



Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa

A Gender Perspective on the Status of the San in Southern Africa

Silke Felton and Heike Becker

Legal Assistance Centre

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF THE SAN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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**A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON
THE STATUS OF THE SAN
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**Silke Felton
Heike Becker**



LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE (LAC)

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Publisher's contact details:

Street address: 4 Körner Street, Windhoek

Postal address: PO Box 604, Windhoek, Republic of Namibia

Telephone: (+264) (+61) 223356

Fax: 234953

E-mail address: legal@iafrica.com.na

Web site: <http://www.lac.org.na>

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PREFACE

At the 22nd Session of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly held in Windhoek in March 1996, a resolution was passed recognising the “special difficulties encountered in integrating hunting and gathering peoples in agricultural industrial states”, and calling for “a comprehensive study of the San people ... in the light of international conventions”. To this end it was decided that a study titled *A Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa* would be conducted, with funding from the European Union (EU).

With a view to implementing the project, the EU commissioned Prof. Sidsel Saugestad at the University of Tromsø to prepare an inception report incorporating a broad work plan and budget. This report was revised in Windhoek in late 1998 by the implementing agency, the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), and implementation commenced following the exchange of contracts between the LAC and EU in January 1999. A project co-ordinator was formally appointed in the same month, and a total of ten researchers were contracted to conduct the research and prepare a report on their findings. The outcome of the study is a series of five reports. The first in the series serves as an introduction to the study as a whole. The second, third and fourth are country-specific reports on the situation of San in South Africa, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe (combined in one volume), Botswana and Namibia. The fifth is the outcome of a specialist consultancy commissioned as part of the study to focus on gender issues in relation to San.

The study as a whole was made possible by a contribution from budget line B7-6200/98-13/ENV/VIII of the European Community (EC). All opinions expressed in the study report series are the opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the EC, nor of the LAC.

James Suzman
Study Co-ordinator

Windhoek
January 2001

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In memory of Boitumelo Simon

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Finally, we extend our deepest gratitude to the many San women and men in Ghanzi District, Tsumkwe West and Schmidtsdrift/Platfontein who shared their knowledge and aspirations with us and patiently answered our never-ending questions. We do not want to single out any of them. All their names are listed in the appendix, as are those of the numerous men and women from southern African countries and other parts of the world who work with San communities for a better future and who shared their expertise with us. Many thanks are due to all of them.

Silke Felton and Heike Becker

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIWO	African Indigenous Women's Organisation
ANC	African National Congress
CASS	Centre for Applied Social Sciences
CBNRM	community-based natural resource management
CBO	community-based organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGE	Commission on Gender Equality
CKGR	Central Kalahari Game Reserve
CPA	communal property association
CRIAA SA-DC	Centre for Research-Information-Action for Development in Africa – Southern Africa Development Consulting
DWA	Department of Women Affairs
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELCIN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
GAD	Gender and Development
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Co-operation)
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HU	Health Unlimited
IRDNC	Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation
JCIQLSW	Joint Standing Committee for Improving the Quality of Life and Status of Women
KDT	Kuru Development Trust
KGNP	Kalahari Gembok National Park
KTP	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
LAC	Legal Assistance Centre
LIFE	Living in a Finite Environment (Programme)
MBEC	Ministry of Basic Education and Culture
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MLRR	Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation
NDF	Namibian Defence Force
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NNC	Nyae Nyae Conservancy
NNDFN	Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
OST	Omaheke San Trust
OSW	Office on the Status of Women
RAD	Remote Area Dweller
RADO	Remote Area Development Officer
RADP	Remote Area Development Programme
RWM	Rural Women's Movement
SACHES	Southern Africa Comparative and History of Education Society
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SASI	South African San Institute
STD	sexually transmitted disease
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWC	SWAPO Women's Council
TB	tuberculosis
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VDC	Village Development Council
VSP	Village Schools Project
WIMSA	Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa

SUMMARY

S.1 Methodology

The following findings are based on data gathered during individual and group interviews with San women and men in Ghanzi District (Botswana), Tsumkwe West constituency (Namibia) and Schmidtsdrift and Platfontein in the Northern Cape (South Africa). The field research was complemented by a large number of interviews with experts conducted in person, telephonically and by means of email, as well as by an extensive literature evaluation.

S.2 General

- While all southern African San are extremely marginalised, this gender analysis shows that San women are subject to multiple forms of marginalisation. They are discriminated against as San, as women, and as San women, by their broader national societies and within their own communities.
- There is growing concern among academics and development practitioners that recent changes in San societies throughout southern Africa have resulted in the erosion, at the expense of women, of the relative equality that formerly pertained between women and men in these societies.
- Studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s among San in Namibia and Botswana, who then still largely relied upon hunting and gathering, emphasised their egalitarian social structures and high level of gender equality. This was the case within the family, and the largely informal community leadership positions could also be held by either men or women. The status and influence of women was high due to the very substantial contribution they made to the sustenance of the family and the community. Women were not only the main providers of food, but also retained control over the food they had gathered.
- Gender relations and identities among San communities have been grossly affected by socio-economic and political changes, with San women losing influence and autonomy. Sedentarisation resulting from the wide-scale loss of land, the shift to pastoralism and wage labour, the influence of male-dominated neighbouring communities and, perhaps most dramatically, the militarisation of San life in the 1970s and 1980s all played a role. Gender relations have been found to be most imbalanced in those communities which have been most directly affected by military structures, the experience of war and violence and the trauma of repeated removals.

S.2.1 Work and the division of labour

- Both men and women aspire to waged employment. The labour market in those sectors that San have been engaged in favours males over females, thus pushing San women even further into the margins of the cash economy than San men.
- Control of income within families varies greatly, but money is predominantly seen as the property of the person earning it. Since men have more access to cash income, they tend to have greater control over financial resources than women.
- The shift to a sedentary lifestyle has brought with it a more unquestioning assumption of household work and child care as being “women’s work”. The more exposure San communities have had to surrounding cultures and institutions (including the military), the less willing men are to perform tasks commonly undertaken by women.
- It appears that the extent to which the livelihood of San groups is still linked to gathering is a predictor of relative gender equality. Women are positively inclined towards foraging and draw pride from their contribution to family sustenance. In contrast to subsistence gathering, however,

the harvesting of natural resources for cash income is a distinctly male activity; in particular, men are more prominent in the sale and marketing of veld products.

- Stock ownership, although very limited in most San communities, is highly prized, and shows a clear bias towards male ownership and handling of animals, particularly of cattle. Both men and women have internalised the division of labour common on commercial farms and among pastoralist groups, where it is typically men who work with cattle. This bias is also inherent in some interventions, both governmental and non-governmental.
- The commercial farming sector is the most important source of employment for San men. Women's residency rights and livelihood on farms is dependent on their menfolk's employment. On some commercial farms women are employed as domestic servants, but their wages are usually lower than those of male farm workers.
- Employment in the army retains importance mainly for the Khwe and !Xu resettled at Schmidtsdrift. Few women have employment in service establishments run by the army, and none are directly employed as soldiers. Dependency on the part of the women on their male relatives has deepened with the relocation from Namibia to South Africa.
- Tourism is being embraced as a promising income-generating strategy by many San men and women of all ages. In both commercial tourism ventures and community ventures, women and older men find themselves sidelined as young literate and multilingual men dominate interaction with tourists. A significant exception is the production of handicrafts for the tourist market, which benefits many women.

S.2.2 Education

- Formal education of San learners is characterised by a significantly higher dropout rate among girls than among boys, contrasting with the far more gender-balanced national averages. It appears that girls currently of school-going age are set to find themselves in the same situation as the majority of adult San women today, whose low educational attainment excludes them from the few existing employment opportunities.
- There are both gender-neutral and gender-specific factors which affect San educational performance. Some of these are cultural, while others are based in the school system.
- Early sexual relationships, early "marriage" and young motherhood contribute to girls dropping out and under-performing. Sexual harassment in all its forms is prevalent in some schools, and is quite common in hostels.
- Educators perceive San girls to be lacking in self-esteem, and suggest that there is a lack of guidance for young men and women as a result of the decreased transmission of gendered knowledge and values through traditional education and puberty rites.
- Parental expectations and encouragement – and indeed pressure – regarding educational achievement is generally low, but lower still regarding girls. Young San women lack modern female role models.

S.2.3 Health

- Inadequate access to health facilities is a source of concern for many San, as are unsympathetic attitudes on the part of clinic staff. In line with the gendered division of labour, many health problems are of particular concern to women, as they are responsible for the health of both their children and themselves.
- Health beliefs and practices vary greatly among communities and generations, as does the extent of transmission of knowledge of the curative properties of plants and spiritual healing.
- Due to widespread food insecurity and the lack of resources, San women express the wish to limit the number of children they have. The use of modern contraceptives appears, however, to be low, with condoms being particularly disliked by both women and men.
- Women are especially vulnerable in respect of reproductive health issues, including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS.

- There is a discernible acceleration in the spread of HIV among San, and San women in particular, despite their seeming until recently to have been less affected than their broader national societies. The occurrence of HIV/AIDS is largely determined by the intensity of San's interaction with neighbouring communities. San women of all ages are highly susceptible to HIV infection due to the nature of many of their sexual relations, which tend to be with male partners from other ethnic groups. While San women are influenced by the greater wealth of the non-San men with whom they form these relationships, some non-San men are alleged specifically to seek out San women for casual relationships, as they are said to be less promiscuous and therefore less likely to be infected.
- The effects of poverty and unhealthy living conditions are compounded by self-destructive drinking patterns. Alcohol abuse and alcoholism pervade all layers of San societies, irrespective of relative economic status. Alcohol abuse has gendered implications for women's health and psychosocial well-being: women are affected by their own drinking, by their male partners' alcohol abuse, by alcohol-induced violence, and by the effects which alcohol has on gender relations.

S.2.4 Violence and abuse

- Violence is one of the most discernible experiences of contemporary San life. In its various forms, violence is a dominant factor in the intra-community relations of San as well as in their relations with many non-San people. While violence affects both male and female members of San communities, there are also obvious gender-based differences. San women are particularly vulnerable to acts of domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse.
- Domestic violence was reported as a serious problem everywhere. There was substantial divergence, however, in the degrees of *gender-based* domestic violence – i.e. violence that is specifically rooted in distinct and hierarchically organised perceptions of 'men' and 'women' – encountered at the three field sites. These differences seem to be largely consequences of the distinct histories and present situations of the respective communities.
- Although alcohol abuse is often blamed for violence among the San, it may be just one contributing factor. The stresses of social and economic change are significant contributors as well, with drinking being a means of releasing pent-up feelings. That women are more often than not on the receiving end of domestic violence that follows alcohol abuse seems to be a result of contemporary unequal gender relations in many San communities.
- The rape of San women is perpetrated by both San and non-San men.
- Many San women across southern Africa engage in temporary relationships with non-San men who are perceived to be wealthier and of higher status. Often these relationships leave the San women vulnerable to abandonment and poverty, especially where such relationships result in pregnancy. Unlike San men, who are likely to support their offspring, non-San men who have fathered children with San women tend to eschew their parental responsibilities.
- At present there are no satisfactory avenues for abused San women to seek recourse. In many instances the current approaches of state institutions and individual officials seem to aggravate problems rather than provide solutions. The community's own conflict resolution structures, on the other hand, appear to be too weak or are "manned" by community leaders who lack the requisite gender sensitivity.

S.2.5 Leadership

- In existing and emerging leadership contexts such as formalised community governance, development projects and non-governmental and community-based organisations, San women are generally under-represented. Jealousy (both sexual and non-sexual) on the part of men at times prevents women from entering a public arena; even in the absence of such jealousy, however, the gendered life experiences of women frequently debar them from this space.
- The character and structure of San community governance, or "traditional authorities", are very different in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. The recently formalised traditional authorities in Namibia appear to have made the most conscious efforts to include women in their ranks.

- Development projects in San communities frequently suffer from a lack of effective leadership, with women in particular showing little desire to aspire to leadership positions. Nevertheless, in some instances women have been found to influence decision-making at crucial junctures.
- Development interventions which foster income-generating activities in which men are bound to dominate as a result of the prevailing gendering of work are inimical to the evolution of female leadership. A high degree of formality in project structures is also associated with a low level of female participation.

S.3 Recommendations

The challenge is for governments, non-governmental organisations and the San's own community-based organisations (CBOs) to develop strategies that address the many facets of gender and discrimination.

S.3.1 Governmental and non-governmental policy frameworks

- It is recommended that development strategies aimed at addressing San gender concerns be guided by:
 - recognition of the differential impact of economic and political marginalisation on San women and men, and of the resultant need to develop appropriate strategies to counter this tendency;
 - acceptance of the principle that interventions aimed at addressing gender concerns need to take account of other economic, political, social and cultural matters in order to be of long-term benefit; and
 - recognition of the need to pay special attention to the interests of San women, because in addition to having been marginalised by their wider societies, they are experiencing increasing levels of gender inequality within their own communities.
- There is clearly a need for the governments of southern African states which are home to sizeable San communities to develop appropriate policy frameworks to address San gender concerns. Such frameworks should be translated into practice-oriented plans of action.
- San gender concerns should be incorporated into national gender policies.
- Policies and programmes directed at San communities should be assessed in terms of their gender implications and modified as required to reverse the current trend of increasing gender inequality within such communities.
- Policies and programmes in all relevant development sectors – most notably poverty alleviation, rural development, health, education and the legal system – should be assessed and amended with a view incorporating measures aimed at addressing the specific gender concerns of San communities.
- Governments should co-operate with NGOs, CBOs and international organisations whose work is geared towards the promotion of San development and gender equality.
- There is also an urgent need for NGOs, San CBOs and international organisations and donors to develop strategies and programmes aimed at addressing San gender concerns.
- Development-oriented NGOs that are not currently involved in San-related issues, especially those which focus on poverty alleviation and rural development, should consider expanding their ambit of operations to include San communities. In so doing they should pay particular attention to gender concerns.
- NGOs which already work with San communities should make a conscious decision to assess the gender-sensitivity and relevance of their programmes and make adjustments where necessary.
- NGOs should also take the lead by establishing internal gender policies relating to their own employment practices and work conditions.
- NGOs striving for gender equality (“women’s organisations”) should assess their policies and programmes and consider making adjustments aimed at benefiting San women.
- San CBOs should assess and adjust their policies and programmes in the light of gender issues. They should furthermore strive for a gender balance on their own governing bodies, and should also set an example by establishing appropriate gender policies regarding employment practices and conditions.

S.3.2 Sectoral interventions

An integrated multi-sectoral development approach that takes into account a broad range of issues, including access to land and natural resources, ethnic prejudice, cultural identity and human rights, is required if San gender concerns are to be addressed.

S.3.3 Work and income

- Programmes and projects aimed at providing an income should take account of the differences in the gendered lives of San women and men in general, and of the division of labour along gender lines in particular. In view of the fact that it is clearly the case that San men tend to appropriate projects as soon as there is the prospect of a cash income, interventions should aim to ensure that men and women profit equitably from income-generating projects.
- Given that historical experiences, skills development and other circumstances vary substantially from community to community, there is a need for flexibility in the development and evaluation of gender-sensitive income-generating opportunities.

S.3.4 Education

- Education is one of the key means of providing the younger generation of San with better life prospects than their parents enjoyed. Great care should be taken, however, to ensure that efforts aimed at promoting San education benefit children of both sexes. San parents should be encouraged to strengthen their resolve to ensure that their daughters as well as their sons receive an education that will equip them with appropriate skills. It is recommended that these concerns be addressed in the context of basic literacy and numeracy programmes targeting adults, particularly San women and mothers.
- In addition to providing the material infrastructure and making efforts to increase the school attendance of San children, schools need to be sensitive to distinct needs arising from current San culture, and to accommodate such needs. A particular concern in this respect is the high number of “married” San girls and young women of school-going age. Their continued education should be ensured by admitting them to schools, and also by convincing San communities that education is still valuable for a young wife.
- Sex education (“life skills education”) should be offered in schools to help curb the high incidence of teenage pregnancy.

S.3.5 Health

- San women’s health concerns relate primarily to reproductive health and child health, the latter as women are assigned the care of their children’s health in San communities. It is recommended that nurses be trained to support San mothers in caring for their children’s health in sensitive and culturally appropriate ways, and that culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive education projects and campaigns be designed to equip San communities to deal with the increasingly pressing issues of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- It is further recommended that culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive education projects and campaigns be designed to equip San communities to deal with the profound and ubiquitous problem of alcohol abuse.

S.3.6 Violence and abuse

- In-depth research into both sexual and non-sexual violence and abuse – of which San women are all too often the victims – is essential for the development of gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate interventions.

- On the basis of relevant research, educational programmes should be developed to help San men and boys to understand the nature and extent of the problem constituted by the violence and abuse that San women endure. By including issues related to their economic and political marginalisation, such programmes should holistically take account of the life experiences of male San in different circumstances. Education should also be provided for San women and San community leaders on how to seek recourse in the event of violence or abuse.
- Efforts should be initiated forthwith to sensitise law enforcement agencies to the needs of San women who have survived violence.

S.3.7 Leadership

Although development interventions can address a number of gender concerns in San communities, the issue of increasing levels of gender inequality in San communities can only be addressed with the prospect of long-term success if the communities themselves are committed and their leaders are actively involved. It is therefore recommended that sensitisation to gender issues (“gender training”) be fully incorporated into capacity-building programmes for San leaders throughout southern Africa. Such programmes should be adapted to the specific circumstances and forms of gender relations pertaining in the various San communities.

S.3.8 The way forward

The present study could do no more than provide a broad perspective on San gender issues in southern Africa. Further consultations with San women and men regarding their general needs and their various gender concerns should be conducted with a view to developing appropriate development strategies together with San themselves.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Our communities must address the present inequality between men and women in society. ... Inequality does not honour our traditions and culture. Strategies to rectify gender inequality must be developed by each community.

Resolution adopted by the Shakawe Indigenous Peoples' Consultation 1998; Shakawe Principles 1999.

This gender perspective on the situation of the San people of southern Africa identifies the need for incorporating gender concerns into policies and programmes directed at the region's marginalised San communities, and the challenges associated with such a course of action.

The focus of the country studies for this regional assessment has been on the ethnic and socio-economic identities through which San are distinguished from other citizens of the region. They have shown in great detail the many ways in which San are the victims of marginalisation and discrimination in southern Africa.¹

The present study investigates the gendered aspects of the marginalisation of the San of southern Africa, i.e. how San men and women are affected differently. However, internal social stratifications within San communities along the lines of gender, age and relative wealth ('class') also impact on the experiences of different San people, and on their development and empowerment needs. This study consequently also focuses on the changing gender relations within southern African San communities.

Gender relations within San communities and between them and their wider societies cannot be discussed in isolation from other aspects of social organisation. Rather, they need to be addressed within the broader context of the San's experience in southern African societies. So as not to reproduce gender imbalances, empowerment strategies need to fully incorporate gender aspects, i.e. to "mainstream" gender. Although great care has been taken in the present study to consider gender as a part of the totality of San life, this gender assessment should be read in close conjunction with the country studies.

San live under very different circumstances and accordingly in highly diverse ways, ranging from the mixed subsistence strategies of San communities which have secure land rights, to San farm workers and their dependants on commercial and communal farms, to San soldiers and their families in a huge army camp, to mention just a few. This gender assessment takes this diversity into account.

Although great care has been taken to consider the gendered experiences and needs of both women and men, the study has a definite bias towards San women. This is due to a growing concern among academics and development practitioners that recent changes in San societies throughout southern Africa have resulted in the erosion, at the expense of women, of the relative equality which formerly pertained between women and men in those societies (see e.g. Bollig et al. 2000: 88). Consequently, while this study investigates the main socio-economic changes and their impact on gender relations, it pays particular attention to the living conditions and status of San women.

¹ Other components of this assessment will be referred to in this text according to the following scheme: Namibia (Nam); Botswana (Bots), Angola and Zambia (AngZam); Zimbabwe (Zim) and South Africa (SA).

1.2 Conceptual framework

This study is informed by the Gender and Development (GAD) framework as defined by Kate Young (1997: 51):

The focus in gender and development is not on women *per se* but on gender relations, i.e. the relations between women and men in a variety of settings. Many of these are what sociologists call ascribed relations, that is relations a person is involved in on the basis of their position in a network of kinship and affinity (i.e. relations by birth and through marriage); many of them are also achieved relations, that is relations established on the basis of a person's involvement in the economic, social or political life of her country. Both ascribed and achieved relations interlock with a matrix of other relations based on factors such as class, race, ethnicity, religion etc.

The approach views women as active agents and not passive recipients of 'development' but does not assume that women have perfect knowledge or understanding of their social situation. That is to say it assumes that while women as individuals may well be aware of their subordinate position, this does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the structural roots of discrimination and subordination. As a corollary of this, the approach does not assume that men in their turn are aware of the social bases of male dominance, or that all men act actively to promote male dominance.

In the context of this study the GAD perspective requires a holistic analysis of the specific and varying circumstances of the lives of San women (and men) in southern Africa to allow for the development of appropriate empowerment strategies. The analysis is not restricted to socio-economic issues, but pays equal attention to cultural and political aspects. San women have to date mostly remained invisible. Strategies employed by governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations aimed at San empowerment have generally ignored gender and subsumed both men and women under the larger category of 'San'. Women empowerment strategies, on the other hand, have usually been oblivious to their San identity and have lumped them together with (African) women in general. The GAD analysis and the recommendations derived from it consequently cut both ways: in the first instance, needs and strategies are identified to incorporate gender concerns into policies and programmes aimed at redressing the marginalisation of San as a group. It is equally important, however, to identify needs and strategies to incorporate the specific concerns of San women as members of marginalised ethnic communities into policies and programmes aimed at redressing gender imbalances in the societies of southern Africa.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The key aims of this study are to:

- provide an analysis of gender relations among San women and men in southern Africa with a view to identifying gender concerns, assessing the needs of San women in particular and making recommendations regarding the incorporation of gender concerns in the development process; and
- provide a description and qualitative analysis of living conditions of San women in southern Africa based on available data and field visits.

Within the scope of these key aims the study seeks to:

- establish a socio-economic baseline of data concerning San women and their changing status in southern Africa;
- review government policies that impact on the lives of San women;
- assess the gender representation and particularly the participation of San women in national, regional, local and community institutions;

- examine the different benefits that women and men might receive from community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives and tourism, taking particular account of women's highly specialised knowledge of local flora and their uses and properties;
- examine health issues, in particular as they affect San women, including the issue of reproductive health;
- establish how San women perceive their own living conditions and status within their immediate communities and their wider national societies;
- investigate the nature and extent of violence and abuse against San women;
- assess the effectiveness of NGOs and San community-based organisations (CBOs) in addressing San gender issues; and
- recommend strategies for incorporating gender concerns into empowerment strategies for the San populations in southern Africa.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

An evaluation of recent publications in the field of academic and applied San studies revealed that very little gender-related information is contained in this body of work. Apart from the occasional passing reference to gender, only a handful of relevant articles and papers and only one recent doctoral dissertation could be found. These will be discussed below.

2.1 Traditionalist "Bushmen studies"

The scant attention paid to gender in studies of contemporary San life is quite in contrast to the prominent place gender relations occupied in "Bushman studies", as they were then generally called, from roughly the 1960s through to the early 1980s. The "traditionalist" school of San studies, which focused on the cultural specificity of San in what they perceived as remnants of a distinct and formerly widespread foraging culture, emphasised the relative equality of women and men in San societies. Richard Lee (1979 and 1982) and Lorna Marshall (1976), writing on the !Kung and Ju/'hoansi of the Dobe and Nyae Nyae areas in Botswana and Namibia respectively, both emphasised the absence of "subjugation of women" (Marshall 1976: 176). Patricia Draper (1975: 77), another member of the Harvard !Kung Bushman Study Project, even concluded that "!Kung society may be the least sexist of any we have experienced."

The Harvard project analysis was based on painstaking measurements of women's and men's productivity in foraging San societies, in particular the working hours they put in while performing the largely gender-assigned activities of gathering (female) and hunting (male), and their relative caloric requirements and output. Lee (1979: 261-262) found in Dobe that men worked a third harder than women, but that the plants gathered mostly by women accounted for two thirds of the food consumed. Furthermore, although men put in more time with hunting, women not only provided the bulk of the food but were also primarily responsible for child-raising, and particularly the care and nursing of babies and toddlers. Both Lee and Dobe emphasised that the very substantial contribution made by San women to San life accorded them a respected social position.

The most influential author of the traditionalist school of San studies with respect to gender relations has been Marjorie Shostak. *Nisa – The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981) was translated into several languages and reached a large general audience well beyond academic circles. The autobiographical/life history form of the book and its easily readable style made it more accessible than any of the more academic studies. Whereas an author such as Lee in his later works attempted a more detailed analysis of "a relatively equal role in society for the two sexes" (1982: 44-5) with female dominance in some spheres of life and male dominance in others, Shostak's somewhat simplistic statement that among San, "women's status is high and their influence considerable" (1981: 13) has carried much weight among students, development workers and the general public.

Although these very interesting publications have focused on relative gender equality in San societies, it would be erroneous to conclude that the traits highlighted in them are inherent in all San societies. Firstly, all these studies were based on a very small number of San communities in the Kalahari – straddling the border between Namibia and Botswana, and secondly they described San gender relations for very specific circumstances, namely those of foragers. It would be a mistake to assume that *all* San communities were organised along the same lines.

2.2 Studies of sexual stereotyping

Even though it has probably had a lesser impact on popular contemporary perceptions of San gender relations, the literature on the historical construction of “Bushman” women – particularly their bodies and sexuality – in the perception of southern African colonialists and Western scientists alike deserves mention. The obsession of many early explorer-travellers and physical anthropologists with San genitalia (see e.g. Gordon 1998 and Gordon & Sholto-Douglas 1999) had its own gendered aspects. Reducing San women to objects of interest simply because of real or alleged *steatopygia* (the Latin name given to big buttocks) made them sexual freaks in the eyes of many 19th and early 20th century Europeans and white southern African settlers – a popular image that persists in contemporary southern Africa. There are white farmers in southern Africa who still believe that San women are “oversexed” and determined by their role in biological reproduction (“All they do is breed”) (see Chapter 4).

2.3 Studies of gender and change

Recent “revisionist” San studies, which have been informed by the perception of San as a marginalised rural underclass rather than by a romanticised view of a foraging culture, have paid little attention to gender (see e.g. Wilmsen 1989, Gordon & Sholto-Douglas 1999 and Suzman 2001). It appears that the focus on the marginality of San life in contemporary southern Africa and its historical roots has precluded an evaluation of the internal differentiations and stratifications of San communities along the fault lines of gender or of other social categories such as generation, relative wealth or relative levels of education. Consequently, not much detailed information is available on precisely how the marginalisation of San manifests itself in social, economic and cultural terms.

There are a few studies contained in short published or unpublished papers which attempt to provide an historical perspective on changing gender relations in the changing lives of San in southern Africa. The question of whether sedentarisation – the relinquishing of an itinerant foraging lifestyle – has promoted gender inequality has been a recurrent one. Patricia Draper’s paper on gender-related changes among the Nharo of Ghanzi District in western Botswana holds that sedentarisation indeed “undermines” sexual egalitarianism. She cites the changing value attached to women’s work where gathering is of reduced importance, the increased value attached to marital stability (which renders divorce more difficult for women to obtain) and the decrease in women’s spatial mobility as reasons for this tendency (Draper 1975: 96-7). Susan Kent (1995), on the other hand, questions that sedentarisation as such increases gender inequality. Her comparative study of the San living in the Kutse area in central Botswana and those in western Botswana suggests that additional factors play a significant role, particularly that of San adopting their black and white neighbours’ non-egalitarian cultural attitudes, which occurs in combination with massive economic transformation. The gender-based division of labour becomes more rigid, patterns of sharing break down, the accumulation of possessions is adopted as a social value and internal politics become more male-oriented (Kent 1995: 531-2).

Hannie Loermans (1992), formerly a development worker in Ghanzi District, suggests different yet very valid interpretations. While she did not observe aggressive masculine ways among the Nharo people, she reported that the autonomy of women seemed to diminish considerably. She suggests that this was due in part to development work initiatives which exclude women in different ways, for example by the automatic assumption of male headship of households and the tendency on the part of planners to ignore women’s expertise in important fields such as the botany of local edible and medicinal plants. Loermans (1992: 2) calls attention to the need for “an overall study of the changing San society from a gender perspective” that should unravel the different levels of marginalisation which entangle San women. She further takes as her point of departure the presumption of a double marginalisation of San women (*ibid.*: 5):

I hypothesize that San women have lost the relatively equal position they had in traditional society and that they are now caught in a process of marginalisation in relation to men in their communities and in relation to the society as a whole.

Loermans proposes that in this process women are gradually cut off from important sources of power such as land, livestock, knowledge and leadership roles, whereas men slowly obtain more access to these resources. She cautions that this process occurs gradually, without force, and on the basis of apparent consensus (*ibid.*). Loermans's paper does not provide detailed data to prove all these points, but the questions she poses provide a most useful starting point for our investigations.

2.4 A study of San women and the military

Linda Waldman's paper on the situation of the San women at the Schmidtsdrift military camp in South Africa is a field research report on a few aspects of the situation of the !Xu and Khwe women in the mid-1990s (Waldman 1995). She describes the peculiar marginalisation and complete disempowerment of the female dependants of the "Bushman" soldiers. She focuses on internal relationships within the camp as well as external relationships with residents of the surrounding areas. The !Xu and Khwe, most of whom are originally from Angola, had been recruited into the former South African Defence Force (SADF) to fight in apartheid South Africa's "bush war" against the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the military wing of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). In the mid-1990s the question of the future of the more than 4 000 San who had been resettled at Schmidtsdrift was a topic of some discussion (see e.g. Sharp & Sholto-Douglas 1996), to which Waldman attempted to contribute some women's perspectives, choices and preferences. Five years later the situation and prospects of the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe have changed drastically with their imminent shift to the farm Platfontein located near Kimberley, which was granted to them in terms of their successful land claim. Nevertheless, Waldman's paper still provided some useful background for our research.

2.5 A study of San women on farms

The most comprehensive study of gender relations and the lives of San women has been presented by the anthropologist Renée Sylvian in her recent doctoral dissertation on Ju/'hoan women's work and survival on farms in the Omaheke Region of Namibia. Sylvian (1999) has focused on Ju/'hoan women's class experiences, their roles in household survival and subsistence strategies, their roles as community managers and their status as women within their own kin community and within the broader political economy. In so doing she has also attempted to cast some light on the lives of the Ju/'hoansi in the Omaheke, who are often not considered as part of "the San" in Namibia – this category being reserved for those who follow a more "traditional" way of life, i.e. those who "live on the land" in the east and west of Tsumkwe District. Sylvian has thus attempted to achieve two goals: to provide information on gender relations and the lives of San women, and to shift the focus onto San who have previously been neglected due to their alleged lack of "pristine authenticity".²

The study provides a comprehensive background of the historical context of colonial conquest and its implications for the Omaheke San. While she suggests that the egalitarian economic and cultural traits (including gender traits) described by the "traditionalist" researchers were to some degree plausible, she also argues that the precise extent of pre-colonial gender egalitarian structures is largely irrelevant today given that political and economic factors introduced through colonialism now weigh heavily against gender equality (Sylvian 1999: 39-40).

Central to Sylvian's dissertation, however, are her descriptions of working life and class politics on the commercial (mostly white-owned) farms in eastern Namibia. Her close description of farm life, based

² The Omaheke San and Hai//om of Mangetti have also been the subjects of recently published studies by James Suzman (2000) and Thomas Widlok (1999) respectively. However, neither Suzman nor Widlok pays much attention to gender aspects.

on in-depth research in the Omaheke Region, highlights the poverty and marginalisation of San farm labourers in general. Particular emphasis is given, however, to the dependency of the women, who can generally not independently get employment on the farms, but are treated instead as the dependants of the male labourers. This results in women being dependent on their male kin. If a male relative loses his job, the chances are that the women will have to leave their abode as well. Furthermore, the dependent status makes it very difficult for women to leave undesirable marriages and relationships. Sylvian demonstrates how working life on the farms is still marked by a patriarchal system characterised by features ranging from benign paternalism to malicious violence.

Sylvian also claims, however, that Ju/'hoan women are not wholly incapable of acting independently. She distinguishes between the very different coping strategies and identities of men and women within the farming economy. In her view, men regard their work as being central to the country's economy whereas women regard their work as being merely a matter of survival (hence the title *We work to have life*). According to Sylvian, this differing view of the farming economy provides women with greater autonomy. Seeing work as only one aspect of survival, women co-operate and support each other more in the domestic, family and wider community contexts. In this way women provide the basis for Ju/'hoan "public life" through the role they play in maintaining "the world the Ju/'hoansi make" (Sylvian 1999: 413). Expressed in less academic terms, the women are more able than the men to become role players beyond the restrictions of the farm environment.

Sylvian's insightful dissertation provides a detailed analysis of the distinct circumstances of a specific group of San, namely those who survive by working for commercial farmers. However, it cannot be read as a depiction of the lives of all San women or of gender relations in San communities in general. It also follows the lines set by earlier scholars in that it focuses on the gendered division of labour and the kin/family framework of production – though in a framework quite different from that employed in the Harvard hunter-gatherer studies. Although Sylvian touches on the matter of violence (both gendered and non-gendered) and alcohol abuse – a recurrent theme during the field research for this study – she does so only in passing. Despite these shortcomings, this recent anthropological doctoral thesis constitutes the most comprehensive San gender study to date. The present study has drawn heavily on Sylvian's work.

2.6 Other data and literature

As indicated above, recent studies on San have for the most part been oblivious to the problematics of gender. This is also largely true for the country studies prepared for this regional assessment. While the amount of information relevant to gender contained in the country studies varies, it is generally scant. Nevertheless, some of the data presented in those reports could be taken up and expanded upon in the present gender analysis. The same can be said for a number of other academic and applied studies which have been re-evaluated for the purpose of this analysis.

The available statistics from official sources in the countries with sizable San populations (Botswana, Namibia and South Africa) have been of limited value. This is because statistics derived from census data and other official enquiries (e.g. the Health and Demographic Survey in Namibia in 1992) do not provide sufficiently disaggregated data in terms of language group and/or gender. Where statistical surveys have been conducted within the boundaries of administrative regions, populations as small as those of the San are not easily discernible. The only exceptions in this regard are the data from Ghanzi District in Botswana, where San comprise about half of the population, and the NGO-administered survey of the Schmidtsdrift population (Archer 1996).

It follows that the present report could not rely much on quantifiable data as almost no relevant statistics are available. Instead the research has been based on qualitative data gathered over the course of a few trips to selected field sites. This constituted the mainstay of the research, though it was complemented by an evaluation of the literature (some gender-focused but mostly more general) and previous experience garnered through formal and informal contacts with San communities.

CHAPTER 3

FIELD RESEARCH

Developing a methodology to develop a gender perspective on the situation of San in southern Africa is not a simple undertaking. As the literature review has shown, very little on which this study could draw has been written on contemporary San life from a gender perspective. The available information could only be used to complement our fieldwork in three selected communities. The limited fieldwork had to provide the bulk of significant baseline data. Consequently the selection of the communities visited for this study had to be made with great care.

3.1 Selection of field sites

There is no single way of San life. In the first place the living conditions and lifestyles of the different communities vary in numerous ways, and secondly San communities are not coherent and homogenous entities, but rather they are stratified along various fault lines. Although gender is highly significant in this respect, the different experiences and needs of San women and men cannot be reduced to the sole social category of gender. Age, educational level, and differences in wealth and status, not to mention other categories which may vary from one community to another, are also important. In most cases these are intertwined with gender: the circumstances of San women (or men for that matter) within the same community also vary, partly in line with those social attributes.

Taking all these aspects of external and internal variance into account, it is extremely difficult to identify common traits which would clarify the tasks of policy formulation and practical development interventions. The methodology employed had nevertheless to allow for the closest possible approach to an intervention-oriented gender analysis of San communities.

The starting point for this gender analysis was provided by studies on contemporary San life, including the country studies undertaken for this regional assessment. A recurring theme is the centrality of the experiences of marginalisation and dependency for San. An investigation of how these experiences are 'gendered', i.e. how men and women experience them differently, was one of the overall tasks of our research. Furthermore we had to contemplate the impact of the cultural differences between the various San communities, the differences in their socio-economic situations and histories, the different national histories of the main countries that are home to San populations today, and finally the same countries' current policies on minorities and gender issues.

The selection of the field sites was determined by a number of criteria. One community in each of the three southern African countries with the largest San populations (South Africa, Namibia and Botswana) was to be visited in order to get an impression of the impact of these countries' various past and present political dispensations. The sampling also had to take into account differences in the social and economic circumstances of each San community – its status as a majority or minority population in a communal area, the nature of life and work on commercial farms or in resettlement camps and villages, and the special situation of San affected by war and army life.

Three field sites or communities featuring the widest possible range of living conditions, past experiences and present problems of San in southern Africa were chosen:

- The population of resettlement villages, and workers and their families on commercial farms in Ghanzi District in western Botswana.

- The tented camp at Schmidtsdrift in the Northern Cape, South Africa, which houses former SADF soldiers and their families who were removed from Namibia in 1990.
- The population living on communal land in the western part of Tsumkwe District in Namibia's Otjozondjupa Region (i.e. the area formerly known as West Bushmanland).

3.2 Ghanzi District: life on commercial farms and in Rural Area Dweller settlements

“The Government likes moving us around.”

Ghanzi District in western Botswana has the highest percentage of San of any administrative area in southern Africa: roughly half of the population are San, and most are Nharo speakers.³

The situation of San in Ghanzi District is strongly influenced by land ownership patterns. A large part of the western half of the district is occupied by mostly white-owned commercial farms. In the past their mainstay was cattle ranching. Increasingly, however, game farming is becoming an important economic activity on the farms. In the northern part of the farming section cattle posts are owned by rich Tswana cattle ranchers, while the eastern half of the district is taken up by the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR).

Both cattle posts and farms depend on the labour of San. An estimated 80% of all farm workers are San (interview with Rein Dekker, D'Kar, 26 May 2000). This labour force is exclusively male. This is said to be because in accordance with the conventional gender division of labour, the herding or fencing jobs on the farms can only be done by men.⁴ Our data further suggests that San women are also excluded from the domestic service jobs offered on the farms, which seem to be reserved for women of other backgrounds, for example Bakgalagadi women. San women on the Ghanzi farms are thus marginalised by both their low status as San and their gender, and they are wholly dependent on their male relatives or sexual partners for their livelihood and residence.

The other large segment of San in Ghanzi District live in the Remote Area Dweller (RAD) settlements. These settlements were established by the Botswana Government as part of its overall strategy to solve the “Bushman problem”. The RAD settlements are intended to fulfil three main components of development and control in terms of the Botswana Government's policy regarding the San: (1) the designation of San settlements; (2) the establishment of traditional authorities in San areas; and (3) the fostering of social infrastructure accessibility to San (Hitchcock & Holm 1991: 8).

