

**The Great Dance: Myth, History and Identity in Documentary Film
Representations of the Bushmen,
1925-2000**

**by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilises a sample of major documentary films on the Bushmen of Southern Africa as primary sources in investigating change over time in the interpretation and visualisation of Bushmen peoples over seventy five years from 1925 to 2000.

The primary sources of this thesis are seven documentary films on the subject of Bushmen people in southern Africa. These films are as follows *The Bushmen* (1925), made by the Denver African Expedition to southern Africa; the BBC film *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956) by Laurens van der Post; *The Hunters* (1958) by John Marshall; the 1974 National Geographic Society film *Bushmen of the Kalahari*; John Marshall's 1980 film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*; and the South African films *People of the Great Sandface* (1984) by Paul John Myburgh and *The Great Dance* (2000) by Craig and Damon Foster. All of these films reflect, to varying degrees, a complex interplay between generic images of Bushmen as pristine primitives and the visible evidence of many Bushmen peoples rapid decline into poverty in Southern Africa, a process which had been ongoing throughout the twentieth century.

The aim of the thesis has been to explore the utilisation of film as a primary source for historical research, but focussing specifically on a subject related to the southern African historical context. The films under analysis have been critically appraised as evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and period that have produced them, and for evidence about the Bushmen at the time of filming. Furthermore, each film has been considered as a film *in* history, for how it influences academic or popular discourses on the Bushmen, and finally as filmic 'historiography' that communicates historical knowledge. This thesis, then, utilises a knowledge and understanding of film language, as well as the history and development of documentary film, to assess and consider the way in which knowledge is communicated through the medium of film.

This study has attempted to investigate the popular and academic indictment of documentary film as progenitor and/or reinforcing agent of crude, reified mythologies about Bushmen culture in southern Africa. It is shown here that the way major documentary films have interpreted and positioned Bushmen people reveals the degree to which documentary films are acute *reflections* of their historical contexts, particularly in relation to the complicated webs of discourse that define popular and academic responses to particular subjects, such as 'Bushmen', at particular historical moments. Critical, visually literate analysis of documentaries can reveal the patterns of these discourses, which in turn reflect layers of ideology that change over time.

A secondary finding of this thesis has been that documentary film might constitute a source of oral history for historians, when the subjects of a documentary film express ideas and attitudes that reflect self identity. It is proposed that the approach to analysis of documentary film that has been utilised throughout this study is a means of 'extracting' the oral testimony from its ideological positioning within the world of the film. The historian might evaluate the usefulness of a subject's oral testimony in relation to the ideological orientation of the film as a whole, to decide whether it is worthwhile being considered as *das Ding an sich* or should be seen purely as a reflection of values and attitudes of the filmmaker, or something in between. It is shown in this thesis that documentary film constitutes an important archive of oral testimony for historians who are properly versed in reading film language.

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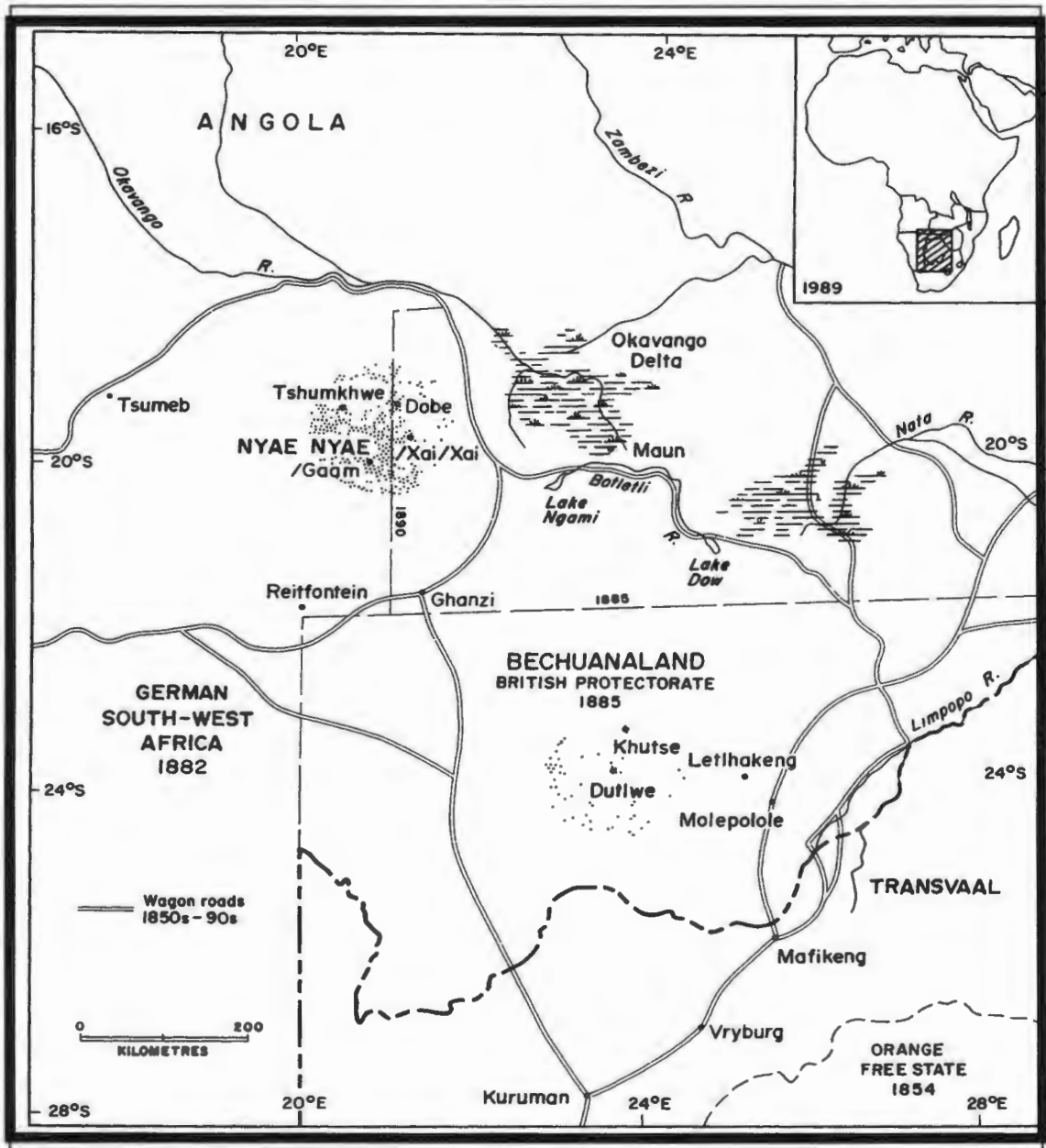
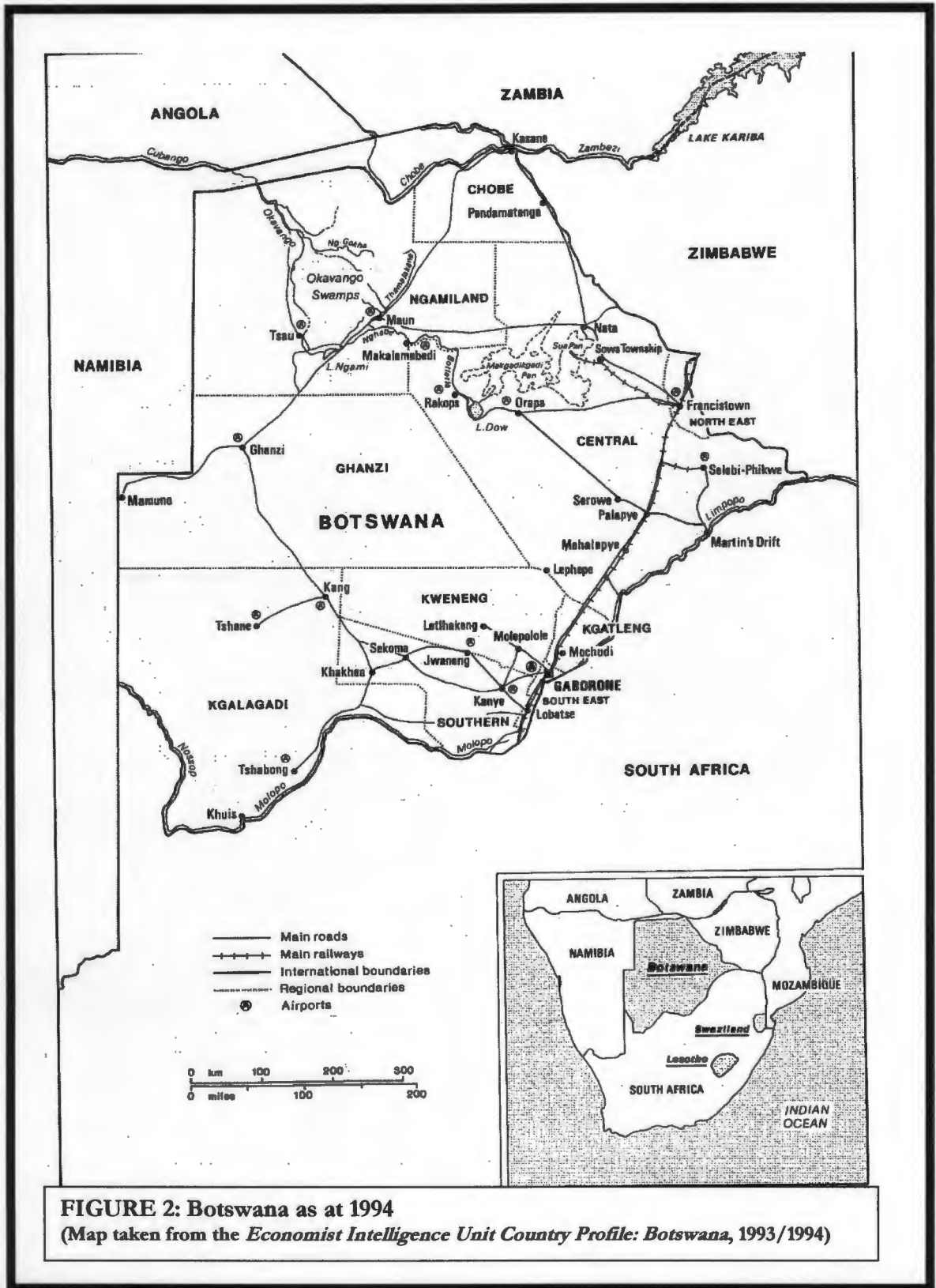


FIGURE 1: 19° Kalahari showing German South West Africa (now Namibia) as at 1882 and the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (now Botswana) as at 1885. (Map taken from Richard Lee, 'Art, Science or Politics? The Crises in Hunter-Gatherer Studies', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 94, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 112.



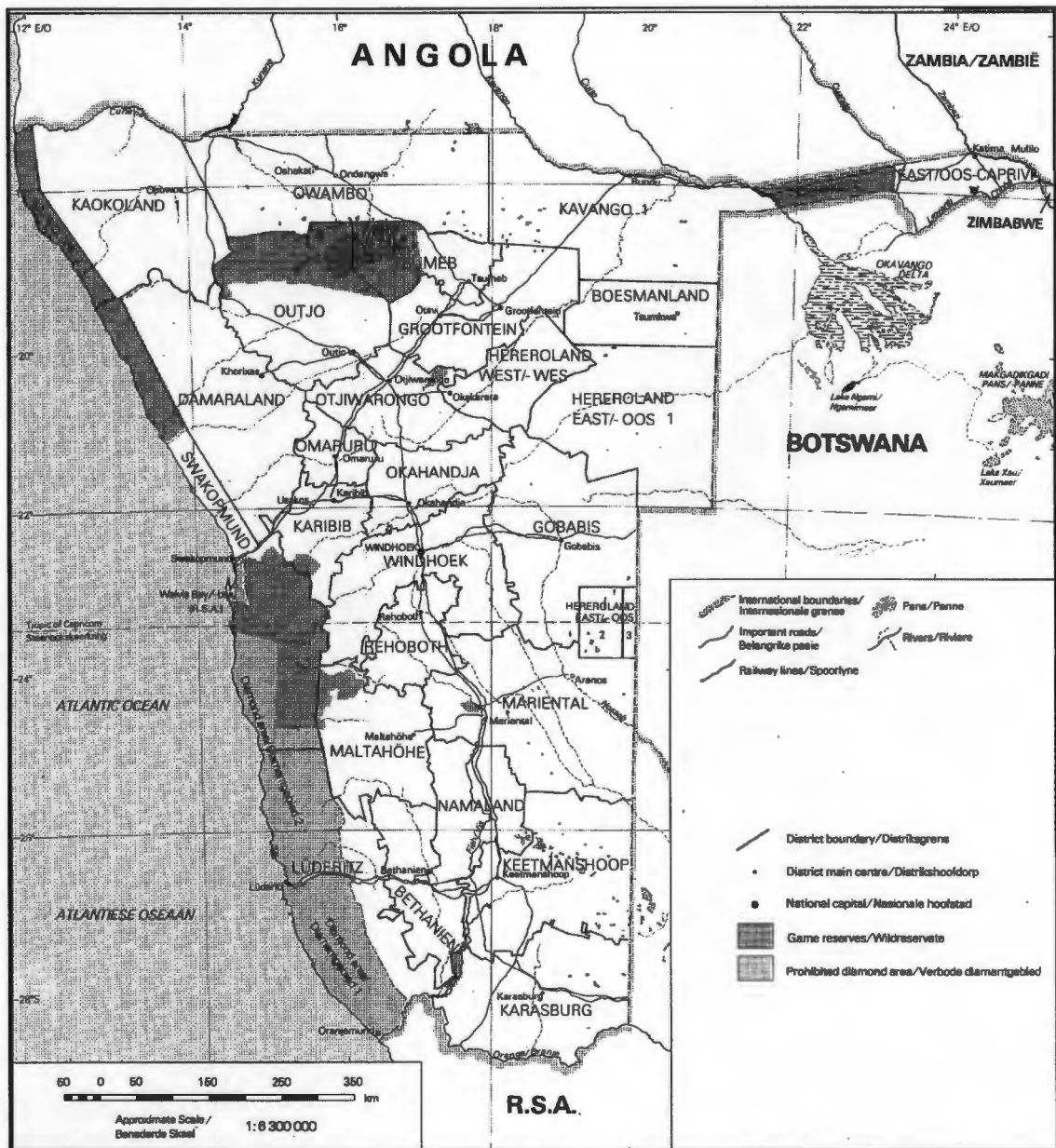


FIGURE 3: South West Africa (now Namibia) in 1982, with Tshumkwe in the Nyae Nyae region as the capital of the 'homeland' Bushmanland (now called Otjozondjupa).
 (map taken from J.H van der Merwe (ed.), *National Atlas of South West Africa* (Cape Town: National Book Printers, 1983), map no. 40.)

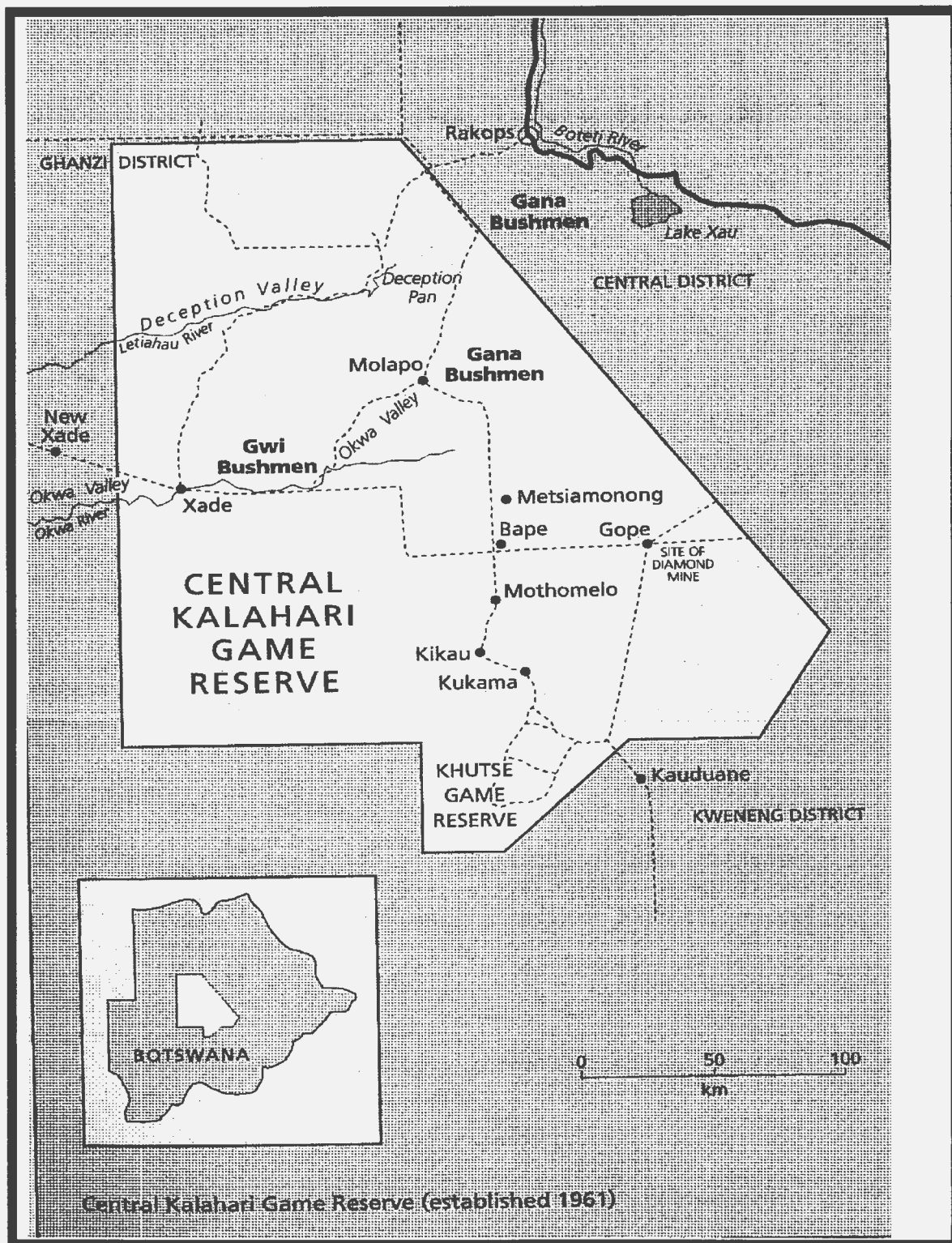


FIGURE 4: Central Kalahari Game Reserve. See Xade at centre left.
 (Map taken from Sandy Gall, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa: Slaughter of the Innocent* (London: Pimlico, 2002))

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the period between 1925 and 2000, and particularly after 1956, a great many documentary films were made about the Bushmen people of southern Africa. These included South African government propaganda films, educational documentary films, made-for-television documentaries shown on local and international television and feature length documentaries for the BBC and the National Geographic Society (enjoying the robust support of those influential institutions).¹ In the post-Apartheid context, there have been a number of South African- and internationally-produced documentaries dealing with the struggle by various Bushmen groups to gain ownership of land lost under colonialism and Apartheid. What is interesting about this veritable glut of documentary films is that their subject matter, the Bushmen of Southern Africa, have in the recent history of the region constituted a marginalised minority with very little political or economic agency; an 'underclass', as Robert Gordon has termed them.² The majority of the documentary films about the Bushmen produced in the last eighty years have evaded any discussion of their contemporary status and have focused instead on the perceived value of the hunter-gathering culture and its cosmology, ecological knowledge and folklore. The overriding of history in favour of an ahistorical view of 'Bushman culture' has contributed to a twentieth century Bushmen iconography that has little to do with the reality of people classified as Bushmen in Southern Africa.³ This mythologising of the Bushmen as ahistorical hunter-gatherers living in a timeless space outside of historical process, untouched by the encroachment of Western civilisation, and providers of 'clues' as to the origin of humanity, is a phenomenon that has been commented on previously.⁴

¹ A feature-length documentary is usually the length of a feature fiction film; fifty two minutes or longer.

² Robert J. Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

³ Some interesting analysis of this Bushmen iconography includes Michael Godby, 'Images of //Kabbo', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1996), pp. 115-27; Barbara Buntman, 'Bushman Images in South African Tourist Advertising: The Case of Kagga Kamma', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 271-80.

⁴ See, for example Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*; Edwin N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled With Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Edwin N. Wilmsen, 'First People? Images and

But, with important exceptions which will be discussed in this thesis, documentary films have usually uncritically reflected an ahistorical interpretation of Bushmen culture. This 'ahistorical' interpretation discounts or glosses over the different linguistic groupings, cultures, traditions and histories that fall under the racial category 'Bushman'. The problem with this is that in the Western empirical tradition, 'visualisation' of a culture or society often becomes synonymous with understanding it.⁵

This thesis, then, constitutes a historical study of a selection of narrative documentary films that will trace how a particular 'visualisation' of Bushmen has occurred, how this visualisation has changed over time and what these changes suggest about the societies and the contexts in which they were produced. The films under discussion are *The Bushmen* (1925) made by the Denver African Expedition members, Laurens van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956), John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1957), the National Geographic film *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) directed by Robert Young, *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) by John Marshall and *People of the Great Sandface* (1984) by Paul John Myburgh. As part of the conclusion, *The Great Dance* (2000) by Craig and Damon Foster, a contemporary example of a documentary film on the Bushmen, will be discussed in relation to the findings of this thesis as a whole. These particular films have been chosen as the focus of this study because, as will be shown, they have been identified in academic debate as important reflections of the Bushmen myth, or as counters to it. Furthermore, they are all feature documentary films aimed at international distribution, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe, with a general audience in mind. The most influential film on the Bushmen, the fiction film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) is not considered in its own right, because it is a fiction film and thus falls outside of the category of film that is the focus of this thesis, namely documentary film. However, *Gods* does reflect the influence of earlier documentary films on the Bushmen, and as such chapter nine includes a brief discussion of the

Imaginations in SA Iconography', *Critical Arts*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), pp. 1-27; Keyan Tomaselli, Alan Williams, Lynette Steenveld, Ruth Tomaselli, *Myth, Race and Power: South Africans Imaged on Film and TV* (Bellville: Anthropos Publishers, 1986); Keyan Tomaselli, 'Myths, Racism and Opportunism: Film and TV Representations of the San', in Peter Ian Crawford & David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 205-21.

⁵ Johannes Fabian quoted in Robert J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1997), p. 122.

film and its sizeable influence on international perceptions of Bushmen culture. Films with a more specialist audience in mind, such as the larger portion of John Marshall's *!Kung Film Series* from the 1950s, or with limited viewership, such as the South African government propaganda film *Remnants of a Stone Age People* (1960), or with non-narrative formats such as *!Ko Buschmanner* (1987) which is a record of !Ko activities in the face of putative cultural extinction, have been excluded from this study. The purpose of this study is not an exhaustive cataloguing of documentary films on the Bushmen, but a literary-historical analysis of certain influential works that might illustrate a genre.

The premise of this thesis is that the documentary films under discussion have framed the Bushmen as mythically pristine hunter-gatherers to varying degrees. Some of the films have attempted overtly to counter such mythology, which means that they have still been required to engage with it. Whether reinforcing or challenging the myth of pristine Bushmen, they have in turn reflected elements of changing racial discourses, changing perceptions of the African environment and landscape by the West, changing theoretical debates and practical developments in documentary film, changing approaches to anthropology and history on film, and the changing significance of aboriginal people in nation states. Thus, these subtly different hegemonic interpretations of the Bushmen as pristine hunter-gatherers – or counter-hegemonic critiques of the myth - present the opportunity for a rich historical analysis.

Film has largely interested historians in three ways.⁶ In the first instance, they view films as evidence of the values, attitudes and ideas about a particular subject that may be present in the films' form and content, how these ideas and values reflect ideologies prevalent in the societies within which the films were made and, importantly, how these ideas have changed over time. Another facet of this utilisation of film as evidence is to glean what the film reflects about its subject matter at a given time. For example, a 1920s documentary film on the Bushmen might reveal something about the way Bushmen dressed in the 1920s, or the kinds of weaponry they

⁶ Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn, 'Film and History Studies in South Africa Revisited: Representing the African Past on Screen', *South African Historical Journal*, no. 48 (May 2003), pp. 4-5.

used or the food they ate at the same time as it reveals what the filmmakers thought about Bushmen at the time.

The second use of the medium for historians is as films *in* history. In this sense films are considered for the way in which they reflect the historical context in which they were made. They can also be considered as shapers of people's perceptions of and ideas about particular subjects. In the context of this study, the influence of these documentary films in creating perceptions of whom and what the Bushmen of Southern Africa are will be considered. It must be stated at the outset of this thesis that the popular reception of these films has been difficult to establish. In some cases, such as those of *Lost World of Kalahari* (1957) and *The Great Dance* (2000) it is possible to some degree to determine the popular success enjoyed by the films, but generally speaking, most of the films studied in this thesis have generated the greatest debate not in the popular sphere, but amongst academics and specialists. Where the influence of these films 'in history' is most marked is in their influence on each other and in the way in which, both visually and through narrative, they reiterate particular themes and images. What will be assessed throughout this thesis is the degree to which the prevalence of particularly influential film images overrides the reality of a constantly changing historical context to produce recurrent and reified depictions of the Bushmen in documentary films. In order to understand this, though, the films need to be understood as *products* of their particular contexts, as will be explained below.

The third use historians have for film is as filmic historiography: films as texts attempting to tell us about the history of the Bushmen. This thesis focuses largely on the first two uses of film in historical studies, although it is also possible and necessary to discuss these films as transmitters of historical knowledge.

In this thesis, each film is situated in an analytical and historical framework wherein its meaning may be assessed more easily. First, each film is considered as evidence of the values and attitudes of its makers. In attempting to understand these markers of ideology(ies) implicitly or overtly expressed in the world of the film, this analysis will consider the context of the making of the film, including the background to its production and the social and intellectual preoccupations

imposed by the filmmakers/producers on its content and structure. Each film will also be appraised in terms of what it tells us about the Bushmen at the time of its making.

Second, in understanding the film *in* history, the filmmaking techniques evident in each will be contextualised within the history of documentary film production as well as in relation to changing ideas about documentary and ethnographic filmmaking. This is because technological capabilities sometimes defined the degree of exposition possible in a film: for example in the 1920s sound was not used in film, and in the 1950s portable synchronous sound recording equipment was not yet freely available. Furthermore, wherever possible the influence of the film will be considered in terms of audience numbers and critical and popular responses to the film. Additionally, another prong of this analysis involves the tracing of *patterns* in the depiction of the Bushmen in these documentaries and thereby identifying ways in which particular films have had evident influences on later ones.

Thirdly the films are also considered as historiography; as films that presents an argument about what the history of its Bushmen subjects is. It could be argued that this kind of analysis is limited by the fact that the majority of documentary films do not acknowledge the history of the Bushmen, and instead posit Bushmen culture as a primordial, static entity. However, it will be argued here that in fact the *discounting* of historical process in Bushmen cultures constitutes an active, influential interpretation of Bushmen history. Furthermore, in some of the films under analysis in this thesis there is a clear attempt to *depict* the history of some Bushmen, and this will be examined at length.

Thus, in each chapter these three modes of analysis will be utilised as a framework for analysing the films. It must be noted that the first, 'film as evidence', comprises two separate aspects, namely film as evidence of the ideas and attitudes of its maker(s) *and* as a source of information about the status of the Bushmen at the time of filming. Importantly, since the films constitute both the *subject* of this study and the *evidence* being utilised, their individual content and style will ultimately dictate the structure of the argument in each chapter. Not all of the films fit comfortably into the framework as it has been laid out in this introduction. For example, in

chapter three, which deals with the film made on the Denver African Expedition, the analysis is fairly evenly weighted between film as historical evidence, film *in* history and film *as* historiography. The structure shifts between examining the film as evidence of ideology and as film *in* history before returning to the film as evidence to examine what it tells us about the Bushmen at the time of its making. Lastly it discusses the film as historiography. By contrast in chapter four, which deals with Laurens van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari*, the content of the film dictates that the bulk of the focus be on the construction of van der Post's ideologies relating to the Bushmen, or film as evidence of ideology. The structure of *Lost World* thus begins with a weighty analysis of the film as evidence, first of values and attitudes and then in terms of what it tells us about the Bushmen in 1955, before discussing the film *in* history and finally *as* history.

It is important to emphasise that it is the *documentary films* that constitute the primary sources for this research and that all argument and analysis flow from a discussion of these sources. This is not, then, a traditional historical studies thesis. In order to substantiate this study as a work of historiography, it is necessary to consider the growing significance of film within the discipline of historical studies.

The place of film in historical studies has generated debate and controversy since the 1940s. Historians have tended to be suspicious of the superficial, reductive nature of film, its ability to be faked and its subject matter distorted; they have distrusted its highly subjective quality and its manipulative, emotional appeal to audiences.⁷ Despite these objections, by the 1960s film (including television) was slowly being drawn into the discipline, and 'film as evidence' of the values and attitudes of the people and periods that produced them was becoming accepted within the academy. Historians who favour its use as source material have argued that film, like written documents, records the intentions and values of its makers⁸, and that close analysis of film with the appropriate analytical skills necessary for understanding its language can reveal rich veins of

⁷ Paul Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 5.

⁸ See, for example, Jeffrey Richards and Anthony Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society 1930-1970* (London: I.B Taurius, 1983), p. 1.

knowledge for the historian. Paul Smith, for example, has argued that there exists no 'immutable hierarchy of sources in terms of their historical significance' and that therefore there should be none in terms of their 'intrinsic purity or impurity'. Furthermore, the criticisms levelled at film as historical record could be levelled equally at other forms of source materials: 'written and printed documents, for instance, may equally be partial, subjective, tendentious, emotional and even forged'.⁹ The corollary to this debate relates to technical skill: the study of film requires particular (and new) techniques of analysis that most historians do not possess.¹⁰

This view of film as a legitimate source for historical research had, by the 1980s, gained general acceptance.¹¹ Aldgate's study of the depiction of the Spanish Civil war in British newsreels of the 1930s is an example of historical scholarship utilising film as a source. In his study, Aldgate showed how film revealed changing attitudes in Britain towards the war.¹² Richards's *The Age of the Dream Palace* is a study of film in history, where film is shown to have influenced the aspirations of ordinary Britons in the interwar years.¹³ Historians have also used fiction and documentary films made about the Vietnam War as significant indicators of the prevailing attitudes towards the war in the United States, and the way that this was reflected in the disparities and the congruencies between the history of the war and the way in which it was represented on film in America. The focus of *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, edited by Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, is on the 'retelling of history and the retrospections that such a process involved,'¹⁴ highlighting the degree to which film becomes intricately bound up in the way history is understood and disseminated in the United States. Of particular interest to this study is the anthology edited by American historians Peter C. Rollins and Joe E. O'Connor called *Hollywood's Indian*. Their study traces the changing depiction of Native Americans in mainstream cinema as a

⁹ Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film*, p. 5. See also William Hughes, 'The Evaluation of Film as Evidence', in Paul Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film*, pp. 49-55 and Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 5 (December 1988), p. 1193.

¹¹ See Robert Toplin, 'The Filmmaker as Historian', *American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 5 (December 1988), p. 1210.

¹² Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Scholar Press, 1979).

¹³ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

¹⁴ Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, 'Introduction', in *From Hanoi to Hollywood* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 1.

means of understanding the historical shifts in perceptions about ‘one of the most important cultural encounters’ in American history.¹⁵

In the late 1980s the ‘film and history’ debate broadened dramatically when American historian Robert A. Rosenstone argued in the *American Historical Review* that film was a potential source of *historiography* – or a means by which historians might *tell* history. Rosenstone’s suggestion sparked heated debate on this subject and a string of subsequent publications began to explore the possibility of, in Rosenstone’s words, ‘really putting history onto film.’¹⁶ Rosenstone’s argument worked from the premise that most ordinary Americans were learning about history from the visual media: documentary films, television documentaries, news and actuality shows and historical feature films.¹⁷ In this sense, Rosenstone argued, it was necessary for historians to start thinking about utilising film as a ‘unique way of rendering and interpreting the past.’¹⁸ Rosenstone controversially argued that historians were in danger of becoming irrelevant in a world defined by the growing power of the visual media, and that it was possible and necessary for historians to start considering the medium of film as a way of producing historical knowledge.¹⁹ The particular attributes of the visual media (including film and documentary) might explore history differently to written media, but with equal validity.

This thesis is an offshoot of the ‘film and history’ debate. As historian Vivian Bickford-Smith argued in the *South African Historical Journal* in 1996, South African historians need to begin engaging with the possibilities of filmic history, as well as applying their expertise to critical

¹⁵ Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor (eds.), *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

¹⁶ Robert A. Rosenstone, ‘History In Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 5 (December 1988), p. 1173. Key publications include: Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Robert A. Rosenstone (ed.), *Revisioning History Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Robert B. Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana: University Press of Kansas, 1996); and Robert B. Toplin, *Reel History: In Defense of Hollywood* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002). See also collections such as Peter C. Rollins (ed.), *Hollywood as Historian: American Film in a Cultural Context* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1983) and M. Landy (ed.) *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words’, p. 1174 and Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Rosenstone, ‘History in Images/History in Words’, pp. 1175-77.

analyses of films and documentaries about South African history.²⁰ In 2003, a special edition of the *South African Historical Review* contained early forays into the study of films on Africa by historians. The articles featured in this special edition approached 'film and history' in the various ways discussed in this introduction: as film *as* history, film as evidence, film *in* history and the influence of films on public attitudes and opinions.²¹ In building on this groundbreaking scholarship, this thesis acknowledges that, as Bickford-Smith has argued, the study of films requires more than expertise on particular subjects on the part of academic historians, it also requires *visual literacy*, and here this thesis offers something unique for South African historiography. Not only will the films in this thesis be studied as sources of information for the historian, they will also be evaluated as communicators of historical knowledge through a critical reading of their film language. In doing so, it will be shown how both individually and collectively these films tell us something about the way in which the meaning of a particular ethnic label has changed between 1925 and 2000.

Importantly, this particular time period (1925-2000) coincides with the rise of the hegemony of the visual media, so that by the 1990s historians could speak of 'post-literate' societies in which people can read but don't, and wherein most historical knowledge and information on other cultures is gained from films and television documentaries.²² In critically appraising these documentary films, this thesis also charts the ascendancy of the monopolistic power of the visual media to influence popular and academic understanding of people called Bushmen in Southern Africa.

²⁰Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Rob Roy in Rondebosch: Putting the Case for Film and History Studies in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, No. 34 (May 1996), p. 153. See also Dylan Craig's unpublished MA thesis on the representation of the South African border conflict in film, 'The Viewer as Conscript' (University of Cape Town, 2003) as a contribution to this new area of historical scholarship, where, as Craig explains, his dissertation 'is concerned with using the *past* in order to understand the *films* which emerge from it' (p. 2). A sample of such South African scholarship might also include for Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Screening Saints and Sinners: The Construction of Filmic and Video Images of Black and White South Africans in Western Popular Culture during the Late Apartheid Era', *Kronos*, no. 27 (2001); Keyan Tomaselli, 'Disarticulating Black Consciousness: A Way of Reading Films About Apartheid', *Communicatio*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1993), pp. 45-51; Jacqueline M. Maingard, 'Strategies of Representation in South African Anti-Apartheid Documentary Film and Video from 1976 to 1995', (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1998); L. van Nierop 'Die Gedaante van die Historiese Feit op Film: 'n Sintese tussen Waarheid en Verdigsels', *Historia*, vol. 45, no. 1 (2000), pp. 11-24; Edwin Hees, 'The Voortrekkers on Film: From Preller to Pornography', *Critical Arts*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1996), pp. 1-22.

²¹ Richard Mendelsohn and Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Representing the Past on Screen', pp. 4-5.

²² Bickford-Smith, 'Rob Roy in Rondebosch', p. 152 and Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, p. 3.

This study might be seen in the context of other studies that foreground the role of visual representation in creating perceptions of the history of a people or of a country. An example of this is *The Colonising Camera*, wherein the history of Namibia is considered through a discussion of photographic relics of that history, and the role of photography in constructing historical discourse.²³ The editors of *The Colonising Camera* make a point relevant to this thesis when they write that:

Historians often regard the photograph as a mere 'illustration' to a more important textual reference, and treat it like a quotation. Quotation itself is often seen as self-evident, and not conceived as a 'language' *which seeks to persuade, or which constitutes a discourse with its own structures of meaning*[own italics].²⁴

Likewise, in this thesis documentary films are not regarded as 'self-evident' representations of the Bushmen. Rather, they are seen as constituting particular discourses that reflect their historical and production contexts. These discourses, it is argued here, can be understood only through close textual analysis of the films.

However, utilising film as source material raises several problems for the historian. Firstly, it is extraordinarily difficult to reference or 'footnote' a film. In this study the films were transcribed before analysis of them was undertaken, but space constraints prohibit the inclusion of these transcripts in the final thesis. Thus, although the films are often quoted directly, bibliographic references to them are not nearly as precise as references to archival sources might be, for example. This is a problem that must be overcome – a system of footnoting films needs to be developed. One possible option is to time-code a film and insert the exact time when an event or quote occurs in a film in the footnote.²⁵ The second problem with using film sources as a historian is the temptation to drift into the realm of 'film criticism', so that one begins to judge the quality and character of a film over and above what it tells us about 'history', whether this be historical context or history as presented in the film. However, in defence of this 'film criticism' it should be noted that the systematic discussion of the aesthetic and narrative strategies of a film

²³ Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann (eds.), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998).

²⁴ Hayes et al, *Colonising Camera*, p. 2.

²⁵ Of course, the advent of DVD makes the process somewhat easier, since the format breaks films up into tracks or 'chapters'. Again, however, this is only useful to academics if the film being analysed (or 'read') is available in the DVD format.

constitutes a very useful way of identifying ideology(ies) therein and revealing the composite parts of such ideology(ies), as will be shown throughout this study. On this point it must be reiterated that part of what this thesis will attempt to show is the importance of 'visual literacy' on the part of historians who analyse film as a source.

Two terms used in this thesis which need further clarification are 'Bushmen' and 'documentary film'. In this study, the term 'Bushmen' refers to those people of Southern African origin who have practised hunting and gathering culture, or who have identified the latter as their cultural inheritance and who speak or have spoken one of a family of 'click' languages endemic to the region.²⁶ The term 'Bushmen' has been identified by some writers and scholars as a pejorative Apartheid-era categorisation with racist undertones, and the label 'San' has been offered as a more appropriate substitution for 'Bushmen'. However, this term has also been criticised since its origins lie in the Khoi-Khoi term meaning 'robber'.²⁷ In this thesis, the term 'Bushmen', though admittedly vague and potentially tainted by earlier racist discourse is also the term most regularly used in the films under discussion. Thus it appears in this thesis as a useful organisational category rather than a precise definition of the people labelled as such.

The other important category utilised throughout this thesis is that of 'documentary film'. This term refers to non-fiction films that claim the ontological status of 'the real' for their subject matter and that are, in Nichol's words, 'serious' communicators of 'truth' or 'reality' along with other 'discourses of sobriety' such as science or history.²⁸ Of course, Nichols is identifying

²⁶ George Silberbauer, an anthropologist who has worked extensively with the Bushmen in Botswana, makes the point that any kind of categorising of Bushmen groups is difficult. His choice of the Botswana word 'Mosarwa' to describe Bushmen, refers to 'people of the Khoisan physical type who live principally by hunting and gathering (or whose ancestors did) and who speak (or whose ancestors spoke) [one of the Bushmen languages]. Silberbauer's definition is in line with the one supplied in the body of this introduction. However, as Silberbauer goes on to argue, 'this wildly imprecise term for a large and loose category... amounts to little more than 'not a member of some other ethnic category' and as such he proposes, where possible, the use of specific group names such as 'Kung' and 'G/wi'. These more particular appellations will be used whenever possible in this thesis, and the use of the term 'Bushmen' is thus qualified as a general organising category rather than a precise definition of a particular culture. See George Silberbauer, 'Morbid Reflexivity and Overgeneralisation in Moswarwa Studies', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 32, no. 1 (February 1991), p. 96.

²⁷ Rob Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface: People of the Great White Lie?', *CVA Review* (Spring 1990), p. 30.

²⁸ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 4.

popular perceptions here, as specialist investigations into 'truth' via philosophy or philosophy of science have long destabilised the positivist hierarchy that presents science as a neutral or 'truthful' body of knowledge.²⁹ The history of documentary film is a history of fierce debate about the possibility of the medium of film ever to represent 'truth'. From its earliest inception, when pioneering documentary theorist John Grierson categorised documentary film as 'the creative treatment of reality', thereby acknowledging the fundamentally mediatory nature of filmmaking, documentary theorists and practitioners have battled with the questions of veracity and verisimilitude in documentary film.³⁰ This largely theoretical debate will be scrutinised at length throughout this thesis, as a means whereby the information load of the film or *what it tells us* can be critically appraised.

A sub-category of documentary film is 'ethnographic film', a concept that is used frequently throughout this thesis. The debate as to what specifically constitutes an ethnographic film is complex. From chapter five onwards, this debate will be reflected in the discussion of, specifically, *The Hunters* (1957), *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974), *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) and *People of the Great Sandface* (1984). For the purposes of this introduction, the term 'ethnographic film' refers to a documentary film that 'seeks to reveal one society to another'.³¹

This study is unique in the field of San or Bushmen studies. Whilst many academics identify documentary and popular feature films as among the major sources of mythological interpretations of Bushmen cultures in Southern Africa, there is almost never any sustained effort made to analyse these films rigorously in their historical context. 'Historical context' here refers to the films both as products of particular times and as part of the history of both the theory and practice of documentary filmmaking. As will be shown throughout the thesis, scholars often use

²⁹ Simon Blackburn, *Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 230-31.

³⁰ The major critical texts on documentary film theory that this thesis will utilise include: Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Richard M. Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Bloomington University Press, 1991); Michael Renov (ed.), *Theorising Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Alan Rosenthal (ed.), *New Challenges for Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³¹ David McDougall, 'Prospects for the Ethnographic Film', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Winter 1969 to 1970), p. 16.

documentary films on the Bushmen as sources in their critical appraisals of the Bushmen myth, and yet their analyses of the films are reductive and in some cases woefully inappropriate. By analysing these films individually and in their chronological positions in relation to each other and the changing Southern African context, this thesis will attempt to counter or contextualise these reductive analyses.

The field of Bushmen or San studies has produced a large body of scholarship, as is evident in the bibliography of this thesis. Most of this work is anthropological or ethnographic in nature.

Of this work Hitchcock writes in 1987:

An unfortunate tendency in the study of African hunter-gatherer societies is to represent their ways of life as essentially static and pristine. Contacts with other societies are usually described as recent or, at the very least, insignificant in impact. Foragers are represented as having been bypassed by history and their role in the political economy of African states is usually relegated to a footnote at best. Diachronic analyses of foraging populations in Africa are rare and have an air of timelessness about them.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this tendency more evident than in the case of the Basarwa (Bushman, San) of southern Africa. Whilst it can be said that the Basarwa represent one of the best studied groups of indigenous peoples in the world today, much of the research done on them has concentrated on foraging adaptations (Tobias 1957, 1978; Lee 1965, 1979; Silberbauer 1965, 1981; Marshall 1976; Lee and DeVore 1976; Tanaka 1980). Relatively little in the way of detailed analysis has been done on socioeconomic change amongst these people.³²

This was to change shortly after the publication of Hitchcock's article. From the early 1980s onwards, revisionist writings on the history of hunter-gatherers in southern Africa began to appear in journals and books. These studies sought to override the discourse of isolationism in much Bushman ethnography and to show that the Bushmen had for centuries been integrated into the local economic systems of the Kalahari region.³³ Robert J. Gordon's *Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* and *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925*, and Edwin N. Wilmsen's *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* brought this debate into the 1990s. This thesis speaks directly to Gordon and Wilmsen's studies by taking a

³² Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana: An Ethnohistorical Analysis', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Summer 1987), pp. 220.

³³ Carmel Schrire, 'An Enquiry into the Evolutionary Status and Apparent Identity of San Hunter-Gatherers', *Human Ecology*, vol. 8 (1980), pp. 9-32; Robert J. Gordon, 'The !Kung in the Kalahari Exchange: An Ethnohistorical Perspective', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), pp. 195-224; J. Denbow, 'Prehistoric Herders and Foragers of the Kalahari: The Evidence for 1500 Years of Interaction', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies*, pp. 175-93; J. Parkington, 'Soaqua and Bushmen: Hunters and Robbers', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies*, pp. 151-74; J. Denbow and E. Wilmsen, 'Iron Age Pastoral Settlements in Botswana', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. 79 (1986), pp. 40-8; J. Denbow, 'A New Look at the Later Prehistory of the Kalahari', *Journal of African History*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1986), pp. 3-28.

particular element identified by them as progenitor of crude mythologising of the Bushmen, namely documentary films, and placing it in its historical context. Over and above the specialist anthropological and ethno-historical debate referenced above, a sizeable number of journal articles and chapters have contributed to this debate around the Bushmen myth, a number of which are utilised in this thesis.³⁴ In this study such scholarship is considered to be reflective of the changing ways in which Bushmen culture has been conceptualised and how this academic conceptualisation is reflected in the films.

For both Wilmsen and Gordon, the *idea* of Bushmen as pristine hunter-gatherers has long ago superseded the historical, economic and political reality of Bushmen people in Southern Africa who live in varying degrees of poverty and dispossession scattered throughout the sub-continent. According to Gordon, who traces the historical genesis of the overwhelming hegemony of the 'Bushmen-as-pristine-hunter-gatherer' myth, films often reflect and reinforce this powerful myth and bypass any real consideration of the problematic positioning of Bushmen people in Southern Africa. Wilmsen takes this argument one step further by positing that the very category of 'Bushmen' is inappropriate, and argues that hunting-and-gathering is only ever a survival strategy in response to extreme dispossession and poverty, and has never been a cultural identity. In this Wilmsen draws on similar arguments by Marks, Schrire and Elphick who have pointed out that in colonial South Africa the ethnic label of "Bushmen" was problematised by the degree of variation between herding domesticated livestock and hunting-and-gathering, depending on access to resources, weather patterns and depredations caused by settler intervention.³⁵

³⁴ This debate is considered at length throughout the thesis. Important works on film representations of the Bushmen include Wilmsen, 'First People?', pp. 1-27; Tomaselli et al, *Myth, Race and Power*, pp. 77-101; Tomaselli, 'Myths, racism and opportunism', pp. 205-21. On the responsibility of film for generic depictions of Bushmen as pristine primitives see Wilmsen, 'First People?', pp. 1-2; Edwin N. Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress: The Marshall Family Testament', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 12 (1999), pp. 229-32, 238-39, 244-46; Edwin N. Wilmsen, 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (June 1995), pp. 201-3; Pippa Skotnes, 'Introduction', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, p. 17, p. 20; Keyan G. Tomaselli, 'Introduction: Media Recuperations of the San', *Critical Arts*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), p. i; Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 123-25; Keyan Tomaselli & J.P Homiak, 'Powering Popular Conceptions: The IKung in the Marshall Family Expedition Films of the 1950s', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 12 (1999), pp. 160-61.

³⁵ See Shula Marks, 'Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Journal of African History*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1972), pp. 55-80; C. Schrire, 'An enquiry into the evolutionary status and apparent identity of San hunter-gatherers', *Human Ecology*, no. 8 (1980), pp. 9-32 and R. Elphick, 'The meaning, origin and use of the terms Khoikhoi, San and Khoisan' in *Cabo*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1974), pp. 3-7. See

Wilmsen's radical questioning of the notion of a distinct 'hunter-gathering' culture or cultures has been countered by scholars who argue that such a cultural identity did and does exist, and that to posit the existence of 'hunting-and-gathering' based only on economic considerations is to deny contrasts 'of an ideological nature' that created 'political boundaries' and delineated ethnic identities.³⁶ The intricacies of this debate, termed the 'Kalahari Debate',³⁷ are considered throughout this thesis when exploring the manner in which the films under analysis conceptualise 'Bushmen culture'. This study is an attempt to explore at greater length the idea, epitomised by Gordon in *The Bushmen Myth* and *Picturing Bushmen*, that films reinforce or recycle the myth of Bushmen as pristine primitives by assessing a number of documentary films and considering *how* and *to what degree* they reflect this process of myth-making.

This thesis, then, draws together strands of various disciplines: anthropology, documentary and ethnographic film theory and history. What binds these strands together is history, and it is to history that this study will constantly return. To understand how the image of the Bushmen in documentary film has changed or stayed the same over seventy-five years is also a chance to understand changing historical contexts, and the way in which film, that powerful medium in our contemporary culture, interprets, reflects, distorts and defines historical process.

Ironically it is a perceived *absence of history* that has marked perceptions of the Bushmen over the past century. Hitchcock explains that:

One of the primary reasons that the Basarwa [Bushmen] have provoked such intense anthropological and popular interest is that some of them practice a way of life that characterizes most of human history. Evolutionary accounts of early hominids often cite the Basarwa as an ethnographic analogue to australopithecines or early *Homo* populations. Human biologists have examined the Basarwa in an attempt to gain insights into genetic patterns and demographic processes. Archaeologists have used data on Basarwa living sites and material remains to reconstruct hunter-gatherer adaptations in places as diverse as the Great Basin of the United States and the coastal desert of Peru. In many senses, the Basarwa have become, as geneticist Trefor Jenkins has described them, southern Africa's 'model people'. Arguments based on analogy make the assumption that patterns observed in the present existed in the past as well. In the case of the Basarwa researchers tend to take for granted that the patterns described by twentieth century ethnographers have persisted over a substantial period.³⁸

also Pieter Jolly, 'Between the Lines: Some Remarks on "Bushman" Ethnicity', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 197-209.

³⁶ Andrew Smith, 'Khoi/San Relationships: Marginal Differences or Ethnicity', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, p. 251.

³⁷ Alan Barnard, 'Laurens van der Post and the Kalahari Debate', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 239-47.

³⁸ Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana: An Ethnohistorical Analysis', pp. 219-21.

What distinguishes the Bushmen as subjects of research is their perceived status as living relics of the past. The Bushmen tell us about the past, but they *have* no past – theirs is the never-changing ethnographic present. Documentary film, then, draws on a long intellectual and popular tradition of seeing the Bushmen ahistorically. How individual films negotiate this intellectual legacy in their construction of images of the Bushmen will be examined at length in a thesis which seeks to find evidence of history (change over time) where it was thought that there was none.

In chapter two of this thesis a brief, generalised historical outline of the history of Namibia and Botswana will be given, as well as an appraisal of the changing position of Bushmen peoples in these countries. This is by way of giving a background to the more specific discussions of historical context in the individual chapters.

Chapter three examines the film *The Bushmen* (1925), made during the Denver African Expedition to South West Africa in 1925. Chapter four is a study of Laurens van der Post's influential 1956 BBC documentary film series *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956). As will be shown, van der Post's conceptualisation of Bushmen culture was highly influential in the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter five is a study of the second influential documentary film made about Bushmen in the 1950s, *The Hunters* (1957) directed by American John Marshall. Through close critical analysis and historical contextualisation, it will be argued that Marshall's imaging of some Bushmen in *The Hunters* is markedly different from van der Post's mythological portrayal in *Lost World*.

Chapter six continues the theme of John Marshall's contact with the Bushmen of Southern Africa, this time by studying a television documentary film made by the National Geographic Society, *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) that looks at Marshall's return to the region in the early 1970s. In chapter seven the first major documentary film to challenge the myth of the Bushmen as pristine primitive is discussed. *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) by John Marshall is an

in-depth study of the political, historical and social causes of impoverishment and social dysfunction at a Bushmen government settlement in South West Africa called Tshumkwe.

Chapter eight appraises a South African documentary film by Paul John Myburgh, *People of the Great Sandface* (1984), which reflects the continued power in the early 1980s of the ahistorical view of Bushmen culture in the context of Apartheid. In the conclusion to this thesis the post-Apartheid, South African-made documentary film *The Great Dance* (2000) by Craig and Damon Foster is utilised as a barometer of the way in which 'Bushmen' were conceptualised in documentary film at the start of the twenty-first century.

This thesis largely examines films that have been classified as having 'ethnographic' rather than historical content. Such categorisation of the individual films will be examined and explained at length throughout the thesis. This, then, is a study that reveals changing ideas about documentary film over time at the same time as it reveals how some documentary films have depicted changing ideas about the Bushmen between 1925 and 2000.

CHAPTER TWO

DEMOGRAPHICS AND GENERAL HISTORICAL OUTLINE

This chapter serves to briefly contextualise the periods under discussion in the rest of this thesis through a very broad account of the conditions in twentieth-century Botswana and Namibia which defined the social and political parameters of the Bushmen subjects of the films under discussion. Part of the phenomenon of the mythical image of the 'pristine hunter-gatherer' is that he/she occupies no particular historical context and his/her territory is never geographically defined. Hence, as will be shown throughout this thesis, the domain of the Bushmen is reflected in many of these films (with some notable exceptions) as 'the desert' or 'the Kalahari desert'. Every chapter thus considers the historical context of the making of the films to clarify these generalisations. In some chapters, geographical regions overlap. So, for example, *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956) and *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) were both filmed in Botswana. This means that while the specific contexts of filming in Botswana in 1955 and in 1971-72 are different, the broader historical context of the country and its recent history remains the same for both films. *The Bushmen* (1925), *The Hunters* (1956), *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) and *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) were filmed in Namibia. *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956), *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974), *People of the Great Sandface* (1984), and *The Great Dance* (2000) were all filmed in Botswana.

By the start of the twentieth century, Bushmen groups in South Africa had been decimated.¹ Only in Namibia and Botswana did peripatetic groups continue to eke out a living on the peripheries of the state. Despite the fact that these remaining groups defied final extinction as culturally identifiable ethnic entities, their history, like that of the South African Bushmen, is one of oppression and dispossession.

¹ Nigel Penn, 'Fated to Perish': The Destruction of the Cape San', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1996), pp. 81-91. See also Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), p. 66.

2.2 NAMIBIA

As with Bushmen groups throughout the southern African region, the Bushmen people of Namibia had struggled to hold their territory from the 1500s onwards, when a large-scale influx of Bantu-speaking people from the north displaced many groups throughout the region. Thus, by the 19th century and the arrival of white colonialism, only a small proportion of the Bushmen inhabitants of Namibia – spread mainly throughout the east of the country – remained autonomous of the new powers in the country.² White colonial control first by Germany and then by South Africa defined the political landscape of Namibia for most of the twentieth century. It was this white colonialism rather than the earlier Bantu incursions that resulted in the most acute marginalisation of Bushmen people in Namibia from the 19th century onwards.³ Under German colonial rule, which lasted from 1894-1914, the Bushmen suffered less than they would under the later South African regime, because the German colonists were absorbed in attempting to pacify the Otjiherero- and Nama-speaking people of the country.⁴

Prior to 1991, demographic studies of the Bushmen of Namibia were largely speculative.⁵ In 1921 the Bushmen population of Namibia was estimated at 5 000. By 1957 this figure stood at 15 000. As of 2001, the Bushmen population of Namibia was estimated at between 30 000 and 33 000, or 2% of the national population.⁶ What this reveals is that, contrary to the popular perception throughout the twentieth century that the Bushmen were facing imminent demise, their population numbers have been rising steadily.⁷ Where hunting-and-gathering was still the primary form of subsistence for Bushmen communities in the twentieth century, population numbers remained stable. However, this occurred only in areas like Nyae Nyae (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 3) where the Bushmen practised hunting-and-gathering until the end of the 1950s. The larger part of the Bushmen population was steadily integrated into the colonial political economy

² James Suzman, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia*, Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa, Report Series, Report No. 4 of 5 (Legal Assistance Centre, Windhoek, 2001), p. 5.

³ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 5.

⁴ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 5.

⁵ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p.4.

⁶ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. xvii.

⁷ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 4.

throughout the twentieth century and their population numbers climbed.⁸ It is the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae who are the focus of much of John Marshall's filmmaking, as discussed in this thesis, such as *The Hunters* (1957) and *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980). However, the Ju/Wasi's continued ability to practise hunting-and-gathering into the 1950s (which will be discussed in chapter five) did not constitute the norm for Namibian Bushmen: in 1950s South West Africa, the majority of Bushmen belonged to the rural proletariat, managing to survive by working on white settler farms.⁹ Census figures support this: the Bushmen of Nyae Nyae (an area later incorporated into the apartheid 'homeland' Bushmanland – see Fig. 3) numbered just 459 of a total Namibian Bushmen population of 21 909 in 1970 (roughly 3% of the Bushmen population). In 1981 this figure had risen to 2 245 of a total Bushmen population of 29 441.¹⁰ Thus, what has collapsed in Namibia through the course of the twentieth century is the *practise of hunting-and-gathering culture* and *not* the people called 'Bushmen', whose numbers have actually *risen*.

German colonial occupation of South West Africa ended with South African occupation of the country during World War I. At the end of the Great War, the League of Nations awarded South West Africa as a mandated territory to South Africa to administer. After World War II, South Africa refused to turn the mandated territory of South West Africa over to the United Nations and continued to administer it as a colony. This was in opposition to United Nations policy, which required that all territories allocated as mandates after World War I should be brought under United Nations Trusteeship. Furthermore, the Malan government which came to power in 1948 opted for a vigorous assertion of sovereignty rather than engaging in any kind of compromise under the force of international pressure. The South African government announced to the United Nations in 1948 that since the mandate had lapsed South Africa would no longer send courtesy reports on South West Africa to the United Nations; instead South West Africa was given representation in the Union

⁸ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 4.

⁹ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 157.

¹⁰ Statistics quoted in Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 8.

Parliament.¹¹ Thus, despite mounting international opposition, South Africa continued to administer South West Africa as though 'it were a fifth province.'¹²

Under South African colonial rule, the Bushmen people of Namibia suffered great losses to their remaining territory due to the SWA administration's land policies. With the implementation of Apartheid policy in South West Africa after 1948, large homelands were created for indigenous groups. The Bushmen who had been living beyond the 'police zone' of direct government control found themselves, from this point, forcibly incorporated into the homelands of other racial groups, such as the Herero.¹³ The only groups of Bushmen who still managed to live without a great deal of interference from the South West African administration, white ranchers or pastoral Herero at this time were the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae. It was they who would later become the subjects of research by the Marshall family in their expeditions to South West Africa in the 1950s that will be examined in chapter five of this thesis. However, as several writers have argued,¹⁴ even the !Kung of Nyae Nyae had contact with their Herero neighbours. Furthermore, due to the road carved by the Marshalls into remote Nyae Nyae in the 1950s they became subject to recruitment from white ranchers seeking cheap labour for their farms.¹⁵ This shift from relative autonomy to direct colonial intervention experienced by the Ju/Wasi between the 1950s and the 1970s will be discussed at greater length later in this thesis.

Thus, by the 1970s, fewer than 3% of Namibia's then-25 000 strong Bushmen population retained even limited rights to any land. The belated establishment of 'Bushmanland' in 1971, which is discussed in the film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Women* and in chapter seven of this thesis,

¹¹ Rodney Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 312-14.

¹² Richard Lee and Susan Hurlich, 'From Foragers to Fighters: South Africa's militarization of the Namibian San' in Lee and Hurlich (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*, p. 330.

¹³ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, pp. 172-73.

¹⁴ Tomaselli and Homiak, 'Powering Popular Conceptions', pp. 153-84; Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Power', pp. 222-27, 241-44; Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 29-35.

¹⁵ There is a particular incident referred to by John Marshall which purportedly occurred in Nyae Nyae in 1956, when #Toma and his family were kidnapped by white ranchers and eventually escaped and returned to Nyae Nyae. See Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 33. Marshall's story has been disputed by Edwin Wilmsen in 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress' in *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 12 (1999), pp. 213-65. The important point is that Nyae Nyae was not completely isolated from the rest of South West Africa in the 1950s, and furthermore it is worth noting that it is almost on the border between South West Africa and Bechuanaland.

did not really solve the general landlessness of the Bushmen population. This was because, as discussed, only 3% of the population actually lived in the area at the time that Bushmanland was established. The other areas of Namibia where Bushmen groups lived were subsumed into commercial farming areas, 'homelands' assigned to other ethnic groups, game reserves or national parks.¹⁶

The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) was formed in 1960 by oppressed Namibians with the aim of liberating SWA from South African colonial rule. In response, SAP (South African Police) activity in SWA increased dramatically, as did repressive measures against resistance to South African rule. In response to this increasing repression, SWAPO launched its armed struggle in 1966, attacking South African bases in the Caprivi Strip. South Africa's response was to strengthen its SAP operational units in SWA, while training within South Africa was revised with a new emphasis on counter-insurgency (COIN) techniques. By 1972, SWAPO operations, both military and political, had gained such strength that the SAP was struggling to contain the uprising. By 1973 the South African Defence Force had moved into Namibia and taken control of all military and paramilitary operations in northern Namibia.¹⁷

The SADF established a strong presence in Bushmanland in 1978, as will be discussed in chapter seven of this thesis. The South African military improved local infrastructure and pumped a great deal of money into the local economy. It also offered a relatively lucrative source of income for about 200 to 250 Bushmen men who joined the SADF and served until demobilisation in 1990.¹⁸

As Namibia began to move towards independence from South African rule and black majority rule in the 1980s, there developed a movement to re-appraise the role of the Bushmen in Namibian society. Within the space of sixty years, between the late 1930s and the 1980s, Bushmen had moved from being popularly conceived of as 'vermin' to being 'beautiful people'

¹⁶ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Collin Bundy, 'Some Aspects of the South African Military Occupation of Namibia', prepared by the Preparatory Committee with the assistance of COSAWR, for the International Conference in Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Namibia (Paris, 1980), p. 1.

