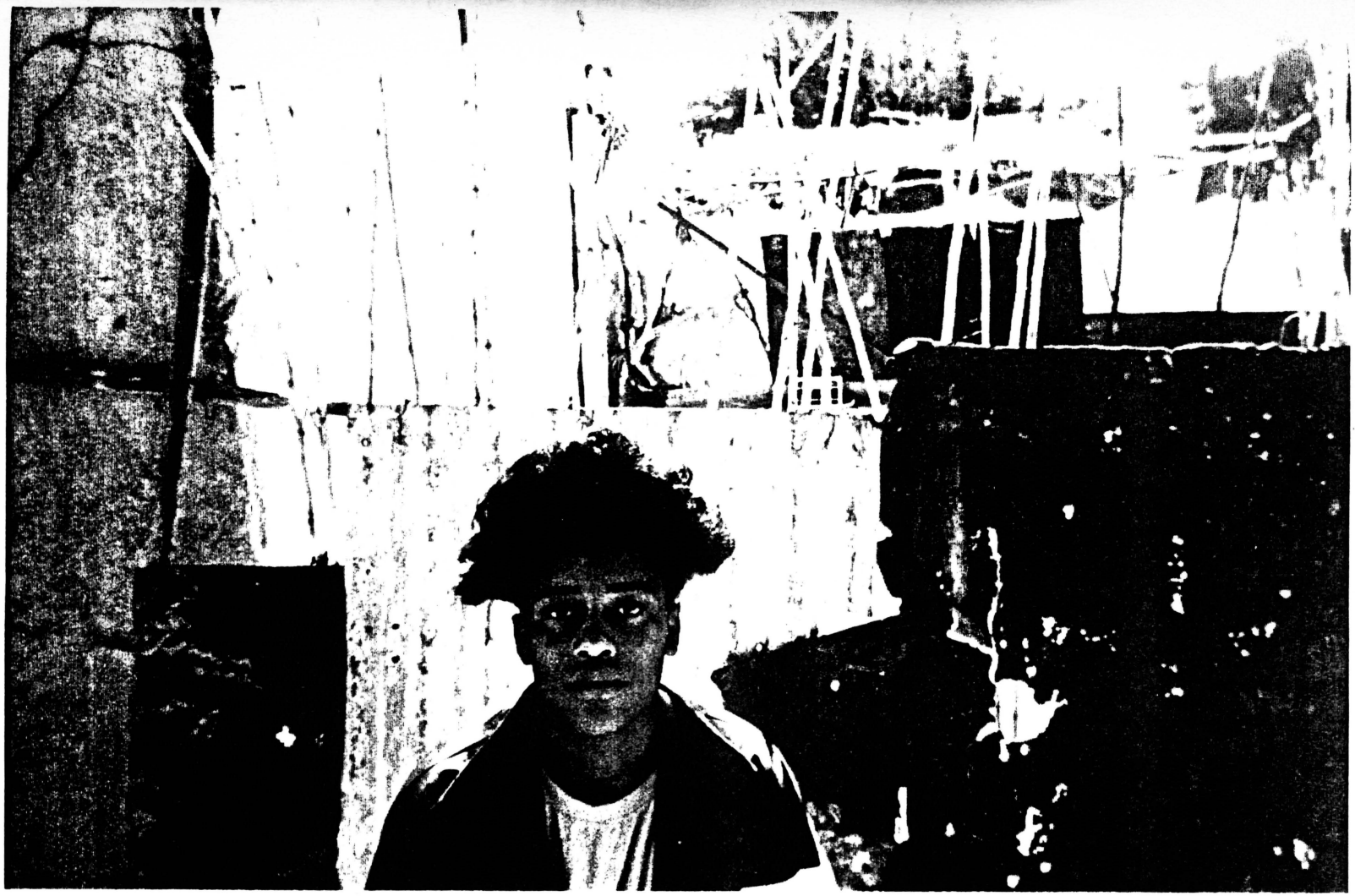




8. These are the woman who cook the food for the old people. They were giving some soup and fat cookies to a man who turned up early and was begging.

9. In the mornings, old people line up at the Lutheran church for their daily food ration. They were pushing each other to get their place in line while one old woman was barking orders saying: ' Stand still! Wait your turn!".





Erwin Tsuseb

1. Girl friend, Okombahe



2 & 3. Drought food relief distribution, 'Peoples' House' Okombahe.









4, 5 & 6. The village square in Okombahe: girls net-ball team.



Christian Uiseb

1. It is in the morning at my neighbour's house. This woman is cooking pumpkins for her husband and her family. Her husband works with me in the garden and soon he will come home to eat his lunch.



Christian Uiseb

2. This man is a 'one-liner' always staying alone. He has no relatives staying at is house and no relatives with whom he can stay. He is busy weeding his garden. His name in Damara is /Awareb which, translated into English, would be 'Rubbish Master'. It is a home-name from his childhood, but now he is old and his friends sometimes call him that which makes him angry.



3. This woman was preparing pumpkins in the pot, and she wa: somewhat under the influence of liquor. She was talking to hersel and I became interested in her story: she had been arguing with he husband about the strength of the tambo and he said: "It was just a shi drink!" but she replied "Ai! It was a nice drink that I had", and so on...



4. This woman had finished cooking her pumpkin, and at mid-day, her children returned from school and they were very hungry. As their mother was in the house when they arrived, they just ate the whole pot of pumpkin. Even the older daughter who came later didn't get any, that is why her mouth is like that - she is still angry her younger brothers who 'chopped' the whole pumpkin. Their mother was also angry, but she just sat down there, seeing there was nothing she could do.



5. Dadi (which literally means: my father) is an Ovambo-speaking old man and he is perfectly drunk. His wife has forced him to go down and water the garden with the hand pump but he was saying to himself: "Why should I do this? Why don't my children come and water the garden? I am the man of the house, so I should give the orders, and should not be bossed around by others..." and so on.



6. Walter is transplanting pau-pau plants. He had run out of tobacco, and he didn't want to ask for any, so he just dropped everything and went to the garden to work to take his mind off tobacco.

7. Eric is one of Mike's workers in the garden. Here he is weeding, but also drinking tambo - he's hidden his bottle on the far side of the tree so that if Mike comes by he won't see it.





8. This man was weeding in his garden. Someone called him to come and drink some ginger beer, and as he looked up I took this picture.

9. This man is known as 'Khaireb' (warthog). He was disappointed with his girl friend and was standing there alone arguing with himself. As I took this picture he began to quarrel with me saying: "Why must you take a picture of me now? Can't you see I'm in a dirty shirt, dirty trousers - why didn't you tell me so I could wear some clean clothes?" He was also drunk.



10. In this donkey cart there was stolen sheep meat. The police officer's car was standing in front of the donkey cart. Two other men were standing and quarrelling with the police officers saying: "What right have you to stop us like that? We have done nothing wrong". The man in the picture is looking depressed., because he is thinking "Now we will all go to jail!" Also, he had beaten the donkeys very hard in trying to make them run faster to avoid the police and they are bleeding so he is wondering what he will tell his mother happened to the donkeys. They argued with the police for a long time, but in the end the police didn't have enough evidence to show that the meat was stolen. The three maintained their innocence throughout, arguing that since they were farming themselves, why shouldn't they slaughter one of their one animals if they wanted to.



11. 'Mibagu' (told each other) was pumping petrol for this man but she put just a little more petrol in the car than the man had asked for... so they are arguing about the payment. He was drunk.





12. This woman is pregnant and the girl in the foreground is her grand daughter. The pregnant woman has been told not to drink before she has given birth but she is just coming back from the shabeen. 'Why can't you wait till I have given birth to my baby, before you take may picture?". The grandchild has covered her face because she doesn't want her photo taken.



13. This woman is drinking tambo which was given to her by this man. He is proposing to her, saying quietly, "after you have finished that we should go to my house and share love together". This is true! The final proposal was for him to buy just one more, then they should go, but the plan failed when this woman's husband arrived shortly after.



14. It is the end of the month and Oan !Gas (slave of everyone) has just bought some groceries at the shop. The moment I photographed her she was dancing and singing: "Oh, now I have enough money - first I was hungry, but now I have my salary and am happy!"



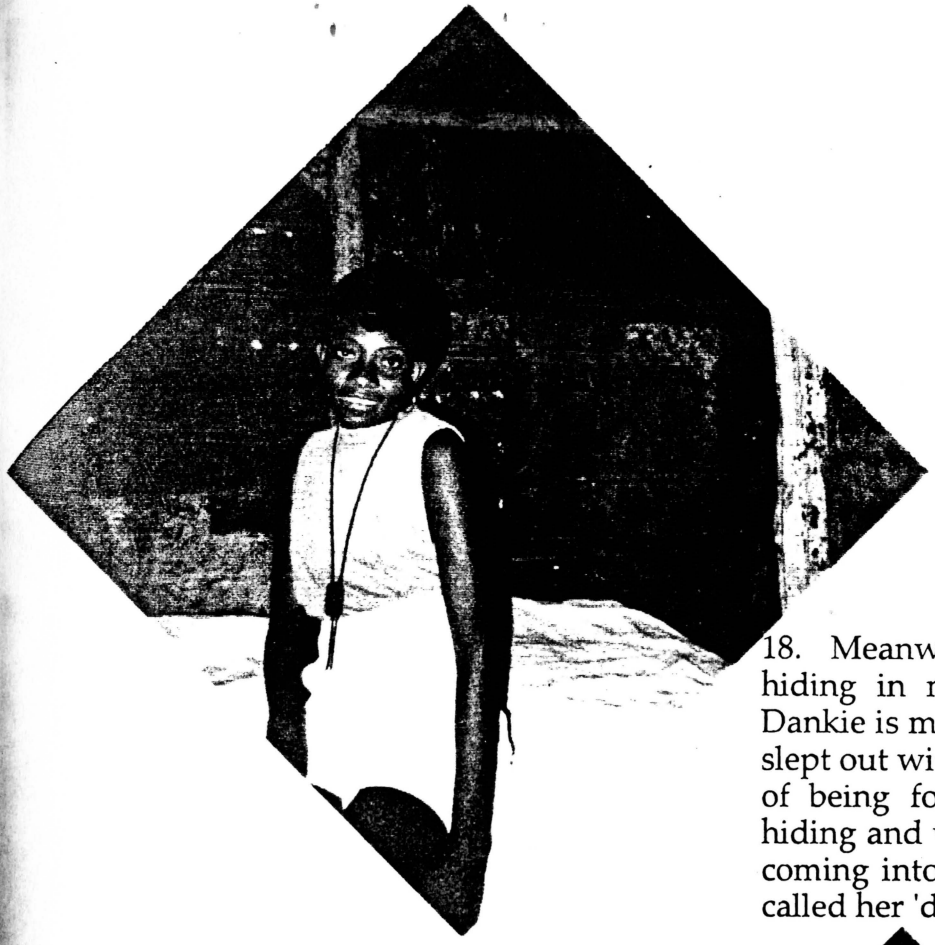
15. My little niece, Patricia, had just arrived at my house in Okombahe. She had been taken from her mother's place at Martin Luther High school by my in-laws without the mother's permission. When my in-laws arrived they began to quarrel and fight so I held Patricia to comfort her.



16. Later, I was listening to the girls who had brought a bottle of stolen liquor to my house. We were drinking and I was concentrating on their story of how the bottle was stolen.



17. Sandra, my girl friend, was resting after having come to help my family prepare food for Patricia's christening.



18. Meanwhile, Dankie and Elsies were hiding in my house for other reasons: Dankie is my friend's girl but she had just slept out with another guy and was afraid of being found out. So now she was hiding and wanted to talk to me and kept coming into my room; my sister jokingly called her 'di /uisa' (sister in law).



19. Elsies stole a bottle of liquor from a drankwinkel in Okombahe where her brother works. Perhaps he asked her to look after the shop for a few minutes and she stole it then. Anyway, she came to my house to hide, and drink.



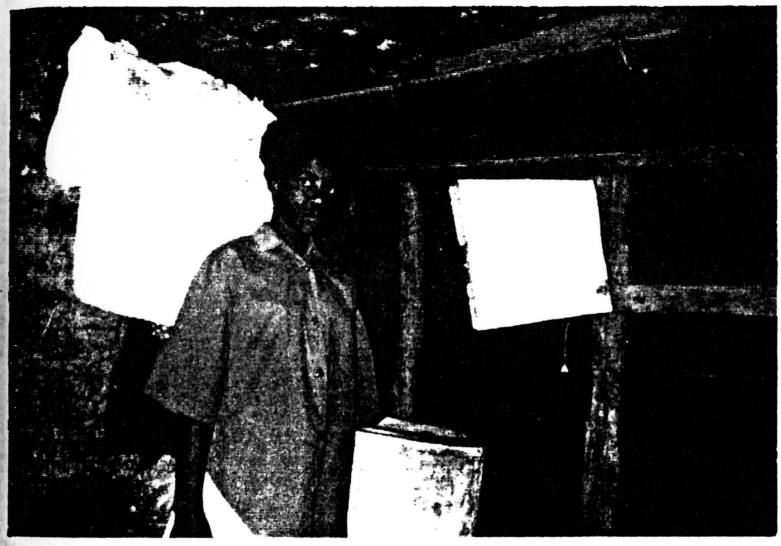
20. At first, Dankie and Elsies were discussing their various adventures and problems and looking for advice,

21. but soon they were joking and laughing. Both are in school together in Okombahe, but Dankie is from Windhoek.





22. This older woman is hogging the bottle and I said to her " Liquor won't pay for your funeral, we are the ones who will give you a good burial, so if you won't let us drink, go to hell, I will find my own liquor to share with my friends.



23. My girl friend Sandra is quarrelling with me; I was tired, drunk and laying down on my bed. She said: " If you drink any more I will take my belongings and leave you right now".



24. But then my sister cooled her down and took this picture.

25. Early the next morning, a neighbour was passing by but stopped to ask for food since she was hungry. My mother told her to make a fire and cook the mealy meal, but the woman was grumbling at all this extra work.



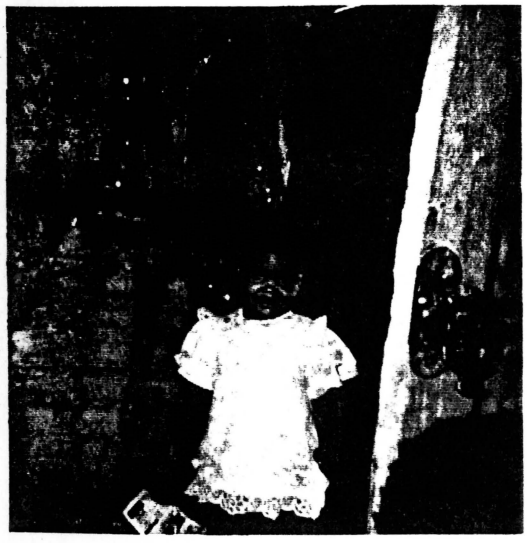


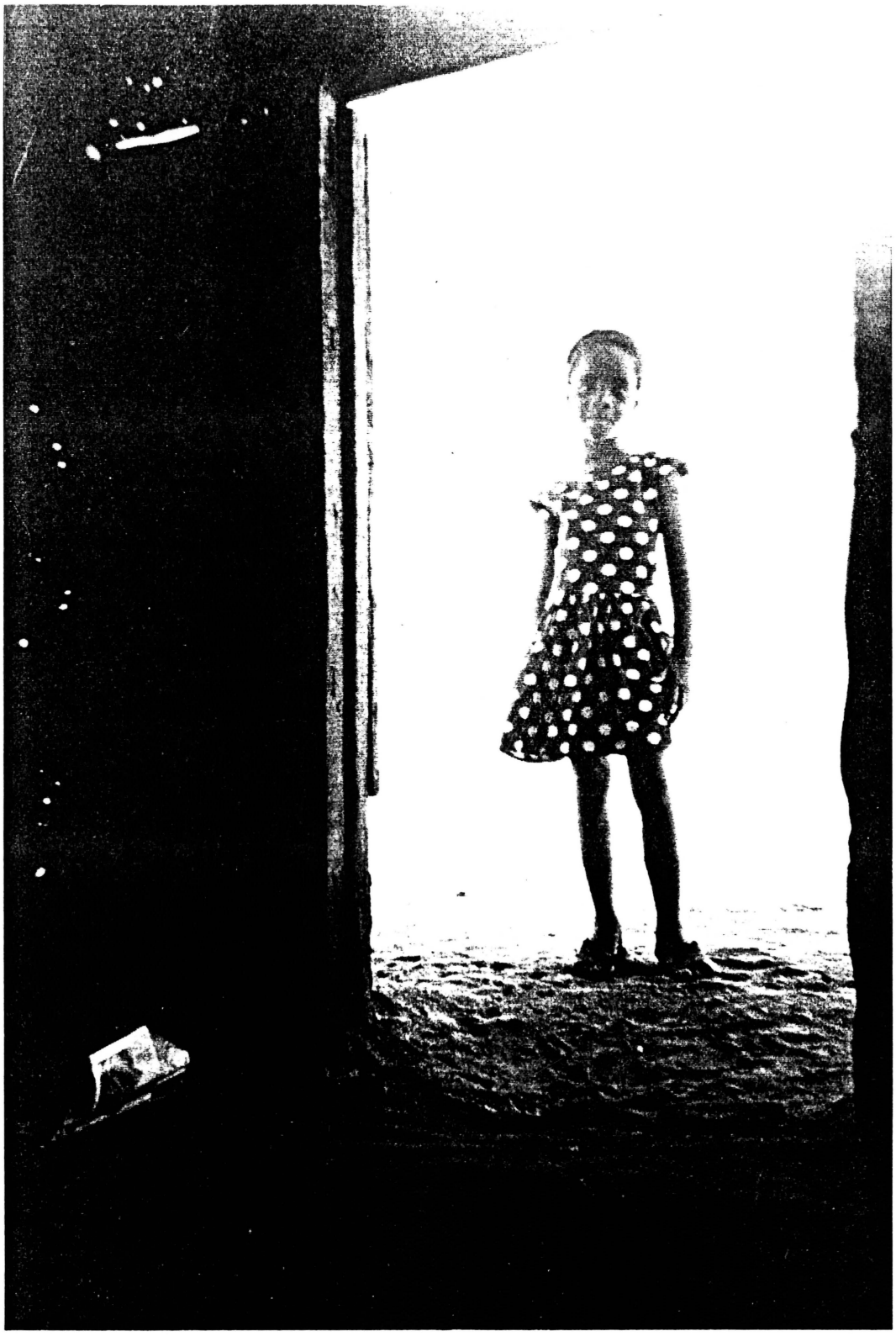
26. Patricia is eating,

27. but I am hungry and angry because I want to eat meat and it will be some time before the christening meal.

28. Finally, Patricia has eaten and bathed and I dressed her in new clothes. She was happy and smiling! It is time for the Christening.







Christian Uiseb

29. My girl-friend and I were flirting with each other in my room and this little girl happened to pass by our open door and see us - she was surprised and shy.



Linda Axakhoes

1. My sisters' children: Clarence, Jennifer, Poppy, Feste, Jersey, Guri, and Daedelus (and Queenie who belongs to Willemina). I will also have children one day.



Linda Axakhoes

2. My mother and step father sitting together in the morning. John was not embarrassed about his socks, he said: "I am an old man, I don't worry - let them see!"

intersection of gazes to which the title refers: how we see each other. The boy in the foreground of this image was nicknamed /Gokhoeb (show-off man). The day I met /Gokhoeb, he had come to see the poster which Albert had stuck to the door of his house. /Gokhoeb approached the poster with a swagger, kissed his image, and then posed in front of it, vainly mimicking a style of pop imagery prevalent in teen-idol magazines. This convergence of name and behaviour in the double-take of pose and image confirmed the aptness of the poster image for me! There seemed to be a perfect example of mimesis - the spontaneous appropriation of the visual quote from both poster image and media stereotypes, the sympathetic magic of the image and its power to influence what it is a copy of (Benjamin 1979b:162; Taussig 1994:206).

As they waited for a 'hike', packed like sardines into the back of a small pick-up truck along with their bedding and bundles of clothes, the young men in the wedding party at first expressed scepticism about **Albert /Haseb's** 'toy' camera (2) . Both photos were taken in the dusty, open village square of Okombahe where donkey carts, cars and pick-up trucks (bakkies) arrive and depart brimming with travellers who have no other means of travelling the long distances between the dispersed settlements and towns of rural Damaraland: 'getting hike' is the only form of public transport. Albert had approached the bakkie like a photo journalist and 'snapped' without greeting anyone: the two contrasting reactions to his unannounced appearance - a distanced cool appraisal and an open responsiveness - are indicative of a more general ritual function inherent in casual public greetings. Social relationships in terms of status, role and personal affiliation are expressed through the manner and form in which greetings are exchanged - between young men these attributes are pointedly contested through the use of kinship terms, respect words and bantering around the subject of reciprocity. Many of Albert's photos can be read as a form of casual, on-going dialogue used in the daily, public interaction of the people of Okombahe to test social identity and personal relationships. The 'how we see each other' of the visual image might be more accurately expressed as 'how we greet each other' in Albert's photo stories.

During the first few months of my stay in Okombahe, the business of getting my greetings right was a continual source of surprise and confusion to me. I knew the various standard forms of address and response:

Mire (Say it!)

!Gai a (It's good)
Aitsama mire! (Say it yourself!)
!Gai da go (We are fine)

as well as several variations asking such rhetorical questions as "Did you get up?" or "Did you sleep well?" and of course knowing at what time of day each was appropriate. Older people, and people in respected positions such as the head teacher and councillor seemed to appreciate my deference when I added the respect form of the pronoun in my greeting: "*Mi du re!*". Initially, because I was a stranger, an outsider, I was always the first one to speak, unless I was being accosted by someone for money, cigarettes, food or some other 'favour'. Gradually I came to see that the order in which people address each other has symbolic significance. The general 'rule' is that as a self-respecting person you are not the first to speak when someone else approaches you, especially if you are 'at rest' or 'in your own space'.

One of my best teachers in the nuances of Damara greeting etiquette was Maria Pietersen's mother, Ouma Ida. We were on friendly terms, since I lived within 50 metres of the Pietersen homestead and we greeted each other several times a day. We often ate together and we helped each other in small ways - I often worked in Ida's garden for an hour or two and she or her widowed sister (Ouma Maria) usually washed my clothes; I was allowed free use of water from the well in the river and gave the Pietersens lifts to Okombahe in my bakkie. As time went on I began to see that the manner in which we greeted each other betrayed a whole domain of subtleties around status, position, relatedness and reciprocity. Of course I could choose to ignore what seemed to me a perverse stubbornness on Ida's part: she would often walk into my camp and pretend as if she were about to sit down before greeting me, waiting for the last possible instant to do so, before it became an explicit issue, although usually I was just glad to see her anyway. I sometimes tried this out on her in reverse, just to see how finely I could judge my timing, and sometimes I was greeted first when I went to visit her and this was either a sign of affection or a dismissal of the greetings game, a change in 'tactics', a temporary lapse in the rules. My interpretation of greeting etiquette might sound petty, but it is an effective means of communicating relatedness, respect or disrespect, very quickly, and is actively used as such, rather than as a veneer of polite equality, so common in European casual greetings. On occasion it was important that I express my own self-respect by remaining silent or engaging in only the briefest of

greetings when I passed other neighbouring homesteads: this aspect of Damara social behaviour intrigued me because it seemed to express a more general and innate irony about social conventions generally.

Albert recounts his own tactics for testing and defining relationships: he confronts people publicly by asking to 'borrow' cigarettes, alcohol or food (8,13,22,25), or he photographs other people doing the same thing - the woman */Obes* (beggar) is 'drinking the pocket' of a man in exchange for the unlikely prospect of later 'sharing love' (20); two old women in the bottle store argue about their credit in terms of their status as old aged pensioners (25). Social relationships are expressively defined by this verbal discussion around reciprocity or the lack of it. A tension permeates this constant negotiation around giving and sharing which is fundamental to the manner in which people define themselves and each other. It is made explicit in personal names: the root 'to give' (*au*) is incorporated into generic kinship titles as well as nick-names of friends such as *Aubeb*' - a person who gives (6). Home-names such as */Khom-i-toma* (no sympathy from anyone), *Surigu* (jealous of each other), *Hui-khoeob* (no one to help me), *Mibagu* (speak to each other) and *Khom-tatide* (I won't say anything) reiterate a variety of stereotypes related to social identity within this small rural community.

