

The Nama Stap Dance: an analysis of continuity and change
E. Jean Johnson Jones
University of Surrey – Department of Dance and Theatre Studies

Introduction

This article expands the field research carried out over a five year period (2001-2006) among the Nama people who live in !Khubus village, South Africa. The Nama may be identified with a sequence of movement that is widely recognised throughout South Africa as the Nama Stap (Step); the Nama Stap (NS) in turn is the major movement motif of the Nama Stap Dance (NS/D), and the foundation of the Nama Stap Dance-Female Puberty Version (NS/P).¹ Despite overt colonial influences within these dances today, the Nama have declared these performance artefacts to be symbols of Nama identity. These dances, I will suggest, contrast with more classical Nama identifiers, such as the *matjieshuis* (mat house) and the Nama language itself. This article attempts to provide an appreciation of the Nama, especially Nama women, through an analysis and interpretation of the Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version. It will then examine the major movement motif know as ‘the Nama Stap’ within the context of the NS/P. Through an integration of selected research methodologies, especially Laban analysis, dance analysis, and field research, an interpretation of the dance is suggested that reveals traditional and contemporary, colonial and post-colonial, markings.²

The Nama of !Khubus Village

Originating in the northern Cape, the Nama are the best known of the Khoekhoen peoples.³ Two groups of Nama are distinguished: the Great Nama who live in Great Namaqualand in Namibia and the Little Nama who reside in Little Namaqualand in the north-western region of South Africa. This paper begins by examining the lifestyle of the Nama of !Khubus village, Little Namaqualand.

Namaqualand, located in northern South Africa, is the least populated region of South Africa due in large part to its harsh, desert-like climate and mountainous terrain. During the apartheid period (1948-1991), it was one of twenty areas known as reserves, coloured reserves, or coloured rural areas. Reserves were officially established in the early part of the 1900s as permanent settlements for the indigenous peoples of South

Africa. Namaqualand, the largest reserve, includes Concordia, Komagga, Leliefontein, Richtersveld, and Steinkopf. The village of !Khubus is part of the Richtersveld reserve, where it lies in close proximity to the Richtersveld National Park.⁴ The village of !Khubus is but one village settlement that developed out of the missionary crusades of the 19th-century. These religious campaigns were characterised by power over and domination of the indigenous people who inhabited the area. Ironically, it was through the mission station system that the national reserves system was established.

...in some parts of the Cape Colony descendants of the Khoikhoi had managed to retain their rights to the land...by recognising that missionaries could offer some protection from encroaching Boers, and Bastards....The mission stations were recognised by the government of the Cape Colony by way of 'tickets of occupation' which gave the indigenous population some guarantee of permanent access to the land around such settlements (Boonzaier, 1996, p 123).

Although reserves are now self-governing and independent of direct mission control, the influence of the missionary movement remains a clearly discernible thread in the fabric of daily life in reserve communities. The village of !Khubus is a model of such lingering authority.

The first image one sees on approaching !Khubus is its remarkable scenery. This tiny village nestles at the foot of an enormous mountain that separates it from the Richtersveld National Park on the opposite side. The dwellings in the central square, !Khubus Museum, the old mission church, the new church, and the village school are whitewashed and stand out in harmonious contrast to the swarthy mountains beyond. On one side of the mountain, lettered in white stone, is the word 'Khoboes'; similar bright white rocks spell 'Welkom' on a hillside near the entrance to this picturesque village.

The colonial village of !Khubus is over one hundred years old but seems to be a curious mix of old and new, traditional and contemporary. The village architecture is an example of this delicate balance. Each small house of two or three rooms is constructed of breeze-block and tin roof; tin walls divide interior rooms from each other, and all houses have access to electricity. Each modern house is surrounded by a large yard in front and rear where there is likely to be found a *matjieshuis*; the traditional, domed shaped, mat hut home of the Khoekhoen. Nearly all of the residents of !Khubus have

one of these traditional structures, in various stages of construction, on their premises. Nearly all the rear yards also contain a Nama bread oven as well as an open cooking area.

Language in !Khubus, and in the Richtersveld more generally, is closely related to South Africa's political history, especially that of the apartheid period. Even the spelling of the word !Khubus is reflective of colonial, traditional and contemporary customs striving to establish equilibrium. I noted, for example, three different spellings of the word !Khubus. According to local informants, '!Khubus' is the proper Nama spelling.⁵ Nama is referred to as a family language. This means that older members of a family, and perhaps a few youth, speak it; few of these, however, are able to write in it. Even those who do speak Nama will not use it outside of the home. According to mature adults in !Khubus Afrikaans was the language of clergy, school, employment and government officials. The use of Nama was rigorously discouraged: school-aged children were punished physically and socially, and the few employment opportunities to be had favoured Afrikaans speakers. Previously, Nama marked a speaker as uneducated and therefore socially inept. To some extent, this sentiment lingers today. However, with the new South Africa, the re-establishment of indigenous languages is important to local identities.