A few of the RAD settlements grew out of older San locations which were endowed with services related to education, health, and development. Most, however, were newly erected and in some cases (e.g. New Xade) were designed specifically to receive San who had been removed from their former abodes. Some of the RAD settlements are occupied exclusively by San while others have mixed populations – with San in some but not all cases constituting the majority.

The RAD settlements provide free healthcare and education for all residents irrespective of ethnicity or gender. The services seem to be fairly comprehensive, but for reasons relating to the politics of ethnicity and culture, many San school children (girls and boys) drop out. San in these settlements (women and girls, men and boys) do not yet seem to have benefited much from social development.

It appears, however, that men have much better access to the temporary jobs that are available in the RAD settlements under the “cash-for-work” drought relief programme. Many of these jobs are found in

³ For details of the situation of San people in Botswana, and specifically Ghanzi District, see Bots.

⁴ This rigid job reservation for males only is somewhat extreme compared to the otherwise very similar situation on the farms in eastern Omaheke Region in Namibia where women do, however, have limited employment opportunities (see Sylvian 1999 and Chapter 5 herein).

the building sector, from which women are again largely excluded in accordance with the conventional gendered division of labour (interviews with Sophie Morris, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000 and Xlale Mokhalaheri, New Xade, 30 May 2000; group interview with women, New Xanagas, 31 May 2000).⁵

The gendered impact of the Botswana Government's policy is also clear in the livestock programme. In Ghanzi District each household in the RAD settlements was given five head of cattle and fifteen goats. In practice the cattle were given to the supposed household head, i.e. to male San, while women only received small stock (Loermans 1992: 12). It is not clear whether the cattle were given to men because of a presumption that the head of a household is by definition male, or whether the officials were of the opinion that women would not be able to handle cattle (Lin Cassidy, pers. comm.). Whichever rationale was applied, the fact is that male-headed households received cattle and goats whereas female-headed households received only goats.

There are basically no income-generating opportunities for women in the RAD settlements except for a few projects run under the auspices of the non-governmental Kuru Development Trust (KDT).

Gathering bush foods is still a significant economic activity for San women in Ghanzi District – those in the RAD settlements and those living as dependants on commercial farms. Men's hunting activities, on the other hand, have been largely curtailed by legal and bureaucratic constraints.

However, the major problem encountered by San living in Ghanzi District stems from Botswana's ethnic politics. The Government's policies are premised on the notion of a unitary Tswana culture underpinning state and society in the country. Any specific concern for minority groups such as Kalanga, Mbukushu, Bakgalakadi or San – which together constitute approximately 20% of the total population of Botswana – is frowned upon on the basis that it might foster ethnic strife. Even the more radical Botswana opposition activists do not for the most part recognise San as a group which has suffered any more discrimination than others in Botswana. They focus on issues of social justice but largely omit the ethnic dimension to economic, political and social marginalisation (Hitchcock & Holm 1991: 7).

Although San in Ghanzi's RAD settlements receive substantial welfare allocations and enjoy relatively high standards of social services, their marginalisation and dependency, together with the ethnic prejudice against them, result in serious social problems, of which rampant alcohol abuse on the part of men and women alike seems to be the most prevalent.

The marginal position of San also leads to ethnic sexual politics which cause serious problems for San women in Ghanzi District. A major problem experienced by San women ensues from their frequent sexual relationships with non-San men – in Ghanzi District most notably with Bakgalagadi and Herero men, whose relative affluence and status are attractive to many San women. When the relations result in pregnancy, however, very few of these men take responsibility for their offspring.

In comparison with South Africa and Namibia, Botswana's official gender politics and policy are relatively underdeveloped. This is especially the case with regard to the promotion of women to leadership positions. The stance of the Botswana State as well as Botswana society towards minorities has so far effectively prevented any meaningful gender-based approach towards San community development. This seems to be equally true for the governmental and the non-governmental sectors.

⁵ It appears that the policy of gender and drought relief work programmes varies between different districts. In some other districts, women and men alike are employed to work on RAD settlements and build schools. Wiessner noted, for instance, that in Ngamiland District, Ju/'hoan women and men were employed in public works and that these programmes emphasised gender equality and provided opportunities for people of all ages (Wiessner n.d.: 38). The gendered practice of cattle allocation also appears to differ between different districts. Kent (1995: 530) points out that in Ghanzi only male San were given cattle, but that the practice was different in Kweneng District. It is not obvious at this point why Ghanzi appears to be more male-biased than other districts with regard to its RAD drought relief and cattle programmes.

3.3 Schmidtsdrift: the temporary lives of war-affected people

In 1990, 500 soldiers of the South African Defence Force (SADF) “Bushman Battalion” along with 3 500 of their dependants were relocated from Namibia to Schmidtsdrift in the Northern Cape.⁶ About 3 000 of these people were !Xu speakers, while the remainder spoke Khwe. Most adults of the 1990 relocation were born and had grown up in Angola, from where they had been recruited into the SADF after the collapse of Portuguese colonial rule. In Namibia they had been stationed either in the West Caprivi military base of Omega or in the area then known as Bushmanland. Thus the older among the current 4 500 Schmidtsdrift residents have twice experienced the trauma of a major uprooting within a period of only 15 years.

All soldiers in the service of the former SADF were male and most were fairly young. The San soldiers were paid generous salaries, topped up with substantial food rations. Observers at the time of the South African “bush war” against the liberation forces of SWAPO noted that in Bushmanland “a great deal of food and money was flowing through the hands of a few young men” (Marshall & Ritchie 1984: 8).

The women related to or affiliated to these soldiers became extremely dependent on their men. Thus when the SADF offered to relocate the San soldiers and their families from newly independent Namibia to South Africa, the men in effect made the decisions on behalf of the women. For most of the !Xu and Khwe men at the time, relocation meant continued well-paid employment. On the other hand there is only anecdotal evidence regarding how the women felt about the move to South Africa, but it appears that they may have been more sceptical than the men (see Waldman 1995: 8).

Ten years later the people still live in army tents in the temporary resettlement camp at the Schmidtsdrift military base. In June 1999 the ANC-led South African Government granted title deeds to Platfontein farm near Kimberley to the Schmidtsdrift people, but a full year later, at the time of the researchers’ visit in June 2000, the !Xu and Khwe still awaited housing and infrastructural development at the farm. Several community members and leaders expressed their frustration regarding the many delays in the allocation of a permanent home over the past decade.

Politically, economically and socially, Schmidtsdrift is located in a very remote part of South Africa. The living conditions are also physically marginal because of the harsh climate on a windy, sandy and dusty plateau that is subject to extreme cold and heat. Tent life at Schmidtsdrift certainly takes a toll on human health: tuberculosis (TB) and other respiratory problems are commonplace. Despite the relative affluence of the Schmidtsdrift community, infant and child mortality are reportedly fairly high. The difficulties associated with raising a family in tents in such a harsh climate were emphasised by many Schmidtsdrift women as one of their main problems – a women’s gender problem indeed, as the raising of the family is almost entirely assigned to women in the Schmidtsdrift culture.

According to the Schmidtsdrift women themselves, however, their foremost gender problem is the high unemployment rate among women. At the time of the research in June 2000, only 122 men were still employed by the army – now known as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) – but the retrenched former soldiers had left with huge packages.⁷ New employment opportunities for men have also opened up over the past few years, particularly on farms throughout South Africa. For the women of Schmidtsdrift, conversely, employment opportunities remain virtually non-existent. In contrast to the other field sites, the gendered division between male “haves” and female “have-nots” was described by many women as a major problem.

The Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe communities are deeply marked by their historical involvement in the war and violence of the apartheid years. Violence against women was reported as a major problem which has resulted from gross gender inequality. The inequality of women and men is in part a consequence of

⁶ See SA for a detailed history and some general background of the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe.

⁷ Many recipients of the retrenchment payouts were reported to have very soon squandered them on expensive cars, TVs, VCRs and other forms of personal consumption.

persistently unequal employment opportunities. The militarisation of the San has also clearly resulted in a sense on the part of males of their own superiority, which is quite in contrast to what was reported about the ideology of gender relations at the other field sites.

The “community” at Schmidtsdrift is further characterised by the deep cleavages between the majority !Xu and the minority Khwe. The divide, expressed in varying forms of conflict, (sexual) jealousy and last but not least the prevailing discourse of cultural difference stems, in part at least, from the specific manner in which the “Bushman” soldiers and their families were integrated into the former apartheid army. The two language groups occupy strictly separate residential quarters in the camp – known in Afrikaans as *lyne* (lines) from the camp’s early days when the tents were lined up in military order. While sexual encounters across the lines are frequent, the ethnic divide is foregrounded in every aspect of Schmidtsdrift life and social organisation, including the representations and practices of femininities and masculinities.

Post-apartheid South Africa has been widely applauded for its progressive policies regarding both gender and minorities. It appears, however, that in the case of Schmidtsdrift the Government’s sympathetic moves to recognise and affirm ethnic minorities have been thwarted by a political and social environment at the provincial level that borders on the openly hostile. On the other hand, the national policies aimed at promoting gender equality have so far appeared to largely bypass the remote Northern Cape.

3.4 West Tsumkwe: “Those who live on the land”

Former Bushmanland in north-eastern Namibia is now the Tsumkwe District of the Otjozondjupa Region. The inhabitants of its western half (“West Tsumkwe”) have not attracted the kind of attention that anthropologists and NGOs have given to their eastern neighbours, the Ju/’hoansi of Nyae Nyae (or “East Tsumkwe”). At times, indeed, people in the west cannot suppress a little envy – especially when luxury four-wheel drive vehicles, the prime symbols of development assistance, roar past without even stopping to offer a lift. The east appears to have it all: substantial donor support, a strong community-based support organisation, an officially recognised and operational conservancy, a flourishing tourism industry, an innovative education programme, and even legal rights to traditional hunting.

This at least is the positive side of Nyae Nyae. The west, on the other hand, lacks even a local name of comparable popular resonance. In naming the planned conservancy that will span the whole area, the local committee resorted to coining a new term by combining the !Kung words for the two dry river beds on its western and eastern edges: Nṯa Jaqna.⁸

The community of around 2 000 people that came to be settled in West Tsumkwe is also an ethnic and social conglomerate of sorts: less than 5% of the adult population are !Kung speakers born in the area (see Nam); the majority are !Kung from Angola (i.e. Vasekele !Kung) and from the Kavango Region of Namibia. Some Ju/’hoansi originally from the Kaudom area in Botswana live here as well.

Through a quirk of apartheid history, the area designated as “Bushmanland” under the Odendaal Plan not only drastically reduced the territories of the eastern Ju/’hoansi, but also stretched westwards over large tracts of land which, with the exception of the Omatako valley, were uninhabited for most of the year due to the absence of surface water.

In little more than a decade West Bushmanland was totally transformed, with the SADF establishing seven army bases in the area by 1980⁹ and the population swelling to over 3 000 people due to the SADF’s recruitment of Vasekele !Kung soldiers from Angola and Mpungu !Kung from Kavango. Those who did not opt for army resettlement in South Africa mostly stayed on in West Tsumkwe. Following independence in Namibia in 1990, at least 407 families of ex-combatants were catered for under a resettlement and rehabilitation programme which focused mainly on crop farming (Jansen et al. 1994:

⁸ Nṯa is the Omatako *omuramba*, while Jaqna is otherwise known as the Nhoma *omuramba* (Hohmann 2000: 16).

⁹ The only army base in the east was located at Tsumkwe.

5-7). Initially implemented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), and since 1995 directly by the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (MLRR), the scheme is generally deemed a failure in terms of its economic contribution due to its top-down structure.

The population consequently depends to a large degree on food aid, the non-delivery of which regularly leads to hardship and hunger. Reports that pupils leave the local schools in droves when supplies for the school feeding programme are delayed also suggest precarious levels of food security. Stock ownership among San is limited to very few individuals. On the other hand, some non-San government officials and pastoralists have sizeable herds in the area. Subsistence strategies include the collection of veld food and occasional hunting, although this is technically illegal. Participation in the formal economy is limited to a very small employment sector within West Tsumkwe (mainly menial jobs in government offices and services) and to seasonal work on the commercial farms bordering the area to the west.

Many people are nevertheless aware of their main asset, namely access to land on which they are not marginalised or “enslaved”, as San sometimes put it, by more dominant population groups. The planned conservancy is understood to be a means of securing these land rights and of generating income from natural resources and tourism. The first effort aimed at attracting visitors and income took the form of a community campsite at the junction to Omatako village, this being a venture in which five villages originally participated and which received some support from both the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) based in Windhoek and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) at the University of Namibia (UNAM). Two other villages have since expressed an interest in establishing their own community-run campsites, but both are caught up in conflicts revolving around a private lodge operator who offers more immediate rewards (payment for services) but no community participation in his enterprise.

Similar tensions have regularly arisen regarding the aspirations of other non-San, notably cattle owners (and government employees whose herds graze in the area), who are seen to encroach unduly on veld-food resources as well as on vegetable and crop fields. Community dynamics and allegiances are extremely complex and are not always a function of animosity between indigenous !Kung (and Ju/'hoansi) and the immigrant Vasekele. An eminent player in community decision-making, though by no means uncontroversial or even united, is the recently officially recognised traditional authority, which in turn has yet to sound out its relationship with the newly emerging community structure of the conservancy committee.

In public matters such as the ongoing conservancy planning process facilitated partly through WIMSA, and in the running of the community campsite, women appear to play a less prominent role than men. This is despite regular pleas by some influential community members, notably the chief, for the inclusion of women. The West Tsumkwe Traditional Authority includes a female senior member at the central settlement of Mangetti.

Women interviewed were concerned about the lack of job opportunities in general, but in particular for women, and thought that one of the advantages of being a man was that one could do “real work” rather than “just looking after children”. A few women are employed in government services (for example as cleaners in schools), and quite a number of men and women from the villages adjoining the commercial farms are employed on a seasonal basis for harvesting. The richer stock owners within West Tsumkwe, who are usually Herero or hail from the Kavango Region, often employ non-San herders, and in any event not women. Limited income is generated through tourism-related activities that benefit both men and women, for example the production of crafts for sale at the Omatako Valley Rest Camp, and the traditional dances presented to tourists at this campsite and at Nhoma.

3.5 Field research methods

The field research was based on anthropological and other qualitative social research methods, such as semi-structured and unstructured interviews with individuals and groups of people and focus group discussions, complemented by participant observation. Most interviews and discussions with San in

Namibia and South Africa were conducted in Afrikaans, with the occasional assistance of locally recruited research assistants who translated from the respective vernaculars into Afrikaans.¹⁰ In Botswana, a Nharo speaker who is fluent in English was part of the research team. This resulted in a rather different situation with mother-tongue interviewing, though possibly with some inhibition resulting from the to-and-fro translation between English and Nharo, or occasionally Setswana.

Despite these obvious linguistic limitations, it was possible to discuss even sensitive subjects like sexual violence in a generally open and relaxed atmosphere. Since the research emphasised the experiences of women, it was important that the researchers were women.

Most of the women and men approached for interviews or asked to participate in focus group discussions at the three field sites willingly complied. Several women (at least in the Namibian field sites) clearly preferred to be interviewed as a group rather than as individuals.

Focus group discussions proved to be very difficult everywhere. With a few exceptions, such as a lively discussion of a group of Khwe women at Schmidtsdrift, the hoped-for group discussions did not occur as the participants did not engage in exchanges among themselves, but rather communicated with the researchers on an individual basis within the group setting. Thus most attempted focus group discussions were actually group interviews.

On the whole, however, the research went smoothly and yielded substantial results.

¹⁰ The fact that neither the researchers nor most of the interviewees were fully conversant in Afrikaans certainly limited the depth and sophistication of the communication that took place.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER AND CHANGE AMONG SOUTHERN AFRICAN SAN

4.1 Introduction

Shifts in gender relations among San have received some attention in the analysis of the transformation of hunter-gatherer societies in the agro-pastoralist socio-economics of contemporary southern African states (see Chapter 2). To date this debate has remained quite theoretical in nature and has largely been confined to academic circles, revolving in the main around the question of what the shift from a foraging to a sedentary lifestyle has meant for women. To be able to draw conclusions for appropriate gender-sensitive development strategies, we have to ask additional questions: which other socio-economic and political developments, besides sedentarisation, have played a role in reshaping gender among the San of southern Africa? What have the implications been for women and men respectively? Who has lost and who has gained? *What* has been gained? What do the shifts in gender relations and gender identities entail for socio-economic, cultural and political development interventions geared towards San communities in southern Africa?

This chapter sets out to answer these questions through the reconstruction of a historical perspective on gender shifts in different San communities. It takes as its point of departure some notes found in the older “Bushmen studies” literature, but then refocuses on the impact of relevant changes in contemporary San communities. The following historicisation of gender in San communities is of necessity tentative, and no suggestion is made that similar developments have taken place in all San communities. It nevertheless does indicate trends in how socio-economic and political developments in mainstream southern African societies impact on gender practices among San.

4.2 Gender in foraging societies

The research conducted among San communities in Namibia (Nyae Nyae) and Botswana (Dobe) which still largely relied on hunting and gathering in the 1950s and ‘60s strongly emphasised their high degree of gender equality. According to the observations of anthropologists such as Richard Lee (1979) and Lorna Marshall (1976), the status and influence of women in the !Kung and Ju/’hoan societies was high as a result of their substantial contribution to the sustenance of the community. Women were not only the main providers of food, but also retained control over the food they gathered (Draper 1975: 84). Hunter-gather societies, and the San communities in particular, astounded Western researchers with their egalitarian social structures that extended to the relations between men and women. This was not only the case within the family, but also applied to the largely informal community leadership of a territorial group.¹¹

Descriptions of a so-called “traditional” hunter-gatherer society based on social and gender equality exist only for those societies which the protagonists of the earlier “Bushmen studies” thought had survived in isolated niches in the Kalahari. There are no depictions of the levels of social and gender (in)equality

¹¹ The level of gender egalitarianism might have been somewhat overstated in some of the academic literature in order to problematise simplistic, theoretical assumptions about the universality of gender subordination (see e.g. Luig 1990). Some anthropologists who spent long periods with “traditional” foraging San made the point that women did not participate in public decision-making on an equal footing with men (see e.g. Lee 1982: 44). On balance, however, there is no doubt that foraging San communities were characterised by a much higher level of gender equality than most other social set-ups.

among San communities which followed lifestyles that were based only partly on foraging, such as the !Xu (northern !Kung) of southern Angola, the Kxoe of north-eastern Namibia and south-eastern Angola, and the Namibian Hai//om. All these communities have in one way or another long been integrated into agricultural and pastoral economic systems, and in some cases also into the colonial cash economy as farm workers or migrant labourers. The Angolan !Xu, for example, engaged in agriculture and (male) migrant labour for many decades. Elderly !Xu women now resident in Schmidtsdrift considered these to be integral features of their traditional lifestyle (group interview with !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000).

When profound socio-economic and political changes began to affect the former hunter-gatherer societies in the Kalahari, gender relations among the Kalahari San began to change as well. These more recent changes have been commented upon by researchers and other observers.

4.3 Sedentarisation, animal husbandry and change

The observers of gender-related changes among the Kalahari San generally emphasise the many changes which have had an influence on former hunter-gatherer societies. It has been argued that changes came about with sedentarisation, i.e. the settling down of formerly mobile people in a fixed abode. San across southern Africa drifted towards a more sedentary lifestyle as they lost their territories following colonial conquest and settlement, and later also because of the creation of national game parks.

Furthermore, work patterns changed with the introduction of cattle husbandry, with San men becoming labourers on cattle ranches. In the process they also acquired small numbers of livestock. The division of labour on the basis of sex became more rigid than had previously been the case, and boys and girls were increasingly socialised in different ways. Men gained greater power and influence through their access to and control over new and important resources, particularly domestic animals and waged labour. Simultaneously, women lost autonomy and influence in this reconstruction of gender as their mobility was diminished and they were increasingly confined to a limited area around the new settlements. This tendency was reinforced by increasingly private households, a consequence in part of increased material property owned by individuals (see e.g. Draper 1975: 78).

The processes through which men gained control over material and non-material resources and enhanced their influence and power within their communities were matched by women's loss of resources, power and influence. Inevitably these developments had repercussions in the perceptions of male and female identities among San:

- The diminishing role of women as providers impacted negatively on their self-esteem.
- A more rigid division of labour was enforced by men who came to regard "women's work" as less worthy, whereas in hunter-gatherer societies men had frequently crossed gender lines, particularly with respect to their participation in the tasks of gathering food and collecting water.
- Marriage and family patterns were considerably altered. In particular, the earlier relatively long period of about four years between children was much reduced, and fathers became less involved in child-rearing than they had been before. Also, divorce, which was once relatively common and easy to obtain, and which was often initiated by a wife, was rendered less accessible.
- Women became confined within a newly created domestic context whereas men gained increasing access to the "outside world" by involving themselves in waged labour, extra-village politics and other external relations. In the process men also acquired some knowledge of Bantu and European languages (Draper 1975: 82, 85-86, 90-91, 96, 97; 103-104).

In this view the crucial factor underlying the loss of women's influence and autonomy is the confinement of San in fixed locations. However, a sedentary lifestyle per se was perhaps less significant in this respect than the adoption of new socio-economic modes. Animal husbandry in particular, which San partly adopted from pastoralist communities surrounding them, led to more male-dominated cultural patterns.

Thus gender relations among San changed with the adoption of distinctive male-dominant features that are characteristic of Tswana and Herero pastoralists and white settlers (see Kent 1995).

In many African societies the care of livestock, particularly cattle, is defined as a male task. In the past this has not automatically and universally precluded women's property rights in small stock or cattle. In the context of modern agro-pastoralist societies, however, the idea that not only is livestock-tending a job for men, but that property rights in domestic animals and particularly in cattle are also a male prerogative has gained currency. Contemporary San who have been in contact with pastoralist cultures or have been incorporated into pastoralist socio-economic systems seem to have adopted this line of thinking. In East Tsumkwe, for instance, where cattle farming was first introduced in the 1970s, 85% of all individuals responsible for herding, watering, kraaling and milking cattle were found to be male in the early 1990s (Botelle & Rohde 1995: 73). Indeed women of the Schmidtsdrift community who were asked whether they might be interested in animal husbandry projects considered the mere thought of women handling livestock to be absurd (interview with group of Khwe women, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000).

This pattern has been re-enforced by government and NGO policies, which tend to be rooted in similar preconceptions regarding gender and animal husbandry.¹² In Ghanzi District in western Botswana, for instance, RAD officers implemented the livestock programme for "Remote Area Dwellers" (the overwhelming majority of whom are San) so that although in theory every household in the RAD settlements should have been provided with cattle and goats, in practice only male-headed households received both cattle and goats while female-headed households received only goats¹³ (see Chapter 3).

Women have lost economic power and social status where they have been denied access to cattle rather than small stock. Where their self-esteem and social standing had previously been based on their importance as providers, women's exclusion from the new dominant economic mode has undoubtedly affected women's self-image. The idea that "women don't work" because they "just stay at home" is instrumental in this respect (see Chapter 5).

4.4 Gendered lives on the farms

The salient feature of gender relations among San living and working on commercial farms in central and eastern Namibia and Ghanzi District in western Botswana is women's extreme dependency on their menfolk. This is caused by the link between residency and employment, and the gendered nature of farm work itself (Sylvian 1999: 7). Residency on a farm is directly tied to employment, and primary employment is usually restricted to men.¹⁴ Women are allowed to live on a farm and are perhaps even given some residual employment, but only if they are kin of a male worker (*ibid.*). That "men's work" is the only work available with any pretension of providing a living wage is the legacy of an historical process that dates back to the days of German colonialism (*ibid.*: 72-73). The close link between San women's access to residency on the farms and their association with male workers also dates back to colonial legislation (*ibid.*: 75).

¹² Most literature on NGO- or donor-driven livestock projects in San communities tend to be gender-blind, i.e. it largely ignores the different impacts of such projects on men and women, and how they affect gender relations (see e.g. Botelle & Rohde 1995: 70-73). The gender-blindness of the assessments reflects the fact that at least until very recently, non-governmental animal husbandry projects were usually designed without consideration of gender aspects. This resulted, often unintentionally, in a male bias. An exception in the literature as well as in development practice concerns a small San farm project in Namibia's Omaheke Region (Sonneblom/Donkerbos). Sylvian (n.d.) traces the gender impact of livestock production and the distribution of assets which occurred despite conscious initial efforts to avoid a gender bias (see Chapters 5 and 11).

¹³ This was the practice in Ghanzi District, which has the highest proportion of San of all Botswana districts. In some other districts, e.g. Kweneng in central Botswana, the handing out of animals appears not to have followed these gendered lines (Kent 1995: 530).

¹⁴ Our research in Ghanzi District suggests that in Botswana the employment opportunities for San women on the farms are even more restricted than in Namibia's Omaheke Region (interview with Bep van Oostrom, Ghanzi, 26 May 2000; group interviews with San women on two farms, 29 May 2000).

A common feature among white commercial farmers and black farm labourers alike seems to be the portrayal of the San woman as a “childish, over-sexed animal – for breeding, prostitution and rape” (ibid.: 112). White farm owners view San women as being “useless”. Commercial farmers in Ghanzi District often think that San women are overly sexually active, and generally “lazy” and “unhygienic” (interview with Bep van Oostrom, Ghanzi, 26 May 2000). In the Omaheke Region, one elderly Afrikaner farmer bluntly summarised his perception: “All they do is breed” (as quoted in Sylvian 1999: 90).

This common image of San women is not restricted to white farmers: it also underlies the exploitative temporary relationships between San women and male workers of different ethnic backgrounds on the farms. In these temporary relationships, sexual service – a “nebulous blend of prostitution with concubinage” – blurs into domestic service (Sylvian 1999: 135). Furthermore, an ostensibly contradictory perception exacerbates the sexual exploitation of San women in the commercial farming districts. Since San are generally considered to be less promiscuous than members of other communities, in the time of HIV/AIDS it is considered to be relatively safe to have casual sexual intercourse with a San woman. Hence they are sought after by non-San men for relationships that are usually exploitative and temporary (Salenia Engelbrecht, a social worker in Gobabis, pers. comm.).

It is not entirely clear to what extent the negative projections on San women may also have been adopted by San themselves. An observer who works with farm workers in Ghanzi District noted that male San farm workers tend to complain that women are “lazy” and “bossy” (interview with Bep van Oostrom, Ghanzi, 26 May 2000). Anthropologists and development workers who have extensive experience with San on the farms in eastern Namibia and western Botswana, however, have expressed different views on the extent to which almost exclusively male waged labour and residency rights have translated into gendered self-perception on the part San on farms.¹⁵ With the design of adequate intervention strategies in mind, a primary question relates to women’s dependency and what Sylvian terms the “historically tangled knot of mythologies”. Do these translate into *feelings* of dependency or inferiority among San women?

Undoubtedly the situation on the farms has brought about a radical change in gender definitions among the San concerned. In Sylvian’s words (1999: 166), “Ju’hoan women were subordinated, not only to the white ‘baas’ and ‘miesis’ on the farm, but also to their own menfolk.”

The portrayal of the San farm worker’s wife as a “housewife” has been adopted by San women. Sylvian also found, however, that San women seem to derive some pride, social recognition and even authority from their role of primary caretakers of the domestic space. Women insist that women are the “baas of the house” (ibid.: 241; own interviews with farm women on Ghanzi farms, 29 May 2000).

A development worker in charge of the farm labourers’ project in Ghanzi District also stressed that San women on the farms see themselves as “housewives”. According to her observations, however, these women suffer from a severe lack of self-esteem because of their situation. In an attempt to redress this problem the Ghanzi farm labourers project has introduced gardening and handcraft projects specifically directed at women (interview with Bep van Oostrom, Ghanzi, 26 May 2000).

These unanswered questions aside, it is obvious that sedentarisation, in conjunction with the shift to waged labour (which is predominantly farm labour) and to animal husbandry, has led to a decrease in San women’s autonomy and influence. Factors related to the growing gender gap include the increased rigidity of the gendered division of labour, including domestic chores and child-rearing as well as an increase in domestic violence (Dekker 1999: 3). These matters will be investigated in detail in ensuing chapters of this report.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, due to limited resources our own research could not explore these issues in any depth. However, future needs assessments will have to pay sufficient attention to male and female perceptions of the opposite sex, as well as to their self-perceptions as (San) men and women.

4.5 The gendered impact of the militarisation of the San

The situation at Schmidtsdrift was profoundly different to that on the farms.¹⁶ Over and over again women in Schmidtsdrift told the researcher that they suffered badly as a result of gross gender inequality in both the public and domestic contexts in their communities. The repeated statements that “we women are always oppressed” and “always come after [i.e. under] the man” graphically capture the spirit of gender relations and women’s gendered identity at Schmidtsdrift.

The conditions of extreme dependency of the !Xu and Khwe women at Schmidtsdrift date back to the 1970s and ‘80s when the SADF recruited male !Xu and Khwe soldiers, mostly of Angolan origin. Not only did the families of those soldiers come to depend on their menfolk’s relatively substantial pay-checks, but the large civilian population associated with the “Bushman soldiers” also found themselves penned down administratively by the army in many respects. The military bureaucratic administration of San started with the official registration of births, deaths and marriages by the SADF and extended to the handing out of food rations, the provision of education in army-run schools, and last but not least, spiritual ministering through Christian missionary activities carried out by army chaplains. Wives of the white SADF officers contributed their gendered share by teaching the San women what they considered to be appropriate female skills, such as Western-style needlework, bakery, cooking and various home industries (Uys 1993: 45, 53, 165). These activities were continued after the move to South Africa in 1990 (Uys 1993: 274-275).

At the army bases in Namibia, two separate councils for the !Xu and Khwe soldiers had been established. These gave the male San some influence in the administration of their communities’ lives, but since the councils were part of the army structure and consequently all-male, women had no influence whatsoever (interview with Mario Mahongo, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000).

When it came to the move to South Africa in 1990, women once again had no influence: men made the decision to move on behalf of the entire community (Sharp 1994: 7; Waldman 1995: 8). Once they had arrived in South Africa, women’s autonomy and influence did not increase and unwanted wives were even sent back to Namibia (Waldman 1995: 8). The number of female-headed households has characteristically remained very low among the !Xu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift (SA; Linda Waldman, pers. comm.). By the mid-1990s there were still no support networks in place for San women in South Africa (Waldman 1995: 10). In the main, life at Schmidtsdrift has been shaped by the hierarchical and male-dominated military culture acquired by the !Xu and Khw in the military bases in Namibia (see SA). Even in mid 2000, although the numbers of men employed by the army have dropped significantly since the mid 1990s, this culture still dominates life at the camp.

The military’s activities have produced a pronounced separation between women and men. Women have had no part in the distinctly male-dominated military sphere. What is more they have no idea what their menfolk’s jobs in the army involve (interview with group of !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000). The (male) soldiers lived through traumatic experiences of war and violence in the bush war prior to Namibian independence, but they have not shared them with their womenfolk. Significantly, the incidence of gender-based violence at Schmidtsdrift is very high. In contrast to the situation at other field sites, domestic violence here predominantly takes the form of male violence perpetrated in an attempt to control women, ensuing from a sense of men’s innate superiority. A community psychologist who has been working with the youth at Schmidtsdrift also reported a high incidence of gender-based violence

¹⁶ This section focuses on the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe. It must not be forgotten, however, that the majority of the estimated 10 000 San who were directly affected by the South African military as soldiers and their dependants remained in Namibia after the country’s independence. Whereas it is more difficult to assess the exact impact of the militarisation on the Namibian ex-soldier communities in the West Caprivi and Tsumkwe constituencies, the massive changes caused by the army in San society can certainly not be dismissed. On the surface it appears that the legacy of the military experience has vanished without trace in Tsumkwe constituency. However, focused research on the impact of war and violence may tell a different story. What is clear is that by the early 1980s the San had the distinction of being the most militarised ethnic group in the world (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas 1999: 2). Serious cleavages within San communities have been created, or at least reinforced (see Marshall & Ritchie 1984: 98-122).

among teenagers, involving beatings as well as brutal gang rapes of female students (interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000).

The gender ideologies among the Schmidtsdrift San community are based on the male provider/female housewife pattern. In reality, however, men often do not fulfil the obligations of providers, but still insist that their wives are obedient and servile (interview with Tumba Alfrino, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000). Women's economic dependency (see Chapter 5), the hierarchical military culture and rigidly distinct male and female spheres have brought about gross gender imbalances. The emergence of the idea that the 'housewife' role is appropriate for the San women of Schmidtsdrift must be seen in the context of a widening gender gap. This gap and its accompanying power imbalances are also experienced at the personal level and have become internalised by both women and men.

The impact of militarisation on community structures and gender relations has remained obscured from the San people themselves. Schmidtsdrift male and female leaders and community members tend to accredit a nebulous, so-called "traditional culture" for the gross gender imbalances. The differences between the !Xu and the Khwe women's female identities were also ascribed to "cultural" differences. !Xu women were said to be more modest, shy and subservient than the more assertive Khwe women. A male Khwe leader, for instance, claimed that in the Khwe culture women "traditionally" had a stronger position than in the !Xu culture (interview with Nicolaas Tenda, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). In the absence of detailed analyses of social and gender relations among the !Xu and Khwe before they became subject to the military culture in the 1970s, these claims are difficult to substantiate. Whatever the case may be, the present Schmidtsdrift San community is characterised by grossly unequal gender relations in general, and low self-esteem among the !Xu women in particular.

4.6 Resettlement

The impact of removals and resettlement on gender relations among various San communities must also be considered. The Schmidtsdrift community represents an extreme case in this respect. By far the majority of the adults at the camp have experienced severe uprooting twice within a mere 15 years, first from Angola to Namibia, and subsequently from Namibia to South Africa.¹⁷ According to a survey conducted in 1996, 87% of the adults at Schmidtsdrift were born in Angola (Archer 1996, as quoted in SA). The social cohesion of any people who have endured such an experience must inevitably have suffered, though the researcher of the South Africa country study in this regional assessment found the social cohesion to be remarkable still (see SA). Social problems, including widespread domestic violence and alcohol abuse, are nevertheless rife at Schmidtsdrift.

The gendered impact on the communities affected by removal and resettlement practices in Botswana, in particular the recent removals from the CKGR, could only be tentatively assessed. Like all other social relations, gender relations do not change overnight, but take years to mutate. The recently resettled community we visited at New Xade in Ghanzi District shows an increased incidence of alcohol abuse, but no apparent changes in gender relations and identities.

The situation with Namibia's resettlement programmes is quite different. Actual "resettlement camps"¹⁸ in the Omaheke Region were established as receiving areas for Ju/'hoansi who had been made redundant on the commercial and communal farms. These resettled groups are not comprised of forcibly removed communities, but rather of previously dispersed individuals and families.

¹⁷ In the case of the !Xu soldiers and their families who were sent from Omega in West Caprivi to serve in former Bushmanland when the SADF started to set up the second "Bushman battalion" there in 1978, this entailed an additional upheaval.

¹⁸ The term 'resettlement' is misleading in the case of the programmes in West Caprivi and former West Bushmanland, as well as those for the Hai//om in the Tsumeb area: the San had already been in the area as SADF soldiers and dependants. The resettlement programmes consisted of the allocation of plots and other assistance intended to enable former soldiers' families to make a new livelihood through farming (see Chapter 3).

Gender relations in these resettlement schemes are not comprehensively documented. Generally the situation is dominated by just another version of the political and economic context of the Omaheke Region. This context “encourages male dominance”, as Sylvian (1999: 312) has noted, because it privileges Ju/’hoan men who have greater access to waged work and livestock.

Generally, San women in the resettlement camps in the Omaheke Region felt that they were worse off than when they had been living on the commercial farms. On the farms they had at least some access to cash income, or at least to their male kin’s earnings. In the camps, however, women have no opportunities to earn an income apart from through occasional projects, which apparently more often than not fail to deliver as they are mismanaged by the government officials in charge.

The difficult situation of San women in the resettlement camps is aggravated by a “micro-migrant labour system” (Renée Sylvian, pers. comm., 9 August 2000) which has been developing in some of the camps. San men who go off to the regional capital, Gobabis, or to do piecework on commercial or communal farms leave their wives and children behind in the resettlement camp. Ideally they remit their wages. In reality, however, women complained that their husbands do not send enough money. Some apparently do not remit any of their earnings. Some of the women had misgivings that their husbands were keeping mistresses in town and therefore did not provide for their wives and children who had remained behind in the camp (ibid.).

In addition, Herero and Damara livestock herders were occupying many of the resettlement schemes in order to make use of the grazing, and construction workers had also been present at the camps for extended periods. Just like on the commercial farms, exploitative temporary relationships between San women and these “outside” men have come about in the resettlement camps. The situation in these camps is distinguished by a serious lack of security. Female residents expressed concern about the high incidence of drinking and violence among residents (ibid.). Increased levels of alcohol abuse and fighting are typically the indicators of diminishing social cohesion, although their implications for gender relations are not necessarily the same everywhere (see Chapter 8). There is no doubt, however, that the nascent local migrant labour system is going to compound the widening gender gap between San men and women in the Omaheke Region.

4.7 Conclusions

Gender relations and gender identities among San communities in southern Africa have been profoundly affected by socio-economic and political changes. The relative gender equality that formerly pertained has been eroding. San women seem to have lost influence and autonomy everywhere as a result of a range of socio-economic and political developments. Prominent among these are sedentarisation following wide-scale loss of land, the shift to pastoralism and waged labour, the influence of male-dominated neighbouring communities, and perhaps most dramatically, the militarisation of San life in the 1970s and ‘80s. Gender imbalances are clearly the most severe in the communities which have been most affected by military structures, the experience of war and violence, and the trauma of repeated removals.

These factors have brought about increasing levels of gender inequality in many San communities. Nevertheless, subjective perceptions and gender relations at the personal level may not have been as strongly affected. Domestic violence was cited as a major problem at all field sites. In Ghanzi District and to a lesser extent in West Tsumkwe, however, it was not necessarily seen as being rooted in gender power imbalances. Both women and men were reported to fight with persons of the opposite sex, as well as with those of their own sex (see Chapter 8). A well-informed development worker from Botswana felt that while there was a level of “structural oppression” that operated against San women, they were not “oppressed” as such in their personal relations with their menfolk (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000).

Apart from regional disparities and different socio-economic contexts, kinship and residential arrangements, particularly those of husbands and wives, influence gender relationships. Sylvian (1999: 336)

found that among the San population on farms in the Omaheke Region, the relations between husbands and wives were somewhat more balanced where couples lived in extended kin groups and especially where the wife's family was close by than where the husband and wife had gone to live at the husband's workplace without relatives close by. Indeed the relatively strong position of women in hunter-gatherer San societies has been attributed in part to the temporary matrilocal residence patterns of young couples who lived with the wife's family for the first few years of their marriage (Lee 1982: 43).

