

**THE IDENTITY OF DIFFERENCE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF  
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BUSHMEN**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own original work and that where use has been made of the work of others, it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

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## ABSTRACT

More than any other people, the Bushmen - like the Aborigines on the Australian continent - have epitomized the sub-human other in South African historiography. My primary concern in this study will be to interrogate the representations that gave rise to such entrenched notions of Bushman alterity, and the consequences these have had for Bushman lives. Through an assessment of the writings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travellers, missionaries, settlers, colonial officials and scholars, I shall examine understandings of 'otherness' and 'difference', and the ways in which alterity discourse opened up a space for the ensuing colonial policies of genocide and subjugation against the Bushmen. By allowing the Bushman 'voices' to talk back - through an exploration of verbal and visual forms of Bushman creative expression - I hope to present a more balanced sense of Bushman 'identity', and expose the fundamental intolerance of difference that lies at the heart of alterity discourse. I shall conclude the thesis with a problematization of contemporary trends of representation, an examination of how these often inadvertently continue the process of othering, and a consideration of their repercussions for present-day Bushman lives.

Aside from the obvious relevance of such a study to an understanding of both the destructive events and representations of history, and the current traumatic circumstances of Bushman lives, the questions that this thesis raises can be seen to have more far-reaching implications. In a country such as South Africa, with its long history of segregation and discrimination, issues of otherness and difference take on a particularly compelling resonance. It seems crucial - especially at this point in our national progress - to interrogate our historical attitudes towards otherness, and posit

more constructive ways of approaching difference, that allow others their distinct identity, without either demonizing or collapsing such difference; or, to phrase it in Homi Bhabha's question: "How can the human world live its difference? how [sic] can a human being live Other-wise?" (1994:122).

## INTRODUCTION

*You pigmies lived in dust and filth,  
The earth with lepers sowing,  
And man, though gaining by your past,  
Is better for your going.*

*For morning hues must pass away  
And dawn be left in shining.  
The moving Earth the stagnant leaves,  
And passes unrepining.*

Owen R Thompson. 1919. "The Bushman" (quoted in Voss 1987:30).

More than any other people, the Bushmen - like the Aborigines on the Australian continent - have epitomized the sub-human other in South African historiography. My primary concern in this study will be to interrogate the representations that gave rise to such entrenched notions of Bushman alterity, and the consequences these have had for Bushman lives. Through an assessment of the writings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travellers, missionaries, settlers, colonial officials and scholars, I shall examine understandings of 'otherness' and 'difference', and the ways in which alterity discourse opened up a space for the ensuing colonial policies of genocide and subjugation against the Bushmen. By allowing the Bushman 'voices' to talk back - through an exploration of verbal and visual forms of Bushman creative expression - I hope to present a more balanced sense of Bushman 'identity', and expose the fundamental intolerance of difference that lies at the heart of alterity discourse. I shall

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### **The Bushman as Specimen**

It is widely agreed that Bushman hunter-gatherers have inhabited the southern African sub-continent for between 11 000 and 40 000 years (Bieseke 1993:xix). Held to be the earliest people in the region (Chapman 1996:1), their original numbers, prior to the arrival of the Dutch, are estimated to have been 150 000 to 300 000 (Brown 1995:31). Their tragic and brutal story is by now well-known. In the era between the arrival of the first settler at the end of the sixteenth century and the start of the nineteenth century, they had been butchered, starved and hounded to the brink of mass extinction

- their culture and society devastated, their hunter-gatherer lifestyle irrevocably destroyed, and the vast majority of the people killed or taken into servitude (Skotnes 1996a:17). Many of those who escaped the genocide died of disease or starvation resulting from the destruction of game and their being driven off their lands. History records that it was not only the white imperialists who perpetrated such determined genocide against them. Magistrate Louis Anthing noted in 1863 that “during the last ten years a wholesale system of extermination of the Bushman people had been practiced [sic]. Corannas....Kafirs....coloured [sic] and European farmers....all shared in the destruction of these people” (quoted in Skotnes 1996a:17). Anthing points out that “the killing of the Bushmen was not confined to the avenging or punishing of (stock) thefts, but that, with or without provocation, Bushmen were killed....sometimes by hunting parties, at other times by commandos going out for the express purpose” (Ibid).

The fate of the Bushmen was shared to a large extent by the Khoi pastoralists, to whom they were closely related both genetically and linguistically, and with whom they are often conflated. However, since there is not scope in a thesis of this nature for an all-embracing analysis of the Khoisan people, the focus will be on the Bushmen per se - a grouping denoted by the practice of a mainly - if not exclusively - hunter-gatherer lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the terms “Bushman” or “San” has occasioned much academic and other controversy. Since the Khoisan do not see themselves as an integrated people identifiable by a single homogenous name (Gordon 1992:4), and since both terms have been proven to have derogatory connotations, I have opted for the more commonly used “Bushman”, in keeping with Robert Gordon’s assertion that: “Changing the label does not reduce the racism....we need to confront the same terms and infuse them with new meaning” (Ibid:6).

The controversial photographic exhibition, “Miscast - Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture”, which was held at the South African National Gallery (Cape Town) in 1996, attempted to “challenge stereotypes and evoke respect for the /Xam and other southern African hunter-gatherers” (Skotnes 1996a:10). It detailed a pitiless record of colonial atrocities. Photographs of hangings, naked shackled prisoners, emaciated women and children, trophy skulls and naked males - often posed sideways against measuring rulers to draw attention to both diminutive size and so-called ‘sexual aberration’ - tell their own story.<sup>2</sup> On the inside cover page of the book version of the exhibition, entitled *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Skotnes 1996a), there is an 1840s price list for a hides and skins auction in which, under the heading “Saugethiere” (Mammals), is the skin of a “Bushman woman”, offered for 400 francs.

It is important to recognize that the acts of colonial aggression referred to above were not enacted arbitrarily, but found their inspiration and legitimation in the discourses of the day. This link between power and discourse and their mutual implication in systems of domination has been noted by theorists such as Foucault, Bhabha, Spivak and others, who have pointed out the way in which subjects are produced, not merely represented, by discourse (McHoul and Grace 1993:15). In the historical writings of the early colonial sojourners, one finds clear evidence of what Bhabha has described as the process through which the colonized “is constructed within a disabling master discourse of colonialism which specifies a degenerate native population to justify its conquest and subsequent rule” (quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths

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<sup>2</sup> A decision was taken not to feature any of the many photographs of female genitalia (Skotnes 1996a:19).

and Tiffin 1989:178). The texts of travellers, traders and missionaries alike deploy the loaded language of dehumanization. Bushmen are variously described as animals, savage vermin, satyrs, untameable wild people, without intellect or history: “the most degraded and miserable of all nations, and the lowest in the scale of humanity”, too “brutish, lazy and stupid” even for slavery (Gordon 1992:15). Their language was described by Edward Terry in 1777 as “inarticulate noise, rather than language, like the clucking of hens, or the gabbling of turkeys” (Skotnes 1996:24). Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in 1649 asserted that: “When they speak they fart with their tongues in their mouths” (Ibid). They are dismissed as stone-age anachronisms, on a “closed development path....incapable of adopting [sic] to agriculture or pastoralism”, whose extinction is thus both inevitable and desired (Gordon 1992:60). As South West African settler Paul Barth put it in 1926, the Bushman, “with his wrinkled skin, bloated stomach, and sly, cunning eyes, looks like a beast of prey himself....they seem to be dying out and no-one will be any worse for their loss, as they are destroyers rather than producers” (Ibid:137).

Such depictions stressed the otherness of the Bushmen in no uncertain terms, with particular emphasis on their perceived physical difference. As Skotnes points out, anthropologists, ethnographers and biologists sited the image of the Bushmen very definitely in the body. She speaks of “the drive by science to describe, measure, record and dissect Khoisan bodies in the nineteenth century”, which found its expression in endless “diagrammatic drawings, anthropometric photographs, casts and collections of body parts” (Skotnes 1996a:20). The term “Bushman”, she notes, conjures up “not specific history, power struggles or literature, but physical type or specimen” (Ibid). Of particular interest to the men of science were the Bushman genital “peculiarities”,

what J Drury, “Modeller to the South African Museum, Cape Town” in 1926, termed “The Pudendal Parts of the South African Bush Race” (Skotnes 1996a:252). By this he was referring to the “steatopygia” (pronounced buttocks) and “peculiar elongation of the labia minora pudendi” (also known as the Hottentot Apron) of the women, and the “semi-erect penis” of the men. “These racial characteristics are of great anthropological and medical importance”, he states, “yet our knowledge of them is far from satisfactory. As the material for the study of these peculiarities is becoming exceedingly limited and scattered, it seemed to us that it would be advisable to use the opportunity afforded to one of us, when taking casts of these people from the nude, to try to amplify our knowledge of the subject” (Ibid). He then proceeds to classify the different types of “buttock contour” - by shape, consistency and colour - and to describe and speculate on the “function” of what he calls “the nymphae”. He concludes with an explicit description - which he claims was given to him by “A Bushman” - of “one of their dances in which the men and women took off all their clothing. During the dance the women rushed up to the men of their choice, turned round and wagged their buttocks before them. This was repeated several times, and ultimately they bent down, separated their legs, and exposed themselves with their lapels hanging down. The men then copulated on the posterior aspect of the women. This went on till all were exhausted” (Ibid).

Such prurient fascination with the perceived sexual proclivities of “savages” is entirely in keeping with the prevailing precepts of the day, which saw Africa firmly established as “the quintessential zone of sexual aberration and anomaly”, where, “as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises” (termed by John Ogilby “large propagators”) and “women consorted with apes” (McClintock 1995:22). Long before

the era of imperialist ventures began, Africa, along with America, “had become the porno-tropics for the European imagination - a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears” (Ibid). In this, the female Khoisan were “located at the very nadir of human degeneracy, just before the species left off its human form and turned bestial” (Ibid:55). According to this trope, their anatomical “difference” was seen as proof of their lascivious and degenerate nature, “primitive” sexual appetite having manifested in “primitive genitalia” (Low 1996:23-24). This culminated in the well-known case of Saartje Baartman, degradingly billed as “Hottentot Venus”, who has become a “potent symbol of the humiliation suffered by indigenous people in general and indigenous South Africans in particular” (Skotnes 1996a:9). For five long years, from 1810 to 1815, she suffered the ultimate degradation of being exhibited for the public at salons, fairs and animal acts in London and Paris, in order that her “physical and sexual pathology as manifested in the ‘Hottentot apron’ and ‘steatopygia’” might illustrate race theorists’ notions of European superiority (Skotnes 1996a:9; Low 1996:23-24). After her death, she was dissected by George Cuvier, the comparative anatomist. Her genitalia and other body parts remain on display in a Paris Museum today.

While it is true that the Bushmen were by no means alone in their persecution by conquering colonial forces, the degree of viciousness that was directed against them was unparalleled. They have the distinction of being “the most victimized and brutalized people in the bloody history that is southern Africa” (Gordon 1992:10). In part, this was undoubtedly due to their tenacious and protracted resistance to colonial attempts to ‘master’ them. Choosing death rather than submission, the Bushmen for the most part strenuously resisted the imperial might, countering guns with poison

arrows, organised brutality with shadow banditry, standing firmly in the way of colonial ambitions to settle what early German maps referred to as “the masterless area” (Ibid:11). The fact that their resistance took the form not of organized military might, which could be admired, but rather guerrilla tactics, perpetrated by an invisible cunning enemy who could not be got to grips with, did little to pacify their settler enemies. “What can the civilized human being manage to do with people who stand at the level of that sheep stealer?” lamented the geographer Siegfried Passarge in 1907; “Does any possibility exist other than shooting them?” (Ibid 60).

The protracted brutality of the encounters between Bushman and settler took a heavy toll on both sides. Records of the war between the Bushmen and Dutch in the Cape Province show that in the space of ten years, from 1786 to 1795, 2 700 Bushmen were killed and 700 imprisoned. In the same span, the Bushmen are said to have killed 270 Europeans and stolen or destroyed 600 horses, 3 500 cattle and 77 200 sheep (Dornan 1925:200-201). While the ‘scourge’ image that such resistance garnered for them undoubtedly did little to win them the sympathy and understanding of their conquerors, it should be seen not as the cause, but the culmination of a process of demonization that had its roots in a long history of othering discourse. In effect, colonial attitudes towards the Bushmen can be seen to have been determined before the colonists had even left the shores of home.

### **The Other of Darkest England<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> From William Booth’s *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, which was directly inspired by Henry Morton Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa* (McClintock 1995:120).

Any effective reading of colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha suggests, should shift its emphasis from the mere identification of images as positive or negative, “to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (quoted in Low 1996:1). Gail Ching-Liang Low takes this further, asserting that in seeking to understand the efficacy of alterity discourse, it is not enough simply to dismiss the stereotypicalities of white patriarchal myths; there is a need to address the power of that mythmaking and the “psychic investments which determine the formation of [such] fictions” (Ibid:1-2). In this regard, it seems important to recognize that, in many respects, the colonial attitudes towards the Bushmen had their earliest roots not in the continent of Africa, but in “Darkest England”.

Nineteenth-century England, prior to and during the period of imperial expansion, was undergoing an intense and critical social and psychological readjustment. The rapid growth of the cities in the wake of industrialization, problems of urban poverty and decay, and the “unbridgeable” divide between the classes, led to perceptions of a split in the nation, a “complete separation, not only in sympathy and feeling, but in actual geographical aggregation” (Ibid:15). “Darkest England” or this “other” nation, became a focus of obsessive concern and study by reformers, evangelists and sociologists. Andrew Mearns’s 1883 pamphlet, “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London”, presents an alarming image of a “vast mass of corruption”, “seething in the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilization and decency” (Ibid:16). The Rev. Ross’s investigation in 1854 into the Parish of St James details an environment of filth that not only generated disease and misery, but was seen as debasing to the character of those who lived there (Ibid:15). Nineteenth-century

biological determinist discourses forged a strong link between human advancement and body health, with the physiologically healthy body representing “psychological, national, literary and racial health” (Ibid:13).

Bodily degeneration thus became conflated with social and urban crisis, the physical body and the body politic inextricably linked in the rhetoric of degeneracy (Low 1996:15). There was a nostalgia for the lost pastoralism of England, which had bred an “autochthonous breed of epic heroes” whose “deeds are written large in history” (Ibid:18). The ‘manliness’ and fearless virility which were considered to be the natural British character - essential for the maintenance of Britain’s position as a dominating power - were seen to be sliding into the “decadent spirit and lack of virility” so evidently manifest among the seething classes of contemporary urban society (Ibid).

Such fears were given credence, and greatly exacerbated, by the prevalent scientific discourses of the day. Biological determinism and racial environmentalism increasingly linked environmental factors such as climate and geographical location with racial development, also drawing on humoral theory to chart character and intellectual development through physique. Influential theories such as “Social Darwinism”, “The Chain of Being” and “Tree of Man” postulated a linear or teleological model of human development, from degenerate native child to adult white man - which held within it the converse possibility of a slide backwards through “racial decline” to “a primordial black degeneracy incarnated in the black mother” (McClintock 1995:49; Low 1996:28).

It is within such paradigms as these, against the widespread alarm of evident national deterioration, and against a background of increased intensification of competition from the newly industrialized nations of America and Germany, that England's obsession with racial difference and white supremacy must be located. To the early settlers, colonization offered the chance to escape "contamination and defilement" by what the narrator in Rider Haggard's *Alan Quatermain* terms the "sinks of struggling, sweltering humanity", and the opportunity to pursue their fantasies of "empowered masculinity" in the wild and unclaimed "Edens" of the "African outback" (Low 1996:37). Britain's social ills were the demon they exported with them: the spectre of their own 'deteriorating' race. It can be argued therefore that in the imperial mind, the trope of the 'other' - what Low calls "the mimesis of savagery" (Ibid:66) - was to some extent a preconceived given, rather than arising primarily out of their encounters with any 'real' indigenous other; that in effect, nineteenth-century Europe's preoccupation with the polarities of sanity, criminality and racial deterioration, became displaced onto the far-flung 'other' of the colonies.

### **The Savage Other**

Edward Said, in his discourse on Orientalism, talks of the distillation of certain ideas about the Orient into "a separate and unchallenged coherence. So that the very word becomes enough to invoke a specific body of information" (1994:144). In examining the discourses around the Bushmen, it becomes clear that to the nineteenth-century Europeans, the word "Bushman" more than anything else conjured up degenerate physical type. Despite what Robert Gordon terms "the extraordinary European fascination with Khoisan genitalia" (Skotnes 1996a:254), the Bushmen were, in stature, the diametric opposite of British ideals of masculinity. They lacked the virile

musculature and military strength so admired in the Zulus. With their childlike size, their 'puny' frames and 'animal-like' physiognomy, they not only represented to British perceptions visible evidence of the nadir of human beginnings, but also the embodiment of the 'slide back' by the 'degenerating' classes back home. "The Bushmen of the Desert", wrote David Livingstone in 1850, "are perhaps the most degraded specimens of the human family" (quoted in Voss 1987:26). His was a view that was widely shared. "The highest type of monkey suggests - thanks, or rather, blame to Darwin - the lowest type of man in Africa. This is the Bushman, or, as the Dutch have it, the Bosjesman". This was the opinion expressed by R M Ballantyne in 1876 (quoted in Voss 1987:26).

Such denigratory discourse clearly played an influential role in subsequent colonial policy towards the Bushmen. Since the Bushmen were not human, had no history, and "lacked entirely the precondition of any cultural development" (Gordon 1992:63&92), invasion of their lands and exterminatory solutions to the 'problem' that they constituted were entirely justifiable. There was a widespread perception that 'human life' only began with settler arrival, the 'natives' having existed in a state of what McClintock terms "anachronistic space" - "prehistoric, atavistic and irrational" (1995:40). Indigenous claims to land were correspondingly either ignored or dismissed as invalid. White settlers took it as a given that "land was available virtually for the asking in the area they dubbed 'Bushman land and Baboon country'" (Gordon 1992:92). The Bushmen, by standing firmly in the way of these settler aspirations, were considered to be obstructionist pests who, by their non-co-operation and refusal to be 'tamed' and 'civilized', drew upon themselves the justified wrath of the colonists. Dr Lichtenstein voiced a popular sentiment of his time when he stated in the

1840s: “What had a people like the Bushmen to lose - they who are every where at home, who know not the value of any land?” (quoted in Moffat 1842:54).

This axiomatic belief in the settlers’ right to colonize the ‘virgin’ and ‘unpeopled’ territories of Africa received further validation from a popular ideology of the time - the ‘civilizing’ or ‘Christianizing’ mission. This is exemplified by the Rudyard Kipling poem, “The White Man’s Burden”:

Take up the White Man’s burden -

Send forth the best ye breed-

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives’ need;

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild -

Your new caught peoples.

Half devil and half child.

(quoted in Kenworthy and Kenworthy 1996:6)

There was a deeply held conviction that it was the ‘Christian’ duty of the ‘advanced powers’ to annex and occupy the ‘uncivilized’ regions of earth (Said 1994:145) - in order to save the ‘degenerate races’ from what the missionary Robert Moffat termed “the lowest depths of ignorance, superstition, disorganization and debasement” (1842:3). Furthermore, it was arrogantly professed that colonization was not just desirable, but desired by its victims: “Wherever Europeans have founding colonies of the type we are considering, it can safely be said that their coming was unconsciously

expected - even desired - by the future subject peoples” (Mannoni quoted in Fanon 1986:99). It was an oft-repeated maxim that ‘they’ were better-off under colonial rule. An added justification was that it was incumbent on the imperial powers to ensure that the ‘God-given’ riches of Africa were not ‘wasted’ - a viewpoint frequently propounded by ‘men of God’ among others. The Rev. Barde declared, for instance, that if the goods of this world had “remained divided up indefinitely, as they would be without colonization, they would answer neither the purposes of God nor the just demands of the human collectivity” (Césaire 1994:175). The Rev. Muller agreed with him: “Humanity must not, cannot allow the incompetence, the negligence, and laziness of the uncivilized peoples to leave idle indefinitely the wealth which God has confided to them, charging them to make it serve the good of all” (Ibid).