The contests surrounding identity and status sometimes found violent expression, especially among inebriated men, in disputes over kinship and respect titles, almost as if the generalised negativity accruing from the culture of apartheid had been internalised. Such violent incidents were not confined to drunken males either. Albert's girl-friend, Sylvia was attacked one afternoon in the open village square by one of Albert's distant relatives, a young woman who had loaned Albert $3 (£0.50). Sylvia had spent the afternoon with this woman who was a casual friend, but had left abruptly when their conversation had become heated over the repayment of Albert's petty loan. Sylvia had walked away amidst the acrimony of name calling and insults. However, the pent-up violence which this released found an unexpected outlet when this young woman attacked Sylvia with a piece of broken glass, cutting and permanently scarring her face from her temple to her jaw bone. This anarchistic disregard for rigid social conventions was part of a dialectic, the other side of which found expression in formalised naming and reciprocity practices which tacitly acknowledged the ever present threat of violence underscoring many aspects of social relations in Okombahe.

Albert portrays the sociality of exchange as encoded and practised in public activities: verbal interchange, the baking and selling of food, repairing tape machines, trading stories, fighting about girl friends, girls grooming each other. The practice of reciprocity and its bearing on status constitutes a (verbal, spatial, embodied) discourse in Damara social relations having direct relevance to concepts of kinship, hierarchy, and property; this constitutes a central theme to Albert's images of daily life in Okombahe.

Some intimations of concepts of social space are also evident in Albert's photographs. The distance occasioned by the institutionalised and gendered space of the girl's hostel (3) becomes more personal and overtly political in the boy's shower: "the guys are complaining about paying high hostel fees and having to bath in wash-hand basins" (4); old people are often viewed from further away than contemporaries and friends, indicating respect through physical distance. The division between inside and outside is explicit to several images of cars, houses or shops when looking through a door or window, allowing the photographer to come closer to his subjects through this conceptual division of space. The children playing house (14) mimic this ephemeral architectural boundary in an abstract simulation of inside/outside, using a single piece of string pegged to the ground.

When I first met Albert (also known as /Eteb or 'little fish') in 1995, he had been living in Okombahe for just over a year, having moved here to 'look after' his older brother's and grandmother's house in the government's so-called 'old aged home' known as Blau Berg. He was also known to many of his peers as 'Rasta Man' because of his short neat 'dreads', a 'religious' attitude towards dagga[2] smoking, and a lively political interest dating back to his involvement in student protests before independence. A prominent scar on his left shoulder, put there by a drunken boy wielding a knife was a reminder of a more reckless period of youth and township violence. /Eteb was 25 years old and unemployed. His teenage girl-friend Sylvia lived with him at the time, but as her pregnancy advanced she returned to her mother's house in Otjiwarongo where she delivered a son towards the end of the year.

His mother, a widow for the last 15 years, was living in a squatter camp adjacent to the township in Omaruru. She continued to support an array of 'grandchildren' with occasional help from their parents, and had only recently became eligible for the state pension of N$135 (£20) a month.

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[2] Marijuana.

/Etèb also helped her with occasional gifts of cash or food from his meagre resources.

/Eteb's father had been born in southern Angola, the issue of a brief liaison between an Angolan girl and a Welsh development worker. During the 1960's he had walked south into Namibia and obtained work as a miner at Tsumeb where he learned to speak Herero and Afrikaans. He later married /Eteb's mother and settled in Omaruru: /Eteb grew up speaking fluent Damara, Oshiherero, Oshivambo and Afrikaans. In recalling his father to me, /Eteb spoke with fondness about the discipline he received, the distinction which was implicit to being his father's only boy and the excitement associated with secretly leaving the township late at night with his father to poach kudu or buck in the surrounding white commercial farms.

He used several family surnames depending on circumstances: Jones (his paternal grandfather) conferred tentative symbolic status in official circles while Gawaseb, (his mother's maiden name) and /Haseb (his maternal aunt's married name) connected him into a wide network of several hundred people through kinship. Like many Damara children, he was brought up in the family of his mother's relatives. At the age of five, he was 'given' to an older brother (actually his maternal cousin) shortly after he married and established a new household in Walvis Bay. This 'brother' was in effect repaying a debt to /Eteb's mother who had previously raised him as a child. /Eteb carried another less noticeable scar from this period - he had been blinded in one eye after his 'step-mother' struck him with the buckle end of a belt for a petty misdemeanour. In Walvis Bay, he quickly learned to fend for himself with part-time jobs such as selling newspapers. At the age of 12, he chose to board at a rural primary school outside of Walvis Bay and three years later went to the secondary school in Otjiwarongo where he passed his Standard 10 and met Sylvia. He worked in a local butchers shop for a year or so and then at the behest of another older 'brother' (*aubutib* designates both older brother and cousin) went to manage a rural shop in the communal area of Otjimbingwe.[3] This was the same cousin who 'owned' the residence in Blau Berg which /Eteb was looking after when I met him.

Several key factors in /Eteb's decision to remain in Okombahe were explained to me in the following way. In the first place, the opportunity to

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[3] Previously designated a 'Native Reserve' for Oshiherero and Damara speaking people.

'look after' his family's tenancy of two houses in Blau Berg (one of which was full of building materials that his cousin planned to make a restaurant in Okombahe) afforded him some status as an independent man and meant that he would have the opportunity of a job when his cousin's restaurant went ahead. It was also a chance to prove his trustworthiness, and at the same time a rare opportunity to 'own' a proper rent-free house with running water, electricity and secure locks. Secondly, living in Okombahe meant that he was distant from his family and therefore could live away from the unavoidable daily responsibilities and demands of his relatives, whether these be moral demands that he give up his 'Rasta' attitudes, or material demands for money and food. /Eteb often spoke to me about the lack of trust within his extended family, especially between himself and his older cousins and their wives. Finally, Okombahe offered him a few opportunities for 'making business' through petty trading in alcohol, cigarettes or ice lollies (which could be made in the freezer his cousin had left in the house.)[4] /Eteb worked as my translator sporadically during the year I lived around Okombahe. Towards the end of that time he had begun to establish a small informal photography business, taking portraits of neighbours and friends.

Albert's social life seemed to centre around Okombahe's junior secondary school; his friends were younger students who used his house as an escape from the school hostel or their parents' home. His relationship with Michael (9, 10, 16) was one of the few he maintained with a local family although by the time I left Okombahe, they had fallen out with each other over the 'borrowing' of tape cassettes. The interior decoration of juxtaposed biblical scripture and pornography (9, 10) in Michael's house is indicative of divergent values underlying a more general discourse involving sexuality, morality and gender associated with the instability inherent in many male/female relationships in Okombahe and Damaraland generally. Albert's own bedroom was plastered with images of naked white women, a poster of Jean Claude van Damme and the text of an ad for 'Wonderbra' which read: "look me firmly in the eyes and say you love me". The photos in Michael's and Albert's bedrooms reflect an inner tension between actual intimate experience and ideal objectification; this tension finds a counterpart in expectations of trust between friends as well as between men and women.

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[4] The freezer and the free electricity that went with a government house meant that in exchange for a share of the meat, Albert could also offer a service to anyone who bought whole goats or sheep, although this was usually confined to neighbours or relatives with salaried jobs.

Albert sometimes took me to the townships in the white, commercial farming dorps. Although this was invaluable for me as a way of getting to know his wide circle of friends and acquaintances, I found myself acutely embarrassed when his usual sensitivity and 'good manners' gave way to what seemed to me (and I expect the women he accosted) a loutish pestering of girls whom he'd obviously never met before. He would shout, often in English, come-ons such as: "Hey baby, what are you doing tonight - you look so good!" Or "How about it? Let's share love!" as we drove through the dusty streets of the townships. This was typical behaviour of many young Damara men and seemed to constitute nothing more significant than what would be involved in asking a stranger for food, or a casual acquaintance for a cigarette. Gossip about sexual liaisons were rife in Okombahe and Albert, although he was serious about his relationship with Sylvia, would often brag to me about his exploits, which he would in weaker moments admit were fantasies. Gossip finally got the better of him after Sylvia's baby was born and she 'hiked' to Okombahe to check out the rumours that Albert was having an affair with a girl from the secondary school. Although this was almost certainly not the case, these insistent allegations finally succeeded in driving a wedge between Albert and Sylvia, resulting in verbal fights and eventually Sylvia's return to her mother's house in Otjiwarongo.

To a large extent, such incidents were a symptom of the insecurity inherent in Albert and Sylvia's situation. Even Albert's occupation of his brother's house at Blau Berg was contested by some of his neighbours who complained that Blau Berg was built to house old people and families, not young single men. Each time we left the village for even a night or two, Albert would make elaborate plans to foil those he thought wanted to take over his house for themselves. Locks were constantly being changed, friends were asked to stay while he was away, and he rarely told anyone about his travelling plans in case this gave them the opportunity to either burgle or squat his house.

My association with Albert definitely influenced my standing with some of the village's traditional leaders: although never referred to openly, my contacts with several elders were curtailed on account of my friendship with Albert. He was looked upon by many 'respectable' members of the community, especially those in positions of power, as riff-raff, in spite of the fact that many of these same people were involved in petty criminality and blatant corruption.

flats, a ribbon of Ana trees fringing the Omaruru River and low granite hills in the distance. Christine's husband was often away from Okombahe for weeks at a time, prospecting for tin and tourmaline which are found scattered throughout the western reaches of Damaraland. On his occasional returns to Okombahe, they would move into a two-roomed mud-brick house adjacent to Christine's mother. Later that year, just as she was about to give birth to her third child, she was able to move into a house in Blau Berg when it was vacated Maria, who passed on this informal tenancy to her friend.

"We have a tough life - my husband tries to earn an income from prospecting and I work part-time in the Okombahe kindergarten. It is hard to survive and I can hardly explain how we do it": Christine and her husband's combined income averaged less than N$200 (£30) per month and they often relied on Christine's mother who worked in the school hostel. It is hardly surprising that many of Christine's photographs are concerned with conditions of poverty: her mother preparing veld food (8), her uncle selling empty bottles (19), her grandfather whose pension has been withheld for several months (22). Many of her descriptions of hardship are oblique and mitigated by references to the simple pleasures of daily life - some of which are redolent with her own childhood memories: waiting by the fire for early morning coffee (10,11), the good, 'nutty' taste of baked grass-seed (8), the respite of a cool cloudy day in spite of the emaciated condition of the hobbled horses: "if you grew up on a farm you would be interested in this picture" (9).

Close-ups of friends and relatives incorporate stories about the problems she and her family encounter on a daily basis. These hardships are countered by narrative asides which betray an implicit affection for the people in her photographs, often in the form of amusing comments on circumstantial details such as her uncle's cigarette "which won't leave his mouth: His life is there, without it he will feel alone" (17). It is hard not to interpret her description of her uncle's affection for his cat (19) with her own feelings of affection towards her uncle. This is revealed in other ways, such as Christine's choice to focus on an economy of pleasure in her uncle's life - the sharing of tombo and tobacco with a friend. A similar theme is repeated in the image of her grandfather, sitting over a smoky fire waiting for water to boil for coffee (6): "He isn't worried about the smoke, in fact he is also smoking his pipe", but somehow the fact that her younger brother "forced

himself into the picture" belies her own concern about the future of her siblings and children and a fear that their lives may follow a pattern so common to the lives of her elders', one of disappointment and poverty. The life of her mother's sister (12) who lives 'alone' is laid bare in a few short comments which hint at the complex inter-generational dependence within families:

> This is my only surviving grandmother, Maro Fistos (my mother's younger sister). She came to our house and asked for a little sugar; there is no-one else whom she can ask. We are the only people who will take care of her, although she also looks after one of her granddaughters...

Christine's respect for elders is epitomised in her portrait of the 'one-liner' !Guri-haseb (5) "... the sort of man who will not depend on others", and Ou Mika (13) her 'advisor' who is a devout member of the Evangelical Ebenizer Church ("with God every thing is possible"). Christine, who was brought up in the Catholic church told me that she was 'converted' to this small but growing Christian sect mainly because it stresses the importance of monogamy in marriage. She sees a stable married relationship to be of paramount importance for her family's future. While she also adheres to other strictures enforcing abstinence from drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco, but she holds no moral judgement over her neighbours in this regard (17 to 21). Christine's moral landscape depends on the continuity and stability conferred by her extended family, on the extension of this into the ideal of a monogamous marriage and a faith that this will eventually enable her to become independent and self-reliant.

Her close-ups (like Albert's) are all interior shots, reflecting an intimacy associated with the private space in her mother's or uncle's home (13, 16, 17, 22). The small number of photographs taken outside of a family context depict a public space in which objects are ordered and circulated in much the same way as in the more intimate setting of her home. The way in which her neighbours clean the area around their home (2) where rubbish "is piled up in one place so that anyone who wants to can pick through it for something that might have a little value" parallels the comment about her prized cupboard of wedding gifts: "Someday, if I get a better life, I will give them to my mother or my sister. . .".

Christine sold several prints and received many compliments about her photographs during the opening night of the exhibition in Windhoek. Afterwards, we met in Okombahe where I interviewed her for a feature for Namibia's feminist *Sister* magazine. I asked her what she had learned from the whole experience of taking part in the photography project and whether it had changed her outlook in any way. She answered me while nursing her new born baby girl, amidst the noise and bustle of her young children - she was obviously exhausted, but remained upbeat:

> I'm interested in the future of my people, just as I'm interested in my own future. This opportunity to make photographs has shown me something important about looking at the present and thinking about my fate. Although the photographs are not important in themselves, when I began to think and talk about them I realised that there was much to be learned, that the history of a photo makes it real and interesting. Now when I think about my own future at times I am optimistic. I would like to complete my education and become someone, perhaps a teacher. I also know now that I have some talent as an artist and I am looking for a chance to develop that talent. But as always, money is a problem: everything is money, or rather the lack of it. Perhaps if I could afford to buy some goats and become a farmer this might help me to overcame some of these problems.

Although not impossible, the probability of achieving her ambition seemed so remote to me. A lack of opportunity, and powerlessness is inherent in so many young rural woman's situation: even were funding available for Christine to attend art school or teachers' training college in Windhoek, how would she be able to manage this under the weight of her maternal responsibilities? Creating an autonomous life, establishing an independent household is harder for women who generally have fewer employment opportunities and consequently depend on their extended family or marriage to expand their economic opportunities. Teen-age motherhood is a common burden and constraint on women's options for work. In Christine's case a lucky break for her husband or perhaps with the help of her extended family she could find a way to spend a year studying in Windhoek. Her optimism is tempered by a pragmatism common to many people in Damaraland - livestock farming is the most obvious option for economic advancement. But even this is subject to having first achieved some measure of stability in the form of a nucleus herd and the support of

either family or friends. This goal of achieving security and independence through farming in a marginal environment, plagued by droughts, thieves and the demands of reciprocity within impoverished extended families is a measure of the limitations inherent in Damaraland's economic landscape.



After the rains came...

Willem and Willemina Hoeseb's photographs portray a nuclear family who have achieved Christine's ambition - theirs is a story of success, independence and self-reliance based on livestock farming in one of Okombahe's many outlying settlements. As a couple they embody the ideal which Christine referred to in her statement about !Guri-haseb (5): " 'Do you know that your lifetime is in your own two hands?' He pointed to his hand and said: "your money is here: if you know how to use your hands you will never be hungry".

The Hoesebs live in Dawebtsaub ('tamarix well'), a small scattered settlement linked to Okombahe by a series of narrow donkey cart tracks which follow the Omaruru River down stream, winding next to and criss-crossing its deeply etched water course and green ribbon of vegetation, through the rugged broken escarpment and far out into the desert region of the pro-Namib (6 & 20). The settlements along this stretch of river are located in places where the ground water in the deep alluvial sand and gravel is brought close to the surface by underlying dike or sill rock intrusions which cut across the river channel intermittently. Wells are constructed on the river banks or in the river itself and water is lifted using buckets attached to long, counter weighted poles (*xui ǂkhorib*). Many of these sites have been permanently occupied by Damara farmers during the past century and were probably also used by pastoralists and hunters in pre-colonial times. Travelling through these homesteads west of Okombahe is like travelling into the past; the material artefacts of the twentieth century (diesel pumps, corrugated building materials, scrap metal and wire fencing)

diminish incrementally, replaced by unlined hand-dug wells, houses constructed of drift wood plastered with cow dung, small garden patches and kraals constructed of thorn branches. Signs of de-population, which is partly cyclical and drought related, partly a symptom of modernisation and urban drift, are seen in derelict homesteads and an increasing preponderance of old people.

Willem had lived in Dawebtsaub as a child, but had spent most of his adult life working as a semi-skilled employee of the Rossing uranium mine and latterly in a fish processing factory at Walvis Bay. During the 1980s he began to invest some of his savings in livestock and employed a relative to look after it at his family's abandoned homestead, but finally decided that he could make a better living by managing his stock himself. Willemina, whose family lived in the Khorixas area, had grown up with livestock and she was also a highly skilled and diligent farmer. Together they had built up a large herd of some 400 goats and sheep in ten years, starting from an initial investment in 20 animals.

Willem and Willemina's first film is a 'day-in-the-life' narrative which accurately reflects a typical stock-farmer's routine (1 -14).[5] The photo story depicts the beginning, middle and end of the working day by highlighting specific activities which punctuate the otherwise continuous work of herding the livestock into and back from the veld. The 'cold' of early morning in summer is actually a pleasure (1) which enhances the ritual enjoyment of a cup of tea (2) before embarking on the morning chores: making a careful check of every individual in a flock of 400 animals for immanence of birth and health disorders (3); marking and integrating older kids with the herd (4); milking (5); letting mothers suckle their young kids and lambs which have been segregated in separate pens and kept at home until the age of three or four months. All this takes time, and a highly developed attention to, and memory for detail. Several hours later, sometime during mid-morning and after a simple meal, the kraal is opened and the goats and sheep herded towards the veld (6). It is unusual that a couple and their young child would herd their animals together like this, but today they have done this for a combination of reasons: the desire to illustrate the fundamental structure of their working lives through the photo project; the opportunity to gather veld food after the rains; the presence of

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[5] They are atypical as a farming unit however, insofar as they lived as a self-contained nuclear family, and often managed their livestock without the help of hired labourers.

water in the veld necessitating more active herding; and just the sheer pleasure of experiencing the transient beauty of the greening landscape after the rains.

Normally, the daily round of herding is self-regulating: the farmer creates a routine around the hunger and thirst of his livestock which takes them away from home in the morning and brings them back in the afternoon. Goats and sheep often spend as much as 16 to 18 hours between late afternoon and mid-morning penned in kraals, consequently, when they are released they hurry to the veld where they graze and browse for 6 to 8 hours until their hunger is satisfied and their thirst brings them back to the homestead where they drink before being kraaled again for the night. During the short rains however, pools of water have collected in granite depressions so Willem and Willemina must be vigilant in herding their animals to and from this water, especially in seeing that they all return home in the evening.

The topic of rain and water is ubiquitous in Namibia, and especially in the dry, semi-desert western region of Damaraland. At the time that these photos were made, there was enough water in the veld to sustain the livestock, but it didn't last for long. Willem was busy digging a new well after the river had flooded and completely filled in the well he had dug the year before. A week of back-breaking work would be enough to dig a new well some 4 to 5 metres down into the hard-packed gravel and during the following months this was deepened by pick-axing laboriously into the hard calcrete base. Six months later, as the water table continued to drop, Willem was emptying this well using a rope and bucket, every six hours during the day and night in order to store enough water (about 1200 litres) in drums and troughs to meet the daily requirements of his thirsty stock. He often spoke to me of his plan to construct a permanent brick-lined well protected from floods but as another dry season wore on this investment of time and effort appeared dubious with the increasing possibility of renewed drought necessitating a move to another area with better grazing.

While all the images and many of Willem's captions hint at wider social relations, the photos firmly locate Willem, Willemina and their daughter Queenie, as the focused centre of their daily world. A sense of their self-reliance is exhibited in images of both their stock and the surrounding veld: Willem told me that "the drought lasted a very long time, but this year we had good rains and the grass is beginning to come out - it makes a man feel

nice, when his stock are healthy and growing". Willem is feeling 'fat' himself (7) and this good humour (and identification with his herd) is acted out and symbolised by the gift of his hat to his favourite ram, 'the chief' (*Gao-aob*) (14). This series of photographs encapsulates Willem and Willemina's personal identification with their livestock and the physical environment upon which they depend for their survival as an independent family. The photos of themselves and their livestock in the veld (7 - 13) are celebrations of the brief transformation of the veld after the rains and this lends a relaxed 'family outing' atmosphere to what otherwise might be a time of severe anxiety over the recurrent possibility of drought.

Willem (known by most people as *Matiba* or 'give mine for others') and Willemina were in many respects an unusual couple. In some ways they reminded me of more educated, well-connected and 'upwardly mobile' Damara speakers who I knew as teachers and civil servants. Often such 'middle-class' Damaras also own livestock, and are known in development jargon as 'weekend' or absentee farmers who typically see livestock as a secondary economic activity and a means of supporting extended family dependants by providing them with (low-paid) work as herders. Stories of family intrigue surrounding the mis-management of livestock owned by absentee farmers are rife in Damaraland and Willem's previous experience of entrusting his livestock to various family members were unexceptional in this regard. References to theft, deception, and mistrust dominated discussions regarding Damara labourers, whether involving family or not. The Hoesebs had managed to extricate themselves from this syndrome, common to many livestock owners, through self-reliance and by distancing themselves from their extended families. This attitude was also consistent with their deep suspicion of many of their neighbours.

One day Willem told me that a message had been broadcast over the radio informing him of his brother's sudden (and violent) death in Omaruru. Because this was now public knowledge he decided not to attend the funeral because it would present an ideal opportunity to anyone who might be waiting to steal some of his livestock. Both he and Willemina kept a constant eye on the movements of everyone in the vicinity of their homestead: when their newly purchased team of donkeys went missing Willem was convinced that they had been stolen by the same neighbour from whom he had bought them only a few weeks previously.

I was unwittingly involved in creating more mistrust between Willem and Linda Axakhoes's family who were close neighbours and 'friends'. I had stopped at Linda's on my way down river and had eaten a tasty meal of goat meat with her and her family. Later, I mentioned this to Willem in the course of a casual conversation about the welfare of various people on the river. It transpired that earlier in the day, he had seen Linda as he passed her house on his way to the shop in Okombahe - she had told him that they had nothing to eat, and since he had often shared meat with her family in the past, this lie caused a permanent rift in their relationship. Not only was this a blatant breach of neighbourly reciprocity, but Willem also wondered if they had lied because they were eating one of his goats!

Part of the difficulty in conveying the dynamics of social distrust is related to the complexity of describing the flux of population which occurs in rural farm settlements. During the year in which I visited Dawebtsaub a total of 28 adults lived there, but only between 7 and 15 adults were resident at any one time. Each homestead site had a recognised 'owner', who was often the family elder who had 'inherited' the usufruct, but such owners were often absent, their rights kept in tact by either other family members or labourers. The logic of tenurial practice stems from this continual movement of people and the temporary migration of entire families and their herds during times of drought. This population instability has the effect of dissolving any sense of collective, community responsibility. Thus, the character of settlements and the identities of individuals within them are to an extent determined by residence patterns and drought induced migration. The mere fact of this photographic documentation gives an impression of permanence and stability which is in many ways false: although the Hoeseb's homestead will continue to 'be there' (and to 'be theirs'), their lives are likely to change dramatically at some point in the near future - recurrent drought will see to that.

Not only are concepts of tenure, property relation and networks of exchange integrally bound up with a farming system heavily determined by environmental factors, but strategies of herd building are also only understandable from a perspective which takes environmental, social and economic considerations into account. When I first met Willem I was puzzled by the fact that his herd contained such a large proportion of 1 to 5 year old castrated goats. Rather than selling them in their prime at about 18 months of age and thereby avoiding the risk of losing many of them from

theft, disease or drought, Willem 'irrationally' kept this accumulated capital, alive on the hoof, rather than as cash in his bank account. This strategy was partly a result of poor marketing opportunities and partly a way of storing capital in a form which could not easily be spent. Finally, he sold all of his castrated and surplus male goats in February 1996 at the beginning of what promised to be a year of drought. With this cash, he bought a bakkie and started looking for opportunities to move his stock to areas of better grazing: rains had been slightly better further north and since Willemina's family lived near Khorixas, this connection would present an opportunity to migrate until conditions improved once again in Dawebtsaub.

