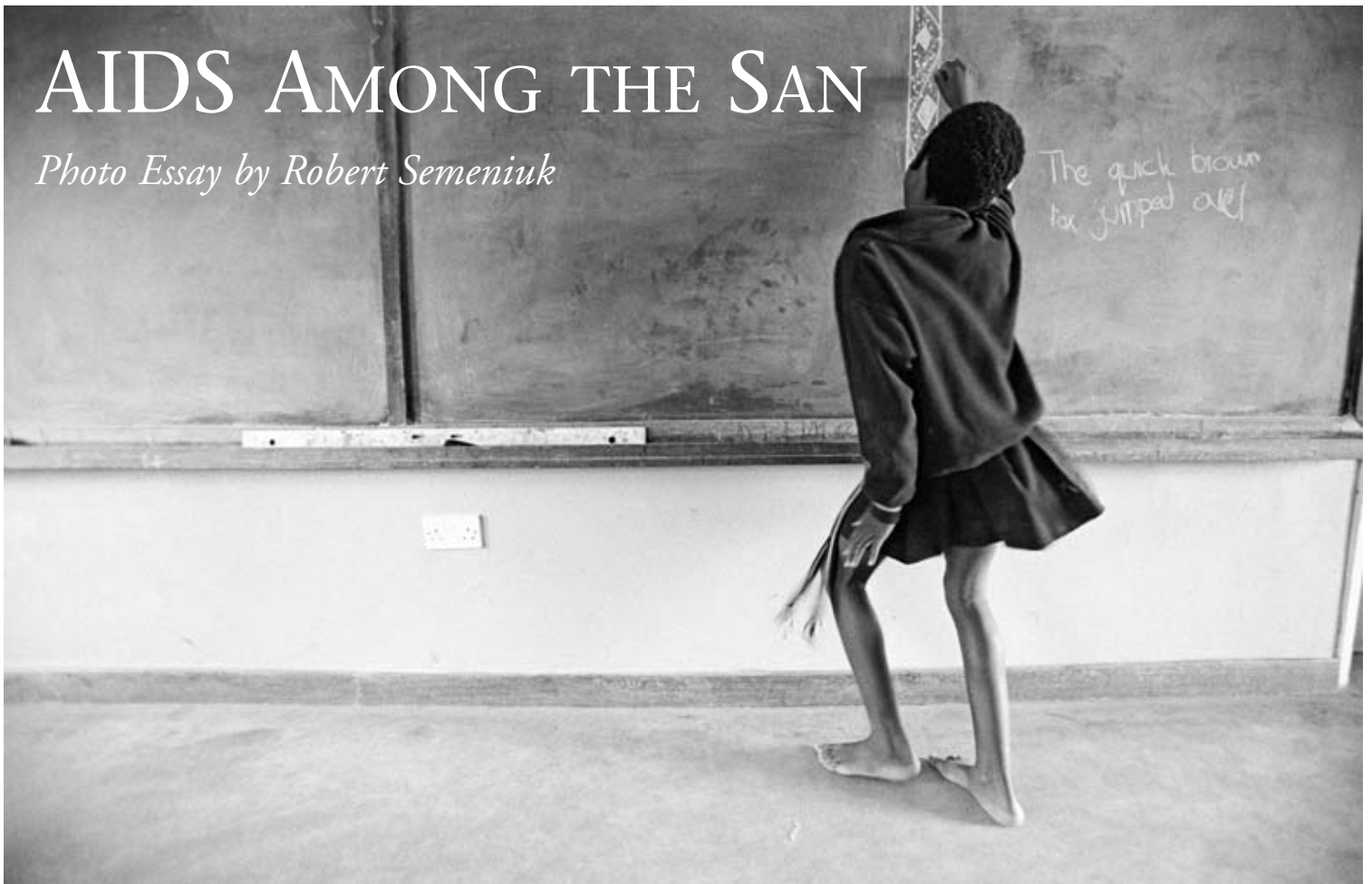


AIDS AMONG THE SAN

Photo Essay by Robert Semeniuk



A young girl displays her learning at school.
By 2010 over half of the children in Botswana will be orphaned.

Robert Semeniuk has been a full-time freelance author, photojournalist, and activist for human rights and environmental rights for nearly 30 years. His photographs, represented by the Black Star Agency, have appeared in most of the world's major magazines, including National Geographic. He is currently working on two books, *Among the Inuit* and *Marks: Lost Connections*, and is also working on a documentary film about post-traumatic stress syndrome among children in Gaza. These photographs are part of an eight-year project on the world health crisis, the first element of which will be a 10-part series on AIDS among the San in the Kalahari Desert, Botswana. Here is what he says about the project on his website:

“Dislocation and dispossession cause disease and are strong co-factors in the spread of AIDS. People without homes get sicker than people with homes, and when people get sick they want to go home. The San are the poorest of the poor in Botswana, which has the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world, with up to 40 percent of adults infected. The Botswana government is systematically displacing the San from their ancestral homelands in the Kalahari Desert to ‘resettlements’ that some San call ‘places of death.’”

To see the complete series of photos from the San project as well as Semeniuk's other work, go to www.robertsemeniuk.com.



The burial near D'Kar of a young woman and her boyfriend. They were living together. He went to a party, got drunk, and slept with another woman, who is HIV positive. When he returned, his girlfriend refused to sleep with him until he got tested. He broke her neck and then hanged himself. People in D'Kar call it a crime of passion. At the funeral the missionary preacher blames alcohol for the tragedy and proclaims abstinence as the solution to the AIDS pandemic.



The highest risk groups in Botswana are street, sex, and migrant workers; disempowered women; marginalized youth; the displaced; and refugees. The Bushmen fit into all of these categories. Desperation lures young San women and girls to men with money. They charge 50 pula (\$10) for sex with a condom and 200 pula (\$40) without a condom.



Koleba Caman is four years old. She was born with AIDS. Her anti-retroviral medications make her sick. Her mother died last year, and her father was never around. Her grandparents care for her and her 10-year-old brother, who tolerates the medication.



On the sand in the shade of Nanke's tin shack, children gather around a bowl of boiled sorghum meal, called "pap." For many days this is all there is to eat. There are never leftovers.

For over a decade San people have been squatting on the outskirts of Ghanzi. They live in tin shacks constructed from recycled and waste material. They come with nothing from the villages and farms hoping for something that never comes. Children raise children because their parents and grandparents have died of AIDS.



There is no shortage of AIDS awareness signs and condom distribution boxes in Botswana. The message is clear. What is not clear is who is paying attention. “Changing behaviour is the challenge,” says Cheryl Arnison, a Canadian AIDS nurse with seven years experience in Botswana, who works in ARV (anti-retroviral) clinics. She estimates that 40,000 people are being treated with ARVs, and that another 600,000 people require treatment.