The new South Africa, the 'Rainbow Nation', has adopted eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Ndebele, Siswati, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga. Afrikaans is the language used by Nama in the Richtersveld; this is due largely to the dictum of the apartheid government that ruled South Africa for nearly fifty years. It is used in the home, at school, in business, and socially. Nama people who are fifty years of age or older may, however, have retained the traditional Nama click language, and, in many cases, are able to speak a second 'African' language. English is not a language freely spoken among the Nama of !Khubus or its surrounding area. The acceptance of Afrikaans as the dominant speech in South Africa remains widespread but language use underpins cultural survival.

In the post apartheid era the Khoisan Heritage Programme (KHP) was established as part of South Africa's nation-wide cultural revitalisation campaign. The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) and the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) manage KHP. In the case of !Khubus, one of the major cultural revival programmes involves the re-establishment of the Nama language.

In Nama history, the Nama language fortunately survived in !Khubus during the colonial period. As related by anthropologist Peter Carstens,

Prior to 1844 all mission work in Richtersveld was carried out by visiting missionaries...But in this year, J.F. Hein, a 'Baster-Hottentot' from Wupperthal, was sent there as an evangelist...Both he and his wife spoke Nama...Hein establish[ed] a small school in which he taught. The medium of instruction in both these institutions was Nama. (Carstens, 1966, p 206).

On the farms, however, where the Khoikhoi worked they had to speak either Dutch or Afrikaans. During the twentieth century, language and cultural loss was more profound as urbanisation separated families and communities.

Contemporary cultural revival initiatives sponsored by KHP include the establishment, in !Khubus, of a Nama Stap dance group organised through the local school and managed by middle aged women in !Khubus, and a traditional Nama guitar ensemble that tours throughout the Richtersveld region that accompanies the Nama Stap dance group. Therefore, as much as spoken language is a major part of revitalising Nama identity, so for this present generation of Nama is the continuity and change taking place in their dance.

A Movement Signature: The Nama Stap

For as long as they can remember, the Nama people have been dancing the Nama Stap (NS). No one has been able to provide evidence of why or how it came into being. Very few Nama, if any, have no embodied knowledge of the NS. Most learn this dynamic cultural artefact in childhood along with other Nama signifiers such as round huts, Nama mud ovens and Nama baked bread. Today Nama also do the Nama Stap Dance (NS/D) and the Nama Stap Dance-Female Puberty Version (NS/P); the later dance has evolved from the historic Nama female puberty ceremony. What is of interest to my research is that the NS, in all its variations, reflects the more recent life experiences of the Nama.

Description of the NS motif does not appear in literature concerning the Nama nor can Nama account for its introduction into the dance. The NS motif appears to be a contemporary addition. The NS motif, for example, is performed when either a demonstration of the NS/D, NS/P or the NS motif is requested. In addition, the NS is performed as part of Nama social gatherings as well as at performances and ceremonies

organised for tourist and government-sponsored activities. While the NS can be, and is, performed apart from the NS/P, the NS/P cannot exist apart from the NS, its most significant motif.

The NS as a cultural artefact can be considered from different perspectives including the ethnographic where the dancing itself is the focus of attention or the anthropological where the culture as a whole must be considered. It may also be viewed in terms of a detailed movement analysis and documentation of the movement content. Extending an interpretation from anthropological perspectives, issues such as gender relations, the impact of Christianity on the Nama, and the power of colonial influences may also be observed in this dance analysis.

In my examination of the NS/P, I should acknowledge that I begin my analysis from a movement perspective as an outsider. Although the analysis is informed by the first hand experience of fieldwork it is nonetheless an outsider's view. But I want in the face of this outsider's position to suggest that the movement analysis therefore serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it has allowed me to document the NS and the NS/P by constructing a score or text of it in Labanotation and Laban Movement analysis (LN/LMA) form. Secondly, the analysis that underpins the construction of the score displays those elements and constellations that form the patterns constituting the NS. Third, recognition of a range of patterns in the dance enables interpretations, evaluations, and statements to be made regarding its history and importance to contemporary Nama. Finally, such an analysis enabled me to learn the NS more easily and quickly. The ability to 'physically' demonstrate this favoured movement pattern of the Nama, to an acceptable level as judged by the people themselves, allowed me swift, albeit temporary, entry into the !Khubus community. The ability to perform The Nama Stap demonstrated to my cultural informants not only my physical understanding of the pattern but also my understanding of the significance of the pattern to Nama people.

