The colonising camera : photographs in the making of Namibian history / Edited by Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester, Patricia Hayes; Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998. (2-9p.)

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Photography, history and memory

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The colonial photographs in this book have been extracted from the archive. The archive is often associated with the closure of meaning, with disconnection, with forgetting. When photographs come out of storage, it is as if energy is released. A good example is the picture of the four-piece band from the Old Location in Windhoek [Exhib photo no 18]. This image, stored away with other photographs from the early 1950s, was captioned by Pretoria's State Information Office as "the orchestra" of the "Bantu Social Club". But recently, in travelling between its filing cabinet and exposure to the public, the fixity of the picture broke down and the functional anonymity imposed by the official caption fell away. Former residents of the Old Location,[1] Peter Katangolo and Victoria Uukunde, when seeing the photograph, experienced a moment of intense recall. Here were the Mareko brothers and their friend Naftali who made up the Warmgat (Hot-arse) Band. Stories about the men flowed.[2]

Connecting old photographs with stories of the past was the hope, if not the aim, behind the exhibition *The Colonising Camera* and this book. The desire was to bring colonial photographs out of the archive and reconnect them with contemporary historical discourses in Namibia and elsewhere. The exhibition was originally conceived as a visual backdrop to a history conference on South Africa's colonisation of Namibia held in 1994 (see Hayes *et al* 1998). But this 'sideshow' soon pulled the curators into a process which went far beyond the initial parameters. The exhibition's ensuing journey between Namibia, South Africa and the United States[3] confirmed a general acknowledgement of the enormous impact and immediacy of photographs from the past. Photographs were "better than the textbook", as one Namibian student put it (Kisting 1995). Because the past erupts so powerfully into the present through photographs, one curator said, they are "an excellent way of making history more accessible" (Kisting 1995). The colonial archive effectively starved the Namibian (and wider) public of images of the past, and this has pushed the exhibition towards publication.

In becoming a book itself, *The Colonising Camera* is envisaged as a kind of album where photographs are central but where visuals and texts speak to one another. Considerable additional research in various photographic archives following the initial exhibition has resulted in a revision of both the exhibition contents and the captions. Further individual commentaries were commissioned to accompany the exhibition, and these represent efforts by scholars of different aspects of Namibian history and anthropology to engage centrally with the relationship between colonisation and photography. To complement this, and indeed to take the 'colonising camera' into visual paradigms beyond colonialism, the book concludes with a contemporary mini-exhibition and essay concerned with, as the rural photographers put it, 'how we see each other'.

Visual history and African history

Most researchers of Africa's social history have had limited interaction with photographs. Indeed, until now the most common location of photographs in books on Namibian and wider African history is on their covers.[4] They might also be included marginally within a text in order to provide a 'feel' or 'atmosphere' for the period, to identify a person or place, or simply because of their outright quaintness. In general, visuality is subordinated to textuality which itself is grounded and empirically validated by reference to documents and sources from the privileged site of the archive. Such treatment of historical photographs has been at worst disdainful, at best condescending.

Historians often regard the photograph as a mere 'illustration' to a more important textual reference, and treat it like a quotation. Quotation itself is often seen as self-evident, and not conceived as a 'language' which seeks to persuade, or which constitutes a discourse with its own structures of meaning. One problem in dealing with pictures is the reluctance of the discipline of history to take up this linguistic turn, let alone a 'pictorial turn' which might give visual material central interpretive value (Mitchell 1994). There is ample evidence to suggest that "*pictures form a point* of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual enquiry" (Mitchell 1994: 13). Visual studies are typically isolated and cordoned off by disciplinary boundaries; libraries and academic seminars typically replicate these divisions.

Disciplines such as art history and anthropology have been much readier than history to take photographs seriously. Issues of the journal *African Arts* on photography have highlighted particular historic collections (see especially *African Arts* 1991). These focused on the photographers and the contexts in which they worked, the conventions and motifs that influenced them, and the forms of display adopted by Africans who were photographed. Much more work has since been done in tracing the emergence of visual discourses around composition and subject-matter, and the specific visual codes adopted in different parts of the colonial world (Geary 1993; Jenkins and Geary 1995; Godby 1996; Hall 1996). Exhibition catalogues, of course, frequently offer the best visual sources and texts on such issues (Engelhard and Mesenhöller (eds.) 1995; Guggenheim Museum 1996; Charity *et al* (eds.) 1995).

Anthropology has had a particular interest in photography because of their 'parallel development' from the late nineteenth century (Pinney 1992). A considerable historiography has emerged from the new discipline of visual anthropology and from visually engaged anthropologists concerning photography in Africa and other parts of empire (Edwards 1992; Taylor 1994; Landau and Kaspin forthcoming; Pinney 1990, 1992 & 1997). Amongst the most exciting is the recent work of Christopher Pinney on photography in India (1997), which studies the projects and desires of both British colonialism and contemporary popular culture. Robert Gordon's work on 'picturing Bushmen' argues

that photographers gave audiences what they expected to see, and has opened up the whole question of the politics of visuality in Namibia's history (Gordon 1997).

