

Where Global Contradictions Are Sharpest ~ Psychospiritual Ecoscience: The Ju/'hoansi And Cultural Tourism



The relation between knowledge and the visual, on the one hand, and knowledge about peoples on the other, is a prime concern in visual anthropology. The impact of the visual on the everyday life of the Ju/'hoansi is my concern here. The results of a field trip in July 1996 to Otjozondjupa (previously known as Bushmanland) in [i]Namibia, are discussed in terms of the question, 'How do subjects make sense of the anthropological?' Our 'subject community' was the Ju/'hoansi of Nyae Nyae. The 'texts' we interrogated via Ju/'hoansi popular memory were those made of them by documentary filmmaker John Marshall, South

African feature film director Jamie Uys, and a documentary made for the Discovery Channel.

'Science' versus 'priest-craft'

The Ju/'hoansi and broader San populations, among many instances of Third and Fourth World peoples, have been argued to be quintessentially the Other to the historical Same of Europe (Mudimbe 1988). This relationship was predicated upon the differences assumed to define Europeans (the Same) in contradistinction to Africans (the Other). The encounter between Europe and Africa has spanned five centuries, and progressed through missionary contact, colonisation, interactions with anthropologists, archaeologists and ethnographic filmmakers, through to the economics of development in the post-colonial era. When the victorious 'scientific' order of knowledge was faced with cultures predicated on other kinds of world-views, it responded through two mutually exclusive avenues: - the world view and behaviour of the Other was treated as 'priest-craft' [ii] and consequently something to be vanquished. The early history of contact between San and white (and black) settlers whom they encountered, for example, is

dominated by extermination. Conversely,
- science tried to 'conserve' the Other in museums, in film, photographs and video, in body through mummification and even in the field itself. Rob Gordon (1985) calls this 'death by conservation'.

However, a third avenue characterized by postmodernity, has collapsed the modernist distinctions between science and priest-craft. The respective narrators of *Dancing at the future* (Stander 1996) and *The art of tracking* (Discovery Channel 1996) have, as I will argue in the next chapter, located ethnography at the intersection of these previously opposed discourses. Ethnography is then commodified via the language of cultural tourism, thinly dressed up in the semantics of 'conservation' and 'development'. This particular language of conservation is embedded in the mystique of 'priest-craft' and indigenous knowledge, and is evoked for 'scientific' and development purposes.

Claims made in the late 1990s, by researchers on the validity of 'ancient indigenous knowledge' in relation to 'science', however, blur the previous separation of the Western Same and the anthropological Other. The new ethnospiritual/ecoscience integrates the mystical, the empirical and the theoretical. These intersect within a meta-discourse of a global fraction of capital, that of eco-tourism. 'Man' - that is to say, some 'men' - e.g. the 'Bushmen' - are ontologically rejoined with 'nature', which has now become a 'scientific' pursuit in the interests of cultural tourism.

Anthro-tourism and human conservation

When science draws on the paradigm of 'conservation' it tends to view indigenous cultures as autonomous objects of study and manipulation. Indeed, this 'scientific' value for the 'scholarly research' of creating reserves for Bushmen is a recurring call (Gordon 1992: 60, 64, 148). As *Dancing at the future* and *The art of tracking* suggest, rehabilitation through eco-tourism satisfies '... the practical demands of Western science' (*Dancing* 1996). N.A.A Davis (1954: 53), reports, for example, that the 1950s policy of the South West African Administration (SWAA)[iii] was to preserve 'the genuinely primitive Bushmen' and 'make them useful and contented people' (Davis 1954: 57). The SWAA-ethnologist KFR Budack classified the 'Bushmen' as quintessential hunter-gatherers, knowing no other economy. Assumptions which derive from this hold is that Bushmen: a) are incapable of future planning; b) lack objectivity with regard to the natural world; c) are 'conditioned' to killing animals and cannot therefore raise them; and d) have no

experience or knowledge of farming (quoted in Volkman 1985). These are recurring motifs in the films discussed in this book. As Gordon (1992: 216) states: ... science has a vested interest in the Bushmen, for, as Trefor Jenkins said, from the vantage point of science, the Bushmen are 'southern Africa's model people' (Jenkins 1979: 280). Whereas filmmakers and journalists were the Bushmen image makers par excellence, it was scientific research that lent credibility to their enterprise.