Based on Laban analysis, an initial movement signature for the NS was constructed. 'Movement signature', in this context, signifies those phrases taken collectively to identify the NS as the NS and not, for example, a Xhosa Stap or a Pas de Chat. A movement signature is readily recognised by indigenous users of it, in this case the Nama, and by knowledgeable outsiders according to Kaepler (1992). A movement signature, like a personal, hand drawn one, is not static but instead operates within a dynamic range of possibilities. These deviations do not change the fundamental

signature itself but reflect responses to momentary internal and external activity. Response to the environment is what allows a movement signature to extend over time, outside a range and to ultimately develop and change. The movement signature of the NS described below should be understood as a constructed movement signature of the Nama during the period of this research.

The NS is primarily a travelling movement which progresses forward and backward through space while the feet typically maintain a close relationship to Place. In Labanotation the idea of Place follows the basic law that ‘place’ is directly related to the centre of gravity of the performer (Hutchinson, Labanotation, 1970, p 35). When the feet move away from a central axis, rather than lifting away from the floor, they maintain contact with it by sliding across its surface. This sliding action is one of the features that distinguishes the Nama of !Khubus from other Nama groups. These two features, along with the fact that the limbs are never stretched beyond neutral, ensure that the dance step is small in respect of distance travelled and use of bodily kinesphere.

An erect torso that is supported by a buoyant, springy action in the pelvis ($\overset{\text{L}}{\text{U}}$) typifies this NS. Rather than initiating its own directions in space, the torso responds to movements of other body parts, especially the feet and the pelvis. The movement of these parts causes the torso to tip or deviate on and off its central axis in a counterbalancing motion. Moving in response to the torso, the arms behave in a passive manner that sometimes develops into a swing movement. Dynamically, two similar effort drives, dab and glide, are apparent. These efforts vary in time only—one accelerating while the other decelerates. Steps on Place dab (acceleration) while sliding steps glide (deceleration). These aspects of the NS are organised or phrased in relatively shorter or longer units. Overlapping, impulsive phrases organise the movement travelling forward while one long phrase structure movement travelling backward. These movement attributes that converge to create a ‘signature’ of the Nama Stap are readily observed when the pattern is viewed as a discrete movement sequence. The NS in the context of the NS/P is however the focus of the discussion that follows.

Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version Performance - An Ethnographic Account

While in residence in !Khubus, I was fortunate to witness a performance of the Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version in June 2001. This version of the Nama Stap Dance

is based on the historic Nama Female Puberty Ceremony described most notably by Agnes Hoernlé. Hoernlé is sometimes referred to as the ‘mother of South African anthropology’ (Barnard and Spencer, 1996). During her field research among the Nama between 1912 and 1913, Hoernlé recorded various rite of passage ceremonies. Among these is her description of the Nama female puberty ceremony. Her account is one of the earliest and remains one of the most detailed recordings of this historic rite of passage among Nama women. The subject of this research is the NS/P, a contemporary interpretation of the female Nama ritual. Hoernlé’s account with its emphasis on the history of the ceremony, rites of preparation, and presentation of the initiate provided an initial perspective for this research. My early ethnographic account of the dance then attempts to paint a portrait of the event in its contemporary context. In so doing, I make no comments on the text of my observations; these follow the description of the dance event.

The dance activities began in the early evening in the front yard of the home of one of the performers. A single pole-type lamp poured light onto the front steps where the speaker for the evening stood. The remainder of the yard, including the performance area, was in shadow. The dance event was in full swing when we arrived. A *matjieshuis* occupied one corner (Figure 3). The area left of the *matjieshuis* and continuing fully around the periphery of the space was active with people talking and children running to and fro. Downstage right of the *matjieshuis* were about half a dozen chairs intended for us and other guests from the Richtersveld National Park; these were the people for whom the festivities had been arranged. There was much laughing and talking among the group that also included people from the village. To the right of the seating area were the front steps of the house, and next to these an electric keyboard. This area was thumping with the sound of music and the voices of young men. Completing the circle around to the front of the *matjieshuis* was another group of people. Here were men, women, and children moving, dancing, laughing, and talking with each other or dancing alone. The central area, the dancing space, remained relatively clear. The mood was festive, and people seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Our host for the evening was Willem De Wet, an organiser of the event and

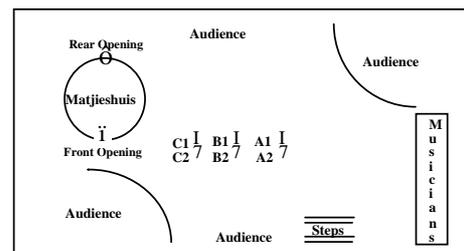


Figure 3.
Floor Plan of Nama Stap Dance- Puberty Version

member of the !Khubus community, as well as a park ranger. Speaking in Afrikaans, he acknowledged and welcomed visitors to !Khubus and also announced our presence. He gave a brief introduction to the Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version and to the women taking part in the performance. Sitting in front of the *matjieshuis*, the finer points of the dance were further explained by the dancers themselves.⁶

The dance company was composed of seven mature Nama women ranging between fifty and sixty-five years of age. The post-menopausal experience of the women struck me as curious. The dance, I had been told, was a contemporary interpretation of a rite of passage ceremony intended for a young female to mark the onset of her first menstrual cycle. I noted younger women in the audience, so wondered why they were not involved in the performance.