¹⁸ Suzman, *An Assessment*, p. 41.

worthy of preservationist drives and political activism, as will be shown through the course of this study.¹⁹

2.1 BOTSWANA

As in the Namibian context, by the second half of the twentieth century the Bushmen population of Botswana had either been absorbed into the farming economies of areas like the Ghanzi farming block (see Fig. 2) as labourers or were living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR – see Fig. 4)) on or near government settlements, relying on borehole water and a mixed economy to survive. An element of this mixed economy was the tourist trade: after Botswana's independence in 1966, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve became a popular destination for international tourists, who often sought out 'Bushmen' to view them in their 'natural' state.²⁰

In 1964 the number of Bushmen in Botswana was estimated to be 24 652.²¹ Of these, some four thousand were estimated to be living on European-owned farms in the Ghanzi district, either as employees or as dependents of the white farmers.²² Approximately 6 000 were 'wild' Bushmen who were able to subsist on the proceeds of hunting and gathering, or who lived in remote areas and made few, brief visits (if any) to the Ghanzi farms or Bantu-owned cattle posts for purposes of trade or acquiring food and water.²³ The remaining fourteen thousand lived permanently or for most of the year at 'Bantu' villages or cattle posts, or in close proximity to them as clients or labourers of the Bantu.²⁴ In the Ghanzi district, the entrenchment of commercial farming forced the Bushmen into serfdom under European masters who generally compensated their Bushmen herders solely with minor food rations.²⁵ Bushmen who relied on traditional permanent water

¹⁹ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 219.

²⁰ Brandenburg and Hitchcock, 'Tourism, Conservation, and Culture in the Kalahari Desert, Botswana' in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 14, no. 2 (1990): p. 24.

²¹ George B. Silberbauer, *Report to the Government of Bechuanaland on the Bushmen Survey*, (Gaborone: Bechuanaland Government Publication, 1965), p. 13.

²² Silberbauer, *Report to the Government of Bechuanaland*, p. 14.

²³ Silberbauer, *Report to the Government of Bechuanaland*, p. 14.

²⁴ Silberbauer, *Report to the Government of Bechuanaland*, p. 14.

²⁵ Cassidy et al, *The Status of the San*, p. 42.

supplies along the Ghanzi ridge thus faced serious deprivation as a result of their dispossession from the farming block. In the CKGR water was scarce except where the government sunk boreholes. These were intended to assist the Bushmen in their hunting-and-gathering lifestyle in the CKGR. However, pumps were not installed in the boreholes. As a result they often became clogged and were useless as sources of water.²⁶

In 1976, the Childers Report showed that there were 4 512 Bushmen farm workers in Ghanzi, meaning that they constituted 58% of the district's population and were by far the largest ethnic group. There is no available evidence of the number of Bushmen living in the CKGR at that time. Chapter six examines *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974), a film which details the experiences of some Bushmen residents of the CKGR in 1971-1972. In the 1970s Bushmen throughout Botswana experienced a high level of poverty, discrimination from the other ethnic groups in the country, especially the Setswana-speaking majority, and continued landlessness.²⁷ They were 'outside of the development process... an underclass that knew its place: they did not expect government jobs...and did not make demands on the government.'²⁸

In 1986, a fact-finding mission to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve by the Botswana Ministry of Commerce and Industry found that the Bushmen would have to move out of the Reserve.²⁹ In Circular Number 1 of 15 July 1986 it ruled that the 'social and economic development of the various settlements in the Reserve, including the largest village, Xade [Xade]' (see Fig. 1) should be frozen because they had 'no prospect of becoming economically viable'. The decision by the government to attempt to evict the Bushmen from the CKGR caused an international furore, with human rights organisations such as Survival International opposing the move.³⁰ Gordon argues that the pressure to remove the Bushmen from the CKGR came from various sources, including the conservation-conscious European tourists who were 'upset when these Bushmen [whom they had gone to view] did not measure up to their expectations, which were fed largely

²⁶ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 54.

²⁷ Cassidy et al, *The Status of the San*, p. 43.

²⁸ Cassidy et al, *The Status of the San*, p. 44.

²⁹ Sandy Gall, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001), p. 169.

³⁰ Gordon, *People of the Great Sandface*, p. 31.

on pulp movies like *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and Laurens van der Post's musings...[m]oreover the Bushmen they saw engaged in such disgustingly irritating behaviour as "begging". Other factors at play included the need to 'open areas of cattle production and placate the European conservationists' lobby which felt that Bushmen were killing too much game [in the CKGR].'³¹

The discovery of diamonds in the Central Kalahari Game reserve and the increasing importance of eco-tourism for the economy of Botswana meant that between 1984 and 2000, the move by the Botswana government to evict the remaining Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve escalated.³² The government announced that this policy of resettlement was a result of the Reserve containing 'resources of national importance' that needed to be protected. These evictions from the Reserve were often achieved through coercion: beating and forced removals were reported by victims of the policy.³³ This issue is still not resolved: as of 2005 the Bushmen of the CKGR are currently fighting their eviction in the Botswana courts.

³¹ Gordon, *People of the Great Sandface*, p. 31.

³² Gall, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa*, pp. 170-71.

³³ Gall, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa*, p. 183.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DENVER AFRICAN EXPEDITION OF 1925 AND *THE BUSHMEN*

This chapter explores the film entitled *The Bushmen*, about the 1925 Denver African Expedition (DAE) to South West Africa. It is an early documentary on the Bushmen, and important because it depicts an expedition that produced the first overtly romanticised, internationally distributed photographic images of the Bushmen of Namibia.¹ The expedition also produced a film, that contained similarly striking visual imagery as the photographs, but which was less successful in its distribution, as will be discussed below. This chapter draws largely on Robert J. Gordon's study of the DAE expedition and the photographic offshoots thereof, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925*. Gordon's in-depth analysis is focused on the photographs of the expedition and his discussion of the film is limited to four pages of a 140-page study. This chapter, then, builds on Gordon's study by closely analysing the film; this is in spite of the fact that the photographs *look* similar to the images in the film and were produced in the same context. However, and in relation to the discussion in the introduction to this thesis, this analysis treats *The Bushmen* as a 'language' that is different to the photographs of the expedition, and which constitutes a discourse with its own structures of meaning, and its own significance.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the prevailing iconography of Bushmen in literature and film antecedent to and contemporaneous with the time of the expedition. This is in order to provide a context for the Denver Expedition's interest in documenting Bushmen society. It will also provide a history of Bushmen iconography up until the 1920s. This will be followed by a discussion of the expedition members and the aims and objects of the expedition, as well as a synopsis of the film.

As outlined in the introduction, the film will then be analysed in the following ways. Firstly, for evidence of the values, attitudes and influences of the people and the period that produced it. It

¹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 3.

will be shown in this chapter that the film reflects an aggressively racist conceptualisation of the Bushmen, in keeping with Social Darwinist thought of the mid-1920s that sought to depict the Bushmen subjects of the film as specimens of a barbarous race doomed to extinction due to an innate inability to become civilised. It will be shown how this discourse was in keeping with the scientific pretensions of the expedition, which sought to discover the 'missing link' between men and apes. In further understanding *The Bushmen* as an ideological product of its time, this chapter takes as a starting point two influences on the expedition that Robert J. Gordon identifies in *Picturing Bushmen*, namely colonial travel writing and early twentieth century travelogue films, and explores how these influences are reflected in the world of the film. This examination will be related to an analysis of how the *form and content* of the film reveal these influences.

The film then will be considered in light of the evidence it contains about the conditions of Bushmen people in Namibia in the 1920s. It will be argued that *The Bushmen* has limited use as a source of such evidence. This is as a result of the highly contrived nature of the film which, as will be shown, was defined more by the ideologies of its makers than by the actual encounter between the Bushmen and the expedition members. However, there are in *The Bushmen* some depictions of engagement with technology such as arrow-making, shelter-building, cooking and clothes-making. It will be argued that these details, glossed over in the explanatory intertitles, tell us what it was *thought* Bushmen looked like in 1925. This analysis will be expanded upon further in the next section, which looks at *The Bushmen* as film *in* history, and as the first of the eight documentary film representations under analysis in this thesis. It cannot be proved that *The Bushmen* had a direct influence on later documentary films on the Bushmen. The film had limited distribution and was certainly less popular than the photographs that were taken on the expedition. What makes the film significant to this thesis is rather the way in which it *foreshadows* trends in later documentary films on the Bushmen. This relates to an interesting anomaly in *The Bushmen*: it will be shown that there exists a dissonance between the images in the film and the way in which those images are interpreted in the narration of the film. It will be argued that the iconography of the film is discordant with its ideology as manifested in its intertitles. This argument is a response to Gordon's assertion that the Denver Expedition film and photographs

constituted the first overtly romanticised, internationally distributed images of the Bushmen of Namibia.² It will be argued here that the ‘romantic’ elements of the film are entirely related to the visuals and that the way in which the Bushmen are photographed in *The Bushmen* is remarkably similar to later, romanticised depictions of the Bushmen as pristine primitives, despite the ideological framing of these images in the film.

The final element of this analysis considers *The Bushmen* as a film that tells us about the history of the Bushmen. It will be argued that the film denies that the Bushmen have a history; and rather posits an *absence* of history as proof of the Bushmen’s barbarism, which does in fact constitute an argument about the history of the Bushmen. It will be shown how a contrived sequence at the end of the film is utilised to support the arguments made in the film about the Bushmen having ‘no history’. Finally let it be noted that, due to the nature of the film, the weighting of the different modes of analysis in this chapter is comparatively even.

3.1 BUSHMEN ICONOGRAPHY AND SCHOLARSHIP BEFORE 1925: A

BRIEF HISTORY

A general pattern may be discerned in the writing on and iconography of the Bushmen before the twentieth century. Surprisingly, before the 1880s the Bushmen were not universally condemned for their ‘savagery’ and incompatibility with modernity as was the case in, for example, the discourse of the DAE. Due to the Bushmen’s usefulness as hunters and their perceived value as camp workers, early explorers such as Thomas Baines and Gordon Cummings regarded the Bushmen with whom they had contact relatively favourably. Baines and other travellers through the Ghanzi district of present-day Botswana were impressed by the ‘manly bearing’ of the Nharo Bushmen they encountered. Baines was inspired to quote verse by Thomas Pringle who had seen in the Bushmen ‘Lords of the Desert’, the ideal noble savages.³

² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 3.

³ Mathias Geunther, ‘From “Lords of the Desert” to “Rubbish People”: The Colonial and Contemporary State of the Nharo of Botswana’, in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, p. 231.

Imperial commentators such as John Barrow compared them favourably to Boers and Barrow's illustrator, Samuel Daniell, drew sympathetic sketches of them.⁴ Equally, in early South African literature there was ambivalence towards the purported savagery of the Bushmen. Ian Glenn points to the discourse of admiration for the 'Noble Savagery' of the Bushmen in the influential writing of eighteenth-century explorer and writer Francois le Vaillant, who acknowledged that the banditry and brutality displayed by the Bushmen was in part a desperate and brave response to the persistent incursions into their territory by both other indigenous peoples (such as the Hottentots) and gun-toting colonialists. This concept of the 'Noble Savage' was forwarded by 'Paris-bound' French intellectuals who argued that humans were better off as 'children of nature', free of the prejudices and conventions of European establishment institutions such as the monarchy and church.⁵ Early South African novelists such as Harriet Martineau and Edward Kendall reflected in new forms Le Valliant's contention that the Bushmen were both violent thugs and yet also victims of history and justified seekers of vengeance.⁶ Furthermore, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd's voluminous mid-nineteenth-century scholarship on the language and folklore of the !Xam Bushmen of South Africa was highly sympathetic towards its subject matter and was accompanied by powerfully resonant images of their !Xam informants.⁷ Bleek's pioneering philology on the click language of the Bushmen posited that linguistically the Bushmen were distinct from the Khoi and thus were not simply impoverished Hottentots. Bushmen were not, Bleek argued, the lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder, but were closer in many ways to European culture than might have been presupposed.⁸ This argument related well to archaeological arguments at that time which saw European rock art as created by a 'Bushmen-like race'.⁹

⁴ Paul S. Landau, 'With Camera and Gun in Southern Africa: Inventing the Image of the Bushmen, c. 1880-1935', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 130, 132.

⁵ John E. O' Connor, 'The White Man's Indian: An Institutional Approach', in Rollins and O' Connor (eds.), *Hollywood's Indian*, p. 27.

⁶ Ian Glenn, 'The Bushmen in Early South African Literature', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 41-9.

⁷ See for example J.D. Lewis-Williams, *Discovering Southern African Rock Art* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1996), pp. 34-9; Pippa Skotnes, 'Introduction', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 18, 21-3 and Michael Godby, 'Images of //Kabbo', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 115-28.

⁸ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 44.

⁹ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 44.

However, by the 1880s the ivory and ostrich feather trades had decayed. Bushmen guides and hunters were no longer of use as they had been to many earlier expeditions. More and more travellers began to denigrate the Bushmen, describing them in animal terms.¹⁰ The guerrilla war between the Bushmen of Southern Africa and the colonists was coming to an end, with the colonists enjoying decisive victory.¹¹ By the 1920s, most photographic depictions of Bushmen were decidedly unflattering, with Bushmen pictured, according to Robert J. Gordon, as 'degenerate'.¹² As shown in *Miscast*, edited by Pippa Skotnes, images of emaciated, poverty-stricken Bushmen were taken from the 1860s onwards, as well as grisly images of mass executions of Bushmen 'bandits' by hanging and shooting and mounted Bushmen 'trophy heads'.¹³ It will be shown in this chapter that these depictions were in part a reflection of prevailing scientific notions of race and evolution, wherein Bushmen were seen as primitive precursors to a chain of human evolution that ultimately resulted in civilised white men, and whose demise was regarded as imminent and justified.¹⁴ As Glenn has argued, 'the influence of Le Vaillant and the spirit of enlightenment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century meant that writing about indigenous peoples was far less racist *than it was to be for the century afterwards* [own italics]'.¹⁵

Another element that needs to be understood in explaining the DAE's interest in the Bushmen was the growing focus on the Bushmen as objects of scholarly study. As Dubow points out, by the mid-nineteenth century Bushmen society in South Africa had been 'decisively smashed'.¹⁶ As a result of this, 'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots' 'acquired novelty value and could now safely be turned into the subjects of academic speculation'.¹⁷ Gordon points to a similar pattern in Namibia. In South West Africa by the early twentieth century, the demise of the Bushmen was

¹⁰ Landau, 'With Camera and Gun', p. 132.

¹¹ See for example Nigel Penn, 'Fated to Perish: The Destruction of the Cape San', in Pippa Skotnes, (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 81-92.

¹² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 123. See also Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 72, for an example of one of these postcards dating from the time of the German colony in South West Africa.

¹³ Pippa Skotnes, 'Introduction', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Saul Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1995), pp. 66-73.

¹⁵ Glenn, 'The Bushmen in Early South African Literature', p. 46.

¹⁶ Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 66.

¹⁷ Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 66.

seen as inevitable and international interest in studying the Bushmen grew rapidly as a result of the perceived urgency of the task.¹⁸ By 1909, the Bushmen were already being filmed for scholarly purposes by Austrian ethnologist Rudolf Pöch who made a film about the Bushmen in 1909 during an eighteen-month expedition through South West Africa and also accumulated the largest collection of Bushmen skulls in the world.¹⁹ Pöch's research into the physical appearance, manners and customs of the Bushmen was facilitated by technology, with the Bushmen being photographed and their language studied through the use of a phonograph.²⁰

Importantly, Pöch's interest lay only in 'pristine' Bushmen living their traditional lifestyle. Pöch's 1909 expedition to South Africa produced a film in which all the Bushmen are dressed in traditional garb, without any indication of their contact with modernity, despite the fact that photographs from the same expedition showed the Bushmen whom Pöch encountered dressed in tattered European clothing.²¹ Pöch's influence was minimal in the Anglophone world where his film was not distributed.²²

Similarly, images amongst German anthropologist Gustav Fritsch's photography of Bushmen living on South African farms between 1863 and 1872 show the healthy-looking subjects without Western dress or accretions.²³ This excising from the scholarly record of acculturated Bushmen was a foreshadowing of later trends in the depiction of the Bushmen on film.

South African administration of South West Africa, eager to attract potential new white settlers, encouraged this scholarly interest in the Bushmen, as can be seen in the active support shown for the Denver Expedition in 1925.²⁴ The DAE of 1925 needs to be examined in the context of this nascent nationalism in South West Africa, which saw a desire to encourage international interest

¹⁸ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 109-13.

¹⁹ Robert Gordon, 'Captured on Film': Bushmen and the Claptrap of Performative Primitives', in Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (eds.), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 215.

²⁰ Gordon, 'Captured on Film', pp. 215-16.

²¹ Gordon, 'Captured on Film', p. 214.

²² Gordon, 'Captured on Film', p. 216.

²³ See Andrew Bank, 'Anthropology and Portrait Photography: Gustav Fritsch's 'Natives of South Africa', 1863-1872', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, no. 28 (2002), pp. 53-4. Fritsch was invited by an English farmer, Bain, to his farm near Bloemfontein to 'gaze upon his rarities... Bushmen of the purest origin that can be found in the land.'

²⁴ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 102-3, 113-16.

in the territory. As Gordon has shown, a corollary of this nationalism was the fear amongst leading South West African citizens that well-equipped expeditions such as Denver would march into the country, film and photograph the Bushmen, and return to the United States to carry out research utilising the artefacts of their journey. It was argued that the priority should be to attract scientists to South West Africa and let them conduct their research there, which meant looking after the scientific assets of the country and not permitting their easy exploitation by scientists from other countries. In this regard, the administration 'Bushmen expert', a Dr. Fourie, ensured that the Denver expedition was steered away from Gobabis, which was regarded as 'prime Bushmen area', where the 'purest' Bushmen lived. Rather, they were directed to the Etosha game park, near Grootfontein, where Hei//kom Bushmen lived who bore 'unmistakable evidence of interbreeding with other races, especially the Bantu'.²⁵ Gordon's fascinating account of this manipulation of the DAE by the South West African administration shows conclusively the degree to which *The Bushmen* was largely a fiction defined by the aims and objectives of the expedition members and the influence of the South West African government.²⁶ In this regard, Gordon makes the interesting point that tourists to the Etosha Game Park in the years between World War One and World War Two 'were frequently surprised by "wild" Bushmen who would then gratefully accept cigarettes and thus reveal their "tamelessness"'.²⁷ The Bushmen with whom the DAE made contact were, according to the intertitles, the Hei//kom Bushmen, and Gordon states that the expedition occurred largely within the boundaries of the Etosha Game Park, although this is never acknowledged in the film.²⁸ This puts paid to the claim made in the film that the Bushmen filmed were 'wild' and had had no previous contact with 'civilisation'. What is important to note here is that already in 1925 scholarly and popular interest lay in 'wild' Bushmen living untainted by civilisation.

²⁵ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 114-15.

²⁶ The influence of the SWA administration on the outcome of the expedition is alluded to in the film when the Denver African Expedition leave Windhoek, with an intertitle declaring that they have 'received permission to enter the forbidden Kalahari.' In the preceding scenes shot in Windhoek amidst members of the South West African administration, the Governor of SWA is specifically thanked in an intertitle that reads beneficently 'we are indebted to Mr Hoffmeyer, Governor of South West Africa, and his splendid staff, without whose co-operation our expedition could not have carried on.' These allusions in the film are a telling indication of the politics behind the expedition.

²⁷ Gordon, "Captured on Film", p. 222.

²⁸ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 41.

3.2 BACKGROUND TO THE DENVER EXPEDITION²⁹

In the atmosphere of growing interest in the Bushmen as objects of scholarly study, the Denver Expedition was organised by Ernest C. Cadle to go to Africa in an effort to seek out the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, who were believed to be living dinosaurs, or 'stone age' human beings. Cadle, who had scientific pretensions, intended to prove that those said Bushmen were the 'missing link' between apes and men. Born in South Africa in 1886, Cadle emigrated to the USA during World War One where he studied theology, eventually graduating from the Iliff Theology School in Denver with a B.A and a B.D. Paul Hoefler, a self-educated cameraman who had worked in Galveston, Texas and in Los Angeles, was working as a freelance photographer-journalist for the Denver Post when he met Cadle. Since both men nurtured dreams of going to Africa, they decided that together they might succeed in organising an expedition. By this time Cadle had moved into popular science, and in later life would be known as an 'eminent anthropologist' and 'internationally renowned scientist'. Cadle sold the idea of the expedition to his sponsors by framing it as a search for the 'missing link' between men and apes, a topic that had become popular in the aftermath of Raymond Dart's discovery of the Taung Skull.³⁰ The expedition, while certainly not achieving the levels of fame achieved by similar expeditions to Africa, such as Theodore Roosevelt's much-publicised safari to East Africa in 1909, produced a series of famed photographs, and a film entitled *The Bushmen*.

3.3 THE BUSHMEN: A SYNOPSIS

The film of the DAE, simply titled *The Bushmen*, runs to just over an hour and a half and consists of nine black-and-white, 35mm, silent negative reels. The film is thus broken down into nine 'sub-sections', although this is not always reflected in the continuity of the film. The only

²⁹ This section of the chapter is drawn largely from Robert J. Gordon's scholarly account of the DAE in *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 16-32.

³⁰ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 16-19.

remaining copy of the film is in the South African Archives in Pretoria. It is possible that over time the reels have become mixed up, which would explain the confusion in the continuity. The film can be further broken down into individual shots, of which the film comprises 664. In a silent film, the movement of the action from shot to shot is far more noticeable than in a sound film, as the lack of audible directives focuses the viewer's attention more closely on the images, to which we look for complete comprehension of the film. The overall narrative of the film constructs itself around a journey that ends, according to the final intertitle of the film, 'In solitude and mystery - lost in the shifting sands of the Kalahari.'

The film begins in Cape Town and tracks the expedition as it moves up the coast of Africa from Durban to Beira to Nairobi to Zanzibar. At each stop the landscape becomes less and less familiar. The cities of Durban and Nairobi are followed by a panning shot of the open veldt, emphasising the vastness of the landscape. It is here that the logic of the sequences seems to waver a little: the film moves suddenly to Windhoek, the capital of South West Africa, with an intertitle that declares 'We are indebted to Mr Hoffmeyer, Governor of South West Africa, and his splendid staff, without whose co-operation our expedition could not have carried on.' The scenes in Windhoek consist mainly of large group shots of the administrator of Windhoek and his staff and the Denver Expedition Members posing in front of their truck, shaking hands with various government officials and driving triumphantly out of Windhoek with an American flag appended to their laden vehicle.

The film now cuts suddenly and surprisingly to Zanzibar, with an intertitle that reads 'A step backward in Time - Zanzibar, famous Isle of Spice, a name immortalised by the glamour and romance of *Arabian Nights*.' There is much focus on narrow streets, fishing boats riding the waves in a bay off the island and palm trees waving in front of stone houses. The meaning of this sequence in the film as a whole is unclear, and it could be that the reels have been mixed up.

The film can be divided into two sections: the first is the travelogue or journey section, the second depicts the contact between the expedition and the Bushmen. There appears to be little coherence to the 'travelogue' section of the film, which depicts the expedition's journey up

through various African cities, through degrees of strangeness (a growing sense of the unfamiliarity and exoticness of the landscape) towards the intended meeting with the Bushmen. The destinations seem to be randomly chosen and barely have been introduced before the film cuts to a new place. The reason for this could simply be the entertainment incentive: that in order to continually delight audiences back home in America, the expedition needed to include as much exotic footage as possible, to illustrate the other-worldliness of the African continent. One result of this 'travelogue' section, however, is that a stark contrast is built up between colonial Africa, as epitomised by the cities and towns featured, and 'wild' Africa, that inhabited by the Bushmen.

Once the city-and-town section of the film is finished, the film moves away from 'colonial Africa' and the landscape and indigenous peoples come into focus. Shot after shot of animals, trees, rivers and empty wilderness are interspersed with shots of black Africans employed by the Expedition – and who are pointedly and unsubtly contrasted with shots of monkeys playing in fields and trees. A number of different black African tribes whom the Expedition meets upon its journey are depicted. These sequences chart a superficial survey of tribal rituals and modes of food production, and many of the intertitles are patronising or mocking, with very few of the people filmed being properly named, save for some members of royal houses. The focus of these shots is mainly on the dances and wrestling matches of the Ovambo people of South West Africa, to the exclusion of any representation of other activities.

Sections three and four of the film focus mostly on animals and the main human players interacting with animals in some way: tracking them, hunting them or photographing them. The film briefly depicts an encounter with some Masai hunters in Kenya, although the focus is more on the lion they are hunting than on the men themselves. When the Bushmen are finally mentioned for the first time at the end of section four, fully 297 shots into the film, the intertitle reads: 'One boundary of the bushman's domain, the Etosha Pan – forty-five hundred square miles of bottomless mud and slime'.

It is a telling introduction to the Bushmen: the image of 'bottomless mud and slime' is particularly primal, and conjures up images of birth or death, or the formlessness of a primordial swamp. The film has facilitated a journey across time and space, through cities and towns, through countryside, through various groups of people who represent greater and greater departure from the 'civilised' centres of Durban or Cape Town, through magical landscapes alive with strange and beautiful animals, to the very edge of prehistory: the domain of the Bushmen, bordered by 'bottomless mud and slime'. The last three sections of the film chart the contact between the DAE and the Bushmen, and will be considered in greater detail below.

3.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE I:

3.4.1 READING *THE BUSHMEN* FOR EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF ITS MAKERS

The discourse of the film clearly reflects popular attitudes to race that were prevalent at the time of the making of the film. The opening intertitle of the film reads: 'A journey *into the past* [own italics] undertaken by Dr. Ernest C. Cadle, Scientist, assisted by scientists from the University of Cape Town and the Museum of South Africa...'. This is followed by an intertitle which reads: 'Africa - known in ancient times as "the mother of all living", the legendary cradle of the human race', followed by 'A grim and savage mother veiled in clouds of mystery – a brooding spirit fiercely jealous of her solitude'. This is very important, as it frames the narrative of the film as built around a temporal journey across a strange and exotic African landscape but also as a geographic journey back through time to the primitive Bushmen.

This particular framing of the expedition as moving 'backwards in time' is thematically reflective of 19th century anthropological writing: those people furthest from European civilisation came to represent the most primitive forms of humanity.³¹ The Bushmen and Hottentots of Southern Africa, who were often collapsed into one ethnic group for the sake of scientific expedience,

³¹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 19.

were popular case studies for evidence of the most primitive and destitute specimens of humanity. As far back as 1870, the British writer Rev. J.G. Wood's two-volume *The Natural History of Man* devoted three chapters to his study of the Bushmen, reflecting the popular discourse of the time, which argued that there was an unmistakable correlation between those occupying the lowest rung of human development and geographical distance from Europe.³²

Thus, when the first Bushman appears in *The Bushmen* in shot 323, an intertitle reads 'Very near the bottom of the path extending through the ages – the home of a Heikum [sic] Bushman, just a window screen of sticks and grass'. It is an important introduction. It signals the end of the journey *back* through time and spaces, for the Bushmen have been 'discovered'. It also immediately points out the simplicity of a bushman shelter, a direct comment on the 'crudeness' of Bushmen life. The point is then made by the intertitles that 'through intermarriage and barter with more advanced tribes they have learned a little in the last thousand years'. This establishes the fundamental premise of the film – that Bushmen are culturally and historically stagnant and can only change if external forces intervene in their isolated social groups. There is a correlation between this depiction of the Bushmen and early twentieth century representations of Native Americans in literature, documentary photography and film that reflected a characteristic view of these people as impeding progress because they lacked the good sense which the whites utilised in developing the American landscape.³³

The exposition of the Bushmen's purported primitive nature and culture continues throughout the section of the film which describes the contact between the Bushmen and the Expedition members. Importantly, this theme is expressed exclusively in the intertitles. A typical intertitle at this point reads 'The Art of pottery far beyond his knowledge, the Bushman must depend upon Nature for all domestic utensils', followed by a shot of a tortoise running across grass. Later we see a woman scooping water out of a waterhole using the tortoise shell as a container. Another intertitle reads 'Meat barely seared on the fire and eaten with the ashes as a relish.' The

³² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 20-1.

³³ O' Connor, 'The White Man's Indian', pp. 27-8.

insinuation that Bushmen eat raw meat neatly corroborates the over-arching 'message' of the film that emphasises their purportedly primitive nature.

In the sequence where the Expedition meets up with Masai Hunters, the explanatory intertitle reads 'The Masai – a high type of Nomad, men of great courage'. It is significant that the film introduces a 'high' kind of nomad. There has been a tendency to insert the Masai alongside Bushmen as Noble Savages into Anglo-Saxon colonial ideology, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, as seen in popular fiction.³⁴ In this 1925 film, however, whilst the Masai are 'high' nomads, proud and brave, the Bushmen are relegated to the very lowest rung on the human evolutionary ladder.

The idea that the Bushmen were living relics of ancient humanity was not new in 1925, but the idea had received a new wave of interest, particularly with the focus on Africa following the discovery of the Taung skull by Raymond Dart, who would become one of South Africa's most famous scientists. In early 1925, Dart published the findings of his study of the Taung skull in the scientific journal *Nature*, where he made the revolutionary claim that the Taung skull represented an intermediate stage of development between living anthropoids and man. The finding of the Taung skull seemed to vindicate Darwin's speculative prediction that 'Africa would prove to be the cradle of mankind'.³⁵ Dart himself, in radio talks, suggested that the Bushman-Hottentot 'types' of mankind and culture were 'living survivals of humanity's infancy'.³⁶

The search for the 'missing link' between man and higher primates has long been a preoccupation in Western thought. Theories of evolution in the nineteenth century greatly increased popular interest in the course of human development.³⁷ This search for the 'missing

³⁴ David Maughan Brown, 'The Noble Savage in Anglo-Saxon Colonial Ideology, 1950-1980: "Masai" and "Bushmen" in popular fiction', *English in Africa*, vol. 10, no. 2 (October 1983), pp. 55-77.

³⁵ Quoted in Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 43.

³⁶ Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 46.

³⁷ Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 43.

link' combined widespread interest in natural history with 'the romance and mystery of discovery'.³⁸

Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century the quest to discover the progenitors of modern humans attained the status of an informal scientific competition with distinctly nationalistic overtones.³⁹ This is evident in the strategies of the DAE, which was specifically framed as a scientific expedition. Cadle and Hoefler generated funding for their expedition on the basis that they would bring honour and renown to the city of Denver by finding the 'true missing link between the highest anthropoid ape and the highest type of manhood'.⁴⁰ There was, then, much invested in framing the Bushmen as 'primitives'. The intertitles reflect this discourse at every level, and the entire film is framed as a journey through space and time to find the relics of human evolution, the last remaining traces of early humanity that were about to be washed away by the advancing tide of 'civilisation'.

The influence of Social Darwinism (a 'naïve' social Darwinism, as Gordon terms it⁴¹) runs like a thread throughout *The Bushmen*. As Social Darwinist thought enjoyed its apogee in the 1920s,⁴² the idea that human evolution was defined by racial fitness ('survival of the fittest') would have been uppermost in the minds of the Expedition members, whose purpose was after all to seek relics of early humanity in the Kalahari Desert. Social Darwinist thought was applied particularly to indigenous populations around the world, such as the Maoris of New Zealand, the Aboriginals of Australia and the Native Americans of the United States. According to racial assumptions common in the early twentieth century, the 'inferior peoples' of these nations had been encouraged to acculturate, but their dismal failure, indicated by the rapid diminishing of indigenous populations through starvation, disease and cultural dislocation, was seen as an

³⁸ Gillian Beer, *Forging the Missing Link: Interdisciplinary Stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 12, 14; quoted in Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 43.

³⁹ Dubow, *Illicit Union*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ *The Denver Post* (July 8, 1925) quoted in Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 16.

⁴¹ Robert J. Gordon, 'Backdrops and Bushmen: An Expeditious Comment', in Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann (eds.), *The Colonizing Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, p. 116.

⁴² Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 268-69. See also Dubow, *Illicit Union*, pp. 120-27.

inevitable outcome of natural evolutionary process that dictated the survival of the fittest.⁴³ There is evidence of this kind of Social Darwinist discourse at several points in the film: as shown, the journey depicted in the film is not only a geographic journey, it is also a journey through various 'types' of nations in Africa. These various races are framed to accentuate the division between the 'civilised' and the 'uncivilised' people on the African continent. Thus the film begins in Cape Town with its familiarly British street scenes of men in bowler hats and cars riding up and down in much the same way as would be occurring on any street in London in 1925. When the Expedition reaches Zanzibar the intertitle reads 'Arab, Persian, Hindoo, Syrian, Copt, Swahili and Goanese swarm the narrow streets. Each learning a little good from the other – and much vice'. By the time the expedition has journeyed back through time to the Bushmen, it is to a 'bottomless world of mud and slime' – the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder, lower than the brave Masai and antithetical to the urban centres of the continent.

What these intertitles also indicate is the intent of the 'civilised' forces in Africa – ultimately and inevitably to infuse indigenous African cultures with the force of civilisation. Such intertitles appear early on in the film, for example, 'But Adventure and Commerce have planted the torch of civilisation on African frontiers – where the primitive and modern man meet face to face and each wonders at the other', 'The Cecil Rhodes Memorial – a man with the vision to see an Empire in the African veldt and jungle' and 'Durban – where the savage Zulu learns from his conqueror the ways of civilisation'. Thus, the journey is built around a series of evolutionary stepping stones from 'civilised' Cape Town and Durban to utterly 'uncivilised' Bushmen in the Kalahari who are thus also almost extinct, in keeping with the Social Darwinist theme.

⁴³ Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot, *The Nations Within: Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, the United States and New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 3-4.

3.4.2 FURTHER UNDERSTANDING THE FORM AND CONTENT OF *THE BUSHMEN*

3.4.2.1 CONSIDERING THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY DOCUMENTARY AND TRAVELOGUE FILMS

There are other evident influences on the ideological shaping of the DAE film. The first of these is the influence of early travelogue and documentary films. This is particularly evident in the *structuring* of the film. A simple breakdown of the various foci of the camera in *The Bushmen* reveals a peculiar pattern for a film supposed to be about Bushmen. Actual shots relating to the Bushmen number more or less fifty percent of the entire film, with 329 shots focusing on the Bushmen, or relating an aspect of nature or of animal movement to an activity being carried out by one or more Bushmen. A full 28.6% or 190 shots focus on animals, of which 60 of these shots relate the animals to Bushmen hunting or dancing. Thus, 20% of the entire film focuses on animals, completely distinct from any human activity. This fits into the 'genre' of the expedition, which Gordon places squarely within a long 'Safari Tradition', dating back to the travels of explorer-writers such as Francis Galton, Charles Andersson, Thomas Baines, James Chapman and, most famously, David Livingstone.⁴⁴ However, it is argued here that the structure of the film also relates to its particular *film* genre that has clear precedents.

In the early years of cinema, some of the leading film-producing nations were colonial powers. Thus, film became an important instrument for the reflection of the kinds of attitudes that made up the colonial rationale.⁴⁵ Barnouw writes that, in the first few decades of this colonial cinema:

Coverage of 'natives' generally showed them to be charming, quaint, sometimes mysterious; generally loyal, grateful for the protection and guidance of Europeans. Europeans were benevolently interested in colourful native rituals, costumes, dances, processions. The native was encouraged to exhibit these quaint matters for the camera.⁴⁶

This kind of superficial, supercilious ethnographic survey is evident throughout *The Bushmen*, particularly in the sequence dealing with the Ovambo in the 'travelogue' section of the film, and

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 19-21.

⁴⁵ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 23.

in the sequences depicting the contact between the Expedition and the Bushmen. All activities and technology attributed to the Bushmen are treated rather condescendingly. For example, a man playing an instrument is described as 'The primitive idea of music – the twang of a bowstring'. There is a long sequence in which woman break ostrich eggs apart and shapes the shell pieces into beads, making decorative jewellery. This process is described as 'the Dawn of Art – making beads from ostrich egg shells'. A woman filmed sewing is described as 'A stone-age seamstress – sinew for thread – an awl for a needle and springbok hide for dress material'.

However, there were commercial considerations to be made. Barnouw has argued that as the popularity of documentary films began to decline in the early years of the twentieth century, the 'documentarist-as-explorer', showed the greatest potential for continuing vitality.⁴⁷ Explorer-travelogue films had become popular around 1909, with the release of Theodore Roosevelt's documented travels through East Africa which had been filmed by Cherry Kearton, a famous naturalist-photographer from London.⁴⁸ The work of American couple Osa and Martin Johnson epitomised the nature of adventure-travelogues: of the Martin Johnsons, Barnouw writes that 'self-glorification was the keynote. Unabashed condescension and amusement marked their attitude towards natives'.⁴⁹ Their first major commercial success, *Among the Cannibal Isles of the South Pacific* (1918), pictured the 'petite, photogenic yet "plucky" Osa amidst cannibals and head hunters' in a film with racist intertitles and gags.⁵⁰ The film was a great success and generated financial support for a second trip to Melanesia, which provided the material for a second popular film, *Jungle Adventures* (1921).⁵¹ Gordon attributes their success to a remarkable sense of what the audience wanted: their personification of American values and the fact that millions of Americans could share vicariously in their exciting escapades.⁵² Thus, the allure of adventure-travelogues and their value as entertaining money spinners was well established by the early 1920s when the DAE film was made.

⁴⁷ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Greg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁹ Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 50.

⁵⁰ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, p. 28.

⁵¹ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, p. 28.

⁵² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 98. For a fuller account of the career of the Johnson's, see Mitman, *Reel Nature*, pp. 26-35.

The massive success of Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), which documented the traditional lives of the Inuit, set the trend for popular 'romantic' documentary films, as Grierson termed them, which pitted man in a battle against Nature.⁵³ What set *Nanook* apart from previous non-fiction films was Flaherty's radical departure from the cursory nature of travelogue filmmaking, which had been a major trend of the first two decades of non-fiction filmmaking. The travelogue was, in Flaherty's words, 'a scene of this and that, [with] no relation, no thread'.⁵⁴

In contrast to the travelogue-adventure films, Robert Flaherty's work in *Nanook of the North* constituted a genuine attempt to understand and respectfully to depict on film another culture. This involved a commitment in terms of time as well as patience and endurance on the part of the filmmaker.⁵⁵ In *Picturing Bushmen*, Gordon argues that expedition films such as *The Bushmen* were situated in the emergent Hollywood tradition of presenting the Other that would become known as documentary, and that was epitomised by Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922).⁵⁶ However, this would be to conflate the divergent forms of the documentary and the travelogue. Flaherty changed the course of documentary film history by pioneering a mode of filmmaking that was non-fictional, but that utilised in-depth representational and interpretative strategies and a strong narrative structure with key identifiable characters.⁵⁷

In contrast, *The Bushmen* has a narrative trajectory that is unclear and ill-defined. No effort is made to properly name or identify individual people, and the crude interpretations of events reflected in the intertitle commentary show scant evidence of any in-depth study of the Bushmen people that the Denver expedition came to film. The structure of *The Bushmen* emulates rather the Johnsons' films, utilising racist gags and reinforcing racial stereotypes of black people as lazy and inferior.⁵⁸

⁵³ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Boston Faber, 1979), p. 84.

⁵⁴ Described in Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ See John Grierson's discussion of the principles behind making a 'documentary' such as those produced by Flaherty in Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, pp. 81-2.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 98.

⁵⁷ See for example Robert Sherwood, 'Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*', in Jacobs (ed.), *The Documentary Tradition*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, p. 33.

In contrast, Flaherty consciously attempted to romanticise the traditional cultures of the people he filmed. He wrote about filming *Nanook* that

The urge that I had to make *Nanook* came from the way I felt about these people, my admiration for them; I wanted to tell others about them. This was my whole reason for making the film. In so many travelogues you see, the filmmaker looks down on and never up to his subject. He is always the big man from New York or from London.⁵⁹

If we compare this to the ideas about Bushmen that appear in the commentary of *The Bushmen*, it becomes very clear that the DAE did not intend to romanticise the Bushmen, they *were* rather 'the big men' from Denver, most certainly looking down on their subjects. Rather than falling into the same filmic mode as Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), *The Bushmen* falls into the category of the early travelogue film, replete with the sarcastic, patronising intertitles that reflect a paternalistic attitude towards black Africans, and most specifically the Bushmen, on the part of the expedition members.⁶⁰

3.4.2.2 THE INFLUENCE OF COLONIAL TRAVEL WRITING ON *THE BUSHMEN*

Another influence that is evident in *The Bushmen* is colonial travel writing, which provides some interesting antecedents to the film, and is also reflected in certain themes prevalent throughout the film. A survey of some of the colonial travel writing antecedent to the DAE describes encounters between Bushmen and expedition members that are remarkably similar to those depicted in *The Bushmen*. Consider this description by James Chapman, who was hunting in Botswana on the 28th July 1852, of an encounter with Bushmen:

This morning some more Bushmen were hunted up by their friends and came. True amazement and surprise was visible on every face, they stood and stared in utter bewilderment... one trod over the *trektoen*, bounded off and we saw no more of him. They would not touch any of our property or allow anything to come into contact with their bodies. They shrank from everything. Our Bushmen told us they had seen the spoor of our wagons and were at a loss to make out what animals they were. They asked whether my large wagon with the broad tyres was not the mother of the other four, her calves.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Quoted in Paul Rotha, *Robert J. Flaherty*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 50.

⁶⁰ However, any documentary film made after 1922, when *Nanook of the North* was released, must be considered in the context of this seminal film's influence. It can be discerned in the sequences depicting the contact between the Bushmen and the Denver African Expedition members.

⁶¹ James Chapman, *Travels in the Interior of Africa 1849-1863*, ed. Edward C. Tabler (Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1971), p. 67.

In *The Bushmen*, an obviously staged sequence bears a notable resemblance to Chapman's encounter. The sequence opens with the already-mentioned intertitle: 'Establishing contact with Kalahari Bushmen was like gaining the confidence of a wild animal'. This is followed by a sequence in which two of the expedition members place sweets and tobacco on palm fronds at the side of a track winding through the bush. This action is described as 'offerings of candy and tobacco placed beside a well travelled trail'. The expedition members walk off camera. Some time passes. Suddenly, from behind the bushes two Bushmen men walk slowly into the frame. They pause, look straight at the camera and immediately turn and flee in apparent terror.

The scene is clearly staged. The area where most of the sequences depicting Bushmen people were shot fell within the parameters of a proclaimed game reserve and as Gordon has argued, it is very unlikely that there were any Bushmen at that juncture who had had no contact with whites, or cars, or cameras.⁶² Furthermore, the light does not change in the shot, which indicates that no time has passed in the filming of the sequence, and the two 'surprised Bushmen' somehow manage to look straight at the camera before they run away. It can be surmised from their body language that the two men knew exactly where to look.

Shot 595 is an intertitle that reads 'But curiosity at last triumphed'. This is followed by a scene in which the 'terrified' Bushmen of the previous sequence now sneak out from behind a tree and inch cautiously towards the 'bait'. This elaborate staging of contact between Bushmen and the expedition members then utilised modes that would have been *familiar* to an audience back home that had watched other travelogue films and read the writings of travellers to Africa that remained perennially popular reading in the West.

There are other parallels between colonial travel writing from the previous two centuries, and the DAE film. Pratt argues that there is a strong pattern of displacement of humans in the writings of colonial travellers; in place of which the landscape is intricately and lovingly detailed. The narration of many travel writings proves to be mostly descriptive sequences detailing vistas, with

⁶² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 41.

travellers being present mainly as a kind of 'collective roving eye' which registers these sights.⁶³ This analysis is applicable to *The Bushmen*. The intensive focus on animals and landscape in this film has already been noted. The idea of the 'collective roving eye' is particularly apt when considering the role of the camera in the journey depicted in the film. Of 664 shots in the film, a mere 6.2% or 41 shots include Denver Expedition Members in the frame. Rather, the camera 'roves' disembodied across landscapes, capturing animals, peoples and the physical terrain. For an expedition so firmly focused on the publicity potential of the trip, the adventurers' absence from the film is noteworthy.

Both Pratt and Rich⁶⁴ argue that part of this attenuation of the traveller-author in favour of an intricate vision of the landscape as seen in written travelogues is about the *potential* of the landscape as a site of political and economic exploitation that will forward the aims of the colonial state. Focusing on the indigenous inhabitants would mean focusing on the problems of land ownership and rights to land: an empty landscape is a landscape for the taking.⁶⁵ Thus, the governing ideology of the explorer-traveller affects the way the 'new world' is described. In the same way that the 'roving eye' – disembodied and all-seeing – of the travel-writer becomes a substitute for meaningful contact between the explorer and the indigenous inhabitants, so the 'roving-eye' of the camera in *The Bushmen* never lingers long enough to properly document its subject. In part this can be explained by the clear ideological framing of the Bushmen throughout the film that limits the need for (and the usefulness of) real engagement with and exploration of its subject matter.

⁶³ Mary Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 142.

⁶⁴ Paul Rich, 'Landscape, Social Darwinism and the Cultural Roots of South African Racial Ideology', Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town. Africa Seminar Paper (1 June 1983), p. 1-7.

⁶⁵ See William Beinart, 'Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century Cape', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (December 1998), pp. 775-99 for a refutation of Pratt's interpretation of travel writings on Southern Africa. Beinart argues that analysis of the texts which Pratt offers as evidence of aggressive male scientific 'colonisation' of the landscape reveals a multiplicity of authorial positions on the part of the predominantly male traveller-writers that do not always uphold the 'empty landscape' position of colonial ideology in South Africa. He points out that one often sees in these texts a conscious engagement with indigenous inhabitants on the part of these men, as well as evidence of dissent against over-arching colonial ideologies such as the brutal treatment of Bushmen by Boers in the Cape Colony.

3.5 FILM AS EVIDENCE II:

3.5.1 WHAT THE FILM TELLS US ABOUT BUSHMEN IN 1925

Tomaselli has commented on the wealth of useful ethnographic information provided by the sequences detailing the technology and activities of the Bushmen in *The Bushmen* – useful, that is, if the patronising intertitles are ignored.⁶⁶ He writes that

There are... numerous sequences in... *Denver African Expedition* [sic] which qualify for an analysis based on their importance as valuable historical ethnography. In the *Denver African Expedition* the appropriate sequences, if considered purely in terms of the visual, are treated holistically insofar as the camera employs lengthy wide angle shots and reduces potential distortion by giving adequate 'film space' to each sequence.⁶⁷

Certainly the film contains several scenes of communal life, technology and domestic practices such as the making of arrows, the production of food and clothing and the leisure activities of the Bushmen which are potentially rich with information about Bushmen culture. The film also reveals evidence of great camaraderie amongst the Bushmen and an efficiently organised division of labour, as for example in the 'shelter building' scene, where the men provide the material and the woman build the shelter.

This sequence occurs just after the Bushmen subjects have been introduced in the film. Their introduction is followed by a survey of the activities of the group. The intertitle (shot 342) reads 'A new family moves in with its earthly belongings'. A group of people files towards the camera, carrying bundles upon their heads. The family begin to build a shelter (*skerm*), all the while talking and laughing amongst themselves. The women do the actual construction and the men arrive later, carrying bundles of grass, which the women then deftly pack inside the shelter as insulation. The sequences are explained by an intertitle that reads 'Permanently settled in twenty minutes'. This description calls attention to the impermanence and simplicity of the shelter. However, what it entirely fails to take into account are the images themselves which, rather than depicting a lack of skill or sophistication on the part of the shelter-builders, in fact show a highly ordered and cohesive group effort, with efficient division of labour and deft application of skills,

⁶⁶ Keyan Tomaselli et al, *Myth, Race and Power: South Africans Images on Film and Television*, p. 84.

⁶⁷ Tomaselli et al, *Myth, Race and Power*, p. 24.

so that the speed with which the shelter is built seems less an indication of simplicity and more one of the sophisticated organisation of group skills within the community.

The men of the group are filmed making arrows. An intertitle introduces the arrow-making, declaring 'Arrow-making: the ultimate Bushmen craftsmanship'. It is the closest that the commentary of the film comes to attributing any form of technology to the Bushmen. The ensuing sequences document the making of arrows, the preparation of poisons and the testing of arrow heads and shafts for defects. Despite the dismissive intertitle, the sequence shows a process of production that is both complex and expertly carried out by various men. One medium close-up shot of an athletic young man deftly testing the strength of an arrow shaft with swift and intricate movements is arresting, not least because the man appears to take absolutely no notice of the camera, going about his task with consummate ease and expertise.

What is evident in these sequences is that, as Tomaselli notes, this information is ideologically tainted because of its framing. These ethnographic details cannot be divorced from their production context, which, as we have seen, was defined by a very clear understanding on the part of the filmmakers about who and what the Bushmen were. The details of what was being depicted weren't especially important; it was the overarching message that was significant. As O'Connor argues about feature film representations of Native Americans in Hollywood films:

Moviegoers came to expect Indians to be presented in a characteristic way. The designers of Indian movie costumes have generally given little attention to the actual dress of the tribes. Language elements, cultural beliefs, and religious rituals of one tribe have been attributed to others – or, more often, invented on the set. Frequently, Native American actors have been denied roles as Indians in favour of non-Indian actors whom the producers thought 'looked better'. Not many Americans noticed: where the finer points of Indian culture and history are concerned, moviegoers have never been particularly discriminating.⁶⁸

Apparently neither were the DAE members in filming the Bushmen. A paragraph from the journal of Paul Hoefler, the Denver Expedition filmmaker, is revealing of this:

A Drama of Bushmen life was completed, it embraced home life, dancing and hunting. It was found that Bushmen were natural actors, *through my interpreter they were made to understand what was wanted of them and after seeing negatives etc., they entered into the spirit of the thing and needed no coaching.*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ O'Connell, 'The White Man's Indian', p. 33.

⁶⁹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 49 (my italics).

Thus, even the ethnographic information in this film should be approached with caution, as it is framed by a particular ideological discourse. Furthermore, non-diegetically (or outside the world of the film) a great deal of contriving went on in 'staging' a drama of Bushmen life.

However, the film does tell the historian what Bushmen were *thought* to look like in 1925: a people who wore skins, lived in a desert landscape devoid of any evidence of contact with modern Africa and practised their culture apparently unmolested by the outside world. In other words the Bushmen in *The Bushmen* look very similar to what later documentary films would call 'pristine' Bushmen, as will be seen in this thesis. This point is explored further in the section which follows.

3.6 THE BUSHMEN AS FILM IN HISTORY

3.6.1 AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF THE IMAGING ON FILM OF BUSHMEN AS PRISTINE PRIMITIVES

We have examined the evident influences in the ideological shaping of the DAE as reflected in the construction of *The Bushmen*. We now turn to a study of the film *in history*. As we have seen, Gordon identifies the film and photographic offshoots of the DAE as the first influential, internationally distributed depiction of romanticised images of the Bushmen. Gordon's identification of the images produced by the DAE as 'romantic' are correct, but it is argued here that the 'romance' is not present in their ideological framing within the world of the film, but rather in their depiction of 'pristine' Bushmen in their 'natural' environment. This is evident in the dissonance between the images and their imposed ideology, as will be shown below.

When describing the contact between the Bushmen and the Expedition, the intertitles of the film characterise the Bushmen as stupid, dangerous, isolated and bestial, as can be seen in the following examples of intertitles from the film: 'When startled, the Bushman betrays animal cunning to a marked degree - - but the Divine Spark of Intelligence barely flickers'; the home of

the Bushmen is described as 'the windswept sands of the Kalahari desert, last retreat of the true bushman – a race isolated by their hatred of all mankind' and 'establishing contact with Kalahari Bushmen was like gaining the confidence of a wild animal'.

However, as we have seen in the analysis of what the film tells us about the Bushmen in 1925, the visuals contradict these descriptions. For example, the early contact between Expedition and the Bushmen sees the expedition members handing out various gifts and trinkets. In one shot, a group of Bushmen are filmed sitting upon the Expedition's vehicle. One of the Bushmen women leans forwards and blows a suggestive kiss at the camera. The rest of the group roar with laughter. This is not the behaviour of a person who is terrified witless at contact with Europeans. Nor is it the behaviour of someone who is uncomfortable in front of the camera; rather it seems to indicate a decided adroitness in 'acting' for the camera.

We have seen how the technologies of the Bushmen are dismissed as evidence of their barbarism, although the visuals depict highly skilled people engaging in cohesive group work with a great deal of camaraderie evident amongst them. The film also documents various leisure activities, including a game between the men involving sleight of hand and an archery competition. Interspersed throughout these sequences are shots of toddlers holding miniature bows and arrows or dancing and playing near their parents. The children are gently looked after, cajoled and included in group activities such as shooting and dancing. The repeated images of contented, well-looked after children are inserted in a film that finally describes the Bushmen as 'Pygmies as treacherous and cruel as the land of their habitation – having no possessions but bow and dog – no history – no morality – no god'. And yet there is not a single shot which shows any activity that could be described as 'cruel' or 'treacherous'. These explanatory categories become meaningless as the images emerge as the powerful 'vein' of knowledge in this film.

There is a historical precedent to this dissonance between image and ideology in *The Bushmen*. It is a trend that dates back to the earliest iconography of the Khoi and San in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where written descriptions of such differed from their accompanying illustrations, the former emphasising the barbarity of the subjects, the latter often depicting

stylised sketches of 'natives' in forms reminiscent of European art. It has been argued that dissonance can in part be explained by the pressure on early African travelogues to show the 'new lands' and their inhabitants as 'the Other' whilst at the same time creating images that would be recognisable to a European audience.⁷⁰ Similarly, although in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Bushmen in Southern Africa being hunted down and killed as bandits and outlaws by white settlers, they were not *pictured* as dangerous for American and European audiences – instead they were 'drawn into a wider conservationist discourse about African fauna and flora'.⁷¹ As we have seen, it was around this time (from the late 19th to the early 20th century) that the Bushmen were becoming the subject of scholarship, which often entailed the use of photographic equipment to depict them.

Van Wyk Smith's argument proposes that contradictions between the visual and verbal elements of early iconography of the Bushmen can in part be explained by the technology of the times, but most importantly by an understanding of who the author is communicating with and what they are trying to say. This analysis applies aptly to the Denver Expedition. As discussed in the previous section, the film was conceived of as a 'Drama of Bushmen Life' which was being defined by the filmmakers who had a very clear idea of 'what [they] wanted' of the Bushmen. The Bushmen were actors in a play whose form and content had already been decided. It is argued here that there existed a very clear understanding of what the Expedition expected to encounter when they encountered the Bushmen, and it was *these ideas*, and not the actual encounter or the nature of the visual documentation of the encounter, that shaped the intertitles of the film. The potential audience of the film would have been expecting such an ideologically defined depiction of the Bushmen: a standard trope of Hollywood films at this time was that of the savage, inhuman Indian whose bloodthirsty nature would stop at nothing to be satiated. For example, in D.W. Griffith's 1914 film *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, the Indians are so savage that they contrive to steal the white female heroine's puppy so that they can consume it in a ritualistic

⁷⁰ M. van Wyk Smith, 'The Most Wretched of the Human Race: The Iconography of the Khoikhoi (Hottentots) 1500-1800', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 285-87.

⁷¹ Landau, 'With Camera and Gun', pp. 136-37.

orgy of violence.⁷² The trope of 'savage Indians' was a popular plotline right up to the 1930s in Hollywood films.⁷³ As we saw in the preceding analysis, *The Bushmen* is structurally akin to popular travelogues – or one might say more Hollywood's Indian than Flaherty's Inuit.

In a Hollywood feature film, it was possible to get Indians to eat puppies, but in the DAE film, despite the imposed ideological framework of the film, the Bushmen subjects did not apparently cooperate with their 'directors'. Thus, there is no visual evidence of their barbarism or savagery – on the contrary, the images are beautiful and striking – hence Gordon's argument about their 'romantic' nature. Gordon has shown that the photographs from the expedition were published around the world in different newspapers, and that the captions used to describe the photos varied from place to place.⁷⁴ The exotic beauty of the photographs could therefore be divorced from their context and re-interpreted. However, in *The Bushmen* the images are married to their original ideological incarnation as defined by their makers because of the *form* of film, with its narration and narrative and the prescriptive nature of the intertitles. Gordon acknowledges this in a later article on the DAE, where he writes of the film that:

Part of the potency of the brew lies in the fact that the accompanying film [*The Bushmen*] is superior to photography as a means of controlling and imaging time and the past [own italics]. Fatimah Rony argues that, as a documentary, a photograph is subject and can disrupt realism, while details in a movie are subjected to 'diegesis' and thus more easily result in socially mediated meanings.⁷⁵

However, in identifying the dissonance between the images and their imposed meaning in the intertitles it is argued that this process is not definitive – the images 'break away' from their context when viewed by the historian seventy-nine years later and are notable less for their framing in the DAE film and more because of their similarity to later, idealised images of the Bushmen as pristine primitives. Most importantly, then, *The Bushmen* is an early example of images of 'pristine primitive' Bushmen in documentary film being utilised to illustrate a discourse divorced from the reality in which those images were gathered, in order to express a particular set of ideas and attitudes.

⁷² O'Connor, 'The White Man's Indian', p. 28.

⁷³ O'Connor, 'The White Man's Indian', p. 28.

⁷⁴ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 4-5, Appendix B, pp. 175-76.

⁷⁵ Gordon, 'Backdrops and Bushmen: An Expendious Comment', in Hartmann et al, (eds.), *The Colonising Camera*, p. 116.

3.6.2 RECEPTION OF, AND DEBATE AROUND, THE FILM

Although *The Bushmen* provides an important portent of how later documentary films on the Bushmen would look, it is difficult to assess how influential the film has been. Only one copy of the film remains, housed at the South African National Archives in Pretoria. At the time of release, the film itself was not a great success. Reviews in the United States were lukewarm and the film was never bought by a national distributor, although it was bought for international distribution by the Pathé organisation.⁷⁶ Despite repeated attempts it has not been possible to discover whether or where Pathé screened the film – such a dearth of information suggests that in fact it did not enjoy widespread distribution at all. Ernest C. Cadle toured the middle-class, business-club circuit in the United States and gave lectures accompanied by a screening of the film.⁷⁷ Gordon has shown how the photographs of the expedition were cleverly merchandised, appearing in newspapers around the world. Throughout the expedition Cadle sent cables and press releases back to the United States, where the story was given prominent coverage in the press. In Southern Africa and later in Great Britain there was similarly widespread interest in the expedition, with reports appearing in the major British, South African and South West African newspapers.⁷⁸ The photographic images of the expedition and their encounter with the Bushmen, similar to those captured in the expedition film, were seen by people around the world. Thus it can be argued that for a brief time, the expedition and its filmic and photographic offshoots had some influence. Yet even this fact has been disputed by Edwin Wilmsen, who points to the fact that in the interwar years fewer than a hundred articles on Bushmen were indexed in the major guides to American and European periodicals, and ‘none in the *American Anthropologist*’.⁷⁹

The film has subsequently generated a limited amount of academic debate. Beyond Robert J. Gordon’s *Picturing Bushmen*, which as we have seen focuses mainly on the photographs of the

⁷⁶ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 90.

⁷⁷ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 90.

⁷⁸ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Edwin Wilmsen, ‘Review of *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925*’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3 (September 2000), p. 585.

expedition, South African academic Keyan Tomaselli has viewed the film in the National Archives and generated a discussion document on it, which has not been published.⁸⁰ The film was also presented as an example of 'naïve ethnographic film' in Tomaselli et al's *Myth, Race and Opportunism: South Africans Imaged in Film and Television*, published in 1986.

Thus, it must be reiterated that in the context of this thesis, it is not the *actual* influence of *The Bushmen* that is historically significant, since this cannot be properly established and is in fact questionable. It is the degree to which the images of the film – *the way the film looks* – foreshadow later documentary film representations of the Bushmen that merged the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives with imposed interpretations based on the ideologies of their maker(s). Thus, even Wilmsen's dismissal of Gordon's analysis of the influence of the DAE does not remove the significance of *The Bushmen* as an early example of a documentary film that contains visuals of the Bushmen as pristine primitives and bearers of a unique and interesting culture.

3.7 THE BUSHMEN AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

In *The Bushmen* there is little reference to any historical process in Bushmen culture. As mentioned earlier, a brief reference to bartering between the Bushmen and 'more advanced tribes' is described as the only source of change over time amongst the Bushmen, as the practice has allowed them to 'learn a little'. This then is the argument about Bushmen history presented in *The Bushmen*: that the Bushmen have no history. A significant example of this argumentation appears in a final sequence from the film, which is introduced by the already-quoted 'no history – no morality – no god' intertitle. The first image frames a vast desert landscape, with wind whipping the sand off the tops of the dunes like foam spray on the ocean waves. This is the 'home' of the Bushmen, although it is never named.

Here, right at the end of the film, amidst an outcrop of rocks, we meet an elderly Bushmen who is given a name: Kanna. An intertitle introduces the scene: 'Like desert phantoms, the tribe

⁸⁰ Keyan Tomaselli, Alum Mpofo, 'Unpublished discussion', National Film Archives, Pretoria, 1993.

vanished in the dusty wake of the drifting game – leaving the old and hopeless to die’, before fading up to the shot of Kanna in front of a small fire. From the top of the rocky outcrop, two members of the expedition hail the old man, who turns and looks up at them. The shot is followed by an intertitle that reads ‘Kanna, the Ancient, awaiting the long Night – forsaken and alone’. The expedition members clamber down the rocks and squat on either side of him, holding their rifles in front of them to keep their balance. An intertitle follows, reading ‘He was an old man when children now old, were young’. A medium close-up of Kanna follows as he raises his hand to his mouth, a gesture that appears to signify the act of remembering. An intertitle explains that ‘All his memories are of food – the hunt and the game he can no longer follow in its migration’. An extended sequence commences, cutting between Kanna’s wise and wrinkled face, which bears a humorous, tolerant expression for most of the ‘interview’, and images of game that are evidently the illustrations of the old man’s memories. Intertitles such as ‘He told of the Ostrich – a bird with a kick like moonshine whiskey and the speed of a false rumour’ are followed by close-ups of Kanna’s animated face and shots of game running across the plains.