Laurence Marshall, leader of the Harvard-Peabody Bushman Expeditions of the 1950s, commented that the Bushmen fill this scientific role because they were: ... a happy race, free from strains and stresses of civilization. Crime is unknown, and they are as honest as the day and would rather avoid than look for trouble. Even the lions seem to leave them alone. They never molest lions and the lions seem to return the compliment (Davis 1954: 57).

It is not clear which group of San Marshall is referring to here, as Gordon's (1992) study shows that the San have historically been part and parcel of environmental degradation, banditry and resistance, trade and travel. The 'enchantment of misunderstanding' derives from fascination with the exotic and the 'laws' of development (Gordon 1992: 216).

Where the early objective was to wean the 'Bushmen' from their 'nomadic habits' (Davis 1954), a variant of 'conservation' was the earlier SWAA-idea to establish a nature reserve in which 'Bushmen' would be encouraged to live as Neolithic relics to prevent the 'biological crime' of their extinction (Reitz 1941, quoted in Volkman 1986; Gordon 1985). The 'Bushmen also provide a rare and vanishing opportunity to study people in the primordial social stage which our ancestors passed through ages ago', stated Edward S. Ross (1976: 23) of the California Academy of Sciences. Ross sees the return to 'nature', hunting and foraging, as conferring some kind of eco-human rehabilitation:

Those bushmen who still live as hunter-gatherers may well be termed 'the Legitimate People' for they have the prime legitimacy - ecological legitimacy. If left free of outside influences, they can live indefinitely on the annual productivity of an environment without damaging or destroying its capital assets ... (Ross 1976: 23).

The discourses intercepted by *The Gods must be crazy* (1980) not surprisingly, therefore, also interpellated the San as the primordial object of the tourists' gaze

(Gordon 1992: 12). This gaze assumed the San as a cultural isolate, and living in ecological harmony. Philanthropist John Perrott (1992: 59) uncritically quotes adventurer and 'anthropologist' Jack Wheeler, who identifies the 'Bushmen' as a 'priceless treasure' in the 'living Paleolithic' (1992: 64). This enduring naturalist discourse of 'genuine Bushmen' (Davis 1954), 'extinction' and 'racial mysteries' (Marshall and Marshall 1956: 11) underpins an eco-spiritual notion of the 'loss' of a timeless original culture before the Fall (in Eden).

The 1988 expedition to Botswana, which Perrott (1992: v) recounts, forms part of his funding appeal to assist organisations working for the survival of the San and their culture. The symbiotic relationship between the 'Bushmen' and wild animals[iv] is the discursive mechanism he invokes to petition Westerners who often seem more concerned with animals than people in Africa: '... if the animals could be protected, why not a few people who were still living nomadically?' (Perrott 1992: 164).

Perrott's description of Bushmen as 'wild' or 'tame' calls into question the Western Same's perception of the Other, with which this chapter was introduced. Calling on an early form of anthropological discourse, Perrott (1992: 169) observes that 'it would be a case of permitting a few wild Bushmen back into the few natural enclaves called parks - land where they can rejoin their animals'. He is, however, suspicious of this kind of anthro-tourism where the Ju/'hoansi 'would have been required to wear skins and pretend to be wild, what John Marshall calls "The Plastic Stone Age"' (Perrott 1992: 180).[v]

'Preservation' of San culture in the guise of a few remaining 'wild' hunter-gatherer Bushmen is Perrott's partial answer to the problem of vanquishment. But conservation also contains the seeds of vanquishment in the form of the touristic encounter: 'You can't bring throngs of people out here to gawk at them up close. Tourism would soon destroy what the tourists come to see'. This would be the final irony for, as Ross (1976: 23) avers, 'Man becomes less and less a bushman'; he simultaneously becomes 'less and less human'.