The sociality inherent in migration, livestock marketing and regular visits to Okombahe or further afield to visit Willemina's family in Khorixas is intimated in their second film which is almost entirely composed of portraits of Willem, Willemina and Queenie presented in variety of more formal dress evoking a sense of their public personas and social status (15, 16, 20). Attention to personal appearance and dress is just as important in rural Namibia as it is globally, as a means of conveying distinctions of value, class and public image: suits, jewellery, handbags and a brief-case are all references to roles which constitute important facets of Willem's and Willemina's personal identity outside of the isolated setting of their (transient) home. These portraits are defined by place and work (this series was sited either in front of the house, or near the kraal) and serve not only to reinforce the cohesiveness of family identity but also embody the continuity of personal history, a sense of pride in their achievements and their hopes for an uncertain future. Other more informal 'domestic' photos of Queenie and her mother betray a sense of pride and attachment to place serving as important markers for personal memories and family affections: "Queenie is so small now, she is only 3 years old but someday, when she grows up to maybe 16 years old, then I will be 66, an old man, and I can show her what she looked like when she was young".



Swallowing your dreams

The majority of photos taken by the **Lucia and Tekla /Goagoses** are family portraits, situated either in their garden, in the midst of their homestead, or in the 'beautiful' surroundings of the Omaruru River. In spite of the formality of many of the poses, this group of photographs conveys the deeply personal atmosphere inherent in this large, relaxed and convivial family group. What we see in front of the camera also reflects what is going on behind it: Lucia and her daughter Tekla have controlled the staging of these portraits, many of which are of themselves: the camera seems to be a disembodied family eye, free-floating between children, adults and in-laws. The portraits display few variations of social or spatial distance: a homogeneous quality of either casual impassivity or muted humour pervades the interaction between photographer and photographed. This family is composed of three mutually dependent generations, a stable core of whom were born here. The /Goagoseb family have occupied this site intermittently for at least 5 generations.

Tekla is explicit about her reasons for taking family photos: "it makes me think of my two sister's husbands who are now dead" (4); "If someone ever asks about any of King David Goreseb's children, I can show them this picture of his first born" (9); "Our family is scattered all over Namibia, so if some of them come here some day, I can show them this picture of my father" (13). Photography becomes an 'inventory of mortality' (Sontag 1980: 70) embracing a sense of family unity which is grounded in continuity and a sense of place. This theme is reiterated in photos of cleaning grass-seeds gathered from ants nests (*tsaui*). Three women sit in close proximity; Lucia emphasises the hard work which this involves (2) and Tekla highlights the continuity which it represents: "I learned to gather tsaui from my mother

and father when I was small..." (14, 15). The collection of wild honey and traditional dancing are also special activities, standing as conscious symbols of embodied practice within a trans-generational cultural continuity.

Lucia only hints at the boundedness of family life by referring to her neighbours and their cattle: "sometimes they sell their milk or give it to relatives" (7). What is said by omission is that she never tastes this milk: few ties of co-operation or exchange exist between Lucia's family and that of her nearest neighbours. The neighbours who do create affective bonds tend to be hired labourers such as Polis, the young Ovambo gardener (Tekla 8), who come to the area, usually on a temporary basis, without either the responsibilities or the opportunities inherent in kinship networks.

Jansen is roughly half way between Okombahe and Dawebtsaub; it is larger than Dawebtsaub but similar in many respects: both have livestock farming economies, some gardening and a stable core of residents and 'owners' with a dynamic internal population flux. I met the /Goagosebs during the first few days after moving to Jansen. At the time I was almost totally dependent on my translator Annatjie, to help me make my introductions and communicate with my new neighbours. At first I confined myself to looking around, counting livestock and looking through all the new gardens which had been created as a result of a newly established bore hole, reservoir and system of pipes which now made irrigated gardening possible for eight of the settlement's ten homesteads. I quickly became used to speaking to people through Annatjie, but as I was questioning Ouma Lucia about one of her crops, she suddenly replied in English! Perhaps she wished that she had kept this ability to herself as I plied her with questions and comments in my excitement at being able to communicate with her directly. It was almost 50 years since she learned to speak English when, as a teen-ager, she was sent to a Catholic convent in Lesotho: she had used her English only sporadically since that time.

Tekla spoke to me in simple Damara using elaborate mime and sign language; she resolutely refused my repeated offers to teach her some English. It was only several months later that I discovered her linguistic ability almost by mistake during a dispute between Tekla and my neighbours. The rota for watering the gardens was a constant source of dispute and ill-will between several factions in Jansen. I had been working with Ouma Ida Pietersen in her garden when Tekla appeared, angry and upset, shouting about how the water had been cut off while she was in the

middle of irrigating her crops. The ensuing argument between Tekla and Ouma Ida was conducted in Damara and Afrikaans, but as it grew heated it was interjected with exclamations of 'fuck off' from Tekla who at that this point seemed on the verge of physical violence. When I casually remarked to Tekla that her English was very good when she was angry, she turned to me with a look of embarrassment and broke into laughter, apologising to Ouma Ida and me in English. She never spoke to me in English again, but continued to teach me Damara and maintain our friendship through jokes, mime and sharing small items of food and favours.

My relationship with Lucia was more serious and practical. She spoke to me as if I were an impartial witness to the ongoing injustices of communal life, its poverty, insecurity and mistrust between neighbours. Yet I sensed a motive on her part, which was aimed at making me the mouth-piece of her complaints either in my role as naive gossip or as an 'outsider with access to authority'. To voice her complaints, to confront the neighbours who controlled her family's use of water would bring with it the risk of open conflict, insecurity and further exclusion. Her deep conservatism seemed at times horribly ironic, especially when she ruefully reminisced about the stability and social order conferred on Okombahe by the past regime - 'when the Boers ruled over us'. Initially I was deeply puzzled by both her reticence in speaking out and her marginal position within the community of Jansen, after all she had lived here for much of her life, her husband Johannes had been born in this same homestead and the /Goagoseb family had resided in Jansen longer than any other family.

Several factors contributed to Lucia's insecurity. Apart from the fact that she and her husband were now physically less capable of looking after their meagre assets, their struggle to survive the drought of 1991-2 had seriously reduced their ability to cope. Much of their cash and material reserves had been depleted over a period of three years when they migrated from Jansen in the hopes of finding better grazing for their livestock. They had moved four times during this period, first 30 kilometres west along the Omaruru River to a less populated settlement where competition for grazing was less intense, but as the drought deepened they moved again to various settlements south of the river. Each time they moved meant dismantling and rebuilding their huts, constructing a new kraal and developing working relationships with their new neighbours. In the event, their herd was decimated anyway and they moved back to Jansen in 1994 just as a garden

project was nearing completion which offered the opportunity of an alternative to their dependence on livestock. The fact that they had been absent during the protracted planning and organisational stages of the garden project contributed to their marginal position with regard to the implementation of the project. Theirs was the last garden to receive a pipe-line and their call on available water was weakest. Lucia and Tekla's photos were taken at the time when their first crops were nearing maturity, but conflicts with neighbours over access to water took the edge off their pride and put their newly found food security in some doubt.

Lucia was the *de facto* head of a large, elderly family group. Her husband Johannes was crippled with arthritis. He often joked to me that he was 'finished' (*toago*) and then laugh as he pointed to his groin and reiterated: "*Toago* ". His two older sisters lived in separate households near by - Angela had a form of Turrets syndrome which was controlled by heavy doses of tranquillisers which made her completely dependent on Lucia's care (Tekla 9). The visiting doctor knew that Angela's condition was chronic but consistently gave out only a week or two's medication at a time, I suspect more for Lucia's benefit rather than for Angela's. When this ran out, Angela was obstinate and outspoken - she made Lucia's life a misery by continually contradicting her; she swore and spoke without restraint, uttering the first thoughts which came into her head with an incisive rude wit which cut through any residual social niceties. She would partially undress herself in front of strangers and roll around on the ground, then sit up and act completely normally for a few minutes. Her sedated state was spent mainly lying in her hut, coughing and muttering incomprehensible oaths. Fistolene her sister, was morose but capable of looking after herself (10) and lived nearby in a separate hut and cooked for herself on her own hearth.

Tekla was unable to bear children and had adopted her sister's last born daughter when she returned from Kavango three years previously. She and her 'boy-friend" (*/aib*) Benjamin and to a lesser extent Lucia, were the only able bodied adults in the family. It was just possible for seven people to survive on N$540 (£90) per month and to pay the wage of a herder from their four state pensions but this left nothing for contingencies such as medical expenses, clothing or parts for the donkey cart. I never knew them to sell any of their livestock although they had a herd of some 150 goats. In the main, any culled animals were distributed among Lucia's children and grandchildren in Okombahe, Walvis Bay and Windhoek or consumed

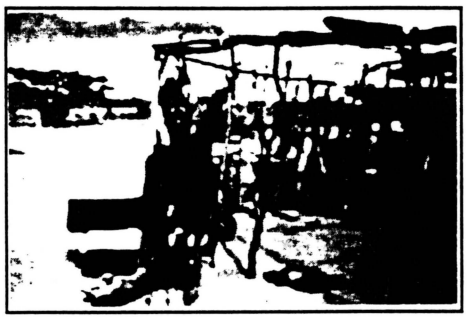
during school holidays when up to seven grandchildren came to stay with Ouma Lucia and Johannes.

The Goagoseb's goats were all herded and kraaled together although each individual family member owned animals which were identified by distinctive ear-marks. In common with the majority of livestock farmers in Damaraland, their success in maintaining a herd was based on their experience and skill balanced against the limitations inherent in this drought-prone environment. The amount of care and attention given to livestock was tempered by a common sense law of diminishing returns: the depredations of drought, outbreaks of contagious disease such as *Pasturellosis* , predation by jackals and sporadic stock theft meant that after a certain point, the efforts of farmers seemed to make little difference to the 'natural' reproductive capacities of the herd. Since male animals are not kept separate from the herd, the reproductive cycle of small stock is in effect controlled by climatic events and the natural seasonal cycle of small stock fertility. While kidding normally takes place during a concentrated period during the early spring and summer, births occur over an extended period of many months. This necessitates a labour intensive farming system where kids are separated from their mothers after a few days and are only allowed to suckle briefly during the morning before the main herd is taken to the veld and again in the evening when they return. The skill involved in matching over a hundred new born kids to their mothers during the height of the kidding season, twice a day, is a testament to the observational skills common to Damara farmers.

The /Goagosebs are representative of many farming families throughout Damaraland. Having lived much of their lives as communal farmers, the situation they find themselves in as they grow old is increasingly affected by the socio-economic changes associated with modernisation: the fragmentation of families along generational lines as children seek wage employment in towns and the effects of recent severe drought which have plunged elderly farmers into deepening poverty. The high unemployment rates throughout Namibia mean that for many elderly farmers, their pensions are the final safely net for themselves as well as for their children and grandchildren.

In many ways, Lucia and Tekla's lives in Jansen are rich compared with many of Okombahe's population who had neither livestock, gardens or a large extended family network. Tekla seemed resigned to the fact that "none

of us have jobs" - she qualified her regret by listing all the things which made life possible: "we raise goats, we garden, we gather *tsaui* and veld foods after the rains, sometimes we brew tombo from honey. I would like to have a job but what can we do? Thinking about the future is like swallowing your dreams".



Jealousy/ gossip

Christolene Goses's photos illustrate another variation on previous narrative themes invoking a sense of personal identity based on affective family relationships and the desire for self-reliance. Hers is the story of a young woman in the process of setting up her own household. She and her boy-friend Bernardo depict their recently established house and kraal as a site where social interaction with family, neighbours and friends is contingent on their fragile economic independence sustained through a small herd of goats and their ability to make business with their donkey cart and horses. But first and foremost Asi's desire to consolidate a stable relationship with Bernardo is objectified in her portrait of him as the 'owner and main character of the house" (1). He is portrayed in terms of how he is living: "he is farming with goats and has a dog". The arrangement of a new ghetto-blaster, placed neatly on a folded cloth as if to dissociate it from the prosaic connotations of the Jerry-can supporting it, suggests a lack of closure surrounding the meaning of his role as husband/farmer. The tokens of a global economy, tape machine, track-suit bottoms, trainers and plastic containers are otherwise seamlessly continuous with the open landscape, the partially constructed kitchen shelter, Bernardo's shirt and hat cast casually on the ground, the synthesis of a silver cross with a Rastafarian necklace and Bernardo's gaze into the ambiguous eye of the camera. Christolene's second photograph turns its gaze outwards from her house framing her neighbours and a child standing in front of Bernardo's cart full of fire-wood and water containers. This image serves as an affirmation of their ability to survive as

an independent household as do several other photographs which detail their livestock and business activities (7,8,18,19).

At the time these pictures were taken, Christolene and Bernardo had lived in Khori !Gaos (the place of Khori - the evergreen Salvadora tree), for only two months. Their nearest neighbour, one of Christolene's distant aunts, lived about two hundred metres away from their new homestead - this kinship link was one factor which made it possible for them to move to this dispersed settlement of approximately 25 households situated within an hour's donkey cart ride from Okombahe. One of the reasons Chistolene gave me for their decision to move here was precisely the fact that neither she nor Bernardo had any close family relations in Khori !Gaos. It was near enough to Okombahe for Asi to visit her mother and sisters but far enough away so their newly established house and kraal was separate and distinct, distanced from the daily demands of responsibility and sharing within her large extended family. It was also a place where their livestock was safer from the continual threat of theft which is a constant source of concern for farmers living in Okombahe village.

Their interest and appreciation of history, as embedded in the landscape surrounding Khori-Gaos, is recorded in several pictures of a near-by abandoned mine and "an old spring where our ancestors took their water" (3 -5); the sense of rupture occasioned by remains of the 'white man's' mining industry is slowly healed as the veld takes over this site where 'free-lance' Damara miners pick over the area for fragments of tourmaline crystal. A sense of the historical significance of the present is implicit to many of the images and occasionally referred to in texts such as that which describes a young boy riding a donkey in the green veld: "it looked so nice - another day I will remember that our people were riding donkeys like this" (6).

Christolene's tongue is firmly in her cheek when she describes 'showing my man how to milk. . ." (7) and much of the interview around this set of photographs was taken up in laughter and jokes. While such gendered divisions do exist, they are weak and flexible - a conscious irony is associated with the delimiting of roles defined by gender. Christolene's comments relating to Bernardo's grandmother - "how an old Damara woman gets up in the morning" (10) are suffused with humour and a similar irony about gender: "she milks the goats, makes porridge for the grandchildren, feeds the dogs and then lights her pipe".

I first met Christolene and Bernardo in Arixa Ams, a remote settlement some 70 kilometres to the west of Okombahe. Here, at the south-eastern foot of the Brandberg (9 & 11) and on the edge of the open grass-lands of the pro-Namib, was where Bernardo's family had lived, at least since the early 1950's. His grandfather was the first settler here, having migrated from Sesfontein, several hundred kilometres to the north, at the time when the Okombahe reserve was expanded. Christolene's pictures of Arixa Ams (9 - 13) were taken six months later, on a brief trip we made together to revisit her 'in-laws'. During this interval, the population of Arixa Ams had changed dramatically and several new families had moved here as a result of the previous year's drought.

The importance of personal names in indicating social relationships is hinted at in Christolene's comments about some of Arixa Ams' new residents - the man who has been contracted to build Bernardo a new donkey cart is known as /Unob (nameless) "maybe because he was the kind of guy who always refused to tell anyone his real name" and his (nameless) wife, "who refused to let me take a picture of her up close" reflects the boundaries which attend the relationship of unnamed strangers. In contrast to this, her in-law and friend Lydia told her " I want you to take a photo of us in our own house, even if it is bad and I haven't anything". Her explanation of the photos of her mother's garden (14-17) is similarly infused with statements of affinity, made explicit in the namelessness of her mother's hired helper who is referred to as simply employee (*!gab*) or 'the other man' . Christolene made a point of insisting that her Christian name was used to identify her photographs in the exhibition rather than her childhood Damara name 'Asi' by which she was known within her community of family, friends and acquaintances, thus signifying her legitimate place as an adult in this wider public context.

The double bind inherent in many extended family relationships is mirrored in Christolene's aside about her sister's children: "I want everyone to know I have a great family" (20) and the story about her cousins, the 'tough guys' (21): "They are very naughty but in fact, we understand one another, at least I understand them". Extended family relationships are fraught with conflicting demands and opportunities which are continually negotiated in an environment of material poverty: Asi's stable relationship with her female relatives is contrasted with the instability inherent in her tenuous relationship to many of her male relatives. This ambiguity of

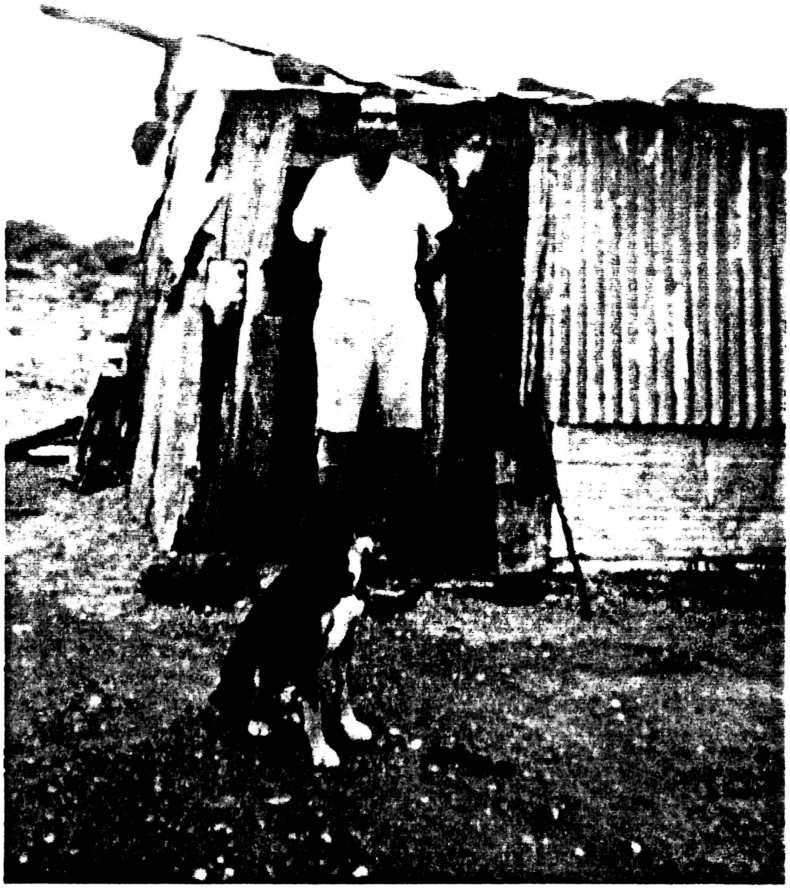
affinity is reflected in the portraits of Bernardo's aunt and her children (22) which conveys the difficulties of single mother's lives: "This family is making money only from the *poka* (alcohol) which Magdalena distils from grass-seed (*tsaui*) - this provides all the income for the family's food". Their facial expressions are penetrating and hard, similar to that of the 'tough guys', but here they are posed deliberately in front of a small bright patch of flowers which alleviates the drab colourless surroundings of their homestead in Okombahe.

By comparison, Christolene and Bernardo's outlook is portrayed as optimistic and positive: they take pride in their ability to survive as an independent household in spite of the fact that this depends almost entirely on a small herd of goats and the meagre earnings from selling wood and hiring out their donkey cart. But behind the up-beat commentaries of Christolene's photos is a story of marital tension, and severe economic hardship. At the time, both were in their mid-twenties having lived together off and on since their late teens. Asi had given birth to two children, one of whom had died in infancy and the other was being raised by a sister who lived in Okombahe where he attended primary school. In exchange, Christolene cared for her sister's youngest child.

When I initially met Asi in Arixa Ams, I was unable to communicate with her (or anyone else in the settlement) through more than a basic exchange of a few Damara and English words. I helped with the daily chores of separating goats, milking, collecting firewood, making the occasional trip to the veld to collect grass seeds and we often ate together. During the month which I camped here Bernardo was sometimes absent for several days visiting his other girl-friend in Uis. Christolene returned to her mother's house in Okombahe soon after this and I met her only six months later just after she had moved to Khori-!Gaos During the course of the following year I saw both her and Bernardo frequently and with the help of an interpreter and a relationship of growing trust I became aware of the extent of misapprehension, distrust and gossip which surrounded their relationship and which began to involve me as well.

During the year in which I stayed in Jansen, several stories which Asi told me began to make sense in relation to her foundering 'marriage'. One day she told me a long detailed story of how she had hiked to Omaruru to buy some shoes for her son. On the way she was given a lift by a white south African miner who befriended her, gave her some money for her

3. My step father John !Naruseb and his dog 'Arib' early in the morning: he was still drunk from the night before.

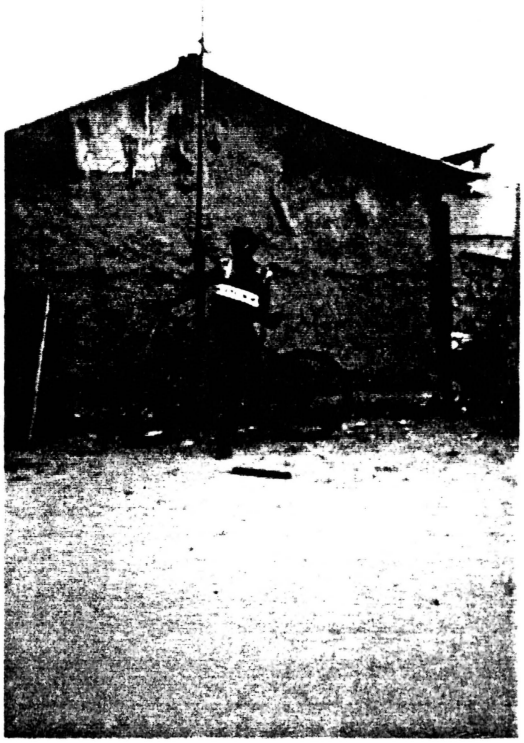


4. That morning, after my mother (Cisillia Axakhoes) and I went to John's house, we all walked to the river. The water had come down during the night and we all wanted to see it. Here my mother is angry with my step father because he has taken her snuff and she is telling him to give it back: "If you don't return my snuff, you must remember that we will continue to fight!".





5. This is me with Feste, Queenie and Jennifer.



6. This is Wilemina my neighbour, standing outside my bedroom. She is much older than me, she is 45 but looks like a young woman. She is not a big woman, but she is strong: it's maybe her bushman blood.



7. This is my sister's daughter Poppy - I love her too much! She is now at Oshituo in the Herero Reserve and I miss her! Her mother (my sister) is in big trouble because of her husband. They are splitting apart and so she left all her children here with us while she is living in Windhoek. Her husband wanted them back in Oshituo and refused to pay maintenance - he went to the police and made her take the children back to him. I asked her to leave this one, but she told me that her husband is too mad. She has seven children.



8. These are my neighbours going home to Dawetsaub from Okombahe. The man thought that I might send this picture to the police if there was trouble, so he beat the donkey as they went past very quickly.



9. & 10. These pictures were taken near my house. It was so beautiful here at that time, during the rains. I wish that people who have never been here after the rains could see how beautiful it is - it is like paradise, though it passes very quickly.

The Omaruru River in flood.





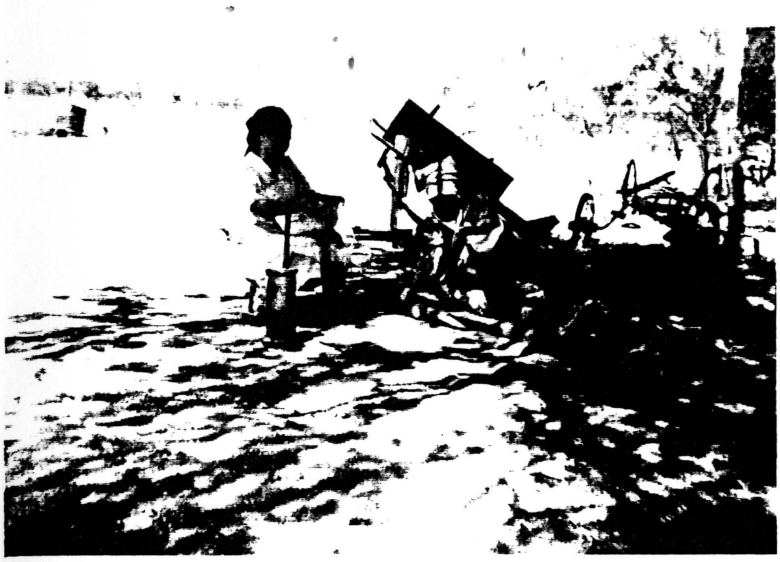
11. This is my boy-friend Victus sitting beside the fire making coffee. Even on the farm we are also drinking coffee.