Literary studies have not been slow to take a pictorial turn, and Kliem's work on nineteenth century stereoscopes in southern Africa is of particular relevance to this book (1995). But analysis of visuals as a body of material in its own right, with its own contexts and discourses, is relatively recent in history, especially African history. British social history and local history projects have admittedly treated photographs and their collection seriously for decades (Samuel 1994), but the emphasis has been on locating previously overlooked sources of evidence about non-elite social categories. The initial approaches to African photographic collections by anglophone historians had a similar documentary motivation, though in such cases it was a search for visual evidence about marginal peoples and colonial histories (Killingray and Roberts 1989). With the rise in interdisciplinary influences, however, greater critical attention is being paid to photographs and postcards, especially in view of an increasingly 'cultural' turn in studies of imperialism. Ryan's book, which embraces the uses of photography across a range of imperial activities and enterprises, demonstrates how central visuality was not only in projecting colonial power but in integrating Empire into British public life (Ryan 1997). Faris' (1996) critical history of the representation of Navajo peoples in the United States shows comparable colonial processes of photographic incorporation and marginalisation.

In conclusion, though, it is the rise in interdisciplinary studies which enables these kinds of projects to emerge. The interdisciplinary space offered by visual studies frequently draws together anthropologists, historians and art historians. Because the study of 'the colonising camera' brings together issues of history, ethnography and representation, the commentaries here reflect this pattern of collaboration.

Photography and the 'cultures of colonialism'

Most of the commentators in this book have come to consider photographs after prolonged periods of archival documentary research, field research or engagement with Namibian oral histories. There has been a recent wave of deep but localised studies of Namibia in the inter-war years (Fuller 1992; Hayes 1992; Hendrickson 1992; Silvester 1994; Wallace 1997). One of the most slippery problems confronting researchers of Namibia in the inter-war years is that enigmatic entity: the South African mandatory state in South West Africa (SWA). In their studies of South East Asia and East Africa respectively, Stoler and Cooper (1997) have stated how little they knew about colonial states, "their workings, their distinctive qualities, and the people who constituted them" (1997). Much the same could be said about the marginal Namibian colonial state constituted by South Africa in the wake of the Germans.[5]

South Africa occupied an ambiguous space between its own colonial (later dominion) status under Great Britain, and its colonisation and trusteeship of Namibia. It displayed insecurities and at times cultural overstatement. Photography by colonisers, whether in the employ of the administration or not, provides particularly striking instances of the effort to project a South African colonial modernity and, frequently and deliberately, indigenous Namibian premodernity or even primitivity (Gordon, Bollig, Hayes this volume). It must be emphasised that the South African occupation took place with a strong sense of audience. At every stage of South Africa's bid to gain the League of Nations mandate to rule Namibia and to control Namibians, photography was crucial to the politics of representing the place and its peoples. In the attempts to depict, document, normalise and/or pathologise Namibians and to legitimise and memorialise themselves — the colonial version of what Sekula (1989: 346) calls the "double system of representation" with both repressive and honorific functions — large numbers of photographs were taken and many of them published. In the early days, when South African photographs were still few and the visual potential for demonstrating German unsuitability for ruling the territory limited, officials dug into the German photograph archive and recycled these images (see next essay).

Indeed, the whole question of photography throws open a number of problems about Namibia's colonialisms. Southern Africa became deeply implicated in metropolitan processes of mechanisation of visual reproduction from the late nineteenth century. Looking at the way photography spread through the hinterlands of the subcontinent, following the uneven spread of capitalism and colonialism, a product of industrial culture which could create new knowledge and easily export it, we can talk of simultaneous processes of colonisation and visualisation of the other. But the 'colonial' photographs and commentaries in this book show that, far from dealing with a linear history of colonisation by a single power, there are plural and different colonialisms which break with the historiographically dominant models of the British or French empires.

To begin with, much of the early body of photography extant on Namibia comes from the photographers of a defeated colonial power, Germany, whose administration ended during World War 1. German colonialism left enormously powerful vestigial influences in the form of settler photographers who remained in Namibia after the mandate, or immigrant photographers who left Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, to say nothing of its huge photographic archive.

The second colonial power in Namibia has been South Africa, initially in the name of Great Britain, but from 1921 mandated by the League of Nations to administer the territory in its own right. As stated elsewhere (Silvester *et al* 1998), Namibia fulfilled several roles for the Union of South Africa: it offered the latter a new position in the international community; it lent its very space for settlement of poorer whites in the land-hungry 'new South Africa' during a crucial phase of its nation building in the 1910s and 1920s; and it offered raw material for the production of knowledge (and images) about 'Bantu' and 'Bushman' which fed into a number of institutional and administrative initiatives in South Africa itself (Silvester *et al* 1998; Hayes 1997: 140–143; Rassool and Hayes 1997).

