

Under the Big Tree



Challenges and Accomplishments of Gqaina,
a Primary School for Ju|'hoan Children in
Omaheke, Namibia.



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Chapter one

Introduction

“The problem of the San [learners] is not at Gqaina. They perform well here and they stay. Problems come when they finish Gqaina and go to other schools. We must find the reasons for that and we must try to help them...” [Mrs. Maritz, Principal of Gqaina in a welcoming speech to the Honourable Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Education in Namibia]

The words of Mrs. Maritz, several days after I had arrived to do research at Gqaina Primary School could not summarize my objectives better. I had set out to do fieldwork in Namibia in a school which had received a lot of positive comments in literature on San education (see Le Roux 1999, Hays 2007). The school was built to specifically serve the needs of the San community in the Omaheke region and to provide education to the poor and educationally deprived children of the numerous farm-workers and resettlement dwellers in the area. It had started as a privately-run school, initiated by white farmers from the area and had managed to provide a hospitable and tolerant atmosphere for the San children. Reports on the schooling situation of San children from the southern African region abound with stories of early dropouts and sometimes severe physical and psychological abuse of San children. Gqaina, on the contrary, was described to keep the largest percentage of its San learners until they finished grade 7. In fact, the school had a record of only 2% – 3% of dropout (compared to dropout rates as high as up to 100% in other schools with San learners (Hays 2007)). The school was also the first in the Omaheke region (and one of the only ones in southern Africa) to offer mother-tongue education in a San language (Ju/'hoansi) during the first years of schooling, as well as San and San-speaking hostel staff. However, problems started when children left Gqaina in Grade 7 and continued with their education in secondary schools (most of which are in town). Away from their families, in a competitive environment, rather intolerant towards their culture, most children preferred the predictable and safe life among their own people. Furthermore, despite its success in retaining San learners, Gqaina was also characterized by a very low community participation and lack of cooperation from San parents.

My original objectives were to 1) find out what makes Gqaina so good for San children and how it differs from other primary schools in the region; 2) find out more about the reported low

participation of parents in the school life of their children; and 3) see what are the main stumbling blocks on San children's way to achieve secondary education. With time, however, I saw that nothing is as simple as it appeared at first. I believe that my research has not only provided some answers to the above-mentioned questions but has looked deeper into the problems of the present-day San people and youth in Omaheke region. Poor social standing and absence of economic opportunities play a major role in San peoples' everyday and long-term decisions, including decisions related to education. I came to know many San people who, despite the commonly-repeated mantra that San people are not interested in education, took keen interest in the education of their children but who could not always afford to send their children to school. I also met many uneducated San people who had a very clear picture of their situation and who asked for more options, and not for handouts, as many others believed. As a result, I believe that the San children's problems in schools throughout the southern African region arise from a rather complex and interdependent circumstances for which there is no one simple solution. Instead, education should be viewed as a long process which has to employ the efforts of many and different parties with special emphasis on the wills and wishes of the San communities themselves.

On a larger scale, this study contributes to the growing body of research on indigenous education and San education specifically. It also brings forward the little researched San people of the Omaheke region.

My hope is that I have not misinterpreted my informers' voices through my own understandings of how things should be, and that I have provided an arena for them to speak out.

The thesis is organized as follows: The rest of this chapter sets the theoretical and methodological framework of my fieldwork and research among an indigenous group in Namibia. Chapter 2 introduces the notion "indigenous people" and the application of this term in the African context. In addition, it introduces the San people of southern Africa and the Omaheke Ju/'hoansi, specifically. Chapter 3 presents the problems which San children experience in schools across the southern African and describe the few positive initiatives trying to improve their situation. In Chapter 4 I analyze data collected at Gqaina primary school and point out the school's strengths

and weaknesses. Chapter 5 looks into the problem of parent participation in the school. This is the chapter where I present the attitude of parents on questions, such as education, everyday problems, interactions with other ethnic groups, etc. In the following Chapter, 6, I look at the situation in secondary schools and try to summarize the main reasons given by both San and non-San people on the obstacles San children meet in high schools. At the end of the thesis, I summarize my findings.

1.1. Implications of the global education discourse for indigenous education

Before I explain why I chose to focus on indigenous education, I will take a look at the global arena on which the education discourse is situated and see how this discourse has affected the education opportunities for indigenous peoples.

During the last few decades, education has turned to a *right* for every child within the human rights context, and different international bodies and national governments have committed themselves to provide it. Yet, how has this trend managed to encompass and meet the needs of the indigenous peoples of the world? As Spring (1998) argues, in the modern world, education serves both the needs of power structures to secure competent labour force for its development, on one hand, and the needs of the individual to gain access to these power structures, on the other hand. It has become national and international policy to proclaim education as the main key to success in the global cash economy and as a crucial tool for liberation and empowerment. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, has set as its main goals the ideals enlisted in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights:

- 1) the right to education for everyone;
- 2) free and compulsory elementary education ;
- 3) education directed to the development of the human personality with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- 4) education should promote tolerance and understanding among nations, ethnic and religious groups;
- 5) parents should have the right to choose the kind of education they want for their children [Spring 1998].

Despite the fact that throughout time education has been perceived differently by different individuals and institutions, often for their own needs and purposes, there is one notion usually linked to and closely related to the understanding of what comprises or what should comprise education – literacy. In the western view, the two notions, *education* and *literacy* are usually perceived as inherently correlated. Similarly to the understanding of the role of education, literacy is seen as a vehicle for access to cultural and power structures in society (Street 1993). For the indigenous peoples, education and literacy mean a tool for challenging the systems which exclude and oppress them and also an opportunity to participate in these systems. The binding of education to literacy, however, has been also used as a measure for classifying the ‘primitive’ versus the ‘civilized’ (Street 1995). Hence, the understanding that the educated is literate, or civilized, whereas the uneducated is illiterate, and is usually marked as primitive (see also Hays 2007). The implications of this for indigenous education have been tremendous. While colonial policy was either characterized by denial of access to or assimilationist approach in education, postcolonial policy has been unable to encompass and allow for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and value systems in its framework, despite its efforts at inclusiveness. Traditional indigenous education is not conveyed through the means of the formal education system, is not written, and is seldom perceived as valuable and important, thus creating a dichotomy between the ‘formal’ versus the ‘traditional’ education styles. ‘Education for All’ has promised equal educational opportunities despite origin, language and ethnic belonging but its implementation on a local level has usually blurred cultural differences and has hindered the development of traditional knowledge systems.

As a result, indigenous children today are entering formal education systems which transmit knowledge much different in form and content from the knowledge systems of their communities with the hope of gaining control over their lives and becoming successful and equal players on the labour market. The road to such education, however, is often marked with difficulties and there are a few critical questions we have to ask when we talk about indigenous education: a) What forms of education should indigenous people have? b) Who should be providing this education? and c) How do we measure the success or the failure of indigenous learners within an educational system? These questions have been the starting point of my thesis for several

reasons. Before I chose the topic of the thesis, I knew I wanted to focus on an ‘alternative form of indigenous education’. Yet, how do we define ‘alternative’? As an alternative to the *existing* formal education system, or as an alternative to an *unsuccessful* formal education system? This choice would also to a great extent determine the ‘providers’ of such education. An alternative to the formal system should be provided by the community. An alternative to an unsuccessful formal system could also be provided by the authorities. Who should decide what education indigenous children get and could there exist an ideal system, where both the benefits of the formal, government provided education be combined with the traditional education styles of a particular community? And thirdly, how do we measure the success of a person, or a group of people, or a school? Is it by the people’s own measures for success, or is it through our western understanding of the meaning of who is successful and who is not?

1.2. Ethnographic research among indigenous people

As argued by Marcus (1995), modern ethnographic research has shifted its focus from a plain, one-dimensional description of a world system, to a fluid and negotiable interaction of people and relations on multiple dimensions, or ‘sites’. This argument has also been supported by Saugestad’s observation that “much of the most interesting research nowadays is not on the ethnography of specific groups, but on the socio-political context of negotiations and adaptations” (1998:7). In Marcus (1995) view, this shift has been driven not only by the postmodernist intellectual concepts about a changing world but also as a response to these changes. As a result, the multi-sited approach suggests and constructs aspects both of a lifeworld and of the system itself. The adoption of this approach blurs the distance between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ by expanding its scope from representation of a particular cultural formation to a description of the system, thus suggesting that describing and linking different sites on a local level would be a representation of the global as well. By situating objects of ethnographic interest across different sites, the multi-sited method also ensures a comparative dimension by “putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation” (Marcus 1995:102). The multi-sited perspective enriches modern ethnographic theory in yet another way. The practice of multi-sited ethnography expands the “them-us” dichotomy by involving more nuanced and varied understandings of the

dichotomy when it is being translated and conveyed through sites. The classical situating of the Other as static and distant, both geographically and chronologically, as compared to the adaptive and contemporary westerner (Fabian 1983, quoted in Saugestad 1998), has been prevented to some extent by the constant negotiation of roles and boundaries across sites, thus leaving more room for the studied object of ethnographic research to emerge as an active player in the field.

The latter argument is of paramount importance for research related to indigenous peoples in yet another way. With the development of the international indigenous movement and the rise of the public and academic awareness of indigenous-related issues and policies, modern anthropological research has shifted its scope from research done *on* to research done *with* and, lately, *by* indigenous peoples (Saugestad 1998). This development has naturally stemmed from the international indigenous movement for control over key mechanisms which shape and determine the direction of indigenous representations. And whereas in the past the image of the indigenous person as an exotic and romantic creature living in a perfect harmony with nature was mainly constructed within and for the purposes of the academia, the decades following the rise of the international indigenous movement saw a change in the means of production, distribution and use of such research. As Saugestad (1998) further argues, this change is reflected not in the kind of research done, but more on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the political and advocacy significance the collected knowledge might play for the latter. This idea is also supported by Brantenberg's (1999) observation on the role researchers play in the transmission process of indigenous knowledge and knowledge on indigenous cultures. In this light, researchers are no longer only perceived as mere academics but also as "advocates for the rights of others to self-expression, autonomy and identity", whereas informants are becoming "patrons and brokers of knowledge with respect to anthropologists" (Brantenberg 1999:263).

Despite this shift of focus, however, there still remains the question of how we, as outsiders, comprehend, process and interpret such knowledge. As Emerson et al. suggest, community members' meanings are not "pristine objects that are simply discovered" but rather "these meanings are interpretive constructions assembled and conveyed by the ethnographer" (1995:108). The main pitfalls ethnographers encounter when in the field, and when reconstructing it afterwards, include the imposition of outside categories used to describe social

scenes and actions, and the representation of native terms by static taxonomies (Emerson 1995). These pitfalls are especially visible when we do research on topics which are widely circulated and which have gained international recognition as inherently ‘good’ or ‘beneficial’ in the western society, such as education. Returning to what has been said at the beginning of Section 1.2., the *right* of every child to formal education may not necessarily reflect the needs and goals of each and every community in the world. The right to *choose* what education their children should have, however, does reflect the voices of the indigenous peoples raised during the last three or so decades at different international arenas. It is therefore worth exploring the dynamics between these two notions and see how they have been applied on the smallest possible scale – a primary school for indigenous children.

1.3. Fieldwork in Omaheke, Namibia

The data for this thesis were collected over a period of two months, from late May to late July 2008, in the Omaheke Region, Namibia. The main research site was Gqaina Primary School, situated about 100 km north of the town of Gobabis, the administrative center of the Omaheke Region. This was the site where I gathered most information on the everyday school life of the San learners, their interactions with each other, with children from other ethnic groups, with teachers and hostel staff. I also visited 4 more primary schools (Drimiopsis Primary School, Epukiro R. C. Primary School, Hippo Primary School, and Goeie Hoop Primary School), 5 junior and senior secondary schools (Epukiro Post 3 Junior Secondary School, Wennie Du Plessis Secondary School, Epako Junior Secondary School, Johannes Dohren High School, Mokganedi Tlhabanello High School), and one church-run school for street children in the Epako village, near Gobabis. All these visits helped me see different aspects of the Namibian education system and the status of the San learners in it. The visits to the primary schools provided a basis of comparison with Gqaina. In these schools I also found out about common problems San children experience in circumstances different than those in Gqaina, where San children are the majority. The secondary schools were the site where I tried to find out more about the factors hindering San learners from finishing secondary education. These schools gave me a small-scale model of the diverse Namibian society and showed me how the San person is perceived in the often hostile and unprotected environment of secondary schools and how this influences his/her choices regarding education, social and ethnic identity.

The other main research site was Skoonheid Resettlement Camp, situated about 30 km. east of Gqaina. This is the place where parents of many Gqaina-going learners live and these are the people I refer to as the ‘community’ later in my thesis. I myself lived in Epukiro R.C. village, situated 7 km east of Gqaina, which is a small Tswana village with few San families living in it. Here I obtained a lot of valuable data on the attitude towards the San people by other, mainly Tswana, Bantu people. The Omaheke San Trust and the Regional Education Office in Gobabis were the places where I spoke to people involved in one way or another with San education. I had brought my 18 months old son Maxim with me to do fieldwork, and as a female researcher accompanied by a small child does not usually go unnoticed, I had many fruitful conversations with a variety of people from different spheres of life throughout my travels in the region who approached me with questions about who I was and what I was doing there. They, on their side, “knew the Bushmen” and these conversations were a useful source of data of how the others construct and convey the image of the San. The presence of my son in the field had also helped me relate to many parents and I approached many mothers with casual conversations about “our kids” and moved to other issues later on. I had rented a car for fieldwork, and as transportation is a scarce resource in the country, and hitch-hikers abound in the roads, I also benefited a lot from driving people around. In return, I asked many questions and received many answers. Driving Gqaina learners to and from Skoonheid turned into a weekly routine and these moments helped me get closer to many children and talk freely about sensitive issues with them, which was usually not possible in the school yard or in the hostel.

The qualitative methods employed in my fieldwork mainly relied on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, group interviews and conversations. Most of the interviews I had prepared for the different groups (learners, parents, teachers, etc.) were centered around topics rather than strictly ordered questions. Very often interviews took their own direction and I simply followed that. With time, as children and adults got more used to my presence, I benefited a lot from just ‘hanging around’ with them and asking casual questions about things which popped up in our conversations. One of the main limitations of my fieldwork, apart from the short time spent there, was my ‘language problem’. As English had become the official language in schools in Namibia, I was able to have conversations in English with the learners above grade 3 or 4.

English was introduced as a means of instruction in schools from grade 1 and it usually took 3 – 4 years to children to acquire it. This automatically excluded children in grades 1 and 2 and although I had many conversations with them as well, usually with older peers translating for us, a certain barrier could never be lifted. Things got even more complicated in my interactions with parents, almost none of whom spoke English. During my visits to Skoonheid, I used a local Damara woman, Nieki, as a Ju/'hoan translator and despite her diligence, a lot of information may have been lost in the translation process. I am also afraid that San people I interviewed wanted to give me positive answers regarding their attitude to education because they related me to the school in one way or another and even in the cases when this relation had been dismissed, I believe that my origin and color tipped the balance into that direction. Except for San parents and young San children, all other interviews were carried out in English.

The whole study can be viewed as a study of interactions between people on a local and broader scale. Personal and communal choices, as well as different historical and present-day events have played major roles in creating the environment in which the indigenous people of southern Africa presently find themselves. These circumstances also influence the decisions many San people, including San learners, make today. Therefore, in order to come to the specifics of education, I will first present the broader context into which the San people are situated and will show the way historical and socio-economic changes have shaped their present situation. The following chapter introduces the San people and their historical and socio-political development, as well as the significance of these dynamics for their present-day status.

Chapter Two

The San of Southern Africa

2.1. Who are the San?

San is the collective term used to denote the indigenous (former) hunter-gatherer societies of southern Africa inhabiting the areas south of the Congo-Zambezi watershed. Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest human inhabitants in the region were hunter-gatherers. Before white colonial rule, the San had lived all over southern Africa from the Zambezi basin in the north to the Cape of Good Hope in the south, numbering about 150 – 300 000 people at the time of first white encounters in 1650 (Lee & De Vore 1976). White colonial and later governmental policy have worked to exterminate or assimilate the San population and nowadays there are about 85 – 90 000 San people living primarily in and around the Kalahari Desert in Botswana (48 000) and Namibia (32 000), and small numbers of the population inhabiting South Africa (4 300), north-western Zimbabwe (2 500), southern Angola (1 200), and southern Zambia (300) (Suzman 2001b; population figures based on regional assessments).

Ethnically, a collective *San* identity has started to shape up with the advancement of the international indigenous peoples' movement and the pan-African idea that some Africans were indigenous, while others were not, in the postcolonial history of the continent. Thus, the term *San* has put under one label a variety of small scattered populations of people who were characterized by similar social and political organization such as egalitarian social structure with emphasis on reciprocity, sharing and gender equality, and similar subsistence strategies, including hunting, gathering and foraging, and who, universally, presently find themselves in a subordinate position with respect to other ethnic groups. Despite these similarities, however, as noted by Kent (1992), San groups are also found to differ considerably in a variety of respects, such as language, kinship, beliefs, settlement patterns, economy and, most significantly for their current status, course of historical development. Therefore, when I speak of the *San* collectively, I mean all the different groups of people characterized by the above-mentioned similar criteria, but when I refer to separate groups, the individual name of the group (such as Ju/'hoansi, Naro, etc.) is used.