Underscoring such beliefs was the dominant discourse of white supremacy, which by affirming the incontrovertible intellectual and moral superiority of the colonizers did much to pave the way for imperial licence: “We are the chosen people - look at the colour of our skins. The others are black or yellow. That is because of their sins” (Sir Alan Burns quoted in Fanon 1986:30). In such tropes, science played an important validating role, with its claims of ‘objective’ evidence and anatomical bases for its doctrines of dogma. Dr H L Gordon, for instance, physician at Mathari Mental Hospital in Nairobi, claimed that a “highly technical skilled examination” of 100 “Native” brains found indications of “inherent new brain inferiority.... [amounting] to 14.8 percent” (Ibid). This privileged superiority of the white race was premised not only on intellectual, but moral grounds, which Biblical indoctrinations, equating blackness with sin, did much to underscore. “The chief culprit in this domain,” points out Aimé Césaire, “is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations

*Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery*, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences” (1994:173). In his hard-hitting critical essay entitled “Discourse on Colonialism”, Césaire takes umbrage at the justificatory discourses of colonialism, such as those outlined above. Colonization, he asserts, is

neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. [The essential thing is to] admit once for all, [sic] without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies. (Ibid:173)

While there is no denying the truth in Césaire’s assertions, it is perhaps as well, as Bhabha and others caution, to guard against too simplistic a reading of colonial motivations. Psycho-analytic theory, for instance, points to the fact that embedded within the “perverse palimpsest” (Bhabha 1994:116) of othering discourse is a complex interplay between desire, power and subjectivity. “Colonial subjectivities produced by the powerful divisions of self and Other seem paradoxically to be dogged by a relentless nostalgia and desire for the excluded Others”, Low observes (1996:3). This gives rise to a need to “reappropriate the libidinous spaces imputed to non-Western cultures” - as is manifested in the colonial fascination with “native” culture

and “going native”, and in the intense scrutiny and examination of “inferior” and “exotic” races (Ibid). What Low calls the “colourful spectacles of exotica” (Ibid:25) were very much a feature of nineteenth-century English life. Armchair travellers could not only hone their prejudices on the “large output of travel writing and the journals of explorers and missionaries”, but view for themselves the various “anthropological curiosities” brought back from Africa and other foreign lands, to be put on display in a variety of travelling exhibitions (Ibid). Among these were “The Zulu Kaffirs” and the “Earthmen from Natal”. The latter were described by the *Illustrated London News*, on November 6 1852, as “interesting little natives of the land of Bushmen, Hottentots and Kaffirs [who] have been rescued from the lowest depths of barbarism and (are now) surrounded by the novel sights and sounds, and comforts of English civilisation” (Ibid). The description that follows of these “grotesque curiosities” illustrates in no uncertain terms the physical superiority of the Caucasian race:

The nose is the worst feature in the face. Between the eyes there is scarcely any projection; and the nose is so spread as to be confounded with the cheeks; until the nostrils appear. The lips are rather thick....the teeth, white as those of a sheep....The hair....resembles the wool of black sheep, strong, short and coarse. It grows in stiff spiral lines, so that the scalp is everywhere seen. (Ibid:26)

The tone adopted for this report may seem to be that of an impartial observer, but there is no mistaking the dehumanizing bias of the description. The frequent animal analogies and the feature-by-feature breakdown place these “Earthmen” firmly in the ‘non-human’ category. In this case the detail is very specific to the ‘specimens’ under observation. However, a particularly interesting feature of alterity discourse in general

is that it often tends not so much to emphasize, as to flatten, racial differences within the othering stereotype, projecting a commonality of racial traits that takes no heed of actual disparities. While skin colour, which Spivak terms “chromatism”, is the more obvious founding characteristic of otherness, where this distinguishing “marker of degeneration” is lacking - eg with the Irish or Jewish ‘other’ - it is compensated for by the caricaturization of features, which McClintock terms a “simianizing of their physiognomies” (1995:53). This is well illustrated in an 1882 cartoon drawing titled “The King of A Shantee”, which depicts an ape-like Irishman with exaggerated lips, receding forehead and unkempt hair, and his equally ‘brutish’ wife outside their hovel (Ibid). It is also noteworthy that the “white negroes” designation was not only applied to specific national or racial types, but extended to all “undesirables”. McClintock notes that in the metropolis, the idea of “racial deviance” was evoked to police the “degenerate” classes - the militant working class, the Irish, Jews, feminists, gays, prostitutes, criminals and the insane. They were collectively figured as “racial deviants, atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory”, ominously resurfacing in the heart of the modern metropolis to place in jeopardy the “virile race of empire-builders” (Ibid:43-47). Such discourse was given validation by doctrines of scientific racism masquerading under the label of objective truth. McClintock outlines how nineteenth-century scientists “became enthralled by the magic of measurement”, premising their discriminatory theories on the belief that the “geometry of the body mapped the psyche of the race” (Ibid:50). A plethora of “scientific” criteria, from cranial capacity to lobeless ears or forearm length and facial features, was used to identify the “racial worth” of the “atavistic” races within the European race - such stigmata signifying the relative position in the evolutionary scale (Ibid).

In her article “Through the Looking Glass: African and Irish Writing”, C L Innes points out that “the colonial image of Irish and blacks was almost identical” (1982:11). She quotes a letter from Charles Kingsley to his wife, in 1860, in which he says of the Irish: “I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country....to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours” (Ibid:12). Innes also draws attention to the similarity between Matthew Arnold’s depiction of the Celts and the popular stereotypes about “Africans” and “darkies”, concluding that such similarities indicate “the rigidity of the colonizer’s conceptual system rather than any likeness between the colonized peoples” (Ibid:13).

I have already suggested that in seeking the underlying rationale behind such self-serving theses of the backwardness, degeneracy and inequality of others, one should look beyond the obvious. While it is true that narratives of ‘other’ are essentially narratives of justified exploitation, and that, as Michael Chapman asserts, “myths of racial superiority and inferiority have served to justify a rapacious history involving conquest and the European (settler) requirement of cheap labour” (1996:2), it is equally possible to see in such dialogues the psycho-analytic tropes of other as self’s shadow. “By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being I affirm at the same time that I belong to the elite” asserted Sartre (quoted in Fanon 1986:87). Edward Said would seem to concur, pointing out that “the negative classification of the non-western ‘them’ allows the ‘us’ category to be silently filled with all the desirable traits which ‘they’ do not possess” (Said 1994:127). Frantz Fanon puts it thus: “Everything that (the colonizer) does is done for The Other. Not because The Other is the ultimate

objective of his action....but....because it is The Other who corroborates him in his search for self-validation” (Fanon 1986:212-213).

### **The Universal Other**

Claude Lévi-Strauss points out that the tendency to othering is a universal trait. “Most of the peoples that we term ‘primitive’ give themselves a name that signifies ‘The True Ones’, ‘The Good Ones’....or even, quite simply, ‘The Human Beings’, and apply to other peoples a name that denies their humanity” (1985:7). In ancient Greece, China and Japan, the practice was to call other groups “barbarians” (Ibid:25).

Said agrees that this “racist”, “imperialist” and “ethnocentric” approach to other cultures has always been a feature of human societies (1994:143). The difference is that it was the unprecedented technological ascendancy of the nineteenth-century Europeans which enabled them to indulge such tendencies, to take such discourse to its logical conclusion and impose the “epistemic violence” (Spivak 1994:76) of their discriminatory ideologies onto the weaker societies of the colonies. “Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness”, Said contends (1994:143). With such statements, he echoes Foucault’s beliefs that power and knowledge are always mutually implicated. Western power in essence equalled the power to enter and examine other countries at will, enabling the production of knowledge which then legitimated the deployment of Western power through stereotyping, othering and dominating (Williams and Chrisman 1994:8).

Said further points out that what gives “Orientalism” its power and durability is that it rests not just on a fantasy of lies, but a “created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment” (1994:133). The constant reiteration of European superiority over “Oriental” backwardness becomes the self-evident norm, the accepted lens through which the ‘Orient’ - or in this case, Africa - is filtered into Western consciousness. He emphasizes that these notions are governed “not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections” (Ibid:134). Low shares his assessment. The issue for her is not so much one of knowledge - i.e. the “fraudulent conviction of superiority” - as “desire” or “cultural investment” (Low 1996:3). In her book *White Skins Black Masks* (1996), which examines the way identity is structured by the colonial mirror, Low explores the influential role of fantasy and myth in the political unconscious, and the degree to which these both impelled and justified colonial behaviour.

### **The Bushman Voice**

While considerations of ‘othering’ dynamics are necessary and illuminating for a project of this kind, they can shed only limited light on the debates in question; for such discourse remains by its nature one-sided. In the discussion thus far, there has been very little input from the Bushmen themselves to undermine the narratives of alterity into which they have been written. It seems self-evident that any meaningful dialectic around questions of identity and difference must involve a dialogue with the Bushman voice. This, however, proves no easy undertaking. The issue is not so much one of silence, as absence. The documentations of history - both official archive and

colonial literature - reveal a narrative written firmly from the victor's vantage point. The Bushmen, as Robert Gordon puts it, "have been relegated to the shadowy underside of history" (1992:8). Both he and Robert Rees (1996:62) point to the frustrations of trying to unearth the Bushman voice, in both South Africa and Namibia, and the lack of direct testimony to be found even in criminal court records and affidavits. Gordon sees this lack as "mute testimony to the smothering history of their victimization" (Gordon 1992:9). Rees offers as explanation the fact that since the Court of Justice could only deal with those within the orbit of the Colony, cases involving Bushmen tended to remain undocumented. The so-called 'wild' Bushmen were considered to be outside the Colony's orbit, while the 'tame' Bushmen living on settler farms were often wrongly categorized under the general appellation of Hottentot (1996:62).

Whatever the reasons for it, such omission is unfortunate and does much to perpetuate the notions of Bushmen as 'anachronistic species' - mere passive victims, devoid of agency and initiative, whose passing was inevitable in the clash with a superior civilization to which they could not adjust. Absence of record should not be confused with inaction and inarticulacy, however. The ferociousness of the Bushman opposition and the corresponding brutality of the retaliation that they unleashed against themselves suggests that they were far from being simply the unwitting "other onto which the coloniser projects a previously constituted subjectivity and knowledge" (Williams and Chrisman 1994:16). Moreover, their 'texts of resistance' played a determining role in shaping both discourse and policy employed against them.

In the account of 1770s colonial traveller Robert Gordon,<sup>4</sup> for instance, the famous “bullet-escaper”, the “Bushman chief” Koerikei is quoted thus: “What are you doing on my land? You have taken all the places where the eland and other game live. Why do you not stay where the sun goes down, where you first came from?” He goes on to threaten that he will kill their herdsman, and “chase them all away” (recorded by Penn in Skotnes 1996a:15).

As has been noted, however, such verbatim testimony is all too rarely to be found. To the Western observer, the Bushmen remain elusive strangers, encountered almost exclusively through intermediaries - interpreters, transcribers, academics; each one inevitably stamping upon the recorded encounter his/her own agendas, biases and misinterpretations. In the welter of hearsay, prejudice and miscommunication that characterizes colonial traveller and settler accounts, for instance, the ‘real’ Bushman becomes increasingly difficult to detect (see Chapter 1). Issues of mediation and misrepresentation are equally salient in the reading of Bushman folktales and songs. Duncan Brown (1995) speaks at length of the ontological and paradigmatic problems attendant on the transcription and interpretation of such texts (a fuller discussion will be undertaken in Chapter 2), which render them of ambiguous status and questionable authenticity (Brown 1995:8-22&35-36). As is so often the case with oral texts, they have largely tended to be dismissed as “the realm of the child mind” or “the savage collective unconscious” (Chapman 1996:17). Many have been reproduced as children’s stories, in some instances extensively revised, their narrative line retained, but with little sense of the dynamic and complex culture that birthed them. In other cases, as with Stephen Watson’s collection *Return of the Moon: Versions from the*

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<sup>4</sup> To be distinguished from his 1990s namesake.

/Xam (1991), the tendency has been to transform the stories into lyric poems, their ‘difference’ of syntax and expression tidied up - along with much of their intriguing ‘otherness’ - in order to produce a version more ‘suitable’ for popular consumption. Such an approach, as Brown points out, “runs the risk of simply appropriating the culture for Western literary expectation and consumption” (1995:37).

At the other extreme, one finds the stilted, rambling verbatim transcriptions of Bleek and Lloyd’s *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore* (1911), which has drawn its own share of controversy and criticism (A fuller discussion follows in Chapter 2). Flawed as these “highly mediated and artificially stabilised” specimens may be (Brown 1995: Abstract), they nonetheless constitute the most comprehensive Bushman oral literature collection ever recorded, and the closest link we have with the now vanished societies of the /Xam and other Bushmen. More current collections, such as Megan Bieseles record of Ju’hoan storytelling, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju’hoan* (1993), and Mathias Guenther’s *Bushman Folktales* (1989), provide access to the storytelling ethos of the present-era Kalahari !Kung and Nharo societies. These collections include both “old order” stories of hunter-gatherer tradition (Bieseles 1993:14) and more modern offerings that incorporate into their traditional structures the changing concerns and lifestyle innovations of the “semi-aculturated” contemporary Kalahari societies (Ibid) - thus testifying to the adaptive and dynamic nature of this song and storytelling ethos. Both Bieseles and Guenther also point out the remarkable uniformity of the /Xam, !Kung and Nharo mythological traditions - despite the varying degrees of temporal and geographical distances separating these groups (Guenther 1989:13; Bieseles 1993:13) - and the striking similarity of ritual practice, religious belief and world view that these embody.

It seems axiomatic to say that no worthwhile reading of the Bushman texts can be possible without an understanding of the deeply significant role that story and song played, and continue to play, in Bushman society. Far more than simply myths or entertaining tales, they were intimately linked to the Bushman sense of social and personal identity (Brown 1995:45). Embodied within their imaginative substance are archival record and social metaphor, environmental lore and spiritual belief. As Brown points out, “the telling of stories and the singing of songs permeate every aspect of Bushman society” (Ibid:42). The complex mythology of the tales is inextricably bound up with the hunter-gatherer way of life, and only in that context can they be fully understood. With their subtlety of allusion, their evocative symbolism and spiritual profundity, they present incontrovertible challenges to the prevalent colonial stereotypes of Bushmen as brutish or ‘childlike’ savages. To Western-trained readers, with our reliance on linear narrative, fixed systems of logic and culturally-conditioned world-views, many of the tales require considerable paradigm shifts for understanding. They arise out of a belief system diametrically at odds with the scientific-rational Western one; a society characterised by its non-acquisitive and non-competitive ethos, rather than ownership or accumulation; reflecting a multi-dimensional world-view, where the borders between real and unreal, possible and actual are permeable rather than fixed.<sup>5</sup>

A similar perceptual adjustment is necessary in the approach to Bushman rock art - arguably the ‘purest’ source of Bushman cultural expression to be found. This too resists facile reading, embodying - as Brown (1995), Lewis-Williams and Dowson

(1989) and others have pointed out - not simply 'naturalist' representations of animals, environment and social activity, but an ulterior dimension, reflecting "complex mythological systems and psychic spaces" (Brown 1995:63).

It is through modalities such as those above - given the absence of more formal discursive records - that the search for a valid Bushman 'voice' is most usefully conducted. And it is only by setting such expressions in dialectic with the dehumanizing discourse of the colonizer that the full brutality of the colonial persecution of the Bushman reveals itself. As has been stated earlier, the particular level of atrocity and persecution that was directed at the Bushmen was unprecedented. The colonial drive seemed to be not just to vanquish the enemy, but literally to annihilate all vestiges of humanity in them. The dismembering of Bushman bodies, and the collection of skulls and other body parts as trophies was widely practised among militia, academic and ordinary settler alike. "There are records" Skotnes asserts, "of commando raids where commandos cut off the breasts of the Bushman women who were killed to make tobacco pouches" (quoted in Gosling 1996:2). Ian Uys, in *Bushman Soldiers: Their Alpha and Omega*, affirms that "up until 1975 the SWA statute books offered 5 Pounds for Bushmen's ears" (1993:2).

Such atrocities cannot merely be dismissed as the brutal aberrations of war. They need to be interrogated for the deeper pathologies that they reveal, and some attempt made to address the psychological states and motivations of the perpetrators (these will be briefly explored in Chapter 1). Chapman, for instance, argues for a need to try to understand, rather than simply condemn or dismiss, colonial behaviour. He points

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<sup>5</sup> A more complete analysis of both oral literature and rock art will be conducted in Chapter 2.

out that the settlers' tendency towards "demonisation and aggression" can be seen to result from the chronic sense of insecurity and alienation that bedevilled them (1996:72). He cites Thomas Pringle's assertion of the need to attempt some understanding for the "colonial predicament" - "ordinary people brought out to the Cape without being informed fully of the facts of settlement" and then neglected by government. Pringle's comment that "we back-settlers grow all savage and bloody by coming into continual conflict with savages" is tempered by an awareness that the reverse is equally true, that "the so-called savages are people driven to desperation and plunder by their treatment at the hands of colonists" (Ibid:95-96).

Jenny Sharpe, in "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape" (1994:221-243), details the way in which the perceived savagery of the colonized is used to sanction colonial acts of "justified" vengeance, thus transforming "the colonizers into the object of their own emblem of barbarism" (Ibid:236). This is borne out by Césaire's observations on the "boomerang effect" of colonization: "Wherever there are colonizers and colonized face to face, I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict", for "the colonizer....in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal" (Ibid:173&177).

McClintock, in seeking similarly to find explanation for the particular degree of violence and brutality that so often characterized colonial encounters, resorts to psycho-analytic tropes. She refers to "the liminal condition" that holds sway "on the margins between known and unknown", and the "danger" that lies in such "transitional states" (1995:24-25). As the figures of danger, she quotes Mary Douglas

as saying, the men of the margins were “licensed to waylay, steal, rape. This behaviour is even enjoined on them. To behave anti-socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition” (Ibid:25).

### **Focus of the Thesis**

As the preceding discussion has suggested, the central concern of this thesis will be to examine the particular role that discourse has played in the construction of the Bushman image, and the way in which this discursive dehumanization has informed and sanctioned the colonial acts of genocide and subjugation against them. The study will also seek to determine the extent to which alterity is a function of self, rather than being located exclusively in the other - and the broader implications this has for our present-day treatment of difference, and our ability to live in diversity without collapsing difference.

In contemporary times, the Bushman image would seem to have undergone a radical reprocessing (see Chapter 3). Demonization and denigration have given way to romantic idealization. Their image is appropriated to serve a host of commercial, academic and popular interests. Surviving groups in Namibia and Botswana are ongoing subjects of scientific scrutiny. They are estimated to be the most examined, researched and recorded people on earth. The overall effect has been to continue the process of othering, and still to “deny them their equal status as human beings” (Jeursen 1994:18). For us today, as for the conquering Europeans, the Bushmen remain in many ways ‘mere psychological projection’, their identity ‘colonized’ afresh, their ‘strangeness’ transmuted into more digestible forms.

In his chapter titled “Marxism and Historicism” (1988), Jameson debates at length such questions of assimilating difference, pointing out the need, when seeking to understand any “alien object”, for maintaining a dialectic between identity and difference. While too close an identification with the “other” leads to a feeling of having “never really left home at all”, the converse - i.e. affirmation of “the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves” - causes the “doors of comprehension...to swing closed”, so that we find ourselves “separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects or cultures thus initially defined as Other from ourselves and thus irremediably inaccessible” (Ibid:150-151).

It is the contention of this thesis that any honest evaluation which seeks to retrieve a more authentic and ‘human’ Bushman identity from the welter of myths - both derogatory and idealized - which have contributed to their long history of ‘othering’, must first acknowledge the element of ‘difference’ that is constituted in that identity. For it is through respect for that difference, rather than by collapsing it, that the Bushmen will perhaps be finally allowed their ‘human’ space in the world of twentieth-century modernity.

As a female, largely Western-trained researcher, I am well aware of my subject location amid the post-apartheid, postmodern and feminist paradigms of my own historical era, and the influence this inevitably has on my approach in this thesis. As Richard Katz (among others) has pointed out, as a researcher, one cannot merely “be invisible, a transparent vehicle through which [Bushman] material passes” (1982:9). In this regard, I fully concur with the observations of both Lévi-Strauss and Said, that

all knowledge - even supposedly neutral “scholarly” knowledge - is in essence partisan, since it is impossible to separate the scholar from his/her cultural conditioning (Lévi-Strauss 1987:10; Said 1994:136). I am also sensitive to the dilemmas attendant on speaking for others (see Alcoff 1991:5-32), and to the fact that my attempts to recuperate ‘the Bushman identity’ run the risk of simply reinforcing their stereotyping as “passive, inarticulate and representable object(s)” (Lewis 1992:6). On the other hand, I feel - in line with Alcoff’s conclusions on the subject (1991:5-32) - that given the current occlusion of Bushman historical testimony, it is incumbent on me to use my privileged position as an academic researcher to give Bushman voices a textual space not otherwise possible. This assertion is reinforced by Spivak’s viewpoint that when the identity is difference, the other cannot speak for themselves (Spivak 1994:80).

In the light of the above dilemmas, my approach in presenting the Bushman ‘voice’ will be a cautious one, aiming for a dialogue rather than a diagnosis. Fully acknowledging both the bias and inadequacy of my Western systems of interpretation in approaching expressions of this nature, I intend to follow Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s advice and try for an “insider’s view” of the Bushman texts, that offers “some glimpse into the minds of the [originators]” (1989: Preface&3), rather than attempting too scrupulous and literal a dissection, which would have the effect of subsuming the Bushman voice under my own “authoritative interpretations” (Lewis 1992:7).

