

EXCHANGES IN MULTIMEDIA ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AS EXPERIENCED DURING THE OVAHIMBA YEARS

LES ANNÉES OVAHIMBA - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN TEXT, FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
NAMIBIA – ANGOLA 1997 -2004

by

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Resumo

Nesta apresentação, usando da nossa experiência em etnografia e através da utilização de vários meios de comunicação durante a pesquisa de campo, examinaremos de que forma o intercâmbio com os membros da comunidade Ovahimba se repercutiu na observação, estudo e documentação do seu património cultural. Através de uma ampla aplicação das técnicas e métodos utilizados em diversas disciplinas (filme, vídeo, fotografia, texto e som), mostraremos de que forma adaptámos a nossa abordagem aos membros da comunidade e, por conseguinte, às emoções e fenómenos afectivos inferidos por esse intercâmbio. Exploraremos a relação que desenvolvemos com os membros da comunidade, inspirada e por vezes provocada pela presença de instrumentos de gravação (vídeo, texto, som e fotografia). Reflectiremos também no efeito que os sete anos de pesquisa de campo tiveram na nossa vida (durante e depois) e, especialmente, sobre o corpo de dados que reunimos durante a nossa estadia.

Palavras-chave

Ovahimba

Intercâmbio

Namibia

Angola

Abstract

In this presentation, as an ethnographer using multiple media in field research, I will examine how the exchanges between members of the Ovahimba community and me came into play in observation, study and documentation of their cultural heritage. Through an overview of the techniques and methods used in the different disciplines (film, video, photography, text and sound), I will show how I adapted my approach in relation to members of the community, and by extension, to the emotions and affective phenomena inferred by our exchanges. I will explore the relationship that developed between community members and myself, as inspired and sometimes provoked by the presence of recording tools (video, text, sound and photographic). I will also reflect on the effect that my seven years of stay in the field had on our respective lives (during and after), as well as on the body of multimedia data gathered during my sojourn.

Keywords

Ovahimba

Exchange

Namibia

Angola

* *Escritora, Realizadora e Antropóloga.*

The various forms of exchange that occur between ethnographers and members of a community offer diverse degrees of insight into the studied culture, the intermediary informants and the researchers alike. Gifts, counter-gifts, friendships, agreements, pivotal rapports with formal and informal informants, and official and unofficial contracting are some of the vital components that shape and inform the relationship between the field researcher and members of the observed community. These perceptions ensue from both the researcher's and the host culture, as well as from perceptions each has of the other and their culture. As early as 1960, Casagrande, in the preface of *In the Company of Man: Twenty portraits by Anthropologists*, underlines the collaborative nature of fieldwork, the need for cooperation and the dependence of the ethnographer on the good will of members of the community in which he chooses to work, "Whatever its emotional tone, whether it be coloured by affection and respect or not, such a sustained close relationship cannot but be highly significant for both parties to it."¹ Until the 1970's, emotions, affects and effects, evoked by the give and take of interaction between fieldworkers and communities were sparsely reflected upon in theoretical studies and field reports. Authors such as Lévy-Bruhl in France, with his idea of "primitive thought" being "pre-logical" and "mystical", Radcliffe-Brown (earlier work) in England with his theory of "structurally requisite sentiments", Durkheim, Mauss, the *Culture and Personality School* in Northern America, and others such as Benedict and Mead, preceded this recent interest in emotional interactions and other affects of transactions in the field. With the rise of interpretative approaches to ethnographic fieldwork, authors such as Lutz and White 1986; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Milton 2002, to mention a few, dealt with various forms of exchange in this type of interaction specifically².

From 1998 to 2004, I lived with the family of the Headman of Etanga at their homestead on oHere hill in the outskirts of the settlement of Etanga in the Kunene North region of Namibia. The pastoral Ovahimba are part of the Otjiherero languagespeaking groups of Bantu peoples³. They live on both sides of the Kunene River in northwest Namibia and southwest Angola. Non-specialists and even some specialists often refer to the Ovahimba as nomad or semi-nomad cattle farmers, as the ochre people or as one of the last remaining traditional cultures. The Ovaherero, Ovahimba, Ovahakaona, Ovadhimba, Ovakuvale, etc. form part of the Otjiherero languagespeaking group of Bantu peoples⁴. The Ovaherero, also known as the Herero, constitute a group that moved further south and east into the Centre of Namibia and the East of Botswana, but they are of the same historic and cultural origin than the Ovahimba. Their difference in attire and lifestyle is due to a long process of acculturation, of partial urbanisation and Christianisation.

During my tenure in the field, I documented the everyday and ritual life of the family and members of the community by means of film, video and sound recordings, photography, drawings, a field journal, as well as daily e-mail reports and interim progress reports sent directly from the field via satellite telephone. The various email accounts turned out to be, initially at least, a way of deflecting the intensity of my experiences in the field. Once I had related an incident to someone of my own or a similar culture, in a language known to me, it was, to a degree, contended with and I could continue to participate in life around me with renewed energy and a measure of reserve. The regular progress reports⁵ I sent from the field to funding instances and colleagues served a similar purpose. Other than informing of my progress and activities in the field, it was also a way to take in the vast quantities of new information I was absorbing on a daily basis. I initially worked with interpreters who were members of the local and outlying communities, but once I had learnt the

¹ Joseph B. Casagrande, «In the Company of Man: Twenty Portraits by Anthropologists», Harper & Brothers, NY, 1960.

² Vincent Crapanzano, «Réflexions sur une anthropologie des émotions», *Terrain*, numéro -22 - Les émotions (mars 1994). URL: <http://terrain.revues.org/3089>. Consulted on October 31 2014.

³ The term "Bantu" designates a category of African languages. It also refers to over 400 ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, from Cameroon across Central Africa and Eastern Africa to Southern Africa.

⁴ For a classification of the Otjiherero language within the group of Bantu languages, see URL: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_lang_family.asp?code=her. Page consulted October 30 2014.

⁵ For a selection of the reports, relating progress and everyday events, sent from the field, see *The Ovahimba Years project Web Site*, URL: <http://www.ovahimba.rinasherman.com/ProgressReports/newsetanga.html>, page consulted on October 31 2014.

basics of the Otjiherero language, I pursued my work without the help of assistants, resorting to punctual translation help only when specific and complex issues arose. To access full understanding of the various forms of data collected in the field, I used a system of word-by-word transcriptions, followed by successive levels of translation by Otjiherero native speakers and finally, myself.

Over time, aspects of the developing relationship between members of the community and me, found their way into the recordings made with sound, camera and photographic tools. The nature of the various relationships and the types of exchanges in the intense and long-term interactions necessarily had an influence on our respective lives, as well as on the body of multimedia data that I collected over a period of seven years. In documenting the lives of the Ovahimba, I focused on initiation, funeral and possession rites. I subsequently realized that, through the various elements, especially the live recordings (moving images and single sound), there was a growing record of the rapport developing between members of the community and the unexpected visitor on an extended stay I turned out to be.

Through the process of becoming an adopted member of the family, more or less integrated, depending on the context and the occasion, and eventually also identified as the image maker and record holder – a public writer of their daily lives – I ended up sharing in intimate moments that at times extended beyond the framework of a purely anthropological undertaking. The extended length of my stay contributed to the development of this situation; there simply came a time when the relationship between members of the family and me moved beyond the give and take association that develops between the field worker and the members of the community. As I learned to speak and understand Otjiherero, I naturally became party to information regarding family life, but also matters pertaining to the community, such as social, leadership, inheritance, grazing and livestock conflicts. Gradually, our relationship took on a dimension of kinship with all it entails in terms of intensity and complexity, both as a mere human relationship, but also as that of a ‘*professional*’ visitor and a family living with a permanent and initially uninvited guest. Therein then lay the dilemma; I was neither a born member of the family nor simply an objective observer, I was both, a live-in participant observer. My seven years of stay with the Ovahimba turned out to be a permanent seeking of balance, of not getting too involved and not remaining too detached. Throughout, I tried to imagine our life shared in image, text and sound. Contrary to the members of the family and the community, I was more or less permanently and actively involved in a narration seeking process.

Current understandings of notions such as memory, desire and emotion as a part of relational expressions rather than individual states have made it possible to reconsider the role of exchange as interaction in the research process. These affects, among others, determine our choices in terms of what to document and what not, as well as what we remember best and choose to report or not. Research on social movements can benefit from greater attention to the interactional dynamics of fieldwork in two ways: First, by examining the strategic use of various exchanges, by informants as well as by researchers. Second, an exploration of interactive dynamics in relationships can serve as data to deepen understanding of both the interpretative process and of the emotional content of social movements.