Early anthropology was popularly understood as the science of disappearing societies. This is evidenced by Perrott in his fear of a tourist overload, and by Ross (1976: 25) in his photographs of 'sadly-aculturated groups dependent on Bantu and European farmers'. This integrated economy, in which ex-primitives sometimes act in the contemporary world as real primitives (MacCannell 1990) while also participating in development projects and broader forms of modern and

postmodern exchange, contributes of course to this disappearance. Perrott (1992: 180) is clear on the problem, which is why he makes a distinction between those 'tame Bushmen' who had made the transition into a mixed economy and those 'wild Bushmen' he claims have not. But he fails to realise that anthropology, too, is one of the catalysts in this destruction: 'At the very instance they [our subjects] become known to us as they are doomed' (Bastian, quoted in Fabian 1985: 10). This is the paradox facing indigenous societies, and those anthropologists, celebrities and environmentalists working with them to protect their natural resources. For example, one of the results of the Kayapo cooperation with environmentalist pressure groups is that the ... ensuing ideological consumption of 'nature', in which both the Kayapo and their environment may be regarded as being held 'hostages' by political decision makers at different levels, seems to pertinently raise a question regarding the compatibility between a Kayapo and Western conceptualisation of nature and the environment (Crawford 1995: 8).

The Body Shop's return to the Kayapo, for access to their indigenous knowledge of 'natural' health products, admits that priest-craft and science can successfully co-exist. But this occurs through a paradox: the Kayapo use video cameras to document - and perhaps reinvent - their own authenticity and alien incursions on their land and culture. They then deploy this authenticity to appeal internationally for justice. The question that remains to be answered is: have they found ways of being simultaneously both cultural isolates *and* world citizens?

Whereas in the age of modernity when Fourth World societies offered remote 'destinations' for academic endeavour, now in the postmodern age, they are the mass-mediated objects of consumption. Ontological differences and discrepancies of popular memories of the 'present' in relation to the 'past', offer new forms of visual exploitation. The Ju/'hoansi are both 'there' (in the desert) and 'here' (on TV *in* our living rooms). Filmmakers and TV-hosts, for example, sometimes try to *become* 'the other' by dressing both 'them' (the Bushmen) and themselves in skins and other 'traditional' garb (Anita in *Uit en tuis*; Alby Mangels in *Adventure bound*). This collapsing of both 'space' and 'time', 'us' and 'them', and 'far' and 'near' in the image and through tourist-bushman encounters, is the essence of 'cultural' tourism. Very little sustainable development accrues to the subjects of these representations because they are held in a kind of ecological suspension, on the margins of the international economic sectors exploiting them. Cultural or

eco-tourism is basically the commodification by capital of the romance of anthropology. This kind of gaze is part of a broader global process in which the ethnographic has been appropriated into the public sphere. Commodification of 'the ethnographic' takes place within the context of a 'mobilized gaze' that is part and parcel of transnational media flows (Friedberg 1995).

Be-texting and be-coming

Anthropology and film exhibit paradoxical representational processes in that both require presence and absence to produce meaning. The two-stage anthropological methodology involves first, 'interpellation into' the Other ('becoming'); and then enddistancing from this assumed subjectivity 'from' the Other through re-interpellation back into the Historical Same in producing the film or study. This relationship between 'becoming' and 'othering' involves manipulating the distance between 'them' and 'us' (Crawford 1992: 68-9). As noted, TV-presenters sometimes also assume (and revitalise) this 'becoming' role, thus conferring a spurious eco-anthropological legitimacy on the encounter. TV-presentation, however, has nothing to do with ethnography, which is the translation of the native's world of meanings into the anthropologists' terminology.

'Becoming' is itself a metaphor for participation which can never be complete. Neither is it a natural consequence of presence or insertion in the 'other culture' (Crawford 1992). The TV-image of Mangels, therefore, is merely visual - it has no methodological significance whatsoever. Mangels uses the travelogue technique of 'arriving' and being co-present as the basis of presumed authority to speak for the other.

Anthropologists, while not absorbed into the Other, cannot be the same after the encounter (Hastrup 1986: 9-10). Only tourists remain the same - because while they have 'seen' everything, they have understood nothing - or very little. Mangels in a loincloth foolishly stalking elephants with a 'Bushman' hunter armed with only a bow is a stark and irresponsible confirmation of this. This form of cultural nomadism feeds a need in the West, which requires reassurance that it has not destroyed all vestiges of ecological legitimacy in its Cartesian-driven escape from primordialism.