In this sequence, for the first time in the entire film, a Bushman person’s words are represented on screen. Kanna becomes the personal focus of a film that up until now has avoided all real engagement with individuals. It also constitutes an oral history, and yet it too proves to be a fallacious sequence aimed at further ‘proving’ the barbarity of the Bushmen. What Kanna ‘remembers’ about his past is really just a sequence of hunts and animals – there is no progression from youth to old age, no memory of changes in his circumstances or the culture of his people, of having children or of occupying a specific geographical place. It seems that Kanna’s ‘past’ is an eternally unchanging landscape of animals and hunting.

This particular scene was in fact staged, and had nothing to do with the people that the expedition members filmed in South West Africa. The sequence was shot in South Africa, past Calvinia at Zak Rivier. Kanna was a local farm labourer who spoke Dutch.⁸¹ The DAE

⁸¹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 35.

members, entranced by the old man's expressive face⁸², perhaps saw a potential 'Nanook' for their film and filmed the 'interview'. The Kanna sequence is inserted into the film, completely out of context, in an attempt to demonstrate the harshness of Bushmen culture that would abandon the old and the weak to slow death from hunger or savaging by animals. This is further evidence of the 'fictive' nature of this film. Gordon has argued, in relation to the photographs taken on the expedition, that Hoefler (the filmmaker and photographer of the expedition) 'sought to choreograph his subjects in order to present his subjects as "typical" or as "ideal types" that could illustrate an argument...In staging these pictures, he was trying to reflect fundamental features of Bushmen social life'.⁸³ In this instance, the point is to 'prove' the argument that the savage Bushmen leave behind the old and frail members of their community, and in order to prove this point a fictionalised scene is inserted entirely out of its context. Symbolically the scene is important: the guardians of 'the past', the 'Ancient' who can remember back many years, are simply left behind by the savage Bushmen. That is because the Bushmen have no history, according to *The Bushmen*, and no need of history: they are eternally concerned with the present and the getting of food through hunting animals. This description of the Bushmen past as essentially static is important as an ongoing theme in documentary film representations. The DAE's depiction of that history as uniformly barbaric is particular to *The Bushmen* and is a reflection, as we have seen, of popular racial ideologies of the day

3.8 CONCLUSION

As a source for historians, *The Bushmen* is most useful as a means of registering the ideologies of the people and the period that produced the film. It does not attempt to tell the history of the Bushmen, except to posit that the Bushmen have *no* history. It contains some interesting ethnographic details about the Bushmen and the framing of those ethnographic details reveals aspects of its makers' ideologies.

⁸² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 35.

⁸³ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 58.

As a film *in* history, *The Bushmen* is an indicator of the unforeseen consequences of images whose meanings alter across time and space and across cultures and historical moments. The significance of the DAE film in this regard goes beyond its evocation of the particular historical context of the 1920s and contemporary ideas about race and civilisation, although it is sculpted overtly along these ideological lines. The dissonance between the images and the intertitles in the film is a foreshadowing of later trends in documentary film representations of the Bushmen where varying ideologies are appended to generic images of the Bushmen as pristine primitives.

Thus, Gordon's identification of the images produced by the DAE as 'romantic' is correct, but the romance is not related to their framing in the film. It is rather the images' depiction of 'pristine' Bushmen in their 'natural' environment that is romantic. For the historian, this film is an early example of the power of images of the Bushmen as pristine primitives and bearers of a unique culture. These images would continue to gain power throughout the twentieth century, as will be shown. *The Bushmen* is a portent of the 'fairytale', as Gordon terms it⁸⁴, that later writers and filmmakers would produce about the Bushmen of Southern Africa.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s scholarly interest in the Bushmen continued, as did the rapid decline into poverty of the remaining Bushmen groups in southern Africa. However, the myth of the pristine Bushmen continued to attract both tourists and scientists to Southern Africa. In remote parts of northern Namibia and central Botswana, small groups of Bushmen continued to eke out an existence by hunting and gathering. This study now moves on to the 1950s, a crucial period in the generation of filmic images of the Bushmen. In the 1950s famed South African author Laurens van der Post would dramatically exaggerate the living conditions of these remaining peripatetic Bushmen groups for literary and filmic purposes. At the same time, an American expedition to northern Namibia would produce images and scholarship on the Bushmen that would influence the filmmaking and popular and academic writing on the Bushmen for the remainder of the twentieth century. In the next chapter, the first and highly

⁸⁴ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 117-34.

influential representation of idealised and romanticised Bushman-as-Pristine-Primitives will be discussed in an analysis of Sir Laurens van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956).

CHAPTER FOUR

LOST WORLD OF KALAHARI (1956)

This chapter focuses on the film series *Lost World of Kalahari*, made by Laurens van der Post in 1955 and shown on the BBC in the summer of 1956. As a film *in* history, as will be shown in the course of this thesis, van der Post's conceptualisation of Bushmen culture was highly influential in the second half of the twentieth century. *Lost World* is a repository of much of van der Post's earliest philosophising on the significance of Bushmen culture for the West. As such, the greater weight of the analysis in this chapter examines the film in the light of its first use for a historian: namely as evidence of the values and attitudes of its maker, Laurens van der Post, and the ideologies which they are reflective of.

Thus, *Lost World* is here analysed as evidence of the strategies that van der Post utilised in constructing his influential mythology of the Bushmen as pristine primitives. The shape of this mythology will be considered in its historical context. As will be shown, his ideas were not entirely original but rather reflected the changes in ways of seeing both the Bushmen and the African landscape from the 1950s onwards. As with the Denver Expedition film *The Bushmen*, it will be shown here that the depiction of the Bushmen in *Lost World* was illustrative of a discourse established not by the encounter between van der Post and the Bushmen, but by a particular philosophical argument which van der Post sought to express. It will be shown how the discourse of *Lost World* differed dramatically from the racist conceptualisation of Bushmen found in *The Bushmen*. Rather than barbarous brutes facing inevitable demise, in *Lost World* the Bushmen are framed as pristine primitives whose unique, Edenic existence was threatened by the modern world, at great potential loss to humanity.

The film will also be appraised in terms of what it can tell the historian about Bushmen in the 1950s. In describing those Bushmen who do not fit his ideal of 'pristine primitives', van der Post inadvertently reveals the reality of changing living conditions for Bushmen in Southern Africa, as will be shown.

As with *The Bushmen* it is difficult to evaluate *Lost World* as a work of historiography, because the way in which van der Post depicts the history of the Bushmen and his own biography is so clearly shaped by the same ideologies that shape the film. Van der Post's representation of his personal history is informed by a number of literary and filmic influences, as well as a powerful identification with Afrikaner culture. As such, it will be argued here that the most compelling mythology in *Lost World* is the mythology of van der Post himself, and that this mythology is compelling *because* he establishes strong historical ties with the Bushmen. As far as van der Post's depiction of Bushmen history is concerned, it will be shown that van der Post's emphasis is on the aspects of Bushmen culture that inform his framing of them as pristine primitives. Unlike in *The Bushmen*, however, the ethnographic information in the film is reverentially depicted and commented upon by van der Post, as it would be in a number of subsequent documentary films on the Bushmen. Finally, the influence of *Lost World* in history will be examined. This will include a consideration of its political influence, its popular reception and its influence on later films on the Bushmen.

The most important point to be made about this film series is that it was not made by a filmmaker, but by a writer utilising film as an extension of a writing project: the book of the expedition entitled *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, published in 1958. The book was a fictionalised account of the expedition which was a great critical and popular success at the time, and continues to sell well to this day¹. This fact differentiates *Lost World* from the other films in this thesis. It will be argued that *Lost World* draws fully more on literary sources than on other film sources. As such, as a film *Lost World* is not particularly interesting or innovative in its production methods or editing style. Rather, the significance of *Lost World* for this thesis lies in the complex manner in which van der Post represents his definitive interpretation of the Bushmen as pristine, primordial primitives in contradistinction to the decadent, spiritually bankrupt West.

¹ J.D.F Jones, *Storyteller: The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post* (London: John Murray, 2001), pp. 224-28.

As seen in the previous chapter in the case of *The Bushmen*, it is necessary to consider *Lost World* in the context of growing scholarly and popular interest in the Bushmen. Between the Denver African Expedition of 1925 and van der Post's *Lost World* expedition in 1955, academic interest in the Bushman continued to grow. A year after the Denver Expedition, an expedition was undertaken by the Austrian anthropologist Viktor Lebzelter, who complained that the Bushmen in Etosha (northern Namibia) all wore European rags and went by European names, but were willing to dress up in their traditional clothes and dance for guests. Lebzelter commented that these Bushmen were 'in the best sense Salon Bushmen who are dependent upon foreign traffic'.² By the 1950s, so frequent were applications to the South African Government for permits to study Bushmen in South West Africa that officials granting the permits commented that the Bushmen were 'starting to resent the interference of so many Europeans'.³

In southern Africa, the interwar years saw the development of a discourse on 'saving the Bushmen'. This discourse, driven by white South Africans and heartily endorsed by the South African press, arose out of several live Bushmen exhibits organised by the prominent big-game hunter Donald Bain.⁴ At the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, Bain's Bushmen camp was the second most popular exhibit on offer. The pamphlet accompanying the exhibit described the Kalahari Bushmen on display as 'the last living remnants of a fast dying race' who were being exhibited as part of an awareness campaign aimed at getting them 'a home, a land, and the perpetuation of their race'.⁵ Importantly, Bain sought academic support for his campaign to save the Bushmen, inviting expeditions from the University of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand to visit his Kalahari camp to study the Bushmen he had gathered together for the Empire Exhibit.⁶ Bain's efforts generated support at the highest level of South African society, with General Jan Smuts expressing his sympathy for the Bushmen – 'those living fossils'.⁷ Scientists in South Africa strongly supported Bain's request for the creation of a Bushmen

² Gordon, 'Captured on Film', p. 221.

³ Gordon, 'Captured on Film', p. 225.

⁴ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 149.

⁵ Gordon, 'Saving the Last South African Bushmen: A Spectacular Failure?', *Critical Arts*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), p. 29.

⁶ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 149.

⁷ Gordon, 'Saving the Last South African Bushmen', p. 32.

reserve with Raymond Dart, then South Africa's foremost scientist, arguing for 'the establishment of one or more Bushmen Reserves in Southern Africa... where the remnants of this fascinating human group of Bush peoples might be preserved for generations to come'.⁸ Although limited in his success, Bain began a veritable trend of Bushmen exhibitions, culminating in the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck festival in Cape Town, where the South West African pavilion included an exhibition of Bushmen under the supervision of the Chief Game Warden of South West Africa, P.J. Schoeman. The Bushmen exhibit was a huge success, with inquisitive crowds 'jostling one another for a vantage point from which to view the Bushmen and see their "childlike simplicity", hear their "animated clicks" and touch their "olive skins"'.⁹ Van der Post's proselytising in *Lost World* on the need to 'save the Bushmen' thus neatly dovetailed with a growing conceptualisation in Southern Africa of the Bushmen as a dying race that needed to be 'saved' from becoming extinct. It also constitutes an interesting shift away from the discourse exemplified by the Denver Expedition film that depicted the Bushmen demise as inevitable, to a preservationist discourse, as will be shown in the analysis below.

The timing of *Lost World*, then, needs to be considered in the light of this newer, idealised portrayal of the Bushmen. Edwin Wilmsen argues that by the 1950s 'anthropology had shown that "tribal" peoples could no longer be thought of as developmentally primitive', and that a more informed reading public in Britain and America would question van der Post's nostalgic view of black people as 'modern exemplifications [sic] of pre-rational modes of thought'. Furthermore, argues Wilmsen, with the rise of African nationalism after World War II, black people, particularly the black working classes, could be the potential fomenters of rebellion. Van der Post needed, then, 'more plausible candidates for primitive exemplars than black Africans could be in the late fifties, hence Bushmen'.¹⁰

⁸ Gordon, 'Saving the Last South African Bushmen', p. 32.

⁹ Rob Gordon, Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'Fashioning the Bushmen in Van Riebeeck's Cape Town, 1952 and 1993', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 259-61.

¹⁰ Wilmsen, 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes', p. 206.

4.1 BACKGROUND TO THE FILM: LAURENS VAN DER POST AND THE BUSHMEN

South African-born Laurens van der Post (1906-1996) rose to fame in post-World War II Britain as an author and speaker. Upon his death his list of achievements was considerable: he had won international renown as a best-selling writer, he had been an advisor to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was a councillor and confidante to Prince Charles and the godfather of Prince William. He was a recognised authority on the Bushmen as well as on Swiss psychologist C.G Jung, and a patron of the environmental movement worldwide.¹¹ At some point in the 1950s, van der Post decided to go and 'find' the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. In his critical biography of van der Post, J.D.F. Jones questions his purportedly lifelong connection to the Bushmen, indicating that in fact van der Post had shown little interest in the Bushmen on earlier expeditions to the Kalahari for the British government, on behalf of the CDC (Colonial Development Corporation) whose function was to 'initiate, finance and operate projects for agricultural or other development in the Colonial Empire.' On these expeditions, in fact, van der Post had seen Bushmen as potential labourers for cattle ranches in the Kalahari, a far cry from his later advocacy of a 'Bushman reserve' where Bushmen could practise hunting-and-gathering unimpeded by contact with the modern world.¹²

In 1954, Laurens van der Post led an expedition into the Kalahari Desert to search for the remnants of what he termed the aboriginal inhabitants of Africa, the Bushmen. His journey became the subject of *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, one of his most famous books, and the slightly differently titled six-part television series, *Lost World of Kalahari* (1956), produced for the BBC. Following the release of the *Lost World* and the accompanying book, van der Post became

¹¹ J.D.F Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 1.

¹² Wilmsen and Jones have argued that up until the 1955 *Lost World* expedition van der Post, as a surveyor for the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC), a British government body, had been a great advocate of the cattle industry in the Kalahari desert, stating in a radio interview in 1954 that 'As you know, the Bushmen (sic) are the Aborigines of Africa... And one of the things that appealed to us all was that these remnants of bushmen, who now have no function and no purpose in life... in a ranching scheme would have a natural function; something that they could understand; something to bring them back to life.' Quoted in Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes', p. 149; see also Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 214 regarding the dearth of interest in Bushmen in van der Post's earlier career as writer.

world famous as an 'expert' on the Bushmen. He followed the *Lost World* book and television series up with a series of successful fictional and non-fictional books with a focus on Bushmen, as will be discussed below. All of these books were great successes internationally and remained in print for many years. Furthermore, van der Post actively campaigned for the protection of Bushmen, alongside the fauna and flora of Africa, right up until his death in 1996.

4.2 LOST WORLD OF KALAHARI: A SYNOPSIS

Lost World of the Kalahari consists of six episodes, each running for half an hour, shot on black and white 16mm film. The series is narrated by van der Post, from a studio replete with 'African' trifles, including a rock art wall hanging in the background and masks on the wall. Van der Post, as director of operations from his studio, lectures his audience from behind a desk, or when needs be, from in front of a large map of Africa, upon which he inscribes the route of their expedition in white chalk. The first episode, entitled 'The Vanished People', sketches out the history of the Bushmen, and the history of van der Post's involvement with them. Two points key to the narrative are made in this episode. The first is that Bushmen were the aboriginal inhabitants of Africa. The second is that van der Post is African, son of an Afrikaner 'pioneering family' who had been settled in South Africa for three hundred years.

The second episode, entitled 'First Encounter', describes the logistics of preparing for the expedition and the stated aims and objectives of the journey. The first objective is to find the river Bushmen in the Okavango swamps and then to seek out the veldt Bushmen on the plains of the Kalahari Desert. In this episode the various members of the expedition, including the servants accompanying it, are introduced with close-up shots of grinning faces. Having set out from Victoria Falls, the expedition travels through hauntingly beautiful (and beautifully shot) veldt, passing 'neat little African villages' and spying out the game available for hunting. They meet a hunter and his son, who warn van der Post and his party that the swamps are flooded and infested with tsetse fly, but the expedition carries on to a village where they seek out dugouts

specially built to navigate the swamps. Once in the swamp, they finally meet a small family of river Bushmen, and after spending some time with them – rhapsodically narrated upon by van der Post – they leave in search of the ‘veldt Bushmen’.

Episode three, ‘The Spirits of the Slippery Hills’, is one of the most intriguing of the episodes. It details the adventure that the expedition has at the ‘Slippery Hills’, the Tsodilo Hills in northern Botswana (then Bechuanaland). A passing Bushman, wearing trousers ‘only for trade with other tribes’ but still a ‘real Bushmen nonetheless’, tells van der Post that he had seen a Bushmen family staying at the Tsodilo Hills. Van der Post obtains the help of a black guide, Samutchoso, and his son, and they travel to the Tsodilo Hills. These hills have great spiritual resonance for the local people, and Samutchoso asks van der Post not to shoot any game on their journey out, as this would anger the spirits that reside at Tsodilo. Van der Post promises, but forgets to tell his companions, who shoot a warthog, to Samutchoso’s horror and van der Post’s mortification. Describing the hills as similar to ‘the rocks that Moses hit in the desert to get water for the Israelites’, van der Post and his party are overawed at the forms rising out of the otherwise flat desert. They become increasingly ‘uncomfortable’ as they get nearer. Once at the hills, they are plagued by mishaps and the technical breakdown of their equipment. This is shown in the film through the inclusion of half frames and jammed frames in the episode, so that the audience can actually witness the technical meltdown. Eventually, van der Post repents and on the advice of Samutchoso writes a letter begging forgiveness from the spirits for killing the warthog. They leave the hills with the assurance from Samutchoso that all is well with the spirits again.

The expedition now gets closer to its goal, coming to an oasis on the outskirts of the desert where the local inhabitants display physical features that infer Bushmen heritage. Finally, at the end of this episode, the expedition comes across a ‘wild wild man’, a ‘true’ Bushman of the Kalahari. They befriend him and he agrees to lead them back to his people. By ending the episode at this point, tension is heightened in anticipation of the expedition’s interaction with the ‘wild wild man’.

Episode four, entitled 'Life in the Thirstland', documents the relationships that develop between van der Post's expedition members and a small Bushmen group living at the 'Sipwells' in the putative heart of the Kalahari. This episode contains many interesting ethnographic details of everyday life amongst the Bushmen, from preparation of food to the manufacturing of bows, arrows, poisons and jewellery. Various members of the community are introduced to the audience. A visit is organised to a neighbouring group. Van der Post notes with some disdain the larger, lankier physicality of these Bushmen, in contradiction to the fineness of the Sipwell Bushmen. Various games popular amongst the Sipwell Bushmen are played, with van der Post sometimes joining in. Their music is recorded by the expedition's filmmaker, Duncan Abraham. Van der Post translates the lyrics of the songs into English in the voiceover narration.

'The Great Eland', episode five, begins the build up to the climax of the series. The Bushmen are described by van der Post as being 'essentially hunters' and the expedition members accompany two young Bushmen men on various hunts. The climactic hunt for the great eland is successful. A strong camaraderie now exists between the expedition and the Bushmen group. Van der Post declares, with great pride, that the women of the community are bringing their sick children to him instead of to the 'witchdoctor'. Furthermore, the Bushmen have agreed to allow van der Post and his expedition members to watch a dance. All the while, clouds build up in the sky and the promise of rain generates great excitement amongst the people. Neighbouring Bushmen arrive to share in the celebration of the successful eland hunt. The film camera records a variety of dances and the momentum builds as thunder rumbles in the sky and lightning bathes the dancers in a white light that shows up starkly on the black and white film. Dancers become entranced and have to be prevented from jumping into the fire. One man swallows live coals. At this point the rains come. The ecstasy dies down and the satisfied dancers return home.

The last episode, 'Rain Song', retreats from the climax of the previous episode. The desert comes alive with flowers and animal life, revelling in the rebirth brought by the rains. Amongst the Sipwell Bushmen, a love affair develops between two of the most eligible youngsters in the

community, which van der Post narrates in detail. But the time has come for the Bushmen to go on one of their 'great walkabouts', as van der Post describes it. It would be cruel, he declares, for the presence of the expedition to inhibit this 'natural' urge within the Bushmen. As such, he and his expedition take leave of them with great sadness, and van der Post ends the series on a rousing note, declaring that 'the only gift we can give the Bushmen is to give them a place in our hearts and imagination, and in our planning for the future'. Van der Post then muses upon the evils of 'civilising' the Bushmen, commenting as he leaves the desert that the Bushmen are victims of a 'process of elimination by disintegration', pointing to 'convicts in convicts' clothes, punished by laws they did not make in a language they did not understand, compelled to live in a way that was not their way'. Most telling is van der Post's conclusion: 'with your [the audience] help they can go on remaining indefinitely'. The words 'remaining indefinitely' deftly sum up van der Post's mythic interpretation of the Bushmen: they cannot change in any way, and their identity is reliant upon remaining pristine hunter-gatherers in their desert Eden.

4.3 THE FILM AS EVIDENCE

4.3.1 *LOST WORLD* AS EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE AND PERIOD THAT PRODUCED IT.

J.D.F. Jones writes that

This decision [to go and find the Bushmen] is one of various examples in Laurens's life of his extraordinary gift for anticipating, and then responding to the new concerns of a new generation. When he wrote *Venture to the Interior* [a bestselling book published in 1952 which will be discussed below] his readers, weary of wartime drabness and insularity, were receptive to a tale of romantic and exciting adventure in the exotic location. Later he would understand the new interest in the life of C.G. Jung. Later still, he was in the vanguard of the Green movement, the concern for the 'Wilderness' and the environmental crusade. He had an uncanny instinct. But his advocacy of the Bushmen was a master stroke, echoing as it did the generation's nostalgia for a simpler, perhaps more innocent, society.¹³

Certainly, after World War II a change in Western images of Africa's landscape accompanied the continent's struggle for political freedom. Mitman argues that the 'dark continent' 'was rapidly transformed into a place of threatened ecological splendour – Africa and its wildlife offered

¹³ Jones, *Storyteller*, pp. 214-15.

respite from the anxieties faced by the generation living in the shadows of the atomic bomb'.¹⁴ This love affair with nature was facilitated by the growing popularity of television, films and literature documenting the work of people such as the Adamson's (immortalised in the film *Born Free*), the Denise's and the Harthoorns, who worked intimately with wildlife in Africa and documented the process of domesticating large mammals such as lions which had previously been seen as dangerous.¹⁵ Beinart argues that this process of domestication, with the emphasis on both the families of animals and the families of their human keepers 'struck a chord' with audiences during the conservative post-war decade in Britain and the USA, when stability was seen as important. Furthermore, for Western, particularly British audiences, the images of Elsa (the Adamson's' lion) and her cubs were a more comfortable vision of Africa than images of Mau Mau in Kenya, Nkrumah in Ghana and Apartheid and the ANC in South Africa.¹⁶

It is interesting to note that a similar pattern occurred in the writing of van der Post, as Edwin Wilmsen has shown. Wilmsen points to a shift in van der Post's fiction between the late 1940s and late 1950s from a focus on black African characters, particularly Zulus, in his novels to Bushmen characters.¹⁷ It is argued here that van der Post's utopian vision of the pristine Bushmen was reflective of this effacement of the revolutionary realities of modern day Africa, which appealed to the post-war West. As a South African reviewer of one of van der Post's popular books noted in 1955: 'He may indeed have known such an Africa as he portrays here, but it had most certainly vanished long before 1948'.¹⁸

Van der Post conceives of the Bushmen in *Lost World* as utterly unique because they are a race of 'man-children'. In the book *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, van der Post elucidated this further.

He wrote:

Perhaps this life of ours, which begins as a quest of the child for the man, and ends as a journey by the man to rediscover the child, needs a clear image of some child-man, like the Bushman, wherein the two are firmly and lovingly joined in order that our confused hearts may stay at the centre of their brief round of departure and return.¹⁹

¹⁴ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, pp. 190-91.

¹⁵ William Beinart, 'The Re-Naturing of African Animals: Film and Literature in the 1950s and 1960s', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, no. 28 (2002), pp. 213, 220.

¹⁶ Beinart, 'The Re-Naturing of African Animals', p. 220.

¹⁷ Wilmsen, 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes', pp. 201-4.

¹⁸ *The Pretoria News*, 2 May 1955, quoted in Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 202.

¹⁹ Laurens van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (London: Penguin, 1958), p. 13.

In order that the Bushmen in the television series *Lost World* should fit this description of who Bushmen were, two things had to happen. The first was that the Bushmen filmed had to be living as hunter-gatherers and could not show signs of acculturation. Wearing trousers or trading with other groups of people, or earning money and carrying guns might indicate that Bushmen were not idealised 'child-men'. The second element that needed to be in place was that the Bushmen filmed had to be utterly isolated from the rest of the world.

Thus, as in *The Bushmen*, the theme of the journey to 'discover' this place that protected Bushmen culture is a key element of the narrative structure of *Lost World*. It is more than a journey from one place to another. In the concluding paragraph of *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, van der Post writes that upon leaving the Sipwell Bushmen he 'drove over the crest and began the long, harsh journey back to our twentieth-century world beyond the timeless Kalahari blue'. The emphasis in the series *Lost World* is thus also on a journey 'out of time' which is reminiscent once again of *The Bushmen*.

Another striking element of this process of journeying out of time relates to van der Post's insistent emphasis on 'purity' in the Bushmen he seeks. This relates back to his clearly expressed understanding of what being 'Bushman' means. As with the Denver African Expedition, van der Post's expedition to seek the Bushmen can be seen as a journey of racial graduations. As van der Post moves across the African landscape towards his goal of meeting the 'true' Bushmen, he literally measures the local people he meets along the way according to their racial type. This process of racial categorisation occurred in *The Bushmen*, but there it was invoked to show the general inferiority of all black Africans to the civilised whites of the expedition. In *Lost World* racial typing is invoked not in the service of a social-Darwinist argument, but rather in a bid to show how unique and different 'true' Bushmen are to all other black and brown people in the region. Thus, people whom the expedition encounters are inspected on camera for physical characteristics that might denote Bushmen ancestry, such as 'high cheek bones' or 'apricot coloured skin'. When van der Post nears the Kalahari Desert, his tone shifts. He is now seeking

any signs of the Bushmen, and each group of people he meets are measured according to physical criteria that van der Post might identify as characteristically 'Bushman'.

For example, at an oasis on the outskirts of the Kalahari, van der Post and his companions meet up with a mixed-race group who survive in the arid lands by farming goats. He posits that the reason the group manages to survive at all under these circumstances is because of their 'Bushman blood'. At this point, the camera focuses in on a group of women from this community. Van der Post, as narrator, points out to his audience the evidence for this 'Bushman blood': the slanted eyes and the pointed ears of the women, their 'Mongolian' features, once again invoking physical characteristics as evidence of belonging to a specific ethnic or racial group. Furthermore, van der Post declares any people they meet coming *out* of the Kalahari as unlikely to be Bushmen, for a 'true' Bushmen survives in the desert throughout the year, regardless of the weather conditions. Further into the desert, they meet one such group of people who are inspected closely by the expedition members. Van der Post concludes that as they are on their way out of the desert and as they are wearing ragged European clothing, they cannot be 'true Bushmen kind' for they have been 'spoilt by years of contact with civilisation'. The point reiterated by van der Post repeatedly in *Lost World* is that for anyone to qualify as an authentic Bushmen, he or she must be untouched by contact with 'civilisation'.

The precursor to van der Post's contact with the 'true' veldt Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert is the expedition's encounter with the so-called 'River Bushmen' in episode two. In van der Post's voice-over narrative, the theme of timelessness is repeatedly stressed. He comments that it is 'as if a forgotten page of African history had come alive'. Later in this same episode, van der Post comments on the 'the wistful and sensitive expression on this face of a vanishing race' and declares that 'though burned dark like the sun he [the 'River Bushman'] had the same sensitive Bushman look on his face' and that the Bushmen were 'decorated with ornaments I had only seen on rock paintings before'. The camera captures the family sharing a meal caught by the father and van der Post notes that the wife waits until her husband has sated his hunger before she eats, concluding that she must wait 'as Bushmen wives have waited, this 40 000 years or

more'. In this interaction, we see Van der Post identifying physical characteristics as evidence of some essential state of being. Hence, the expression on the man's face is 'the wistful expression on the face of a vanishing race.' There is no place in van der Post's discussion of this Bushmen family for individuality, as physical appearance is imbued with dramatic and primordial symbolism about the ending of Bushmen culture. Despite the ecstatic commentary dedicated to this interaction between van der Post and the 'River Bushmen', it is but a brief interlude in the ongoing journey out of time, towards the mystical home of the 'Veldt Bushmen'. But first, the expedition must move past the Tsodilo Hills and enter into a 'new dimension'.

Contact with the 'true' Bushmen is made only at the end of episode three, with Dabe the guide suddenly calling excitedly to van der Post, 'Master, Master! There is a wild man in the grass down there.' The expedition members close in on the 'wild man', and van der Post in his excitement goes from describing the man as a 'wild man' to a 'wild wild man' to a 'wild creature.' The semantics are revealing: the connection is made between Bushmen and animals. Van der Post also invokes an image with a long history in European intellectual and cultural tradition – that of the 'wild man' who stands in opposition to the 'civilised man', who in turn is the consumer of images of 'wild men'. Examples of this can be seen in literary creations such as *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's Shylock, Caliban, and Othello, Swift's Yahoos, racial stereotypes from nineteenth-century 'science' (as seen in *The Bushmen*) and mystical figures from the romantic wildernesses of Blake, Byron, and Wordsworth.²⁰ Furthermore, the term 'wild creature' relates Bushmen to the natural environment and to animals, certainly not to other blacks and whites in contemporary Africa. This is once again similar to the DAE film, where the Bushmen's territory was defined and distinct – a 'bottomless pit of mud and slime' – where no other human being would or could penetrate. This interaction marks the end of the journey out of time, as the true Bushmen have been 'discovered'.

²⁰ Murray J. Leaf, 'Review of *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism*', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 46, no. 2 (June 1974), p. 342. See also Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak, *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

The world of the 'true' Bushmen is described by van der Post in episode four as 'lovely and natural'. As the Sipwell Bushmen (as van der Post names them) go about their daily chores, the camera rolls and van der Post again emphasises that amongst these Bushmen, 'no one seems to have heard of time'. Rather, the Bushmen work and sit about 'happily in the sun as they had sat for centuries'.

The activities of the group, such as hunting, are ascribed not to culture or even to survival, but to the essential nature of Bushmen. Van der Post states that 'true Bushmen are essentially hunters.' No variance is admitted into his framing of Bushmen hunting practices. All male Bushmen are natural hunters in *Lost World of Kalahari*. The hardship and intricacy of hunting is glossed over, as the hunters filmed catch a large variety of game, apparently in one day, returning in the evening with birds, buck and warthog.

The highlight of this hunting episode is the tracking and killing of the eland. According to van der Post, the expedition is credited with bringing this luck upon the community and so the Bushmen promise to allow van der Post and his party to witness a dance. The dance is captured on film and provides the highlight of the series. Van der Post declares that 'they may be a dirty little people but they are deeply religious, and because they cannot express religion, they dance it'. The images of the dancing are powerful, illuminated as they are by the lightning. The stage has been set for the climax: the Bushmen have been framed as existing in a mystical other-world, intricately bonded to the animals and the land, a bond which they express through dancing.

The final episode begins with van der Post stating that the relationship between the Bushmen and the expedition members is 'full and complete'. Now he senses 'changes in the Bushmen, with the coming of the rains'. This essentialist depiction of the Bushmen's relationship with the landscape and the seasons is heightened by the camera's panegyric to the changes in nature after the rains. Plants bloom, animals mate and the desert bursts with life and new vigour. According to van der Post, the Bushmen suddenly feel the urge for another 'great walkabout'. No realistic explanation is given for this 'urge' amongst the Bushmen: there is no discussion of the need to find water or to move with the game. Rather, the wanderlust of the Bushmen is credited to their

essential nature as lords of the desert, wild and beyond the clutches of civilising influence, moving at the whims of their free spirits.

All that is captured on camera in *Lost World* is interpreted through van der Post's narrative within the discourse which van der Post himself had constructed around mythical 'Bushmanness'. At the end of episode six, as the expedition travels out of the desert and away from the Bushmen it has been filming, van der Post concludes in a manner similar to his conclusion in the book: 'We went out on the track we had made into the Sipwells, out towards the great world from which we had come and which knew them [the Bushmen] not.'

Thus, we see in *Lost World* an emphasis on the landscape and the Bushmen's relatedness to their environment. Furthermore, that the environment is edenic and ideally devoid of intrusions from the outside world is similarly foregrounded. Van der Post's pristine Bushmen live in an Africa where the landscape is god. They are the bearers of a unique and valuable culture that needs to be 'preserved', an idea which, as we have seen, already had growing support in South Africa and amongst international scholars. Finally, the intrusion of other races, particular modern black Africans, is seen as a threat to the stability and order of the Bushmen world. *Lost World* thus constitutes an interesting example of Beinart's argument, discussed early, about the trend in the 1950s west to efface black African nationalist politics in favour of a prolonged meditation on the pristine, ahistorical African environment.

Van der Post also expresses a set of ideas that would come to characterise anthropological studies of the Bushmen throughout the fifties and sixties. Studies such as the Marshalls' and George Silberbauer's (both of which will be discussed in later chapters) focused on 'unacculturated Bushmen' living by hunting-and-gathering. It wasn't that the anthropologists didn't know about the reality of most Bushmen in southern Africa at the time, of whom only a minority were hunter-gatherers – rather it was that the 'wild' Bushmen were considered to be worthy of study, both as a means of learning about their unique cultural practises and as a

departure point for better understanding the more acculturated Bushmen minorities in the region.²¹

4.3.2 BEYOND BUSHMEN: THE VAN DER POST MYTH IN *LOST WORLD*

Van der Post intersects the mythical image of the Bushmen in *Lost World* with another fairytale: that of himself as the searcher, frontiersman and explorer who breaks ground both physically and in the realm of the human spirit. It is the combination of these two myths, presented in *Lost World* that constitutes van der Post's influential Bushmen myth. Arguably, neither would have been as powerful had they been presented in isolation.

In a sense the Bushmen of *Lost World* were more literary figures than literal ones – literary figures who illustrated van der Post's thesis about the significance of pristine Bushmen culture for the decadent West. The use of the word 'literary' is deliberate, since it is clear from close analysis of *Lost World* that it was literary influences that most shaped the journey depicted in the film. This relates directly to the second significant vein of myth that is constructed throughout *Lost World*: the myth of Laurens van der Post as heroic explorer. Like earlier films ostensibly about the Bushmen, such as the Denver African Expedition film, *Lost World* is far more about the journey of van der Post than it is about Bushmen people in any concrete sense. The presence of the Bushmen as spiritual phantasms drawing van der Post ever onwards provides a powerful and convincing narrative structure for the series, so that van der Post's 'quest' becomes, through six episodes, a metaphysical journey that elevates the meaning of the series to a search for 'lost humanity'.

The quest motif is a familiar literary device in colonial literature on Africa. Two examples pertinent to *Lost World* are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and H. Ryder Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Whilst Conrad's complex and ambivalent examination of colonialism in *Heart of*

²¹ Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana: An Ethnohistorical Analysis', p. 221.

Darkness is very different to Ryder Haggard's wild adventure stories set on the African continent, elements of both novels find their way into *Lost World* in the form of recurring motifs throughout the film.²²

In the opening episode of *Lost World of Kalahari*, van der Post describes how he wrote in his diary as a small boy: 'I have decided today that when I am grown-up I'm going into the Kalahari Desert to seek out the Bushmen'. As already noted, the validity of van der Post's claim of having grown up with a profound spiritual connection to Bushmen has been questioned by writers. Interestingly enough though, as Jones has written²³, this diary entry description does bear a resemblance to the story told by Conrad's character Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness*, who describes how as a child he had gazed at maps of the world and decided that when he grew up he would go to the places marked on the map, particularly Africa, 'the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after'.²⁴

In *Lost World* van der Post emphasises the unexplored and untrammelled nature of the regions he is travelling through: the Kalahari is 'one of the great mysteries of Africa', the Chobe and Okavango Swamps are 'unexplored' and the expedition is reliant upon bases set up around the perimeter of the Kalahari for stores and water supplies. The challenge of the wild and unnameable wilderness to an explorer-frontiersman sets up a central tension in the film series. In overcoming these challenges, explorer-frontiersman 'discovers' the Bushmen who exist inside a world that no other humans can comfortably inhabit and that is difficult to access at all. This is a motif that bears a fleeting (though not comparable in depth or quality) resemblance to Marlowe's journey into the heart of Africa in *Heart of Darkness*. This journey also becomes a journey into the primal impulses of human beings in the absence of the distractions and trappings of civilisation, though where for Conrad the journey is dark and full of despair, for van der Post the

²² Also relevant is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. Whether conscious or not, van der Post's choice of words certainly creates an indelible link between the novel and his film. In Conan Doyle's antebellum 'boys' book', the aptly-named Professor Challenger leads an expedition to discover the Amazonian lost world of the dinosaurs – to discover, as it were, 'living fossils' (cf Jan Smuts's comment quoted on p. 61 of this thesis). Both the adventure-story atmosphere and the theme of a journey taken backwards through time to encounter a form of prehistoric – or ahistoric – life are also shared by both *Lost Worlds*.

²³ Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 213.

²⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 21-2.

journey is a positive rejuvenator. The 'primordial' in Africa was something altogether more positive in *Lost World* than it was in *Heart of Darkness*.

In episode three of *Lost World*, 'The Spirits of the Slippery Hills', the confrontation between 'spirits' and the expedition members mean that van der Post's conciliatory behaviour facilitates a movement through a mystical gateway. Van der Post declares that the expedition has 'moved into quite another dimension of living' and is freed from the tribulations that had dogged them up until that point. This is reminiscent of the popular 19th-century novel *King Solomon's Mines*, in which an expedition of Europeans passes beyond a mysterious mountain range called Sheba's Breasts in an undisclosed place in Southern Africa, having faced near-death through thirst and starvation. Upon crossing the mountain, they seem to enter a world outside the temporality of colonial Africa, quite another dimension of living: the land of the prosperous, beautiful, noble Kukuanas.²⁵ This mysterious land has remained aloof from the developments in the rest of Africa. It is a land where people live forever (Gagool the witch) and a great beauty of both people and landscape meet the eye wherever the protagonists travel. It is a land to which the staunch British protagonists come and are met as gods from another planet; given access to the very centre of the realm. They leave after many adventures, carrying with them wealth untold in the form of the diamonds of King Solomon's Mines.

The allusions to Ryder Haggard in *Lost World* also occur in relation to van der Post's construction of himself as a brave explorer traversing unknown realms, a reputation on which he had been building since the publication of his successful novel *Venture to the Interior* in 1952. In that novel – and in a manner similar to what he would do with *Lost World of Kalahari* – van der Post fictionalised the events of an actual expedition up Mount Mlanje in then-Nyasaland (now Zimbabwe), during which a young forestry officer is killed in a flash flood. As Jones has written,

Venture to the Interior marked the beginning of Laurens's reputation as an 'explorer', which he would build on in the subsequent ten years when he turned his attention to the Kalahari Desert. His publicity invariably described him as an explorer, and he was happy to accept the description, but in truth his career, however distinguished, could never class him with the Livingstones, Spekes, Burtons, Thesigers.²⁶

²⁵ H. Ryder Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London: Cassel, 1887).

²⁶ Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 175.

This process of self-mythologising begins in episode one when van der Post recalls how his decision to go in search of the Bushmen was inspired by a 'tall, tanned, rugged and lean' frontiersman-hunter who paid a visit to the van der Post family, recounting how he had just seen 'true' Bushmen in the Kalahari desert. Furthermore, van der Post describes one of his fellow expedition members as in *Lost World* as a 'sort of Afrikaner Allan Quatermain', referring to the ubiquitous hero of many of Ryder Haggard's African adventure stories. In episode two, van der Post furnishes the expedition with its own historical significance, pointing out in the narrative that they were departing from Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe 'almost a hundred years to the day' after Livingstone departed from the same place. He also sets himself up as the 'civilised' Livingstone, an icon of British exploration, setting out into unknown, dark Africa to 'discover' the Bushmen and bring back his discovery to his television audience. In doing so, van der Post places himself and his expedition into the category of great explorations of the past, lending significance to the expedition that it did not necessarily warrant. The repeated references to frontiersmen, adventurers and explorers in *Lost World of Kalahari* set the tone for van der Post's most important projection: that of himself as the brave, intrepid hunter-explorer, a motif that would have been easily recognisable to a British audience in the 1950s.²⁷ Furthermore, critics regularly compared van der Post's novels to Haggard's work, so the connection between them had already been made before the *Lost World* series was broadcast.²⁸

It is interesting to note that by the 1950s *King Solomon's Mines* had twice been made into successful feature films. The 1937 version starred the famous African-American actor Paul Robeson in the role of Umbopa and the 1950 version starred Stewart Granger and Deborah Kerr. Thus, van der Post's filmic version of his trip to seek out the Bushmen was to some extent, as in the case of the Denver African Expedition film, built on preceding filmic and literary imagery. At the very least it can be argued that *Lost World's* claim to authenticity was corroborated by the fact that the van der Postian notion of Africa as the untrammelled, mysterious realm of other-worldly people had

²⁷ Lindy Stiebel, *Imagining Africa: Landscape in H. Ryder Haggard's African Romances* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. xi-xii. See also pp. 126-28.

²⁸ Jones, *Storyteller*, pp. 198-200.

a long literary and filmic tradition. Stiebel's analysis of Haggard's enduring legacy might have been written about van der Post:

What this speaks of primarily is the enduring power of latent discourse on Africanism that Haggard tapped into, with its fixed dreams and fears of Africa articulated frequently through the use of landscape which in the more popular cultural manifestation blurs people and landscape into one equation. The appeal of adventure, particularly Haggard's romance recipe, in a geographic world where there are few secrets left is seen in cultural forms as diverse as Wilbur Smith's novels and the non-fictional books and films of the National Geographic Society.²⁹

The literary allusions in *Lost World* are also imbued with a unique theme by van der Post, who identifies himself with the Afrikaner *trekboers* from whom he was descended. The expedition sets off with the white members 'humming *trekker* tunes'. Afrikaans folk music plays on the soundtrack as the Landrovers are filmed driving off into the distance. In van der Post's search for the Bushmen, he evokes his Afrikaner heritage at two levels. At one he articulates – in the voice-over narrative – his need to search for the remnants of a people in whose massacre his Boer forefathers in South Africa had played a part, which frames the expedition as a search for redemption from history. At another level, he consistently identifies with Afrikaner culture. This is evident visually, verbally and in the soundtrack of *Lost World*. For example, in episode one, van der Post explains to his audience that he is 'born of an old South African pioneering family' and that his 'people have been in Africa for over three hundred years'. He reminisces about his childhood on an African farm, *Boesmansfontein*. Throughout the film series he wears 'veldskoene' and the khaki safari suits favoured by Afrikaans farmers in South Africa. He and his expedition members hum '*trekker* tunes' as they travel along. As such van der Post positions himself uniquely in relation to his goal of finding the Bushmen, for he frames himself as a man born of explorers and frontiersmen; and also as a white African who has a cultural and historical connection to the land he now traverses in his quest for the Bushmen. Van der Post's timing here was crucial: as Bickford-Smith has argued, before Sharpeville there was still a tendency in the west to depict Apartheid South Africa in a 'balanced' or objective way. After the horrors of the Sharpeville massacre had been screened around the world, opposition to Apartheid intensified dramatically, and by the 1980s Hollywood films, for example, tended to depict *all* white South Africans as evil, and particularly Afrikaans white South Africans who were

²⁹ Stiebel, *Imagining Africa*, pp. 128-29.

stereotypically depicted as brutes.³⁰ Had *Lost World of Kalahari* been made at a different time, perhaps van der Post's pride in his Afrikaner heritage might have raised the ire of western audiences.

The myth of van der Post, evidently built of literary and cultural allusions, comes most clearly into focus during the Tsodilo Hills adventure in episode three. J.D.F. Jones has written that the entire Tsodilo Hills episode, as represented in *Lost World*, shows evidence of distortion and exaggeration, not least because van der Post claims to have discovered the hills and the rock art in their shelters. In reality, the Tsodilo Hills had been known to Europeans since at least the beginning of the century.³¹ If indeed the entire episode is exaggerated, then it must be asked: what did van der Post hope to achieve with this?

The answer may lie in van der Post's desire – conscious or unconscious – to project an image of himself as mediator between Western culture and Bushmen culture. The Tsodilo Hills episode contains the only moment in *Lost World of Kalahari* where the power of the expedition's technology is overridden – by 'spirits'. Importantly, the spiritual resonance of the Tsodilo Hills is attributed to Bushmen cosmology. Samutchoso is not a Bushman, although he fervently believes in the power of the spirits. He informs van der Post that the Bushmen believe that it is at the Tsodilo Hills that 'the Great Spirit made the world'. In the voice-over narrative, van der Post implies that the spiritual power of the Tsodilo Hills emanates from the Bushmen rock art panel on the summit of the largest hill. The power of the spirits is illustrated by including the damaged frames in the television series.

By petitioning these spirits for absolution for breaking the sacred law of the Hills, van der Post demonstrates a willingness to engage earnestly with the spiritual beliefs of the Bushmen whom he is seeking. In this way, van der Post as the connective thread between Aboriginal Africans (Bushmen) and the West, between primitivism and technology and between spirituality and reason, is brilliantly embodied. The power here of the film camera should not be

³⁰ Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Screening Saints and Sinners: The Construction of Filmic and Video Images of Black and White South Africans in Western Popular Culture during the Late Apartheid Era,' pp. 183-200.

³¹ Jones, *Storyteller*, pp. 220-23.

underestimated. By breaking down, the film camera is shown to be susceptible to the mystical power of the spirits of the Tsodilo Hills. Furthermore, the inclusion the half-frames and jammed frames in the broadcast television series signifies that the evidence of this susceptibility exists not merely in the spoken word, but in the mechanism of film itself. In this instance, van der Post *relies* on the damaged frames to 'prove' the entire episode which is followed, as has been shown, by the expedition's shift to 'a new dimension of living'.

For van der Post, the filmmaking process was a useful means of showing his audience exactly what he was talking about; a mechanism not available to the writer of fiction. This is evident in the film itself, where van der Post's concluding statement begins with the words 'If what I've told you *and what you've seen in these films* can help you to bring back some hope to those disturbing Bushmen faces...'. What van der Post 'shows us' is illustrative of his two major myths in *Lost World*: the myth of pristine Bushmen and the myth of Laurens van der Post, explorer and spiritual frontiersman. In constructing his own mythology, van der Post utilised *Lost World* to 'tell history', and by illustrating that history with images of, for example, his family home *Boesmansfontein* and his sturdy Afrikaner compatriots, he created a fable that was highly influential throughout his life and beyond.

4.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE II

4.4.1 INADVERTENTLY REVEALING HISTORY: WHAT THE FILM TELLS US ABOUT THE BUSHMEN IN 1955

The degree to which these themes in *Lost World* are contrived is obvious when the message of the film is considered in the historical context of southern Africa in the 1950s. Van der Post's claims to 'discovering' Bushmen after a long, arduous journey out of time and through history need to be qualified. At the time in Bechuanaland (now Botswana), the inhospitable Kalahari Desert provided some protection to the remaining Bushmen bands who eked out a living by hunting

and gathering in its centre.³² These people, all of whom lived in the Central Kalahari Desert, numbered around 10 022 in 1956.³³ However, it appears that these bands could not have been the subject of *Lost World*. Van der Post claimed to have travelled to the very heart of the desert during his 1955 expedition, but a close appraisal of his route map contradicts this assertion. The fact is easy to establish, since van der Post displays a map of the journey in the studio from which he narrates *Lost World of Kalahari*. Then who were the Bushmen van der Post 'discovers' in the 'heart of the desert'?

At the beginning of episode four, 'Life in the Great Thirstland', van der Post shows the route the expedition had followed to reach the Sipwells. The camera focuses on the map in close-up and van der Post points out the route, starting at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and ending in southwestern Bechuanaland. The final destination, 'Sipwells', is very clearly marked on van der Post's map. To the left of the frame is the clear line of the South West Africa-Bechuanaland border with its distinctive right angle turn just below Ghanzi, extending west and then, at another right angle, continuing south again (see Fig. 1). Just above and to the left of the Sipwells is a point marked 'Shansis Settlement', a name which is an old variant spelling of Ghanzi.³⁴ Not only the spelling of 'Shansis' but also the proximity and position of the 'Sipwells' to the distinctive right angle turn on the South West Africa-Bechuanaland border conclusively show that van der Post was nowhere near the centre of the Kalahari desert when he made contact with the 'Sipwell Bushmen', but north and west of the desert in the Ghanzi farming district. Edwin Wilmsen has pointed out the presence of a white farm building that appears in one of the shots in the last episode of the *Lost World*, noting that in that shot there is also evidence of the 'bare and trampled sand characteristic of areas where cattle congregate, such as farms and wells'.³⁵ This writer has examined the shot in question and can corroborate Wilmsen's findings, although the shot does not occur in the episode entitled 'The Rain Song' as Wilmsen states, but rather in the preceding episode, 'The Great Eland'.

³² The G/wi Bushmen were studied by George B. Silberbauer in the late 1950s. His research was published in *Hunter and Habitat in the Central Kalahari Desert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³³ Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana', p. 241.

³⁴ Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes', caption on p. 161.

³⁵ Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes', caption on p. 158.

This evidence suggests then that van der Post's contact with the Bushmen group of *Lost World* was made in Ghanzi and not in the central Kalahari. However, Van der Post would not have 'discovered' 'pristine' Bushmen in Ghanzi in the 1950s; Ghanzi had been settled by Boer farmers since 1898. By the middle of the twentieth century most Ghanzi Bushmen lived as impoverished and hungry squatters. One of the major problems facing the Ghanzi Bushmen was unemployment: from the 1950s onwards, large numbers of black people moved into the farming block and were hired by farmers as labourers since they were deemed better workers than Bushmen. Furthermore, English-speaking farmers from South Africa who were beginning to buy and modernise farms in Ghanzi preferred not to employ Bushmen as labourers, regarding them as unreliable since hunting and roaming were 'bred in the Bushman's bone'.³⁶

Van der Post obliquely refers to this historical context in the last minutes of the last episode of *Lost World of Kalahari*, 'The Rain Song'. After he is pictured driving away from the Sipwells, the film cuts to the studio, where he begins a passionate polemic on 'this forty-thousand-year-old process of elimination [that] is still going on in the Kalahari Desert', meaning the rapid changes occurring amongst Bushmen in South West Africa and Bechuanaland in the 1950s. Van der Post goes on to say

We've stolen all the Bushman's best water, the black man and the yellow man and the white man. And the Bushman is still threatened. And what is more, he is administered by people who do not really care, who do not understand. Do you know that in the whole of the administration which administers that whole desert territory in your name and mine, there's not one man who speaks Bushman? There's not one man who really knows what they think, and what they feel? Do you realise that the game in the Kalahari desert is protected and the Bushman is punished, punished for hunting and killing the game, although he needs it for survival? And he who owned all that country, who was the lord of it all once, he has no such protection at all, he has no special rights of any kind.

Van der Post then goes on to discuss the people he meets 'along the fringes of the desert'; where there were 'signs of how this process of elimination by disintegration among the Bushmen was going on': He saw

...sordid, demoralised people, in the grip of the disdainful rag-and-tatters contamination of our own civilisation. I saw them work for a people who didn't understand them, didn't know their beginnings. I saw them as convicts in convicts' clothes, punished by laws they didn't make, in a language they couldn't understand. I found one oasis even, with a jail, to compel the Bushmen to live in a way which was not only not their own, but also a kind of death to them. I saw the deadly look of our own incomprehension and lack of imagination in so, so many things like these by the side of the long, long trail

³⁶ Guenther, 'From "Lords of the Desert"', pp. 227, 233-34.

out and along the edge of the desert. I could not accept that this look that was imposed on those faces was the best that we could do. I could not accept that that reproach which was in those eyes should remain there forever.

The ideas in this eloquent and passionate polemic hint at van der Post's central thesis on how to avoid such 'disintegration' amongst the Bushmen: by giving them a protected place where they might practise their hunting and gathering lifestyle, undisturbed by 'outside influences'. However, it also reveals to the historian evidence of the changing conditions of the Bushmen people in southern Africa in the 1950s, which even van der Post's rhapsodic mythologising could not entirely discount. As has been shown, these 'spoiled' Bushmen constituted the majority of Bushmen in southern Africa at the time.

It is puzzling that van der Post should have chosen to film in Ghanzi, when he might have found G/wi Bushmen in the Central Kalahari suffering less (at that time) the depredations experienced by the Bushmen in the farming block. Wilmsen argues that a possible reason for this is that for van der Post it was a 'metaphoric' remoteness rather than a physical remoteness that was resonant in his image of the Bushmen, in that van der Post referred to his experience with the Bushmen as 'exploring a great unknown area within my own spirit, to put it in the idiom with which I began, re-remembering the great memory'.³⁷ In this case, since the Bushmen were in essence the parts of a spiritual encounter for van der Post, the film could ignore the historical realities of Bushmen in southern Africa and present a hypothetical encounter, a journey to the 'heart of the desert' that didn't actually occur in the heart of the desert at all. There is no evidence available as to who the Bushmen filmed in *Lost World* actually were. However, whether or not van der Post staged the events in *Lost World* or how he organised them is less important than what the film says about Bushmen in general. It is the degree to which an *ideal form* is generated in front of van der Post's camera that is significant to this thesis. In light of the evidence placing van der Post in the Ghanzi district when he filmed *Lost World*, it would be fair to hypothesise that at least parts of the contact with the 'Sipwell Bushmen' were staged, or that

³⁷ Edwin Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes: The Imagery of Primitiveness in the Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 15, no. 12 (March-June 2002) p. 159.

the footage presented actually comprised a number of different encounters filmed during the expedition of 1955.³⁸

This close examination of van der Post's depiction of Bushmen in *Lost World* in relation to the historical context of the region in which it was filmed reveals the degree to which he consciously sculpted his image of Bushmen. It also reveals the degree to which *Lost World* was reflective of changing discourses about the Bushmen, whilst at the same time inadvertently reflecting their continuing impoverishment and dispossession. However, close analysis of *Lost World* also reflects a secondary and more personal vein of mythology in the film. It is argued here that, over and above the degree to which the film was reflective of changing discourses on the Bushmen and Africa in the 1950s and of van der Post's personal philosophising on the significance of Bushmen culture for the post World War II west, the enduring influence of this film in history must be seen in the light of the myth of van der Post himself.

4.5 LOST WORLD OF KALAHARI AS FILM IN HISTORY

The ratings alone suggest that *Lost World of Kalahari* was very influential. The BBC declared it a 'tour de force' – 'one of the most successful film series we have ever undertaken'.³⁹ The entire series was rebroadcast on the BBC in 1957 and subsequently was broadcast many times all over the world. Jones writes that BBC ratings for the film series were said to be second only to those for the Coronation.⁴⁰ Fully twenty-five years after its original broadcast, a well-known British journalist, Christopher Booker, nominated it as 'the most significant television series ever made'.⁴¹ The success of the series was matched only by that of the book *Lost World of the Kalahari*. Published in the United States on 29 October and in London on 10 November, 1958 the book

³⁸ J.D.F. Jones, van der Post's biographer, has commented that 'there is a certain amount of TV trickery [in *Lost World*]: some Kalahari wildlife shots were taken on the slopes of Table Mountain in Cape Town, and Dabe appears earlier in the story than was strictly true, it also looks as if two separate Bushman dances have been intercut into the same sequence, in which [a] farmhouse... can be glimpsed in the background, suggesting that the dance may not have been as spontaneous or remote as it is described' (p. 224).

³⁹ Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 225.

⁴⁰ Jones, *Storyteller*, pp. 225, 227.

⁴¹ Christopher Booker in *The Spectator*, 22 September 1984, quoted in Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 225.

built on the publicity around the successful television series. Total British Empire sales climbed to 225 000 over the following four years. Importantly, reviewers in Britain linked the book to the television series.⁴² Although some influential publications like the *Times Literary Supplement* contained reviews that were less than complimentary ('ridden with mystical fancies, with theories of fate and destiny, with high-falutin' analogies, with symbolism and Meanings and ornate significant metaphors'⁴³), the sales figures speak for themselves: van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari* in both book and series form added significantly to his reputation as a writer. At the time that the book of *Lost World* was enjoying such success, *Venture to the Interior* had achieved 400 000 sales.⁴⁴ American reviews were also warm. For example, Rumer Godden wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune* 'I cannot recall a story more touched with fascination, or more curious – in fact magical' (9 November 1958) and Charles Rolo in the *Atlantic Monthly* concurred: '*The Lost World of the Kalahari* has in full measure that exciting combination of qualities that van der Post has brought to the literature of adventure: a beautiful command of language, an extraordinary psychological awareness, and a spellbinding ability to evoke the sights and sounds and moods of the African interior.'⁴⁵

The film also had political influence. Van der Post used the success of *Lost World of Kalahari* to influence legislation in Botswana. He showed the film to the committee drawing up Botswana's independent Constitution in the late 1950s, a move which influenced the decision to set aside the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana for the protection of Bushmen.⁴⁶ As Alan Barnard wrote in 1989:

In many Western countries, the general public's knowledge and images of the hunter-gatherer way of life are directly attributable to Sir Laurens van der Post's book and films on his travels in search of the Bushmen of Southern Africa.⁴⁷

⁴²Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 227.

⁴³ Review from the *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 November 1958, quoted in Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 227.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Excerpts from reviews found at 'Published Works by Sir Laurens van der Post' at http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/LvdP/works.html#LWK

⁴⁶ Edwin N. Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes', pp. 178-80 and John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', in Jay Ruby (ed.) *The Cinema of John Marshall* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 135-68. See also Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 238.

⁴⁷ Alan Barnard, 'The Lost World of Laurens van der Post?', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 1 (February 1989), p. 104.

As a film *in history*, then, van der Post's specific framing of the Bushmen proved to be very influential. His theme of exploration and his valorisation of both the white explorer and Bushmen culture *if it remained untouched by the stain of modernity* would recur in later film representations of the Bushmen, as will be shown. Van der Post published more highly successful books on the Bushmen through the course of his life. These included *The Heart of the Hunter* in 1961, and later two substantial works of fiction with a Bushmen theme, the 1972 novel *A Story Like the Wind* and the 1974 *A Far-Off Place*. In 1975 he published *The Mantis Carol*, supposedly based on a true story.⁴⁸ All four of these books were great successes internationally and remained in print for many years. Furthermore, van der Post actively campaigned for the protection of Bushmen, alongside the fauna and flora of Africa, right up until his death in 1996.

In 1986 *A Walk with a White Bushman: Conversations with Jean-Marc Pottiez* was published. The book was a transcription of a number of conversations between Pottiez and van der Post, in which van der Post reminisced on his life of adventure and travel, and offered his thoughts and philosophies on these (including Bushmen).⁴⁹ On *Walk with a White Bushmen* Alan Barnard wrote:

During my own wanderings in the Kalahari, I have always thought van der Post was living in a fantasy world – a world which, for better or worse, bears only passing reference to the mundane world of science and scholarly, or of real Bushmen making a living from the desert. *A Walk with a White Bushmen* confirms it: Van der Post's Africa is no specific Africa; even the Bushmen he describes are not any specific one of the many diverse Bushman groups. They are the Bushmen of his imagination.⁵⁰

Van der Post made a trip to the Kalahari with Prince Charles in March of 1987. In 1988 a coffee table edition of *Lost World of Kalahari* was published, with photographs by David Coulson and a long essay by van der Post titled 'The Great and Little Memory'.⁵¹ Thus, despite the growing concerns of academics that van der Post's portrayal of Bushmen was hopelessly out of date and lacking in precision and clarity, the van der Postian 'Bushman Industry' continued to have

⁴⁸ Alan Barnard and Edwin Wilmsen have written critical analysis of van der Post's fiction writing. See Alan Barnard, 'Laurens van der Post and the Kalahari Debate', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 239-43, 247; Alan Barnard, 'The Lost World of Laurens van der Post?', pp. 104-14; Edwin Wilmsen, 'Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes', pp. 201-23; Edwin Wilmsen, 'Primal Anxiety, Sanctified Landscapes', pp. 143-201.

⁴⁹ Van der Post, *A Walk with a White Bushman: Conversations with Jean-Marc Pottiez* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986).

⁵⁰ Alan Barnard in *The Independent*, 15 November 1986, quoted in Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 372.

⁵¹ Van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, illustrated ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988).

international appeal well into the eighties.⁵² The very popular *Gods Must be Crazy* (1980) emulated van der Post's idealised depictions of Bushmen, even utilising a voiceover narration similar to the one used in *Lost World of Kalahari*, as will be discussed in chapter seven of this thesis. Van der Post's imaginings about the Bushmen, then, were very influential in history, despite their contrived nature.

4.6 LOST WORLD AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Van der Post tells us a great deal about the history of the Bushmen in *Lost World of Kalahari*, as well as about his own history, which as we have seen he relates to the history of Afrikanerdom in South Africa. As has been argued, however, this recounting of the past is imbued with van der Post's particular idealisation of both 'Bushman' and 'van der Post'. Thus, what van der Post *tells* us about the history of the Bushmen reiterates the earlier analysis in this chapter, which looked at *Lost World of Kalahari* as evidence of the values and attitudes of its maker and the period that produced it.

According to van der Post, the Bushmen were the first inhabitants of Africa and were once 'lords' of vast tracts of southern Africa. Left in isolation, they would continue to practise their culture in splendid style, as we see the River Bushmen doing, eating fish lovingly prepared by Bushmen wives who wait for their husbands to eat before eating themselves, as 'Bushman wives have waited, this 40 000 years or more'. The Bushmen sit about 'happily in the sun as they had sat for centuries' and van der Post's 'discovery' of them is 'as if a forgotten page of African history had come alive'. The expedition documents various games played by the Bushmen and records the music of the expedition. There are other ethnographic details, as we have seen, including documentation of hunting practices, trance dancing, preparing of meat and arrows, treatment of skins for clothing and bags, making of jewellery and preparing of poison for the arrows. *This* is the history of the Bushmen, according to van der Post – interesting ethnographic details; a state of cultural stasis which is idyllic and undisturbed.