As the introductory bars of music started, the dancers casually formed a line of three pairs near the opening of the *matjieshuis* while the seventh dancer had

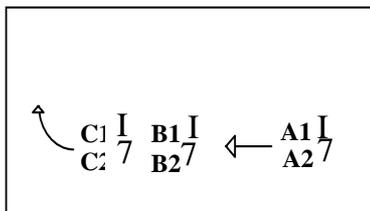


Figure 5. Clockwise Circular Path

unobtrusively entered the hut by the rear opening (See Figure 3). The observers either stood around the edges of the space or took seats on the ground, benches, steps, or around the *matjieshuis*. After a short stepping progression forward, the first theme of the dance was

displayed. Each pair of dancers made a full clockwise circular path around each other as the arms of each circled, embraced, and slid along the torso of her partner. This intricate inter-twining action was performed along a counter-clockwise oblong or circular path. Holding hands, gliding, shuffling steps defined the next segment of the unbroken counter-clockwise path. It was not possible to distinguish the rhythm for this stepping action as the dancers did not seem to be co-ordinated in regard to timing. Each appeared to be dancing to a slightly different beat; perhaps this is the nature of the movement. Roughly three-quarters of the way around the circle the dancers shuffled backwards (Figure 5). They were then moving backwards on a clockwise circular path. This change in direction seemed to help the dancers re-organise themselves rhythmically and spatially. This collection of basic actions—progressing forward, turning around each other, and retreating—were then repeated to bring the dancers approximately three quarters of the way around the circle once again. Upon completing the second circle the first pair and second pair of dancers exchanged places and the circle was repeated a third time. This circuit was slightly changed from the others.

Spatially, the curved shape of the path gradually expanded to take the form of an outward spiral that aimed towards the rear of the *matjieshuis*. The turning of the dancers around each other also changed. Rather than a change of movement pattern itself, it showed a change in attitude; each pair of dancers seemed to perform a succession of turns along a spiralling path. The visual and dynamic effect was a progression of seemingly endless spinning towards the black space at the rear of the *matjieshuis*.

Still moving in pairs, the dancers continued their counter-clockwise dance around the hut. As they approached the front opening they gathered together, peered inside and hammered on its walls. Getting no response, they danced their way around the hut once again. When they reappeared along the right side of the *matjieshuis* a new member of the group had joined them. Her elaborately painted face singled her out from the rest and she became the focus of attention of both dancers and observers. With her arrival, the mood of the performance was lifted to a light gay tone. As they continued their progression around the *matjieshuis* the dancers took it in turns to spin with the new comer. When all who wanted to had danced with her, the ceremony ended. The dance event, however, was not quite complete.

The ceremony was immediately followed by a discussion. The performers answered questions and responded to comments regarding the dance and their performance. The final portion of the evening was then given over to social dancing, in which the performers, villagers, and visitors could meet, chat, and dance with each other. It was also a chance to have a go at learning the Nama Stap from the performers. Young, old, men and women joined in this informal dance lesson. The evening finished on a high note with everyone 'Nama Stepping' to a popular dance beat coming from the electric keyboard. The organisation of the dance, spatial relationship between dancers, and sequence of dance patterns were elements that came together to distinguish the NS/P.

Structurally, the Nama Stap Dance is a dance comprised of circles within circles. In all, the dancers make five counter-clockwise circles around the dance area. The first two circles set the mood of the dance and establish three basic movement themes. These three patterns—circling around each other in a clockwise direction, gliding-shuffle step (NS), and retreating steps (NS)—are repeated throughout the dance. Of equal importance is the spatial relationship and interaction of the dancers with each other. The third circle is a transition circle in that it is not a true circle but an outward spiral

that changes the focus of the dance from the centre space and the dancers to the *matjieshuis* and its contents. Out of context, the spatial patterns and movement vocabulary that form the foundation of the puberty version of the Nama Stap Dance appear limited and perhaps uninspiring. The structure of the dance can, however, be considered merely the skeleton on which the cultural content of the dance is supported.

The Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version Performance – An Anthropological Perspective

The Nama Stap Dance that I viewed was organised not as a rite of passage ceremony which marks the transition of a Nama female from childhood to young adulthood, but as a performance event based on that ceremony. It was sponsored, planned, and hosted by the Richtersveld National Park in conjunction with the !Khubus community. This context alters both the performer's and observer's perception of the dance and its progression as a ceremony, from ritual to theatre, raises a number of significant issues concerning its analysis and contemporary interpretation.

A dance titled the Nama Stap Dance could be regarded as a cultural representation or symbol of the Nama. Yet, Dutch colonists have heavily influenced Nama culture, including its dancing, since the Nama were subjugated by Dutch (and German) pioneers and forced to adopt much of their culture, including language. How is this 'foreign' influence situated in relation to the Nama today? It would appear that the contemporary Nama accept several variants of the NS/D and NS/P as representative of their culture.

The NS is part of the movement vocabulary of all residents of !Khubus from the very young pre-school child to the eldest grandparent. It, along with the NS/D, is part of the primary education programme of the local school that all school-aged children of !Khubus attend. Within the school setting, young dancers are encouraged to not only develop as good Nama Stap dancers but also to be inventive within the form. Through the dance, a competitive spirit is encouraged and nurtured. Further, the NS and the NS/D are the forms that are most frequently performed and exported out of the village setting as part of local and government-sponsored tourist activities. These two dances enable a range of fundamental educational principles and the assertion of positive self and communal image. Within such a structure the future of the NS, NS/D and its

messages will survive, adapt and remain a dynamic aspect of the Nama culture.

The puberty version of the NS/D presents this research with a set of particular challenges in terms of interpretation. There are, for instance, a number of descriptions of the historic Nama female puberty ceremony on which the dance is based. These include, among others, Hoernlé (1918), Hoff (Barnard, 1992), and informants in !Khubus. The Hoernlé and Hoff versions introduce elements of the dance not mentioned by cultural informants, such as the use of cold water and the fact that the initiate's feet should not touch the ground. What is the historical significance of these elements and why have they disappeared from the ceremony? More fundamentally, what purpose does the dance ceremony serve for Nama women today? Close analysis of the Nama Stap Dance Puberty Version provides evidence of the effects of continuity, discontinuity and transformation in the contemporary context.

!Khubus is sometimes labelled a sleeping town. This identifies a locale as well as a condition in which there is no paid work in the immediate vicinity. Residents must seek employment outside of the community and, where practical, return home to rest. This situation was already apparent when Carstens did his research fifty years ago. Today, those who are employed further afield such as in Port Nolloth, Springbok, or even Cape Town, do not return to the village on a regular basis. Grandparents in small accommodation, as few as three rooms, may care for as many as three or four children. According to informants, it is the case that some parents gradually cease to return to the village for long periods of time. The extended absence of parents from the village has had an effect on traditional social systems; male puberty ceremonies, for example, have all but disappeared (Barnard, 1992, p.185). In terms of the female Nama legacy, as traced through the NS and the NS/P, the intervention of the remaining middle-aged females and grandmothers, has allowed the Nama female puberty ceremony to survive thus far. Since another generation of young women to whom to pass the dance is either absent or no longer appreciates the significance of the dance, the future of the NS/P is however uncertain. The presence of the NS/P in the tourist performance has perhaps slowed this process of loss and discontinuity.

I have explained that the concept of cultural revitalisation is prominent in post apartheid political and economic reconstruction in South Africa. The regeneration of Nama culture is, however, linked as much to commerce as it is to the repair of damage inflicted on indigenous peoples by a brutal apartheid regime. My informants first

suggested the linking of culture to commerce when they expressed dissatisfaction with the cultural revival programme that has been set up to re-establish the knowledge and craft of *matjieshuis* construction. Some informants felt that the knowledge of traditional hut construction was part of Nama cultural heritage that should not be closely linked to commerce. Of equal importance is the process of why and how culture is restored, if indeed it can be.

The indigenous peoples of South Africa have not had access to their country's vast natural resources such as diamonds, gold, and fertile farmland. Nor have they had access to the same superior educational opportunities or the worthwhile employment of white South Africans. This deprivation has left many indigenous peoples devastated culturally and economically. The acknowledgement of cultural identity among indigenous peoples through a programme of cultural revitalisation has had positive psychological and economic benefits. Dancing, in this regard, can be revised along commercial lines and developed into what has been referred to by anthropologist and dance ethnographer Adrienne Kaeppler as 'Airport Art' (1992). This form of art caters directly to a commercial market and is displayed at tourist venues. Tony Manhire, a specialist of San Rock Art and one of my guides, expressed concern that the dances of the San were being exploited in this way.