Confirmation that some First Peoples have survived intact is somehow seen to hold a key to the West's own redemption. If there are still worlds to be explored - if only from our own living rooms - audiences can still be moved to awe. None of

this, however, has much to do with anthropology, and it furthermore completely ignores the fact that, in our case, the San, have themselves played an active role in ecological devastation (Gordon 1992: 39). Projecting one's fantasies onto the people being filmed on the one hand - and learning from them on the other - is the difference, argues Marshall (1993), between *The hunters* (Marshall 1958) and *N!ai: Story of a !Kung woman* (1978).

Textualising the 'past'

The 'naturalistic' mystique of First Peoples is both a resource and a curse. It is a resource because it provides opportunities for the 'Bushmen' to exchange the stereotypical image of themselves and their artefacts for cash income. But it is a curse in that the 'Bushmen' are frequently manipulated by discursive forces, often beyond their control and comprehension, to exhibit tourist-orientated behaviour, and to feed now largely academically discredited but popularly legitimate anthropological paradigms of a stone-age people frozen in time.

In the face of this, the Ju/'hoansi have partly absorbed their Othered exclusion by turning it into a resource. In a world of travelling images in which anthropology no longer has sole ethnographic authority, cultural tourism is a tactic some Ju/'hoansi and ≠Khomani have mobilized to attract resources to their villages. One of the symbolic commodities that can be sold easily is the image of 'poverty'. Historically having little material culture to exchange, the San became dependent upon transacting their authenticity. The mechanism of exchange is conducted through interviews and photographs, [vi] films and videos with and of the Ju/'hoansi.

Ironically, inauthenticity is the result of the Discovery Channel's documentary about Ju/'hoansi storytelling, *Hunters of the Kalahari* (Discovery Channel 1995). When we asked villagers at N/aqmtjoha why they had cooperated with the filmmakers in representing themselves as traditionally-clothed pristine stone-age relics, they replied that they wore the skins because they wanted to look 'poor'. (These skins, as with some village dance groups we interviewed, were obtained by the filmmakers from curio shops, the local Dutch Reformed Church, and collectors.) Like all First Peoples, the Ju/'hoansi are increasingly self-conscious about their place in the wider world. If their narratives and images of their front-stages are understood by them to be commodifiable, then *Hunters of the Kalahari* and other films, therefore, offer a long-term ground for exchange - no matter the nature of their representations. Exchange relationships between the Ju/'hoansi

and other visitors take some of the following forms:

- the cooperation of entire villages with filmmakers and other visitors, perhaps to indicate their legitimacy to the land in the face of Herero and Kavango incursions into Otjozondjupa;
- interviews become negotiating points for financial transactions; and
- transactions for information and photographs act like magnets to attract yet more visitors to these otherwise remote villages.

The Ju/'hoansi, !Xoo and ≠Khomani appear to make little distinction between anthropologists and linguists, zoologists and entomologists, tourists and friends, filmmakers and photographers, donors and development workers. All these social practices are reduced into the text of the Western Same, the people who have power and money, and whose largesse has made them dependent upon such tourists in terms of cash exchange, development projects and inter-village transport. As N!ai and her husband, /Kunta, indicated to us, they felt powerless to influence the kinds of films made, but were happy to take the income and goods derived. The Ju/'hoansi's textual self-construction is that of villagers who have interpellated themselves as 'past'. To be real 'Bushmen' means to appear 'poor'. N!ai, as in her film entitled *N!ai: Story of a !Kung woman*, continued to insist that life in the 'old days' was better than now: 'Now life is difficult. Now I do not even have money. I am eating here and I do not have maize', she told Kaitira Kandjii. (Commodification brings its own dependencies. Nutritious bush foods may be available from foraging, but pre-packaged store-bought food is obviously more convenient, and often less nutritious.) Front-stage authenticity is communicated via a strategic friendliness and a transactional hospitality. In stark contrast are some traditional ≠Khomani who have little, if any, understanding of conventional exchange relations.