⁵² Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 229.

Thus, evaluating *Lost World* as a work of historiography presents various difficulties because van der Post's modes of depiction in the film of the intertwined histories of the Bushmen and his own biography are so clearly shaped by mediatory informing ideologies. As we saw in the section on what the film tells us about the Bushmen in 1955, in commenting on change in this ideal form of Bushmen culture, van der Post reveals and acknowledges the changing circumstances of the Bushmen in southern Africa: 'this forty-thousand-year-old process of elimination [that] is still going on in the Kalahari desert,' where 'he who owned all that country, who was the lord of it all once, he has no such protection at all, he has no special rights of any kind'. Van der Post acknowledges these changing circumstances, but this evidence of change over time is not 'history' – rather it is a travesty, an aberration, which must at least be stopped, at best reversed. Van der Post uses the evidence of 'acculturated' Bushmen who are showing signs of *change* as the basis of an argument *against* this change: in *Lost World* history is indicted in favour of myth: the myth of the Bushmen as pristine primitive.

4.7 CONCLUSION

As evidence of the values and attitudes of its maker and the period that produced it, *Lost World* reflects van der Post's influential idealisation of the Bushmen as pristine primitives. This in turn reflects a larger ideological shift in perceptions of Africa in the West, that would foreground ecology and conservation over the reality of revolutionary anti- and post-colonial African politics.

As evidence *about* the Bushmen in the 1950s, *Lost World* inadvertently reveals the presence of the rural, poverty-stricken people who constituted most of Southern Africa's Bushmen population at the time. Van der Post's discourse, which frames these Bushmen as 'spoilt', accounts for their presence in the film by holding them up as a reason to 'preserve' Bushmen culture. Yet their presence in the film is significant, as it points to the realities of Bushmen poverty and dispossession in Southern Africa at the time.

Van der Post does try to present *Lost World* as a work of history, in that he purports to be telling the history of his own family and his symbolic relatedness to the Bushmen through historical ties. However, it has been shown in this chapter that his 'history' reflects a palimpsest of filmic and literary influences that constitute a successful 'formula' for van der Post's later works on Bushmen. In telling this 'history', it has been argued here, van der Post presents the most compelling myth in *Lost World*: that of himself as a brave frontiersman who seeks out the mystical Bushmen. It turned out to be a winning formula for him, as was shown in the analysis of the film *in history*.

Lost World was shown to have had a threefold influence: through the use of the film in influencing legislation, through the great popularity of both the *Lost World* film series and van der Post's later Bushmen books and through the evident echoes of *Lost World's* images of pristine Bushmen on later documentary film representations. This point will be picked up again in later chapters.

In the next chapter we turn to the second influential source of Bushmen iconography and scholarship in the 1950s, the American Marshall family expeditions. Although less influential than van der Post's Bushmen iconography, the Marshall family expeditions constituted the first long term study of the Bushmen that produced influential scholarship and film material. John Marshall's films on the Ju/Wasi Bushmen of northern Namibia would go on to span 50 years of their history and provide a definitive filmic record that will be considered at length in this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HUNTERS (1958)

The subject of this chapter is the documentary film *The Hunters* by American filmmaker John Marshall. It will be shown that *The Hunters* is regarded as one of the best known and most widely circulated ethnographic films of the last fifty years. Along with *Lost World of Kalahari*, its depiction of the Bushmen as pristine primitives has been widely influential, particularly in the United States.

Despite their status as contemporaries, however, *The Hunters* differs fairly dramatically from *Lost World*. Analysis of the film as a historical source reveals it to be reflective of a growing academic anthropological interest in the Bushmen and of discourses that would characterise that scholarship in the sixties and seventies. This chapter will begin with an outline of the Marshall family expeditions to South West Africa in the 1950s, in order to better understand the production context of the film. This will be followed by a synopsis of the film. The film will then be analysed for evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and period that produced it. It will be argued that *The Hunters* departs from the hyperbolic mythologising of *Lost World*, whilst at the same time bearing some similarities to it, particularly in the way that both films appear to depict the Bushmen as untouched by modernity and practising their traditional hunting-and-gathering culture, and in the reasons given for choosing the Bushmen as a subject of study. However, the structure and style of *The Hunters*, as well as its production context and governing ideology, differ considerably from those of *Lost World*. Thus the form and content of the film will be evaluated as evidence of the intellectual and ideological influences evident in the aims and objectives of the expedition, and of the ideas that the Marshalls and their colleagues had about film as a record of anthropological fieldwork as well as their conceptualisation of their work as creating a record of a vanishing culture. The evident influence of John Marshall's interests and concerns are also discussed in this chapter. As evidence of what the film tells us about the Bushmen in the 1950s, it will be argued that the depiction of the Bushmen as 'pristine primitives', while reflective of the ideological underpinnings of the expedition, also reflects the

complexity of the historical period in which *some* Bushmen still practised hunting-and-gathering as their major form of subsistence.

As a film *in* history, it will be argued that the images in *The Hunters* have taken on a significance as 'primary source' material on the Bushmen because the film has subsequently been utilised so often as 'stock footage' in other films. Thus it will be argued that *The Hunters* has *subsequently* been influential in shaping stereotypes of the Bushmen as pristine primitives. *The Hunters* was influential not just as a film about the Bushmen, but also as an early example of an ethnographic film. Its influence, then, was felt in academic circles rather than as a force shaping mass popular perceptions of the Bushmen in the west, as van der Post had been.

In appraising the film as a work of historiography, it will be shown that Marshall, in the context of the film's very specific focus on hunting, does not really discuss the history of the Bushmen at all. This, as we saw in the introduction, feeds into a common discourse on Bushmen people which regards them as devoid of history, having always stayed the same in their practice of a unique culture. Thus, once again it is the *ethnography* of the Bushmen that is foregrounded, without considering this ethnography in relation to history, or change over time.

5.1 BACKGROUND TO THE MARSHALL FAMILY EXPEDITIONS TO SOUTH WEST AFRICA IN THE 1950s

The Hunters was released in 1958. Its maker, John Marshall, was still a teenager when he accompanied his parents Laurence and Lorna to South West Africa on a series of expeditions organised in cooperation with the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. Critical discussion of these expeditions has been undertaken elsewhere¹, but for the purpose of this study it is important to note that their most significant and enduringly influential outcomes were *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*, an ethnography written by Lorna Marshall; *The Hunters*, the film by John Marshall; and Marshall's later !Kung Film Series.

¹ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', pp. 213-65. See also Nancie L. Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', in Jay Ruby (ed.), *The Cinema of John Marshall*, pp. 179-91.

The footage that became *The Hunters* was shot in the period 1952-1953 at the /Gam waterhole in Southern Nyae Nyae, in the northern reaches of the then South West Africa (see Fig. 1 and 3). It was edited on the third floor of the Marshalls' family home on Bryant Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, between 1954 and 1956. Further scenes were shot on the Marshalls' third trip to Nyae Nyae in 1955 and the completed film was finally released in 1958.² During the fifties the Marshalls lived in close proximity to the Bushmen groups they were filming and writing about on seven different expeditions that Laurence Marshall led to Nyae Nyae. This is an important point: unlike van der Post or the Denver African Expedition members, the Marshalls were concerned with producing ethnographic surveys built on sustained and intensive fieldwork amongst their informants.

As seen in the previous chapter on Laurens van der Post and *Lost World of Kalahari*, the intellectual atmosphere of the 1950s was very different to that of the 1920s, when the Denver African Expedition went to Africa to 'seek Bushmen' who would provide evidence of stone-age primitives' lifestyles and even of the 'missing link' between humans and primates. Importantly, however, Bushmen did not feature prominently on the American academic landscape in the early 1950s. When John Marshall's family originally set out for Africa in the early 1950s, they struggled to find a professional anthropologist or ethnographer to accompany them, despite their offer of a generous stipend and payment of all expenses. Edwin Wilmsen points out that it was archaeologists, and not anthropologists, who were interested in accompanying the Marshalls to study Bushmen in the early 1950s, revealing the degree to which Bushmen were consigned to prehistory rather than history. Lorna Marshall credited the general lack of academic interest in their expeditions to the Bushmen being 'so far from the mainstream of the American anthropologists' studies... that no one wanted to take the time out to spend a year with them'.³

There have been many myths circulated about the purpose of the Marshall expeditions. The most common is that Laurence Marshall, co-founder of Raytheon, which produced the fuse that detonated the atomic bomb at the end of World War II, was so appalled by the end results of

² Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 36.

³ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 220.

modern technological warfare that he wanted to seek out and study the isolated Bushmen of South West Africa, who were supposedly peace-loving and did not engage in warfare.⁴ As mentioned in the previous chapter, there did indeed emerge from the chaos and destruction of World War II strong movements throughout Europe and America toward a refiguring of racial discourses that might result in another outbreak of slaughter such as that witnessed under the Nazi regime. The association between 'Bushmen' and 'peace-loving' was also made later in the 1950s by van der Post. Thus, there are marked ideological similarities between the purported motives for the Marshall expeditions and van der Post's *Lost World* expedition.

John Marshall recalls that the trips to Africa in fact began when Laurence decided that he wanted to get to know his son better and so asked John to choose a place where they could go travelling together and have an adventure along the way. It is worth quoting Marshall's reminiscences on the topic in full, as they reveal the similarities between his perceptions of this first trip to Africa and the kinds of myths that informed that other American expedition to seek the Bushmen, the Denver African Expedition – as well as van der Post's adventuring in *Lost World*. These are evident both in the telling of the travellers' setting out for Africa and in their perceptions of the 'strangeness' of the landscapes they traverse in their 'search' for the Bushmen of the Kalahari. Marshall writes:

In 1949, when travelling with my mother to investigate markets in several countries, Laurence visited South Africa to try to sell a harbour radar system to the Cape Town Port Authority. My parents met Dr. E. van Zyl, a surgeon at Tigerberg [sic] Hospital. The doctor was planning an expedition to find the 'Lost City of the Kalahari.' Laurence was invited to join the expedition.

After years of war and absence from his family, Laurence wanted to take a trip to get to know his son. One of my hobbies was reading accounts of explorers like Livingstone, Stanley and Grant. I was enthralled by *Jock of the Bushveld* by Percy Fitzpatrick, and mesmerised by the films of Osa and Martin Johnson. My myths were obviously strong. When my father asked me where I wanted to go, I said Africa. At home, on a set of US Air Force maps, we saw that all the roads and tracks petered out around the edge of the Kalahari.

When discussing our planned trip, Laurence asked professors Lauriston Ward and J.O. Brew, director of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, if we could serve a useful purpose while looking for a lost city. Someone [Wilmsen has shown that this 'someone' was J.O. Brew]⁵ said we should try to find 'wild Bushmen.'

It was a wondrous trip. I flew in ever diminishing aircraft to Twi Rievieren (sic) in the Black Nossob Valley... On our first day out, Laurence stepped on a sleeping puff adder

⁴ For example, this story surfaces in J.D.F. Jones's biography of Laurens van der Post, *Storyteller*, pp. 211-12.

⁵ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 215.

and knocked out a baboon with a right hook; we didn't know the baboon was tame. At Tsau in Botswana, a lion jumped into a *kraal* 20 yards from where I was sleeping, and jumped out again with a cow. A Tswana farmer fired an Enfield rifle at a fornicating donkey.

I took shots of people in native costumes standing in rows, and filmed an elephant running far away. I filmed our Dodge Power Wagon winching itself out of an ant bear hole. The Wagon broke in half in Angola. I was having an adventure.⁶

The significance of the map of the Kalahari surfaces in the Denver Expedition, in van der Post's *Lost World* and in Marshall's reminiscences. In the film *The Bushmen* (1925), the Kalahari is described as 'forbidden'. It is painted as 'the heart of darkness', a place beyond the realms or reach of the colonial powers that dominated Africa at the time, a recess of primal Africa, as it were, which of course is also a theme of van der Post's *Lost World*. The attraction for the Marshalls of the 'mapless' Kalahari is thus strikingly familiar. Furthermore, the descriptions of 'strange' creatures, landscapes and events mimic film travelogues such as those of Osa and Martin Johnson and the Denver African Expedition film, and recall the writings of G.A. Farini and H. Rider Haggard. The images evoked include searches for mythical lost cities, lions stealing cows, black people shooting at donkeys, baboons and puff-adders, natives in traditional dress, elephants running across the vast veldt and Western technology falling prey to the treacherous terrain. This latter theme is present in *Lost World*, in the example of the Tsodilo Hills misadventure when van der Post's film equipment breaks down.

Unlike the Denver African Expedition members and van der Post, however, John Marshall did not regard any of his excited travelogue-type footage to be worthy of inclusion in his first film.⁷ Thus, while the early experiences of Marshall and his father, and later his sister and mother, in many ways mirrored the experiences of the Denver African Expedition members and Laurens van der Post on their respective trips through Southern Africa in 1925 and 1955, the filmic output from the Marshall expedition proved to be markedly different from *The Bushmen* and *Lost World of Kalahari*, whilst at the same time echoing elements of both the earlier films, as will be shown below.

⁶ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', in Jay Ruby (ed.), *The Cinema of John Marshall*, p. 25.

⁷ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 25.

5.2 THE HUNTERS: A SYNOPSIS

The Hunters documents a hunt undertaken by four Ju/Wasi men, ≠Toma, //Ao, Kxao and /Qui.⁸ At first faced with meagre pickings such as a tortoise, some dead baby birds and two porcupines, the men finally manage to shoot a female giraffe. They then begin the exhausting task of tracking her while the poison of their arrows sets to work in her body. The men struggle to make sense of the giraffe's movements. They track her across dry and cracked earth that yields few discernible tracks, and finally, after five long days and many debates and confusions, they face her down and kill her with spears. The killing sequence is particularly harrowing, as the giraffe is discernibly exhausted and sick, yet still manages to kick out with her long legs at the men who are dwarfed by her stature and foiled in their repeated attempts to stab her. Once she collapses, Kxao ends her suffering by stabbing her heart and jiggling his spear to speed up her death. The men begin the process of skinning her, stopping to eat their first proper meal in the course of the long hunt. They then divide up the meat in a night-long process of skinning and butchering, while one man returns to the *werft* (shelter in a Ju/Wasi settlement) to fetch other members of the group to assist in the carrying of the meat. The meat is divided amongst the entire community on their return home, where there is feasting and finally storytelling as the hunt is discussed in minute detail – and many other hunts besides – and thus 'the story of the hunt is told'.

The Hunters opens with shots of the wilderness; flowers and butterflies, birds soaring and game running across the desert. The audio track is silent, until two Ju/Wasi men enter the frame. Then a traditional !Kung melody plays over the visuals. The last shot of the opening sequence shows ≠Toma (whom we will get to know well), his face framed up against a deep blue sky, surveying the land. His expression is thoughtful and his manner authoritative as the title of the film, *The Hunters*, fades up on to the screen. In a manner radically different to the cinematography of either the Denver Expedition film or *Lost World*, Marshall films ≠Toma in a low-angle shot, making him tower in the frame. The only thing that dwarfs ≠Toma and the other hunters in *The Hunters* is the desert landscape itself. This is important, since nowhere in *The*

⁸ The Ju/Wasi are a branch of the Northern Namibian and Northwest Botswana Bushmen who speak a version of the !Kung language. See James Suzman, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia*, p. 3.

Hunters is a comparison made between Ju/Wasi culture and the West, as occurs so frequently in the Denver film and in *Lost World*, a process which inevitably begins with an emphasis on the Bushmen's diminutive size.

The opening sequences, explaining that this 'hard, dry land' only supports those who know it well, introduce the Ju/Wasi, 'a quiet people' who live in the northern Kalahari. Various elements of Ju/Wasi society are explained in the voiceover narration, including ownership of the scarce waterholes near which the people live during the driest times of the year. Food collection is discussed, whilst women are shown collecting food in the veld, and then hunting, the 'work of men' is introduced. The role of hunting in the community is explained and the significance of the hunter identity for the men in the group is emphasised. Boys are shown learning to hunt using miniature bows and arrows, and it is explained that all young boys have ambitions to be great hunters and practise from a very young age.

The film shifts from these introductory sequences into the tale of a particular hunt. An establishing shot signals the start of this sequence, showing a *werft* in the early morning, framed by trees and the veldt stretching off into the distance. The narrator declares:

One day in winter, when there had been no meat in the *werft* for a month since the rain, many people had gone gathering, and the *werft* seemed abandoned in the morning. Among the few who remained at home was !U, ≠Toma's wife, and their new baby. People needed meat... So ≠Toma strung his bow with a new string he had recently made of the best sinew.

The visual track shows ≠Toma sitting in front of his *werft* stringing his bow, with close-ups of his hands at work.

Once the hunt is properly under way, the film documents its various stages; the successes and failures, group discussions and disagreements, and finally the killing of the giraffe. As if to reinforce the 'storytelling' that structures the film, it ends with images of all the men of the band around a fire, cooking the meat from the hunt. The film concludes with ≠Toma telling the story of the hunt to an eager audience of men and boys.

5.3 FILM AS EVIDENCE I

5.3.1 READING *THE HUNTERS* FOR EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE AND PERIOD THAT PRODUCED IT

There are two evident 'streams' of influence on the structure and content of *The Hunters*. The one is a reflection of the intellectual context in which the film was made, in that the purpose of the Marshall expeditions was to record the 'threatened' culture of the Bushmen. This will be discussed in light of the ideas expressed by the various Marshall Expedition members about the purpose of anthropological work and their motivations for studying the Bushmen. The second 'stream' of ideology relates to Marshall's personal fascination with the Bushmen he was filming, his relationship with them and his boyish interest in their hunting culture. Both these 'streams' can be related to larger ideologies and specific evidence thereof in *The Hunters* will be discussed.

5.3.1.1 STREAM ONE: IDEAS ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PURPOSE OF THE MARSHALL EXPEDITIONS

As axiomatic as it may seem, the very choice of 'Bushman' as the focus of the Marshall's' studies and of John Marshall's film in the 1950s reflected both emerging ideologies about 'Bushman' and ideas about the role of anthropology in recording vanishing cultures.

Despite shooting many feet of film detailing the exciting adventures his family experienced in South West Africa, John Marshall saw the key purpose of his filmmaking as being to record a document that would both supplement and prove the research that the Marshalls intended to carry out amongst the Bushmen of Southern Africa. According to John, Laurence Marshall was very clear in his instructions to his son: he must shoot a record. Marshall recalls his father saying, 'Don't direct, John. Don't try to be artistic. Just film what you see people doing naturally. I want a record, not a movie.'⁹ Thus, John Marshall recalls that when *The Hunters* was released in

⁹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 19.

1958, his father was uncomfortable with the film and wished that John had 'made more of an effort with the record'¹⁰ – this point will be explored at great length below.

What is evident here is the degree to which the Marshall family, particularly Laurence, believed in the power of the camera to record reality and produce an unmediated record. Laurence Marshall believed that television could be used to educate and inform.¹¹ This was influenced in part by the work of anthropologists such as Boas, Herskovits, Bateson and Mead who saw film as an accurate means of data collection.¹² Margaret Mead, a pioneer of ethnographic filmmaking, firmly believed that the film camera offered a unique and powerful way of capturing data about cultures, and should be an essential tool of the anthropologist working in the field.¹³ The idea that documentary film could capture 'reality' has been questioned since the inception of the non-fiction film, and the debate goes back to the early pioneers of the form such as Dziga Vertov and John Grierson, who argued that the process of filmmaking had a mediatory effect on the final meaning of the material and that documentary film was by nature an arrangement of reality and not reality itself.¹⁴ However, as is evident in the association between Mead and Marshall and their belief in film as a tool of recording reality, these critical stances did not necessarily affect the pervasive view in the 1940s and 1950s that film could record and show the real. As the philosopher Ian Jarvie has written,

Filmmakers acknowledging the element of creativity in the presentation of reality were philosophically more sophisticated than, say Margaret Mead, who in the late 1950s could be heard at the Royal Anthropological Institute extolling the virtues of the camera and the tape recorder as boons to the anthropologist. At last the technology was available definitively to record what went on in another society. Just set up the equipment and get out of the way, and countless hours of priceless and informative data would be yours. On hearing this I was dismayed, not so much because of the naïve inductivism of Mead's implicit philosophy of science as because she seemed to be unaware that even Grierson was unable to leave out the world 'creative' from the use of the tape record and camera to capture reality.¹⁵

In the 1950s Mead considerably influenced Laurence Marshall's belief in the potential of the camera as a recording device that could produce 'source material in anthropology'¹⁶, advising him

¹⁰ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 39.

¹¹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 22.

¹² Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 185.

¹³ Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, 'Introduction', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 3.

¹⁴ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, (ed.) Forsythe Hardy, (London: Collins, 1964), pp.79-80.

¹⁵ I.C. Jarvie, 'The Problem of the Ethnographic Real', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 24, no. 3 (June 1983), p. 314.

¹⁶ Quoted from Lorna Marshall's diary in Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 182.

on the best way of producing a film record and lending him a copy of her edited filmmaking from her fieldwork in Bali.¹⁷ Thus, for Laurence Marshall, film was a means of capturing a record of a vanishing race. This also had been the rationale behind the Denver African Expedition in 1925, but the Marshall Expedition members did not express the overt racial prejudice and stereotyping manifested by the Denver Expedition. In fact, unlike the Denver African Expedition members, the Marshall's seem to have been engaged in a constant battle to interrogate their responses to the people they were studying and living with and to learn *from* them as they learnt *about* them. This kind of governing discourse is evident in the following extract from Lorna Marshall's diary:

Damn it, I'm not perfectly free and natural. I am strained and troubled and worried – and trying to play act at the same time. I feel like a damned fool and I feel that in spite of vague intentions to the contrary, we are patronizing. And I am jumbled about whom I'm trying to please (27 September 1952, at /Gautcha).¹⁸

Compare this kind of introspection to a diary extract by Denver African Expedition member Paul Hoefler:

The Bushmen are peculiar folks and do good work fast when they feel so inclined, other days they are just two degree worse than useless... Showed them the white man's magic tonight when we took some night pictures by means of flares. This was another big event in their lives and they could not understand it. I enjoy watching them while riding on the truck to take scenes of the veldt. They enjoy the sensation of travelling fast as much as we do, but none of them seem to possess the knack of expressing their feelings, they are just like children, knowing when they like a thing, but take it all as a matter of course.¹⁹

Hoefler's engagement with the Bushmen he filmed was narrow and cursory; his responses drawn from random observations that heavily registered the weight of his own prejudices. In contrast the Marshall family, and particularly John Marshall, showed a desire to learn the ways of the people they filmed and not to assume meanings based on their own conditioning and context. Marshall's later film record reflects this: unlike *The Hunters*, which is a narrative documentary film, the rest of his films about Bushmen in the 1950s focus on single events or rituals in the life of the Ju/Wasi. The result of this work was the !Kung Film Series, which eschewed straight narrative documentary in favour of focused attention on particular events expressed from a variety of angles in order to capture the 'fullness' of the event. Marshall wanted to move away from merely

¹⁷ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 220.

¹⁸ Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 184.

¹⁹ Robert J. Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 43.

reflecting his own perceptions of what was important in his films and to try to express the perceptions of the people he was filming.²⁰

The Marshalls were committed empiricists. As Richard Lee, a well-known anthropologist who has studied the Bushmen extensively explains:

To recover a link to the real world, to empirical reality, is precisely what some scholars tried to do in the 1960s with the work diaries, demography, subsistence ecology, and careful ethnography (e.g., ...[Lorna] Marshall 1961...).²¹

Furthermore, as seen in chapter one, Hitchcock explains that

During the 1950s and 1960s, when intensive, long-term ethnographic research began to be undertaken among the Basarwa [Bushmen], much of it concentrated on foraging populations. This intentional bias was prompted in part by the fear the hunting-and-gathering way of life was not going to survive much longer... The Marshall family looked specifically for 'unacculturated Bushmen' who were living 'in complete independence' from other groups.²²

There is evidence of these ideological underpinnings in *The Hunters*. The focus, as stated at the start of this analysis, is firmly on a group of Ju/Wasi Bushmen who live by hunting-and-gathering. The ethnographic information in the film is not presented as proof of the Bushmen's barbarity or stupidity, as in *The Bushmen*, or as part of an extended monologue on the philosophical significance of peace-loving, ancient Bushmen culture for the spiritually bankrupt west, as in *Lost World of Kalahari*. Rather, the film attempts to capture elements of Ju/Wasi culture apparently for its own sake – in other words to record intricate details of that culture without engaging in comparative comments on it or declaring its primordial significance for western culture. For example, unlike the DAE film and *Lost World*, *The Hunters* is not about a 'journey' by a white protagonist to 'discover Bushmen'. In *The Hunters*, the only journey undertaken is by the Ju/Wasi protagonists. Apart from a single map at the very start of the film that locates Nyae Nyae in the northern Kalahari, there is no visual illustration reminiscent of the dramatic demarcation of a journey from the 'civilised' West. From the opening frames of *The Hunters*, we the audience have already arrived – or indeed *are already there*. Unlike van der Post and the Denver African Expedition, Marshall does not discuss the heroics of his own journey. He is the silent observer capturing another journey; that of a hunt by four Ju/Wasi men. Their world

²⁰ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 40-1.

²¹ Richard Lee, 'Art, Science, or Politics? The Crises in Hunter-Gatherer Studies', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 94, no. 1 (March 1992), pp. 41-2.

²² Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana', p. 221.

is never once compared to Western society, either favourably (read van der Post) or unfavourably (read Denver African Expedition).

Rather, *The Hunters* constitutes an extensive exploration of specific elements of Ju/Wasi society in the 1950s, in an attempt to provide an empirical study of their culture. These include the individual identities of the people filmed, their relative isolation in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s, the type of hunting and gathering methods shown in the film, the importance of water rights to the band and the form of social organisation depicted in the leadership of ≠Toma, all of which are clearly present in the film.

The following excerpt from the voiceover narration of the film gives evidence of the 'matter-of-fact' tone of the information presented in the film, which gives us 'just' information on the Ju/Wasi, without overtly framing that information in interpretation or polemic:

The Northern Kalahari is a hard dry land.

In this bitter land live a quiet people who call themselves !Kung or Ju/Wasi. Ju/Wasi could be translated 'ourselves' as opposed to [indistinct] meaning 'strangers'.

Far from generous, the land provides a livelihood only to those who know it well, and the people must travel from time to time throughout the year to where the different wild foods ripen, according to their season...

Permanent waterholes are few and precious. They are considered owned by the headmen of bands, and the headmen's permission must be asked to drink the water. It is always given for the asking.

Around these permanent waterholes, the small bands live through the hard months. During these hard months the lack of water confines the people, restricting their movements.

Music.

It is a bitter land indeed where all the trees have thorns.

From the ceaseless labours of women, pecking and tugging at the land, comes most of the people's food. If the year proves constant, visiting the land with the rain in season the earth bears faithfully. The women's work is to gather wild roots, nuts and berries...The implement used is a digging stick, and with its sharp point the women chip away the hard ground, uncovering the fat root. The roots must be tasted, some are bitter.

Compare this to excerpts from *The Bushmen* and *Lost World of Kalahari* that we have already examined:

Pygmies as treacherous and cruel as the land of their habitation – having no possessions but bow and dog – no history – no morality – no god (*The Bushmen*);

True Bushmen are essentially hunters...wild, wild [men]... they may be a dirty little people but they are deeply religious, and because they cannot express religion, they dance it (*Lost World of Kalahari*).

However, whilst the film does not bear the burden of a voiceover narration that declares definitively what Bushmen culture is, as *Lost World* does, it is argued here that the foregrounding of the ethnographic details of Ju/Wasi life reflects the anthropological purpose of the Marshall expeditions, that sought to 'record' those details before they vanished. The Marshalls' eagerness to record the Ju/Wasi culture in its pristine state meant that Marshall was moving 'tin cans out of shots' in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s.²³ Keyan Tomaselli and John P. Homiak have analysed *The Hunters* in relation to the archive of 700 000 feet of Marshall's 1950s filmmaking kept at the Smithsonian museum that were not included in *The Hunters* or in Marshall's short film projects, the !Kung Series. Tomaselli and Homiak argue that this film record reveals the degree to which Marshall deliberately excluded any signs of acculturation amongst the Ju/Wasi, such as the use of modern implements (pots, pans, Western clothing, tyres, water drums, etc.) and the interactions between the Ju/Wasi and neighbouring Ovambo and Herero who traded with the Ju/Wasi or employed them as cattle herders. The proof of this is in the fact that the 'cutting-room floor' portions, or sections of film that were not included in any of the produced films, show evidence of these accoutrements and connections.²⁴ The 'isolation' of the Ju/Wasi is also symbolically commented upon in the film through repeated long shots of the four hunters dwarfed by the vast desert landscape – an image that would recur in later documentary film representations of the Bushmen throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

This focus on 'pristine' Bushmen by the Marshalls had a more scholarly conception, but was nonetheless similar to van der Post's focus on 'pristine Bushmen' as examples of soulful humanity and the DAE's focus on pristine Bushmen as examples of the depredated remnants of early humanity whose demise was imminent. Common to the discourse of all three films is the idea that this pristine culture – however it was conceived of through the lens of specific ideologies – were on the point of demise, and needed to be 'captured' for posterity. The idea that this information could and should be 'captured' reflected the positivist discourse evident in the aims and objectives of the Marshall expedition, that in turn reflected the positivist ideas about

²³ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 43.

²⁴ Keyan Tomaselli and J.P Homiak, 'Powering Popular Conceptions: The !Kung in the Marshall Family Expedition Films of the 1950s', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 12 (1999), pp. 160-61.

fieldwork which still pervaded scholarly anthropological discourse in the 1950s. However, as Lee has argued,

In the 1960s, many anthropologists saw themselves as crusading empiricists, replacing speculation with facts, but it is now possible to recognise that, like all scholars in the human sciences, the ethnographers of the 1950s and 1960s were also storytellers, weavers of narratives. It was not only a question of *what* they had to say but also *how* they said it. To this extent those who emphasize anthropology's affinities to literature *do* have a point.²⁵

The Hunters is not just a vehicle that bears interesting ethnographic information about the Ju/Wasi. It is also a film defined by a clearly 'woven' narrative, the trajectory of which can be read for the 'second stream' of ideology present in the film: that of John Marshall's own subjective influences evident in the story he told about his Bushmen colleagues in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s. This was to such a degree that Laurence Marshall 'was uneasy when the film was released in 1957. He thought that [John Marshall] should have made more of an effort with the record.'²⁶

5.3.1.2 STREAM TWO: NARRATIVE AND *THE HUNTERS* AS A PRODUCT OF JOHN MARSHALL'S INFLUENCES AND CONCERNS

In 1953 Elizabeth Marshall, John Marshall's sister, commented on how deeply involved John had become in Ju/Wasi life:

John takes his gun to do his share of hunting; only his share – to keep up his end of the food getting. He lives like the Bushmen when he is with them – sharing pipes and everything else, blankets, pots, eating *veldkos* and their meat cooked their way.²⁷

In retrospect, Marshall has commented about his time amongst the Ju/Wasi in the 1950s that

I was eighteen, nineteen—the best years of my life, the happiest I've ever been, without any question. It was a pretty wonderful experience for a kid of that age in a place like that with people like [Ju/Wasi], damned decent, good-to-be-with people.²⁸

And Nancie L. Gonzalez, Marshall's ex-wife has written that

John also danced with the medicine men during curing ceremonies and went through a betrothal ceremony with a Ju/Wasi girl (as a successful hunter, he must have been in great demand). He was the only one of the family who learned enough of the language to manage without an interpreter. He defended their human rights with youthful fervour and characteristic obscenity when he thought they had been maligned.²⁹

²⁵ Richard Lee, 'The Crises in Hunter-Gatherer Studies', p. 42.

²⁶ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 39.

²⁷ Quoted in Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 189.

²⁸ Carolyn Anderson and Thomas W. Benson, 'An Interview with John Marshall', in Jay Ruby (ed.), *The Cinema of John Marshall*, p. 137.

²⁹ Nancie L. Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 189.

John Marshall's personal involvement with the people he filmed for *The Hunters* is evident in the film, particularly in the way in which he defines the individual Bushmen in the film. As Lomax wrote of Marshall's 1950s Ju/Wasi footage,

Marshall clearly knows the Bushmen well and feels a deep affection for them. The ease they feel when he is photographing them comes through in the footage, and, with the aid of sensitive photography, one has the very great pleasure of getting to know some of these extraordinarily charming people at close range, as they chat, flirt, bathe, quarrel, tell stories, dance, go into trance, and take care of each other.³⁰

The individualisation of people in the film sets *The Hunters* apart from *The Bushmen* and *Lost World*. In both earlier films the individualisation of the Bushmen remains at a minimum (in *The Bushmen* there are no individuals except for the fictitious 'Kanna'). In *Lost World* van der Post does name his Bushmen informants but fails to explore their personalities in any great depth. Marshall, on the other hand, constructs *The Hunters* around the central figure of ≠Toma. In the narration of the film Marshall describes ≠Toma in the following way:

≠Toma the leader, ≠Toma the vigorous and able. He was a man of many words and a lively mind. One who had travelled to the edges of his world. He had a little of the clown in him. ≠Toma was not descended of headmen. He married into a headmanship that he cannot bequeath, but he was the perfect man for a job that brings no rewards and often only earns worry. It pleased ≠Toma to be headman. With the new baby, ≠Toma had become a family of five. When he praised himself he said [unclear meaning] which is to say 'I am the sharpest edge of the arrow'.

Another hunter is described as

//Ao the beautiful. //Ao was a natural hunter, taking great pleasure in the chase. His arrows were keen and each point was shaped in his own fashion with deep notches behind the ears, for it is the custom of these hunters each to make their arrows different from any other man's. //Ao was something of a dreamer, often he played with children...But though he had done much in hunting and was well known he rarely spoke out among the people, being of the sort who listened all their lives. His first two children died, each in their first year. He often played for his third child on a one-string violin.

Marshall identifies ≠Toma as a close friend and personal mentor.³¹ The historical record bears out ≠Toma's leadership position in his community.³² In Marshall's later films, the same people

³⁰ Alan Lomax, 'Review of *Bitter Melons*', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 74, no. 4 (August 1972), p. 1019.

³¹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 34.

³² In the seventies and eighties ≠Toma, later followed by his son Tsamko ≠Toma, became a leading figure in the Ju/Wasi Bushmen Development Foundation and later the Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative, organisations that worked towards establishing sustainable small-scale agrarian economies in Nyae Nyae to provide a stable income for Ju/Wasi communities trapped in a cycle of poverty, alcoholism and dependency on government handouts. See Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 103-5; Toby Alice Volkman, 'The San in Transition. Vol. 1: A Guide to *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*', Occasional paper No. 9, *Cultural Survival and DER* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 17-18 and John Marshall and Claire Ritchie, 'Where Are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae? Changes in a Bushmen Society: 1958-1981', *Communications*, no. 9 (Centre for African Studies: University of Cape Town Press, 1984), pp. 69, 181-82.

often appear, particularly ≠Toma and his family. In fact, up to the year 2000 Marshall's Nyae Nyae films continue to focus on members of ≠Toma's family. Consider the following description of Marshall's relationship with ≠Toma:

≠Toma was my mentor and Lorna Marshall's best informant. Filming ≠Toma and his family was one of my right decisions. Members of the family were involved in most of the major events in recent Ju/'hoan history.

From ≠Toma, I learned as much about observing as I did about hunting and gathering. ≠Toma taught me how to watch, listen and suspend judgement. His hope that I would learn the arts of mediation faltered, but his lessons have been important to me in the way I shoot film. I have often been called a 'fly on the wall.' ≠Toma stressed the importance of telling the truth and being specific.

≠Toma influenced my filmmaking in more ways than by imparting abstract values. He was often near when I was filming. He taught me how to use social space while I was shooting by including me in groups. He admonished me when I was too close... and laughed when I was too far away. When I began to learn Ju/'hoan, he explained what people were doing and saying, telling me about the background of disputes and advising me about the important players.³³

At the very least, what can be inferred from this extract, even taking into account the subjectivity of oral testimony, is that a personal relationship existed between Marshall and some of his informants. It was a relationship that vastly superseded the kind of superficial contact made by the Denver African Expedition members and van der Post on their travels to seek Bushmen. There is an element of idealisation of ≠Toma and the other hunters in *The Hunters* – a simplification of their characters by invoking only their positive characteristics. The extract above shows this element of idealisation in Marshall's relationship with ≠Toma – the latter was Marshall's teacher, and clearly the subject of his respect and admiration.³⁴ In the opening sequences of *The Hunters* ≠Toma is framed from a low-angle shot against a dark blue sky, gazing into the distance. He cuts an impressive figure, the choice of framing de-emphasising his small stature (unusual in itself – the diminutive size of the Bushmen is emphasised in *The Bushmen* and in *Lost World* by van der Post's repeated references to 'little' Bushmen). In terms of reading the film for evidence of ideology, Marshall's idealisation of his informants arguably reflects the breathless wonder of a happy and excited teenager, whose camera was capturing what *he* found interesting and admirable about the Bushmen.

³³ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 34.

³⁴ It is important to note this relationship, as it would inform some of Marshall's later filmmaking on the Ju/Wasi, a point which will be discussed in his thesis.

Marshall's youth and the experience of the expeditions to Kalahari as an 'an adventure' are evident in his fascination with hunting as opposed to other important elements of the culture such as gathering or trance dancing. He admitted as much in 1993, when he said that 'I was a kid, and I got captivated by hunting, so I went hunting. I figured it was technology.'³⁵ In his later films on the Ju/Wasi he would attempt to redress the balance by focusing on other elements of the culture, but in this early film his focus was squarely on the hunting, both as technology and as mythology. Marshall's romanticisation of hunting in *The Hunters* is similar to Flaherty's focus on hunting in *Nanook of the North* (1922). Flaherty was so eager to capture the process of Inuit walrus hunting that he asked Nanook and his compatriots to enact an outdated and dangerous method of hunting.³⁶ This mythologising of the hunting process is shown in particular in the concluding sequence of Marshall's *The Hunters*, which shows the meat from the hunt being divided up. The narration states:

That afternoon, people gathered around the fires where the meat cooked to listen and take part in the telling of the hunt. Toma, being the good talker that he was, told the story of the long failure and eventual success. He spoke of the places they had been, all familiar places to the older people around him, and of the things they had seen...[and of the shooting of the giraffe and the tracking of her]...Then of the arguments, and the differences of opinion, and how surprised they were she could have travelled so far being full of poison, and how she had run all day...[and then of her killing]...And finally of the bringing home the meat, the distribution, and how good it was that men hunted, and everybody agreed. And old men remembered, and young men listened, and so the story of the hunt was told.

The story of the hunt thus is narrated not only for the audience of the film, but also for the people within the world of the film. The idea inherent in this is that the 'story' of the hunt had significance for the identity and continuity of the community, and also served as a source of unity, hence 'the old men remembered, and the young men listened'. Externally, the mythologising or romanticising of the hunt in *The Hunters* reflected a larger romanticisation of primitive culture that had, to greater and lesser degrees, infused the history of both the discipline of anthropology and also documentary filmmaking up to the 1950s. As Jarvie argues,

To the true romantic [anthropologist or filmmaker], however sentimental, even the working classes seem to live somewhat artificial lives; the only truly unspoiled and hence real people those out of touch with civilisation but in touch with nature: primitive people.³⁷

And on Flaherty's filmmaking, Grierson writes that

³⁵ Anderson and Benson, 'An Interview with John Marshall', p. 137.

³⁶ Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 22.

³⁷ Jarvie, 'The Problem of the Ethnographic Real', p. 313.

The job of romantic documentary is easy... *easy in the sense that the noble savage is already a figure of romance...* [own italics]. Their essential virtues have been declared and can more easily be declared again, and no one will deny them.³⁸

In this Marshall's personal and boyish fascination with hunting is in part reflective of the romance associated with primitive hunting cultures, which stems back to the idea of the 'Noble Savage' embodied in Rousseau's philosophy of the 18th century.³⁹ The Bushmen as hunters had sometimes been an appealing image to travellers even in early colonial southern Africa, as seen in chapter one, and as Guenther shows:

Baines, the artist with an eye for beauty and strong leanings to the ideas of Rousseau, 'could not help but admire' the deportment and apparel of these... handsome 'manly fellows' [≠Au//gei Bushmen of the Ghanzi veld] who were bedecked with bird feathers and heads. So impressed was Baines by the sight of them that he broke into verse in his narrative of the journey, citing some adoration verses by Pringle who saw in the Bushmen 'the lords of the desert land', the embodiment of the 'Noble Savage'.⁴⁰

The 'romance' of *The Hunters* has been identified by other writers, and Marshall himself has expressed concern that 'my interest in hunting [bent] the record way out of shape.'⁴¹ The 'romance' is also present because of the narration of the film: Marshall, like van der Post, had his own cultural and literary influences. He relates that the style of the voiceover narrative was influenced by his reading of Faulkner and Melville's *Moby Dick*.⁴² Delivered in a fairly monotonous tone by John Marshall, it forms a rhythmic chant that both explicates the visuals and also wanders into strange and idiosyncratic descriptions of the action on screen. An example of this comes after the giraffe has finally been killed. Marshall muses in the narration:

A large creature, having an important death, the giraffe left a sudden hollow in the world behind her. The hunters were aware of the hollow and felt it anticipating. Uncertain, now at the loss of day, in the land being abandoned by the sun, the men who did not know what active thing might be coming to replace the giraffe, perhaps to spoil the meat, and who knew that so much life could not be gone and unnoticed, let !Gau, because he was a medicine man, open the giraffe.

Like van der Post, Marshall was attracted to elements of Bushmen culture that exemplified its difference from Western culture – the strangeness of the landscape on which they lived, the 'adventure' of the expeditions, the fascinating rituals and technology of their society, the mythical beliefs that underpinned their attitudes to hunting and gathering. If Marshall 'bent the record

³⁸ John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 84.

³⁹ O'Connor, 'The White Man's Indian: An Institutional Approach', in Rollins and O'Connor (eds.), *Hollywood's Indian*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Mathias Guenther, 'From "Lords of the Desert" to "Rubbish People"', p. 231. Guenther quotes Thomas Baines in *Explorations in South West Africa* (London: Longman, Green, 1864), p. 144.

⁴¹ Edwin Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', p. 229.

⁴² Edwin Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', p. 36.

out of shape' with his subjective interest in these specific elements of Ju/Wasi culture, he was similar to the DAE and to van der Post, who also refracted the image of the Bushmen as pristine primitive through particular ideological lenses.

The Hunters was released in the late 1950s. It thus coincided with changing attitudes to Bushmen in southern Africa and in the West that replaced previous perceptions of Bushmen as brutes and savages with the more generous image of 'Harmless People' or innocent children of nature. This shift, as seen in chapters three and four, was the result of several factors. The first was that the remaining groups of Bushmen in Namibia no longer posed a threat to the colonial economy. Their numbers had been drastically diminished, and so colonisers could afford to 'beautify' them with the added benefit of attracting foreign scientists to South West Africa and so generating publicity for the territory.⁴³ The second factor was the growing tendency in the West to efface the nationalist politics of modern Africa with a focus on the 'threatened ecological splendour' of the continent, of which the Bushmen were depicted as constituting an integral part.⁴⁴ A further factor was the work of anthropologists, beginning with the Marshalls in the 1950s and followed in the 1960s by Lee and De Vore, Silberbauer and Tanaka, who identified and analysed the culture, religion and technology of the Bushmen groups with whom they worked, generating far greater understanding of those cultures.⁴⁵ Before the Marshall expeditions, there had been little interest amongst American anthropologists in studying the Bushmen. Wilmsen writes that

Although the Marshalls had very good relations with Harvard anthropologists, Lorna records that they could not find an ethnographer, not even a student, to go with them – with all expenses paid and a generous allowance to boot – on the 1952-53 expedition.⁴⁶

The Marshall expedition thus marked a sea change in ways of studying Bushmen culture and society.⁴⁷ At the same time, Marshall's narrativising of the hunt and the evidence of literary influences on the film, as well as Marshall's personal passion for the people he was filming, are remarkably akin to van der Post's motivations in filming *Lost World*. Though *Lost World* and *The Hunters* are very different films, they emerged from the same mythical perception of Africa in the

⁴³ With regard to Namibian nationalism and the Bushmen as objects of scientific enquiry, see Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 101-16.

⁴⁴ Beinart, 'The Re-Naturing of African Animals', p. 220.

⁴⁵ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 219.

⁴⁶ Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', p. 220.

⁴⁷ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 124; Robert K. Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa', p. 221.

West – in the words of John Marshall about his first trips to Africa: ‘I was having an adventure. Adventurers, like most TV hosts, are self-absorbed.’⁴⁸ When one thinks of van der Post in his studio, hosting *Lost World of Kalahari*, the image seems apt.

5.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE II

5.4.1 WHAT *THE HUNTERS* TELLS US ABOUT THE JU/WASI OF NYAE NYAE IN THE 1950S

The status of *The Hunters* as a ‘record’ of Ju/Wasi culture has been questioned by subsequent scholarship, such as that of Tomaselli and Homiak quoted earlier, which has highlighted the distortions in the film. Apart from the removal of evidence of acculturation from the world of the film, it emerged subsequently that *The Hunters* did not document one hunt but was made up of a series of different hunts that took place between 1952 and 1955 at Nyae Nyae.⁴⁹

This process of ‘reconstruction’ has been defended by a number of scholars. David MacDougall has argued that

The film is not a strict record of an actual event, but an attempt to reveal one aspect of Bushman [sic] life, and through it an understanding of the Bushmen world view. It is a case of synthesis put to the service of a truth which no single event by itself might adequately express.⁵⁰

Nancie Gonzalez, who has assessed the diary entries of the various participants in the making of the film in an attempt to clarify the debate, has similarly argued that

The Hunters, although a reconstructed narrative, recreates an actual event that had meaning for the people involved in their persistent efforts to wrest a living as foragers in the difficult African desert in which they lived.⁵¹

These arguments in defence of *The Hunters* are remarkably akin to Flaherty’s assertion regarding the making of *Nanook of the North* that ‘sometimes you have to lie. One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit.’⁵² As we saw in the discussion of *Lost World*, that

⁴⁸ John Marshall, ‘Filming and Learning’, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, pp. 31-2.

⁵⁰ David MacDougall, ‘Prospects of the Ethnographic Film’, p. 21.

⁵¹ Nancie L. Gonzalez, ‘An Argument about a Film’, p. 180.

⁵² Robert Flaherty quoted in Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 23.

film too contains evidence that disparate sequences were edited together to create an impression of the Bushmen's reality that accorded with van der Post's philosophical framing of them as pristine primitives.

In his review of *The Hunters* Bill Nichols points out that the idea of 'reality' in documentary has changed over the past century, and argues that John Marshall's 'compilation technique' would have posed hardly any problems of integrity to the likes of documentary film pioneers such as Dziga-Vertov (*Man with the Movie Camera*, 1929) or Walter Ruttmann (*Berlin: Symphony of a City*, 1927).⁵³ Any analysis of what *The Hunters* can tell the historian about Bushmen in the 1950s must take this debate into account, as it qualifies the meaning of the film. In reading the film for evidence of ideology, it is possible to better understand the 'shape' of the film, or what it chooses to focus on. However, as with *Lost World of Kalahari*, even within the defining contours of the ideologies evident in the film, there is still evidence to be gleaned of the conditions of some Bushmen in South West Africa in the 1950s. As we have seen, *The Hunters* focuses mainly on the story of a hunt. The film reflects an intricate, highly sophisticated knowledge of their environment on the part of the hunters. The importance of hunting in the community is established early on in the film, when the narrator explains that

To be good hunters, boys must begin early in life to learn all the knowledge necessary to chase, shoot and track the many different creatures of the veldt. Each animal produces its own special feeling in the hunter, and no two situations are ever alike. There is little formal instruction, so a boy must learn for himself, by experience.

Later in the film the necessity of having these skills is examined at length. During the hunt, the hunters struggle to track their prey. Their extensive ecological knowledge comes into use:

In the morning, they found where she had turned and trampled during the night. At their feet in the disturbed ground a beetle had found the giraffe's dung that suited it. It had laid its eggs in it, and was rolling the little ball away with it, on its journey. Tow took the dung and examined it briefly, noticing that there was nothing white in it, nor did it smell of poison. The poison was not yet in her viscera. The hunters knew that the giraffe would go far that day... Then, in the afternoon, the hunters following, seeing where she had been and what she had done, puzzling why and guessing, began to shorten the distance. They began to take short cuts, leaving her spoor and picking it up, travelling straight where she wandered, learning her history from the marks of her passing, and so, gradually, from her traces, they knew her.

⁵³ Bill Nichols, 'Review of *The Hunters*', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 82, no.1 (March 1980), p. 229.

The Hunters was the first major documentary film that revealed this rich ecological knowledge on the part of the hunters. Later documentary films would return to the fascinating details of hunting in Bushmen culture, as will be shown in this thesis. Whilst both the DAE and van der Post mention Bushmen hunting practices, they do not explore its practical and symbolic meanings to the degree that Marshall does in *The Hunters*. In the last scenes of the film it is shown how the meat is divided up amongst the community, thus reaffirming bonds of sharing and reciprocity. Furthermore, as already argued, the symbolic meaning of hunting is made evident in the way in which the story of the hunt is retold in the form of a tale to an eager audience back at the hunters' home.

The 'pristine' condition of the Bushmen in *The Hunters* is also of significance, particularly if the film is considered in relation to *Lost World of Kalahari*. In that film there appear acculturated Bushmen who have been 'spoilt' (according to van der Post) by contact with modernity. In *The Hunters* there is no evidence whatsoever of any acculturation amongst the Bushmen – they are apparently practising their culture unmolested by other race groups or ubiquitous modernity, although the films were made at roughly the same time. This 'absence' in the film reflects at one level the desire of the Marshall's to focus only on 'unacculturated' Bushmen for scholarly reasons. However, at another level it shows that there were in fact *some* Bushmen in the 1950s who still managed to live mainly by hunting-and-gathering. Southern Nyae Nyae, where the Marshall's worked in the 1950s, was protected by geographical remoteness from much of the interference from government administrators, tourists and white ranchers seeking cheap labour.⁵⁴ Marshall, when admitting that he 'moved cans out of shots' in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s does make the point that these accretions were largely the result of contact between the Ju/Wasi and the Marshall family, who were living in close contact with each other. In this way, elements of the contact were represented in sharing of resources, a means by which the Marshall family could build trust between themselves and their Ju/Wasi colleagues. The degree to which the Ju/Wasi enjoyed relative autonomy in Nyae Nyae is evidenced in Lorna Marshall's anxiety that the road the Marshall expedition had forged into Nyae Nyae would open up the area for other forms of

⁵⁴ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 28-35; John Marshall and Claire Ritchie, 'Where Are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 1.

exploitation.⁵⁵ Further evidence of this relative autonomy lies in the fact that the first Bushmen Commissioner, sent to regulate the Bushmen groups in the Nyae Nyae region in 1959, had to enter into negotiations with ǀToma and his band in order to encourage them to come and settle at the newly created administrative post of Tshumkwe.⁵⁶ As seen in the introduction, whilst not representative of the majority of Bushmen in South West Africa in the 1950s, the Bushmen of Nyae Nyae were practising hunting-and-gathering into the 1950s.⁵⁷ It is useful, then, to note that whilst at one level the choice of 'pristine Bushmen' as the subject of *The Hunters* reflects the specific ideological discourse of the Marshalls on their scholarly expedition to South West Africa, at another level *The Hunters* reflects the complexity of the historical period: that some Bushmen, no matter that they were the minority, still saw themselves as hunters and gatherers and practised a hunting-and-gathering-based culture. This point will be raised again in the study of *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* in chapter seven.

⁵⁵ Nancie L. Gonzalez, 'An Argument about a Film', p. 191.

⁵⁶ Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 69.

⁵⁷ James Suzman, *An Assessment of the Status of the San of Namibia*, p. 4.

5.5 THE HUNTERS AS FILM IN HISTORY

Described as 'the most outstanding and influential ethnographic film of the decade'⁵⁸, *The Hunters* has been used as a teaching aid in schools and in university anthropology departments throughout the United States.⁵⁹ It had a limited theatrical release in U.S Art House theatres in 1971, although no statistics regarding its success are readily available. It was broadcast by the BBC in the UK in 1972. Once again, no statistics are available on how many people watched it there. One is on firmer ground in considering its major success to have been in the academic sphere rather than in the popular arena, where *Lost World* enjoyed great success.

As Neil Parsons has written,

The Lost World was cruder and more popular than *The Hunters*, concentrating on Van der Post himself and his prejudices, rather than reconstructing the lives of the Bushmen themselves as Marshall did.⁶⁰

David MacDougall, an influential ethnographic filmmaker and film theorist, places *The Hunters* alongside Jean Rouch's influential filmmaking in West Africa in the 1940s as early and important examples of ethnographic film. Before Rouch's and Marshall's work there were the famous films by Flaherty, most notably *Nanook of the North* ('probably the first true ethnographic film') and *Grass* by Cooper and Schoeksack.⁶¹ *The Hunters* is repeatedly categorised as one of the most important ethnographic films ever made. For example, MacDougall says of *The Hunters* that

Through its emphasis upon the pursuit of a wounded giraffe, the film makes us share something of the attitudes of a people whose marginal existence depends upon the killing of game. No single 'slice of life' could communicate quite the same sense of the Bushman's world of scrub, thorn, or pan, nor his experience of living always on the edge or privation. *The Hunters* is a rare and special film, reflecting the kind of understanding of a culture which permits a meaningful interpretive rendering. It is one of the few true ethnographic films that we have, and it is also a pioneer work in the field [of ethnographic filmmaking].⁶²

Pioneering ethnographic film theorist Karl Heider writes that *The Hunters* 'quickly became a most popular and respected ethnographic film'.⁶³ In a review for the *American Anthropologist* in 1972,

⁵⁸ Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, p. 295.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 124.

⁶⁰ Neil Parsons, 'Botswana Cinema and Film Studies' at <http://www.thuto.org/ubh/cinema/bots-cinema-studies.htm>

⁶¹ David MacDougall, 'Prospects of the Ethnographic Film', p. 21.

⁶² MacDougall, 'Prospects of the Ethnographic Film', p. 21.

⁶³ Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 31.

Alan Lomax declared it to be 'perhaps the best known ethnographic film.'⁶⁴ As with *Lost World of Kalahari*, *The Hunters* was accompanied by a bestselling book, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Harmless People*, 'a modern classic amongst ethnographies written for the general public'.⁶⁵ Robert Gordon writes that 'within a few years of the release of *The Hunters*, John's sister published her best-seller *The Harmless People* and film and book mutually reinforced use of each other in most U.S anthropology departments.'⁶⁶ J.D.F. Jones writes that '[The Marshalls] were amateurs but they produced two influential results: a best-selling book... and a film, *The Hunters*, by their son John. Marshall's wife, Lorna, also published a number of ethnographic papers. The Marshalls' work did much to establish an international image of the Bushmen as an ancient people, unspoiled, living in harmony with their environment.'⁶⁷ Edwin Wilmsen wrote in 1999 that 'there can be no doubt that the Marshall's testament to the "Bushman", particularly *The Harmless People* and *The Hunters*, played a major role in shaping a public image of our ancient ancestors.'⁶⁸ Statistics from Documentary Educational Resources, which distributes the film, shows that *The Hunters* has been bought by every major American and European university with a film collection, as well as by many archives and media libraries around the world.⁶⁹ According to Cynthia Close, the executive director of DER, it still sells well today.⁷⁰

The Hunters has also been used as a tool of political activism: like its contemporary, *Lost World of Kalahari*, it was screened for the parliamentary commission responsible for writing a Constitution for the soon-to-be independent Botswana in 1965 and led to 'Bushman' being the only people specifically named therein.⁷¹ It was also used by John Marshall's Nyae Nyae Development Foundation on Namibian TV in 1991 to motivate the government to evict Herero pastoralists from Ju/Wasi territory in Nyae Nyae, northern Namibia.⁷² Marshall approved of this 'quick and

⁶⁴ Lomax, 'Review of *Bitter Melons*', p. 1019.

⁶⁵ Lomax, 'Review of *Bitter Melons*', p. 1019.

⁶⁶ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ J.D.F. Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 211.

⁶⁸ Edwin Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 241.

⁶⁹ Cynthia Close, 'The Work of John Marshall' at

http://www.imaginenews.com/Archive/2003/MAR_2003/01_FEATURES/06_JMARSHALL.html;

Personal communication from Cynthia Close, Executive Director, Documentary Educational Resources.

⁷⁰ Personal communication from Cynthia Close.

⁷¹ Edwin Wilmsen, 'Desert Storm', *Southern African Review of Books*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1991), pp. 20-2.

⁷² Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 246.

dirty' tactic, recognising that the images were being used out of their context to support the battle to hold Bushmen territory in Nyae Nyae in the 1990s, a 'historically uninformed' usage, as Edwin Wilmsen terms it.⁷³ This 'recycling' of footage from *The Hunters* brings us to another impact of the film in history, as will be discussed below.

5.5.1 THE PROBLEM OF *THE HUNTERS* AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF HISTORY

Tomaselli himself identifies an interesting point about the role of *The Hunters* in history when he says that 'though Marshall's [1950s] films deal with specifics amongst one small band of Ju/Wasi, they are often (mis)read as metonymically standing for all San'.⁷⁴ If the film is assessed as representative of the Bushmen of Southern Africa as a whole, its limitations are immediately apparent, considering that its focus on the hunting-and-gathering Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae excluded the circumstances of the majority of poor, acculturated Bushmen in South West Africa in the 1950s. However, unlike van der Post's *Lost World*, and as has been shown, no claim of universal representation is ever made at any point in *The Hunters*, and the word 'Bushman' is never used in the narration. What Tomaselli is identifying in his analysis is in fact a subsequent historical phenomenon rather than anything relating to *The Hunters* in particular, and one which will be explored further in chapters six and seven of this thesis. At work here is the phenomenon of a documentary film, a secondary source that has been constructed by a filmmaker, becoming a 'primary source' on a particular subject. The same happened to Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1936), the footage from which has been recycled in many documentary films as 'stock footage' of the Nazis.⁷⁵ This is problematic, since *Triumph of the Will* can be seen only as evidence of Nazi *propaganda* and not as 'raw' footage about Nazis, since it was constructed by Riefenstahl to represent the might of the Nazi state.⁷⁶ Similarly, Humphrey

⁷³ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 246.

⁷⁴ Tomaselli and Homiak, 'Powering Popular Conceptions', p. 172.

⁷⁵ Paul Smith, *The Historian and Film*, p. 57.

⁷⁶ Gordon R. Mork, 'Teaching the Hitler Period: History and Morality', *The History Teacher*, vol. 13, no. 4 (August 1980), p. 519. The films of Riefenstahl have generated great debate, particularly as she herself claims them to be 'pure history' and *not* propaganda. See for example Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 31-43; Richard Grenier, 'The Fuehrer's Filmmaker', *The Motion Picture Commentary*, vol. 98, no. 2 (August 1994), p. 48 and

Jennings's British World War II propaganda film *Fires Were Started* contains a sequence in which a burning dock is shown. The fire was set and filmed by Jennings specifically for the purpose of the film, and yet this footage is regarded 'as some of the best "actual" images of the London Blitz.'⁷⁷ As Paula Rabinowitz argues

Documentary cinema is intimately tied to historical memory. Not only does it seek to reconstruct historical narrative, but it often functions as an historical document itself.⁷⁸

Or even more aptly,

It takes a real effort *not* to imagine the Nuremberg rallies according to Leni Riefenstahl's presentation 'Triumph of the Will'.⁷⁹

The Hunters has similarly been utilised a 'stock footage' representing the history of the Bushmen *not only* of Nyae Nyae in the 1950s but of Bushmen people in southern Africa in general. The evidence for this argument will be produced in the course of chapters six and seven. It is argued here that with the growing power of the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives over the past fifty years, these 'recycled' images from *The Hunters* have taken on a representative significance as originators of the Bushmen myth that actually overrides the original meaning of the film. This historical phenomenon only arose once the influential ethnographic industry devoted to depicting Bushmen took shape (from the late 1960s onwards) and generated debate amongst scholars and critics. In the context of the growing canon of films and books on the Bushmen, an early depiction such as *The Hunters*, which enjoyed such enduring success, is read as metonymically standing for 'all Bushmen', because the van der Postian tendency to depict *some* Bushmen as *all* Bushmen tends to become the norm in later films, as this thesis will show. This is partly – as will be shown in the next chapter – a function of John Marshall's recycling of his own footage from *The Hunters* in later films. We saw earlier how he was willing to do this in order to agitate for the political rights of the Ju/Wasi of Tshunkwe in the 1990s. However, segments of *The Hunters* have also been licensed to be used as footage in a 'significant' number of TV documentaries that have aired on PBS, Discovery Channel, The History Channel and

David B. Hinton, 'Triumph of the Will: Documentary or Artifice?', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), pp. 48-57.

⁷⁷ Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, (London: British Film Institute, 2000), p. 137.

⁷⁸ Paula Rabinowitz, 'Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory', *History and Theory*, vol. 32, no. 2 (May 1993), p. 119.

⁷⁹ Martyn Housden, 'Review of *The Triumph of Propaganda: Film and National Socialism, 1933-1945*', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4 (December 1991), p. 1135.