One of the questions to be answered in regard to this 'reconstruction' of The Nama Stap Dance that I witnessed is related to its social and (symbolic) purpose for the community. In the performance that I observed in !Khubus, it would appear that this purpose of the Nama Stap Dance has changed dramatically. Cultural change is part of the dynamic progression of living societies but different historical circumstances have altered the dance and thus informed the viewer's understanding and thus analysis of the dance event. I wanted to try and understand what alterations have been made for artistic or economic purposes in its transition from ritual to theatre and what has been retained of its ritual purpose. In order to do this, I will consider the role of the women in this dance and Nama society.

An Interpretation of the Nama Stap Dance Female Puberty Version

In pre-colonial Nama society women had supreme authority within the homestead. The female puberty ceremony was a major rite of passage for young Nama females and it marked not only the transition from childhood to full adult membership,

but also the division between males and females. Anthropologist Theophilus Hahn explains this division further:

In every Khoikhoi's house the woman...is the *supreme ruler*; the husband has nothing at all to say. While in public the men take the prominent part, at home they have not so much power even as to take a mouthful of sour milk out of the tub, without the wife's permission. If a man should try to do it, his nearest female relations will put a fine on him, consisting in cows and sheep, which are added to the stock of the wife (Hahn, cited in Barnard, 1992, p. 185).

Early Nama were sometimes hunters and at other times herders, and there was a division of labour between men and women. Typically, men hunted while women gathered. Various levels of governance of Nama communities were based on the accumulation of wealth so that large stockholders, for example, were regents. Nama women could inherit stock in their own right and maintain these distinct from male relations even after marriage. Through this system, women gained considerable power (and independence) and in historical times, some women even became regents or temporary chiefs (Vedder, cited in Barnard, 1992, p.185). Marriage, linked to direct authority of the household, could provide women with another avenue of financial independence via the acquisition of stock by means of the 'fine' system as described by Hahn. Equally notable is the fact that it was not the wife who levied such a fine, but the nearest female relative of the husband. This necessitated good relationships between female family members and between women in general. Male informants (such as officials of the local school) in !Khubus reported that, 'women had privileges above men; women, for example, could not be punished; a husband or father was punished; women were not held accountable' (Field research, !Khubus Village, 2006).

In !Khubus, for example I noted that despite the opposition of members of the community, older females supported younger women in the opening of the Gastehuis in the central portion of the village as well as a café; and mature women not only maintain the NS/P but also oversee the development of the NS/D performed by village youth. The NS/P has however, as I have explained, undergone modification. These adaptations have contributed to its persistence by altering portions of its content to take account of the Christian values of early missionaries. Some of its traditional symbology, for example, has been removed such as '...dabbing the testicles of each one [boy] with buchu, in order to prevent the acquisition of sexual disease' (Barnard, 1992, p. 186). Other aspects also demonstrate a response to colonisation as a statement of the Nama.

Western dance vocabulary, spatial formation, and the patchwork costume point to an acceptance, or incorporation, of rather than conformity to colonial authority. The 'traditional' Nama Stap motif, for example, is used repeatedly throughout this portion of the dance. Nama guitar music that accompanies the dance is also part of Nama colonial history but may indicate an adaptation of the *ramki* traditional stringed instrument.

Most significant for understanding the pre-colonial context in the dance as carrier of tradition are the performers themselves since *mature* Nama women do the dance. The second part of the dance relates directly to the traditional puberty ceremony and is a re-enactment of the historical heritage of Nama women. Few traditional symbols remain part of the rite, but the NS motif, turning patterns, and arm movements, comprise the full movement vocabulary. This limited vocabulary is of little consequence as the dancing is to a degree secondary. The focus is on the performers themselves, especially the initiate, and the embodiment of the theme of the ritual.

According to Nama history, an elderly woman who had borne many children, the *abá tarás*, would once have attended the initiate. In this modern day version, six mature women attend her. There is no choreographic or historical reason for the increase in number; the dance, according to informants, could be performed with fewer or more couples. The dance leader of the contemporary version, however, can be seen to represent the single elderly attendant, of the historic ceremony. The point of her presence is that adult women had or have rights, power, and could also accumulate wealth within Nama society. These rights can be exercised directly and indirectly through the female line. Women, therefore, are reliant on each other. At the end of this section each performer dances with the initiate first, and then other members of the community are invited to join in. This portion of the dance demonstrates the acceptance of the initiate not only into the community as a whole but also into full partnership with Nama women.

The historic Nama Female Puberty Ceremony is no longer performed in !Khubus. A few families however have the NS/P performed as a rite of passage for young Nama females. Only mature women enact the ceremony and in this respect they are sentinels or guardians of it. These women aged approximately sixty years or more, carry certain responsibilities in regard to the dance. They must maintain the ceremony in historical and performance order, clarify its codes, and interpret its significance for Nama female in the present day. Crucially, they have a duty to pass this embodied

knowledge on to the next generation of Nama women. But this next group of mature women is not present in !Khubus to pass it on to their children.