Speaking back to the same

N!ai partly operates as a kind of 'guerrilla' film, in that it features scenes of the making of *The Gods must be crazy* (1980), in which the cast, now living in modernity, make sceptical remarks about the anthropological restorations and traditional clothes with which they have been fitted. **[vii]** The idyllic Eden-like representation of the 'Bushmen' in Uys' film evoked a storm of criticism from North American academics and Marshall himself (see Tomaselli 1992). Yet our research in July 1996 at /Aotcha Pan similarly revealed that N!ai and members of her family, also had reservations about some scenes in the film, *N!ai*. This related

mainly to the sequence in *N!ai* which depicts drunkenness, decaying social relationships and N!ai accusing her daughter of being a prostitute. N!ai commented:

The quarrel with my daughter was not part of the film script. John had his cameras on. It was just a normal day and I was just quarrelling. That my son-in-law was jealous and he was accusing my daughter of sleeping with a black man. It was not true that's why I was angry (interviewed by Kandjii, 13 July 1996).

N!ai's husband, /Kunta, added that 'I did not know that people will know about what I was saying to my wife'. When asked if they had discussed this scene with Marshall, /Kunta replied: 'Now that John has shown the film to many people, there is nothing that I can do'. Dependent personalities often feign powerlessness: 'It is up to John to think what he can do', replied N!ai. N!ai told Kandjii that Marshall 'has been very good' to her: 'When John is here he gives me all kinds of things - clothes, blankets and foodstuffs - John is "*Omuhona uande*" (Herero - 'my boss')'.**[viii]** The reference to 'my boss' in Africa may sometimes be a form of endearment, but it also indicates a client-patron relationship. Social relationships - like authenticity - are resources for dependent people. Researchers like ourselves offer opportunities for the forging of new client-patron relationships. N!ai and /Kunta possibly saw a relationship with Kandjii and me as worth cultivating.**[ix]** Further, some societies make unwarranted accusations as a means of controlling or balancing relationships, of controlling sharing and reciprocity, or enforcing equality. By suggesting that some visitors are stingy, they might be hoping to elicit more generous responses from others.

During one interview at /Aotcha Pan, our interpreter, ≠Oma (Leon) Tsamkxao, sharply questioned the responses from some elderly informants on their lack of vision regarding possibilities for self-directed, sustainable development beyond the small scale transaction involving visitors. As he commented more generally:

In terms of capacity building for Bushmen to film themselves, people here do not understand filming or making film about themselves or environment. Filming is something foreign to them. I want tourists and filmmakers who come here to bushmanland for filming to learn teach us how to film ... We also want to learn us to do things for ourselves. This is what I call development (interviewed by Kandjii, 12 July 1996).

≠Oma Tsamkxao's frustration in not having a camera is palpable, as he wants to video some of the real issues regarding the relationship, which results in the petty

commodity exchange of small amounts of money for video and photographic images and cultural artefacts. [x] With the exception of Marshall's films, these are the myths that draw tourists to 'Bushmanland' in the first place. ≠Oma Tsamkxao knows that images can be both positive and negative *vis-à-vis* the projection of a people. [xi]

Otherring/becoming and the textual tourist

My argument has been that the othering/becoming relations with regard to academic researchers, cultural tourists and filmmakers, have been partly orchestrated by the subjects themselves. Certainly, the appropriation of images from visitors, starting with the Polaroid snapshots handed out by Laurence Marshall to his contacts in the early 1950s, must have marked a significant moment in the ensuing exchange. [xii] Both parties in the encounter have since commodified ethnographic methods. In 'becoming', some visitors might have been seduced into an imported Western anthropological text constructed by the subjects themselves. This is the discursive resource they have developed in what they see as facilitating exchange relationships of one kind or another.

If the observers are seduced by this mercantile text which is interpreted as 'culture', but which masks something else, then it is they who have become the exploited rather than the exploiter (in academic terms of course). This exploitation occurs in the sense that the power to determine what meanings are exchanged during the encounter, is determined by the subjects. The last laugh is on the observers as those who do the 'looking' are subverted by their subjects who have reversed the direction of this looking relationship in the act of exchange.