As I grew into the role of the public writer, I was often times solicited to record proceedings (in writing, video and sound) I may otherwise not have attempted to document⁶. This allowed to me to witness and record both private family events and important community meetings, especially customary court cases that took place within the community. At varying times, the degree of emotional charge of the exchanges between members of the family, the community and me played different roles. Sometimes, it prevented me from recording a certain event, such as the intimacy of a family funeral and at other times, it provided access to information I would not have had otherwise. Once, during the funeral of a close family member, a visiting journalist kept asking me why I was not filming. I told him that it was an intense moment in my relation to the mourning family, and that I needed to be simply present without filming. Nobody had asked me to film or not, but I felt it was not appropriate to film and that I needed simply to spend the time with the family.

⁶ See, [Wiping the Tears](http://www.rinasherman.com/film/WipingTearsEssuyerLames/WipingTearsOvahimba.html), a film by Rina Sherman based on the preambles, hearings and conclusions of a customary law proceedings dealing with an adultery case in the community of Etanga: <http://www.rinasherman.com/film/WipingTearsEssuyerLames/WipingTearsOvahimba.html>, page consulted October 30 2014.

Over the years, certain members of the family I lived with developed a special relationship with the various instruments of recording. This can be seen in the subtle catching of my eye or a quick head movement to indicate details worth filming, the holding back on the intensity of a performance during cassette changes and the enhancing of a performance or individuals placing themselves in line with the camera on some occasions are but a few examples in case. Kakaendona, the Headman's youngest daughter, became particularly adept at participating in the *mise en scene* of my various modes of recording data. She would raise her voice, or just say, "*Kandavi, Wait!*"⁷, when things needed to be worked out before I could start or continue recording. Her role developed both from my need for an intermediary and her own desire and natural aptitude to participate, which became more and more defined as a role of leadership in relation to me as time went by. During the course of fieldwork, such experiences suggest the subtle nature of the process of gaining information. Learning and applying research techniques is one matter, but there are underlying ethical, moral, cultural and methodological issues that emerge from these everyday events. These issues are important, not only on a personal level but also in terms of the broader sphere of the philosophy of science and the methodological context of information management, use, and control, as well as in terms of the interpretation of cultural heritage in a conservation context once the information is displaced from the original field of research.

Since my return from the field, a constant concern in processing the body of data collected has been to distinguish between what to disclose and what to leave within the realm of family privacy. A possible solution to this dichotomy would be to treat the intimate aspect of my knowledge in the form of fictional writing. In the case of the image, still and moving, discretion will determine whether to divulge certain documents. For example, filmed scenes of a family circumcision ceremony; the parents of a young boy may have allowed me to film such a ceremony, but once the boy grows into an adult, he may not want images of his circumcision at age three circulating freely in the world.

One of the problems with fieldwork is that one never seems to have much control over what is happening at any given time. Perhaps one has a larger degree of control in structured interviews, but regarding most of the techniques available to an ethnographer, such as participant observation, one has to follow the flow of events as they evolve. It is a matter of how much one would like to shape events and to what degree events require adaptation. Mead (1975) summarizes this point about experience as an epistemological factor in fieldwork, "*The fieldworker is wholly and helplessly dependent on what happens... one must be continually prepared for anything, everything—and perhaps most devastating—for nothing*" (p. 25). Mead further reminded us: "*There was not much that happened in Wolf River that I did not find interesting in one manner or another. This does not mean that I tried to force all my experience into the mould of my dominant political-economic research theme, but I played around with situations long enough in my mind to see if I could take advantage of them in some way for research purposes. I never forgot that I needed material...*"

In this sense, participant-observation is a factor of what is happening within the community. I never asked for an event to take place but preferred to wait for someone to alert me to something happening, often already underway. Beginnings and endings, and interpretations often came my way later by means of explanations or in subsequent scenes recorded. I rarely asked questions during filming other than for practical reasons, preferring to move freely amongst people as they proceed with their activities. At times, members of the community would solicit me to contribute with provisions for certain ceremonies and rituals, such as buying alcohol for the spirits, giving pieces of wire to fix a ritual structure, buying perfume for a corpse, or providing transport for people. Depending on the circumstances, I would agree or refuse the given request. On one such occasion, when I declined such a request, an old woman said, "*It is true that you do not help the people.*" It is difficult to continue filming when put on the spot in this way, and I would then typically have to stop or wait until someone indicated that it is possible to continue. Often that person would

⁷ Kakaendona gave me the nickname of Kandavi, which means a small rapidly moving fairy figure or a twig moving in the breeze. I call her '*Hina ku tji wa*' or '*I do not know.*' Ovahimba nicknames often refer to a characteristic of a person or to an event in the individual's life. Kakaendona said the spirits gave me the name of Kandavi, but my search for activity may also have influenced the choice of the name.

be Kakaendona or another of the Headman's children, who would let a span of time pass and then indicate through some sign that I could resume filming. This relationship of interdependence developed over time, and the various mechanisms of power and permission, allowed us to deal with minor conflicts and regulate our relationship on a daily basis.

Prior to fieldwork

A research project on the early film holdings in the film archives of Southern Africa took me to the national libraries and archives of Cape Town, Harare and Windhoek. In the South African Museum in Cape Town, I came upon old photographs of the Ovahimba that drew my attention to the Ovahimba culture of north-western Namibia⁸.

Then followed a photograph of a young Omuhimba man seen on a postcard at a friend's house in Windhoek: I remember experiencing an intense emotion when first seeing that image, amazed as I was at the beauty of the person's face and of the accomplished aesthetic of his style. The intensity of the gaze and the geometric hairstyle design became a recurring element in the visual documentation (moving and still images) established during fieldwork.

The Internet provided another preliminary source of documentation about the Ovahimba. Most of this information falls into three main categories: tourism websites representing the Ovahimba on a par with the "big five"⁹, photography sites offering shots of beautiful sunset backlit faces and at times topless young women, and information sites presenting data on the Ovahimba culture and history.

However, in recent years, with the advent of eco-tourism and its overlap with the growing trend of sustainable development, the 'nature-native' merger, presenting people on a par with wildlife have become less prevalent in all three categories. Beyond these first impressions, I reviewed the limited but consistent production of institutional and religious documentation on the Ovahimba and other Otjiherero language speaking groups produced over the past hundred years in both Namibia and Angola. Carlos Estermann, amongst others, wrote on the Bantu peoples of south-western Angola¹⁰. Materials vary according to the period of writing and the origin of the authors, which provided from substantial information to mere hints of what I would experience in the field some months later and over a period of seven years.

I arrived in the Kunene Region and in Etanga at the homestead of the headman with a frame of mind shaped by first music and later anthropology studies, performance art practice, a keen interest in Afro-Urban pictorial expression, especially as portrayed in religious practice, as well as several years of both study and close collaboration with Jean Rouch. My early experiences in the field turned out to be all but what I expected. My very first encounter with Ovahimba culture was through photographs and films. During my first reconnaissance sojourn, I stayed with Councillor Katjira Muniombara – at the time considered the 'eminence grise' of Ovahimba Culture – at his Omuramba homestead near Epupa Falls. Like his father before him, Katjira was advisor to Headman Hikuminue Kapika of the Omuramba area.

During my visit, Katjira, already well advanced in age, spoke to me of the stars, women, love and many other aspects of life in general. He was accustomed to the solicitations of anthropologists and other

⁸ Foreign urban dwellers, mostly non-Otjiherero speakers, but at times also by Otjiherero speakers that form part of the Herero (Ovaherero) community, often refer to the Ovahimba as the *Himba*. The Otjiherero word for a person is Omuhimba and for people is Ovahimba.

⁹ Big-game hunters use the expression "Big Five" to designate the five most difficult African animals to hunt on foot: lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo. The term is widely used in tourist and wildlife guides that promote African wildlife safaris. Example of trophy hunting tariffs for Namibia: <http://www.srollet-safaris.com/tarifs-namibie>, consulted October 30 2014.

¹⁰ Estermann, Carlos, Padre, C. S. Sp. «Etnografía do sudoeste de Angola: Volume 3. O Grupo Étnico Herero», *Memórias da Junta de Investigações do Ultramar* N. 30 (Segunda Série), Lisboa 1961. See selected Reading at URL: <http://www.ovahimba.rinasherman.com/filesvarious/Bibliography.htm> and *Otjiherero Lexicon* at URL: <http://www.ovahimba.rinasherman.com/filesvarious/lexicon.html> (scroll down to bottom of page), page consulted October 30 2014.

information-seeking professionals, and was acquainted with the procedures, and perhaps more accustomed to male rather than female visitors. I never quite fathomed whether Katjira spoke in earnest or merely to a degree at least passed through the motions required by the presence of a visitor, but his manner and way of expressing himself made a lasting impression on me. Katjira provided the first keys of understanding to the vast cultural complex of the Ovahimba. By the time I left Katjira's homestead, I had decided to return to undertake a long-term study of Ovahimba cultural heritage.