Beyond South Africa's takeover of the territory from Germany, there is a third outside presence which this publication begins to explore: that of the United States of America (USA), technologically and diplomatically a nascent world power. The cameras of rich

safari-goers like President Roosevelt (see Landau this volume) or pseudo-scientific adventurers like Ernest Cadle (Gordon 1997; this volume) brought images of Africans back to American audiences for various kinds of consumption. More to the point, American camera technology — speeded up by the photographic demands of its own internal colonial expansion westwards — was superseding that of other producers. This made it possible for sophisticated photography to take place in the most adverse and remote of frontier conditions. Thus C.H.L. Hahn could use an American camera to produce panoramas of the Kaokoveld and Owambo of astonishing technical and aesthetic standards some 60 years after James Chapman despaired of achieving anything with his British stereoscopic apparatus at the Victoria Falls (Kliem 1995: 16). It is perhaps mostly through this technological input that a kind of American informal colonialism happened: it allowed Americans and their products to occupy a particularly central place in the spread of metropolitan discourses and images to and from southern Africa in the inter-war years. In addition the possession of American cameras, the embodiment of progress, virtually confirmed the photographer's right to scan and 'capture' subordinate human and other natures.

Hunt's (1996: 326) argument that colonialism "can no longer be viewed as a process of imposition from a singular European metropole" is most apt here. Namibia's colonialisms in the twentieth century were indeed "multiple and distinct", characterised by defeat (Germany), emergence (South Africa) and informality (USA). In their photographic interactions and encounters with Namibians, each colonialism contributed to the tangled layers of representational politics. Clearly a greater understanding is needed of the "cultures of colonialism" (Stoler and Cooper 1997; Dirks 1992; Thomas 1994) that developed in this part of the southern African subcontinent.

It must be stressed again that these cultures of colonialism, in which photography was implicated, were multiple. Nor were they restricted to white colonial agents. While it appears that until the 1960s there were relatively few black photographers and indeed journalists in Namibia (Henrichsen 1997; Wallace this volume) compared with South Africa, and especially compared with parts of West Africa (Viditz-Ward 1985; Killingray and Roberts 1989: 199), photographic representation in the colonial space of Namibia cannot be reduced to a one-sided process. By talking about the colonising camera, we do not intend to construct a set of dichotomies around coloniser/colonised, active/passive, let alone white/black. The people who became colonial subjects in Namibia incorporated photography at different historical stages and for different purposes, be it Herero leaders having their portraits taken in the 1870s (Gewald this volume), German-speakers under South African rule after 1915 (next chapter), John Muafangejo subverting the photographs published in a colonial magazine with his linocut art (Timm this volume), or present-day Okombahe residents representing their own daily lives (Rohde this volume). It is always possible to colonise the colonising camera. The photographic paradigm here questions the representational strategies of both 'coloniser' and 'colonised', and shows they are complex, contradictory, at times even blurring into one another. This is because they are mutually engaged in what Hildi Hendrickson (1997: 1) has called "a semiotic web whose implications are not completely controlled by any of us".

Reading Namibian photographs

It is not the intention here to argue that photography is important because there is a direct and instrumental link between colonial photographs and colonialism itself. Photographs of empty lands did not necessarily produce hundreds of white settlers (Silvester this volume); photographs of Africans in 'savage' garb did not necessarily produce military expeditions and conquest. The relationship between politics and representation is far more subtle, problematic and open-ended. A more 'open-ended' reading is facilitated if the viewer moves beyond positivism. This has been painstakingly argued by Stuart Hall:

> The conventional view used to be that 'things' exist in the material and natural world; that their material or natural characteristics are what determines or constitutes them; and that they have a perfectly clear meaning, outside of how they are represented. Representation, in this view, is a process of secondary importance, which enters into the field only after things have been fully formed and their meaning constituted. But since the 'cultural turn' in the human and social sciences, meaning is thought to be *produced* — constructed — rather than simply 'found'. Consequently ... representation is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things; and thus culture is conceptualized as a primary or 'constitutive' process, as important as the economic or material 'base' in shaping social subjects and historical events — *not merely a reflection of the world after the event* (Hall (ed.) 1997: 5–6 [authors' emphasis]).

One constitutive process in the making of the photographic images here was the photographic equivalent of what Pels (1994) has termed 'the ethnographic occasion'. These 'photographic occasions' were those 'real' incidents where people or landscapes or animals came before the lens of a camera, and their framed image was transposed on to glass plates or light-sensitive paper and then chemically developed into a print or a plate to produce the photographic analogue of the actual event. There were power relations, administrative contexts and discourses involved in these occasions, which are central concerns of the exhibition and of the commentaries that follow. Hahn's projection of orderly hierarchy and consensus in his photographs of the 'tribal' gathering at Oshikango [Exhib photo nos 71–79], for example, was a product of the 1930s formulation of 'indirect control'. Of course, the photographers in the *How We See Each Other* exhibition arguably made their own photographic occasions, though their cameras and photographs were mediated through the anthropologist (Rohde this volume).

