

Excerpt from my Namibian Diary

Katutura, Tuesday September 8, 1981

I am in a state of shock. I am in a state of complete culture shock, and for the first time I am totally aware of it. Never, in all my life have I seen a system like this - complete dependence of women on men – a “sleeping” network, it seems. Men have several women, while the latter, since none of the relationships with men are really satisfying, or because the system works as it does, have several boyfriends. In addition, all women keep looking for a better one. Some women even said that sex must take place entirely with Herero men. A Herero woman is only accused of being “loose” when she copulates with a non-Herero. So far, I have not seen nor encountered a single lasting, least of all monogamous, marriage. Most Herero are not married at all. Those who did marry divorced soon thereafter. And yet, the whole system functions to preserve old customs, although these customs have become grotesque in the urban-industrial context. The urban setting has furthered a kind of loosening of customs, or so it seems, but not their disappearance. What is more shocking, however, is that I have been drawn, at least somewhat, into the system - otherwise I would not believe what I have learned from interviews, observations, and participation.

I found myself packing my suitcase. The only thought going through my mind was that I must leave this malfunctioning society immediately.

So distraught was I that I didn't notice C enter my room. For lack of chairs, we sat down on the big bed and I told her that I thought my research was not possible here. There was a long silence.

"The Herero have problems," she said firmly. "You must study them." And then we talked and hung my clothes back into the cupboard and I stayed.

Wednesday, September 9 1981

I woke up with renewed determination. When P arrived, I suggested that we go somewhere and have a coffee – away from the black township. I wanted us to review where we were in our research.

At Schneider's Café in Windhoek comfortably enveloped in its German cosiness I told P that I had reached and overcome a crisis yesterday. She was not surprised. She had wondered for some time how I, "a Westerner," could take it. She had known about various activities, but she had not felt free to tell me. "All these secrecies that irritate us, you'll feel too," she said.

I suggested that we stop interviewing women and arrange to interview students and gradually work on interviews with men. P was delighted. We selected schools and that very morning drove around to meet with principals to enlist their cooperation. We had no refusals.

K who lived near C's place in Katutura was selected as the first man on whom to test out various questions. K was a returnee having spent a number of years in Sweden and in the States. I'll discuss this interview later as I work in the interviews of other returnees.

P suggested that I should interview a woman whom she knew to have great qualities and wisdom. She felt that we should break our pattern of knocking on doors and interviewing whoever was there. In order to reduce bias in our interviews, we had selected to knock on doors of houses in different sections of Katutura: in the poorest section; in the newer better-off sections; and in the "wealthier section." At first P refused to interview those who sat around drinking. Drunk and dilapidated people, she insisted we avoid. I told her this avoidance would terribly bias our data. Finally, she agreed to also assist me at least intermittently with interviews in the poorest sections.

Today, however, she felt I needed uplifting and she knew exactly the woman who would fill that need. If I write up more of this interview than of the others, it is because here was a woman who had suffered and triumphed.

T was born in 1918 among those defeated Herero who had fled to Angola during the 1904 to 1907 Herero-German war. With their chief Kambozembe they trekked south again to stay first among their cousins, the Ovatjimba of Kaokoveld and then move on to Grootfontein, Keetmanshoop, Okahandja and Windhoek.

When T was still a baby, she was given to her maternal uncle whose wife, a daughter of Samuel Maherero, would raise her. Her mother and father had moved to Okahandja, while T

remained in Namaland with her "foster" parents.

At age five, her maternal uncle and his wife returned to Botswana to the funeral of Samuel Maherero. They would never return, and T was given to another maternal uncle and later fetched by her father to settle in Okakarera. She is in Windhoek now because she earns money in the city. She also fostered thirteen children.

Like most Herero, T too considers the reserve to be her home. "Spiritually," she said, "our whole existence is tied to the land where we came from. Our children belong there. We have been an independent people who were self-sufficient. We never had to go and make our existence far away. So when our children go away, the hearts of parents fill with worry. They search spiritually for them. If the children don't return, they won't succeed."