Linguistically, the San people speak a range of closely related to mutually unintelligible languages most notably characterized by phonetic clicks and falling into the Khoisan language group. Scattered ethnographic work in the past, as well as uncoordinated linguistic efforts to provide orthography for a specific language, has resulted in a rather multiform linguistic map of the different San languages. Later efforts to present a uniform grouping of the languages have resulted in the *Penduka Declaration on the Standardization of Ju and Khoe Languages* which has suggested the following division: *Ju* or *Northern Khoisan*, which includes a variety of languages in Botswana, in the Ngamiland District and the northern part of the Ghanzi District, and in north-eastern Namibia and southern Angola which are predominantly mutually intelligible. *Khoe* or *Central Khoisan* comprises of more than 30 languages spoken from Zimbabwe in the north-east, across the Central District and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana, to the western parts of Namibia, with some related languages spoken in the Caprivi and Okavango areas. *Khoekhoegowab* (also referred to as *Nama/Damara*) is a language spoken by the Khoe people in most of Namibia, north-western South Africa and small parts of Botswana. *Southern Khoisan* comprises languages that were previously spoken largely in South Africa and south-western Botswana. Nowadays, few languages from this subgroup are preserved in South Africa (Saugestad 2004).

2.1.1. Terminology and Identity: San, Khoe and Khoisan

A classification by Barnard (1992) suggests that the *Khoisan* peoples include the *Khoekhoe* (or *Hottentots*, including *Nama* and *Korana*), the *Damara* (former livestock keepers who subsequently subsidized by hunting, gathering and stock-theft), the *Khoe speaking San* and the *non-Khoe speaking San* peoples of southern Africa. The development of the Khoekhoe society has been associated with the circulation of stock (sheep and later cattle) and pottery between the agro-pastoralist groups that entered southern Africa around 2 000 years ago and the hunter-gatherer populations living on the land at the time (Smith 1992). The exact relation between San foragers and Khoe herders throughout the centuries remains arguable and ranges from descriptions of peaceful neighbour coexistence (Lee & De Vore 1976), to that of a class stratification between failed herders (associated with foraging) and successful ones. Elphick (1977) has suggested that the distinction between the Khoekhoe and the San as two culturally distinct peoples has only been put forward by nineteenth century scholars and that such

distinction had been nonexistent for the first settlers in the Cape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who assumed that the “Bushmen” were subspecies of “Hottentots” who “maintain[ed] themselves by robbing and stealing from other Hottentots, having no cattle at all nor anything else on which to live” (Waterhouse 1685-6 in Elphick 1977:25). With herding being the preferred option associated with a higher class status, as the argument goes, it was preferably chosen by those who could afford it and people moved fluidly from one form of subsistence to another upon chance and luck.

It is important to note, however, that linguistic evidence suggests that upon encroachment some 2000 years ago in the southern African region, Bantu people have already discovered two different types of groups of people – hunter-gatherers and pastoralists; the evidence is encoded in the different terms used to denote them (Crawhall, forthcoming).

Arguments opposing Elphick’s (1977) view build upon the idea that the foraging mode is a strategic choice which requires a completely different world view than the world view of a herder and a shift between different subsistence strategies (hunting and herding) requires the “bridging of an enormous ideological divide” (Hays 2007:102, based on Smith 1992a) which is rather an exception than a common occurrence. As further argued by Hays (2007), changing of economies is not an entirely impossible undertaking but when it does take place, it is more likely for an individual to stray from the patterns of his/her own group and join a group with a different subsistence pattern, than for an entire group to do so. The “foraging mode of thought”, as suggested by Barnard (2002), centers around a number of concepts developed within the specific circumstances in which the foraging people find themselves, as opposed to the so-called “accumulation mode of thought”, characteristic of the other groups with which the San people (in our case) have been in contact. These two different “modes of thought” have developed independently throughout time and each bears specific characteristics which shape the worldview of the people associated with it and underlies their behaviour, choices, strategies, cultural and social organization, etc. The differences between the two modes are to be found on several levels: 1) *accumulation and consumption* (in foraging societies goods are widely shared and circulated and accumulation is perceived as anti-social, whereas in non-foraging societies accumulation and saving of goods is the norm); 2) *politics and leadership* (in foraging societies leaders emerge

naturally and leadership ambitions are negatively perceived); 3) *society and kinship* (for foraging peoples the kin classification is universal with no distinction between kin and non-kin; the society is equated with kinship); 4) and different *concepts of land* and land use. Furthermore, the relationship of hunters to animals they hunt is “physiologically” different than the relationship of herders to animals they herd, as is the relationship to the immediate consumption of a product versus the long-term tending of a herd (Smith 1992a in Hays 2007). Thus, it appears that hunting or herding, or any other subsistence strategy for that matter, requires the employment of a rather complex set of behavioural and cultural patterns and when shifts between such boundaries occur, they usually take a long time to happen and necessarily trigger a cultural and behavioural change, in which case frequent shifts back and forth seem to be rather difficult.

2.1.2. San identity questioned again - the Kalahari debate

Another controversy has stemmed from the nature of the relations between the San people and the Bantu encroaching populations, who emerged on the southern African continent some 1 700 years ago. The so-called *Kalahari debate* has put on the opposite sides of the argument the *traditionalists* (fronted by Lee, Silberbauer, Tanaka among others) versus the *revisionists* (most famously represented by Wilmsen and Denbow), each with their set of arguments for the character (and origin) of the San people in ethnic and social terms. Along the traditionalist view, the San people have been portrayed as autonomous foragers with their own ethnic and cultural identity as opposed to the identity of the surrounding pastoral Bantu groups; who had developed independently throughout time and who give a valuable insight of the human’s hunting and gathering past. The revisionists, on the other hand, had accused the traditionalists for having “granted the Bushmen antiquity whilst denying them history” (Wilmsen 1989 in Suzman 1999:5), and argue that historical and anthropological evidence suggested that the San were a dispossessed and marginalized group which was left behind by the dramatic political and economic processes that took place in southern Africa over the past millennium. Foraging, as the argument continues, does not represent the San’s cultural and ethnic identity values but should be rather understood as adaptation to poverty of a previous class stratification in which the San had found themselves on the losing end (Kent 1992, Suzman 1999).

The debate has been fuelled by different anthropological, historical, archaeological and socio-political evidence. Insufficient number of stone and bone artefacts from both Early Iron Age and Late Stone Age sites, as well as selective interpretations of rock paintings has tipped the balance in favour of the traditionalist school with the conclusion that there is yet not enough archaeological evidence supporting the revisionist view (Sadr 1997). Archaeological and historical data also suggest that even when certain San groups had been in contact with Bantu people, they had managed to remain ethnically distinct. As pointed out by Barnard, “Bushmen do not cease to be Bushmen when they encounter other peoples or come to be dominated by them” (1989:111 in Kent 1992:53). In an anthropological perspective, a sound argument comes from Kent’s (1992) observation that most of the conclusions in favour of one side or another are drawn from a rather limited perspective and that both sides might be right depending on the particular group being studied and the time period of conducted research, when we take into account the diversity among different San groups and the different socio-political courses of development they had taken. Isolation may have been true of some San groups, just as interethnic interactions may have been true of others, but even in the cases where they occurred, these interactions did not necessarily transform the society or the people they affected.

The debate has also put on the table the question of the *pure* (traditional) hunter-gatherers versus the *impure* (or acculturated) ones with strong orientation of anthropological interest towards the first. The last few decades, however, have influenced all previously pristine peoples and there is hardly a place in the world where modernization has not reached yet. Therefore, the Kalahari debate has also served to blur the distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ Bushmen and to attract more interest in groups who had previously been neglected by anthropologists as not pure enough (Suzman 1999). The anthropological neglect towards the ‘impure’ San people has been most clearly articulated by Howel (1986 in Gordon 1992), when pondering over the anthropological neglect towards the ‘impure’ !Kung:

... we didn’t come all the way around to see them. We could have stayed home and seen people behaving as rural proletariat, while nowhere but the Kalahari and few other remote locations allow a glimpse of the “hunting and gathering way of life”. So we focus upon bush camps, upon hunting, upon old fashioned customs, and although we remind each other once in a while not to be romantic, *we consciously and unconsciously neglect and avoid the !Kung who don’t conform to our expectations.* [Howel 1986, in Gordon 1992:3, emphasis added]

This anthropological neglect also reflects the political and economic subordination of some San groups and, as I will show shortly, has had a huge negative impact for the San people of the Omaheke region in terms of political, developmental and economic strategies by the government, donors, etc.

Both controversies – the Kalahari debate, and the relation of the San and the Khoe people – have implications for the course of development San people have taken and will take in the era of the advancement of indigenous peoples' rights. This leads to one of the most controversial questions in indigenous-related issues, namely, who exactly counts for indigenous in Africa?

2.2. Who are the indigenous peoples of Africa?

The notion *indigenous peoples* has emerged on the international human rights arena after World War II and the decolonization wave that shook all imperial powers of the time. Though originally applied as a term for Asian, African, Caribbean and Pacific peoples who had undergone European colonial rule, the term had soon shifted its scope of implication and became a meaningful legal category that encompasses peoples from different parts of the world who:

- claim continuity with the first inhabitants of an area;
- are (politically) dominated by other ethnic groups;
- are culturally different and have different modes of land and resource use;
- and identify themselves as indigenous (Saugestad 2001a).

The indigenous peoples' movement gained momentum on 13th September 2007 with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the concept *indigenous peoples* has turned from a loose description without much meaning in international law, to a powerful and significant standard-setting concept. When applied to the African context, however, the term is usually interpreted ambiguously because of 1) the recent colonial past of the continent, during which time *all* Africans were indigenous in relation to the European settlers; 2) the strong nation building policies which have taken place in postcolonial Africa, and 3) the strong competition for international and national donor programs aiming for indigenous peoples. All of these points will be discussed below.

As pointed out by Barnard and Kenrick (2001), many African governments use the indigenous concept selectively and strategically and argue that *all* of their citizens are indigenous (referring to their colonial past), whereas the peoples who determine themselves as indigenous in postcolonial times are seen as 'backward' and underdeveloped. Thus, the term has both positive and negative connotation, depending on the people it is applied to. In addition, most of the Sub-Saharan African governments have incorporated the International Declaration of Human Rights into their legislation systems with the promise of *equal* rights for their citizens in terms of education, health care, voting and legislative rights, etc. (Woodburn 2001). The standardization of services to all citizens on all levels is the first step towards the building of a nation. The blurring of ethnic differences within the African context has been also used to avoid interethnic conflicts which have outburst in many post-independent countries. As Saugestad (2001b) suggests, however, there should be found a balanced approach between the *equal rights ideals* and the *special needs* of the indigenous minorities on the continent.

The opinion that all Africans are indigenous had unquestionably been true in colonial times when the African people were subjugated and forced into European political and economic models. Thus, all Africans were indigenous *in relation to* (Saugestad 1998) the white settlers who controlled all governmental mechanisms, as opposed to the local peoples on whom these mechanisms were imposed. After independence, however, these mechanisms had been put into the arms of the Africans themselves, and the concept of indigenusness had become inapplicable for the majority of the local peoples. So, who are the modern indigenous peoples in Africa? These are mainly hunter-gatherer (or former hunter-gatherer) societies that are found in the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries, who had been inhabiting the areas where they are to be found today for centuries, and whose land was encroached upon by other, usually Bantu-speaking populations, who had pushed them into the most arid and unfavourable parts of their lands. Harshly impoverished and dispossessed, presently, they play only a marginal role in the economy of their countries and lack appropriate political or governmental representation (IPAAC 2009, IWGIA 2009).

In terms of terminology, there has also been a debate as to whether the indigenous peoples of Africa should represent themselves as indigenous, especially as governments reject to recognize them as such. Woodburn (2001) has argued that a more appropriate term would be 'first people' as there is still a very strong symbolic relation of the indigenous peoples and the land which is recognized by most other ethnic groups upon location. Suzman (2001a) sees the concept 'indigenous' as a "problematic social category" and suggests that aligning with the indigenous peoples' movement is not the most appropriate tactic for the San. Instead, their status as a "marginalized minority" would be more beneficial within the human rights framework. Both authors recognize the fact that Africa is not yet ready to embrace a different category for special treatment on an ethnic basis. That the San peoples are 'first people', as well as a 'marginalized minority' is a fact. These notions are included in the concept of indigenusness presented above. However, the description of the San only in terms of a different 'social category' is rather narrow and limited. As pointed by Saugestad (2001b) the choice of *terminology* also determines the choice of *strategy* for the indigenous peoples. A good example of an unsuccessful treatment on the basis of a marginalized status rather than ethnic or cultural autonomy is provided by the Remote Area Development Programme in Botswana, which, according to Saugestad (1998, 2001a, 2001b) has created clients rather than empowered the people it was designed to alleviate. Such a treatment "removes the symptoms, not the causes" for the marginalization and dispossession of certain groups (Saugestad 2001b:309). When indigenous peoples are represented as impoverished minorities, this automatically puts them in a dependency position at the receiving end of a one-way relation. When they voice their problems under the label 'indigenous peoples', however, their demands would also question the validity of their current marginalized status and would put them in a more reciprocal relation to those who make decisions regarding their status and course of development.

So far, I have shown that the term 'indigenous peoples' has been met with resistance by both African governments and some scholars because of the many challenges it is usually associated with. The picture gets even more complicated when we try to apply it for the San people of the Omaheke Region in Namibia, where I have conducted my fieldwork, for several reasons: 1) the San people in Omaheke have been completely dispossessed over the last 100 years as they have been forced to be labourers on mainly white-owned farms, which has resulted in 2) fast

acculturation and 3) loss of authenticity as ‘real Bushmen’. Their specific historic development and present challenges will be described in the following section.

2.3. The Omaheke Ju’hoansi

The Omaheke region is situated in the central eastern part of Namibia and consists of the former homeland areas of Aminius, Tswanaland and most of Hereroland east, presently known as ‘communal areas’ set aside by the government for the ‘natives’ during Apartheid and comprising almost 35% of the region area. The rest of the region is occupied by the so-called ‘commercial farming block’ consisting of about 900 commercial cattle farms mainly owned by German and Afrikaaner farmers. Linguistically, the region is quite heterogeneous and is dominated by a majority of Otjiherero speaking people (43%), followed by Nama/Damara speakers (12%), the Ju’hoansi (12%) and Afrikaners (8%) of about 53 000 permanent residents. Presently, about 4 000 of the 6 500 Ju’hoansi in Omaheke work on Afrikaner farms as third – or fourth – generation dispossessed labourers, comprising about 27 % of the farm work force. 2 000 more Ju’hoansi work on Herero owned farms in the communal areas (Sylvain 2001). The rest live on the two government operated resettlement camps, Drimiopsis and Skoenheid, or in small scattered settlements, referred to as ‘locations’. In addition to that, the number of San people moving in to Gobabis (the capital city of Omaheke) as an urban underclass of beggars and squatters is increasing drastically.

Historically, the Ju’hoansi, the largest San group in the Omaheke, together with Khoe speaking pastoralists (Namas and Damaras), were the only permanent residents of the region prior to the encroachment of Bantu speaking stock herders (mainly Herero, Mbanderu, and Tswana people) around the turn of the eighteenth century. The arrival of these groups marked the beginning of the Ju’hoansi marginalization and dislodging into the arid and harsh areas of the western fringe of the Kalahari, or their incorporation as occasional labourers. But despite the unequal relation between the Ju’hoansi and the Bantu people in terms of political and economical organization, the former managed to resist Bantu encroachment on their lands up until the 1920s (Suzman 1995). As a local Afrikaner farmer’s wife put it, when recollecting the history of the farm on which her family resides:

In 1928 [when the farm was established] the Bushmen were the only residents of the area but they were not settled and just wandered around. [fieldnotes]

The really dramatic changes for the Ju/'hoansi occurred with the appearance of white farmers in the region. The first white settlers came towards the end of the nineteenth century, when organized Tswana, Herero and Nama peoples signed treaties with Germans who settled around the Gobabis area. The German-Herero war (1904-1907) ended with the drastic increase of German settlers in the region, whose encroachment was stopped by the outbreak of the First World War. The most substantial wave of white settlers, however, started in 1915 when the League of Nations granted the mandate of South West Africa to the Union of South Africa. The policy of the Union targeted mainly South Africans who had been impoverished and dispossessed after the Boer War and recruited them with the promise of substantial material assistance. About a decade later, in 1928 and 1929, the bulk of white settlers increased with the arrival of the Angola Boers, whose relocation in Omaheke was financed by the Union Government after hardships with the Portuguese administration in Angola, and who were offered the 'unsettled' areas to the north and east of Gobabis. Thus, by the 1950s, there were as many as 700 white-owned farms in Omaheke (Suzman 1995, 1999; Sylvain 2001).