As these colonial photographic occasions are singled out, it becomes clear that there was a vast difference in what ethnographic photography produced at different times and in different contexts. When Chapman or Hodgson (Kliem 1995; Schoeman 1997) took pictures of people in the 1860s and 1870s in

what was then called Damaraland, the portrait figures show fluidity of identity and dress; but when Fourie or Hahn took pictures between 1920 and 1930 (Harris, Hayes, Bollig this volume), anthropometric and ethnographic influences become apparent in the attempts to fix identities and appearances (see also Rassool and Hayes 1997). The shifts in convention in photographic representation and their precolonial, colonial and postcolonial frameworks need careful historicisation.

This book is not simply about the politics of colonial perception and deterministic attempts to construct ethnicities and landscapes. There is a relationship between photography and colonisation, but the nature of this relationship cannot be reduced to the predictable or the inevitable, the instrumental or the functional. There is always the "messy contingency of the photograph" (Sekula 1989: 353) to undermine the supposed colonial purpose. It would also be unwise to predict in advance how different academic disciplines might initially approach the reading of photographs. A social historian might be expected to privilege 'evidence' and 'context', or the art historian form over content. But photographs cannot easily be contained by disciplines. Even the most rigorous of social history, for example, the commentary by Marion Wallace on urban Windhoek, talks of the photograph which most represents settler fears: that of the defiant-looking black women in town. While it may not be everyone's view, this settler affect is productive new territory for historians, a paradigm of the emotions. Wolfram Hartmann's reading of the different possibilities for the decoding and recoding of gender and sexuality in Dickman's photographs, also heavily dependent on historical contextualisation, enters deep into desire and is itself couched in terms camp enough to make Dickman turn (possibly pleasurably) in his grave.

This is not to say that these are the only readings possible, or the most authoritative. Different meanings are created by different readers. Contributors here have tended to shuttle to a greater or lesser degree between photography's dual potentialities: between positivism and fantasy, between evidence and enigma, between truth-claims and lies "that tell a truth", and between photographs that denote and those that connote. Rohde (this volume) argues that these are the fixed and open readings to which photographs lend themselves, and discusses the ambiguity inherent in the way people interpret photographs, in seeing them as visual quotes. Meaning is derived from the 'reading' of visual imagery at many levels, one of which is almost purely sensate and subjective, harking back to an embodied, pre-linguistic experience of being which is a fundament of perception. This innate ability to lend cohesion to the world of appearances also gives rise to what has been termed elsewhere the optical or ocular unconscious, where meaning, language and vision become conflated. The naturalising tendency of the eye is explained by Kliem (1995: 2) as "the biological ease of vision which naturalises what is in fact a cultural construct". She argues that the eye of the photographer is socially and culturally conditioned to seeing things in certain ways, thus prompting a particular framing of a scene or people. From there, of course, the photographic print itself naturalises a range of representations within its frame.

Photography is embedded in the history of the late nineteenth century when optical empiricism was considered equally feasible as other forms of scientific empiricism. The camera formed part of a "truth apparatus" (Sekula 1989: 352–353) being forged by science and police work in modernising states in Western Europe. In colonial contexts, anthropometric photography offered a new form of imperial knowledge about colonial peoples that signalled a shift from mapping sites to mapping visuality (Banta and Hinsley 1986). As Landau (1996: 132) suggestively puts it, the anthropometric photograph was "cousin to the police mug shot". Mofokeng (1996: 56) argues that ethnographic photographs constituted "authoritative knowledge", which played "no small part in the subjection of those populations to imperial power". The question here is whether such photography did so in the case of 'South West Africa' and, if so, how?

The sleight of hand performed by photography was, as Harris (this volume) reminds us, to separate the sign (in the image) from its referent (how it was produced). The concern in this book has been to try and re-attach some of the signs identified in colonial images to at least some referents. It has emerged, for example, that the photographs of activities in the reserves in the 1950s, showing the Advisory Board at Otjihorongo and dairy production [Exhib photo nos 21–23], were originally commissioned by the Visual Section of the State Information Service in Pretoria for propaganda purposes where both internal and external audiences were targetted, at the Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival in 1952 in Cape Town and at the United Nations in New York. This purposeful creation of a set of images of 'natives' thriving in the reserves (see next essay) accompanied the erection of a costly building to represent SWA at the Cape Town festival (Witz 1997: 289). The images gave the impression of colonial success at the very moment when African dairy production in most reserves in central Namibia, one of the few means of earning cash, was coming under threat from local white settlers (Werner 1989; Fuller 1992). Most visitors were not to know this from the images of thriving progress.

Even without such contextualisations, close study of colonial photographs, their form and composition, especially if read against other reference systems, can actually serve to fracture the narrative that they appear to support. Bollig suggests, for example, that the pose adopted by the Himba man with two women [Exhib photo no 132] was unlikely to have been an accepted mode of public gesture. The subjects being photographed were possibly encouraged or instructed to demonstrate this more visibly affectionate domesticity. If so, it possibly tells us more about white notions of presenting an African family than it does about Himba — though many other readings are also possible.

