Photography, memory and the archive in Namibian history

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This paper foregrounds visuality as a powerful route into memory and history in southern Africa. We consider the results of an ongoing collaborative project on colonial photography in Namibia, a territory formerly under South African rule (and previously under German control).[Ö.] This project has forced us to think about two things. One is the position of photographic archives in a marginal colonial setting. The second is the way photographs and images constitute social memory and historical knowledge - especially as they move between archive and public circulation through exhibition or publication in what is now a postcolonial setting.

To begin with, the colonial photographs in the project's main exhibition[Än] entitled *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* were extracted from the archive. A set of tensions is already generated by the juxtaposition of 'archive' and 'photograph'. While the archive "seems to make its contents invisible, the photograph appears to map its truths across its surface." The one is associated with darkness, the other light. As Pinney and others have argued, "the archive, as it struggles to close meanings suggests imagined certainties, the photograph by stressing its causal links with reality sets its indexical certainties free into the world. The archive declares its physicality, its existence as an object, by attempting to hide its contents. The photograph strives to deny its materiality and status as an object as it projects its seemingly transparent truths from its surface" (Pinney et al 1995: 10). "

Thus the archive - often associated with the closure of meaning, with disconnection, with forgetting - interacts in a peculiar way with photographs. When these photographs come out of storage, it is as if new energies are released and the tensions are unbundled.

One occasion where this happened was the picture of a four-piece band from the Old Location in Windhoek [in Fig. 1]. This image, stored away for 45 years with other photographs from the early 1950s, was captioned by Pretoria's State Information Office as "the orchestra" of the "Bantu Social Club". But recently, in travelling between its filing cabinet and exposure to the public, the archived fixity of the picture broke down and the functional anonymity imposed by the state fell away. Former residents of the Old Location[1] Peter Katangolo and Victoria Uukunde related how, when seeing the photograph, they experienced intense moments of recognition and recall. Here were the Mareko brothers and their friend Naftali who made up the Warmgat Band. Vivid stories about the men flowed.[2]

[.Ö] This paper is an expanded and updated version of some of the collaborative research in visual history conducted by the authors for the exhibition and book project entitled *The Colonising Camera*: *Photographs in the Making of Namibian History, 1915-1950s.*

[nÄ] All photographs referred to in this paper derive from the exhibition *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, and the book of the same title (Cape Town, Windhoek and Athens OH: University of Cape Town Press, Out of Africa and Ohio University Press, 1998). Extracts from the exhibition *How We See Each Other* also appear in the publication, courtesy of the Okombahe photographers. Permission to exhibit and publish photographs for this project was kindly granted by the following: National Archives of Namibia, Basler Afrika Bibliographien; Archiv der Vereinten Evangelische Mission (Wuppertal); South African Museum. The views expressed about these photographs are solely those of the authors.

A process whereby people would make connections between old photographs and stories of the past was the intention behind the exhibition entitled *The Colonising Camera*. The desire was to bring colonial photographs out of the archive and plug them into contemporary historical discourses in Namibia and elsewhere. The exhibition was originally conceived as a visual backdrop to a history conference on South Africa's colonisation of Namibia held in 1994 (see Hayes *et al* 1998). But this 'sideshow' soon pulled the curators into a process which went far beyond the initial parameters. The exhibition's ensuing reworkings and journeys between Namibia, South Africa and the United States[3] confirmed a general acknowledgement of the enormous impact and immediacy of photographs from the past. Photographs were "better than the textbook", as one Namibian student put it (Kisting 1995). Because the past erupts so powerfully into the present through photographs, argued one curator, they are "an excellent way of making history more accessible" (Kisting 1995). The colonial archive had effectively starved the Namibian (and wider) public of images of the past. Public pressure effectively pushed the exhibition towards publication, and the book has already entered its second reprint for the Namibian market.