Following the increase of the number of white settlers and 'white areas', the Union Government had to set aside land where the 'natives' could live in accordance with their traditional lifestyle, and at the same time, serve the labour needs of the white areas. This led to the establishment of the Epukiro (later Hereroland East) and Aminuis Native Reserves, where mainly Herero and Mbanderu people settled. Originally, the native reserves measured some 514 000 hectares but as more people moved in, their territories were further expanded to the north and to the east, incorporating the Eiseb and Rietfontein areas, which were preliminary occupied by Ju/'hoansi people at the time. At the same time, a track of land southeast of Gobabis, surrounding the Aminuis area, was set aside for the Tswana people, but after the declaration of the reserve, a wave of Hereros moved in and outnumbered the Tswanas considerably, turning the reserve into Hereroland East Area 2 (Suzman 1995).

Although they were the first inhabitants in the area, ironically, when the native reserves in Omaheke were established, the Ju/'hoansi were not seen as worthy enough to be granted any land

on their own. Identifying herding and cropping as the only legitimate land use, as opposed to the foraging lifestyle of the Ju/'hoansi, it was only Bantu pastoralist groups who were seen as proper land users. On a political level, the Herero and Tswana groups were organized, in contrast to the Ju/'hoansi who did not seem to have any political or social order. This led to the complete dispossession of the Ju/'hoansi in Omaheke.

The exclusion of the Ju/'hoansi from the native reserves policy, as well as the advancement of farm fencing considerably shrank the areas in which the Ju/'hoansi could still pursue hunting and gathering. During the first years after their incorporation as labourers on white farms, many Ju/'hoansi returned to the remaining *veld* in the rainy season and went back to the farm when food and water got scarce in the dry season. This resulted in the adoption of a number of laws, of which the 1920 Masters and Servants Proclamation is probably the most significant. According to this law, farmers had legal right to track Ju/'hoansi who left the farm without permission. Fear of being shot or killed made many Ju/'hoansi abandon foraging and remain permanently settled on the farm they worked on. By the early 1970s, hunting and gathering became completely impossible with the implementation of the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission, according to which all 'free' areas between the farms and around the native reserves became state property (Suzman 1999).

2.3.1. Baaskap¹ and class status in the Omaheke

As the majority of Ju/'hoansi became 'stranded' on white-owned farms where they were forced to live and work, their lives became predominantly shaped by, and dependent on, the will of their white *baases*. By the time the Odendaal Commission came into force, many white-owned farms had evolved into "total institutions" (Suzman 1999:40) with almost no state interference in the farm matters. Central in these 'total institutions' was the *paternalistic* model, with the farmer at the top and having absolute power over his subjects. As suggested by Sylvain (2001), the idea of paternalism encapsulates in itself two main elements: gender and age:

¹ 'Baaskap' is an Afrikaans term that refers to the unequal power relations and domination of native Africans by white settlers in South Africa and Namibia; from 'baas + skap' (Afr.) – 'boss + ship'.

The concept of paternalism is predicated on the notion of a *male* of legal standing who enjoys the right – without having to seek resource to the law – of exercising traditionally sanctioned authority over minors within his ‘family’; that is, over the ‘women and children’ on his property. [Sylvain 2001:726]

The implementation of this model on Omaheke farms has put the Ju/’hoansi in a state of ‘perpetual childhood’ (Sylvain 2001:726) with the *baas* responsible for making decisions for and on behalf of his Ju/’hoansi workers and for the basic material needs of his workers, which in most cases usually covers the minimum basics (Suzman 1999:57). There have been debates as to what, precisely, *is* the status of the Ju/’hoansi on Afrikaner farms in Omaheke, with opinions varying from notions like ‘rural proletarianisation’ to ‘serfdom’ and ‘slavery’. Sylvain makes a thorough dissection of the phenomenon and suggests that there are several points which distinguish the ‘unfree’ labour from proletarianisation, and these include: 1) remuneration methods; 2) methods of recruitment and control; and 3) definitions of the labourer’s personhood (2001:722). In terms of remuneration, the status of the Ju/’hoansi can be related to that of rural proletariats because they receive paid wages and because their situation has improved with years. This process has left out women, however, who are still bound to their men in terms of employment and who usually follow their men to farms and get jobs as domestic servants. Jobs as domestic servants for women, however, are usually fewer than jobs for men and this creates certain tension between farmer employers and Ju/’hoansi women. The relation of farmer employers to Ju/’hoansi women is well illustrated in the answers I got from a white farmer while I was inquiring about the labourers on his farm:

- How many San people do you have on the farm?
- Three.
- You have only three San people on the farm?
- No, I have three men with their wives and children.²

In terms of methods of recruitment and control, Sylvain (2001) further notes that many Ju/’hoansi continue to be forcefully recruited by farmers, although not as harshly as in the past. The measures applied today include the enforcement of women to work on farms where their husbands get jobs. Furthermore, people who are found to be ‘squatting’ on a farm may escape sentence only if they agree to work for the farmer and workers can be freely moved from one farmers’ property to another, or ‘rented’ to other farmers. In the few encounters I had with white farmers, women’s employment was mentioned several times indicating that it is an issue in the

² Suzman (1999) also reports similar data.

region. One farmer expressed his frustration with Ju/'hoan women explaining that when they recruit men they come with their families and in this way create problems for the farmers as they now need to find jobs for the women as well and provide for more people in general. Another white woman rationalized the women's employment with the fact that they are trying to find jobs for the Ju/'hoan women on their farm, so that they would have some money for themselves and for the children because when the men get their wages they only spend them for themselves. Control has spread also to the children of farm workers, who left the farm and went to school. In two cases, Ju/'hoan boys have left secondary school because their parents' employers had demanded their presence as labourers on the farm and their parents had not been able to oppose to them.

However, attitudes towards Ju/'hoan labourers perhaps most clearly depict their status with respect to white farmers. Discourses regarding the nature of the Ju/'hoansi usually circle around their *childlike-ness* and *unpredictability*. As Suzman (1999) notes, the *childlike-ness* of the Ju/'hoansi had been attributed to two main factors – to their recent entering in the social world of the farmers and to their inability to think on a long-term basis. The second feature popped up in most of my conversations with white people. As one white man noted:

You can never be sure with the Bushmen. They are just like that. They can live at one place for 10 years and then, just like that, they can decide to move. They pack everything they can carry, sell the rest and just leave. No matter how well you know them, you never know what they will do tomorrow.

Both of these concepts stem from the understanding that the Ju/'hoan person has been brought into civilization too quickly and has not had time to naturally 'grow' to see the benefits of it and to embrace it. This has led to the approach many farmers (especially farmers' wives) have taken – to 'teach' the Bushmen the proper way. This 'teaching' is implemented on two levels – physical and moral. On a physical level, it includes personal hygiene, basic domestic chores, understanding the value of money, understanding the idea of time, etc. On a moral level, it most generally takes the shape of teaching what is 'right' and what is not, with virtues like loyalty and respect being among the most cherished. Family models and gender relations are also being suggested. It should be noticed, however, that the aim of these 'teachings' usually serves the needs of the farmers themselves and when Ju/'hoansi stray from this expected behaviour, they are seen as 'ungrateful' and as not wanting to accept the help that is being offered to them.

As a result, the class status of the San in Omaheke cannot be clearly characterized as purely 'slavery' or 'proletarian', as features related to both notions are found to be present. As Sylvain (2001) suggests, the class status of the Omaheke Ju/'hoansi should not be understood as a *static category* but should be rather seen as a *relationship* which most clearly depicts the gender and race asymmetries associated with it.

Related to education, there is little freedom on the part of farm workers to decide which school their children should attend, or whether their children should attend school at all. Usually, farmers choose the nearest school for their workers' children. In some cases teachers reported that farmers pay the school fee and transport the San learners to the school. In other cases, San children were reported not to be allowed to go to school by the farmers themselves, especially after a certain age when they could perform different tasks on the farm. The economic instability of farm labour and the mobile life of many Ju/'hoan people in search of jobs is also hindering many children from attending school.

The next chapter gives an overview of the education status of San learners in South Africa, Botswana and especially Namibia and points the main challenges San learners encounter in mainstream education, as well as the efforts to improve their situation.

Chapter three

San children in formal education

3.1. San children education.

Indigenous communities from different parts of the world voice similar problems concerning the educational opportunities of their children. What people want is access to schools which are not hostile to their children and which show respect for their language and culture. What they get, instead, are mainstream educational system without any (or with little) recognition of the traditional skills and knowledge of the indigenous learners. Learners are separated from their homes and are usually placed in boarding schools, where they are taught in a language they do not understand and where they experience harsh discrimination and further marginalization from both other learners and school staff. Furthermore, as most of them leave before the completion of their secondary (and many even before the completion of their primary) education, they have no other options but to return to their communities without the necessary skills to compete with other educated people for jobs but also without the necessary traditional skills to live as full members in their own communities (Hays 2007).

The educational realities for the San people in southern Africa are not any different. One of the earliest efforts to introduce San children to western-style education started in the late 1960s with the establishment of the reformed Church Mission of Aranos at D'Kar in the Ghanzi District, Botswana. Since then, governments and organizations in the region have combined efforts to bring and keep San learners in formal schools. Yet, the present-day situation of San learners, almost 50 years after their introduction to formal education, is far from ideal, with reports showing that only a few San learners have finished secondary and tertiary education, and that a large number of San learners drop out of school before the completion of the primary level (Le Roux 1999). If these tendencies prevail, most of the San population in the region will still be illiterate in the next decade or so (Suzman 2001b), which together with the dispossession process affecting the San communities in the southern African region would only further impoverish the San population.

A report from the Regional Conference on Multilingualism in Southern African Education, held in Gaborone, Botswana, 2005, shows that what indigenous groups ask for is inclusive and accessible education, with provision of mother tongue instruction and an emphasis on cultural diversity. Instruction in the mother tongue is a basic human right, as indicated in Article 28 of ILO 169, stating that indigenous groups “shall, whenever practicable, be taught to read and write their indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong”, and in Article 15 in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which says that “indigenous peoples have the right to an education in their own languages and cultures, using indigenous teaching methods” (Hays 2006:7). Furthermore, much education research has shown that simply learning in one’s own language can produce optimal results and can help preserve a language; this is especially true with small languages, such as the languages spoken by the San people (Hays 2006).

Each of the countries with a San population has employed different strategies towards their indigenous groups in terms of education. The present day policies towards indigenous education are to a large extent influenced by the historical developments in each specific country and, as I will show below, have proved to be either beneficial or restrictive for the San communities in the region.

3.1.1. Education and the San in South Africa and Botswana³

South Africa can mostly be characterized as open to the differences of its people with various cultural backgrounds. The country recognizes the importance of mother-tongue education during the first three years of schooling and individual school communities have the freedom to choose their own language of instruction. During the apartheid era, the government has also supported the development of mother-tongue educational materials in the eleven official languages in the country. This material development, however, has excluded all San languages because during the apartheid period the San people were subjugated into the colored ethnicity whose main language was Afrikaans. As a result, all mother-tongue initiatives in South Africa as of this point serve the

³ There are almost no data about the schooling situation of San children in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola. Scarce data is being presented by Suzman (2001c) and show that only a handful of San learners have attended primary school in the three countries. Several San learners have received higher education in Angola as a part of their military training.

needs of language restoration, rather than an effective pedagogical practice (Hays 2004, 2006, 2007). It should be noted, however, that the largest school for San learners – !Xunhwesa Combined School – is in South Africa. The school was built in 2003 to serve the needs of !Xun and Khwe soldiers and their families (originally coming from Angola and Namibia) and accommodates 1190 San learners from Grades 1 to 12 (Hays and Siegrühn-Mars 2005).

The government in *Botswana* has adopted the complete opposite approach regarding its culturally different citizens. The country claims to have achieved universal basic education of up to ten years, yet, the discourse of “one official language and one official tribe in the country” (Le Roux 1999:34) has hindered the provision of mother-tongue education in any San language (and any other minority language). Instruction in the first years of schooling is done in Setswana, which is considered all people’s mother tongue, regardless of the fact that up to 18% of the population speaks a different mother tongue (Hays 2006). This approach has also made it impossible to get accurate numbers of San learners in schools in Botswana, as learners are not differentiated on an ethnic and language basis. The support most San benefit from comes from the RAD (Remote Area Development) Programme whose aim is to reach the people in remote areas (more than 80% of whom are San). RAD children are encouraged and supported to enroll in mainstream schools although the process is usually accompanied by traumatic clashes with the dominant Setswana culture and early dropouts of the San learners. Still, there should be noted, that the country has opened up for a dialogue on the topic, as the Minister of Education himself has stated at the Regional Conference on Multilingualism in Southern African Education, that the country no longer wants to “exist as a ‘pretentious whole’ but rather one that recognizes diversity” (Hays 2006:26).

3.1.2. Education and the San in Namibia

Of all countries with San populations, Namibia has been most progressive in meeting the different educational needs of its minorities. Right after Independence from the South African Union in 1990, Namibian education was still strictly ethnically segregated and different ethnic groups had differential access, and the quality education options varied greatly. As an inevitable part of the nation building process, human capital was seen as one of the major resources of the country and investment in education was believed to be a direct path towards socio-economic

development and democracy. Therefore, the new Namibian government, inspired mainly by the human rights ideals, has promulgated in December 2001 an Education Act which had as its main objective to

...provide for an accessible, equitable, qualitative and democratic national education service [MBSEC 2004]

that would eventually lead to an

...innovative, knowledge-based society, supported by a dynamic, responsive and highly effective education and training system [*Vision 2030*, in MBESC 2004:3].

In order to implement its innovative policy, the government has highlighted special areas of interest which are to be considered if the above-mentioned ideals are to be achieved. The most important of these for the San people is the *National Policy for Educationally Marginalized Children* whose main objective is to identify disadvantaged children and to facilitate their access to education and support them through the process. Within the group of “educationally marginalized children” fall children victims of HIV / AIDS; learners with disability; and children from remote areas, who have poor access to schools due to bad infrastructure and unavailability of schools close to their communities. In addition to outlining the special needs of the educationally marginalized children, the Ministry of Education has also set up a language policy which recognizes the pedagogical soundness of mother tongue education and recommends the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction from Grades 1 to 3 and classes in the language up until Grade 12 consequently. Grade 4 is seen as a transitional grade from the mother tongue to English and from Grade 5 onwards, the main medium of instruction is English. The language policy is based on the premise that “all national languages regardless of number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language” are equal and any given language is also “a means of transmitting culture and cultural identity” (MBESC 2003:1). This rather progressive language policy goes further and acknowledges that proficiency in English facilitates communication and gives greater access to social welfare activities but it “does not automatically ensure effective participation in society” and in order “to be an individual in a multicultural society [one] must possess [their] cultural identity and traditional norms that [they] call [their] own” (MBESC 2003:2).

Another innovative approach in education after Independence was the implementation of “learner-centred education” which is based on the premise that both learners and teachers are active problems-solvers and not passive transmitters / recipients of information.

Learner-centred education presupposes that teachers have a holistic view of the learner, valuing the learner’s life experience as the starting point for their studies. Teachers should be able to select content and methods on the basis of a shared analysis of the learner’s needs, use local and natural resources as an alternative or supplement to ready-made study materials, and thus develop their own and the learner’s creativity... A learner-centred approach demands a high degree of learner participation, contribution and production ... (it) is based on a democratic pedagogy; a methodology which promotes learning through understanding, and practice directed towards empowerment to shape the conditions of one’s own life (NIED 2003:7). [MBESC 2004]

The Ministry of Education has also recognized the important role teachers play in the education process and has self-critically acknowledged that

... teacher educators hold the position of authority and control over the structure of knowledge to a certain extent, and therefore it was crucial to work with them on changing their beliefs, attitudes and practices [MBESC 2004].

The implementation of these high ideals on a local level, however, has turned out to be more difficult than envisaged and despite the growing number of San learners who enrol in schools each year, their dropout rate is still extremely high.

3.2. Problems of San children in formal education.

As the previous sections have shown, each country has taken up different initiatives towards the provision of education to their San populations. Yet, an in-depth report by LeRoux (1999) on the educational status of the San communities in the three countries with the highest San populations reveals that there are striking similarities across borders. Despite the fact that the report was carried out ten years ago, all of its findings are still relevant today, as more recent studies on San education have shown (see Hays 2007) and as I have come to witness myself. The main findings of LeRoux’s report are summarized below:

- ***Power and dependency***

All San people throughout the region have expressed concerns that they feel powerless and without any control over their lives. This dependency derives from the fact that the San people have been dispossessed from everything they had once owned – land, natural resources and free

access to them. As a result, all San communities today depend on the mercy of the government to provide them with what is needed for their survival – a situation which ultimately perpetuates their marginalization and does not offer any choices to solve it. These processes have made the San people suspicious towards all other groups who, in the eyes of the San, try to keep them down for their own interest. Therefore, the San people find it very difficult, if not impossible, to gain any political representation, get access to school and other facilities, and get access to land and other resources. On a school level, San learners have to fight tremendous prejudices against them. The situation is also worsened by the fact that it is not only other learners but also school teachers and hostel staff who have negative attitudes towards the San and who stifle their free participation in school.