Some months later, I undertook a second trip through the Kunene North region, home to a part of the Ovahimba population, the remainder living in Angola on the northern side of the Kunene river border. I visited several Headmen to explain the project to them and eventually request permission to settle in their area to undertake a long-term study of their culture. All except the Headman of Etanga asked me to stay; he said I should travel around and was welcome to return if I wanted to. The apparent freedom he awarded me finally led me to settle in Etanga. Several weeks later, I arrived at his homestead at the foot of oHere hill in the outskirts of Etanga with a 4x4 loaded with basic camping and technical equipment. Thus began *The Ovahimba Years*. My initial intention was to stay for six months to a year but I ended up staying for seven years and the project has turned out to be an ongoing process if not a lifetime occupation.

Before arriving in Ovahimba country, through my years of studies with Jean Rouch, I had become acquainted with the experiences of some of the pioneers of fieldwork methods, [Marcel Griaule and the Dakar-Djibouti expedition \(1931-33\)](#)¹¹, [Germaine Dieterlen](#) and the interpretations of *The Pale Fox*¹², as well as [Robert Flaherty](#)¹³. Rouch frequently referred to Flaherty's use of staging techniques as examples of fictional elements used as a means of portraying reality, such as the building of a roofless igloo to facilitate the filming of interior shots for *Nanook of the North*, or the use of a dead seal for the hunting scenes. As filmmaker and theorist Paul Rotha states, "*Documentary defines not subject or style, but approach. It denies neither trained actors nor the advantages of staging. It justifies the use of every known technical artifice to gain its effect on the spectator... To the documentary director the appearance of things and people is only superficial. It is the meaning behind the thing and the significance underlying the person that occupies his attention... Documentary approach to cinema differs from that of story-film not in its disregard for craftsmanship, but in the purpose to which that craftsmanship is put. Documentary is a trade just as carpentry or pot making. The pot-maker makes pots, and the documentarian documentaries.*"¹⁴ (Ellis. *The Documentary Idea*. P. 7.)

One of the most profound lessons of Jean Rouch's teachings that accompanied me on my own fieldwork, was his way of referring to all people on an equal basis; he would relate events, neither providing ethnic information about the people he spoke about, nor much geographic context or temporality. He would speak of a hunter by the name of so or so, a strike of lightning here or there as the founding incident of a given event in the same vein as he spoke of any given event that he referred to in his local (French) environment. I had come from a world – South Africa – of extreme racial categorization – white, black, coloured, Indian and "other" for those who did not fit the given categories. In many ways, Jean's constant non-contextualized mode, prepared me for my encounter with the Ovahimba, a people that do not have a word for "black person" in their language; they simply refer to people, *ovandu* to designate human beings or *omundu* for a person.

Jean Rouch often referred to the deep impression reading the Surrealist magazine [Minotaure](#), especially the issue N° 2 about *Griaule's Dakar – Djibouti Mission* made on him as a young man. This led him to develop a keen interest in the Surrealist movement¹⁵ as well as the study of Dogon masks undertaken by Griaule and his team. After filming the Sigui ritual, Jean Rouch commented that it was like

¹¹ Fiemeyer, Isabelle, *Marcel Griaule, Citoyen Dogon*, Actes Sud, Arles, 2004.

¹² *Le renard pâle*, Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen, Institut d'Ethnologie, 1965. See photograph by Jean Rouch of a rock art painting of the Pale Fox in the Songo cave in Mali at URL: <http://rcfilms.com.sapo.pt/paroles.htm>, consulted on April 9 2012.

¹³ Melanie McGrath, *The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

¹⁴ Ellis, Jack. *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. 1989.

¹⁵ Bruce Hodsdon, *Surrealist Documentary: Reviewing the Real, Senses of Cinema*, URL: http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/feature-articles/surrealist_documentary/, Consulted 30 October 2014.

filming an opera of which he had read the libretto several years before, referring to Griaule's account of the previous Signi series of sixty years before, which the latter had not witnessed but reconstituted from oral accounts. Given my background in performance art, I was hence able to share with him both my interest in performance and the study of reality as it came about in my ethnographic fieldwork, where I was constantly on the look out for particular events and situations to be studied, analyzed, and placed in a larger context. As Powdermaker (1966) has explained, ethnographers "*write out of their immersion and participation in a particular situation... the particular illuminates the human condition*" (p. 296). On occasion, these '*particulars*' come to us, unannounced, on our doorstep, but mostly, we have to go out and seek them, to reach out, even though we might feel shy or retiring. In retrospect, I have gained an understanding of what Geertz (1973) meant when he talked about ethnography becoming "*imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail*" (p. 24). Such were the diversity of the references of Jean Rouch, which, combined with my own, accompanied me throughout the time of my fieldwork.

At certain points of our fieldwork journey, time becomes crystallized when certain events attain added meaning by coming to stand out in sharp contrast to the more mundane situations that make up everyday life. However, the people and situations that we become involved with do not always correspond to what we imagined initially. At times, it becomes necessary to reconsider the direction our fieldwork is taking. We are often obliged to make of any given situation what we can as everyday events fill out our time in the field, imbue them with meaning - however obscure at times - and serve to create a sense of continuity. My initial ideas about filming the other were shaped by the ideas of shared anthropology and direct cinema, in urban and rural contexts, for I had worked and filmed in both contexts in France and in Southern Africa. I knew that point of view was crucial in my rendering, on film and video, in photography and text, of my life with the Ovahimba. Ultimately, the story would be *my story* and to a degree at least *their story*; the quality of the relationship I was to develop with the members of the Omuhimba family and the Ovahimba community would be a determining factor of the study as a whole. Emotional experiences in interpersonal relationships correspond to what *we feel*, but they are also determined to a degree at least by what we have learned to feel, as "*an arbitrary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory*" (Bruner, 1986, p. 7). However, I did not know that the encounter with the *other*, at worst, a figure of style, at best, a possible self, would also become an encounter and at times a confrontation with the self and possibly selves. Whilst mentors, colleagues and reading provided a generous preparatory framework, in terms of fieldwork techniques, nothing that I had learnt could have prepared me adequately for the intensity and scope of this process of self-confrontation.

The Foreign Other

Once in the field, theoretical notions of participant observation, reverse anthropology and of providing the other with a voice came apart in varying degrees and needed to be redefined in order to hold any kind of measure. The reality of managing techniques, known and unknown, of protecting equipment from sun and dust, of living without a nearby source of water, was preoccupying and time consuming. All the while, the Ovahimba were there, observing me, adapting to me as an individual, to my presence in their midst and trying to turn the foreign visitor's presence into a meaningful experience for themselves. Quietly but without respite they also demanded that I adapt and live with them as they do. Gradually I shifted from being well prepared to having a sense of not being prepared at all. A sense of remoteness entered into what was at stake between the ethnographer and members of the community I was studying. In this way, an examination of inner experiences, especially in terms of emotional introspection, developed into an awareness of my own identity and at times dominated my reflexions about my fieldwork. With the exception of individuals involved in external politics, I rarely if ever witnessed an Omuhimba person explaining an incident in racial terms in public. In my experience, people tend to narrate difficult situations in language devoid of judgemental and especially racial terms. One day, an Omuhimba man made the following observation: "*When a white man (Otjirumbu) travels, he does not put people in his car; he puts them on the back with the animals and his other things. He gets into his car and puts a little dog inside on the seat next to him. Then he starts the car and caresses the little dog before he accelerates and drives off with the people on the back of the pickup.*" The man cleared his throat, drew on his pipe and looked away. Having grown up in South Africa, I was fully aware

of the racist implications of the anecdote, which were all the more forceful because of the non-judgemental manner in which it was narrated. In Southern Africa, in the past (and for many still in the present), white people did not allow black people to sit inside their vehicles, mostly single- or double-cab pick-ups. So, each has his other and his way of describing the behaviour of the other.

In a part of the world where the general experience of white man visiting informs that he comes both well supplied and does not stay for long, the pervasive attitude in Etanga was to obtain as much from me in as short a time as possible. From the onset, I was pressed with requests to construct buildings, to provide, in any order, food, clothes, money, transport, water, alcohol and medication, as and when the need arose or at times simply because I was present. In Ovahimba culture, the accumulation of livestock is the principal accepted form of wealth. Goods from external economic systems, such as the cash economy, are expected to be shared amongst those present. Hence, there was considerable pressure on me to part with what visible resources I had. Managing the use of a vehicle and a research camp composed of tents, equipped with cash economy goods (refrigerator, satellite telephone, solar installation, computers, 16mm and video filming, editing and screening equipment) within the perimeter of the headman's homestead, was at times a trying undertaking.

Small and large conflicts overshadowed the first months of my stay, mostly due to a difference in conception over the notion of the gift and the counter gift. To the extent that people shared their real opinions with me and that I could fully understand the translation provided by my assistants, it appeared that since I was their visitor, it followed that I would provide various forms of help in return. Creating extensive documentation of a culture is in itself a considerable contribution to that culture. However, for a people that are largely illiterate to our culture of writing and whose cultural heritage is transmitted through oral tradition, documenting their intangible heritage presented little apparent interest, other than the obvious material interest represented by my presence. While I did give and share as much as I could, at times, the divide between our respective ideas of what I was giving and what I was supposed to be giving, was such that I considered abandoning the project altogether. However, the twofold process, that of the richness of my preliminary observations and the first foundations of strong human bonds, was well underway and preponderant enough to see me through the crucial initial years.