In becoming a book itself, *The Colonising Camera* was envisaged as a kind of album where photographs are central but where visuals and texts speak to one another. Considerable additional research in various photographic archives following the initial exhibition resulted in a revision of both the exhibition contents and the captions. Research work of university history students was incorporated. Further individual commentaries were commissioned to accompany the exhibition, and these represent efforts by scholars of different aspects of Namibian history and anthropology to engage centrally with the relationship between colonisation and photography. To complement this, and indeed to take the 'colonising camera' into visual paradigms beyond colonialism, the book concludes with a contemporary mini-exhibition and essay concerned with, as the rural photographers themselves put it, 'how we see each other' (see Rohde 1998).

Visual history and African history

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

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

Disciplines such as art history and anthropology have been much readier than history to take photographs seriously. Special issues of the journal *African Arts* on photography highlighted particular historic collections. Their focus was very much on the photographers and the contexts in which they worked, the conventions and motifs that influenced photographers, and the forms of display adopted by Africans who were photographed. Much more work has since been done in tracing the emergence of visual discourses around composition and subject-matter, and the specific codes adopted by photographers and the photographed in different parts of the colonial world (Geary and Jenkins 1985; Godby 1996; Hall 1996). Exhibition catalogues, of course, frequently offer the best visual sources and

texts on such issues (Engelhard and Mesenhöller (eds.) 1995; Guggenheim Museum 1996; Charity *et al* (eds.) 1995; Revue Noire 1999).

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

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

Photography's colonialisms

Most of us who collaborated in *The Colonising Camera* came to consider photographs after prolonged periods of archival documentary research, field research or engagement with Namibian oral histories. There has been a recent wave of deep but localised studies of Namibia, especially in the inter-war years (Fuller 1992; Hayes 1992; Hendrickson 1992; Silvester 1994; Wallace 1997). One of the most slippery problems confronting researchers of Namibia in the 20th century is that enigmatic entity: the South African mandatory state in South West Africa (SWA). In their studies of South East Asia and East Africa respectively, Stoler and Cooper (1997) have stated how little they knew about colonial states, "their workings, their distinctive qualities, and the people who constituted them" (1997). Much the same could be said about the marginal colonial state constituted by South Africa in the wake of the Germans from 1915.[5]

South Africa occupied an ambiguous space between its own colonial (later dominion) status under Great Britain, and its colonisation and trusteeship of Namibia. It displayed insecurities and at times cultural overstatement. Photography by colonisers, whether in the employ of the administration or not, provides particularly striking instances of the effort to project a South African colonial modernity and, frequently and deliberately, indigenous Namibian premodernity or even primitivity (Gordon, Bollig, Hayes 1998). We were repeatedly struck by how the South African occupation took place with a strong sense of audience. At every stage of South Africa's bid to gain the League of Nations mandate to rule Namibia and to control Namibians, photography was crucial to the politics of representing the place and

its peoples. In the attempts to depict, document, normalise and/or pathologise Namibians and to legitimise and memorialise themselves - the colonial version of what Sekula (1989: 346) calls the "double system of representation" with both repressive and honorific functions - large numbers of photographs were taken and many of them published.

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

To begin with, much of the early body of photography extant on Namibia comes from the photographers of a defeated colonial power, Germany, whose administration ended during World War 1. German colonialism left enormously powerful vestigial influences in the form of settler photographers who remained in Namibia after the mandate (or immigrant photographers who left Germany in the 1920s and 1930s), to say nothing of its huge photographic archive. This entire photographic economy straddling Namibia and Germany encompasses early ethnography, consumer capitalism, political advocacy, evangelical fund-raising, popular memorabilia, and much more.