But it is not only the observer who brings reference systems, subjectivity and knowledge to looking at colonial photographs. There have been many previous sets of filters which have mediated the photographs that appear in this book. Historians would argue that it is crucial to identify the layers of selection — the inclusions and exclusions — through which the photographs have passed, and the paths along which they have travelled. From the photographer's background, to the photographic occasion in which the picture was taken, to the way photographic subjects

presented themselves to the camera, to the technical production of the print, to the private or public circuits into which the image was inserted, to the ultimate fate of the picture as a framed family portrait, a book illustration, part of a forgotten collection that is destroyed or an item in the photographic files of an archive, it is important to contextualise, historicise and theorise the processes by which the photograph has come before the public gaze (or not). After the technical production of the original print, a wide range of possibilities exist for the reproduction, dissemination, collection and storage of images, and during each stage images can be re-captioned, decontextualised and recontextualised.

The Colonising Camera not only seeks to contextualise, but itself engages in such recontextualisation by having selected and privileged certain images from the archive over others for exhibition and publication. By selecting from a pool of Okombahe photographers certain photographs over others for *How We See Each Other*, Rohde does the same thing. At every level of selection or exclusion, important agendas, needs and desires are at work. One of the most powerful sites of selection and exclusion is, of course, the official body of received photographs from the past in the form of the 'national' or state archive, from which images filter (or do not filter) into the public gaze.

On archives and scopophobia

Compared with the present moment of visual saturation, the ways in which images of Namibia were assembled and circulated in the period covered by the photographs in *The Colonising Camera* were very limited. Even before World War 1, photography began to play a central role in the construction of public and private settler histories. Photographs were taken for public consumption through publication, or for private viewing through the personal visual narrative of the family album. Some photographs were widely reproduced and circulated as postcards or within books, whilst others remained within personal albums. The majority of the latter were ultimately discarded, although a few filtered through to the privileged historical site of the national photographic archive.

A constant problem encountered in trawling through the emerging literature on visual studies is its Euro- and American-centrism. Most work assumes that the paradigms of the modern state apply, an assumption which needs the kind of interrogation put so succinctly by Megan Vaughan (1991: 8): "Foucault in Africa?". Thus Roberts talks of "the rigid archival ordering of images" (Iles and Roberts 1997: 9); and Sekula's classic essay on Galton's and Bertillon's archives, in London and Paris respectively, takes the order for granted. Such impressive metropolitan archiving allows one to problematise their purpose and — as recent exhibitions and literature show — the contradictions and products of their classificatory systems (Iles and Roberts 1997; Charity *et al* 1995; Skotnes 1997). But what happens when the photographic archive has not been organised on long-standing bureaucratic principles (as is the case in Namibia) but has been assembled unevenly, haphazardly, anonymously — not even called an archive but a 'collection' or 'library' — and is not easily rendered up for scrutiny, not through design but through lack of prioritisation? A new historiography is emerging about the metropolitan and imperial archive (Foucault 1972; Tagg 1988; Sekula 1989; Richards 1993), but the Namibian case forces us to ask about the nature of the peripheral colonial archive.

A substantial proportion of the photographs in the public picture archive of the National Archives of Namibia did not reach this institution as part of a larger body of images, such as a collection or government's legally regulated deposits. On the contrary, a great many of the images were hand-picked and reproduced from private albums, magazines and books. And while these photographs are quite remarkable in scope and depth,[6] and unrivalled when compared to other archives, a huge problem remains.

In fact, there exist two archives of pictures in one official archival institution. The one archive is publicly and directly accessible, catalogued and computerised on a par with the documentary archival holdings. But the other (and bigger) archive is the repository from which the images in the public collection were culled. In theory, access to this repository — mainly private and other acquisitions stored in the archive basement — is not in question. But the form in which these private acquisitions is catalogued does not lead the researcher directly to the photographs. Moreover, even the highly skilled and professional researcher tends to assume that the public collection is the one and only to be consulted for all purposes of visual documentation.

Such transfer as there has been from hidden repository to public photograph library has entailed a number of problems. Whereas, in general, great pains are taken to conserve documentary material in its structural, chronological, political and historical context — they are dated and classified according to government department, agency, company or other source — the pictures in this archive are in most cases doubly or trebly removed from such contextualisations. Not only were images actively removed (even torn) from albums or collections for the purpose of professional studio reproduction and frequently not returned to their original place in the acquisitions, but they were also removed from whatever caption or text went with the original print. Then, apart from the inevitable decrease in quality through photographic reproduction of the original, in all cases there is the additional problem of unrecorded format changes: for example, postcards were not reproduced in postcard format, and instances of huge cropping took place. All of the above amounts to a massive dehistoricisation and decontextualisation which, if it had occurred with documents, would create a massive scandal.

To spell out some of the implications: images travelled in different circuits according to whether they were produced as postcards, for example, or were part of a private collection in a family album. As a postcard or a collectable, numerous people would have seen the picture and it would have had an impact on public perceptions of a place, an event or the people photographed, especially if there was a caption with the original. Large numbers of Germans, for example, were exposed to the postcard depicting the beating of a man [Exhib photo no 24] because it travelled between SWA and Germany as a postcard. Mechanisms of exoticisation and eroticisation relied largely on the construction

of images in photography and the percolation of these to the public through postcards, books and magazines. An image culled from a private photo album, however, would have had different audience connotations.