When I asked her about this spiritual link she said, "We are tied to our ancestors (*ovanene*). When children leave, the ancestors feel for the parents. The dead and the living form an alliance. It gives parents a boost, for they know that he who attempts to cut this link will have misfortune. Soon the child returns."

Then she said, "We are tied to our cattle and to the land. The holy cattle are tied to the holy fire (*okuruwo*) which is tied to the spirits of the dead. It is one chain."

When we began to discuss male-female differences T told us. "Mostly we are the same. But man is the *omuhona* master, woman the servant."

"We learn this," she answered my next question, "by what we see. The *external* part of the home, I mean cattle, people, decisions, is the realm of men. The *internal* part of the home is the preserve of women. I saw this even as I grew up."

About the nature of power she said. "*Omukaendu orupuiko ruozondunge zorumurumendo*. It means, a woman is the storage place of the man's knowledge. That is her power. The man has power in a different sense. He talks out. But he has this reservoir, this woman, who does not have the power to talk out in public, but who advises him and guides him in private. Then he goes out and he says: 'I have decided thus and so.'"

It occurred to me that this duality itself, the private secret behind the public decision, would contribute to the psychological bend of the Herero mind.

"Woman's quiet guidance is a form of power," she continued. "However, you can't be seen as being a powerful figure. But to develop this man, to do that, a woman is allowed. Only, not publicly," she emphasized.

I remembered N's claim that she was grooming a returnee for office. It is probably the same phenomenon.

"A woman is just as intelligent as a man, only she can't show it publicly. But men can tap this resource for their benefit," she said.

And then she continued, "Women have intelligence *ozundunge* and empathy *ozongama*. Even during wars, women made the men stronger. They spurred men on and encouraged them to persevere. All the strength of war is that of women."

Remembering some of the missionaries' and soliders' accounts of the role of Herero women during the 1904 war, I thought T must be right. But then why did P and I encounter such defeatism, such helplessness, such dependency among the younger women we had interviewed previously. I mentioned as much and T said: "Urban life has interfered with the natural experience of this power. Women aren't taught it anymore, and most don't experience it anymore. Then, people are so mixed here. There are so many groups. Everything has become jumbled and we all have lost out."

Funny, I thought, that she did not refer some of those changes back to 1904. But then, few Herero ever talked about that war and their defeat. Most were too preoccupied with surviving in the present. It was still apartheid, after all.

P brought up the point that Herero women are not making decisions. This attitude seriously hindered her work.

"For me," said T with great vigour, "no man decides anything. Where I am standing now, everyone is equally a human being. I decide for myself. I am like a man."

"You seem to draw on the values of the past to give you strength to make decisions in the

present," I said.

"You are right," she laughed. "I extricate from the past what I think I can use to help me make decisions now." She felt happy and relaxed and indicated that our conversation was important.

"How true," she said, "I draw on my own reservoir to help me know and handle people. I have many children. I have learned to let them be themselves, to allow them growth. This I learned in the past."

We reviewed her personal history more closely. She had given birth to a boy who died. There were no other births thereafter. The thirteen children she raised were those of her sisters and grandchildren. Married traditionally, she divorced two years later.

"This man I married," she said, "I had never set eyes on him until the wedding. And I said to myself, is this what I married. We were related (*omuramue* cross-cousins). He was the child of my maternal uncle's wife's sister."

She continued: "The marriage was arranged. Actually, my uncle's wife wanted me. And so she had me marry her son."

I laughed and shook her head, "... to a man I didn't know," she said. We asked her how she was introduced to sex.

"I had a cousin with whom I was sexually involved. He impregnated me. When I married the other man, I was already pregnant with my cousin's child."

"This cousin got me by grabbing me. That was it, I did not enjoy it, but I became pregnant. So what did he teach me? Look, the cousin has these sexual rights. Therefore it is not rape and yet it is rape."