## CHAPTER 1

### Representing the Bushmen: Through The Colonial Lens

*The Case of a Bosjesman's child recently exhibited with its parents at Edinburgh*<sup>1</sup>

Sir,

*Some months back there were exhibited at Edinburgh two Bosjesman couples - one of those has an infant, born on the passage of its parents from the Cape. The man & woman (the parents of the child) appears to be sunk intellectually into the lowest situation of which humanity is capable - rising little above the beasts which perish & apparently incapable of moral & religious training. The infant is reported to be a fine child, and might by the divine blessing become an intelligent Christian under a suitable education....were the infant placed under the charge of some missionary or active intelligent private Christian at the Cape it might turn out well....If Sir you could interfere in this case you might be the means of adding to the Kingdom of the Redeemer & to the Church one who if left to the direction of circumstances will only turn out brutal as its parents. (CAD CO 4041:137)*

The major concern of this chapter is to analyse the role that discourse played in forming and perpetuating the prejudicial assumptions that underpinned the colonial treatment of the Bushmen. Through an analysis of mainly nineteenth-century colonial writing, the chapter will attempt to deconstruct the

stereotypical notions of Bushman otherness, and to assess the extent to which such representations became a self-fulfilling prophecy, influencing the shape of the early encounters and setting the course for the subsequent war of extermination that followed. Since it is not possible in a thesis of this limited scope to do justice to the vast body of travel documentation from the period, my intention is rather to focus on a representative cross-section of texts. The selection will include the accounts of explorers, hunters and adventurers such as William Burchell, James Chapman and Farini, of colonial officials such as Sir John Barrow, missionaries such as Robert Moffat and John Campbell, and settlers such as Thomas Pringle. Use will also be made of archival material for corroboration of events described.

It will be seen that, though far from representing a consensual picture of the Bushmen, these accounts - despite their diversity of authorship and agenda - reveal a remarkable similarity in their recurring tropes and themes. Entrenching myth and stereotype along with 'objective' fact, and often taking their validation from each other in mutual corroboration, they promote a convincingly axiomatic version of the Bushman as degraded and sub-human species. George W Stow, a mid-nineteenth-century resident at the Cape Colony who was remarkable for his atypically enlightened attitude towards the Bushmen and whose *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905) was an important early source of information about them, is unequivocally critical of his fellow authors' lack of accuracy and reliability in this regard. He charges them, with their numerous conflicting observations, of "giving rise to

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<sup>1</sup> Addressed to His Excellency, Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, December 20th, 1848.

erroneous ideas, which, at length by being repeated by others even less informed than themselves, become accepted as verities, and thus....the fallacies became stereotyped and perpetuated, without further questioning, the one to the others” (Ibid:1-2).

An attempt will be made in this chapter to establish some of the common tropes that emerge from the colonial body of writing, to interrogate the assumptions on which they rest, and to determine the extent to which they can be considered to constitute any accurate reflection of the Bushman people. The chapter will also briefly examine the link between discourse and political expediency, reflected by the changing nature of discourse as it evolved in tandem with the process of colonization. It will conclude with a brief overview of the war of genocide, and an examination of its underlying imperatives and the justificatory discourses that facilitated the atrocities committed.

It has already been suggested in the introductory chapter that rather than arising out of actual encounters with the Bushmen, the colonial prejudice towards them was to a large extent pre-formed by the propaganda imported from home. A prime example of such polemic is the text that appeared in the 11th June 1853 edition of *Household Words*, a popular and widely-read journal of the day. Penned by the well-known and respected ‘social conscience’ author, Charles Dickens, it was titled “The Noble Savage”. A representative extract follows:

To come to the point at once, I beg to say that I have not the least belief in the Noble Savage. I consider him a prodigious nuisance, and an enormous superstition....It is all one to me, whether he sticks a fishbone through his visage, or bits of trees through the lobes of his ears, or birds' feathers in his head; whether he flattens his hair between two boards, or spreads his nose over the breadth of his face, or drags his lower lip down by great weights, or blackens his teeth, or knocks them out, or paints one cheek red and the other blue, or tattoos himself, or oils himself, or rubs his body with fat, or crimps it with knives....he is a savage - cruel, false, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs....Think of the Bushmen. Think of the two men and the two women who have been exhibited about England for some years. Are the majority of persons - who remember the horrid little leader of that party in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and his antipathy to water, and his straddled legs, and his odious eyes shaded by his brutal hand, and his cry of 'Qu-u-u-aaa!' (Bosjesman for something desperately insulting I have no doubt) - conscious of an affectionate yearning towards that noble savage, or is it idiosyncratic in me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure him? (1853:337-339)

This influential text - so eloquently expressing the racist attitudes of its day - is informing, not only for the arrogant intolerance for difference that it exhibits, but for the blatantly dehumanizing discourse that it employs in its depictions of otherness. Constructing the 'noble' savage as incontrovertibly

sub-human, it reveals a conditioned response to difference that precludes any equitable basis for interchange.

The kind of denigratory and inflexible approach to difference that such representations promote - and the moral entitlement which this automatically confers - finds its counterpart in the very earliest of colonial encounters, with the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape in 1652. The “Aborigines Protection Society” Report of 1837 offers a disturbing glimpse into the mindset of avarice and unscrupulous duplicity that appears to have characterized many of the early visitors’ dealings with the indigenous populations. The Report records extracts from governor Jan van Riebeeck’s journal, in which he gives vent to “a very natural sentiment, and one which we fear has been too prevalent with succeeding colonists”, when he describes himself as “looking from the mud walls of his fortress on the cattle of the natives, and wondering at the ways of Providence, which could bestow such very fine gifts on heathen” (APS Report 1837:29). The Report goes on to quote the words of Van Riebeeck himself: “We feel vexed to see so many fine head of cattle, and not be able to buy to any considerable extent. If it had been indeed allowed, we had opportunity to-day to deprive them of 10,000 head, which....if we obtain orders to that effect, can be done at any time, and even more conveniently, because they will have greater confidence in us” (Ibid 30). Van Riebeeck evidently holds himself back with difficulty from the temptation to indulge these covetous impulses, returning more than once to the subject:

With 150 men, 10,000 or 11,000 head of black cattle might be obtained without danger of losing one man; and many savages might be taken without resistance, in order to be sent as slaves to India, as they still always come to us unarmed....What would it matter much to take at once 6,000 or 8,000 beasts from them? There is opportunity enough for it, as they are not strong in number, and very timid....and as we perceive they place every confidence in us, we allure them still with show of friendship to make them the more confident. (Ibid)

Van Riebeeck seems entirely oblivious to the treachery inherent in such considerations. It is clear that to him these “Hottentots”, being mere uncivilized savages and thus not really part of the human family, do not merit the same considerations of fair play and human decency required in dealings with more ‘civilized’ people. This lack of respect for the other - which Manoni ascribes to the colonizer’s lack of “awareness of the world of Others, a world in which Others have to be respected” (quoted in Fanon 1952:107-108) - continues to be a recurring theme throughout colonial dealings with the Khoisan. From the earliest days of contact, when relations were still amicable and characterized by a fair degree of goodwill, the Bushmen’s friendly disposition and trusting nature were easily taken advantage of. Burchell, one of the earliest travellers to the interior in 1811, recounts - with a show of conscience rarely encountered - how the Bushmen were persuaded to part with valuable skins and ivory in exchange for very paltry quantities of tobacco. In “trafficking” with the natives, he charges, the men of his party had taken “advantage of [the Bushmen’s] simplicity, by purchasing their clothes from off

their backs; and at so low a rate, that in this, my people showed themselves to have neither conscience nor feeling” (1953 Vol 2:29).

Such unprincipled behaviour notwithstanding, relations between the earliest travellers and the Bushmen appear to have been generally good. Despite the fact that already by this date their relentless persecution by the Boers had caused much suffering to them, the Bushmen exhibited towards the travellers - once the travellers’ good intentions had been ascertained - a remarkable degree of goodwill. To the mutual benefit of all, they would often fall in with the travelling party, acting as guides and ambassadors to spread the advance word of the visitors’ peaceful intentions as they progressed through the Bushman country, and performing other small services in return for meat and tobacco. These amicable relations are generally reflected in the tone of the textual discourse. While inevitably represented as an incontrovertibly ‘degraded’ people, offputting in the extreme on account of their curious appearance and ‘bestial’ tendencies, the Bushmen are depicted with a general lack of malice. Mention is often made of their ‘good’ qualities, of the fact that “savages - however low or debased” are not immune to human attributes (Burchell 1953 Vol 2:69). They are characterized as a happy people, loyal, generous and trustworthy, quickly responsive to kind treatment and usefully knowledgeable in the whereabouts of good grazing, water and game. The Rev. John Campbell, for example, recounting his journeying in 1812 through “Wandering Boshemens Country”, “Wild Boshemens Country” and “Makoon Boshemens Country” (1974: Map), describes as a “singular favour from Providence” a young Bushman’s willingness to accompany the party and his

knowledge of the whereabouts of abundant water, grazing and firewood. “I looked on him,” he confides, “as Elijah may be supposed to have looked on the ravens that fed him in the wilderness, as God’s instrument for fulfilling his gracious will to us” (Ibid:139-140).

As political expediencies changed, however, with the expansion of colonial presence and settlement and the inevitable conflict of interests that this occasioned, so the tenor of the discourse changed. Tony Voss points out for instance that from the 1850s to the 1920s, at the height of the Bushman-settler war, the dominant image of the Bushman was of “a barely human, duplicitous, cruel savage” (1987:26). Bushmen were represented as dangerous animals, imbued with human cunning, fit only for extirpation; occasional cannibals, even “eating [their] own children when driven by hunger, cruel, and useless” (Anthony Trollope quoted in Voss 1987:27). They were described by their enemies “not only as being ‘the lowest of the low’, but as the most treacherous, vindictive, and untameable savages on the face of the earth: a race void of all generous impulses, and little removed from the wild beasts with which they associated, one only fitted to be exterminated like noxious vermin” (Stow 1905:31).

Well into the twentieth century, this was the image of the Bushmen that endured. Far more than mere physical threat, they had come to represent the ultimate psychological evil - “the negative of the positive concept of the civilized, the black Other to the white norm, the demonic opposite to the

angels of reason and culture” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:159).<sup>2</sup> This can be clearly seen in the writings of popular poets such as Francis Carey Slater, whose denigratory depictions graphically epitomized the image of the Bushman as incarnate evil. In “Tina” (1957:63-65), one of the collection of Trek poems written in the early 1900s, he details the attempted rape of “Tina the trekker-girl” by the vile “Bushman-Pluto”, as she becomes lost in the “vast Karroo”. Tina is a Proserpina vision of innocent loveliness - “Gay as a curvetting springbok fawn” - while her would-be despoiler is described in the most damning terms. A “desert-satyr, filthy and squat”, he “stills her screaming with his snake-eyes gleaming”, and drags her off “toward his bat-hung cave”. In the nick of time, Tina is rescued; a gunshot rings out, and “the goblin-horror” falls at her feet. It is difficult to avoid reading into such loaded imagery the allegory for more resounding victories; the triumphant arrest of human degeneracy - incarnate in the dark shape of the ‘vile pygmy form’- that dared to raise itself up in opposition to the advancing light of Christian settlement.

It is only once victory has been assured, and the Bushman threat as a group decisively removed, as Voss points out, that it becomes possible to ascribe to them any individual value. This is reflected in the discursive tendencies of the early twentieth century, where the dominant trend was to regard the Bushman as an idealised anthropological curiosity, “the genetically long-lost brother” (Voss 1987:33) and paleolithic archive of human origin, doomed to inevitable

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<sup>2</sup> While the above quote refers to the West’s view of Africa in general, it is my belief that it applied with particular relevance to the Bushmen.

and regrettable extinction. Later still, as the Bushman presence becomes more and more ethereal and difficult to access, the seeds are sown for the “neo-Romantic, ‘modern’ image” still prevalent today; a people who are “kind, noble, indomitable, independent, infinitely adaptable to Nature because infinitely wise in her ways” (Voss 1987:26).

In an interesting parallel with the above, Kenworthy and Kenworthy (1996) have noted similar discursive patterns used during the different stages of Australian colonization. They observe that during the first contacts, when colonizers were few and had little power, and the indigenous inhabitants were many, the Aborigines were constructed as “noble savages” living in harmony with nature, leading happy, carefree, moral lives (Ibid:40-41). As land conflicts escalated, so too did the propensity for negative description. They were increasingly depicted as dangerous, violent criminals with no respect for European life or property, who should be trained to become ‘useful’ workers for white land-owners and taught - with whip and gun if necessary - respect for white masters and white laws. As Aborigine numbers fell as a result of white-introduced diseases, as more and more were killed and forced off the land, so discourse altered accordingly and began increasingly to construct the Aborigine people as paleolithic remnants - the most primitive examples of humanity on earth, ‘worth preserving’ for their links with human origins (Ibid:41-42).

The remarkable similarity in patterning suggests that far from being located exclusively in essentialist ideologies, the discourse of alterity evolves

according to very set parameters of political expediency, accommodating itself to the changing imperatives of policy and power.<sup>3</sup> Michael Chapman, for instance, notes the “fierce polemic” of Dutch farmers and British settlers in the newspapers of the 1820s, where editorial propaganda of the lazy Khoi, perfidious Xhosa and heroic settler mirrored and confirmed the current ‘enemy of the day’ (1996:92). This was in contrast to the rhetoric of earlier times, when the Bushmen, constituting as yet no political threat, were “granted a rare tone of elegy” by travel writers such as John Barrow (who travelled the interior in the years 1797 and 1798); the Xhosa, rarely seen, could be depicted as “exotic savages”; while the chief rivals of the British settlers - the Dutch and African peasants - were “exaggerated into caricatures of the idle and the uncouth” (Ibid:81-82). In the same vein, the construction of the Bushmen during the Bushman-settler war years, as feckless untameable savages who must be ‘broken-in’ like animals to useful labour, greatly convenienceed their enslavement, enabling them to be portioned out with impunity as spoils of war to ease the labour woes of farmers.

Stow, in tracing the course of the long and bitter feud between Bushman and settler, points out that up to the middle of the 1800s, the Bushmen of the Karoo on the borders of the Dutch settlement were on good terms with the colonists. The situation changed when the colonists crossed the mountain ranges in large numbers, with their flocks and herds, “invading the Bokkeveld, seizing the fountains, making permanent settlements, destroying or driving

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<sup>3</sup> Cf also Carolyn Hamilton’s work *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (1998) for a discussion of analogous shifts in the discursive representation of

away the game....treating the inhabitants, the ‘zwarte schepsels,’ with menace and contumely, and reducing [them]....to a condition of abject slavery” (1905:155). Such treatment naturally raised a spirit of resistance in the Bushmen, setting in motion a cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation that drew forth increasingly savage reprisal from both sides. At the heart of the hostile relations was the settlers’ desire for land, which they believed to be theirs for the taking. The Bushmen, by standing in the way of such aspirations, and by avenging the acts of trespass and robbery they saw being enacted on their ancestral territories, set themselves irrevocably on a course of conflict with the settlers, who - like the various invading Bantu tribes before them - saw the Bushmen as little more than vermin to be eradicated. Since the Bushmen were considered to be little better than the animals, living off the land in the same opportunistic way, their occupancy rights were neither understood nor recognized.

Dorothea Bleek, in defence of settler actions, attributes the colonial infringements to ignorance, rather than deliberate trespass. She notes that tensions arose “in the first place from the white man’s not understanding what a Bushman considers his property and consequently acting in what seemed to the Bushmen a hostile manner, without intending to do so” (1920:UCT BC 151 D3.3:4). White hunters, camping on Bushman territory, “are sometimes greeted by a poisoned arrow from an unseen hand. They speak of treachery, not realising that they are merely armed poachers in the Bushman’s eyes; not even knowing that the waterhole they are camping at is Bushman property”

(1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:18). Bleek points out further that, unlike the Khoi, the Bushmen had no flocks and herds, no established kraal to be recognized as visible signs of property. There was no understanding of the fact that “a Bushman’s property is the water” and that the springs and vleis, as well as the beasts that drink there “are the lawful spoils” of the family or band. The white man intruding, with his wagon, “makes straight for the spring, where he camps on apparently unoccupied land”. The Bushman, deprived of ‘his’ food and water, sees him as robber. “If he protests, he speaks to deaf ears, no one understands a word he says; nor even if he did, would the ordinary hunter or explorer admit that he was wronging the native by camping on uninhabited, uncultivated land” (1920:UCT BC151 D3.3:4-5).

Not all would agree with Bleek’s assessment of the ‘unwitting’ nature of European behaviour. Stow for one takes a far less charitable view, laying the blame for the ensuing war firmly at the settler door. He charges that the Bushmen were dispossessed of their country to “gratify the territorial greed of a few score men, who called themselves civilized because they had guns in their hands” (1910:165). If a more humane course of action had been adopted towards the Bushmen from the first, he points out, their history would have been very different, “but the greed for increasing pasturage was paramount, every available fountain was seized and occupied, and every right of the ancient owners unceremoniously trampled on” (Ibid:35). While it is difficult - given the brutal evidence of history - to find fault with the spirit of Stow’s blunt summation, such simplistic interpretations do not sufficiently problematize the deeper imperatives of colonial behaviour. The singular lack

of awareness and accountability manifested by the colonists throughout their dealings with the Bushmen finds its motivation not just in the practical exigencies of imperialism, but - as has been repeatedly stated in this thesis - in the discourses of alterity that predated the colonization process. Running in clear motif through the texts of the early travellers and sojourners, such discourse is easily identifiable.

### **The Colonial Encounter**

“When foreign ships arrived in southern African waters”, notes Pippa Skotnes, they brought with them their cargoes of strange objects and strange people with alien customs, unimagined practices and unintelligible languages” (1996a:15). Her observation echoes Fanon’s assertion that “alterity for the black man is not the black but the white man” (1986:97). Such points of view present a welcome challenge to essentialist notions of otherness, which tend as a matter of course to set up the colonized, rather than the colonizer as ‘the strange’ and ‘the other’ (Kenworthy and Kenworthy 1996:29-30), thus obscuring the point that ‘difference’ is in fact a two-way dialectic.

Ashcroft et al, in examining Timothy Findley’s 1984 novel, *Not Wanted on The Voyage* - a radical interpretation of the story of the Biblical flood, which examines the processes involved in first the stigmatization, and then the suppression/annihilation of all forms of ‘otherness’ - point out that once hegemonic knowledge has been textually codified and sanctioned, “Othering” can be assumed by authoritative right (1989:98). Since the sole interpretative

power of events resides with the authority - who gains control of certain 'moments' and then, through writing, inscribes his/her interpretative reality as the exclusive meaning of that event - the only recorded 'voice' remains that of the authority. This 'voice' is consequently given an axiomatic weight that allows the readings of events to confirm positions of legitimacy (Ibid:98-99).

In the narratives of the early colonial travellers and residents, such processes are very clearly evident. Since the only point of view recorded is the unreflective 'master voice', the Bushman alterity becomes inscribed as a palimpsest of fact. The colonial voice's "knowledge of the land, climates and peoples underscores narrative authority by reinforcing its privilege, possession and its science....[T]he privileged status of the narrator is represented through the knowledgeability of his pronouncements....The structure of the text enables the unreflexive and authoritative white voice to scrutinise, define and pin down its black subjects" (Low 1996:50-51). This allows the narrators to make, with absolute unchallenged certainty, whatever sweeping statements they may care to make; to exercise their various biases, suppositions and misperceptions in a mutually collaborative fiction masquerading under the guise of truth.

Michael Chapman reports that the first British occupation of the 1790s attracted numerous travel writers, who described the landscape, recorded the vegetation and portrayed the customs of the indigenous inhabitants. He points out that what these travelogues had in common, despite the wide variation of nationalities (and personalities) involved, was their propensity for "viewing Africa through European eyes" (1996:81) - a portrayal firmly stamped with

the stigmatizing doctrines and tropes of home. As such, the travel document becomes in many respects “a document of ideology” (Ibid:82). Despite the writers’ superficial engagement with the tribes and landscapes they encountered, and the varying degrees of amicable relationships they seem to have built up with those encountered, there is little sense of any personal investment. They remain at heart the displaced travellers, adrift in a world of physical and psychic strangeness, unable to detach themselves from the familiarities of home. In the writings of the diverse group of travellers, one finds little true empathy with land or people. There is a constant hankering for the “green pastures” and “still waters” of home (Campbell 1974:291). Ashcroft et al note that while imperial conquest tends to destroy (or ‘remake’) the land, and regards the human occupants as disposable - like exotic fauna - the conquerors themselves, having subjugated and annihilated the original occupants, cannot feel at home in the “place” of the colonized (1989:82). It is this chronic sense of displacement, perhaps, that makes the colonial travellers so fiercely attached to the known and familiar values and customs that circumscribe their identity, and which precludes any real and empathic contact with the strange and the new.