Original captions and locations are crucial in piecing together the dynamics of colonial representation, and the latter's circuits of dissemination and reproduction. The archive ideally facilitates the tracing of such processes. It is clear that different selections of photographs from the archive have been presented in different collections or albums, and that even the same photograph may have been presented in a variety of different ways — like that of Samuel Maherero (Hartmann this volume). The ways in which particular photographs have been circulated is a history of selection, distribution and interpretation that has constantly shifted. While photographs seem to fix time, they yet float through it.[7]

The lack of contextual information makes many of the stored images in Namibia's archives take on a different life, it changes their potential uses. Some would say it makes them worthless. Very often the name of the photographer, the studio and the place of publication (often the only clue as to the date of a photograph) have been lost in the process of selection and reproduction.[8] As curators and editors of an exhibition and publication on colonial photography in Namibia during South African rule, therefore, we faced continuous ironies ever since we started out with a naive notion of 'keeping the integrity of a photographic archive' — whose very integrity its own archivists had simultaneously created and undermined, engendered and ripped apart. In general one could argue that this is the result of unthinking scopophobia, so seemingly inherent in academic historical work with its privileging of and, indeed, fixation on the word.

Scopophobia — literally translated as fear of the picture or fear of the view — is used here as a term that generically describes the dismissal and neglect with which historians and archivists have viewed photographs as historical documents. History's disciplinary leanings towards positivism and empiricism have encouraged the view that photographs represent *prima facie* evidence only: what is in the picture is seen as a direct and true rendering of reality as it existed at the moment when the camera shutter was operated. This may have tempted archivists and historians alike to define the photograph as a timeless document that, after a minimum of identification, needed no further context, social background or ideological framework to be understood and creatively re-deployed. Hence its positioning in the economy of the archive and its merely illustrative use (if at all) by historians.

The flaws in the Namibian photograph archive point directly to one of the most interesting broader features of this peripheral territory's colonial history: that processes of producing knowledge here were very strained and ambivalent and did not necessarily feed into the colony itself. For the archive, applying 'Foucault in Africa' is tricky. Sekula's and Tagg's elegant appraisals of the modern state's appropriations of visual knowledge are of limited use to us here: as Stoler (1997) argues with regard to Foucault, these analyses are too encapsulated in the European metropoles. The Namibian archive suggests that the circuits of power and knowledge are plainly running on different courses and greatly complicated by the peculiar 'tensions of empire' generated in this part of southern Africa.

To wit, Gordon (1998) has argued for the outright antipathy of most white settlers in the Namibian context to the acquisition of knowledge about 'the native', and one of the most under-researched areas of colonial studies must surely be that of more general white anti-intellectualism in settler societies (Rassool and Hayes 1997). These tendencies existed and created tensions for those few in Namibia who sought to produce a range of knowledges about the territory and its inhabitants. Without the outside audience of the League of Nations, it is doubtful that the little that was published on ethnography and history in the 1920s would have seen the light of day. Moreover, as the SWA Administration grasped the importance of publicising the territory and their policies within it for international consumption (and to attract more settlers), the tendency was to fawn over foreign and South African expeditions and scientists and offer support in exchange for SWA being 'put on the map'. Locally based 'experts' were by no means automatically valued and the establishment of 'collections' of artefacts, documents and research entailed considerable struggle. It was largely to this end that the independent South West Africa Scientific Society was formed in 1925.

Some of the most poignant complaints about recognition of the lack of a national intellectual effort and its failure to feed into national institutions came from the territory's Medical Officer in the 1920s, Dr Louis Fourie. Fourie was a dedicated student of ethnography and carried out a systematic anthropometric photography of the 'Bushman' groups that became his field of expertise (see Fig 3.3 in Harris this volume). He was one of the co-authors of *The Native Tribes of South West Africa*, published in 1928.

Fourie lamented the haemorrhage of research material and knowledge out of the territory, and advocated 'local collection', particularly as Namibia was in a "unique position with regard to the Bushmen" (cited in Gordon 1997: 110). He was personally and politically offended by the plundering of Namibia's incipient 'heritage', and the opportunism of colleagues and seniors who, it seemed, exploited and plagiarised local intellectual efforts (including his own). In 1928 he wrote in bitter terms to his friend, the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland, 'Cocky' Hahn: "old fellows like you and I should commence to think about ourselves and ... set our minds on tasks which may possibly leave some heritage to the future".[9]

Both Fourie and Hahn were photographers as well as ethnographers. In producing visual knowledge about Namibians, a neglected aspect of their intellectual contributions towards a 'heritage' for the territory, we see the lineaments of a colonised 'nation' crystallising into racial, ethnic and gendered categories. They are probably the most coherent ethnographic photographers of the first decades of South African rule in Namibia. Photographs by both were used in government publications, Hahn's over a longer period given that he outstayed Fourie in the SWA Administration by many years.