This initial difference in interpretation culminated in a threshold event: One day, a group of men came to camp and demanded that I take the Headman and several of his councillors to a meeting upcountry. While I was explaining why I could not provide transport on an *ad-hoc* basis, more and more people arrived at the homestead of the Headman. The elderly men, visibly angry, hands clutched on their canes, insisted that I heed to their demand. From the ensuing discussion, it emerged that there was no road or track to the place; nobody could tell me how far it was or how long we would be staying. I was responsible for a camp filled with sponsored equipment and managed by barely trained assistants from the local community and from the more urbanised area in and around Opuwo with little prior work experience. I could not just leave without prior preparation and for an undetermined period. I repeatedly explained why I could not heed to their demand, and in the end, visibly dissatisfied, the Headman and his councillors left.

Over the next few days, nobody came to the camp and I did not go the Headman's hut located some thirty meters away. The dichotomy was extreme. What purpose would a research basis serve if there were no contact with the members of the community? I then did what seemed obvious to me: with my assistants, we repaired the thorn shrub fence of the formal cattle enclosure situated in the centre of the camp and started planting a vegetable garden. The growing seeds increased our water needs and we subsequently spent a fair amount of time seeking out water sources in the vicinity. In the process, we discovered the location of several water sources, met with farmers from the surrounding homesteads and began to observe the grazing and organisational patterns of the local community. As times went by and the garden continued to grow, bemused, people observed this work-in-progress, joking about the "*otjana komawe*" or garden in the stones, as they referred to our efforts in creating a sustainable food source. The Ovahimba grow summer gardens on banks of the dry riverbeds, with maize, beans and pumpkins; that are irrigated when the rivers come down, and could not fathom why anyone would start a garden on a dry hilltop where there was no natural source of water. That was until the first crops arrived and I handed a handful of chillies to the Headman's wife, Omukurukaze, who had her own source of wild chillies hidden in the scrub but loved

the red peppers I provided and subsequently stopped mocking me when she saw me working in the garden. More importantly so, these gifts seemed to have decreased the frequency of her complaints about what she seemed to consider my wayward manner.

My early attempts to establish an open door policy and to share the infrastructure of the camp were severely put to test. Day and often at night, people would come, not so much to spend time, or so it seemed, but rather to ask for one thing or another. These constant demands meant that contact remained superficial and establishing a more substantial relationship proved to be problematic, if only because at times I would avoid contact for fear that it would result in not much more than requests for more goods or services. This situation led me to become hesitant to ask to film or photograph people, in the fear that they could justifiably refuse since I refused demands that I considered to be unreasonable. I soon realised that I needed to address the question of permission to film as way of negotiating a direct exchange. My project of studying and documenting the Ovahimba cultural heritage, set out in detail to the headman and his councillors prior to my arrival, no longer seemed to be fully present in anyone's mind, least of all the headman and the local leaders. My motivations for being there and the community's motivations for accepting my presence in their midst at times did not have enough in common. I continued to give and provide as I saw fit and in keeping with my limited resources in the hope of establishing a mutual balance of giving and receiving.

Finally, when it became clear that however much I shared it would never be enough, I started talking about it to people, trying to explain to them that I was working on a limited research budget and had to provide detailed accounts for the use of any resources allocated to the project. People nodded in agreement but with their eyes, they saw a vehicle, equipment and food, goods that represented wealth and resources to which they lacked regular access if any at all. I tried in vain to explain that most of the equipment was on loan from sponsors, but no sooner my explanations stopped they would ask for the next thing they wanted. How to give, when to give, when not to give, what not to give became one of the principal preoccupations of the first years of my stay and was in many ways the principal and hardest learning school of my years in the field.

Related to the notion of the gift and the counter gift, is that of image recording (video and photography). Early on, some people offered to *play* scenes from everyday and ritual life to the camera in exchange for money preferably but also other goods, such as tobacco, alcohol, food and medication. Some of them had prior experience working with television crews and were used to re-enacting aspects of their culture, most notably spirit possession ceremonies. When I declined offers of this kind, people would tend to lose interest in my request to record images. However, their attitude toward me changed once they had learnt that I shared regularly and without asking for anything in return. Gradually, they allowed me to film freely under most circumstances.

Initially, I perceived their frequent requests for help as an imposition. However, this changed once I understood that they live in an essentially subsistence culture and an exchange economy but that they are in increasingly frequent contact with cash economy goods and have in recent times been called upon to pay in cash for goods and services, such as minimal school-, medical-, and transportation fees. Furthermore, I observed how foreigners, tourist and development agents visited their region with an attitude of self-righteousness, that comes with a distorted sense of duty of aid workers and an often ignorant attitude that travelling into communal land equals indiscriminate freedom of movement, if not a free for all.

Government and especially NGO agents arrive in state-of-the-art vehicles, wearing fashionable city clothes and carrying abundant food supplies. Tourists arrive with all they need: tents, food, cameras, alcohol and equipment. At the ready to record images, often in exchange for not more than half a tin of Coke, or pre-wrapped packets of sub-standard tobacco or maize flour, coffee and sugar they were told to bring along for such occasions, having been warned against giving money since the Ovahimba would buy alcohol with it. As if not giving money would stop people from drinking if they wanted to and as if people should not have the right to judge and decide for themselves. Oftentimes tourists set up camp just anywhere, in the dry riverbeds, and often in the regular pathways of the Ovahimba and their livestock. They are happy to exchange greetings and hand out a few items, but in essence they have come to experience the virgin wilderness and prefer to be left alone in their experience of nature to which is added the best meat and beverages that Namibia can offer, be that in full view of the local population or not. Most foreigners coming into the communal land areas

feel free to roam about, including at times into the homesteads of the Ovahimba, again offering the stock list of goods they have with them for such occasions. Most are illiterate to the culture and to the language of the culture, or worse, they are not aware of their ignorance, and often drive right into centre of the homesteads of the Ovahimba, who mostly remain seated and silent in shock and dismay at behaviour they do not understand. Generally, in Ovahimba culture, one does not ask a visitor when they should be leaving.

Once I had learnt the rudiments of the language, I began to understand that different ways of asking require different responses. For example, when someone says *Ndji pao* or *give me*, one can refuse politely even with the requested object visibly in one's possession; the key is to remain polite. However, when someone says *Mendji vatera* or *help me*, if possible, one should not refuse the request. With the help of my assistants and my friends among the women of the homestead, I learned to remain polite even when exasperated by insistent and repeated demands. Such is a brief overview of the context within which the uninvited visitor I was initially devised modes of interaction upon my arrival amidst the Ovahimba. Gradually, I made the passage from an observer to a participant observing adoptive member of the family and the community. However fraught with tensions our relationship was initially, my disposition of "*empathy*", could be compared to the *Einfühlung* approach, a concept first introduced by Robert Vischer in relation to art. It was subsequently extended by Theodor Lipps from art to visual illusions and interpersonal understanding, as an involuntary, instinctual, kinaesthetic form of mimicry, that, crucially, could also be directed towards inanimate objects, such as spaces, colours or sounds, as well as (more typically) humans or animals. As Tedlock (1991) states, ethnography is both a product and a process of ongoing interaction between the observation of the unfamiliar and participation of the self in the field, leading to the phenomenon by which the ethnographer can at times act as his or her own informant.

Over and above the period of adaptation to the socio-economic context described above, I also had to adapt my methods of work in the various disciplines applied in the field to the local culture and environment. Cultural attitudes accompany and determine ways of doing things, including some, excluding others. Adaptation to the local situation influenced my way of seeing and also my relationship with and attitude to members of the community, and hence by extension, that of emotions evoked and experienced by me as well as members of the community. I hereafter provide a brief overview of some technical considerations in as much as they directly influenced relationships in the field, since emotional interaction is not an isolated social phenomenon but rather follows from the whole of a rapport between the different actors of human relationships.