12. Victus is relaxing after work.



13. I was not waiting for this! After I took a bath, I was relaxing and drinking a cup of coffee - then Victus called my name and the moment I looked up he took this picture.



14. My mother and sister are doing something cultural: cleaning tsaui soon after the rain. This is called //gara, and the winnowing bowl is called gaub.



15. Victus and I are just going to Okombahe. My hair is looking nice and we are wearing good cloths. I wanted a picture of me looking dressed up!



16. I told my brother Usiel to sit down on a chair so that I could make a picture of him: he should have one of himself.



17. Victus playing music in the morning.



18. Linda at home in /Noma.



Ishmael =Kharichab

1. At home in Jansen. My wife (Margaret /Goagoses) is washing clothes while I am in the garden working.



2. Rebecca and Philip are old people from Okombahe. Stones on the ground indicate that there may be tourmaline here so they are removing the bush and starting to dig. They are looking for precious stones in the veld because they are hungry and need some way of making money: their pensions have not come for many months.



3. This is Fistolene /Naris, a pensioner in Okombahe harvesting beans from her garden. She is my brother's woman.



4. Fistolene is preparing beans and porridge for lunch.



5. & 6. At the farm called !Huni-!gaos where family and friends are cooking meat and porridge for an impromptu celebration.



7. Old Johnny is building a new house, since his old one fell apart in the rainy season.





8. It is lunch time and Johnny is hungry - so he is cooking a meal for himself at his old house.

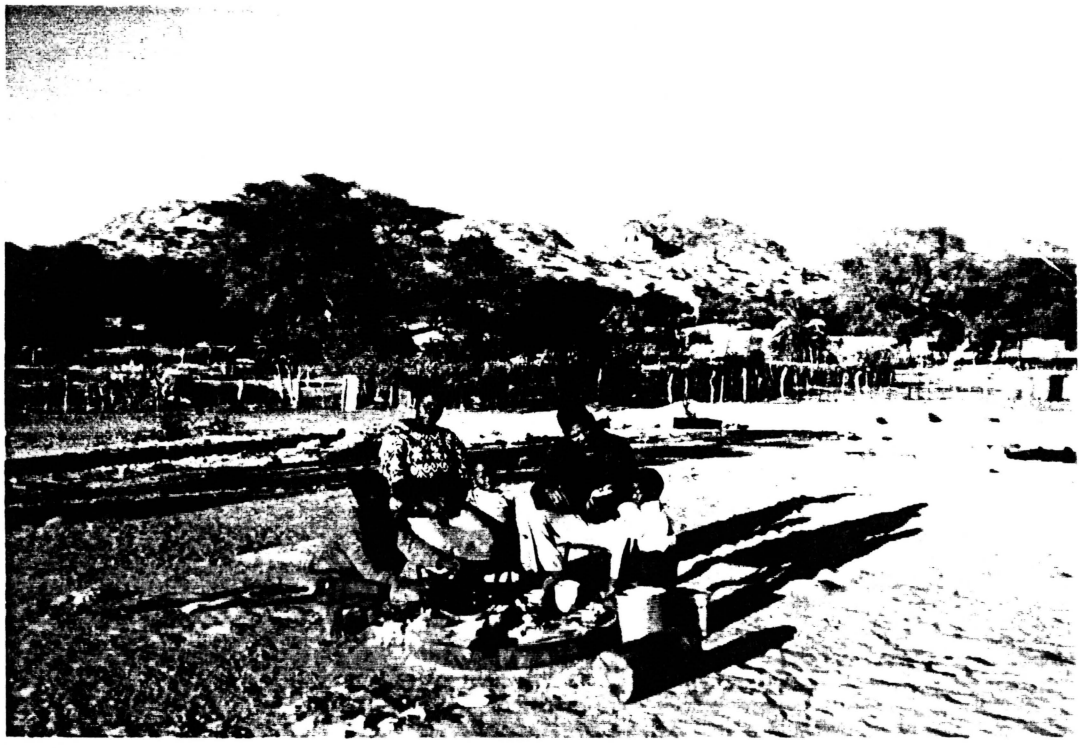


9. I am going home to rest. I have been listening to Nama-Damara radio to hear what has been going on in the world. I am turning the radio off and taking it home with me.



10. My sister, Lena =Kharichas, is helping me to weed and irrigate the garden while I go home to rest. It takes between 1 and 2 hours to water the plants.

11. Margaret and myself, my two sons and step son in the front of our house. It is early in the morning and we are drinking tea before starting work.





Jacky Pietersen

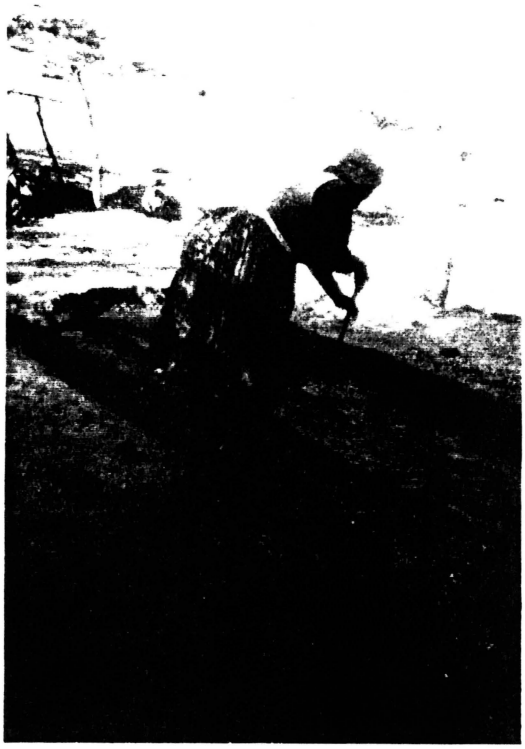
1. Jansen. Ouma Ida washing her grandchildren.



2. Ouma Ida and Ouma Maria.



3. Planting seeds in Ida's garden.





4 & 5. Watering the seed beds.



Ricky Locke

1. I don't know this child, but he was playing with his friends on the other side of the river in Okombahe and I just stopped him and took this picture. You can see he his looking a little bit scared.



Ricky Locke

2. This is my great grandmother (my mother's father's mother) cleaning pots and then resting in the shade. Her name is Elsa Noses, but she is just called 'Maeru' (porridge). There are now five generations of us here at our house in Okombahe.



3. This is 'Oan !Gas' (Libertina) pumping petrol at the shop.



4. This is Nobel's daughter Olga and her friend Consetta at home in Blauberg.



5. The ambulence driver in Okombahe. I had just got a puncture on the road and it was impossible to get help from the owner of the vehicle as the phones are very difficult in Okombahe, there is only one line and it is either busy or out of order. So I asked him to try to phone through for me.

6. Mandi, cursing me and telling me not to take her photo.





7, 8 & 9. Rebecca runs the weaving workshop with her husband Mateus. This is the whole process of how they are getting the wool ready for weaving. Here she is spinning it, and then cleaning it. After that they are sometimes dying it to get other colours like red, blue and green.







10. Mateus can weave about 5 rugs in one week. This was my first visit to their workshop. They are really struggling because of poor market outlets. At the moment, they are sending finished rugs to the church in Windhoek where they are sold to customers, but orders are few and payment often slow.



11, 12 & 13. Workers at the Rossing Garden project.







Maria Pietersen Abubakar

1. =Aobhe and Dadu playing =hus



Maria Pietersen Abubakar

2. Augustinus milking his goats.

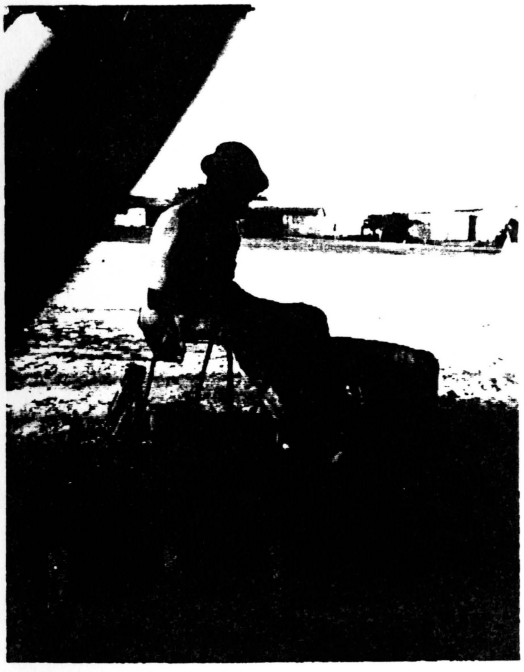


3. Preparing breakfast at Blauberg.



4. Baking fat cookies. This woman supplies all the bread for Blauberg.

5. Early morning at Blauberg.





6. This man is having trouble starting his fire.



7. My daughter Roxette with a friend.

8. My mother.





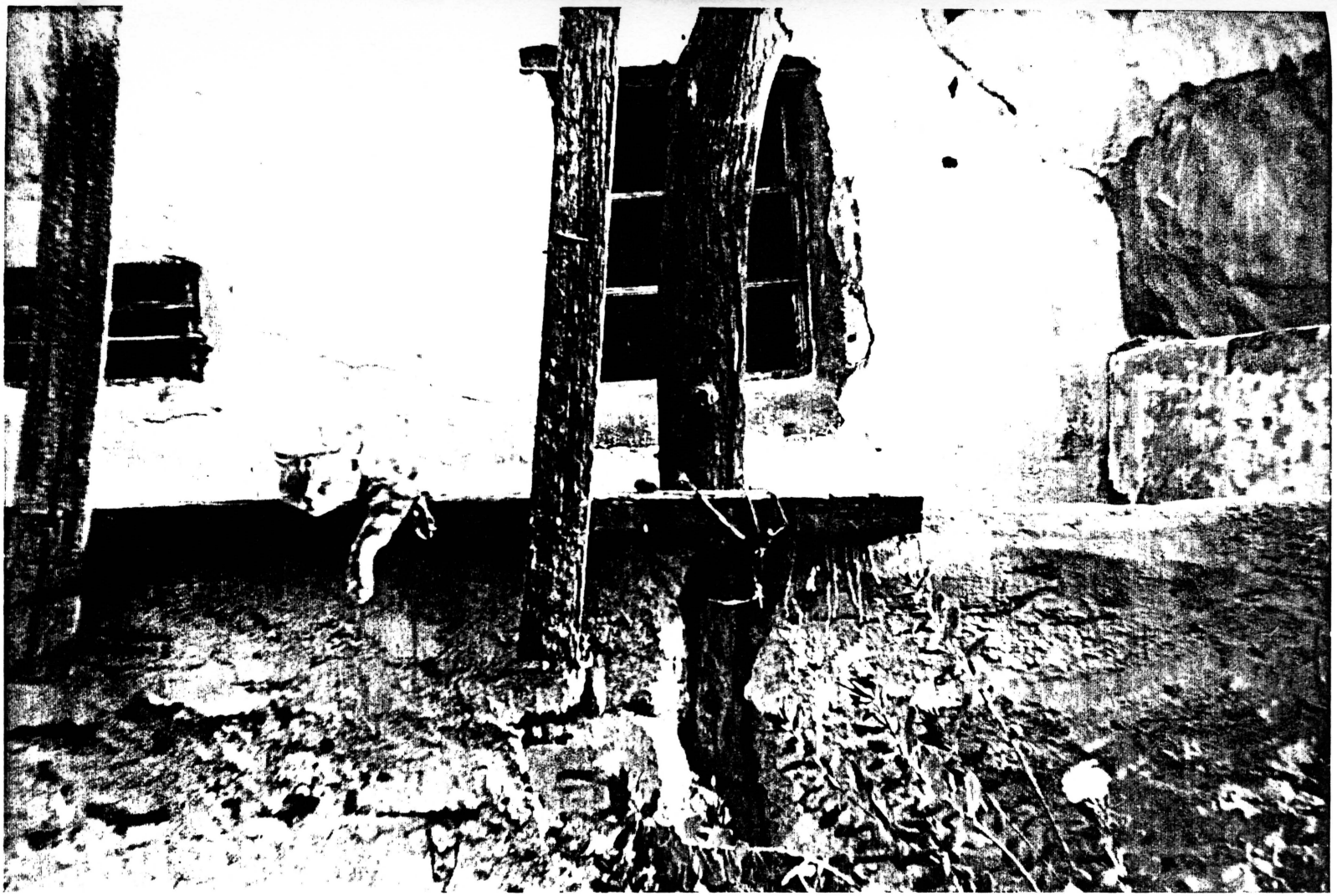
9. My sister Lotte cleaning in front of our house. This is how we spend our mornings at Blauberg.



10. Central Hall, Blauberg. A lonely old woman.

11. Harnessing the donkeys.





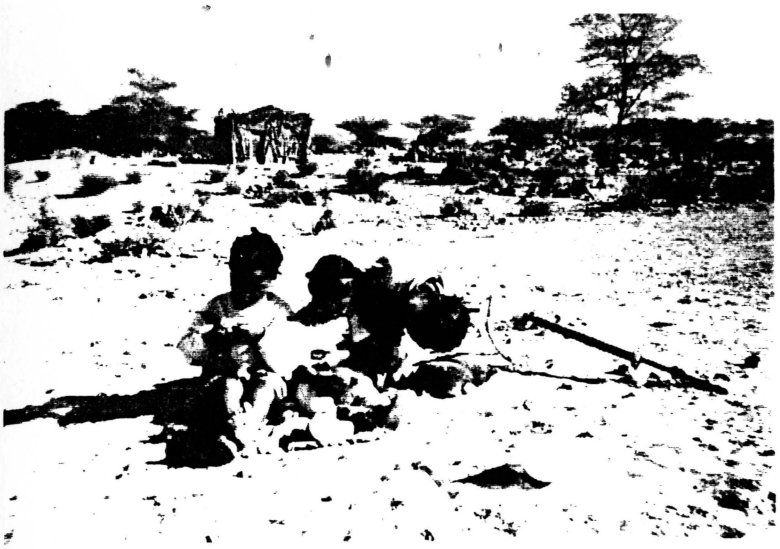
Maria Pietersen Abubakar

12. Augustinus's cat. If you go there even now, that cat will be lying like this with its leg hanging down.



Maria Pietersen Abubakar

13. Making Tambo.



14. Because Roxette doesn't know about plaiting hair she was given the bald doll - Marilyn is saying "look up" but she is too shy to look at the camera.



15. Roxette. Once she came to these pepper plants and bit one and while it was burning her mouth she spoke her first word. "What happened?" we said, and she cried "pepper! pepper". But still she cannot stop going to this pepper tree.

16. This is Marilyn's dolls house.





17. The girls put a trap for birds in the garden. Now, there was no water here so maybe they are collecting water from their urine. First they put water here, under a cage propped up on a stick and when the birds come they pull the stick and catch them. I didn't ask them to do this!

18. I asked the girls to put lemons on their heads.



19. Ana trees in the middle of the river. In the summer, this is where we were always having fun, there is a lot of shade and it's where we go to have our picnics and Christmas and things like that.







20. Dendu, Oboti's husband. He is building their new house.

21. A kooper tree. As children, we used to collect the leaves from this tree and to use as cups in our dolls houses, they are like copper.



22. Khoris (Salvadora persica) in the river. We eat the fruits, some of which are sour and some are sweet: there are two different kinds of berry.



Maria Pietersen Abubakar

23. This is the view of Jansen, our house is hidden in the trees. It hasn't really changed at all since I was a little child. But there was one tree around here, we used to call it Nasartjie, it was like a man who was chasing the kids, so every time we came there and were jumping on the tree it made a noise like 'grrrrrrrrrr', so we thought 'that man will come out and frighten us'. It has rotted away now.

Seeing and Perceiving

"It would seem to be the case that Malinowski's stricture that the function of the ethnographer was to see the native's culture from the native's own point of view could at last be achieved - literally and not metaphorically" (Worth 1974:347). These images present us with a multiplicity of view points within an open and dynamic community of photographers, their families, friends and neighbours. The 'ethnographic present' of the photographs speaks of a consciousness which is as much concerned with moving into the future as with its roots in the past. It is hard to see how these photos constitute or objectify something like a Damara culture: we see influences from 19th century German missionaries in easy conjunction with the latest styles of black American youth culture; Rastafarian and Northern European religious symbols given space alongside soft porn pin-ups; a whole constellation of disparate technologies and material artefacts gleaned from a world market and incorporated, naturalised within the specificity of Okombahe's locality.

> Far from being primordial, 'ethnicity', 'tribalism', and other forms of identity reside in tangible practices - as, of course, does 'modernity'. They are the social and ideological products of particular processes, of the very conjunctures that set the terms of, and relations between, 'local' and global' worlds (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 44).

A purely visual reading of the images conveys a wealth of detail to the viewer: the physical environment during the rainy season, habitations and associated material artefacts, styles of dress, public gatherings, formal and informal poses, facial expressions, family groups, places of work, play and relaxation. This is the level of engagement at which many ethnographic photographs remain (e.g. Collier & Collier 1986), being for the most part an uncritical variation of the documentary genre (Caldarola 1988: 434). As such they are committed to an ontological level of realism, used as a mirror of life, obscuring discourse and supporting generic referents, "relieving the image of the peculiarities which mark real social events" (ibid.:434) remaining identified with characterisations of the 'typical', 'average', 'types', 'examples' etc.

The Okombahe photographers' comments add a layer of meaning to these visual and ethnographic 'facts': statements conveying humour, irony, affection, frustration, apprehension, hope and desire give depth to stories

about personal relationships and contextualize the photos in terms of social, economic and cultural processes. They also incorporate an awareness of the image making process. My own comments throughout this thesis add a further layer of information which interprets both image and text from my personal point of view, and is further complicated by my personal relationship to the photographers and their subjects. The logical extension of this interpretive approach comes dangerously close to what Sekula refers to as 'literary invention with a trivial relation to the artefacts at hand' (1982:91). The reading of photographs based on historical context, discourse theory, or aesthetic judgement (for example), are reductive in relation to the phenomenological impact of the photos, their 'magic'. And finally, the layering of serial images and extended captions gives a narrative quality to the work of each photographer, which at times seems deliberate and intentional, but for the most part is constructed as a fragmentary and attenuated autobiographical story, specific and personal, which draws the viewer into a multi-faceted web of nuanced meaning.

In short, and to paraphrase Harper (1987:5) the foregoing description of how the Okombahe photos can be 'read' on many levels might be simply divided into four basic typologies:

1.) 'Objective' or documentary - as a so-called 'objective' record of artefacts and the relational aspects of the reproduction of social space such as that used by Bateson and Mead (1942) Collier (1967; 1979);

2.) 'Reflexive' or photo elicitation - the reflexive use of photos as a tool in interviewing subjects on the meanings implicit in photographic representations of themselves and their society, e.g. Collier & Collier (1986); Sprague (1978);

3.) 'Phenomenological' - a medium whereby experience is to some extent reproduced in the viewer's apprehension of the photographic subject through a universal neurobiological foundation that implicates forms of learning and disposition with cultural relevance which operate at an embodied, prelinguistic level, (e.g. Benjamin 1979a; 1979b and Barthes 1989);

4.) 'Narrative' - when photos are arranged to tell a story; when the reading of a photo on the three levels described above are combined in the discontinuous temporal dimension where the story teller, the listener and the subjects of the story become mutually dependent, e.g. Berger & Mohr (1989).

A reading of the photo exhibition at the objective, or documentary and the reflexive levels forms the core of the next chapter. It seems to me that the more difficult, theoretical issues surrounding the way we perceive, experience and express ourselves is to be found at the level of the phenomenological and narrative levels of this typology. These pose questions which go to the heart of any understanding of visual apprehension, and also to much wider problems facing anthropological epistemology and theoretical debates within cultural studies generally. The remainder of this chapter will explore some of these debates as to 'how we see each other'.

Ambiguity and Analogue

On the one hand, the reading of a photograph depends on the viewer's ability to place perceived objects within an intelligible system of relationships, within an ideology made up of the "sum of taken-for-granted realities of everyday life; the pre-given determinations of individual consciousness; the common framework of reference for the projection of individual actions" (Burgin 1982: 42). The possibility of meaning which the photograph presents is partially fulfilled insofar as it is embedded in some form of discourse; the problem lies in the fact photographs are as limited as any other medium in exposing some assumed bed-rock of reality - "our preconceptions, our ideology, are primarily determined by widely varying social and historical experience " (1982: 174). On the other hand, this totality of experience, glimpsed in the images made by photographers from Okombahe finally eludes all descriptive, interpretive and critical analysis. "[. . .] I have no other resource than this *irony*: to speak of the 'nothing to say" (Barthes 1993: 93).

This irony is contingent on the ambiguity of the photographic image, its isolation from the continuity of time and personal history: both time and space are 'framed'. The photograph begs for an interpretation. The photographer's reading of an event or situation, the decision of what to photograph, and what not to photograph can be deliberate and posed, although it is often intuitive and spontaneous: in either case the photographers' choice can be thought of as a cultural construction. At the same time, the relation between the image and the event is immediate and unconstructed: it is like a trace - perfect, analogical. This photographic trace

is produced by reflected light, not consciousness or experience: it is like a message without a code - this is its ambiguity: "photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them" (Berger 1989: 96).

The process of reading visual quotes, complex bundles of meaningful information, is not simply a matter of decoding. A family snapshot, for instance is not simply reducible to "the deciphering of meaning which it betrays by being part of the symbolism of an age, class or an artistic group". (Bourdieu 1990: 7). Of course the photographic image is imbued with the viewers ability to translate the quotation of social roles (the husband, grandchild or friend), or social occasions (family occasions, places of work, sites of relaxation) but the understanding of context does not end with our ability to translate quotes into stereotypes or clichés. Critics (such as Bourdieu) who concentrate solely on the photograph's connotative qualities thereby denying the photo's innate ambiguity also tend to deny the social function of subjectivity (Berger 1989:100). Many of the images from Okombahe are both intentional and functional reminders of subjective experience, of emotional bonds and affective experience which defy history; ciphers of memory which encapsulate a subjectivity which is at once contingent on time yet not confined by it.

Perception, Memory an Mimesis

Visual quotations, when positioned within a discourse or contextualised by words, can misinform - the use of photos in the positivist project of early ethnography is a prime example - by reducing photographic information to a conceptual framework in order to verify or answer a specific question. The caption channels our desire for an explanation "whereby photography turns all life's relationships into literature... " (Benjamin 1979b:256). The fact remains that our response to the visual world goes beyond discourse because the act of perception itself arises from a deeply atavistic and instinctual process.

> Desire and thought are influenced by discourse and expressed in words. And words figure prominently in the organisation and expression of the self. It is too simplistic, however, to say that the unconscious is structured like a language. Moreover, an emphasis on the linguistic structuring of the mind begs questions about the precultural and prelinguistic foundations of cultural schemas and linguistic structures. (Ingham 1996:7)

In his critique of postmodernism, Ingham argues that by overemphasising the role of the culture as a displaced, unstable locus of meaning (where the play of signifiers reduces the individual to a decentred artefact of a symbolic system), subjective experience, desire and emotion are devalued. The role of the pre-cultural origins of emotion and motivation are subsumed and reified in the notion that social groups and culture overdetermine individual behaviour. However, the 'self' is not simply culturally formed or socially constructed and the images and emotions which arise from pre-cultural, pre-linguistic experience probably play a more important part in unconscious thought than language.

Physical objects are not given to us (seen) as primary data, what is given is only a set of *sensa.* Perception requires the ability to focus and select, and to store accumulated experiences in memory (Huxley 1942:16). In adults, this process of sensing, selecting and perceiving seems to take place simultaneously, but it is built upon an act of recognition through the coherence and correspondences found in memory and imagination. Our perception of any single thing or event depends on our memory of other things and events. The recognition of appearances requires the memory of other appearances. "And these memories, often projected as expectations, continue to qualify the seen long after the stage of primary recognition" (Berger 1989: 113).