Some San men have benefited economically through access to new resources such as waged labour and productive property, in particular livestock. While many San men still remain marginal in economic terms, the notions of male power over and domination of women appear to be commonly accepted even among San women (see Sylvian 1999: 336). In practice, however, much of this may be mere lip service. With the possible exception of the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe, where a truly male-supremacist culture has emerged, the concept of male supremacy is apparently still being contested by San women. The following chapters consequently foreground San gender relations in the fields of work, education, health, violence and leadership. This analysis serves as the basis for recommendations for appropriate development interventions.

CHAPTER 5

WORK AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

5.1 Introduction

This chapter charts a contemporary gender profile of work that San men and women are engaged in, including subsistence strategies, waged work, income-generating activities and household and childcare chores. Although categories cannot always be neatly separated, the divisions of domestic (household) work, foraging, subsistence farming, farm labour, army employment and tourism are applied in this chapter.

When San women were interviewed about their work, a fairly typical initial response indicated doubt regarding the applicability of the question to women: “We don’t work, we are just at home.” It appears that today’s San people have adopted the line of thinking common throughout southern Africa which only values work that yields income. The few formal employment opportunities for San at our field sites in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa are by and large reserved for men. This is most marked with the primary source of employment for San, namely labour in the commercial farming sector. The employment of San women on the farms is subsidiary and contingent on that of their husbands. But even outside the farming domain, the gender imbalance regarding waged labour is glaring: according to one of the few quantitative surveys conducted in former Bushmanland in Namibia, nearly five times more men than women held a permanent job (Botelle & Rohde 1995: 62), whereas seasonal employment, still a source of income for close to 10% of males, affected virtually no women at all.

In rendering services to others for payment in cash or in kind, both women and men distinguished between “working” and “helping” (Felton 1998; Sylvian 1999: 250). “Working” usually refers to waged employment, whereas “helping” denotes casual work, or the kinds of arrangement found in patron-client relationships (Sylvian 1999: 252). This distinction is not merely a semantic nicety. This is evident in the farming context, where it actually mirrors the dual economy: employment on usually white-owned commercial farms, which implies residency on such farms, is called “work”, and is generally preferred to the ad hoc kind of piecework done for cattle owners in the communal areas, which is known as “helping”.¹⁹ Similarly, women speak of “helping” in black township households with laundry and other domestic work, but of “working” for a white *miesies* (madam) on a farm.

At all of our field sites, women clearly aspired to work that generates cash income, preferably waged employment. Although we did not carry out explicit ranking exercises, respondents coveted jobs or “projects” above subsistence strategies such as crop production or animal husbandry.²⁰ Women were also unequivocal about striving for work and income for themselves, and not just for their male kin or family. Women rarely specified skills that they would like to put to gainful employ, however, but when they did, sewing and craft production were mentioned most frequently.

¹⁹ As Sylvian (1999: 252) shows, however, ‘helping’ is a more intricate concept entailing reciprocity. It may also denote expectations and obligations in a formal employment relationship, depending on whether a worker approached the employer for a job (in which case the farmer has already “helped” the worker) or vice versa (in which case the employer might be expected to return the “help” that he received from the worker).

²⁰ This contradicts the findings for Tsumkwe constituency of Botelle and Rohde (1995: 61), who report that only a fifth of interviewed households (no gender breakdown given) saw paid employment as a solution to their economic problems.

5.2 Domestic work

A shift towards more rigorous gendering of household work, including childcare, has been taken as an indicator of a change in the degree of gender equality. Although even in the past the !Kung, Nharo and others were said to have perceived cooking, collecting water and wood and building shelters as female tasks, in practice men frequently also performed many of these chores (Draper 1975: 87). With the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle and new modes of subsistence, the number of household chores grew: cleaning and laundry took up more time, and certain tasks connected to food processing and storage were new. At the same time the prestige associated with home-bound work decreased inasmuch as San aspirations towards waged labour mounted (Loermans 1992: 10). Crucial to these shifts were influences from neighbouring Bantu cultures in which notions of ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ were less flexible, and in which women’s work was held in low esteem. It should be added that white-owned farms as well as army life also fostered patriarchal societies with a rigid division of labour along gender lines.

Of all communities at our field sites, the Schmidtsdrift community displayed the strictest gender division for housework, with female respondents reiterating that “Men don’t do anything in the house.” Women clearly felt that they were housewives as per their husbands’ design. One female informant summed up the position of men thus: “*As ek die vrou vat is sy net vir die huis*” (“If I take a wife, she has to be there only for the house”) (interview with Tumba Alfrino, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000). Women’s resentment of their ascribed role is an indication of the low status that housework is accorded.

The only ‘domestic’ work that Schmidtsdrift men were said to perform was occasional repairs to the tents. It is revealing that some men had in the past collected firewood for home use, doing so with the aid of army trucks. Since the introduction of army regulations forbidding this use of SANDF vehicles, however, men no longer provide firewood but leave this chore to the women, who must walk several kilometres to do so. Sylvian (1999: 182) observed a similar gender asymmetry on farms in the Omaheke, noting that when men performed a traditionally female task like gathering firewood, they were usually able to employ technical aids such as saws and bakkies, or at least donkey carts. Furthermore, men’s firewood collection was often part of their waged work (some farmers sell firewood, but also supply their workers’ compound), whereas for women it was invariably unpaid labour.

In San farm workers’ households women do most of the domestic chores, such as meal preparation, dishwashing, cleaning, tidying up, laundry and childcare. Sylvian (1999: 180) estimates that these female tasks take up a total of 7 to 8 ½ hours daily, whereas the male tasks around the house (repair work, wood chopping, digging garbage pits, building small garden fences or making household tools from wire) take up a maximum of 3 hours. She also notes, however, that few Ju’hoan women actually put in these long hours; especially when they themselves are employed as domestic workers on the farm, other non-employed female household members share the daily household chores.

Women in Ghanzi’s RAD settlement likewise perceive the conventional household chores as being female duties, but upon probing they admitted that men sometimes helped with these, including looking after children. Respondents in West Tsumkwe also report that men frequently cross gender lines by participating in ordinarily female activities such as collecting water and wood. Firewood collection was at times carried out jointly by men and women, with men cutting the wood and both men and women carrying it home. By contrast, Ju’hoan men in Botswana’s Ngamiland were observed not to accept such work for themselves, and nowadays “scorn” female chores like collecting water and cutting thatching grass (Draper 1992: 52-53). On the other hand, even though the Kxoe in the Caprivi Region are said to maintain a fairly rigid division of household work (for instance a man would regard it as unseemly to cook the family meal even when his wife is sick), men and women commonly share the chore of collecting firewood (Magdalena Brörmann, pers. comm.).

The degree of exposure to surrounding cultures and institutions seems to have had a major effect on men’s readiness to do “women’s work”. To put it differently, the more San men have been exposed to the experience of waged labour as a male prerogative and have had contact with neighbouring cultures

with rigid gender perceptions and practices, the less likely they are to “cross over”. In former Bushmanland, men’s willingness to do these tasks appears higher in the more homogenous Ju/’hoan villages. Social status is a further factor, as witnessed, for instance, by the fact that some of the office-bearers of the recently established Namibian San traditional authorities would do their own laundry as a matter of course when in the capital for a workshop, though at home, female household members would usually wash their clothes for them (Axel Thoma, pers. comm.).

Women’s roles as housewives should not, however, lead one to assume that they are invariably submissive. This depends rather on the particular situation of a woman and her degree of dependency. A knowledgeable observer pointed out that domestic work is occasionally a sphere for power struggles, in which women wield some influence. In some instances women have been known to withhold their labour when they have a disagreement with their husband, and refuse to cook for him or do his laundry (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000). Nevertheless, though some women may manage to exert some control through their household work, in other situations this is not the case and women who fail to do their chores draw their husband’s wrath and incur beatings.

5.3 Foraging (gathering and hunting)

An absolute gender division of labour in the style of ‘man the hunter’ and ‘woman the gatherer’ was never quite the reality for foragers in the past, nor is it for contemporary San households. Not only were young boys taken by their mothers on gathering trips along with their sisters, in this way acquiring knowledge of veld foods, but women also captured small animals (often with snares) and clubbed them.²¹ Furthermore, the information on the state of the bush that women had was invaluable for men’s hunting expeditions. On the other hand, men would sometimes collect veld foods on the side while hunting or herding.

The fact remains, however, that gathering was a principally female activity, and that its economic and nutritional importance far exceeded that of hunting. A compelling argument was made that with the shift away from a predominantly foraging mode, women lost not only their role as primary providers of staple foods, but also much of their egalitarian status and self-esteem which had been grounded on this foundation (Draper 1975).

On the other hand, it could be argued that men’s status as defined by hunting has suffered even more. Whereas gathering has certainly declined in frequency and importance in all San societies, the importance of hunting is even more marginal today: game has all but disappeared in most areas, or hunting has either been made illegal or is strictly regulated, as is the case with Botswana’s game licensing system. A case in point are the Kxoe in game-rich West Caprivi, where the fear of being caught poaching in the vicinity of the West Caprivi Game Reserve is an effective deterrent to hunting. Whereas Kxoe women still contribute to family sustenance through the collection of veld foods, the men – unemployed since the withdrawal of the SADF – don’t contribute equally and women explicitly admonish them for their failure to hunt (Matthias Brenzinger, pers. comm.).

Hunting is nowadays reported to be an exclusively male activity, for example in East Tsumkwe, the only area in the region where there is no restriction on traditional hunting by San²² (Botelle & Rohde 1995: 85). In contrast, according to the same survey (ibid.: 90), although collecting veld foods is viewed as a predominantly female activity, it is also practised to some extent by men, especially by those aged 31-45 years. Younger people in East Tsumkwe seemed to do less gathering. Towards the west, however, the survey recorded no gendered division of labour in veld-food collection (ibid.: 123).

²¹ For a literature review of women’s role in hunting, see Biesele 1998.

²² Legally only traditional weapons and hunting techniques may be employed (and this excludes, for example, hunting on horseback).

In most areas though, foraging for vegetable food appears to be largely a female occupation, with men occasionally joining women. Women on farms and in RAD settlements in Ghanzi District reported that in the rainy season they went out to collect plants up to three times a week. On the commercial farms in the Omaheke Region, gathering likewise remains seasonally important, not only for nutrition but also to provide a tasty diversion from the standard fare of maize porridge (Sylvian 1999: 200-201).

It seems that San living in peri-urban locations or in those communal areas where the land is denuded by large cattle herds practise gathering very little, if at all. The Schmidtsdrift area is not naturally endowed with many veld foods, so gathering plays virtually no role for the resettled !Xu and Khwe there. In addition, the younger generation of the Schmidtsdrift San are said to prefer bought “Western” food to veld foods (interviews at Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

Gathering features most prominently in areas such as former Bushmanland where Ju/'hoansi and !Kung comprise the majority of the population and where they have retained a large measure of control over their land and resources. Even in this case, however, the data on the actual importance of veld foods is not consistent: Wiessner (n.d.: 14-16) concludes that veld foods only supplement people's diet, constituting 8-15% of caloric intake, and attributes this partly to the delivery of food aid. In contrast, in the survey conducted by Botelle and Rohde (1995: 90) in Tsumkwe District, veld foods were ranked as the most important food source.²³ The degree of effort invested in the collection of veld foods – in former Bushmanland at least – is also linked to government food rations: when relief food is available gathering declines, but when no drought aid is received it tends to increase (Polly Wiessner, pers. comm.).

It is probably fair to assume that the degree to which gathering is currently practised and knowledge of veld foods transmitted is commensurate with the level of women's competency in gathering. For Nyae Nyae, all women are assumed to be proficient gatherers (Wiessner n.d.: 14), though at the other end of the spectrum, in Schmidtsdrift only the “*oumas*” (grandmothers) are said to have retained appropriate knowledge (interview with Awelina Chifako, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000).

An interesting aspect of foraging which can only be touched upon here is its psychological importance. While on the one hand some have concluded that San perceive foraging as a demeaning element of their identity, one that places them on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy (Botelle & Rohde 1995: 91), Sylvian (1999: 202), on the other hand, found that skill in gathering bestowed on the Ju/'hoan women on commercial farms a sense of positive “cultural and class identity”. Some of these women also regretted the fact that as a result of their work obligations to farm owners they could not spend as much time collecting wild foods as they would have liked (ibid.: 203).

It seems that the extent to which livelihood still depends on gathering is a predictor of relative gender equality. Kent (1995) describes a group in central Botswana which despite being sedentary has retained a relatively high level of gender equality, not only because they have had little contact with male-dominated neighbouring cultures, but also because foraging is still important.

Quite a number of veld products are not only collected for own consumption, but are also important sources of cash income. Subject to limitations imposed by natural resource endowment, veld products sold for cash include thatching grass, Devil's Claw, mangetti nuts, morama beans, marula and mopane worms. It would seem that in contrast to subsistence gathering, harvesting for a cash income is in no small measure also a male activity. This may be due to the notion that it is seen as more appropriate for men than women to deal with “outsiders” (e.g. a white farmer who buys thatching grass) and to travel in order to sell.

²³ The difference between these study results may stem from different data collection methods. Botelle and Rohde conducted a survey by means of a standardised questionnaire which required respondents to rank activities for their relative importance. Ju/'hoansi are likely to have emphasised the importance of gathering, since in Nyae Nyae it is still the work activity on which women spend the most time. Wiessner found that actual measurement of the caloric value of the food thus gathered yielded results at variance with the professed “importance” of veld foods (Polly Wiessner, pers. comm.).

With products such as Devil's Claw which require some processing, tasks may be divided up between family members, with men being primarily responsible for digging up the tubers and carrying them home, and women cutting them and laying them out to dry before they are sold (interview with Dave Cole, CRIAA SA-DC, 7 September 2000, Windhoek).

There is scant information on whether men and women benefit equally from this kind of commercial exploitation of veld products, which might also be linked to the question of who actually conducts the selling transaction and receives the money. The example of traditional beer brewing for Botswana's Central and Chobe Districts is one instance where specifically women market a processed natural resource (usually berries such as *Grewia spp.*; see Bots).

In Namibia and Botswana Devil's Claw projects have been set up in an attempt to maximise profits by eliminating middlemen of the trade, but also to ensure sustainable harvesting of the resource. Communities are trained to extract the tubers in a manner that allows each individual plant to regenerate. For one of the sites of CRIAA SA-DC's Sustainably Harvested Devil's Claw Project in Namibia's Omaheke Region, a study is currently underway to determine gender aspects of the project (interview with Dave Cole, Windhoek, 7 September 2000).

A final aspect deserving mention is the kind of employment opportunities presented by CBNRM. The very small number of jobs available in Namibia's communal-area conservancies²⁴ are mostly held by men working as community game guards to control poaching. In the designated Bwabwata Conservancy in West Caprivi, however, two female San resource monitors are employed to survey the area's flora on a regular basis. According to a spokesperson for Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC), the organisation supporting this and other conservancies in the region, the employment of women to assess "the state of the bush" was a deliberate attempt to raise awareness of the importance of CBNRM for women's livelihood (Richard Diggle, pers. comm.).

In summary, it should be noted that whereas the current significance of gathering veld foods varies from place to place, women tend to be very positively inclined towards foraging and making use of natural resources. However, assistance efforts to commercialise veld foods should bear in mind gender balances in respect of benefits, as there appears to be a tendency that as soon as foraging is connected to cash income, men gravitate more to the centre of the marketing function.

5.4 Subsistence farming and animal husbandry

The extent to which San resort to animal husbandry and crop production as a livelihood strategy varies greatly over the region, and depends as much on underlying causes of marginalisation, including insecure land rights, as it does on climate and the natural environment. Although most San value livestock immensely, the role played by stockholding as a source of food and income or in the accumulation of wealth is limited. In Nyae Nyae stock ownership is perhaps more widespread than elsewhere, as the colonial administration introduced cattle in the 1970s (Marshall & Ritchie 1984: 126) and the Ju/Wa Farmers Union started to assist villagers with the procurement of cattle in the 1980s. More recently WIMSA has been planning and facilitating small-scale cattle projects such as Sonneblom/Donkerbos in the Omaheke Region (see below). In Ghanzi District San were given animals under the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP). Few households or individuals have managed to acquire livestock independently, though some farm labourers are among those who have.²⁵

Cultivation of crops and vegetables, usually in small gardens, is somewhat more widespread, but the produce rarely ranks highly as a food source and is less popular with many San than food aid in its

²⁴ This section deals only with employment linked directly to conservancy structures. For information on tourism-related income opportunities, see section 5.7 below.

²⁵ An intriguing observation was made by Kent (1995: 525) at her field site in central Botswana: her informants initially denied owning any stock, even when they in fact possessed goats. She interprets this as embarrassment occasioned by a disjuncture between egalitarian values (one ought not to own more than others) and reality.

various guises. In this regard it should also be noted that many resettlement measures created with the express intention that San should engage in agriculture have failed spectacularly on this count. One observer mentioned the revealing example of communal vegetable gardens in resettlement camps in the Omaheke Region, where garden workers received maize meal under the food-for-work programme. In an absurd twist the vegetables produced were sold by ministry officials in the regional capital and the gardeners themselves received none of the proceeds (Axel Thoma, pers. comm.).

Animal husbandry, particularly of cattle, is a predominantly male domain. Not only are herding chores carried out only by men and boys,²⁶ but ownership of cattle is usually also vested in men. This gender imbalance is not so much a result of men preventing women from acquiring stock, but rather of men simply having more opportunity to acquire stock. On some commercial farms labourers receive gifts of livestock as a periodic bonus (see section 5.5 below). Overall men are more likely to be wage earners and thus to be in a position to afford cattle. Under Botswana's official stock scheme for RAD settlers, five cows and fifteen goats were allocated to each household; in practice these were given to whichever adults the officials presumed to be the household heads, i.e. the men (Loermans 1992: 12). Interviewees in RAD settlements in Ghanzi District also stated that the cows were allocated only to men and the goats only to women.²⁷

The manner in which San acquire stock is only one factor that favours men. An equally important factor is that San men and women alike have internalised the division of labour common on the commercial farms and among pastoralist groups, where the men work with cattle and the women are responsible for housework.

The Sonneblom/Donkerbos project provides an interesting illustration of the trend towards male ownership of stock assets. The project was established in 1995 on two adjoining farms in the Omaheke, which the local Mbanderu traditional leadership allocated to San following mediation conducted by WIMSA. Prior to the move to the two farms, each of the then approximately 30 adult settlers (irrespective of sex) was allocated one head of cattle as start-up capital in an area not suitable for crop production. When Sylvian (n.d: 15) conducted a census at the twin farms three years later, the cattle herd had shrunk due to the fact that some animals had been sold or slaughtered following the discontinuation of the state food-for-work programme. Some cattle had also died after consuming a poisonous plant (*gifblaar*). Of a total of 25 cattle, two thirds were owned by men. The significance of this was not only that ownership was now predominantly male, but also that these stock assets were concentrated in relatively few hands. Though less common, overall stock ownership (including cattle, goats and chickens) among women was more evenly distributed. Sylvian's findings do not explicitly trace the processes that have led to this gender bias,²⁸ but suggest very strongly that both Ju/'hoan men and women had an ingrained image of "proper" gendered behaviour taken on from the commercial farms from which most of them had come, and where only men work with cattle.

The survey of these two small communities also illustrates that stock ownership is overwhelmingly individual. Indeed only four adults stated that that they owned animals jointly with their spouses. The implication for gendered control and decision-making power over livestock assets is perhaps not necessarily that the male owners will be the sole recipients of any monetary gains, but a tendency in this direction seems likely.

²⁶ It should be added, however, that most San livestock herding practices are rather opportunistic: Botelle and Rohde (1995: 73) found that less than a third of stock-owning households in Tsumkwe constituency were herding their cattle regularly, and impute this lack of animal care to high rates of predation as well as loss due to the consumption of poisonous plants.

²⁷ Actual practices and even numbers of stock allocated seem to vary and to be somewhat dependent on individual RAD officers. Some officers were said to favour giving goats to female-headed households, because they deemed this to be more appropriate to the needs of such families (Lin Cassidy, pers. comm.).

²⁸ It would appear to be unlikely that there was a higher mortality rate due to *gifblaar* (a poisonous plant) or other reasons in the case of cattle owned by women, since cattle were usually herded together. One can only speculate as to whether women are more likely to have sold their cattle, or whether the male household member might simply have appropriated a cow owned by his wife.

Respondents at our field sites confirmed the gendered nature of perceptions regarding the handling of stock. In Schmidtsdrift, where army regulations have prohibited the keeping of livestock on army premises (i.e. the Schmidtsdrift camp), the women were taken aback by the suggestion that following their move to Platfontein they might consider keeping goats or sheep (group interview with Khwe women, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). This is no doubt attributable to the fact that the women, unlike the men, had had little exposure to stock-rearing, and such barriers also extend to dealing with draught animals: respondents at Sonneblom/Donkerbos stated that women were “afraid” of donkeys (Sylvian n.d.: 28). Similarly in most incidences where donkey carts are used as a means of transportation, the reins are almost never in the hands of a San woman.

Growing crops, on the other hand, involves both men and women. Fields are typically shared by a family or household and are no longer planted and harvested by only men or only women, as was the case in some communities in the past.²⁹ As for the division of labour in crop production, Botelle and Rohde (1995: 84) established that women and men were involved almost equally in planting, weeding and harvesting; processing of crops was mainly done by women, while more men than women were involved in ploughing. Where larger fields have been cleared for cultivation of maize or millet (as in resettlement schemes), ploughing is nominally a task undertaken by the MLRR. Frequently, however, government tractors do not arrive on time in the planting season and the fields remain uncultivated.

It is evident that gender plays a role when cultivation becomes mechanised or involves draught power: whereas in the past field preparation by hoe was commonly carried out by both men and women, ploughing with oxen is a male prerogative (Axel Thoma, pers. comm.). Again, this may be influenced by the examples of both commercial and subsistence farms, where such a gendered division is common. It is reinforced or institutionalised when agricultural machinery (ploughs and other tools) is allocated to men only, as was noted in respect of Ghanzi District (Kent 1995: 530).

In those few resettlement camps run by Namibia’s MLRR which have communal project gardens for vegetables, the associated work activities are carried out mainly by women. One of the reasons for this could be that men are often absent from the camp doing temporary farm labour jobs on white- or Herero-owned farms (see Chapter 4).

This survey of the gendered nature of work activities related to stock-holding and cultivation indicates that stock ownership has the potential to become a stratifying element in many San communities, with a clear bias towards male ownership and handling of animals, in particular cattle. This bias is further inherent in many governmental and non-governmental interventions. Both men and women have internalised gendered assumptions prevalent in other cultures according to which animals are regarded as the property of men and work involving animals is regarded as men’s work. Cultivation, though a more gender-balanced domain, is generally limited to small gardens or mismanaged in resettlement schemes.

5.5 Farm labour

The commercial farming sector remains the single most important source of employment for San across the region, and this is quintessentially male employment. Indeed the whole farming realm is a male one: the vast majority of farm owners are white men and the farm labour they employ for tending livestock and maintaining fences and machinery is predominantly male. Women’s residency rights and access to livelihood on farms therefore hinge on their menfolk’s employment as farm labourers (Sylvian 1999: 166). The situation of women, as well as of others such as the elderly who depend on employed farm workers for a livelihood and a place to stay, has become even more precarious as labour forces on commercial farms have been cut down. The Namibian cattle-ranching industry in particular has witnessed massive retrenchments following independence, with a decline in state subsidies and legislation aimed at protecting farm workers’ rights leading to structural adjustments (Nam). Indications are that the cattle industry in Botswana is following suit, as a younger generation of commercial farmers mechanises and

²⁹ For example, this was the case in 1970 with the San of Kgalagadi district, Botswana (Axel Thoma, pers. comm.).

specialises production, and requires a smaller but more skilled workforce (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000).

The situation regarding women varies somewhat across the region. The Nharo in Botswana's Ghanzi District, the Ju/'hoansi in Namibia's Omaheke Region and part of the Hai//om in Namibia's central areas are the San language groups which constitute the largest farm labourer populations, due to the fact that most of their traditional territories became commercial farm land. In contrast to the generational farm workers of Ghanzi and the Omaheke, the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe have taken up farm work only since their resettlement. In response to a strong labour demand all over South Africa from commercial farmers – who view “bushmen” as loyal to whites (SA) – the Communal Property Association (CPA) of Schmidtsdrift set up a contract facilitation service. Contracts are typically for three months, and salaries are comparatively high – ranging from R700 to R1 000 per month (interview with Mario Mahongo, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). The job descriptions and employer specifications effectively reserve these contracts for men: farmers look for workers to do conventional farm labour, but with the increase in crime directed at farm owners and their stock, they also employ San men as security guards. Lastly, game farms also employ men as trackers. In total around 600 Schmidtsdrift men are engaged in this kind of temporary farm work. The men who have secured a farm work contract leave their families at Schmidtsdrift for the duration of their employment.

For the women of Schmidtsdrift, employment opportunities on farms are limited to casual harvesting work in the area surrounding the resettlement camp, for which usually only women are employed. For a week's work on potato or peanut fields, the women are paid an average of R150. As these activities are strictly seasonal, the total employment only lasts a few weeks (interview with Nicolaas Tenda, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). However, !Xu women bemoan the fact that local farmers hire exclusively Khwe women for these tasks; other informants claim that after initially recruiting women from both groups, farmers had found the Khwe to be more industrious (group interview with !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000; interview with Hennie Swart, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000).

In the more conventional farm labourer setting in the Omaheke Region, where the labourers with their dependants reside on the farm, it seems to be standard practice for farmers also to employ wives or other female kin of the labourers, usually as domestic servants in the farmer's household. Sylvian (1999: 168) found that nearly all of her female Ju/'hoan informants were either currently or had at some stage in the past been domestic workers. On the Ghanzi farms, however, hardly any Nharo women are employed; reportedly, farmers employ only very few women to work in their households, and these tend to be from other population groups – mainly Bakgalagadi. The reasons for this disparity between the two farming areas are not clear, since as pointed out above, rationalisation and mechanisation (which would require less labour) are rather lagging behind on Ghanzi farms compared to those in Namibia. Regarding the Omaheke, Sylvian (1999: 215) sheds some intriguing light on farmers' paternalistic attitudes to San women in particular: she reports that some farmers see it as their moral responsibility to give Ju/'hoan women jobs in the house simply to keep them occupied, as San women are seen as inherently lazy.

Sylvian notes the complex web of dependencies that women's livelihood on farms is contingent upon, observing that several determining factors lie beyond their own control.³⁰ Significantly, wives or other dependants of employed labourers enjoy no legal or other protection if their employed relative is made redundant. They not only automatically lose their income, but at a stroke are also rendered homeless. Their choices become very limited indeed, even though many farmers are reported to be more tolerant of female squatters in their workers' compound, for instance when women stay with female relatives while their husbands are on the road hunting for jobs.

From her extensive fieldwork among farm-dwelling San in the Omaheke Region, Sylvian (1999: 169) concludes that “Ju/'hoan women are extremely dependent on male kin for income-earning opportunities

³⁰ Sylvian (1999: 189) lists five interpersonal relationships that have a bearing on a woman's situation on a farm: “first, good relations between her male kin and the farmer; second, good relations between themselves and the farmer; third, cordial relations between themselves and the farmer's wife; fourth, ... agreement and co-operation between themselves and the farmer's wife; and finally, ... amicable relations between the Ju/'hoan woman and her husband (or other male kin).”

and survival.” She found only one single case where a San woman was employed independently by a farmer, i.e. without having a male relative employed there. Furthermore, unlike men, women do not move around the farms in search of employment because they would have little chance of success given the scarcity of jobs in a contracting economy, and because farmers in general already have access to female labour by virtue of the presence of the unemployed relatives of their workers (ibid.). When a farmer wants to recruit a woman, he usually approaches her employed husband or other male kin. In this way any negotiations over her terms and wages are typically carried out without her voice being heard.

The duties of domestic workers on farms extend to cleaning, washing and ironing, as well as food-processing and storage. Sylvian (1999: 175) experienced working hours of up to eight or ten hours a day, though sometimes less; like the men, domestic workers are expected to be on call over weekends and whenever the farmers entertain guests. Wages for domestic workers recorded by Sylvian in 1998 ranged from no cash remuneration at all to N\$180 per month. On average her informants earned 54% of what male Ju/'hoan farm workers received (Sylvian 1999: 190). Although there were significant variations between farms, it was notable that domestic servants, even if more experienced and with longer employment histories than some male workers on the same farm, were grouped more or less in the salary bracket of junior male farm labourers, and never in that of senior labourers. Farmers clearly perceive Ju/'hoan women's wages as being merely supplementary to those of their menfolk (ibid.). Similarly, employed San women usually received smaller ration packages than their husbands, consisting typically of coffee, tea, sugar, maize meal and tobacco.

Goats or other livestock are an occasional bonus in kind for farm labourers and are seen as being very valuable. Accentuating gender inequalities, however, this remuneration is only given to men, as men are regarded and regard themselves as the rightful owners of livestock or of money gained through the sale of an animal (Sylvian 1999: 193). A type of payment in kind or gift that women used to receive as much or more than men was cast-off clothing from the farmer's wife. Possibly in response to the economic and structural pressures on the commercial sector since independence (Nam), and to the fact that cash wages have risen, these are much less forthcoming, and Sylvian's informants complained about being made to pay for second-hand clothes from the farmer's household (Sylvian 1999: 193).

Sylvian reveals a crucial difference in the gendered concepts of farm work: whereas men display a sense of how their labour contributes to the economic system (“our hands made them rich”), women tend to view their work as a mere means of survival (Sylvian 1999: 219). Nevertheless, San women in both Namibia and Botswana rate living on commercial farms above living in communal areas, settlements in communal areas (where many San have become alcoholic destitutes), resettlement camps in Namibia or RAD settlements in Ghanzi District in Botswana. This is largely because farm life provides them with an income, albeit a meagre one – rations and their own and their husband's wages. For the Omaheke Region Sylvian notes that although gender relations on farms are not altogether equitable, women at least have some authority through their role as household managers: a farm worker usually hands over some of his wages to the “woman of the house”, who uses the money to purchase necessary items for the family. Men's sphere of decision-making, since they are the primary wage earners, relates more to where and when to move to another farm or location (Sylvian 1999: 337-338).

Work-related power balances are clearly different for Schmidtsdrift, possibly due to the migratory character of farm work there: women (and children) who stay behind when their husbands go off to do three-month stints on farms feel they do not benefit from farm workers' wages, even though these are by now the second largest source of income after army wages (SA). Indeed female interviewees claim that not only do they not benefit from the men's wages, but that they do not even know how much their husbands earn (group interview with Khwe women, Platfontein, 15 June 2000).

5.6 Army employment

The profoundly negative effects that the militarisation of the Kxoe/Khwe, !Kung/!Xu and Ju/'hoansi in the late 1970s and '80s had on San societies has been well documented (see Chapter 4). Apart from

creating dependency, army recruitments fostered rifts between the sexes and the generations, as noted by Marshall and Ritchie (1984: 8) at the time: “Ju/wa society has become divided not only between haves versus have nots but also between men versus women, old versus young.”

With the demobilisation of SADF’s “Bushman Battalion” prior to Namibia’s independence, only those San men who opted for resettlement in South Africa in 1990 remained in army employment. The current situation of the Schmidtsdrift community is in many senses not comparable to that in the former army bases of West Caprivi and Bushmanland. The same gender imbalances persist, however, and appear to have become more profound with relocation. The Khwe and !Xu women interviewed clearly see their dependency as a fallout from the gendered nature of work opportunities, namely army jobs and farm work. One put it succinctly: “Men have work, women don’t . . . If the man is angry, the woman cannot do anything if she has no work or income.” (interview with Sonia Kamuti, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000)³¹

No female Khwe or !Xu has been recruited by the army; one reason given for this is that the adult San women did not qualify due to their low educational levels.³² However, in the case of the small number of women (20-30) who do have formal full- or part-time employment with service establishments run by the SANDF (such as the school, clinic and shop) as cleaners, cooks, shop assistants and translators, a primary criterion for their employment appears to have been their Afrikaans language proficiency (Waldman: 1995: 5). Outside these army-managed centres, employment opportunities are virtually non-existent, being limited to small-scale income-generating projects run by the CPA. These include bread-baking, textile production and an arts and crafts project at Platfontein.

Women’s intense concern regarding their lack of income opportunities seemed to be caused as much by their dependency on their male kin’s salaries on the one hand, and their husbands’ failure to provide adequately for their families on the other, as by poverty. Interviewees reasoned that according to the standard notions of property in their community, people had “separate” money, and that men therefore felt that they could freely dispose of their income. Clearly the women did not agree with this convention, but felt the whole family should benefit. Wives of soldiers displayed powerful feelings of impotence: “We can get angry about men who do not provide for the family, but we can’t do anything about it” (group interview with !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000). Khwe women were said to be more willing than !Xu women to demand from their husbands what they believe to be rightfully theirs, namely a share of their husbands’ wages³³ (interview with Nicolaas Tenda, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000).

In mid-2000, for the first time since independence, the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) started to recruit San in West Caprivi and Tsumkwe. In West Caprivi the rationale pertained to the prevailing security situation, in particular the expansion of the Angolan war into Namibia’s north-east. Local community leaders had met with the Minister of Defence to suggest that local soldiers might counteract the notorious harassment of Kxoe villagers by army units. At the time of the research, 20 Kxoe men and 5 Kxoe women were undergoing military training with the NDF (Axel Thoma, pers. comm.).

In former Bushmanland, however, the recruitment seemed to be motivated by job creation. While development workers regarded the removal of the largest part of educated males (30 men and 5 women

³¹ This is not to say that unemployment is not a problem for men. Recent SANDF retrenchments reduced the number of !Kung and Khwe soldiers employed to 122 by mid-2000 (interview with Hennie Swart, Platfontein, 16 June 2000), and with more restructuring at hand, especially the transfer of most of the remaining !Xu and Khwe soldiers to Upington (400 km away), as well as the envisaged move of the community to Platfontein, the SANDF’s role as the major local employer will gradually diminish.

³² The army is said to require a minimum school attainment of Standard 8. By the time some young women had completed the necessary schooling at Schmidtsdrift, priorities of the post-apartheid Government for its army had changed, and the recruitment of additional Khwe or !Xu soldiers – male or female – was not considered necessary.

³³ Interviewees stated that before their relocation their husbands had remitted their army pay to the family, but that these days many men did not even tell their spouse how much they earned and did not contribute to the family’s sustenance. They were at a loss to explain why men’s attitudes should have changed in this way, although one contributing factor mentioned was that whereas back in Namibia men had been paid in cash, their salaries were now being paid into bank accounts, to which women do not have access (group interview with !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000).

were to be recruited) from their communities as a setback,³⁴ the individuals who had enlisted were clearly motivated by the prospect of a relatively high salary. It was difficult to gauge whether communities or women in particular perceived this kind of “history revisited” as being problematic, however it is unlikely that the problems associated with army employment in the past will not recur.

5.7 Tourism and community-based natural resource management

Although not unaware of possible ethical dilemmas posed by certain types of voyeuristic and intrusive tourism, San themselves display less reservations about its potentially negative effects on their culture than some concerned anthropologists, development workers and others. Indeed tourism is being embraced across the region as one of the few promising economic strategies. In communities such as that of West Tsumkwe which have had some contact with tourists there is broad support straddling the sexes and generations for attracting and working with tourists. Furthermore there is a strong tendency to view novel CBNRM concepts primarily as a means of attracting tourism.³⁵

This section appraises the impact of tourism on employment generation in terms of gender.³⁶ It has been stated that in principle both men and women, young and old, possess “marketable” skills that could be put to use in demonstrations for or interactions with tourists. These skills include tracking, hunting, gathering bush foods and medicinal plants, preparing and cooking bush foods, healing, singing, dancing and manufacturing crafts. In practice, however, young men have benefited disproportionately from tourism enterprises, particularly in the commercial sector (Loermans 1992: 9). Safari companies mainly employ San as hunting guides and camp labourers. The trackers are invariably men, and young males are also preferred over women as menial labourers who erect tents and do other chores because they tend to be more fluent in English or Afrikaans and are more likely to have some experience in dealing with outsiders (Hitchcock 1997: 103). Only as photographic subjects do women sometimes have an edge over men: elderly women adorned with lavish beadwork or tattoos are favourites with camera-laden tourists (ibid.), and they can charge to have their pictures taken.

A businessman and lodge owner in Tsumkwe offers his guests tours to outlying villages, where tourists witness cultural performances and are offered crafts to buy. The villagers are paid in cash by the lodge owner. He deals directly only with one or two younger men who are handed the money for group performances. Tourists may also go on a guided bush walk. Female bush walk guides are paid N\$25 whereas men receive N\$50. Despite these problems, San women in Nhoma were strongly in favour of the enterprise, expressing the opinion that “Arno [the lodge owner] *het ons lewe gegee*” (“Arno has given us life”) (group interview with women, Nhoma, 22 June 2000).

Since there is clear evidence that income generated through private enterprise tourism is not spread equitably, but rather favours younger men and generally contributes to more marked stratification within San groups, the question arising is whether community-based tourism models fare better in this regard. Indications from some nascent community ventures in Namibia’s former Bushmanland are that similarly differential gender and generational patterns are taking shape: persons tasked with administering campsites are young literate men who speak some English, as are those put in charge of selling crafts on behalf of the community. The guides who take tourists for bush walks are also mostly men. Money for

³⁴ It certainly seemed that development initiatives and community projects in Tsumkwe constituency were set to lose the few young males who due to their schooling and language skills had played important roles as, for example, administrators and tour guides.

³⁵ When women were asked about their hopes for the planned Nꞛa-Jaqna conservancy in West Tsumkwe, a frequent response was that they could become guides for tourists. It has been pointed out that expectations regarding the income-generating potential of CBNRM are often unrealistically high and do not take into account the fact that the strategy was devised with conservation rather than development as its primary goal (NAM).

³⁶ The focus and scope of this report do not allow for a general discussion of the dangers and opportunities associated with tourism for indigenous groups. See ꞤOma & Thoma (1998), who addresses the question, “How realistic is it for San to say ‘No’ to tourism?” and Hitchcock (1997) on cultural, economic and environmental implications of San tourism.

group performances is likely to be paid to males, for example the healer in trance dances, from whom the female singers have to receive their share.

Notably, even activities such as bush walks that are typically carried out mainly by women become male-led when they are carried out for the benefit of paying tourists.³⁷ On the other hand, the division of menial labour in tourist camps tends to be gendered: cleaning work is predominantly done by women whereas men do construction and repair jobs.

In the process of establishing small tourism ventures, the sidelining not only of women of all age groups but also of most of the middle-aged and older men happens in subtle ways. It amounts to the bolstering of what passes as the latter-day elite in most San societies: younger men who are most likely to have been to school and perhaps even to have completed primary education, who are probably multilingual (possibly as a result of having done stints on farms), and who are most likely to be conversant with bureaucratic requirements for setting up special ventures, or even to possess the kind of identity documents required for dealing with officialdom. In several cases it was an individual or a group of younger men who (possibly through links with support organisations) played the strongest role in initiating a community venture. These tend to be the individuals who persevere with such ventures, and to some degree tasks associated with an income become their responsibility (interview with Linda Vanherck, Windhoek, 19 August 2000). The communities accept that literacy and numeracy, as well as a basic command of English, are vital for dealing with tourists, and assume that persons with these skills will become the most prominent actors. It must also be noted, however, that disaffection and factionalism within communities crystallise around community campsites and similar establishments.