As a result of this research, drawing on the ethnographic and anthropological perspectives, the analysis of the dance favours an interpretation in which the public re-enactment of the NS/P is used to symbolise revalidation, not merely acceptance, of traditional Nama values as well as colonial mores, especially in regard to Nama women. Based on my analysis of various sources including the movement content, historical and archaeological evidence, interviews, participant and distant observation, the story of the Nama women is told through dancing. While the NS motif may stand as a symbol of the Nama people more generally, the NS/P may be said to stand as symbol of Nama women. These changes have not, however, altered the basic structure and sentiment of the ritual; it remains a statement that delineates the status and rights of women and their bonds to each other in traditional and present day Nama society. Nevertheless, the economic disappearance of young women, the more recent adoption of Western attitudes towards women and the fact that the dance is restricted to the confines of the village have placed its continued existence under threat.

Conclusion

Through direct contact with various Nama communities, I documented a variety of different versions of the NS, NS/D, and NS/P. These versions are distinguished in performance by: different Nama groups (peoples), age, and gender. These differences are both thematic and movement-related. The theme of the Nama Stap Dance remains one of unity. Variations on the basic theme are distinguished by who performs the dance. Performed and interpreted by young people, it is a dance that binds the group together through exhibition and innovation. When performed by different groups of Nama people, differences of movement content separate groups from one another. Danced by mature females, it reveals the story of the relationship between Nama women over time. These dances have adapted to colonial and contemporary Western influences. They have absorbed European movement vocabulary and spatial orientation; and the costumes worn by both mature dancers and young performers are indicative of Western attire.

No single perspective would have provided this interpretation of the NS and

NS/P. Rather, various points of view—archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, history, Laban and Dance Analysis—have contributed to my vision of Nama dancing. Without the experience of field research, for example, my hypothesis concerning the missing generation of Nama women and its impact on the survival of the NS/P would have no basis. The different versions and social organisation of Nama dancing were encountered in the field rather than in literature. Through Laban analysis a movement signature was created and a score of the dance produced that provides a tangible link in its development from colonial to post-colonial periods; and my interaction in Nama communities allowed current Nama influences to permeate the research findings.

This interpretation of Nama dancing therefore includes both the theme and content of the dances and an analysis which positioned the NS as central to the NS/D and the NS/P. Without this movement motif, the NS/D and NS/P could not exist. While all versions play a significant role in the Nama community of !Khubus, I perceived the NS/P to be most at risk. Similar to the Nama language spoken by (only) older members of the !Khubus community, the NS/P dance is performed only by a small group of mature women.

Although the Nama female puberty ceremony is no longer celebrated as described in literature and there are only a few older Nama women in !Khubus who have experienced some version of it, the NS/P dance, as a contemporary re-enactment of the ceremony, continues the theme of the traditional ceremony. As a ritual it enacts the public declaration of unity and cooperation between Nama women, the understanding and acceptance of traditional Nama values, and the recognition of alien values imposed upon Nama people. In spite of the gradual decline of the participation of younger women in the dance ceremony in more recent times, these themes remain a hallmark of the dance. Interaction with the wider world through tourism and better access to the media has coincided with a change of status of women (and men), and a dramatic change in the political infrastructure of South Africa from an apartheid government to a more democratic system. These have all had a major influence on traditional social structures in !Khubus. Men have, for example, more authority in the household. As a result of these kinds of pressures, the future of the NS/P and its message is uncertain. This work acknowledges that Nama dancing as an artefact, comparable in value to other archaeological objects such as Nama beads, pottery, cave drawings, rock etchings, and even language remains a powerful marker of cultural

expression and identity. It also suggests that dancing can catalogue social history in a manner similar to other tangible aspects of Nama culture and demonstrates the endurance of cultural identity and endurance in the face of colonial and post-colonial transformation.

Via an appreciation of the Nama Stap, Nama Stap Dance-Puberty Version and the people who do the dancing, this research has provided a record, a documentation, and an interpretation of dancing as Nama history and social life. It also reveals and archives the changing role and status of Nama women during the period of the research. It is a fascinating story about women that is subtly revealed through dancing.