The second colonial power in Namibia has been South Africa, initially in the name of Great Britain, but from 1921 mandated by the League of Nations to administer the territory in its own right. As stated elsewhere (Silvester *et al* 1998), Namibia fulfilled several roles for the Union of South Africa: it offered the latter a new position in the international community; it lent its very space for settlement of poorer whites in the land-hungry 'new South Africa' during a crucial phase of its nation building in the 1910s and 1920s; and it offered raw material for the production of scientific knowledge (and images) about 'Bantu' and 'Bushman' which fed into a number of institutional and administrative initiatives in South Africa itself (Silvester *et al* 1998; Rassool and Hayes 1997; Hayes 1997: 140-43). But in the early days after the 1915 occupation, South Africa’s lack of any recent visual archive of the territory and its peoples created special problems for the representational needs of the new administration and its international supporters.

Incoming officials had no choice but to dig into the existing photograph archive. At times there are cases of outright plagiarisation of German photographs.[6] One example of this early 'borrowing' stands out. Probably the most notorious publication on colonial Namibia is the so-called Blue Book (Great Britain 1918). This circulated a very disturbing vision of how German colonisers incorporated Africans into the colonial economy before 1915. The Blue Book has an appendix with a medical report on German corporal punishment. Photographs show the bodies of Namibians who had been tortured, flogged, emaciated, chained, and hung by the neck. As Gewald (1998) points out, the photographs originated from an official German inquiry into the treatment and corporal punishment of the indigenous inhabitants of its colonies before World War I, a fact which is not mentioned in the Blue Book itself. These photographs were opportunistically deployed by British-South African strategists to demonstrate German cruelty and unfitness to retain colonial possessions. This in turn legitimated the South African claim to be awarded the League of Nations mandate to govern Namibia.[7]

The German photographic economy, it should be mentioned, has proved very resilient. Despite massive attempts at South Africanisation after the demise of German colonialism, commercial photography in present-day Namibia has remained largely in German hands. Some of this photography has ensured a visual continuum of the German colonial past. Photo Nink of Windhoek, for instance, has a thriving trade in visual memorabilia of German colonialism to this day; others have ensured that the remnants of

German colonialism have been inserted into the consciousness of contemporaries and tourists through calendar, coffee-table and postcard photography. Such photographers have also greatly contributed to the Namibian landscape genre which constructed the country as a land devoid of people. Thus, while German colonial rule may have ended in 1915, there has been a far less dramatic break in certain genres of the overall visual history of the territory.

There are, therefore, two intriguing features in the ongoing biographies of German colonial pictures: their plagiarisation by South Africans coming in after 1915, and their appropriation by German-speakers in an effort (perhaps) to recreate a sense of German colonialism and to propagate a German identity in late twentieth century Namibia.

Beyond the German and South African roles in the territory, there is also a third outside presence which *The Colonising Camera* begins to explore: that of the United States of America, technologically and diplomatically a nascent world power. The cameras of rich safari-goers like President Roosevelt (see Landau 1998) or pseudo-scientific adventurers like Ernest Cadle (Gordon 1997 & 1998b) brought images of Africans back to American audiences for various kinds of consumption. More to the point, American camera technology - speeded up by the photographic demands of its own internal colonial expansion westwards - was superseding that of other producers. This made it possible for sophisticated photography to take place in the most adverse and remote of frontier conditions. Thus the notable colonial photographer C. H. L. Hahn could use an American camera to produce panoramas of the Kaokoveld and Owambo of astonishing technical and aesthetic standards some 60 years after James Chapman despaired of achieving anything with his French apparatus at the Victoria Falls (Kliem 1995: 16). It is perhaps mostly through this technological input that a kind of American informal colonialism happened: it allowed Americans to occupy a particularly central place in the spread of metropolitan discourses and images to and from southern Africa in the inter-war years.

Hunt's (1996: 326) argument that colonialism "can no longer be viewed as a process of imposition from a singular European metropole" is apt here. The colonialisms that Namibians experienced in the twentieth century were indeed "multiple and distinct", characterised by defeat (Germany), emergence (South Africa) and informality (USA). In their photographic interactions and encounters with Namibians, each colonialism contributed to the tangled layers of representational politics.