While employment opportunities in the sector and face-to-face interaction with tourists are markedly skewed in favour of younger men, a notable exception is the production of crafts for sale to tourists. Particularly middle-aged and older women, but also older men are enthusiastic about handcrafting (interviews in West Tsumkwe). In Ghanzi District women claimed that their only constraint was the availability of materials like ostrich shells. Of apparent concern is Botswana's Ostrich Policy, established in 1994, which bureaucratises the use of this natural resource to an extent that is potentially harmful to San women and their families (Bollig et al. 2000: 25).³⁸

Of the diverse range of projects run under the umbrella of the Kuru Development Trust (KDT), the craft branch is by far the most important source of income for women.³⁹ Similarly, a successful handcrafts project in Nyae Nyae has benefited women in particular. Some communities have witnessed a renaissance in craft production, with a range of traditional items such as ostrich jewellery and beadwork, skin bags, hunting gear and carvings, but also innovations on traditional themes manufactured with traditional materials.⁴⁰ Observers also note that craft-makers who have had direct marketing experience, for example through having sold goods at lodges, have become convinced of the need to produce high-quality crafts.

³⁷ This example is taken from a community campsite in West Tsumkwe. Apparently a group which initially included a majority of women had originally been formed to take care of bush walks as a tourist activity. In the event, however, the women had ceased to be part of the group as only one or two men walked with the tourists, and clearly the income thus derived was not shared out among the whole original group. When a tourism trainer reminded the community of the original group composition and suggested that the know-how of especially the older women might be appreciated by tourists, and that a fairer distribution of the income might ensue, some of the women thanked the facilitator for considering them (interview with Linda Vanherck, Windhoek, 19 August 2000). What was also noteworthy in this particular case was that English communication skills cannot have been a major factor since one of the male bush guides did not speak any English and was accompanied by a translator on tourist outings.

³⁸ A group of women in Hanahai wanting to set up an ostrich user group waited years to receive the necessary licence (Bollig et al. 2000: 25).

³⁹ In a survey of KDT projects it was found that for "40% of all women participants of all projects, crafts was the most important source of income, compared to 15% of all men, confirming that craft producing and marketing is one of the best ways of supporting poor rural San women" (Dekker 2000: 49). The same survey also notes that in terms of poverty, defined as ownership over assets, the participants in the craft group were the poorest and 76% of craft producers were women (ibid.).

⁴⁰ The researcher was impressed by colourful bead "wristwatches" on sale in a craft shop in West Tsumkwe.

A revival in other traditions and practices has also been credited to increasing exposure to tourists. In one case in former West Bushmanland, the San involved in a campsite reactivated the healing ceremonies which had fallen into abeyance in that community, and reportedly value and enjoy the trance dances not only for their income-generating potential. It would be interesting to ascertain whether significant gender differences can be noted in the efforts to re-appropriate cultural knowledge. It seems likely that the few individuals, often young men, who deal directly with tourists would be most involved in the process.⁴¹ Finding out more about such processes, and about whether the traditional knowledge of older women and men is being drawn on to the same degree, would require directed research.

A point of debate among communities with fledgling tourism ventures has been the issue of traditional clothing (interview with Linda Vanherck, Windhoek, 19 August 2000). On the one hand San obviously perceive a certain amount of pressure to conform with the visual cliché and some are not entirely comfortable with dressing up in traditional garb for tourist encounters or performances. On the other hand, many profess a pride in dressing in leather loin cloths. An aspect that is perhaps all too obvious, but is nonetheless relevant for a perspective on gendered involvement in tourism, is that women have to bare more when donning traditional scanty dress: whereas bare breasts in public are traditionally anything but a taboo in San communities, younger women (who have been to school and have internalised different clothing norms) are more likely to be self-conscious or embarrassed by curious onlookers – tourists as well as community members – when performing dances in topless attire (ibid.).

5.8 Conclusions

Waged employment and income-generating activities are valued highly by both men and women. The labour market in those sectors that San have been engaged in favours males over females, thereby pushing San women even further into the margins of the cash economy than San men. As Sylvian (1999) has shown, women try to cope with their lack of access to employment, and their resulting poverty and dependency, through maintaining extensive visiting and exchange relationships.⁴²

Control over income within families, and even within communities, varies greatly over the region. In most instances money is seen as the sole property of the person earning it, much to the chagrin of, for example, the soldiers' wives in Schmidtsdrift. In other cases, as described for Omaheke farms, wives have a share in their husbands' earnings.

Income-earning potential has been shown to have a clear bearing on gender equality: Sylvian found gender relations within San families to be most equal in Epako,⁴³ the township of the Omaheke Region's regional capital, the town of Gobabis, where women are relatively successful in finding employment, mostly in domestic service for Herero, Tswana and "coloured" households.⁴⁴ Our own research in three San communities with distinct traits showed that the degree of gender equality or inequality is indeed in part determined by gendered access to economic activities and income (see Chapter 4).

We found very little information on whether the cultural and social problems related to wage earning that have been described for men in San societies also apply to women in employment. It is often

⁴¹ At a trance dance at the aforementioned campsite, the sequences were explained to the researcher in English by the young male camp administrator who – in a curious intercultural twist – first had to be given the relevant information by other participants (male again) in !Kung. He himself, having been away at boarding school for most of his childhood, was no longer conversant with the content and meaning of the chants, but obviously relished learning about them while he was translating to the visitors.

⁴² Not surprisingly though, money appears to play a smaller role in women's sharing relationships than it does for men. According to a baseline survey carried out at Kuru, women are less likely than men to share, borrow or lend money, and also claimed to receive fewer cash gifts (Dekker 2000: 22).

⁴³ This is not meant to gloss over the fact that women in most townships, including Epako, face enormous social problems, such as violence, alcoholism and prostitution, which are addressed elsewhere in this report.

⁴⁴ San women are less likely to find employment with white households than coloured or Herero women, and they earn significantly less than domestic workers in white families (Renée Sylvian, pers. comm.).

individuals who earn a comparatively generous income who stand out in their communities, and having more than others subjects them to criticism and pressures from relatives to share. As a consequence it is not usual for men to “drink away a good portion of their wages so as to glean some pleasure for themselves before the money vanishes into the hands of others” (Wiessner n.d.: 19). Focused research would be required to establish whether women have different strategies to resist the obligations placed on income earners by their community. The limited evidence seems to indicate that, at least in the case of income derived from crafts, women are more successful in “defending” their money. One reason for this might be that in the past men were compelled to share the returns of their hunting efforts widely, whereas women were under less of an obligation to share the food they collected (Polly Wiessner, pers. comm.).

One frequently mentioned obstacle that some San women in employment have faced is their husbands’ “sexual jealousy”. San men argue that women may engage in sexual relationships with men who they encounter at their workplaces. It is quite likely, however, that men feel their status to be threatened if their wives acquire better education or economic and social standing. In a disquieting case, all except one of the female trainee teachers in the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project were coerced by their husbands, sometimes violently, into abandoning their training.

While the general trend is that gender asymmetry works to the disadvantage of San women, allowance must be made for the diverse situations and living conditions in which San find themselves. Among the Nyae Nyae Ju/’hoansi, a community which has access to its own land but very few employment opportunities, one study even found that young men were most in need of work opportunities of any kind, as they were contributing least to the economy and suffered from boredom.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Wiessner (n.d.: 23) observed that with the exception of a handful of employed young males, “men below 40 ... were the most seriously unemployed age group of all – it is not unusual to see fully grown young men driving toy wire cars around the village for want of something better to do”. In contrast, men above this age were “always looking for work” such as repairing houses, procuring firewood, making crafts or tending cattle and gardens. This older generation also tended to grumble persistently over the young men’s idleness.

CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION

6.1 Introduction

At the October 2000 conference of the Southern Africa Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) held in Windhoek, a panel of six young San men and women from Namibia, South Africa and Botswana discussed the topic “San education for the 21st century”. In their presentations, three of the panellists alluded to the fact that gender imbalances in San education are a serious concern. WIMSA Assistant Co-ordinator Joram /Useb from Namibia pointed out that the dropout rates of San school girls were particularly high because many girls got involved in sexual relationships as a result of poverty. The two female panellists, namely Xhwaa Qubi from D’Kar (Ghanzi District) and Awelina Chifako from Schmidtsdrift, placed special emphasis on the negative impact teenage pregnancies have on San girls’ schooling.

The recognition of gender concerns in San education appears to be a rather new phenomenon. Until recently the multitude of problems experienced by San children of both sexes throughout southern Africa appears to have obscured gender aspects. Previous regional and national conferences of San community representatives have repeatedly featured the dire state of formal education and have formulated resolutions,⁴⁶ but have never focused on the gendered nature of obstacles faced by San girls and boys.⁴⁷ A notable example was the *First Secondary San School Learners Conference* convened for learners from all over Namibia, where although female San learners made up only about a third of the almost 90 student delegates, the gender gap in education featured neither in the agenda nor the discussions (MBEC 1997).

It appears that up until the present most of those concerned with San education have thought that efforts at creating more supportive and culturally sensitive schooling environments would automatically go a long way to enhancing girls’ enrolment, and that no special emphasis on gender concerns was needed.

To reconsider this position, we will first investigate the extent of the gender gap in San education, and thereafter we will elaborate on some of the reasons for school dropout rates and poor performance that might conceivably affect learners of one sex more than those of the other.

6.2 The gender gap

Official statistics on San school attendance were readily available only for Namibia. Such statistics could not be obtained for Botswana as the Botswana Government does not disaggregate statistics according to mother tongue or ethnicity. In the case of South Africa, information for the school at Schmidtsdrift was gathered during field research.

⁴⁶ Although the resolutions on education passed at the *First Conference on Development Programmes for Africa’s San/ Basarwa Populations* in 1992 and the *Indigenous People’s Consultation* in 1998 do not contain references to gender, a notable shift had taken place from demands for physical infrastructure and teaching staff to the need to take cultural issues into account in formal schooling.

⁴⁷ While most gender aspects in education concern girls, boys may also be disadvantaged in some instances. Observers have noted, for example, that in some sedentary communities in Botswana, boys spend more time away from the settlement performing chores than girls (Kent 1995: 516). It follows that boys are less able to attend school because of their assigned chores (see section 6.3.5 below).

That San education is in need of special attention is well documented and acknowledged by Namibia's education authorities, who have adopted policy guidelines on educationally marginalised children that target San along with farm workers' children (who often are San), as well as Himba children, street children, working children, orphans and children in other categories (MBESC 2000). Although these "Policy Options" do not specify gender gaps in much detail, they state that female San learners tend to drop out early during their educational careers, and they recommend the inclusion of gender sensitivity training in teacher training (*ibid.*: 28).

The figures for Namibia paint a bleak picture: not only do relatively fewer San children enter the school system than the national average (30% of San children enter Grade 1 compared to nearly 95% for the country as a whole), but in contrast to gender equity in primary schooling nationwide, towards the higher primary grades enrolment becomes markedly skewed, with a high proportion of San girls dropping out. Whereas up to Grade 5 the enrolment of San boys and girls is fairly balanced, the proportion of girls decreases to just 33% for Grades 6 and 7. This figure drops to 21% for secondary school (EMIS 1998).⁴⁸ Although some San have taken the opportunity to continue their education via the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL),⁴⁹ all 43 students from Tsumkwe District who were enrolled in 1998 were male (WIMSA 1999: 8).

All of the five San students in tertiary education (Polytechnic of Namibia and teacher training colleges) in 2000 were male. Of the seven applications received by WIMSA for 2001, six were from males and one was from a female. WIMSA has also negotiated an affirmative action agreement with the Windhoek College of Education which will review applications from San separately (Magdalena Brörmann, pers. comm.).

For the !Xu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift, a school offering primary and full secondary education up to Grade 12 level is provided. With 1 377 pupils it is the largest exclusively San school in the region. Even though a few female learners were reported to have completed Grade 12, very few have gone on to tertiary education. Of those who have done so, most have registered for diplomas, though in 2000 two young women were studying for nursing degrees.

Statistical information from Botswana is sketchy, since for one thing the RADP does not collect statistics on educational attainment in the settlements. The situation does, however, seem to parallel that in Namibia: with a higher dropout rate for girls than for boys in the higher grades. Bollig et al. (2000: 33) note that despite an overall increase in school attendance on the part of San learners in Botswana, enrolment of girls in Grades 5-9 is only 50% of that of boys.

In all three countries, therefore, the gender imbalance in education is notable, all the more so since in each case the overall national statistics indicate that girls' enrolment equals or exceeds that of boys. Although the proportionately higher dropout rate of girls has been ascribed to puberty (*ibid.*) and to early marriages and teenage pregnancy (†Oma & Brörmann 1998: 3; EMIS 1995: 2), no detailed analysis of gendered educational problems has so far been attempted.

6.3 The stumbling blocks

The most detailed account of the complex web of underlying causes of the poor attendance and under-achievement of San students and pupils is given by Le Roux (1999), who conducted an assessment of San education in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on behalf of WIMSA and the KDT. She places

⁴⁸ One data set for Tsumkwe constituency (Botelle & Rohde 1995: 125) is not consistent with this, in that it states that no gender discrepancy was measurable. However, which grades are being referred to is not specified. The school in Tsumkwe itself had a majority of non-San learners in the mid-90s, which might have distorted overall figures somewhat (Magdalena Brörmann, pers. comm.).

⁴⁹ NAMCOL is the system set up by the MBESC to enable adults to complete junior secondary or senior secondary schooling (Grade 10 or Grade 12).

education holistically in the general context of San marginalisation, and groups the underlying reasons around the themes of dependency, poverty, language, abuse and discrimination, and culture.

Obstacles faced by San learners include an inability to pay school and hostel fees, a lack of transport, the absence of mother-tongue education and culture-sensitive curricula, stereotyping on the part of teachers and fellow learners, a culturally alien school discipline system and a lack of parental support. The worst aspect of this scenario is perhaps the fact that most of these impediments refer not to initial access to school – or rather, not to those obstacles that can be surmounted through relatively simple interventions such as the waiver of school fees or the provision of transport to school – but to children’s retention in school. In other words, getting children enrolled in school is one thing, but ensuring that they feel comfortable in their learning environment so that they finish not only the school year but their full primary or even secondary education is quite another matter.

Inadequate attention has been given to gender issues in discussions of the factors contributing to non-attendance and dropout on the part of San children. After investigating early sexual relationships as a major cause of teenage girls leaving school, we will assess some other possible contributory factors such as self-esteem and changes in traditional education, as well as child labour and parental expectations.

6.3.1 Sexual relationships

Early sexual relationships have frequently been voiced as a concern regarding girls’ education. For example, a female traditional leader in West Tsumkwe pondered whether girls’ education would not benefit from single-sex schools, because if they are together with boys, boys and girls “finding each other” distracts the girls in particular from their school work (interview with Sara Sungu, Mangetti, 23 June 2000).

In 1998 the Namibian Deputy Minister of Basic Education and Culture travelled to former East Bushmanland with the stated mission of convincing the Nyae Nyae residents “to change their culture” with respect to the practice of early marriage.

Girls “going around with boys” or getting “married” in their teens appears uppermost in the perception of teachers, parents and communities alike: girls’ significant underperformance and absenteeism from a certain age – often as young as 14 – are most commonly attributed to such relationships and the resulting changes in a girl’s interests and responsibilities. It is also noteworthy both in itself and in comparison to other population groups that it is not only teenage pregnancy that is invoked in accounting for high dropout rates on the part of girls, but that such relationships are themselves seen as factors.

Early marriage

As for the nature of such relationships, it appears that in many San societies the customary marriage (and evidently the tradition that the Namibian Deputy Minister set out to “correct”) which entailed a girl being betrothed to a husband (usually several years older than her) soon after her first menstruation is now much less common in most communities.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Le Roux (1999: 66) mentions occasional arranged marriages in both Tsumkwe District and Schmidtsdrift, ascribing these to economic motives: parents anticipate that their daughter will be provided for by a husband and his family.

It appears that at least in some cases young brides do not enter the marriage entirely out of their own will. During our field research in West Tsumkwe, several cases were reported to us in which girls were made to marry by their parents without their own consent. In one case the parents’ reasoning was actually indirectly related to education: they felt that their daughter, who was staying away from the village at a hostel, was unduly distancing herself from her community, family and traditions, and hardly even visited home during school holidays. Committing her to marriage and restricting her to village life

⁵⁰ Shostak (1981: 127) describes “trial” marriages for !Kung (which are often unstable and do not last long) arranged by parents and other close relatives.

was evidently seen as a means of bringing her “back into the fold”. Similarly, a San tertiary student who hails from the Kxoe community in West Caprivi thought that parents in his community were ambivalent in their ambitions for their daughters: on the one hand they saw the advantages of the “book and the pen” (i.e. formal education), but on the other hand they berated educated girls for “not listening”, and regarded married girls as good examples who are in line with the community and traditional life.⁵¹

In general, however, communities in Tsumkwe were of the opinion that school should take priority over marriage. Equally well though, they were unequivocal in stating that if a sexually mature girl had already dropped out of school for whatever reason and was now residing back in the village, she was expected to become a wife and mother forthwith.

In order to conform with community expectations, female adolescents who get married – whether or not they are pregnant – leave school as a matter of course. School is evidently not seen as a place where young wives belong. Reports of husbands refusing to allow their wives to remain in school confirm this (†Oma/Brörmann 1998: 3). Furthermore, some girls interviewed stated that the main reason for their resisting pressure to marry was that marriage would effectively terminate their school career (interview with girls, Den/ui, Nyae Nyae; Felton & Thomas, notes).

School authorities likewise appear to view school attendance and living in a relationship as incompatible. As one principal from West Tsumkwe put it, “When a girl goes to school from the bed of her husband, how will she learn?” Some schools do, however, appear to have a more open-minded attitude; in one school hostel in West Tsumkwe special provision was made for quarters for couples (Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.). Presumably because the issue does not crop up very frequently in national contexts, governments do not have official policies on whether “married” students are allowed in schools.

Teenage relationships

The majority of relationships between adolescent girls and boys do not result from family arrangements. Indeed parents frequently worried that they had no control over their daughters and sons dating the other sex since they were living away from home in school hostels. The education system, which requires children to live away from their families for most of the year, is held responsible for the demise of customarily arranged unions: “They just find each other” is how interviewees frequently described how relationships start.

Quite commonly, San girls are dated by boys from other population groups who may be schoolmates or may already have left school. Some female San learners are said to consciously aspire to having non-San boyfriends in the hope of escaping the traps of low status and poverty. At the same time, many teenage boys and men of other population groups are said to find San girls attractive (Jennifer Hays, San Regional Education Project facilitator, pers. comm.).

Even though parents are usually resigned to the fact that relationships are nowadays no longer initiated by parents, these boyfriend-girlfriend liaisons remain a major cause of concern for parents, as they are seen to lead to a dwindling of girls’ attention and performance at school, and to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy. Xhwaa Qubi from Botswana reported at the SACHES 2000 conference that San parents might indeed prevent girls from attending school because they fear that they may fall pregnant: “They say, ‘your brother can go to school but not you [as a girl] because you will come back with a big stomach.’”

Teachers are often adamant that San youth start sexual relationships earlier than adolescents of other population groups (Le Roux 1999: 85). However, one should be alive to the possibility that this may be a stereotype. A similar generalisation that is particularly marked among teachers is the conviction that

⁵¹ Interview with Tienie Mushavanga (Windhoek, n.d.) conducted by Steve Felton and Caroline Thomas as part of the preparatory research for a documentary video on San education made in 1999 (*Listen to Us*) on behalf of WIMSA and UNICEF. (Further references to interviews conducted for this project are given as “Felton & Thomas, notes”.)

once girls get interested in the other sex and have boyfriends, this frame of mind becomes all-pervasive and that they consequently lose all interest in school work and attend school only erratically. This mindset is not ascribed only to girls, however, as this quote from a teacher suggests: “These boys, they drop out because they want girls. They think of nothing else.” (ibid.)

In all likelihood this simplistic and reductionist explanation does not do justice to the complex emotional and other issues at play. The fact remains, however, that community and school informants agree that early sexual relationships cause females to drop out.

Early motherhood

From the above it can be inferred that teenage pregnancy levels are high among young San women, and at all field sites teenage mothers were much in evidence. Although we have pointed out that it often does not even take a pregnancy for girls to drop their education, pregnancy is most definitely a major cause for the high attrition rate among female San learners. Despite the fact that the extent of pregnancy-related dropouts among students in general is not accurately measurable (Becker et al. 1995: vii), there can be no doubt that it is a common phenomenon. For example, the principal of a school with a majority of San learners in Omega in West Caprivi reported that over a period of only six months, more than half of the female learners dropped out due to pregnancy (Nam). This may be an extreme case (possibly in part a consequence of the swelling numbers of Namibian soldiers at the local army base who engage in relationships with local girls), but teenage pregnancy rates among San can safely be assumed to be at least as high as the national levels in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.⁵²

Practices regarding the readmission of young mothers into school vary, and in the absence of national policies they often depend on individual principals. Even where ministerial directives have been issued instructing schools to allow pregnant learners to resume their schooling once they have delivered, as in the case of Namibia,⁵³ cases of girls being expelled on the grounds of their pregnancy are still common. The evidence from all research sites clearly indicates, however, that even where schools allow female learners back after delivery, virtually none make use of this opportunity. At Schmidtsdrift, where teenage pregnancies were said to number more than 20 per year, young mothers do not normally return to school even though the school has a policy of allowing them back after one year (Jennifer Hays, pers. comm.).

Although young motherhood itself traditionally does not carry a stigma in San societies (Nam), teenage mothers are not envied by their peers: more often than not a boyfriend does not acknowledge paternity and in any event does not provide for the child, in particular if he is from a different ethnic group. One group of female students in the northern Omaheke Region opined that it was preferable not to have boyfriends “because they make the situation worse by just impregnating the girl and afterwards ditching her” (interview with learners at Drimiopsis, Namibia; Felton & Thomas, notes). On the other hand, some girls might even revel in the novelty of the maternal role and the adult status which it accords, preferring it to the child status they had at school (Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.).

Although it affects mainly female learners, the phenomenon of learners dropping out as a consequence of pregnancy is not an exclusively female one: some cases have been reported in which male San learners who had fathered children were pressurised by the girls’ parents to take responsibility for the young mother and child and marry. In these instances the young fathers also dropped out of school.

Sexual harassment and abuse at schools

Although sexual harassment, like teenage pregnancy, is certainly not an exclusively San problem, it is reported in all its degrees from many San schools and it clearly contributes to girl-unfriendly school environments. During her research across the region, Le Roux (1999: 91) found that in a few instances

⁵² In Namibia 45% of women have a child or become pregnant by the age of 19. The figures for other southern African countries are comparable (Becker et al. 1995: 2).

⁵³ This directive is in accordance with Namibia’s Teenage Pregnancy Policy, but this has remained in draft form for many years. There appear to be no mechanisms to compel school managements to abide by the existing directive.

teachers who misused their position of authority or who simply “bought” girls (e.g. with some bread) to obtain sexual favours were the perpetrators. In the majority of cases, however, male peers, i.e. students or young men from the school’s neighbourhood, were the ones putting various degrees of pressure on girls to “give in”. The males were often but not exclusively from other ethnic groups.

The root causes of sexual violence in any society are complex, but grossly unequal gender relations typically feature prominently among them. Additional underlying factors, as well as more immediate factors leading to abuse in the case of female San learners, are graphically illustrated by an incident of attempted rape that was reported in a national newspaper:

Two male Mbukushu students attempted to rape a Kxoe learner. They were, however, foiled in their attack by two other female pupils sleeping in the same building who had been awakened by the screams. After seeing that the rescuers were also from the Kxoe tribe, the heavily intoxicated duo “unleashed a volley of insults, belittling Chief George and claiming the Kxoe leader was “just a headman” and that “you Bushmen will never have a chief, you are just dogs.” (*The Namibian*, 5 June 1997)

This incident brings to the fore three factors that render San teenage girls vulnerable to sexual abuse in many settings (see also the discussion of this case in Chapter 8). Firstly, there are overt tribalistic elements. Although this case occurred in a specific context where a traditional chief of a neighbouring community claims authority over the Kxoe San, it is evident that girls from a marginalised community are seen as easy or even legitimate prey (on account of their being subhuman “dogs”). Secondly, and just as obviously, a role is played by alcohol as an agent that lowers inhibition regarding sexual violence. Thirdly, the structural problems posed by the boarding school system should not be underestimated. It is no coincidence that rape and other forms of sexual abuse involving school learners are widespread in school hostels (Le Roux 1999: 111; Robert Hitchcock, pers. comm.).

Many rural school hostels do not even provide the most basic amenities such as sufficient mattresses. In the example quoted above the reporter aptly depicts the hostel as “dilapidated, windowless, doorless, ceilingless ... just like a bombed-out building”. The lack of a perimeter fence and burglar bars allows for easy access to girls’ dormitories for outsiders. Contributing to the lack of physical security, hostels are also often not locked at night. Even more crucial than the lack of infrastructure is the absence of effective supervision and support for learners from matrons or teachers on hostel supervision duty: hostel children from the youngest age are more or less left to look after themselves, and receive neither guidance nor emotional support, nor indeed any attention from adults outside school hours. There is a notable absence of any leisure activities for students in the afternoons or over weekends (Le Roux 1999: 93; Becker et al. 1995: 34), and boredom is the order of the day. Small wonder, therefore, that this environment is conducive to early sexual encounters, often resulting in teenage pregnancy, just as it is to children “on the loose” getting access to alcohol and committing acts of sexual abuse.⁵⁴

Whereas the deficiencies of the hostel system affect learners in hostels in general, the overall lack of support for these children is conceivably even more detrimental to San girls, who are overwhelmingly described as lacking in self-esteem.

6.3.2 Self-esteem

Perceptions of San girls’ low self-esteem in the school environment are so widespread that this socio-psychological factor should be taken note of. Teachers experience San girls as being “very shy” and “quiet” in the classroom. Low self-confidence clearly reveals itself in learner statements such as “I don’t know if I can finish school, maybe I am too dumb” (as quoted in Felton & Frank 1999: 28). Researchers found that whereas both male and female San learners experienced verbal abuse in the form of being

⁵⁴ It is coming to be recognised that the hostel system may be detrimental to education. In Namibia a presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training obviously held that the system could not be reformed with the available financial and human resources, and recommended that it be phased out in favour of alternative community- and family-based forms of accommodation.

called dumb by other learners, girls seemed to have internalised such stereotypes more than boys, and in interviews themselves questioned their own learning capacity, something the boys did not do (ibid.).

Low self-esteem appears not to be limited to the intellectual domain, but also extends to social and even physical aspects. San girls are described as keeping their own company during their free time, and it is said that they “do not easily mix” with children from other groups. The extent to which teenage girls have taken the ridiculing of their physiognomies by other students to heart becomes painfully clear in this self-assessment of a girl with perfectly average looks: “The other girls don’t like me because I am ugly.”⁵⁵

It is unlikely that such low self-esteem is solely attributable to the mocking attitudes of peers. Although certainly enhanced by verbal abuse, it possibly has root causes elsewhere, perhaps in the fact that in many contemporary San communities girls stay around the house much more than boys, and also in the copying of gender representations from other population groups who regard female shyness as the norm.

A diachronic perspective might reveal the changes in child socialisation that have occurred in the transition from an itinerant foraging lifestyle to a sedentary one: Draper (1975: 100) relates how in settled life girls largely stayed within the village or compound, whereas herding work took boys further afield, for example to waterholes where they met and observed people from other ethnic groups, and where they picked up other languages. Draper (ibid: 101) concludes that this kind of exposure would foster in boys not only more comprehensive and earlier-acquired knowledge of the world around them, but also “a more confident spirit”. Girls are described as inhabiting a much more restricted space. This latter observation most certainly still applies a quarter of a century later: just as adult women appear less “out and about” than men and are less often seen hiking a lift on the road, for example, girls appear conspicuously home-bound.

When the researcher experienced a noisy tyre blow-out in West Tsumkwe, conveniently just a few metres from her destination, half the local village – the male half, that is – appeared on the scene to check out the attraction: scores of young boys, as well as some men, but not a single girl. (Field notes, West Tsumkwe, June 2000)

The often-invoked shyness of not only San girls but also San women (see Chapter 10) might also be linked to the adoption of cultural traits from neighbouring communities. For example, in Herero culture shyness is a prescribed norm for females of all ages. By contrast, observers note that in the past, and still today in exclusively San communities, young girls appear to be very confident and indeed playfully self-assured, and that parents in no way keep their daughters on a closer leash than they do their sons (Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.). During our research in the predominantly San Schmidtsdrift settlement as well, young Khwe girls did not appear in any way shy about relating to strangers.

6.3.3 The demise of traditional education

Girls’ low self-esteem and early sexual encounters leading to unwanted pregnancies have both been related to the dwindling importance of traditional teaching through mothers, fathers and other adults within San communities. The kind of traditional education that has been on the wane encompasses not only specific rituals such as initiation ceremonies, but also the transmission of gendered knowledge and values. The latter did not occur through one-off events, but was integrated into subsistence strategies, community life and parenting practices: girls accompanied women and boys accompanied men on their daily activities; in addition, storytelling is said to have been an essential educational tool in former hunter-gatherer societies (see Biesele 1993).

The diminishing presence of female puberty rites is a factor that must be taken into account in educational analyses. Although one might question the viability of such rites if they are no longer embedded in lifestyle and culture, some pertinent points have been made regarding both general traditional

⁵⁵ This is a quotation of a San girl from the documentary film titled *Listen to Us* (Felton 2000).

education and rituals. In particular, there is now an absence of guidance which leaves adolescents to make their own choices in the absence of cultural guidelines, especially regarding sexual behaviour. This can partly be ascribed to the boarding school system, especially in rural Namibia and Botswana, which physically removes children from the control of their parents.

Furthermore, adolescents in San societies did not live in such close proximity as they do in co-educational formal schools, and the latter system has been pointed to as one of the reasons for girls and boys developing early sexual interest in each other (Le Roux 1999: 104). Also, everyday traditional teaching would instil a sense of responsibility and realism. A young girl, when out with the women on a gathering trip, would be warned, "Do you feel this hot sun? Remember you will have to carry the baby as well as the food!" (as quoted in Le Roux 1999: 105). Interestingly, some elements of traditional education for boys appear also to have addressed – and condemned – sexual abuse, as this quote indicates: "The old people teach the boys ... that if you take a girl and she does not want you, it is the same as rape." (ibid.)

The most memorable event that instils self-respect in girls entering womanhood is said to be the individual menstruation ceremony, which signifies a woman's future role as a potential wife and mother. The initiate is put in a specially constructed hut around which the adult women dance, and by bearing their buttocks they try to defeat the only male player, depicting the eland (Barnard 1992: 60). Interestingly, and somewhat contradicting the view that their absence is to blame for some developmental and educational impediments, these rites appear to have been quite resilient, and are indeed still practised – albeit often more in an abbreviated version (Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.) – in San groups with very different living conditions and commonly perceived degrees of "traditionality". While parents state that puberty rites had to be abandoned because they are incompatible with the school calendar, some schools state that girls disappear from class at the time of their first menstruation, never to return to school again. A girl would have to miss more than just a few school days if she returned home to her village on the occasion of her first menstruation. However, some schools reportedly do make some kind of provision for this ceremonial event, varying from a long weekend in some Botswana schools to two weeks in some schools in Namibia's Omaheke Region (Jennifer Hays and Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.).

Whatever the extent of puberty ceremonies, what is relevant for girls' education is that women are no longer their pre-eminent traditional teachers.

6.3.4 Lack of role models and low expectations from parents

Just as the adult generation of women no longer presents traditional role models, there are precious few modern female role models who have completed school and are seen to have acquired some kind of professional status. The same holds true for men, but the picture for women is even bleaker: of the approximately 4 500-strong !Xu and Khwe community in Schmidtsdrift, there were just two young women currently involved in tertiary education. Several community members displayed pride in these future nurses, as only a few other young Schmidtsdrift women had ever completed any post-secondary training, and many other communities cannot boast a single such female "achiever". A notable example is the now all-male teaching force of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project (VSP), where most of the female teacher trainees were forced by their partners to give up their training. Considering that the VSP was conceived as a model school project, and that teachers are prime identification figures, the absence of a single female San teacher is indeed a stark indicator.

Whereas in the older generation there was no significant gender difference in the negligible proportion of San men and women who had attended school, the educational gender gap is reported to be highest in the 20-40 age group. Figures from Namibia show that 10% fewer women than men in this group had any school education (EMIS 1995: 5). On the other hand, even those Namibian and South African San women who attended school did not necessarily experience a quality of education that would have convinced them of the value of institutional learning for their own daughters: many would have been enrolled in the schools of the military bases in the then South West Africa, which for boys provided de

facto pre-vocational army training. For girls, on the other hand, schooling appears to have been largely devoid of any learning content.⁵⁶

Although it has repeatedly been stated that San parents place a high value on education and want their children to succeed, some of our research findings indicate that in many families it was the father rather than the mother who would urge children to go to school. Teachers also reported that despite a generally low level of parental involvement in school matters, it was more likely to be a father who would attend parents' meetings than a mother. This might be a consequence not only of the oft-quoted higher degree of educational exposure that men have had (and their resultant relatively greater appreciation of the value of formal education), but also of the described educational socialisation of the mothers' generation.

Both the lack of role models and the illiteracy of mothers⁵⁷ might account for the fact that there is less expectation on the part of the families (including the mothers) of girls that they will finish school (Nam). Such low expectations are probably also the underlying reason for the late enrolment particularly of female learners, who are sometimes as old as 10 by the time they start Grade 1.⁵⁸ Similarly, there is a lack of parental insistence that a child who has dropped out of school should return. On a commercial farm in Ghanzi District, a group of Nharo women was asked what had been done about a particular girl who was evidently no longer in school. The women only stated that nothing could be done to pressurise children in this situation: "They just don't want to go" (group interview with women, Ghanzi District, 29 May 2000).

Finally, a somewhat dubious light is thrown on the role of parents in their children's education by the inadequately documented phenomenon of San children living in foster care with families from other population groups. Although as a result of the limited scope of our field research it was not possible to investigate this issue thoroughly, we did find evidence of this practice in communal areas of Namibia, where San form a minority among Otjiherero, Oshiwambo or Rukwangali speakers. Its relevance for education lies in the fact that some of these San children constitute some of the rare "success" stories, often having completed primary school, and sometimes even secondary school. From our small database it did not become clear whether there is a gender distinction at work regarding children in foster care, and if there is, whether boys or girls are preferred by San parents for "giving away" or by foster parents for "adopting". It is also far from obvious whether, as is sometimes assumed, foster parents are mainly interested in securing child labour for the household or for farming, or whether charitable motives are uppermost.⁵⁹ Similarly, since very little is known about the agency in the fostering process,⁶⁰ the assumption that it is a disempowering experience for the San child's mother (Le Roux 1999: 103) would need verification.

6.3.5 Child labour

It is impossible to quantify the extent to which school dropouts can be attributed to children taking on employment of a formal or an informal nature. It appears that in the commercial cattle-ranching economies of Ghanzi District, the Omaheke Region and the Northern Cape, there is pressure on boys to do

⁵⁶ The following account was given by one of Waldman's female informants who now resides in Schmidtsdrift: "While there (at Omega) we had *veldskool* [bush school]. The boys spent one to two weeks in the veld and the soldiers taught them army stuff. The girls just went out for the day and we learnt nothing. We just sat with the teacher under the trees and ate food. We learnt nothing but the boys worked hard. When I got my report at the end of the year I used to tear it up – I didn't know what it was." (Waldman 1995: 7)

⁵⁷ It should be noted, however, that adult literacy classes in most research sites were strongly attended by women.

⁵⁸ This information was given in Nyae Nyae, Namibia (interview; Felton & Thomas, notes).

⁵⁹ Two young San women from Omaheke who grew up in Herero households in Windhoek reflected very positively on their experiences and said that they were treated just like the family's other children. One, however, was left without support when her guardian moved to Botswana, and consequently she dropped out of school. The other woman is now one of the few female San NGO workers in Namibia, and she admits having to familiarise herself with "her" culture, not least of which entails (re-)learning Ju/'hoansi, her original mother tongue (interview with Dina Kakora & Adeline Goagoses, Gobabis, 28 June 2000).

⁶⁰ For example, does a Herero family just "take away" a child? From our limited evidence it appears that the San family and the foster family have some employment or other links, even generational family links. (In one case the interviewee's father had already been raised in her foster family.)

either piecemeal or regular work. Le Roux (1999: 67) reports from South Africa that labour demand from farmers was such that the !Xu and Khwe Association which facilitates labour contracts had to stipulate a minimum age in order to minimise the employment of teenage boys. Mention is also made of children sliding into semi-permanent employment by way of taking on jobs with farmers during school holidays and being lured with the prospect of continuous income to stay on after the holidays. Similar incidents were narrated to us in villages in communal areas in West Tsumkwe which border the commercial farm area; here, however, such instances clearly did not involve boys alone.

A form of child labour that almost exclusively involves girls is the practice of assigning childcare chores to an older sibling. This was uncommon in San societies prior to their sedentarisation, due to long child spacing as well as the foraging patterns that allowed for both subsistence-related activities and child-rearing on the part of both fathers and mothers (Draper 1975: 100). In the context of increased wage labour, however, older girls are likely to be kept at home in order to take care of younger children (Le Roux 1999: 67). On the whole, though, this practice does not appear to be a primary cause of girls dropping out, and it was not mentioned as a major concern in our field sites.

6.4 Conclusions

There are both gender-neutral and gender-specific factors which affect San educational performance. Some of these are cultural, being based in the attitude of parents and communities towards children's education, while others are based in the school system. It would appear that of the three crisis periods in the school career of San children, as identified by Le Roux (1999: 42),⁶¹ the second crisis period, namely the time around puberty, affects female learners disproportionately.

This chapter could not provide a comprehensive gender analysis of San education, as there are scores of aspects that could be investigated. A pertinent area to research, for example, would be the question of how girls show agency, or make their own choices, in dropping out of school, or in remaining at school, or even in pursuing a relationship at the expense of their school careers.

We have no reliable data regarding several other issues. One of these is the question of whether commercial farmers display any gender bias when they encourage and assist their farm workers' children to go to school. Other issues might be the extent of bullying at school that is not primarily racially based, which according to some sources affects boys more than girls (Felton & Frank 1998), or the question of whether some poverty-related material deprivations, such as a lack of basic toiletries, have a more discouraging effect on girls than on boys (*ibid.*).

It would appear that there is a danger of the prevailing situation, in which women are excluded from the few employment opportunities that exist because of their low educational and language proficiency levels (see Chapter 5), being replicated in the current generation of school-age girls.