This overlap of memory with imagination is a common enough experience. Our imagination gives us the power to recombine memories in novel ways, both consciously and unconsciously affecting how we see the world. The photograph presents us with an exact visual simulation which draws our attention to this anomaly of looking:

> No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject... For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. (Benjamin 1979a: 243)

The reality-effect of a photo is accomplished through repeated 'vertical readings' which take place outside of time, (in memory), which implicate not only a narrated world, a world of causes, of 'before and after', of 'if, then',

but also an embodied world, one which is comprehended by what Benjamin refers to as the 'mimetic faculty', "... the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore differences, yield into and become Other." (Taussig 1993: xiii)

The 'Physiognomic' and the Neurobiological

Benjamin refers to this embodied space as the 'physiognomic aspect of visual worlds', where the perceiver is drawn into a complex, subliminal bodily relation to the image: visual perception is learned in relation to tactile experience through a correlation of the senses with one another to create a world of visual objects, concepts and meanings. It is this relationship of the visual to concepts and meanings which is rooted in a bodily knowing made possible by the imaginative, mimetic faculty. Our ability to identify with other bodies, to find correspondences, likeness and difference, concepts and meaning originates in this fundament of perception. Our ability to mime, to copy and represent is fundamental to the complex creation of knowledge. But it is also a complexity "we too easily elide as non-mysterious, with our facile use of terms such as identification, representation, expression and so forth - terms which simultaneously depend upon and erase all that is powerful and obscure in the network of associations conjured by the notion of the mimetic." (Taussig 1993:21)

Physiognomic aspects of the visual are exhibited in the habits of everyday life where social routines implicate the unconscious strata of culture to bodily disposition; in architecture and the physical environment where space is not simply conceived as a blue-print, but is "more like a mobile Cubist constellation of angles and planes running together in time, where touch and three-dimensional space make the eyeball an extension of the moving, sensate body" (Taussig 1993:26). Even the language which we employ in constructing abstract concepts, *to substantiate, illustrate, to give an example* are forms of a sympathetic magic where likenesses, copies, assume the power of the original. Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987) suggest that preverbal processes of conceptualisation precede and underlie both language and thought. Such cognitive approaches "imply that language is grounded in and surrounded by nonlinguistic mental processes" (Ingham 1996:36). Serial-symbolic processing (such as language) is only a part of what takes place in the cognitive process.

The distinction between verbal and non-verbal cognition are well established in the field of neuroscience and the study of the functional differences between the two hemispheres of the brain where "both hemispheres are involved in higher cognitive functioning, with each half of the brain specialised in complementary fashion for different *modes* of thinking, both highly complex" (Edwards 1979:29). Each hemisphere perceives 'reality' in it own way while a sense of individual unity is maintained through the thick bundle of nerves (*corpus callosum*) which connect the left and right hemispheres. These different modes of thinking, or consciousness are in effect different ways of knowing. The left hemisphere is verbal and analytic, it uses symbols and makes abstractions, it is sequential, lineal and logical. The right hemisphere processes the same sensory information nonverbally and synthetically, it's cognitive mode is analogic, seeing likenesses and metaphoric relationships, it is non-temporal and spatial, seeing things in a relational sense, outside of time, and it is intuitional, able to make sense of complexity through emotion, 'hunches' and visual images.

Neuroanatomy demonstrates the function of the right hemisphere of the brain as the dominant site of pattern recognition, motor manipulation and emotionality - "it mediates recognition of emotional expression in the self and others" (Ingham 1996:37). Various neural systems in both hemispheres mediate nonlinguistic understandings of the body-self and the external world. A second system, located primarily in the left hemisphere, "mediates the representation of phonemes and syntax. And a third system mediates the two-way relations between these first two systems" (ibid.). Such a theory of neurobiological process is in keeping with anthropological theories of cultural transmission such as those espoused Maurice Bloch (1990), that 'chunky knowledge' is the processual locus of many forms of learning, 'dispositions' and common practice which operate at an embodied, prelinguistic level. "They involve habits, bodily skills and routines, and ways of thinking and feeling that are hard if not impossible to put into words" (Ingham 1996:37).

Connectionism and Cognitive Anthropology

What Bourdieu defines as habitus, and Benjamin refers to as second nature, merges with what Bloch and Ingham describe as 'connectionism':

> [. . .] the idea that most knowledge, especially the knowledge involved in everyday practice, does not take a linear, logic-sentential form but rather is organised into highly complex and integrated networks or mental models most elements of which are connected to each other in a great variety of ways (Bloch 1989:130).

Anthropological theories tend to treat cognitive systems as either an unexplained postulate or as a product of collective historical process: the cognitive system is received ready-made from previous generations through the re-creation of 'culture', 'collective representation' and 'ideology'. Furthermore, anthropologists often assume that culture is transmitted through and constructed by language; that it is ultimately language-like in that it consists of linked linear propositions (Bloch 1990:184). Moreover, cultural knowledge is conceived of as arising through one single unified process which embraces culture, ideology and cognition. Bloch challenges all three of these notions by suggesting that cognition is built up through interaction with the environment; that concept formation precedes language. That classificatory concepts are based on an appraisal of their referents in the world implies that the mental form of these concepts "involve loose and implicit practical-cum-theoretical pattern networks of knowledge" which become in effect "chunked networks of loose procedures and understandings which enable us to deal with standard and recurring situations" (1990:185)

> These mental models are, what is more, only partly linguistic; they also integrate a visual imagery, other sensory cognition, the cognitive aspects of learned practices, evaluations, memories of sensations, and memories of typical examples. Not only are these mental models not lineal in their internal organisation but information from them can be accessed simultaneously from many different parts of the model through 'multiple parallel processing' (1989: 130).

We are continually 'reading' our visual surroundings in a variety of ways, through a complex interaction of the brain's two 'ways of knowing'. Activity, emotion and contextual familiarity or surprise combine in both

focused and expressive readings. "In every act of looking there is an expectation of meaning. This expectation should be distinguished from a desire for an explanation" (Berger 1989:117). Explanations arise after the act of looking, the left hemisphere' s analytical response to the syncretic act of perceiving the bundled information of visual quotes. We find meaning in them through the correspondence of the perceptual process with the coherence of appearances. Appearances implicate a 'frame of mind' which goes beyond the discrete physical phenomena they represent - this tension between appearances and their implications give rise to the ambiguity inherent in the photograph's uncoded quotation. It is precisely this ambiguity which stimulates how we think, feel or remember when confronted by an image. "Appearances are so complex, that only the search which is inherent in the act of looking can drag a reading out of their underlying coherence" (ibid.:118).

If visual perception is itself derived from a process of quotation, it is not surprising that the reading of a still image functions in a similar way. How do we overcome this ambiguity inherent in defining visual meaning? The dualism implied in our use of language to describe the world is indicative of two functionally separate modes consciousness as metaphorically defined in the neuroscience of the brain. Barthes defines this ambiguity, or 'madness' of the photograph as a combination of its phenomenological emptiness and at the same time its temporal certainty: "The Photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: a mad image chafed by reality" (1993:115). One means with which society tames this madness consists in making photography into art: "when there is no longer any madness in it; when its *noeme* is forgotten and when consequently its essence no longer acts on me. . ." (ibid.:117). The other is to generalise the photograph within a master narrative or to subject it to critical judgement thereby disarming it of its specificity, 'its scandal'.

> Mad or tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits; mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive moment which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic *ecstasy*. [. . .] The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilizing code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality. (ibid.: 119)

Towards a Visual Ethnography

The difficulty of writing ethnography is comparable to Barthes' discussion of reading a photograph. In ethnography, as a post-modern discourse, it is no longer acceptable to posit a direct subject/ object relationship. Critical theory is the vehicle whereby we open ethnography to a world of "reading, imbricating, implicating a divided and unstable subject in the multiple instabilities of a text which continually opens on to other texts" (Burgin 1986: 199). My appeal for a legitimacy of the visual as ethnography is not based on some Romantic notion of 'art' as a place of transcendence or of the 'artist' as spiritual or intuitional supplicant. It is rather an appeal to 'another way of telling' as Berger and Mohr (1989) suggest, insofar as the critical forms of articulating sociality and subjectivity are as deeply embedded in the visual as they are in language. My objective in groping for a theory of representation based on photographs from Okombahe is to open a space within the critical discourse of anthropology making the photographs themselves a counterbalance to the overwhelming influence which language and writing have exerted in the development of theories of representation. Again, I am not arguing that visual representations are independent of other symbolic systems such as language, but that they take their place in the world through a distinct form of apprehension which I have tried briefly to elucidate. I seek to emphasise the dual nature of interpreting culture's Janus face of expression and the discursive power which surrounds and informs it.

It is not my intention to delineate a 'Damara culture' or even a 'culture of Okombahe' in a carefully laid out exposure of the optical unconscious. While I hope to achieve this to a very limited degree, my main objective is a plea to the viewer, echoed in the sentiment expressed by Roland Barthes: "Depth is born only at the moment the spectacle itself slowly turns its shadow toward man and begins to look at him." (1989:73) It is also a claim for the legitimacy of visual representation in ethnographic discourse, as a distinct medium both independent of and complimentary to that of speaking and writing. These photos are a site of work both for the photographers, their subjects and you, the viewer, where they both structure and are structured by familiar perceptual codes, and (occasionally) an incommensurable (existential) insight.

> Apart from the event photographed, apart from the lucidity of the idea, we are moved by the photograph's fulfilment of an expectation which is intrinsic to the will to look. The camera completes the half-language of appearances and articulates an unmistakable meaning. When this happens we suddenly find ourselves at home amongst appearances, as we are home in our mother tongue. (Berger 1989:129)

Conclusion: Photo Narratives

In the next chapter I will isolate some of the visual and narrative themes which run throughout the exhibition. This requires several distinct ways of seeing and reading: the exhibition as text, a medium to be interpreted in relation to cultural codes; as visual and narrated data, as language structured by codes of 'grammar', and as stories, as an affective form, interpreted through expressions of emotion, memory and fantasy.

The exhibition photographs rely to a large extent on how they hang together as a whole, and on ethnographic comparisons in terms of age, family background, and the personal histories of the photographers. As such, I have abstracted the meanings and motivations of the photographers from knowledge derived from my fieldwork and interpreted this knowledge after the fact of the visual and textual evidence. The inherent lexical openness of the still photograph provokes this prior naming and characterisation. The same holds true for de-coding visual data. The positivist, 'objective' approach of researchers into visual communication such as Collier (1967), ultimately conflates the computing and interpreting of spatial arrangements and material artefacts in terms of the aesthetics and psychology of a "cultural inventory", with a functionalist project of uncovering the 'natives point-of-view'. Similarly, Worth and Adair's (1975) analysis of the narrative and stylistic devices utilized by Navajo film makers falls short of this aim. Their discussion of the structural and processual aspects of film production and self-representation relies on a textual reading of visual imagery, in order to reveal not only the natives point of view, but also "to see just how we pattern our own world through our own culture" (1975:253). Their concluding remarks acknowledge the limitations of interpreting the visual through words and stresses the value of studying "personal expression as a "store of knowledge about man which our culture traditionally calls art" (1975: 262). Ethnographic self-representations using

still images present an opportunity to proceed beyond this impasse by examining both the discursive and expressive elements of 'culture'.

For the photographers of Okombahe, the process of making pictures and the pictures themselves were meaningful, and to a large extent as uncomplicated as Burgin suggests when he says "that it is extensively believed by photographers that meanings are to be found in the world much in the same way that rabbits are found on downs [...] all that is required is the talent to spot them and the skill to shoot them" (1982:40). The images and the photographers' commentary imply a variety of intentions, interests and emotions which bear directly on their perception of self-hood, social relationships and place. My own commentary on the photographs (Chapter 2) positions each individual photographer in the context of his or her life as revealed by a combination of their creativity and my knowledge of them as individuals within broader social and historical frameworks which define Okombahe.

Since the project was deliberately open-ended in terms of subject matter, many narrative themes emerge. It is difficult to do justice to the variety and complexity of issues which the photos raise, however this in itself illustrates the poly-valency of meaning arising within broad narrative structures. By viewing the photographs as the work of individual photographers and as a whole in the form of the exhibition, numerous visual quotations residing in each image can be seen to take a narrative form. Like memories, the stories that the photographs convey are placed within a discontinuous field of time and space - they both depend on and oppose the passage of time (Berger 1989: 280). When placed in a sequence these take on the ambiguous form of a story, which unlike photo reports, are invested with the authority of their subjects.

Stories are based on a tacit agreement between teller and listener where discontinuities arise in what is explicitly described, and a host of details and actions which are absent become implicit.

> The discontinuities of the story and the tacit agreement underlying them fuse teller, listener and protagonists into an amalgam. An amalgam which I would call the story's *reflecting subject*. The story narrates on behalf of this subject, appeals to it and speaks in its voice. (Berger 1989: 285)

Similarly, the discontinuities inherent in the technique of montage, used in writing, film-making and photography create a reflexive space, overcoming the realist monologic narratives of past ethnographic practice (Marcus 1994:43). The notion of sequence is relinquished in the narrative form of montage, which like memory, evokes the multi-faceted aspect of people's lives who coexist in time and conjoin diverse localities. In the same way, the photographers from Okombahe represent themselves in a montage of coexisting stories: multi-local, simultaneous, living, and experiential. And the ambiguity of the photos, their numerous quotations and uncoded messages, the frozen traces of instances quickly swallowed in memory, reflect a truth central to their shared reality. Far from being a hindrance to comprehending something about the intractable reality of Damara lives, the dialectic of the still image in the realm of memory and imagination are expressions of it.

CHAPTER 2
PHOTO NARRATIVES: IMAGINATION AND DESIRE

[. . .] the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination.
Roland Barthes in *The photographic message* (1989: 205)

What matters is not who is holding the camera but who is doing the viewing: whose 'desire' is being satisfied.
Crawford & Turton in *Film as ethnography* (1992: 165)

In the previous chapter, I argued for the legitimacy of photographic imagery as an ethnographic form, as a distinct medium, rich in possibilities for grasping the view point of 'others'. In this chapter I will write about these same images as the site of my work, as a locus of my memory, as a text coded by the connotations inherent in my experience and personal history. By turning the uncoded messages of still photographs into text, I want to explore the connotations implicit in the act of reading appearances as intelligible signs, without losing sight of the denoted phenomenological experience lurking in the photographic trace. The process of constructing stories around the visual is dependent on a temporal structuring which is discontinuous with the still image: it involves isolating details, finding correspondences and patterns which depend on my reading of the images in relationship to my memory. The dangers of pacifying the 'intractable reality' of Okombahe through the connotative dimension of language must be weighed against the possibility of arriving at a more accurate understanding of the pictorial and narrative elements which contextualize social life through a reading of photographs which "depends on the readers 'knowledge' just as though it were a matter of a real language (langue), intelligible only if one has learned all the signs" (Barthes 1989: 207).

We already know so many of the signs - so many of the photographers' concerns are our concerns: appearances play around issues of sex, fighting, food, reputations and status; affection for children, spouses and ageing relatives; the sense of beauty, transience or insecurity associated with the landscape; the acknowledgement of mortality inherent in family portraits: the amplitude of the photographic present can be picked through for any number of details which betray universal human emotions. An almost

indecent joy in the images, promised from a 'toy' camera, is counter-weighed by a serious intent to record and communicate.

The photographs often seem to make sense to us, even before the text picks out the image's arbitrary detail. Tekla's affection for her child, Christolene's pride in her man, Maria's portrait of a sleeping cat, or Christine's study of two girls sitting on adjacent toilets: each conveys a poignancy which is immediate and recognisable. The subjects often gaze back at us with an engaged intent: Angelika posed as an angel by the halo of a papaya tree; the curious and shy girl framed in the doorway of Christian's room, polka-dotted, hesitating on a symbolic threshold separating a child from womanhood; the serious scrutiny of Christolene's in-laws whose expressions convey hardship, sorrow and determination (are their almost hostile looks directed at Christolene or at us?); the dignity and humour expressed by Albert's elderly neighbours who, while posing, are at the same time self-aware and unpretentious. We see individuals whose realities are in the final analysis as incommensurable as those of our own family, friends and neighbours. There are self-portraits, often so consciously constructed to glamorise what we would normally only see as shabby or barren but which instead, force us to reflect on the vapidness of our own self-images which tend to be submerged in a culture of commodity images and images as commodities (Hartford 1997).

And then there are the stories. Sequences of images convey narratives as a day-in-the-life of a rural farming family or the drama of theft, drunkenness and sexual liaisons surrounding the christening of Christian's three year old niece. Just as a photographic reading based solely on visual information is discontinuous with the denoted photographic image, narrative form is based on a tacit understanding that stories themselves are constructed with interruptions: the authority of a story is achieved when it makes sense of these, when the connections between what is said and what is not said becomes whole, absorbed in a form of institutional activity invested with the "authority of its characters, its listener's past experience and its teller's words" (Berger 1989:285). Added to image is text, and the story becomes sight, insight and all the space between the lines.

The uncritical quality of the combined visual and textual story is deceptive: the words present a pared down description which conveys everything you need to know in order to find your own critical insight. Take Linda's portraits of her parents for example:

> [This is] my step-father and his dog early in the morning: he was still drunk from the night before." "That morning. . . my mother is angry with my step-father because he has taken her snuff and she is telling him to give it back: 'If you don't return my snuff, you must remember that we will continue to fight!'" [At the same time] "the water had come down during the night and we all wanted to see it". [Then she catalogues the names accompanying a portrait of her nieces and nephews]: "My sister's children - Clarence, Jennifer, Poppy, Feste, Guri, and Daedelus. I will also have children one day.

The accumulation of disconnected comments and informal asides quickly serves to construct a multi-faceted story around Linda's life, a mini autobiography of the image's present tense.

In this chapter I will add a further layer of narrative complexity to the stories told by the photographers of Okombahe - my own story of being an observer, a listener and a reteller of these photo tales. The desire which brings this story of Okombahe 'to life', resides in the focused convergence of all of these narrative elements, but it is the photographer's original desire to look, record and to comment which resonates authority at each narrative level, progressively distanced and subject to the corruption of other's desires (mine and yours) as the story is retold in a chimera of words around fixed and open images.



Greetings, Gossip and Rasta Reciprocity

The photo[1] of 'the wedding party' (1) was one of only ten facial close-ups produced in the photo project. It was enlarged as a poster advertising the exhibition in Windhoek and it illustrates an appealing aspect of the

[1] Numbers in brackets refer to the exhibition photos as illustrated in Chapter 1.

child's shoes and took her to meet his wife and children living in the comfortable 'white' residential area of the town. A few months later, Asi complained to me about feeling ill, and having visited several doctors who diagnosed her as being anaemic. It turned out that she was pregnant and: Bernardo was convinced that the child she was carrying was the result of her relationship with the white man from Omaruru, or me! Asi's pregnancy became the catalyst for mistrust and a growing lack of commitment on Bernardo's part as he began to spend more of his time back in Uis and with his family in Arixa Ams. My friendship with Asi seemed to become even more suspect in the eyes of Asi's friends and neighbours in the light of Bernardo's behaviour and although I was fairly immune to such idle gossip, Asi was not and it became more and more difficult to meet as casual and relaxed acquaintances. When Asi's baby was born, there was nothing obvious in its appearance to suggest that Bernardo was not the father, but by this time, his relationship with Asi had deteriorated to such a degree that their future as a couple was in serious doubt: their homestead in Khori !Gaos was unoccupied and their herd split in two. Asi was living with her mother in Okombahe again and her despair and depression was barely disguised by her devotion to her new daughter and her normally vivacious disposition. Rumours and gossip continued to erode her self-image as if they had a life of their own. It was bad enough that her efforts to establish a stable independent household had failed, that she was penniless and once again dependent on her mother for support, but even her status and reputation were being actively taken away from her. This loss of status seemed attendant on the levelling tendency of gossip, a symptom of this socio-economic environment fraught with insecurity and contested loyalties; a social control reflecting the dynamics of a communal identity rooted in the interdependency of poverty.[6]

[6] Robert Gordon discusses the function of gossip in Okombahe using a class analysis, but also emphasises the "individual's priority over his [sic] family group" (1972: 46) where gossip becomes a function of the 'intimate connection between kin and social imperatives of economic survival, leading to an imprecision in the definitions of who is and who is not kin because the imperatives of economic survival are themselves constantly changing" (Fuller 1993: 216).



Leaving home

It was at the beginning of my fieldwork in Okombahe when I first met **Diana Gawanges**. We were introduced to each other by Maria Pietersen, the daughter of Ouma Ida in Jansen. Anna, my interpreter, had struck up a friendship with Maria, and had spent the day together washing clothes. I agreed to take them to Maria's boy friend's house at the secondary school in Okombahe that the evening so they could use his electric iron and electric lights. For Maria, it was also an excuse to elude the restrictions of home life, to relax with friends and to drink a beer or two. This is where I first met Diana. Maria, Anna and Diana were all in their early twenties and each, in their own way, were trying to leave home permanently. My first impression of Diana (everything about Okombahe at this time was infused with first impressions) was that of a young attractive self-contained woman who was proud, even aloof. She refused to speak to me and avoided eye contact as well, which made me feel awkward as there were just the four of us, listening to music and talking in David's two-roomed house. It seemed as though she pointedly declined to engage with my clumsy attempts to converse in rudimentary Damara, but in retrospect it is more likely that the combination of my poor grasp of the language and her expectation that a white man would never speak Damara made her deaf to my attempts to communicate. She spoke Afrikaans but not English and I later came to realise that this set her apart from Maria and Anna who she considered to be more worldly and experienced.

It was around this time that I mentioned the photography project to Maria who was enthusiastic and said she would introduce me to some of her friends who would be keen to take part. Were it not for this I probably would never have found out how shy and vulnerable Diana was under a veneer of what I took to be her imperious manner. I might have been the first, or at least one of the few white men Diana had ever met. The ramifications of this are probably incalculable when considered in the light

of Namibia's history of colonialism. At the time, I had no idea of the extent to which an inverted racism affected many people's reactions to me on first meeting. In thinking about it now, I am reminded of the terrified reactions of small children and babies to my pale skin, blue eyes and strange features: their shock and ensuing screams were the outward symptoms of an almost atavistic nightmare in which I appeared as some primeval and alien force, which in a sense, was accurate and true. I became the personified 'other'. In the case of children however, it didn't take long to overcome these perceptions of physical difference; with adults it was sometimes a different story and I felt as though my skin colour and all that this implied remained a perpetual spectre standing between us. This became one of the most dispiriting aspects to being white and living in Damaraland, not so much because of the ever present issue of race, but because it often seemed impossible to distinguish where racial prejudices began and ended within the politics of daily social life. So when Maria took me to Diana's home on the outskirts of the village a week or two later, after she had spoken to Diana about the photography project, I was apprehensive about how we would form a working relationship.

In the event, Diana was reticent and shy as she listened carefully to what had by now become Anna's deftly delivered sermon on the basic principles of photographic technique. My initial impression of Diana was quickly altered as it became apparent that she was frightened of me, and somewhat daunted by the prospect of being in control of a new technology, the camera. I imagine that she felt a complex mixture of awe, intimidation and a resentment regarding the strength of her own involuntary reaction to me; if we had more time together this tension would probably have relaxed into a more informal relationship. Unfortunately for me, Diana left Okombahe to work as a hostel cleaner at a distant mining town shortly after she took these photographs; I was only able to interview her briefly six months later when she returned to her mother's house during a holiday.

Since I had so little contact with either Diana or her family I can only conjecture as to the context of her photo stories. Some of the pathos of her family life is conveyed by four photos showing some of the daily chores and dramas enacted in the small fenced off yard in front of her family's house: her mother's seemingly endless job of washing clothes for a large extended family (2); her father's frustration at the irresponsibility of his children (3) and the crude violence associated with alcohol abuse (4). She seems to

express this daily grind through an ironic visual metaphor: "Today my mother killed a chicken and the children are plucking it. As they were doing this, another chicken was looking at what was happening and this struck me as tragic and funny" (7). It is almost as if Diana is suggesting that this image is a metaphor for both her family and social life generally: is she the chicken watching her family being plucked, or was she thinking of us, as voyeurs of the incomprehensible reality of her life?