Thus the ‘cultures of colonialism’ (Stoler and Cooper 1997; Dirks 1992; Thomas 1994) that developed in this part of the southern African subcontinent were multiple, and they all implicated photography. But even more important is the fact that they were not restricted to white colonial agents. While it appears that until the 1960s there were relatively few black photographers and indeed journalists in Namibia (Henrichsen 1997; Wallace 1998) compared with South Africa, and especially compared with parts of West Africa (Viditz-Ward 1985; Killingray and Roberts 1989: 199; *Revue Noire* 1999), photographic representation in the colonial space of Namibia cannot be reduced to a one-sided process.

By talking about the colonising camera, we do not intend to construct a sharp colonier/colonised dichotomy, or to suggest that whites were active and Africans passive in these processes of representation. The Namibians who became colonial subjects incorporated photography at different historical stages and for different purposes, be it Herero leaders having their portraits taken in the 1870s (Gewald 1998; see Fig 2), John Muafangejo subverting the photographs published in a colonial magazine with his linocut art (Timm 1998; see Figs 3 & 4), or present-day Okombahe residents representing their own daily lives (Rohde 1998). It is always possible to colonise the colonising camera. The photographic paradigm here questions the representational strategies of both ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’, and shows they are complex, contradictory, at times (not surprisingly) blurring into one another. This is because they are mutually engaged in "a semiotic web whose implications are not completely controlled by any of us" (Hendrickson 1996: 1). Photography provides a deep suggestiveness of the presence of ‘an indigenous syntax’ - in both content and form - and requires a continued and profound probing.

Reading Namibian photographs

We have sometimes got into trouble with politicised audiences at home when arguing it is not our intention to draw a direct and instrumental link between colonial photographs and colonialism itself. Photographs of empty lands, we believe, did not necessarily produce hundreds of white settlers; likewise photographs of Africans in 'savage' garb did not necessarily produce military expeditions and conquest. The relationship between politics and representation is far more subtle, problematic and open-ended. We have tried to facilitate more 'open-ended' readings by urging viewers of photographs (and especially historians) to move beyond positivism. Stuart Hall's exposition has been helpful here:

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

One constitutive process in the making of the photographic images here was the photographic equivalent of what Pels (1994) has termed "the ethnographic occasion". These 'photographic occasions' were those 'real' incidents where people or landscapes or animals came before the lens of a camera, and their framed image was transposed on to glass plates or light-sensitive paper and then chemically developed into a print or a plate to produce the photographic analogue of the actual event. There were power relations, administrative contexts and discourses involved in these occasions. I have argued with regard to Native Commissioner Hahn's photography in northern Namibia, for example, that the projection of orderly hierarchy and consensus in his photographs of the 'tribal' gathering at Oshikango [Figs 5 & 6] fed directly into the 1930s formulation of 'indirect control'.

As these colonial photographic occasions are singled out, it becomes clear that there was a vast difference in what ethnographic photography produced at different times and in different contexts. When Chapman or Hodgson (Kliem 1995; Schoeman 1996) took pictures of Namibians in what was then called Damaraland in the 1860s and 1870s, the portrait figures show fluidity of identity and dress. But when Fourie or Hahn took pictures between 1920 and 1930 (Harris, Hayes, Bollig 1998), anthropometric and ethnographic influences become apparent in the attempts to fix identities and appearances. These shifts in convention in photographic representation and their precolonial, colonial and postcolonial frameworks need careful historicisation.

