

OTSE MBAKA

this is who we are

CULTURAL LOSS, CHANGE AND RECUPERATION IN
OVAMBOLAND

INGA BRASCHE

Thesis submitted for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Technology, Sydney
2003

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A thesis, like a relationship, is bigger than one person. Much bigger, in fact. Had I known in 1997 that my contract in Ovamboland would result in endeavouring to encapsulate the region's culture and complexities in writing, I may have decided to stay and watch *Water Rats* from the comfort of my lounge room! Instead I had the privilege of watching it in my lounge room in Oshikuku and observe this and numerous other cultural quirks which Ovamboland presented.

During my time in Namibia, I was lucky enough to be professionally engaged with the University of Namibia, and would like to thank Francois de Necker, Haaveshe Nekongo Nielsen and Chief Ankama for their advice and support. I would also like to acknowledge the significant input I received, both in my professional work and research activities, from the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture at a national and regional level. Rita-Louise Hofmeyr, Ervast Mtota and Bernadette Mojekwu were inspirational in their commitment to the development of arts and culture in a country so rich with talent and possibility. I was privileged to have the support of traditional authorities in my work and research, and wish to gratefully acknowledge the contribution and support of King Munkundi and King Kauluma, not only for sharing their knowledge and experience, but also for welcoming me into their royal homesteads. My interviews with Father Houbert and Father Stephen Okeke from Okatana and Oshikuku Missions provided many valuable insights.

The cultural development project which I was involved in would not have been possible without the support of the Ford Foundation. I am particularly indebted to David Chiel who served as a mentor, adviser, boss and friend. His insights and experience in donor funding and NGOs were enormously helpful and his commitment to the promotion of justice was inspiring.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the members of the North Central Cultural Initiative, particularly Dr Stuart Keane, who helped to establish the direction of the project and whose contributions to natural resource management in the region are significant. My Namibian counterpart and former Nuuyoma Senior Secondary School colleague, Metusalem Ashipala was a fantastic help both professionally and academically. I wish Metusalem and Karen Le Roux all the very best for the future of the Rössing Foundation's enterprise development work in culture. I would also like to thank Jane Moeller for her support and friendship during the early stages of my research.

Closer to home, I would like to thank my supervisor, Devleena Ghosh, for providing helpful and insightful comments on my drafts. I have appreciated her wealth of knowledge and her guidance. Also to fellow post-graduate students, Nathalie Apouchtine and James Arvanitakis who have given me endless hours of friendship, support, punching bags and shoulders.

The support of my family and the distracting fun of my friends, particularly Joggi, Kirsty, Kara, Mai and Al has also been a great reminder that the world does turn outside the university walls.

Finally, words cannot adequately express my gratitude to the Mungandjera family. To Mbockoma, Reinharda, Ndali, Niita, Tautiko and baby Inga – thank you for teaching me so much about life, love, friendship and family. It is through the lens of the Mungandjera family that the true beauty and warmth of Namibia was revealed to me. Tangi unene.