The notion of 'authenticity', the prime discursive resource embedded in the social (stereotypical) text, and strategically appropriated by indigenous people, has been popularised from the 'academic text' of the discipline by filmmakers, scholars and the media in general. The resulting myth of the 'Bushman' will provide fodder for all these constituencies for many years to come. These contradictory interventions and media interpretations will provide the ground for exchange for the Ju/'hoansi for as long as they continue. The new commodity is psychospiritual ecoscience, as negotiated and agreed upon by both parties to the encounter.

NOTES

[i] ≠Oma Tsamkxao was employed as an interpreter by Sonja Speeter, a German

anthropologist whom we joined for the duration of our ten-day-visit to the Otjozondjupa Region. Speeter had negotiated our access to the Ju/'hoansi through the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation and John Marshall. Her thesis topic was: *Family in the field: The polymorphic ethnography of the Marshall family*

[ii] The two kinds of scientific understanding clash with each other by virtue of an internal ideological inconsistency in the Western intellectual heritage: the Western tradition cannot make up its mind as to where the experiencing subject fits into our self-proclaimed intellectual marker of *Science*. Richard Rorty (1980: 328) has pointed out that there is, in Western thought, a very specific kind of dialogue within which valid knowledge-claims can be made, and that this debate draws its agenda from the judgement we today pass on those who, like the Inquisition's Cardinal Bellarmine, sought to refute Galileo's cosmological claims. For our modern culture, we tend to dismiss claims that fail to conform to a specific mode of justification, as the equivalent of Bellarmine's 'priest-craft' (cf. Shepperson and Tomaselli 1992).

[iii] South West Africa was at that time administered by the South African government on a mandate issued by the League of Nations following the First World War.

[iv] Ross (1976: 23) offers a similar analogy with practices of the 'Natural Sciences': 'I happen to need to hunt and gather insect specimens and photographs in untrampled regions'.

[v] As proposed by SWAA, the Ju/'hoansi would: a) be forbidden to keep cattle, maintain gardens or practice subsistence farming; b) be permitted to hunt with bows, and gather with digging sticks; c) teach children at school how to hunt and gather; d) organise 'hunting bands', supervised by bush rangers, to be experienced by a 'special class' of tourists flown to overnight camp sites. Conservation officers, including eight Ju/'hoansi, would lead 'nature walks' (SWAA Administration 1984, quoted by Volkman 1986). In contrast, European tourists who demanded their removal (Hitchcock 1985) opposed inclusion of San in Botswana game parks.

[vi] Early anthropologists like Franz Boaz, and their expedition photographers, clicked for both ethnography and commerce. Native Americans, as subjects for these photographers, also partly constituted their clientele (Blackman 1980).

[vii] A comment recorded on the out-takes sound track of the film is a girl appealing to a man who has lost interest in 'long ago' stories: 'These things are going to another place like America - it's good to tell the old stories which long ago died so that people can hear them' (Bieseke, comments on transcriptions,

18.00-18.15).

[viii] N!ai had nothing good to say about Jamie Uys, whom she claimed had never paid her for her work on *Gods*. She also complained that G/aq'o, the star of both Uys films and three other feature films, had a house while she did not. (G/aq'o's house at Tjum!kui was built in 1994. He was paid a basic monthly retainer by Mimosa Films until his death in 2003.)

[ix] During the first two visits, N!ai showed little interest. The questions posed on the film, however, obtained her direct attention, on our third visit to /Aotcha Pan.

[x] The lodge owner at Tjum!kui who manages a cultural tourism company incorporates permission to take photographs into the price that visitors are charged, which is passed onto the indigenous performers. Americans buy everything; Germans only want traditional items; and the Japanese usually don't buy at all: 'They take photos' (Arno Oosthuizen, interview, July 1996).

[xi] Marshall had, in December 1995, taught ≠Oma Tsamkxao the basics of video production while he was at Documentary Educational Resources (DER) in Watertown, USA. Temple University's Department of Anthropology documented ≠Oma Tsamkxao's visit to the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives and his viewing of out-takes from the various Marshall expeditions on a 16mm editing table, which occurred during this visit.

[xii] The still photographs taken by the Marshalls were never marketed. Some appeared in print in Marshall Thomas (1963) and Ruby (1993).