The Colonising Camera is not simply about the politics of colonial perception and deterministic attempts to construct ethnicities and landscapes. There is a relationship between photography and colonisation, but the nature of this relationship cannot be reduced to the predictable or the inevitable, the instrumental or the functional. There is always the "messy contingency of the photograph" (Sekula 1989: 353) to undermine the supposed colonial purpose. It would also be unwise to predict in advance how people from different walks of life or different academic disciplines might initially approach the reading of photographs. Of the latter, a social historian might be expected to privilege 'evidence' and 'context', or the art historian form over content. But photographs cannot easily be contained by disciplines. Even the most rigorous of social history, for example, the commentary by Marion Wallace on urban Windhoek (1998), talks of the photograph which most represents settler fears: that of the

defiant-looking black women in town [Fig 7]. This settler affect is new territory for historians, a paradigm of the emotions. Wolfram Hartmann's study of the possible or latent gayness in René Dickman's photographs [see Fig 8], also heavily dependent on a foundation of historical contextualisation, enters deep into desire and is itself couched in terms camp enough to make the said Dickman turn (possibly pleasurably) in his grave (1998b).

This is not to say that these are the only readings possible, or the most authoritative. Different meanings are created by different readers. These may shuttle to a greater or lesser degree between photography's dual potentialities: between positivism and fantasy, between evidence and enigma, between truth-claims and lies "that tell a truth", and between photographs that denote and those that connote. Rohde (1998) argues that these are the fixed and open readings to which photographs lend themselves. Ambiguity is inherent in the way people interpret photographs. Meaning is derived from the "reading" of visual imagery at many levels, one of which is almost purely sensate and subjective, harking back to an embodied, non-linguistic experience of being which is a fundament of perception. This innate ability to lend cohesion to the world of appearances also gives rise to what has been termed elsewhere the optical or ocular unconscious, where meaning, language and vision become conflated. The eye is said to have a naturalising tendency, where "the biological ease of vision ... naturalises what is in fact a cultural construct" (Kliem 1995: 2). This works on more than one level, for the eye of the photographer is socially and culturally conditioned to seeing things in certain ways, thus prompting a particular framing of a scene or people. For the viewer of the photograph, of course, the photographic print then naturalises a further range of representations within its frame.

Photography is embedded in the history of the late nineteenth century when optical empiricism was considered equally feasible as other forms of scientific empiricism. The "metrical accuracy of the camera" formed part of a "truth apparatus" (Sekula 1989: 352-53) being forged by science and police work in modernising states in Western Europe. In colonial contexts, anthropometric photography offered a new form of imperial knowledge about colonial peoples that signalled a shift from mapping sites to mapping sight (Banta and Hinsley 1986). As Landau (1996: 132) puts it, the anthropometric photograph was "cousin to the police mug shot". Mofokeng (1996: 56) argues that ethnographic photographs constituted "authoritative knowledge", which played "no small part in the subjection of those populations to imperial power". The question here is whether such photography did so in the case of Namibia and, if so, how?

The sleight of hand performed by photography was to separate the sign from its referent. Our concern as historians in *The Colonising Camera* project was the attempt to re-attach some of the signs identified in colonial images to at least some referents. It has emerged, for example, that the photographs of activities in the reserves in the 1950s, showing the Advisory Board at Otjihorongo and dairy production [Figs 9 & 10], were originally commissioned by the Visual Section of the State Information Service in Pretoria for inclusion in a brochure to be distributed at the Van Riebeeck Festival in 1952 in Cape Town. This purposeful creation of a set of images of 'natives' thriving in the reserves accompanied the erection of a costly building to represent SWA at the festival (Witz 1997: 289). The images gave the impression of colonial success at the very moment when dairy production in most reserves in central Namibia, one of the few means of earning cash, was coming under threat from local white settlers (Werner 1989; Fuller 1992). Most visitors were not to know this from the images of thriving progress.

Even without such contextualisations, close study of colonial photographs, their form and composition, especially if read against other reference systems, can actually serve to fracture the narrative that they appear to support. Bollig suggests, for example, that the pose adopted by the Himba man with two women [Fig 11] was unlikely to have been an accepted mode of public gesture. The subjects being photographed were possibly encouraged or instructed to demonstrate this more visibly affectionate domesticity. If so, it possibly tells us more about white notions of presenting an African family than it does about any such ‘Himba’.