Technical and Ethical Considerations, and Editorial Choices

In my case, being in Etanga to film, record and photograph, I had to manage different sets of equipment under extreme weather conditions and with no source of energy other than what I could produce with solar panels, vehicle batteries and fuel run generators. I spent a considerable amount of energy and time on just managing equipment and data. At times, people would show impatience at my constant preoccupation with protecting my equipment and preserving my data. Once people became used to me always having some or other piece of recording equipment with me and accepted to be filmed, I had to learn how to move among them. I had to assess what distance to keep, when to move, how to anticipate their movements, how to incorporate the constraints of the technical aspects, such as battery charging, battery changes and reel changes within a context of ongoing events with no time or space for neither adjustments nor retakes. I never asked the people to pose, with the exception of group photographs, and very rarely asked questions during any action. I filmed and photographed as and when I could. I started out filming in 16mm, but soon the constraints outweighed the indisputable advantages of the format. It was simply not viable during a spirit possession ritual or such other activity, taking place in a hut filled with some fifteen people to take up the space needed by 16mm camera equipment (camera, boom stick, microphone and extra magazines for reel changes). I would need to go outside for reel and battery changes, and often there was no space left for me when I returned to the hut. Charging the battery belts meant having a 20-metre long high power cable to keep the noise of the generator away from the homestead and the camera, which generator needed to

be moved whenever the wind turned. I hence switched first to Hi8¹⁶ as an interim solution of *caméra stylo*¹⁷ filming and shortly thereafter to Mini-DV¹⁸; both cameras took up less space, allowed greater mobility and autonomy. Having worked with the ten-minute reels of 16mm cameras taught me to incorporate elements of editing within my shots, i.e. changing angles, moving in closer, and more importantly, to try and discern the essential moments of the action. However, working with hour-long videotapes did change my way of filming and challenged my attention span. I have never been an advocate of extensive filming simply because the format allows it, but being able to film a ritual or another activity in real time almost uninterruptedly and being able to make a tape change within seconds, made it possible to capture events that 16mm could not do under similar circumstances. However, it is regrettable that such unique footage of the life of an Ovahimba family and community, filmed over a period of seven years, was recorded on such a fragile medium.

Recording sound in the field proved easier: I could install a microphone and a small DAT¹⁹ recorder in the middle of an event and leave it there to record, since people tended to lose interest in the equipment once they realized that I was recording speech only. This would however meant that the sound recording axis remained static and did not follow the action as would have been ideal. Photography provided its own set of problems. Working with film reflex cameras, the clicking sound of the camera would initially distract people's attention from what they were doing. Using the flash in low light circumstances was an obvious hindrance to their eyes. Protecting the film stock from heat and preventing dust from entering into the camera during film changes required taking constant precautions, such as carrying everything in anti-dust bags, placed into plastic bags, in turn placed into rug sacks or camera bags. Whilst filming or photographing, I move with the action or dance movement, which means I need to be light and capable of reacting quickly. My complementary materials, such as extra film stock and batteries would need to be close by but not get in the way of people moving or in the way of dust clouds provoked by intense dancing. I hence always needed to ask an elderly person or a child to look after my camera bags. Often, people would wander away and forget about them, leaving them unattended. I hence constantly had to watch over what was happening in terms of what I was filming but also over what was happening to my equipment and bags. This creates a constant tension whilst working in the field, which is both distracting but also provides the opportunity every now and then to withdraw from the action and have time to think about what has happened and how to proceed. It also offers much needed rest from the intensity of continuous filming or photographing.

During fieldwork, I rarely ask direct or out of context questions, and I rarely take written notes in front of people, preferring to write journals late at night or during other quiet times. However, recording image and sound is a high-visibility activity, that initially gave rise to constant comment, but which over time became my accepted and designated role within the family and the community at large. The unexpected visitor had something to do. At times, I would suffer from a sense of cultural isolation and would withdraw into my hut. On such occasions, someone would always come to see me and ask where my cameras were or why I was not working. Amongst members of the family that knew me well, someone would always come to suggest that I film or photograph some or other event to get me to re-engage into their vision of the social interaction. This does not mean that some people in the community had no prior experience of the power of the image, nor does it mean that others did not learn about it quickly. It simply means that a role developed for me over time, and at times, all of us resorted to it in one way or another. Moreover, this close following of my moods was the Ovahimba way of ensuring that I remained integrated in everyday social relations.

In 1996, a film team from *Discovery Channel*²⁰ came to Etanga to make a film about the inauguration ceremony of the Headman, an undertaking facilitated by Christofer Wärnlöf, a researcher who had then been

¹⁶ One of the three formats of video cassettes, of which *Video8* (analogue), *Hi8* (analogue and digital) and *Digital8*.

¹⁷ "That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of camera-stylo (camera pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language." *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo* by Alexandre Astruc (Originally published in "L'Écran française" on March 30, 1948, as an article entitled, "Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo").

¹⁸ DV SD, *Digital Video Standard Definition*.

¹⁹ DAT, *Digital Audio Tape*, allowing reproduction of an exact copy of the original recording.

²⁰ *Discovery Channel* is an American broadcaster specialised in outdoors, indigenous and wildlife content.

working in the community for some months²¹. The production team had pre-sold the script of the ceremony to *Discovery Channel*. When it seemed that the ceremony would not take place as planned, the film team, researcher and local assistants were under pressure to deliver. Finally, through coercion by the television team, an inauguration ceremony was more or less improvised by the community for the film. Little or no consideration was given to the fact that a major conflict was still unresolved and that it would influence the course of life within the community for years to come. *Discovery Channel* had their film²², the Ovahimba their gifts and payment. The Headman's inauguration, imposed onto the community prematurely, caused the community to exist in an impasse for years to come and has remained a source of division up to present times.

Over and above the previously described context of the first months of my stay in Etanga, three key issues were constant preoccupations: The first was to adapt my equipment and my way of filming to local conditions. Ovahimba women are covered with a red unction made of iron oxide stone powder, fat and perfumed plants. Nowadays, the men only use the unction on rare ceremonial occasions and hence their skin tone is of a darker colour and different texture. Living in extreme heat conditions, people tend to gather in the shade and as they move about invariably turn their backs to the sun. I never ask people to change location or position. Filming situations as is, and improvising as the action flows, meant that I often found myself filming varying skin tones under varied and rapidly changing light conditions, in the shade, depending on the position and movement of each person, with a technically almost unmanageable difference in lighting conditions between subject and background due to a scorching sun. Video does not render well with bright, overexposed zones or murky dark zones in the same image. However, I attempted to maintain the correct exposure of the subjects' skin tone and to film on a slight diagonal to avoid a strong backlight whenever possible. I hence at times had to accept that the background of images were often overexposed; I try as I can, in post-production, to colour correct such images. Film latitude being greater and more subtle than video, especially when using negative stock, photographing was easier, even though changing light conditions and moving people required constant adaptation. Not using a flash very often and not using lights except raw light in extreme low light situations, meant that I could not do what dark skin tones need, that is, not necessarily overexposing but reflecting lateral or surrounding light on the subject. Being constantly aware of these technical difficulties and constraints, meant that my attention was divided between being focussed on content and action, and on technicalities, which provided the advantage of making me look busy and contributed to people accepting my presence with greater ease, allowing me to remain present at all times, even when fiddling with my equipment.

Observing and interacting with people while filming are demanding activities, and tending to equipment in between provides an opportunity to withdraw partially from the action, to rest, to reassess situations and plan anew how to proceed best to capture a moment before resuming filming. Whilst all of this is going on, interpersonal relations come into play. For example, the Headman would often attend ceremonies generally reserved for women. At some point, alcohol would be a part of the ceremony, at first just as an object and later to be drunk by certain designated people. The Headman would linger about, waiting for the alcohol to be opened. Often, I would be asked to watch over the bottles to see that nobody would drink them before the designated time. Whilst I was filming and participating in a dance ritual, the Headman would call me to give him some of the alcohol in my bags. I would hence at once have to deal with the technicalities of filming, watching over my equipment and the bottles, and defy the Headman's authority calling upon me to give him a drink.

The second key concern in fieldwork and the practice of data processing that follows is that of content; what, how and what not to disclose from the information observed and recorded. Certain information clearly belongs to the realm of family intimacy and is not intended for public use. Furthermore, in terms of the forms

²¹ Christofer Wärnlöf, "The 'Discovery' of the Himba: The Politics of Ethnographic Film Making", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 2000. Abstract URL: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1160814>, page consulted 31 October 2014.

²² The film features on the main page of *Discovery Channel's African History & Culture* online catalogue as follows: *The Himba of Namibia: Fight to Be Headman* ©, 1995. URL: <http://www.midatlanticttraining.com/Discovery/SocialStudies/African.html>, page consulted 30 October 2014.

of narration, in fictional or documentary renderings, a film (or any presentation for that matter) that holds, is a well-told story, be it experimental or linear in structure. For a narrative to work, the author has to create a particular melody and set a specific tone. My way of filming and photographing is essentially focussed on the relationship between the people and the reactions evoked by my presence with the camera. I film or photograph when something happens in me in relation to others. It is essentially a *'writing'* process, which happens when the symbiosis is such that I start filming without being aware of it, that is, when the work of the intellect and that of emotion meet in such a way that the moment of *writing* takes place. Communicating through the transformed perspective of the viewfinder and earphones, gives one the impression of being an integral part of the filmed scene.

This is what Rouch referred to as *'ciné-trance,'* or the altered state of the filmmaker, induced by the intensity of the scene as seen through the viewfinder. In Rouch's own words: "*For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it... it is a matter of training, mastering reflexes as would a gymnast. Thus instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or artisan, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, 'ciné-trance'*" (*Ciné-Ethnography*, 39).