From the writing of William Burchell, John Campbell, Thomas Pringle and others, one gains a distinct impression of what McClintock (as discussed in the Introduction) calls “The Liminal Zone”. As the travellers leave the borders of the Colony there is a clear sense of passing beyond the last friendly ‘human’ habitation, into a zone of not just physical, but psychological danger; unfriendly wilderness, unfriendly climate, savage beasts and bestial savages.

“We had now taken leave of the inhabited part of the colony, and with it all intercourse with white men. From these no assistance could, in future, be obtained: all now depended upon ourselves, a solitary party roaming over an almost trackless land”. Thus writes William Burchell, of his journeying through the Roggeveld to the borders of the Colony en route to the “wild and desert Bushman country” (1953 Vol 1:181&189).

The psychological states that this sense of imperilment and vulnerability gave rise to undoubtedly played their part in determining the tenor of both interaction and textual record. Conditioned to expect nothing but barbarism from those they encountered, ‘barbarism’ was all too often what the travellers found. Their perceptions were coloured by preconceptions and hearsay. They carried to all encounters the arrogant convictions of their own superiority of values, customs and abilities - a pre-given grid against which to measure the ‘humanity’ of others. In the light of such rigidly defined criteria, the Bushman qualities were accorded no value. Their highly evolved humanity, so evident in their artistry, their love for story, dance and other shared cultural pleasures, their thoughtful and complex mythology, their keen faculties of observation, and unparalleled environmental knowledge, were remarked, but dismissed as being of no account. “The Bushmen,” as the scholar Dorman observed in 1925, in echo of early traveller sentiments, “were low in the scale of mentality. They had extensive knowledge of the outdoor world....and knew all that could be known of the country in which they dwelt....(but) their reflective faculties were poorly developed” (Ibid:53). Reading through the diverse narrative accounts of the nineteenth-century imperial visitors, coloured though they are by the

widely differing personalities, styles, and agendas of their scribes, one is struck by the similarity of their discursive themes. Despite the often wildly-conflicting evidence that they present on the Bushmen, and the varying degrees of bias or empathy that they exhibit towards them, they all display as their starting point the same consensual belief in Social Darwinist precepts, seeing in the Bushmen unwavering evidence of 'degraded species'. The missionary Robert Moffat expresses the sentiment of many when he characterizes the Bushmen as: "the feeblest, poorest, most degraded and despised of all the sable sons of Ham" (1842:50). With the exception of "the Troglodytes", he declares, "a people said by Pliny to exist in the interior of Northern Africa, no tribe or people are surely more brutish, ignorant, and miserable" (Ibid:53). Writing firmly in pulpit hyperbole for his audience of Christian converts, he asserts his belief that the Bushmen exist at the nadir of human depravity, citing as his evidence the fact that they have "neither house nor shed, neither flocks nor herds. Their most delightful home is 'afar in the desert', the unfrequented mountain pass, or the secluded recesses of a cave or ravine" (Ibid:53). He goes on to declare that "it is impossible to look at some of their domiciles, without the enquiry involuntarily rising in the mind - are these the abodes of human beings?" (Ibid:56).

Moffat's observations on the Bushmen's position at the bottom of "the scale of ignorance and vice" (Ibid:59), are born out by the remarks of fellow missionary Kicherer, whom Moffat describes as having had the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the Bushmen's "real condition", having lived among them (Ibid:57). Kicherer, who seems to have formed a decidedly

jaundiced view of the Bushmen, does not mince his words. “Their manner of life is extremely wretched and disgusting”, he states bluntly. “They delight to smear their bodies with the fat of animals, mingled with ochre, and sometimes with grime. They are utter strangers to cleanliness, as they never wash their bodies, but suffer the dirt to accumulate, so that it will hang a considerable length from their elbows” (Ibid). Their huts, he describes as a hole in the earth, with a roof of reeds, where “they lie close together like pigs in a sty” (Ibid). For a man of God, Kicherer exhibits little charity, finding nothing good to say about the Bushmen at all. They are extremely lazy, he charges, adept at “destroying the various beasts which abound in the country”, total strangers to domestic happiness. Men have several wives, and “conjugal affection is little known”. Most damning of all, he alleges, they are cruel and violent to their children, and will “kill [them] without remorse”. There are instances, he claims, of parents “throwing their tender offspring to the hungry lion, who stands roaring before their cavern, refusing to depart till some peace-offering be made to him” (Ibid:57-58).

Where Kicherer received his information is a subject for speculation. One finds in his assertions suspicious echoes of the Bushman folktale, “The Young Man of the Ancient Race, Who was Carried Off by a Lion”<sup>4</sup> (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:174-191); however, Kicherer is not alone in his belief. These assertions of Bushman cruelty to their children - largely unsupported by any firsthand witness - are frequently repeated in the writings of the travellers, and as

frequently refuted. Usually prefaced by an impersonal “it has been said”, they offer damning allegations of Bushman barbarity and incapacity for any human feeling. “It has been stated that the Bushmen are wanting in feelings of affection towards one another. I have often heard the statement made that mothers are cruel to their children, sometimes destroying them if they prove too great a burden”, reports the scholar Dornan. He adds that “This is not borne out by what I have seen” (1925:133-134). Similarly contradicting such assertions of cruelty, Moffat echoes a host of other travellers when he cites the Bushman mother’s selflessness in foodsharing, her propensity for going without in times of want in order to give what food she receives to her “emaciated children” (Moffat 1842:59). In further proof of the Bushman ‘human feeling’, Moffat recounts an incident of his own experience, when inadvertently drinking from a pool of water poisoned by the Bushmen to kill game, he fell violently ill and was much moved by the Bushmen’s kindness and concern for his welfare when they realised what had occurred (Ibid:155-157).

These parallel and contradictory versions of Bushman character exemplify the difficulties of separating fact from fallacy, first-hand observation from second-hand hearsay, in the colonial writings. There was a widespread tendency amongst the travellers to take each other’s word as gospel, and to repeat as verity what was no more than conjecture or misconception. Since few of the visitors could speak the language, they relied to a large extent on the

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<sup>4</sup> In this tale, the lion, having tasted the young man’s tears, tracks him relentlessly. The young man runs home and begs his people to hide him. When the lion comes seeking him, they offer it a child if it will

dubious veracity of interpreters for their information. The reportage gleaned from these seems in some cases to have been imbued with a large degree of interpretative licence - and no doubt, sycophantic desire to please. This lack of direct interchange did nothing to help bridge the cultural and perceptual divides between the two groups.

Much of the confusion and misapprehension of Bushman ways undoubtedly arose out of ignorance about the hardships and necessities of Bushman life. Stow, for instance, points out that the Bushman practice of infanticide, of burying an unweaned infant alive with the body of its mother - which no doubt helped to feed the notions of 'gross cruelty' to children - was forced on them by the imperatives of survival, in an environment of very precarious subsistence (1905:51). The same is true for the practice, noted by Dorothea Bleek among some groups, of "throwing away" the second child if it arrived before the first had been weaned (1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:20-21). The lack of suitable diet for infants of such young age meant that each infant had to be nursed until the age of three or four years, while the imperatives of hunter-gatherer lifestyle required that the infant be carried by its mother on all foraging and other expeditions. This resulted in a very close relationship between mothers and young children. The impossibility of coping with two infants simultaneously under such conditions made birth spacing crucial to infant survival, sometimes resulting in the "throwing away" of "prematurely" arriving infants (more accurately, they were buried) as an unavoidable necessity (Lee 1979:311-312; D Bleek 1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:20-21). It is

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go away and leave them in peace. But it only wants the man whose tears it has licked.

in the same light of survival necessity that one needs to view the practice of institutionalized geriatricide that was a known feature of /Xam society. The “unproductive” old, while being valued members of the group, at times placed too great a strain on scarce resources, and in seasons of particularly severe want were of necessity left behind (Hewitt 1989:31). The Bleek and Lloyd text, “The Old Woman’s Song” (1911:228-229) records the unavoidable abandonment of an old woman too weak to keep up with the group. A footnote details the care that was taken to ensure that the old woman was left in as much comfort and safety as possible. The note emphasizes that: “They were obliged to leave her behind, as they were all starving, and she was too weak to go with them to seek food at some other place” (Ibid).<sup>5</sup>

The lack of understanding that gave rise to the above-mentioned colonial perceptions of the Bushmen’s ‘want’ of affection towards their children and each other is similarly manifest in colonial charges of Bushman ‘dirtiness’ and so-called aversion to washing. This is remarked on again and again with varying degrees of abhorrence by the various writers as confirmation of the Bushmen’s primitive and brutish disposition. The latter’s habit of smearing themselves with rancid fat, ochre and accumulated dirt as protection against

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<sup>5</sup> There is not space in this chapter to go more deeply into the issue of homicide in hunter-gatherer societies. Recent research has indicated that violent death is a widespread and intrinsic feature of such societies (though to what extent the figures incorporate the practices of geriatricide and infanticide discussed above, has not been made clear). Other researchers dispute such conclusions. Respected ethnographer Lorna Marshall in 1976 argued that “the !Kung are a people who fear fighting and therefore do everything possible to avoid it” (quoted in Lee 1979:370). Richard Lee points out that while homicide and other interpersonal violence do undoubtedly occur in such societies - an inevitable consequence of social tensions arising in such close-knit groups - they should be seen as far more circumstantial than inherent. He notes that “violence and aggression, far from being a constant, are among the most variable aspects of human life”, pointing out that “if you visited the Nyae Nyae !Kung in 1950, you would say they were relatively peaceful. If you visited them 30 years later at Chum!Kwe,

the extremities of desert climate - and the strong odour this gave rise to - was not seen for the survival strategy it was, but only for the offence it gave to the travellers' Western sensibilities. "How disgusting human beings may render themselves by neglect of personal cleanliness", remarks the normally broad-minded Burchell sententiously (1967 Vol 2:42). The well-meaning Rev. Campbell reports that he advised one of the Bushwomen he encountered to wash her face, "which was extremely dirty", but that she expressed aversion. One of the Hottentots in his party then explained "by way of apology for her" that the Bushmen believed the dirt kept them warm (Campbell 1815:139). Equally misconstrued was the perceived 'debauchery' of the Bushman eating habits. The Bushman propensity for gluttony, their ability to feast through the night without stopping and consume whole carcasses at one sitting, was frequently remarked on in the most condemnatory tones. There was no recognition of the survival value of such habits, of the fact that they were dictated by the vagaries of food supply, and should be seen as indicative of a people's remarkable adaptability to the harsh imperatives of their environment. Instead, the 'abnormal' appetites were taken as further evidence of the Bushman's savage and animal nature. Barrow likens the Bushmen to vultures. "Like these voracious birds," he states, "they are equally filthy and gluttonous". Describing their consumption of a sheep, he records that they continued to eat all night, "without sleep and without intermission, till they had finished the whole animal. After this their lank bellies were distended to

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you would say they were among the most violent people on earth. In the space of a few short years their whole attitude towards violence has been transformed, and their homicide rate has tripled" (1979:150).

such a degree that they looked less like human creatures than before” (1801:288).

It seems important at this point to recognize that, notwithstanding the bigoted myopia evinced by the Europeans towards anything that did not accord with their own predefined value systems, the colonial perception of Bushman ‘difference’ was not a purely fabricated construct. For the image that the Bushmen presented was, to Western eyes and sensibilities, incontrovertibly different. Their ‘animal-like’ physical appearance, their virtual nakedness, their strong body odour, their ‘primitive’ click-based language so unpronounceable and incomprehensible to Western tongues and ears; their habits of ‘gluttonous’ gorging in times of plenty, their penchant for meat in any stage of putrefaction, for blood and entrails, insects and reptiles and other foods considered anathema to Western tastes; their lack of ‘human’ need for shelter and settled abode; their strange customs and beliefs, their ‘pagan’ religion that “reverenced the mantis” (Dornan 1925:55); their ‘licentious’ dances and ‘savage’ music - which Moffat described as making sounds which “are often responded to by the lion’s roar, or the hyena’s howl” (1842:58-59) - all contributed to colonial perceptions of their irremediably bestial nature and ways. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that this perception is located not in the Bushman difference as such, but in the colonial inability to accept this difference on its own terms, without ascribing to it the dehumanizing value judgements of alterity.

This devaluing tendency runs in an unbroken thread through the accounts of all the colonial writers referred to in this thesis - whether early or late nineteenth-century, and whether regarded as Bushman 'friend' or 'foe'. It expresses itself in the language of objectification and reductionism in which the Bushmen are generally described; in the tendencies to view them not as human individuals, but as a homogeneous group, notional representatives of their 'species'. This 'specimen-based' approach is very well illustrated in the description given by George M Theal in his "Editor's Preface" to Stow's work, *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905), in which he details the "striking features of the people of this race", describing them as follows: "the hollow back, the lobeless ear, the receding chin, the sunken eye, the lowness of the root of the nose, the scanty covering of the head with little knots of wiry wool, and the low angle of prognathism as compared with negroes" (Stow 1905:vii). It is equally apparent in hunter James Chapman's casual musings that "I should like to have a dry skull of a Bushman" (1971:59); in Barrow's blunt assertion that "The Bosjesmans, indeed, are amongst the ugliest of all human beings....Nature seems to have studied how to make this pygmy race disgusting" (1801:277&279). And it is vividly evident in Burchell's description of an old Bushwoman whom he was busy sketching, a "characteristic....specimen of her nation at that age". Burchell avers that, sitting like "an inanimate mass", she "scarcely, indeed, looked like a human being; a rough sheep-skin kaross, only served to give her a more shapeless appearance; and eyes so sunken as hardly to be visible, together with large clots of red ochre hanging over and covering her forehead, gave to her miserable dirty wrinkled visage, the strongest character of poverty

wretchedness and neglect” (1953 Vol 2:139). This is the same William Burchell who prides himself on being a tolerant and open-minded individual, a firm “friend” of the Bushmen, and self-styled ambassador of good relations and goodwill.

The flamboyant Farini - real name William Leanord Hunt - a showman, hunter and explorer (who once walked across Niagra Falls on a tightrope), is another who contributes to the body of othering representation. Infamous for having shipped a “party of Earthmen from the Kalahari” to be exhibited in London (1973:v), Farini is described on the flyleaf of his *Through the Kalahari Desert: A Narrative of a Journey with Gun, Camera, and Notebook to Lake N’Gami and Back* (1973) as one who “seems capable of exaggeration”; but it is doubtful that his questionable credentials would have been of much concern to his readers. In a section entitled “A Drunken Orgy”, he recounts the debauched goings-on as the Bushmen grow increasingly drunk on newly brewed honey-beer: “Soon they were on their feet, laughing, dancing, and singing, their drunken howls making the night hideous as they staggered around the fire, narrowly escaping falling into it every now and then. If there had been any hyenas or jackals looking on, how proud they must have felt by comparison, and how they must have laughed at the idea of man’s superiority” (1973:344).

Depictions such as the above gave considerable reinforcement to the palimpsests of alterity into which the Bushmen were inscribed. The nineteenth-century travelogues are full of such loaded imagery, painting an

undeviating picture of Bushman primitivity and depravity of lifestyle, taste and character. What is notable is that the men who penned such representations did not consider themselves in the main to be prejudiced against the Bushmen, nor were they insensible to the 'good qualities' of the people.

One such, who was among the earliest - and most enlightened - explorers to record his 1811 encounters with the Bushmen beyond the Cape Colony borders, was the already mentioned William John Burchell, well-known naturalist, collector and artist, whose *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (1953) is quoted in its Introduction by Schapera as being: "Among the classics of English travel, from its simple, vigorous, and truthful style" (Ibid Vol:x ). Burchell's writing is worth examining in some depth for the useful insight it offers into the kind of tropes and prejudices identified above. While relatively free of the overt bigotry that characterized so many of his fellow narrators, Burchell nevertheless reveals himself to be - notwithstanding his own claim that his travels were undertaken "with a mind free from prejudice" (Ibid:3) - as much a prisoner of his own inflexible cultural conditioning as the other colonial visitors. Remarkable for his studied lack of arrogance, his interest in his "fellow-creatures" as "human beings, and not as mere ethnic specimens" (Ibid:xii), for his sense of fair play, and eagerness to accord 'the other' his due whenever possible, his good intentions of open-minded tolerance are frequently sabotaged by his own entrenched xenophobia. In him, we see operating clearly the conditioned mindsets so characteristic of the period - and the dual and conflicting impulses towards bigotry and tolerance. This is clearly exhibited, as Schapera points out, by "the delightful

juxtaposition” of two contradictory entries in the General Index to his work: “Taste of different nations, not to be condemned”, followed immediately by “Taste, disgusting depravity of” (Ibid).

Burchell, in contrast to many of his peers, exhibits a genuine desire to ‘know’ the land and its people, coupled with a rare respect for the world of the other, and a recognition of the occupancy rights of the indigenous inhabitants. In him the sense of ownership and entitlement that characterizes so much of the writing and behaviour of the other visitors of the period is noticeably diminished. Unable to find out the local name of a particular river, for instance, and sensitive to the fact that he is a visitor in a country not his, he avoids imposing a name of his own, preferring to “leave this blank in my map to be filled up by some traveller who may hereafter discover the name by which it has been always known to the aboriginal inhabitants of the country” (Ibid Vol 2:15) .

Burchell appears in a very short time to have built up a remarkable degree of trust and reciprocal amicability with the Bushmen he encountered. Frequently putting himself at risk by walking alone and unescorted in their midst - despite the fearsome reputation of these “dreaded little hunters” (1953 Vol 1:xii) - he seems to have won from them a reciprocal regard. “As a European, I was alone in the midst of their hordes, and trusting my life in their hands: I associated with them, and by conforming to their ways and customs, yielded apparent respect to their prejudices. It was this confidence”, he asserts, “which so completely gained their good-will; and which pleased them the more, as they

had been unused to witness in the conduct of white men, so unequivocal a mark of amicable intentions” (1953 Vol 2:35). From the first, his generosity set the tone, winning the Bushmen over with liberal gifts of meat and tobacco, and gaining much pleasure from their evident pleasure. He records his own surprise at meeting with “so much confidence and goodwill, shown us by a people whom the Klaarwater missionaries had represented as the most ferocious of savages” (Ibid:26). He relates that the experience “warmed my heart with equally kind feelings towards them, and dispelled from my own mind every sensation of fear” (Ibid:26). The men in his party, he reports, were likewise greatly surprised that they “could have found any means of gaining the good-will of a race of savages, whom they had been accustomed to look upon as the greatest scoundrels in Africa” (Ibid:134). Such observations seem to bear out the assertions of Stow, Dorothea Bleek and others that the Bushmen’s ferocious image was a direct consequence of their ill-treatment, and that “had the conquering race been desirous of doing so, it would not have been so difficult to have cultivated peace with these oppressed people, if measures of real kindness had been in the first instance adopted towards them” (Stow 1905:162).

In a rare mark of trust, Burchell was conducted to the Bushman kraal, in the midst of an unarmed throng. This he found a depressing experience, erroneously construing the paucity of possession as evidence of a terrible and pitiful poverty. The kraal, he observes, was comprised of half a dozen “wretched weather-worn” huts, only partially enclosed and “utterly incapable of protecting their inhabitants from the inclemency of wind or rain” (1953 Vol

2:27). Within these huts, he notes, was no property of any kind, except “a dirty furless skin, or the shell of an ostrich-egg. Never before had I beheld, or even imagined, so melancholy, so complete, a picture of *poverty*” (Ibid). In an echo of Moffat’s reaction quoted earlier, he is prompted (with “tear....trickling down my cheek”) to exclaim involuntarily to himself: “and is *this* the home of human beings!” (Ibid). Like so many of his contemporaries, Burchell falls into the trap of measuring the Bushman lifestyle by English (and agrarian) standards, equating the former’s lack of property with degradation and want. This prompts from him an indulgent outpouring of self-reproach at his own insensitivity in “sleeping on the bed of ease, and pampered with a thousand useless luxuries, while my fellow-creatures have been wandering the burning plains from day to day, and have returned at last to their wretched huts to pass the painful night in hunger, and unsheltered from the storm” (Ibid).