The public space of the village shops, restaurant and church is a place to escape the strictures and tensions of family life and to meet friends and relax (1), or to exchange favours (6). The issue of drinking is highlighted again by contrasting the social behaviour of dagga (marijuana) smokers and distinguishing the different sense of space created by these two forms of social interaction (5): "smokers stand around and in groups and talk, while drinkers sit separately and watch the scene or quarrel". Diana depicts her friends and the youth of Okombahe generally engaged in drinking and smoking although she herself was not a dagga smoker and probably only drank occasionally[7].

Diana's images of life in Okombahe oscillate between the space of her family home and the public space of shops, church and village square. In terms of composition, structure, distance and framing, there is little to differentiate these two domains. A subject common to both and dominating the majority of her twenty odd pictures (only nine were reproduced for the exhibition) is the role of women as providers, workers (6), organisers (8) and even bosses. Even though she refers to the women in one photograph as "drying onions at Michael's shop", it is his wife Mandi who employs and works along side them. While women cook, wash and work men are only seen peripherally as gravitating around these female activities. The men depicted here are either her father, her contemporary male friends, the old men waiting for the church's food relief or her family's employees who look after some livestock in a small settlement outside of Okombahe.

In spite of the fact that I never had a chance to extend my relationship with Diana, her photographs gave me some insight into the situation of many young single women in Okombahe. The ease with which she and her friends negotiate all the pleasures and limitations of 'hanging out in

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[7] Alcohol and dagga both carry negative social connotations within Namibia's predominantly Christian moral discourse. While many people consume alcohol openly, the extent of dagga consumption is masked by the added stigma of it being an illegal substance.

Okombahe', belies an underlying apprehension relating to a highly uncertain future and a dearth of opportunity in the present asserts itself. The fates of Diana's older relatives are all too apparent in the photographs: poorly paid manual labour and domestic chores give way to daily food queues, charity and the state pension. What are Diana's prospects in the "New Namibia" where the convergence of opportunity with her skill and experience is unlikely to promote her career beyond the menial job of hostel worker with a monthly pay of around N$250 (£35)?



Petty politics and "Poor man water die"

In many ways, **Erwin Tsuseb** represents an aspect of social life in Okombahe which consistently eluded me: in spite of the fact that each of my meetings with Erwin were engaged enough for me to give him two cameras and two sets of photographs, he consistently avoided talking in any depth about his photos or himself. Although at each of these four meetings we arranged to get together again at a more 'convenient' time, he assiduously avoided keeping these appointments. This and the poor quality of many of his photos (which were under-exposed interior shots), made it difficult to justify including more than six of Erwin's images in the exhibition. The selection was entirely a subjective one on my part, based on how the images affected me emotionally (1) or on how they made a narrative series from my knowledge of the context in which the photos were taken (2 & 3; 4, 5 & 6). My relationship with Erwin and my interpretations of his images are indicative of my limited understanding of several key social institutions in Okombahe which were the subjects of many of his photographs: the social networks surrounding 'traditional' and political leaders along with the dominant businessmen and the authority of the church.

Erwin was in his late twenties and had lived in Okombahe for only four years. He was born and grew up in Walvis Bay and then moved to Uis where he attended secondary school. Several close relatives of both his

father and mother lived in Okombahe, including the wife of the local councillor. It was probably this connection that brought Erwin to the village with the prospect of employment or at least some patronage from his 'powerful' uncle. One immediate benefit of this connection was the occupancy of a government house with running water and free electricity. This was situated in the 'street' of sixteen neatly spaced township style houses which had been built for government employees such as teachers, the nurse and various technicians working for the Department of Water Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. Erwin's house was adjacent to the councillor's large residence known as the 'People's House' (2 & 3). Like many of Okombahe's residents, Erwin also owned livestock which was looked after by members of his extended family on a 'post' not far from the village. Cash income from his part-time assistance to the councillor and the sale of three or four goats each year gave him a modest income of about N$150 (£25) per month.

Although his income was relatively low, his meticulous dress, his relatively high standard of education (Standard 10), a reasonable fluency in English, his participation in church functions and his association with the councillor, the community 'activator' and the dominant shop owner conferred a degree of status usually aligned with high earning professionals such as the teachers and technicians among whom he lived. Several of his photographs depict the interiors of the 'affluent' homes of professionals (government employees and businessmen) who comprise an emerging 'middle class' in Okombahe. One such photo, for instance, portrays a young woman with curlers in her hair, standing beside an electric stove in a 'modern' kitchen, complete with spice rack, electric grill and kettle, brightly painted kitchen cupboards and work tops with matching canisters labelled 'flour', 'sugar' etc. Other photos show the same woman standing behind the cash register in the new shop where everything from cosmetics, jewellery, deodorants, false hair, toys, hardware, sweets, tobacco, potato crisps, tinned fish, long-life milk and fresh bread are sold. Other photos feature the headman's bakkie crossing the receding waters of the flooding river during the rainy season or the shop-owner's bakkie and trailer being loaded with bricks made by the women's co-operative. These and other similar images of comparative affluence make a stark contrast to Erwin's pictures of drought relief food distributions at the People's House where the elderly, pregnant

women and children under five were eligible for 'luxuries' such as oil, tinned fish and a month's supply of mealy meal.

Mention must be made of the relationship between the small coterie of Okombahe's church, civic and traditional leaders in order to understand Erwin's situation and possibly his attitude towards me. By the end of my stay in Okombahe in March 1996, a ground-swell of popular discontent at the way the combined leadership were handling the community's resources emerged with the informal creation of a new, local political party called "Poor Thirsty People Have Had Enough" (*ǂÂu ta go /gâsa khoeb ta //gam //ò* , or literally: 'I had enough poor man water die'). Among other things, a sizeable faction of the predominantly poor in Okombahe wanted to protest at the way certain state and donor resources were being misappropriated by a few powerful individuals. One of these concerned the distribution of drought relief food. Allegations that community leaders were disbursing this among their extended family, selling it on the black market or using it as payment to herders and employees were rife in Okombahe [8]. It also became known that the headman, the councillor, the community activator and the Lutheran minister had conspired to redistribute goats that were meant for poor farmers who had lost all their stock during the 1992 drought, amongst themselves, their families and girl friends. The misappropriation of funds from the church sponsored 'community' ostrich farming project, the collusion between the councillor and a local shop keeper in protecting criminals who committed theft and even rape, the use of government cars for private journeys and for poaching game were some of the more salient scandals which had been brewing during the time I had been trying to engage Erwin in the photography project.

Erwin's avoidance of me was typical of all those involved with the distribution of government and donor resources. The community activator was assiduously evasive; his assistant, the volunteer Ghanaian development officer would only respond to my interest in the area's development projects with banal assertions that everything was wonderful; the councillor made promises to meet with me which were constantly broken without any explanation and the dominant business men in Okombahe would merely snarl at my attempts at civility because it was patently obvious that I was hanging around with people who had little or nothing to do with the upper

[8] Such rumours and allegations were common in all the drought relief distribution centres in Damaraland during the period between 1992 and 1995.

echelons of the village's petty power brokers. The implicit danger of associating with me resided in my 'neutral' position as a researcher, as someone who would undoubtedly ask awkward questions: for Erwin to be seen socialising with me would call into question his loyalty to the councillor and the patronage network on which he depended for his small income and future prospects. Whether or not this adequately explains Erwin's apparent 'dislike' for me, it does coincide with a pattern of behaviour which I associate with power relations in Damara villages. And, it coincides with the confusion which I discussed in relation to Diana and inverted racism: both symbolic and economic power has a deep significance in social interaction. My confusion about people's motivations and intentions is almost certainly not particular to me as an outside white male researcher, rather it is indicative of the local politics of social interaction generally.



Drink, Sex ,Theft and a Christening

Christian Uiseb was a 'natural' photo-journalist. As soon as he heard about the project, he approached me and in broken English explained that he wanted to 'show Okombahe like it is'. I remained somewhat sceptical of his intentions, partly because of the uncompromising manner in which he addressed me. The admixture of respect and irony inherent in his insistence in calling me 'Masterman', in spite of the obvious embarrassment with which I responded to this, was symptomatic of an irreverence which he applied to social norms generally. But the depth of his iconoclastic vision was only revealed to me when he spoke at length about his photographs. His photo stories revolve around neighbours, friends and family and contextualise some of the fundamental subjects of village gossip: food, alcohol, tobacco, sex and theft. The directness of his visual and textual treatment of these

subjects is made ironic through the contradiction of his apparent detachment as a story teller with the affective bonds which he betrays as a photographer.

Christian (otherwise known as /Igili) was in his mid to late twenties, employed as a gardener, and lived with his parents in a corrugated iron shack on the outskirts of the village. He chose to follow distinct but related themes in each of his two films. In the first, he characterises and catalogues a series of social interactions based around the issues of work, drinking, and theft. These images depict the places along /Igili's route to and from work, over a mile of scattered homesteads along the dusty track which runs parallel to the Omaruru River and the garden plots along its banks. He uses peoples' home names to characterise his narratives: 'Rubbish Master' is weeding his garden; "My Father' is being bossed around by his wife and children; 'Told Each Other' is arguing with a customer over payment for petrol; 'Slave Of Everyone' is overjoyed because she has received her monthly wages; 'Warthog' turns on the photographer angrily. It is as if Christian set out to reinforce common stereotypes of social dysfunction which are associated with rural Damara speakers: drunkenness, theft, lying, family fragmentation, and sexual licentiousness.

The intentionality of his photo images is revealed through a welter of visual and narrative detail which catalogue the minutiae of domestic life and its inherent drama from moment to moment. An example of this is found in the image of a woman preparing pumpkins in a pot (3), who "was somewhat under the influence of liquor. She was talking to herself and I became interested in her story [. . .]": this story, like many others he tells, is about drinking. "She had been arguing with her husband about the strength of the tombo and he said: 'It was just a shit drink!' but she replied 'Ai! It was a nice drink that I had', and so on . . . ". In the following picture (4) we catch up with the story about an hour later, after the children have arrived home from school and eaten ("chopped") the cooked pumpkin, whereupon their sister and mother who were too slow to eat from the pot, resign themselves to their hunger. It hardly matters whether or not this story is 'true'. Its significance lies in the almost fairy-tale quality of detail conveying social roles and stereotypical relationships: the husband and wife quarrelling over the quality of liquor, the mother cooking food for her children, her children eating it all up without regard for their siblings.

A series of photos showing men gardening (2, 5 - 8) convey another amoral angle on men's social relationships and daily preoccupations. /Igili

are not pure Damaras like us." When I asked her to explain the presence of her light complexioned niece Jennifer (1, 5), the irony of her professed Damara identity seemed lost on her as she evinced an evident pride in the fact that there is German blood on her mother's side, or that her own father is Herero.

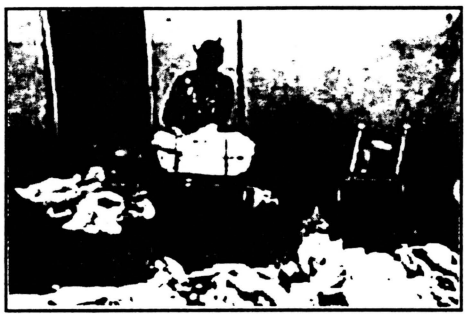
The huddle of rooms which comprise the homestead and the immediate environment - the track which runs in front of the house; the river some one hundred metres further on, briefly in flood; and the new lush growth of ephemeral grasses and herbs which carpet the sandy ground beneath the mature, graceful Ana trees; all of these are effective markers for Linda's local world. She made several landscapes or 'pictures of nature', where her clearly expressed appreciation for the beauty of the veld during the short rainy season was typified by her excitement at seeing the Omaruru River in flood (9, 10). "It was so beautiful here at that time, during the rains. I wish that people who have never been here after the rains could see how beautiful it is - it is like paradise, though it passes very quickly."

By the time she made her second film, Linda's older sister and her sister's husband had also built a house here: he had been made redundant as a technician working for the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation in Windhoek and decided to retire to a communal area and farm. Both Linda's sister and her husband considered themselves to be 'Coloured', and their two teenage children spoke neither Damara or Herero, but Afrikaans and English. This example of Linda's family and her own confusing explication of ethnicity is not an unusual illustration of the highly fluid nature of Damara identity. At the same time, her family consider the cleaning of grass-seed as 'doing something cultural' (14); and specifically Damara.

Linda's hope to 'have children one day' (1) is brought closer with the arrival of Victus, her 'Damara' boy-friend who at the time was between jobs as a long-distance lorry driver. Portraits of her and Victus in the second film are suffused with some of the romance associated with the glamorous images in pop fashion magazines (15, 17, 18): "My hair is looking nice and we are wearing good clothes. I wanted a picture of me looking dressed up!". The camera angle and poses (Victus playing a stringless violin next to the flowers, Linda reclining on the earth in front of her house) are like talismans and implicitly magical: they are "attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality" (Sontag 1980: 16). Linda's situation was one of extreme poverty and

isolation, even after the arrival of her boy-friend Victus, who was often drunk. His intense jealousy made Linda's daily life like walking on glass, or on a knife edge, associated with the constant need to placate Victus's unpredictability and threats of violence.

A few months after these pictures were taken, Linda's step father was being treated for Tuberculosis in Omaruru, her brother Usiel was absent for extended periods after his older brother had committed suicide by drinking battery acid; her sister's husband had gone through most of his savings and could no longer afford to drive his bakkie back and forth to Okombahe, but spent more time drinking at home, or hiking to the nearest dorps in search of work. Linda was staying in Gobabis at the time of the exhibition opening, living alone in the township while her 'fiancee' Victus was on the road, working as a long distance driver again. She told me that she had no money, even for food, let alone a bus ride to Windhoek and although I sent her the fare, she didn't make it to the exhibition opening in Windhoek.



Baaskap and balanced reciprocity

Ishmael ǂKharichab was one of my neighbours in Jansen. He was a hard working man of about my own age (mid-forties) who had returned to his family's place after having spent most of his adult life working as a labourer in Walvis Bay. To me, he remained a 'closed book', which at times was hard not to take personally, but I suspect that his disdain (or indifference) had its origins in the brutal *baaskap* of South African colonialism. Also, I couldn't really blame him for not wanting to take the time and effort to communicate with a 'dom' foreigner. We saw one another fairly frequently but only exchanged greetings and brief comments, usually as I passed his garden in the morning on my way to visit another neighbour in Jansen. My field notes record the responses of Ishmael and his uncle Augustinus to my offer of a camera:

> Albert and I visited Augustinus who was still busy building a new donkey cart in his 'workshop' inside the deep shade of the massive Prosopis tree near his garden. He declined to take part in the photo project somewhat peremptorily because of his bad eye-sight and more significantly because 'I am not that sort of a man'. We stopped to speak with Ishmael and decided to elicit his interest in taking part. He refused to talk to me, even though he has some English, and continued to work in his garden as Albert told him everything about the photo project and the camera. He seemed keen to use a camera but refused to engage me, even avoiding any eye-contact: Albert thinks he is suspicious of whites, but I don't have the energy or the skill to tackle that one.

The next time I spoke at length with Ishmael was when I returned his photographs. His cousin, a teacher from Spitzkoppe helped to translate Ishmael's comments which I then transcribed for the exhibition. Both the images and the text seem characteristic of Ishmael's business-like manner. I knew very few of the people in his photos, and these only very casually, so I have little to add in the way of contextualisation. Images of everyday activities -washing, cooking, building and gardening - are suggestive of a sense of purpose which motivates the lives of Ishmael's family and neighbours. Many of his comments might be read as having political or moral spin: in contrast to popular discourse on Damara 'laziness', everyone in his photos is working; old people look for semi-precious stones "because they are hungry and need some way of making money: their pensions have not come for many months" (2); his elderly sister-in-law cooks the produce from her own garden (3,4); old Johnny is evidently very poor but is building himself a new house (7,8). The many photos of Ishmael's garden convey something about the pride and success which this new venture has brought to him and other families in the village of Jansen.

The story of this garden project is centred on the local politics which dogged the project during the year I lived here. Something of the complexity of local social relations can be gleaned from my own relationship with Ishmael. During the course of the so-called 'photo project', I had made a point of trying to communicate my reasons for, and interest in the Okombahe photos, although most of the photographers were unconcerned about this. Ishmael however was, and knew instinctively what these photos might be worth to me. He started a rumour that I was prepared to pay each photographer to take part in the project. At that time, I did not know for

sure that an exhibition would take place, but later in the year I contacted all the photographers individually and explained that it would, and that free transport and accommodation would be provided for the photographers to attend the opening night in Windhoek. At the same time, I also explained that prints would be offered for sale, and that half the proceeds would accrue to the photographer, and the other half would form a fund which could be used for further community arts projects. Most people readily agreed that this was a fair arrangement. However, Ishmael' s suspicions were aroused and he became convinced that I was taking a cut. Furthermore, he accused me of discriminating against him because I had only chosen one of his images to enlarge and frame. I explained that he had used only one roll of film whereas others had used two, and therefore provided me with choice, but this explanation did little to allay his suspicions.

This brief vignette of misunderstanding is indicative of the misapprehension inherent in the falsely relativised discourse associated with the development project which brought reliable irrigation to Jansen the year before. Again, the problem relates to imputed motivations associated with reciprocity and the political implications of 'dividing the spoils', as it were, of development aid. Ishmael was astute in his assessment of the value which the photo project represented to me, and in spite of the fact that I was not out for direct financial gain, he would not have been surprised to learn that the generous terms of my research grant made me very rich in comparison to him, and the symbolic value which the photo project would confer as part of my qualification for an academic degree would bring with it the ability to earn relatively fabulous amounts of money. Ishmael's abiding sense of this injustice became personalised and affected my own moral sense what constitutes a rough form of 'balanced reciprocity'. This disallowed the kind open financial reciprocity which Ishmael seemed to be demanding.

In the portrait of himself and his family (11), Ishmael can be seen concentrating on the instructions printed on the Fuji disposable camera packaging, as ever, looking into things, searching out the sub-text, teasing out some hidden political implication.



A new daughter-in-law

Jacky Pietersen came to stay with the Pietersen family in Jansen immediately after she married Ouma Ida's youngest son, Albertus. She arrived in Jansen, heavily pregnant and exceedingly shy, and stayed during the next two months until just before she gave birth and returned to her mother's home in Usakos. She and Albertus had been married during one of his brief, twice yearly shore visits from a deep-sea fishing boat working out of Walvis Bay and Cape Town. She came to stay in Jansen immediately after the wedding when Albertus returned to work; this was an opportunity for her and her in-laws to get to know each other, and while Ida looked after Jacky during the final stages of her pregnancy, she in turn could help look after Ida's young grandchildren.

This was a household dominated by three generations of women. Ida's husband had been bed-ridden after a car accident five years ago when she had become the effective household head. Now Ida, her older sister Maria, Ida's teenage daughter Lotte, Jacky, Oxkely (Ida's hired helper) and three young granddaughters spent much of their time in the shady area near the cooking room or in the garden, talking, listening to the radio and entertaining the occasional neighbour who might drop by for a chat and a bucket of water. The domestic work was shared by all and consisted of looking after Ida's husband Johannes, pumping water from the nearly dry well twice a day, gardening, collecting firewood, looking after a few goats and chickens: Jacky's photos depict some of these daily chores - washing clothes, bathing children and irrigating the extensive fruit and vegetable garden.

Jacky was one of many people who came to stay with the Pietersen's during the year in which I stayed in Jansen. The constant coming and going of sons, daughters, grandchildren and in-laws from the extended Pietersen/Beukes family was augmented by a succession of labourers, most of whom stayed only for a month or two in order to get a small amount of

cash before moving on. The going rate of pay was less than $100 a month (£15), supplemented with a diet of pap, vegetables and occasionally some stewed meat. Six out of the eleven households in Jansen employed such labourers, either as herders or as gardeners. Many of these were young men from Ovamboland, who unlike their Damara counterparts, have a reputation for reliability and thrift. Such characterisations of Ovambo identity by Damara farmers is ambiguous and contradictory: there is a general distrust of the Ovambo as a political force associated with the ruling SWAPO party. They are feared as the new colonialists, an alien culture creating new power structures which by-pass Damara interests and this residual fear is sometimes manifested in stories alleging the practice of witchcraft and murder on Damara employers by their Ovambo workers. Ovambos' reputation for diligence and hard work contrasts with Damaras' general denigration of their own character: "I don't know what is wrong with our people: the Damara are sick" is a common refrain of Damara employers. Drunkenness, theft and unreliability are stereotypical attributes of Damara farm labourers which bare a striking resemblance to the discourse surrounding the Ju'/hoan farm labourers of the Omaheke (see Suzman 1995:20). Such negative ascriptions are common among marginalised groups who occupy positions at the bottom of the social hierarchy throughout Namibia. The ambivalence associated with temporary social relationships between Damara employers and their hired workers finds its counterpart in the transitory settlement patterns of both individuals within families and of families as a whole. The bonds of affection which were made between Jacky and her in-laws during her visit to Jansen would serve to incorporate a new member into the highly mobile Pietersen family and consolidate a new generation within the family core, built on trust and reciprocity.

Shortly after Jacky completed her film, she returned to Usakos to deliver her baby and I was therefore unable to record her responses to the photos. Consequently, the captions which accompany her photographs are based on my own familiarity with the Pietersen homestead. I chose to include only a small selection of images which reflected her overall concern with typical domestic activities. The overwhelming predominance of females within this domestic space is not altogether untypical and I was struck by the similarities between Jacky's photographs and the results of my own attempts to record the Pietersen household on film.



A realist's perspective: vegetables and tourmaline

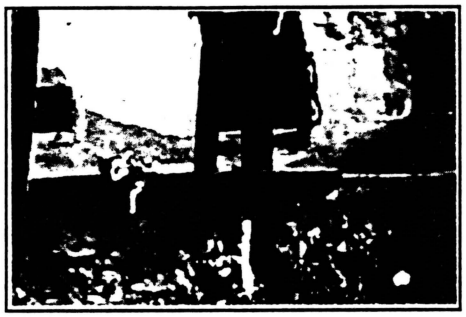
I was born near Okombahe, behind //Ganeb and lived there until I was four years old. Then my Grandfather came for me and took me to Walvis Bay where I grew up and went to school. When I finished I moved to Windhoek, went to work in Cape Town for a year and then returned to Windhoek. I came back to Okombahe a couple of years ago where I have been involved in the Rossing Garden Project.

Now I am trying to start another business buying tourmaline from local miners and selling it in Windhoek and Walvis Bay, trying to establish a market. At the moment there are problems because the buyers don't like the colour of the local tourmaline. I also plan to start marketing local fruit and vegetables. For example, presently dealers are buying carrots from South Africa for 80 cents or less per kilo and reselling them for 3 Rand in Namibia. The quality is often poor, and so we can easily compete. Many local gardeners are struggling because they don't have a local market. I will also try to sell Mateus's rugs in Windhoek when I go there once a week with vegetables and tourmaline.

In spite of the fact that **Ricky Locke** had a long family history in Okombahe (2) he was somewhat disconnected socially, because he did not speak Damara with any fluency due to the fact that he was taken away from his grandfather at the age of 4, and at the time probably resembled the boy who "looks a little bit scared"(1). The above transcription relates an enthusiasm and entrepreneurial optimism which was soon to be disappointed - he left Okombahe shortly after completing his second film to work in a video arcade in Windhoek.

Apart from the portraits of the little boy (1) and his grandmother (2), Ricky's photos depict a strata of Okombahe society associated with local

business men (10) and women (6 - 9), their children (4), their workers (3) and government employees (5). Many of the photographs are concerned with processes: the running of the garden project, connecting up irrigation systems in Jansen, the stages in textile manufacture (7 - 10); these accord with a 'realistic' view of image making, which defines knowledge as technical information. Although Ricky had been in Okombahe for over a year at the time, it was his first visit to Rebecca's and Mateus' rug weaving workshop at the Lutheran church. The workers in the Rossing Garden Project are 'his' workers and although his subjects appear to be comfortable with the relationship, Ricke's photos betray a distinctly different social position from that of other Okombahe photographers, one that might be interpreted in terms of class.