And to Cam – my everything.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ABBREVIATIONS | VIII |
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS | X |
| GLOSSARY | XI |
| ABSTRACT | XIII |
| MAP OF NAMIBIA | XIV |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Theoretical Framework | 4 |
| Background | 10 |
| Methodology | 13 |
| Terminology and Positioning | 14 |
| Personal Engagement, Methodology & Background | 24 |
| Professional Methodologies, Interviews & Ethics | 35 |
| SECTION ONE · “LOSS” | 41 |
| IDENTITY | 44 |
| The Psychology of Loss | 48 |
| Idealism and the “Happy Savage” | 54 |
| Non-Sanctioned and Non-Doctrinal Changes | 55 |
| Names | 60 |
| Dress | 62 |
| Family Structures and Loss | 67 |
| Domestic Impact of HIV/AIDS | 68 |
| POWER AND POLITICS | 73 |
| Colonialism and the Spread of Christianity | 73 |
| Traditional Authority Challenged | 75 |
| South African Rule and Apartheid | 81 |
| Liberation Struggle | 86 |
| GLOBALISATION | 90 |
| Interdependency and Loss of Independence | 93 |
| Breakdown of Community and Individualism | 97 |
| Cultural Commodification and Commercialisation | 100 |
| SECTION TWO · CHANGE | 110 |
| IDENTITY | 112 |
| Diversity | 113 |
| HIV/AIDS and Gender Considerations | 118 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Case Study: PEP Guy | 124 |
| POWER AND POLITICS | 126 |
| SWAPO and Political Nationalism | 126 |
| Identification and Post-Independence Choices | 130 |
| Decentralisation and Co-ordination | 133 |
| Political Change = Social Change? | 137 |
| Accountability and Responsibility | 141 |
| Ministry of Basic Education and Culture | 141 |
| Geographical Legacies | 144 |
| GLOBALISATION | 149 |
| Local Responses to Globalisation | 149 |
| Letter to The Namibian | 155 |
| Reflections on Television | 158 |
| Case Study: Water Rats | 162 |
| Discussions on Clay Pots | 165 |
| | |
| SECTION THREE · RECUPERATION | 171 |
| | |
| IDENTITY | 176 |
| “Enlightenment” | 176 |
| Why Cultural Development? | 183 |
| Community Based Cultural Development – NCCI | 186 |
| Case Study: UNAM Workshop | 187 |
| Ford Foundation and the CDP | 192 |
| Dual Mandate | 194 |
| Case Study: NBC | 196 |
| Case Study: Otse Mbaka | 200 |
| | |
| POWER AND POLITICS | 203 |
| NGO Work and the Absence of Cultural Content | 203 |
| Donor vs NGO Agendas | 205 |
| Truth and Reconciliation Commission | 210 |
| SWAPO, Education & the Role of MBEC in Cultural Recuperation | 213 |
| Accountability and Responsibility | 220 |
| “Loss” or Preservation? | 222 |
| The Church’s Role in the Struggle | 227 |
| The Writing of Culture | 231 |
| | |
| GLOBALISATION | 237 |
| Development Work: Moral Imperative or Economic Strategy? | 237 |
| Politics | 242 |
| Motivations | 246 |
| Peace Corps | 247 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| VSO | 253 |
| AVI | 254 |
| Cultural Commodification, Commercialisation and “Sustainable” Development | 256 |
| Tourism in Ovamboland | 260 |
| Return Trip and how CDP had Changed | 263 |
| | |
| CONCLUSION | 267 |
| | |
| APPENDICES | 272 |
| | |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 285 |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AVI | Australian Volunteers International |
| CCD | Community Cultural Development |
| CDP | Cultural Development Project |
| CoD | Congress of Democrats |
| DFID | Department for International Development (UK) |
| DRFN | Desert Research Foundation of Namibia |
| IGCSE | International General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| MBEC | Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (Namibia) |
| MSF | Medecins Sans Frontieres |
| NACOBTA | Namibian Community Based Tourism Association |
| NBC | Namibian Broadcasting Corporation |
| NCCED | North Central Community Enterprise Development Project |
| NCCI | North Central Cultural Initiative |
| NEPRU | Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit |

| | |
|--------|--|
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| NNF | Namibia Nature Foundation |
| NORAD | Norwegian Development Co-operation |
| NSHR | National Society for Human Rights |
| OXFAM | Oxford Committee for Famine Relief |
| SIDA | Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency |
| SWABC | South West African Broadcasting Corporation (pre-NBC) |
| SWAPO | South West African People's Organisation |
| TNCs | Trans-National Corporations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Project |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education, Culture and Science Organisation |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| VSO | Voluntary Services Overseas |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1.1 – Example of homestead | 12 |
| Figure 1.2 – Child outside homestead fence | 12 |
| Figure 1.3 – Example of landscape in Ovamboland | 24 |

LOSS

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 2.1 – Hardrock Center cuca shop | 47 |
| Figure 2.2 – Hot Fire cuca shop | 47 |
| Figure 2.3 – Example of graveyard in Ovamboland | 72 |
| Figure 2.4 – Children’s graves are common due to AIDS crisis | 72 |
| Figure 2.5 – Ohungi taking place in Oshikuku, June 2000 | 79 |
| Figure 2.6 – King Kauluma of Ndonga tribe, September 2000 | 97 |