Burchell’s feelings of sympathy for the ‘degraded people’ seem based on a genuine fund of goodwill. Like fellow early traveller Campbell, he exhibits a touching eagerness for acceptance from them and for ‘adoption’ into the Bushman family. Their expressions of gratitude at his gifts, he confides, “conveyed to the heart sensations the most delightful” (Ibid:28), winning greater largess from him. The women especially, he notes, “seemed to view me, not as a stranger, but as one of their own kraal, as a member of their own family” (Ibid). This is a fantasy - or fact - frequently reiterated. “The longer I stopped amongst them, the more these people treated me like a friend whom they had known for a great length of time” (Ibid). In a later episode, on reaching another Bushman kraal, he is again greeted with gratifying acclaim by

the inhabitants. Burchell reports that, on his distributing meat and tobacco to them, the people declare him “the best man they had ever seen, for the boors, they said, never gave them either tobacco or meat, though they came into *their* country and killed *their* game” (Ibid:62).

In the light of such evident empathy and pretensions to friendship, Burchell’s lapses are all the more glaring. Despite his commendable intentions of broadmindedness, he exhibits the same blindspots of prejudice as the rest of his counterparts. He persistently refers to the Bushmen in Social Darwinist tropes as “poor simple people....artless as....children” (Ibid:36) of whom, “whatever concessions may be made in favor of their heart, nothing can be said in praise of their mind, at least in their present rude state” (Ibid: 40). He describes their custom of smearing themselves with “buku” and “red-ochre” mixed with grease - in “what was thought by these simple Africans to be the most graceful and fascinating style of adorning themselves” - as “precisely the same as that which the clowns and buffoons at our fairs, have adopted in order to render their appearance absurd and ridiculous” (Ibid:43). Summing up the Bushman character, in what appears to be a rather arbitrary assessment, given his inability to speak the language and the brevity of his contact with them, he declares them to be a people without ambition or avarice; lacking in “that essential virtue, *veracity*”, but possessing the virtues of hospitality and generosity - though “it must....be admitted that....they are more inclined to supply their wants by *robbing* the colonists and neighbouring tribes, than by honest industry and patient labour” (Ibid:39-40). Burchell’s inability to live up to his own standards of ‘valueless’ judgement and to recognize the extent and

nature of his cultural partisanship are tellingly illustrated in his account of a Bushwoman feeding bodylice to her baby like “bonbons”. Noting his own instinctive revulsion, he is forced to concede: “The fidelity of my narration has required me to relate the unpleasing, as well as the pleasing, parts of this people’s character; but justice to them obliges me, at the same time, to say, that I do not believe this filthy practice to be general among them, however such examples as this, of depraved taste, may often be met with” (Ibid:50).

The amicable reception and goodwill which Burchell seems to have encountered on his travels through Bushman territory were clearly not experienced by fellow artist and explorer, Thomas Baines, a later traveller, who visited the country between 1842 and 1853. Baines’ sketching talent was evidently not matched by an enlightened tolerance. His racist arrogance and overweening contempt for the ‘savages’ - so typical of many of the mid-nineteenth-century explorers - exemplified the attitude of ‘savage them’ as against ‘superior us’. He is described in the Introduction to his *African Journal* as “a likeable fellow” with a “pawky” sense of humour, good-natured, modest, generous in his judgement, and with a facility for friendship with “Briton, Boer, or Bantu” (1961:xix) - qualities which seem to desert him in his dealings with the Bushmen. The Bushman Chief Madore, for example, whom Baines refers to as “the old knave”, does not appear to have taken to the Baines party. Baines reports with some disgruntlement that not only did he refuse them the services of a guide, but had been “terrifying the Hottentots with dreadful stories of lions and other savage animals” and dissuading them from

accompanying the party (Ibid:77). Given Baines' contemptuous attitudes and imperious manner, Madore's lack of co-operation is hardly cause for surprise.

To Baines, the Bushmen were little more than parodies of men, aping a humanity they did not possess. "Around the fires were groups of men and women sitting in listless indolence or reclining with their woolly pates in the lap of their friends who performed for them such offices as will readily occur to the memory of any one familiar with the habits of a tame monkey" (Ibid:74). No doubt Baines intended his offensive comments to pass as 'pawkish' humour. He continues in the same vein: "One young fellow stood for a moment in a position that, had his figure been less prominent behind and before and countenance more like that of a human being, would have rendered him a fitting model for an Apollo" (Ibid:74). The Bushman language he describes as "a babel of apparently inarticulate sounds". The language of these people, he avers, is "said to be the very lowest of which we have any knowledge and so imperfect that, in the opinion of those engaged in their instruction, it is necessary to teach them another before the benefits of Christianity can be made intelligible them" (Ibid). Like the arrogant artist he is, Baines reserves further contempt for the Bushman art, dismissing the endeavours of the "aboriginal artists" as comprising "rude but recognizable delineations" of various animals, with "grotesque representations of men engaged in chase or war, as well as many in which it was impossible to trace a resemblance to any living creature whatever", all drawn "without the slightest attempt at shadow, blending or perspective" (Ibid:116).

Another traveller of roughly the same period, whose discourse is redolent of a very similar aversion and contempt, is hunter and adventurer James Chapman (referred to earlier), who undertook several hunting expeditions to Lake Ngami and the Nata River in 1854. The flat and damning tone of his descriptions leaves in the reader an indelible impression of Bushman alienness and savagery. Describing how “the king partook of breakfast with us”, and due to his lack of dexterity with a knife and fork, spilt gravy over his naked legs, Chapman records that “it was soon licked off by his nearest friends and relatives” (Ibid:49). He offers this report of the Bushmen feasting on an elephant cow:

The Bushmen were all laid up by surfeit of elephant flesh. They have been for the last few days gorging themselves until their bellies were hard as pumpkins. They rub the grease off their hands onto their bellies or heads, roll over and sleep for 10 minutes, then are at it again. There are continually pots on the fire, titbits or marrow bones on the coals. They are all besmeared with blood and their hair and head is regularly plastered. They get into the belly of the beast when the entrails are out and chop and cut away. They eat every portion of any animal, hide and all, save the horns and hoofs, and of these they even eat the pith. (Ibid:68)

From such visions of alterity, it is hard indeed to retrieve balanced notions of Bushman ‘humanity’ - particularly given the scarcity of Bushman ‘voice’ to counter-balance the impression. What is of particular interest in Chapman’s

account, despite its condemnatory nature, is the fascinating glimpse it gives into alterity from the 'other' point of view; namely, the consternation caused by the white strangers among the Bushmen of the interior, many of whom had never been confronted by Europeans before. The terrifying prospect that these Europeans presented, with their strange appearance, wagons, horses and other mystifying accoutrements, precipitated such generalised panic and flight among the "wild" Bushman bands, that Chapman recounts that he resorted to sending "tamed" Bushmen on ahead to prepare their countrymen for the unnerving experience to come and to lull their fears. "True amazement and surprise was visible on every face," he relates of one such encounter; "they stood and stared in utter bewilderment....One trod over the trektou, gave a jump into the air and bounded off and we saw no more of him. They would not touch any of our property or allow anything to come in contact with their bodies. They shrank from everything" (Ibid:67). Chapman notes that "tobacco, beads and flesh, very potent medicines, were duly administered" as an effective panacea (Ibid).

To a large extent, the colonial writers referred to so far were in essence mere travellers, passing through the territory in pursuit of their various goals and agendas, their 'home' remaining firmly in Europe. In the writing of Thomas Pringle, by contrast, we encounter the testimony of one who had made an actual psychic investment in the new land. As Michael Chapman notes, Pringle's account of colonial occupation "makes its impact on readers with an immediacy of human depiction that....[gives] the reader the 'feel' of living in a colony governed by an 'unjust and mischievous policy'" (1996:95). Of

Scottish descent, Pringle immigrated to the new country in an attempt to turn the tide of family fortune. He was a deeply religious man and a committed abolitionist and humanitarian, who writes with moving vividness about the suffering of slaves. His writing - far more than that of any of his contemporaries - complicates any facile condemnation of settler attitudes. Despite his singular commitment to the causes of freedom, equality and justice, however, he too is not immune to the powerful ideological conditioning of his time. In his settler narrative, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), we see clearly the operation of the axiomatic discourses of the day: the trope of unoccupied land there for the settling; the references to the Bushmen “banditti” holed up in the fastness of the mountains, worse than wild beasts in their savagery; and the deeply vested belief in the civilizing mission, undertaken at the behest of and under the blessing of God.

Pringle’s thoughtful and evocative poet’s style conjures a vivid picture of the brave and beleaguered pioneer, abandoned in a ‘liminal zone’ of psychic and physical strangeness and danger. “The uncouth clucking gibberish of the Hottentots and Bushmen....and their loud bursts of wild and *eldritch* laughter”, he records, made him feel “that we were now indeed pilgrims in the wilds of savage Africa” (Ibid:25-26). Crossing the Great Fish River, at the “utmost verge” of the old Colony boundary, he describes “the howling wilderness” of the depopulated land beyond, “occupied only by wild beasts, and haunted occasionally by wandering banditti of the Bushman race (Bosjesmen), who

were represented to us as being even more wild and savage than the beasts of prey with whom they shared the dominion of the desert” (Ibid:29).<sup>6</sup>

Pringle’s writing demonstrates, once again, the element of hearsay and error that underpins the colonial picture of the Bushmen. He makes the common mistake of believing them to be a version of ‘degraded’ Hottentot, who had “descended from the pastoral to the hunter state” and had, “with the increased perils and privations of that mode of life, necessarily acquired a more ferocious and resolute character. From a mild, confiding, and unenterprising race of shepherds, they have been gradually transformed into wandering hordes of fierce, suspicious, and vindictive savages. By their fellow men they have been treated as wild beasts, until they have become in some measure assimilated to wild beasts in habits and disposition” (1834:236). Notwithstanding Pringle’s evident compassion for the “persecuted natives” (Ibid:236), and his deep aversion to the commando system and other such abuses, he is forced by the circumstances of confrontation to subscribe to the common stereotypes of “predatory native banditti hordes” and “destitute and desperate savages” (Ibid:237). Given the ongoing state of hostility between Bushmen and settlers, and the impossibility of personal encounter under such conditions, he would have had little opportunity to correct his misapprehensions.

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<sup>6</sup> Pringle’s most famous poem, “Afar in the Desert (Chapman and Voss 1986:101-103), based on “the experience of Pringle’s ride from Somerset to Cape Town in 1822” (Ibid:247), offers moving testimony to the difficulties of adjusting - both physically and psychologically - to the alien climes, spiritual barrenness and wild desolation of his new land. With the “silent Bushboy” who accompanies him reduced in the poem to a phantom presence that does not impinge on the loneliness of mood or landscape, Pringle rides in effect alone, through “A region of emptiness, howling and drear,/Which Man hath abandoned from famine and fear;/Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone” (Ibid:102).

## **The Savage War**

“In 1774” records the “Aborigines Protection Society” Report, “an order was issued for the extirpation of the whole of the Bushmen, and three commandos, or military expeditions were sent out to execute it. The massacre at that time was horrible....[and as] Mr. Barrow records it came to be considered a meritorious act to shoot a Bushman” (1837:32). The Report goes on to note that the goal was not just conquest, but deliberate genocide, “the total extinction of the Bosjesmen race....actually stated to have been at one time confidently hoped for” (Ibid:33).

The prolonged and savage war of extermination that followed - and the reciprocal catalogue of retaliatory atrocities it provoked - is well-documented. Commandos - formed for the express purpose of “totally subduing and extirpating the obnoxious [Bushman] race” - destroyed and pursued them with relentless savage ferocity (Stow 1905:156). Clan after clan were annihilated, the men shot down, women and children “dragged into a state worse than slavery....Men, nominally Christians, boasted, as if they had been engaged in some meritorious act, of the active part they had taken in these scenes of slaughter” (Ibid). The callous cruelties that were enacted in the course of these commando raids make for chilling reading. The “Aborigines Protection Society” Report refers to “the most horrible atrocities” committed on those occasions, such as “ordering Hottentots to dash out against the rocks the brains of infants (too young to be carried off by the farmers for the purpose to use

them as bondsmen), in order to save powder and shot” (1837:33). More than one traveller reports hearing stories of prisoners shot in cold blood to save the inconvenience of transporting them across inhospitable distances in inclement weather. Pringle relates one such incident, told to him by “a most respectable and trustworthy person” who heard it from a field-cornet involved in the event, concerning the destruction of a “considerable” Bushman kraal, during which all but five survivors were slaughtered. The “unfortunate wretches” - whose lives were initially spared because the farmers wanted them for servants - were soon found to impede the progress of the party and ordered to be shot. “The helpless victims” the field-cornet is reported to have said, “perceiving what was intended, sprung to us, and clung so firmly to some of the party, that it was for some time impossible to shoot them without hazarding the lives of those they held fast” (1834:238). Nonetheless, four of the five were “at length despatched”, the fifth finally being spared only because she could “by no means be torn from one of our comrades, whom she had grasped in her agony; and his entreaties to be allowed to take the woman home were at last complied with” (Ibid:238-239).

What adds a particularly chilling dimension to such mercilessly cold-blooded acts of murder is the fact that they appear to have been perpetrated not just in the course of commando offensives, but as a regular and routine feature of settler life. Pringle recounts hearing the “boors” boast how in former days, they used to lie in wait and shoot the Bushmen like baboons (Ibid:235). Gordon reports the “jottings” of a farmer living in the Gobabis district of South West Africa in 1950, in which he refers to “a certain Polish-Silesian

settler family in the most remote corner of the vast Gobabis district [who] used to shoot Bushmen at sight [sic] anywhere in the territory which they had claimed as theirs. The mother of this family proudly displays Bushmen skulls acquired in the early days of their settling” (1992:97-98).

In trying to understand the psychological states that give rise to such generalized and virulent antipathy, one is led inevitably to an awareness of the way in which the preparatory discourses of alterity become inscribed into the texts of colonial action. Styled as irrevocably sub-human, as ‘baboonlike’ travesties, irredeemably savage and uncivilizable, the Bushmen were easily ‘verminized’ in the face of competing settler interests. Their perceived brutishness - so indelibly scored into colonial perceptions - was the legitimating trope that catalysed and validated the brutal treatment they received. By treating them with inhuman bestiality, the colonists in effect transformed them into the beasts of their colonial imaginings.

It must be acknowledged that the Bushmen themselves were not mere passive innocents in this process. Their reputation as “bloodthirsty marauders” was well-earned. Stow, Barrow and many others have detailed the Bushmen’s capacity for savage reprisals in reaction to the treatment meted out to them. The settler cruelties, not unsurprisingly, drew forth from them a “studied barbarity” in return, which “ultimately extended itself to every living creature that pertained to the farmers” (Stow 1905:35), including dogs, horses and all livestock. “Lichtenstein relates that at a place called Bruntjeshoogte, 40 oxen, 200 sheep, several dogs and horses and some Hottentot herdsmen were all

destroyed by the Bushmen, not a single one of them having escaped” (Dornan1925:201). The Bushman propensity for slaughtering entire herds of captured animals, their reputed cruelty towards the stolen animals, and the torture they meted out to those in farmer’s employ are often referred to. “Should they seize a Hottentot guarding his master’s cattle, not contented with putting him to immediate death, they torture him by every means of cruelty that their invention can frame, as [sic] drawing out his bowels, tearing off his nails, scalping, and other acts equally savage” (Barrow 1801:286). To what extent Barrow’s claims are factual and to what extent fed by rumour and projection is hard to know. What is clear is that, in the increasingly savage cycle of retaliation and reprisal, the settlers did not have it all their own way. The “First Supplement to Papers Relating to Bushmen, 1785-1797”, from “Notices furnished by the Clerk of the Peace, Stellenbosch” (UCT BC151 H2.1), records an illuminating catalogue of settler hardship. The Nov 11, 1788 entry reports: “Bushmen had taken the whole stock of G. Maritz, behind Roggeveld, and driven him from his farm” (Ibid:ii). Under the 1789 listing is: “House plundered - several murders - unsuccessful pursuit into Roggeveld - prevalence of Measles” (Ibid). A 1793 entry records: “Depredations - inactivity and want of energy of Burgert - twenty farms lying vacant” (Ibid:iv).

Stow, in detailing the course of the bitter feud that escalated into the war of extermination, points out the settler inability to see their own acts of atrocity in the same light as those perpetrated by their enemy. “It was considered as a necessary part of civilization”, he wryly remarks, “to look with leniency on the wholesale purloining of territory on the one side, yet still to paint the character

of the weaker and much-wronged race in the blackest possible colours” (1905:39). He cites the evidence of Field-Commandant Nel, that from 1793 to 1823, he had personally participated in 32 commandos against Bushmen, during which great numbers were massacred - 200 in one raid alone - and innumerable children carried into slavery in the Colony (Ibid:163). Stow points out that Nel was known to be a “meritorious, benevolent, and clear-sighted man”, yet he had no difficulty with the commission of the atrocities in which he had taken part, believing unshakeably in the justification of his actions, on grounds of the Bushman outrages against the settlers. In his own acts, he saw no shame “while, on the other hand, he spoke with detestation of the callousness of the Bushmen in the commission of robbery and murder upon the Christians, not seeming to be aware that the treatment these persecuted tribes had received from the Christians might in their apprehension justify every excess of malice and revenge they were able to perpetrate” (Ibid).

The Bushmen’s “unconquerable spirit” was not in any way admired by their enemies and did not draw from them the same acknowledgement and respect that, for instance, the Zulu military might did.<sup>7</sup> The former’s “unswerving determination” to resist submission was instead put down to their “wild animal propensities and untameableness” (Ibid:39). Their “incomprehensible attachment to their original mode of life [and] strong love of the wild freedom” were considered evidence of their “unimproveable nature”. The members of the “formidable expeditions” that were launched against them propagated the idea that “the cause of humanity would be best served by annihilating a race

with such peculiar tendencies” (Ibid:39-40). Stow goes on to state that “in defense of these aggressions, [the colonists] maintained that the Bushmen were a nation of robbers, who, as they neither cultivated the soil nor pastured cattle, were incapable of occupying the country advantageously; that they would live much more comfortably by becoming the herdsmen and household servants of the Christians than they did on their own precarious resources and finally that they were incapable of being civilized by any other means”<sup>8</sup> (Ibid:161).

In the discourse of the era, such rhetoric emerges with dismaying frequency. The editorial for the 18th December 1873 *Standard and Mail* baldly states: “the wandering Bushmen are worse than the Kafirs....He [sic] neither ploughs nor sows, he does not rear cattle or sheep; he is, in truth, a wild animal in human shape, preying upon whatever he can lay hands on, now stealing sheep, now grubbing up roots, now feeding on mere garbage when nothing else comes his way” (quoted in Skotnes 1996a:144). Magistrate Outjo echoes the sentiment when he says: “The biggest native difficulty in this district is the labour-evading, game-destroying, stock-thieving Bushman who roams all over the district causing trouble. He is a slippery customer and very difficult to lay by the heels for offenses committed” (quoted in Gordon 1992:127).

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Carolyn Hamilton’s previously-mentioned work, *Terrific Majesty* (1998), in this regard.

<sup>8</sup> See Kenworthy and Kenworthy (1996) for similar arguments used with regard to the ‘taming’ of the Australian Aborigines: “If the Government is desirous of having the native race in existence for many years longer....and wishes to do away with the seemingly never ending trouble and expense pertaining to it, why not emasculate all initiated native offenders and indenture them to settlers? As Eunuchs [sic] they would make good, useful, law-abiding servants. Cattle stealing, sheep-stealing, hut robbing, and murder would soon be offences of the past” (Ibid:44).

Such statements bring to mind Paul Landau's observation that "the discursive construction of bushmen [sic] and the material interests of their observers, thus corresponded to each other" (1996:129). In settler eyes, one of the Bushmen's biggest sins was their intransigent refusal to contribute usefully to the practical exigencies of settlement. In the archival documents of the period, there is more than one mention of the Bushman's 'inability' to be habituated to labour - juxtaposed with several aggrieved references to the chronic labour shortage suffered by the farmers, and the many failed attempts to induce the various native groups to take up the government's offers of employment (in return for a pittance of remuneration), which was blamed on "the great attachment of the people to their homes, and the very low level of their domestic requirements" (CAD AGR 464.3781). The degree to which this rankled is illustrated by the comments of Missionary Blake, a Dutch Reformed Minister at Upington, who was considered to be somewhat of an expert on the "Native" condition in his district. Of the great drought of 1903, which caused untold hardships throughout the North Western and other Districts, he had this to say: "I candidly look upon the present distress as the natural means by which a wise providence wishes to teach the Korannas and a large section of the Bastards to work. South Africa cannot afford to have so large a proportion of its population indulge in the indolent habits and trekking propensities of these people" (Ibid).