⁶¹ Le Roux (1999: 42) defines the first crisis period as the first two to three years of schooling (4-9 years of age), the second crisis period as puberty (ages 10-14) and the third crisis period as one affecting San learners in secondary schools, especially around the time of transition from junior to senior secondary school.

CHAPTER 7

HEALTH

7.1 Introduction

The health status of San is to a large extent contingent on living conditions, nutrition and access to facilities. These factors are in turn linked to poverty, although this causality is not always linear: at least in the case of Ghanzi District, the data suggest that D'Kar – the RAD settlement with the highest per capita cash income – has a relatively high level of malnutrition (Bots). The availability of cash may even lead to malnutrition if money is spent on alcohol rather than food.

For Ghanzi (*ibid.*), as well as for the Omaheke Region (Sylvian n.d: 5), observers note that San on commercial farms tend to have a better diet and are healthier than San in settlements, resettlement camps or townships, a fact partly attributable to the food rations paid to farm workers.

A gender perspective on health should not only take into account how diseases affect men and women physically, but should also consider social implications and gendered attitudes towards health matters, as well as the extent to which women are able to make decisions regarding their health. Health issues of particular interest in this regard are reproductive health, alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Many health matters are of particular concern to women, as they are usually also responsible for their children's well-being. For example, it is usually the mother who takes the children for immunisations; however, accurate survey data on immunisation coverage were not available. A prevalent disease that women in Schmidtsdrift singled out as affecting children in particular was TB, though it was by no means restricted to them.

TB is among the most widespread serious diseases and occurs in almost all San communities, though without a discernable gender pattern in infection rates. Most San patients find it difficult to comply with the six-month treatment regime. Although the default rate for taking medication is high overall, a health worker in Namibia (Omaheke Region) observed that women are slightly more likely to finish the course of anti-TB drugs than men (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000). This staff member of Health Unlimited (HU), an NGO working with San communities in the Omaheke and Nyae Nyae, also noted cases of San men who were hospitalised for TB absconding from hospital (*ibid.*). There is furthermore anecdotal evidence of incidents in which San men pressured their wives into prematurely discharging themselves from hospital where they were receiving treatment because women are seen to be indispensable in the house and family.

7.2 Access to health facilities

When access to health facilities is reported to be inadequate, this is more often on account of the distance to clinics or the unsympathetic attitudes of nurses than of the cost of treatment.⁶² Health service infrastructure appears to be better developed in Botswana, where all RAD settlements and most other larger settlements have health posts and often also an ambulance, than in Namibia. Interviewees in Ghanzi District, however, did complain about the system not always functioning properly. By way of example, in one case the clinic car was dispatched to another settlement, and as a result the delivery of medicine supplies was substantially delayed (interview with Khanxae Moelenyane, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000).

⁶² In Botswana, treatment at health posts in RAD settlements and mobile clinics is free. Clinics in Namibia charge a nominal fee of N\$3, which can be waived. Treatment at the Schmidtsdrift clinic is free.

Commercial farms and cattle posts in Ghanzi District are served by mobile clinics, a system that has also been introduced in many rural areas of Namibia, although in Namibia it does not usually cover commercial farms. As a consequence, farm workers and their families are dependent on the farmer taking them to the nearest clinic or otherwise on hiking lifts.

The army-run clinic at Schmidtsdrift provides comprehensive health services, but officially only caters for soldiers and their families, though in practice its staff also treat other residents free of charge. In some cases, however, a sick person has to travel 35km to the hospital at Douglas, which charges R20 for treatment.

Especially in Namibia, San women have complained about verbal abuse by clinic staff who scold patients for being “dirty” and who “blame” mothers for their children’s illnesses, implying that they do not look after them (HU n.d.). Although most women will not shy away from seeking medical advice at clinics,⁶³ patronising attitudes on the part of healthcare staff and a lack of trust in them on the part of San are perceived as obstacles.

HU regarded improving relations between clinic staff and communities as one of their highest priorities (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000).

7.3 Health beliefs and practices

At the outset, some remarks on San health beliefs and practices must be made. Contemporary San explanation models for the causes of disease are a complex field (Rudert 1995). Illness, like misfortune, may be attributed to factors identified in bio-medical science, or to the agency of “supernatural” forces, such as ancestors, the devil or sorcery. A study carried out in Nyae Nyae and the Omaheke Region found that both women and men commonly distinguished between diseases caused by the spirits and those that fall outside of this traditional disease concept. TB and STDs in particular are seen as “new” diseases that are contracted through contact with other population groups. On the other hand, explanations for the same disease may simultaneously refer to ancestors, as well as to external causes such as dirt, insects and contact with a sick person. An example is malaria, which is blamed both on transmission by mosquitoes and on the spirits of the deceased.

Interestingly, “bewitching” by a non-San, or by “Satan”, is also given as the cause of excessive alcohol consumption or its after-effects, like a particularly debilitating hangover (Rudert 1995; Sylvian 1999: 282; Suzman 1995). The following is a depiction of how Ju/’hoansi in Skoonheid resettlement camp in the Omaheke regard “the devil” as being behind a person’s drinking:

The devil takes hold of you and leads you round the resettlement from one drinking place to the next until you lose your mind and are no longer responsible for your actions. Next day you feel so rotten you need another drink, and so it continues. (HU n.d.)

The meagre evidence available does not allow for generalisations as to whether men and women implicate “magic” forces in their drinking to the same extent. The question of any existing gender patterns would merit further research, particularly in view of the described tendency of drinkers (and the community at large) to blame some external agency rather than the individual him/herself for alcohol abuse.

Regarding health and disease in general, the survey found in at least two sites in the Omaheke (Corridor and Drimiopsis resettlement camp) that female interviewees were drawing more on rational explanations like a lack of food, dirt, overcrowding and other objective causes for illness. Men, though not dismissing these causes, emphasised the role of agentive sources such as “witchcraft” on the part of people who intend harming another, or other “supernatural” forces leading to illness (HU n.d.). Women in the

⁶³ “We think twice about going to the clinic, but then we do go,” was how a group of women in the Corridor area of Omaheke put it (Health Unlimited n.d.).

Corridor also thought that their health status would improve through income-generating projects which would enable them to buy food and medicines, whereas the men had no suggestions for self-help, but rather implored the government to provide medical outreach services.

The kind of treatment chosen to cure illness – traditional practices or Western medicine – varies greatly between and within communities, and is determined by a range of factors, with no obvious gender pattern being discernible. Respondents at our field sites valued medical care greatly, and a common complaint related to the distance to the nearest clinic and the lack of transport. Younger people with some formal education are said to be more likely to hold bush remedies and healing ceremonies in low esteem (Rudert 1995). HU's surveys in the Omaheke and Nyae Nyae conclude that levels of confidence in the respective merits of indigenous practices and modern medicine are primarily shaped by pragmatic considerations rather than principled preference for the one or the other. Most respondents believed that some serious diseases which were not caused by "magical" forces (especially TB) could be effectively treated only by medicine, whereas certain diseases were best tackled by traditional means. Frequently a traditional healer is consulted if treatment at a clinic has not brought a cure, just in case supernatural agents are the cause of the disease. Equally well – especially if the nearest nurse is some distance away – bush remedies may be employed first, and only if they fail will a journey to the clinic be undertaken.

Knowledge of traditional healing practices and transmission of this knowledge to the younger generation varies, partly in accordance with the degree to which a more "traditional" lifestyle has been retained. For example, in the Nyae Nyae area traditional medical practices have remained more important than elsewhere. The use of medicinal plants seems to be more widespread than communal and social healing ceremonies ("trance dances").

Quite a few bush remedies are still fairly widely known and used by San, even in areas like the Omaheke which are dominated by commercial and communal cattle farmers. The curative properties of certain roots and plants are common knowledge with many men and women of the older generation, and some individuals are seen as expert herbalists. In former Bushmanland these healers may be men or women, although the majority seem to be men. Likewise, healers from the Omaheke who are known beyond the confines of San settlements and who even travel to treat non-San for payment, are men. A constraint in many of these places, however, is that natural biodiversity has been much reduced by the pressure exerted on the environment by cattle, rendering many bush remedies well nigh unobtainable.

A different and more specialised practice is spiritual healing, which involves trance-dancing rituals. Among the Ju/'hoansi in the past, control and application of *n/um* (healing power released through trance dance) was learnt by men, and to a lesser extent also by women (Shostak 1981: 298).⁶⁴ Interviewees in West Tsumkwe could no longer conceive of female trance "doctors", however, and many could in fact not even remember any such healing ceremonies at all. Triggered partly by tourism, trance dancing has seen some revival, although as in the case of the Omatako Community Rest Camp these dances are predominantly social rather than spiritual and no longer address physical illnesses.⁶⁵ In RAD settlements in Botswana too, the dances originating in healing ceremonies continue to take place, but the healing element is said to have disappeared under the influence of alcohol (interview with Khanxlae Moelenyane, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000).

In any event the "doctors" performing the trance dance are all men, while women constitute the chorus that sings and claps. In the Nyae Nyae area in the mid 1990s, Rudert was told that there were a few female trance healers, though their healing powers were generally seen as being inferior to those of men (whose prowess, however, is also seen to vary considerably). She describes the status of women healers relative to men as being equivalent to the status of nurses relative to doctors in modern medicine (Rudert 1995: n.d.).

⁶⁴ Shostak's informants attribute this to what they perceive as women's fear of the pain associated with spiritual mastery, but the author also notes that girls and women are given less opportunity to practice their healing skills (Shostak 1981: 298).

⁶⁵ Even with the more culturally cohesive Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi, Claire Ritchie, who conducted research there in the 1980s, perceived that healing ceremonies had degenerated into secular parties that were accompanied by alcohol and fighting (Ritchie as quoted in Rudert 1995).

7.4 Reproductive health

One of the effects of a sedentary lifestyle on women's reproductive health has been a shift in the direction of shorter birth intervals. In a foraging lifestyle, the pattern of adult work together with the fact that, rather than tasking older siblings with looking after babies and toddlers, parents did most of the child-caring themselves, encouraged a relatively long average child spacing of about four years (Draper 1975: 90). In settled villages women began to have children after shorter intervals. When a group of Ju/'hoan women in West Tsumkwe was asked how many children they considered ideal for a woman, they responded rather fatalistically: "We simply bear children until we die" (group interview with women, Grashoek, 23 June 2000). On the other hand, many younger women and men evinced a preference for smaller families, particularly due to food insecurity and the lack of resources (HU n.d.).

It is difficult to assess to what extent traditional birth control methods are still practised. Awareness of modern contraceptive methods, which are available at all health facilities, appears to be quite high (ibid.), though actual use is thought to be low, with condoms being particularly unpopular. Women perceived them as being dangerous because they could burst or remain in the woman, and men thought they reduced pleasure. Women also noted that often one is not carrying a condom when one needs one. The most frequently used family-planning method appeared to be an injected contraceptive (i.e. Depo Provera), though women also frequently complained about this drug's side effects (ibid.).

There is no substantive information available regarding how family-planning decisions are made, or whether women have power over their own fertility. One informant suggested that especially in the case of a woman who had just married, older female relatives give advice and influence decisions in this regard, possibly more so than the husband (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000). Again, it would be impossible to generalise on this issue for San women with diverse living conditions and cultural practices.

Whether women give birth at clinics or at home depends in no small part on the distance to the nearest clinic with maternity services. The custom described for the Ju/'hoansi of the Nyae Nyae and Dobe area, where women retired into the veld to give birth all alone, seems to have been totally abandoned (Lee 1979). When a woman gives birth at home she is usually assisted by her mother or some other older female relative. In the field sites visited there were no specialised traditional midwives. In Schmidtsdrift most women said that since the maternity station at the local clinic had been closed, deliveries usually took place in the tents, i.e. their homes. It seems that the majority of births in rural San communities take place at home, though some women expressed a preference for delivering in hospital, especially when complications are expected.

Early sexual relationships and a high number of teenage pregnancies were noted by many informants. Although San informants were divided on whether early sexual activity was as common in the past, most adults do not condone it, especially because more often than not the girl's school career is terminated due to pregnancy (see Chapter 6). In two instances we were told how a female leader and a female teacher, in Mangetti Dune (West Tsumkwe) and Schmidtsdrift respectively, tried to convince sexually active school girls to go to the clinic to get contraception. In the Schmidtsdrift case the girls did not comply because they feared that other patients might tell their parents (Jennifer Hays, pers. comm.), and for similar reasons the girls at Mangetti were said to often miss their Depo Provera injections.

Most concern about teenage pregnancy was voiced in Schmidtsdrift, where informants estimated that at least 20 girls fell pregnant every year. Teachers felt that the parents did not discuss sex or family planning with their teenage children, and that such openness was needed especially regarding the taboo of girls accessing contraception.

At Schmidtsdrift the issue of teenage pregnancy also brought differences between the two language groups to the fore: !Xu girls were said to be impregnated by Khwe men, who later took no responsibility for either the young mother or the child – a reprimand which in all other sites is reserved for non-San men (see Chapter 8).

There was overall agreement among interviewees that non-San men took San women only as temporary distractions and hardly ever with a view to marrying them,⁶⁶ and that they took no responsibility for offspring resulting from such relationships. Some female interviewees in the Omaheke Region also condemned San women for seeking to improve their status by taking Herero boyfriends. They thought that San men made preferable partners because they did not usually shirk their responsibilities: “He won’t make you rich, but at least you’ll have somebody to share your suffering” (interview with Adeline Goagoses and Dina Kakora, Gobabis, 28 June 2000).

According to HU’s needs assessment, San in the Omaheke see a clear connection between interethnic relationships and sexually transmitted diseases. Several male interviewees stated that women were to blame for spreading STDs. They also thought that San raised in Herero families, as well as younger, promiscuous people, were likely to have STDs. Treatment sought for STDs was usually at the clinic, as there were said to be no herbal or other traditional remedies.

7.5 HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has become the most pressing health concern in southern Africa. With HIV infection rates between 20% and 30%, all three countries studied for this report are at the global pinnacle of infection rates.⁶⁷

It is difficult to discuss the extent and nature of the problem with special reference to San communities, as national statistics are not disaggregated according to ethnicity. Based on broad regional differentiations of statistical evidence and informed observations, however, it appears that HIV/AIDS does occur in San societies, but that at the time of writing (October 2000) it is less prevalent among San than it is among other residents of southern Africa (Nam; interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000; interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000). An exception to this general picture are the Kxoe of the Namibian Caprivi Region, where HIV/AIDS has been found to be as prevalent as in their neighbouring communities, which show very high infection rates. It appears that the HIV/AIDS prevalence among San is largely determined by the intensity of their interaction with neighbouring communities and the incidence of infection among such communities (see Nam).⁶⁸

There is abundant evidence that HIV/AIDS is a gender problem in southern African societies. This is so not in the sense that either women or men are significantly more affected, but because the underlying causes for the spread of the virus lie in distinct forms of gender relations. Statistical information on infection rates which is disaggregated according to gender shows that everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa roughly half of all HIV infections occur in females and half in males (UNDP 1997: 32); statistics from Botswana and Namibia confirm this trend (Datta et al. 1998: 70-71; Ipinge & LeBeau 1997: 72-73). If we look at a combination of the demographic attributes of gender and age, however, a more complex picture emerges: the statistics from everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that women become infected earlier than men. HIV/AIDS prevalence is highest in young women aged between 20 and 30 years, and in men aged 30-34 years (UNDP 1997: 31). Among the youngest cohort of reproductive age (15-19 years), the gender gap is most pronounced. In Botswana, for example, HIV prevalence in young women has been found to be almost ten times higher than in young men in the same age group (Datta et al. 1998: 71).

Over the past few years the trend in Africa has been that women are being infected with HIV at a faster rate than men. In part this reflects the inequalities in all aspects of economic and social life that women

⁶⁶ However, marriage-like relationships, albeit temporary ones, between San women and men of other ethnic backgrounds have been described for commercial farms (Sylvian 1999: 127).

⁶⁷ The infection rates and the “ranking” of the most affected countries vary from study to study and are also subject to variations over time. Nevertheless, despite the statistics not being altogether accurate as a result of the methods used to gauge prevalence, there is no doubt that South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are currently among the most severely affected countries in the world.

⁶⁸ In Namibia, for instance, the Omaheke Region has been less affected than most other parts of the country.

endure. Generally women are poorer than men because they have a lower labour force participation (UNDP 1997: 52-53). In sub-Saharan Africa, where heterosexual intercourse is responsible for most HIV infections, the vulnerability of very young women from poor backgrounds has been accredited to poverty which has pushed many into sexual relationships with older, wealthier men.

It is obvious that San women of all ages are a highly vulnerable group because of similar forms of sexual relations. San women of all age groups tend to engage in sexual relationships with male partners from other ethnic groups because of their relatively greater wealth and higher social status (see Chapter 8). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that San women sometimes enter such relationships at an extremely young age, in some cases as young as 11 years. Lastly, as a direct reaction to the epidemic, non-San men often prefer San women as casual partners because they are said to be “cleaner” (i.e. less promiscuous) than other women (see Chapter 4). These factors are collectively accelerating the spread of the virus in San communities, and particularly among women, despite such communities until recently having been less affected than their respective national societies.

Research conducted on behalf of HU in different Namibian San communities in the mid 1990s showed that very few San had an even remotely accurate understanding of HIV/AIDS, with most informants not being in the least concerned about it (Rudert 1995; HU n.d.). This can be expected to have changed somewhat over the past five years, but in the course of our own research in mid 2000 we still came across San who on being questioned claimed that they had never heard of the epidemic (group interview with women, Aasvoëlnes, 22 June 2000). At none of our field sites did any informant spontaneously mention HIV/AIDS when asked about health concerns.

The HU studies found that although some San knew that using condoms helps to prevent HIV infection, they were unpopular with both men and women. Although myths about condoms being unsafe are not peculiar to San – similar fears have been found in other communities in southern Africa (see e.g. Lebeau et al. 1999: 148-56) – there are some specific concerns. For example, HU research found in Tsumkwe District (Nyae Nyae) that San felt that the standard size condoms were “too big” for the Ju/'hoan men (Rudert 1995). Whether this is true or not, it indicates a need for tailor-made and culturally-sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention education campaigns in San communities.

In Namibia a linguist was contracted in 1996/97 by the Namibian-German AIDS Control Project – which is sponsored by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit* (German Technical Co-operation) (GTZ) – to develop educational materials for the Kxoe of West Caprivi (see Brenzinger 1996). This researcher has not been able to access enough information pertaining to this unique project to assess it in terms of gender sensitivity. The GTZ project did find, however, that adult women rather than men or adolescents had realised the necessity of making HIV/AIDS a community concern and they perceived the lack of appropriate information on HIV/AIDS within the community as a threat to the future of their children (ibid.: 9). This project continued until 1998, but as a result of the present volatile situation in the Caprivi Region it is no longer operational.

7.6 Alcohol abuse

The problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption pervade all layers of San society, and alcohol abuse is prevalent in quite different economic situations. The reasons given for drinking are usually not gender specific, and they mostly relate to using alcohol as a coping strategy in the all-too-familiar vicious cycle of poverty: a glass of *tombo* allows a person to forget his/her hunger, whereas his/her derisory wage will only buy an inadequate amount of food. Simultaneously, however, alcoholism is related to relatively high income, as is evidenced by the level of alcohol abuse in D'Kar, a village where San have better than average access to cash. Another example quoted was of the !Xoo employed at the Intu Afrika lodge near Mariental in southern Namibia: when they pay visits to their home area in the Omaheke Corridor (with money and alcohol), the entire community descends into a drunken stupor for a few days (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000). Among the relatively affluent Schmidts-drift population, alcohol abuse is likewise pervasive. Furthermore, alcoholism is “programmed in”

through the notorious practice of paying casual labourers in liquor or home-brewed beer, which is found in communal areas across Namibia and possibly in Botswana too.

Alcohol abuse certainly has gendered implications for women's health and psycho-social well-being: women are affected not only by their own drinking, but also by their men's drinking and often their alcohol-induced violence too (see Chapter 8). As mothers, women are also affected by the alcohol abuse of their teenage children. Female interviewees in Ghanzi District and Schmidtsdrift were greatly distressed about the latter, but felt powerless. They claimed that punishments, even beatings, had no lasting deterrent effect.

As for the comparative extent of women's and men's drinking, most San interviewed at our field sites thought that women and men drank equally, with a few male respondents even expressing the perception that women either drink greater quantities than men, or that women get drunk faster because of their physiological dispensation. A few male interviewees also stated indignantly that men today are forced to do their own laundry or other household chores because the women fail to perform these tasks when under the influence of alcohol (interview with Khanxlae Moelenyane, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000). Most observers did however note a positive correlation between access to cash and drinking patterns, which generally gives men a dubious edge over women; put blandly: "Men only drink more than women because they have more money" (interview with Wendy Viall, Windhoek, 3 September 2000).

A health professional in the Omaheke noted that in comparison with older women, fewer younger women were drinkers, but that young women often acquired the habit in time through their husbands: drinking is unquestionably a social pastime, and men would introduce their young wives to alcohol because "You cannot drink alone" (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000).

On occasion women have been found to be more vocal than men in speaking out against drinking (Renée Sylvian, pers. comm.), even when they themselves might have a problem with alcohol (Michael Daiber, pers. comm.). This could be ascribed to women having to forgo remittances if their husbands spend their pay on drink, and to the fact that they are likely to be on the receiving end of alcohol-induced violence.⁶⁹ But it is also women who are themselves drunk who become vulnerable to violence, in particular sexual violence: a case from Outjo was recounted where a heavily intoxicated Hai//om woman had fallen asleep outside a bar and was raped. Afterwards she could not even remember the face of the man (group interview with Hai//om women, Windhoek, 16 September 1999).

Men in particular seem to experience feelings of strength and power when they have had a drink, and their boasting – usually discouraged in most San societies – easily leads to fights. Women sense the effect that alcohol has on a man: "With alcohol, he is the boss" – the boss, one might add, over his wife also (group interview with Hai//om women, Windhoek, 16 September 1999). The psycho-social motivation of men also surfaces in two contrasting behaviour patterns of drinkers, as observed by Polly Wiessner in Nyae Nyae. Both testify to men's need to compensate for their low self-esteem:

One was the inclination of people to boast and have 'illusions of grandeur' or power ... This was often taken as a challenge by others, resulting in conflict. The other was to express feelings of rejection – that nobody loves, cares about, or gives them [sic]. This too could escalate into accusations against others and fights. Both of these expressions may stem in part from insecurity – at being unemployed, hungry, unable to produce and adequately give. (Wiessner n.d.: 24)

In the Omaheke, and elsewhere too, alcoholism and alcohol abuse are most prevalent in *lokasies* (low-cost housing townships) and larger villages in communal areas where San are a minority population and where alcohol is readily available (Nam). The economic options for San women here are largely limited to domestic work for Herero or Tswana households. Those not lucky enough to have a steady arrangement often have to rely on the odd day's laundry work, remunerated with as little as N\$5 in Talismanus, a predominantly Herero settlement in the Omaheke Region. The money is then sometimes taken straight to the *shebeen* (drinking venue). In some cases payment is even made in kind, i.e. directly in beer.

⁶⁹ To quote but one example: in a demographic survey at Tsumkwe, no less than 30% of the women interviewed had physical injuries from their recent involvement in drunken brawls (Wiessner n.d.: 25).

Another visible feature in these settlements is a sort of opportunistic prostitution whereby sexual favours are exchanged for beer.

In Schmidtsdrift alcohol abuse on the part of men and women of all ages, and even children, was of grave concern to interviewees. In the perception of many Schmidtsdrift residents, alcohol use and abuse had increased since the relocation from Namibia. Some female interviewees thought that one of the reasons for this was that people drank partly to combat boredom (interview with Awelina Chifako, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000). Young women were also said to “go with men” just to get a drink, and after payday teenage girls were said to hang around at the gate of the military camp in anticipation of soldiers who would take them shopping and drinking.

To this day San are paid only in alcohol by some communal farmers in northern Namibia and the Omaheke. On commercial farms the levels of drinking vary greatly. On some farms alcohol is banned during the week, while on others brewing takes place whenever sugar is available. Sylvian (1999: 277) notes that on more rationalised farms with a small labour force, farmers tend to try to enforce an alcohol ban in their workers’ compound and to closely monitor visitors who might bring in alcohol. Although the San workers resent this control, they appreciate that less alcohol means fewer violent fights. On “old-fashioned” farms neither the activities of labourers outside their working hours nor the frequent visitors are regulated. Here beer is brewed more openly and more copiously, with more fighting as a result.

In the Nyae Nyae area of former Bushmanland villages occasionally indulge in episodic bouts of drinking – when money is available to bring in alcohol from Tsumkwe, or when it is brewed on site or sold by Herero *shebeen* owners. These are sometimes followed by months of sobriety (Wiessner n.d.: 24).

In most instances beverages consumed are home-brewed,⁷⁰ though only very rarely by San households. San often do not have the resources or ingredients to produce beer, but it has also been argued that the sharing and reciprocity conventions among San would undermine the chances for profit if San were to sell to their own community (Gujadhur n.d.). As a result very few San women draw economic gain from alcohol production.⁷¹

The most dangerous homebrew bought at *shebeens* in Namibia is adulterated with toxic substances like pool cleaner, battery acid and other ingredients, used to make a brew more potent. These occasionally become literally lethal. In one incident on a farm in the Omaheke seven people (five women and two men) died slow and agonising deaths after imbibing *khadi*, a potent homemade liquor. The autopsies found that their livers, kidneys, lungs and brains had been affected (*The Namibian*, 15 March 2000). Brews that are only “slightly” poisonous leave the telltale sign of bright red lips (alcohol-burnt) – a common sight with women and even children in settlements such as Talismanus in the Omaheke.

To conclude, it is noteworthy that most San realise that alcohol threatens the very fabric of their society. This has also been noted in San forums like the *Indigenous People’s Consultation* in Shakawe in 1998, which resolved that “A strategy to deal with alcohol-related problems should be made by every San community. This problem must be dealt with rather than ignored.” (KDT & WIMSA 1999: 112)

7.7 Conclusions

San are affected by many health issues that result from their marginal situation in southern African societies. The effects of poverty, unhealthy living conditions and restricted access to healthcare facilities are compounded by self-destructive excessive drinking patterns. Women are in a vulnerable situation and are particularly affected in respect of a variety of reproductive health issues, including HIV/AIDS. Moreover, as women are – in line with the gendered division of labour – responsible for their children’s health as well as their own, the paucity of adequate health services certainly is a gender concern in San communities.

⁷⁰ In Schmidtsdrift commercial beer and wine was said to be consumed in larger quantities than home brews.

⁷¹ The Botswana study notes, however, that in Botswana’s Central District, brewing and selling of beer is an important means for women to earn an income (Bots). In Schmidtsdrift a few women also brewed and sold beer.

CHAPTER 8

GENDER, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

8.1 Introduction

Violence is one of the most salient features of contemporary San life. In its different guises violence dominates the intra-community relations of both male and female San as well as their relations with many “outsiders”. There are quite obvious differences, however, in how men and women experience violence. While little in-depth research has been conducted thus far on the topic of gender-based violence affecting San women, an exploratory research project – which was unique in that it was conducted and presented by a Namibian San woman – has shown that San women throughout southern Africa experience many forms of violence both inside and outside their communities. Elfriede Gaeses concludes on the basis of conversations with other San women that within San communities alcohol abuse, men’s jealousy, and their fear of losing respect in the presence of women who are better educated than themselves are the main reasons for violence committed by men. Violence against San women committed by other ethnic groups, however, seems to be linked to the belief that San are generally inferior and that San women, being the weakest members of their communities, are most easily abused (Gaeses 1998: 96).

In the absence of substantive prior research, the presentation in this chapter is primarily based on our own findings from our field sites. It investigates some of the most pertinent gender-related aspects of violence, in particular domestic violence and rape. The discussion focuses on two crucial questions that are of special significance for developing promising strategies to combat violence against San women:

- What does *gender-based* violence entail in the context of San in southern Africa?
- What is the relationship between alcohol abuse and violence?

Apart from the obvious instances of domestic violence and rape, the chapter also considers forms of gender-based *abuse* which do not easily fit the commonly understood definition of ‘violence’ as involving physical force, or at least the threat of its use. Here we focus on exploitative sexual relationships involving adult and young San women. The discussion will focus on abusive aspects of relationships between San women and non-San men, and in some cases indeed also San men, which are built on the greater social status and economic power that these men embody.

Lastly, attention will be given to the opportunities available to San women to seek solutions to problems of violence via state legal and law enforcement agencies, and in some cases via customary and informal structures, and to the obstacles they face when they attempt to do so.

8.2 Gender-based violence: a definition

Gender-based violence is defined by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as:

any act ... that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life. ... violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-

spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence against women perpetuated and condoned by the state. (As quoted in Bennett 2000: 4)

This definition covers an extensive range of abuses, and it is explicit about the sex of the survivors/victims of gender-based violence: they are female. The definition is not explicit regarding the sex of the perpetrators, who can be either male or female. Nevertheless there are implicit notions in the definition regarding who gets hurt and who causes the injury. Furthermore the definition implies what kind of rationalisations allow the abuse to exist. Both domestic and “public” (work, school, etc.) environments tend to become sites of gender-based violence when they rely on and affirm unequivocal, distinct and usually hierarchically organised perceptions of men and women (Bennett 2000: 4).

8.3 A violence-free past?

At all field sites visited for the purposes of this project we were faced with sad tales of frequent violent acts against women. While the nature and the extent of this violence varied, it is clearly a prominent feature of San experience throughout southern Africa.

The prevalence of gender-based violence in contemporary San communities is in stark contrast to the picture painted in earlier “Bushmen studies” literature, which emphasised that violence against women was very rare (Marshall 1976: 176-177), or that the relationships between men and women were “relaxed” (Draper 1975: 94). This is not to say that violent behaviour between men and women was unknown. Shostak’s (1981: 76, 223) recorded life history of the “traditional” !Kung woman Nisa, for instance, contains several moments of serious male violence perpetrated against women.

Overall, however, American anthropologist David Levinson found in his literature-based comparative cross-cultural study of family violence that “Bushman” society was one of only six societies worldwide (out of a sample of 90 non-Western societies from all continents) which had little or no family violence (Levinson 1989: 102-103).

These depictions of a largely violence-free environment were based on published research into hunter-gatherer societies in the Kalahari. These societies were relatively gender-egalitarian in the economic sphere and with respect to community decision-making, and they generally had sophisticated means of peaceful conflict resolution as well as easy access to divorce for both men and women (see Chapter 4). The foraging San thus conformed to Levinson’s conclusion that four factors taken together are strong predictors of prevalent violence against women in a society, and conversely that the absence of these factors predicts a largely violence-free social environment. According to Levinson (1989: 107), the factors associated with gender-based violence are:

- economic inequality between men and women;
- the use of physical violence to resolve conflict;
- male authority and control of decision-making in the house; and
- restrictions on women’s access to divorce.

It follows that we must assess what changes are responsible for the high incidence of gender-based violence in contemporary San communities: are some or all of the factors Levinson isolates responsible, or are the causes to be found elsewhere?

8.4 Domestic violence

Elfriede Gaeses (1998: 93) summarised the situation in respect of domestic violence as follows:

Domestic violence is common among San families in southern Africa. According to the women’s reports, they have been hit, stabbed or burned by their boyfriends and husbands. Often the men

were drunk, but it also happened that they beat the women because they did not follow orders to do or not to do something. Women have been hurt so badly that domestic violence is very painful and they believe that it could end in murder. My colleagues from Botswana and South Africa told me that domestic violence occurs frequently in the San communities of those countries. Alcohol abuse and sexual jealousy were the causes in most cases. ... Where San women have acted violently towards men within partnership, this was mostly in reaction to attacks by those men.

In keeping with Gaeses' depiction, at all field sites in Namibia, South Africa and Botswana domestic violence was reported to be prevalent. The extent and underlying causes seem to differ widely, however, and so the situation at each of the field sites deserves some detailed discussion.

8.4.1 Ghanzi District

In Ghanzi District domestic violence was mostly reported as a non-gendered phenomenon of "fighting" between men and women. It was reputed to be first and foremost a consequence of heavy drinking.⁷² Contrary to the depiction of violence-free domestic relations in the Kalahari in the literature (see above), two old women who had recently been removed from the CKGR to New Xade claimed that violent occurrences were nothing new. They explained that in the "old days", i.e. in their youth when they had lived in the central Kalahari, sexual jealousy had played a dominant role, as had "misunderstandings" between husbands and wives (interview at New Xade, 30 May 2000).

Unlike the rest of the informants in western Botswana, who asserted that it could be either the husband or the wife who usually started the fight, these two elderly women said also that fighting was always started by the men.

Unfortunately we could not collect sufficient data regarding non-spousal domestic violence such as that between adult siblings or between adult children and their parents, though a female San *kgosi* (headman/headwoman) in Ghanzi District mentioned cases of sons "fighting" with their mothers, which she attributed to young men's general proneness to violent behaviour (interview with Sophie Morris, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000).

It is difficult to ascertain without more extensive research whether or not the domestic violence in the San communities in Ghanzi District is predominantly gender-based violence in the sense of the CEDAW definition. Indications are, however, that domestic violence at that field site is not strongly gendered. The general picture suggests that the survivors/victims as well as the perpetrators can be either male or female. It appears that the changes which have challenged the earlier relatively equal gender relations among San in western Botswana (see Chapter 4 and, for example, Draper 1975, Loermans 1992 and Kent 1995) have not (as yet) resulted in forms of violence rooted in a wide gender power gap. This view was also confirmed by a development worker who had worked with the KDT at D'Kar for many years, and who suggested that the largely non-gendered nature of domestic violence was an indication of San women's relatively strong position in their relationships with men (Willemien le Roux, pers. comm.).

8.4.2 West Tsumkwe

The situation in West Tsumkwe is somewhat different to that in Ghanzi in that domestic violence there seems to be predominantly initiated by men. Women normally just "rail verbally" in a domestic dispute, though they were said to occasionally "hit back". A woman would only start a fight if drunk (interviews in different places, West Tsumkwe, June 2000), however, and some informants felt that women had no physical means of responding to male violence because they were "too weak to hit back" (interview with group of women, Grashoek, 23 June 2000).

The difference between Ghanzi and West Tsumkwe becomes obvious when we consider the rationalisations given for domestic violence (apart from the ubiquitous role of alcohol abuse). Although, as in

⁷² The links between alcohol abuse and violence are discussed below.

Ghanzi, sexual jealousy might be grounds for either spouse to start a fight (interview with group of women, Nhoma, 22 June 2000), there were some clearly gendered underlying reasons given too: men were said to beat their wives if angry with them for not doing their chores properly (interview with group of women, Omatako camp, 21 June 2000). Men might also beat women for being “cheeky” (“*stout*”) (interview with group of women, Kandou, 21 June 2000).

Indications are therefore that distinct perceptions of ‘men’ and ‘women’ are more pronounced and hierarchically organised in West Tsumkwe than in Ghanzi District. Men have apparently begun to develop a sense of entitlement to their wives’ deference and their own “right” to chastise them if they are not sufficiently compliant – a notion that is very common elsewhere in Namibia (see e.g. Becker & Claassen 1996). It is noteworthy that, unlike in other Namibian communities, particularly in the marginalised southern regions where the researcher has previously investigated domestic violence (*ibid.*), feelings on the part of males of frustration and marginalisation related to unemployment and poverty were *not* explicitly mentioned as causes of domestic violence. This does not necessarily mean that they do not play a role, however. It may as well be the case that San men in West Tsumkwe feel unable to live up to masculinist ideals, including the notion of males being breadwinners, which are dominant in contemporary Namibian society at large.

It must also be borne in mind that the San community in West Tsumkwe has come about as a product of the militarisation of San in the 1980s, with numerous male residents of the area being former SADF soldiers. The impact of the militarisation of San on gender relations in war-affected communities has been discussed above (see Chapter 4). While further research would be required to firmly establish how lasting the impact of military experience has been in West Tsumkwe, we must be alive to the possibility of a causative relationship in this regard. It might be revealing to know what has happened to these ex-soldiers in the interim, where they are today and what they are currently doing. It can be anticipated that ex-soldiers – who once earned a good wage – will feel deprived: as has been proven beyond doubt in masculinity studies in southern Africa and beyond (see e.g. Morrell 1998: 10), resorting to violent behaviour is a common reaction of men who feel threatened economically or politically, or in other social and cultural respects.

On the other hand, the self-perceptions of West Tsumkwe women of their being physically “too weak” to hit back are also interesting, as these women – who commonly carry children and very heavy bags of gathered food during long gatherings trips – are certainly not physically weak. There are also indications that in the foraging Ju/’hoan society, women were apparently quite actively involved in cases of less serious fighting, although not in deadly fights. “Traditional” Ju/’hoan women are said to have fought back when attacked, and “often gave as good or better than they got” (Lee 1979: 377). The trope of female “weakness” may well be an adaptation of dominant gender images in Namibia and the former SADF (see Chapter 4). These may be some of the reasons behind the perceptible trend towards a gender-based domestic violence at West Tsumkwe.

8.4.3 Schmidtsdrift

While little situation-specific written information on domestic violence in respect of the Namibia and Botswana field sites was available, several previous researchers have commented on the prevalence of gender-based domestic violence in Schmidtsdrift. Linda Waldman, an anthropologist from the University of the Witwatersrand, for example, observed in the mid 1990s that “it was fairly obvious that many of the women in the camp were regularly beaten by their husbands” (Waldman 1995: 5; see also SA). This is one of her case studies:

Case study: Maria Ngala

Maria Ngala wanted to go back to Namibia because her husband, Private Kambinda, and the children from his first marriage repeatedly beat her. Her friends commented that there was nothing she could do; she could not move away. She complained to her husband about his children, but he never spoke to them. If she had approached the army chaplain, the children would have been punished and then she would, in turn, be beaten by her husband. Maria was unable to defend

herself and commented that if her family had been in South Africa then she would not have felt so powerless. ... Recently Kambinda had poured boiling water over Maria's thighs and said that she should return to her family. Maria said that she did not have any family. Her husband responded that she should go, if she did not have family she could go elsewhere, as he did not want her there. (Waldman 1995: 10)

During our field research we were also repeatedly told of the high incidence of domestic violence at the Schmidtsdrift camp. In the words of a young woman – one of the few with a secondary school education – who co-ordinates the !Xu & Khwe women's textile project, domestic violence is “the biggest problem we have [at Schmidtsdrift]” (interview with Tumba Alfrino, Schmidtsdrift, 13 June 2000).⁷³

Domestic violence was said to occur among both the !Xu and the Khwe communities, affecting all age groups from teenagers to the elderly. It was furthermore stated that it was in almost every case a matter of men being violent towards women. Apparently the level of violence is at times extreme, and several cases have been reported in which domestic violence has resulted in a woman's death (interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000; interview with a group of Khwe women, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). Women were said to occasionally fight back, but no one suggested that a woman might also start a physical fight with her husband or boyfriend (interviews at Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

Sexual jealousy and alcohol abuse were reputed to be partly responsible for domestic violence, though drinking was mentioned far less frequently than at the other field sites. Instead there were many rationalisations which were linked to distinct, hierarchically organised perceptions of the characteristics and rights of men and the duties of women, for example that a man may react with violence if a woman comes home late or if she refuses to do what he tells her to do. This may happen even if a woman is tired and therefore refuses to obey the man's orders. A woman who “talks back” was said to put herself in danger, as does a wife who has nothing available when her man asks for food. Generally the feeling was that battery was in many cases triggered off by “small things” (individual and group interviews at Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

There is no doubt that in Schmidtsdrift domestic violence is gender-based. Usually the perpetrators are male and the survivors/victims are female. The rationalisations given were also clearly based on distinct, hierarchically organised perceptions of men and women. The factors which have been instrumental in creating the specific, highly unequal social and gender relations among the !Xu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift have been discussed in detail above (see Chapter 4). It is clear that the Schmidtsdrift community's immersion in military culture has created or at least reproduced male hierarchies (SA).