Both men kept the main corpus of their photographic output as private collections. Fourie's collection was submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand after his retire-

the namibian Weekender

PICTURING THE PAST

Namibia's Historic Photo Album

PHOTOGRAPHS help us remember the past, that is why so many of us keep photographs on our walls and sideboards to remind us of friends, family and the good times that we have known.

Yet these are generally private memories. Only a few people or events are remembered by a wider public through street names, statues or memorials.

The National Archives of Namibia has an extensive collection of photographs showing people and events from Namibia's rich and eventful past.

However, there is often a lack of information about the people and events shown in these photographs. In particular photographs featuring black people often failed to identify them, so denying many a place in our history.

Today the Namibian Weekender is launching a fortnightly column in which it will feature photographs from the album of Namibia's past. We are inviting people to contact us with any information or stories of interest connected with the photographs shown. Such insights can add depth and meaning to a photograph, help deepen our knowledge about our past and allow new voices about the past to be heard. We will feature some of the stories we receive in subsequent editions of Picturing The Past.

The first of today's photographs features a band that used to play regularly in the

continued on page 2

Above left: COOL CATS ... This is a band that used to play in the Old Location dance hall before that area of Windhoek was destroyed by the Apartheid authorities. Nothing else is known about the people in the picture. Do you know the people in the band or perhaps you even danced to their music?

Above right: SHOW OF FORCE ... In a show of force the authorities at the time loaded King Iipumbu into a plane and flew him to the Okavango region. What stories do people tell about this incident. Why did it happen? Is there anybody still alive who was present when the King was sent to the exile?

Left: THE LAST KING ... A rare photo of King Iipumbu Ya Shilongo of Uukwambi in the north of Namibia, who was deposed and sent into exile in 1932. A cloth hangs from his left arm apparently because his hand was blown off in an explosives accident.

Photo: National Archives

48 Taf Street
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all shows: 21h00, doors open 20h00
CLaSH presents: FRI&SAT, 14&15 FEB:
Gcina Mhlope
(breathes life into African Stories)
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THE SUNSHINE KIDS
featuring Bjorn Eldsvåg
WED, FRI, SAT: 19, 21&22 Feb.:
sex 'n love
(angolan R&B & jungle music)
supported by IMPACTUS 4

Fig 1 The launch of 'Picturing the Past' in *The Namibian*, 14 February 1996.

ment and is now housed in the MuseuMAfrikA in Johannesburg; archivists from the National Archives of Namibia persuaded Rodney Hahn to lend the bulk of his father's collection to the national institution.[10] Hahn's collection does not form part of the public photograph library, except for those pictures which were selected in 1994 by the curators of *The Colonising Camera* from the private accession boxes housed in the archive basement.

Picturing the Past

"It's good to get the photos out of the archives and to the people," stated one viewer of *The Colonising Camera* in Windhoek (Kisting 1995). But exhibition and publication have not been the only means employed to open up the files of the pictorial archive to the public gaze in Namibia. Apart from being televised in Windhoek in 1995, the exhibition was packed in boxes in late 1996 and taken on a field trip to Owambo to be viewed and discussed during research visits. It was also shown to photographers running commercial portrait studios. Then, in co-operation with the National Archives of Namibia, further attempts were made to flush the photograph archives out into the open and spark off debates around history and visuality. Every fortnight throughout 1997 (continued in 1998) the weekend supplement to the popular Friday edition of *The Namibian* newspaper ran a column called "Picturing the Past", which featured all manner of photographs from the archives.

Such initiatives, of course, have many precedents in social history (Samuel 1994: 337–349) and indeed in colonial history — South Africa's *Annual Reports* to the League of Nations, for example. But in this most recent Namibian case, the column urged the public to contact the newspaper, or one of the curators based at the local university, should they have any information or opinion to advance about the photographs. Some of this feedback was in turn printed in the next issue of the series. In a practical sense, all of this has been historically satisfying because it has enabled access to (and made public) those private knowledges which have identified and contextualised a number of photographs in the exhibition and in the archive itself. Thus photographs in the state archive, with captions which literally reduced individuals to representatives of a colonially defined 'type', are acquiring new layers of meaning and, to some extent, being re-captioned.

The implications go much further, however. By shifting the medium, the archive has moved out into a much more public space where, instead of being stored, it circulates along the paths of a national newspaper. The photograph in this medium contributes towards a remembering and an historical awareness on a wide scale, as against the colonial archive which has dismembered the 'evidence' and put away its component parts into boxes and filing cabinets. The newspaper thus provides an interface between unofficial knowledges and the photographic archive of the past as it is presented in this form.