Childhood landscapes

Maria Pietersen Abubakar was one of my first friends in Okombahe and she helped me to meet other potential photographers and to distribute some of the cameras. She had the highest educational standards of all the photographers, spoke fluent English and during the year I knew her, made the transition from the rural poverty of her childhood into the emerging middle class through her marriage to a Nigerian secondary school science teacher. Her daughter Roxette, the issue of a previous relationship, was being brought up to speak English in an urban environment, although this was offset against her lengthy visits to Maria's mother, (Ouma Ida).

Maria's work is perhaps the most varied in terms of subject matter and technical approach. She was hesitant to talk about her photos preferring in many instances to 'let them speak for themselves'. Many of her pictures are made with an innate sense of composition in keeping with western aesthetic values (1,2, 11, 12, 13), and subject matter is strictly concerned with situations and events common to everyday living, whether at her mother's home outside of Okombahe or in the so-called 'old age home' of Blau Berg

where she lived after leaving school and before her marriage. Images of lighting fires, cooking, eating and cleaning are interspersed with the whimsical (12): "Even if you go there now, that cat will be lying like this with its leg hanging down".

Her second film was taken at her mother's house (in the same location as Jacky Pietersen's photographs) where she concentrated on the lives of her own and her sister's children. Many of these contain direct referents to her own childhood and reveal a personalised symbolism attached to specific aspects of the immediate environment (19-22). Landscapes hold a similarly connotative function which is expressed in her panoramic view of Jansen around the Pietersen homestead. It is one of only ten unpeopled landscape images to have been produced in the entire project.

> This is the view of Jansen, our house is hidden in the trees. It hasn't changed at all since I was a little child. There was one tree around here, we used to call it Nasartjie, it was like a man who was chasing the kids, so every time we came there and were jumping on the tree it made a noise like 'grrrrrrrrrr', so we thought: 'that man will come out and frighten us'. It has rotted away now.

Another of Maria's landscapes depicts an island of large Ana trees in the centre of the river (19): "In the summer, this is where we were always having fun, there is a lot of shade and it's where we go to have our picnics and Christmas and things like that". A series of five more, nearly abstract images, of trees and shrubs are related to the sweet and sour taste of their berries, their use in building houses, the process of desiccation by termites and their place in childhood play "... we used to collect the leaves from this tree to use as cups in our dolls houses..." (21). These pictures and the landscape they represent, mediate the cultural and the natural, a medium of exchange between the human world and the world of nature (Mitchell 1994: 5-34). For Maria they provoke memories of childhood, tastes and smells, fears and pleasures associated with the raw material of play; they become ciphers for the moral and ideological ambiguity inherent in the process of a child's inclusion in a network of social and cultural codes.

This theme is elaborated in several photos of Roxette and her cousins; they are depicted playing with dolls , standing in ridiculous poses, or helping with simple household chores. This conflation of Maria's childhood memories with that of her own daughter betrays a deep attachment to place,

a sense of personal identity and continuity associated with her childhood home and its 'unchanging' landscape.

Through my friendship with Maria, I was able to observe and experience many of the anomalies which colour the contemporary culture in Okombahe in ways which might be said to illustrate rapid change and 'social transformation'. Maria's sudden marriage to David Abubakar is a case in point. After many months of uncertainty stemming from several deferred plans for engagement parties, Maria and David arrived back in Jansen after a weekend in Walvis Bay to announce that they were now married. Rather than conform to convention and hold a large 'traditional' wedding lasting several days, with all the attendant entertainment and expense, the Abubakars had decided on a quick civil wedding. Maria was married in a new black dress because it could double as a party dress for other occasions and immediately after the ceremony they put a down payment on a new white bakkie. As a symbol of her upward mobility, independence and her partnership with David, it could hardly have been matched by the most glamorous of wedding gowns. While their pragmatism might easily be interpreted as a response to economic change and class formation, it might also be seen in reference to changing marriage practices and institutional appropriation which have characterised Damara responsiveness to social and economic circumstances throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (Fuller 1993:121-131).

The institution of the church plays a critical role in the cultural lives of many Damara, and Maria's decision to marry outside the church seemed to have had nothing to do with her lack of Christian faith, or participation in the church itself. In spite of being brought up a Catholic, she sometimes attended the Lutheran church, although most Sundays she met with the much smaller Catholic congregation. As a way of introducing me to the social life of Okombahe, she took me to a Lutheran choir meeting soon after I moved to Jansen. About twenty choirs from all over southern Namibia had gathered to raise funds for the church. Local people were charged a small admission fee and the event took the form of a kind of game show/ lottery. A church elder officiated by collecting bids from the audience who 'bought' the right to decide on which choirs or individuals were to sing. During the course of the performance anyone was then free to stop the proceedings in mid-song by nominating another hymn, or a completely different set of singers. This interruption could be outbid by someone else who had some

other preference and the elder ran up and down the isles waving money and directing the wishes of the latest and highest bidder. The whole event seemed to embody a chaotic parody of the capitalist system, within the framework of a church charity, its spectacle a radical contrast to the sedate Protestant churches of northern Europe.

I also attended a Catholic service with Maria and Ouma Lucia one Sunday and found myself sitting on the wrong side of the church which was segregated down the middle into male and female domains. My embarrassment at this *faux pas* was made even worse when during collection when I was obliged to join the queue of women and put my contribution into their pot in front of the alter. I felt somewhat irritated with Maria for not forewarning me of this gender divide but later she told me that she was glad this had happened because during the next week's service the amount of money collected would be announced and my contribution would help the women to 'beat' the men. In any case, she assured me that this division between men and women was not strictly adhered to and she made me feel as if my embarrassment was superfluous.

If I were to 'position' Maria within the social matrix of the 'new' Namibia, I would be tempted to see her in the forefront of her generation, an intelligent, courageous woman, at times recklessly desperate to escape the narrow confines of poverty and communal segregation, at others, almost laconic, able to take everything in her stride. Within the context of the 1990s, she is replicating the determination of women in previous generations, including her mother, to secure better opportunities and more security for their children than they themselves experienced. Historians have often used the trope of 'transformation' to describe the social and economic upheaval which accompanied the establishment of Okombahe as a Damara settlement.[9] And yet many individuals, (of whom Maria is an arbitrary though apt example), characterise a form of on-going transformation which begs the question of Damara identity itself. What remains consistently 'Damara' across generations and through time? How is this 'something', commonly recognised as pertaining to a Damara identity, transmitted? How indeed, if not through women like Maria, whose ability to adapt, incorporate and appropriate relevant strategies gleaned from the world and times in which they are living, bestows a continually renewed sense Damara

[9] The historiographic issue of social 'transformation' is discussed at length in chapters 4, 5 & 6.

identity? There can be no doubt that this collective conceit is associated with the deep affective bonds between parents and children, especially between mothers and daughters, but it is also rooted in a sense of place, albeit a place characterised by the transient, the temporary, and all the perverse regressions perpetrated by colonial bigotry and greed, but also a place of childhood memories, a place which changes more slowly than other parts of the late twentieth century world, a place characterised in Maria's memory in countless personal stories (15):

> Roxette. Once she came to these pepper [chilli] plants and bit one and while it was burning her mouth she spoke her first word. "What happened?" we said, and she cried "pepper! pepper". But still she cannot stop going to this pepper tree.

Conclusion

I trust the reader will forgive the length of this chapter, although I'm not sure how to excuse my inability to do justice to the men and women whom I have been describing. This chapter might easily have formed the basis of an entire thesis devoted to the photographs and the people who made them. Any one individual, indeed, a place, an event or even the recollection of a single day might have been sufficient to draw all the ethnographic detail out of my experience, provided I was a skilled enough writer. My intention, as I have already said, was to explore the meaning of the photographs at several levels by engaging the imagination and acknowledging the distortions of desire which affect the gaze of all viewers. No doubt, the individuals involved would have told very different stories about themselves, and about me.

The primary purpose of this chapter then, has been to elaborate on the visual imagery and self-representations of the photography exhibition. This multi-layered narrative, if read in conjunction with the photos, where the text is an adjunct to the visual presentation, rather than the other way around, might just engage that 'other side of the brain' and take the reader closer to the syncretic, spatial and perceptual experience of 'being there'. The photos themselves act as a counter balance to my verbal and analytical discourse which seeks to contextualize, normalise and compare that which is ultimately incommensurate, mysterious and incomparable. Perhaps someone else will take this process to its logical conclusion in a full-blown

treatment of visual self-representation as an ethnographic genre. The ultimate goal of this thesis however, is otherwise, though this brief ethnographic exposure serves as a necessary prerequisite to reaching that goal. What I hope to have achieved, is the beginnings of a holistic sense of what it means to live in Okombahe and how this is contingent and contested. It would be possible to draw out any number of themes and related debates about identity, place, culture, history and representation based on the montage created by the Okombahe photographers.

Briefly, these first two chapters contextualize the scene of my fieldwork, without which my subsequent discussion on the reproduction of pastoral practice, property relations and their attendant social networks would be incomplete and perhaps incomprehensible. The following chapter takes the subject of the photography exhibition one step further away from its creators into the realm of political discourse, and specifically into contemporary expressions of ethnic identity and ethnic historiography, in other words, into the murky waters of agency and ideology. Chapter 2 has laid the ground work for this: if I have not yet succeeded in conveying the polyvalency of multiple and competing discourses which exist in Okombahe between young and old, between the educated and uneducated, between classes and ethnic groups, in the dichotomy of rural and urban, of traditional and modern, conservative and 'progressive', then hopefully the next chapter will bring us closer to this end.

CHAPTER 3
THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Let us begin by accepting the notion that although there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular, it is accessible to analysis and interpretation and - centrally important - it is not exhausted by totalizing theories, not marked and limited by doctrinal or national lines, not confined once and for all to analytical constructs.

Edward Said in *Culture and imperialism* (1993:35)

I initially conceived of self-representation through photography as a research methodology which at the same time gave the people of Okombahe a voice, unmediated by the political influence of outsiders. It was hoped that this process might reveal some of the visual and narrative codes which surround issues of representation, identity, and the social relations. I was less concerned with delineating Okombahe's social relations and material culture (of poverty) "through the basic methodology of counting, evaluating and comparing the treasure of photographic data" (Collier 1967: 104), and still less with such positivist projects as Collier's "study of the mental health and adjustment of native Americans relocated into cities" (1979:280).[1] As outlined in Chapter 1, the analysis of personal perceptions and the mediation of cultural norms through the visual suggest ways in which to understand the ocular unconscious, the 'second nature' underscoring the common sense of every day life in Okombahe. But this 'second nature' can only 'make sense' in the context of a theory of the individual as existing within a number of contradictory positions and subjectivities.

> What holds these multiple subjectivities together so that they constitute agents in the world are such things as the subjective experience of identity, the physical fact of being an embodied subject, and the historical continuity of the subject which means that the past subject positions tend to overdetermine present subject positions (Moore 1994:140).

In the local politics of Okombahe, where the co-existence of multiple subjectivities are expressed as competing discourses, these subject positions

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[1] The use of ethnographic photography as a means of studying material culture and cultural change is discussed in relation to Collier and others in Chapter 1.

become hierarchically ordered, not only as overdetermining structures of a conceptual or metaphorical nature, used and 'taken for granted' in every day life, but also in the more overtly political discourses which put these same metaphors to use as an *indirect* way of getting at issues of meaningful existence (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:236).

By examining these political discourses it is possible to locate the 'intractable reality' which constitutes local knowledge and common practice in relation to the dynamics of poverty, strategies of survival and concepts of property and place through the sedimentation of micropractices into macroprocesses. Many of these issues have been illuminated in the personal images and stories of the photographers. The previous chapter set out to elaborate on some of the themes which individual photographers evoked; short biographies and some reference to my personal relationships with the photographers and their families were intended to convey something of the multiple subjectivities which exist in and between individuals. When this is abstracted to a level of rhetoric, as in either academic or political discourse, it is possible to understand something about the local effects of regional, national and global influences which form part of a larger overdetermined historical continuity.

This chapter examines the speeches of two Damara politicians, both of which raise issues of identity and representation in different ways. Each have their reflection and counterpart in ongoing, political and academic discourses which locate Damara 'ethnicity' and 'tribalism' somewhere between a primordial condition and the accumulation of neglected 'traditional' practices. It is a discourse which describes a collective fall from grace, the loss of self-esteem and the evasiveness of power while propounding a revival of Damara pride based on concepts of aboriginality, Christian moral precepts and a historical sense of political injustice. Damara identity, is shown to be diverse and polyphonous. The premise of a 'collective life', the unification of a Damara people, can be seen to arise from disparate discourses fused into a consistent ideological structure based on the practices of individuals in their everyday life feeding into the creation of wider social movements. The colonial predilection of transforming an African past "into the timeless sign of the 'traditional'" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:33) has been adapted by contemporary Damara leaders in order to similarly characterise and historicize a complex Damara collectivity in relationship with other collectivities. "For it is the gradual articulation of

such alien worlds that local and universal realities come to define each other - and that markers like 'ethnicity' and 'culture', 'regionalism' and 'nationalism' take on their meaning" (ibid.:33).

Poverty, Art and Culture

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Theo-Ben Gurirab opened the Okombahe photo exhibition in the National Art Gallery of Namibia to an assembly of perhaps two hundred people including ten of the photographers from Okombahe. He was (and remains) a leading and influential politician in the SWAPO government; a Damara speaker who spent some of his youth in the Okombahe area before going into exile in the early 1970s: his perspective is one of an informed but distanced 'insider'. He spoke to a mainly white audience in English, punctuated by asides in Damara to the otherwise mostly uncomprehending photographers.

The transformation of the photographs from snap-shots to art exhibition elicited a critical/political response from Theo-Ben Gurirab, where the intractable reality of both the images and what they signify became distanced and more focused in political and cultural discourse. Three basic themes were intermingled in the Foreign Minister's address: the function of art, the relationship between identity and tradition, and the politics of development. A patrician moral tone underscored all of these concerns and he seemed unable or unwilling to identify with the powerful images confronting him on the walls of the gallery.

He sought first of all to separate the social issues portrayed in the photographs from the exhibition's aesthetic merits by disclaiming the critical function of art, although he commented that art "connects the present with the past" and "reminds a people about their roots" and "helps objectify their aspirations or problems".

> Their heritage and social values are kept alive through art giving hope and confidence in preparing the future. You can see the evidence of this in our rock paintings or in museums and libraries of many countries in the world." [But not, presumably, in the photographs of Okombahe.] "...there is no good or bad art. By the same token there is no good or bad language. I am not here talking about the difference between poetry and graffiti. What I mean is that both language and art are a means of communication. As such, they are value-neutral.

Having made this connection between language and art, it is then hard to understand what he means by heritage and social value if the medium of their communication (through language and art) is value-neutral - as a politician he must surely know they are not. Is this meant to be an oblique reference to what Saussure called 'the arbitrariness of the sign' (Saussure 1959) or its opposite, the impossible notion that we are living in a world whose signs are indeed 'natural' (Taussig 1993: xviii)? He then turns his attention to the marginal status of the Damara language within Namibia today and remarks on the fact that many places, once named by Damaras, are now commonly known by their German, Afrikaans or Herero equivalents (Okombahe is a Herero name). In the light of what he goes on to argue, it seems that Theo-Ben Gurirab is discussing the transmission of power and its associated legitimating discourse, which actually defines what we normatively categorise as poetry or graffiti. The graffiti and/or poetry of place names, scrawled and inscribed across the Namibian landscape is openly contested:

> My link to /Â ‡Gomhes - which I suppose, is called Okombahe because of the intimidation of the clicks - is this: I was born in !Usa !Khos (Usakos) but my afterbirth is by custom interned at /Ui-Kerens. /Ui-Kerens is a village located at the northwestern frame of !Oe ‡Gâb (Erongo mountain) about 10 kilometres south-west[2] of /Â ‡Gomhes.

His emphasis on language is anything but "value-neutral". At the same time however, he locates this conflation of names and language within the colonial experience of his childhood where Usakos "was transformed by internal migrations and inter-marriages into a multi-ethnic and harmonious community of black people, transcending tribalism and regionalism. It was our human fortress of solidarity against apartheid and brutal white *baasskap*". This direct reference to colonial politics and their impact on inter-ethnic relations can also be interpreted as an indirect statement about the wavering policy of reconciliation which was prominent in the news at the time of his address. The complex debate around the status and legitimacy of Damara identity within Namibia today is touched on here. But underlying this discourse is an assertion common to both pre-colonial and post independence inter-ethnic relationships insofar as Damara identity has

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[2] It is actually south-east of Okombahe.

always been and remains highly fluid: this in itself remains a defining trait of the Damara.

Astonishingly, his claim to "Damara Royalty" and through it his connection to Okombahe as the burial place of its kings, opens a discourse on tradition and hegemony which could be seen as paradoxical and ironic were it not for the utter seriousness with which it is stated. ".../Â ǂGomhes used to be and is still today a revered place of Damara pilgrimage for political, religious and cultural reasons." He does not state that these reasons are based on the fact that Okombahe was settled by refugees, that their first 'king' was appointed by the Germans and that thereafter this designation was dependent on various colonial agencies conferring a modicum of authority over a crowded labour reserve. Today, the Damara leadership constitutes an ineffectual opposition to SWAPO political power and retains little of the popularity and support evident during the pre-independence struggle. While the present 'king' continues to command respect, his ineffectiveness makes him little more than an icon of missed opportunities, a symbol of dwindling political power associated with the official posturing to do with the a 'tribal identity' during the homeland era.

Gurirab's statements concerning 'royalty' can only be seen in relation to the tribal undercurrents within SWAPO's dominant support base in Ovambo. His claims to a Damara aristocracy and the implied political status of a 'Damara tribal tradition' might be seen as a shallow repetition of a thoroughly discredited colonial discourse surrounding 'tribal leadership'. Today in Namibia, the theme of 'tribal authority' is a recurring source of political manoeuvring, especially between the most powerful ethnic groupings (Ovambo and Herero) as a means of countering the overwhelming centralisation of power by SWAPO (Leys & Saul 1995:196-203). It seems ironic that having just made a plea for the transcendence of tribalism he now legitimates his own position within such a tribal power structure calling on the convergence of geography and his clan history - "My clan comprising the Gurirabs and other kindred families is called !Oe ǂGân after !Oe ǂGâb (Erongo Mountain)" - it is here that "my afterbirth is by custom interned [sic]".[3] This blatant contradiction between SWAPO's 'nation building' effort on the one hand, and its popularist identification with tribal structures at a local level on the other, is symptomatic of the dominance of

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[3] This custom has almost completely died out, partly because many women now deliver their children in hospitals.

SWAPO. Its party bosses have successfully constructed a *de facto* 'no party state' by appropriating the strategies of the opposition within its own programme.

Theo-Ben compounds his own contradictions when he describes the course of tradition and its manifestation in contemporary Okombahe through a political and socio-economic history which compares the Okombahe of his youth to that of today. He is clearly troubled by his present knowledge of Okombahe and its portrayal in the photographs:

> Sadly, /Â ‡Gomhes is today a community which is sleeping through many exciting things that are taking place in Namibia: it is being by-passed by opportunities and benefits of independence. Most of its inhabitants appear to have been struck by a numbing amnesia.

He accounts for the "process of disintegration" in Okombahe's social and cultural life first of all by blaming the colonial policy which created the expanded 'ethnic homelands' during the late 1960s and sustained the Bantustan administration through to the late 1980s. This "sapped the place and no less the residents of livelihood and initiative, leaving behind a wasteland of broken hearts and deferred dreams". Secondly, urban migration accounts for the absence of a flourishing economy '"leaving the future of a once thriving community in the hands of a vanishing group of old people" who are now impoverished because of "nature, cattle thieves and various other midnight robbers". Finally, the upstream damming of the Omaruru River by white commercial farmers is held responsible for the demise of the area's 'lifeline'.

> During the heyday of this enlarged community, of many fond memories for my generation [sic], the people were self-sufficient in food, livestock of all kinds and could even boast of impressive financial savings. All this is now gone. The community itself has dwindled. A few individuals and families are, nevertheless, keeping hope alive. This is the message of the photographs. . . the exhibition we are viewing depicts mere relics of what was once a self-sustaining community of proud people with outstanding achievements as farmers, businessmen, administrators, builders and educators.

Gurirab's analysis of change is a critique of colonialism and the direct effects of grand apartheid, migrant labour and the control of water by white farmers; all subjects which I will address in detail in the following chapters.

Without referring to it by name, he blames the mentality of 'dependency' as it was fostered by colonial policies for the moral decay, lack of initiative and loss of economic opportunities which he sees in the Okombahe of the present. I will argue that this is at best only a partial truth and that for many Damara speakers in Okombahe, the creation of Damaraland represented an opportunity to escape the confines of a tiny labour reserve and to exercise greater political control over their own affairs. Urban migration was only kept in check by repressive pass laws and when they were repealed in 1976, this phenomenon took on patterns similar to situations common throughout the developing world; there is little evidence to support claims that the demography of Okombahe is skewed as a result of this. The proportion of productive adults living in Okombahe is presently higher than the national average; the discrepancy in the proportion of men and women in this age group is only marginally higher than average indicating that male migration is relatively small.[4] The village has rapidly become a mini-urban centre as families move here from surrounding settlements and more remote rural areas. Far from dwindling, the 'community' has grown several-fold since the 1960s.

The increasing frequency of stock theft (and 'various other midnight robbers') is a consequence of deepening poverty, worsening unemployment, and a general break-down in law and order. This might be explained as a symptom of the democratisation process after a century of repression (as in South Africa during the 1990s) but its opposite, the removal of locally based 'traditional' authority and the continual centralisation of state power must also have contributed to this trend.

The damming of rivers and the extraction of ground water for urban and commercial populations has undoubtedly contributed to falls in the water table and decreased flooding during the rainy season but other factors complicate this equation. Nearly 20 years of below average rainfall in Damaraland, and a poorly implemented national water policy are also to blame for reduced flooding. Severe droughts during the 1980s and early 1990s decimated cattle numbers throughout the region but Okombahe was one of the hardest hit areas. Many livestock farmers have since moved their

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[4] The national ratio of women to men is 52 percent to 48 percent in the 15 to 65 age group ; in Okombahe the ratio is 56 percent to 44 percent indicating that at least 8 percent of men in this age group are elsewhere. Many of them are looking after livestock outside of Okombahe while the mothers of their children stay in the village. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed analysis of Okombahe's demography.

remaining herds to higher rainfall areas in Damaraland and away from rural population centres, improving their chances of surviving drought and at the same time diminishing the threat of stock theft. Others have simply given up.

The change which Theo-Ben Gurirab confronts in the images of Okombahe is in many ways an uncomfortable one. But as a Minister and leading politician during six years of independence he bears a certain responsibility for the present social and economic situation facing the photographers and their families, which he is unable to face up to. /Â ‡Gomhes is a microcosm of change typical of many communities in Namibia, its recent history a symptom of colonialism, economic modernisation and unequal rights over the natural resources from which most of Namibia's wealth has been produced. But his analysis of Okombahe's 'demise' is worrying when he conflates this with Kolmanskop[5] and Pompeii ("I am reminded of two other places which suffered varying degrees of devastation. . ."}! The grand sweep of history ("Renaissance followed the Dark Ages in Europe the same way sunrise always follows midnight") and his appeal to "good Samaritans everywhere, to protect and help preserve our national heritage and universal cultural patrimony" (as embodied in the country's rock paintings), are evasions of the issues raised by the photographs of Okombahe. He invokes 'progress' and calls on all of us "to be ready to give a helping hand", commenting finally that *"Such humanitarian gestures should, however, beware not to confuse poverty with art or culture"*.

This final admonition goes to the heart of current debates in Namibia more commonly associated with 'exoticized' groups such as the Bushmen and Himba. It is a reaction against the reifying tendencies of past ethnographic representations which isolated cultural attributes from their political and historical contexts. All Namibians were subjected to this in varying forms during the colonial period. As the colonial period began, Damara status was characterised through names given to them by their more powerful and well organised neighbours, such as "Chou Dama" (dirty or shit people) and "Ovazorotua" (black barbarians), providing Europeans with a justification for the presence of missionaries and for colonialism in

[5] Kolmanskop was a flourishing diamond mine on the Namib coast around the turn of the century. It is now derelict and inundated with sand dunes, a magnet for tourists and a bizarre set for media production companies making advertisements of commodities ranging from French cheese to Japanese cars.

so that now he reclined, rather than sat, uncomfortably on a chair clutching his walking stick, incongruous but unfazed. Christolene and Christine both held their recently born babies, smothered in brightly patterned blankets as if they might contract a fatal illness in the faintly cool air of the gallery interior. Maria was stunning in her Nigerian dress; Ishmael, Albert and Bernardo were all cool and casual behind dark glasses. Willem and Willemina looked like a prosperous middle class couple - it was hard to imagine that they had left their remote farm by donkey cart only the day before to meet me in Okombahe. Later, when I questioned the photographers about their impressions of the Foreign Ministers opening remarks, they expressed their disappointment and regret: "I guess he doesn't like the people from Okombahe very much" or "What does he know? He's been away for most of his life and now he's separated from his people". They felt betrayed by his ungenerous response to the openness of their work and the 'intractable reality' of their lives.

