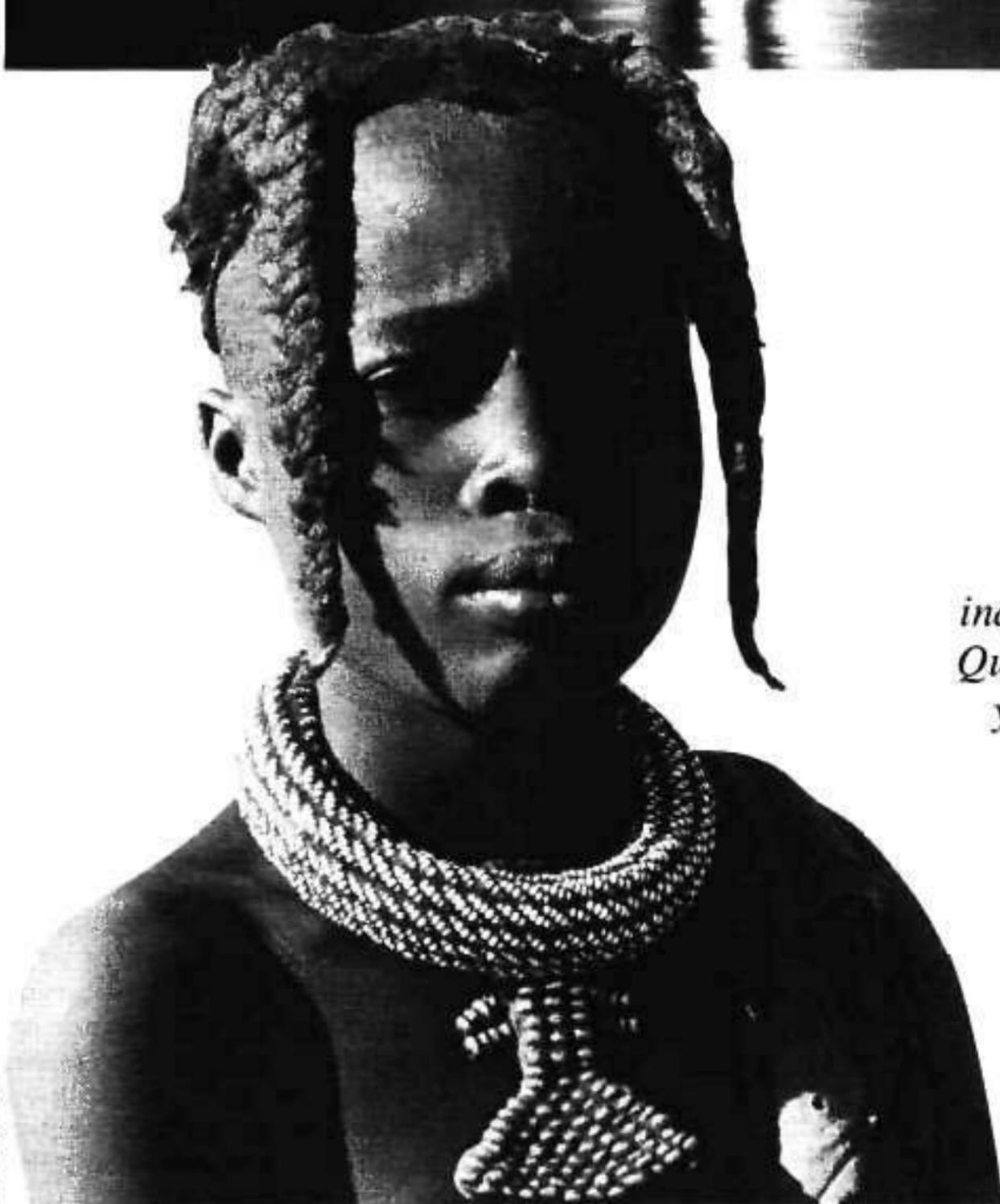




J. Lieberberg/Atropis



Gis de Vlieg/Atropis

children of namibia

*From 'fifth province' to
independence: who were the 'Kings,
Queens and Pawns' in Namibia's 70
years of administration by South
Africa?*

*Above: Young herdsman in Oshakati
hospital after playing with a rocket
found in the veld.*

*Below: Young Himba girl, Kaokoland,
Namibia, May 1987.*

Katutura - 'we have no dwelling place'

Katutura, a black township outside Windhoek, is the home of 60 000 to 100 000 people, 45% of whom are children under the age of 18. The fact that nearly every second adult between the age of 18 and 65 is looking for a job guarantees that Katutura acts as a cheap labour reserve for the largely white commercial city of Windhoek, and keeps wages low...

Katutura is an ever-growing township. Originally, people were split into 'ethnic groups' and 'O' for Ovambo or 'D' for Damara can still be seen on doors. Although it is not illegal to live in another area, poor people cannot afford to move house for the sake of the principle of national unity and children grow up accepting this division into ethnic groups as normal.

Children are visible everywhere in Katutura. With an average of eight people to each tiny brick-built, tin-roofed house, they have to play outside in the stony yards or in the dusty streets. The younger children, usually left in the care of an elderly relative, have hardly any toys. There are no green areas near their homes, and no play equipment is supplied by the municipality.

The older children can be seen running errands or looking after the younger ones. Schooling for black children is not compulsory, and many parents can simply not afford to send their children to school. A number of the children have turned to street violence...One of the more distressing products of this harsh social climate is the increasing number of child prostitutes...

White children

White children are a very small minority in Namibia. They live in a carefully protected environment and often do not see the harsh realities of apartheid or war - unlike their black counterparts. White children, like black children, have ambitions; but unlike black children, they have some chance of realising them.

Today, white children have ten years of compulsory schooling in English, Afrikaans or German. Al-

though numbers of white Namibians, anxious about the possibility of independence, are leaving and school rolls are falling, the money spent on white education is not being reduced.

In recent years, there have been some 24 times as many whites as blacks from Namibia attending university in South Africa.

Health services reveal much the same picture. For a white child, medical services are good. In 1981 almost fifty times as much was spent on average per annum on the health of every white child as was spent on a black child from the southern area of Rehoboth and 15 times as much as on a black child from the Damara 'homeland'.

Although white children have a better material life, they are trapped by the ideology of apartheid in which they are brought up, just as much as black children are trapped by poverty. Each has as little chance of breaking free. White children are taught to regard blacks as both inferior and potentially threatening. There is almost no opportunity for white and black children to meet on equal terms and get to know each other.

Life in the war zone

Thousands of parents living in the north today were children themselves when the war first broke out in 1966. Their own childhood was marked by the terrors of war, and they are now watching their own children accepting as normal a situation the rest of the world would regard as intolerable. Children are exposed to the sights of a particularly brutal war - people beaten to death, houses burnt down, military vehicles flying a red ribbon to designate a SWAPO 'kill'. Many of them seldom see their fathers, who are away fighting in the war or working as migrant labourers; daily life is frightening and uncertain. It is not surprising that some children turn to delinquency and aggression. The older children in particular are forced to take sides and make judgements of a kind many adults would find too challenging. Childhood ends abruptly for most Namibians today. □

From *Namibia, Apartheid's Forgotten Children*, a report for Oxfam by Caroline Moorehead, 1988