European television channels such as ZDF and Arté.⁸⁰ By 2001, John Marshall was insisting that any footage of his from the 1950s utilised in documentary films be *dated* so as to place it in its appropriate historical context.⁸¹

In expanding on this argument in the next two chapters, it will be shown how certain films utilise footage from *The Hunters* and Marshall's !Kung film series from the 1950s, sometimes to problematic ends, as with the case of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) in chapter six. The significance of Marshall's !Kung film archive as a 'stock footage' on the Bushmen should not be underestimated: totalling 500 000 feet of film, the Marshall !Kung film archive is probably the largest film study ever made of a culture.⁸² It is now housed at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. It could be argued that *The Hunters* has 'dated' better than van der Post's *Lost World*, which seems contrived by today's standards of documentary filmmaking, with his narrating of the film from a classroom-like studio and his essentialist framing of the 'little' Bushmen. In contrast, *The Hunters* was filmed in colour and looks 'modern' – as Heider argues, in comparison to *Nanook of the North*, in *The Hunters*

[t]he account of Bushmen hunting was more systematic, and throughout the narration Marshall tried to penetrate the Bushmen's minds more deeply. He was less the outsider and idyll-creator than Flaherty had been. One of its greatest virtues was that *The Hunters* was modern. By the 1950s the earlier films had become dated. They were valued and enjoyed, but not unlike the way in which Chaplin's films are enjoyed. *The Hunters* was proof that fine ethnographic films could still be made.⁸³

5.6 THE HUNTERS AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Hunters does not say anything about the history of the Bushmen. Marshall himself sheds some light on this absence when in retrospect he states that

The geographic remoteness of Nyae Nyae also [had] academic importance. Continuing our family's studies in the 1960s, the Harvard Kalahari Research Group, led by Irven De Vore and Richard Lee, began a multidisciplinary study of the Ju/Wasi in eastern Nyae Nyae in Botswana. Studies of the hunting and gathering economy in Nyae Nyae are now being used to interpret aspects of human evolution. Were our family and the HKRG looking at a 'window on the Pleistocene' or were we glancing back at the last century?⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Personal communication from Cynthia Close, Executive Director, Documentary Education Resources.

⁸¹ Personal communication from John Marshall.

⁸² Lomax, 'Review of *Bitter Melons*', p. 1019; Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 31.

⁸³ Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 29.

Marshall's question can be related to Lorna Marshall's statement that 'we observed [in the fifties] a way of life that had not changed radically in ages'.⁸⁵ We see here further evidence of the Marshall's' interest in Bushmen as 'pristine primitives' in that the 'history' of the Bushmen was unchanging – and thus what was captured in the 1950s *was* to some degree a representation of Bushmen history as the Marshalls understood it then, because it was *as they perceived Bushmen culture always to have been*. As seen in chapter one, anthropologists and historians in the eighties and nineties criticised any texts (including films) that stressed the isolation of the Bushmen at the expense of a nuanced discussion of their relatedness to local economies and their contact, involvement and conflict with other ethnic groups such as the Herero. This debate, the 'Kalahari debate' discussed in chapter one, has occurred largely in hindsight and has been aimed at films such as *The Hunters* and ethnographic studies such as Lee and De Vore's *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers: Studies of the !Kung San and their Neighbours* (1976) and Silberbauer's *Hunter and Habitat in the Central Kalahari Desert* (1981). However, Lee has responded to these criticisms by pointing out that 'Hunter-gatherers can only be understood by seeing how some of them have been involved with farmers for a long time yet have retained their cultural identity'.⁸⁶ In the fifties, however, the Bushmen were seen as relics of the past, living in a way that reflected the past – evident in the fact that, as we saw, it was archaeologists and not anthropologists who were originally interested in assisting the Marshall family in preparing for the expedition to the Kalahari in the early 1950s.⁸⁷

In van der Post's films the 'history' of the Bushmen is more actively explored, albeit through the distorting influence of his fantastical projections that were based on little if any real research or fieldwork. However, like the Marshall family, van der Post also implies that 'real' Bushmen history is the *absence* of change over time, the persistence of a particular state of culture ('spoilt' Bushmen have changed, but then they don't count). In *Lost World of Kalahari*, for example, he says that the 'wild' Bushmen sit 'happily in the sun as they had sat for centuries'. The absence of any discussion of Bushmen history in *The Hunters* might arguably be seen to imply a similar idea.

⁸⁵ Lorna Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 14.

⁸⁶ Lee, 'Crises in Hunter-Gatherer Studies', p. 39.

⁸⁷ Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', p. 221.

However, it should be noted that *The Hunters* does not claim to be a history of the Bushmen in any way. Were it not for the persistence in later films on the Bushmen of the idea that the Bushmen have no history, which is seen throughout this thesis, the absence of any discussion of history in *The Hunters* would not be worth mentioning.

5.7 CONCLUSION

It can be argued that *The Hunters* was a successful, influential documentary film on the Bushmen. Whilst specific box office and viewership figures are impossible to ascertain, it can be argued that the long-term influence of the film was more greatly felt within the academy than without – although the use of the film as a teaching aid in universities means that it would have reached large numbers of undergraduates who did not necessarily remain within the academy. However, the film did not have the same impact as van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari*, which was reinforced by the (popular) international success of his Bushmen publishing empire. Another example of the influence of *The Hunters* in history is that images from the film are later recycled in some of Marshall's other films and thus gradually come to 'stand in' as a 'stock footage' of the history of 'Bushmen'. This is a point that will be expanded upon further in the following two chapters.

As this chapter has shown, the larger ideological world in which the Marshall's operated was not very different from van der Post's when he made *Lost World of Kalahari*. Both the Marshall's and van der Post came to seek the Bushmen with particular ideas in mind about who and what the Bushmen were, both parties sought 'pristine' Bushmen and were drawn to the purported 'peaceful nature' of pristine primitives living in their natural environment. In this sense, both van der Post and the Marshall's fed into changing discourses about Africa in the West that substituted a focus on the environment and on preservation of that environment for any real engagement with the reality of black nationalist politics and revolution on the continent. As with van der Post, John Marshall in particular arrived in Africa with particular myths in mind: a desire to explore the 'mapless' Kalahari stimulated by immersion in literature such as *Jock of the Bushveld* and

Ryder Haggard and the travelogue films of Osa and Martin Johnson; the desire to have an 'adventure'. However, Marshall's youthful exuberance spurred intense, lifelong friendships with his Ju/Wasi informants and an initial but powerful fascination with the hunting elements of their culture (Marshall's idealisation of hunting reappears in his later films on the Bushmen), whilst van der Post's less prolonged contact with the Bushmen meant that he left the continent with his 'myths' intact – there was to be no revisionist filmmaking by van der Post, as there would be from Marshall who would try and reverse the 'mythical' imaging of the Bushmen in his later filmmaking. Van der Post continued to work within the confines of his specific ideological framing of the Bushmen in his writings until the end of his life.

The Marshall's were also the forerunners of anthropologists with a growing interest in the Bushmen, anthropologists who attempted in the 1950s and 1960s to undertake nuanced, empirically-based studies of the Bushmen as part of a process of 'salvage ethnography' – the race against time to record ways of lives that were vanishing off the face of the planet.⁸⁸ In this, there was an effort to put into abeyance any obvious ideological framing of the Bushmen, unlike what the 'scholars' of the DAE demonstrated in their racist perception of the Bushmen as seen in *The Bushmen*. However, the scholarly ideas behind the Marshall expedition did not exclude evidential ideological framing of the Bushmen in *The Hunters*. The very project of empirical anthropological fieldwork came with a certain amount of ideological preconception as to who and what the Bushmen were and how they could best be studied.

In its focus on pristine Bushmen, *The Hunters* reflected these overarching ideological influences, but at the same time its depiction of the Ju/Wasi hunting-and-gathering was also reflective of a persistence of that way of life for a minority of South West African Bushmen in the 1950s. Seen together with *Lost World of Kalahari*, the film reflects two relevant points about Bushmen in the 1950s in southern Africa: firstly that there were *some* Bushmen still living mostly by hunting-and-gathering in corners of Namibia and Botswana; and secondly that filmmakers were overwhelmingly interested in filming the hunting-and-gathering Bushmen, who were purportedly

⁸⁸ Christopher F. Roth, 'Review of *New World from Fragments: Film, Ethnography and the Representation of Northwest Coast Cultures*', *American Anthropologists*, New Series, vol. 97, no. 3 (September 1995), p. 614; Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change among the Basarwa in Botswana', p. 221.

on the verge of dying out, rather than the 'spoilt' acculturated Bushmen who were living in poverty throughout the region.

Finally, as a work of historiography, *The Hunters* does not refer to Bushmen history at all. As has been argued here, this reflects the perceptions of the Marshall's that what they were studying was a culture that had *not* changed much in many thousands of years. This implication about Bushmen history in *The Hunters* places it on a continuum with *The Bushmen* (1925) and *Lost World* (1956), both of which reflect Bushmen history as 'history' in the sense that Bushmen in the present are relics of the past and are really about the human past hovering unchanged in the present. This is a theme that would recur in later documentary films on the Bushmen, as will be shown.

In the next chapter, the National Geographic film *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) will be discussed. Between the end of the fifties and the early seventies, two key processes were influencing the depiction of Bushmen in documentary film and the critical responses to those depictions. The first was the growing scholarly output on Bushmen being generated by American anthropologists that both questioned and corroborated the myth of Bushmen as pristine primitives. The second was changing film technology, which saw marked shifts in the way documentary films were made and the way they were theorised. Both of these themes will be explored in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER SIX

BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI (1974)

Chapter six continues the theme begun in chapter five of John Marshall's contact with the Bushmen of southern Africa, this time by studying a television documentary film made by National Geographic Society (NGS), *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974). *Bushmen of the Kalahari* looks at Marshall's return to the region in the early 1970s. As a film made for television broadcasting by the influential National Geographic Society, *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is an indication of the degree to which the image of 'Bushman as hunter-gatherer' was, by the 1970s, entering into mainstream consciousness in America. This process would reach its apotheosis with the massive international success of the fiction film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980).

In considering the film as evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and the period that produced it, it will be argued in this chapter that there are two 'streams' of discourse in the film. One is reflective of the ideological orientation of the NGS and its relatively conservative depiction of the world for a middle-class American audience. The second 'stream' relates to the positioning of John Marshall as the focus of the film, and the ideas about and attitudes towards the Bushmen which his narration and behaviour reflects. Both 'streams' of discourse in the film to some degree reflect changing attitudes and values in the west from the 1960s onwards, as will be shown: the rise of environmentalism, the radicalised youth culture of the United States and Britain in the 1960s and an ongoing effacement in the West of nationalism and conflict in Africa in favour of a concern with the environment and with a nostalgic focus on vanishing cultures.

Bushmen of the Kalahari also gives us some evidence about the Bushmen of southern Africa at the time of the making of the film. As will be shown, there is evidence of ongoing poverty and dispossession amongst Bushmen people in the region. There is also, in this film, a brief but important example of a Bushmen person expressing his self-identification with hunting-and-gathering culture.

In considering the film as historiography it will be argued that the familiar depiction of the Bushmen – as having experienced no significant cultural changes up until their sudden and

forcible incorporation into modernity – is present in the film. However, there is the added problem of the incorporation of John Marshall's *Hunters* and !Kung Film Series footage (to be discussed below) into the film which, as will be shown, results in a misrepresentative impression regarding the Bushmen past. The problem of this use of John Marshall's 1950s footage in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* will be explored further in the section on film *in* history, in an expansion of the argument introduced in the previous chapter wherein it was stated that Marshall's KFS footage begins to be utilised as 'stock footage' of Bushmen history.

The background to the making of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is somewhat complex. It concerns both John Marshall's ongoing filmmaking with the Ju/Wasi, which informs to some degree the content of the film, and also the prominence of the National Geographic Society (NGS) as an influential American institution, since the film was produced by NGS and thus enjoyed both its powerful endorsement and its ideological stamp, as will be shown. Finally the background to the film relates to the growing influence of 'nature' documentary filmmaking in the west, and the degree to which this interest in the 'natural' world reflected growing concern with the depredation of the natural environment and a turn towards conservation in the West. These paradigmatic issues will be explored below, in the section on the background to the film.

6.1 BACKGROUND TO THE FILM – JOHN MARSHALL, THE !KUNG FILM SERIES AND THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, after shooting *The Hunters*, John Marshall had continued throughout the 1950s to film the Ju/Wasi. His developing filmmaking style resulted in the editing and release, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, of the !Kung film series. This consisted mostly of short films (some as short as five minutes) focusing on specific activities, rituals and personal relationships amongst the Ju/Wasi.¹ By the time Marshall returned to this Bushmen footage from the 1950s, he had already become involved in other filmmaking,

¹ For a detailed filmography, including synopsis and awards, see Sue Marshall Cabezas, 'Filmography of the Works of John Marshall from 1951 to 1991', in Jay Ruby (ed), *The Cinema of John Marshall*, pp. 233-46. For critical analysis of these films see Karl Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, pp. 36-8.

specifically filming aspects of US life. He shot *Titicut Follies* (1968), a famous documentary film on the Bridgewater Asylum for the Criminally Insane by Frederick Wiseman. He also shot a series of short films on aspects of policing amongst the Pittsburgh authorities. However, as Heider has written, 'Marshall's Bushman footage was too important to lie idle.'² Thus, in the mid-sixties, along with Frank Galvin, a film director, and Timothy Asch, an ethnographic filmmaker, Marshall set up a large ethnographic film studio near Cambridge in Somerville, Massachusetts called Documentary Educational Resources. As Heider explains, the centre became 'an extraordinarily productive centre during the late 1960s and early 1970s.'³ Marshall's 1950s !Kung footage was edited into the !Kung Film Series (KFS). Marshall and his colleagues proposed 'an innovative solution to the constant problem of how to make a complex event without resorting to a wordy explanatory narrative' (as Marshall had done in *The Hunters*).⁴ For example, when editing footage shot of a trance dance for the film *N!um Tchai* they showed the ceremony twice. The first showing was as a series of still photographs of the action with a voiceover explaining the events. The second time they ran the footage of the film with well-synchronised 'wild sound' (ambient sounds recorded at the time of shooting). These experiments in ethnographic filmmaking carried over into Timothy Asch's later, influential ethnographic filmmaking as seen in *The Axe Fight* (1975).⁵ The KFS included *A Group of Women* (1961), *A Joking Relationship* (1962), *An Argument about a Marriage* (1969), *A Curing Ceremony* (1969), *N!um Tchai: The Ceremonial Curing Dance of the !Kung Bushmen* (1969), *Lion Game* (1970), *The Melon Tossing Game* (1970), *Bitter Melons* (1971), *Debe's Tantrum* (1972), *!Kung Bushmen Hunting Equipment* (1972), *Playing with Scorpions* (1972), *A Rite of Passage* (1972), *The Wasp Nest* (1972), *Men Bathing* (1973), *Baobab Play* (1974), *Children Throw Toy Assegais* (1974), *The Meat Fight* (1974) and *Bushmen Tug of War* (1974). As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, through his growing familiarity with Ju/Wasi society, Marshall had attempted in the 1950s to refine his filmmaking style to capture more fully events as they occurred. He filmed from a variety of angles and positioned his camera

² Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 36.

³ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, pp. 36-7.

⁴ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 37.

⁵ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 38; David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 195.

as the 'silent observer' of these events. His strategy for filming the Ju/Wasi precipitated his involvement with the Direct Cinema movement in the United States in the 1960s.⁶ As Heider argues,

It is an impressive testimony to the insight and thoroughness of John Marshall's photography that the footage which he shot in the 1950s could be so effectively edited into the films of the 1970s.⁷

And concludes in 1976,

The Marshall group and Timothy Asch are making a rare attempt to use ethnographic film to treat the major concerns of anthropology today.⁸

The KFS, then, was very different to *The Hunters*, in conception if not in subject matter, and even more so to van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari*. Both of the latter films enjoyed continuing influence in the 1950s and 1960s. As late as 1972, as we have seen, *The Hunters* was shown on BBC television. Van der Post continued to produce his Bushmen books: *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961), *The Seed and the Sower* (1963), *A Story like the Wind* (1972) and *A Far-off Place* (1974). The 'scholarly' experimentation of Marshall and Asch in the production of the KFS would not have appealed to a popular audience, as *Lost World* and to a lesser degree *The Hunters* had in the 1950s.

Thus, whilst acknowledging the KFS as important in John Marshall's oeuvre, in this thesis none of the films in the series is the specific focus of a chapter. In this chapter the KFS film *Bitter Melons* is considered because it relates to the action in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. However, the KFS does not constitute narrative documentary filmmaking, and as is evident in its scholarly objective, its influence has been confined, even more so than *The Hunters*, to the academic world. Furthermore, the focus of the series is largely an extension (although in a far more comprehensive way) of the focus of *The Hunters* – i.e. on elements of Ju/Wasi hunting-and-gathering culture. This thesis is an effort to examine change over time – the KFS represents developments in Marshall's personal filmmaking style, and are useful as a background to understanding *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, but will thus not be focused on themselves.

⁶ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 20-1, 38, 72-4, 122-24. See also MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 127: MacDougall writes that 'Marshall had already practised a makeshift kind of synchronous-sound filming in the 1950s among the Ju/Wasi. His observational approach foreshadowed the discoveries of the Drew Associates group [which consisted of Leacock, Pennebaker and other pioneers of Direct Cinema].'⁷

⁷ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 38.

⁸ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 38.

The KFS instalment *Bitter Melons* (1971) is useful in explaining the background to some of the content of *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. *Bitter Melons* documents a small group of G/wi Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana in the 1950s. The focal point of the film is the blind musician Oukwane (also spelt 'Ukxone'), who composes haunting melodies on his hunting bow. Oukwane's compositions are used as the soundtrack to *Bitter Melons*. Routines of daily life are shown, as are the diverse wildlife and landscape where the little band lives. One of the band members, !Gai, arrives with his relatives and the visit, including games and dances, is recorded. Eventually !Gai and the visiting relatives set off for the Okwa valley, whilst Oukwane and his wife stay behind because they are too tired and old to travel. Marshall's history of filmmaking with the Ju/Wasi and Khwe of Namibia and Botswana is reflected in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* through the use of footage from both *The Hunters* and *Bitter Melons*. Furthermore, the personal relationships he formed with the people he filmed in the 1950s apparently affect his behaviour in the course of the film.

Bushmen of the Kalahari is a product of the National Geographic Society and an example of the 'nature films' that were increasingly popular from the 1960s onwards in America and Britain. It is a conservative film made in the mould of standard narrative documentaries with an omniscient narrator, soundtrack music and a linear narrative. After World War II the inheritors of this model of documentary filmmaking were largely television channels such as the BBC. In the United States, as in post-WWII Britain, a tradition of state-funded 'public-education' documentary production arose, albeit with a considerably more commercial orientation than the 'not-for-profit' ethos of the BBC documentary tradition. The two leading American networks, NBC and CBS, developed large in-house TV documentary units⁹ which would produce shows in this very successful sub-category of 'nature entertainment' documentary. Post-war America saw an explosive growth in audiences for these nature documentaries, a phenomenon which Mitman argues was partly due to war-weary Americans seeking 'wholesome entertainment' for their children. In the 1960s, the environmental movement sparked even greater audience demand for

⁹ Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, p. 45.

natural history shows.¹⁰ Mitman argues that natural history television shows about Africa became vital tools for conservationists. By 1960 (as seen in previous chapters) Africa as ‘an earthly paradise, an ecological Garden of Eden, became a prominent feature in nature films, television shows and articles in the popular press.’¹¹ The *National Geographic* television Specials were a prime example of this, appearing in the late 1960s and early 1970s to meet the growing demand for a source of knowledge and observation of wildlife and the natural world.¹² That ‘Bushmen’ qualified as ‘nature’ and not ‘people’ reveals how influential the van der Postian myth of the Bushmen as pristine primitive had become, possibly aided by depictions of the Bushmen in a pristine environment found in *The Hunters*.

In 1966 the National Geographic Society approached David Wolper, head of the successful television production company David L. Wolper Productions and generally regarded as one of the great figures in the history of American television¹³, with the idea of producing a series of nature specials for the CBS channel in the United States. Wolper Productions went on to produce 27 National Geographic specials for CBS between 1966 and 1975¹⁴ before they were moved to the PBS network.¹⁵ The successful one-hour Specials were seen as an extension of the high-quality *National Geographic* magazine format.¹⁶ The Specials still are produced by National Geographic Television today and since 1995 have been hosted by the NBC network.¹⁷

In explaining the ethos behind the Geographic Specials, David Wolper states that ‘we felt that we could apply the dramatic documentary form to travel-adventure shows, so that they would make

¹⁰ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, pp. 204-5.

¹¹ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, pp. 191-92, 194-96.

¹² Mitman, *Reel Nature*, p. 205.

¹³ Brian Peterson, ‘David Wolper: L.A. Influential’, at http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/autumn99/Wolper/wolper.html

¹⁴ Brian Peterson, ‘David Wolper’, at http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/autumn99/Wolper/wolper_pg2.html

¹⁵ ‘The National Geographic (Specials and Series)’, at <http://www.classicthemes.com/50sTVThemes/themePages/nationalGeographic.html>

¹⁶ See for example the perception of the television specials as extensions of the magazine format at ‘National Geographic (Specials and Series)’, at <http://www.classicthemes.com/50sTVThemes/themePages/nationalGeographic.html>

¹⁷ Alan Bunce, ‘National Geographic specials Migrate back to Network TV’, in *Christian Science Monitor*, vol. 87, no. 8 (1995), p. 13.

exciting viewing.¹⁸ The merging of travelogue and adventure with the more rigorously investigative quality of documentary film was epitomised by the National Geographic Society's idea that the television Specials should be character-driven, with a strong storyline and inherent drama.¹⁹ Wolper Productions won a number of Emmy and Peabody awards for the *National Geographic* specials.²⁰

John Marshall had been expelled from South West Africa in the late 1950s for crimes that were only darkly hinted at, although Marshall later found out that he had been accused of fathering a child with a Ju/Wasi woman, a criminal offence in Apartheid-era South West Africa.²¹ His outspoken agitation for the rights of the Ju/Wasi would also have diminished his popularity in South West Africa, where, as Gordon has argued, only researchers with 'impeccable conservative credentials' were granted research permits.²² The idea behind *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, of filming a reunion between Marshall and the Ju/Wasi after a twenty-year absence on the part of the latter from southern Africa, suited the National Geographic Society travel-adventure-foreign-culture format well. For a start, there already existed a connection between the Marshall family and *National Geographic* stemming from 1963 when Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's article 'Bushmen of the Kalahari' about the Marshall Family expeditions to the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae had been published in the magazine.²³ The article had been accompanied by a rich photographic record of the Marshall expeditions taken by the entire family and included the striking image of a very young John Marshall joking with some of his Ju/Wasi friends as he filmed them.²⁴ The text and photographs of this article, presented in full colour, had detailed the hunter-gathering culture of the then little-known Ju/Wasi. The article had accentuated the isolation and inhospitable nature of the Kalahari Desert, and the ingenious ways in which Ju/Wasi culture and technology had

¹⁸ Brian Peterson, 'David Wolper', at http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/autumn99/Wolper/wolper_pg2.html

¹⁹ Kathryn Pasternak, Supervising Producer, National Geographic Television, quoted in discussion with Wendy Jane Carrel, at <http://hollywoodnetwork.com/banff/index5.html>

²⁰ Brian Peterson, 'David Wolper', at http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/autumn99/Wolper/wolper_pg2.html

²¹ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 74-5.

²² Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 137.

²³ Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, 'Bushmen of the Kalahari', *National Geographic Magazine*, no. 6 (1963), pp. 866-88.

²⁴ Marshall Thomas, 'Bushmen of the Kalahari', p. 870.

been adapted to suit this environment. An image of the writer, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, driving an expedition vehicle through the long, dry Kalahari grass with thorn trees in the background had emphasised the foreignness of the landscape and the bravery of the expedition members.²⁵

Having made the series 'The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau', which debuted on ABC in 1967, David Wolper also realised that audiences responded well to an active, on-screen narrator.²⁶ He would use this strategy again in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, this time with John Marshall as the active narrator, returning to the people his sister had already presented to the *National Geographic* readership with her 1963 magazine article. The use of an 'on-screen' persona in the NGS television specials was synonymous with a strategy employed by NGS Magazine. As the president of NGS said in 1988:

The magazine maintains the classic, first-person, eyewitness-account style that has characterized it from even before the time of its long-time editor, Dr. Grosvenor [Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, editor from 1899 to 1957].²⁷

In their critical analysis of the National Geographic Society magazine, *National Geographic*, Lutz and Collins have highlighted the Society's positioning of itself since its inception in 1888 as a powerful institution in the United States that has safeguarded American values and forged and cultivated ties with government officials and corporations. *National Geographic*, they argue, has throughout its history been a recognisable emblem of conservative middle-class tastes in the United States. The conservative stance of the *Geographic's* editorial committee shifted hardly at all in the rapidly changing world after World War II. Despite the radicalisation of the race and culture struggle in the United States after 1964, the *National Geographic* assiduously avoided reporting on issues that suggested interracial or intercultural conflict. Particularly after World War II, the *National Geographic* attempted to strike a balance between encouraging public interest in countries unknown but worthy of exploration and presenting the world as a safe, well-ordered

²⁵ Marshall Thomas, 'Bushmen of the Kalahari', p. 870.

²⁶ Brian Peterson, 'Wolper', at

http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/autumn99/Wolper/wolper_pg2.html

²⁷ Gilbert M. Grosvenor, 'A Hundred Years of the National Geographic Society', *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 154, no.1 (March 1988), p. 90.

place.²⁸ The Society did, however, embrace new media for transmitting its work. In 1988, then president of the NGS, Gilbert M. Grosvenor, wrote that

While the magazine and scientific research remain the hallmark of our Society, National Geographic is using nearly every medium of twentieth century communication to document and disseminate geographic knowledge: the publication of other magazines, including a research journal aimed at the academic community, large-format books, computer-assisted cartography, atlases, globes, illustrated lectures, *educational films*, high-technology exhibits, radio broadcast, *television specials*, video cassettes, compact discs, and video discs [own italics].²⁹

The television Specials were thus an extension of the magazine and a reflection of the ideologies of the NGS. Whilst avoiding the harsher realities of racial conflict and a radicalised American political scene, as well as the Vietnam conflict and anti-colonial conflict in Africa, the NGS did not shy away from a major problem of the second half of the twentieth century: environmental depredation. Thus, from 1970 onwards *National Geographic* magazine focused whole issues on water and air pollution and the state of America's National Parks.³⁰ In this, *National Geographic* was in touch with a changing world: during the 1950s and 1960s in the US and other developed nations,

A grassroots 'protest' movement had emerged, uncomfortable with the rampant modernism, social conservatism and naïve technophilia of the post-war economic boom. Environmentalism matured alongside other questioning initiatives such as anti-consumerism, anti-war, feminist and civil rights that flourished in the reformist climate of the 1960s and 1970s.³¹

While there is evidence of the conservative stance of the NGS in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, there exists in the film an interplay of multiple discourses, some of which relate at least obliquely to the radicalisation of culture in the west and the growing significance of anti-war, anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s. Depictions of the Bushmen would not be untouched by the changing times, as will be shown below.

²⁸ Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 15, 38, 40, 43.

²⁹ Grosvenor, 'A Hundred Years of National Geographic', p. 87.

³⁰ Grosvenor, 'A Hundred Years of National Geographic', p. 90.

³¹ William Beinart and Peter Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 94.

6.2 BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI: A SYNOPSIS

Bushmen of the Kalahari is a traditional expository documentary, including the familiar voice-of-god commentator and music that matches the emotional pitch of the action on screen. The narrative of the film is structured around 'an argument directed towards the historical world'.³² The opening sequence consists of a close-up of Marshall's sunburnt, thoughtful face as he drives a 4x4 through the Kalahari Desert. The narration accompanying the image states: 'Heading into the heart of Africa's Kalahari, a sprawling desert of thorns, one man begins a personal odyssey. For John Marshall, a journey into the past.' The opening sequence also asks a fundamental question which the film presumably will answer, namely 'Do these [Ju/Wasi] people still pursue their ancient way of life, in freedom, in the Kalahari?'

After the introductory sequence and the opening credits, the film shows Marshall at the Documentary Education Resources headquarters in his native Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the United States. The DER is described as 'unpretentious and unconventional', where 'in-depth studies of different cultures and ways of life' are produced. Marshall, founder of the DER, is shown watching, along with some colleagues, his film *The Hunters*. Marshall's reminiscences in the voiceover narration are accompanied by a truncated version of the 1958 film, with Marshall narrating the action of the hunting and killing of a giraffe.

Following this sequence the action returns to Marshall in the Kalahari Desert, where he attempts to arrange a meeting with some of the Ju/Wasi living across the border in South West Africa. Marshall sends a couple of Bushmen friends whom he meets on his journey through Botswana across the fence and into the South West African side of the reserve, to seek out #Toma and his band (of *The Hunters* fame). Only Bushmen, the narrator notes, are allowed to cross the fences between South West Africa and Botswana, for the reserve that has been allocated to them spans the two countries. The meeting finally takes place at the border after days of anxious waiting by Marshall and the film crew. #Toma arrives with over fifty of his friends and family to meet

³² Bill Nichols writes that 'If narrative [cinema] invites our engagement with the construction of a story, set in an imaginary world, documentary invites our engagement with the construction of an argument directed towards the historical world.' See Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 118.

Marshall. The meeting is joyous. Marshall wonders at the changes in the group. He notes that the young children whom he knew have grown into adults, and the adults he befriended have aged and now wear ragged Western clothes. He sets up a movie projector and shows them the film record he made in the fifties. There is laughter and reminiscing. However, the people really want to talk about the present and about the problems facing them. These include the loss of their land and access to water, the prohibitions placed on their hunting and the prejudice they face from the South West African administrators.

After catching up, Marshall takes ≠Toma to the famous Tsodilo Hills in northern Botswana and shows him the rock art panel that van der Post featured so prominently in *Lost World of Kalahari*. ≠Toma and Marshall chat animatedly about the panel, and ≠Toma interprets it as a paean to hunting. He turns and points across the vast plain that stretches beyond the horizon and explains that the artists who made the panel were Ju/Wasi, who were once many, living throughout the surrounding lands. This is Marshall's only interaction with the Nyae Nyae Ju/Wasi group in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.

The film now shifts its focus to Marshall's recollections of his time amongst Oukwane's people, who were the subject of *Bitter Melons*. Marshall begins to search for Oukwane's people, moving along the edge of the Kalahari where many Bushmen seek work on marginal Botswana farms. It is at this point that Marshall finds /Giamakwe, Oukwane's son. /Giamakwe responds bitterly to a question Marshall asks about his father's music, which was a central focus of *Bitter Melons*. Marshall interprets in the voiceover: 'I left the desert long ago because of thirst. My father is dead, my people scattered. I am here because there is nowhere else to go. I don't remember my father's music. Why should I?'

It is a powerful moment in the film, accentuated by the use of slow motion as /Giamakwe, wearing tattered Western clothes, pulls despondently on a cigarette, refusing to look at the camera. The tone of the film shifts after this. Marshall, already clearly upset about the news of Oukwane's band, hears about a group of people who are rumoured to be living deep in the Kalahari. They have abandoned their village, !Kadi (also spelt Xade), due to the breakdown of the

water pump there. Marshall goes in search of them. He finds the people in a state of extreme thirst, living from hand-to-mouth on roots, tubers and the moisture from tsama melons. Their small stock of animals, namely goats, donkeys, dogs and a horse have not had water to drink in four months and are barely surviving on whatever moisture they can obtain from leaves and roots. The animals are dying. Marshall returns to !Kadi, has the pump fixed and then returns to the people. He convinces them to undertake the march back to !Kadi, across 120 miles of waterless desert. The film documents the arduous journey of the people, battling thirst and extreme heat on their return to !Kadi. A quarter of their animals have died. However, with the ancient pump now working they have a chance to continue farming with goats and planting tsama melons. The film ends as it began, with a lingering shot of John Marshall.

6.3 THE FILM AS EVIDENCE I

6.3.1 READING *BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI* FOR EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE AND PERIOD THAT PRODUCED IT

As in *The Hunters* there are multiple 'streams' of discourse evident in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. In some ways, these discourses are in conflict with each other, or reflect different concerns and interests. At other points they reinforce each other. Where this process is most evident in the film is in the two narrations that run throughout the film: namely that of the omniscient (unseen) narrator and John Marshall's onscreen persona which also narrates some of the action.

Narration in a documentary film often achieves a distancing effect by considering and describing the action taking place in the film and by filtering it through an argument or an interpretative description.³³ In *Bushmen of the Kalahari* the omniscient narrator, it will be argued, reflects the values and attitudes of the NGS. The principal narration of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is read by Hollywood actor Leslie Nielsen. His resonant, masculine voice conforms to the classic 'voice-of-god' narration found in expository documentaries. The second narration heard throughout the

³³ See Nichols, *Representing Reality*, pp. 34, 37-8.

film is in the voice of John Marshall himself. Nielsen's serves as the guiding voice that explains the meaning of the images that make up the film. Marshall's highly subjective and more emotional narration is often at odds with the moderating tone of the omniscient narrator, and his is also the voice that speaks during many of the dramatic moments in the film, as will now be shown.

The idea that a documentary film can address its audience on more than one level and with more than one argument has been posited by Bill Nichols. Nichols argues that one way in which this might occur is in the tension between the professional stance required of the reporter of events in a documentary film (whether this is the omniscient narrator or an onscreen reporter) and the actuality of those events. Nichols writes:

[The professional stance] often seems to bear the sign of a lack, a lack of *human* response to the events that unfold so that others, the viewers, may see, witness and experience what someone else reports dispassionately. The reporter remains 'free' to move on, to take up other stories... but the text may show signs of the strain between the professional and the humane... in some documentaries this tension between the human and the professional surfaces as a conflict between establishing rapport with subjects and reporting about these same subjects.³⁴

In *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, this strain between the 'professional' and the 'humane' is embodied in the person of John Marshall, although the depth of his inner conflict is not properly explored. These two, differing strands of narration can be fruitfully analysed for evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and the period that produced the film. Consider the following two extracts from the film:

NIELSEN:

It had been fifteen years since John Marshall had seen the people whose way of life he shared, and ≠Toma, who gave him his Bushman name. He too was ≠Toma. Now, *for the National Geographic Society* [own italics], he will return to the Kalahari.

MUSIC

[Nielsen continued] John Marshall returns again to the Kalahari, with him is Ledimo, a Bantu interpreter and close friend. *Two support vehicles carry food, fuel and water as the tiny caravan heads into the African wasteland of some six thousand miles* [own italics].

For days they move westward, across the nation of Botswana, towards the border of South West Africa. Once man and animals moved freely across an unmarked boundary. Now, stretched between the free black nation of Botswana and South West Africa is a ten-foot-high fence, put up by the South West African administration. Just over the fence is a government reservation set aside for !Kung people. Here John Marshall cannot enter.

MARSHALL:

³⁴ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 137-38.

Near the border, we picked up two acquaintances, !Kung Bushmen I had known in 1957. They would carry a message some thirty miles into a region called Nyae Nyae. I said, "talk to no-one, until you see ≠Toma, and tell him I am here, he would know if the government would really let people come." Only the !Kung are free to cross the border between Botswana and the reservation where they are restricted in South West Africa. For fifteen years I have been denied permission to return to /Gautcha.

Right from the start of the film, as seen in this extract, there is a difference between the measured, explicating tone of Nielsen and Marshall's personally motivated interest in the action on the film. Nielsen supplies the (limited) background information: geographical location, presence of reservations, and the ban on Marshall entering South West Africa. The reasons for this prohibition are not explained, a point which will be taken up later in this analysis.

Marshall, on the other hand, speaks of people he has known, conspires with his acquaintances and reflects on his own prohibition from meeting the people 'he had known' in the 1950s. The ominous influence of 'the government' is referred to although once again is not explained.

The urgency in John Marshall's message to ≠Toma injects a subjective intensity into the narrative that is absent from the more measured, explicating tones of Nielsen. However, the difference between the two narrators is not just one of degrees of emotion. Nielsen's omniscient narration tells an entirely different story to Marshall's onscreen narration. Nielsen's narration sculpts a representation of the Bushmen that is remarkably similar to previous depictions of the Bushmen on documentary film, as will now be shown.

According to Nielsen's omniscient narration, *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is about a man going on a physical and emotional journey. As we have seen, at the start of the film this journey is described as a 'personal odyssey' and a 'journey into the past', the Kalahari Desert is a 'wasteland' (reminiscent of *The Bushmen's* 'miles of bottomless mud and slime' and van der Post's 'unexplored' Kalahari), breached at great odds. Furthermore, the expedition is related to Marshall's scholarly work at the DER, which in turn is related to Harvard University's venerable history as an institution of learning. Nielsen explains early on in the film that:

In the three hundred years of its colourful history, Harvard University, the oldest in America, has become a symbol of man's search to understand the world and himself. A few short blocks from Harvard, in an antiquated factory building, is another institution, unpretentious and unconventional, but also dedicated to understanding man: the centre for Documentary Education Recourses. Started by John Marshall, a filmmaker/anthropologist, and his associates, the centre produces in-depth studies of

different cultures and ways of life. Through these films, anthropologists and students are able to compare other cultures with their own.

Thus, as with the DAE, the journey which Marshall will undertake is framed as a scholarly exercise. There is also a relationship implied between 'Harvard' and 'NGS' as venerable American institutions in the discussion of Marshall's scholarly pursuits. This connection between an expedition to seek the Bushmen and an academic institution is also made in *The Bushmen*, where the introductory intertitles referred to scientists from the University of Cape Town who were accompanying the expedition.

Marshall's journey in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is further framed as difficult, even dangerous – an 'odyssey', no less. The narrator describes the expedition as 'heading into the heart of Africa's Kalahari, a sprawling desert of thorns'.³⁵ As we have seen, the themes of a journey into the past and into a hostile, unknowable landscape had occurred in earlier depictions of the Bushmen such as *The Bushmen* and *Lost World*.

Bushmen of the Kalahari further mirrors earlier documentary film depictions of the Bushmen through its completely incongruous inclusion of a trance dance, which occurs shortly after Marshall and Ledimo have found the !Kadi community in dire straits in the middle of the desert. These people have just been described as desperately thirsty, with Marshall's narration stating that 'thirst never lets you go, the only way to deal with it is to do as little as possible'. Very soon after this, the music of a trance dance begins on the soundtrack and the people begin to dance. Marshall explains that 'underlying the gaiety, there is deep magic, for the dance is the way the people protect themselves from the dark forces within themselves and their land, from the evil of dissension, and thirst and starvation, from disease and death.' It is difficult to understand how the very people who were dying of thirst minutes earlier suddenly have the ability to dance vigorously and sing and clap, nor whence their gaiety comes amidst their desperate plight. The trance dance appears suddenly and inexplicably in the middle of an apparently urgent attempt to save the !Kadi community. It is argued here that the trance dance was an obligatory insertion

³⁵ Keyan Tomaselli comments on the biblical imagery of the film, pointing to the 'notion of "the exodus", the "wilderness", the "wandering" in the desert and the "return" to Eden recreated in Marshall's fixing of the pump. Marshall is imaged as being on a crusade. This image of the "lost tribe" is a recurring one in Western myth.' See Keyan Tomaselli, 'Film Synopsis: *Bushmen of the Kalahari?*', at <http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amp/reviews/bushmen.htm>

into the film, foregrounding the interesting culture of the Bushmen at the expense of the real 'story' behind *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, which relates Marshall's attempts to help the community return to !Kadi. As we have seen, the trance dance is featured prominently in both the Denver African Expedition film and *Lost World*. Thus we see all the familiar themes of this framing of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* – the journey into the past; the journey into the unknown; the significance of aspects of Bushmen culture.

Analysis of Marshall's narration reveals a somewhat differing set of concerns. Marshall has commented that 'together Bob [Young – the director assigned by NGS to the project] and I struggled against the "Man the Primal Hunter" fantasies that Wolper tried to impose.'³⁶ This idea that Wolper had, of a 'Man the Primal Hunter' theme for *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, had significance in the post-World War II world. A desire to refigure racial discourse in the light of the racially-based atrocities of World War II saw scientists returning to the image of 'Man-the-Hunter' as the universal origin of human beings. It was the 'family-of-man' myth of the new United Nations, and its influence was felt in both anthropology and archaeology.³⁷ Once again the Bushmen were being seen as embodying an idea. The dissonance between Wolper's ideas and the reality of poverty and dispossession amongst the Bushmen in southern Africa at the time resulted in a 'struggle' that is evident in the body of the film. As Tomaselli has commented, what is apparent in both *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and the later *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) which will be discussed in the next chapter is Marshall's 'quite blatant emotional attachment... [to] the !Kung.'³⁸ Certainly we see clear evidence of Marshall's emotion at several points in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, his shock at the changes he witnesses amongst the Bushmen in Botswana and Namibia and an implied nostalgia for the passing of this culture: one of the questions asked at the very start of the film is 'do these people still pursue their ancient way of life, in freedom, in the Kalahari?' In his voiceover narration, Marshall muses along the following lines at different points in the film:

I wanted to show them some of the movies I had made. We remembered the happy times, the good rains that fell my last year in /Gautcha...

³⁶ Quoted in Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', p. 252n.

³⁷ Wilmsen, 'The Marshall Family Testament', pp. 232-34.

³⁸ Tomaselli et al, *Myth, Race and Power: South Africans Imaged on Film and TV*, p. 96.

The people could only stay four days. We discussed, not the past, but the new problems of life in the reservation. Kau said Tsoma had received one cow from the government, but not the bull. He concluded, progress would be slow. Their concern was with the future. I wondered how long their past would remain in living memory...

Now, with horse and dogs, the time and labour of the hunt was cut by days. The dogs had (indistinct) the kudu within twenty minutes. But I remembered with what skill and patience we used to track the game.

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Killing so efficiently seemed to rob hunting of its symbolic qualities, making it a simple act of subsistence instead of a larger act of kinship, binding the people together.

What is evident from these excerpts is that the secondary narration of John Marshall is enmeshed with his personal involvement with the people he had lived with and filmed fifteen years previously. What we witness if we follow Marshall's narration in the film is a Bushmen sub-proletariat existing throughout southern Africa, plunged into a mire of poverty. This is evident in almost all of Marshall's interactions with scruffy, dissolute and desperate Bushmen people, who constantly express dismay at their living conditions. Marshall worries about the future of the Bushmen, and the ideas he expresses in the film relate to this worry, as evident in the following excerpt from his narration:

Now the Kalahari is becoming cattle country. The Bushmen's last remaining waterholes are being taken over by commercial ranchers. It seems to me that the crucial question is: can these Bushmen hold their hereditary land? Or are they destined to be like those I saw, landless, itinerant labourers, herding other people's cattle?

Marshall's determination to find the people in the desert can be related to the climactic moment in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* when he discovers that almost all of the people he had filmed while making *Bitter Melons* had died after his family left the region in the 1950s. The degree to which he feels subjectively involved in the history of the people he filmed is evident in the many times he uses the word "we" (did this, ate that, hunted with this) when referring to his time amongst the Ju/Wasi in the 1950s, reflecting his own perception of himself as an active participant. Furthermore, elements of the film language of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* heighten this sense of the despair both of the Bushmen and of Marshall himself. In this regard, Nichols argues that the prevalence accorded the criterion of objectivity in documentary film has left the exploration of subjectivity in documentary film underdeveloped.³⁹ Documentary filmmakers have recourse to the visual cues of fiction film in representing the subjective feelings of persons or to emphasise

³⁹ Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 120.

sadness or despair.⁴⁰ The intensity of /Giamakwe's despair when Marshall asks him about his father is heightened by the use of slow motion. The image of /Giamakwe smoking becomes a visual metaphor for the despair of many of the Bushmen people who appear in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.⁴¹ Furthermore, his despair and pain act as a spur that drives John Marshall for the rest of the film. His words echo across the frames of the film and literally 'follow' Marshall (on the soundtrack), who continues to search for survivors of the families he once knew. By making use of a technique commonly employed in fiction film to represent subjectivity, director and cameraman Robert Young succeeds in emphasising John Marshall's sadness at the condition of his friends and his desire to seek out the !Kadi community and help them.

Marshall's evident concern and nostalgia make *Bushmen of the Kalahari* more than simply a film about his reunion with the Ju/Wasi and the G/wi. The 'travel-adventure', as it was originally conceived, is diminished in significance as the focus turns to a search-and-rescue mission with many people's lives at stake. And yet, as will be shown, the death and poverty central to the film are sanitised by the conservative stance embodied by the voice of the narrator. The clearest evidence of this is in the absence of any explanation of historical context that would explain the conditions evident in the film. We see this absence of historical context in Marshall's *The Hunters* but in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* this absence is more evident because in the film history is

⁴⁰ Nichols argues that the prevalence of criteria of objectivity in documentary film has left the exploration of subjectivity in documentary film underdeveloped. In fiction film, subjectivity is often illustrated through flashbacks, visual memories, slow motion, fantasy, or visual representation of altered states such as drunkenness, reverie or dreams. See Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 120. See also MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 52-3: MacDougall writes that 'documentary demands that another's separate consciousness be acknowledged. Whatever the descriptive function of a film, it must register its subjects' consciousness of being, the quick in them...very occasionally films glimpse this through the overlayerings of conventional behaviour, like live flesh through dead tissue. It appears in the artless responses of others, not unlike slips of the tongue that reveal a subject with which we are complicit... such experiences often involve a third term that is the common object of these subjectivities. This means that in viewing a film the viewer is usually responding *not only to the content of images but also to the postural schema of the film itself* [own italics].' MacDougall is acknowledging here that the subjectivity of people in documentary films is often communicated through the choices of the filmmaker – of camera angle, structuring of the film, uses of slow motion etc.

⁴¹ As MacDougall argues, for many filmmakers, then, documentary is not just a way of 'representing the real but of touching within themselves and others something more fleeting and more precious. This contact, when it occurs... we may glimpse in a few frames out of a thousand, or a few seconds in an entire film. It is that moment in a shot or sequence that gives it its life, without which (to put it conversely) it would be tautological, no more than "itself." It is what we wait for when watching a film a second time, as we wait for certain moments in music. It may lie in a gesture, a look, in the catch of a voice, a puff of smoke, or a distant sound that animates a landscape. This moment may be regarded as what is quintessentially *filmic* in film.' MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 49.

everywhere alluded to but nowhere explained. In this, Marshall and the omniscient narrator reveal a similar attribute – neither stream of narration attempts in any way to clear up the obvious questions about historical context that the film poses.

For example, it is stated that John Marshall cannot enter South West Africa, but it is not explained why. Furthermore, the fenced border between South West Africa and Namibia is described by Nielsen as ‘stretching between the free black nation of Botswana and South West Africa,’ having been ‘put up by the South West African administration’. This statement raises a number of questions. If Botswana is a ‘free black nation’, then what is South West Africa? And who constitutes the South West African administration? And why the need for ten-foot-high barbed wire fences between the two countries? There is no discussion of Apartheid or the fact that South West Africa in the 1970s was under the power of the Apartheid state and was being occupied by South Africa despite intense international opposition to this. In relation to the !Kadi community, the historical context of the Khwe Bushmen of Botswana is not properly explained. At one point in the film Marshall states that ‘they [the Bushmen attempting to return to !Kadi] had become dependent on an outside world which had always rejected them.’ Why are Bushmen rejected? Who constitutes the ‘outside world’? This is not explained by either Marshall or Nielsen. The result of this lack of historical context is a ‘suspension of reality’ in the film. The living conditions of the people filmed in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* are shown but not explained, so it cannot properly be addressed and solutions cannot be considered. As such, this reality remains suspended as a backdrop to the story of John Marshall in Botswana.

Once again this absence of historical context can better be understood if the film is seen as a product of the *National Geographic Society*. The graphic depiction of poverty and death in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* goes against the grain of trends common in representation in the *Geographic* magazine and by extension in the films made under the aegis of the Society up until that time. The themes that run through all *National Geographic* renderings of the non-Euroamerican world have tended towards exoticising, idealising, naturalising (by removing them from all but a single historical narrative) and sexualising people of the third world. In particular, there has been a tendency to focus consistently on the beauty of native people and their rituals (such as the trance

dance). Furthermore, importantly, there has been a strong suppression of any visual evidence of illness, poverty, hunger or deformity.⁴² As Marc Manganaro writes,

National Geographic magazine has functioned for over a century as a critical producer of America's vision of the world at large and ... this privileged perspective on the outside world is due in large part to the intoxicating photographs of exotic peoples and places.⁴³

It is argued here that the historical context of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* remains mysterious because the content of the film is sanitised for its audience – keeping the Bushmen at a distance, foregrounding their exotic culture and the drama of their rescue by John Marshall at the expense of understanding the key elements that have contributed to their poverty and dispossession. In part John Marshall's emotion and his emphatic identification with the Bushmen subjects of the film undermine the 'professional' stance of the omniscient narrator. However, as MacDougall argues,

It is only through the author's [of a book or film] agency that we are allowed to hear other voices, by a process of 'transmission'. But the question of how other voices can be transmitted is really pre-empted by another question: *how the materials out of which a work is made act themselves to define and control its meaning* [own italics].⁴⁴

In *Bushmen of the Kalahari* the conflict between the two narrators is resolved by structuring the film in such a way that Marshall's journey, his experiences, his emotional involvement in the events filmed and the history of his relationship with the Ju/Wasi and the Khwe are emphasised. Importantly, Marshall is safe at the end of the film, and is furthermore responsible for a humanitarian intervention that saves the lives of an entire community of people. The result of this narrative focus is that the world is represented, if not exactly as a safe and well-ordered place, then at least as a world where rescue is a possibility, and where death can be combated by heroism and determination, in this case on the part of the white male protagonist. As Lutz and Collins have argued,

The *National Geographic* photographer has always been and predominantly remains, both literally and symbolically, a white man. And not just any white man, but the whitest and most masculine version possible: the great hunter/adventurer... free to roam the globe in search of visual treasure, flamboyantly virile in his freedom from observations and evaluation, and his

⁴² Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, pp. 88-95. Importantly, the Lutz and Collins study concludes in 1993. Thus it cannot be stated emphatically that such trends have *continued* in products of the National Geographic Society.

⁴³ Marc Manganaro, 'What's Wrong with This Picture: Reflections on Reading National Geographic: A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 1 (January 1995), p. 206.

⁴⁴ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 156.

bravery in entering the dangerous realms at the ends of the earth, in continents still dark for most of his audience.⁴⁵

Marshall himself, it seems, battled against this stereotyping of himself and the Bushmen in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, although his success was limited by the overarching narrative structure of the film that emphasised his adventure with the Bushmen at the expense of any real explanation of their plight. And yet Marshall's emotional 'second stream' of narration also reflects his own ideological orientation – which at points, as we have seen, reinforces the conservative commentary of the NGS omniscient narrator. This is most apparent in Marshall's evident nostalgia for the passing of Bushmen culture, a passing which his movies cannot prevent – when he shows the KFS footage to the Ju/Wasi they are momentarily amused but then return most insistently to the problems of the present. As discussed at the start of this chapter, the NGS, whilst avoiding the political questions of the 1960s and 1970s, did take up the issue of conservation and the problems of pollution and the destruction of natural resources. What is framed as the untamed Kalahari Desert at the start of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* turns out to be, as Marshall ruefully concludes at the end of the film, 'cattle country'. The Bushmen are victims of this change in the character of the Kalahari – they cannot seem to adapt their culture to the commercialised environment. Marshall's nostalgic concern at the demise of Bushmen culture as he knew it in the 1950s thus also can be seen to reflect a greater concern with environmental depredation and the destruction of natural resources. The whole narrative of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is a morality tale along these lines – the story of diminishing resources and the 'desertification' of the environment – and the human toll of this desertification. The solution proffered is a mixture of collaboration, team work and 'preservation' – Marshall hopes at the end that in adapting to some degree to the new economy of the Kalahari, the Bushmen will be able to hold onto aspects of their culture.

Thus, the purpose of the film is arguably to utilise the images of some remaining Bushmen who look vaguely 'pristine' as evidence of environmental degradation and the problems of unchecked modernisation. Marshall's musings on the passing of Bushmen culture, most movingly seen in the following extract:

⁴⁵ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, pp. 184–85.

The oldest member of the band [filmed for *Bitter Melons*] was a composer named D/guoney. His songs celebrated day to day events in the gathering-hunting life. D/guoney's culture was intangible. Knowledge, traditions, values. His compositions were its living record, easily swept away.

Over and above Marshall's personal sense of responsibility and his involvement with the Bushmen in the region, this quote could stand in as a lament for the 'sixties' counter-culture movements that gave such strength to environmentalism. As Beinart writes, though each of these anti-hegemonic counter-cultures

... had its own distinctive history they coalesced and were mutually enhancing as part of a youthful countercultural critique of dominant values and structures... the leitmotif of the new conservation was not so much the protection of particular components of the environment such as trees, soil or wildlife, but a broad-ranging confrontation with the insidious by-products of industrialisms... environmentalism was conditioned by the new post-war order of big science and technology, their marriage to big business and the spread of affluence and effluence.⁴⁶

In *Bushmen of the Kalahari* Marshall clearly indicts these 'large' forces – specifically *commercial* cattle farming – for the decimation of the Bushmen's environment. His defence of the vulnerable and marginalised Bushmen in the film embodies a move throughout the West that had gained momentum in the sixties to defend the helpless and the defenceless against the relentless onslaught of government-endorsed capitalist-based technophilia. Even the concept of 'government' is invoked by Marshall as a sinister, dominating force in the film – would the 'government' let ≠Toma and his band come see Marshall? Similarly, in Hollywood in the late sixties and early seventies, the image of the Native American Indian was being utilised in fiction films as a 'substitute for the oppressed black or hippie white youth alienated from the modern mainstream of American society.'⁴⁷

However, despite these ideological undertones in the film as embodied in the 'personal' narration of Marshall, it is argued here that the film frames its content in such way that Wolper's 'Man the Primal Hunter' theme is the stronger ideological strand of the film. This is effected not only by framing Marshall's journey to seek the Bushmen in a van der Postian mode but *also* by framing Marshall as a great white hero seeking to save the helpless Bushmen. This process is aided by the lack of historical context given in the world of the film, which further obscures the significance

⁴⁶ Beinart and Coates, *Environment and History*, p. 94.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, 'The White Man's Indian', p. 28.

of the Bushmen's poverty and their deathly plight – in this way, the Bushmen stand once again as symbols of something – in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* it is as *victims* of a relentless modernisation that threatens their continued existence on the planet.

6.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE II:

6.4.1 WHAT *BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI* TELLS US ABOUT THE BUSHMEN IN 1974

We have seen how the major narrative trajectory in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* obscures the plight of the Bushmen people filmed by not explaining the historical causes of their situation. Of note to the historian, however, is the clear evidence that exists in the film of the dramatically changed conditions of some of the Bushmen filmed. This is particularly apparent from a comparison of 1974 footage of the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae, which appears early on in the film, with the sequences used in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* from Marshall's earlier footage taken in Nyae Nyae and Botswana in the 1950s. The sequence in which the Ju/Wasi watch scenes from *The Hunters* is particularly profound in this respect, as the difference between what they looked like in the 1950s and what they look like in the 1970s is visible on screen. As they sit and watch themselves on a makeshift projector set up in the desert, they see themselves as they were filmed twenty years earlier. Now they wear ragged Western clothing and look poor and hungry. As Marshall travels around Botswana, he meets many Bushmen in similar states of poverty. In *Bushmen of the Kalahari* there is visual evidence of the 'underclass' status of Bushmen, who are generally poverty stricken.

What *Bushmen of the Kalahari* also reveals is the degree to which the practise of hunting-and-gathering was subsiding in southern Africa by the 1970s. Almost all of the Bushmen in the film wear tattered Western clothing and do not carry bows and arrows. As we have seen, however, this change over time is not properly explained in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. Instead, it becomes a source of nostalgia about the past of the Bushmen in the same way that van der Post mourned the contamination of those Bushmen 'spoilt' by civilisation, as discussed in chapter four. The images from John Marshall's 1950s films reveal people who are healthy and strong, who have

access to water and food and who form a cohesive community based on their traditions and access to natural resources. By juxtaposing these images with the poor, grubby Bushmen of the 1970s, there is implication in the film that the people were better off in the past.

There is another sequence in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* which is of use to the historian: this occurs when Marshall takes #Toma to the Tsodilo Hills and shows him the rock art panel. In a short but moving sequence #Toma explains the rock art to Marshall. In the voiceover narration, Marshall says that 'Theories say the hands are signatures, or magic signs.' Without overtly pointing out that #Toma is contradicting these 'theories,' Marshall goes on to translate #Toma's response:

#Toma said the hands and creature were one painting, the story of a hunt. The hunter saw an Eland, and his hands saw how he crept close. Try the giraffe, #Toma said. #Toma told me that they painted the giraffe, showing how to stalk it, just like we did in /Gautcha when I was a boy. And he said they were Ju/Wasi, the people, and they lived out there, long long ago.

In the midst of a film dense with imposed ideas about what Bushmen culture is or was, this is an unobtrusive but revealing moment of self-identification on the part of a Bushmen man with a hunting-and-gathering past. He doesn't think much of the 'theories' about rock art – he relates the panel to his past, to the memory of the hunt and the stalking of prey. As #Toma makes the point about the Ju/Wasi having lived out there 'long long ago' he turns and faces the Kalahari Desert that stretches away from the Tsodilo Hills. Unlike the contrived 'Kanna' sequence in *The Bushmen*, where the 'Bushman' filmed was actually a farm labourer who had never practised hunting-and-gathering, #Toma had lived largely by hunting-and-gathering just twenty years earlier. Furthermore, #Toma is invited by Marshall to interpret the meaning of a relic of the Bushmen past, namely the Tsodilo Hills rock art. In voicing his opinion, #Toma is given the space to *counter* the imposed 'theories' about the meaning of the art.

Even if the sequence is inserted only to reinforce the overarching nostalgia for the Bushmen past that can be discerned in the film, #Toma's testimony has some validity. He is expressing an 'oral tradition', which, as John Tosh explains, 'is the narrative and descriptions of people and events which have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations' – something which constitutes a legitimate source for historians in understanding how people conceive of their

culture and identity.⁴⁸ Thus it is useful not as a historical fact, but as an indication that at least some Bushmen still identified with the hunting-and-gathering past in the 1970s in Botswana. Not all were like the young man who says so dispiritedly later on in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* 'I don't remember my father's music. Why should I?'

The other significant point about this relates to changing filmmaking styles – in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* Bushmen are starting to speak on camera. A growing self-consciousness on the part of filmmakers caused major changes in ethnographic filmmaking between 1955 and 1985.⁴⁹ As it became clear that the 'illusion of authorial invisibility' (as MacDougall terms it) could lead to incorrect interpretations of the behaviour and actions appearing on screen, filmmakers became more concerned with showing the workings of their filmmaking to reveal its mediatory influence upon their subjects.⁵⁰ Thus, single, authoritative voiceover narration was replaced by subtitled speaking subjects. Film subjects were brought into the filmmaking process as collaborators and asked for commentary and feedback on the films, while filmmakers took pains to show themselves in their films in an effort to emphasise the mediatory influence of the camera on the filmic event.⁵¹

These changes were not confined to specialist ethnographic films made by visual anthropologists: from the 1960s onwards – documentary filmmakers and theorists in general grappled with the idea of reflexively revealing the process of filmmaking to an audience in order to address the authorial influence of the camera and the filmmaker on the subjects of documentary films. These issues had been raised very early in the history of documentary film: by pioneering documentarian Dziga Vertov in *Man With The Movie Camera* (1929) and the French *Cinéma Vérité* practitioners such as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in *Chronicle of a Summer* (1963) who, as Bruzzi writes, 'ostentatious[ly] foregrounded the filmmaking process: the crew of *Chronicle of a Summer*

⁴⁸John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow: Longman Ltd, 1991), pp. 206, 216-17.

⁴⁹Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 14.

⁵⁰MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 186.

⁵¹See MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 186-87; Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film*, pp. 10-14; James C. Faris, 'Anthropological Transparency: film, representation and politics', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, p. 171.

[did not] hide behind the supposed transparency of film, they [did not] remain anonymous *auteurs*.⁵²

Bushmen of the Kalahari is not a groundbreaking documentary in its structure and style, nor does it constitute an experiment in reflexive documentary filmmaking – furthermore John Marshall interprets !Toma's words for the audience, and thus the film doesn't utilise subtitles. However the point is that ideas about the function of documentary films were changing. The !Toma sequence does constitute a rare moment in which a Bushman gets to speak on film – something which would become more common as documentary film styles and political and social sensibilities developed through the last quarter of the twentieth century. Changing documentary film practice is something that will be considered more closely in the next chapter.

6.5 BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

In *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, then, Marshall's films are utilised as 'evidence' of the Bushmen past. However, the meaning of the Marshall film clips depends largely upon their contextualisation within *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. Rather than being used as evidence in a systematic survey of the history of the Bushmen people of Southern Africa, the KFS clips are used to illustrate Marshall's own memories of his time amongst the !Kung and the G/wi and his personal interpretation of the way in which these societies operated in the relative isolation of Nyae Nyae and the Central Kalahari in the 1950s.

Furthermore, as discussed, there is a very sharp contrast between the healthy, happy Bushmen shown in the KFS clips and the sequences from *The Hunters*, and the poor, hungry Bushmen who populate most of the world of the film. As seen in the above analysis, a notable absence of historical contextualisation in the film means that these changes are not properly explained, except in brief references to the Bushmen's dispossession by 'commercial ranchers' and the Kalahari becoming 'cattle country'. Without a proper explanation of these changes, an

⁵² Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 99. For further discussion of the rise of reflexive and interactive documentary filmmaking strategies see also Nichols, *Representing Reality*, pp. 45-75.

impression is created of sudden and wrenching spontaneous change from a past which was idyllic and pristine to a present that is miserable and unsympathetic to the plight of the Bushmen. This sharp dichotomy echoes previous arguments about Bushmen history as found in *Lost World of Kalahari* and as implied in *The Hunters*: that the Bushmen past is a state of 'ideal culture' as pristine primitives.