- *Poverty*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the majority of San people have been displaced and forced into the most unfavourable parts of the country or live in very poor conditions on farms or in urban centers as an underclass of beggars, without any real economic opportunity to sustain themselves and their families. For San children this means malnutrition and bad hygienic conditions which result in poor health and hindered cognitive development from an early age. On a school level, San learners face the humiliation of being poor and not having the basic necessities which the others have. These include clothes and school uniforms, shoes, toiletries, blankets, etc. Policies to prevent San children from leaving school because of their poor condition have tipped the balance in the opposite direction – San children feel embarrassment and humiliation for getting support and being exempted from paying the school and hostel fee.

- *Language*

San learners today enter schools where they are taught in foreign or at least non-native languages which most of them do not understand. Even in the cases when San learners have been exposed to the language of instruction from before, they do not have full command of it and cannot comprehend and articulate complex concepts in it. Poor command of the language of instruction also means poor performance at school which incorrectly puts San learners in the group of ‘poor learners’.

- ***Abuse and discrimination***

The social stigma of being San is widespread among all areas with San population. This stigma is also conveyed in schools and San children are subject of severe verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse by both other learners and school staff, including teachers. Added to the fact that San learners are a minority in school and are far away from their families and communities, they are extremely vulnerable and insecure.

- ***Acculturation***

As the social status of the San is so low, and as San children are a minority in schools, traditional San knowledge stands no chance of being introduced and taught on a large scale in formal schools. This creates a great gap between the illiterate San parents and their school-going children, who see their parents as backward. Parents on the other hand, feel embarrassed in front of their children and disconnected with them.

3.3. Positive developments

Despite the grim picture presented above, efforts to fight the hardships most San children encounter in schools exist. *WIMSA* (The Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa) has chosen education as one of its main activity areas. The organization carries out different training programs for San youth, educates the public and advises governments in the region on San-related issues. The Omaheke San Trust (OST) – an Omaheke-based WIMSA supported San organization – plays an active role for the improvement of the schooling situation of San children in the region. It campaigns for the exemption of school fees for all San learners and also provides for San learners materially and logistically.

A bilateral university agreement between the University of Tromsø and University of Botswana – *UBTromsø* has been initiated as a “capacity-building” programme in 1996 with the main objective of assisting San learners in their tertiary education and to strengthen the body of research done on San-related issues (Norwegian Church Aid Report).

The Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project is perhaps the most well-known and integrated educational initiative for San children in southern Africa. Located in Tsumkwe East (north-west

Namibia), the project includes several village school up to Grade 3 which offer mother-tongue education in Ju/'hoansi taught by Ju/'hoan teachers. The project is rather holistic in its approach and tries to combine both skills and knowledge from the mainstream education curriculum and traditional knowledge with the main objective to prepare San children for successful transition to governmental school in Grade 4 (Hays 2004, 2006, 2007).

Gqaina Primary School, the main focus of this thesis, has also been referred to as one of the few good initiatives for San education. Designed specifically to meet the needs of the San children in the Omaheke region, the school has managed to keep a strikingly high attendance profile (as high as 97 - 98%) and a relatively tolerant atmosphere among its learners. The next chapter gives a detailed picture of the school; of the challenges it faces and the many accomplishments it has achieved.

Chapter four

Gqaina Primary School

4.1. History of Gqaina

The idea of an exclusive school for San children in Omaheke was generated by Dr. Gerard Buys of the Dutch Reformed Church as a response to the great number of San children who were living on scattered farms with little if any access to the outside world and lack of any educational opportunities whatsoever. Local farmers embraced the idea and soon after a piece of land on the Ramba farm was set aside and intended as a school site for a period of ten years. The school opened its 'doors' in 1981 with a total number of 49 learners, all of which were San and came from nearby farms. The school had no buildings, classrooms or blackboards. It was situated under a big tree with the sand to write on and few magazines to look at. This gave the school its name, *Gqaina*, which from Ju/'hoansi would translate as *The big tree*.

Gradually, a shed was erected, desks and chairs were introduced and the next year already, in 1982, there were 70 San children enrolled in it. Local organizations were approached and a small amount of money was generated for the building of four dormitories, proper ablution blocks and a classroom. Farmers' wives generated additional amount of money for the purchase of mattresses, blankets and other necessities by selling out meals at cattle auctions in Otjinene. By 1985 the school had 175 learners and 6 farmers' wives teachers. Focus was mainly on art classes with dancing and singing being among the most common activities. When the ten year period expired, however, the farmer on whose land the school was situated withdrew from the initiative and in November 1990 the school was closed down.

The history of the 'new Gqaina', as the school is sometimes referred to, started soon after the old school was closed. A local farmer, Mr. Tölken, contacted the wife of the owner of a big Namibian grocery chain, Mrs. Woermann, and in November 1991, one year after the previous school was closed, the Gqaina Trust was established. Just after Independence, time was favourable for international donors and the trust established firm connections with donors and organizations from Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. A local farmer secured a new

school site on his farm, Du Plessis, and in 1993 the school was reopened with 132 learners in grades 1 to 3 and Mrs. E. Maritz (a teacher in the old Gqaina) as a school principal. The school staff included 5 teachers altogether, the Ju/'hoan Chief Frederik Langman as a handyman and interpreter for the Ju/'hoan children, and 5 hostel and kitchen staff. As the school did not have enough learners for Grade 3, Otjiherero speaking children were also admitted. In 1994 the government provided the school with electricity and in 1997 the school started its pre-school Bridging class in Ju/'hoansi, as well as expanded up until Grade 5. In the same year, the farm on which the school was situated was sold to the government which resulted in the loss of many San children whose parents lived on the farm. After being appropriated by the government, Du Plessis Plas was now populated with Damara-speaking people whose children were also enrolled in the school, which more or less resulted in the language distribution in the school also found today. In 2001 the school expanded up to grade 7, and as of the school year 2007, according to the Annual Education Census, the school accommodated a total number of 312 learners, 161 of which were San. The next largest group of learners was Damara, followed by Herero children.

4.2. School and hostel facilities and environment

When I first entered the school yard one late Sunday morning in the (Namibian) winter of 2008, my first impression was of a well-managed schooling facility with a big and neat yard, nicely decorated classrooms, and rather clean and well equipped hostel rooms. The school itself consists of 3 classroom buildings with two to four classrooms each, three separate hostel buildings – one for the boys, one for the girls and one for the junior learners (up until Grade 3), a kitchen and a big canteen with a TV set, as well as few additional small buildings where the two volunteers and 7 of the 9 teachers lived. The school also has a small library room, a computer room, and a handicraft workshop, which children can use under supervision. The hostels are equipped with indoor toilets and showers and there are also two additional outer ablutions in the school yard. The girls' hostel matron despite being of non-San origin speaks fluent Ju/'hoansi and has been in the school since its beginning. She is also teaching the 'Bridging class' (a pre-school class for young children aged 5 - 6). The Junior hostel is under the supervision of two Ju/'hoan women who have also been involved with the school for a long time. The boy's hostel's matron is a committed Tswana/Herero woman who does not speak Ju/'hoansi but who has also been employed in the school for a long time. All the matrons live and spend the nights in their hostels

respectively. The hostel rooms are furnished with two-story beds equipped with mattresses and blankets. Children are encouraged to clean their own rooms and do so in turns. Each child also has access to a locker where clothes, cosmetics and other personal belongings are being stored. The youngest learners usually get help from the hostel staff washing their clothes, whereas the older children are expected to wash their clothes themselves.



Picture 1: The school yard

The school day starts with a maize breakfast in the canteen (for the boarders), followed by classes until noon. After lunch, the children have a short break and afternoon organized homework writing in the canteen. The late afternoon is set aside for free activities, which usually take place in the yard and which are often coached by one of the two English and Scottish volunteers who had been there for about a year; one left at the end of my fieldwork, and the other one soon after I left the school. In the afternoon, the children are usually accompanied by the matrons and kitchen staff, as well as by some of the teachers who live on the site and are interested in engaging with the children (especially with the young ones). During the weekends, children are free to leave the school after signing up with the matron.

Food in the hostel seems abundant and most learners referred to it as sufficient enough, although a few of them reported that they get hungry long before lunch and many complained about not getting a more varied food menu (maize meal comprised most of the meals). Sweets were largely missed on the site and sugar was one of the most desired commodities. Food sharing was also widespread, usually among kin. Many children, especially those coming from Skoonheid (where most parents stayed unemployed and without any income) also admitted that the food they get in the school is better than the food they get at home. A few entries from the School Journal (written by the school principal) also reveal that:

“Another learner came back [to the school] the fifth week. When the matron asked why he had come back, his reply was that there is nothing to eat at Skoonheid.” [School Journal, 2002]

“Apparently his mother found them a lift to the school because she could not feed them.” [School Journal, 2002]

What made a huge difference between Gqaina and other schools in the area was the fact that the hostel environment was a very secure one with strict control especially during the night. No outsiders were allowed on the site and whenever there were problems between learners, the matrons intervened and solved them. Stealing was limited although not unheard of. In cases of theft, the matrons searched and threatened all children and the missing item would eventually appear, although an ex-Gqaina learner who was now staying in Skoonheid after dropping out of Johannes Dohren High School reported that while he was studying and boarding at Gqaina, Herero boys would steal his and his Ju/'hoan peers' clothes and shoes and would threaten them with beating had they reported them to the matrons. Skoonheid parents of junior learners also complained that some children have the few clothes and shoes they possess stolen after having them washed.

4.3. San identity and learner – learner relationships

With the majority of learners being of Ju/'hoan origin, the school environment is rather tolerant and easy to bear for most of them. The second largest group of learners is Damara children who come from DuPlessis Plass Resettlement Camp which is situated right next to the school, or from farm-working families. Herero children make up the third largest group of learners, followed by very few Tswana, Ovambo and Afrikaans-speaking children. The majority of learners are

boarders and only those who live in the nearby resettlement camp, Du Plessis Plass, or on very close farms do not live in the hostel.

The fact that the school was initially intended mainly for San children gives San learners certain advantage in terms of who is the ‘rightful beneficiary’ of the facility and also gives them some pride in that. This allows boasting among peers, and school staff reported that in cases of conflicts San learners would remind problem-causers that they should not behave like that in ‘their school’. Being the majority also allows San children to readily self-identify as ‘San’. When I was asking them to identify themselves, most San learners would say they are San (in contrast to their parents who usually identified themselves as Ju/’hoansi). This could be because in the school environment they are referred to as San (and not as Ju/’hoansi specifically) both by their peers and the school staff. The Annual Education Census Form also only has the ‘San language’ as the only identification option, thus putting all San people under one umbrella. Self-ascribed markers of San-ness usually coincided with the non-San learners’ views of who is San and mostly described how the San people look and what they do. Physical markers were usually more important for others than for the San themselves, and most non-San learners identified the San as having ‘strange round hair’ (a very common expression), of having different skin color, and of living in the bush and wearing animal skins. The last two associations were quite wide-spread among non-San learners, although when further asked whether the San people still do that, they would conclude that they actually do not. Interestingly, San learners themselves described the San as people living in the bush and wearing animal skins, although they themselves did not know anyone who was still doing that. This description reveals that the image of the San person today is still to a large extent influenced by static old taxonomies and despite the fact that the San people no longer exhibit certain features, the attitude towards them is largely influenced by that.

Language was also a distinctive feature attributed to San learners, although it was sometimes referred to as “funny” and “strange”. San learners, on their hand, did not feel embarrassed about their language and often said proudly that “we speak San”, “we have our own language”, “when we speak San, they don’t understand us”.



Picture 2: The San cultural group

The other features which distinguished the San from the rest were their dancing and singing skills. San children readily engaged in the school's 'cultural group' (which had regular performances in the school upon occasion and was taking part in regional and national cultural festivals) and their skills were also appreciated by other learners, staff and parents. Alignment with San-related activities was an issue in other schools and a staff member at Johannes Dohren High School admitted that it was impossible to form a San cultural group because no San children wanted to participate in it (the school had other ethnic cultural groups) and San learners themselves admitted to me that they are "ashamed" and "afraid" to join the group because 'the other[s] will laugh at us'. No San children at Gqaina self-identified as something else, which was a reported common practice in other schools (especially in schools in town and in high schools).

Bullying and fighting was present at Gqaina, although staff (especially the hostel matrons) were doing their best to prevent it. Conflicts ran in two directions –the stronger beats the weaker and 'our' ethnic group beats 'yours'. Usually San children stuck together and preferred to engage in activities with children from their own group. Socializing with children from other ethnic groups seemed to be more difficult for girls than it was for boys. Some non-San children complained

they did not have any San friends because “the San children like each other but not the other children”. As the children were mixed in class and in the hostel rooms (matrons were encouraging mixing and were putting children of different ethnic background in one room in order to facilitate socialization) there were also many examples of San children forming friendships with non-San, although, as one teacher reported:

When they mix, maybe, there can be three San and one other. One San with children from other ethnic groups is a problem for them. Other people can mix with them but for them to be in another group is a problem. [Gqaina teacher]

Despite the relatively friendly and tolerant atmosphere, some San learners reported that others would call them names and insult them for being San, especially Herero children.

Herero girls call me, “Hey, you, ugly San!” [San boy, Grade 4]

- And they swear [at] us and say we eat snakes and insects.
- Who does that?
- Herero boys.

[San boys, Grades 6 and 7]

On a broader scale, Herero – San relationships in Omaheke have been defined in terms of superiority and oppression which is to be found on all levels of everyday interactions between the two groups and which also conveys in the school environment. The principal also reported that in the past they had had problems with Herero learners refusing to respect the San staff at the school.

The Damara people, on the other hand, today find themselves in a rather similar economically and socially marginalized status as the Ju/'hoansi. This, combined with their historically tolerant interactions with the San, has led to rather peaceful and non-oppressive relations with them. Therefore, the schools where more San children were to be found, were those with less Otjiherero-speaking learners. On the contrary, staff from schools with a large number of Herero children (e.g. Goeie Hoop Primary School in Epukiro Post 3) reported that the San are largely discriminated by the Herero, which on its side resulted in high dropping out rates of the San.

It must be also noted that San children were not only victims of bullying but they also formed groups and approached others, “making up stories” and initiating fights themselves. The most common ground for bullying, however, was based on physical strength and size, although San children were also disadvantaged in this respect, being physically much smaller and shorter than their peers of other ethnic groups.

According to the Namibian Constitution, learners are admitted to schools on an equal footing irrespective of their ethnic origin, social standing, etc. Being half-private and half-government supported, Gqaina is no exception to the rule and admits learners according to who enrolls first. Despite the fact that a few San parents expressed their concern that their children would feel much better and would perform better in class if they were not oppressed by others, the majority of interviewed parents and San learners expressed opinions that a mixed ethnic atmosphere is not necessarily a bad thing and as long as there is control, and tolerance is encouraged, it is much better for the San children to mix with other children from an early age. This helps them learn languages and skills. Once the protective Gqaina environment is left behind, they will be thrown into competition with children of other backgrounds when they go to high school, so the sooner they learn more about different cultures, the better. A mother from Skoonheid also noted that this relation also goes the other way – children from other ethnic groups also learn to live with and respect the San people from an early age.

4.4. Learner – teacher relationships and San learners’ performance

During my fieldwork in 2008, the school had a total number of nine teachers, five Afrikaans-speaking, two Herero-speaking, one Damara-speaking, and one Silozi-speaking. Only one of the nine teachers spoke the Ju/'hoan language, although he was not of Ju/'hoan origin himself. The volunteers from England and Scotland had a very positive influence on the improvement of the English language of the children. As the school is situated in a remote area (100 km. from town), and public transport and shops are missing, attracting highly-qualified teachers on a long term basis has turned out to be a problem, especially in later years. In the past, the school had also had problems with a teacher sexually abusing learners, as well as alcohol-abusing teachers.

Some teachers that abuse alcohol are actually good teachers but it's such a bad example for the children because how can you talk about alcohol abuse if ... It doesn't make sense. [Mrs. Maritz, Gqaina School Principal]

All teachers found the atmosphere at the school relaxed and ‘normal’. Some of them also reported that they like the school facilities very much and find the atmosphere in the school very stimulating for their work. Most teachers reported that they feel prepared enough to work with San children because San children did not seem to require any different attitude on their side but were just like anybody else. Still, some said that the fact that they had grown up with San people actually helps in their interactions with San learners, because they ‘know’ them better. Two teachers reported that they feel unprepared to work with San children and need some background regarding their culture, and especially their language. Seven of the teachers recognized the language as the biggest obstacle in their communication with San learners.