The World of Man

I had been living in the small farming community of Jansen, outside of Okombahe village for several months when I was given the gift of a book by Oxkely, my young friend and sometimes Damara teacher. Oxkely was illiterate but like many of my neighbours, most of whom could read some Afrikaans, his thirst for picture magazines and newspapers seemed unquenchable. The equivalent of 'Good Housekeeping', Woman's Own', 'True Romance', old mail-order clothing catalogues and weekly newspapers were exchanged and hoarded, becoming dog-eared and torn, until eventually they were abandoned to the depredations of children or eaten by goats. People would sometimes drop by or shout in passing, asking if I had anything they could read, even old newspapers were useful in whiling away the afternoon hours during the fierce heat when many people either napped or sat in the shade against the outside walls of their oven-like huts or under make shift awnings.

Having grown up in Omaruru Oxkely left home at the age of twelve and took a 'job' working with a tin miner on the edge of the Namib where he gathered fire-wood, carried water and cleaned camp in return for his food and keep. He was strong and well built for his age, cheerful and good-natured, but 'dom' , slow - he dropped out of school after repeatedly failing

at the lowest grades and could neither read nor write, his credulity and trusting nature making him prey to a variety of unscrupulous cheats and tricksters. His real mother had turned him out of her house because she could not cope with a retarded child, her first born, a 'mistake' common to teenage girls in Namibia. Oxkely never knew his father although he was told that a certain rangy guitar player who toured with a Damara pop band was the man. In the circumstances he had no alternative but to attach himself to any kindly adult who would take him on as a 'son' and child labourer.

Oxkely was brought to Okombahe by Maria Pietersen, who needed someone to look after her house in Blau Berg, the compound built by the Bantu administration for the old and disabled, but which was now increasingly occupied by the descendants, relatives or friends of these original inhabitants[7]. Ostensibly these houses belonged to the government, but in the absence of any clear administrative control the right of occupancy was determined by community consent, the headman's decision, or informal rights of succession. Since Maria was dividing her life between Blau Berg, her fiancee's government house at the secondary school and her parent's home in Jansen, she wanted Oxkely to look after her possessions in Blau Berg (in case of theft) as well as to maintain a symbolic presence there in case her occupancy rights were questioned. Maria's younger sister Lotte had fulfilled this role until recently, as well as taking on the role of mother to Maria's two year old daughter. This arrangement had come to an end when tension between Lotte and a neighbour in Blau Berg reached a violent climax - he had deliberately run into Lotte with his bakkie late one night as she returned to Maria's house, from a party. Lotte (who was only 17 at the time) went back to her parent's home in Jansen after being released from hospital in Omaruru and filed a court case against her next-door neighbour in Blau Berg.[8] Oxkely became her temporary replacement. Two months later Maria and her fiancee were married, making it possible for her to live officially with her husband in accommodation provided to teachers and their families

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[7] Out of 48 dwellings, only 14 were occupied by the elderly; 28 were inhabited by young families or single men and women, 6 were empty.

[8] Almost a year after this incident, Lotte and her mother travelled to Uis for the trial hearing by a magistrate from Walvis Bay. By this time Lotte had turned eighteen and was no longer a minor needing the representation of a parent. Before her case was opened, she was ushered into the magistrates office where she was requested to drop her case by the magistrate and the defence council. Frightened and unsure of herself, she agreed.

at the secondary school; the tenancy in Blau Berg was passed on to her friend Christine Maletsky.

Oxkely actually referred to Maria as his 'mother', and when she moved away from Okombahe with her new husband, Oxkely was 'given' to Maria's mother and went to live in Jansen, becoming a part of the Pietersen household as a working 'son'. During the short space of six months he went from being a mistrusted stranger to a family member and then abruptly left.

The book Oxkely gave me was unusual in being a large hard-back with many colour illustrations and photographs. It was called *The World of Man, Volume 2/ Europe (France through Ireland)*, published in 1969 by Creative World Publications, Inc. in Chicago. Here was a popular ethnography of the tribes of Europe, adapted from an earlier edition of Museo dell 'Uomo in co-operation with the Musee de l'Homme. I had previously told Oxkely stories about my home in Scotland, trying to describe it in terms of its similarities and differences to Namibia, but now he had an authoritative source of illustrations to which he eagerly turned expressing consternation, surprise and seeking my explanations of strange images of bizarre nineteenth century national costumes or a 'primitive' Hungarian festive mask. Apart from the puzzle of bag-pipe players decked out in the effete Victorian parody of highland dress ('The fighting Highlander of olden times were toughened warriors, little interested in the peaceful arts...") and the tossing of the caber ("an outstanding event at the Highland games") the illustrations of Scotland seemed rather pedestrian and familiar: peasant women with creels on their backs, hearths with the iron pots (poitjies) so much a feature of contemporary Namibian life, querns or grinding stones for cereal, potato fields, a green but barren landscape.

Each nation was described through short sections featuring population, principal cities, government and history, followed by brief essays on national traits and 'folklore' with headings such as "The Rain Fairy", "Is There a German Soul", "The Forest as Temple", "The Life Cycle" , "The Dead Man's Shoes" . . . The Scots are accorded a separate section within Great Britain and are described as having "always been proud of their glorious past and their popular traditions".

> The Scot is both tougher and sadder than the Englishman. He is more devoted to detail, slower to make decisions, and on the whole, more philosophical. Although there is a great deal of humour in him, he does not make jokes readily. Physically robust and meticulous in

> character, he is also a refined craftsman, a faithful executor of orders, a diligent citizen, and one of the world's best foot soldiers. One of the finest, in fact, of all human types. . .

Oxkely knew that I was intending to write about the Damara people: the latent irony of giving me this naive 'volkskunte' ethnography written by and about European people cut several ways at once! Here was a perfect example of the complex workings of the mimetic faculty: the reifying tendencies of ethnography in the age of colonialism had come home to roost in the othering of European 'natives' albeit in a highly romanticised, anodyne form. It bears all the hall-marks of Namibian ethnographies carried out under the colonial regime and used to justify policies of subjugation and exploitation:

> Being used to subservience the Berg Damara is happiest under a firm hand, which rules his daily conduct and nips sudden desires for insubordination and impertinence in the bud. The art and liberty of brewing a strong intoxicating beer from sugar, meal and other ingredients he misuses to his own detriment and ruins his health thereby, does not achieve possessions, becomes a disgrace to his community and only carriers out his duties under protest. In the background wait the augur of the witch doctor, the bearers of his old, almost forgotten, religion and instead of gratefully enjoying and applying the freedom which modern times have brought him, he frequently and of his own accord reverts to subservience to his lusts and passions... (Vedder 1966 [1928]:77).

These negative images might just as easily have been used to describe Scottish Highlanders before they became the objects of romantic nostalgia. Given a more benevolent and generous disposition, Henrich Vedder's Damara ethnography could have been used as a model text for 'The World of Man'; and here was a Damara lad eager to share this work of scholarly knowledge with me, about 'my own people'! So much of what I was surrounded by in Okombahe seemed to be reflected in these images of European peasantry. Because of its studied denial of all signs of modernisation in 1960s Europe (not one reference is made about the existence of motor ways, housing estates, industry and the mass media), 'The World of Man' achieves an 'othering' of Europeans as objectified cultural entities in a similar vein to Vedder. Oxkely's gift was a token of the depth of interpenetration between European colonialism and indigenous Namibians:

how could I begin to explain the complexity of this without in some way referring back to my own model European world of man?

Inevitably, every ethnography must remain partial - an approximation of the multiple and complex inter-relationships between people. Ethnographic representation necessarily spans the narrative distance between individual testimony and political discourse, between personal history and its contextualisation within ideology. When Theo-Ben Gurirab warns us 'not to confuse poverty with art or culture' he is severing this connection between personal experience and collective representation. Even without a clear definition of what he means by the words poverty, art and culture, I don't see how it is possible to separate them, unless they simply stand for value orientations and power in relation to social status. Rather than celebrating the honesty and directness of these personal images infused with irony and humour, as the cultural voice of Damara artistry, he reiterates the moral imprecations of Vedder: he generalises from a distance. To a certain extent every individual photographer also took part in this political debate around Damara identity, expressed in negative characterisations such as "We are sick" or "I don't know what is wrong with our people". These statements were always made in the context of discussions of Damaras in relation to other ethnic groups - this conflict between ethnic and national identity is central to post-colonial Namibian politics, but the way in which it is manifested in Damara discourse is indicative of a long history of political and economic marginalisation.

My objective in constructing this ethnography, which is based more on notions of place rather than ethnicity (Rodman 1992; Duncan & Ley 1993), is not primarily aimed at analysing the discourse of identity, indeed I have said very little so far about how individuals see themselves in this regard. But since identity is ultimately political, it is worth noting how politics are conducted within this ethnic framework. It is interesting that the views of Theo-Ben Gurirab of the ruling nationalist SWAPO political party and those of the Damara 'King', Justus //Garoeb, the leader within the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) converge around the moral implications of low status and weak pride in a Damara identity. This might also be said to reflect the low status and lack of respect which the Damara give to their leaders! To the limited extent that Damara ethnicity is a significant component in any attempt to construct an ethnography of the 'communal inhabitants of Okombahe and Damaraland' the issue of the creation and

reproduction of Damara identity is essential to understanding social relationships within networks of authority, leadership, patronage and institutionalised power.

The King's Day

Once a year, the Damara leadership hold what has come to be known as the 'Damara Cultural Festival" in Okombahe. During the height of the Damara council's power in the 1980's this event was the focus of political rallies and the gathering of Damara speakers from throughout Namibia to assert their position within the freedom struggle and the independence which was sure to follow. When I attended it during two days of November in 1995, I was told that its popularity had seriously declined in recent years - what had brought several thousand participants together ten years ago could now muster only a few hundred. The central event of two days of celebration took place in the now derelict and vandalised stadium, built by the Damara 'Second Tier' (Homeland) Authority next to the village cemetery during its heyday in the early 1980s. The central podium backs onto the graveyard almost forming an extension to it, a link with the dead, itself commemorating former 'kings' and leaders of the people. From here, the introductions and eulogies to the Damara leaders were delivered to an assembly of school children and adults, mostly from Okombahe itself, a small proportion having come from Omaruru, Usakos, Walvis Bay and Windhoek.

The "King's" (*Gaob*) 'Message to the Nation' was titled: "The fire shall not be extinguished" (/Aes ge /ai titesa) and began with a joke:

> Before I start my speech, I want to refer to the previous speaker who said: 'A woman is a lovely thing' (tare hoes ge /nam/namsa). This made me think of somebody else who said: 'Without a woman you can't go on - even if she is there, you can't go on!'

The irony of this incipient pessimism characterises themes which are elaborated through homilies, metaphors and lessons in Damara history - approached through an explicit appeal to "The Damara Nation', and tempered by a moderate nationalism: "We are not separating ourselves from the other people of Namibia. It is not like that. Rather, in the garden of our

country grow many types of flowers (bloemdi). That means we have different manners and habits and to celebrate these differences is not an act of separation, but a way of giving life to the different 'bloemdi' of Namibia". Like Theo-Ben Gurirab, *Gaob* //Garoeb calls on the Damara language as a basis for identity, going back to the tower of babel to substantiate the Damara antiquity: "ours is one of the oldest remaining cultural traditions (*!Khuriti*) and although it is small, you must take this message into your hearts". He calls on the ancestral leaders and their message as passed down through the generations and now to be pronounced once again through the king: "Stay near to receive your inheritance and receive their message". Incredibly, the message is almost post-modern in its simplicity and insight into the nature of socially constructed worlds:

> A person's identity is built on what he believes himself to be. Do not believe that you are on the side of evil or that you cannot have what others are having. Do not evaluate yourself by saying 'I am the person who did such and such in the past' but rather say: ' I am the child of my father and mother, in the present, now!

Identity is located in descent and the emotionally charged metaphor of 'blood'. //Garoeb then addresses the issue of Damara inferiority: "Why are you letting yourself live like a foreigner in your own country? Maybe you don't know that this is your fatherland and this is why you feel ashamed" He sets about answering this problem in the same manner as Theo-Ben Gurirab, by conflating the past with the present, appealing to prehistory through place names, and by avoiding the connections which so obviously exist between poverty and the expression of culture: "While the Damara people were first naming this land the only other people here were the Bushmen... the country itself will testify to our history". He refers to the history of conflict between the Damaras and the Ovambos, their more recent coalition in the freedom struggle and finally to the national symbols of Namibia which bear many of the signs of Damara tradition: the colours of the flag (the blue and green of the two Damara factions prominent in the early 20th century), the county's emblem (the gemsbok), the Damara author of the national anthem, the Damara prime minister, foreign minister and many others. Blood, descent and then citizenship are evoked as markers of Damara identity: "First of all you must realise in yourself that 'I am also a

person' and that 'I am a citizen of this country'. . . After realising this then you should look to whether you own a house. . ."

The somewhat disingenuous advice which follows is worth quoting at length because it has a direct bearing on several themes which emerged in the discussion of the individual photographers in the previous chapter. These include the importance of owning a house and being independent, definitions of gender and the important place which women occupy as carriers of continuity and cultural identity.

> Honourable people, if you do not own a house, *then you are not a person and no one else will see you or respect you.* And now, if you are having a house, is it a municipal house or is it your own? It is good that you are having houses in the townships, but on the other hand, these are just borrowed houses and we must prepare our own houses which will belong to us forever. So start building a house which you can say "this is mine". You must start to collect some drums and other building materials and put them on the site of your house so you can say: 'this is my place'. When one day you lose your job, you can come and stay there and during holidays your children can take a look at donkeys, goats and cattle. It's good that you take your families down to Swakopmund and sleep in bungalows, but all this is only for a very short time. By that I mean, you will take your family on such holidays only while you are getting a salary, but you should try to get a place for the time when you no longer have a salary, and you will have a place to live in the future. For you ladies, wait a little while before buying that furniture, and you men, wait a little longer before buying that car and rather start buying some goats and cattle for yourself and your family's future. Don't buy that TV but use that money to purchase some goats and a year from today those goats will have multiplied and you can sell some to buy that TV and still have a kraal. You men, do the same as I told the ladies and rather than buy a car, use that money to buy a cow or goats or a tractor because you can sell livestock again after two or three years and your kraal will still remain.

While the sentiment expressed in this exhortation might appeal to many people listening in the audience, //Garoeb's target would seem to be a small minority of people who earn salaries, who take holidays in bungalows, who buy TVs and cars - these things are way beyond the means of most people living in Okombahe. Like his appeal to history and language, the emotional attachment to place and the sense of security which that implies in the myth of Damara nationhood is called up as a practical solution to 'feeling like a foreigner in your own country'. But the prospect of losing your job and

having to retreat to the risky environment of communal farming can hardly be said to raise confidence and pride in a Damara identity!

> I want to retain our Damara surnames as they have been in the past: a woman should not use a 'b' instead of 's' at the end of her surname. For example Nuwaseb is a man and Nuwases is a woman. Some women are using a 'b' at the end of their names and that is not the way it should be. They say that insurance companies are not paying if a wife's name is different from her husbands, and so if her husband's name is ǂNuseb then she is also ǂNuseb: this spoils the language. You have the right to change your surname if you want to but, you should remember what the owners of our language will think of you. Then if I say "There stands Anna Xoagub", then I am saying that person is a 'homo' which means they are both male and female.

Here, the seriousness of the opening joke is alluded to again (even if she is there, you can't go on): as the bearers of Damara identity, women lend continuity to family life and social cohesion, but in spite of this, a history of poverty, lack of effective leadership, political fragmentation, and oppression built upon ethnic division still serves to undermine the pride which //Garoeb would instil in 'his' people.[9] Even the dress code of 19th century missionaries wives, adapted by converted Damara women during the last 100 years (and now a symbol of cultural continuity), is drafted in to confirm a civilising code of traditional values serving to define and instil respect in Damara identity:

> Now I will ask the grandmothers to give instruction to the young ones who will also wear the long (traditional) dress, as a lady. This dress carries with it a mark of respect - for example, if you want to speak to a woman wearing such a dress you must not shout at her from far away, but come close and speak gently. If a woman wants to turn around in such a dress she will not turn in a rough manner but turn in a soft and cool way. Woman do not jump about dancing in this dress but will dance a cool soft dance.

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[9] These remarks were made in the context of a heated public debate around a draft act of Parliament (The Married Persons Equality Act 1995) which was eventually passed and established equality of women's rights in marriage. Many prominent politicians and traditional leaders opposed the act on the grounds that it would undermine 'traditional Namibian family values'; //Garoeb, in calling for the retention of gender distinctions in naming practices, emphasises the relative equality of Damara gender relations. His position with regard to homophobia would seem to be more ambiguous.

Gender, class and race are key ingredients in the construction of discourses on social identity: they belong to a basic folk model of what it means to be a Damara man, woman, child. . . . As such, these concepts constitute ideal subjective roles which define difference in terms of group identity as well as individual positions within the group. Since difference structures discourse, and the concepts of race, class, ethnicity and gender intersect in ways which create a multiplicity of subject positions, the resultant multiple discourses become hierarchically ordered with the result that some come to be accepted as dominant or ideal, and others develop into oppositional subdominant discourses (or subjectivities). Such a structuring of difference inevitably implicates the relationship between subjective fantasies of power and fantasies of identity (Moore 1994: 143).

> [. . .] with regard to the relationship between violence and particular forms of difference - gender, race, class - we might come closer to an understanding of the phenomenon if we shift our gaze and move from imagining violence as a breakdown in the social order - something gone wrong - to seeing it as the sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power (Ibid.: 154).

The issue of violence has been only briefly alluded to so far in this thesis. Gurirab's reference to 'cattle thieves and various other midnight robbers' as well as //Garoeb's remarks about traditional female dress as a 'mark of respect' are shallow allusions to stock categories constituting Damara identity. Gender categories are less of an issue in terms of 'fantasies of power and identity' than in many ethnic discourses, but at the same time, gender relations and especially women's role in the maintenance in the social order and men's role in its break-down are central to conceptions of a Damara collectivity. Women generally have fewer employment opportunities than men but are never-the-less successful shop-owners, farmers, petty traders, traditional healers and popular community leaders. Women form the core of household units in spite of the tendency for married women to acknowledge their husbands as the household head. Even so, over 40% of households are classified 'female headed' in official government statistics (National Planning Commission 1993: 95-6). Women are also the frequent victims of domestic violence and physical abuse at the hands of their men (Hubbard 1995:61-4), probably indicating the degree to

which Damara men feel threatened by the uncertainties of status attendant on unfulfilled fantasies of masculinity.

Why, given the ethnic hierarchies erected through the forces of colonialism, does a woman like Maria Pietersen Abubakar identify herself as Damara and choose to bring her daughter up as one? Her relatively light complexion, her European/Nigerian surname and command of Afrikaans and English, would confer a higher position within a racial/class hierarchy, albeit on a more subliminal level than previously. At a collective level, there can be no simple answer to this question although Maria's explanation that "Damaraness" is unavoidably matrilineal (conferred in much the same way as "Jewishness"), must be a dominant factor within a specifically Damara discourse which treats hierarchy, racial or otherwise, as ambiguous, arbitrary and ironic.

Poor Thirsty People Have Had Enough - Or Have They?[10]

The forgoing discussion of Damara leaders has only hinted at the fractious nature of political leadership within Damara communities such as Okombahe. The story of my relationship with Erwin Tsuseb (Chapter 2) hinted at the conflicting nature of social relations in the village where a general disaffection with local civic, traditional, church and business leaders seemed to comprise a classic example of the dynamics of petty patronage in an environment of poverty. The corruption associated with the dispersal of food aid, the allocation of goats as part of a restocking programme, and the blatant manipulation of development projects by local leaders came to a head when a group of disaffected men and women opposed the existing development committee with its own nominees. A public meeting was called and its importance was reflected in the attendance of King //Garoeb, his councillors and several respected elderly Damara men.

The meeting took place outside in the dilapidated arena near the 'People's House'. Around one hundred and fifty men and women sat in bleachers above the assembled leadership who were arranged in a semi-circle around King //Garoeb and his chief councillor. The anger of the people was palpable, and as the long-winded opening of the meeting dragged on through prayers and introductory speeches by the chief

[10] See Chapter 2 (Erwin Tsuseb), where the formation of a 'people's party' was mobilised to oppose the petty corruption of local officials.

councillor, heckling broke out from the assembly: the people wanted a voice. The leaders handled the situation skilfully and were gradually able to appeal to the assembly for calm and deliberation. As the anger of the people became increasingly defused, the village 'idiot' appeared on the scene, sauntering up to the King's table and throwing his hat down shouted: " You've spoken enough! It's time you heard what the people have to say!" The audience's response encouraged him and he continually interrupted the leaders speeches which he insisted had nothing to do with the issues at hand. The audience's laughter quickly gave way to embarrassment and by ignoring him or attempting to mollify his obnoxious behaviour with patience and dignity, the King and his councillors were eventually able to win the audience over to their side and avoid opening the divisive issues which had instigated the meeting in the first place.

When, after several hours of sitting in the baking heat of the afternoon, the time finally came for individuals in the community to voice their complaints, these were muted and couched in metaphors rather than direct accusations of corruption. The regional councillor who was accused of gross incompetence was conspicuous by his absence; his underling, the community development officer who was also accused of embezzlement and favouritism spoke up for himself without rebuttal and the meeting was adjourned with promises that the leadership would consult among themselves and call another meeting in the future. What began as an impassioned attempt by ordinary people to change the way 'democracy' operated locally ended in a somewhat dispirited, fatalistic and pragmatic acceptance of the situation. Gradual change might result, but ultimately, the symbolism of Damara leadership and its association with order and respect won out over the uncertainty and risk attached to open revolt, embodied symbolically in the behaviour of the 'village idiot'.

A similar situation arose when the Department of Agriculture organised a 'participatory appraisal' workshop which was intended to elicit information about the problems of drought, development, tenure and subsistence associated with livestock farming in Okombahe. A camera crew from South Africa was on hand to record the proceedings of two days of group discussion, which took place in the open area afforded by the cool shade of a large grove of Ana trees near the river. By the end of the second day, a general confusion was evident among many of the participants who felt it was a waste of time, since they could hardly be expected to raise issues

related to the organisation of the village development committee, the farmers union and the leadership in general: the risks involved in causing enmity by speaking out were too great for many individuals. The elderly were especially reluctant to complain in case this intelligence found its way back to the powerful clique who controlled the distribution of food aid, drought relief and even the shop keepers to whom many were indebted. The presence of video recording equipment only exacerbated this fear.

Many similar examples of how the politics of local patronage operate in underdeveloped rural areas throughout various 'ethnic' communities in Namibia are common. What seems to typify leadership structures in Damara communities such as Okombahe is a weak articulated hierarchy associated with the levelling tendencies of gossip, a social structure based on shifting kinship alliances and a form of individualism which results from the Damaras' specific history of social and economic marginalisation. Rural and pastoral development initiatives based on the notion of 'community participation' will continue to flounder as long as project managers fail to address this fundamental fact of community fragmentation and the ambivalence attached to an ineffective leadership in the context of distorted and weak political community organisation.

Conclusion

This final chapter of Part I has only succeeded in airing a few of the issues pertaining to discourse, identity, social relations and leadership structures implicated by the Okombahe photographs and expanded in my discussion of their political significance. By highlighting some of the most commonly stated positions on Damara identity, through the words of Damara politicians, I hope to have opened the succeeding chapters to a more detailed discussion of the historical imagination in the making of contemporary Okombahe. It represents an axis in the thesis where the ethnographic content becomes increasingly dependent on historical, geographical, and sociological narratives. The following chapters elaborate some of the issues which have been raised thus far, and focus increasingly on the pastoral economy which is both the underpinning and outcome of social relations and environmental circumstances.

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