If there is an implicit argument about the Bushmen past in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, it is that all the poverty-stricken Bushmen in the film were *all* hunting-and-gathering just twenty years earlier. This is bolstered by Marshall's reminiscences and the insertion into the film of the KFS footage. This is, of course, a case of 'false invention,' as the historian Robert Rosenstone terms those elements of a film that distort the generally accepted discourse of history. The historical record, shows that by the end of the 1950s, the majority of Bushmen people in southern Africa were living in poverty, practising mixed economies by planting and farming with goats, herding the cattle of wealthier farmers or surviving as poorly paid labourers on commercial farms. Only a few Bushmen groups in South West Africa, and marginally more in Botswana, were living by hunting-and-gathering. ⁵³Toma's and Marshall's reminiscences are thus not reflective of the recent history of all the Bushmen filmed. Given the way *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is structured, this is a point that might easily be misunderstood. The significance of the KFS will now be explored further in the analysis of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* as a film in history.

6.6 BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI AS FILM IN HISTORY

The inclusion of Marshall's 1950s Ju/Wasi footage into *Bushmen of the Kalahari* indicates the degree to which these iconic images would continue to constitute the hegemonic representation of Bushmen culture(s) on film. As stated in the previous chapter, Marshall would later insist that any of his footage from the fifties inserted into documentary films had to be dated to show that the clips were shot in the 1950s and were *not* indicative of a continued state of existence for the Bushmen.⁵³ *Bushmen of the Kalahari* is an example of *The Hunters* and other KFS footage being

⁵³ Personal communication.

used as a 'stock footage' of Bushmen history in a way that strips away the specificity of the footage and frames it as a universal history. In *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, the people who are assisted by Marshall in returning to !Kadi are not related to either the Khwe people of *Bitter Melons* or the Ju/Wasi of *The Hunters*, and yet the only 'past' of the Bushmen in the film is shown through those clips. Unlike the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae, who only experienced rapid changes in their material circumstances from 1959 onwards, the Bushmen of Botswana had already suffered rapid loss of jobs and security around the Ghanzi area throughout the 1950s. The circumstances of the group found in the desert by Marshall in 1972 were thus emblematic of the *same problem* that had caused the death of Oukwane's family in the 1950s: mainly lack of access to water through dispossession of their traditional lands.

While circumstances had worsened in Botswana for the Bushmen, they had not radically changed since Marshall was there in the 1950s. Thus, the ordering of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* does not take into account the complex differences between the different groups of Bushmen living in South West Africa and Botswana. In *The Hunters* the Ju/Wasi are specifically named, as is their geographical location, and all activities and cultural practises are attributed to that particular group. However, as has been argued, the structure of *Bushmen of the Kalahari* makes it easy to misunderstand the *Hunters* and *Bitter Melons* footage as representing a general Bushmen past. This confusion is the result of the format of *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, which incompletely contextualises Marshall's images of the Bushmen, glosses over history and structures the film as an adventure story.

As seen, both *Lost World of Kalahari* and *The Hunters* enjoyed continuing influence into the 1960s and 1970s. With *The Hunters* shown on BBC television in 1972; *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, a *National Geographic* Special, coming out in 1974; Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's publishing success with *The Harmless People* and van der Post's bestselling 'Bushmen' books, it is possible to see how the image of Bushmen as primarily hunters-and-gatherers, as incompatible with modernity, and as bearers of interesting culture had begun to enter into the popular imagination in both America and Britain. The scholarly-based anthropological work of Silberbauer, Lee, DeVore and Tanaka

would only be published from 1976 onwards. And yet, as seen in the previous chapter, even these valuable ethnographic studies would be focused on hunting-and-gathering Bushmen.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Bushmen of the Kalahari incongruously merges familiar images of the Bushmen as trance-dancing mystics whose past was idyllic, with the graphic reality of people changing and adapting – acculturating – to ever-shifting political and economic realities in Southern Africa. The major themes of the film are similar in several ways to those in previous films on the Bushmen. These include the focus on the journey ‘into the past’, the characterisation of the harsh beauty of the landscape and the Bushmen people’s connectedness to the landscape, the focus on the trance dance and the elision of historical contextualisation that might explain the plight of the Bushmen. However, the film also reveals *changes* in the circumstances of many Bushmen through the subjective analysis of John Marshall’s voiceover narrative. In the differing discourses of the two narrators of the film, there are evident ‘streams’ of ideology that are in conflict at moments, and yet at other times merge to tell one tale – of nostalgia for the Bushmen past, and how the demise of that culture is an indictment of ubiquitous modernity in the post-war world.

As the key mouthpiece of the National Geographic Society, the influential *National Geographic* has traditionally favoured a representation of the world as idealised, exotic and relatively free of pain and class conflict.⁵⁴ The journey of John Marshall into the Kalahari in the early 1970s sees repeated encounters with obvious examples of pain, filth, poverty and death. However, the disturbing circumstances of these encounters are the result of unexplained *external* – and only briefly mentioned – historical forces. Apart from the pivotal image of the young man at the centre of the film, the Bushmen groups depicted maintain order and compassion amongst themselves through consideration, self-control and respect. The world without may be attempting to fragment the lives of these people, but amongst them there is order and temperance. The world according to this *National Geographic* television special remains a place of hope, and when

⁵⁴ Lutz and Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, p. 46.

the underbelly of disorder and death manages to flicker on the surface at points, it is subsumed again into a tale of compassion, heroic rescue and second chances.

The 1950s had produced two influential and popular film representations of the Bushmen: *Lost World of Kalahari* and *The Hunters*. Echoes of both films may be found in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. In the case of *The Hunters* the connection is literal, for John Marshall is the subject of the film into which sequences from *The Hunters* have been edited. In the case of *Lost World* the influence is more oblique, but it is particularly noticeable in the discordant inclusion of a trance dance and the focus on Marshall's journey to seek out the Bushmen through inhospitable and unknown terrain. It is also evident in the embedded premise of the film, namely that it is difficult for the Bushmen to adapt to modernity. However, the seeds of change are present in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. The anaesthetising effect of the overarching narrative of Marshall's redemptive journey to save the Bushmen of !Kadi does not entirely disguise obvious signs of change and acculturation amongst the Bushmen, nor does it disguise their poverty and dispossession. Furthermore, the film contains an important moment when a Bushmen speaks to the camera about his self-identification with the hunting-and-gathering past.

Bushmen of the Kalahari is a fitting primer for the next important documentary film on the Bushmen: John Marshall's acclaimed *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, which is the subject of the next chapter. As will be shown, later documentaries on the Bushmen continued to recycle the van der Postian notion of the Bushmen as pristine primitives, but Marshall's filmmaking in *N!ai* marked the first attempt to deconstruct this image and undertake a *filmic* analysis of why a particular Bushmen community had gone from independence to dire poverty in under twenty years.

CHAPTER SEVEN

N!AI: THE STORY OF A !KUNG WOMAN (1980)

The film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) is the most complex and groundbreaking of the films under discussion in this thesis. It constituted an almost complete break with previous depictions of the Bushmen in documentary film. *N!ai* was the first documentary film on Bushmen to be structured as a biography and the first to relate the story of a single Bushman woman. It was also the first to systematically appraise and analyse the historical, political, economic and social pressures that had contributed to the poverty and dispossession of the Bushmen of northern Namibia, and revealed reflexively the complicity of film in the generation of false or distorted images of Bushmen which contributed to the problems it depicted.

In reading the film for evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and the period that produced it, the structure of *N!ai* needs to be seen as a reflection of changing ideas about ethnographic filmmaking. Unlike *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, *N!ai* was a film produced by a professional ethnographic filmmaker who had been involved in the development of new strategies for ethnographic filmmaking between the 1950s and the 1970s. It is thus important that the film be seen as reflective of new ideas about ethnographic filmmaking in the second half of the twentieth century, which were in turn a response to the 'crisis of representation' or movement away from positivism that characterised academic anthropology from the 1960s onwards. These changing strategies of ethnographic filmmaking conceptualised whole new ways of understanding the relationship between filmmaker and subject. This analysis will be contextualised in a brief explanation of the changing concerns of ethnographic film from the 1960s onwards. It will then be argued that the film reflects Marshall's intense concern with the plight of the Bushmen living at Tshumkwe in the late 1970s. In this it will be argued that the film is structured as eye witness account of the problems facing the Bushmen in a particular time and a particular place, incorporating the spasmodic, confusing plethora of impressions and concerns that might inform an emotionally charged response to a difficult situation. This is evident in Marshall's structuring of the film as a 'view from the ground', which sometimes obscures rather

than clarifies the larger forces causing the problems depicted. The film also reflects the values and attitudes of a number of people operating in the immediate context of Tshumkwe in the 1970s, and in doing so reveals prevailing racial discourses in southern Africa at the time, particularly those of the South African milieu. Finally, it will be argued that in *N!ai* there is a strand of meaning which constitutes a continuation of nostalgic longing for the Bushmen past.

N!ai provides a great deal of evidence for the historian about the conditions of the Bushmen in Nyae Nyae in the 1970s, highlighting significant problems of location life such as alcoholism, the imposition of external controls from government and the ideological (and physical) incursions of Christianity, environmentalism, filmmakers looking for pristine Bushmen and the South African Defence Force (SADF) looking for recruits. It will be shown how the film also reveals some opposition on the part of the Ju/Wasi to these incursions.

In considering the film as historiography, it will be argued that *N!ai* presents a historical argument based on a synthesis of N!ai's 'oral testimony' about her life and John Marshall's KFS footage. It is also another example of Marshall's KFS footage being utilised as 'evidence' about the Bushmen past. However, it will be shown that in this instance the 'nostalgic longing' for the hunter-gatherer Bushmen past is N!ai's own nostalgia and longing for a past life that seemed better than the one she inhabits in the present.

As a film *in history* *N!ai* will be considered as a 'classic' ethnographic film that turned N!ai into a 'star' of ethnographic cinema.¹ The film was broadcast on American television as part of the *Odyssey Disappearing Worlds* series, and won numerous awards. Amongst scholars and anthropologists of the Bushmen it was also both successful and influential. Once again it has been difficult to gather any information about the actual viewership figures for the film, but more important about *N!ai* is that, as with *The Hunters*, its enduring success and influence were greater in academia than without.

The section of this thesis which relates the background to the making of the film is extensive for two reasons. The first is that *N!ai* is an 'observational' ethnographic film, a form of ethnographic

¹ David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 140.

filmmaking of which John Marshall was a pioneer. In order to understand what this means, it is necessary to briefly sketch out the rise of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité, and the way in which Marshall's film work contributed to these important documentary film movements. For the historian, understanding the subtle generation of argument in *N!ai* and the evidence which supports it requires that the language of the film be understood. How the 'meaning' of the film is created through its assembly is made easier by understanding its roots in Direct Cinema, and such knowledge also assists in a critical analysis of the film, for it reveals the ways in which argumentation is worked into the construction of the film.

The second reason is that *N!ai* is a contemporary account of the problems facing the Bushmen residents of Tshumkwe in the 1970s – an 'eye witness account' – as was argued earlier. In order to show the larger historical context which *N!ai*, with its 'view from the ground' implies but does not always explicate, and simply to make better sense of the film as a whole, the background to the film will include a brief discussion of the changing circumstances in Nyae Nyae between the end of the 1950s and the 1970s, when Marshall made *N!ai*.

7.1 BACKGROUND TO THE MAKING OF *N!AI: THE STORY OF A !KUNG WOMAN*

7.1.1. THE INFLUENCE OF DIRECT CINEMA

This section commences with a discussion of the rise of Direct Cinema during the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States, and of John Marshall's role in utilising its principles in the making of ethnographic film. Incorporating technological innovations such as lightweight film cameras and synchronous sound-recording facilities, Direct Cinema practitioners developed a journalistic ethic of strict non-intervention in the events they were filming, in the hope of capturing reality as it unfolded.² An early and influential example was the documentary film *Primary* (1960), made by Direct Cinema pioneers Robert Drew and Richard Leacock. The two men persuaded United States senators John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey to grant them

² See Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, pp. 21-3.

behind-the-scenes access to their election campaigns in Wisconsin for the Democratic presidential nomination. The filmmakers made the promise that they would never attempt to direct or even make suggestions to the two senators, provided they were granted continued access to the entire campaign process, from speeches to meetings to strategy sessions and interviews. As Erik Barnouw writes, 'no previous film had so caught the euphoria, the sweat, the manoeuvring of a political campaign'.³ Direct Cinema emphasised the role of the filmmaker as neutral observer recording events as they would have unfolded even had the camera not been there. The tendency of Direct Cinema practitioners was to examine places and people that society tended to ignore, leaving the drawing of any conclusions to the viewers, which meant that the films often seemed ambiguous in the depiction of their subject matter.⁴ Famous Direct Cinema films include *Don't Look Back* (1966) and *Monterey Pop* (1968) by Leacock and Pennebaker, *Salesman* (1969) by the Maysles brothers and *Titicut Follies* (1967) and *High School* (1968) by Fred Wiseman.⁵

When John Marshall was filming *The Hunters* in the 1950s, technological limitations meant that documentary films often contained re-enacted scenes, or as seen in *The Hunters*, a reconstruction using a synthesis of different sequences. From the 1960s onwards, however, as a result of improving technology and the rise of Direct Cinema such interventions on the part of the documentary filmmaker became less common. John Grierson's careful arguments about the documentary as a 'creative treatment of reality', or an artistic interpretation of actual events or situations for the purpose of generating insights into the world, were losing their appeal. The distinction between broadcast journalism and documentary film was beginning to fade.⁶ The aim of Direct Cinema was to show events and people 'in as unadulterated a state as possible' with minimal artistic intervention on the part of the filmmaker.⁷

³ Barnouw, *Documentary*, pp. 237-38.

⁴ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 231.

⁵ On the rise of Direct Cinema see also Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, pp. 299-309; W. Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 144-210. On the influence of Direct Cinema on ethnographic filmmaking see MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 125-39.

⁶ Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, p. 22. Grierson's arguments have been addressed in previous chapters; see Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 79. See also Winston on Grierson's differentiation between newsreels, travelogues and documentary in Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, p. 20-1.

⁷ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 68.

This ideology behind Direct Cinema – that one might, like a ‘fly on the wall’, show something real about the events taking place without influencing the way in which they occur – has been consistently questioned even from its inception in the early 1960s. For example, pioneering Direct Cinema practitioners such as Leacock worried about the influence the camera might have on the events being filmed. Others, such as the Maysles brothers and Wiseman, downplayed this influence.⁸ Albert Maysles stated that ‘I regard our films as the purest form of cinema’ and his brother David concurred by stating that ‘we don’t impose anything on the people we film. We are the servants of our subjects rather than the other way around’.⁹ However, as Stella Bruzzi has argued, what this argument fails to take cognisance of is the defining influence of the filmmaking process as an intervention in the events taking place. For this reason, American Direct Cinema has been ‘accepted and defined as naïve, simplistic and misguidedly idealistic’.¹⁰ Bruzzi uses the example of the Maysles brothers’ *Salesman* (1969) as a film which violates several tenets of the Direct Cinema code. They use non-diegetic music on two occasions, edit sequences out of their chronological order and are highly selective regarding who and what constitutes their focus. These, argues Bruzzi, ‘are all elements that, to some degree, are the impositions of the filmmakers, they are tools of interpretation.’¹¹

These criticisms of Direct Cinema are useful in understanding the structure of *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*. For Marshall, Direct Cinema meant that the major structural choices were made during editing, as he writes: ‘interpretation follows filming; major selection takes place during shooting and cutting instead of in scripts written beforehand.’¹² This strategy is evident in the example of *Salesman*, where the editing choices of the Maysles brothers belie their purported non-interventionist policy. The intervention of editing needs to be considered carefully. It is not a voiceover narrative or a linear narrative trajectory that explains the observational film or gives it meaning. In an observational film it is the way in which the events filmed are put together that

⁸ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 253.

⁹ Maysles brothers quoted in Bruzzi, *Documentary*, p. 70.

¹⁰ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 70.

¹¹ Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, pp. 70-7. For further debate around the failings of the idealistic Direct Cinema movement see Brian Winston, ‘The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription’, in Michael Renov (ed.), *Theorizing Documentary*, pp. 42-50 and Calvin Pryluck, ‘Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking’, in Alan Rosenthal (ed.), *New Challenges for Documentary*, pp. 255-68.

¹² Marshall, ‘Filming and Learning’, p. 72.

creates meaning *after the fact*. Or, as Nichols argues, self-conscious argument is least common in observational films. Rather, there is 'an inevitable perspective on the events and this can be taken as an implicit argument, but self-conscious, overt argumentation or commentary remains minimal.'¹³

The very fact that the editorial process defines the meaning of the film shows that the non-interventionist ideals of Direct Cinema are fallacious. However, as David MacDougall has argued,

Although many observational filmmakers may have wished to film 'as if the camera were not there,' none of the best of them believed they were producing complete, unmediated documents, nor did many of them ever hold that observational film could be ideologically transparent. In retrospect their work now appears manifestly personal in its choice of subject matter and its emphasis on the perspective of the individual filmmaker.¹⁴

Meanwhile in France, pioneering ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch experimented with the counterpart to Direct Cinema, *Cinéma Vérité*. Rather than stressing the non-intervention of the filmmaker in the events being filmed, *Cinéma Vérité* created films around the interaction *between* filmmaker and subjects, using the camera as a means of instigating the action of the film.¹⁵ Rouch saw in the camera the power to provoke atypical behaviour. *Vérité* saw the filmmaker as a participant both behind and in front of the camera. All the devices of fictional cinema, such as sound stages and stylised lighting, were eliminated. The aim was to generate a sense of the spontaneous and informal in its aesthetic by including scenes shot in poor lighting and rapid movement of the (frequently hand-held) camera. What *Cinéma Vérité* and Direct Cinema have in common is the belief that good non-fiction films are defined by their subject matter rather than the subject matter being defined by and made to conform to a preconceived narrative strategy.¹⁶

The rise of the Direct Cinema and *Cinéma Vérité* movements had a definite influence on the way in which ethnographic films were made from the 1960s onwards. Revolutionising both the theory and practice of documentary filmmaking, Direct Cinema and *Cinéma Vérité* offered new

¹³ Nichols, *Ideology and the Image*, pp. 122-23.

¹⁴ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 197.

¹⁵ This very brief reference to *Cinéma Vérité* is hardly a satisfactory expression of the complex and challenging theoretical and practical assertions made by the *Cinéma Vérité* practitioners, but since classic *Vérité* films such as *Chronicle of a Summer* do not have a great deal of relevance for the subject at hand, it must be left at this. For further reading on *Cinéma Vérité* see Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics*, pp. 69-108 and Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, pp. 299-305.

¹⁶ Barsam, *Non-Fiction Film*, p. 300.

and innovative ways of filming that seemed particularly suited to recording the rituals and practices of other cultures, such as the use of lightweight portable synch-sound camera technology. Discreet events might now be filmed as they unfolded, with the filmmaker attempting to depict the natural sounds, structure and duration of the events, also known as 'real time'.¹⁷ Synchronised sound particularly facilitated the ability to depict 'real time'. The ambiguity and complexity of 'real time', along with a synchronous soundtrack, meant that the filmed material could become a catalyst for discussion, rather than being authoritatively explicated by, for example, an omniscient voice-over narrative.¹⁸

French *Cinéma Vérité* had rather less influence on English-speaking ethnographic filmmakers, who tended to shy away from the interventionist tactics of *Cinéma Vérité* practitioners and preferred to adopt the observational mode of American Direct Cinema. The hesitance of these filmmakers to interact with their subjects, according to MacDougall, 'had an almost religious asceticism, distinct from the speculative approach of Rouch and other European [*Cinéma Vérité*] practitioners.'¹⁹

The two pioneers of the observational mode of ethnographic filmmaking were John Marshall and Jean Rouch.²⁰ It was Rouch's experimental ethnographic filmmaking in Africa, where he sought to allow his subjects to speak for themselves and to define what would go into the films about them, that inspired him to turn his camera upon his fellow Parisians, resulting in the *Cinéma Vérité* classic *Chronicle of a Summer*.²¹ In the short films of the !Kung Film Series John Marshall adopted the observational mode of filmmaking, with each film representing particular activities and interactions amongst the Ju/Wasi. Marshall's 'makeshift synchronous-sound filming' in the 1950s was a forerunner of the Direct Cinema practices of filmmakers such as Leacock and Pennebaker, for whom Marshall worked briefly in the early 1960s.²² His pioneering

¹⁷ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 126.

¹⁸ Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 251.

¹⁹ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 127.

²⁰ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 127. Roger Sandall describes John Marshall as 'a man who leads all others in his mastery of the structural integrity of events.' See Roger Sandall, 'Observation and Identity', at <http://www.culturecult.com/film/observation.htm>

²¹ Kenneth W. Harrow, 'Manthia Diarwara's *Rouch in Reverse*: An Interstitial Perspective', *Critical Arts*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1999), p. 40.

²² MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 127.

observational filmmaking amongst the Ju/Wasi thus favoured the 'fly-on-the-wall' approach that would become the hallmark of Direct Cinema over Rouch's interventionist *Cinéma Vérité* strategies.

Early examples of observational ethnographic films include John Marshall's *An Argument about a Marriage* (1969) and Timothy Asch's *The Feast* (1970).²³ In both films, the camera acts as a witness to events as they unfold. The filmmaker does not intervene, although in *An Argument about a Marriage* he is referred to indirectly.²⁴ In this film, Marshall recorded a fight that took place amongst the Ju/Wasi after a man, while working on a white farm, had made a woman pregnant and 'married' her, despite the fact that she had a husband back in Nyae Nyae. The farmers had been unwilling to let the Ju/Wasi workers return home and the Marshall family intervened and negotiated their release. However, on their return to Nyae Nyae, the marital status of the woman (Baou) became a source of conflict. In *An Argument about a Marriage*, as Marshall films the argument one of the combatants shouts 'But /Ui protected the women, and if it weren't for old Marshall...' at which point the irate father of Baou shouts 'Screw old Marshall!' The camera moves through the actions, as a roving eye, capturing facial expression, exclamations and physical interactions between the combatants. The style of filmmaking in *An Argument about a Marriage* was in keeping with the later aims of Direct Cinema, where the filmmaker aspired to invisibility and the status of an uninvolved bystander. Marshall's camera did not instigate the fighting, but rather utilised the events occurring in front of it as a means of expressing the cause of the conflict.²⁵

John Marshall's pioneering work in observational ethnographic film has great significance for the film currently under analysis, *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980). When Marshall was experimenting with his sequence filmmaking in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s, he did not call it Direct Cinema. However, on his return to the United States he worked with Leacock and Pennebaker

²³ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 126.

²⁴ Heider also picks up on this reflexive element of the film, whereby the filmmaker is alluded to on-screen. See Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 61.

²⁵ See Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 254-55 for these tenets of Direct Cinema.

at Drew Associates, where he witnessed the birth of the movement as discussed in the previous chapter.²⁶

Marshall saw Direct Cinema as a means of resisting 'the imposition of mythic projections' on to people, since 'the purpose of CV [sic²⁷] is to let the people being filmed express and explain themselves through their own words and actions. When shooting CV you do not tell people what to do or say; you try to film the activities of your subjects as thoroughly as you can whilst interfering with them as little as possible.'²⁸

Marshall might have been attempting to resist the 'imposition of mythic projections' but he was also manipulating his subject matter to substantiate an argument. For example, as will be shown, the deliberate framing and juxtapositioning of scenes are used in *N!ai* as analytical strategies. This was a common practice among Direct Cinema practitioners.

7.1.2 CHANGES IN NYAE NYAE BETWEEN THE 1950s AND THE 1970s

In the face of mounting international pressure in the 1950s and 1960s that questioned the claim of South Africa to South West Africa, the former country sought to strengthen its grip on the border regions of the latter and to establish colonial infrastructure where none had existed before. This affected the !Kung (Ju/Wasi) Bushmen of Nyae Nyae directly for the first time. South Africa built a series of government stations in northern South West Africa between 1960-1965 and the !Kung of Nyae Nyae were summoned to settle at a station called Tshumkwe with the promise of free rations and medical care.²⁹ On 26 September 1959, Claude McIntyre was appointed Bushmen Affairs Commissioner for South West Africa.³⁰ McIntyre was a senior

²⁶ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 72; Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 254.

²⁷ It is important to note that Marshall consistently refers to his filmmaking style as *Cinéma Vérité* or CV, although the style he is referring to is in fact Direct Cinema and *not* the very different French *Cinéma Vérité*. This is probably the result of a tendency that developed to label American Direct Cinema incorrectly as *Cinéma Vérité* even though this conflated two very different forms (Barnouw, *Documentary*, p. 254).

²⁸ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 72-3.

²⁹ Richard Lee and Susan Hurlich, 'From Foragers to Fighters: South African's Militarisation of the Namibian San', in Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 329-31.

³⁰ There are various accounts of McIntyre's arrival at Tshumkwe. This account is based on the following sources: T.A. Volkman, 'The San in Transition. Vol. 1: A Guide to *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*',

official from the Department of Native Affairs and had a long-standing interest in the Bushmen, having escorted the original Marshall expedition to Nyae Nyae in 1951.³¹ McIntyre arrived in Tshumkwe in December of 1959. The site had been chosen as a settlement because of its centrality in relation to other settlements. A Ju/Wasi band was already living at Tshumkwe at the time of McIntyre's arrival. He began to visit groups in the area to encourage them to join him at Tshumkwe, where he hoped to help them begin a new life based on pastoralism and gardening.

In 1980 Ju/Wasi leader ≠Toma told Marshall:

When McIntyre first came, he found us at Gura in the winter. He talked to us strongly and said he was going to make a settlement at Tshumkwe and we should come and help him. He said he was going to teach us new things like gardening and working for money and raising goats, and teach us how to live in one place. He said our children would go to school and some day he would bring us cattle. He left us with our thoughts. At first we didn't want to go to Tshumkwe, but we talked about it and decided it was a better life for us and we should learn to live like other people. So we came to Tshumkwe in the hot season before the rains.³²

McIntyre's arrival thus marked a key turning point in the history of the Nyae Nyae region, where Marshall had filmed *The Hunters* in the 1950s. McIntyre had recognised that the increase in the Bushman population by the late 1950s meant that the hunting-and-gathering lifestyle was no longer a viable option and that the Bushmen should be instructed in sedentary agricultural production.³³ He initiated various projects at Tshumkwe, including the raising of poultry, the planting of gardens, the introduction of goats and the making of handicrafts for dealers in Windhoek. Some projects failed, or the Bushmen lost interest in them. McIntyre was further hampered in his efforts by a lack of interest and support from the administration in Windhoek.³⁴

McIntyre's wife, Beryl, opened the first clinic at Tshumkwe in 1961. Thereafter, the McIntyres were joined by a Dutch Reformed Church missionary, Ds. Weich, who set up a mission at Tshumkwe and was also responsible for setting up the first school and trade store. Claude

Occasional paper No. 9, Cultural Survival and DER (Cambridge: Cultural Survival, 1982), pp. 7-9; Robert J. Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', Occasional Paper 13, Cultural Survival Inc (Cambridge: Cultural Survival, 1984), pp. 7-8; Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 75-9; Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', pp. 98-115. Lee and Hurlich's more cynical description of the attempts to lure the various bands to Tshumkwe is contradicted by all of these accounts.

³¹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 28.

³² Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 76; see also Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 69.

³³ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 7.

³⁴ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 7.

McIntyre retired in 1969. The South African government was now actively applying Apartheid policy in South West Africa. In 1970, at the recommendation of the Odendaal Commission, Bushmanland was established as the 'homeland' for people classified as Bushmen.³⁵ With this precise demarcation of land, the Ju/Wasi lost 70% of Nyae Nyae and all but one of their permanent waterholes.³⁶ After McIntyre retired, the government struggled to find officials to replace him. The job of Bushman Affairs Commissioner was regarded as a backwater job unsuitable for an ambitious civil servant, and subsequently the post seldom was filled for longer than two years by the same bureaucrat.³⁷ Hence, very little development was initiated by McIntyre's successors. The school and mission were not very successful. Truancy was high and very few conversions to Christianity occurred at Tshumkwe. The establishment of a store in Tshumkwe was altogether more successful, with residents flocking to spend cash on sugar, eggs, mielie-meal and other consumer goods.³⁸

With the establishment of Bushmanland and the resultant loss of territory for hunting-and-gathering, more and more !Kung became dependent on government handouts. Furthermore, money began to pour into Bushmanland. The Windhoek administration had purchased the Dutch Reformed mission school at Tshumkwe, which was henceforth administered by the Department of Native Education. The Health Department took over the clinic and expanded it. The administrator's office and other administrative buildings were completed by 1970. The growing number of black people employed by the administration at Tshumkwe were housed in a separate location, according to Apartheid law.³⁹

The most significant developments that help explain the conditions at Tshumkwe at the time of the filming of *Nlai* were the sudden increase in employment of Bushmen by the administration as

³⁵ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 8.

³⁶ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 2.

³⁷ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 8.

³⁸ Volkman, 'Guide To *Nlai*', p. 9. See also 'Tshumkwe Store Survey' in Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi?', p. 117.

³⁹ Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi?', pp. 98, 105 and Volkman, 'Guide to *Nlai*', p. 9.

menial labourers and the opening of a store at Tshumkwe by a Kavango entrepreneur with backing from the Bantu Development Corporation.⁴⁰

As Marshall and Ritchie have argued, the sudden injection of wage earnings into the community meant that there quickly developed a strong division between those with money and those who were destitute.⁴¹ The previously egalitarian nature of Ju/Wasi society was disrupted as jealous relatives descended on those who had access to money and material goods. Volkman writes that

The growth of a cash economy at Tshumkwe, however small in scale, stimulated inequalities that revealed a darker side of !Kung sharing and reciprocity. Money, unlike fresh meat, need not be divided. Neither perishable nor visible, money is easily stored, hidden, hoarded. Although like gathered plant foods money may be distributed informally to relatives, unlike roots and tubers it does not grow abundantly in the bush, nor is it easily accessible to all.⁴²

Thus, starting in the early 1950s with the arrival of the Marshalls in Nyae Nyae, the various bands of !Kung Bushmen in South West Africa experienced wrenching changes to their traditional lifestyles. As has been discussed in previous chapters, this is not to say that the Ju/Wasi who were filmed by Marshall in the fifties had never had contact with the outside world, nor that they lived in an idyllic Eden outside of history before the 1950s. However, the rapid changes in Nyae Nyae from 1959 onwards were unlike anything that had occurred before. As the Apartheid state clamped down on South West Africa and applied the Group Areas Act to even the previously ignored borderland regions such as Nyae Nyae, the physical territory of the Ju/Wasi radically diminished. The move to government settlements willingly undertaken by ≠Toma and his band in the hope of a better life and in readiness to accept the inevitability of change resulted in altogether new pressures on traditional social relations within and amongst bands. This in turn created social upheaval and a disturbance of traditional values and practices at places like Tshumkwe, despite the best intentions of officials such as McIntyre.

Another significant factor that played a part in the social problems at Tshumkwe was the arrival of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the area in the early 1970s, where they established bases from which to carry out their war against the South West African People's

⁴⁰ Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 65.

⁴¹ Volkman, 'Guide to *N!at*', pp. 11-12; Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where Are The Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', pp. 64-6, 114-16; Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 79-82.

⁴² Volkman, 'Guide to *N!at*', p. 11.

Organisation (SWAPO). Fifty thousand South African troops were moved into northern Namibia and a massive base and airfield were built at Grootfontein, a town 145 miles west of Tshumkwe. !Kung throughout northern Namibia were recruited as trackers for the SADF, who regarded them among the best trackers in the world.⁴³ After 1974, !Kung soldiers were recruited directly into the SADF. Gordon has argued that the Bushmen were essentially 'prisoners of their own reputation', quoting a white soldier who said 'with the Bushmen along, our chances of dying are very slight. They have incredible tenacity, patience, and endurance. They've taught me to respect another race'.⁴⁴

The impact of the SADF presence in northern Namibia was enormous. Lee wrote in 1982 that 'in relative terms, this is the highest rate of military service of any ethnic group in the world, much higher, for example, than that of the Gurkhas of Nepal or the Montagnards of Vietnam'.⁴⁵ The army paid wages far in excess of any administrative jobs available to the residents at Tshumkwe and this further heightened the divisions between the young soldiers with money and the rest of the community, who continued to live in abject poverty. When John Marshall arrived at Tshumkwe to shoot *N!ai*, he began to argue vociferously against the growing dependency upon the SADF in Bushmanland, as it generated a cash economy entirely reliant on its ongoing presence in Namibia. Furthermore, in 1982 Volkman expressed a further concern:

Although the army captain in the film [*N!ai*] announces that he expects to remain in Bushmanland indefinitely, clearly a black-ruled Namibia may become a reality in the not-too-distant future. It is difficult to assess the likelihood of retribution against the San counterinsurgents should army withdrawal and an independent Namibia be realised.⁴⁶

The South African Defence Force proudly advertised their use of Bushmen soldiers, reporting to the South African press that they were civilising the Bushmen and providing them with a humane opportunity to enter modernity. Gordon quotes an SADF officer who suggested that hate was the reason for the Bushmen joining the army: 'A Bushman's hate for SWAPO will give you the shivers... they hate SWAPO because they enslaved them and took their daughters for

⁴³ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 19.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 19.

⁴⁵ Richard Lee, 'SWAPO: Best Hope of the San', *ARC Newsletter*, no. 6.1 (Boston 1982), p. 7.

⁴⁶ Volkman, 'Guide to *N!ai*', p. 16.

prostitutes'.⁴⁷ In *N!ai*, this notion is called into question, as ≠Toma (seen before in *The Hunters* and *Bushmen of the Kalahari*) is filmed saying, 'SWAPO won't kill us. We're good with SWAPO... We'd share the pot with SWAPO.' A SWAPO representative to the United Nations had his own version to tell of the militarization of Bushmen in Bushmanland, stating in 1977 that:

The Bushmen being traditionally hunters are being used by South Africans as trackers. In the process they become victims of land-mines and guerrilla ambushes... these ancient people... are lured with tobacco, dagga (marijuana), and meat to do the dirty job... since they always walk in front of patrolling soldiers in most cases they receive much of the punishment intended for racist soldiers. Their population being small, our concern is that they might be exterminated.⁴⁸

Into this complex situation in Bushmanland in 1978 came John Marshall, returning to Namibia for the first time in 20 years. None of the changes and upheaval in the lives of Bushmen living in Nyae Nyae since 1959 had been committed to film.⁴⁹

7.2 N!AI: THE STORY OF A !KUNG WOMAN: A SYNOPSIS

The later analysis in this chapter involves the detailed explanation of whole sequences from the film. Thus, to avoid repetition, the following synopsis of the film is truncated and generalised. *The Story of a !Kung Woman* begins in Tshumkwe, the administrative capital of Bushmanland, in 1978 where people are queuing for their government food rations. Subtitles explain that the South African government has established a reservation (Bushmanland) on the South West Africa/Botswana border which restricts eight hundred !Kung to an area half the size of their original territory. It is stated that the reservation lacks sufficient food and water for the !Kung to continue their hunter-gathering lifestyle and the introductory subtitles end by explaining that the filming for the programme has taken place over twenty seven years, beginning in 1951 'when the !Kung were an independent people'. An introduction to life at Tshumke is explained through the first person narration of N!ai herself, who speaks to the camera, and whose words are interpreted into English through written subtitles that appear on the screen. After the introduction, the film cuts to a long recollection narrated by N!ai of life in Tshumkwe 'before the white people came.'

⁴⁷ Gordon, 'What Future for the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 20.

⁴⁸ Lee and Hurlich, 'From Foragers to Fighters', p. 340.

⁴⁹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 75.

These recollections are illustrated with sequences from Marshall's KFS. N!ai speaks of her past with sadness and joy, recalling the difficult times, and the times when she was happy and content. She remembers the course of her marriage to her husband /Gunda, and various trials and tribulations faced by herself and other women in her band, as well some of the rituals and traditions of the her people. She and /Gunda laugh together as they recall the problems of their marriage. N!ai speaks of childbirth. She speaks about her family. She recalls the arrival of the Marshall's in the 1950s, and how her beauty singled her out for their attention.

The film then cuts suddenly and rather dramatically from a long shot of N!ai's band in the late 1950s sitting outside their shelters to a low-angle shot of a white male administrator sitting behind a large desk with his wife next to him. A subtitle appears on the screen: 'Tshumkwe 1978.' John Marshall's voiceover explains: 'In 1978 in Tshumkwe, there were eight hundred !Kung living in twenty-five square miles.' What follows is a sustained exposition of the problems being encountered by the Bushmen living at the government settlement. These include problems with health, lack of food, prohibitions on hunting, alcoholism and violence in the community, the racist attitudes of the white officials who run Tshumkwe and the lack of adequate education for the children. The film also explores the role of the SADF in the lives of the people at Tshumkwe, including the attitudes of white South African soldiers and officers to the Bushmen and the complex responses of some of the Bushmen to the prevalence of Bushmen joining up to fight SWAPO. There is also a sequence which shows tourists watching a Bushmen 'trance dance' and an extended sequence behind the scenes of the filming of the feature film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) which shows the racist and patronising attitudes of the South African filmmakers. The film ends with an emotional scene in which one of N!ai's uncle's, who had been one of the eponymous hunters in Marshall's earlier film, joins the army, promising to return to his family soon and bring rations back to them. The final words belong to N!ai, who sits in front of her house and sings sadly, 'Now people mock me and I cry. My people abuse me. The white people scorn me. Death mocks me. Death dances with me. Don't look at my face. Don't look at my face.' She stops; clear her throat and smiles sadly at the camera. The film ends.

7.3 NIAIAS EVIDENCE I:

7.3.1 READING THE FILM FOR EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF ITS MAKER AND THE PEOPLE AND PERIOD IN WHICH IT WAS PRODUCED

John Marshall's reputation as a pioneering ethnographic filmmaker rested more upon his later experimentation with the KFS than with *The Hunters*. His pioneering work in applying the principles of Direct Cinema to ethnographic filmmaking is perhaps his greatest contribution to the field. *Nlai* is an important example of this, and one that reflects many of the new ideas that emerged from the 1960s onwards about the nature and potential of ethnographic filmmaking. Ideas began to change with the re-evaluation of anthropology as a discipline that occurred in the sixties and seventies. Anthropology experienced a 'crisis in representation' with the end of the colonial era and the growing assertion of self-determination by native peoples. Along with the process of decolonisation came the radical revisionism of the 1960s onwards, that replaced positivist models of knowledge production, such as the Marshall family's scholarship on the Bushmen in the 1950s, with more 'interpretative and politically self conscious motives.'⁵⁰ With these changes in approach to knowledge production came a re-conceptualisation of 'the native voice' as one that should *inform* the process of anthropological interpretation through direct dialogue.⁵¹

Ethnographic filmmakers, less constricted by academia than scholars producing written anthropology, were already finding solutions to these problems of representation as early as the 1950s, as was evident in the pioneering work of John Marshall's KFS and Jean Rouch's African filmmaking such as *Les Maitres Fous* (1954) and *Jaguar* (1955).⁵² In *Le Maitres Fous*, for example, Rouch filmed a possession ritual carried out by workers from Accra (then the capital of the Gold Coast British colony). In the intensive and information-rich narrative, Rouch attempts not only to explain the meaning of the possession cult, but also to provide a rationale for it, suggesting

⁵⁰ Faye Ginsberg, 'Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (February 1991), p. 95.

⁵¹ Ginsberg, 'Indigenous Media,' p. 95.

⁵² Ginsberg, 'Indigenous Media,' p. 95.

that the cult re-enacts rituals of the British colonial authorities as a means for the men to re-empower themselves so that they may 'sanely resubmit to colonial servitude during the week.'⁵³ Marshall, as we have seen, used the KFS to record discrete events and rituals in the life of Ju/Wasi and attempted to overcome problems of representation through, for example, direct translation of people's words through subtitles, reflexive strategies which emphasised the presence of the filmmaker or experimenting with the structure of the film as was done in *N/um Tchai* (1966), discussed in the previous chapter. By 1975, influential ethnographic filmmakers such as David MacDougall were articulating in academic articles the need for more participatory methods and styles of representation.⁵⁴

An example of these 'participatory methods' or 'dialogical approaches' to ethnographic filmmaking was Sol Worth and John Adair's 1960s experiments which put filmmaking technology into the hands of the Navajo Indians. Thus Navajo were taught to use the technology, but were not taught western conventions of production and editing. The hope was that the films that the Navajo would create would reflect their world view through the structuring of their films. The results of the project were discussed in the book *Through Navajo Eyes*.⁵⁵

This very brief discussion of the changing ideas in ethnographic film between the 1960s and 1980s aims to show that from the 1960s onwards there was a dramatic shift away from ethnographic films structured along the lines of *The Hunters* towards a far more reflexive, self-conscious engagement with the subjects of ethnographic film. John Marshall was an important innovator in the field of ethnographic film, and there is evidence of these changing ideas in the structure of *N!ai*. This is particularly so in relation to the film's foregrounding of N!ai as a speaking subject. This occurs in two ways: her words are translated directly into English subtitles when she addresses the camera, and she is the main narrator of the film, alongside John Marshall. When N!ai is narrating, her words are spoken by a famous singer, Letta Mbulu.

⁵³ Heider, *Ethnographic Film*, p. 40.

⁵⁴ Ginsberg, 'Indigenous Media,' p. 95. See also David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp.125-49.

⁵⁵ John Adair and Sol Worth, *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977).

Furthermore, a recurrent element of the narrative is a chant which N!ai composes as she sits in front of her home at Tshumkwe. It is a prolonged and poetic lament, as the excerpt below shows:

Death is ringing me,
death is stealing from me.
Death is dancing me ragged...
Death, yes, death is stealing from me. Will death steal me too?

The film ends with N!ai's lament – she sings sadly to the camera:

My people abuse me.
The white people scorn me.
Death mocks me.
Death dances with me.
Don't look at my face.
Don't look at my face.

Thus, for most of the film it is N!ai's words that are foregrounded – this was dramatically different to previous documentary films on the Bushmen. Furthermore, N!ai is given the space in the film to analyse her circumstances and to speak of her own self-identification, a point which will be discussed at length in the section of this chapter on film as historiography. *N!ai* presents evidence of the dramatic changes that had taken place in the field of ethnographic filmmaking by the 1980s. These changes in turn reflect larger shifts in the discourses of anthropology and ethnography in the West. In turn these shifts in anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking also reflect and feed into debates about the changing status of indigenous people in world politics from the 1970s onwards. The problems typified in *N!ai* were becoming part of an intensified international debate aimed at achieving the recognition of the rights of indigenous minorities in countries around the world.⁵⁶ Fleras and Elliot might have been referencing the story of *N!ai* directly when they wrote of the problems facing indigenous communities worldwide:

The grinding physical poverty that is often part and parcel of aboriginal status is sufficient cause for concern. No less worrisome are dislocations in the social sphere of family, kinship, and group relations. Aboriginal peoples confront psychological disorientation and spiritual destruction as a result of sustained assimilation pressures that have in some cases involved relocation. Loss of culture and control over life have in some instances led to chronic problems over personal identity, group integrity, and social solidarity.⁵⁷

These problems are explored at length throughout the course of *N!ai*, as will be seen in further consideration of the film as evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and period that

⁵⁶ Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism*, pp. 3, 44-7.

⁵⁷ Fleras and Elliot, *The Nations Within*, p. 5.

produced it, and the discussion which follows that – on the film as evidence about the conditions of the Bushmen in the 1970s.

As we have seen, John Marshall saw Direct Cinema as a means of limiting the ‘imposition of mythic projections’ on the subject matter of a film. *N!ai*, and particularly the second half of the film, seems to be a chaotic, sometimes confusing sequence of events that move from one scene to another, with the connection between the scenes not always very apparent. Much of the second half of the film unfolds without any overt commentary or narration. For example, straight after the Bushmen commissioner is seen paying the diffident Bushmen at Tshumkwe, the film cuts to a scene in which N!ai comes out of her hut, and an argument breaks out between her and other Tshumkwe residents. The cause of the fight is food. N!ai is accused of hoarding food, which she denies. This scene is followed by a series of juxtapositions between N!ai explaining how they are all hungry at Tshumkwe, and yet are not allowed to hunt for food; her cousin Tsamko hunting on horseback and defiantly explaining that he has to hunt to feed his people; and a white game warden explaining that the Bushmen are breaking the law and will be punished for this. This is followed by scene at the clinic, where the white doctor misdiagnoses a sick baby, juxtaposed with a scene in which N!ai’s husband /Gunda tries to heal the child through trance. The child dies despite all attempts to heal her. Next SADF soldiers try to recruit the men at Tshumkwe for the army, after which the film cuts to scenes on the set of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. Later on there is a ten-minute sequence showing a desperate, drunken fight between the residents of Tshumkwe.

This is Marshall working as an observational filmmaker – following the actions around with his camera, capturing the action as it unfolds. Marshall’s own emotional involvement is evident towards the end of the film when he is heard off camera urgently asking a SADF soldier how long the men from Tshumkwe will sign up for the army. The bored soldier looks away from Marshall’s shaking camera and shrugs, saying that he doesn’t know, but probably forever. It is a moment where Marshall’s emotion overcomes his professed status as a ‘fly on the wall’ – and yet the entire film reveals evidence of Marshall’s concerns and his deep antipathy to the prevailing attitudes and conditions at Tshumkwe. It is necessary, then, to recognise that the ideas and

attitudes revealed in the film are filtered through Marshall's interpretative power as the filmmaker. Despite his professed desire to utilise CV in abjuring mythic projections, he *does* project onto the world of the film. One way in which Marshall's own concerns inflect the film is in the cumulative impression that the film gives of the white people in the film being racist, thoughtless or sinister. In emphasising *Nlai* as a 'view from the ground', Marshall never names the particular officials who are filmed, they are only ever referred to as 'the Bushmen Commissioner' or 'the Game Warden' or 'The Doctor'. This might be read as a comment on previous films on the Bushmen that similarly fail to name the Bushmen individuals. Or it could be read as Marshall's attempt to show these officials from the Bushmen's perspective: as omnipotent but anonymous. A constant process of framing goes on throughout the film – the white people speak about the Bushmen and often reveal prejudice or a lack of insight into the problems facing them and Marshall frames them in such a way as to emphasise this prejudice, thus imposing an interpretation on the action. Gordon comments on the subtlety of Marshall's manipulation of symbols in the film and the 'symbolic nuances' of the film in its 'study of the colonisers, their stereotypes and actions.'⁵⁸

For example, in the first scene at Tshumkwe in the second half of the film, the white Bushman Commissioner expresses his disapproval of the Bushmen's general idleness, whilst his petite wife sits next to him nodding in agreement. He says to the camera that

These Bushmen don't work. They loaf around all the time. If they should be paid for the work they actually perform, they won't draw R25 a month

His wife agrees with him. He continues:

And then we have a crowd around here, cleaning up all the time, you know, the yard and garden and the office which is in the process of being completed now.

However, preceding this interview, Marshall has filmed the Bushmen Commissioner sitting behind his desk from a low angle shot, which makes the desk look very vast. A Ju/Wasi man steps up to the desk to receive his pay, the Commissioner gives it to him unsmilingly and the man bows deferentially. The impression created by exaggerating the size of the desk is of the intimidating nature of the Bushmen commissioner and the attributes of his official power, such

⁵⁸ Robert Gordon, 'Review of *Nlai: The Story of a Kung Woman*', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 3, no. 83 (1981), p. 741.

as the paying of wages and setting of tasks. When the interview follows, the man's dismissive, unsympathetic attitude emerges in his discourse.

Another example of Marshall's discursive framing occurs in the scene in which N!ai goes to the clinic at Tshumkwe to be examined by the white doctor. The doctor is asked to look at a sick infant, but he dismisses the illness, saying that it is due to the 'problem' of the Bushmen living 'in those little grass huts and they light their fires in the huts'. Their coughing is 'normal' to them, he argues, and as such concludes that there is 'no obvious evidence of infection in the child's chest.'

In the following scene, /Gunda tries to heal the same baby through trance, but the child dies regardless. 'A terrible illness!' /Gunda cries at one point. However, the death of the baby is not the only means by which the doctor is indicted. His address to the camera reveals a condescending attitude towards the Bushmen. Furthermore, throughout this address, his face is skew in the frame. The strange framing is notable; it suffuses the scene with a sinister element. David MacDougall relates a similar example of the psychiatrist in the Direct Cinema film *Titicut Follies*. Directed by Fred Wiseman and shot by John Marshall, *Follies* was a highly critical analysis of a Massachusetts psychiatric institute for mentally ill convicts. MacDougall writes that

In *Titicut Follies* there is an emblematic image. It is the close-up of the blinking, cigarette smoking doctor as he first appears conducting a psychiatric interview. The shot proves that the man existed. But this is also a certain *kind of man, a character created not by a script but by framing and editing*, [own italics] and as recognisable as any of the conventional figures of the [cinema]... he has been cast for a part. It is the part of the mad doctor – half comic, half villainous, usually foreign, often Germanic, engaged in necrophilic or apocalyptic activities.⁵⁹

MacDougall argues that the framing of the doctor suggests 'that characters drawn from life can gravitate – in the audience's view, as much as in the filmmaker's – toward certain predetermined positions in a dramatic and moral field.'⁶⁰ In *N!ai* these strategies are evident in the 'framing' of the doctor and the Bushmen administrator.

However, even taking into account this process of 'framing' on the part of the filmmaker, the observational style of *N!ai* allows for people to speak at length to the camera, or the camera runs as people go about their business – in the process revealing the various concerns and attitudes of

⁵⁹ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 42.

⁶⁰ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 42.

people operating in the context of Bushmanland in the 1970s. An example is the sequence in *N!ai* filmed on the set of a film being made by white South African filmmakers in Nyae Nyae at the time.⁶¹ On the set N!ai speaks to Marshall's camera about the jealousy directed at her because, as she is beautiful, 'these South Africans' pay her in exchange for taking her picture. *N!ai* includes a scene in which N!xau (the lead Bushmen actor of the South African production) is rehearsing a homecoming scene for the film. A crew member explains what the director wants from N!xau. His submissive answer, 'Ja, meneer' [yes, sir], is accompanied by a deferential bow to a white man who wears a dusk mask over his face. This sequence emphasises the patronising, paternalistic attitudes of the white filmmakers and the submissive attitudes of the Bushmen actors.

A white official who receives considerable attention in *N!ai* is the Game Warden for Tshumkwe who explains the rationale behind hunting laws. He tells Marshall that the Bushmen cannot hunt illegally, since this would lead to the extinction of animals in the Kalahari. He says:

A while ago I drove to Xao/wa to see the giraffes. I could see them perfectly and take pictures. They are very rare and beautiful. That was before the horse. Today I saw three. I saw many vultures. I picked up many bones. And I know if the Bushmen go on like this, you'll see no more giraffes in the land.

His explanation is juxtaposed with Tsamko, #Toma's son, explaining that 'this land is my garden. I harvest my meat to fill our bellies. We are hungry people with no other garden.' The ideas about conservation expressed by the Game Warden are in keeping with a prevalent discourse on African environmentalism that had gained influence since the 1960s. As Mitman explains:

In eating the fruits of Western civilisation and freedom, Africans themselves were cast out of this garden. Indigenous tribes allegedly lacked the enlightened appreciation of nature found in developed nations... their voice in the management of wildlife was silenced, just as their presence in shaping the natural landscape of Africa was effaced...scientific testimony fostered this representation within popular culture, as ecologists increasingly frequented Africa to conduct ecological reconnaissance missions to offer advice on game management and land-use planning.⁶²

Furthermore, by the mid-1980s the South West African government was proposing that the eastern half of Bushmanland be made a game park and the residents of Nyae Nyae be moved to

⁶¹ In fact, this film was none other than *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) directed by Jamie Uys, which Marshall, whilst filming *N!ai* in the late 1970s, could not have known would go on to enjoy such enormous international success in 1980. For the sake of clarity of argumentation, this chapter will not investigate *Gods* at all, since the film will be more closely considered in the next chapter.

⁶² Mitman, *Reel Nature*, p. 191.

western Bushmanland, an 'arid, poorly-watered, and unpopulated wasteland.'⁶³ This move would remove the Nyae Nyae !Kung from their ancestral lands and put paid to any chance of halting the development of a cattle economy. The conflict between Bushmen hunting rights and conservation in South West Africa and Botswana would become highly politicised throughout 1980s, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Furthermore, in *N!ai* there is further evidence of this dissolution of indigenous culture under intense pressure from external forces which do not understand Bushmen culture, but which profit from it. There is a short but revealing example of this in *N!ai*: the game warden says that the budget for Tshumkwe allows for recreation for the Bushmen:

Then we have recreation, that's er, special treats like dances and things given to the Bushmen, er, R1000. That's for, er, you can say its kind of human relations between us and the Bushmen.

To refer to an important and sacred part of Bushmen culture as 'special treats' is patronising. However, this scene is followed by one of the 'special treats' being viewed by tourists taking photographs, as *N!ai* helps /Gunda in trance. The Bushmen's 'special treats' are clearly more than just 'human relations' between the administration and the Bushmen – they also constitute a tourist attraction for paying visitors.

Another white person interviewed at length is the SADF officer. His apparently caring attitude towards the Bushmen is reflective of the discourse which the SADF was developing around the militarization of the Bushmen during the SWAPO-South African conflict. The captain explains to Marshall that his task is to 'train a few of these Bushmen people in gardening, and eh, eh farming with sheep and cattle' and that 'younger' Bushmen are accepted into the permanent SADF force. He goes on to say that 'the Bushmen are used to the veld' and are good at 'tracking' and 'survival,' even better than 'most of our whites' who come from cities. He ends by stressing that the Bushmen look up to the whites as their superiors.

The captain's words are almost identical to those published in a propagandistic newspaper article on the SADF's humanitarian intervention in the lives of the Bushmen. The article, published in 1977, framed the militarization of the Bushmen as a civilising process that was bringing them

⁶³ Richard Lee, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy, but the State Has a Plan: Government Policies towards the San in Namibia', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1986), p. 96.

into the modern world, to their very great benefit. The article opens with the line ‘deep in the dense Caprivi bush a colony of Bushmen are being taught a new culture and a new way of life by the White man’.⁶⁴

Importantly, this rationale for the militarization of the Bushmen was based on an idea that the Bushmen had no culture at all: As Commandant P. Hall of the SADF argued in the *Volksblad* in 1980, the ‘San has no culture to destroy...’:

I have been accused that I am interfering with noble tribal members, but there is nothing noble about people who are riddled with sickness. The Bushman in his natural state had no noticeable (*behoorlike*) tribal system – only a reasonably desperate day to day existence. We are busy changing their lives drastically and we are reacting thereto by attempting to give them skills and values.⁶⁵

Thus, in the SADF discourse on the Bushmen, as reflected in *N!ai*, there was a reversion to much earlier racial ideas about the Bushmen being fundamentally debased and wretched, and in need of rehabilitation. This was reminiscent of the racial discourses of *The Bushmen*. The paternalism evident in both the captain’s words in the film and the larger discourse that justified Bushmen incorporation into the SADF also reflected an element of South African Apartheid ideology ‘where unashamed support for the principle of white supremacy was mitigated by the injunction that the European race must look upon the natives as a sacred trust.’⁶⁶ What the preceding analysis has shown is the degree to which the prejudices and concerns expressed by the white officials in *N!ai* drew on larger discourses about race, conservation and Apartheid ideology that were prevalent at the time of the making of the film.

The image of the Bushmen could be used in so many ideological incarnations: for the SADF they were killers with great skill in tracking and commensurate endurance; for some filmmakers they were peace-loving primitives living in a pristine Eden. This brings us to an important evident subtext of *N!ai*: that of nostalgia for the passing of Bushmen hunting-and-gathering culture. As we have seen, this had been an ongoing pre-occupation of previous filmmaking and scholarship on the Bushmen. At the start of the film *N!ai* explains that ‘before the white people came we did

⁶⁴ See newspaper article (*Windhoek Advertiser*, 19/09/77) quoted by Richard Lee in Lee and Hurlich, ‘From Foragers to Fighters’, pp. 335-36.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Richard Lee, ‘The Gods Must Be Crazy’, p. 94.

⁶⁶ Saul Dubow, ‘Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualisation of ‘Race’, *Journal of African History*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 213, 224.

what our hearts wanted. We lived in different places, far apart, and when our hearts wanted to travel, we travelled'. It becomes easy for a casual viewer of *N!ai* to assume the superiority of the hunter-gathering lifestyle over the despondency and powerlessness shown at Tshumkwe in the 1970s. As Gordon argues, 'one can gaze and contemplate a still photograph, whereas movies encourage not gazing but glancing: shallow, accumulative looks'.⁶⁷ Or, as MacDougall argues,

Most people only see a film once, and so they never actually see it. Viewing a film for the first time is a continuous unfolding that is only complete when one reaches the end. At any point one knows only what has gone before, never what is to come. Thus, throughout the viewing of a film, it remains incomplete; but once it is over, it is gone, to be grasped in its entirety only in memory.⁶⁸

The risk inherent in *N!ai*, then, is that the complexity of analysis and the nuanced depictions in the film may be overlooked in the fleeting experience of a first viewing and that what remains paramount in the mind of the viewer is the dichotomy between the relatively secure and affirmative context of the Ju/Wasi hunter-gatherers in the 1950s and the damaged, chaotic context of Tshumkwe in the 1970s. This dichotomy is emphasised by the juxtaposition of the two, starkly contrasted and labelled in subtitle, 'Tshumkwe: 1958' and 'Tshumkwe: 1978', to prevent confusion. The marking of this boundary serves *N!ai*'s claim that life has changed for the worse since the Bushmen have fallen under the administration of the white government. However, her nostalgia potentially overflows its context and could be read as a more general lament for the hunter-gathering past, mirroring earlier depictions of the Bushmen in documentary film.⁶⁹ In reading *N!ai* for evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and period that produced it, it is possible to discern a certain idealisation of the hunting-and-gathering past – once again the outcome of utilising Marshall's KFS as illustration of this past. Within the context of the film this nostalgia has a clear rationale – the fundamental difference between *N!ai*'s past and *N!ai*'s present is the memory of group autonomy versus the sure knowledge of the

⁶⁷ Gordon, 'Captured on Film', p. 215. Gordon goes on to argue (p. 215) that 'it is glancing and not gazing that has encouraged and shaped the way tourists now look at those they label Bushmen'.

⁶⁸ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 28.

⁶⁹ Wilton Martinez writes that while researching students' assumptions about 'the primitive', he discovered that most students conceptualised 'primitiveness' as 'both an essentialist *presence* – an 'original' and 'basic' form of life characterised by instinct and survival – and a 'lack' or regressive *absence*, signalled by a lack of culture, of development and of intelligence. They see the 'primitive' either as 'simple', 'pure' and 'naïve', thus emphasising 'positive' attitudes associated with the romanticised image of the 'Noble Savage', or as 'wild', 'backward' and 'lacking education, language, morals'. See Martinez, 'Towards a Theory of Ethnographic Film Spectatorship', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, pp. 145-46.

contemporary powerlessness of herself and her people. However, the structuring of the film contributes to this nostalgia – the past is idyllic, in many respects, and N!ai and her friends and family look more dignified in the KFS sequences in the first half of the film than in the second half, when they are dressed in ragged Western clothing and mostly either are fighting with each other or are drunk. We have seen that the film contains evidence of Marshall's emotional response to the events he witnessed in Tshumkwe in the 1970s – the shaking camera, the desperate questions. *N!ai* can be read not only as a lament by N!ai herself for her lost culture and traditions, but also as a lament by John Marshall. Furthermore it is a lament that was being heard around the world in the 1970s, as the plight of indigenous cultures came under greater scrutiny.

7.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE II:

7.4.1 WHAT *N!AI* TELLS US ABOUT BUSHMEN IN THE 1970s

As we have seen, in *N!ai* Marshall acutely *reflects* the larger historical context through the film's various vignettes, including the declaration of the Bushmanland 'homeland', the burgeoning reliance on a cash economy, the prohibitive legislation controlling hunting and gathering, the rise of illness and alcoholism and the influence of the SADF's presence in the region. These were the problems of 'acculturated' Bushmen – indigenous populations plunged suddenly into new modes of living. In *Lost World of Kalahari* and *Bushmen of the Kalahari* there was evidence of such 'acculturated' Bushmen who clearly no longer were practising hunting-and-gathering, even many of whom had never practised hunting-and-gathering, but their presence was not properly explained. In *N!ai* it is 'acculturated' Bushmen and their societal problems that is the exclusive focus of extensive investigation.

This is what the film tells us about a particular group of Bushmen in the late 1970s in Northern Namibia. The first and most obvious problem faced by the residents of Tshumkwe is the social dissolution that constitutes location life. Alcoholism is identified as major symptom of this. A

recurring problem in indigenous communities around the world⁷⁰, it was rampant at Tshumkwe by the time Marshall arrived in 1978, with violence and aggressive fighting accompanying bouts of drinking.⁷¹ A particularly harrowing scene occurs three-quarters of the way through *N!ai*, epitomising the 'eyewitness account' impression which the film gives. In the scene, N!ai's daughter, Hwa//a, is accused by her husband, //Gau, who is in a drunken rage, of being a whore who 'would sleep with her brother'. He hits her. A young man pulls them apart. /Gunda defends his daughter, calling //Gau mad. //Gau storms up, threatening to kill them, shouting that he didn't start the conflict, but that he will finish it. N!ai denies that her daughter is sleeping around, but points out that her husband believes the rumours. She adds 'people are jealous but I fear my husband'. Immediately her aunt, !U, screams at N!ai that no one is jealous of her, and that is she insulting people by saying so. She accuses N!ai and her daughter of being 'on heat'. N!ai, in an aside to the camera, confides that she doesn't know whether or not her daughter is sleeping around. She is filmed approaching her daughter. Someone warns Hwa//a that her mother is coming. Hwa//a runs, crying 'no mother'. N!ai grabs her. Suddenly /Gunda runs up and attacks both N!ai and Hwa//a, crying 'filthy wife, filthy daughter!'.