As illustrated by the case of Maria Ngala (see above), an additional element appears to have added to the dependency of the !Xu and Khwe women: some cannot count on the support of their own families or broader kin because they moved to South Africa as dependants of their soldier husbands while their relatives stayed behind in Namibia or Angola. Leaving a violent relationship can be extremely difficult under such circumstances.

In conclusion, the present social organisation at Schmidtsdrift clearly matches Levinson's four predictors for a society prone to family violence, namely gross economic inequality between men and women; male authority in domestic decision-making; difficulties for women to obtain divorce (because of their dependency); and a pervasive culture of violent conflict resolution (Levinson 1989: 107). Furthermore, cultural mechanisms such as support from members of the woman's family or the intervention of other community members that traditionally inhibited gender-based violence are now absent.

⁷³ A volunteer community psychologist who lived on the campsite for the first year of her contract found the atmosphere so “draining” due to the pervasive violence that she moved out to the town of Kimberley, more than 70 km east of Schmidtsdrift, and is now commuting daily. While still living at the camp, women in distress kept calling on her for support at all times of the day and night (interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000).

8.5 Violence, gender and alcohol

On the commercial farms today, domestic violence in the form of wife battering also appears to be more common than in the past. A researcher in Namibia's Omaheke Region was told by a Ju/'hoan woman why a husband would beat a woman:

If they don't understand each other. If her husband is not good and she is talking to him about it, then they will just fight. He is stronger and he will beat her. ... If she does something wrong ... like if her husband told her to do something for him and she said "no", or maybe she did not prepare food for him ... he will beat her. (As quoted in Sylvian 1999: 332)

Domestic violence is not restricted to spousal relationships, though, but also occurs between children and parents, especially between fathers and sons, which places considerable strain on the social fabric as showing respect for one's parents, and for one's elders in general, used to be an important principle of social relations among the Ju/'hoansi (Sylvian 1999: 280).

As is the case in other settings, domestic violence on the farms also seems to be alcohol-related, though some commercial farmers in Namibia and Botswana have banned alcohol consumption altogether (interviews with Ghanzi District farms, 29 May 2000). Even where there is no formal ban in place, alcohol is often difficult to come by on remote farms, and in the commercial farm setting drinking is thus usually confined to weekends and the Christmas holiday period. A group of Hai//om women from the Outjo farming district in northern Namibia told the researcher that alcohol abuse and related violence had become a very serious problem only when retrenched farm workers and their families congregated in the small town's location (group interview, Windhoek, 16 September 1999).

Although there is no doubt that alcohol plays a role in the violence that now occurs within most San communities, the precise relationships pertaining between heavy drinking, violence and gender require more detailed attention. A possible explanation for the relationship between alcohol and violence might be that a state of inebriation has become an acceptable condition for showing frustration and anger, which otherwise tend to be suppressed. Furthermore, cultural practices of dissolving conflict through talk and joking might not be effective when everyone is drunk and feelings escalate quickly (Sylvian 1999: 284). As an informant from Tsumkwe explained: "The fight was always there inside us. Liquor let it out." (As quoted in Marshall & Ritchie 1984: 95).

Alcohol abuse as such might be not the root cause of domestic violence so much as just one contributing factor acting in concert with other significant factors, such as the stresses of social and economic change. The effect of drinking may be to release suppressed feelings. That women are more often than not on the receiving end of domestic violence seems to be a result of contemporary unequal gender relations in many San communities. The differences between our three field sites in the degrees of gender-based domestic violence are remarkable, however, ranging from the near absence of gender-based violence in the settlements of Ghanzi District through to a trend towards gender-based violence in West Tsumkwe, and at the other end of the scale, the unmistakable manifestation of gender-based violence in Schmidtsdrift. These differences seem to be largely in line with the distinct histories and present situations of the different communities.

What is also remarkable, however, is the open admission – even among the clearly male-dominated !Xu and Khwe communities – that not too infrequently women "hit back".⁷⁴ Indications are therefore that San women may have more resilience in the face of domestic violence than other southern African women.

⁷⁴ Such open admission of physical violence on the part of women is very unusual among other Namibian communities (see Becker & Claassen 1996).

8.6 Rape

Elfriede Gaeses (1998: 94) found that rape is a fairly common experience among San women:

The women interviewed defined 'rape' as the situation in which a man (including a husband) has sex with a woman without her permission. None of them have been raped, but all of them have heard about rape cases. The women from west Bushmanland [West Tsumkwe] and the Omaheke Region knew San rape victims personally. The women from the Omaheke reported that San men, and men of other ethnic groups, raped San women.

Our research confirmed that rape might be both an intra- and an extra-community occurrence. In both Ghanzi District and West Tsumkwe we heard of some rape cases involving San men, and of others involving non-San men (interview, Ghanzi District, May 2000; interview, West Tsumkwe, June 2000). As a result of the inadequacy of the available statistics, it is difficult to gauge the frequency of rape or the ratio of instances involving San men to those involving non-San men. As is so often the case with rape, the proportion of actual cases being reported to the police and other state institutions is very low (see below).

In addition there seems to be a taboo attached to admitting that rape takes place within San communities. At Schmidtsdrift most female and male interviewees readily spoke about the prevalence of domestic violence, but both men and women denied the occurrence of rape within their community, or claimed that it was very rare. One Khwe leader maintained that "it is not in our culture" (interview with Nicolaas Tenda, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). When the researcher, having been alerted to the fact that intra-community rape – including cases of brutal gang rape – was not infrequent (interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000), approached the issue differently, however, a group of !Xu women openly discussed the problem of extra-marital and marital rape (interview with group of !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000).

Rape is in its essence a gendered phenomenon. In the vast majority of cases it is men who rape and women who get raped. That rape is essentially rooted in attempts to assert power and dominance rather than in sexual libido has long been asserted (see e.g. Brownmiller 1975). It has also been shown that in many instances sexual violence constitutes an important "war weapon" in armed or civil conflicts which is used to "keep the balance of society – or, from a woman's perspective, the imbalance of society" (Ashworth G, *Of Violence and Violation: Women and Human Rights*, London, Change 1985, as quoted in Honwana 2000: 7).

Acts of sexual violence committed by non-San men against San women can thus also be understood in terms of attempts to keep the "Bushmen" in their place as a marginalised rural underclass. This is suggested by cases reported by Elfriede Gaeses (1998: 94) of Herero and Owambo rapists who put bottles in their victims' vaginas (an especially humiliating act). It is even more obvious and explicit in the 1997 case of an 18-year-old Kxoe female learner from West Caprivi who was subjected to attempted rape by two male Mbukushu students in her school hostel room (see also Chapter 6). Two fellow female Kxoe learners came to her rescue. Upon seeing this the attackers "unleashed a volley of insults" at the Kxoe Chief Kippie George, declaring, "You Bushmen will never have a headman, you are just dogs."⁷⁵ (*The Namibian*, 5 June 1997)

8.7 Abusive relationships

The infamous "sugar daddy" phenomenon whereby older, relatively wealthy men get young, usually school-going girls to have sex with them in exchange for "gifts" in cash or kind is a common phenomenon in many African societies. In the case of San communities, however, ethnicity rather than age differentials seems to play a significant role. San women of all ages are often victimised through their

⁷⁵ At the time of the event, the long-smouldering conflict between the Kxoe Chief and Mbukushu Chief Erwin Mbambo regarding the recognition of an independent Kxoe leadership structure had just come to a head.

involvement in abusive and exploitative sexual relationships. The overwhelming majority of these relationships are with non-San men, though at least in the case of Schmidtsdrift they were also found to occur within the San community. All these relationships are temporary, and range from a casual sexual encounter in exchange for some drinks to temporary “marriages”.

Reports of San women who occasionally “sell” their bodies for a few drinks bought for them by the man in question come primarily from the resettlement camps and communal areas of the Omaheke Region in eastern Namibia (Suzman 2000: 22; Sylvian 1999: 129-130). These women are certainly not professional prostitutes, as they only exchange sexual services for a few beers on an occasional basis.⁷⁶ Whereas this type of exchange sex in the Omaheke usually involves San women and non-San men, similar casual encounters at Schmidtsdrift often involve San men as well. Normally the men in question are soldiers who earn a fair salary through their employment in the SANDF. Especially on pay day, young women hang around the gate of the camp hoping for a soldier to pick them up and buy them some drinks and clothes in exchange for sex (interview with Joan Ryan, Kimberley, 14 June 2000).

Women at Schmidtsdrift also complained that many husbands spent their earnings derived from their employment as soldiers or farm labourers on their young unmarried girlfriends, i.e. temporary exchange relationships which involve young San women (usually of the !Xu community) and San men (often of the Khwe community) (interview with group of !Xu women, Schmidtsdrift, 16 June 2000). Indeed men from the Schmidtsdrift camp also have established temporary relationships based on the exchange of sex for gifts in cash or kind with women from the Griqua communities in the vicinity. Some of these “outside” women seem to be professional prostitutes (Waldman 1995: 14-15).

The difference between the situation at Schmidtsdrift and that in other San communities is rooted in the relative affluence and social status of the Schmidtsdrift men (see Chapter 5), who have even become attractive to “outside” women. In all other cases inter-ethnic relationships were reported to normally involve San women and non-San men.

However, many women of the San communities throughout southern Africa tend to engage in relationships with black non-San men who are perceived to be richer and hence more desirable than San men.⁷⁷ This happens regularly despite the San women’s awareness that in all probability the man will eventually leave her worse off than she was before (interview with Sophie Morris, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000).

A special form of temporary relationship seems to have developed on the commercial farms in the Omaheke where San women become involved in marriage-like “*liefmeid*” (literally “love-servant”) arrangements with farm workers of different ethnic background, usually Owambo (Sylvian 1999: 127; see also Chapter 4). Temporary liaisons of San women with non-San construction workers have also been reported for the resettlement camps in the Omaheke (Renée Sylvian, pers. comm.), and for the West Caprivi area where Kxoe girls of as young as 11 have been taken as “brides” by non-Kxoe workers (*The Namibian*, 6 June 1997).

These relationships often leave the San women vulnerable to abandonment and poverty, particularly in cases where they become pregnant. At the Ghanzi field site San women constantly complained about non-San men who fathered children with San women but neither paid maintenance nor supported the mothers in looking after their offspring in any other way, as San men would have done (interviews in Ghanzi District, May 2000). In Schmidtsdrift, however, the same accusations levelled against non-San men elsewhere were made against the Khwe men who father babies with !Xu women (interviews in Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

⁷⁶ This is not a San-specific form of sex-for-gifts exchange and is a common phenomenon in urban locations throughout Namibia, involving women and men from different ethnic backgrounds (see Becker & Claassen 1996 and Becker 2000b).

⁷⁷ In one instance, however, two female San interviewees (an employee and a board member of a Namibian San organisation) were critical of this practice, suggesting that these relationships were not only bound to be disadvantageous to the San women concerned (see below), but also that such women “showed disrespect to their own culture” (interview with Dina Kakora and Adeline Goagoses, Gobabis, 28 June 2000).

Provided they are between consenting adults, such relationships are not strictly speaking a matter of gender-based violence. Nevertheless, due to the economic and political context of many San women's lives – their poverty and marginalisation on the grounds of both ethnicity and gender – they may indeed become “a form of economic and sexual servitude” (Sylvian 1999: 83).

8.8 Abuse and discrimination in institutions

Institutional settings where San women are likely to suffer insensitive behaviour and abuse are public offices and facilities in general, and in particular institutions which (theoretically) offer redress for abuse, namely governmental and community-based law enforcement institutions.

Although discrimination in such institutions is not always blatantly abusive, it is nevertheless humiliating. Elfriede Gaeses (1998: 95) lists examples:

In public places such as post offices, clinics, hospitals and Home Affairs offices, San women have frequently experienced discriminatory treatment. They have been ignored, they have had to wait longer than others for service, they have been addressed in an unfriendly and loud voice, and they have not been given information or explanations that they need.

Gaeses, a Hai//om community worker, also states that typically in these environments San men are taken slightly more seriously than San women (ibid.).

Perpetrators of maltreatment in institutions are by no means all male: a case in point is the verbal abuse that some nurses and sisters have meted out to both San women and San men (see Chapter 7). In many clinics the personnel are seen as arrogant, and some San have been deterred by previous negative experiences from seeking medical attention for all but the most severe illnesses.

8.9 Seeking recourse

Very few cases of gender-based violence and abuse are reported to the police and other institutions. Gaeses (1998: 97) gives a number of reasons why her interviewees declined to report domestic violence or rape – not all of them directly linked to a lack of confidence in the police or other institutions. The reasons given related to their dependent status (women are said to be afraid to lose their husbands or boyfriends)⁷⁸ and to poverty (San women in rural areas often cannot afford transport to the nearest police station).

On the other hand, complaints abound about law enforcement agencies failing to deliver, particularly regarding police inaction in rape cases and the ineffectiveness of magistrates with regard to enforcing maintenance payments by fathers for their children.

8.9.1 Police

At least in Namibia and Botswana, the fact that violence is rarely reported is in part a consequence of well-founded perceptions that institutions tasked with handling such cases are part of the problem rather than the solution: police stations are nearly always staffed by (predominantly male) members of non-San ethnic groups who may out of a sense of ethnic solidarity side with members of their own group rather than with a San victim of abuse.⁷⁹ In the case of !Xoo women from Namibia's Omaheke Corridor area who claimed they were assaulted by Herero farmers when they told them that they had impregnated

⁷⁸ A disconcerting note was also struck by a female Ju/'hoan delegate from Nyae Nyae to the *First African Indigenous Women's Conference*, who explained that women were aware that “a future husband could be even worse” (Tsisabe & Viall 1998: 91).

⁷⁹ In independent Namibia, at least, ethnically-based prejudices and tensions have been widely reported for the general population (see e.g. Becker & Bruhns 1998).

them (*The Namibian*, 11 June 1998), the assumption is probably not too far-fetched that an Otjiherero-speaking policeman was unlikely to have handled the charge that was laid in an unbiased manner.

There appears to be a general perception that San women who want to bring charges are not taken very seriously at many police stations, though this varies depending on the attitude of the individual officers concerned and other circumstances. An interviewee from a communal area in the Omaheke reported that the local police station tended to ignore San women who turned up in an obviously inebriated state, whereas in other instances sober complainants had received help and women in need of medical attention had even been taken to hospital (interview with Dina Kakora and Adeline Goagoses, Gobabis, 28 June 2000).

Gaeses (1998: 97) states that in some instances officers failed to lay charges, reasoning that a woman's complaint was her own affair. A female representative of the Corridor community in southern Omaheke quoted in a national newspaper claimed: "We and our daughters are undergoing very serious abuses [by Herero farmers] that are tantamount to rape, but when we lay charges [with] the Police nothing is done." (*The Namibian*, 11 June 1998) When asked by the journalist to react to such allegations the responsible constable maintained that no discrimination against the !Xoo community was practiced.

Many instances have been reported where police failed to follow up on charges (Gaeses 1998: 97). A Ju/'hoan woman from Nyae Nyae noted that an abusive relationship could even deteriorate if the woman went to the police: if any action at all ensued, the police might lock up the perpetrator for the night, but the next morning the woman could expect the homecoming of a "very angry" husband (Tsisabe & Viall 1998: 91).

A rather convoluted case of rape in the Omaheke involving an elderly Ju/'hoan woman and a Herero man points either to inefficiency or to incompetence on the part of the police:

A case of rape had been reported to the local police station in Otjinene by the San woman's grandson. Some months later, however, no criminal proceedings had been started. A female San community member discussed the case at a workshop in Gobabis with other San, and decided to contact the Gobabis police. A police constable was dispatched to the remote area, only to find the rape victim herself declaring that she had no interest in pursuing the case, and that she wanted to withdraw the charge. It turned out that the woman had been "compensated" through a customary court ruling, which had sentenced the Herero man to paying the woman two head of cattle, which he did. The woman clearly feared that legal proceedings would endanger her new livestock possessions. The police took no further action on account of the withdrawal of the charge. (Piteimo Hainyanyula, pers. comm.)

In many rural areas a major obstacle for San women is the need to pay for lifts in order to get to the nearest police station. This is exacerbated by poor transport facilities at many rural police stations, rendering effective investigations very difficult indeed. A case in point is Schmidtsdrift, whose nearest police station is 35km away. Respondents there did not voice the same scepticism regarding the neutrality and efficiency of the police heard elsewhere (possibly because they had had little contact with the police since their arrival in South Africa), but rather stated that the situation in respect of domestic violence might improve if they had easier access to the police, preferably within their community.

8.9.2 Other institutions and community dispute resolution

In the absence of adequate policing, women have at times sought help through community structures. All three areas visited for the purpose of this study have community structures under San leadership. For different reasons, however, these institutions do not appear to be very useful in cases of violence and abuse.

The recently established West Tsumkwe Traditional Authority has only just begun to institute customary law and court procedures. During our research in Mangetti, the area's largest settlement, a list of fines was presented – apparently given to office-bearers of traditional authorities at a workshop in Rundu –

which included set amounts (of livestock or cash) for cases of rape and other violence. At the time of writing no cases had been tried (interview with Sara Sungu, Mangetti Dune, 23 June 2000). Some years ago the researcher was informed of the existence of a village council in Mangetti comprising the local headmen, police representatives and ministry officials, which had been set up to deal with local conflicts. If still in existence, however, this structure is not mentioned as one for abused women to turn to.

In Botswana, Government-appointed headmen or headwomen (*kgosi*) are a well-established institution, complete with three “local”, mostly non-San policemen or women in each settlement. The predominantly San settlements in Ghanzi District now also have San *kgosi* who are entitled to hold court (see Chapter 10). Two of the three San *kgosi* who we tried to interview were not at all helpful, with one completely refusing to speak to us and the other giving us obviously inaccurate information. However Sophie Morris, the female San *kgosi* in Chobokwane, said that she did not feel empowered to really deal with cases such as non-payment of maintenance by fathers because neither the non-San nor the San members of her community respected her (interview with Sophie Morris, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000).

From a countrywide perspective, the actual chances of women gaining redress for abuse through Botswana’s customary courts are even worse. The *kgotla* (customary court) is notorious for being a “male affair” even when gender-based discrimination is not at stake. Even in D’Kar – with its large Nharo population and strong community organisation (see Chapter 11)⁸⁰ – San women who speak in a *kgotla* meeting (let alone bring a complaint) were deemed “very brave indeed” (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000). An anthropologist conducting research with a group of *Sarwa* (i.e. San) women living in a Tswana village in Tswapong (Central District) notes that “a woman alone, and more so a ‘Sarwa’ woman or a ‘Sarwa’ youth ... does not even approach the public area of the *kgotla*” (Motzafi-Haller 2000: n.p.). Her female respondents headed their own households and had no immediate male kin in the village – the fact that they lacked the legal and social guardianship of fathers and adult brothers meant that these women were effectively barred from access to social institutions that could protect their few rights as unmarried mothers (ibid.).

In Schmidtsdrift the !Xu and Khwe councils deal with cases of domestic violence. According to male leaders of the two communities and their respective councils, they regularly hold court and deal successfully with such cases (interviews with Mario Mahongo and Nicolaas Tenda, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). On the other hand, the women of both communities generally expressed strong doubts about the effectiveness of these community-based institutions. According to !Xu and Khwe women, many male perpetrators of abuse ignored and occasionally violently defied the courts. It was reported, for instance, that perpetrators of domestic violence might refuse to comply with an order to attend a council hearing. Such men would argue along the lines of “Why me? Everyone is doing it.” Some women also questioned the leadership qualities of some male leaders and their gender sensitivity (interviews at Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

It appears that the situation has not improved much since the earlier years of the San settlement at Schmidtsdrift when Waldman (1995: 16-21) reported detailed case studies of dispute resolution. She also concluded that the “judicial process always favoured men and soldiers above women and dependants”: in council meetings men were allowed to present their side of the conflict in lengthy detail,⁸¹ whereas women typically only responded to direct questions. The researcher interpreted women’s behaviour as a clear lack of faith in the council’s efficacy, and concluded that none of the existing structures (whether council-, military- or church-based) provides a mechanism appropriate for dealing with women’s grievances. This view is consistent with our own more recent research.

In conclusion, the present conflict resolution structures do not seem to be well equipped to deal with violations of women’s human rights, gender-based violence or abuse.

⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the local chief is a Tswana.

⁸¹ Waldman (1995: 21) observed that men sought to present themselves as good and decent. During council session they spoke of themselves as men who were reasonable and who spoke to their wives before beating them. In addition they said they did not drink and did not wish their wives to swear (Waldman 1995: 21).

8.10 Conclusions

The discussion of violence against San women has shown that violence is rife and that it takes many different shapes, not all of which are gender-based. The differences between various communities are glaring, and largely a consequence of other social characteristics. Most prominent among those are the varying degrees of gender inequality. Other social differentials are also significant, however, including those which might be relevant in connection with “outsiders”. For example, extreme levels of impoverishment might increase the incidence of exploitative sexual relationships. Internal stratifications based on relative wealth or ethnic differences may also be significant, as is illustrated by the example of the importation of sex-for-gifts exchange relationships at Schmidtsdrift.

Alcohol abuse – which has often been singled out as the main underlying cause of violence against women – is a major contributing factor. It must be emphasised, however, that this problem cannot be dealt with in isolation.

It appears that at present there are no satisfactory avenues for abused San women to seek redress. In many instances, the current approaches of state institutions and individual officials seem to aggravate problems rather than provide solutions. The communities’ own conflict resolution structures, on the other hand, appear to be too weak and/or “manned” by community leaders who lack the necessary gender sensitivity.

CHAPTER 9

POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO ADDRESS SAN GENDER CONCERNS

9.1 Introduction

Of late the field of gender and development has attracted attention and generated concern in southern Africa. In September 1997 the Southern African Development Community (SADC) committed itself in the *Declaration on Gender and Development* it adopted to establishing an institutional framework for advancing gender equality and ensuring that gender is taken into account in all SADC sectoral initiatives. In early 1998 a SADC Gender Unit was established, headed by a prominent legal academic and gender activist from Botswana.⁸² SADC initiatives, however, can provide only a broad policy framework. Policies pertaining to gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate development initiatives involving San communities need to be designed within national gender and minorities policy frameworks.

Namibia, Botswana and South Africa have highly divergent policies on both minorities and gender. The policies are derived from the three countries' political histories within the southern African region. This chapter will give very brief summaries of the essential features of the respective national policies on minorities. More detailed information on the countries' minorities policies can be found in the reports on the country studies conducted for this regional assessment (Nam; SA/AngZam/Zim; Bots). The focus here is on the national policies regarding gender, how these policies take the situation of women belonging to minority groups into account, and how they affect San communities in particular. Selected non-governmental initiatives from the three countries are also discussed.

9.2 Namibia

9.2.1 Minority policies

The Namibian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status. In Article 23(2) it further makes provision for affirmative action, i.e. "legislation providing directly or indirectly for the advancement of persons within Namibia who have been socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged by past discriminatory laws or practices, or for the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalances in the Namibian society arising out of past discriminatory laws or practices ...". Affirmative action has come to be regarded as the panacea that will redress the effects of South African apartheid colonialism. Thus in Namibia nothing stands in the way of assigning programmes of special assistance to marginalised sub-groups of the population, including the country's San.

In practice, however, fulfilling this commitment has proved problematic in the face of competing interests and demands. If the Namibian Government were to devote a special plan of action and separate funds to the relatively small number of Namibian San, the large numbers of other Namibians who are in need of assistance might feel alienated. The Government cannot run the risk of this large political constituency feeling that San are receiving special attention and extra funds at their expense (Suzman pers. comm.).

⁸² Before taking up her appointment Athaliah Molokomme was a senior lecturer in Law at the University of Botswana and also the executive director of the national women's organisation called *Emang Basadi*.

The Namibia country report concludes that Namibia has some policies that are appropriate and others that are inappropriate to San needs. The researcher commends in particular the Namibian Government's commitment to participatory development, the devolution of leasehold rights in resettlement areas and the prioritisation of San development. He cautions, however, that thus far these commitments have largely been on paper only and states that "in many instances the Namibian Government's dealings with San have been in contravention of stated policy" (Suzman pers. comm.). In many instances this appears to be a consequence of personal prejudice rather than official strategy.

9.2.2 Policies on gender

"Gender equality" has played a prominent part in Namibian national political discourse since the country achieved its belated political independence in 1990 (see Becker 2000a). The Namibian Constitution prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of sex, but it goes beyond this simple equality provision by making explicit provision for affirmative action for women (Article 23(c)). Namibia's supreme law furthermore specifies the "enactment of legislation to ensure equality of opportunity for women" as one of the "Principles of State Policy" (Article 95). The provisions of the Constitution are backed by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the Namibian Parliament ratified in 1992. According to Article 144 of the Namibian Constitution, the general rules of international agreements binding upon Namibia form part of the law of Namibia. It follows that the provisions of CEDAW apply in Namibia.

National machinery for the promotion of gender equality

Bureaucratic structures aimed at the promotion of gender equality were created shortly after Namibian independence, and more recently a National Gender Policy has been adopted. The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) in the Office of the President was established in August 1990. During the first few years of its existence the DWA remained a small body with only a handful of Windhoek-based employees. Executive members of the DWA initially complained about a lack of power, and specifically demanded a budget allocation to the department and representation in the Cabinet (Becker 1995: 274-755). Since the financial year 1992/93 an annual budget has indeed been allocated to the DWA, and since September 1996 it has had a seat in the Cabinet. In the latter half of the 1990s the DWA also began appointing officials responsible for "women's affairs" in the country's 13 administrative regions. In March 2000 the DWA was reconstituted as the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare.

National Gender Policy

In 1994 the DWA established "gender sectoral committees" made up of representatives of governmental and non-governmental agencies tasked with developing specific policies and plans of action to improve the situation in fields such as law, education, decision-making, gender-based violence and the role of the girl-child. These efforts were directed towards the drafting of a national gender policy document.

In November 1997 the Namibian Government adopted its National Gender Policy. The policy was complemented in early 1998 by the first National Gender Plan of Action (1998-2003), which translates the policy into specific measures. These documents currently provide the basis of the Namibian State's gender policies. The policy document lists gender policy measures for fields such as poverty and rural development, education and training, reproductive health, violence against women and children, economic empowerment, power and decision-making, information and communication, the environment, legal affairs and the girl-child. It further provides for monitoring mechanisms to oversee the implementation of the policy, though these had yet to be established at the time of writing (October 2000).

Gender and political representation

The Namibian legislation governing local elections makes provision for affirmative action for female candidates, and some 40% of all members of city, town and village councils are women. In the absence

of statutory affirmative action requirements for the national and regional legislatures, 19.2% of the members of the National Assembly, the first house of Parliament, are women. This compares well with the 12.7% of female parliamentarians internationally. On the other hand, Namibia's Cabinet includes only three female ministers (those in charge of Health and Social Services; Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation; and Women Affairs and Child Welfare) and the female Director-General of the National Planning Commission. The second house of Parliament, the National Council, is still a male domain, including only two female deputies out of a total of 26 members (Becker 2000a). This reflects the near absence of women in regional as opposed to local and national politics. Only a handful of women have been elected to the regional councils, and just one of the thirteen regional governors is a woman.

Affirmative action in traditional authorities

Namibia has also made legislative efforts to improve gender balances in traditional authorities, though the provisions made in Traditional Authorities Act No. 17 of 1995 are of quite a general nature, with no stipulation regarding a minimum level of women's representation or any enforcement or monitoring mechanisms. However, Article 10(1)(g) of this Act defines the promotion of women to positions of traditional leadership as one of the functions, powers and duties of traditional authorities. While the terms of the Act are therefore not very precise, it nevertheless *requires* traditional authorities to take initiatives to enhance the participation of women in traditional leadership structures.

On the other hand, the Act unequivocally states that the qualifications for the designation of traditional leaders rest entirely with the traditional community in question, and that designation shall occur in accordance with the respective community's customary laws (Article 4(2)). Prescriptive requirements are thus not possible, as this would constitute an inroad into the community's autonomy regarding the selection of its traditional leaders.

It follows from this stipulation that affirmative action in traditional authorities depends on the gender attitudes prevailing in the communities themselves.

Non-governmental initiatives

Although Namibia has a range of NGOs which are committed to gender equality, there has been little co-ordination between them. Many work only within their specific environment, e.g. as "gender desks" of trade unions or student organisations, or concentrate on specific issues such as gender-based violence or the media. In 1999, however, a network was established with the explicit aim of promoting gender equality in Namibian politics. Apart from running media campaigns, the Women's Manifesto Network has provided training workshops in leadership and political skills for women in all Namibian regions. These were particularly geared towards female local and regional councillors.⁸³ It appears that for the first time, success is meeting the efforts being made to empower Namibian women who have become representatives at the local and regional levels.

It must be noted that the Namibian Women's Manifesto explicitly states that the "human rights of all women ... need to be ensured, including ... women in marginalised ethnic groups" (*The Namibian Women's Manifesto 1999*: 8).

Gender policies and San communities

Although Namibia's achievements in the field of gender policies are quite remarkable, they have not yet extended to San communities. Many reforms, for example the Married Persons' Equality Act, No. 1 of 1996, which only applies to civil legal marriages, have not been formulated with the most marginalised sections of the population in mind. Nevertheless, judging from informal discussions the researchers

⁸³ The Women's Manifesto Network involves most relevant NGOs. Notably, however, the Namibia National Women's Organisation (NANAWO), which is very close to the ruling party, and SWAPO's own women's wing, the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC), have remained outside the network.

had with male and female members of different San communities, many San, like other Namibians, do have some awareness of gender equality being a goal to be striven for in “the new Namibia”.

Despite the limited practical impact that gender policy documents have had to date, they do consider the special needs of marginalised communities. Under the heading “Gender, poverty and rural development”, the National Gender Policy (Article 3.5.8) requires the Namibian Government to “introduce measures to integrate men and women living in poverty and socially marginalised groups into productive employment and [the] economic mainstream.” The National Gender Plan of Action also makes specific mention of the “poorest of the poor” as a target group for actions taken in the field of gender, poverty and rural development. These documents do not single out the San communities or any other group on the basis of ethnicity, but they are implicitly targeted through these inclusive terms.

It is not easy to gauge the effects of the affirmative provision in the Traditional Authorities Act, but this has been pointed out in several training programmes for the newly established traditional authorities of Namibian San, and every one of the six San traditional authorities has made at least some efforts to include women among its office-bearers.

That little happens in practice to find gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate solutions in fields such as education, health and rural development for Namibian San seems in many instances to be due to logistical problems (e.g. a lack of transport) and a lack of personnel and other resources rather than to ethnic prejudice or a lack of good will, although the former certainly also plays a role at the individual level. There have been occasional attempts to address San gender issues, however, such as Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC) Deputy Minister Clara Bohitile’s call on San communities to discontinue the practice of early marriage in order to promote the educational opportunities of girls, though these have not always been entirely appropriate (see Chapter 6). As various documents show, there is certainly a degree of awareness among relevant government officials and NGO gender activists of the needs and rights of female members of marginalised communities.

9.3 South Africa

9.3.1 Minority policies

The South African Constitution of 1996 prohibits discrimination on the basis of, among other things, race, gender, ethnic or social origin, language, culture, religion or sexual orientation. The process of South African social, political and economic transformation since the first democratic elections in 1994 has placed much emphasis on affirmative action policies in different fields to render South African institutions – ranging from the public service management cadre to pillars of the economy – more representative of the country’s population.

Whereas under apartheid San were simply classified as “coloureds”, their languages, land and cultural rights have been recognised by the ANC Government. The South Africa country report for this regional assessment commends the settlement of the San land claims at the KGNP for the †Khomani San and at Platfontein for the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe San, as well as the South African Government’s track record on San human rights. The researcher (Robins 2001 (November 1999 draft): 53) concludes that these developments have:

... created a precedent that could have significant implications within the broader southern African region. Neighbouring countries will no doubt have taken note of South Africa’s sensitive and progressive policies towards Khoi and San communities.

It appears, however, that the Central Government’s commitment is not always fully shared by governmental agencies at the provincial level. The long delay of the final resettlement of the !Xu and Khwe, for instance, has been partly blamed on the Northern Cape Provincial Government’s structures. Informants at Schmidtsdrift regretted that the relations between the province’s ANC Government as well as sections

of its population on the one hand, and the Schmidtsdrift San on the other, had at times been quite tense (interviews at Schmidtsdrift and Platfontein, June 2000).

9.3.2 Policies on gender

The post-1994 South African policies on gender have been widely hailed. Nowhere in Africa do women have more clearly spelled-out legal rights than in South Africa (Connell 1998: 196). The South African Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, and uniquely, sexual orientation, as well as pregnancy and marital status. The Bill of Rights allows for affirmative action to redress past discrimination. Women are also strongly represented in South African politics.⁸⁴ Several most pertinent reforms have been adopted by the South African legislature in recent years, such as the decriminalisation of abortion and progressive reforms in areas such as domestic violence and child maintenance. Within a year of taking office the democratic South African Government endorsed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

National machinery to promote gender equality

Prior to 1994 there was no national machinery for the advancement of women, but this was established within the first few years of the new democratic dispensation. Since 1997 a package of institutionalised arrangements has been in place that was created to deal with gender issues. Gender concerns are being channelled inside the Government through the Office on the Status of Women (OSW), and in civil society through the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE).⁸⁵ Within Parliament there is also the multi-party Parliamentary Women's Group and the Joint Standing Committee for Improving the Quality of Life and Status of Women (JCIQLSW).

The intention behind this set of institutions is to ensure that gender concerns are integrated or "mainstreamed" into the everyday tasks of the Government, i.e. procedures, policy formulation and service delivery (Hassim 1999). A conscious decision was taken to not have a separate ministry dealing with women's affairs. Instead, the main focus of the gender institutions in South Africa is to incorporate gender concerns into all policy areas, i.e. health, education, finance, defence, trade and industry, and so on. It is hoped that ministerial gender units will ensure that each line ministry will take responsibility for addressing gender issues in its policies and programmes (Baden et al. 1999). A major initiative in this regard has been the Women's Budget Initiative, a joint effort of the JCIQLSW and NGOs, which has disaggregated the budget votes of all ministries and has analysed the spending on women (both direct and indirect). This project has therefore addressed the key determinant of the Government's level of commitment to gender equality, namely the extent of budgetary allocations (Hassim 1999).

The OSW is located in the Office of the President at the national level, and in the offices of the various premiers at the provincial level. Their tasks include co-ordinating the gender units in the line ministries and in the nine provinces.

The number of OSW staff is small and appointments are at a "fairly low level" (Hassim 1999). At the national level the OSW consists of a director and an administrator only, while provincial appointments are at the level of deputy director. Concerns have consequently been raised that "these posts carry little formal power to force the directors-general of government departments (those formally charged with implementing policy), let alone ministers, to take account of gender concerns" (Hassim 1999).

⁸⁴ The representation of women in politics is far higher in South Africa than in most long-established democracies, with the sole exception of the Scandinavian countries.

⁸⁵ The CGE is one of the six state institutions to support constitutional democracy as provided for in the 1996 Constitution. Its aim is to promote gender equality and to advise and make recommendations to Parliament or any other legislative body with regard to any laws or proposed legislation affecting gender equality and the status of women (see <http://www.cge.org.za>).

National Gender Policy

The OSW has also been assigned the task of drafting a National Gender Policy. At the time of writing (October 2000) there was still no fully-fledged plan to mainstream gender, although a draft Women's National Empowerment Policy was circulated in 1999.

Gender and political representation

South African women's representation in the legislative and executive branches of government has been most remarkable since 1994. The current Parliament has roughly 30% female deputies, and women are also well represented in government posts, with 8 out of 29 ministers and 8 out of 13 deputy ministers being female. Women ministers and deputy ministers are responsible for areas such as health, welfare, housing, finance, defence, and trade and industry.

Concerns were aired during the run-up to South Africa's second local government elections in December 2000 that women's involvement in local government has not been as encouraging as it has been at the national and provincial levels (Haysom 2000: 3). This has been addressed, however, through the new White Paper on Local Government, which provides the basis for new political structures at the local level (*ibid.*).

Affirmative action in traditional authorities

The relationship between the Government and traditional authorities has been an uneasy one in democratic South Africa. Traditional authorities have maintained pressure on the Government to enhance their powers and status, at times to unreasonable levels. In the run-up to the December 2000 local government elections, members of traditional authorities demanded, for instance, that traditional authorities and not elected councils be the primary level of local government, and that their hereditary powers be recognised in an amendment to the Constitution (*Mail & Guardian*, 20-26 October 2000).

In this situation not much has taken place in the way of democratic reforms or affirmative action in favour of women in South African traditional authorities, despite efforts by NGOs such as the Rural Women's Movement to reverse the former exclusion of women from decision-making forums such as *kgotlas* (Kemp et al. 1995: 144).

On the other hand, Article 9 of the Communal Property Associations Act of 1996, which governs the self-administration structures of communal property associations (CPAs), requires that the decision-making processes and membership rights of such associations be consistent with the non-discriminatory principles mentioned in the South African Constitution. As the two major South African San communities have both been required to form CPAs to run the land they have been allocated at Platfontein and the KGNP – the latter now being part of the new Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP) – it appears that CPAs are more significant than traditional authorities for the internal decision-making processes of the major South African San communities.

Non-governmental initiatives

In the aftermath of the 1994 elections South African NGOs generally experienced a decline in strength due to problems associated with readjustment to the changed circumstances following democratisation. NGOs promoting gender equality were no exception to this rule.

Observers have noted, however, that around the time of the second democratic elections in 1999, participation in civil society organisations, including gender equality advocacy organisations, was growing again (HSRC press release, 28 November 1999, as quoted in Hassim 1999). Observers further noted a "progressive commitment to marginalised communities" despite the turn that many NGOs took in the direction of specialised research and lobbying activities while moving away from traditional forms of

protest politics (Hassim 1999). The lobbying activities around local government are a good example in this regard (see Agenda 2000).

It appears, however, that NGOs which focus on gender activism have so far not taken an active interest in the San communities. The residents of the Schmidtsdrift camp, at least, could not recall any contact with such organisations.