Two further elements augment this sense of hyper-presence: Firstly, there is the fact that I film with one eye following the action through the viewfinder and the other eye open to anticipate what is happening out of the frame, hence creating a double vision for hours on end. Secondly, I often filmed ritual ceremonies accompanied by repetitive music practice, such as drumming and the clapping of hands. Inevitably, you become immersed in it whether you participate directly or not. Hence, an altered state comes about induced by the combination of the double vision and the repetitive rhythms, an underlying excitement that inexorably seeps into your consciousness. Furthermore, in time, the people that I filmed learnt to anticipate and control to a degree my movements and hence project themselves, their desires and objectives onto the filmed image. They knew when I was filming, when I was going to move forward or backward and would automatically adopt their movements accordingly, hence joining in the dance I was accomplishing around them as they moved.

Back in Paris, after seven years of filming, finding myself with only that which I filmed and photographed in order to tell the story brings me to the data processing stage that constitutes a final writing and editing process. Finding the means of telling the story with what you have, around what you do not have and to large degree, with what you project onto the image in terms of memory, emotion and of the bond between yourself and the people filmed, constitutes the final step in this process. In my case, having been adopted as a member of the family with whom I lived, also meant that I had frequent access to private family matters, and deciding what I can divulge or not is a constant preoccupation of the writing process, be it in video, photography or text. Perhaps the only way to render my experience fully will be through fiction, by tracing the narrative line of the interactions that shaped the nature of our relationship.

The third and central key concern is that of ethics, morality and the political context between the subject, the observer (filmmaker) and the audience. However, another question has raised itself during the process of editing: will I be capable of receiving an Omuhimba person in my home and everyday and ritual life for a period of seven years? If the answer were *'no'*, then one could ask, why not? If the answer were *'yes'*, how would I do it? To their honour, the Tjambiru family with whom I lived for seven years only rarely showed signs of strain at having a permanent uninvited visitor in their home that spent much of her time filming them. My presence may have brought added dimensions to their lives, such as travelling together and their participation in the multimedia exhibition held in Windhoek halfway through my stay in the field. During the course of the seven years, people from very different horizons came to visit me at the camp, paying tribute to the Ovahimba culture and bringing generous gifts with them. Whilst I had become more or less integrated into their lives within months, participating at many levels of everyday and ritual life, it is easy to imagine just how trying it must have been for them at times to accommodate this uninvited stranger in their home and lives for a period of seven years.

On a moral level, there is increasing pressure on ethnographers to connect their work with development projects or to participate in such projects, as if observing, documenting and studying a culture do not provide a concrete contribution to knowledge and understanding. When I arrived in Namibia, the public debate about the proposed dam project at the Epupa falls had reached an international level. Journalists and lobbying NGO's from all over the world arrived in the Kunene Region to report on or lobby against the dam project. Once the project was no longer on the cards, the news value of the dam story diminished, and with it, concern over the victim status of the Ovahimba waned. Much of the reporting presented a partly true and one-dimensional image of the Ovahimba as an impoverished people, struggling to survive and maintain their traditions, as well as being victims of unconsidered development. This image incompletely reflects the reality in the field and it masks the dimension of the Ovahimba as a relatively autonomous cattle raising people with strong social cohesion and cultural traditions. It is as if the rapport to the 'Other' is possible only if he is portrayed as a victim in need of assistance. Whilst there may be substance to such arguments, one should also remember that the Ovahimba exist as they do for a number of reasons, not all of which follow from a collective struggle, conscious or not, to preserve their culture. First, their location for the past hundred years in the remote location of northwestern Namibia meant that they did not have much contact with the outside world. Enforced racial segregation added to this geographic isolation, firstly by the German administration who classified their region as a nature reserve in 1905, placing them on a par with the fauna of the region. Secondly, by the Union of South Africa and later the Republic of South Africa who classified the area as a native reserve, from and to which movement was severely restricted if not altogether forbidden. Because of this extended period of little or no contact with the outside world, the traditions of the Ovahimba evolved within a closed and isolated community rather than in relation to other cultures.

During the first years of my stay, I was under pressure from within the community and from the outside world to make my research 'useful' by participating in local community development. I was not adverse to it as such, but I knew that it would change my role from being a participant observer to an active agent within the community and an interface between the community and the world of government, NGO's and foreign support. I performed this role punctually and intervened to obtain various forms of development aid for the community of Etanga, such as water installations, school equipment, the building of classrooms, producing a film on alcohol abuse for the community services, development of the rest camp, and recording fodder walks for local research and development units. During the last three years of my fieldwork, I raised the funds for building a community resource centre in Etanga, and coordinated the construction process, acting as an intermediary between the community, financial partners, architects and builders. After I had left, and once the building was completed and equipped, unfortunately conflicting local politics negatively affected the implementation of the project. Managing members of the local community did not follow the two-year training prerequisite and hence some financial partners pulled out of the project.

Conclusion

Over the years the relationship between members of the Tjambiru family and myself developed into a deep emotional bond of friendship and love. It was a relationship based on trust, confidence and memories of times of shared fun and hardship. Regularly, Kakaendona would travel from the cattle posts to the village school to ask the schoolmaster to send me call identification on my cell phone as a signal to call her.

I have been back in Paris since 2004. The data processing is underway of [The Ovahimba Years](#) collection of films, photographic, articles and books based on my fieldwork. The group of young Ovahimba people who participated in the Windhoek exhibition decided that the next exhibition would take place in Paris, so that they can share their culture with the French people, see how they live and visit my home. This project will provide for a reverse visit of my long stay at their home. In a way, one could say that our relationship has moved beyond the purely ethnographic. If that is so, the inconvenience of emotion is such that one cannot treat matters of family intimacy publicly in their entirety. The advantage is that the emotional bond allowed me to have insights and perspectives into their ways of thinking and being that I would not otherwise have had.

Rina Sherman
Paris, October 2014

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[When Visitors Come](#) | *Quand les invites arrivent* | *Ovaryange Tji Veya*, Rina Sherman, VSD, 30 min, 2006, Production: ACA LTFA, International sales: DER

[Wiping the Tears](#) | *Essuyer les larmes*, Rina Sherman, DV, 75 min, 2012, French & English versions, Production: ACA LTFA, Distribution: Label K



Figure 1 - [The Headman of Etanga and members of his family](#) gathered for his grandson Tjimbosi's name-giving ceremony, oHere, 1998, Ref. 01713, © Rina Sherman.



Figure 2 - Rina Sherman with the Headman of Etanga, 1999. Ref.: 04603. All Rights Reserved.



Figure 3 - Map of Southern Africa. URL: <http://www.customdigitalmaps.com/free-maps.htm>, page consulted October 31, 2014.

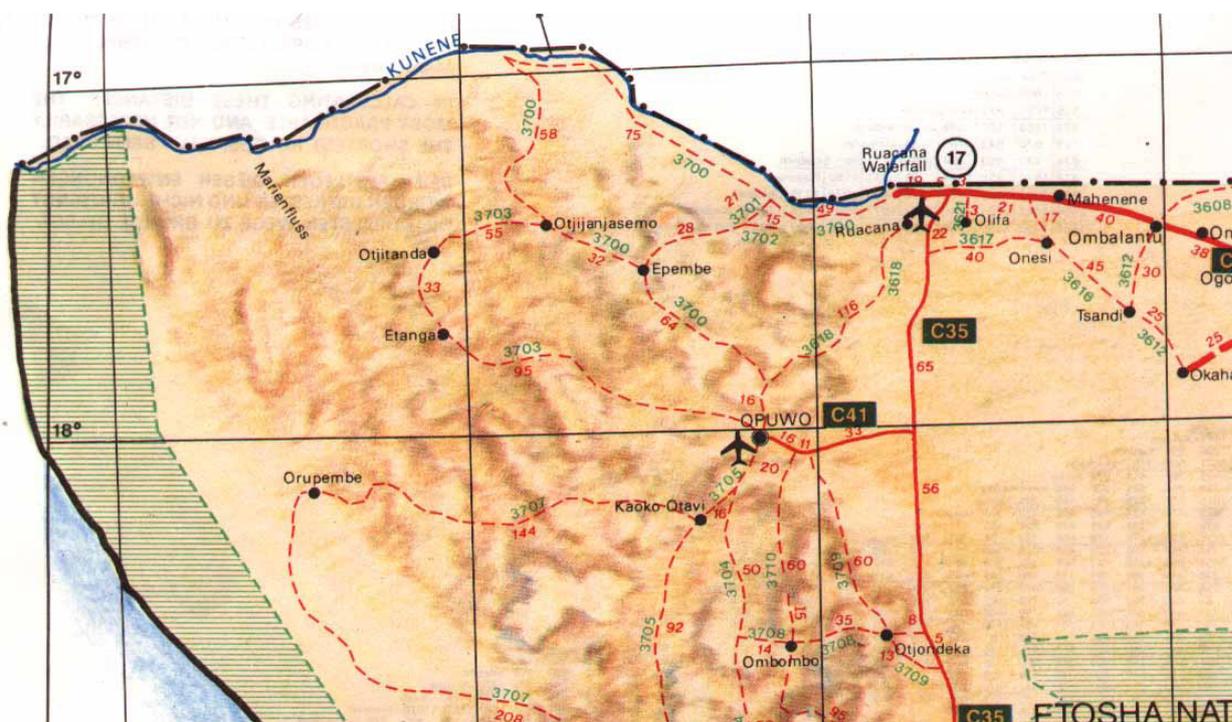


Figure 4 - Excerpt of Map of Kaokoland and Skeleton Coast Park area. URL: <http://www.namibweb.com/mapkaoko.htm>, page consulted October 31, 2014.