Thinking back to the past she said: "My cousin story is a common one. It was abused in the past and is abused even now. Then a cousin could sleep with all the daughters and even marry them. This at least is dying out. Also, a girl could report this abuse to the police. Mind you, they don't."

"When it comes to sex," T lamented, "children take their own initiative. To persuade parents and the school to teach about sex would be good. But it won't happen. We are too fragmented into different political alliances. If I voiced my idea, people would ignore it just on political grounds."

She gave an example of how the political fragmentation affected everything in one's life. "Suppose," she said, "I talked to a woman and told her, look, to raise the children of our grandchildren is difficult. Men are difficult. Children are too many. The woman would dismiss me immediately. 'In my opinion,' she would say, 'this country has not many people so we must reproduce.' They encourage pregnancy period. These women would even want to hurt me by saying. 'You don't have a living child, so you don't want us to have one.'"

The topic shifted gradually to her divorce.

"This man was so jealous," T said. "I didn't even last two years in the marriage. It was disgusting. He would not let me walk twenty feet from the house. When I relieved myself, I had to point out this is my shit."

She was breathing hard with disgust. "I was tired of his fantasies. He beat me because of his fantasies. Maybe he was mentally unbalanced. If anyone passed, he was jealous. If I greeted someone, he beat me. What he said had nothing to do with reality."

His fantasies were extreme. Indeed, I found the jealousy business puzzling and pursued it.

"He was sleeping around," T said answering my question about her husband. "Before we married he already had three children by three other women. He slept around. And then he accused me of giving him VD. That broke the marriage. He was forcing me to say that I had VD and gave it to him. I fought him."

Most women succumbed when responsibility was shifted unto them. "In one way, I became disinterested in all men, even now," she said. "Our men are generally jealous. They have to have everything women, money, control. Their minds lose balance."

P blamed this peculiar form of jealousy, blended as it was with suspicion, on the sense of

self-importance that is taught boys. The mere fact of being born a man gives him a higher status. Only, they're always suspicious someone is undermining it.

I wanted to know whether T also hid the pain of birthing. Other interviewed women said they did.

"Oh you can't show pain," she said. "You fear what other people might think. What I did, I left people and went into the veld. There I was free to make sounds and noises. When I gave birth I showed nothing."

Her mother and father's mother helped her.

"Because we learn not to show pain or love, we are used to it. It does not bother me much. We don't know other ways ..."

And so on. I began to see why P wanted me to interview this woman. She knew her politics, the past, the changes that came and are now unwanted ...

Historical sociology can be understood both as a specific sub-field of sociology and as providing general conceptual underpinnings of the discipline, to the extent that it provides an understanding of the specificity of the modern state and the perceived emergence of modernity within Europe. The association of modernity with Europe (and with a European history limited to the self-identified boundaries of the continent) is commonplace and pervasive within the social sciences and humanities. So far, fifty-five skulls and two human skeletons have been repatriated to Namibia and preparations for the return of more skulls from Germany were at an advanced stage at the time of writing this article. The Namibian Herero: A History of Their Psychological Disintegration and Survival by Karla Poewe (pp. 453-454). Review by: Dag Henrichsen. <https://doi.org/10.2307/221663>. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/221663>. Cite this Item. Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries by Douglas H. Johnson. Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries by Douglas H. Johnson (pp. 455-456). Review by: Jay Spaulding. <https://doi.org/10.2307/221664>. Read a list of psychological disorders that describe different categories of mental disorders and offers examples of each type. Dissociative disorders are psychological disorders that involve a dissociation or interruption in aspects of consciousness, including identity and memory. Dissociative disorders include: Dissociative Amnesia. This disorder involves a temporary loss of memory as a result of dissociation. In many cases, this memory loss, which may last for just a brief period or for many years, is a result of some type of psychological trauma. Dissociative amnesia is much more than simple forgetfulness. Those who experience this disorder may remember some details about events but may have no recall of other de