Gender policies and San communities

How much effect have all these governmental and non-governmental efforts had on San gender relations, and in particular on San women in South Africa? Judging from our field research at Schmidtsdrift, where the overwhelming majority of South African San live, the impact has thus far been minimal, apart from a slight increase in the number of women representatives in the main !Xu and Khwe decision-making structures, i.e. the CPA board and its committees.

Most interviewees at Schmidtsdrift were vaguely aware of the vibrant discourse on gender equality in South Africa. Nobody, however, including high-profile female and male !Xu and Khwe leaders, could recall any direct contact with central or provincial government officials who visited the camp for consultation or even just to deliver a political address on gender issues. They only recounted events where non-governmental San support organisations had addressed gender issues (interviews in Schmidtsdrift, June 2000) (see Chapter 11). This is so despite Schmidtsdrift being not only the largest San community in southern Africa, but also a highly visible one due to its specific history and present situation, which have attracted the attention of numerous journalists and researchers. The problem might in the first place be a consequence of the lack of organisational strength in the provincial gender equality machinery, as the researcher's efforts to locate any Northern Cape provincial gender structure also met with no success.

Despite these practical shortcomings, however, there is no doubt that South Africa has an appropriate political framework in place with respect to gender concerns and issues pertaining to minorities. The challenge facing the relevant agencies is to consult with San women and men with a view to designing policies and programmes that are sensitive in terms of both culture and gender.

9.4 Botswana

9.4.1 Minority policies

The Constitution of Botswana forbids discrimination on the grounds of "race, tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour or creed". Ever since the country gained political independence in 1966, the Botswana Government's position has been that all policies and programmes should benefit all members of the population equally (Datta et al. 1998: 79). Any negative or positive discrimination, such as might be embodied in affirmative action policies, has therefore been ruled out.⁸⁶ This policy position had its background in the country's longstanding vulnerability in what was then a region dominated by settler colonialism and apartheid.

There is no doubt that in material terms Botswana has contributed substantially to the welfare of the country's San population. The core of the policies that have been directed towards Botswana's poorest of the poor, namely the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) introduced in 1974 initially with the title Bushman Development Programme, was intended as an initiative aimed at rural development. In practice the RADP has contributed little to human and rural development due to its preference for "straight forward but expensive infrastructural activities" (CMI 1996, as quoted in Cassidy et al. 2001). Critics have emphasised that the RADP and other programmes aimed at Botswana's poorest – who are

⁸⁶ It will be shown below that until very recently this applied equally to Botswana policies on ethnic minorities and on women. Women might be the numeral majority in most countries but they have nonetheless been described as a "marginalised group" in recent gender and development documents (Republic of Botswana 1997).

predominantly women and/or members of ethnic minorities – have heightened their dependency on a paternalistic state. The Botswana country report for this regional assessment (Cassidy et al. 2001: 42) shows that despite their relatively high numbers, San in Botswana are in a much weaker position than the far smaller number of San in South Africa today. The authors conclude that this is a consequence of the official government policy of 30 years as well as the attitudes prevailing among high government office-bearers (ibid.):

The contrast between Thabo Mbeki's warm and supportive views expressed to the †Khomani San and Festus Mogae's depiction of people of the CKGR as stone-age creatures or dodos could hardly be greater. In failing to recognise the basic rights of the San for more than thirty years, Government policy has necessarily failed to extend them in areas like land, access to productive resources and political organization.

9.4.2 Policies on gender

Until the second half of the 1990s Botswana had not achieved much in the way of addressing gender concerns. The Constitution of Botswana was silent regarding discriminatory treatment on the basis of sex. Botswana was also reluctant to adopt relevant international human rights instruments; in particular it did not accede to CEDAW until 1996, i.e. only after the newly democratic states of South Africa and Namibia had already become signatories.

The failure of the supreme law to prohibit gender-based discrimination resulted in a number of openly discriminatory laws. Significant changes only took place in the mid 1990s in the wake of the widely publicised case of the Attorney-General vs Unity Dow, a Botswana citizen and lawyer who challenged the Government on gender-based discrimination enshrined in the country's citizenship laws.⁸⁷ The Court of Appeal ruled that the discriminatory sections of the Botswana Citizenship Act were invalid, and that discrimination on the basis of sex was not permissible. Thus in Botswana the international instruments against forms of discrimination were incorporated into the law by the courts and not by the executive or legislative (Otlhogile 1997: 322).

National machinery to promote gender equality

Botswana has been slow to establish national machinery aimed at promoting gender equality. In 1981 a Women's Affairs Unit was established in the former Ministry of Home Affairs, but this unit did not have much political clout and largely failed to address relevant concerns (Republic of Botswana 1997). Only in the second half of the 1990s was the Women's Affairs Unit elevated to a fully-fledged department within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs. While this development has been applauded by Botswana gender activists (see *The Women's Manifesto* (third edition) 1999), it still falls far short of the central location that the South African OSW enjoys in the Office of the President. The National Policy on Women in Development and the National Gender Programme (see below) also make provision for mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating gender equity programmes, procedures and policies, however these structures have yet to be put in place.

National Gender Policy

In 1996 the National Policy on Women in Development was adopted after having been in preparation since 1988. The policy attempts to address the situation of women in Botswana in an "integrated and multi-sectoral" manner (Republic of Botswana 1997). In order to practically implement the policy, a National Gender Programme and a Plan of Action for the National Gender Programme 1997-2004 were developed through co-operation between the Government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and academics of the University of Botswana. The programme identified six "priority national

⁸⁷ Unity Dow's children from her marriage to a non-Batswana citizen were denied Batswana citizenship even though they had been born and had lived in the country, on the grounds that their father was not a citizen. The children of a Batswana father and a non-Batswana mother, on the other hand, would automatically have been granted citizenship rights.

issues”: women’s economic empowerment and poverty alleviation; education and training; health; violence against women; power sharing; and women’s human rights. The programme also lobbies for the disaggregation of data along gender lines, which has not been the case for crucial development indicators in the past (Datta et al. 1998: 14).

Although the programme identifies women as a marginalised group and acknowledges the existence of “particular classes and categories of women” which result in different needs, the list of fault lines along which the category of ‘women’ is subdivided fails to include ethnicity or any recognition of marginalised communities. Age, spatial and regional location, the rural-urban divide, education, the formal vs the informal sector divide, and employment status are mentioned (Republic of Botswana 1997).

Gender and political representation

Before the 1999 national elections only 9.1% of deputies in the Botswana Parliament were women – far fewer than in either Namibia or South Africa. It appears that Botswana’s political parties have been fairly reluctant to nominate female candidates. This is despite the long-standing and determined efforts of the *Emang Basadi* women’s organisation to empower women in politics (see below).

Affirmative action in traditional authorities

In line with the Botswana Government’s rejection of affirmative action politics (see above), no special efforts have been made to encourage the participation of women in traditional authorities. It appears, however, that women now play a somewhat more active role in *kgotlas* than they did in earlier years.⁸⁸ Furthermore, women have been put in place as headwomen (*kgosi*). In Ghanzi District, for example, two San women have held the position of *kgosi* of their respective villages/RAD settlements.⁸⁹

How “traditional” the village headman/headwoman (*kgosi*) system is, and to what extent the *kgosi* can act as the community’s spokesperson, is open to question. One should bear in mind that a *kgosi* is in the first place a government employee assigned to “keep law and order”, even though she or he is selected by the community in question.

Non-governmental initiatives

NGOs advocating gender equality sprang up in Botswana especially after the *Third World Conference on Women* held in Nairobi in 1985. The activities of gender activists received a renewed boost during the run-up to the *Fourth World Conference on Women* held in Beijing in 1995. During that period gender activists outside and within government structures also started to co-operate more closely. The most prominent among the Botswana gender advocacy NGOs is the women’s organisation called *Emang Basadi*, which has been running a Political Education Programme since 1993. In 1994 the organisation launched its first Women’s Manifesto to focus attention on the specific issues and demands of women. The Political Education Programme also aims to support female candidates standing for election across party political lines, and to lobby for the nomination of more women candidates. The activities involve periodical national conferences on women and politics to plan and evaluate progress, and the revision and re-publication of *The Women’s Manifesto*, the third edition of which was published prior to the 1999 national elections.

Botswana’s Women’s Manifesto, unlike its Namibian “offshoot”,⁹⁰ does not pay special attention to the women of marginalised minorities. Despite the Manifesto’s obviously critical stance in respect of some government policies (especially where socio-economic inequalities and poverty are factors), the exis-

⁸⁸ This has been suggested to the researcher by several female Botswana acquaintances in informal communications.

⁸⁹ One of these has recently died.

⁹⁰ The idea for a Namibian Women’s Manifesto was indeed conceived when some Namibian gender activists learned about the Botswana initiative in 1998.

tence of minorities is only mentioned in passing. Furthermore they are perceived as being clearly subordinate to the dominant Tswana culture:

Positive Setswana culture should be taught in schools starting with nursery/daycare children. This should be done bearing in mind that there are many and different cultures in Botswana. (*The Women's Manifesto* (third edition) 1999)

Gender policies and San communities

The Botswana Government's rejection of affirmative action policies with respect to both the country's minorities and women has resulted in the invisibility of San gender relations and San women's issues. In the absence of any clear policies, the decentralised character of the RADP (Cassidy et al. 2001) has left significant decisions in the hands of district offices and individuals. In a society that has been characterised by strongly patriarchal cultural features and by "tight male control over the political power" (Datta et al. 1998: 26), this has resulted in insensitive, gender-blind and even openly gender-discriminatory practices in contexts such as the RADP cattle programme (see Chapter 4).

On the other hand, the political attention of critical Botswana activists and academics, including gender activists, is focused on socio-economic issues: they too do not seem to transcend their Government's denial of the existence of socio-cultural as opposed to socio-economic inequalities.

Current governmental and non-governmental politics in Botswana make it difficult to see how a critical re-evaluation of past policies and programmes can take place in the country in the near future in order to come up with policies which successfully take account of gender issues and which are geared towards the country's marginalised San people.

9.5 Conclusions

The assessment of the three countries' policies on gender and minorities indicates that all southern African countries which are home to sizeable San communities have yet to take sufficient account of the specific gender concerns of their San communities.

With respect to San human rights and land and language issues, the post-1994 South African Government has been largely gender-blind, although some relevant legislation, for example the CPA Act, has probably had a positive influence on gender balance in the structures of San communities. The Namibian situation is not dissimilar to that in South Africa: both countries have basic policy frameworks in place, and both are committed to affirmative action, though a strategic commitment to empowering San communities generally and San women particularly is still lacking.

The situation appears to be somewhat different in Botswana. General welfare policies aside, the country has to date proved to be quite indifferent regarding the concerns of San as a marginalised social group, and has also only very reluctantly begun to take up gender concerns. The Government's renunciation of affirmative action policies appears to be a major stumbling block in addressing the gender concerns of the largest San population in southern Africa.

CHAPTER 10

LEADERSHIP

10.1 Introduction

Most San leaders and prominent individuals are men; men have attended UN conferences of indigenous peoples in Geneva,⁹¹ present-day San traditional leaders are mostly men, and the (few) San who have been elected to national political offices have been men. This imbalance is reinforced by the fact that when San communities are approached by outsiders, be they government officials, NGO representatives, business people or church leaders, almost by default the San men are addressed first.

Furthermore, community facilitators and trainers, development workers and researchers alike regularly report on their frustrations when trying to involve women in decision-making in public forums. As a social worker and missionary in Namibia's Omaheke Region put it:

Usually in large meetings women sit somewhat removed from the men. Even when I address them specifically, they don't speak up during the meeting, although they talk a lot among themselves, sometimes even causing a disturbance of the discussions, so that somebody tells them to be quiet. When nobody has anything more to contribute, I summarise what has been said as a conclusion. Frequently at this point a woman sets out to bring up new concerns, or one of the men hints "The women want to say something." The women then voice their objections, and the whole issue that I had considered finalised is unravelled again and re-discussed! In a new "final" decision women often get their way. (Interview with Raymond Martin, Gobabis, 29 June 2000)

Whereas in this example some women do eventually state their opinions, this late twist in community meetings is by no means the order of the day, and outside facilitators of consultations or workshops are often left to wonder whether the female participants approved of the deliberations (or whether they were even following them). Consequently they might be surprised to find that women were animated in taking part in the conversations during the evenings in an informal environment (Thoma & Piek 1997: 62).

On the other hand, informants from Tsumkwe have frequently insisted that women willingly speak up during community meetings, provided that no outsiders are present: "Women normally talk about their problems, also when we have meetings" (interview with Paula Manuel, Windhoek, 28 June 2000); "In Omatako, women participate quite well in meetings I call. They also come by themselves to our [traditional authority] office to bring grievances" (interview with John Arnold, Omatako, 21 June 2000).

Both male and female informants thought women were only "shy" in the presence of outsiders, or in unfamiliar surroundings (interview with Ou Johannes, Omatako, 21 June 2000; interview with Paula Manuel, Windhoek, 28 June 2000). This shyness remains a distinct phenomenon even when outsiders are neither unfamiliar nor obvious bearers of authority (such as government officials), and when language barriers are taken care of through translators.

When asked for the cause of women's shyness in meetings, interviewees often argue that women have not had as much experience with the "outside world": they travel much less, they do not move around much by themselves to seek jobs, and they are less fluent in other languages, and therefore also have less experience in relating to outsiders, whoever they may be.

⁹¹ A notable exception is a female former WIMSA trainee who has participated in various international conferences and workshops.

Such generalisations should be treated with care, however, as the gendered experiences of San communities with the “outside world” vary, and it has been noted, for example, that where San live in close proximity to Hereroes, women’s shyness seems to be rather more pronounced than in predominantly San areas such as former Bushmanland. It would appear that in the case of exposure to Herero culture, behavioural norms dictating female diffidence are adopted.

An explanation of women’s reserve in organised gatherings might also be found in the nature of such events: meetings called with or by outsiders are necessarily more structured. Even if they don’t have a formal agenda and are conducted sitting on the ground under a tree, their interactional dynamics are different from those of internal San meetings, and thus they constitute an unfamiliar setting. Furthermore they are typically called specifically for the benefit of a visitor. It would appear that it is this inevitably more structured and official element (not the visitor per se or the male participants) that pushes women into the background. The structured nature of the meeting can be seen as part of the “outside world”, to which women are generally perceived to have had less exposure than men.

It is clear that “the San women” or even “the women” in a settlement or project do not necessarily constitute a cohesive entity⁹² characterised by identical economic or social aspirations. Development workers and San themselves note that women are not bound together through the solidarity and identity of “sisterhood”, but are very individualistic. This has clear repercussions for development interventions: a recent evaluation of KDT projects notes that in most projects, Nharo were working individually for their income rather than as true “production groups”. This was the case for projects that involved men and women, as well as for those in which only women or only men participated (Bollig et al. 2000).

This has to be borne in mind when the formation of female interest groups or “women projects” (or any other vehicles for “women’s empowerment”) are contemplated. A member of a San organisation in Ghanzi reported that plans for a Botswana San Women’s Association were taking shape, but that when this idea was put to women in the area they professed that they could not see much point in it.

The situation appears to be different among San communities which, due to their historical experiences and contemporary lifestyles, have developed dichotomously distinct male and female identities. In the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe community, for instance, with its distinct and hierarchically organised gender identities, women were much in favour of “women’s councils”.⁹³ Observers have also noted that among the Namibian Hai//om San – a community with long-standing interactions with Owambo people as well as a long history of farm labour – there is a discernible tendency towards separate women’s and men’s projects, with women being said to be “stronger” in those efforts (interview with Axel Thoma, 29 September 2000).

It would appear that the few women who play any kind of leadership role in their communities appear to do so from the basis of their individual strength, character or disposition rather than because they are tasked through some structure with a particular task or because of any specific experience, education or training.

One small example of such individual initiative was provided by a !Xoo woman in the Omaheke Corridor – herself childless – who organised a lift back to school with a visiting researcher for the dozen or more school children who had spent the weekend at home. She approached the researcher with the request to make a turn at the next farm in order to pick up the children, who otherwise would have had to walk the 20 km back to the hostel (field notes, Omaheke Region, June 1998).

Another example is provided by a Khwe woman who is a member of the Khwe council at Schmidtsdrift, but of her own accord assists individual women with their problems. During our interview with her she dashed off to sort out a problem that was threatening to escalate into violence: a school girl who had

⁹² Nor do “the men”, one should hasten to add.

⁹³ Due to the prevailing tensions between the !Xu and the Khwe communities, the !Xu women recommended two separate women’s councils along ethnic lines, whereas the Khwe women thought one council could cater for the interests of all women at Schmidtsdrift.

become pregnant was facing the irate disappointment of her mother (field notes, Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

Despite this individual pattern (which might be equally applicable to men), existing and emerging leadership structures, particularly traditional authorities, development projects, NGOs and CBOs, have to be scrutinised to ensure participation and acceptance on the part of women.

10.2 Traditional authorities

10.2.1 Namibia

The issue of San traditional leadership in Namibia is currently contested ground. Following the passing of appropriate legislation, six geographically defined San communities applied for recognition, and with this the prescribed structures of chiefs, senior traditional councillors and traditional councillors (Felton 2000). The Traditional Authorities Act, No. 17 of 1995, entitles “every traditional community” to have a traditional authority. Its provisions cover the administration of customary law and dispute resolution, as well as cultural matters and the sustainable use of natural resources. The Act also calls on traditional authorities to “promote affirmative action ... in particular by promoting women to positions of leadership” (see Chapter 9).

Traditional authorities have had to go through the necessary recognition formalities to qualify for official status and remuneration. This has been a long and drawn-out process, hinging crucially on the content and legal recognition of ‘community’. Of the San communities which tendered their applications, to date only the communities of East and West Tsumkwe have been officially gazetted – and this only after publicity in the media and WIMSA and CASS facilitation of direct communication between designated leaders and the responsible Minister. The two Tsumkwe communities were relatively straightforward cases since both constitute majority populations in their respective areas and both have access to land and reasonably secure land tenure, but following several inconclusive investigations undertaken by the Council of Traditional Leaders, all the other San applications have been left pending.⁹⁴

The recognition of traditional authorities clearly has two angles: the national political and administrative process, and the acceptance of the traditional authorities by the communities they purport to represent. Unlike in Botswana, San representation as such is not seen as undesirable, though in at least one case, namely the Kxoe of West Caprivi, the recognition process was effectively stalled by the chief of the neighbouring Mbukushu community, who has influential allies in the ruling party. For the remaining applications it can be assumed that no considerations of ethnicity or active blocking strategies on the part of the Government came into play, but it is conceivable that there were unofficial delaying tactics in the recognition process for budgetary reasons: at the time of writing the Government was facing a backlog of more than 140 applications, and though the remuneration paid to a maximum of 14 traditional leaders per community is relatively small, the combined financial effect of their recognition would nevertheless have been sizeable.⁹⁵

The actual power and status an officially recognised Namibian chief holds vis-à-vis the Government are limited, but they are nevertheless practically and symbolically significant for communities which up until recently have had as little political representation on the national level as San. Chiefs do, for example, serve on land boards and regional development committees.

A number of individual Namibian San have embraced traditional authority as a means of empowerment; incumbent leaders have also eagerly participated in training workshops to familiarise themselves with

⁹⁴ According to unofficial sources, in November 2000 the Council of Traditional Leaders recommended that the applications of the Ju/'hoansi and the !Xoo of Omaheke be approved. The President still has to approve this recommendation to make it binding.

⁹⁵ Namibia's Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing stated at a conference on decentralisation and traditional leaders that he found it difficult to balance his budget, particularly as he had been forced to compromise between such important budget lines as Early Childhood Development and Traditional Authorities (CASS 1998).

the legal framework in which they operate. There is as yet little systematic empirical evidence regarding the extent of broad community support, but indications are that it varies from one community to the next.

Settlement patterns like those in the northern Omaheke Region – where San are widely dispersed in a contact setting with pastoralists and white farmers – do not provide ideal conditions for identity and leadership formation. Historically only the Kxoe of West Caprivi have had centrally organised leadership comparable in structure and functions to that found in Bantu groups. Other groups, like those in former Bushmanland, had village elders (*n!oresi*)⁹⁶ in the past who attended to local issues. Prior to the recent recognition process a more central leadership, which in some communities was ratified through elections, had started to evolve. But even in cases where there is such an apparently democratic mandate, leaders seem to be well nigh immune to disrespect and criticism from their communities. This was evidenced in West Tsumkwe by frequent criticism aimed at a leader who was seen to favour one San population group over another, and to have his own farming and business interests more at heart than the interests of the wider community.

All incumbent chiefs are male at present, as are the majority of traditional councillors, but this is not due to purposeful exclusion of women by a male leadership elite. In fact, only in part as a result of the encouragement of NGOs facilitating the application process, most leaderships have actively encouraged women to become leaders. Nevertheless, the difficulties noted in enlisting women are frequently related to the fact that the tasks seen as being most important for traditional authorities are all but ‘traditional’ in that they require language skills and confidence in dealing with officialdom. Once again, women are seen and see themselves as not having had enough extra-community exposure to qualify.

The gender composition of this latter-day “traditional” leadership contrasts with what has been described for San in the foraging context: for the !Kung and Ju/’hoansi, leadership was commonly attained through criteria such as *n!ore* ownership (or marriage to a female *n!ore* owner) and seniority, as well as personal qualities (Lee 1979: 344). Not infrequently a woman was acknowledged as *n!oresi* in her own right; sometimes this leadership was shared between man and wife. Already in the 1970s Lee noted that when San began to live more in a contact setting with other ethnic groups, their leadership changed with the requirements of their new situation: whereas the former leadership was more internally oriented and required leaders who were “modest in demeanour, generous to a fault and egalitarian” (ibid.), the new political arena required external representation of the group, and these leaders were usually men.

Furthermore, colonialism played a role in the male gendering of leadership, at least in administrative frameworks: during the tenure of the first “Bushman commissioner” in Tsumkwe, an all male *Rada* (a large forum best described as a residents’ council) was established, composed of older men adjudged by officials to be leaders. The *Rada* was an advisory body that served as a link between the Government and the Ju/’hoansi (Marshall & Ritchie 1984: 106).

Lee (1979: 350) describes the personal attributes of leaders emerging in contact settings as being quite contrary to !Kung values: the new style of leadership was “male, aggressive, articulate and wise in the ways of the world”. This description is to some extent still valid today, at least for the San “chiefs” (Felton 2000: 15ff). In particular, the San discourse regarding women not being versed in the ways of the world is pertinent.

Nevertheless, at least in Nyae Nyae the old leadership guard has not been rendered wholly redundant, but rather has become part of an interesting duality in leadership. At the village level women leaders appear to be as outspoken as men (interview with Wendy Viall, Windhoek, 3 September 2000), but in Nyae Nyae’s officially gazetted “central” leadership women have not featured prominently. Still, the internal village leadership and the externally orientated “traditional authority” do complement each other in many ways, and indeed the gazetted leaders in Nyae Nyae (and elsewhere) insist on their actual

⁹⁶ *N!ore* refers to the territory/land on which a Ju/’hoan group moved. *N!oresi* is the man or woman acknowledged to be the “owner” of a *n!ore* – somebody who decides when the group moves and is consulted if, for example, another group wants to move to the waterhole.

traditional legitimacy, for example by claiming not only democratic legitimacy through elections but also hereditary succession (Felton 2000: 17).

Women who do feel able to take up leadership positions face one impediment which is rooted in gender relations: they are reluctant to do so for fear of being “perceived as soliciting men” (Thoma & Piek 1997: 55), especially when attending meetings away from home.

Nevertheless, most of the Namibian San traditional authorities include female councillors. One woman councillor together with a male colleague established a second traditional authority office in Mangetti Dune,⁹⁷ and appeared to be taking up certain “women’s issues”, including the case of a government official allegedly spreading STDs to school girls (interview with Sara Sungu, Mangetti Dune, 23 June 2000). In Tsumkwe the public dispute hearings initiated by a councillor who subsequently moved to Windhoek following his election to Parliament have reportedly been taken over by a woman (who had hitherto not even been part of the “official” leadership).

One community in which women appear to be prominent is to be found in the southern Omaheke. Here the female councillors – unpaid and not officially recognised – have taken on various tasks (partly in conjunction with and with the support of the Omaheke San Trust) such as ensuring that children are enrolled in school, and some have additional functions as board members of the OST (interview with Anna Moore, Gobabis, 29 June 2000). They also received newspaper coverage when a predominantly female delegation travelled to Windhoek to meet with government officials to draw their attention to human rights abuses affecting women, such as rape by Herero men, a lack of co-operation on the part of the police, unfair distribution of drought-aid rations and landlessness (*The Namibian*, 11 June 1998).

What the above shows is that since foraging ceased to be the primary San lifestyle mode, leadership has become a predominantly male domain, and this is essentially a result of gendered life experiences and underlying socio-economic relations. Until San women have equal access to the “outside world”, it will remain a challenge for them to assume leadership positions in the public sphere. Despite this situation, however, a number of San women have shown considerable initiative and have indeed been supported by the “new-time” male leaders.

10.2.2 Botswana

Unlike in Namibia, recognition of traditional authority in Botswana is not tied to community or ethnic status, and in fact the politically dominant Tswana class has for a long time energetically repudiated the existence of plurality (and ethnic minorities) within the Botswana nation. Instead, for every larger village or settlement a *kgosi* (headman; pl. *dikgosi*) is elected and gazetted. The *kgosi* is much more a direct administrative representative of the central Government than is the case with a Namibian chief, and the *kgosi* and Village Development Council (VDC) constitute the local authority. Headmanship in Botswana has more of the character of a paid “job” – indeed the remuneration for headmen is higher than that received by Namibian chiefs – and the incumbent has at his or her disposal a government car and an office. A *kgosi*’s main duties include holding public dispute hearings (*kgotla*) based on codified Tswana customary law, which is used everywhere in the country but is only published in English and Setswana.

Initially the institutionalisation of San headmen met with official resistance as the dominant discourse was based on the premise that San communities have no social institutions above the band or family level. In 1991 Hitchcock (1991: 12) recorded San headmen for only 19 villages in the whole country, and noted that the number of formally instituted San headmanships was growing very slowly – partly as a result of the rigid application of the Government’s requirement that a *kgosi* be literate, whereas most San who were respected by their people as leaders had had no formal schooling (ibid.).

By the end of the decade most settlements in which San were in the majority had an officially designated San *kgosi* (Bots), including the official RAD settlements in Ghanzi District. San headmanship, however, is still problematic in Botswanan politics, and in ethnically mixed settlements the headman is usually a

⁹⁷ The main traditional authority office is situated in Omatako – the village where the Chief lives.

non-San (ibid.). There are also numerous reports of elected and gazetted San leaders being bypassed by neighbouring cattle owners who wish to reside in their settlements and simply apply directly to the Land Board for permission to do so (Bots). The position of outspoken San *dikgosi* is also insecure as they risk replacement by somebody willing unquestioningly to toe the official line (ibid.).

The Botswana country study (ibid.) notes only two female San *dikgosi*, both in Ghanzi District (i.e. in Grootlaagte and Chobokwane).⁹⁸ Interviewed about her position, the *kgosi* of Chobokwane frankly admitted that she considered it to be compromised⁹⁹ (interview with Sophie Morris, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000). She said that she was not respected by the villagers (nearly exclusively Nharo speakers) on two counts: for being a San and for being a woman. She felt that the people were accustomed to having only Tswana men as headmen, and that the Tswana had actually taught San not to respect their own kind as leaders. She claimed that villagers only acquiesced to the fines she imposed in the *kgotla* because the tribal police enforced them.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the *kgosi* felt that her office lacked certain powers that would have made it easier for her to alleviate some of the adversities faced by women; for instance, only a magistrate is entitled to order men to pay maintenance for children born out of wedlock.

The insecurity of her position was also borne out by the fact that we were first made to interview a male San elder, who is clearly seen as having the actual right to the title of *kgosi*: his father was the previous gazetted leader of the settlement, but due to the literacy requirement he could not follow in his father's footsteps. Sophie Morris was then chosen – against her will she professed – on the basis of her being one of the few educated people. Other female informants in Chobokwane confirmed that women had no leadership ambitions, and claimed that plans were being hatched to elect a male assistant chief because “men know about the outside world and can share their knowledge” (group interview with women, Chobokwane, 28 May 2000). This argument in favour of male leadership seemed distinctly threadbare in view of the female incumbent's professional background as a pre-school teacher in another village. The notion of women not being conversant with “the outside world” has developed into a stereotype that may impede the assumption of public positions by San women.

Comparing the situation in Botswana with that in Namibia, one must conclude that although the nascent traditional authorities in Namibia battle with a multitude of structural and capacity problems (not least of these being the lack of official recognition of four of the six existing San traditional authorities), the framework in Botswana is even less conducive to the growth of a leadership structure that is accepted by the communities. Furthermore, the male-dominated Tswana culture continues to be a hindrance in the path of gender-balanced structures. In the cases of the Nharo in Ghanzi District and the Ju'/hoansi of Ngamiland, observers have noted complex patterns of acculturation which have been eroding the earlier relative equality between men and women in San society (e.g. Bollig et al. 2000: 88; Kent 1995: 532-533). Furthermore it appears that the experience and the discourse of an “outside world” which San women supposedly do not know also works to their detriment.

10.2.3 South Africa

The situation in South Africa is quite different from those in Namibia or Botswana. This is partly a consequence of the different histories of the two main South African San groups, i.e. the !Xu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift, and the †Khomani in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. While both settlements are fairly recent, the experience of the Schmidtsdrift communities has been moulded by military culture more than anything else, whereas the †Khomani San only began to define a community identity during the process that accompanied their successful land claim.

The Schmidtsdrift leadership structure consists of a council for each of the two language groups. The !Xu and Khwe councils were first established in the times of military service in Namibia, and they have more recently developed new outlooks, focusing on community conflict resolution. The councils

⁹⁸ The headwoman in Grootlaagte passed away in 1999.

⁹⁹ This was in marked contrast to the male San headmen in our field sites, who either refused to be interviewed or glossed over blatant grievances of their constituents.

¹⁰⁰ Each RAD settlement has three tribal policemen/women who are paid by the Government. Most of these are non-San.

are closely linked to the CPA, which was constituted in accordance with recent legislation (see Chapter 9). This new legal body has replaced the previous !Xu and Khwe Trust that was initiated by the SADF in 1993 when the army began to withdraw from the communities of former “Bushman” soldiers.

In the past observers have commented on the specific character of the leadership at Schmidtsdrift, which has been drawn largely from among higher-ranking soldiers as a “male military-civilian elite” (Sharp & Sholto-Douglas 1996: 101; see also SA). The interconnectedness of the current “civilian” leadership structures and the military remains evident in the fact that many of the male leaders remain on the SANDF’s payroll. The paternalism and authoritarian character of the military culture has also caused the inclusion of women in the leadership structures at Schmidtsdrift to be an extremely slow process.

Observers in the mid 1990s noted that the two women who on an ethnic basis had by then been included in the councils and in the executive of the now defunct !Xu and Khwe Trust were mere tokens who had been put there as a “perfunctory gesture” (Sharp & Sholto-Douglas 1996: 106, 109). The first two female representatives did not even want to be elected. One of them, Awelina Chifako, commented:

I didn’t want that work, I cannot talk a lot, I always get too shy. We were chosen to talk on behalf of people, to hear at meetings what is where and what is going to happen, to tell the people and also to help the people. But the things that I wanted to say, perhaps other people said it, then I remained quiet. I did not talk. (As quoted in Waldman 1995: 2-3)

More than five years later Awelina Chifako is much more confident about her leadership role (interview with Awelina Chifako, 13 June 2000). She is not only a member of the !Xu council and the CPA board, but at the time of the research was also a trustee on the WIMSA board.

Nevertheless, women are still not prominently represented in the Schmidtsdrift leadership structures. By mid 2000 the CPA board comprised 25 members, of whom only six were women (interview with Mario Mahongo, Schmidtsdrift, 14 June 2000). None of the women were office-bearers, but some did serve as chairpersons or vice-chairpersons of committees established to run the CPA.

The !Xu *Rada* (Residents’ Council) currently has 10-12 female members out of a total of 43. Under the SADF this council had no female representation as it was a military structure only involving the (male) soldiers. The council has therefore at least seen more change than its Khwe equivalent, which is all-male, though a few women serve on sub-committees. In line with a more established system of traditional leadership among Khwe speakers, the Khwe *Rada* includes several traditional leaders of old, including a leader of “royal” lineage who is said to be of equal standing to Chief Kipi George, the current chief of Khwe/Kxoe speakers in West Caprivi in Namibia.

Women of both language groups are also not too comfortable with the gender insensitivity of several male leaders. They felt that a better gender balance on the council would be beneficial, especially as they were not in the least confident that the male councillors would take a genuine interest in women’s problems (group interview with Khwe women, 14 June 2000, and with !Xu women, 16 June 2000).

According to South African San Institute (SASI) representatives, the position of women is much stronger among the †Khomani than among the !Xu and Khwe due to these communities’ divergent political and social histories (Meryl-Joy Wildschut, pers. comm.). Like the !Xu and Khwe, the †Khomani – with SASI’s assistance – elected a CPA as this was a legal requirement for the handling of the now successful land claim for a section of the KGNP/KTP. The †Khomani CPA is currently headed by a woman. Although leadership is a divisive issue within the community, it is noteworthy that of more than a dozen leaders nearly half are women, and there is also a †Khomani Women’s League (interview with Philippa Haden, Platfontein, 15 June 2000).

10.3 Leadership in development projects

The need for effective leadership in empowerment projects of any kind is realised by most organisations and governments. San decision-making processes based on consensus probably still play a role in com-

munity dynamics, but are seen as being not viable in the modern development context, not least because support organisations and governments have to be able to approach individual leaders or representatives.

It appears almost axiomatic in development practice that a project needs a committee, and indeed the KDT, WIMSA and others make the existence of a community committee (or a similar structure) a pre-condition for any material or other assistance to a community or emergent project. The community is usually also encouraged to include women in its development committee. As the following case shows, however, in practice women might be left out for a host of reasons:

During the conservancy planning process in West Tsumkwe, a conservancy committee had to be elected, as this was a legally required institution for the granting of CBNRM rights. The San chief, as well as some village headmen, suggested that each village should be represented by two persons, one woman and one man. In the final committee of 29 people, only 6 were women. Different reasons for women's under-representation were given. In some villages, no women who were able – or felt themselves to be able – to contribute to this important committee could be found. In others, a woman could only be chosen if the second representative was her husband, because a woman would incur her husband's jealousy if she went on her own to meetings with other men. However, electing a couple was felt to be impractical in some families, because if husband and wife both had to travel to a meeting, there would be nobody at home to look after the children. (Summarised from Hohmann 2000: 49)

The conscious call to include women did not fail because of overt resistance from men in the village communities. Instead, the reasons were located in deeper layers of people's gendered lives, in particular in women's low self-esteem and in husbands' restrictive jealousy, which is itself a gendered phenomenon: no men are known to have been excluded from village politics on account of their wives' jealousy.

Often the inability of San committees to function effectively appears to lie in the ad hoc manner in which the members are chosen,¹⁰¹ in the unavailability of relevant information and in the absence of capacity-building measures. After a short time visitors may even have difficulty in eliciting responses as to the names of people serving on a committee, indicating that this leadership vehicle has not properly taken root.

Sonneblom/Donkerbos, a rural farm project in Namibia's Omaheke Region which had formed a project committee that was also formally the owner of stock allocated to the community, serves as an example. When important and potentially conflict-ridden decisions needed to be made, the decision-makers were not committee members. For example, in a case in which a decision had to be made as to whether or not to sell a cow owned by the committee in order to buy maize-meal to relieve acute hunger, a researcher was given the name of a temporary resident, a government driver (with whose suggestions many of the villagers did not agree, as it happens), as the person with whom authority to make the decision lay. When the villagers were asked how this man had come to be their leader, many of them responded that he had been "appointed" by the Government, or that he was the leader because he was connected to government officials. Questions about why a man they had not chosen was leading them were not answered directly, and the impression was created that attempts to establish how he had been "elected" made no sense to them (Sylvian n.d.: 23).

Sylvian's further analysis points to the dire need for effective leadership and decision-making – evinced by drawn-out arguments over how to resolve the situation and acute power struggles between three men.

It was interesting to note that an all-male group came to the researcher to discuss leadership problems with her (Sylvian n.d.: 22). Furthermore, the one female committee member introduced to her did not seem involved in village politics and remained silent in group discussions. By contrast, another woman appeared quite outspoken, but did not indicate interest in becoming involved in the project's leadership

¹⁰¹ A fictional but amusing tongue-in-cheek account of the "committee syndrome" in D'Kar from the San perspective is given by Le Roux in her collection of stories published under the title *Shadow Bird*. The scene is a government meeting: "Often at these meetings they were asked to choose a 'chairman' for some or other 'committee' which they knew would never meet again. But they had such fun in proposing people like old Petros or Maria, whom they knew would turn up drunk or say all the wrong things. Komtsha sniggered to himself. At least his people had always known how to have fun." (Le Roux 2000: 138)

(*ibid.*). As in the West Tsumkwe case discussed above, the overall lack of women's participation seemed to be rooted in gendered experiences rather than male resistance. Sylvian (*ibid.*) concludes that what had shaped people's lives most was the fact that they had lived almost entirely on commercial farms, where women are altogether dependent on their male kin for employment and rights of residence.

Nevertheless, the issues surrounding gendered leadership in development projects must not be seen in isolation from the empowerment strategy employed. Where income-generation is at stake, tendencies towards the gendering of work (see Chapter 5) need to be taken into account. Given that cattle production (the only viable farming activity in the area of the above-mentioned project) is seen as essentially "men's work" (Sylvian n.d.: 28), men would automatically be the major decision-makers.

Many observers believe that women do not have an interest in becoming office-bearers, whether on committees or other organs, merely for the sake of being "leaders" (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000). In projects they appear to be content to let men take the decisions and conduct negotiations with extension workers and officials.

On the other hand, cases were related to us in which women felt that a project had gone off track to the extent that their income was in danger, and against this background San women displayed surprising decision-making powers and even dominance. At the KDT's Dqae Qare Game Farm and campsite, the female project members staged a "coup" by sacking all the male employees, who they thought were becoming a liability and might upset visiting tourists through their quarrelsome and drunken behaviour. Subsequently the women also confronted the Government's labour officer who had come to investigate the unfair dismissal (interview with Willemien le Roux, Windhoek, 8 September 2000).

10.4 Training and leadership

NGOs and other organisations which work with San communities offer diverse training programmes. Although these are mostly not explicitly geared towards leadership training, sometimes covering fields such as health or tourism, if successful they do develop capacity in the form of community mobilisers.

The Regional WIMSA Office (in Windhoek) offers internships and runs a mentored on-the-job training programme for young San lasting from 6-12 months. Administrative and office procedures, the organisation's history and structure, information on the past and present situation of San communities and on the roles and functions of San leaders, and skills such as drawing up project proposals and organising and chairing meetings are covered (WIMSA 1999: 5).