Notes

1. I have labelled this version of the dance ‘Nama Stap Dance-Female Puberty’ Version in order to distinguish it from the better known Nama Stap Dance.
2. The content of this article relates to the three fieldtrips undertaken in Namaqualand, South Africa between 2001-2006 as part of my doctoral research titled: *Nama Marks and Etchings: an analysis and interpretation of the Nama Stap*.
3. Basically, all specialists would agree that the Khoisan peoples include speakers of numerous click-using languages which belong to some four or five language families, subfamilies or groups. The linguistically ‘generic’ relationship between all Khoisan languages has yet to be established beyond question, but most specialists do assume for reasons of practicality that we can at least speak of a Khoisan phylum or superfamily. Briefly, Khoisan language families or subfamilies include Khoe (also known as Khwe-Kovab or Hottentot), !Kung (Ju), Ta’a (including !Xō), !Wi, and tentatively ‘South-western’ or ‘Cape’ (/Xam) (Barnard, 1992, p. 22-23).
4. Situated in the western corner of Namaqualand, and named after Dr. Richter, an inspector of the Rhenish Mission who visited the area in 1830, the Richtersveld National Park was opened on 16 August 1991. The management of the park is atypical in that it is managed by community members and National the Park Board.
5. I noted three spellings of !Khubus: Khoboes, Kuboes, and !Khubus. The name is a Nama word meaning ‘God is found here.’
6. The dancers for this event were: Kaaitjie Cloete, Maria J. Farmer, Betjie Joseph, Fredrika Joshua, Anna Moos, Elizabeth Moos.

Bibliography

Barnard, A. *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa A Comparative Ethnography of*

- the Khoisan Peoples*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Berzborn, S. The Richtersveld and the National Language Policy of South Africa. Unpublished paper, 2002.
- Boonzaier, E., Berens, P., Malherbe, C., Smith, A. *The Cape Herders A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1996.
- Carstens, W. *The Social Structure of a Cape Coloured Reserve a Study of Racial Integration and Segregation in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Davenport, R. & Saunders, C. *South Africa A Modern History*. London: Macmillan Press, Ltd. (5th edition), 2000.
- Farnell, B. (ed) *Human Action Signs in Cultural Context: The Visible and the Invisible in Movement and Dance*. London: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995.
- _____. Ethno-graphics and the Moving Body. *Man*, 29 (4), 1994, pp 929-974.
- Fenton, R. A Dancer Thinks About 'Dance' Cross-Culturally. *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*. 9 (3), 1997, pp 115-124.
- Gall, S. *The Bushman of Southern Africa: Slaughter of the Innocent*. London: Pimlico, 2002.
- Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gennep, A.V. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge, 1963.
- Geurts, K. *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community*. London: University of California Press, 2002.
- Giurchescu, A. & Bloland, S. *Romanian Traditional Dance A Contextual and Structural Approach*. California: Wild Flower Press, 1995.
- Grau, A. Fieldwork, Politics, and Power in Buckland, T (ed) *Dance in the Field Theories, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*. London: Macmillan, 1999, pp 163-174.
- Groff, E. Laban Movement Analysis: An Historical, Philosophical and Theoretical Perspective. Unpublished MA thesis. Connecticut College, 1990.
- Guenther, M. *Bushmen Folktales Oral Traditions of the Nharo of Botswana and the /Xam of the Cape*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989.
- Hewitt, R. *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San*.

- Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1986
- Hoernlé, A. Certain Rites of Transition and The Conception of !Nau Among the Hottentots. *Harvard African Studies*, Vol. 1, 1918, 65-82.
- Hutchinson, A. *Labanotation The System of Analyzing and Recording Movement*, London: Dance Books, 1970.
- Kaeppler, A. Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for Anthropological Studies of Dance and Human Movement Systems. *Ethnographica* 8, 1992, pp 151-157.
- Layiwola, D. The Problem of Literal Documentation in African Dance Studies. Proceeding of the International Conference on Dance and Music, University of Cape Town, South Africa, 16-19 July, 1997.
- Ness, S. A. Laban Movement analysis in Humanistic Cross-cultural Dance Research A Case Study from the Philippines in Kim, M. (ed) *The Challenge and Message in Dance*. International Academic Conference on Dance, KIDE'95 Committee, pp. 76-92, 1995
- Scheffelin, E. Problematizing Performance in Hughes-Freeland, F. (ed), *Ritual, Performance Media*. London: Routledge, 1998, pp 194-207.
- Sheets-Johnstone, M. *The Phenomenology of Dance*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.
- Sklar, D. Reprise: On dance Ethnography. *Dance Research Journal*, 32 (1), 2000, pp 70-77.
- _____. On Dance Ethnography. *Dance Research Journal*, 23 (1), 1994, pp 6-10.
- Thomas, H. *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- _____. (ed) *Dance Gender and Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1993.
- Van Gennep, A. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge, 1960, 1977.
- Van Zile, J. Capturing the Dancing: Why and How? In Buckland, T. (ed) *Dance in the Field Theories, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*. London: Macmillan, 1999, pp 85-99.
- Vedder, H. The Nama in Hahn, C., Vedder, H., & Fourie. L. (eds) *The Native Tribes of Africa*. Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd. 1928, pp 109-145.
- Williams, D. Fieldwork in Buckland, T. (ed) *Dance in the Field Theories, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*. London, Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1999, pp 26-40.