Figure 5 - Tjimposi held by the wife of the Headman, his Grandmother, Omukurukaze (Old Mother) or Kazinguruka, during the name-giving ceremony of the newborn, Ref. 01716, © Rina Sherman.



Figure 6 - Rina Sherman filming an Ondjongo dance-play session with Kapandi, left, and Twakupasana, right, Etanga, Namibia, 2000, Ref. 2344. All Rights Reserved.



Figure 7 - Rina Sherman sorting through the administrative health documents of various members of the family. Etanga, 2003. Ref.: 0067 All Rights Reserved.



Figure 8 - Interactions with the camera: A member of the community asks me to take his photograph. Ref.: An excerpt from [Ovaryange tji veyá - When Visitors Come](#), a film by Rina Sherman, video, 30 min, 2006. © Rina Sherman



Figure 9 - Katjekere's husband applies disinfectant ointment to their son after his circumcision.
Ref.: 05810, © Rina Sherman.



Figure 10 - A man takes my camera and starts taking photographs of people in the local store of Etanga. Excerpt from [When Visitors Come](#), a film by Rina Sherman. Video, 30 min, 2006.



Figure 11 - A First Impression: Early 20th century Ovahimba (Ovaherero) dress style as shown on undated postcard, circa 1950. Ref.: Photocopy courtesy of the South African Museum, Cape Town.



Figure 12 - The First Impression: An image similar to the first one of an Omuhimba person I saw (on a postcard). Ref.: 02312, © Rina Sherman.

About Kaokoland And Himba Tribes, Namibia



Himba children dancing

Figure 13 - “Kaokoland in Namibia is the home to the semi-nomadic Himba Tribes” is the heading of this advertisement, illustrated by a main photograph showing a variety of wildlife, located some hundred kilometres from the nearest tribal settlement. Note the Ovahimba children captioned as Himba. URL: <http://www.siyabona.com/kaokoland-andhimba-guide-info.html>, page consulted October 30 2014.

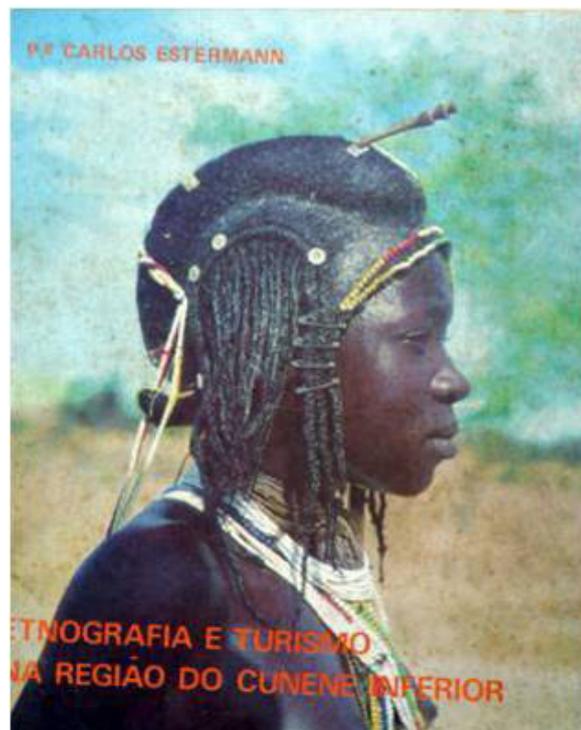


Figure 14 - Estermann, Carlos, *Etnografia e turismo na região do Cunene inferior*. Lisboa: Ag. Geral do Ultramar, 1973. Father Carlos Estermann, a missionary in south-western Angola, later became an ethnographer and studied spirit possession in the region.



Figure 15 - Katjira Muniombara at his homestead in Omuramba near Epupa Falls, Namibia, 1997. Ref.: 00233, © Rina Sherman.



Figure 16 - The Headman of Etanga, Namibia, 2000. Ref.: 03206, © Rina Sherman.

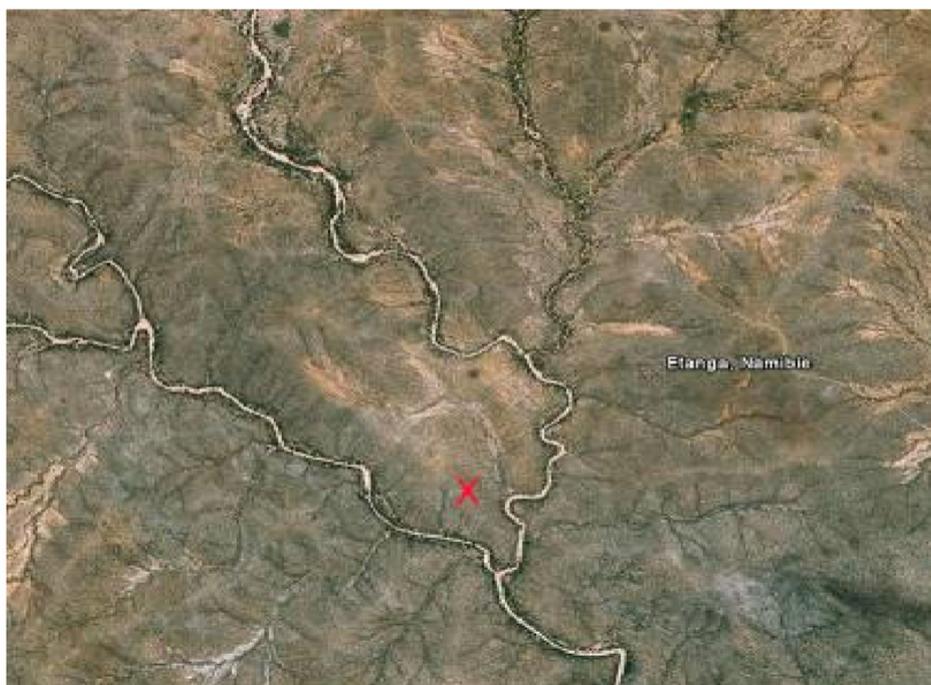


Figure 17 - The homestead of the Headman of Etanga, situated at the foot of oHere (or Dassie) hill, is located at the spot (X) close to where the two tributaries of the river meet.

Google: <https://www.google.fr/maps/place/Etanga,+Namibia/@17.8120789,12.9773256,2892m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x1b9a30014e-1515c9:0xf14e fe4f928fd92a>

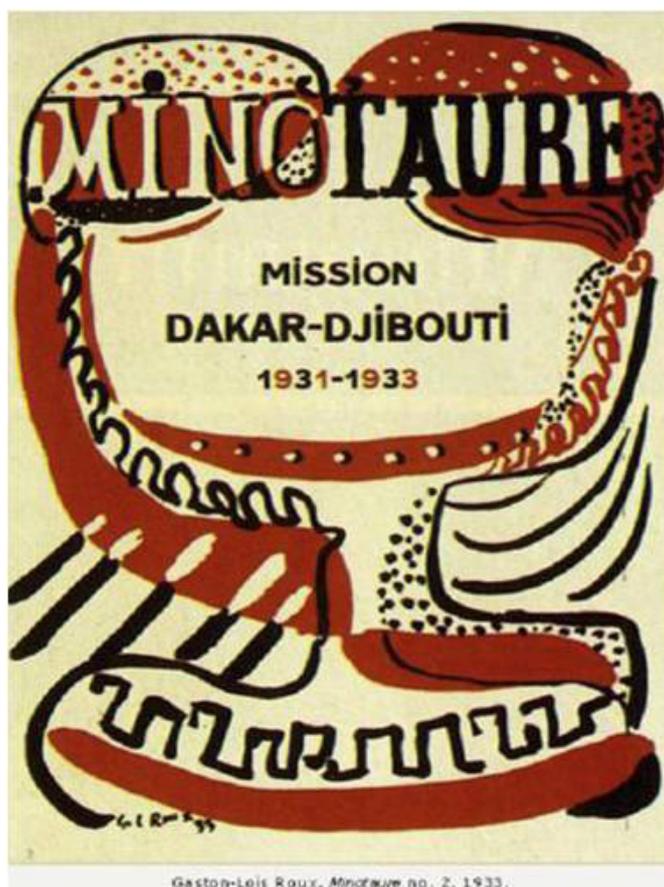


Figure 18 - Mission Dakar-Djibouti. Minotaure n° 2 (Special edition). Cover by GastonLouis Roux. Paris, 1933. 320x250mm, 70 pages, stitched.