For the farmers and colonial state, one undoubtedly useful consequence of the long and drawn-out war was that it alleviated the labour shortage, by legitimizing the taking of prisoners as spoils of war and their enforced

conscription onto farms in order to break them of their “thieving” ways. A Memorial by G Grey to “the Rt Honourable H Labouchere” in 1856, records that, in response to robberies committed in the Orange River sovereignty in 1853, attributed to Bushmen, it was decided to arrange a plan “for putting a stop to thieving by these people, and also for making them useful or ‘dientebar’ by dividing them and hiring them out to the farmers in the neighbourhood” (CAD GH 23/26.121). A few days afterwards, orders were accordingly given for armed patrols to go out. “On the 13th December 1853, the first party of armed farmers went out and captured 87 men, women and children, a portion of whom were at once divided amongst the persons present” (Ibid).

Colonial official Barrow, commissioned by the governor in 1797 to investigate the frontier unrest in the Graaff-Reinet district, recounts how, on arriving at the house of the Commandant of Sneeuwberg who had just returned from an expedition against the Bushmen, he found in the house “one of these wild men, with his two wives and a little child, which had come to him by lot, out of forty that had been taken prisoners” (1801:241). He reports that the man “represented to us the condition of his countrymen as truly deplorable”, telling how they suffered greatly from cold and starvation, were frequently forced to watch their wives and children “perishing with hunger, without being able to give them any relief”, and lived their lives as a hunted, persecuted people, knowing themselves to be “hated by all mankind, and that every nation around them was an enemy planning their destruction” (Ibid). Barrow goes on to say that “hunted thus like beasts of prey, and ill-treated in the service of the

farmers....they considered themselves driven to desperation. The burden of their song was vengeance against the Dutch” (Ibid).

The suffering that ensued from such merciless persecution is vividly evoked by the words of 'Kou'ke, a Bushwoman of the 'Kouwe, or Jammerberg Mountain, who describes the shooting of all the men of her tribe by commandos. “There....were all the best of our tribe shot down; there all our brave men's bones were left in a heap: my captain's, my brothers', and those of every friend that I had” (quoted in Stow 1905:188-189). The thoroughness of the genocide in the Cape, which left scarcely a Bushman alive, is confirmed by the missionary Dr Philip. In a “Memorial” to the government in 1834 detailing the massacre of missionary Bushmen, he notes that in just a few years, the 1800 “Boschmen” belonging to two missionary institutions had all disappeared, except for “those....brought up from infancy in service of the boors” (APS Report 1837:34). Philip records that in the entire seventeen days that he was in the previously well-populated country in 1832, the only “free” Bushmen he met who had escaped the commandos were two men and one woman. “They were travelling by night, and concealing themselves by day, to escape being shot like wild beasts. Their tale was a lamentable one: their children had been taken from them by the boors, and they were wandering about in this manner from place to place, in the hope of finding out where they were, and of getting a sight of them” (Ibid:34).

The stealing and enslavement of the Bushman children appears to have been a widespread feature of the war, and was of great concern to the officials of the

day.<sup>9</sup> Stow relates that Korannas, finding they could exchange them for guns, ammunition and brandy with the old colonists, routinely kidnapped Bushman children. He goes on to note that “some of the wandering Boers....along the Bushmen borders of the Old Colony, made forays upon them for this express purpose, seizing almost all their children”, raping the girls and sometimes making eunuchs of the boys - a fact, he says with great understatement, which “greatly exasperated” them (1905:48). Barrow confirms the practice. Expressing the wish that “the peasantry” would stop their “expeditions against this miserable people, and adopt in their place a lenient mode of treatment”, he notes that the first step would be “to abolish the inhuman practice of carrying into captivity their women and children. This, in fact,” he states, “is the ‘lethalis arundo’ that rankles in their breasts, and excites the spirit of vengeance which they perpetually denounce against the Christians” (1801:291).

Eldredge and Morton, in *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier* (1994), note that “in districts such as Graaff-Reinet, labour demands on Boer farms were consistently high. Individual Boer families owned up to ten or twelve thousand head of livestock....and needed many herders” (1994:94). Slaves being too expensive, the Bushman captives of war - acquired through various open and underhand means - provided a convenient alternative. Trekboers, crossing the borders of the Colony to graze their cattle

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<sup>9</sup> Laurens van der Post observes about the Bushman children that “everywhere they were in great demand as slaves because, when they survived captivity, they grew up into the most intelligent, adroit and loyal of all the farmer servants”. He claims that many of the children captured on the commando raids “died of the heart-ache, shock, and the suspension of the only rhythm their little lives had known” (1958:46).

illegally beyond the boundary, would frequently return with “destitute” children, whom they claimed to have “rescued” from appalling starvation and worse. The already-referred to “Memorial” to the Rt Honourable Labouchere on the 23rd December 1856 reports the following: “I have the honour to state for your information that one of the difficult questions which this government at the present moment has to deal with, is that connected with the capture and sale of Bushmen and other colored children in the Territories beyond our Borders who are afterwards brought into British possessions” (CAD GH 23/26.121). The sense of moral entitlement that informed such behaviour, and the complete absence of any awareness of wrong-doing, is tellingly illustrated by the case of one Jacob Theron, who in 1818 was charged with illegally bringing two Bushman children he had “procured” into the Colony. In a Memorial sent to the governor of the time Lord Charles Somerset, he testifies: “That your Memorialist travelled into the interior of this Colony from November 1816 to April 1817 during which period he procured in a kraal through the medium of two Inhabitants [sic] each named Brits two Bosjesman’s children intending to bring them to Cape Town for such further purposes as Memorialist might find their services adapted” (CAD CO 3912. 273). Theron indignantly relates how the children were “by violence seized” and taken from him, on the orders of Landdrost Stockenstrom, “not only to the detriment of your Memorialist’s private interests but to the injury also of your petitioner’s public character....and on a day too, which every Christian is supposed and ought to devote to his Creator - ‘The Sabbath’!” (Ibid). With no apparent sense of the irony inherent in his claims, he waxes more indignant still over this perceived trespass against him, by a power supposedly set up as a

“firm Bulwark” against lawlessness. Theron’s plea is “most strenuously tho’ most respectfully to solicit the restoration of these two Bosjesman’s children”, whom he regards firmly as ‘his property’, on the grounds that, at the time of his acquiring them, no law existed against bringing them into the Colony (CAD CO 3912.273&329).

There is not space in this chapter for any fuller exploration of the long catalogue of war crimes to which the Bushman people were subjected and of which the abduction and enslavement of their children formed only part. The sustained slaughter, the cruel atrocities of the commandos, the rape of the women, the deliberate acts of dehumanization, the enforced nudity of prisoners and their incarceration in surroundings entirely alien to them, at the mercy of incomprehensible laws,<sup>10</sup> must remain their own indictment on the inhumanity of the perpetrators. The impersonal tone in which such unmerciful acts are recounted in the official records, the constant privileging of the colonial vantage point, and the absence of any counterbalancing perspective from those at the receiving end, tend to obscure the full extent and impact of such outrages. The vast suffering of the Bushman people remains with very few exceptions ‘unspoken’. The picture that does emerge - strongly embedded in the texts of colonial narrative and colonial action - is one of unremitting intolerance, formed and fuelled by the dehumanizing discourses of alterity. It was these discourses that set the scene for the encounters and prepared the way for the colonial acts of entitlement and aggression; that instilled in the colonists an unshakeable belief in the degraded humanity and bestiality of the

Bushman people; that permitted 'ordinary decent' men and women to perpetuate with a clear conscience, their vicious war of extermination against a 'sub-human' other, considering them to be "mere animals in propensity, and worse than animals in appearance" (Skotnes 1996a:44). It is against such representations that the next chapter will mount its main argument.

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<sup>10</sup> See Magistrate Gage's letter to the Secretary of the Protectorate (quoted in Gordon 1992:221).

## CHAPTER 2

### Identity and Difference: The Bushman Voice

*Where is Cagn....<sup>1</sup>*

*We don't know but the Elands do.*

*Have you not hunted and heard his cry*

*when the Elands suddenly start and run to his call.*

*Where he is Elands are in droves like cattle.*

The Bushman Qing (1873), quoted in J M Orpen's "A Glimpse into the Mythology of the Maluti Bushmen" (SAL MSC57 33(16)).

The previous chapter was primarily devoted to discursive representations of the Bushmen by imperial visitors and colonial conquerors, and the ways in which such representations helped to set the course for the ensuing genocide against the Bushman people. European 'voice' predominated, constructing an enduring impression of the Bushmen as savage and 'degraded' species - a depiction only infrequently modulated by the more humanitarian portrayals of sympathisers such as Stow and Pringle. Such accounts give little sense of Bushman identity, of their perceptions of and responses to the acts of conquest - or of their surpassing artistic abilities and the extraordinary richness, vitality and spirituality of the cultural heritage that they created. In the living context of their culture, through the highly evolved complexity of story, art, sacred dance and other expressive forms, people depicted as bestial 'spoke' their humanity with great eloquence. Their voices went largely unheard and uncomprehended by the European colonists. Unable to look beyond the stereotypicalities of physical 'type' and

ideological bias, the latter saw, in keeping with their own prejudices, only “a soul, debased....and completely bound down and clogged by his animal nature”<sup>2</sup> (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:4). To use the words of Michael Chapman, as the Bushmen “entered the white South African psyche in the manipulative and mutating forms of frontier myth”, they “had their meaning wrested from them” (1996:32).

The intention of this chapter is to create a space in which to allow the Bushmen to ‘speak’ their own meaning. Though acknowledging the difficulties inherent in such an enterprise, I hope, through an exploration of folklore and songs, rock art and engravings, sacred dance and trance experience, to offer some insight into the cultural, cosmological and social imperatives that informed the Bushman identity. The difficulties of this have already been touched on in the Introduction to this thesis. The Bushman ‘voice’ - in ‘pure’ and unmediated form - is anything but ubiquitous. Problems of accessibility - locational, linguistic and ontological - preclude any easy approach to sources of original expression. This necessitates a heavy reliance on mediated interpretations. Between us, the reader/viewer, and the Bushman creator, there are always the intermediaries - observers, translators, interpreters, ‘experts’. They are the conduits through which Bushman creative expression is relayed - often at the cost of much of its vitality and meaning. Exacerbating such difficulties is the inadequacy of Western mind-frames to come to grips with a spiritual, social and experiential paradigm very different from the utilitarian scientific-rational one which has thus-far dominated. As Stephen Watson points out in the Introduction to his collection of reworked /Xam Oral texts, *Return of the Moon* (1991), “the soul of the

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<sup>1</sup> /Kaggen, the Mantis.

<sup>2</sup> Missionary Henry Tindall, addressing a Cape Town audience in 1856.

Bushman” eludes us - embodying as it does “precisely those habits of mind not readily available to us” in our modern technological societies (Ibid:18).

Without wanting to engage too extensively in debates that have been thoroughly covered by others (see especially Brown 1995:1-65; Guenther 1996:77-99), I feel it necessary to touch briefly on some of the problems of mediation inherent in the recording, recuperation and interpretation of Bushman oral literature. These include the unnatural conditions under which the /Xam texts in particular were recorded, in situations very far removed from the living storytelling context that formed such an important dimension of their textuality; the unequal power balance between transcribers and their convict/servant informants - which inevitably acted as a censoring mechanism on the type of material volunteered; the laborious and stilted methods of transcription and translation; the imperfect language grasp and ignorance of implicit cultural and cognitive codes on the part of the transcribers; and the incongruent language signifying systems and differing cosmogonic and ethical assumptions of source and target languages (Brown 1995:11). While such concerns apply particularly to the /Xam texts, they are by no means exclusive to the latter. Guenther points out for example that the Nharo tales in his collection, *Bushman Folktales: Oral Traditions of the Nharo of Botswana and the /Xam of the Cape* (1989), were collected in most cases not in the course of live, spontaneous performance, but as a result of formal solicitation by him (Ibid:20-22). He further notes that the bawdy and scatological content of much of the Nharo material was probably influenced by the fact that most of his informants were men.<sup>3</sup> An interesting

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<sup>3</sup> Yet such distinctions would seem to be countermanded by the equally bawdy and scatological nature of the stories collected from women informants by Megan Bieseke (1993).

aspect uncovered by his research is what Guenther describes as the “marginality” of modern-day Nharo narrators, whom he found to exhibit a markedly negative outlook towards their culture’s beliefs and values, together with a similarly self-deprecating view of themselves (Ibid:23). This is evidenced by their manner of referring to themselves as the “‘*kam ka kwe*” - the “mouthless people”. Guenther notes that such feelings of ineffectuality and powerlessness are reflected in the themes of inferiority that run through many of the latter-day myths and stories - a state of affairs he attributes partly to the influence of missionaries (Ibid 23).

Central to the mediation debates outlined above is the dilemma of authenticity versus accessibility, which Brown characterizes as the need to find a way to “maintain a necessary dialectic between the difference of a text which is outside of our immediate cultural experience and its similarity as an artefact which can address us across social or historical distances” (1995:11). At one end of the spectrum are the stilted, verbatim transcriptions of Bleek and Lloyd’s *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911) - characterized as “*story-dictation* rather than *story-telling*” (Guenther 1996:83) - with their scrupulous fidelity to source; at the other end, are the far more ‘modern’ versions of Megan Biesele (1993) and Stephen Watson (1991), who in keeping with a growing body of thought, see word-for-word translations as a misrepresentation of the verbal reality of performance (Brown 1995:36). While it has become fashionable to criticise Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd for their painstaking adherence to the literal letter of the tales at the expense of their spirit, it must be said that these ‘original’ versions - for all their longwinded obscurity and archaic, stilted English - offer an invaluable starting point for further study. Encoded in their convoluted, repetitive and aesthetically untidy structure is a far better sense of the

cultural 'strangeness' and perceptual and expressive 'difference' of Bushman worldview than is offered by the more lyrically flowing versions of the later collections.

Whatever one's criticisms of the Bleek and Lloyd transcriptions (and their somewhat paternalistic and reactionary colonial attitudes), the two scholars deserve recognition at least for their unprecedented philological achievement in attaining a working knowledge of the daunting click-based Bushman language and devising a usable phonetic system for its recording; for their extraordinary act of faith in taking into their home - though "with some anxiety" - what they had been led to believe were convicts "of a race supposed to be wild and unmanageable" (Dorothea Bleek 1920a: UCT BC151 D3.3:1); and - not least - for their very atypical recognition of the value of the Bushman folklore treasure. Unlike their contemporaries of the late nineteenth century, they did not simply dismiss the tales as the 'absurd' beliefs of 'savages', but devoted themselves, against considerable obstacles (among them Bleek's own failing health) to setting them down in writing.

Equally, however, one must find sympathy with Watson's view that apart from isolated attention from anthropologists and academics, "the astonishing riches" of the Bleek and Lloyd collection might as well not exist (1991:11). Watson's reworked lyric versions are an attempt to extend the accessibility and appeal of the /Xam texts to a deservedly wider audience. In the process however, his revisionary acts of "periphrases, re-writing and re-structurings" (Ibid) have risked becoming, as Brown points out, "a simple appropriation of /Xam culture" (1995:44). Watson himself is well aware of the dilemmas. Though he has tried to be sensitive to the fact that literary

licence should avoid “betrayal” of the originals - particularly in view of the fact that the /Xam’s extinction demands an added fidelity from translators (1991:11) - he has not fully succeeded in his intention. The end-products we are left with, while lyrically pleasing and ideationally intriguing, convey a somewhat muted sense of their cultural origins - purged of much of the identifying oral mannerism, repetitive circularity, circumlocution and detail of focus that are the hallmarks of Bushman expression.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, as with the profoundly moving and evocative song-text “The Broken String” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:236), Watson’s well-intentioned embellishment has resulted in a self-conscious clumsiness that does the poem little justice (Watson 1991:59). As Belinda Jeursen points out, in comparing Watson’s versions to the originals, the issues we debate should be seen as centred not so much around clarity and logic, as difference in world-views (1994:19). Perhaps, as Brown avers, the solution to such dilemmas resides in finding the balance between a retained sense of ‘difference’, and sufficient accessibility to make ‘meaning’ and identification possible. Brown’s recast versions of the Bleek and Lloyd works attempt to create “readable” texts through “regularizing syntax and grammar, and removing parentheses and archaic diction”, while still allowing the texts their “strangeness” by retaining the distinctive phrasing and register of the original translations (1995:38).

With my reliance on the collective noun “the Bushmen” in my discussions of Bushman oral literature, art and other creative expression, I am fully aware that I risk falling into the same trap as others have done, of ascribing to the Bushman people a reductive homogeneity. As Dorothea Bleek points out, there is a need to recognize the

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<sup>4</sup> See Richard Katz’s observation that !Kung conversation is characterized by repetition for emphasis, circularity of approach and a certain discomfort with Western penchant for direct questioning (1982:6).

diversity of the Bushman people, to give credence to the fact that in appearance, language and custom they were far from uniform: “The Bushmen are no more one people than the Europeans or the Bantu. Some of their habits are similar, as their mode of living by hunting and collecting....is the same....Yet, in spite of this, they are a race divided into many separate tribes, with different language, folklore and beliefs” (1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:3). At the same time, both Guenther (1989) and Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989), among others, have pointed out the strong cultural links and striking similarities in way of life and belief systems that exist among groups of very disparate location and mutually unintelligible language. Guenther’s research into the folklore of the /Xam and Nharo Bushmen of the Cape and Botswana regions respectively indicates that, despite the differences in language and thousands of kilometers of separating distance (as well as a temporal distance of at least a century), Nharo and /Xam texts are informed by very similar mythological traditions, ritual practices and creative outputs. This leads Guenther to posit that they are part of a wider “Khoisan tradition” of religious, cosmological and expressive culture (1989:13). Guenther’s conclusion is supported by Lewis-Williams and Dowson, who point to the fact that the Kalahari Bushmen, whose desert environment precludes a tradition of rock art, evince many of the beliefs and rituals of the extinct southern artists (1989:28).

It is widely agreed that the prolific creative output of the Bushman people was greatly facilitated by the particular mode and tenor of their existence. Their hunter-gatherer lifestyle left plenty of time for gregarious cultural and artistic activity (Brown 1995:32; Guenther 1989:16). Stow observes that in their “undisturbed state” the Bushmen were the most musical people in South Africa - judging by the numbers of

dance tunes and variety of musical instruments (1905:102). These instruments included a variety of musical bows with either a quill in the string (eg the *goura*) or tortoise-shell or gourd sounding-boards; drums, made of clay pots covered with tightly stretched skin; and dancing rattles, consisting of springbok ears filled with small stones or dried berries tied around the ankles (Hewitt 1986:39; Dorothea Bleek 1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:28). The Bushman passion for dancing, particularly on full moon and feast nights, is well-documented. Dances were both secular and sacred in character, with the former embracing animal, social and entertainment themes, and the latter involving the highly cathartic and communal experience of the trance or healing dance, the purpose of which was to facilitate shaman passage into the trance world. To the uninitiated - and partisan - colonial ear and eye, neither music nor dances appeared intrinsically alluring. Dornan describes the Bushman music as “melancholy and monotonous” consisting of “the repetition of a few notes. The intervals were not ours, and the whole had a very sad air” (1925:54). Dorothea Bleek would seem to concur with his assessment, asserting that: “All Bushman dances bear a similar character; the dancers go round and round in a circle, stamping rather than dancing....Their music and singing is not beautiful to our ears; they keep perfect time and follow a tune vaguely. Everyone hits any note he pleases, and all go up and down together” (1924:UCT BC151 D3.5.1:28). Richard Lee, by contrast, in *The Dobe !Kung* (1979) describes the *n/um* healing songs of the !Kung people of the Kalahari, sung without words, as having “beautiful complex melodies” (Ibid:111).

In his discussion of Nharo and /Xam folktales, Guenther characterizes ‘classic’ hunter-gatherers as living in small close-knit bands of between 12 and 36 people, around permanent waterholes to which the band would lay claim (1989:14-15).

Seasonally nomadic, they would split in rainy seasons into smaller family groups to take advantage of the abundant veldkos, also following the transient routes of game migrations. Guenther points out that there was much interaction between groups, who could form co-operative social aggregates of several hundred for purposes of communal hunting or defence (Ibid). Food and water resources were scrupulously shared within the band, which was “highly egalitarian, non-stratified and non-authoritarian....features [which] have left an unmistakable imprint on their rich and exclusively oral literature” (Hewitt 1985:651). Traditional Bushman society, while not without its strains, frictions and outbreaks of internecine violence, was characterized by general equality and co-operation. The precariousness of survival in so harsh an environment required high degrees of social harmony. The importance of maintaining a stable social order appears as a ubiquitous theme in the folktales, as do other central concerns associated with hunter-gatherer adaptation, such as food-sharing, the difficulties of procuring game, uncontrollable weather, interpersonal relationships and social protocol (Guenther 1989:17; Biesele 1993:13). The significance of story and song in Bushman society goes far beyond mere pastime, entertainment or didactic function. Stories form the “imaginative substrate” of hunter-gatherer existence (Biesele 1993:13), indivisibly entwined with the psyche of the people, reflective of the deeply symbolic way in which they see their world. Biesele, in her discussion of the Ju/'hoan people, points out that “metaphor permeates Ju/'hoan expressive life, which in a few words can be characterised as highly oblique, indirect, and allusive” (Ibid:23). She points out that “metaphorical play” is not reserved for storytelling, but is part of everyday conversation, so that “narrative style grows organically from the style of everyday discourse” (Ibid:23&25). This penchant for word-play, allusive meaning, multiple association and symbolic resonance would seem to be consistent with the

Bushmen's intuitive and keenly observant character. It seems the supreme irony that people repeatedly denigrated for their bestiality and 'stunted mental development' should display such highly evolved expressive ability - considered in Western society to be the mark of highest cultural and intellectual development.