Recognition of people or places in the images (the signs in the representational system) has led to responses. One might say that the photographs trigger 'memory', leading respondents to re-narrate the past, often in a form they state they learned from older relatives, particularly when the photographs have featured tragic-heroic figures such as Mandume ya Ndemufayo, an icon in oral histories. There appears to be a very strong connection between visual history and oral history, the former galvanising the latter. But the trap here is to see 'memory' as a passive storage system. Like the archive itself, it is far from being so, and neither memory nor the archive should be fetishised for the imputed truths they carry: memory's emotional/popular truth, on the one hand, and the archive's objective/bureaucratic truth on the other.

Samuel (1994: x) has argued that "memory is historically conditioned ... It bears the impress of experience, in however mediated a way. It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time". More to the point (and following Freud), he suggests that "the unconscious mind, splitting, telescoping, displacing and projecting, transposes incidents from one time register to another and materializes thought in imagery". It is obvious that exposure to images can activate powerful mechanisms of remembrance or association, however displaced these might be. When there is a conjuncture between photograph and stored knowledge (or images) of the past, a process of recognition and release takes place which produces fresh new historical narratives infused with both intellect and emotion.

The circulation of historical images through *The Namibian* has set in motion another process. It should come as no surprise that families living in the black townships of Namibia have kept their own photographic collections: studio portraits, townscapes (notably Swakopmund) and informal family shots. The publication of colonial images in the newspaper has led to people communicating information about these private archives. No such images have ever made their way into the National Archives of Namibia, but from their unofficial sites they begin to challenge the assumption of a colonial monopoly of photography.

The challenge to "portray Africans in a very different manner" (Mofokeng 1996: 56) is taken further in the recent exhibition by Okombahe photographers, part of which is reproduced in the closing section of this book (Rohde). Unlike colonial ethnographic photography of 'the other', this photography here is an ostensible ethnography of closely intertwined people who represent 'each other'. The possibility emerges of the production of visual histories by those groups usually on the other side of the colonising camera, and of seeing new narrative forms.

To conclude, one might compare for example Albert Nuwuseb's photograph of "Ouma Basaura and an old man" (p. 193) with the cover picture on this book [Exhib photo no 124]. Ouma Basaura and the old man, we are told, have come together in front of the photographer, whose shadow is visible. This intersection of people is fortuitous — just as fortuitous as in the photograph where Hahn is present behind the two Kwaluudhi women who would normally be the sole ethnographic focus (see Hayes this volume). The first is taken from the uncertain crossroads of postcolonial Okombahe, where the photographer narrates what he remembers and forgets, naming people and stating what they do. The viewer is taken into people's lives. The colonial photograph, by contrast, shows the official trek into western Owambo at a crossroads with two women, where colonialism is very deeply inserted into the picture through the assertive figure of Hahn which implies colonial occupation and possession (however transient). The viewer is taken into colonialism.

Both photographs are about people meeting by chance, as it seems, *en passant*, the lines of their gazes and histories intersecting with those of the photographers who have the means to frame, fashion and reproduce these colonial and postcolonial moments. But the postcolonial analogue in Okombahe renders the previously colonised more as subjects, less as objects. In its own understated way, it effects a repossession of a landscape that is poor and harsh, but theirs.

Endnotes

1. The Old Location, like many similar black urban settlements later in neighbouring South Africa, was demolished in 1959 and its residents forcibly removed (see Wallace this volume).

2. Interviews with Peter Katangolo and Victoria Uukunde by Jeremy Silvester, Windhoek 1997.

3. In Namibia the exhibition travelled in 1994-1995 from Windhoek to Swakopmund to Rehoboth and back to Windhoek; in South Africa to Cape Town and Grahamstown in 1995; and to Yale University in the United States in 1996.

4. Kratz (1994: 185) suggests that academic books use black-and-white or tinted photographs on the cover rather than colour) for economy. But the 'art' or documentary value of black and white photographs also influences academic publishers.

5. The difficulty in the Namibian case has been that such an area of study falls between two stools. Firstly, most state officials originated in South Africa, and it has been left to South African studies to deal with ruling groups and their histories and this has effectively excluded analysis of their spells of duty in Namibia. Secondly, it has not been a priority in Namibian studies dominated by social history in recent years to engage directly in questions of the state and its ruling figures — 'white histories' — except in passing.

6. That this collection exists at all is due to the pioneering efforts of Christel Stern and Sally Harper who initiated the systematic collection of photographs in the archives in the early 1970s, ably followed up by the late Brigitte Lau and fellow staff (especially Everon Kloppers) in more recent years.

7. Retro-chic's use of photographs in recent decades is just one example (Samuel 1994; Sontag 1979: 71).

8. Who, for instance, was the photographer of the soft-pornography postcards portraying and exoticising indigenous women from around the first decade of this century? Information found on the back of originals, and a close reading of advertisements in the colonial press, suggests that the photographer of this particular group of images, Wywias, practised until the outbreak of World War 1 in Windhoek and was probably Catholic since he advertised only in the Catholic press.

9. NAN A450 Vol. 4 1/29, Fourie to Hahn, 27.4.1928.

10. Thanks to Ann Wanliss for information concerning the Fourie collection; and to the late Brigitte Lau, Rodney Hahn, Dag Henrichsen and Carl Schlettwein concerning the Hahn collection.