Figure 19 - The camp, view from the back, from left to right: film production tent, kitchen, chicken pen and grain store, library, Etanga, 2001. Ref. 09536, © Rina Sherman.



Figure 20 - A group of elders at the sacred altar with the Headman of Etanga at a meeting typical of the one I was called to in the above-mentioned description, 1999. Ref. 02002 © Rina Sherman.



Figure 21 - The vegetable garden planted in the former cattle enclosure. Ref. 09508 © Rina Sherman.



Figure 22 - The Garden in the Stones. Ref. 9507 © Rina Sherman.



Figure 23 - An ondjongo playing dance ceremony in the riverbed of Etanga. Ref.: O5431, © Rina Sherman



Figure 24 - Rina Sherman filming an “ondjongo” dance playing sequence at the Headman’s homestead in the outskirts of Etanga. Excerpt from [Ovaryange tji veyá – When Visitors Come](#), a film by Rina Sherman, video, 30 min, 2006.



Figure 25 - Toward the end of her 'bird flight,' Kakaendona notices that I no longer have the camera pointing at her but have moved over to Kukatepa, and come in 'to land' in the axis of the camera, forcing me to drop down from a high angle shot to a level shot to include her in the shot. Excerpt from [Keep the Dance Alive](#), a film by Rina Sherman, video, 75 min, 2008.



Figure 26 - Kakaendona raises her voice slightly and turns her face to me to indicate that although the main dancer Vaanderua is leaning backward as if her solo is completed, it is merely a pause and the sequence is not completed. In other words, it is an indication that I should keep filming. Excerpt from [Ovaryange tji veyá – When Visitors Come](#), a film by Rina Sherman, video, 30 min, 2006.

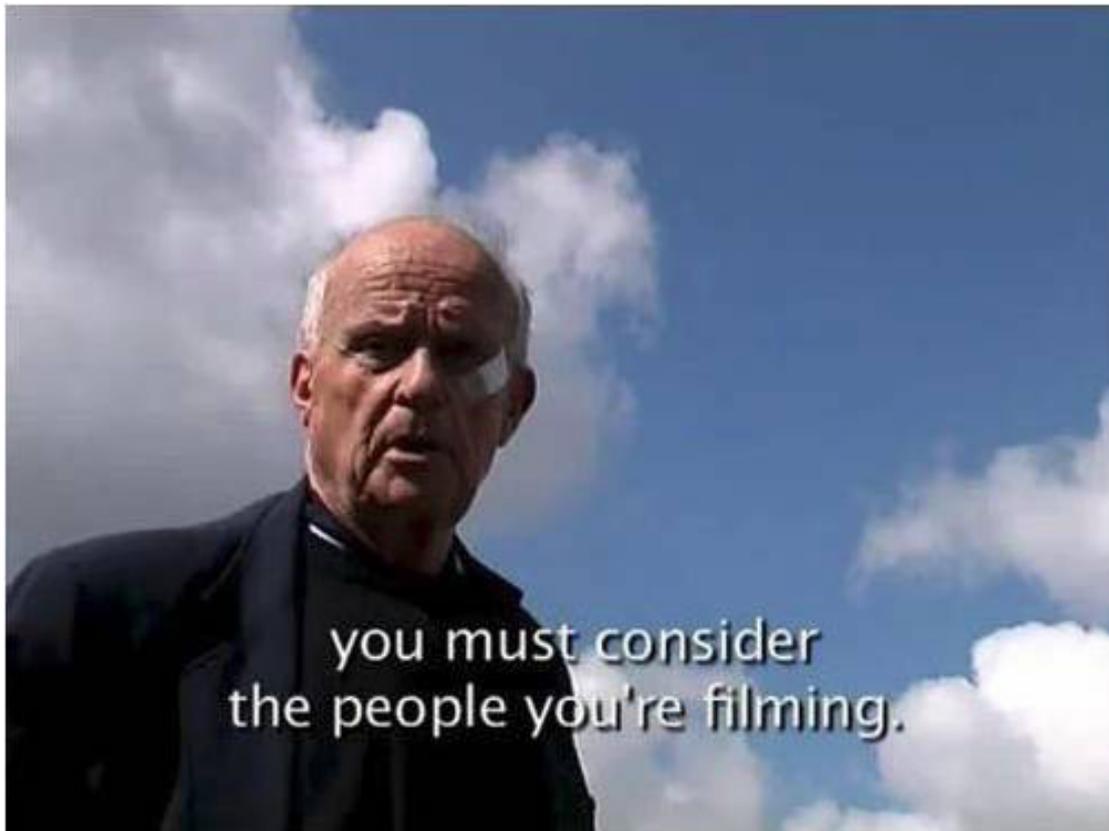


Figure 27 - Jean Rouch on the future of visual anthropology and the responsibility of filming real lives: Rouch reminds us of the responsibility implied in filming people. He also evokes the importance of filming through a viewfinder and hence looking into the eyes of the filmed person through the camera, as opposed to filming via the screen of a video camera. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvyXCpzpJJs>, page consulted October 30 2014.



Figure 28 - A site meeting during the construction of the [community resource centre in Etanga](#), with the Headman and Rina Sherman, centre, members of the community, funders and architects, front, and model of the centre in the middle. Ref.: All Rights Reserved

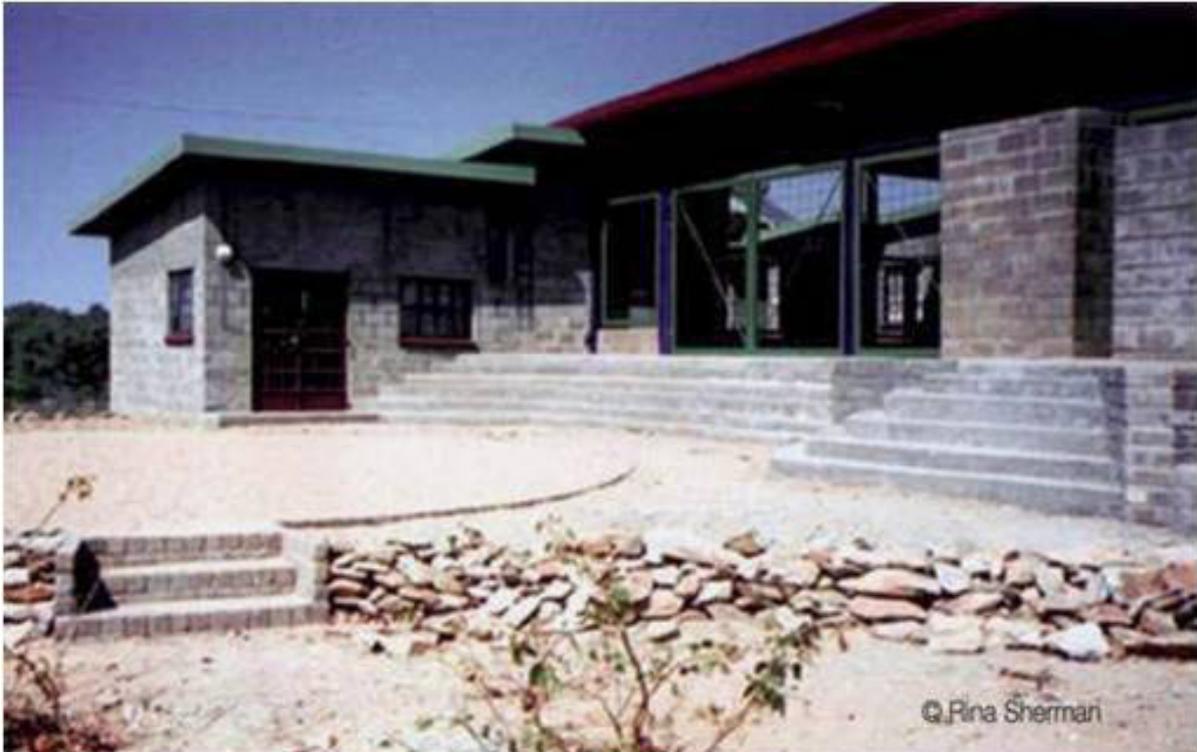


Figure 29 - [The Etanga Community Resource Centre](#). Credit: All Rights Reserved.



Figure 30 - During an aftermath discussion in the Headman's hut, Kakaendona announces that the following exhibition will take place in France, and hence creates proof of a decision that has been taken orally. Excerpt from [Ovaryange tji veyá – When Visitors Come](#), a film by Rina Sherman, video, 30 min, 2006.