This harrowing scene identifies two elements of the problems relating to alcohol consumption at Tshumkwe. The first is the aggression and the physical abuse that accompanied bouts of drinking, the second is the despair and impotence experienced by all members of the community. The effects of excessive alcohol consumption are painfully apparent, as are the dismal living conditions that precipitate and exacerbate the problem.⁷²

N!ai highlights another important problem related to life at Tshumkwe: the Ju/Wasi who live there are dependent on work which they neither fully understand, nor fully support. An example

⁷⁰ Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot, *The Nations Within: Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, the United States and New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 5.

⁷¹ Volkman, 'Guide to *N!ai*', pp. 16-17. See also Marshall and Ritchie, 'Where are the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae?', p. 95.

⁷² Cameraman Ross McElwee provides fascinating insight into the filming of this sequence. Filming in fact took place over seven hours and was done by McElwee and Marshall. He describes how 'The !Kung are a very short people, and I had this odd sense of not being there, of being invisible. An angry !Kung rushed in my direction bandying a large stick, seemingly at me, but actually in pursuit of another !Kung who happened to be next to me. But my presence was never actually acknowledged.' The seven hours were edited down to the ten-minute sequence shown in *N!ai*. See Scott MacDonald, 'Southern Exposure: An Interview with Ross McElwee', *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1988), p. 16.

of the latter occurs towards the end of the film. A Ju/Wasi artist, who is working on an ornamental shield to sell to tourists, is approached by two SADF soldiers who attempt to recruit him for the army. When their efforts are unsuccessful they take to mocking him. Their interchange is revealing:

[white soldier]	Those soldiers are Bushmen too. They fight SWAPO. How come you're scared? You think SWAPO will shoot you?
[Ju/Wasi artist]	I really have too much work.
[white soldier]	Just grab a gun and shoot.
[artist]	SWAPO will shoot me.
[white soldier]	You're just chicken. We'll teach you to lie in the grass and he won't see you. When SWAPO walks by you shoot him.
[artist]	I'll just stay home. I'm a cook.
[white soldier]	Ja! Just a cook.

The artist's response reveals an antipathy toward joining the army; an antipathy which crude teasing does not undermine. The artist is not willing to be involved in the war, and he is not convinced of the South African soldiers' argument. On the film set of the feature film which Nlai is acting in, Nlai expresses her frustration at the lack of clarity on what her acting job entails. She says in irritated tones to Marshall's camera that 'I'm supposed to be the wife in the hut. Do they want the hunter with me? They never make sense!'

In both these sequences, Bushmen are recruited on the basis of their 'Bushmanness'. As discussed in the previous section, the SADF publicly emphasised the particular suitability of Bushmen for combat in the bush due to their good tracking skills, and knowledge of the veld. Similarly, for the feature filmmakers, the residents of Tshumkwe (once suitably tidied up) *look* like the Bushmen he needs for his film, although they have to don skins in order to look authentically 'pristine'. What these sequences reveal is that by the 1970s Bushmen in South West Africa had to enact their traditional lifestyles (tracking for the army or acting as pristine Bushmen for filmmakers) as a means of securing a minimal income.⁷³

⁷³ Gordon makes this point when he writes that, for tourists, 'Authentic Bushmen are those who dance exactly as they do in the countless (real and pseudo) documentary films made about them... The national identities of Bushmen have been reduced and simplified into a handy bit of shorthand, a saleable image.' Gordon, 'Captured on Film', pp. 212, 228.

N!ai also reveals evidence of the presence within the community at Tshumkwe of overtly expressed opposition to the external imposition of political and social identity. In chapter six it was shown that *Bushmen of the Kalahari* contains a moment of self-identification of #Toma with his hunting-and-gathering past. Similarly in *N!ai*, because many of the Bushmen people filmed are also given space in which to speak to the camera, we see evidence of their response to, and interpretation of, their material conditions. Thus, despite pressure and even mockery, the Ju/Wasi artist refuses to be signed up for the army. #Toma contradicts the army captain's assertion that the Bushmen are grateful to the SADF for the chances they offer them by stating in matter-of-fact tones he does not support the SADF, and that he would not allow his children to be soldiers, 'the experts at anger.' He goes on to state that in fact they would 'share the pot with SWAPO.'

And *N!ai* laughs off a sermon preached to her and her family at church, where the Christian minister uses the story of the prostitute at the well whom Jesus absolves of her sins (John 4) to explain that any sin can be forgiven if people simply ask for forgiveness. *N!ai* says laughingly that

Now really, those two at the waterhole never even met before. How can a woman go down to the waterhole with a perfect stranger? Calling himself God's son? It would have been very bad. Her husband would have punished her for being alone with such a man! That man was fooling her.

Indeed, it was a noted fact that attempts to convert the residents at Tshumkwe to Christianity enjoyed limited success.⁷⁴ *N!ai* also identifies the problems that *filmmakers* cause in furthering the discord at Tshumkwe. She explains to the camera that 'people are really yelling at me, because of the work I have with you and other white people... people are saying that I have many things and they nothing. They say these South Africans take my picture because they think I am beautiful. That's why I get paid.'

Richard Lee expressed concern in 1986 at the lack of organised political movements amongst the Bushmen of the then South West Africa and Botswana, which was markedly different to the situation at the time in other parts of the world where organisations such as the Australian Outback Movement and the Dene Nation Movement in Canada advocated the rights of local

⁷⁴ Richard Lee, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy', p. 92.

indigenous populations.⁷⁵ Political mobilisation did in fact occur amongst the Ju/Wasi throughout the eighties, and was led at Tshumkwe by people such as Tsamko ≠Toma, ≠Toma's son. Just after the release of *N!ai*, in 1981, the Ju/Wasi Bushmen Development Foundation was started by John Marshall and residents of Tshumkwe with the aim of producing food by developing agriculture.⁷⁶ In *N!ai* there is evidence of the stirring of this political consciousness in a marked undercurrent of opposition to the external imposition of ideas and expectations upon the Ju/Wasi, expressed through humorous mocking or quiet refusal to co-operate, as well as an awareness in people like N!ai and ≠Toma of the degree to which these external forces bred mistrust and anger within the community. The question of self-identity amongst the Bushmen themselves brings us to the next section of this chapter, which discusses *N!ai* as a historiography.

7.4 N!AI AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

N!ai reflects its protagonist's life as it changes over time, from childhood to adulthood. It is N!ai herself who tells this story, though her recollections of childhood are illustrated by images from Marshall's KFS. Thus once again we see Marshall's KFS utilised as source of evidence about the Bushmen past. The view presented by N!ai herself is that life in Tshumkwe is a dreadful, hungry affair. She explains that people fight constantly because they are hungry and jealous of those who have greater access to resources, as she does. We witness these fights at length in the film, as do we witness N!ai's post-mortem analysis of the major battles. She argues that illness and hunger are the reality of life at Tshumkwe, and that in comparison to this her life as a young girl living with her band, hunting-and-gathering in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s was a vastly superior experience. Marshall in turn uses N!ai's oral testimony as a structuring device to mount an argument about how the Ju/Wasi's co-option into a sedentary life at Tshumkwe has been severely mismanaged not just at an administrative level, but at an ideological level, where racist and crude perceptions of who and what the Bushmen are have contributed to inappropriate management of Tshumkwe. Thus, it can be argued that Marshall is using N!ai's story as a means

⁷⁵ Richard Lee, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy', pp. 96-7.

⁷⁶ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 102.

of arguing about history in *N!ai*. Marshall is comparing the past with the present, and presenting, with N!ai's oral testimony and his archival footage of the Ju/Wasi in the 1950s as evidence, a critical account of this change over time.

Utilising Marshall's KFS footage to illustrate N!ai's recollections of the past means the meaning of that past is limited to *what Marshall filmed* but also *how things looked on that film*. Whilst N!ai in *N!ai* remembers back to when her family had enough water and food to eat, and is actually shown eating and drinking with her family, Marshall explains that in the 1950s the !Kung in Nyae Nyae were still independent hunter-gatherers. Furthermore, when N!ai explains how exciting it was when her father hunted for meat, Marshall illustrates this with clips from *The Hunters*. This is an exact example of Marshall's KFS footage constituting a record of 'Bushmen history'. And as was argued in chapter five, *The Hunters* contains romanticised and edited elements of the hunt.

It is argued here that, in *N!ai*, the insertion of Marshall's KFS, which includes a degree of inherent romanticism in their construction, is appropriate because N!ai herself romanticises her hunting-and-gathering past. It is argued here that the nostalgia inherent in *N!ai* is not only Marshall's nostalgia, but also N!ai's nostalgia. *N!ai* as historiography acknowledges this nostalgia, because it reflects something important about the conditions at Tshumkwe in the 1970s – that they were worse than when the Ju/Wasi were hunting-and-gathering. But more than that, the footage from the 1950s reflects something else that N!ai is trying to express in *N!ai*: her own identification with her hunting-and-gathering past. For example she says at the start of the film that

When the white people first came, I was already a young woman with breasts. Before the white people came we did what our hearts wanted. We lived in different places, far apart, and when our hearts wanted to travel, we travelled. We were not poor. We had everything we could carry. No one told us what to do. Now the white people tell us to stay in this place. There are too many people. There is no food to gather. Game is far away and people are dying of tuberculosis. But when I was a little girl we left sickness behind us when we moved.

There is an inevitable risk in such use of 'oral testimony' in *N!ai*. As David MacDougall argues,

The inclusion of indigenous narrative often raises the questions of whether the film is making indigenous statements or merely absorbing a device into its own narrative strategies. Inevitably a method that purports to disperse its authority to its subjects is also capable of using this to reinforce its own.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 154.

MacDougall's criticism is valid, but this does not necessarily discount the argument about history present in *N!ai*. It has already been acknowledged that to some degree the nostalgia in *N!ai* is Marshall's own nostalgia for the hunting-and-gathering past. However, all historiography that utilises oral testimony as a source runs a similar risk. As John Tosh argues,

It is naïve to suppose that [oral] testimony represents a pure distillation of past experience, for in an interview each party is affected by the other. It is the historian who selects the informant and indicates the area of interest...whatever the evidence it rests on, the notion of a direct encounter with the past is an illusion, but perhaps nowhere more than in the case of testimony from hindsight. The 'voice of the past' is inescapably the voice of the present too.⁷⁸

In reflecting this romanticising of the past in its protagonist's testimony, *N!ai* seems to be arguing that hunting-and-gathering culture remains an important part of the way the Ju/Wasi see themselves and relate to the rest of the world even in the 1970s. It remains an important *memory* for N!ai, and informs her discontent with the conditions at Tshumke. It also gives her a sense of identity in the face of ideological impositions such as evangelical Christianity – we see how N!ai mocks the sermon of the pastor and reinterprets the story of the woman at the well according to her own understanding of correct behaviour, using the word 'waterhole' instead of 'well' – once again a reference to her hunting-and-gathering past. It thus is argued here that *N!ai* constitutes a historiography that presents N!ai's romanticised past as a means of emphasising the problems of the present. It is also suggested that, whilst Marshall arguably emphasises N!ai's nostalgia for her hunting-and-gathering past because of his *own* nostalgia about that past, there is also a degree to which N!ai's recollections constitute another example of Bushmen self-identification with hunting-and-gathering, as we saw occur with ≠Toma in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.

The history of Bushmen before the 1950s (before N!ai's childhood) is represented by Marshall as constituting twenty thousand years of hunting-and-gathering. Thus, in *N!ai* history as 'change-over-time' is once again reserved for the recent past of the Bushmen. As a historiography of the Bushmen, then, *N!ai* both reconstitutes old myths about the Bushmen past, whilst at the same time reflecting how these 'myths' were becoming important as a form of self-identity at Tshumkwe in the late 1970s.

⁷⁸ Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 213.

7.5 N!AI AS A FILM IN HISTORY

It has been argued in the introduction to this chapter that *N!ai*'s influence was felt largely within academia, although this might arguably be extended to include the 'art-house' circuit and documentary enthusiasts, since the film was shown at a number of documentary film festivals around the world and enjoyed some popular success in the United States through its televising on PBS. At the film festivals *N!ai* received a large number of awards, including the CINE Golden Eagle; the American Film Festival Blue Ribbon; Grand Prize: Cinema du Reel; International Film and Television Festival, NY: Best Television Documentary, International News Coverage Festival: Grand Prize and RAI: Highest Film Commendation.⁷⁹ Robert Gordon in his review for *American Anthropologist* wrote that 'as a resource for courses dealing with culture change, colonization, Africa, race relations, sex roles, conflict, and political economy it should prove invaluable' and in the American anthropological journal *RAIN* Joan Kathryn O' Donnell wrote that 'this is... a truly remarkable film... focusing on individual life history the structure is both synchronic and diachronic... *N!ai* speaks in the present, about her own and her people's past; at the same time we see that past, including *N!ai*'s own childhood and adolescence.'⁸⁰ *N!ai* herself would be placed alongside Nanook as an example of a 'star' of ethnographic cinema by influential ethnographic filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall.⁸¹

N!ai was also shown on American television as part of the *Odyssey* television series in 1980. *Odyssey* was the first American anthropology television series and was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The first series consisted of five one-hour documentaries that PBS owned – and *N!ai* was one of these films. The success of the series saw a further twelve hour-long documentaries being aired which aimed at 'exploring people and cultures'. In addition, a magazine containing notes about the background to the anthropological searches themselves was published to supplement the programmes.

⁷⁹ See '*N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*' at <http://www.der.org/films/nai-kung-woman.html>

⁸⁰ Robert Gordon, 'Review of *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 83, no. 3 (1981), pp. 740-41; Joan Kathryn O' Donnell, 'Review of *Odyssey* Series', *RAIN*, no. 41 (December 1980), pp. 7-9.

⁸¹ David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 140.

As a film *in* history, *N!ai* was an early challenge to the van der Postian myth of the Bushmen as enduring pristine primitives in the third quarter of the twentieth century. *N!ai* was released in the year that saw the first in a series of revisionist writings on the history of hunter-gatherers in southern Africa that sought to override the discourse of isolationism in much Bushmen ethnography and to show that the Bushmen had for centuries been integrated into the local economic systems of the Kalahari region.⁸² As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, later works such as Robert J. Gordon's *The Bushmen Myth* would similarly challenge the mythical interpretation of the Bushmen as pristine primitives living untouched by the modern world. Gordon, who greatly admired *N!ai*, undertook at Marshall's request an extensive analysis of the conditions at Tshumkwe in the early 1980s, a process which influenced him on both a personal and a professional level.⁸³ As Gordon writes in *The Bushmen Myth*:

The contemporary social problems in Bushmanland, the Apartheid generated 'homeland,' which John Marshall so movingly captured in his film *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, are thus not the result of isolation but are rather the product of the texture of the Bushmen's ties with the wider society.⁸⁴

Furthermore, in 1981, a year after the release of *N!ai*, the book *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* by American researcher Marjorie Shostak was published.⁸⁵ The book told the story of Nisa, a !Kung woman living in the Dobe region of Botswana and was based on a series of interviews between Nisa and the author. *Nisa* was an international best-seller (precise figures unavailable) and in 1997 was still the best-selling ethnography of all time.⁸⁶ Gordon attributes its success in part to that of *N!ai*. The publication of the former marked a shift away from researching hunter-gatherers based on models of biology and the natural sciences. Instead, researchers such as Shostak drew on historical, symbolic and interpretative frameworks to base

⁸² Carmel Schrire, 'An Enquiry into the Evolutionary Status and Apparent Identity of San Hunter-Gatherers', *Human Ecology*, vol. 8 (1980), pp. 9-32; Robert J. Gordon, 'The !Kung in the Kalahari Exchange: An Ethnohistorical Perspective', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), pp. 195-224; J. Denbow, 'Prehistoric Herders and Foragers of the Kalahari: The Evidence for 1500 Years of Interaction', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies*, pp. 175-93; J. Parkington, 'Soaqua and Bushmen: Hunters and Robbers', in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter-Gatherer Studies*, pp. 151-74; J. Denbow and E. Wilmsen, 'Iron Age Pastoral Settlements in Botswana', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. 79 (1986), pp.40-8; J. Denbow, 'A New Look at the Later Prehistory of the Kalahari', *Journal of African History*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1986), pp. 3-28.

⁸³ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Story of a !Kung Woman* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1983).

⁸⁶ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 124.

their studies on the lived experiences of foragers 'seen as encapsulated minorities within nation states, who still strongly adhered to traditional cosmologies and lifeways.'⁸⁷ As argued in this chapter, *N!ai* similarly presents an argument that acculturated Bushmen still perceived their lives through their traditional cosmologies. *N!ai*'s success, however, cannot be compared to the massive international success of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) that would come out in the same year. It was, however, an 'important film,' to use Robert Gordon's words. For the historian it provides a text in which threads of change and continuity in the ongoing representation of Bushmen on documentary film come together in a revealing nexus of nostalgia, revelation and critical exposition.

7.7 CONCLUSION

The structure of *N!ai* is reflective of changing ideas about ethnographic film that by the 1970s produced a greater emphasis on the *subjects* of such films – as is evident in the centrality of *N!ai* as the speaking, interpreting, fighting, thinking, crying, philosophising, exploiting and exploited subject of *N!ai*. Or,

It is readily apparent that ethnographic film methodology has advanced rapidly over the past three decades and that there is a whole universe of difference between the narrative strategies of heavily plotted films [like] *The Hunters* and *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, even though the filmmaker [is] the same.⁸⁸

It is difficult to compare *N!ai* to any of the earlier films examined in this thesis, since its purpose was so very different – even to previous Marshall films. *N!ai* was an exposé of the conditions at Tshumkwe in the 1970s, and involved an intensive examination of the various pressures being brought to bear upon the Ju/Wasi who lived there. In its observational style, *N!ai* revealed some of the values and attitudes of the white officials who ran Tshumkwe at the time, or who affected the lives of the Tshumkweans. It was possible to trace the concerns and attitudes of many of the white officials in the film to racial discourses percolating in South Africa at the time. The SADF officers' paternalistic ideas about 'helping' the grateful Bushmen were reflective of the SADF's

⁸⁷ Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly (eds.), *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.

⁸⁸ Craig Mishler, 'Narrativity and Metaphor in Ethnographic Film: A Critique of Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds*', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 87, no. 3 (September 1985), p. 669.

propagandistic framing of the militarization of the Bushmen, and also reflected elements of Apartheid ideology that emphasised the white person's responsibility to 'uplift' Africans. The ideas that the Game Warden expresses about protecting game against Bushmen hunting was resonant with post-war discourses on African environmentalism that saw indigenous populations and conservation as inimical. Furthermore, it has been argued that the structuring of *N!ai* that so clearly differentiated between the hunting-and-gathering of the 1950s and the squalor and desolation of Tshumkwe in the 1970s raises once again the questions of Marshall's nostalgia for the Bushmen hunting-and-gathering past – nostalgia which seems to be shared by N!ai.

In considering the film as evidence about the Bushmen in the 1970s, it has been shown how the film revealed extensive evidence of the problems facing the Tshumkwe residents. These included alcoholism and violence within the community, and the interference from without of powerful, often unsympathetic white people who recruited the Bushmen based on their 'Bushmenness' – as evidenced in the actions of the army and the South African filmmakers. It was also argued that the film contains evidence of a resistance to these forces on the part of some of the residents of Tshumkwe, who through humour, mockery or anger express their unwillingness to be absorbed wholesale by these incursive forces.

The film was also considered as a historiography that utilises a synthesis of N!ai's oral testimony and Marshall's KFS to argue about the history of the Nyae Nyae Ju/Wasi's incorporation into sedentary life at Tshumkwe. This is further evidence of Marshall's KFS becoming a 'primary source' on the history of the Bushmen. In this it was argued that the use of Marshall's KFS footage, including the 'romanticised' images from *The Hunters*, was an appropriate reflection of an important element of the film, and of N!ai's own argument about her past, particularly her own romanticisation of that past as an important element of her self-identity in the deplorable conditions at Tshumkwe in the 1970s. This 'oral testimony' has been seen before, in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, and it must be noted that it is when the Bushmen subjects of a documentary film are allowed to speak to the camera that there are such 'glimpses' of self-identification with hunting-and-gathering. In considering N!ai's oral testimony, it was also argued that in some ways the prevalence of N!ai's nostalgia for her past might be indicative once again of Marshall's own

nostalgia about the end of the Ju/Wasi's existence as independent hunter-gatherers. However, even if N!ai's self-identity is contrived, and foregrounded because of Marshall's own concerns, or because N!ai is aware that her 'hunting-and-gathering' past makes her interesting to filmmakers and researchers – it is still possible to see how the idea of hunting-and-gathering culture informed the self-identity of some Bushmen in Tshumkwe in the 1970s – and how Marshall used this 'identity' as part of his argument about the immediate history of Tshumkwe in the second half of the twentieth century.

What emerges from this analysis is the degree to which *ideas* about Bushmen in the film – both ideas held by Bushmen themselves and ideas held by particularly white participants in the Tshumkwe context – were still related to their hunting-and-gathering culture. Even in a revisionist film such as *N!ai*, which sought to counter the image of the Bushmen as pristine primitives, it is possible to see that the image was perhaps one of self identity *as well as* imposed identity. This is a point which will be taken up in the conclusion to this thesis.

N!ai's influence as a film *in* history is mostly measurable in the academic sphere – in its identification as an important ethnographic film. However, its televising on American television as part of the influential *Odyssey* series in the 1980s speaks to a potentially larger pool of influence. Its influence on particular academics such as Robert Gordon is significant, and from the early 1980s revisionist anthropology on the Bushmen began to appear. *N!ai*, however, related only obliquely to this revisionist scholarship because it did not attempt to question the Ju/Wasi's status as independent hunter-gatherers in the 1950s. However, it did constitute a critique of ongoing efforts to present 'Bushmen' as pristine hunter-gatherers, and in this it was a useful primer for the revisionist scholars. The early 1980s, then, should have seen the demise of the van der Postian notion of the Bushmen as pristine primitives. But this was not to be.

The film that will be discussed in the next chapter, *People of the Great Sandface* (1984) by South African John Paul Myburgh, has more in common with van der Post's *Lost World* than with *N!ai*. By the mid-1980s, the image of the pristine hunter-gatherer was still more popular and more appealing than Marshall's complex revisionist depiction of the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae in *N!ai*.

Sandface is a case in point – despite its complexity and beauty, it clung to the idea that the Bushmen are irrevocably Other to contemporary human beings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PEOPLE OF THE GREAT SANDFACE (1984)

The film under analysis in this chapter, *People of the Great Sandface* (1984) by South African filmmaker Paul Myburgh, is anomalous in terms of its historical context. It seeks, van der Post-style, to present a group of G/wi Bushmen living in the Central Kalahari as pristine primitives who are forced by the ongoing depredations of drought and hunger to give up their existence as hunter-gatherers and go to live in a government settlement.

The film was made at a time when the remaining Bushmen in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) were facing imminent eviction from the park, and the very notion of 'hunter-gatherers' living in a pristine Eden, as seen in the previous chapter, was being revised in academia and challenged in films like *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*. *Sandface* is also anomalous because it posits a unique theory for the demise of Bushmen culture: not modernity, not savagery, not evolution but *nature* is the cause. It is *nature* that ultimately defeats the Bushmen – and then it is to the modern state that they must turn, and to life on a government settlement. There is no precedent for this idea: none of the other films under discussion in this thesis posit such a notion. Generally speaking, romantic stereotypes about the Bushmen tend to blame the demise of their 'pristine primitive' culture on ineluctable modernity. In the case of *The Bushmen*, and as a reflection of Social Darwinist thought, it was their *savagery* and their status as relics of the human past that indicated the sureness of their imminent demise. Furthermore, Myburgh mystifyingly posits in the film that nature is the cause of the demise of the 'last remaining wild Bushmen' at a time when indigenous people were becoming active campaigners in environmental moments and were consciously identifying their cultures and traditions with stewardship of the environment.¹ The eighties saw the rise of the 'ecological Noble Savage' whereby indigenous populations around the world such as the aboriginals of Australia and the Amazonian peoples of South America were actively campaigning for the right to occupy their traditional land, and were gaining political power through international environmental networks that gave them platforms from

¹ Beth A. Conklin, 'Body Pain, Feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 24, no. 4 (November 1997), p. 711.

which to voice their grievances and promote their rights within nation states.² Myburgh's Bushmen seem oblivious to these developments – they are isolated, culturally unique and unable to adapt to modernity in any way. If they change, if they acculturate, then they are no longer 'Bushmen.' Van der Post's Bushmen imaginings, then, were reproduced in the 1980s by Myburgh.

In the 1980s the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives had received a new wave of interest in the context of the considerable international success of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980). Thus, *Gods*, which was mentioned briefly in relation to *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter as a background to *Sandface*. As further background to the film, a historical outline will be given of the moves which began in the early 1980s to evict the Bushmen from CKGR. It will be argued in the section on the film as evidence of ideology that the discourse of *Sandface* affirms the rationale behind the Botswana government's eviction drive. The purpose of this historical outline is also to show just how different 'life on the ground' was for Bushmen in Botswana at a time when the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives was enjoying such renewal.

In studying the film for evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and period that produced it, it will be shown how *Sandface*, as a made-for-television ethnography, reflects the superficial modes of such programmes that are required to provide entertainment which will attract large audiences. In this it will be argued that *Sandface's* imaging of the Bushmen as pristine primitive was an echo of Laurens van der Post's commercially successful formulation of the Bushmen myth in his books and films. *Gods* also echoed van der Post's mythical Bushmen – so Myburgh's 'pristine primitives' had a successful film and television pedigree by 1984. Beyond the film as a means of entertainment, it becomes more difficult to understand the significance of the discourse of the film. It will be argued that the specific rationale which *Sandface* constructs about the 'end' of Bushmen culture is interestingly similar to the discourse of the Botswana government that from the early eighties sought to evict the remaining Bushmen from CKGR. Furthermore,

² Beth A. Conklin and Laura R. Graham, 'The Shifting Middle-Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 97, no. 4 (December 1995), p. 696.

the film was particularly well received in South Africa, was made by a South African filmmaker, and can thus be seen, as Robert Gordon argues, as a further embodiment of the tradition of the paternalistic idealisation of Bushmen in white South African society. Certainly it is notable that *Sandface* offered a view of the southern African environment devoid of war and racial conflict – a *tabula rasa* upon which a noble battle between man and nature was being enacted – at a time when the struggle against Apartheid was reaching its height.

In considering the film as evidence about the Bushmen in the early 1980s, it will be shown how the film may be a source of information on various elements of G/wi ritual and cultural practice. It also reveals the presence of a government settlement, and includes a bit part by ‘acculturated’ Bushmen who visit their ‘wild’ cousins in the desert in order to attempt to convince them of the wonders of settlement life. Thus, *Sandface* does reflect, albeit obliquely, the ongoing pressures on Bushmen to accept sedentary life.

In considering the film as a historiography it will be shown how the film’s positing of the Bushmen as having *no* history is a form of false historicisation of the Bushmen’s past. Furthermore, it will be shown how the film purports to be a record of ‘history-in-the-making’ as it records the final demise of the ‘last wild Bushmen band’ in the world.

Finally, in considering the film *in* history it will be shown how made-for-television ethnographic films such as *Sandface* enjoyed popularity in Britain and America throughout the 1980s and affected people’s attitudes towards and understanding of so-called primitive cultures. Furthermore, the academic debate that erupted around *Sandface* will be considered, since it reveals how the new scholarly paradigms in hunter-gatherer studies, as discussed in the previous chapter, informed critiques of the film – and how contentious the film’s reception was in academic circles.

Sandface is considered in this thesis because it was a South African documentary film that received international distribution after the success of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. It is also a film that, perhaps because of the vociferous debate around *Gods* amongst (particularly American) academics, further attracted strong criticism for its depiction of Bushmen as pristine primitives. Myburgh did posit that ‘his’ Bushmen were pristine primitives, but the real significance of the

film lies in its purported depiction of the demise of the very *last* pristine primitive Bushmen. The film thus claims a great historical significance as a record of this demise, something which, it will be argued below, was about creating an interesting, exciting and even profound narrative structure for the film.

8.1 BACKGROUND TO THE FILM

8.1.1 *THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY* (1980)

The Gods Must Be Crazy, released internationally in 1980, is arguably the most influential film on the Bushmen in history. It enjoyed box office success throughout the United States, Europe and the Far East. By mid-1985 in the United States the film had become the highest-earning foreign film ever, overtaking the 1979 French hit *La Cage aux Folles*. The film ran for years in Stockholm, Paris and New York.³ In the United States alone it earned over 100 million dollars, and in South Africa it made another R4 683 649.⁴ *Gods* was made by successful South African director Jamie Uys, who had already enjoyed considerable South African box office success with earlier films such as *Beautiful People* (1974) that included a vignette of Bushmen imitating animals in the Kalahari Desert.⁵

At the start of *Gods* we are introduced to a group of pristine Bushmen living in an idyllic Kalahari Eden, in community with nature and entirely removed from the modern world. One day an aeroplane flies over and the pilot drops a Coca-Cola bottle into their midst. The bottle cannot be reproduced, it does not occur naturally and so it starts to be coveted by individuals in the community, who ultimately resort to violence to gain control of this 'gift from the gods'. The

³ See these statistics in Tomaselli, 'The Cinema of Jamie Uys', in Johan Blignaut (ed.), *Movies, Moguls, Mavericks: South African Cinema, 1979-1991* (Cape Town: Showdata, 1992), pp. 216-17; as well as Peter Davis's scathing analysis of the film in Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungle of Cinema's South Africa* (Randburg, SA: Ravan Press, 1996), pp. 81-94. Even now, as this thesis is being completed, an advert with a scantily clad Bushmen seeing a bottle fall from the sky is being broadcast on South African television.

⁴ Statistics at Internet Movie Data Base - specific web page: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0080801/business>; see also Tomaselli, 'Myths, Race and Opportunism: Film and TV Representations of the San', in Crawford and Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 206.

⁵ Tomaselli, 'Myths, Racism and Opportunism', p. 206.

isolated world of the Bushmen in *Gods* is represented as pristine: water may be gathered from dew covered leaves in the morning, there is plenty of food in the form of game and plant foods, there is no conflict between the members of the band and there are absolutely no external impositions of laws or any institutionalised control over the group. When Xixo, the Bushman protagonist, decides to return the Coke bottle to the gods because of the discord it has sown, he sets out on a journey through a contrived African landscape where, along with the white protagonist, he becomes embroiled in the manic revolutionary activities of a group of black terrorists. The blacks are depicted as bungling fools whose unsuccessful coup attempt in an unnamed African state ultimately leads to their demise at the hands of the white protagonist aided by the Bushmen. *Gods* was embraced by movie critics, but lambasted by anti-Apartheid academics in the United States.⁶ One of the most serious allegations against the film was that it misled the public. Despite its fictional status, many people took it to be a genuine representation of the Bushmen. The myth that this depiction of the Bushmen was based on fact was encouraged by Uys in press releases and interviews. One of his most problematic distortions was in relation to the lead actor N!xau. Uys claimed at the time that N!xau threw away his monetary payment for participating in *Gods* because he had no use for, or concept of, money and that when he needed to communicate with N!xau he would circle in a plane until N!xau lit a fire in the desert to signal his whereabouts.⁷ This claim was highly ironic given that, as shown in *N!ai*, fighting over money had become a central problem amongst Bushmen in government settlements, and that N!xau was a cook at a government school at Tshumkwe at the time of the filming of *Gods*. Apparently oblivious to *N!ai*, and charmed by the naïve humour of *Gods*, prominent film critics lauded the film for its simple but successful comedy.⁸ N!xau was taken on

⁶ Tomaselli, 'Myths, Racism and Opportunism', pp. 206-8. The frenetic debate generated by the release of the film focused on the question of whether the film was racist or not. A fair sample of this debate would include (amongst others): Tomaselli, 'The Cinema of Jamie Uys', pp. 216-17; Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, pp. 81-94; T.A. Volkman, 'The hunter-gatherer myth in Southern Africa: preserving nature or culture?', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, no. 10 (1986), pp. 25-32; T.A. Volkman, 'Out of Africa: *The Gods Must Be Crazy*', in L. Gross, J.S. Katz, and J. Ruby (eds.), *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and TV* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), pp. 236-47.

⁷ See Tomaselli, 'The Cinema of Jamie Uys', pp. 214, 216-18 and Davies, *In Darkest Hollywood*, pp. 90-3.

⁸ See for example influential New York Times film critic Vincent Canby's 'effusive' praise of the film. Quoted in Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, p. 93.

a world tour, dressed in a cloak, for all his millions of adoring fans to see. Furthermore, tourists began to arrive in Southern Africa to see first-hand the delightfully primitive Bushmen.⁹

Enraged anti-Apartheid academics in the United States vociferously condemned the film. In *American Anthropologist*, Toby Alice Volkman (who wrote the study guide to *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*) wrote:

[In *Gods*] Apartheid finds legitimation in an excruciatingly nasty, condescending view of Blacks, whether those in power (the ludicrous Black government) or out (the equally absurd guerrillas). The only inoffensive Black people are the truly powerless: kidnapped children and singing villagers, wrapped in gorgeous colours, earthy and minding their own business down on the farm.¹⁰

However, it is important to note that *Gods*'s simplified formulation of Bushmen culture and its representation of Xixo as a 'Noble Savage' paralleled a continuing pattern in American popular cinema. There, despite a number of documentary films made throughout the eighties that attempted to undertake, as *Nlai* did with the Ju/Wasi, a more sensitive and nuanced depiction of Native American culture and the problems faced by Native Americans both historically and contemporarily, mainstream Hollywood depictions continued to present the 'white man's Indian' as Noble Savage or a foil to Western modernity.¹¹ However, as O'Connor argues,

In spite of a more or less subtle racial bias, Hollywood is presumably not filled with Indian-haters intent on using their power to put down the natives. One need only observe how quickly a director or a studio might switch from portraying a 'bloodthirsty' to a 'noble savage' if the market seems to call for it. Far from purposeful distortion, significant elements of the Indian image can be explained best through analysing various technical and business-related production decisions that may never have been considered in terms of their effect on the screen image.¹²

Furthermore, there was also a popular tradition of Native Americans as comical sidekicks in Hollywood films, such as Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Thus, the crude racial stereotyping in *Gods* might have been based less on sinister, sublimated efforts to justify Apartheid than on simple commercial considerations and a fine understanding of what would be popular with international audiences. It is also interesting to note that Uys chose to structure *Gods* as a 'documentary' – the opening scene has the clipped English tones of a van der Postian narrator

⁹ See Gordon's discussion of the 'Bushmen Tourist Boom' in Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, pp. 1-2. See also T.A. Volkman, 'The Hunter-Gatherer Myth', pp. 27-30 and Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, p. 94.

¹⁰ Toby Alice Volkman, 'Review of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 87, no. 2 (June 1985), p. 482.

¹¹ O'Connor, *Hollywood's Indian*, p. 29.

¹² O'Connor, *Hollywood's Indian*, p. 30.

(Paddy O'Byrne) describing the pristine world of the Bushmen to its audience – and for most of the film the thoughts of the Bushman protagonist are interpreted by this omniscient voiceover narrator. In the context of a film which made fun of every one of its characters, this was not an entirely inappropriate spoof on the regularity with which 'Bushmen' had appeared in documentary films over the preceding thirty-four years, starting with van der Post's *Lost World of Kalahari* in 1956.¹³

However, Uys's depiction of black terrorists as bungling idiots unable to overcome the whites in the film came at a time when the South African Apartheid state was under renewed attack by countrywide protests and activism following the 1976 student uprisings.¹⁴ In *Gods* the threat of a black uprising is reassuringly contained by the intelligence of the white protagonist aided by his trusty sidekick Bushman and is rendered even more harmless by the stupidity of the black terrorists themselves. As we will see, in *Sandface* the political reality of southern Africa is similarly obscured, in this instance by a fantasy of man-against-nature entirely removed from black nationalist politics or the poverty and ongoing dispossession of Bushmen in southern Africa. Like *Gods Must Be Crazy*, *Sandface* was a South African-produced film set in Botswana. The association with the Apartheid state was not a positive one for commercially-minded filmmakers in the 1980s. The most important point about the international success of *Gods* is that by the time *Sandface* was released in 1984 *Gods* had dramatically raised the profile of 'pristine primitive' Bushmen throughout the world.

It is useful for this analysis to consider depiction of anthropology on television in England in the late seventies and eighties, since it was here that *Sandface* was broadcast. During these two decades, a number of television programmes represented as 'anthropology' were broadcast in

¹³ Other symbolic resonances in *Gods* are not entirely without historical precedent. For example, in one scene the Bushman protagonist Xixo shoots a goat because he is hungry. The goat is actually domesticated, and Xixo is arrested and thrown into jail, where he is completely confused as to the nature of his crime and utterly distressed at the nature of his confinement. This is reminiscent of the situation in South West Africa in the early twentieth century, when, after the passing of the Stock Theft Act in 1911, starving Bushmen were pursued, arrested and sometimes tortured and killed for hunting cattle. See Toby Alice Volkman, 'The Hunter-Gatherer Myth in Southern Africa: Preserving Nature of Culture', pp. 25-30. And as Lee and Solway pointed out in 1990, 'the "Coke Bottle in the Kalahari" imagery also bears a subtext, the rueful recognition of the unlimited capacity of "advanced societies" to consume everything in their path.' Lee and Solway, 'The Hunter-Gatherer Myth', p. 110.

¹⁴ William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 217-22.

England and America. The producers of the *Odyssey* series (as part of which *Nlai* was shown), *Disappearing Worlds*, *Worlds Apart*, *Under the Sun* and *Millennium* all involved anthropologists in the shaping of the films. However, natural history programmes remained far more popular than the shows depicting vanishing tribes. With the broadcasting of the *Disappearing World* series in the UK and the *Odyssey* series in the United States, there was a perception amongst broadcasters that anthropology had been 'covered', as it were. Anthropology also was associated with particular broadcasters: Granada television (as opposed to Anglia TV, the natural history broadcaster),¹⁵ and it is interesting that *Sandface* was produced by Anglia Survival Ltd, considering the station's association with natural history programming.

8.1.2 THE THREAT OF EVICTION TO THE BUSHMEN OF CKGR IN THE 1980S

The success of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* was used by the South West Africa administration in the early 1980s to promote the idea mentioned in the previous chapter, of turning eastern Bushmanland into a game reserve for international tourists, who would come to admire both the wild animals and the 'wild Bushmen', complete with bows and arrows.¹⁶ Across the border in Botswana the reverse was occurring – from 1978 onwards there were moves afoot to evict the Bushmen from CKGR. As discussed in chapter two, the CKGR was created in 1961, granting indigenous people foraging rights within the confines of the park. In 1978 the Botswana government implemented hunting restrictions on the Bushmen in CKGR – special licences were distributed to them, limiting and specifying the type and amount of game they were permitted to hunt. In the early 1980s diamonds were discovered at Gope, a Bushmen community in CKGR (see Fig. 4). South African mining giant De Beers launched a joint venture with the Canadian mining company Falconbridge to evaluate the Gope deposits. On 15 July 1986 the Botswana government passed a White Paper which confirmed the relocation of Bushmen communities out

¹⁵ André Singer, 'Anthropology in Broadcasting', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, p. 270.

¹⁶ Volkman, 'Review of *Gods*', pp. 483-84.

of CKGR as official government policy. On 12 October 1986 Botswana's Minister of Commerce and Industry announced the government's plans to relocate the Bushmen.¹⁷

The pressure to evict the Bushmen from CKGR didn't only come from mining companies. During the long drought in Botswana during the 1980s, a film was made by two conservationists showing dying wildebeest being clubbed to death by starving people along a game fence. The European Economic Community, which purchased Botswana meat products under a development contract, received pressure from European conservationists to make the Botswana government evict the Bushmen from CKGR and keep it exclusively for wildlife.¹⁸ The question of conserving dwindling wildlife in CKGR continued to characterise the debate about the future of the Bushmen in CKGR throughout the 1980s.¹⁹

These acute economic and social pressures are entirely absent from the world of *People of the Great Sandface*. Nature is the only enemy of the G/wi group, and it is Nature that leads to the group's demise as a distinct 'hunting-and-gathering' band. This complete elision of historical context will be considered and explained below.

8.2 PEOPLE OF THE GREAT SANDFACE: A SYNOPSIS

Sandface follows the life of a small G/wi band over four seasons and charts the process whereby the group's members collectively agree to abandon their traditional mode of life and move to a government settlement. The film is set in Botswana, at an indeterminate time. The only time periods specifically identified in *Sandface* are the four seasons that give it its structure and the ten years that Myburgh purportedly spent researching and filming it. The film describes the individuals in the community and documents various technologies and cultural practices around which life is organised within the group. Hunting, gathering, dancing, child-rearing, arrow-making, treatment of skins for garments and bags, musical instruments, games and various rituals

¹⁷Information on the chronology of the move to evict the Bushmen from the CKGR from *Ecologist*, vol. 33, no. 7 (September 2003), pp. 32-3; see also Robert K. Hitchcock, *Bushmen and the Politics of the Environment in Southern Africa* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 1996), p. 38.

¹⁸ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', pp. 55-6.

¹⁹ Hitchcock, *Bushmen and the Politics of Environment in Southern Africa*, pp. 38-9.

are represented on camera by Myburgh, who lived with the group he filmed, made the film on his own and narrates all the actions. Only one voice is heard in *Sandface*: Myburgh's, and there are no subtitles translating the words of any of the G/wi. The audience relies entirely on Myburgh's interpretation of events for explication of the action in the film.

The film begins in a similar manner to *Lost World of Kalahari*: with a map of Africa and introductory intertitles explaining that 'for 40 000 years the ancestors of today's Bushmen have lived by hunting and gathering on the great sandface of Southern Africa.' The film is declared to be 'the final record of these ancient people and their story of the old way of life.' The intertitles are followed by aerial shots of the Kalahari Desert. The aerial views of the desert are an interesting introduction to a film that plays out squarely at 'ground level', amongst the people living day to day on the desert who by dint of their primitive technology are bounded to the earth and the view from the ground. It emphasises the fact that the filmmaker has a range of perspectives from which he may draw his images of the G/wi.

The film begins in summer. It follows the life of the band through autumn and the harsh, dry winter. Drought and thirst plague the land. Various rituals, such as tattooing and dancing, are employed to ward off bad luck and ensure the ongoing survival of the band. Many hunts are documented, as is the growing difficulty that the hunters experience in finding game. The little boys of the band continue, with great passion, to practice being hunters. Despite the growing hardships, the great hunters of the band lovingly train their sons in the art of hunting and snaring. A girl enters puberty and the rituals surrounding her first menstruation are documented. Thirst in particular is highlighted as the central threat to the band's survival. According to Myburgh, the Kalahari is entirely waterless, and the G/wi rely on roots, melons and rainwater for moisture.

By the end of the long, dry winter, after spring has brought some rain, the band decides that this ongoing battle for survival must end. They do not feel they can justify the ongoing hardship and want amongst their children. They will move to the government settlement (a fictional name is

given to the settlement, which was in fact called !Xadi²⁰ and accept the generous offer of the Botswana government to provide them with water and mielie meal. Their journey to the settlement is filmed. They arrive at the settlement and immediately drink from the tap at the borehole. The film ends with an old man from the band staring in complete bemusement at the water running from the tap. Myburgh ends the film with the following narration:

It must be said that for as long as Bushmen have lived in the Kalahari Desert, perhaps fifteen thousands years or more, they have been thirsty. This thirst is almost genetic in proportion, and when presented with the alternative of a tap which constantly runs water, clean water; it is understandable that man's whole being is drawn to that place, and the water. The Botswana government has done as much as any government can for a small minority of people who for long have been so different in all of their ways. The consciousness gap cannot be breached. You see, no one is to blame. It is just that the Bushmen winter has come.

8.3 THE FILM AS EVIDENCE I:

8.3.1 READING THE FILM FOR EVIDENCE OF THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE PEOPLE AND PERIOD THAT PRODUCED IT

Sandface is a made-for-television documentary. It was produced for the Survival Anglia series, which had been producing natural history programmes since 1961, and was shown on Britain's Channel 4 in 1986.²¹ Most anthropological material shown on British television in 1970s and 1980s was separate to the academic disciplines of anthropology or visual anthropology. The films and programmes were made by amateur anthropologists such as the producers of current affairs programmes, documentaries and drama, for whom anthropology was often incidental to the major focus of the films.²² Paul Myburgh, who had studied anthropology and communications at the University of South Africa, did not claim the status of an anthropologist in the making of *Sandface*.²³ In fact, he assumed a resolutely anti-intellectual stance in the making of the film, stating that

²⁰ John Marshall, 'At the Other End of the Camera', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 167-73. !Xadi is the place where Marshall fixed the pump in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.

²¹ Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 54 and ITV1 Anglia website at <http://library.digiguide.com/lib/channel/50>

²² André Singer, 'Anthropology in Broadcasting', p. 268.

²³ Tomaselli, 'An Interview with Paul John Myburgh', *CVA Review*, Fall (1989), p. 26.

To make judgements [by analysing the form and content of a film] on this level is an academic pursuit. I'm always scared of that because words can destroy the real meaning of everything somehow. '*Sandface*' is heart-full, no head. Heads discriminate.²⁴

Anthropological films on television tend to be moulded by the requirements of 'good television', which means that entertainment value is foregrounded. By the 1980s wildlife films in particular had become a huge source of revenue for commercial networks in Britain and America.²⁵

While *Sandface* was not a wildlife film, it was bought by Survival Anglia Ltd, which was a specialist wildlife programme producer. Thus, there would have been commercial pressures to consider. The narrative of *Sandface* is constructed around the purported capturing of the very moment when the *last* wild Bushmen in the world give up their peripatetic hunting-and-gathering life. Part of what is fascinating and gripping about the film is the feeling that the audience is *witnessing* the demise of something rare and extraordinary that has clung to life despite the pressures of the modern world. Neither critics of the film nor those who have expressed qualified support for *Sandface* such as Keyan Tomaselli, who says of the film that '*Sandface* is really Myburgh's own self-exploration, an ethno-biography in attempting to re-discover a coherent unity and culture, so thoroughly evacuated by post-modern societies', have considered the simple fact that, over and above the purported prejudices and passions of the filmmaker, *Sandface* was a film aimed at commercial, international distribution on television, with the incumbent requirements of telling a good, interesting and simple story.

The made-for-television ethnography follows a generic format which includes an introduction by an authoritative Western narrator who establishes the location of the film, introduces the audience to the group under study and then embarks on an explanation of the rituals and practices of the group. Despite the similarities between this pattern and written ethnography, the problem with the television format is that little space is left for analysis and a dependence on 'self-evident' description results.²⁶ As Wright argues, these 'classic realist' ethnographic narratives often appear to be used as an excuse for screening a succession of 'interesting' or 'spectacular'

²⁴ Tomaselli, 'An Interview with Paul John Myburgh', p. 27.

²⁵ Mitman, *Reel Nature*, pp. 203-5.

²⁶ Terence Wright, 'Television Narrative and Ethnographic Film', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, p. 274.

images.²⁷ *Sandface* fits the description of a made-for-television ethnographic film. We have already seen this in terms of its dramatic narrative. There is further evidence of this in the structuring of the film.

For a start, the voiceover narration of filmmaker Paul John Myburgh is the only voice heard throughout the film. He introduces the Bushmen to us in the 'classic realist' mode with a description of the Bushmen and a list of all that 'Bushman culture' is renowned for:

They were the hunters with the poisoned arrows, the people of the healing dance, the painters of Southern Africa's rock art treasures who spoke with a strange clicking tongue, the Khoisan, the Bushmen.

This introduction is interesting because the use of the words 'they were' implies that this is no longer the case – and yet Myburgh goes on to posit that the Bushmen he is filming in fact *do* continue to live in this mode, even if only for the remaining time in which they are the subject of his filmmaking. This might be seen as an inadvertent metaphor for the fact that from the 1960s onwards Bushmen were always *almost* at the moment of complete demise, but for the continuing attentions of the film camera which kept the *images* of hunting-and-gathering culture alive.

The introduction to *Sandface* is followed by an explanation of the rituals and activities of the group. Wright's argument about 'classic realist' ethnographic films is applicable to *Sandface*. For example, in many sequences of *Sandface* the people's features are entirely obscured because they are filmed in silhouette against a bright sky. They are filmed smoking around the fire, but the backdrop makes it impossible to identify the gender or identity of the individuals. Twenty-two minutes into the film the women of the band are framed walking off together on a gathering expedition. They are filmed from a low angle against the blue sky, and so their features are lost. When the children play together the camera captures their games at a distance, framed by a flaming red sky so that they are mere silhouettes dancing in the foreground of a blazing sunset. During a healing dance, the people are filmed for an extended period against another sunset. They are filmed from various angles, but the camera returns to a close-up of the fire around which the people clap and dance. Once again they are silhouetted against the sky and so appear as featureless shapes on the screen. In another beautiful but bemusing sequence just over thirty-

²⁷ Wright, 'Television Narrative', p. 274.

five minutes into the film, the band is filmed in various moments of communal living: laughing, talking and playing. However, their faces constantly blur in and out of focus, so that once again it is difficult to identify individuals. The effect is to produce a series of powerfully poetic, even hypnotic images: hands, eyes, legs, arms are all brought into close-up, often during the dances and whilst people sit around the fires chatting. In the context of group shots around the fire, or dances, these repeated close-ups seem to serve an aesthetic function above all else, and in the process reduces the people who are the subjects of the film to shadows and fleeting, unknowable beings, perhaps in keeping with Myburgh's presentation of the G/wi as primordial humans.

This poetic blurring of individual identities in the film is not tempered by the building of relationships between the camera and the film's subjects. At the start of the film, Myburgh introduces us to some of the key 'characters' of his film, whom he names. He describes them as 'the old lady', 'the hunter', 'the doctor' and 'the hunter's wife'. Unfortunately, their G/wi names are difficult to pronounce for an English-speaking audience. These particular individuals, however, do not become more familiar to us through the course of the film, as the people in *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman* do, nor do we gain much insight into their personalities. Owing to the abstract nature of much of Myburgh's filming, people's individuality is obfuscated by the communal and abstract images that dominate the film.

The problem of adequately brokering between one culture and another in ethnographic film is a complex one. As MacDougall argues, when a lack of understanding exists between the filmmaker and his or her subjects that cannot easily be expressed in film language, there is often evidence of this in the film. MacDougall writes

Many films give evidence of the bafflement that has confronted their makers – films suddenly resort to romantic imagery or narration... People are followed almost by reflex, doing things as though those things had a cumulative significance, but the significance never materialises. The camera zooms in on a face which reveals precisely nothing. Worse than just showing nothing, these false emphases contribute to an image of a world that is mute and off balance.²⁸

Sandface contains substantial evidence of this lack of comprehension between subject and filmmaker in the many mystifying shots throughout the film that fail to tell us anything concrete about the events and people being depicted. However, in relation to MacDougall's argument, it

²⁸ MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, p. 142.

can be said that Myburgh takes the process one step further – upon the mantle of his confusing imaging of the G/wi he places a definitive interpretation of the G/wi for his television audience. Thus, in the film when significance is not apparent, it is created. The particular activities of the G/wi are always re-routed back to a communal vision of a primal symbiosis with the natural environment, a process that is facilitated largely by the explanatory voiceover narration which constantly outlines and interprets for us the significance of the sequences in the film. A notable example of this is a description of one of the old men of the band going to check snares around the camp as part of his daily chores. Myburgh explains in the voiceover narration that the old man does these small tasks so that he remains useful to the band that is feeding and caring for him. As he walks away from the snare with a captured Steenbok slung over his shoulder, the voiceover narrator calls him:

... so absolutely primitive in all of his ways, his primal instincts always on the surface. He represents so closely the way in which Stone Age man related to his environment, almost as if he were a throwback from the old people, the ancestors of today's Bushmen.

Here the camera follows the old man and the mundane and banal elements of his life are imbued with a hyperbolically essentialist primordial significance. This voiceover narration also reflects a discourse about Bushmen people that has a great deal in common with *The Bushmen* (1925) in which they are seen as the primitive relics of ancient human beings. It is the same discourse evident in the narration of *Lost World of Kalahari*, in which van der Post philosophises at length on the 'essential nature' of Bushmen that has not changed in '40 000' years. This was reiterated in early, positivist ethnographic writing on the Bushmen before the 1970s, as we have seen. In all of these statements the Bushmen are 'essentially throwbacks' – relics of a primordial man, and ultimately primitive. This discourse was prevalent not only in romantic television documentaries on the Bushmen or ethnographic writing. In 1984, for example, the then South West African government released a report entitled 'Survey of the Bushmen Population in SWA' where it was stated that Bushmen still were, as they always had been, people of the bush whose major livelihood was hunting-and-gathering. This was in spite of the fact that by then all Bushmen in

South West Africa, even those on their traditional land at Tshumkwe, were no longer living by hunting-and-gathering as a sole means of subsistence.²⁹

This discourse is further evident in the way that, throughout *Sandface*, all the activities of the band are accrued as evidence for the generalised statements made by the narrator about who and what these Bushmen people are. Boys are 'always hunters' with no other ambition, anger is 'instinctual', children playing are 'secure in their identity'.

Like Uys, Myburgh continued to express such ideas in interviews he gave about the film. To Keyan Tomaselli in 1990 he said that '[the G/wi] had not at this stage ever been exposed to a two-dimensional image of this nature – their brains had not yet learned how to correctly interpret a two-dimensional image.'³⁰ This claim seems as dubious as Jamie Uys's claims that the Bushmen actor in *Gods* had no conceptualisation of money and lived wild in the desert.³¹ It is highly unlikely that the G/wi featured in *Sandface* had not come across cameras before: anthropologists such as Silberbauer had been working in the central Kalahari since the fifties. Furthermore, John Marshall has written that once the Ju/Wasi (!Kung) of Nyae Nyae had seen a film, 'they quickly understood its simple language of cuts, screen direction, angles and distance'.³² Furthermore, with the growing prevalence of technology throughout the world, it was becoming less and less likely that subjects would have no understanding whatsoever of the filmmaking process.

Finally, in considering the structure of *Sandface* as that of a made-for-television ethnography it must be noted that the film is suffused with a theme that has enjoyed a very long and successful pedigree in documentary film: the struggle of man against nature. This is a theme which, as we have seen, has emerged recurrently in the history of documentary film, beginning with Robert Flaherty whose films such as *Nanook of the North* depict a hunter-gatherer society pitted against nature. It has also been a subtext of certain film representations of Bushmen, such as those of

²⁹ Volkman, 'The Hunter-Gatherer Myth', pp. 25-32.

³⁰ Keyan Tomaselli, 'An Interview with Paul John Myburgh', p. 20.

³¹ Keyan Tomaselli, 'Interview with John Paul Myburgh', p. 30. Uys quoted in Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood*, pp. 90-1.

³² Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 196.

*Lost World, The Hunters*³³ and *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. Myburgh confirms this by identifying Flaherty as being a fundamental influence on his filmmaking, although, surprisingly, this was ideological rather than aesthetic, since he had not actually seen any of Flaherty's films.³⁴ In the Keyan Tomaselli interview, he said:

While studying communications I learned about Robert Flaherty and *Nanook of the North* and John Grierson's *Coastface* – and these were men who seemed to care about their fellow humans. What it was said they had done inspired me. It was then that I wanted to make a film, that one day when they wrote about films and they wrote about documentaries and they wrote about *Nanook* and they wrote about *Coastface* then they would write about *Sandface* in the same way.³⁵

In *Sandface*, as we have seen, it is nature that is the ultimate victor in the struggle. As stated in the introduction, this central idea in *Sandface* was reflective of the Botswana government's rationale behind evicting the Bushmen from CKGR. Margaret Nasha, one of the ministers who authorised the removals of Bushmen from CKGR commented in 2000 that 'we do not want to see pictures of semi-naked prehistoric people.' Festus Mogae, the president of Botswana at the time of writing, similarly argued that 'if the Bushmen want to survive they must change; otherwise, like the Dodo, they will perish.'³⁶ Whilst these public statements were made ten years after the last public broadcast of *Sandface*, on American television in 1991, it is still notable that the film seems to reinforce this notion by positing the impossibility of the Bushmen's continued existence in the 'wild'. In *Sandface* it is argued that *because* of nature this change is inevitable. Furthermore, in the same year that the film was released, the Botswana government explained that evicting the Bushmen from the park would bring them closer to social services and development assistance. The same is argued in *Sandface*, in which the people move to an unnamed government settlement where they can benefit from resources such as tapped water,

³³ As we have seen, John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1957) was criticised for rehashing this theme. Marshall has subsequently written that 'I had not seen *Nanook of the North* when I made *The Hunters*, but presenting the chase of the giraffe as a kind of struggle against nature, which is the theme in Flaherty's classic, is not the way Ju/Wasi regarded hunting. The last thing people wanted to do was struggle against nature. Nature in the Kalahari is unforgiving to those who waste effort. People used common sense, as well as their skills and knowledge, to avoid confrontations and struggles with nature.' See Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 40.

³⁴ Keyan Tomaselli, 'John Grierson in South Africa: Afrikaner Nationalism and the National Film Board', *Breaking the Boundaries - the Stirling Documentary Conference: an international conference on documentary*, University of Stirling, Scotland, 28-31 January 1999. Paper available online at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0799/ktfr7e.htm>

³⁵ Tomaselli, 'Interview with Paul Myburgh', p. 26.

³⁶ Quoted in *Ecologist*, p. 32.

schools and a clinic. In *Sandface* the Bushmen think much about the 'the abundance of water and all the other apparent advantages' of living at the government settlement. Furthermore, as already mentioned, Myburgh states in the voiceover narration that 'the Botswana government has done as much as any government can for a small minority of people who for long have been so different in all of their ways. The consciousness gap cannot be breached. You see, no one is to blame. It is just that the Bushmen winter has come.'

The attitude of the Botswana government officials, that the Bushmen are a hindrance to conservation efforts in CKGR³⁷, was at odds with the growing international alliances between conservationists and indigenous populations throughout the eighties, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Similarly, Myburgh's contention that it is nature that is the cause of the demise of the last wild Bushmen was contrary to the contemporary realities of the Bushmen living in CKGR. Both the discourse of the Botswana government in their drive to evict the Bushmen from CKGR and the discourse of *Sandface* reflect the idea that the time of Bushmen as hunter-gatherers is at an end, and that a move to a government-controlled settlement is the solution to this. *Sandface* is to all intents and purposes a eulogy for the passing of the culture. This at a time when most indigenous people around the world were re-embracing the attributes of their traditional cultures. For example, from the 1980s onwards, indigenous cultures such as Native Amazonians began to celebrate their indigenous identity by wearing traditional dress. While at one level this reflected renewed pride in indigenous identity, as Conklin wrote in 1997

It is equally clear that this shift responds not only to indigenous values and internal societal dynamics, but also ideas, aesthetics, and expectations about Indians. As some native South Americans have learned to speak the language of Western environmentalism and reframe their cosmological and ecological systems in terms of Western concepts like 'respect for Mother Earth,' 'being close to nature,' and 'protecting biosphere diversity,' so some have also learned to use Western visual codes to position themselves politically.³⁸

Thus, in the 1980s Bushmen in some areas of the Kalahari were requesting help from the National Museum and Art Gallery to set up their own museums and libraries and were asking anthropologists for their research information on indigenous Basarwa customs to be used in the

³⁷ Robert K. Hitchcock and Rodney L. Brandenburgh, 'Tourism, Conservation, and Culture in the Kalahari Desert, Botswana', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2 (April 1990), p. 23.

³⁸ Conklin, 'Body Paint, Feathers, and VCRs', p. 712.

development of curricula at local private schools.³⁹ There is no direct evidence to suggest that the film *Sandface* was a work of propaganda on behalf of the Botswana government in their bid to evict the Bushmen from CKGR, but then there is no direct evidence to suggest that Uys was attempting to be an apologist for Apartheid when he made *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The point is that both films frame their subjects in such a way that it is possible to read these interpretations into the films – and films do, inevitably, absorb the discourses of the societies within they are made. This is what has been argued throughout this thesis – and this is what is implied when historians analyse films as evidence of the values and attitudes of the people and the period that have produced them.

This argument that it was *entertainment* that most completely defined the fanciful nature of *Sandface*, is more than just trite or axiomatic. It is also reflective of an affirmation of the saleability of the Bushmen as pristine primitive ‘images’ in popular media by the middle of the 1980s – as evidenced by the enormous success of *Gods*, and despite the concerted re-evaluation of the appropriateness of this idea in academic anthropology and in John Marshall’s filmmaking. Furthermore, this was also in spite of burgeoning awareness worldwide of the plight of indigenous people in modern states that went hand in hand with a growing political awareness on the part of indigenous people themselves. The ongoing significance of the idea of Bushmen as pristine primitives was, by the 1980s, being used to justify two completely opposite policies by the respective governments of Botswana and South West Africa. For the Botswana government the time of ‘Bushman as pristine primitives’ was over – the overtly stated nature of government policy was to remove the Bushmen from CKGR and to begin a concerted policy of ‘modernising’ them. In South West Africa the government wished to create a reserve where Bushmen would be allowed to live as traditional Bushmen, hunting and gathering with bows and arrows, a ‘plastic stone age’ as John Marshall described it. Perhaps inadvertently, *Sandface* affirms two elements of the Botswana government’s position – that there *were* Bushmen that were hunting-and-gathering still that could be ‘modernised,’ and that they *themselves* agreed that life on a government settlement was more appropriate than life in the desert. Common to all these

³⁹ Hitchcock and Brandenburgh, ‘Tourism, Conservation and Culture’, p. 23.

discourses is the *idea* of Bushmen as pristine primitives – an idea which had very little to do with the ongoing poverty and dispossession of the Bushmen living in southern Africa.