The fact that there were no San teachers seemed to create a gap between learners and teachers. When asked whether he wished there were any San teachers at Gqaina, a grade 7 San boy replied:

It will be good to have San teachers, who can teach us our language and our things.

This answer insightfully recognizes the things San children miss in the school – people of similar background who would understand what they say, what they think, and how they behave. The need for San teachers was also recognized by other Gqaina teachers:

What they miss in the school are other San teachers. When they see a San teacher they will think: “Ah, he is one of us and he knows me. Maybe one day I can be like him.” [Gqaina teacher]

Despite the fact that most children adapt well in the school according to the teachers, San learners were still reported to feel uneasy in front of teachers. A teacher reported:

- They [the San] are stubborn, or I don’t know. Something is there but I cannot say what is their problem. You can call them to come to you but they will never come like that [points straight with hands]. They’ll just turn their side and stand next to you instead of in front of you.
- So, what you’re saying is that they don’t feel comfortable with you.
- Yeah, something like that. Shy or I don’t know what. Maybe they’re very shy.

Also attributed to their shyness, teachers complained that San children do not want to take leadership positions (e.g. prefects), or sometimes refuse to freely answer in class, even though they knew the answer.

Sometimes San learners (especially young ones) were also seen as not quite understanding why they were there and how important school was for them.

They [the San] don't have a clue on what education is. They just come here for the sake of what? They really don't know what the meaning of education is. They're just at school because they have to be. Because you can see sometimes they're not even interested. [Gqaina teacher]

In general, San learners' performance was seen as average, with San children being among the "brightest" and "stronger than others" in class, as well as, among the poorest performers, described as those who "you don't even know how to help". Poor performers were also receiving extra classes to help them catch up with the others. Arts were again mentioned as San learners' strongest side, especially drawing:

They're good at drawing. Even if you look through their books you can see there is a difference between them and the others, the Damaras and Hereros. If you just give them something to draw... [Gqaina teacher]

The language barrier was pointed out as the main stumbling stone for most learners, especially during the first years of studying. In this respect, the introduction of the Bridging class in 1997 has made a huge difference, especially for San children. The class is being taught by the girls' hostel matron, Christine⁴. Some of the children have never been outside the farm or the resettlement camp they were raised on, and therefore the change they experience after coming to the school is tremendous.

When they come at the beginning, they don't know how to sit on the chairs. And just come here and sit with their backs to the blackboard. [Christine, Bridging class care-giver]

During their Bridging class, they are introduced to drawing, counting, reading the alphabet, using scissors and other basic skills. As most of them only speak Ju/'hoansi and Afrikaans, they are also taught some English. The impact of the Bridging class is huge and all teachers asked said there is a big difference between children who had been to the Bridging class, and those who had not.

⁴ Christine was sister to the Ju/'hoan-speaking teacher, Mr. Ludewyk. They are not of Ju/'hoan origin themselves but speak the language with near native-competence as they grew up on a nearby farm with Ju/'hoan people after their parents had followed their employers who had fled South Africa before Christine and Mr. Ludewyk were born.

Like now, there is this class, there are only ... five of them and the problem is that they didn't attend any kindergarten or bridging or what. But others who were last year in the bridging, you can see. And right now I only have problems with those who came this year [and have not attended the Bridging class]. [Gqaina teacher]

You can see there is a big difference. We cannot take all in the Bridging class. There is a big difference when they come to school, those who have preschool and those who don't. It's very obvious. [Mrs. Maritz, Gqaina principal]



Picture 3: Christine helping pre-school learners in class

Learners also received a lot of support and protection from some of the teachers, who treated them 'as my own children' and who were trying to assist them with different tasks which were more difficult to them or listen to their problems and find solutions for them. Learners also noted this and said that some teachers 'love us', and those teachers were described as 'good' and caring. One teacher also reported that being able to spend time in the afternoons together with the children helps both learners and teachers to get to know each other better, which helped a lot in class.

Another big issue at the school was the problem of discipline. Teachers were very strict with learners and expected them to behave in a disciplined and respectful way.

- We've got some disciplinary things that we have to work very hard on them.
- What are these?
- When the children leave after studying they scream and run all over.
- But these are just children.
- No, it shouldn't be like that. It depends where you went to school. If you were taught the right way, then you know this is chaos. Because they take the chaos with them to the hostel. So, when they're running to the hostel, they start doing funny things there. So, it is very important for them to know discipline, that this is the way you do things. [Mrs. Maritz, Gqaina principal]

A young teacher complained that it is very difficult for her to control the children in class and they do as they wish. Learners on their side complained that teachers beat them⁵. The problem of corporal punishment popped up in most conversations with learners, especially when talking about what they did not like about the school. Usually, children differentiated between 'just' and 'unjust' beating. 'Just' beating was being exercised when they misbehaved in class or in the hostel, when they had not prepared their homework or failed to answer correctly in class. All but one of the teachers were reported to use that measure, some of them more often, others rarely. 'Unjust' beating was one which they received without obvious reason. One teacher was reported to beat learners on a daily basis, using also verbal abuse, and every child that had had classes with that teacher complained that he or she was being beaten or abused, irrespective of ethnicity.

In addition, the principal also mentioned to me that learners did not trust 'black' teachers to teach them and preferred 'white' ones (during my fieldwork, there were two white farmers' wives teacher).

The discrepancies between teachers' expectations and San learners' behaviour – children being too shy in front of teachers; not wanting to take leadership positions; not being used to be told what to do; not always being interested in what is being taught in class; and not willing to accept physical and verbal abuse could be better understood if we take a look at the traditional Ju/'hoan socialization practises and norms.

As pointed out by Hays (2007), traditional Ju/'hoan socialization practises and knowledge transmission differ considerably from western models of children upbringing and education. These include: intolerance of aggressive behaviour and competitiveness; little pressure on

⁵ Despite being outlawed in Namibia, corporal punishment in schools was widely reported throughout the Omaheke Region during my fieldwork. Other sources (e.g. Hays 2007, LeRoux 1999) also report it.

children to perform work and freedom of choice whether to engage in a certain activity or not; individualistic approach with strong emphasis on personal autonomy and will; and different teaching and learning techniques in which the *process* is more valued than the result itself. Despite the fact that all San people have been influenced by dramatic social changes that have also triggered new models of social interactions and behaviour, much of the above stated principles are deeply rooted within the San culture and many people still conform to them.

A western-type educational system, on the other hand, seems to run exactly contrary on the above-described practices and behaviour: school performance is based on competition; there is no or little choice of subjects and each class is scheduled at a specific time during the day; a learner's personal wishes (whether to take part in a discussion, or text reading, for example) are dismissed; and it is the results, not the process itself which are mostly valued. In addition, traditional knowledge transmission is a lifelong endeavour, with people of middle age still learning from the elders, whereas the formal educational system finishes at a time, when an individual of a traditional society may just feel ready to start actively engaging in a specific learning process (Hays 2007). That San youths come to an age in puberty when they feel more "drawn" to their roots and want to take a more active role in their own communities was also mentioned to me by a pastor who was sometimes visiting Gqaina in the afternoons.

Given this huge discrepancy a child's decision to act in one way or another may not necessarily express the child's wish to confront the system but could simply reflect her own understanding of how this system should work.

4.5. Mother-tongue education

The equality ideal promoted in the Namibian Constitution after Independence has also granted "equality of all national languages regardless of the number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language" (MBSEC 2003:1) and has also acknowledged the pedagogical soundness of mother-tongue education, especially during the first years of schooling. The main idea behind the policy has been to facilitate the transition to English-based education in Grade 4 with the objective to have the mother-tongue as a subject until Grade 12. In contrast to the level of development of other Namibian languages (European languages, Bantu languages,

Khoekhoegowab), the implementation of this policy has caught the San languages ‘unprepared’, since there were not many developed materials for them. Still, the Ju/’hoan language was one of the best described San languages in the country thanks to the linguistic work of Patrick Dickens who had provided an orthography of the language in close collaboration with the Ju/’hoan people living in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy.

The Ju/’hoan language instruction at Gqaina was first introduced in 1996 when a local farmer’s wife, Mrs. Labuschagne, a fluent Ju/’hoan speaker, joined the school staff. With no developed materials, she started writing her own Ju/’hoan materials – mostly simple grammar and vocabulary exercises which helped the learners visualize the language and acquire its alphabet and clicks. Initially introduced as a subject only, in 2001 the school had its first Grade 1 entirely in Ju/’hoansi, with Mrs. Labuschagne as a class teacher (there was also another Grade 1 for non-San learners). The school principal, however, had observed:

“This is a very difficult situation. On the one hand we are doing our best to uplift the San by teaching them through their mother tongue in Grade 1 but on the other hand thereafter they are thrown back into the bundle to survive.” [School Journal, 2003]

Determined to provide Ju/’hoan education for as long a period as possible, the school trust had sponsored the pedagogical education of another local man, Mr. Ludewyk, who was also fluent in the language, and after graduation in 2004, he joined the school. With two Ju/’hoan speaking teachers, the school could now offer Ju/’hoan classes up to Grade 4. Mrs. Labuschagne was teaching Grade 1, and was giving Ju/’hoan classes to Grade 3 and 4 in the afternoons, whereas Mr. Ludewyk was teaching Ju/’hoansi two periods a week in Grade 2 (he is a Grade 2 class teacher). In 2007, however, Mrs. Labuschagne retired and during the school year of 2008, the school was only offering two Ju/’hoan periods a week to the learners in Grade 2 (as before), and two periods in the afternoon to Grade 3. Grades 1 and 4 did not have any Ju/’hoan classes. From 2008, the objective was to exclude Grade 2 and to include Grade 4 instead. Children were seen as being exposed to too many languages when they come to school (English and Afrikaans), which according to some teachers had led to a complete confusion among learners and inability to differentiate between different languages. Therefore, the school board had decided that junior learners need more time to get used to the other new languages they are introduced to (English and Afrikaans), and afterwards to turn to their mother tongue. This may make sense in the light

of a situation, in which children mix English and Afrikaans (two related Germanic languages), as repeatedly reported throughout my fieldwork. It should be noted, however, that instruction in Ju/'hoansi should not be regarded as an introduction of a foreign language but as acquisition of literacy skills in the Ju/'hoan learners' mother tongue. Learners may find it difficult to visualize clicks and tones (which are orthographically expressed) but they do not need to 'acquire' the language as they need to for English and Afrikaans.

As of 2008, the NIED supervised language development workshop had translated materials in the Ju/'hoan language up to Grade 3. The school, however, had never received any of the developed materials for the learners and it was only the teachers who had the Ju/'hoan translated school books. The near-future appointment of new Ju/'hoan-speaking teachers was referred by the school principal as "virtually impossible" due to the lack of any local Ju/'hoansi who had completed Grade 12 – a requirement for continuing their studies and obtaining a Basic Education Teachers Diploma. On the other hand, the school (referring the Ministry of Education's requirements) has been very strict with the appointment of teachers and people without a diploma could not be considered for a position. What had seemed as a promising and very much appreciated initiative is now awaiting new Ju/'hoan speaking people to join the school and to continue it, and the school trust is ready to sponsor the further education of any Ju/'hoansi speaker who qualifies.

The implementation of mother-tongue instruction in a San language has been referred to as one of the most characteristic features of the school. No other school in the Omaheke region offers Ju/'hoan classes due to lack of qualified teachers. The need for such classes, however, was repeatedly expressed by teachers from other primary schools who saw the inability of junior primary learners to understand what is being taught in class as one of the main reasons for their poor performance and dropping out. Why is mother-tongue education so important? When San learners first come to school, in addition to being introduced to a completely new setting, they do not clearly understand what is being spoken to them. Even Grade 7 learners, who had a relatively good level of English, were reported to be unable to understand certain concepts and teachers were struggling trying to visualize them or explain them in a descriptive way. Not fluently

comprehending the language that is spoken at school affects not only the learning process but also hinders the communication between learners and staff:

“A big problem is that learners do not speak freely about these issues [personal problems]. Problem? Not enough vocabulary to express themselves freely in another language??” [School Journal 2002]

In this respect, the presence of Ju/'hoansi speaking staff in the hostel has made a great difference. A teacher at Goeie Hoop Primary School reported that the dropout number of the San learners has decreased dramatically after the employment of a San woman in the hostel.

San learners themselves mentioned the Ju/'hoansi classes as one of the best aspects of their school life at Gqaina. The mother-tongue classes were also mentioned by San parents as one of the main reasons for choosing the school and also as one of the reasons for their children's success in the school. Also during the parents' day, I only saw parents freely talking to the Ju/'hoansi speaking teacher, Mr. Lydewik. Parental involvement will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that perhaps one of the biggest miscommunication problems between parents and teachers is the language gap. And despite being described as not interested in their children school life, parents seemed very much engaged and pleased with the conversations they had in their own language.

The use of Ju/'hoansi at school also empowers children from an otherwise very undervalued social background and shows them that their language is good enough to be used in school like any other language.

4.6. Dropping out of school

Gqaina School has a remarkably low reported drop-out rate of San learners (1% – 3% per year according to the School Journal) compared to other primary schools with San learners in Omaheke, although my visits to other primary schools revealed that in later years less San learners were abandoning school than had done before. Since 2006 the Annual Education Census Form also includes a section with numbers of children who had dropped out of school during the school year and possible reasons for that. The data presented below is based on the Census Form from 2006 to 2007, the School Monthly Reports (2004 – 2006), Cases from the Counselling

Support Group of the school, entries from the School Journal, and personal accounts of learners, parents and staff.

According to the school's official documents, the most common reason for children dropping out of Gqaina was parents moving out of the immediate area, either because of a new job, or in search of better employment. This was due to the insecure economic situation in which the San people of Omaheke found themselves and the increased lack of employment opportunities in the area.

The largest number of learners who leave the school are not able to give any specific reasons for that. Among the mentioned reasons are that children are being beaten by either other learners or teachers. During one of my field trips to Skoonheid I found one Gqaina-schooling boy staying in the camp during the week who said that he had run away because a teacher had hit him in front of the class for not being able to give a correct answer. The mother of the boy said that she was helpless to persuade him to go back to the school if he was being beaten there. The boy eventually returned to the school in few days.

Other children decide to leave the school when they miss clothes, shoes or some other necessity. Despite the fact that the school tries to provide its learners with basic necessities, there are not always enough for everyone, and things are also being lost or stolen. The school, however, tries to prevent this, and when a child is found to have left the school for that reason, they try to persuade the child to come back and provides her with the missing item. The dropout number of San learners increases most in wintertime when temperatures get low and they feel cold in the hostel.

Some ex-Gqaina learners who had dropped out of the school before completing it, usually gave money problems as their reason to leave the school. A case from the School Counselling Support Group reveals that a Grade 4 San girl had left school because her parents could not afford to pay the school fee. The parents were contacted and eventually the girl had come back to school after the parents had cut off the bushes in the school yard, as an in-kind payment of the fee.

The distance between children and parents also reappears as a valid dropout reason. The great distance and lack of transport also prevents San learners to come back to the school in time after weekends with their families or after holidays. The San children whose parents live in Skoonheid, for example, had to walk 30 km. in one direction to get home. Many learners complained that they were afraid to walk alone because other people (Tswana people from Epukiro R.C. in this case) would stay along the road, insulting them and throwing stones at them. Fear of beating, kidnapping and rape was also present. Many parents also expressed their concern with having their children to walk alone such great distances.

Some children just did not want to stay away from their families and preferred to live with them. Learners who had kin in the school usually adapted better. In addition, some girls leave school because they get pregnant and Gqaina had several such cases, in one of which the girl had returned to school after she had had a miscarriage.

Data collected from other schools reveal that in addition to the above-mentioned factors, learners run away from school also because of language problems (especially junior learners), and one teacher from Goeie Hoop Primary School also reported that many San children leave school because they join their parents for gathering trips which last from few days to few weeks. Gqaina had no record of such cases. In one school only, Hippo Primary School, the principal reported no cases of dropping out, which was attributed to the good facilities and the high-quality education learners were getting at the school.

4.7. Factors contributing to the low dropout rate at Gqaina

Coming back to LeRoux's (1999) report presented in Chapter 3 and comparing its findings with the situation at Gqaina, the factors contributing to the low dropout rate of the school can be summarized as follows:

Because of the low social standing of the San people and the discrimination they face by others, the fact that **San learners are the majority** at Gqaina gives them a high degree of self confidence and opportunity to communicate mainly with children of similar cultural background. Relationships between learners are strictly supervised, ethnic tolerance is encouraged and

bullying is prevented as much as possible. The next larger group of learners is Damara children and relations between Damara and San people are rather peaceful and non-oppressive. In addition, most of the children, irrespective of their ethnic origin, come from very similar socio-economic status (with the exception of few Herero children), namely farm workers and resettlement camp residents, which creates certain equality among the learners in terms of personal belongings, clothes, pocket money, etc. and the stigma accompanying the image of the poor San learner is to some extent dismissed.