But it is not only the observer who brings reference systems, subjectivity and knowledge to looking at colonial photographs. There have been many previous sets of filters which have mediated the photographs that appear in *The Colonising Camera*. It is crucial to identify the layers of selection - the inclusions and exclusions - through which the photographs have passed, and the paths along which they have travelled. From the photographer's background, to the photographic occasion in which the picture was taken, to the way photographic subjects presented themselves to the camera, to the technical production of the print, to the private or public circuits into which the image was inserted, to the ultimate fate of the picture as a framed family portrait, a book illustration, part of a forgotten collection that is destroyed or an item in the photographic files of an archive, it is important to contextualise, historicise and theorise the processes by which the photograph has come before the public gaze (or not). After the technical production of the original print, a wide range of possibilities exist for the reproduction, dissemination, collection and storage of images, and during each stage images can be re-captioned, decontextualised and recontextualised.

The Colonising Camera engages in such recontextualisation by having selected and privileged certain images from the archive over others for exhibition and publication. At every level of selection or exclusion, important agendas, needs and desires are at work. One of the most powerful sites of selection and exclusion is, of course, the official body of received photographs from the past in the form of the 'national' or state archive, from which images filter (or do not filter) into the public gaze.

On archives and scopophobia

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

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

Some specific problems derive from a substantial proportion of the photographs in the public picture archive of the National Archives of Namibia not reaching this institution as part of a larger body of images, such as a collection or government's legally regulated deposits. On the contrary, a great many of the images were hand-picked and reproduced from private albums, magazines and books. And while these photographs are quite remarkable in scope and depth,[8] and unrivalled when compared to other archives, a huge problem remains.

In fact, there exist two archives of pictures in one official archival institution. The one archive is

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

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

To spell out some of the implications: images travelled in different circuits according to whether they were produced as postcards, for example, or were part of a private collection in a family album. As a postcard or a collectable, numerous people would have seen the picture and it would have had an impact on public perceptions of a place, an event or the people photographed, especially if there was a caption with the original. Large numbers of Germans, for example, were exposed to the postcard depicting the beating of a man [Fig 12] because it travelled between SWA and Germany as a postcard. Mechanisms of exoticisation and eroticisation relied largely on the construction of images in photography and the percolation of these to the public through postcards, books and magazines. An image culled from a private photo album, however, would have had different audience connotations.

Original captions and locations are crucial in piecing together the dynamics of colonial representation, and the latter's circuits of dissemination and reproduction. It is necessary to trace these processes and, ideally, the archive facilitates this. It is clear that different selections of photographs from the archive have been presented in different collections or albums, and that even the same photograph may have been presented in a variety of different ways - like that of Samuel Maherero (Hartmann 1998a; see Fig 13). Boundaries between visual media can be very porous. Photographs seem to fix time, but they also float through it. In the worst cases where photographic images have been pushed out of earlier contexts, genericisation tends to take the place of identification and historicisation (Rassool and Hayes 1997).

The lack of contextual information makes many of the stored images in Namibia's archives worthless. Very often the name of the photographer, the studio and the place of publication (often the only clue as to the date of a photograph) has been lost in the process of selection and reproduction.[9] As curators and editors of an exhibition and publication on colonial photography in Namibia during South African rule, therefore, we faced continuous ironies ever since we started out with a naive notion of 'keeping the integrity of a photographic archive' - whose very integrity its own archivists had simultaneously created and undermined, engendered and ripped apart. In general one could argue that this is the result of unthinking scopophobia, so seemingly inherent in academic historical work with its privileging of and, indeed, fixation on the word.