Aside from the pressing needs of survival, the major preoccupations that governed Bushman life can be characterized as close social interchange, and a deeply felt mythic connectivity both to the animal species with whom they shared their environment, and to the supernatural world that articulated with the natural one. Hunting rite, trance dance, rock art and folklore, while each having their own dimension of significance, can all be seen as expressions of this same psychic continuum - what Chapman calls "the mythic unconscious" (1996:30). The metaphoric, the symbolic and the experiential find their echo in the interlinking motifs of myth, ritual and rock art. Lewis-Williams suggests that what informs the myth is the profoundly altered consciousness of trance, with shamans' accounts of their experiences in the spirit world providing much of the symbolic material of the tales - their often disjointed narrative structure reflecting the drift between states of consciousness, normal and abnormal (1996:136-138). Religion in Bushman life is not reserved as a separate area of worship, but forms an integral part of the fabric of everyday existence (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:13). Dornan points out that "to the Bushmen everything about them seems alive with some kind of spirit, lightning, eddies of wind and dust, storms, thermal springs" etc. (1925:151). The basic elements of life - water, air, earth - are not seen as comprised of inanimate matter, but embody a kind of magical potency which can be harnessed for human purpose. There is a constant interpenetration between natural and supernatural worlds. Men and animals

can change shape at will, and certain animals, such as baboons, snakes and springbok, are believed to be shamans in another state of existence (Ibid). As Watson asserts of the /Xam: “[they]...lived within a structure of beliefs whose horizons did not stand guard over the possibilities of consciousness as they do for us” (1991:18). In /Xam perception, there was no distinction between the realm of possibility and the realm of the actual. The borders of the seen and unseen worlds, natural and supernatural, symbolic and physical were permeable rather than fixed, allowing for constant interchange. Shamans travelled at will along the horizontal and vertical axes of upper, surface and underworld (Lewis-Williams 1996:124-133), reproducing the psychic trance visions that they experienced onto the rock walls of caves.

Underpinning the foundations of Bushman belief and creative expression was the deeply lived knowledge of the environment they inhabited. The Bushman, notes Laurens van der Post, lived in “an extraordinary intimacy with nature....Wherever he went he belonged....The trees knew him; the animals knew him as he knew them; the stars knew him. His sense of relationship was so vivid that he could speak of ‘our brother the Vulture’. He looked up at the stars and he spoke of ‘Grandmother Sirius,’ of ‘Grandfather Canis’” (1962:8).<sup>5</sup> This “vivid” relationship and deep sense of identification was felt above all with the animals that sustained the Bushmen. As with everything else in the Bushman world, animals inhabited a dual dimension of the real and the mystical. They not only represented meat for survival, but spiritual feeding, and were endowed with a symbolic potency that could be drawn on and harnessed to aid such difficult shamanistic accomplishments as healing the sick, entering trance

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<sup>5</sup> Space will be given in the following chapter to discussion of Van der Post and the controversy surrounding his work.

states, or ‘controlling’ animals (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:118). In the mystical world, the separations between human and animal were far less absolute. There, animals and humans occupied the same psychic space, sharing attributes, able to change form at will, retaining the morphology of one form even as they transmogrified into the other (Skotnes 1996b:241-242). This intersection between states of being finds its echo in the stories about the Early People, ontologically ambiguous beings, of combined human and animal traits, who occupied the formative period of primal time (Hewitt 1985:654); in the therianthrope trance figures of shaman rock art; in evocative and skilfully imitative animal dances; in taboos that preclude the eating of certain animal parts - for instance the “biltong flesh” or *katten-ttu* (located near the thigh muscle) of the hare - in the belief that it retains its memory of the time when the animal was human (“The Origin of Death; Preceded by a Prayer Addressed to the Young Moon” in Bleek and Lloyd 1911:60-61); and in the harnessing of mythical animals such as the rainbull, which could be captured in the spirit world of trance and ‘led’ over the parched land with a special thong in order to effect vital rain in the natural world. The Bushmen’s acute powers of observation and fine-tuned spiritual sensitivity enabled a knowledge of animal and insect lore so acute it verged on the telepathic. “Shamans of the game”, each linked with a particular species of animal, could “control” such animals supernaturally. They were characterized by their head cap made of animal scalp and sewn so that the ears stood up (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:100-102). These shamans were said to be able to “call”, and to “possess” the game. “This possession was not exactly one of control, rather it was an ownership of powers capable of influencing these things” (Hewitt 1986:287). “Shamans of the springbok”, for example, could cause them to run into the hunters’ ambush (Lewis-Williams 1996:138).

It should be stated here that the Bushmen's relationship with animals, while highly intuitive and deeply respectful, held a very pragmatic element. Dia!kwain, in "Certain Hunting Observances called !Nanna-sse" (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:270-275), recounts that "when we show respect to the game, we act in this manner; because we wish that the game may die. For the game would not die if we did not show respect to it" (Ibid: 271). In an environment where life was lived very close to the survival edge, where infanticide and geriatricide were practised as pragmatic necessities of existence, the imperatives of survival precluded any great indulgence in pity or sentiment. In "How /Han=kass'o's Pet Leveret was Killed" (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:317-321), the narrator recounts his dismay, as a youngster, at the killing of his pet leveret by relatives, and their efforts to discourage him from treating game animals as pets: "She (my mother) said (to me), that I should not play with meat; for we do not play with meat; for we lay meat to roast" (Ibid:321). The many reports of Bushman atrocities against the captured stock of settlers would seem to indicate a certain imperviousness to their suffering. This is supported by Stow's description of hunting by pitfalls and fences among the Bushmen "huntmen" of the Kalahari, in which he details "an indescribable chaos of writhing, smothering, tortured animals [the pit being filled] with probably from fifty to a hundred head of game....the living [making] their escape by trampling over the dying, while the delighted and triumphant Bushmen rushed in, spear in hand, and slew the uppermost as they were struggling to escape"<sup>6</sup> (1905:149-150).

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon points out that contrary to the widely-held belief of Bushmen as 'natural' conservationists, the Kalahari Bushmen at least were actively complicit in the ecologically-devastating game destruction of the colonial era, acting as willing agents in the mass shoot-outs conducted by commercial hunters, who often employed them as very effective "shootboys" (1992:38-40).

This pragmatic attitude of the Bushmen towards their food source seems to have existed quite comfortably in tandem with the “almost mystical” attunement (Hewitt 1986:51) that they apparently felt towards the wildlife of their environment. The extraordinary depth of the empathic identification is in fact epitomized in the rites around hunting, where the hunter carefully guards himself from any action that might impart strength to his wounded prey and prevent the arrow poison from doing its work to maximum effect. After shooting game, for instance, while waiting for the poison to take effect, the hunter eats only “the flesh of a thing which is not fleet”, for to eat the flesh of a thing which is “fleet”, such as a springbok, may telepathically cause the shot game to be impelled to similar speed (“Certain Hunting Observances Called !Nannasse” in Bleek and Lloyd 1911:271). The extent of this intensely empathic link between hunter and animal necessitates the hunter’s avoidance of any association with the game until the time that it is safely brought back to camp to be eaten. He will, for instance, lead other men to pick up the game’s spoor, but does not participate in the final rites of death or the cutting up of the animal (Jeursen 1994:45). In “Bushman Presentiments” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:331-339), //Kabbo relates how he can ‘know’ where springbok are by ‘feeling them’ as they walk. He describes feeling a “tapping” at his ribs, which alerts him to the fact that “the springbok seem to be coming”; of feeling the sensations in his feet, like “the rustling of the feet of the springbok....[the] sensation in our face, on account of the blackness of the stripe on the face of the springbok....[the] sensation in our ( ) eyes, on account of the black marks on the eyes of the springbok” (Ibid:333-335).

This acute hypersensitivity seems more experienced than imagined, equalling, in effect, an extra sense dimension. It is testimony to the intense and focused levels of

concentration needed to bring the hunt to successful fruition. More than simple superstition, the strong transcendental element in Bushman belief and ritual should be seen as arising, once again, from practical exigency, its purpose being to attune the senses and bring intuition and endurance to the fore. This would seem to be a vital requirement in an environment of such harsh and precarious subsistence, where in the name of survival, seemingly incredible feats must be performed - such as running hares to death in the hot sun (see “//Kabbo’s Intended Return Home” in Bleek and Lloyd 1911:311-313).

Presentiment - or sixth sense - and the related themes of prophecy, premonition, out-of-body journeying, and transcendental states form a recurring theme throughout the body of folklore and rock art. While such phenomena might seem far-fetched to Western-trained logic systems with their scepticism about all ‘arcane’ forms of knowledge, to the Bushmen they were deeply believed, and practised with a conviction that lends them credence. More than one traveller remarked, for instance, on the extraordinary coincidence between prophecy through the use of divining bones, and actual events that occurred (Dornan 1925:157). It is perhaps as well to remember, as Guenther points out, that to the Bushmen our technological ability to fly planes and visit the moon seemed equally incredible (1989:25). To dismiss too peremptorily these corner-stones of Bushman belief, simply to label such things as superstition or charlatanism and relegate them to the category of ‘naive knowledge’, is to fall into the same trap of narrow-minded arrogance as did the colonial Europeans.

### **Bushman Oral Literature**

In seeking to undermine the facile and demeaning stereotypes of Bushman otherness discussed in the previous chapter, one finds ample supporting evidence in the Bushman oral literature. While not all would agree with Van der Post's Jungian-based assessment of the Bushman stories as being illustrative of "the creative, pre-analytical richness of the human imagination and spirit" (Chapman 1996:30), there is no disputing the value - both aesthetic and metaphysical - of these intriguingly imaginative and conceptually complex texts. The Bushman tales in fact are anything but the simple and naive superstitions of colonial understanding. In their entirety, they form a vastly complex web of linked strands and recurring motifs, replete with esoteric ciphers, allusive references and coded axioms that make them, to cultural outsiders, by no means easy to fathom. In many respects, they represent an exercise in bilateral thinking - configurations of strangeness that challenge established Western conceptions, requiring from readers a nimble ability to think beyond the obvious and open their own doors of perception.

The "richness" is as much in quantity as quality. Bleek notes that the stories in the Bleek and Lloyd collection (constituting 12 000 notebook pages) represent "only a small portion of the great store of Bushman traditional lore" (SAL MSC57.27(1):6). Sigrid Schmidt's "Catalogue" - a "superb, comprehensive and extensively cross-referenced 'field guide' to Khoisan oral literature" - lists 2 399 tales in all (Guenther 1996:89). The verbal narratives of the stories represent only one element of a much wider textuality. In Bushman society, *storytelling* is the creative form, as much as the story per se. Biesele notes the high degree of enjoyment, gleeful anticipation and innovative performance that characterizes the recounting of familiar tales, with individual raconteurs often having "specific stylistic tricks and/or methods of

advancing the plot”, such as “comical reduplication to emphasise instances of outrageousness” (1993:27-31). While there is no specialized group of storytellers, stories are performed most frequently and skilfully by the older members of the band (Hewitt 1985:652), and - though children are not barred from listening - tend to be for “mature” rather than juvenile consumption. As Biesele stresses, “the telling of stories among San is no watered-down nursery pastime but the substantial adult pleasure of old cronies over a bawdy or horrific or ridiculous tale” (1976:307).

The integral role that the story plays in Bushman individual and communal life has already been suggested. In “Aspects of !Kung Folklore” (1976), Biesele records the words of one of her informants, that “the old person who does not tell stories just does not exist. Our forefathers related for us the doings of the people of long ago and anyone who doesn’t know them doesn’t have his head on straight. And anyone whose head is on straight knows them” (Ibid:308). Far more than simple pastime or entertainment, the story is the expressive embodiment of Bushman cultural, spiritual and imaginative existence. Intimately bound up with the core identity of band and individual, it constitutes the continuing thread of existence, the umbilicus, by which the individual attaches to his/her community, both past and present - to the imperatives of life itself. The intricacy of the connection, and the degree to which the story is constituted in the living fabric of the society, is witnessed by the rapidity with which these stories disappeared from /Xam memory with the disintegration of their society. Dorothea Bleek reports that of all the relatives she met of the /Xam who had worked with her father in the 1870s, none remembered any stories. “The Folklore was dead”, she said, “killed by a life of service among strangers and the breaking up of families” (quoted in Skotnes 1996a:23).

The vast body of songs, poems and stories, legends and animal fables grouped under the umbrella of Bushman oral literature is impossible to analyse in any adequate way in the space of this chapter. The texts span the whole spectrum of human ontological, emotional, physical and spiritual existence, and have been more than adequately covered by Hewitt (1985&1986), Biesele (1976&1993), Brown (1995), Chapman (1996) and others. Collectively, they represent an intricate and imaginative record of cosmological and aetiological belief, cultural and social custom, personal expression and communal history, decisively undermining the prevalent stereotypes of ‘basic primitive mentality’ into which the Bushmen had been written. As would be expected given their centrality to Bushman survival, animals feature prominently in song and story, realistically represented in keeping with their intrinsic natures, while at the same time illustrating - through their symbolic aping of human motives and interactions, and their ambiguous place in Bushman cosmology - social or moral points. Many of the texts in which they appear have an aetiological element to account for the origin of certain features or behaviour. In “The Song of the Bustard” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:233) for example, the Korhaan explains his black head-stripe by singing: “My younger brother-in-law put my head in the fire”. A footnote explains that: “When the ‘Knorhaan Brandkop’ was still a man, his head was thrust into the fire by his brother-in-law, in order to punish him for having surreptitiously married a sister. Since then he is only a bustard”<sup>7</sup> (Ibid).

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<sup>7</sup> A particularly interesting aspect to the /Xam folklore was the special speech given to animals and the Moon, which Dorothea Bleek described as “an attempt at imitating the shape or position of the mouth of the animal in question” (D Bleek 1936:UCT BC151 D3.15). Clicks are changed into other special clicks, or into consonants, the resulting sound representing the language of the Tortoise, the language of the Jackal, the language of the Ichneumon etc. (W H I Bleek 1875:SAL MSC57.27(1):6). Wilhelm Bleek notes the difficulty of taking down these animal speeches, which first had to be rendered into “ordinary Bushman” before being translated (Ibid).

The conceptual subtlety and allusive richness of the Bushman creative impulse is particularly well-illustrated in the mythological narratives concerning the people of the Early Race, “therianthropic man-animal beings”, who bore animal names and exhibited some of the anatomical/behavioural traits of their signifying species, yet at the same time were recognizably human, walking upright, having spouse and children, and hunting and gathering in the Bushman vein (Guenther 1989:31). These animal-people of the “early fabular period” constitute an important aspect of the Bushman mythological ethos, existing in a formative time when “the raw materials of life, both social and cosmological, were....constantly interacting and revealing profound truths” (Chapman 1996:29); when transgression of taboo (particularly menstrual) and other acts of intransigence had not just individual, but collective repercussions.<sup>8</sup> Encoded in the symbolic mythology of the stories are not only social and survival concerns, but issues of a more existential import. The sidereal tales, for example, are indicative of the philosophical attempts of a hunter-gathering people to account for the great imponderables of their existence. Mortality, the origin of the heavenly bodies, cyclical regeneration and the intersection between the human, natural and supernatural world are some of the questions addressed. In the popular and plural-versioned “Origin of Death” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:57), for example, it was the Hare’s disobeying of the Moon’s instructions to carry the message of immortality to Humankind that brought death into the world. In other tales, the Moon was said to have been created by /Kaggen who “once being inconvenienced by darkness, threw up one of his

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<sup>8</sup> In “The Girl’s Story, the Frog’s Story” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:199-204), one disobedient girl’s act in killing and eating “the Water-children” of the rain-being !Khwa causes a whirlwind which sweeps off not just her, but her family and all their possessions to a spring. There, they are transmogrified into Frogs, while their possessions revert back to the original form of their natural state.

veldschoens into the sky to become the moon and make light for him” (Bleek and Lloyd 1873:UCT BC151 E4.21-E4.24). “The Children are Sent to Throw the Sleeping Sun into the Sky” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:44-57) recounts how the sun was once a man who lived on earth, emitting only a little shining light from under one of his raised armpits, until the children of the Early Race threw him up into the sky. Such tales represent far more than arbitrary whimsical fancy. They are indicative of the Bushman talent for apt metaphor - and of the keen perceptiveness of people who lived their lives in close practical and mystic linkage with sidereal and elemental bodies, deeply alert to their fluctuating influence on their daily survival. The metaphorical complexity, rich imagery and deep spiritual questing of such stories decisively undermine the Social Darwinist assumptions of primitive barbarity and stunted mental development epitomized by colonial historians such as George McCall Theal, who in his Introduction to *Specimens of Bushmen Folklore*, takes pains to remind readers that “the minds of the narrators were like those of little children in all matters not connected with their immediate bodily wants” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:xxxviii).

Equally intriguing in their conceptual subtlety and often mystifying ambiguity is a second body of linked tales, revolving around the Bushman Mantis deity, /Kaggen, “the favourite hero of Bushman folklore” (Dorothea Bleek 1923: Introduction) and a protagonist of central importance in Bushman mythological belief.<sup>9</sup> /Kaggen features

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<sup>9</sup> Biesele, in “Aspects of !Kung Folklore” (1976), makes mention of the !Kung deity Kauha - the /Kaggen equivalent - a trickster protagonist of a whole cycle of bawdy and scatological stories of a “tit-for-tat nature”, most often “reeled off in rapid succession” (Ibid:316). These tales, told with great hilarity and enjoyment among the !Kung, and revolving around the trickster’s mutual chicanery with his wife, explore some of the fundamental problems of living: sex, excretion, birth and death, hunting and gathering, food preparation and sharing, the division of labour and the balance of power between men and women (Ibid:317). Such tales are reflective of the Bushmen’s irreverent attitude to deities, who despite the power they wield over Bushman life in one dimension, are considerably demystified in the mythological realm. This merging of sacred and profane is a seminal feature of Bushman religious

prominently in the stories, along with his strange cast of relatives - his sister the Blue Crane, his Dassie wife, their three children, his adopted Porcupine daughter, son-in-law Kwammang-a (a mythical personage who is seen in the rainbow), their son the Ichneumon, and Porcupine's 'real' father, the terrifying All-devourer, who swallows everything in his path (Ibid). /Kaggen typifies the dual identity and multiple symbolism of so many of the Bushman folklore personages. He is both trickster figure - "mischievous, vain, quarrelsome, foolish, getting into numerous fights in which he is always worsted" (Dorothea Bleek 1920b:UCT BC151 D3.4.2) - and powerful deity, a transforming and somewhat maverick force, "roaming....through primal time, wreaking havoc and triggering the inversion of the as yet precarious social and cultural beings and states" (Skotnes 1996b:241; Guenther 1989:32). /Kaggen is gifted with supernatural powers, able to undergo metamorphosis at will, to take on human or animal form, to display both masculine and feminine characteristics (Jeursen 1994:53). Dorothea Bleek describes him thus:

He [/Kaggen] flies away from a fight and calls to his stick and cap, his bow and arrows and boy to follow him, and they arise and come. He dreams, and lo, his enemies rise in the air and fly down near his hut....He prophesises, [sic] and what he says happens. He brings people and things to life. The eye of his son he puts into water, and it grows into the boy again; he does the same with a bone of his sister the Blue Crane. He puts a shoe into the water and it grows into an eland. (1920b:UCT BC151 D3.4.2)

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convention. Richard Katz, in his study of Bushman trance dance, *Boiling Energy* (1982), notes that the build-up to this most significant of mystic events is characterized not by any awed or demure atmosphere, but ribald humour, with the shamans, in their progress towards *kia* or trance state, often being spurred on by lots of raucous and explicit sexual joking (1982:52).