Of an original five trainees from Namibia and South Africa, three were women and there was also a trainee secretary from Botswana. The women from Namibia and Botswana both continued to liaise with WIMSA on community issues following their training. One woman from the Hai//om community in Namibia remains active in the establishment of a community trust, which aims to overcome the current leadership impasse created by an autocratic self-styled chief.

To enter the course, applicants are normally required to have secondary level school education and a reasonable command of spoken and written English. In 1998 WIMSA received applications from 15 men and three women (WIMSA 1999: 5). It is not clear whether this disparity only reflects the fact that fewer young San women have the required formal education, or whether other reasons prevent them from showing an interest in this kind of training.

Other training and leadership programmes co-organised by WIMSA were workshops in Namibia dealing with broad legal issues like land and leadership, and programmes aimed at enhancing the practical skills of secretaries to San traditional authorities. In most cases, although there were both male and female participants, the majority tended to be male.

Cape Town-based SASI has been running training programmes to build the leadership capacities of the !Xun/Khwe and ǀKhomani communities. Conscious efforts were made to incorporate gender concerns and gender-sensitive training methods in these programmes (see Chapter 11).

In contrast to the programmes described above which target general capacity-building, there are also training initiatives with a more vocational content, such as the Bokamoso Pre-School Training conducted under the auspices of the KDT. Most aspirant pre-school teachers have been San women.

The majority of community health resource persons trained by Health Unlimited (HU) in the Omaheke Region and Tsumkwe are female. HU puts this down to the fact that men tend to look more for jobs and employment, and also perceive health concerns (especially of children) to lie in the domain of women. The organisation aims to attract more men for the training, especially because the female healthcare volunteers who visit individual homes do not always find it easy to address health issues (e.g. STDs and HIV/AIDS) with men (interview with Cathy Mbeki, 3 August 2000).

The training offered by the San Cultural Centre near Cape Town is geared towards the skills required for setting up tourism ventures. Since the centre has not yet been completed it is not yet open to the public, but the intention is that in future it will provide on-the-job training in catering for tourists. Currently groups of around six adults do six-month stints at the centre. The involvement of men has been largely in setting up infrastructure, while more women have taken the opportunity to receive training in tourism, the English language and crafts production (interview with Beths Daiber, 25 October 2000).

Female trainees in some programmes have at times had to contend with unhelpful attitudes on the part of men. Elfriede Gaeses, a Hai//om community worker who completed the WIMSA course, reported that the community's controversial chief had put pressure on her to drop her training, obviously because he sensed a challenge to his power position (Gaeses 1998: 95). The case of female trainee teachers in Nyae Nyae who terminated their training after being bullied and beaten has already been noted (see Chapter 6). Gaeses (1998: 95) comments thus on the constraints faced by women who enter training:

One reason for San men wanting women to drop their training is jealousy of men (who they might encounter in the course of their training). Another reason is a husband's feeling that his wife has a better education than he has. A third reason is that San men want the power to tell women what to do. Most husbands have succeeded in getting their wives to drop their training by verbally and physically abusing them.

Gaeses' comments show that San women may be prevented from participating in training and capacity-building programmes on account of their sex, and that these women clearly need support from governmental and non-governmental organisations. It is also clear that no solution will be found unless the feelings of men who consider themselves to be threatened and react by seeking power and authority, or even by resorting to physical violence, are taken seriously as well.

10.5 Conclusions

What emerges from the discussion above is that while jealousy (both sexual and non-sexual) on the part of men at times prevents women from entering a public arena, in many cases women's non-participation in decision-making and leadership is not due to men purposefully preventing them from being involved. Rather, women's gendered life experiences – the smaller measure of exposure to economic, social and political life beyond the confines of a rural area or farm setting that many women have had – debar them from this space. This exposure is all the more important since modern leadership is necessarily directed towards the external world. On the other hand, it should also be noted that the discourse centred on the notion that “women don't know about the outside world” tends to develop a life of its own and to be invoked even in cases where women *are* acquainted with “the outside world”.

In leadership in development projects, and therefore in devising general intervention strategies, one should bear in mind that “the more structured a project is, the more women will be pushed out” (interview with Axel Thoma, Windhoek, 29 September 2000). It certainly appears that the degree of formality of structures, be they projects or meetings or leadership structures, inversely predicts the level to which women can be expected to participate actively.

CHAPTER 11

NGOs AND GENDER CONCERNS

11.1 Introduction

It is self-evident that organisations which explicitly aim to empower San have a leading role to play in taking up San gender concerns. This chapter assesses the past and present effectiveness of some of these organisations with special reference to the gender aspects of their respective empowerment strategies.

The marginalisation and disenfranchisement of San through the wide-scale loss of their land and domination by other ethnic groups have for the most part prevented the emergence of effective community and leadership structures. Equally poorly developed in this highly dependent underclass is any kind of institutional culture. In recent years, however, there has been a proliferation of San CBOs and NGOs,¹⁰² as well as the establishment of a national support organisation, namely SASI, and a regional networking and advocacy organisation, namely WIMSA. In some cases different NGOs have even vied with each other for the acceptance of members of the same San group. In general, however, the coverage of such institutions remains very thin and focused on selected areas or groups. Whereas the Nyae Nyae's CBO, recently renamed the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC), like the KDT implements projects directly, both WIMSA and SASI are conceived of more as advocacy and networking organisations.

The large numbers of dispersed San families living on communal or commercial farms in Botswana and Namibia have, as a result of obvious logistical and other constraints, attracted the least attention from NGOs and governments alike,¹⁰³ and the San there have also not had the capacity to organise themselves into community organisations.

While a gender analysis of the whole spectrum of these organisations is beyond the scope of this report, those NGOs that have arguably been most influential and high-profile will be portrayed in terms of the relative representation of women and men in their organisational structures, as well as the gender-sensitivity of their programmes.

11.2 Kuru Development Trust

Over the past 15 years "Kuru" has become a byword for San organisations not only in Botswana, but in southern Africa in general. Established as a charitable organisation, Kuru was the first NGO in the region to work directly with San in Botswana, and today it is the largest NGO in that country. Kuru started as an initiative of the Dutch Reformed Church, based at a freehold farm at D'Kar. It grew from a local CBO into a service organisation operating in nine settlements in Ghanzi District and three programme areas in Ngamiland. The transformation into a complex support organisation with more than 80 employees and substantial donor income has not been free of conflict regarding ownership, involving especially Kuru's "home", namely the D'Kar community (both its San and its non-San inhabitants), and district and central government structures.

¹⁰² Twenty San organisations (CBOs or NGOs) across the region are listed as WIMSA member organisations (WIMSA 2000).

¹⁰³ An exception as far as commercial farms are concerned is the Farm Workers' Project recently initiated under the RAD programme in Ghanzi District, which currently runs a pilot programme aimed at income generation and educational activities (interview with Bep van Oostrom, Ghanzi, 26 May 2000).

11.2.1 Programme and policy

Kuru's programme activities are in the fields of small-scale income generation, education and training, arts and culture, and increasingly CBNRM and tourism. A recent evaluation of Kuru (Bollig et al. 2000) acknowledges that the organisation is especially appreciated in the RAD settlements for its economic activities, and that as a development organisation it has become the biggest employer in the district. The Bokamoso training for San pre-school teachers has earned a reputation that extends far beyond Kuru's geographical programme area. The internationally renowned art project and other cultural activities have increased San self-respect and promoted San culture, while CBNRM projects have successfully aided San groups to secure land rights and access to natural resources.

On the other hand, the evaluation contends that Kuru is seen as a mere charitable benefactor by many programme participants, who have not gained significantly greater control over their social and economic lives (ibid.: 144). Economic activities are highly subsidised, and the report questions whether its strong emphasis on this sector may perhaps have diverted the organisation's attention away from issues of political survival, such as securing access to land and recognition as an indigenous minority with adequate representation (ibid.: 138). On a different note, the process of organisational development at a community level, which is seen as being vital for collective strength, is adjudged to be inadequate: most participants, from cochineal producers to tanners, leather workers and textile workers, operate as individuals for individual monthly payments rather than as members of producer groups (ibid.: 144).

Kuru's "Mission and Vision Statement" explicitly refers to "equality between men and women" as a "traditional value ... of our culture [which] the day-to-day activities of Kuru should reflect" (as quoted in ibid.: 92). Similarly, its Ngamiland sub-project aims at "improving the position of women" (*Kuru Ngamiland Annual Plan 1998*, as quoted in Bollig et al. 2000: 72). Nevertheless, the evaluators note that despite the recognition of the need to support women in their economic ventures, the increasing power divide between women and men does not feature sufficiently in programme design and the selection of participants (ibid.: 88). Instead Kuru has turned a "blind eye" to social differences within its clientele along the fault lines not only of gender, but also of age and relative wealth and status.

In terms of income generation, Kuru's purchase and marketing of handcrafts has undoubtedly benefited women in particular. Nevertheless, even though this is one of Kuru's biggest extension projects, in real terms only a rather small number of producers (less than 80) benefit, and the market potential for expansion appears to be limited (ibid.: 40). A project for textile production specifically for women is limited to D'Kar, and had 18 participants – mostly from slightly better-off families (ibid.: 37). While the women appreciated the wide-ranging training they received, they felt the payment they received was too little. In another project, the Dqae Qare Game Farm employed nearly the same number of women and men, but the better jobs, such as ranging and guiding (which attract tourists' tips), were invariably occupied by men while all the cleaners were women¹⁰⁴ (ibid.: 68).

11.2.2 Institutional gender balance

As for gender issues in the ranks of the staff, the evaluation concludes that a "western style management" with a male bias had been imported.¹⁰⁵ Men dominate the Kuru board, which has 19 members but only two women (Kuru 2000), and the powerful action committee is comprised exclusively of men. Kuru employs a total staff complement of 38 women and 45 men, but none of the higher management positions are held by San women. The evaluation takes cognisance of many complaints from women relating to their limited career opportunities and not being taken seriously within the organisation.

The evaluation states that gender issues among Kuru staff, as well as in training and other programme activities, cannot be dealt with appropriately through the existing rules and regulations imposed by the

¹⁰⁴ In an intriguing development since the completion of the quoted evaluation, the female employees have "dismissed" their male co-workers whose behaviour they perceived to be destructive (see Chapter 10).

¹⁰⁵ The report's analysis of KDT's management not only takes issue with gender, but also notes that the organisation's expansion necessitated an organisational structure which has led to increasing alienation of San leaders from "their" organisation, along with high-profile roles played by expatriate experts.

management (Bollig et al. 2000: 107), and calls for comprehensive and proactive gender policy and practice to be implemented.

Since the completion of the Bollig report, a gender awareness workshop has taken place involving Kuru staff by way of preparation for an organisational gender audit. The workshop served to take stock of the positions of men and women within the organisation, and provided the opportunity for staff to assess gender-based divisions in field and office work. It concluded that while women constitute the majority in Kuru projects, they are not sufficiently involved in decision-making processes in the organisation (Kuru 2000).

The Dutch volunteer in charge of the gender audit felt that it was not an easy task to promote a higher-profile representation of women in Kuru's management structures. Plans to form a committee to observe gender issues within the organisation, for instance, had been hampered by women's unwillingness to become involved in such a committee, based on their fear of their husbands' possibly violent reprisals. According to the development worker, the solution might be to try also to get a substantial number of men involved in the envisaged committee (interview with Nelke van der Lans, D'Kar, 27 May 2000).

It appears that while progress with respect to gender issues has been rather slow in the past, more recently there has been greater commitment on the part of Kuru to address gender issues. This seems to be largely a donor-driven initiative, however, which might reduce its effectiveness.

11.3 The Nyae Nyae Conservancy

The community organisation representing the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae, now called the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC), is the oldest and best established of all San organisations in Namibia. Its history dates back to the early 1980s, when anthropologists John Marshall and Claire Ritchie set up a cattle fund to assist Ju/'hoansi to start their own herds and establish themselves economically, and to lobby for San land rights in Bushmanland. The Ju/Wa Farmers Union established in 1986 played a major role in assisting the Ju/'hoansi who had moved out of Tsumkwe back to their *n!oresi* to establish a mixed subsistence economy consisting of foraging, farming and livestock production. This process served to re-establish ancestral land rights, and in 1998 Nyae Nyae was granted conservancy status under Namibia's legislation for CBNRM. The organisation was subsequently renamed the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, and is supported by the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDFN).

11.3.1 Projects

The NNC has an administrative and training centre at Baraka in Nyae Nyae. With substantial donor funding and 30 employees (as well as a considerable turnover in expatriate advisers), the NNC manages projects relating to craft-making, tourism, natural resource management and education, as well as a technical workshop. The Village Schools Project of Nyae Nyae uses Ju/'hoan teaching materials, and is pioneering an innovative concept of teacher training of community members.

Women presently benefit substantially only from the craft-making programme (interview with Wendy Viall, Windhoek, 3 September 2000), due to the fact that many craft producers are women. This branch is also the only one with a female non-San co-ordinator. Where natural resource management activities are formalised it is predominantly men who are employed, for example as rangers monitoring wildlife. At this stage the campsites in the area are not managed by appointed persons or committees. Of the three female trainee teachers, two abandoned their training following intimidation and abuse by their jealous partners (see Chapters 6 and 10).

11.3.2 Institutional gender balance

The NNC has a board of trustees as well as a management committee which is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the organisation. In contrast to the near parity between women and men on the

Rada representing all villages in the area, as well as on the NNC Board of Trustees,¹⁰⁶ the important management committee – on which members serve as full-time staff – is all male. The organisation attributes the dominance of men on this body to the dearth of women with an appropriate level of formal education (interview with Wendy Viall, Windhoek, 3 September 2000), but it also acknowledges that gender aspects of Kuru have not as yet featured in its strategic planning regarding either its structures or programmes.

Thus, while the NNC and NNDFN have undoubtedly had “a marked impact in terms of capacity” and San in its ranks have become “perhaps the most articulate, literate and capable leaders in Namibia” (Nam), it remains predominantly male-dominated. This fact is all the more conspicuous since current evidence suggests that women are as vocal as men at the local village level.

It remains to be seen in what way programme activities of the NNC develop, and whether a stronger emphasis on CBNRM will involve women to the same as extent as men.

11.4 Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa

The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), a Windhoek-based regional networking organisation, was established in 1996. WIMSA has also established a Botswana branch, based at the KDT (or “Kuru”) offices in D’Kar near Ghanzi.

WIMSA was formed with the mandate to “advocate and lobby for the San’s rights, establish a network for information exchange among San communities and other concerned parties, provide training and deliver advice on tourism, integrated development projects and land tenure”. Apart from its official networking mandate, WIMSA has also been directly involved in an advisory capacity in the implementation of projects, including fundraising and other related activities.¹⁰⁷

WIMSA is directed by an all-San board whose members are appointed by the Annual General Assembly of leaders and delegates from San communities in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Its day-to-day activities are run by the staff based at its regional headquarters in Windhoek.

The following sections discuss WIMSA’s gender politics and policies with regard to institutional matters and San development and human rights concerns.

11.4.1 Institutional gender balance

WIMSA’s governing body is its all-San Board of Trustees, which is elected by the Annual General Assembly (composed of two delegates from each San community in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa) for a term of two years. The board consists of nine members; three each from South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. There are also three alternative members from each of these countries who stand in for members who may be prevented from attending a board meeting.

Apart from the first year of its existence, during which there was one woman on the WIMSA board, since its inception in 1996 the board has been all-male until two women were elected as trustees in 2000.

WIMSA does not have rules governing the representation of men and women respectively in its decision-making bodies. However, there has been some awareness of the need for more gender-balanced representation among San trustees and the WIMSA staff. Although there are no formal quota requirements, most of the more prominent and vocal male San leaders regularly suggest that women should also be elected to the board. While some leaders probably do this in recognition of a partly donor-driven “political correctness”, others argue from the background of San tradition which involved women in

¹⁰⁶ The NNC board currently comprises seven men and five women (interview with Wendy Viall, Windhoek, 3 September 2000).

¹⁰⁷ See WIMSA’s annual reports for 1998, 1999 and 2000 for a detailed description of the organisation’s activities.

influential positions, and still others feel that gender balance will add to a “traditional” atmosphere of harmony and peace among the trustees (interview, Axel Thoma, 29 September 2000).

In 2000 the professional WIMSA staff at its regional office consisted of the non-San co-ordinator and the San assistant co-ordinator (both male), the non-San mentor/trainer and a San trainee secretary (both female). The co-ordinator and the field worker of the WIMSA Botswana office are both San men. The WIMSA regional office has trained a number of young San individuals in basic administration skills and development work. Several trainees were women from Namibian San communities (see Chapter 10).

11.4.2 Policies

Gender issues have not yet featured formally on the agendas of the WIMSA Board of Trustees and General Assembly. Some gender concerns have occasionally been taken up, however, mostly by San women attending these meetings. Violence has been a special concern in this respect, mostly in the wake of ghastly incidents of abuse and violations perpetrated by “outsiders”.

WIMSA has also shown a gender-sensitive approach in some of the projects which the organisation has been assisting to implement. An example in this regard is the Sonneblom/Donkerbos San community project in the Rietfontein area in the Omaheke Region of Namibia, to which WIMSA provides support, advice and facilitation services. Cattle and goat farming forms the economic basis of this project. When it started in 1995, adult men and women each received one cow and one goat as breeding stock on a loan basis (WIMSA 1998: 27). Women and men were thus equally enabled to benefit from the project.

11.4.3 First African Indigenous Women’s Conference

WIMSA along with the NNC was party to the *First African Indigenous Women’s Conference* held in Morocco in April 1998. This gathering revolved around two main themes:

- the role of African indigenous women as treasurers of the cultural and intellectual heritage of their peoples; and
- violence against African indigenous women.

The conference saw the formation of the African Indigenous Women’s Organisation (AIWO), which established as its overall goal the defence and promotion of the rights and interests of indigenous women in Africa (WIMSA 1999: 26).

WIMSA was represented by Elfriede Gaeses, who at that time was a trainee with the organisation’s regional office. The WIMSA delegate chose to focus on violence against San women in her paper, which was based on her own research among women in a number of San communities (Gaesens 1998; see also Chapter 8).

It appears that within WIMSA there is a measure of awareness of the need to take gender concerns into account, but there are neither formal structures nor a clear commitment which would recognise San gender concerns in terms of both representation in decision-making and policy matters as an integral part of the organisation’s activities. To date the internal stratifications of San communities along the lines of gender, age and relative wealth (‘class’) have not received adequate attention within WIMSA.

11.5 South African San Institute

The Cape Town-based South African San Institute (SASI) was established in July 1996, a few months after the establishment of WIMSA. The two NGOs have an extremely close organisational and working relationship. SASI was created in response to the need for support and access to resources identified by WIMSA. Its official status within the network of southern African NGOs promoting San human

rights and development is that of a support organisation to WIMSA.¹⁰⁸ The task of support organisations is to render advice and other assistance, and generally to help “strengthen WIMSA’s programmes, campaigns and legal actions” (WIMSA 1999: 24).

From a procedural perspective, SASI only acts when the WIMSA board members mandate it to implement a project. Initially SASI was mandated by WIMSA to deal with land issues, to conduct research into San language matters and the situation of the San in Angola, and to establish the San Cultural Centre near Cape Town (WIMSA 1999: 25).

Whereas WIMSA operates at a regional level, SASI has been confined to South Africa. Its key programme areas include advocacy and lobbying; the provision of legal resources; cultural programmes; tourism; and research and development (*SASI Press Pack: San Claim Briefing Document*, 1999).

For the first few years of its existence, however, SASI’s practical efforts were mainly geared towards supporting the land claims of the †Khomani in the KGNP/KTP and the !Xu and Khwe at Platfontein farm on the outskirts of Kimberley. Following the successful conclusion of the two land settlements in 1999, the organisation has been undergoing a process of reorientation and reorganisation.

The following sections discuss SASI’s gender politics and policies with respect to institutional matters and San development and human rights concerns.

11.5.1 Institutional gender balance

As a support organisation to WIMSA, SASI does not have a San-directed board; to date, SASI’s staff has consisted entirely of non-San professionals. Among its high-profile staff, one of two former co-ordinators and the former Northern Cape co-ordinator are women.

A woman currently employed by SASI has described the organisation’s employment policies and work environment as being gender-sensitive. The rights of female SASI employees are protected by contractual stipulations relating to racial and sexual harassment (Meryl-Joy Wildschut pers. comm.).

11.5.2 Policies

SASI has not as yet published an official gender policy. During the intense period of lobbying surrounding the land claims, the organisation functioned with a narrow focus on the central issues, and with only minimal and loosely defined structures (interview with former SASI Northern Cape Co-ordinator Philippa Haden, Platfontein, 15 June 2000).

It appears, however, that SASI has made some efforts to incorporate a gender perspective in its work with the South African San communities, and that these have not escaped the attention of San. During our research at Schmidtsdrift male and female leaders of the !Xu and Khwe unequivocally recalled several SASI workshops and discussions as the only forums in which they had received information about gender issues pertaining to their community and had had the opportunity to freely express their opinions (interviews at Schmidtsdrift, June 2000).

SASI’s San Advocacy Training Project incorporates a gender perspective on the representation and monitoring of indicators. The project is aimed at building San people’s advocacy capacity, encouraging the participation of women in training programmes and enabling gender-sensitive facilitation “by stimulating the formation and organisational development of sustainable civil structures that defend the rights to equality and cultural upliftment of indigenous people” (SASI 1999: 14-15). The project has targeted the !Xu and Khwe at Schmidtsdrift; the †Khomani at Rietfontein, Welkom, Upington and Kagga Kamma; and the Nama at Riemvasmaak.

¹⁰⁸ Other southern Africa-based WIMSA support organisations are the public interest law centres Ditshwanelo of the Botswana Centre for Human Rights and the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) in Namibia. Both organisations have a broad human rights focus which includes some work for and with San communities.

In recognition of the dire need to address the problem of internal stratification along the lines of gender and age, particularly among the Schmidtsdrift !Xu and Khwe, SASI has planned a programme focused on gender and youth to be carried out with these two communities over the course of 2001 (Meryl-Joy Wildschut, pers. comm.).

It is difficult to make any conclusive statement regarding SASI's capacity to address the gender concerns of San communities, as the organisation is currently undergoing a process of reorientation. During the first few years of SASI's operations, however, it has clearly played an extremely influential role in San communities in South Africa.

Complementing its historical and ongoing commitment to lobbying for San communities' land rights, SASI is nowadays paying more attention to cleavages along lines of stratification such as gender and age than most other organisations promoting San human rights in southern Africa.

11.6 Conclusions

The evaluation of the KDT referred to above contains an assessment that by and large could be applied to most other organisations:

[E]thnic identity – i.e. being San – has been the main criterion for [the KDT], through which it distinguishes itself from other people and organisations. Internal – within the San communities – categories of social stratification like gender or class ... do not actively feature in the selection of participants or the design of programmes. (Bollig et al. 2000: 88)

While it appears that the internal stratification of San communities has till now been “on the backburner” for most San organisations and support organisations, there seems to be an increasing awareness that this issue should no longer be viewed as being less significant than the problems associated with marginalisation along ethnic lines.

The KDT evaluation also emphasised the urgency of adequate gender policies:

This [issue] cannot be “postponed” and placed second to ethnic discrimination/emancipation. The different approaches to issues, whether related to basic survival, dignity, health care, reproductive rights, violence, household management, rearing children ... between women and men need to be recognised, acknowledged and integrated in strategies for positive change. Unless valued in their own right, women's views are likely to be ignored and not heard. Societal change processes that do not incorporate women's views, rights, etc. on [their] own terms are not going to be sustainable in the long run and will only contribute to a worsening of the position of women. (Bollig et al. 2000: 89)

It appears that at present, in sync with the vibrant gender equality discourse taking place in the broader context of South African society, gender awareness is more developed in SASI – the foremost South African San support organisation – than in any other San-focused organisation in southern Africa. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that some other organisations are not also alive to what is at stake: after all, the discourse grounded in the relative gender equality of earlier San societies is now frequently adduced by organisations and individual San leaders in arguing for a more gender-balanced dispensation.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Conclusions

All San in southern Africa remain extremely marginalised. This gender analysis has shown, however, that San women are subject to multiple forms of marginalisation. They are discriminated against as San, as women, and as San women both by their wider societies and within their own communities.

The different forms of marginalisation and discrimination are mutually reinforcing. The challenge is thus for governments, NGOs (both San support organisations and NGOs striving for gender equality) and also San CBOs to develop strategies that address the many facets of gendered discrimination.

Substantial efforts are needed to incorporate gender concerns into policies and programmes, be they in the fields of education, health, land rights or any other development sector. Very little has yet been done in this respect; on the one hand, San empowerment strategies – where they have been initiated – have generally neglected gender concerns, while on the other, efforts to promote gender equality in southern Africa have hardly ever taken note of the specific concerns of San women.

This analysis has shown, moreover, that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to addressing the gender concerns of San communities in southern Africa would be altogether inadequate: the circumstances of the various San communities differ too greatly, and these have been shown also to have a substantial impact on gender relations. The recommendations listed below can thus not be more than guidelines for the design of adequate intervention strategies. Where it has been deemed appropriate, recommendations which address the specific gender concerns of certain San communities have also been included.

12.2 Recommendations

12.2.1 General recommendations

It is recommended that development strategies aimed at addressing gender concerns among the San of southern Africa be guided by the following three principles:

- The recognition of the differential impact that economic and political marginalisation has on San women and men and the need to develop appropriate strategies to respond to this.
- The recognition that gender concerns need to be addressed simultaneously with other economic, political, social and cultural matters in order to be of long-term benefit.
- The recognition that special attention should be given to the needs and interests of San women because they have been marginalised by their wider societies and are experiencing increasing levels of gender inequality within their own communities.

12.2.2 Recommendations for government policy frameworks

There is a clear need for the governments of the southern African states which are home to sizeable San populations to develop appropriate policy frameworks for addressing San gender concerns, and translate such frameworks into practicable plans of action.

- The gender concerns of San should be incorporated into the respective countries' national gender policies.
- Policies and programmes directed at San communities should be assessed in terms of their gender implications and readjusted where necessary to reverse the current processes of increasing gender inequality within San communities.
- Policies and programmes in all relevant development sectors, in particular poverty alleviation, rural development, health, education, and the legal system, should be assessed and amended to incorporate the specific gender concerns of San communities.
- Governments should work closely with NGOs, CBOs and international organisations which strive to promote San development and gender equality.

Insofar as they impact upon San gender relations, the current policies of the Government of Botswana are a cause for special concern. The Namibian and South African Governments have policy frameworks in place which are broadly appropriate for developing programmes to address San gender concerns. Whereas both of these countries have made explicit provision for affirmative action measures to promote disadvantaged sections of their citizenry, such policy frameworks are absent in the case of Botswana. However, such affirmative action policies and programmes are a prerequisite for efforts aimed at redressing the effects of marginalisation in terms of ethnicity and gender.

12.2.3 Recommendations for NGOs, CBOs and donors

There is an equally urgent need for San CBOs and those NGOs and international organisations or donor agencies directly or indirectly involved in San affairs to develop strategies and programmes that address San gender concerns. The following recommendations are made in this context:

- Development-oriented NGOs, especially those that focus on poverty alleviation and rural development, should consider strengthening their commitment to working with San communities. In doing so they should consider and address gender concerns.
- NGOs that already work with San communities, including San support organisations, need to make a conscious decision to assess the gender-sensitivity and relevance of their programmes and make adjustments where necessary.
- NGOs should also set an example by establishing internal gender policies regarding their employment practices and working conditions.
- NGOs striving for gender equality ("women's organisations") should assess their policies and programmes against the criterion of how their efforts benefit San women, with a view to subsequently incorporating the specific concerns of San women into their activities.
- San CBOs and their networks should assess their policies and programmes in terms of gender and ensure that gender concerns are always incorporated. They should strive for a gender balance among the representatives on their boards and other governing bodies. San CBOs and networking organisations should also set an example by establishing internal gender policies regarding their employment practices and working conditions.

12.2.4 Recommendations for sectoral interventions

Within a broader and integrated approach there are several key areas in which interventions directly address San gender concerns. The list of recommendations is necessarily incomplete, as more detailed strategies for specific areas and individual communities can only be designed following focused needs assessments. It must furthermore be born in mind that sectoral interventions indirectly impact on many other aspects of the San's social organisation. Efforts to promote gender equality in San education, for example, cannot be made in isolation. An integrated multi-sectoral development approach is needed to address San gender concerns. Such an approach should take account of the entire range of issues, such as access to land and natural resources, ethnic prejudice, cultural identity and human rights.

Work/income

Programmes and projects aimed at providing an income and a sustainable livelihood should take account of the differences in the gendered lives of San women and men in general, and of the division of labour along the lines of gender in particular. Intervention measures should be designed with the following in mind:

- Men and women should be able to materially profit from income-generation projects in an equitable manner.
- Care should be taken to eschew a male bias in projects aimed at providing an income. There is a discernible danger that San men take over projects as soon as the possibility of a cash income is involved.
- Projects aimed at promoting community-based tourism should be carefully designed to avoid the danger that they mainly benefit a specific section of San communities, e.g. young, relatively well-educated men.
- Craft-making projects – currently one of the more successful income generators for women – should consider a broadening of their market base and also aim to ensure access to and rights over resources (e.g. ostrich eggs).
- Livestock projects should be planned and implemented in line with a gender analysis so as to counter their tendency to develop a male bias.
- There is generally a distinct need for flexibility in the consideration of gender-sensitive approaches to the creation of income-generating opportunities. Historical experiences and skills vary greatly between the various communities, as do other circumstances.¹⁰⁹

Education

Education is one of the key areas in which interventions can equip the younger generation of San with better life opportunities than their parents enjoyed. Great care should be taken, however, to ensure that efforts to promote San education benefit San children of both sexes. The following recommendations are made:

- San parents need to be educated to strengthen their resolve to ensure that their daughters as well as their sons receive an education to equip them with skills. It is recommended that educational campaigns aiming at San parents be integrated with basic literacy and numeracy programmes for adults. San women and mothers should be especially targeted.
- The hostel situation in boarding schools across southern Africa requires special attention. This is also a gender issue as many San girls currently live in extremely problematic situations characterised by physical danger and emotional insecurity. It is consequently recommended that San women be employed as matrons for hostels which accommodate significant numbers of San learners.
- Schools should be sensitive to distinct needs arising from current San culture. A particular concern in this regard is the number of “married” San girls and young women of school-going age. Care should be taken to ensure their continued education by admitting them to schools as well as by encouraging the perception in San communities that education is still valuable for a young wife.
- Sex education (“life skills education”) should be emphasised in schools to help curb the high incidence of teenage pregnancies.
- Pre-primary education, also known as Early Childhood Development (ECD), should be promoted in San communities to give San girls and boys a better start in formal education. The establishment of ECD programmes could also provide employment for a number of San women with a measure of formal education.

¹⁰⁹ Thus, for example, women of the large Schmidtsdrift San population expressed the hope that following the move to Platfontein, the current small-scale women’s pottery project could be expanded into a fully-fledged ceramics factory to provide a living wage for a larger number of women.

Health

In the area of health, gender concerns relate primarily to reproductive health and child health, the latter because women are assigned the task of caring for their children's health in San communities. The following recommendations are made:

- Culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive education projects and campaigns should be designed to equip San communities to deal with the increasingly pressing issues of HIV/AIDS and other STDs.
- Nurses should be trained in sensitive and culturally appropriate ways to support San mothers in caring for their children's health.
- Culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive education projects and campaigns should be designed to equip San to deal with the immense problem of alcohol abuse in their communities across southern Africa.

Violence and abuse

Interventions in the area of violence and abuse against women need to be very carefully designed as these are areas in which San women are crucially vulnerable. It is recommended that relevant efforts concentrate on the following areas:

- In-depth research into violence and abuse, both sexual and non-sexual, is needed to develop the foundation for gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate interventions. Research should take the views, fears and aspirations of San men and women seriously, as violent behaviour is rooted in men's and women's attitudes and feelings. While both men and women should be included in the research, it should target men in particular as they are almost always the perpetrators. The research also needs to look into broader issues of the San communities' histories and present-day situations. The traumatic experiences of war and army life and the general militarisation of San society are factors requiring special attention. In the case of the Schmidtsdrift San, the experience of repeated uprooting also calls for attention.
- Educational programmes that are based on relevant research should be developed to educate San men and boys about the problem of violence against women. Such programmes need to consider the total life experience of male San in different circumstances by encompassing issues related to their economic and political marginalisation.
- Efforts should be made without delay to sensitise law enforcement agencies regarding the needs of San women who have survived acts of violence against them.
- Education should be provided for San women and community leaders on how to seek recourse in the event of violent incidents.

Leadership

Development interventions can address a number of gender concerns of San communities. If, however, the issues of widening gender gaps and increasing levels of gender inequality within San communities are to be addressed with any prospect of long-term success, it is essential that efforts be made from within the communities themselves. San community leaders will necessarily play a crucial role in this regard. It is therefore recommended that sensitisation to gender issues (i.e. "gender training") be fully incorporated in capacity-building programmes aimed at the leadership structures of San communities across southern Africa. Such programmes should be tailor-made for the specific circumstances and forms of gender relations of distinct San communities.

12.2.5 The way forward

This study could only lay some foundations for the incorporation of gender concerns in development strategies geared towards southern African San people. As already pointed out, some areas require more substantive in-depth research.

There is a distinct need to consult further with San women and men about their needs in general and their various gender concerns in particular. The nature of the consultative process will vary from community to community. For example, the women of Schmidtsdrift requested that group consultations with them take place in the absence of any men. In other San communities with less rigid and hierarchical gender relations, however, consultations could take place in mixed-sex meetings. Whatever style of assembly is chosen as the appropriate form of consultation with San women and men in a particular community, the aim should always be to develop appropriate development strategies together with the San.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Botswana (Ghanzi District)

Ms Boitumelo Simon (WIMSA trainee secretary)	18 May 2000	Windhoek
Mr Rein Dekker (KDT)	26 May 2000	D'Kar
Mr Roy Sesana, Ms Mama Rampadi (FPK)	26 May 2000	Ghanzi
Ms Bep van Oostrom (Coordinator Farm Workers' Project)	26 May 2000	Ghanzi
Ms Nelke van der Lans (KDT)	27 May 2000	D'Kar
Mr Khanxlae Moelenyane	28 May 2000	Chobokwane
Ms Sophie Morris (<i>kgosi</i>)	28 May 2000	Chobokwane
Ms Kweexlae, Ms Kwaba	28 May 2000	Chobokwane
Group interview, women	29 May 2000	Farm van Graaff (cattle post)
Group interview, women	29 May 2000	Farm van Graaff (main farm)
Group interview, women	30 May 2000	New Xade
Mr Xlale Mokhalaheri (Chairman: Village Development Committee)	30 May 2000	New Xade
Mr Mathambo Ngakaeaja (WIMSA Botswana)	30 May 2000	D'Kar
Mr Robert Khaise (<i>kgosi</i>)	31 May 2000	New Xanagas
Group interview, women	31 May 2000	New Xanagas

South Africa (Schmidtsdrift)

Mr Mario Mahongo (Chairperson CPA)	12&14 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Ms Awelina Chifako (WIMSA Board, CPA Board)	13 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Ms Sonia Kamuti	13 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Ms Marie Ndumba	13 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Ms Tumba Alfrino (Co-ordinator Textiles Project)	13 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Mr Nicolaas Tenda (WIMSA Board, Vice-Chairperson: Khwe Council)	14 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Focus group, Khwe women	14 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Ms Joan Ryan (psychologist, APSO volunteer)	14 June 2000	Kimberley
Ms Philippa Haden (SASI Northern Cape Co-ordinator)	15 June 2000	Platfontein
Ms Riette Mierke (Arts and Crafts Project Co-ordinator)	15 June 2000	Platfontein
Group interview, Khwe women potters	15 June 2000	Platfontein
Focus group, !Xu women	16 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift
Mr Hennie Swart (!Xu and Khwe CPA Co-ordinator)	16 June 2000	Schmidtsdrift

Namibia (Tsumkwe West)

Group interview, women	21 June 2000	Omatako Camp
Mr John Arnold (Chief)	21 June 2000	Omatako
Group interview, women	21 June 2000	Kandu
Mr Ou Johannes	21 June 2000	Omatako Camp
Group interview, women	22 June 2000	Nhoma

Ms Cgosje Kgasje, Ms Ncaoga Cwi	22 June 2000	Nhoma
Group interview, women	22 June 2000	Aasvoëlnes
Ms Sara Sungu (senior traditional councillor)	23 June 2000	Mangetti Duin
Ms Edla Karuombe (school principal)	23 June 2000	Grashoek
Group interview, men	23 June 2000	Grashoek
Group interview, women	23 June 2000	Grashoek
Ms Paula Manuel (VSP teacher)	28 June 2000	Windhoek

Namibia (Omaheke)

Ms Dina Kakora, Ms Adeline Goagoses (OST)	28 June 2000	Gobabis
Mr Raymond Martin, Ms Marie-Claire Martin	29 June 2000	Gobabis
Ms Anna More (OST)	29 June 2000	Gobabis

Additional interviews and consultations

Ms Linda Waldman (University of the Witwatersrand)	13 June 2000	by email
Ms Catherine Mbeki (Health Unlimited)	3 August 2000	by telephone
Ms Linda Vanherck (formerly WIMSA)	19 August 2000	Windhoek
Ms Ute Dieckmann (University of Cologne)	29 August 2000	Windhoek
Ms Wendy Viall (NNDNFN)	3 September 2000	Windhoek
Mr Dave Cole (CRIA SA-DC)	7 September 2000	Windhoek
Ms Willemien le Roux (KDT)	8 September 2000	Windhoek
Mr Axel Thoma (WIMSA Co-ordinator)	29 September 2000	Windhoek
Ms Beths Daiber (San Cultural Centre)	25 October 2000	by telephone
Ms Meryl-Joy Wildschut (SASI)	6 November 2000	by email
Dr Renée Sylvian (Dalhousie University)	various occasions	by email

At the 22nd Session of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly held in Windhoek, Namibia, in March 1996, a resolution was passed recognising “the special difficulties encountered in integrating hunting and gathering peoples in agricultural industrial states”, and noting “the lack of accurate overall information on the present condition and prospects of San”. The European Commission was consequently requested to undertake “a comprehensive study of the San people ... in the light of international conventions”. To this end a series of studies was conducted among San populations throughout the southern African region over the period 1999-2000 as part of a project titled *Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa*. This publication is one of five reports produced under the project.

Reports on the *Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa*:

- ***An Introduction to the Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa***
– James Suzman (ISBN 99916-765-3-8)
- ***An Assessment of the Status of the San in South Africa, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe***
– Steven Robins, Elias Madzudzo and Matthias Brenzinger (ISBN 99916-765-4-6)
- ***An Assessment of the Status of the San in Botswana***
– Lin Cassidy, Ken Good, Isaac Mazonde and Roberta Rivers (ISBN 99916-765-2-X)
- ***An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia***
– James Suzman (ISBN 99916-765-61-1)
- ***A Gender Perspective on the Status of the San in Southern Africa***
– Silke Felton and Heike Becker (ISBN 99916-765-4-6)



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