Scopophobia - literally translated as fear of the picture or fear of the view - is used here as a term that generically describes the dismissal and neglect with which historians and archivists have viewed photographs as historical documents. History's disciplinary leanings towards positivism and empiricism

have encouraged the view that photographs represent *prima facie* evidence only: what is in the picture is seen as a direct and true rendering of reality as it existed at the moment when the camera shutter was operated. This may have tempted archivists and historians alike to define the photograph as a timeless document that, after a minimum of identification, needed no further context, social background or ideological framework to be understood and creatively re-deployed. Hence its positioning in the economy of the archive and its merely illustrative use (if at all) by historians.

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

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

Some of the most poignant complaints about recognition of the lack of a national intellectual effort and its failure to feed into national institutions came from the territory's Medical Officer in the 1920s, Dr Louis Fourie. Fourie was a dedicated student of ethnography and carried out a systematic anthropometric photography of the 'Bushman' groups that became his field of expertise. He was responsible for inducting the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland Hahn into the codes of ethnographic production, and facilitated the writing and editing of Hahn's draft chapter for *The Native Tribes of South West Africa*, published in 1928.

Fourie lamented the haemorrhage of research material and knowledge out of the territory, and advocated 'local collection', particularly as Namibia was in a "unique position with regard to the Bushmen" (cited in Gordon 1997: 110). He was personally and politically offended by the plundering of Namibia's incipient 'heritage', and the opportunism of colleagues and seniors who, it seemed, exploited and plagiarised local intellectual efforts (including his own). In 1928 he wrote in bitter terms to his friend Hahn: "old fellows like you and I should commence to think about ourselves and ... set our minds on tasks which may possibly leave some heritage to the future".[10]

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

Both men kept the main corpus of their photographic output as private collections. Fourie's collection was submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand after his retirement and is now housed in the MuseumAfrika in Johannesburg; archivists from the National Archives of Namibia persuaded Rodney Hahn to lend the bulk of his father's magnificent collection to the national institution.[11] Hahn's collection does not form part of the public photograph library, except for those pictures which were selected in 1994 by the curators of *The Colonising Camera* from the private accession boxes housed in the archive basement.

Picturing the Past

"It's good to get the photos out of the archives and to the people," stated one viewer of *The Colonising Camera* in Windhoek (Kisting 1995). But exhibition and publication have not been the only means employed to open up the files of the pictorial archive to the public gaze in Namibia. Apart from being televised in Windhoek in 1995, the exhibition was packed in boxes in late 1996 and taken on a field trip to Owambo to be viewed and discussed during research visits. It was also shown to local Ovambo photographers running commercial portrait studios. Then, in co-operation with the National Archives of Namibia, further attempts were made to flush the photograph archives out into the open and spark off debates around history and visuality. Every fortnight throughout 1997 (continued in 1998 and 1999) the weekend supplement to the popular Friday edition of *The Namibian* newspaper ran a column called "Picturing the Past", which featured the forgotten photographs from the archives.

Such initiatives, of course, have many precedents in social history (Samuel 1994: 337-49) and indeed in colonial history - South Africa's *Annual Reports* to the League of Nations, for example. But in this most recent Namibian case, the column urged the public to contact the newspaper, or one of the curators based at the local university, should they have any information or opinion to advance about the photographs. Some of this feedback was in turn printed in the next issue of the series. In a practical sense, all of this has been historically satisfying because it has enabled access to (and made public) those private knowledges which have identified and contextualised a number of photographs in the exhibition and in the archive itself. Thus photographs in the state archive, with captions which literally reduced individuals to representatives of a colonially defined 'type', are acquiring new layers of meaning and, to some extent, being recaptioned.

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

Recognition of people or places in the images (the signs in the representational system) has led to responses. One might say that the photographs trigger 'memory', leading respondents to re-narrate the past, often in a form they state they learned from older relatives, particularly when the photographs have featured tragic-heroic figures such as Mandume ya Ndemufayo, an icon in oral histories [Fig 14]. There appears to be a very strong connection between visual history and oral history, the former galvanising the latter. But the trap here is to see 'memory' as a passive storage system. Like the archive itself, it is far from being so, and neither memory nor the archive should be fetishised for the imputed truths they carry: memory's emotional/popular truth, on the one hand, and the archive's objective/bureaucratic truth on the other.