Finally, it is perhaps not surprising that Gordon, in his review of *Sandface*, wrote that

The wave on which *People of the Great Sandface* coasted to its modest triumphs [in South Africa] was the same one on which the *Gods Must Be Crazy* rode to Box Office success in South Africa... [because] 'wild Bushmen' are a critical feature in the self-image of white South Africans.⁴⁰

Gordon's argument about the South African tradition of idealising the pristine primitive Bushmen has been discussed in chapter four. Certainly there is evidence of Myburgh's van der Postian notion about the 'little Bushmen of the Great Sandface' (exact quote from the film). In building on Gordon's analysis, however, it is worth noting that there exist within *Sandface* – as there exist within *Gods Must Be Crazy* – traces of Apartheid ideology, which caused the vociferous reaction from anti-Apartheid academics against both films, as will be discussed below. In *Gods* it was the caricaturing of black terrorists as foolish and inept and the paternalistic discourse of the white male hero and his trusty Bushmen sidekick. In *Sandface* the traces of Apartheid ideology are subsumed into a wider, very sympathetic, even passionate meditation on the nature of 'wild' Bushmen society. However, they do find voice in the film through the idea that race constitutes an essential state – and furthermore that it is with the government that the hope for assistance and modernisation lies. This idea of race as an essential state is evident in Myburgh's narrative, which repeatedly stresses the 'organic' nature of the community. During a dance, Myburgh states in the narrative, 'these little people of the sandface: they are born on the earth, they live on the earth, they laugh, they dance, they eat, they sleep on the earth, always the contact with the one common reality.' Later he declares, 'dancing, food gathering or hunting, all part of the same integrated whole which G/wi children relate to from birth.' Myburgh's narration focuses strongly on his perception of the unity and equality of G/wi culture, and furthermore attributes much of this to an *instinctual* as opposed to an *intellectual* process. When the group has been without water for a while and food is scarce, Myburgh states that the anger and insecurity in the group are 'almost instinctual' in origin. And finally, as we have seen, Myburgh posits that it is to the settlement and the government that the Bushmen must turn because – 'it is nobody's fault, it

⁴⁰ Gordon, 'Review of *Sandface*', p. 33.

is just that the Bushmen winter has come.' Myburgh ends *Sandface* with a prolonged framing of a Bushmen man staring at water running out of a tap in bewilderment. 'The consciousness gap,' Myburgh explains, 'cannot be breached.' Myburgh's discourse is a more sympathetically expressed, 'van der Postian' version of earlier, stronger white South African sentiments towards the ultimately defining primitiveness of the Bushmen.⁴¹

8.4 FILM AS EVIDENCE II:

8.4.1 WHAT THE FILM TELLS US ABOUT THE BUSHMEN IN 1984

In *Sandface*, Myburgh also creates the illusion of the absent filmmaker – the omniscient camera that observes the natural unfolding of events. As Wright argues, the biography of Robert Flaherty by Arthur Calder-Marshall reveals the fundamental problem of the ethnographic filmmaker, namely 'that the subject is altered by the intrusion of the observer.'⁴²

The white explorer may wish to see a world as it was before the white man came; but he can only see it as it reacts to the coming of the first white man. He is looking for the rainbow's end, unless he can imaginatively construct what things would have been like if he had not been there.⁴³

Flaherty-esque, *Sandface* seems to try and show the world of the G/wi as though the camera weren't there. The inherent contradictions of this style are not addressed at any point in the film and are not acknowledged by the filmmaker in subtitles, voiceover narration or in interviews about the making of the film. The omniscience of the camera, its all-pervasiveness, is emphasised in shot after shot from the low angle behind long grass, as though the camera were a hidden observer, never actually disturbing the events being filmed, and the cameraperson as small as a stone, unseen by the people being filmed on the other side of the grass. There is no interaction between the people and the camera whatsoever. Rather the subjects of the film seem to be under omniscient surveillance. Children playing are filmed from a distance. In one scene,

⁴¹ Such as that evident in the speech by the Minister of Native Affairs, Denys Reitz on the 3 May 1941 who said at a sitting of the South African parliament that 'It would be a biological crime if we allowed such a peculiar race to die out, because it is a race which looks more like a baboon than a baboon itself does – we have so far got about 20 who look just about genuine.' Quoted in Volkman, 'The Hunter-Gatherer Myth,' p. 25.

⁴² Wright, 'Television narrative and ethnographic film', in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton (eds.), *Film as Ethnography*, pp. 274-82.

⁴³ Calder-Marshall quoted in Wright, 'Television narrative and ethnographic film', p. 275.

the women of the band play musical instruments while the children dance and the camera tracks the scene through the grass from a low angle. Half an hour into the film, some older boys go with their father to inspect the traps around the campsite. On arriving they discover a trapped steenbok that is quickly killed. The entire scene is viewed through the grass from a low-angle perspective. The camera often tracks behind the hunters, following their feet, or captures them as they walk single file across the desert. The camera also catches people in repose, as though its intimate gaze is silently privy to all the elements of their daily lives.

In this way, in expositing the 'the one common reality' of the G/wi, *Sandface* shows a host of rituals, practices and technology of the Bushmen being filmed. We see the processes of bow making, hunting practices and the building of shelters. So convincing is *Sandface* in its ethnographic information that anthropologist Guenther recommended *Sandface* as an 'excellent' supplement to the key ethnographic works produced on the G/wi by George Silberbauer and Jiro Tanaka.⁴⁴ However, the evidence provided by *Sandface* on the Bushmen in the 1980s needs to be approached with caution for two reasons. The first is that the 'record' of Myburgh is contradicted by the historical record, which reflects that at the time most Botswana Bushmen were acculturated and living in poverty, and that those living in CKGR (including the G/wi in the film⁴⁵) faced the threat of eviction from the park. A government report produced in 1986 showed that 90% of Bushmen in Botswana now survived on government food relief.⁴⁶

The second caveat is that there have been repeated accusations against Myburgh that he staged much of *Sandface* by paying Bushmen people to dress up in traditional clothes and enact their now defunct rituals.⁴⁷ Certainly these charges do not seem unlikely given that the film so

⁴⁴ Mathius Guenther, 'Review of Paul John Myburgh's *People of the Great Sandface*', *CVA Review* (Spring 1991), p. 44.

⁴⁵ John Marshall, 'Filming and Learning', p. 56.

⁴⁶ Linn Cassidy, Ken Good, Isaac Mazonde and Roberta Rivers, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Botswana* (Windhoek: Legal Assistance Centre, 2002), p. 44.

⁴⁷ John Marshall, 'Comment on *People of the Great Sandface*', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 171-72; Wilmsen, 'Comment', p. 176; Keyan Tomaselli, 'We have to work with our own heads' (/Angn!ao): San Bushmen and the Media', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 15 (2002), p. 204; Robert J. Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface: People of the Great White Lie', p. 30. This is reminiscent of Robert Flaherty's work in early ethnographic films such as *Nanook of the North*, *Moana* and *Man of Aran*, and yet before the 1950s the purpose of film in ethnography was often seen as preserving images of dying cultures. These ideas were no longer in vogue in the 1980s, when Myburgh was working. On Flaherty see Karl Heider, *Ethnographic*

obviously ignores the larger historical context of the Bushmen in Botswana and moulds the film around a contrived narrative of man's struggle against nature. However, as with *Lost World of Kalahari* and *Bushmen of the Kalahari* there is evidence in the film of the existence of acculturated Bushmen. Myburgh's 'wild G/wi' reference them when they speak of the hunters on horseback from the government settlement, and at the end of the film we witness the G/wi band's decision to go to the government settlement. There, in the final scenes of the film, we see the settlement with its muddy dirt roads, dusty soccer field and a tap with its steady stream of water. As with *Lost World*, this evidence of change is pressed into service of a particular ideological discourse. For van der Post it was proof that pristine Bushmen needed to be preserved, especially in reserves. For Myburgh it is that this is the end of Bushmen culture: that when Bushmen change their mode of existence then 'Bushman culture' ceases.

However, just as it was argued that in both *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and *N!ai* there were moments when the Bushmen subjects of the film provided glimpses of their self-identification with hunting-and-gathering culture, so then can it be argued that the rituals and practises that Myburgh filmed in *Sandface* reflected something about what the people he filmed *knew, remembered* and *believed*. It certainly seems unreasonable to posit that Myburgh made up the rituals themselves when he filmed *Sandface* – such artifice would have been immediately apparent to the anthropologists who participated in lively debate over the film, and as we have seen Mathius Guenther, an anthropologist who has worked with the G/wi, saw value in the ethnographic information in the film.

An example of this is a menstruation ritual that the women in the group undertake. Myburgh is allowed to film the ritual, which is usually exclusively attended by women, because, as he later explained, the G/wi had named his camera 'the thing that cannot see is looking at you', because when they had looked through the viewfinder, they had failed to focus it and so believed that Myburgh could not see them through it. As a result, Myburgh explained to Tomaselli, 'the

Film, pp. 22-3; on the purpose of film in 'salvage ethnography' and Mead's input on this, see MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, pp. 66, 189.

women said that I as a man could attend the dance so long as I kept my eyes in the camera, because they said, I wouldn't see them and that Gamama – the great God – could not be angry'.

The sequence details a girl's ritual seclusion at the onset of her first menstruation and the women of the village enact a number of dances around the girl as she sits in a grass shelter for the course of her menstruation. Thus, we see intimate details of a ritual that plays an important part in the life of a young girl entering puberty. At the same time, Myburgh's patronising discourse about his presence at the ritual being misconstrued by the women reflects once again his idea that the Bushmen were too primitive to conceptualise the attributes of modernity, such as cameras. As was argued previously, this was an unlikely notion. This event usefully sums up the argument here: that the film shows rituals that have meaning for the participants (even if they are only enacting them for the camera), and so tells us something of their self-identity, but that these rituals are framed within a wider discourse that reflects a typecasting of the Bushmen that has more to do with the filmmaker's attitudes and context than with the Bushmen themselves. Unlike in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and *N!ai*, where these flickers of 'self-identity' on the part of the Bushmen are present through their speaking to or in front of the camera, in *Sandface* all of the world of the Bushmen is filtered through Myburgh's explanatory voiceover. Thus, while it can be argued that the Bushmen participants were reflecting elements of their cultural beliefs to Myburgh, these elements are subsumed and indeed defined by Myburgh's narrative of inevitable demise and racial essence.

8.5 PEOPLE OF THE GREAT SANDFACE AS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Myburgh's description of his filmmaking style attests to his idea that the people he was filming for *Sandface* had *no* history,

In the kind of culture that these people manifest everything repeats itself sometime or the other, so there was no real continuity problem. People would wear the same skins for a long while, until they wore out, and then they would make new ones which would look just the same anyway. The scenery didn't change radically either, so I could film a dance, and then this dance would take place two weeks later and then two weeks later again and I would just keep on filming, each time adding that little extra. Each time I would film

whatever inspired me – and the life continued thus, these different events always repeating themselves.⁴⁸

His perception that ‘all was one’ amongst the people he filmed could explain his abstract cinematography that merged individual identities into one mirage of group and vast environment in parts of the film. Myburgh makes fleeting references to historical process in his narration, and yet his careless treatment of that history is evident in several errors and inconsistencies. At the start of the film, for example, Myburgh says that the Bushmen have been living ‘on the Great Sandface’ for forty thousand years or more, whereas at the end of the film he claims the figure to be fifteen thousand years. Or he references history obliquely, as when he declares that ‘time and history have taken a toll on their numbers’, referring to the number of Bushmen living their traditional lives in Southern Africa. At the end of the film, Myburgh concludes that ‘no one is to blame. It is just that the Bushmen winter has come.’ Considering the complex history of the Bushmen of Southern Africa, this highly problematic statement constitutes a total negation of history.

This negation reveals the guiding logic of *Sandface*. As Laurens van der Post finds in *Last World*, to admit change over time and integration into the regional economy would be to admit that the Bushmen do not represent an idealised, unique culture of pristine primitives. At the end of the film, the band decides to go to the government settlement. Instead of relating this decision to a historical context of game reserves, land dispossession, seasonal foraging, access to water and minority rights in the Botswana Constitution, Myburgh, as we have seen, sets up this ‘change’ as the *end* of Bushmen culture. He ends the film by saying that ‘it is just that the Bushmen winter has come.’ The G/wi in this film are incapable of responding to the contingencies of history. Their culture is reified as a thing that must live in isolation or die completely. And in the end, according to Myburgh, it is not historical forces but the natural environment that leads to the demise of the culture. It is the drought, the thirst and the hunger that have caused this decision. In the light of the (human) history of the region in which *Sandface* takes place, it is understandable that critics such as Gordon declared the ending to the film to be ‘dishonesty of ethnocidal

⁴⁸ Tomaselli, ‘Interview with Paul Myburgh’, p. 28.

magnitude' and a 'denial of history'.⁴⁹ Thus, Myburgh's ideological framing of the Bushmen as pristine primitives also constitutes a particular interpretation of what the Bushmen subjects' history is.

In the introduction to this thesis it was argued that the interpretation of the Bushmen as having no *history* constituted a false but influential argument *about* their history. *People of the Great Sandface* reflects this kind of false historicising about the Bushmen's past most acutely of all the films under analysis in this thesis. The same might be argued about van der Post's *Lost World*, but in that film there is a peripheral view of examples of change, those 'spoilt' Bushmen of whom van der Post so despairs. *The Hunters* and *Bushmen of the Kalahari* also imply or posit an absence of change in the larger scope of Bushmen history, although the latter utilises some of Marshall's *Hunters* and *Bitter Melons* footage to make arguments about how suddenly and dramatically the Bushmen have changed between the 1950s and the 1970s. In *Sandface*, Myburgh also represents the G/wi as essentially unchanged across 40 000 years of history. Then he goes on to claim that the film itself is a *recording* of their final cultural devastation as they leave the desert to go and live in a government settlement. Thus the film is constructed as a historically significant moment of change, or film showing history-in-the-making.

Wilmsen makes a very important point about *People of the Great Sandface*. He writes that 'we might have [accepted this film] if it had been stated up front [that] the film is a *well-considered reconstruction of the past* [own italics].'⁵⁰ Gordon further comments that if the film is labelled non-fiction, then it must be viewed as a hugely problematic distortion of the 'truth' it is supposed to represent.⁵¹ It is because the film claimed to be a record rather than a reconstruction that it was so definitively challenged by its critics.

It is argued here that *Sandface* claims to be depicting history, or is presented as a study of history-in-the-making. What it is *saying* about Bushmen history, though, is that the history of the Bushmen is that they have no history, that their culture is unchanging and if it does change, this means that it has ended. Historians of film and history would label this 'false invention', whereby

⁴⁹ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface. People of the Great White Lie?', p. 31.

⁵⁰ Wilmsen, 'Comment on *People of the Great Sandface*', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 5 (1992), p. 178.

⁵¹ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', p. 32.

they mean that the history presented in a film denies, distorts or obscures the accepted historical record.⁵² However, Myburgh was not alone in positing this argument about the history of the Bushmen – it was implied or overtly stated in *The Bushmen*, *Lost World of Kalahari*, *The Hunters* and *Bushmen of the Kalahari*.

8.6 PEOPLE OF THE GREAT SANDFACE AS FILM IN HISTORY

8.6.1 THE POPULAR INFLUENCE

As we have seen, *Sandface* was a made-for-television ethnography that was shown on Britain's Channel Four in 1986. Despite the limitations of ethnographic films made for television, their influence is considerable. Programmes such as *Sandface* built on the popular success of series such as Granada TV's *Disappearing World* series, aired between 1970 and 1977, which had had a 'most positive influence in the British mass media on public views both of 'primitive peoples' and of social anthropology.'⁵³ In 1990 the Royal Anthropological Institute found that 25% of anthropology students had developed an interest in their field from watching television documentaries.⁵⁴

In South Africa, academics and the public embraced *Sandface*. It was seen as a 'breakthrough' in South African ethnographic filmmaking.⁵⁵ Myburgh himself was interviewed on a popular South African television programme called *Uit en Tuis* where he dressed up as a Bushman in order to show his audience how his fieldwork was done.⁵⁶ Beyond the borders of South Africa *Sandface* was well received in Britain and Europe.⁵⁷ Despite an extensive search, it has been impossible to find out how large the audience for *Sandface* was. Most of the debate around the film occurred in specialist academic journals, as will be discussed below, rather than in the popular media. The difficulty in establishing the precise viewership figures of *Sandface* relates to a larger problem

⁵² Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 72-6.

⁵³ Peter Loizos, 'Television Production: Granada Television's Disappearing World Series: An Appraisal', *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 82, no. 3 (September 1980), pp. 575-76.

⁵⁴ Wright, 'Television Narrative', p. 280.

⁵⁵ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', p. 30.

⁵⁶ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', p. 32.

⁵⁷ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', p. 30.

which this research has highlighted – that documentary films are difficult to track in terms of their general popularity, particularly older films. This point will be considered at greater length in the conclusion to the thesis.

8.6.2 INFLUENCE IN ACADEMIA: THE KALAHARI DEBATE

Since *People of the Great Sandface* claimed to be a factual representation of a G/wi band, anthropologists took notice of the film. It has been argued that this was in part due to the vociferous debate surrounding *Gods* which had increased interest in the representation of the Bushmen in popular film, but *Sandface* had raised some difficult and persistent questions of its own that would be debated in a number of anthropological journals. These debates have been referenced throughout the course of this chapter, however, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, the debates that arose around specific documentary films on the Bushmen were reflective of changing understandings of the Bushmen in academic anthropology, and also reflected changing intellectual currents that challenged reified depictions of the Bushmen as pristine primitives.

Much of the academic criticism levelled at *Sandface* was reflective of emerging ways of understanding the position of Bushmen in the modern states of Southern Africa. As shown in *Nlai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, it was becoming less and less possible – and less and less justifiable – to study the ethnography of Bushmen hunter-gatherer groups when these cultures, under sustained pressure from rapidly changing political and economic climates, were shifting and adapting in response. Two of the major critics of *Sandface* were Robert J. Gordon and Edwin Wilmsen. As discussed in the introduction, in the late 1980s and early 1990s both scholars would publish major revisionist and critical studies of the mythical representation of Bushmen as evidenced particularly in the scientific study of their bodies and cultures in anthropological writing.

In his review of *Sandface*, Gordon criticised what he identified as a complete denial of history in the film, epitomised by vague, unexplained statements in the voiceover narrative such as ‘time

and history have taken a toll on their numbers'. Gordon argued that the film failed to offer any kind of historical context, either for the historical dispossession of the Bushmen, or for their own context in Botswana in the late seventies and early eighties. He wrote that

If this film had been made thirty, or even fifteen years ago, it would have been hailed as a masterpiece, but so overwhelmingly has the political dimension been in Southern Africa that it would only be a foolishly naïve or a conservative positivist filmmaker who would not at least make some passing reference to the wider socio-political context [in which the film was produced].⁵⁸

Gordon furthermore condemned the film for its crude mythologising of the G/wi, who he said came across as 'objects' as opposed to subjects of Myburgh's camera, and for a narration filled with 'naive, romantic psychologisms representing them as some contemporary throwback to some imagined primeval men.' As seen earlier in this thesis, Gordon located Myburgh's film at the tail end of a long tradition of work by white South Africans who elevated the 'wild bushmen' to the status of mythic icons. Gordon concluded that Myburgh was not unique in having conceived and propagated this distorted image, but was part of a pedigreed white South African intellectual tradition.⁵⁹

Anthropologist Edwin Wilmsen and filmmaker John Marshall also condemned *Sandface* for distortion and elision of the historical record. Marshall was particularly critical of the subtext of the film which suggested that the Bushmen could survive without water in the desert.⁶⁰ Marshall calculated that, since a *tsama* melon contained about a pint of water, for the G/wi group in *Sandface* to have lived on the moisture from these melons for an entire year in one camp as alleged by the film, there should have been about 20 000 melon husks littering the shots that Myburgh took of the camp.⁶¹ Marshall's point was significant given the influence that the myth of waterless survival had had on legislation in the country, particularly in the influencing of MPs involved in writing the Constitution of Botswana in the 1960s. Then it had been recommended that the Bushmen be allowed to live in the CKRG since it was believed 'that surviving on roots and melons was a normal and sustainable condition.'⁶²

⁵⁸ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', p. 30.

⁵⁹ Gordon, 'People of the Great Sandface', pp. 32-3.

⁶⁰ Marshall, 'At the Other End of the Camera', p. 171.

⁶¹ Marshall, 'At the Other End of the Camera', p. 168.

⁶² Marshall, 'At the Other End of the Camera', p. 169.

The consequences of this myth of waterless survival were deadly for inhabitants of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, who sometimes died attempting to find water in the Botswana farming block of Ghanzi when CKGR boreholes dried up or became blocked.

Edwin Wilmsen also argued that certain rituals had been romanticised in the film, distorting the ethnographic information therein.⁶³ He argued that ‘any conceptual isolation of peoples in a time outside which they actually exist or in a mental state different from that of their contemporaries feeds racist ideologies. Myburgh’s mythopoetic, reverential voice-over does just that.’⁶⁴ Other reviewers of *Sandface* were less harsh than Wilmsen and Gordon. Mathias Guenther, an anthropologist who since the 1960s had worked amongst the various Bushmen groups in Botswana, expressed approval for the ‘genuine sympathy of the narrator [Myburgh] for the people’ and said that the film presented ‘a vast and valuable body of ethnographic information on a Bushman group that, for once, is not the !Kung’. Guenther recommended *Sandface* as an ‘excellent’ supplement to the key ethnographic works produced on the G/wi by George Silberbauer and Jiro Tanaka.⁶⁵ However, it is notable that Silberbauer, for example, had produced work on the G/wi that Wilmsen had criticised as being part of the isolationist paradigm which revisionist anthropologists and historians were seeking to overthrow, and Silberbauer had in turn criticised Wilmsen’s thesis that hunting and gathering was a last ditch survival strategy and not a cultural identity.⁶⁶

The purpose of juxtaposing the different responses to *Sandface* and tracing the intellectual positions held by the various critics is to show the confusing, often contradictory slew of responses to the film.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it is useful to see that the various commentators were

⁶³ Edwin Wilmsen, ‘Comment on *People of the Great Sandface*’, p. 176.

⁶⁴ Wilmsen, ‘Comment’, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Mathias Guenther, ‘Review of *People of the Great Sandface*’, p. 44.

⁶⁶ See Wilmsen, *Land Filled With Flies*, p. 5 and Silberbauer, ‘Morbid Reflexivity’, pp. 96-8.

⁶⁷ There was another contribution to the literature that grew up around *Sandface* that generated further debate. The controversy prompted Keyan Tomaselli, a South African Professor of Media Studies, to convene a panel discussion on the film amongst three African Studies scholars based in the United States who had not seen the film and were not aware of the controversy it had generated. The contents of the discussion are vague and highly speculative. Since no historical context is provided for the film (certainly not *by* the film), the panellists ended up discussing the autobiographical subtext of the film and agreeing that it deals far more with *Myburgh’s journey into himself, in search of himself* than with the G/wi and that, had Myburgh acknowledged this, the film would have been far more acceptable and less controversial. See

operating within paradigms that related to the discourse of their scholarship. Here we see emerging the two sides to the 'Kalahari Debate' (as discussed in the introduction) between the anthropologists who argued that hunter-gatherers in southern African practised discrete cultures and related their identities to this mode of living, and the revisionists who claimed that the Bushmen had long been integrated into larger regional, social and economic contexts in southern Africa, often as a dispossessed underclass, and that the traditionalist ethnographers inappropriately and disproportionately depicted hunter-gatherers in an ahistorical isolationist model.⁶⁸ Guenther's suggestion that Gordon and Myburgh 'move each within his own universe of discourse' is perhaps an apt one.⁶⁹ As a film *in* history then, *Sandface* provoked a discussion which reflected the growing strength and influence of debates that questioned the older, positivist ideas about the uniqueness of hunter-gatherers in southern Africa. These debates were related not only to the Bushmen – as seen in the previous chapter, the discipline of anthropology was moving away from positivist research methods that validated the objectivity of data collection in the field in favour of arguments that recognised the prejudices and concerns of the scholars themselves.

8.7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is argued here that in *Sandface* the elision of historical context, the discourse of inevitable demise and the stylised cinematography draw the audience away from the subjects of the film and toward the director's prescriptive interpretation of Bushmen culture. Thus, as with *The Bushmen* and *Lost World of Kalahari*, the audience is left with no doubt as to who 'Bushmen' are. As evidence of the ideologies of the people and period that produced the film, it was argued that *Sandface* is a nexus of three influences. The first is the requirements of popular made-for-television ethnographic film. The second is arguably that of Apartheid ideology. This is less

Keyan Tomaselli, Teshome Gabriel, Ntongela Masilela and Amie Williams, 'Discussion on *People of the Great Sandface*', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 153-66.

⁶⁸ This debate has been the introduction in the introduction to this thesis and is well assessed by Barnard in 'The Kalahari Debate', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 239-47.

⁶⁹ Mathias Geunther, 'Myburgh-Gordon Exchange: A Comment by Mathias Geunther', *CVA Review*, (Spring 1991), p. 60.

overt than the contrived narrative and obvious structure of the film's made-for-television format, but it is evident in the racial typing of the Bushmen which equates their race with their destiny, or the way 'in which the idea of human difference appears as part of the natural order of things'.⁷⁰ Apartheid ideology is also implied in the paternalistic ideas about the relationship between filmmaker and Bushmen subjects *and* in the idea that only the government can help the Bushmen adapt to modernity.⁷¹

As for the third influence, it was argued that in *Sandface* Myburgh also reflects the ongoing idealisation of a stereotypical depiction of Bushmen in popular white South African discourse, which might have received further impetus from the success of *Gods*. The film also parallels in many ways the Botswana government's discourse on the need for remaining Bushmen to adapt to modernity – except Myburgh posits that it is nature's wrath and not government mining and conservation interests that are bringing about this 'ending' of traditional Bushmen culture. It was argued that it cannot be proven that Myburgh was producing propaganda for the Botswana government – the film contains an acknowledgment of the Botswana's government's support in the making of the film, and presents the government in a positive light, but this is insufficient to prove a sinister connection between the two. Rather, it is argued, the film reflects the discourses of the broader culture in which it was produced, and in this example the discourse of Apartheid ideology and the ideas about conservation and diamond mining in the free Black nation of Botswana, disparate as they were, managed to cohere around a depiction of the Bushmen as noble pristine primitives, battling against nature and facing bravely their own culture's demise, only to be embraced by the beneficent State.

It was argued that the film offers some insight into certain cultures and rituals of the G/wi, as well as further examples of 'acculturated' Bushmen both hunting on horseback and living at the government settlement. It was also argued that the information in the film must be considered in

⁷⁰ Saul Dubow, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'', *Journal of African History*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), p. 210.

⁷¹ As Dubow writes, there were 'deeply encoded patterns of paternalism' that were an 'essential part of the Afrikaner nationalist tradition' which suffused Apartheid ideology. See Dubow, 'Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualisation of 'Race'', p. 210.

the light of accusations that the film was staged, and the strongly interpretive influence of the filmmaker.

As historiography, it was argued that *Sandface*, as with previous documentary films on the Bushmen, argues that the Bushmen have no history in the sense that their culture and traditions have remained the same over time. However, *Sandface* is also claimed to be a depiction of 'history in the making', a portrait of the demise of the very last traditional Bushmen in the world. Thus the film claims status as a first-hand account of this demise – a dramatic effect which reinforces its entertainment value.

Finally, as a film *in* history, *Sandface* was broadcast on television throughout England and America. This thesis has considered the influential nature of such made-for-television ethnographic film. It was noted that it is difficult to trace the influence of documentary films shown on television, and that the major debate around the film occurred within academia, amongst anthropologist and historians. The nature of this debate reflected changing scholarly approaches to the study of Bushmen culture and the rise of revisionist scholarship that critiqued any depiction of Bushmen as isolated pristine primitives.

The eighties was a time that saw the rapid politicisation of indigenous nations across the world. For example in Brazil, indigenous people and environmentalists joined forces in opposing ecologically destructive dams, roads, mines and colonisation schemes. Throughout the world international NGO's such as Environmental Defence Fund, National Wildlife Federation, Nature Conservancy, Rainforest Action Network and World Wildlife Fund began to agitate for native rights to land and resources.⁷² In South West Africa John Marshall and some of the Ju/Wasi founded the Ju/Wasi Bushmen Development Foundation in 1981. Thus, even in the fractious environment of southern African politics, with the ongoing war between the Apartheid state and SWAPO in South West Africa, a grassroots political awareness was growing amongst the Ju/Wasi in northern Namibia. By 1989, Botswana's Bushmen population would also begin

⁷² Conklin and Graham, 'The Shifting Middle Ground', p. 695.

to rally around common political causes and assume more prominence in the politics of the nation.⁷³

As seen in the previous chapter, ethnographic film practices were also changing rapidly, putting greater emphasis on participation between subjects and filmmakers and allowing film subjects to speak on camera. *Sandface* reflects neither of these currents – in fact the film posits the very archaic notion that nature is the only threat to a primordial way of life enjoyed by the G/wi. Thus, the film reflects a jarring dissonance with its immediate production context, and with the contemporaneous and growing global awareness of the rights of indigenous people. It might be posited that the artificiality and archaism of the film was a reflection of South Africa's ongoing cultural isolation. It might also be suggested that the enormous worldwide success of Uys's *Gods* had invigorated the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives so that, as with 'Hollywood's Indian', growing political awareness did not change the prevalence of simplistic popular depictions. The 'Bushman' were important subjects for South African filmmakers through the 1980s, as *Gods* and *Sandface* attest, and as is seen also in van der Post's *Testament to the Bushmen* (1986), a series which was met with warm reviews in England. It would seem that positing the idea of the Bushmen as pristine primitives was the one way that white South African filmmakers could articulate racial ideas without being pilloried by the international community. Richard Lee called it the 'peculiar mythology of white South Africa... the San as Noble Savages... the little brown men as a kind of mascot embodying the timeless values of a lost world.'⁷⁴ The 1980s and early 1990s would see the continued vigour of the image of the Bushmen as pristine primitive, and those images were not emanating only from South Africa, as will be shown.

⁷³Cassidy et al, *An Assessment of the Status of the San in Botswana*, p. 44.

⁷⁴ Lee, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy...', p. 91.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

THE GREAT DANCE: MYTH, HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN DOCUMENTARY FILM REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BUSHMEN FROM 1925 - 2000

FORWARD TO 2000

Throughout the eighties and nineties the image of Bushmen as pristine primitives remained ascendant in popular filmmaking. *Gods* spawned a number of spin-offs, including a sequel filmed by Uys called *The Gods Must Be Crazy II* (1989) and a number of Chinese-produced sequels entitled *Fei zhou he shang* (*The Gods Must Be Crazy III*, 1991), *Hcongong ya fungkwong* (*The Gods Must Be Crazy IV*, 1993), and *Fei zhou chao ren* (*The Gods Must Be Crazy V*, 1994). Of these, only *The Gods Must Be Crazy II* achieved any notable distribution in the West. In the early 1980s Laurens van der Post participated in a six-part documentary series entitled *Testament to the Bushmen* (1983) which was largely a testament to van der Post himself, centred on his putative lifelong connection to the Bushmen and rehashing the themes of *Lost World of Kalahari* such as the primordial significance of Bushmen culture for the decadent West.¹ The film was shown on BBC television in 1984, accompanied by an illustrated book by Jane Taylor which was published by Viking and Penguin to 'positive notices'.²

In 1996 the Discovery Channel aired a documentary entitled *Hunters of the Kalahari* by Richard Waxman and Wayne Derrick. Despite its documentary status the film was largely re-enacted by Bushmen 'actors' hired by the directors. Cattle, boreholes, old people and Western clothing were removed from the lives of the people filmed so that they could be portrayed as living pristine primitives in perfect symbiosis with their environment, completely removed from the harsh realities

¹ Jones, *Storyteller*, pp. 369-70.

² Jones, *Storyteller*, p. 369.

flowing from the inescapability of their enmeshment in a larger world.³ Thus, Laurens van der Post's pristine Bushmen remained pre-eminently interesting to filmmakers in these two decades. Once again it is useful to point to a similar pattern in popular Hollywood portrayals of Native Americans, where, as seen in the previous chapter, there was a continuing tradition throughout the eighties and nineties of depicting the Native Americans as Noble Savages, although a more appropriate term might be that of 'ecological Noble Savage': indigenous peoples generally and particularly Native Americans have in the past two decades become seen as 'natural conservationists' whose use of environmental resources is forward-thinking, non-destructive and sustainable. Despite the cautioning of anthropologists, historians and even certain native leaders about a generic connection between 'natives' and 'environment', particularly when 'environment' is framed along Western environmentalist principles, the rhetorical power of this idea in contemporary Western culture is undeniable.⁴ Thus, the Native American is still the exotic Other, but now is also the bearer of a profound ecological knowledge and understanding that can be educative to a Western audience.

In 2000 a new documentary film about the Bushmen was released that posited a similar notion of the Bushmen as ecologists drawing from primordial knowledge of the environment. Made by two young South African filmmakers, Craig and Damon Foster, it met with great international acclaim, winning awards for its photography and treatment of its subject matter.⁵ The acclaim garnered by *The Great Dance* leads one to a wry point about 'Bushmen': twenty years after the massive international success of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* they still constitute a powerful film export for South Africa. Unlike *Gods*, though, which was presented as a Botswanan film in order to obscure its origins in Apartheid South

³ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, p. 118.

⁴ Conklin and Graham, 'The Shifting Middle-Ground', p. 697. Thus, in the animated popular Disney children's film *Pocahontas* (1995) that featured no less than a female Native American historical figure as the central character, the theme song of the film 'Colours of the Wind' features the lyric 'but if you walk in the footsteps of a stranger/You'll learn things you never knew. Lyrics quoted by Pauline Turner Strong, 'Animated Indians: Critique and Contradiction in Commoditized Children's Culture', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 3 (August 1996), p. 405.

⁵ These included three prestigious Panda Awards (the equivalent of the Oscars for wildlife filmmaking), where *Great Dance* beat such noteworthy competition as the BBC/Discovery Channel's *Walking with Dinosaurs* and Sir David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*. See 'Award-winning San doccic gets public's nod' at http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art_id=ct2000112913551046G307

Africa, *The Great Dance* was 'proudly South African'. Furthermore, it was a local success by documentary film standards, attracting a relatively large audience in South Africa. In 2000, film distributor Ster Kinekor announced that *The Great Dance* was the second most successful documentary ever to be released on the South African cinema circuit. Despite the fact that only one 35mm film print was available for circulation, the film's short run at Cinema Nouveau in Rosebank was beaten only by that of *Buena Vista Social Club*, a foreign documentary with two prints in circulation. This is remarkable given that very few South African documentaries (and very few documentaries at all) ever reach the cinema screens of South Africa.⁶

The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story (2000) is a film that presents an opportunity to reflect on the findings of this study, because although it was made sixteen years after *People of the Sandface* it still focuses on the hunting-and-gathering culture of some Bushmen – with one very important difference. In the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, using the latest digital technology and reflecting the input of its Bushmen subjects, the film turns its focus on hunting-and-gathering culture into a vehicle for cultural remembrance *on the part of its Bushmen subjects*. As we have seen there were flickers of this in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and in *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman*, where individual Bushmen reflected on their continued identification with hunting-and-gathering culture. *The Great Dance* took this idea one step further and made the *whole film* about what the Bushmen informants say about hunting-and-gathering as their cultural identity. Thus, the film contains all the familiar images – Bushmen hunting, Bushmen half-naked, Bushmen at home in the vast spaces of the uninhabited desert, Bushmen using bows and arrows and spears, Bushmen trance dancing, Bushmen women gathering, Bushmen women clapping and singing, Bushmen eating raw animal innards, Bushmen living on minimal water – except this time the images are interpreted through the narration of a Bushmen hunter and what *he* says about hunting and gathering, about his culture, about his friends and about life as a poor Bushmen person in Botswana at the turn of the millennium.

⁶ See 'Award-winning San dobbie gets public's nod' at http://www.iol.co.za/general/news/newsprint.php?art_id=ct2000112913551046G307

Van der Post philosophised in *Last World* that the trance was the only way the Bushmen could practise religion: being 'unable to express their religion, they dance it'. Forward to 2000 and *The Great Dance* in which N!qate, one of the Foster brothers' Bushmen informants, explains that

We must dance for the good rains. The soft rains...
The healer is strong. He takes the ember inside of his body. The heat helps the power to rise in him. He will draw the arrows of sickness from the people...
The dance is hot. The fire is hot. The ember is hot. My hand is hot. My head is hot...
My spirit boils. Bad things go away! Get behind me! Bihisabolo, give me rain. Give me meat...
In the past times the old ones marked the stones. They tell how they journeyed to faraway places while dancing. They show us creatures they saw in that faraway world.

It would seem that on the rare occasions that documentary filmmakers actually allow their Bushmen subjects to speak to camera, what they choose to say affirms the importance of their culture and traditions to their individual and communal sense of identity. Thus, apparently, it is not only white male filmmakers who identify and focus on the significance of Bushmen hunting-and-gathering culture. Often the Bushmen subjects of their films do as well. In the meantime, the 'Kalahari Debate' rages on and the question remains: is this repeated imaging of 'hunting-and-gathering' on film a product of all the academic and popular interest that it has generated? Are the films reflecting something about their Bushmen subjects, or only something about the ideas and projections of their makers? The answer, it would seem, is something of both, as this research has shown and as will be discussed below.

At the time that *The Great Dance* was released, the idea of Bushmen had received new significance in post-Apartheid South Africa and Bushmen iconography was enjoying growing exposure and national significance.⁷ The South African national coat of arms contains rock art imagery and a motto written in !Xam, the now extinct language of the Northern Cape Bushmen who were destroyed in their guerrilla war with colonial South Africa. Bushmen iconography has proliferated on tourist literature and rock art has become a popular draw card for both local and international tourists. Derived from the van der Postian image of the Bushmen, the affirmative Bushmen iconography in the new South

⁷ Tomaselli, 'Introduction: Media Recuperations of the San', *Critical Arts*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1995), p. i.

Africa depicts the Bushmen as a link between past and present.⁸ Academic Ntongela Masilela has identified the van der Postian Bushmen image as a 'common cultural heritage which predated all later immigrants to South Africa' and has proposed that 'San culture' constitutes a means of 'avoiding the destructive competing nationalisms which threaten to sink the emergence of a non-racial future for this country'.⁹ The South African academic debate has occurred at a time when the idea of 'First Nations' and the rights of indigenous peoples has been gaining increasing international attention.

By the 1990s aboriginal peoples enjoyed greater influence in world politics, with the power to embarrass and influence national governments.¹⁰ The success of First Nation activism was evident in the gradual improvement of relations between aboriginals and national states that saw old relations of domination and control replaced by patterns of interaction that asserted the unique status of aboriginal peoples as 'nations within' or as distinct societies with 'special claims and collective entitlements that derive from formal recognition as the indigenous occupants of the land'.¹¹ In South Africa, for example, on 21 March 1999 President Thabo Mbeki signed a historic land deal at Askham in the Northern Province that returned centuries-old homelands to 'one of Southern Africa's oldest peoples', the Khomani San.¹² The makers of *The Great Dance* reflected this growing critical awareness of the plight of indigenous people in the world by allowing their Bushmen informants to speak at length throughout the film, and this underpinned their decision to give the Bushmen participants financial shares in the film. The film was also made in close co-operation with WIMSA (Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa).¹³ In *The Great Dance*, !Nqate proudly declares in the opening sequence that 'We are San Bushmen, the sons and daughters of the First People.'

⁸ Tomaselli, 'Media Recuperations of the San', p. i.

⁹ Tomaselli, 'Media Recuperations of the San', p. vii.

¹⁰ Fleras and Elliot, *The Nations Within*, p. 3.

¹¹ Fleras and Elliot, *The Nations Within*, p. 3.

¹² This typical reference to the 'ancientness' of the Khomani San was made in an article entitled 'Khomani San: A historic land deal' at http://www.firstpeoples.org/land_rights/southern-africa/whatsnew/kalahari%20san.htm

¹³ The producer of the film, Ellen Windemuth, explained that 'WIMSA... pronounced the film to be truly representative of the San people and their situation, and accepted our offer to be attached to the project as equity partners in exchange for expert advice and guidance on the subject. See 'Interview with the Producer' at <http://www.senseafrica.com/greatdance/movie/producer.html>

Furthermore, in post-Apartheid South Africa interested parties such as photographers and academics have been attempting to grapple with the ubiquitous Bushman imagery in the post-Apartheid South African context. This was evident in, for example, the revisionist photography of Paul Weinberg that tried, Marshall-esque, to depict scenes from life in Bushmen slums rather than images of Bushmen as pristine hunter-gatherers¹⁴ and the 1996 museum exhibition at the Cape Town National Gallery by academic Pippa Skotnes entitled 'Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture'. The exhibition brought together historical photographs and artefacts in a bid to explore the exploitative tendencies of Bushmen iconography that, in the words of Skotnes, cast Bushmen people as 'timeless, ahistorical hunter-gatherers, cast all but naked [on] a pristine landscape in which no foreign intrusion is evident.' Skotnes went on to make the point that this image is one 'exploited by...popular filmmakers'.¹⁵

Some 'popular filmmakers' were apparently alert to the accusation. The allure of Bushmen hunting-and-gathering practices remains and the visuals of pristine primitives in a desert Eden continue to appear in South African advertising.¹⁶ However, as a serious documentary film on the Bushmen made in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, *The Great Dance* reflects these cultural practices without eliding the influence of modernity on the Bushmen hunters. The subjects of the film wear ragged Western clothes, drink from plastic bottles and speak of their children going to school and learning English and Setswana. They speak of working for money on government projects, while their wives make necklaces from ostrich egg shells to sell to tourists. At one point in the film, the members of the hunters' village dance to music playing on a transistor radio and close-ups of running shoes and high heels emphasise the transforming influences of modernity on the lives of these people. But, says the hunter in the film, '[hunting] is a way to bring meat, and otherwise there is little work to be had. We can no longer follow the rains. We are no longer moving from place to place.

¹⁴ See for example Paul Weinberg, 'Footprints in the Sand', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 331-42.

¹⁵ See for example Rory Bester and Barbara Buntman, 'Bushman(ia) and Photographic Intervention', *African Arts* (Winter 1999), p. 52.

¹⁶ Barbara Buntman, 'Bushman Images in South African Tourist Advertising: the Case of Kaggga Khama', in Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast*, pp. 271-79.

Much of our land has been taken for cattle farming and wildlife parks. Sometimes we feel we have no future. My friend Karoha says, 'If you only sit, then you are just waiting to die. That is why he is always on the move. If he sees fresh tracks, he doesn't ignore them, it is our way'.

In this documentary at least, the Bushmen informants' accounts constitute a reminder that 'hunting-and-gathering' might be subject to exploitative, anachronistic imaging that fails to take account of the changing historical context of the Bushmen, but it is still part of an identity, a 'way' for some people in Southern Africa at the end of the twentieth century. The self-identity expressed by these Bushmen is in keeping with trends throughout the world since the 1980s that have seen indigenous people embracing their aboriginal status for the purpose of political activism and also in response to the commoditisation of indigenous cultures through tourism. However, the evidence provided by the documentary films under analysis in this thesis suggests that this process of 'self-identification' began earlier than the 1980s. Despite the predominance of imposed ideas about Bushmen culture in all these films, even and including *Nlai*, it is argued here that these films do not constitute evidence only of 'imposed ideology' – there are other voices, sometimes submerged, sometimes overtly apparent, within them. The documentary film, in its untidy relationship between the contrived diegetic world and the uncontrolled elements of the non-diegetic world which it seeks to capture and depict has the ability to contain within itself competing discourses and moments of 'rupture' where information escapes its ideological boundaries. In appraising these documentary films as sources, this study has sought to analyse the contrived, ideologically shaped nature of the films, but also has gleaned meaning from those moments of 'rupture' in the films, where the present-made-past by the movement of time is revealed as an unexpected archive for the historian, as will be discussed further below.

In considering these documentary films as evidence in this way, the analogy of a mirror ball is useful: the films reflect and refract the contexts in which they are produced; they offer clues about the societies that produced them and about the subjects of the film. For example, the aggressive responses of many academics to the films of Jamie Uys and to *People of the Great Sandface* must be seen

in the context of the 1980s and early 1990s anti-apartheid discourse. Thus, when using a film as primary source, the historian must always take into account historical context but *also* the way meaning is created by the language of the documentary film. The analysis of the films for evidence of ideology has confirmed the hegemony of the myth of Bushmen as 'pristine primitives', that is, the Bushmen have been most interesting to these documentary filmmakers as custodians of their culture and traditions, a point which has been made by many writers before. However, the way in which these cultures and traditions have been framed has changed over time – thus the *image* has remained the same or similar, but the interpretation of the image has changed with the values and attitudes of the filmmakers involved, and the periods in which they were produced. For example, in *The Bushmen* (1925), prevailing ideas about race and science saw the Denver African Expedition members framing Bushmen culture as a savage illustration of Social Darwinist evolutionary theory. The images themselves did not reflect the crude and racially derogatory nature of the intertitles of the film – and it was *those kinds of images* of the Bushmen which would endure through the twentieth century.

It is also possible to conclude that although all of these films have claimed to be about 'Bushman', what they really tell us the most about is the *ideas* that the various filmmakers had about Bushmen culture. Identifying and understanding these ideas, which have changed over time and are often a reflection of historical context (including changing film technology and ideas about filmmaking), has been a major part of this thesis. Whilst it has been difficult to trace the actual influence of some of these films, what this analysis has repeatedly revealed is that films are intensely influenced by their production contexts. So they might not always influence *history*, but their particular *historical contexts* influence *them*. Thus, it is proposed here that this thesis confirms the value of film, and arguably particularly documentary film, as providers of significant evidence about the values and attitudes of the people and periods which produced it.

Broadly speaking, the pattern observed by writers such as Robert J. Gordon, Edwin Wilmsen and Keyan Tomaselli of the Bushmen myth evolving from 'brutal savage' to 'pristine primitive' to 'first people' is reflected by these films. This is partly why they were chosen for this study in the first place

– because they had been identified by academics as important reflections of the Bushmen myth, or as counters to it. However, as with all historical writing, the danger of identifying patterns is that the practice can ‘flatten out all difference, [and] mould the complexity of human idiosyncrasy into one picture of what is ‘normal’.¹⁷ Identifying ‘documentary films’ as a source of the Bushmen myth, as so many writers do, fails to take into account the anomalies that individual films such as *Nlai* constitute but also, most importantly, overlooks anomalies within the films themselves. These films are valuable sources not just because they reflect the shape of the Bushmen myth as it has changed over time, but because each contains moments when people or events depicted in the film ‘escape’ its defining discourse. This argument relates to the first of the two most important findings of this study, which emerged through examination of the films as evidence of what they tell us about the Bushmen at particular times, and as films *in* history. When appraising the films for what they tell us about the Bushmen at the time of filming, almost all the films reveal some useful information about elements of cultural practices such as trance dancing; or technology such as arrow-making or bead-making. However, the historian wonders about change over time – thus what is more interesting than ethnographic details are the moments when the films *inadvertently* reveal actual evidence of such change – those moments of ‘rupture’ referred to earlier. For example, try as he might, van der Post cannot disguise the presence of some acculturated Bushmen people. He dismisses them as ‘spoilt’, presenting them to the audience as evidence of the desperate need to preserve pristine Bushmen culture. Similarly, in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) a lack of historical context and the foregrounding of an adventure story about a brave white protagonist still doesn’t disguise clear evidence that many Bushmen in Botswana are living in poverty. Even in *Sandface*, which entirely obscures the historical realities of the Bushmen of Botswana in a prolonged meditation on man against nature, the Bushmen culture is defeated by nature and eventually they move to a government settlement. Filming of the settlement briefly reveals the presence of a Bushmen proletariat, dressed in modern clothes, who look somewhat mystified by the exodus of their ‘wild’ counterparts out of the desert. In *Nlai* this

¹⁷ John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 110.

evidence of change over time is the subject of the film and hence is foregrounded, but for the historian, *N!ai* reveals evidence of something else – the presence of oral testimony on the part of the subject. By foregrounding change over time but allowing the Bushmen subjects of the film to speak, *N!ai* reveals the importance of hunting-and-gathering as a residual conduit of cultural identity to the protagonist and her community. Thus, oral testimony on the part of the Bushmen informants in *N!ai* ‘tells’ historians something interesting about what some Bushmen think about themselves. In this *N!ai* is a forerunner to *The Great Dance*.

A useful distinction can thus be drawn between those films that give their Bushmen subjects a space to speak and those that do not. In *Bushmen of the Kalahari*, for example, a film that otherwise rehashes anachronistic ideas about Bushmen culture, the brief moments in the film when Marshall interprets the words of two Bushmen informants reveal interesting points about the complex positioning of Bushmen people in Southern Africa at the time. The smoking young man is moribund and angry, seeing no further use in the traditions of his father who had still lived partly by hunting-and-gathering before his death. For him the future is grim, but the past is equally useless. ≠Toma, on the other hand, when analysing the rock art at Tsodilo, expresses pride in the hunter-gatherer past and reminds Marshall that once there were many Ju/Wasi who hunted and gathered on the surrounding plains. N!ai too is nostalgic about her hunting-and-gathering past.

However, it is notable that the only films that reflect *insights* into Bushmen identity as opposed to reinforcing didactically expressed ideas about Bushmen culture are those that allow their informants to speak, namely *N!ai* and *The Great Dance* – although there are fleeting examples of this in *Bushmen of the Kalahari*. *The Great Dance* similarly foregrounds the oral testimony of its Bushmen informants, who all express a strong identification with their hunting-and-gathering culture. In the extended DVD version of the film this ‘testimony’ is analysed by anthropologist Megan Biesele, who makes the point that ‘self-identification of the San is very deeply [connected] with the idea of hunting,

seeing themselves as hunters.¹⁸ Changing technology, as we have seen, also has had an influence on the way these films have been made, and in considering the question of oral testimony this is an important point to remember. Synchronous sound was not available to Marshall in making *The Hunters*, nor to van der Post when he made *Lost World*. The 'appending' of a narrative onto these films was thus partly related to the limits of technology. The advent of synchronous sound and experimentation with the documentary film format such as Direct Cinema opened up the way for documentary film subjects to be allowed to speak. *N!ai* was an early example of this – although, as has been discussed, the film still bore the heavy weight of Marshall's own concerns and N!ai's nostalgia for her hunting-and-gathering past is arguably also Marshall's nostalgia for the same.

The Great Dance is thus a recent indicator of how these changing technologies, film formats and ideas about documentary and ethnographic film foreground what was hinted at by *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and *N!ai*: the notion that their memory of the past may constitute an identity for the Bushmen informants themselves. This is not to say that these testimonies represent unadulterated 'truth' or are uncontaminated by the ideological framing of the films as a whole. We saw in *N!ai* how the 'argument' of an observational film is created in the editing process. Thus the potential for manipulation on the part of the filmmaker is great – it is easy to include *only* those pieces of testimony where the Bushmen informant expresses a desire for continued connectedness to his hunting-and-gathering traditions rather than, perhaps, to be part of a modern consumer society. Here the importance of the 'three-tiered' approach to analysis throughout this thesis becomes apparent – if it has been shown that a film is dramatically defined by a particular set of ideas, then the historian knows to approach what the film says about its subject with caution. It is unlikely, for example, that van der Post would have included any clips that show Bushmen people quite happily and contentedly managing to adapt to their changing circumstances. However, in more complex films where various strands of information run concurrently, as in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and *N!ai*,

¹⁸ See *The Great Dance*. extended DVD: Added Features: Alternate Commentary: Megan Biesele.

there is greater potential for evidence about Bushmen self-identity (as opposed to imposed identity) to emerge in spite of the governing ideology of the film, as we have seen in both cases.

Keyan Tomaselli writes of a 1997 video called *In God's Places* made by Irine Straehelin and Richard Wicksteed that the film 'has elevated San knowledge as a primary source.'¹⁹ The film, distributed by John Marshall's Documentary Education Resources, shows the descendents of Khoi and San people in South Africa explaining their own interpretations of Bushmen rock art and history. Tomaselli explains that 'this is the first time the power relation that exists between observers and observed in film has been inverted with regard to interpretations of San rock-art.'²⁰ However, as has been shown in this thesis, such a process of revealing indigenous knowledge predates *In God's Places* and *The Great Dance*. #Toma gave his interpretation of rock art in *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and N!ai speaks of her Bushman identity in *N!ai*. The use of documentary film as a source of oral history for historians should not be underestimated. All oral testimony is informed by ideology, the auditing of hindsight and gaps in memory. In documentary this framing is multi-layered – by the time the information comes to the historian it has been expressed by the informant and framed by the filmmaker. Thus, what this analysis has shown is that *first* the film must be analysed for evidence of ideology reflected by the values and attitudes present in the construction of the film, to understand the way in which the oral testimony has been framed, and *then* the value of that oral testimony can be considered. Documentary films are potentially living archives of oral testimony that with improving digital technology could have an indefinite shelf life. Understanding the way film frames and manipulates – being visually literate – is the way to opening up the testimony within documentary film as a form of knowledge for the future.

A second important result of this research relates to the use of documentary film footage as 'primary sources' of history, or film *in* history. As was shown, while *The Hunters* is a very specific film, detailing hunting culture amongst a small group of Ju/Wasi, clips from it have appeared in later films

¹⁹ Keyan G. Tomaselli, '...We have to work with our own heads' (/Angn!ao): San Bushmen and the Media', *Visual Anthropology*, no. 15 (2002), p. 203.

²⁰ Tomaselli, '...We have to work with our own heads', p. 203.

where they appear to be 'stock footage' of hunting-and-gathering culture. This is false – *The Hunters* itself was a constructed film that can constitute only a secondary source on Bushmen. However, these inserted clips from *The Hunters* take on different meanings in later films such as *Bushmen of the Kalahari* and *Nlai*, where they are seen to be depicting a generic Bushmen past. This is similar to the way in which footage from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1936) is very often included in documentary films to represent 'the Nazis' as though it were unedited raw footage, and yet the film was a highly stylised work that deliberately emphasised the might of the Nazis in the *very specific context* of the Nuremberg Rally of 1934. John Marshall was not blameless in this process of *The Hunters* becoming seen as generic 'historical' footage of the Bushmen, although he later demanded that footage from *The Hunters* be dated if it was to be used in documentary films. In 1991 he used the film on Namibian television as a means of generating support for Bushmen land claims in Namibia.²¹ It would seem that he himself saw the power of the images he made in the 1950s. The use of documentary as 'raw footage' is an under-researched subject. It constitutes a possible explanation for the tenacity of the image of Bushmen as hunter-gatherers in the late twentieth century – the images of Bushmen that circulated through the 1960s and 1970s, such as the clips from *The Hunters*, appeared in films as 'raw footage' of the Bushmen past that seemed to suggest that until very recently *all* Bushmen were hunting and gathering in southern Africa as the Ju/Wasi were doing in Nyae Nyae in the 1950s.

Arguably the most influential film *in* history about Bushmen was *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and there too Uys chooses to frame his Bushmen initially in a 'documentary' – perhaps this may be seen as evidence of the pervasiveness of documentary images of the Bushmen by the 1980s. The documentaries that have been examined in this thesis were not nearly as influential as *Gods* – perhaps *Lost World of Kalahari* comes closest to popular success, but the rest of the documentaries have mostly been utilised within the academy or shown on television, where the possibility for actually establishing their influence is limited. However, collectively these films reflect a growing visualisation

²¹ Wilmsen, 'Knowledge as the Source of Progress', p. 246.

of pristine Bushmen culture that reached its peak in the post-*Gods* 1980s. It is the lot of documentary film never to achieve the levels of influence that feature film achieves. Sophisticated investigations into Native American identity in documentary films over the past ten years have not overshadowed the popular images of 'Indians' in mainstream feature films. Despite Grierson's original aims for documentary film as an influencer of public opinion and perception, there simply never has been an audience for documentary films of the kind drawn by feature films.²² Thus, over and above mere popular influence, then, this investigation has also shown how the films engendered debate within academia – a smaller historical palette, but an indication of film *in* history nonetheless.

Finally, this thesis has assessed the films as works of historiography. Unsurprisingly, most of the films proposed that Bushmen history is static, which is a contradiction in terms. In *The Bushmen* (1925) and *People of the Great Sandface* (1984) (and even though these films are separated by 59 years) the Bushmen *are* history, relics unable to exist in the modern world whose demise is imminent. In *Lost World* we learn more about van der Post's history than about Bushmen history which – if they are 'proper' Bushmen – apparently has not changed in 40 000 'lovely and natural' years. In *The Hunters* the focus is on hunting and no mention is made of the Bushmen past. In *Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974) the history of all Bushmen is summed up through the reminiscences of Marshall and his !Kung film footage from the 1950s, except for the brief moment where we hear from ≠Toma about the Tsodilo Hills rock art. We see in that analysis how this failed to properly reflect the complexity of the variances in the histories of Bushmen groups in different regions of Southern Africa. In *N!ai* there is extensive analysis of the contemporary conditions of the Ju/Wasi of Nyae Nyae which reflects a number of important changes in their recent past. However, understanding the actual process of this change is limited to a brief introductory subtitle that explains how Apartheid policy in South West Africa resulted in the dramatic reduction of the Ju/Wasi original territory. It is through the protagonist that an oral history is told, and N!ai's reminiscences of her past are illustrated by Marshall's !Kung film footage.

²² Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentary*, pp. 40-1.

Thus, one may conclude that all of these films overtly tell us *something* about the history of the Bushmen, but generally the 'something' that they have not changed at all. At the same time, these films do not constitute 'ethnography', either. There is no systematic attempt to study the rituals and traditions of the Bushmen in any of these films. The ethnographer faces the same problem as the historian when appraising the films in that interesting rituals and traditions are depicted in all of the films, as well as even some evidence of kinship ties (in *The Hunters*, *Bushmen of the Kalabari*, *N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Women*) or technology (*The Bushmen*, *Lost World*, *The Hunters*, *Bushmen of the Kalabari*, *N!ai* and *Sandface*) but they are not subject to analysis *within* the film. Analysis must come from without, from the scholar who views the film for evidence, as has been done in this thesis. All the films uneasily straddle the divide between 'history' and 'ethnography', and it is up to the researcher to mine them for these veins of information. The structure of analysis that has been applied to these particular films might be applied to others with similarly fruitful results.

In drawing together these strands of analysis, we return to the importance of moments of 'ideological rupture' within the films, which constitute a specific potential of the documentary film form with its mediation between 'the real' and representation of 'the real' within a structure that constitutes its own world of discourse. These moments of 'rupture' might also be called a moment of 'direct address' – when the subject or subjects of the film suddenly 'speak' to the camera. The woman on the car in *The Bushmen* who blows a kiss at the camera, N!ai saying 'don't look at my face', #Toma gazing out over the plains below the Tsodilo Hills all seem to be saying 'we know you are watching and we also have something to say'. It opens up the difficult, intricate questions of what constitutes history and what mythology: most of the filmmakers studied here have foregrounded the Bushmen as 'pristine primitives', but perhaps, as *N!ai* and *The Great Dance* suggest, this process is a two-way street, a 'great dance' around the idea of identity. Perhaps the myth of Bushmen as pristine primitives is so tenacious precisely *because* it reflects (albeit through the strong refraction of ideological lenses defined by specific times and contexts) an element of self-identity on the part of the Bushmen informants of these films. Gordon argues this in relation to the photographs taken on

the Denver Expedition, pointing out that 'rigged or staged photographs require collaboration, and if bushmen [sic] did not want to collaborate there were many ways for them to disengage.'²³ Perhaps by blowing a kiss at the camera? Perhaps by asking the audience to look away? Perhaps by using the camera to assert identity? As N!qate says in *The Great Dance*, 'we know tracking. This is what we are born to do. We talk silently with our hands and we read the animals' stories... this is our way.' Documentary films are visual and aural archives which historians cannot afford to ignore.

²³ Gordon, *The Bushmen Myth*, p. 135

FILMOGRAPHY (arranged according to year)

i. Films relating directly to the Bushmen:

- The Bushmen* (1925). C. Ernest Cadle, Paul Hoeffler. United States. 95 mins.
- Lost World of Kalahari* (1956). Laurens van der Post. BBC. Britain. 180 mins (6x30 mins).
- Bushmen of the Kalahari* (1974). Robert Young and John Marshall. National Geographic Society. U.S.A. 52 mins.
- The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980). Jamie Uys. Mimosa Films. Botswana. 109 mins.
- Testament to the Bushmen* (1983). Paul Bellinger. BBC. Britain. 180 mins (6x30 mins).
- People of the Great Sandface* (1984). Paul John Myburgh. Anglia Television, *Survival* Series. South Africa and England. 120 mins.
- !Ko Buschmänner* (1987). D. Heunemann and H.J Heinz. Institut für den Wissenschaftlingen Film (IWF). Gottingen.
- The Gods Must Be Crazy II* (1989). Jamie Uys. Mimosa Films. South Africa/Botswana/USA. 98 mins.
- Fei zhou he shang* (*The Gods Must Be Crazy III*, 1991). Billy Chan. China. 96 mins.
- Fei zhou chao ren* (*The Gods Must Be Crazy V*, 1994). Kin-Nam Cho, Jamie Uys. China/South Africa/Botswana. Mimosa Films. 98 mins.
- Hunters of the Kalahari* (1995). Richard Waxman and Wayne Derrick. Discovery Channel.
- The Great Dance* (2000). Craig and Damon Foster. Aardvark / Earthrise / Liquid Pictures / Off The Fence. South Africa. 90 mins.

The !Kung Film Series:

- The Hunters* (1957). John Marshall. Film Study Center, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. U.S.A. 80 mins.
- A Group of Women* (1961). John Marshall. Laurence Marshall, John Marshall, DER. U.S.A. 5 mins.
- A Joking Relationship* (1962). John Marshall. Laurence Marshall, John Marshall, DER. U.S.A. 13 mins.
- An Argument about a Marriage* (1969). John Marshall. Laurence Marshall, John Marshall, DER. U.S.A. 18 mins.
- A Curing Ceremony* (1969). John Marshall. Laurence Marshall, John Marshall, DER. U.S.A. 8 mins.
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