The difficulties in transition to instruction in a non-native language have been diminished by the introduction of **Ju/'hoan language classes**. This has given both San parents and learners pride in their own culture and language. It has also made learners feel more appreciated and wanted at the school. **The presence of San and San-speaking personnel** at the school helps children overcome the difficulties they encounter especially during the first years of schooling and makes the transition from the home environment to the schooling environment more smooth and easy to handle. The Bridging class has also helped a lot in this respect.

The school has a very **good management and supervision** by the principal and the school board. This is manifested on two levels: on one hand, teachers and staff are expected to perform their duties to the best of their abilities and a very strict control is being exercised over them. On the other hand, the school funds are being used in a well calculated way and all the money the school gets, be it from the government or from international donors, are transparently invested in the school. In this respect, the connections with international donors have helped a lot for the good school and hostel facilities.

Whenever possible, **learners are supplied with basic necessities** such as shoes, clothes, toiletries and blankets, which is not a practice in other schools in the Omaheke. This has helped a lot keeping poor learners at school. Learners get **enough food** and **feel relatively secure and comfortable in the hostel**.

Learners who cannot afford to pay the school fee are not expelled from the school and other ways of payment are sought. This includes in kind paying (cleaning the school yard, for example)

and even in the cases when parents cannot come and work for the school, the fee is covered by donors.

And finally, when a learner runs away, the school makes its best **to trace her and persuade her to come back**. This includes investigation of the problem (why the learner has run away), contacting the parents' employer or the resettlement camp manager and searching communication channels with the parents.

To sum it up, the school has done a great deal to provide a stimulating learning environment for its learners. Mother-tongue instruction, a good material basis, as well as strict control and tolerance have made the transition to formal school bearable for a large percentage of Ju/'hoan learners from the region. Cultural differences, however, still seem to pose problems both in the interactions between learners and teachers, as well as in the interaction between teachers and parents. Parental involvement and attitudes of Ju/'hoan elders towards the education of their children will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter five

Parental involvement

5.1. Skoonheid Resettlement Camp – recent past and present

Upon Namibia's Independence in 1990, many white farmers sold their farms to the government and fled to South Africa or Germany, leaving numerous labourers, the majority of whom were Damara and San, literally in the streets. Having been born and raised on a farm, completely dispossessed, and without any other skills than those of farm labourers, the majority of ex-farm labourers had nowhere to go and no means for subsistence whatsoever. The new Namibian government, in its attempt to meet the needs of all its citizens regardless of origin and color, implemented a resettlement policy, according to which, a shelter was given to people falling into one of the three categories – landless people, poor people, and people with some livestock but without any land on which their livestock could graze. The idea behind the resettlement policy was to provide dispossessed people with land on which they could engage in agricultural and animal breeding activities and who would eventually manage to sustain themselves, thus breaking the bondage system which had governed their lives up until that moment.

Skoonheid Resettlement Camp was established in 1993 on a territory of about 7 000 hectares about 130 km northeast of Gobabis. As of the year 2008, the camp accommodated about 500 landless people, 3/4 of which were Ju/'hoansi. The camp was also a home to four Damara, one Himba, one Herero, one Okavango, and one Owambo households. The camp residents lived in brick houses, without functioning inner ablutions and bathrooms. Electricity cables were stretched to the camp but electricity was still not provided. Those who owned some cattle were settled in the camp's outskirts, so that the cattle could graze in the adjacent areas, and those without livestock were given houses in the more central areas in the camp. Cooking was done on fire in the yard and most of the San houses lacked furniture and bedding. After its establishment, the camp had had a government-appointed manager for a ten-year period, followed by a two-year period of self-governance. Activities and projects, however, were not sustainable enough, and after an inspection, the Ministry of Land and Resettlement decided to take up again the camp's management for an unlimited period of time. During my fieldwork in 2008, the camp's current

manager, Mr. Siyaya, had been occupying the position for more than three years and did not know how much longer it would take before his presence on the camp would not be needed.

The camp offered several ‘small industry projects’ with the aim of creating small-scale local employment and providing food for the residents. The projects included crop production, livestock production, needlework and beading, as well as arts and crafts. The crop production project consisted of two gardens – one irrigated garden and one seasonal garden (utilized in the rainy season) – in which people planted carrots, pumpkins, melons, beans, etc. Everybody could work in the communal gardens and production was distributed among people depending on participation. Production and money generated from the communal gardens were initially intended to be divided as follows: 40% for consumption, 40% operational cost, and 20% extra optional incomes. Operational costs include money for diesel, or different repair costs. At the time of my visit, however, the community was directly consuming 80% of the production and the government was covering the operational costs. In addition, the community had a joint bank account where earned money were saved and used to cover unexpected expenses. The majority of people involved with the gardens were women, as men had more economic opportunities in the region (seasonal or more stable jobs as farm workers) and moved in and out the camp more frequently than women did.

The livestock project included sheep, goats, donkeys and cattle. A new cattle project was started in 2005 and had benefitted 14 families. People who did not manage to benefit from the project initially would still have the chance to do so when the cattle start breeding. The introduction of cattle and other livestock had become a controversial issue in the camp, however, as most people wanted to benefit from that but not all did. This had created competition, jealousy and tension among people. Sustainability of livestock projects was also more difficult than sustainability of agricultural projects. A case from the past, for example, shows that because of hunger the people had killed and consumed a newly introduced pack of goats before it could breed and reproduce itself.

The arts project was introduced by Helene De Kok – a medical doctor who lives in the area and takes active role in different San-related activities. The arts project includes the production of a

variety of traditional bead pieces, like bracelets, Christmas toys, cup mats, etc. produced mainly by women. Men, on their hand, produced wood canes and walking sticks, wooden food mats and beautifully knitted hats. Dr. De Kok provides people with materials (emphasis is placed on recycling), buys the items from them and finds different places to sell them without added cost. Also during my fieldwork, a new leather-processing project was started: hides were purchased from Windhoek and local men were trained how to process them into leather.



Picture 4: A Ju'hoan woman from Sfoonheid making bead cup mats

The facilities and services which the camp offered were a small clinic project – Dr. de Kok visited the camp about twice a month and provided medical services to its residents – and a kindergarten facility which accommodated the pre-school age children of the camp. The kindergarten care-giver, my translator Nieki, however, worked on a voluntarily basis and did not receive money for her job, which allowed her to take regular absences from her job.

Illegal house-building on the territory of the camp was forbidden but as Suzman (1999) had noticed, large portions of the grazing fields were illegally occupied by mainly Herero people, thus leaving little space for the camp residents' own livestock.

5.2. Ju/'hoan identity and socio-economic status

Much like the self-descriptions of Gqaina Ju/'hoan learners, Ju/'hoan elders' identity was deeply rooted in the past – where the Ju/'hoan people came from and how they used to live. Reappearing associations are that they originated from the bushes and did not wear clothes:

- What does it mean to be Ju/'hoansi?
- [laughs] The culture we have is Ju/'hoan. The house I come from is Ju/'hoan-speaking. We were staying in the bushes and we are now *boesman*. It is, we were not having clothes on our bodies, you see. We were just living without clothes and then they started to call us that name. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

I am a Ju/'hoan because my parents came from the bushes and were not mixed with the others. They were not wearing clothes. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]

Ju/'hoansi are people that have nothing and that were living in the bush. People that have nothing, like clothes and like that. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]

- What does it mean to be Ju/'hoansi?
- I don't know. Maybe God made like that so that the Ju/'hoansi can speak their language and to be different from the others. I don't know how it came so that there can be Ju/'hoan people.
- What do Ju/'hoan people do which is different from what the others do?
- We are different because we were in the bushes and we did not know what the [other] people are doing and what they are eating. The Boers, they brought us to the other people, to wear clothes like the others, and to stay [live] like the others. Before we were staying in the bushes. We are from the bushes but we don't know why we were staying there. Just the old people know what happened and why they were staying there in the bushes. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

Many people replied that they did not know what it means to be a Ju/'hoan person and it was only the old people who still knew that. Interestingly, only 'old time' practices, like living in the bush and not wearing clothes, which were no longer practiced were seen as Ju/'hoan identity markers. Subsistence methods and traditional customs and ceremonies which were still used today, were not perceived as 'real' Ju/'hoan markers, despite being seen as different from what the others did. Most of the interviewed people would reply that they no longer remembered anything from the old traditions and practices because "we grew up with the Boers". Still, when further asked, most of them would admit they still did a lot of that; it was just not seen as something related to their Ju/'hoan identity. Many interviews ran like that:

- Do you still do any traditional things from the past?
- No.
- Do you gather and eat bush food?
- Yes, I do that.

- Who gathers it?
- I can go alone or with other women and children.
- ...
- And do you still perform the menstruation initiation ceremony?
- No.
- Not anymore?
- No, because this year there is no one who must get it.
- So, you mean that you still perform the ceremony when there is a girl who gets her first menstruation?
- Yes. [San woman, Skoonheid]

Because of scarce food sources, gathering of bush food was still a common practice, especially in the rainy season. Hunting was also practiced, although to a very limited extent because it was outlawed and, especially at the beginning of my research, people were very cautious talking about that.

- Are you still hunting game?
- We are not doing it because it is forbidden.
- If it weren't forbidden would you still be doing it?
- We still know how to do it and if it was not forbidden we would do it. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]
- Do you still eat bush food?
- I am still hunting and gathering that potatoes that I was telling you about but now we don't have permission to hunt.
- Do you hunt presently or not?
- When I go to the bush and see a kudu and if its leg is broken, then maybe I can kill it.
- What do you use for hunting?
- [translator misunderstands the question and the man answers] It is to eat the meat. And we also sell the meat and get some money from that.
- I see. And what tools do use for hunting?
- Something that we make. Like a bow and then we shoot it [at the animal]. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

Story-telling was also a common practice in the evenings when people sat around the fire and remembered the past:

When we sit around the fire the old people are telling us stories about the bush – where we were living, what we were eating and how we were hunting. Even now we must know how to live in the bush from children. When someone is alone in the bush he must know what he must eat and what he must not eat. The old people tell us not just to care about this food [the food they are eating now] but to eat things from the bush because it is nice for us. Because first in this world we were staying in the bushes and life was just from that. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]

Other traditional practices, like trance dancing and healing were at the verge of extinction:

- What about traditional healing?
- There is one old man, like a doctor, and when someone is sick, they are sitting around the big fire, and then, the other one is like a doctor and he gives the sick person some medicines from the bush.
- Is there only one healer in the area?
- He is only one but he is no longer doing it because he is too old.

- Have any young people learned to do that?
- No.
- So, when the old healer dies, his knowledge will die with him?
- Yes. When he passes away, there is no one who has the knowledge to do like him. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

Emphasis on traditional subsistence methods was strong because it was still significant in their daily diet. Socio-economically, San people in Omaheke were relegated to the lowest level possible. The only real job opportunity in the area was as farm labourers but as mentioned earlier, farm jobs had become scarce with women being especially disadvantaged in this respect. In the camp itself, cash could only be obtained from old people's pensions, orphans' aid money, and the arts project. Still, the money from the arts project was not enough to sustain a whole family for a long period of time and people often complained about that. This economic instability has resulted in a rather multiform migration pattern in which men usually ventured away from the camp to look for jobs on neighbouring farms or communal areas while women and children stayed in the camp. The camp was also a place where other black people (usually Herero men) came and searched for cheap labourers, usually as farm workers, animal tenders or domestic servants. Ju/'hoan people were very cautious with these job offers, however, because of long history of oppression and exploitation and whenever possible, jobs on white-owned farms were preferred. White employers were described as caring for their workers, paying with cash and providing different items for them, whereas Herero employers were described as disrespectful and giving handouts:

- Where do you want to look for a job?
- Any job but not a Herero job.
- Why?
- Because they misuse people and we don't like them. Because they say "this Bushman" and we don't want to hear that from the Hereros. I must go and work and get money and come back and give the people. But the Hereros are not giving money. The whole month you stay with a Herero without pay. They just give food. And when you come to see your family you don't have any money to give them.
- How do Hereros treat you?
- They call us 'kakuroha' [a word used to denote San people in Otjiherero]. "Come here you, Bushman!" They don't use your name; they just say "Come here you, Bushman!"
- Why do Herero people treat you like that?
- They don't see you as a person. They use us like dogs. They even say 'voetsek' to us [a word used for dogs, meaning "go"]. They say, "You are stupid, you don't know anything."
- What about white people? How do white people treat you?
- The Boers treat us very well because they give us money and clothes and even take us to town and they don't say "Bushman" to us. Even if you work on a farm, the Boer can pay for your child to go to school and when it is holiday, the Boer goes and takes the children [from school].
- So, you prefer to work on a white farm?
- Yes. Because my parents were also working for the Boers. But now Hereros are coming in the place and look for people to go and work. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]

Malnutrition and poor living conditions have resulted in poor health, with TB being the most common disease. People also attributed their poor health to their new way of living and the food they were eating which they did not know and which they had not produced themselves. Alcohol and drug (marijuana) abuse were also present, although there was a stark contrast between Skoonheid and Epukiro R.C. village in that respect. In Skoonheid, I seldom saw drunk people, whereas the Ju/'hoan people at Epukiro R.C. village where I lived, were very seldom sober. The reduced alcohol use in Skoonheid was attributed to the introduction of the beading project which kept people busy while exercising some traditional skills in exchange for cash. Violence was associated with alcohol abuse and was seldom reported on a domestic level, although perhaps it was more common than people would admit.

This lack of any real economic opportunity and stable income source has made people see their situation as hopeless and impossible to change. People expressed their concerns that something should be changed, so that they would have a more normal and secure lifestyle. Among the things that could bring these changes were access to stable job opportunities (especially for young people), stock and land for agriculture and stock grazing, or better network and communication facilities. However, people were also tired of voicing their problems to different people without any real changes coming to them:

We need things, so that we can go forward. Like cows and materials to do our crafts. But the things we have asked for are not coming and we don't know what we have to do to get another life. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

We don't get any answers and we don't know what we must say so that they would listen to us. Because many times we cry for our problems but nobody listens. [Ju/'hoan man, Skoonheid]

Despite their hardship, however, some people have also learned to live with the little they have and have put up with their situation:

I don't have many problems. Maybe one time during the day I get some food and I am not hungry. I feel good and my life is good. I don't feel like someone who is not having anything. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]



Picture 5: A Ju'hoan family from Skoonheid

5.3. Attitudes towards formal education and Gqaina

In the eyes of the others, San peoples' illiteracy and lack of knowledge about how to do things kept them "behind" and hindered their development. Therefore, education was seen as their only means for breaking the circle and becoming "someone". When it came to the topic of education, however, the views of San and non-San people differed considerably. All non-San people I had the chance to talk to considered San people uninterested in education and oblivious to whether their children would go to school or not. This lack of interest was usually attributed to the fact that most San parents had not been to school themselves and could not grasp the very idea of education. A more extreme view was that San parents did not care about their children at all. They were just having children without taking proper care of them afterwards.

Very few of the interviewed people at Skoonheid had attended formal school. Of those who had done so, some had attended the 'old Gqaina' for few years and others had been to other schools in the region for one or two years. Reasons given for not attending school were either that they were staying and working on a farm and their parents did not know about school, or some of them were having a more mobile lives, moving from one place to another. *All* interviewed parents at Skoonheid were unanimous that their children should go to school because they themselves had

not had the chance to do so. Formal schooling was seen as a key to success both economically and socially. Educated people were expected to find a good job and to be able to communicate with people from other ethnic background on an equal basis. During my fieldwork, however, Skoonheid had its first mass school-going generation and as examples of already educated people were still lacking, parents were trying to see more immediate results of their children's schooling – their children would be able to read and write for them, would understand what the others are talking about them and would help them speak up to people of authority who could help them.

Attitudes towards Gqaina were generally positive. Parents liked the school facilities and the fact that originally, the school was intended for San children exclusively. Among the reasons for choosing the school, parents gave the lower school fees, the Ju/'hoan classes and the fact that the majority of learners were of San origin. In general, however, parents knew very little of the school life of their children. For example, many parents did not know that their children were receiving clothes and toiletries at the school. Most of the parents have not been inside the hostels and did not know how their children lived there. A great number of parents did not even know which grades their children were in. Among the most frequently mentioned things parents did not like about the school were: the distance to Skoonheid (about 30 km.), which prevented them from seeing their children more often and caused them to worry when their children walked back home, and the constant reminders that they should pay the school fees on a regular basis.

There was certain confusion among parents why they had to pay for the school, as at the beginning they were not asked to do so (when the school was still private). Despite the fact that education is free in Namibia, each government school has a so-called 'school fund' which covers different small expenses and which is different for each school. Poor and disadvantaged children can apply for school fee exemption, but no children at Gqaina were exempted, despite the fact that all San children fell into the category. Obviously parents did not know about this option and the school principal related that to the fact that at Gqaina parents who could not afford to pay the fee were allowed to come and work for the school (clearing the yard off bushes, for example). The in-kind payment policy, described in Chapter 4, was met with much resistance by the Omaheke San Trust which saw it as further stigmatizing and marginalizing the San communities in the region. A conflict had arisen when San parents had complained that they were asked to

sleep in the yard after having worked a whole day at Gqaina and the organization had intervened to solve the problem.