Samuel (1994: x) has argued that "memory is historically conditioned ... It bears the impress of experience, in however mediated a way. It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time". More to the point (and following Freud), he suggests that "the unconscious mind, splitting, telescoping, displacing and projecting, transposes incidents from one time register to another and materializes thought in

imagery". It is obvious that exposure to images can activate powerful mechanisms of remembrance or association. When there is a conjuncture between photograph and stored knowledge (or images) of the past, a process of re- cognition and release takes place which produces fresh new historical narratives infused with both intellect and emotion.

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

The challenge to "portray Africans in a very different manner" (Mofokeng 1996: 56) is taken in yet another direction by the recent exhibition by Okombahe photographers, part of which is reproduced in the closing section of the project's book (Rohde 1998). Unlike colonial ethnographic photography of 'the other', the postcolonial photography here is an ostensible ethnography of closely intertwined people who represent 'each other'. The possibility emerges of the production of visual histories by those groups usually on the other side of the colonising camera, and of shifting the relations of representation in Namibia's history.

Compare, for example, Albert Nawuseb's photograph of "Ouma Basaura and an old man" [Fig 15] with the cover picture on the book [Fig 16]. Ouma Basaura and the old man have come together in front of the photographer, whose shadow is visible. This intersection of people is fortuitous - just as fortuitous as in the photograph where Hahn is present behind the two Kwaluudhi women who would normally be the sole ethnographic focus (see Hayes 1998b). The first is taken from the uncertain crossroads of postcolonial Okombahe, where the photographer narrates what he remembers and forgets, naming people and stating what they do. The audience is taken into people's lives. The colonial photograph, by contrast, shows the official trek into western Owambo at a crossroads with two women, with colonialism very deeply inserted into the picture through the assertive figure of Hahn which implies colonial occupation and possession (however transient). The audience is taken into colonialism.

Both photographs are about people meeting by chance, as it seems, *en passant*, the lines of their gazes and histories intersecting with those of the photographers who have the means to frame, reproduce and fashion these colonial and postcolonial moments. But the postcolonial analogue in Okombahe renders the previously colonised as subjects, not objects, and effects a repossession of a landscape that is poor and harsh, but theirs.

Endnotes

[1] The Old Location in Windhoek shared the fate of many similar black urban settlements in neighbouring South Africa when it was demolished in 1959 and its residents forcibly removed.

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

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

[4] Kratz (1994: 185) makes the point that academic books often use a black-and-white or tinted (rather than colour) photograph on the cover and suggests that this is largely due to a question of economics. But the conventional view that 'serious' art photography is generally conducted in black and white might

influence publishers trying to present a serious academic book. Of course, with history books it is also often the case that the relevant images are only available in black-and-white.

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

[6] In later years some German photographs also re-emerged in photomontages, notably during the rise of Nazism (Rassool and Hayes 1997; Exhib. photo no 94).

[7] A propaganda war between London and Berlin, and between white settlers in Namibia and the South African administration, rumbled on for nearly a decade until the Blue Book was officially banned in 1927 by demand of the newly constituted Legislative Assembly in Windhoek.

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

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

[10] NAN A450 Vol. 4 1/29, Fourie to Hahn, 27.4.1928.

[11] We are indebted to Ann Wanless for information concerning the Fourie collection; and to Rodney and Jessie Hahn, Dag Henrichsen, Carl Schlettwein and the late Brigitte Lau for information concerning the Hahn collection.

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Abbreviations:
BAB - Basler Afrika Bibliographien;
JMT - John Muafangejo Trust;
NAN - National Archives of Namibia;
SAM - South African Museum;
CC - *The Colonising Camera;*

SWA - South West Africa.