CHANGE

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 3.1 – Ovamboland sign at the Red Line | 147 |
| Figure 3.2 – Homesteads are built on dry, sandy, rain-dependent land | 147 |
| Figure 3.3 – Centre of Oshakati – the unofficial capital of Ovamboland | 148 |
| Figure 3.4 – B-52 Bomber pattern woven into “traditional” basket | 152 |
| Figure 3.5 – Verena Endjambi at her homestead | 170 |
| Figure 3.6 – Two clap pots made by Verena Endjambi | 170 |

RECUPERATION

| | |
|--|-----|
| Figure 4.1 – Women at Regional Cultural festival | 224 |
| Figure 4.2 – Men at Regional Cultural festival | 224 |
| Figure 4.3 – Cultural artefact displays – a new category at the festival | 226 |
| Figure 4.4 – R&B group at Nuuyoma Senior Secondary School Talent Quest | 226 |
| Figure 4.5 – Bush school where Peace Corps teacher-trainers worked | 252 |

GLOSSARY

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Aahongi</i> | Christian missionaries |
| <i>Aakelelipo yombepo ondjapuki</i> | diviners / ancestral spirits |
| <i>Boer</i> | derogatory word for white South African |
| <i>Cuca</i> | Angolan beer |
| <i>Efundula</i> | female initiation ceremony |
| <i>Ekipa</i> | clasp/brooch worn with onyoka |
| <i>Ezaleko lyonyoka</i> | traditional baptism ceremony involving onyoka |
| <i>Kalunga</i> | God (pre-Christian and Christian God) |
| <i>Kwasa kwasa</i> | Zambian dance music |
| <i>Mahangu</i> | millet-based grain, staple of Ovambo diet |
| <i>Mbushandjes</i> | name-sake |
| <i>Meal</i> | pounded mahangu flour, used for oshifima |
| <i>Meekulu/Kuku</i> | old woman; Mrs; grandmother |
| <i>Meme</i> | woman; Mrs; mother; aunt |
| <i>Ohungi</i> | traditional story-telling evening |
| <i>Omithigululwakalo</i> | culture |
| <i>Ongushu y'omithigululwakalo</i> | our culture |
| <i>Onyoka</i> | ostrich/oyster shell necklace |
| <i>Oshikundu</i> | traditional beer |
| <i>Oshifima</i> | porridge made from mahangu |
| <i>Oshindjendje</i> | beads worn around waists of unmarried women |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Oshilumbu</i> | white person. Once derogatory, now descriptive |
| <i>Oshicoca-cola</i> | coca-cola |
| <i>Otse mbaka</i> | this is who we are |
| <i>Ovakriste</i> | Christians |
| <i>Tate</i> | man; Mr; father; uncle |
| <i>Tatekulu</i> | old man; Mr; grandfather |

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation into the terms of cultural change in north central Namibia. I am primarily concerned with issues of agency in the processes which result in cultural change, and look at both historical and contemporary agents of change in order to determine who and what impacts cultural dynamism, and what implications this has for a newly independent country within a globalised world. These issues are presented through the lenses of Identity, Power and Politics and Globalisation.

In this thesis, I posit that traditionally, Ovambo people have not been empowered in decisions regarding cultural change, which has resulted in a sense of cultural “loss”. This sense exists within the context of culture being seen as strongly associated with the past – past practices, activities, traditions and customs, as well as early development theory which insisted that such things were indicative of a backward and primitive society at odds with the principles of modernisation. In order to progress, such practices were, with and without reticence, abandoned or changed. Contemporary Ovamboland, however, represents a dynamic cultural *mélange* of traditional and modern life, which co-exist whilst negotiating issues such as the impact of HIV/AIDS and neo-liberal style of post-independence democracy. Therefore, by investigating the cultural shortfall in traditional development theory, and using examples of different forms of cultural development, I suggest that when culture is seen as an important consideration of development, as well as supported as a field of development in its own right, cultural identity becomes clearer, and cultural futures are determined more democratically.

In order to demonstrate these ideas, I am drawing from a number of case studies in which I was professionally involved, as well as through interviews conducted in the field. By presenting the differing agendas of international engagement in development work as well as different types of cultural development projects, I will highlight the complexities of development theory in practice, particularly when capital is involved, and how these relate to the wider issues of cultural preservation versus cultural change.