The in-kind payment policy was more strongly opposed by San parents from areas closer to Gobabis, however. This could also be related to the fact that in Gobabis, many San people were trying to hide their identity and the in-kind policy usually applied to San people. At Skoonheid, the in-kind payment was problematic for other reasons. People did not see it as stigmatizing or further marginalizing them. Many parents said they were happy they were able to work for the school because they could see their children and not be indebted to the school. People who saw the practice as problematic usually complained about their poor health and the long distance to Gqaina which they had to walk. Two women expressed their concern that perhaps their children did not feel well seeing that their parents cannot afford to pay with cash like everybody else and had to go and work for the school. Learners, on their side, were reluctant to talk about the issue; this could indicate certain embarrassment. When commenting on the topic, they usually reported that they were happy to see their parents and be with them. Children, whose parents could not afford to pay the school fee and could not go and work for the school, were still not exempted from the school.

5.4. Parent – teacher relationships

Because the parents did not seem to be very interested in the school and most of them only visited it once a year, on the Parents' Day, they were automatically labelled as not interested in their children's education. All discourses of non-San people regarding parental involvement circled around that. It must be noted, however, that not only San parents, but *all* parents were equally little involved with the school, and parents from other ethnic groups were also reported to only show up in the school on the Parents' Day, when paying the fee, or when learners ran away and they had to bring them back. The difference between San parents and other parents lay in the fact that other parents used disciplinary methods and techniques closer to the methods used in the school, whereas San parents' upbringing techniques were of a more relaxed and non-dominative nature. San parents' lack of coercive methods to keep children in school by all means was seen as a direct example of their lack of interest in the school and in education, in general. What are these differences?

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, San parent – child relations are built on a mutual respect for the individual’s will and choices. San children learn from the time they are youngsters to make their own decisions and to engage in activities upon interest. Children are not directed or disciplined and social behaviour is not taught; it is expected to be learned through observation and participation from the side of the child. Therefore, there is little pressure on children to do something specific because they are told to do so by their parents (see Hays 2007). Related to the school, when children ran away, not all parents thought it necessary to make their children go back if they had decided themselves not to. Although school was unanimously perceived as a good thing, there were no real examples of San people who had succeeded because of schooling, and school dropping out was not necessarily perceived as a failure (as it was not yet seen as success). And as beating and other coercive methods are not widely used, children did not feel pressure to live up to certain expectations. From the school’s side, however, this was seen not as a cultural difference between the San community and the model imposed by the school, but as a direct evidence for the parents’ lack of interest in the school. The school expected parents to learn how to ‘discipline’ and ‘control’ their children:

Child ran away. Parent brought him back, while father was in the office, he ran away again. Parent cannot control him. [School Monthly Reports, Sept. 2006]

Refuses to come to school. Father is unable to persuade her to come back. Expects school staff to discipline the child. [School Monthly Reports, Feb. 2005]

Does not want to go to school. Frequently hides away when employer is ready to bring learners to school. Parents cannot/don’t discipline him so he has taken over and does as he wishes. [School Monthly Reports, June 2004]

Parents, on their side, had begun to try to live up to these expectations and beating was started to be seen as a positive thing and as something the others expected them to do in order to show they care about education. Most of the San learners reported that their parents did not beat them. Parents also denied beating their children but when asked what they would do if their children did not want to go to school, many parents replied that *then* they would beat them. Real life examples showed the opposite and parents who did not beat their children in general did not use physical punishment to make them stay in school (similar data were also reported by LeRoux 1999, Hays 2007). Still, the very fact that they replied in such a way indicates that they knew what was expected from them and gave this answer in order to show that they cared about the school.

Parents' Day, which was held once a year in July, was the only day most parents visited the school during the school year. The day was awaited with much eagerness by both learners and parents. On the Parents' Day parents visited the school, looked in their children's textbooks and notebooks, talked with teachers, saw an entertainment program, had a meal and left in the early afternoon. Teachers, however, complained that when they come to the Parents' Day, most San parents just rushed through their children's notebooks without really understanding what was going on and without asking questions about their children and the school. Parents, on their side, complained that teachers rushed the whole program, so that they could go to town as early as possible:

- When you go to the Parents' Day, do you ask the teachers questions?
- No, I don't ask questions because they just talk and don't give us a chance to ask questions.
- What do you mean that they don't give you a chance to ask questions?
- The teachers are in a hurry. They are doing things in a hurry. They say they have to go to Gobabis and there's a road to go. And even the dance culture thing [the entertainment program]. They just do it quickly so that they can go. The only thing they are doing is just talking about the money – they complain that we have to pay the money. They are in a hurry every time. [Ju/'hoan woman, Skoonheid]



Picture 6: San parents speaking with Mr. Ludewyk at the Parents' Day

Many parents at Skoonheid also reported to me that they did not ask any questions when they went to the school not because they did not want to but because they were not feeling confident enough to ask them. Among the question they wanted to ask were why they had to pay the fee if they did not have money for that, why their children lose clothes and shoes and why are they beaten by teachers and other learners. Keeping in mind the great social divide between the two groups – the illiterate San parents and the teachers – it is easy to understand the parents' uneasiness in front of the teachers. This uneasiness was further deepened by the constant reminders parents received during the Parents' Day that they should pay the school fees. Parents, on the other hand, complained that they wanted to pay the fees but simply did not have money for that.

What was largely overlooked and what could be at the heart of the misunderstanding between teachers' and parents' relationships are the different expectations both sides have regarding San learners' education. Both sides agree that school is necessary and non-San people have tried to provide school for San children. Parents have agreed to send their children to school, if children want to go. What had started as a great opportunity for the San children, however, had gradually put more and more pressure on the San community. Parents have been required to pay money they did not have, they were expected to treat their children in a way that is not culturally appropriate for them, they have been constantly reminded that they are "behind" because of their illiteracy and in a way are keeping their children behind as well. At the same time, school success has not given any visible and direct positive changes for the community.

Children like Gqaina, and that is why they choose to stay there. However, when they go to high school they prefer to come back to their families and to live a life that has little to do with knowledge gained from formal schooling. That is why parents thought it was important to transmit to their children their traditional knowledge and subsistence practices. Hunting was no longer an option and gathering was very limited but still it gave an alternative means for food supply. Children were expected to learn that from a young age and interestingly, parents did not

see the school as a hindrance for the acquisition of this knowledge, relying on the fact that children “already know” and continue to learn when they come home for the weekends⁶.

School has not yet given any real proof of social and economic change and that is why parents saw it more as an alternative and an option rather than as a norm in their society. Many San people also expressed their opinion that the knowledge they have is also valuable and should not be ignored or forgotten because it has helped the San people survive for centuries. Formal schooling, on the other hand, has little respect for traditional knowledge, and instead of trying to incorporate it into the curriculum, which would make the schooling environment more adequate for children of different background, it stigmatizes traditional knowledge as primitive and not ‘real’ knowledge.

The dichotomy of ‘primitive’ versus ‘real knowledge’ has stigmatized the San people in the Omaheke in yet another way. Most parents, similar to their children, related their San-ness to old time practices which were no longer used, such as life in the bush and lack of clothes, whereas other ‘typical’ and still practiced San activities (such as traditional ceremonies, subsistence strategies, etc.) were not seen as worthy enough to make them ‘real’ San. The image of the non-real San person that inhabits the region today is largely articulated by both San and non-San people, creating a situation in which the Omaheke Ju/’hoansi are perceived as both too ‘behind’ to cope with their own lives, and, at the same time, too ‘modern’ to have preserved any valuable knowledge from their ancestors (Suzman 1999 presents similar data).

This poor image and self-image has hindered the participation of the San groups in the Omaheke into the international indigenous peoples movement that has taken place in the last few decades. The Omaheke Ju/’hoansi know that they were once free to roam all over the place; that the food they were getting was enough to sustain them; that their children were learning enough to manage a life in the bush. They do not know, however, that nowadays, they have the right to challenge their dependency status; they can ask for access to more resources and they can ask for different education for their children with emphasis on their cultural practises, as promulgated in ILO 169

⁶ As pointed out by Hays (2007), this could be also related to the fact that traditionally San children do very little work and only after puberty they engage more actively in food subsistence.

and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The indigenous peoples' empowerment movement has left the Omaheke Ju/'hoan people behind and one could argue that this could be because of the lack of educated Ju/'hoan people who can speak for themselves and for their own people. Yet, as repeatedly shown throughout this thesis, provision of a good and stimulating education environment is much more difficult than it may seem at first. While schools like Gqaina have managed to create a safe atmosphere for San learners, graduation from Gqaina and enrolling into secondary schools poses great challenges even for the most persistent ones. So, why are there not many educated San people who can 'make a difference'? The next chapter gives a picture of the harsh reality San learners face when they go to secondary school.

Chapter six

Secondary education

6.1. Transition to secondary school

After graduation in Grade 7, many San children enrol in junior secondary school. The majority of them leave before the completion of the first school year. Many of those who make it to Grade 10 fail to pass the exams required to enrol in senior secondary schools and prefer to leave school instead of repeating the year once again⁷. Very few San children have reached and completed Grade 12. All reported San learners in Omaheke who graduated from Grade 12 are boys. Data from schools also reveal that girls drop out earlier than boys. What are the factors contributing to this picture?

Most San parents from Skoonheid wanted their children to continue in secondary school after finishing senior primary education in Grade 7. Still, the majority of parents reported that they did not have the resources needed to support their children in high school and in order to be able to sustain their children, something should change – they would look for a job on a farm so that they would have money for the school fees, or they would try to acquire some cattle that would help them support their children throughout their further studies. Still, most parents realized that these changes were not very probable and concluded that they very much wanted their children to go to school but most probably they would not be able to afford that.

Children, from their side, readily reported that they definitely wanted to go to secondary school. Still, the very idea of secondary school was a bit unclear to them and despite the fact that some children viewed school graduation as a prerequisite for a better future with a real job opportunity, most of them associated the transition to high school with a positive change but without clear outcome. When asked why they wanted to go to high school, many children reported that they

⁷ The Namibian formal school system consists of 12 years of schooling of which 4 years of lower primary (Grades 1 – 4); 3 years of upper primary (Grades 5 – 7); 3 years of junior secondary (Grades 8 – 10); and 2 years of senior secondary (Grades 10 – 12). Primary schools are usually combined (both lower and upper primary phase), and secondary schools can be either divided into junior and senior secondary or combined into so-called ‘high schools’ from Grades 8 – 12. In order to proceed from one phase to another, a learner must sit and successfully pass a national examination after Grades 7 and 10, and International General Certificate for Secondary education examination after Grade 12 (MBESC 2004).

wanted to go there because they will ‘get new blankets’, because they will have ‘nice uniforms’, or some other short-term benefit. Learners were also aware of the likelihood that they would not finish secondary school because of the many dropout examples they had seen. Furthermore, they usually associated certain secondary schools with higher dropout rates of San learners and preferred to go to other schools which, according to them, were nicer to the San (this view was not supported by real-life examples). A great number of children were also quite realistic about the economic situation of their parents and replied that they did not know if their parents would have money to support them continue in high school.

The poor economic status of the San in Omaheke was a valid reason for parents doubting whether they would be able to sustain their children in high school. Still, examples from the secondary schools I visited showed that almost all San learners that were schooling in secondary school were either exempted from paying the school fees, or they had different sponsors who covered the fees for them. Gqaina itself had developed a post-Gqaina support program which supported prospective San learners in their further studies – either with payment of their fees or with pocket money and money for clothes and toiletries. In addition, many other organisations, companies, or individuals were supporting San learners in secondary schools, be it with fees or other necessities. This support, however, had not prevented the majority of them from leaving school. What are the reasons for that?

6.2. Dropping out of secondary school

Despite the fact that there are certain similarities between different individuals’ decision to leave secondary school and the many factors which have forced them to do so, each case is unique and is influenced by many individual choices and wishes, which we can never really know. Huge pressure is put on San learners in schools today – everybody is watching them, supporting them, questioning their choices and decisions and everybody expects them to justify the help and attention that is being offered to them. Staying in school is not that easy, however, and perhaps the majority of learners prefer a more predictable and slow-pace life to the hardships and the promise of an uncertain future away from their community.

I have roughly divided the factors contributing to the high dropout rates of secondary school learners in two – internal and external. The internal factors are those related to their low self-esteem as San people, and the external are those related to their poor economic status, although the two are largely mutually reinforced and there is no clear distinction between them – San people are poor because of their origin and to a large extent their low self-esteem is such because of their low social status. During my fieldwork in the Omaheke, I visited 5 secondary schools and what struck me a lot was the huge difference between each one of the them – each school was in a different area, had a different learners composition and presented different obstacles for the San learners, yet some common problems were to be found everywhere. I will briefly describe the visited schools and will then try to summarize the common reasons for school dropping out.

Epukiro Post 3 Junior Secondary School is located in the Herero-dominated area of Post 3 in the north-eastern part of the Omaheke. Due to the specific Herero – San relationships in the area, many San children were ‘adopted’ by Herero families (where San children performed different tasks in return for food) and it was mainly such Herero-raised children who were present at the school. The school had an unidentified number of San learners (less than 10 according to the school staff) and San learners had only started to identify themselves as San during the last few years – that is, the school had no previous record of San learners who identified themselves as such, although there could have been some. The San learners in the school spoke Herero fluently which facilitated their communication with the rest of the learners although mocking and bullying on an ethnic basis was also reported.

Johannes Dohren High School is a private school run by the Roman Catholic Church, situated just outside Gobabis. The school has a very good material basis and a very strict control (including in the hostels). The school has about 10% San learners and is the largest secondary school for San learners in the Omaheke region. The majority of the learners are Damara, followed by Tswana and only few Herero learners. Despite the somewhat tolerant relationship between San and Damara, learners and staff reported bullying and the tendency that almost all San children try to shift their identity (usually to Damara), especially in cases when they came to the school from remote areas after Grade 8 and the staff did not know them from before (as the school runs from Grade 1). Other hazards reported at the school were its closeness to town and

the many temptations it offered (alcohol, prostitution for cash, etc.), as well as the long distances to the San learners' homes and their inability to go home and come back more regularly.

Wennie Du Plessis Secondary School is located in Gobabis and is considered as one of the "good" schools in town. The school did not have a record of its San learners (also because many did not identify as San) and only 4 San learners were reported. Still, at the meeting I had with learners, 7 boys and girls appeared, some claiming that they were either half-San or ex-San (e.g. a San mother had married for a second time to a non-San man and both the mother and the child have adopted the identity of the man). The school was considered expensive and elitist, yet, Frederik Langman, the first Gqaina learner to finish Grade 12 studied there, together with other relatives. Chief Langman, on his side, said that he had chosen this school for his grandchildren because of the good education it provided.

Epako Junior Secondary School is situated in the township of Epako, just outside Gobabis. This township is more of a ghetto where the poorest people in town live and where newcomers to Gobabis usually settle. In this school, I only had the chance to talk to learners, but no teachers or other staff, and could therefore not obtain any information about the number of San learners in the school. The main problems reported there were those related to the "dangers" of the ghetto and many San learners were reported to leave school because they get criminally involved. Girls, on their hand, fell easy victims to the men in the neighbourhood. Identity change was reported to be very common⁸; mocking and physical bullying were also present.

Mokganedi Tlhabanello High School is situated at Drimiopsis Resettlement Camp, 50 km north of Gobabis. The school had no record of its San learners and the major problems for the San learners' dropping out were related to the closeness of the school to the resettlement camp and the fact that learners would just skip classes in order to stay with their friends and family.

Despite the different situations found in each of the schools I visited, there also seemed to appeared many similarities for the poor performance of San learners.

⁸ San identity change was reported to be a very common practice in the whole Epako village.

6.2.1. The problem of being San

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for San learners' dropping out of secondary school was their low social status and the stigma accompanying the image of the San person. As mentioned in previous chapters, San people in Omaheke are relegated to the lowest socio-economic level possible and are dominated by all other groups in the region, who see them as extremely underdeveloped, lacking knowledge and skills to govern the course of their own lives. In schools with little control, there was a huge psychological pressure on San learners who were mocked for their origin and color (they were being insulted for coming from the bushes, being 'red' and not having a color) and for the primitiveness of their parents.

[W]hen they are doing things, maybe here at school, or at the hostel, or even speaking their language, the others are laughing at them and say "Oh, you are like that. You are a San!" [Johannes Dohren High School teacher]

Therefore, it is not a surprise that when they go to secondary school many San children prefer to hide their identity and usually identify themselves as something else:

- We have more San learners in the secondary level now. But when they come here, they are no longer San.
- How do they identify themselves?
- Maybe as Nama or Damara, or Setswana.
- How many of them do that?
- Most of them. If you don't know them [from before], they would always go like that. So, when I started this group [a San cultural group], I had to force them to accept that you are a San. Because others were also telling me, "No, that one is also a San". [Johannes Dohren High School teacher]

However, there was also a certain confusion among learners who had shifted their identity, and learners who self-identified as Damara, Herero or Tswana would also appear to meetings with me, admitting they were San, or "half San". After one such meeting at Mokganedi Tlhabanello High School an ex-Gqaina San learner waited for me after the group interview I had had with San learners and we had the following conversation:

- You know, she is not a real San [referring to another girl who had appeared at the meeting].
- Why?
- Because she was speaking Ju/'hoansi before but then she stopped and now she is Damara.
- So, she only speaks Damara now?
- Yes. And when I speak to her in Ju/'hoansi she pretends she doesn't understand.
- Why do you think she is doing it?
- She doesn't want to be a San anymore. She is a Damara now. [San girl, Moghanedi High School]

As most San children learned Khoekhoegowab, Setswana or Otjiherero from their peers in primary school, it was easy for them to switch to some of these languages when they went to secondary school. Of all major languages spoken in the Omaheke, only Ju/'hoansi was not taught as a subject or used as an instruction language on a secondary level and San learners had to study another language instead, thus further alienating them from their Ju/'hoan background.

San learners were also a minority in high schools. Attributing it to their small number, a teacher at Johannes Dohren High School reported to me that San learners always stick together and when a kin or a close friend leaves school, the other would usually follow.

And you can also see they are bound to their family. When I talk to them, they say they are bound to their family and when one member is out, the other one will not stay. [Johannes Dohren High School teacher]

Similar to descriptions of learners in Gqaina, San learners in secondary schools were described as too shy and always staying in the 'background' which easily explains their uneasiness to stay in school when their closest peers leave. San learners' poor performance (especially girls) was also attributed to their shyness and low self-esteem to stand up and speak in front of the others. The cultural differences between the formal education system (where you have to stand up and speak up in front of the class) and the traditional San socialization standards (according to which cooperation is more valued than 'standing out'; see Hays 2007) which were described in Chapter 5 are also part of this problem.

6.2.2. The dilemmas of "special treatment"

The fact that San learners were receiving money and support and were exempted from paying the fee had also created tension between them and other learners who thought that they were unnecessarily privileged over them. This special treatment had also gone further and teachers at Moghanedi High School reported that regulations prohibited them from taking measures against San learners even when they misbehaved in class or in the hostel. Other, non-San, learners at the school also mentioned that and said that the San receive too much attention and get away easier than them, which has put additional pressure on San learners because of their origin.

Despite the fact that San learners receive support for their schooling, usually the money only covers the basics, and they do not have enough pocket money to buy things like the others do – such as drinks, sweets, nice clothes.

They become ashamed because when they grow up they get needs which they cannot afford. And that may cause that they become inferior, ashamed to be with others and that is why they drop out – because of their appearance, because of not having everything. [Epukiro Post 3 Junior Secondary School teacher]

A staff member at Johannes Dohren High School reported that girls had complained that the things they received from sponsors were the cheapest available and the others had mocked them for that, too.

6.2.3. *Lack of control*

In addition, many San learners complained for being misused and abused either by other learners or school and hostel staff:

- Do you like the hostel?
- No.
- What is it that you don't like about the hostel?
- I don't have a blanket and the matron is not nice to me.
- How does the matron treat you?
- She tells me I am San and she beats me. [San girl, Moghanedi High School]

Of all high schools I visited, only one school had private hostel facilities (Johannes Dohren High school, owned by the Roman Catholic Church) and that was the only school with strict control over its learners. The government schools had loose control, especially in the hostels, and neither learners nor personnel were being strictly supervised and kept responsible for their actions. A striking report (Kandirikiririra 1999) from the Aminius Area in Omaheke reveals the alarming picture found in most governmental schools and hostels in the region. Because of its geography and population distribution, 60% of the Omaheke learners are placed in hostels. Buildings are built with little attention to aesthetics, many of the hostel buildings have broken windows and locks, most of them lack running hot water and proper ablutions, and there are not enough beds and mattresses for all. School and hostel funds are managed with little transparency and often there is a shortage of food. As a result, many children leave the school in search of food. Still, those who stay there are subject to harsh physical and verbal abuse – men and boys see children

in hostels as an easy prey and often go there to bully children for fun, to steal children or to 'hunt' girls:

Hunting is a local jargon. It describes a practice where boys from the school or nearby schools cover themselves with blankets and force their way into the girls' hostels. They then indiscriminately get into bed with a girl and force her to have sex, which can involve the threat of violence with sharp implements such as the cutting off of underwear with razor blades. Boys can go as individuals, with friends that have arranged liaisons with girlfriends (they tag along and hunt) or in groups that intimidate a whole dorm or subject a girl to multiple rapes. Boys that establish a good reputation for hunting are known as 'Jagter Nommer Een – Hunter Number One'. [Kandirikiririra 1999:12]

Despite its criminal nature, 'hunting' is reported not to be seen as a serious act and boys who are found to be hunting are usually punished to do some chores for the school (Kandirikiririra 1999). Loose hostel control affects all children regardless of origin and belonging; however, San children are especially vulnerable – they are a minority, are discriminated by the others and do not have relatives and family nearby to support them. In addition, San girls are made even more of a target because of circulating stereotypes that San girls are easier to get than others because they are prostitutes by nature (Kandirikiririra 1999:49), and because they are poor and would always agree to do it for some cash or food.

6.2.4. Parental neglect

The lack of parental support was also repeatedly mentioned throughout my visits in secondary schools in the area. As schools were situated close to or in town, usually far away from the family, parents could not afford to visit the school or have regular visits from their children. Here again, similarly to the explanations I got in primary schools, teachers and staff described San parents both as not caring for their children, and at the same time, loving them too much to let them stay away from them. In Epukiro Post 3 Junior Secondary School, which is situated in the village where many San parents lived, a teacher reported that San parents themselves come and take their children from the school in wintertime:

- And here and there also the parents won't allow their kids to be far from them. During this wintertime they come here and take them back.
- Why do they take them back during the winter?
- I don't know. Maybe it is because of the love they have for their kids. They feel that their kids are more safe, more protected against winter when they are with the parents rather than in school. Maybe it is because they cannot supply them with things and they think, how can they stay in this cold when he or she doesn't have a blanket. [Epukiro Post 3 Junior Secondary School teacher]

Another alarming tendency was also reported in some of the high schools I visited – after mixing with children from different background and social standing, many San learners became ashamed of their poor parents and did not want them to come to the school at all. This was also justified by the fact that sometimes San parents appeared drunk at the school and further embarrassed their children in front of the others, thus deepening the gap between parents and children. Still, most of the San learners I met in secondary schools were either receiving a lot of support from their families (both moral and material), or were ‘adopted’ by other, non-San, people (usually Herero or Mbanderu people). In the first case, these were mainly children related to Chief Langman and had received a lot of support from him throughout their studies as he had taken a keen interest in providing “good education” for his grandchildren. Gqaina’s first learner to ever reach Grade 12, Frederik Langman, was a grandson of Chief Frederik Langman and attributed his success to his grandfather who had been selling off his cattle in order to support him. The boy spoke very openly about his problems at the school (he was studying at Wennie Du Plessis Secondary School) and reported that he had had many tough moments, had not always had everything he needed, but had “forced” himself to finish school, so that he would get a different life than the one he would have had as a farm worker or as an unemployed young man at Skoonheid.

The other successful group of San learners in high schools – those ‘adopted’ by people from other ethnic groups – succeeded in school for another reason. These were usually children who were either taken away from their parents, or who lived with their family but were ‘adopted’ by the people for whom their parents worked and who were used as servants from an early age in exchange for food and other basic necessities. Being raised in a different culture, most of them did not speak their mother tongue but the language of their ‘adoptive’ family. Therefore it was easier for them to mix with the others and to behave in ways considered appropriate for the others. The most ‘successful’ stories of San learners who had finished secondary school and who had got jobs in town were all examples of such ‘adopted’ children. The question remains, however, whether they perceived themselves as San anymore or not.

The remoteness from their families was also mentioned as a reason for leaving school. Children wanted to see their parents more often and in many cases, distances to home were more than 100 km. Because of that, many learners could not come back in time after holidays or simply

preferred to stay at home and be close to their families. However, at the school situated next to Drimiopsis Resettlement Camp, Mokhanedi Tlhabanello High School, a teacher attributed the high dropout rate of San learners to the closeness of their families – they did not want to stay in school because they were negatively influenced by their families on a daily basis and preferred to hang around with other non-schooling children in the ‘location’.

6.2.5. Lack of role models

The other problem repeatedly mentioned throughout the region was the lack of positive role models that could inspire San children (and their parents) to put their efforts in school and finish it.

This is the whole problem for them. Maybe because here we are not having a San speaking teacher so I am speaking with them Khoekhoe, they understand Khoekhoe but the whole problem is that in this way they are not having confidence in themselves. [Johannes Dohren High School]

They don't have many positive examples. People who have finished education. Just to see that they can do something. We have so many bad role models in this country. Even the parents are bad role models. Teachers are bad role models... [Gqaina Principle]

They don't know any San people who have achieved something because of education. People who can inspire them and show them that there is also another way in life. [Gqaina teacher]

They need educated San people who can tell them what to do. Because now, when you ask them what they want to be, they all reply ‘farm workers’. This is the only thing they know – farm workers. [Gqaina teacher]

When imagining their future, San learners, both from primary and secondary schools, reported that they wanted to be teachers, doctors, nurses, ministers and other ‘prestigious’ jobs. None of them had seen or even heard of such a successful San person, however. This, together with the numerous hardships which San learners endure in formal schools, demotivates and discourages most of them. Attempts to stay at school despite all difficulties were also put to an end when learners became of certain age and wanted to assume a more independent and active role as young adults. This applied especially to boys, who would leave school to find a job on a farm and get some income or who just preferred to wander around with other non-schooling peers. In some cases, learners were forced to leave school by their families or their family's employers who had demanded their presence at the farm instead.

6.2.6. Transition to town

Another huge obstacle for the majority of San learners in high schools is the transition to life in town. Most San learners come from remote areas and farms. Some of them have never been to town, and others had visited it infrequently. Their primary schooling was done in a small school, closer to their families. In the case of Gqaina, learners have received a lot of support and protection from teachers and staff in a very tolerant San-dominated setting. Suddenly, this protection is lost and they find themselves in a hostile and competitive environment. As most high schools were either in or close to town, most San learners had to leave their immediate area and stay away from their families for the whole trimester. Having no previous experience from the town, many San children become easy victims of others. Girls get easily involved with men for money:

- If they are becoming big in their body, it is a danger for them. They are selling their body to get money.
- Where, here in Gobabis?
- At Gobabis. And also during the holiday, if we are not transporting them [to their homes], they are staying in Gobabis and do that thing and the parents don't know what is going on. And now two girls dropped out because they were used for that and they cannot cope with school. [Johannes Dohren High School teacher]

Boys, on the other hand, often meet up with other non-schooling San teenagers in town, abuse alcohol and get involved in criminal activities (usually thefts). Teachers complained that once on that road, it was almost impossible to get them back in the classroom and make them finish school. Another apparent contradiction that struck me during my fieldwork was the fact that despite all above-mentioned difficulties San children from rural areas experience when they move to town, it was mainly such rural San children that I met in the high schools I visited. Perhaps, they had an easier access to primary schools and it was easier for them to reach high school. In contrast, San children who grew up in town may have been more vulnerable to various 'street factors' which prevented them to even finish their primary education, let alone continue further on. Or, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, perhaps 'town' San learners shifted their identity already in their primary school and were no longer visible as San in their secondary education.

6.3. Education as a prerequisite for success in life?

All of the above-described factors contribute to the rather difficult and non-tolerant environment which San learners encounter in secondary schools. What is being overlooked here again, mainly

by people directly involved with San children's education on a local level, are the cultural differences between the San society and the encompassing society which offers education to the San. Successful graduation from secondary school is a prerequisite for a successful job future. San people have all expressed their opinion that they want a change, they want jobs and different material necessities, which a good job can secure. When such needs are being voiced, however, they were usually envisioned within the boundaries of the specific group and community, which is San people want *both* to be educated *and* to live as San. The present reality shows different alternatives. When San people graduate from school, they have the choice to either move out of their community for a life in town, or get back to their families with little opportunities to practice their school-accumulated knowledge. Previous research in Nyae Nyae has also shown that San people who have graduated from school and have stayed with their communities, have been put under huge psychological stress by the others, simply for 'standing out' in a poor society which discourages it (Hays 2007). Therefore, when people look into the problem of San learners dropping out of school, they must consider *both* the socio-economic factors directly affecting San learners' performance and attendance *and* the long-term opportunities San learners receive when they finish school.

Conclusion

Education, as a basic human right, has been loaded with expectations of empowerment and progress both on an individual, communal and national level. UN has set as one of its Millennium Goals the ideal of achieving universal primary education (Bolaane and Saugestad 2006) that would eventually lead to the presumed personal realization of the individual and would equip the poor and oppressed ones with the tools needed to challenge their situation. As a result, this would fight poverty and would “promote friendship among all ... racial or religious groups” (UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26).

Related to indigenous peoples, educated indigenous individuals can voice the problems of the community they represent, and educated indigenous youths can find jobs and sustain themselves and their families. The discrepancy between the human rights ideal and the everyday challenges indigenous children face in schools, however, are huge – indigenous children are harshly discriminated or even assimilated in schools; they are exposed to languages they do not know; the curriculum has little relevance to their everyday lives. Therefore, instead of following the hard road to achieving education, many children choose the safe path to their homes.

The San of Southern Africa, like many other indigenous groups from different parts of the world, have both faced harsh challenges in schools *and* have expressed their desire to have access to schools. Schools, however, have turned too unwelcoming for most San learners and high figures of high dropout rate, as well as reports of discrimination and acculturation depict their situation. Positive examples do exist, however, and the aim of this thesis has been to provide an analysis of a ‘good’ school for San children.

In this thesis, I have argued that Gqaina Primary School in Omaheke, Namibia has proved to have a good profile mainly thanks to the combined efforts of the school board, the principal, the staff and the international and national donors who support it. A progressive mother-tongue education in Ju/'hoansi in the first years of schooling also contribute to the school's attraction for the San community in the area. Mother-tongue instruction is perhaps one of the most important prerequisites for a successful education system for indigenous children, and backed by the

Namibian government, Gqaina has been working hard to provide it, although lack of qualified Ju/'hoan teachers is slowing down the process a lot. Notions like 'tolerance' and 'difference' are also some of the school's main keys for success and they have made much more sense after I had visited other schools in the region, where San children are the minority and no special measures had been taken to secure their success in school. Concerns of high dropouts, physical and verbal abuse, as well as language problems have been repeatedly expressed during my visits to other schools in the Omaheke.

Yet, despite its many positive sides, Gqaina has not managed to involve the parents in the school life of their children. The main reasons for that, as I have argued, are not in the presumed parental disinterestedness in education but in the greater amount of pressure the school has put on them, the great social divide between the parents and the teachers, as well as cultural differences in terms of adult – child relations. The lack of any visible economic benefits from schooling is also adding to the lack of parental involvement.

Problems abound when San children enter secondary education and the transition from Gqaina (or other primary schools) has turned to be an impossible task for the majority of San learners. Low social standing and poor economic conditions are at the heart of the problem, although there are many individual cases which suggest that the situation is a rather complex one and there could not be given a single solution to the problem. Yet, both parents and ex-learners have expressed opinions that the traditional knowledge the San people possess is also worthy enough to be included in schools and not to be neglected by others. Formal schooling, however, has little respect for such knowledge; this further stigmatizes the San people as 'left behind'. And as education has not yet managed to 'uplift' the San communities in the region, school going is of now seen only as an alternative, rather as a norm in their society.

The issue of school 'failing' should also be discussed with caution because what may seem as a failure to one may not necessarily be perceived so by others. The only benefits the community has seen from their children's school-going have been the children's language and reading and writing skills – skills, which are acquired before the completion of secondary education. No San parent described his/her child's dropping out of school as a failure, although many non-San

people did. Therefore, in addition to respecting a community choices regarding what education their children should have, we should also try to understand their motives in one situation or another and not be too quick to make judgement on matters which look ‘obvious’ to us, such is the benefit from formal schooling. Indigenous communities should get ‘options’ and ‘chances’ but also respect of their choices, a view, which was underlying in many of the conversations I carried out with San people from the Omaheke.

Departing from the local arena, I believe that this thesis invites discussions related to indigenous education in yet another way. I have shown that despite the very good atmosphere at Gqaina, misunderstanding of cultural differences have increased the gap between the different sides (learners/parent - teachers) which logically leads to the questions: 1) Who should provide for indigenous children’s education?; 2) How can formal education be something indigenous children can successfully go through and still maintain their cultural integrity intact? and 3) How can mainstream education *really* empower indigenous people? These questions require more research but as we explore them we should keep reminding ourselves that there are perhaps more options for the successful implementation of education models for children of different cultural backgrounds than we have ever imagined there could be.

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