As with the other Bushman tales discussed, the /Kaggen stories operate on manifold levels, their apparently random motifs and narrative devices linked to more subtle and implicit imperatives. Irreverently entertaining, sometimes bewildering and not a little disturbing in their strangeness, they are full of hidden mystical and metaphorical significance, their central tropes and emblems linked with the trance symbolism of rock art and shaman trance experience (see Lewis-Williams 1996:122-141). Many of the /Kaggen stories involve themes of regeneration and restoration - usually through the medium of water - and the reversibility of death through magical potency. In "The Mantis makes an Eland" (Dorothea Bleek 1923:2-5), /Kaggen creates a pet Eland out of the shoe of his son-in-law, Kwammang-a, keeping his pet in secret among the reeds and feeding it on honey. When his son-in-law Kwammang-a kills the Eland and enlists the aid of the Meerkats to cut up the carcass, the Mantis weeps bitterly. Piercing the Eland's gall-bladder to create a darkness in order to aid his escape from his Meerkat persecutors, he throws up one of his shoes into the sky, and orders it to become the moon. "Thus the moon is red, because the shoe of the Mantis was covered with the red dust of Bushmansland, and cold, because it is only leather" (W H I Bleek 1875:SAL MSC57.27(1):7). This tale, in part aetiological, has a number of the key elements integral to many of the /Kaggen tales; regeneration and the reversibility of death (/Kaggen later 'regrows' the eland, though now it is wild and 'spoilt' and runs from hunters); the treachery of in-laws; and the recuperative power of the Mantis, though bested, to turn defeat to his own advantage and to effect out of grief and destruction a careless but significant act of creation (the Moon).

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The choice of so seemingly insignificant an insect as the mantis as one of the symbols for so powerful an entity as the trickster deity, while it may seem odd to Western readers, is consistent with the worldview of a people not bound by Western predilections for physical size and beauty. The Bushmen, as both Chapman and Van der Post point out, were able to find the “supreme image of the infinite in the small” (Chapman 1996:29; Van der Post 1984:146). Their choice of a spiritually representative vehicle tended to be informed not so much by literal as symbolic qualities (Chapman 1996:29). The Mantis can, in many respects, be seen as the embodiment of the Bushman spirit - a small being, large in importance, combining within himself very ordinary human traits and quirks, with access to the magical and supernatural. In his trickster incarnation, he lives the existence of an ordinary Bushman, hunting, fighting, getting into scrapes, reflecting in his life and antics all the characteristic Bushman troubles and concerns (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:13).

Far from the static ‘stone-age’ tradition it is often perceived to represent, the oral literature of the Bushmen constitutes a dynamic response to the changing realities of Bushman existence. Guenther for instance points to the incorporation in the Nharo tales of missionary-influenced biblical emblems such as “Addam” and “Effa” (living in “a veld region rich in berries and game”); a “//Gauwa named ‘Jessu Kriste’”; and the tower of “Babbal” (1989:30). Similarly, Hewitt makes reference to Nharo narratives that relate humorous stories about a fox-trickster, who works as garden servant for a foolish and brutal Afrikaner farmer: “Thus an ancient protagonist has come to be used in a rudimentary form of social satire” (1985:660).

In related vein, the value of the /Xam texts as sources of political and historical reality is often overlooked. Texts such as “//Kabbo’s Capture and Journey to Cape Town” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:291) and “//Kabbo’s Intended Return Home” (Ibid:299) provide invaluable testimony of the processes of colonial conquest viewed through Bushman eyes, offering at the same time a fascinating portrait of the collision between colonial and indigenous worlds. The latter text in particular, in its own idiosyncratic way, offers a decisive denunciation of the indignities and injustices of subjugation.

Full of reproach and restless nostalgia for lost familiarities, lost meaning, lost identity, “//Kabbo’s Intended Return” is a powerful and poignant piece in which //Kabbo himself becomes a metaphor for his wronged, dislocated and dispossessed people. Once in his own community a personage of considerable power and respect - said to be a *!gi xa*, or medicine man, linked to the powerful /Kaggen (Guenther 1996:95), and privy to such arcane knowledge as the ability to command rain, ‘call’ springboks, and cure the sick (Lewis-Williams 1996:138) - //Kabbo is here reduced to a quaint and lonely aberration, in a place of strangers who have no understanding of him or the world that he represents. “I feel that the people of another place are here; they do not possess my stories. They do not talk my language” (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:301), he laments. And there is a clear sense that these “people of another place” are not just of a different geography, but a vastly disparate consciousness. “I do work here, at women’s household work...when I should sit among my fellow men, who walking meet their like” (Ibid:301-303) is his further complaint. And it is clearly not just the inferior status of the “women’s work” that is so troubling to him, but the ruptured social order, the perversion of essential identity that it represents. Among

these “people of another place”, //Kabbo is not recognised in any way for the person he is. There is no meaningful exchange with them, as there is with his “fellow men”; they “merely send (him) to work” (Ibid:303). In this piece, as in no other, one sees the close intersection between story and Bushman life. The story is “like the wind”, //Kabbo says, “it comes from a far-off quarter, and we feel it” (Ibid:301). It brings with it the breath of wider connections, providing bonds of linkage not just with the immediate society, but with all who hear it. “It (the story) is wont to float along to another place. Then, our names do pass through those people....For, our names are those which, floating, reach a different place” (303-305). //Kabbo’s deepest lament is that life has left him behind, because in his exile he has not been woven into the story of his place and his people. “For, the trees of the place seem to be handsome; because ( ) they have grown tall; while the man of the place (//Kabbo) has not seen them, that he might walk among them” (Ibid:305). There is clear reproach against the colonizing strangers who walk there now. “Their place it is not” (Ibid), //Kabbo says with finality. In a clear rebuttal of colonial claims to the contrary, he insists on his ancestral right to his people’s land, which according to established laws of heritage has passed down through generations of settlement. His homesickness for that land is very clear. He longs to return, to quench his spiritual thirst at the waters of home (Ibid:313), where there are people who know him and care for him, and where he is deeply woven into the fabric of meaningful and connected existence. His waiting, for “the return of the moon” (Ibid:305), is a waiting of great symbolic import. For the immortal moon, with its cyclical resurrections, so central in significance to Bushman life and lore, represents as nothing else does defiant regeneration - the ability to transcend the finality of death. In //Kabbo’s waiting on the moon, there is implicit hope that the

Bushman 'death' by cultural and literal annihilation, can be similarly reversed; that they too will find their restoration into the established cycles of existence.

In "The Broken String", related by Dia!kwain, the metaphors of loss and silenced desolation are far more directly drawn. Composed by a /Xam shaman, Xaa-ttin, in mourning for his murdered shaman friend (Bleek and Lloyd 1911:236), this song-text gives the lie as nothing else does to the colonial view of Bushmen as intellectually-stunted children, with little capacity for perceptual subtlety or abstract thought:

People were those  
 who broke the string for me  
 And so the place became like this to me,  
 because the string was broken for me.  
 And the place does not feel to me  
 As the place used to feel to me  
 For the place feels as if it stood wide open before me  
 Because the string has broken for me  
 and so the place does not feel pleasant to me. (Hewitt 1985:664)

The simple structure of the song hides a multi-layered symbolism. With its evocative strangeness, its complex metaphoric subtleties and profoundly moving sorrow, it has captured Western imagination to an extent no other Bushman text has. Its sense of loss resonates across the cultures and the centuries. The central event that sparked off the composition - the slaying of the elderly shaman !Nuing-/kuiiteng by Afrikaner

farmers<sup>10</sup> - is never mentioned directly. But it looms large behind the song, pervading it with the shadow of colonial presence. The “People” in the first line are the same dispossessing “people of another place” that //Kabbo refers to in his “Return” text. And because of them, “the place” has been irrevocably changed, the musical and the magical string broken, the song and the story silenced. It is not just the loss of the singer’s shaman friend, but the wider loss - with all its tragic repercussions - that resonates so strongly through the lines. The deeply human pain that this song conveys, provides a very eloquent counterpoint to the bigoted colonial refrain of Bushman subhumanity, epitomized in the voice of poet Francis Carey Slater (referred to in the previous chapter). Slater - described on the back cover of his book in the most glowing terms as one who “more than any other South African poet....has interpreted the history, spirit and problems of his country” (1957) - is infamous for his consistently defamatory depictions of the Bushman, in poems such as the following:

In the far days that are gone there dwelt in the depths of the desert,  
 Scattered and wandering pygmies; hideous, filthy and squat:  
 Fitting kindred of Ishmael - their hands against all men were lifted -  
 Hating all that was human with blind and inveterate hate....  
 Tameless and fierce and foul were these pygmies, and cunning as serpents,  
 Callous spawn of the desert, dull to the sting of its sun. (“The Karroo”  
 1957:205-206)

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis-Williams points out that !Nuing-/kuiiteng “met his end through his implicit belief in traditional San religion. Genuinely believing himself to have turned into a lion, he had killed a farmer’s ox” (1990:86).

When set against Bushman texts such as “The Broken String”, such portrayals would seem to constitute a far more telling indictment of the ignorance and myopia of their originator, than of the people against whom they were directed.

### **Rock Art**

If Bushman oral literature, in all its mystical and metaphorical complexity, can be seen as illustrative of the highly original, profound and spiritually-attuned Bushman world-vision, then the same is equally true of the Bushman rock art. Paintings and engravings represent arguably the most ‘unadulterated’ examples of Bushman expression, in that they are generally able to be encountered in unmediated form, as the authentic creations of the artists themselves. Yet, even so, problems of interpretation limit accessibility for the ‘ordinary’ viewer. Far more than the straightforward representations of everyday Bushman life and environment they were once thought to be, the paintings - for those lacking a developed knowledge of Bushman culture and customs - remain in many respects little more than intriguing hieroglyphics. Meaning is encoded in a complex multilayering of the real and metaphoric, in subtle touches and small details signifying symbolic meanings difficult for those who are foreign to the culture to grasp. This necessitates, once again, reliance on the testimony of ‘experts’ for translation, or at the least, on an in-depth study of Bushman cultural, environmental and mythological precepts. One of the most helpful explanatory texts in this regard is Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s *Images of Power: Understanding Bushman Rock Art* (1989), which offers valuable interpretative keys to understanding the more esoteric features of the rock art, drawing for its insights on “comprehensive and largely unpublished records of Bushman beliefs

which were recorded verbatim during the 1870s”, as well as more current testimony from present-day Kalahari societies (Ibid: Flyleaf).

Paintings and engravings, while broadly representing the same themes and subject matter, are typically found in different geographical regions of the country. Rock paintings tend to be confined to mountainous areas, where there are abundant rock shelters (such as the Drakensberg, Malutis, Brandberg, Cedarberg and Waterberg), or to elevated sites such as isolated koppies or hillside boulders with shallow overhangs beneath them (such as the Kruger National Park and Mlamboja Valley area). Rock engravings are found principally on the interior plateau - for example in the vicinity of Kimberley, the Magaliesberg and the Karoo - a typical engraving site being located on a low rise with a scatter of exposed rocks (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:13-16).

The profusion of the artwork testifies to its importance in Bushman life. Lewis-Williams and Dowson note that in areas such as the Drakensberg, virtually every inhabitable rock shelter has evidence of paintings (Ibid:14). The Spatial Archaeology Research Unit of the University of Cape Town records 2 500 painting sites in the Western Cape alone (Parkington et al 1996:212). Dorothea Bleek states that “in the Eastern Province north of the Katberg and in the foothills of the Malutis in the Free State and Natal, there are countless galleries showing layer upon layer of paintings” (1946:UCT BC151 D3.21:1). She points out that the rock art is not just a feature of South African legacy but extends also to Zimbabwe (“Rhodesia”), Namibia (“the South West Protectorate”), Tanzania (“Tanganyika Territory”) and “the ranges that divide the Transvaal plateau from the low lands of Portugese East Africa” - everywhere except the “sandbelt of the Kalahari, where there are no rocks, hence no rockpaintings” (UCT BC151:E5.1.26:1).

As with the folklore, Bushman rock art represents far more than just an artistic pastime; it is dynamically expressive of the most central beliefs and concerns of hunter-gatherer existence. As a living manifestation of Bushman spiritual and cultural vitality, it - like the folklore - ceased to be a practised tradition with the social disintegration that followed colonial intrusion and conquest. Dorothea Bleek attests that “some seventy years ago, the last Bushman artist perished in battle, his paintpots still strapped to his belt” (UCT BC151 E5.1.26:2).

The paintings depict a blend of spiritual and prosaic references. They reflect, in addition, the changing historical imperatives of the Bushmen people, telling not just of “communions between physical and spiritual realms, but of destructive meetings with African and white farmers” (Chapman 1996:21). Such things are shown with typical astuteness of observation and accuracy of detail. Dorothea Bleek notes that “the dress, weapons and physiognomy of the different peoples [Zulus, Basotus and Europeans] are so characteristically depicted, as to leave no doubt as to their identity” (UCT BC151 E5.1.26:2). Animals form a major part of the content of artworks, with themes embracing the multitudinous aspects of Bushman life - sacred, secular and profane. The singular beauty, postural vitality and visual richness of some of the more representational animal scenes - such as the perfectly proportioned and sleekly contoured eland herd among the rocks, inappropriately titled “The Meads”, (Appendix A), attest to the keen eye and artistic mastery of the painters. Such accurately-drawn depictions contrast strongly with the more stylistic and often exaggeratedly large-bodied ‘mystical’ elands, represented according to symbolic rather than literal proportions and often left incomplete to signify states of change or becoming (see Appendix B). These latter, as with the attenuated human figures (thought to symbolize

the weightlessness of trance state), were often erroneously construed as the result of the Bushmen's poor or under-developed spatial and technical grasp (Appendix C).

Included in the mindboggling profusion of cave and rock art imagery are hunting scenes, mythological references, battles with invading groups, traditional dances and shaman trance experience. So accurately are the traditional facets of Bushman life depicted, in all their evocative detail, that they were instantly recognizable to all the Bushmen who saw them. Stow recounts showing his handdrawn facsimiles of the cave paintings - what he terms "cartoons" - to one old Bushman couple, lone survivors of the annihilation of their clan, who he reports seemed delighted, "emphatically terming them '*their* paintings', '*their own* paintings' 'the paintings of *their* nation'" (1905:103-104). On being shown pictures of some dances, the old woman identified them immediately, including one which she said had gone out of fashion in her grandmother's time, and began to sing the tunes and sway her body to the time. Stow reports that the old man became visibly affected and kept touching her shoulder and saying "Don't! Don't sing those old songs, I can't bear it! It makes my heart too sad!" As she kept on however, ignoring his entreaties, he appeared to grow infected with her enthusiasm and joined in. On subsequently being shown a dance of Bushman hunters with their arrows "filleted" round their heads, Stow records, the old man disappeared and reappeared "with his head arrayed with a perfect coronet of barbed arrows, most artistically arranged, swaying at the same time his old grey head, in evident glee" (Ibid:105). Stow is driven to remark that "one was not prepared to meet with such a display of genuine feeling as this among people who have been looked upon and treated as such untamably vicious animals as this doomed race are said to be" (Ibid:104).

In his Preface to *Images of Power: Understanding Bushman Rock Art* Lewis-Williams notes that, until very recently, Bushman art was largely ignored by archaeology, on account of the Bushmen's despised status. He refers to the difficulties of overcoming the scepticism of a general public unable to reconcile the stereotypes of animal primitivism with such highly developed cultural expression (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:4). From colonial times, the tendency was either to dismiss the paintings as nothing more than the daubings of primitives, born of a primeval urge to leave their mark on the surroundings, or alternatively to attribute them to the handiwork of others. This latter tendency is borne out by Dorothea Bleek's efforts in "The Probable Age of Bushman Paintings in the Union of South Africa" (UCT BC151 D3.19) to defend her belief that the paintings "are not the work of a decadent race, of poor artists imitating old masters" (Ibid:5). She cites evidence that such artworks are part of a general and widespread Bushman tradition, and reveal the talents of a people who were "in the very height of their literary and artistic powers, when fate in the shape of black and white invaders swept them away" (Ibid). The extent of the contempt with which Bushman art was viewed and treated in the nineteenth century is witnessed by the reputed actions of the British troops under Colonel Durnford who, at the time of the Langalibalele rebellion in 1875, reportedly used rock paintings for target practice (McGibbon in Brown 1995:34).

From the first, the Bushman art has been the site of contested interpretations, its esoteric features baffling Western understandings and giving rise to many misconceptions of both purpose and content. Out of the mistaken ideas about the mental capacities of 'primitive people' arose one of the earliest erroneous

interpretations - of Bushman art as the product of attempts at “sympathetic magic”, in the belief that depictions of animals prior to a hunt and the act of shooting arrows at them would ensure success (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:23). A similarly reductionist trend was to view the art as nothing more than whimsical vignettes of everyday life and activity. This resulted in various arbitrary and distorted understandings of Bushman culture, society and belief - exemplified by claims “for the detection of fur-lined leggings, drunken brawls, ‘singularly beautiful home-decorating’, humorous caricatures and....the use of enemas” (Ibid:24). As late as 1956, critics such as A R Willcox were still propounding the viewpoint that “it is perhaps natural to expect that Bushman art and child art should be much the same. As the last survivors of Stone Age man the Bushmen were still, so to speak, in the childhood of the race and the ‘biogenetic law’ leads us to believe that the individual, before birth and after it, recapitulates first the biological evolution and then the social development of the human race” (1956:79). The extent to which the paintings’ more esoteric features challenged the limited knowledge and perceptual inflexibility of Western viewers - and the amount of guesswork involved in attempting to make sense of them - is typically illustrated by some of Willcox’s less inspired explanatory efforts. Of a circular procession of cloaked figures, with “animal-like heads and horned head-dresses”, at the Main Caves, Giant’s Castle, (Appendix D), he says: “I interpret this as a party of Amazizi using Bushman hunting methods” (1956: Plate 28). For a seated group of clearly bird-headed figures ranged one behind the other, with a therianthrope composed of animal head and torso and human hind-quarters bringing up the rear (Appendix E), Willcox suggests: “The four seated figures with the conventionalized heads may represent Bantu at a fire using their shields behind their backs to screen them from the wind” (1956: Plate 34). The explanatory notes for a fascinatingly

complex trance dance scene, complete with elongated figures and other characteristic trance emblems (Appendix F) provide little helpful guidance, save for the rider: “Note the steatopygia” (1956: Plate 36). Similar signs of incomprehension are betrayed by some of the captions in Johnson and Magg’s *Major Rock Paintings of Southern Africa* (1979). For instance, Plate 82, which shows an ectoplasmic figure attached by umbilical cord to an upside-down embryo-like torso below it (Appendix G), is simplistically interpreted as “the scene of a birth”, followed by anthropological details of Bushman birth procedure. Features such as the very un-Bushmanlike shape of the supernatural entity, the fact that the “newborn” has an energy stream of what seems to be *n/um* potency emanating from the crown of its head, are unremarked and ignored - no doubt put down to the Bushman lack of artistic competence. Such palpable misinterpretations by so-called ‘experts’ lend weight to Lewis-Williams’s observations concerning the necessity of adopting an “insider’s” perspective in interpreting the art; of trying as far as possible to see it through Bushman eyes and to assess what it may have meant for the artists themselves (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989: Preface). This inevitably entails a knowledge of Bushman cultural and religious reference systems.

It should be borne in mind, however, that all interpretations - no matter how apparently insightful - involve a certain amount of guesswork. The fact that there are no Bushman artists left to consult over meanings makes contested interpretations an inevitable feature of the field. As Skotnes puts it: “The culture of the people who painted....is dead, and in the sense that we have no single testimony from an artist or from a person intimately acquainted with the art as it was practised, it is doubly dead” (Skotnes 1996b:235). Parkington et al, in “Reading San Images” (1996:212-233),

point out that one of the primary problems of interpretation is correct identification of subject matter: “Is this a bag? Is this an eland? Is this bleeding from the nose?” (Ibid:213). They go on to note that some knowledge of “San” contexts, customs and artefacts is thus essential in aiding the assignation of valid meaning, outlining as their own parameters, “the tasks of identifying recurrent image choice, of understanding the conventions of composition, and of relating this to social and historical events in the lives of....hunter-gatherers” (Ibid:214).

Among the most respected researchers in the field of rock art interpretation are the archaeologists David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson, whose seminal work *Images of Power* (1989), mentioned earlier, pioneers the view that the Bushman paintings and engravings are “essentially the work of medicine people, or *shamans*” (Ibid: Flyleaf). They provide a fascinating window onto shamanistic trance experience, altered states of consciousness, healing and other esoteric activity (Ibid:30-31). Lewis-Williams and Dowson cite as their evidence the frequent occurrence in the paintings of such features as geometric designs, which are said to be consistent with the entoptic phenomena thrown up spontaneously by the nervous system in the course of all transcendental or hallucinogenic experience (Ibid:60), drawing attention in addition to the strong correlation between the nasal bleeds, stylized postures and other significant indicators depicted in the paintings, and the recorded evidence of shaman trance (Ibid:38-49).

Citing evidence of neuropsychological research into altered states of consciousness by Ronald Siegle and others, Lewis-Williams and Dowson find fascinating coincidence between the experiences of drug-induced transcendence and the stages of

shaman trance, suggesting that “some trance experiences are human universals” (Ibid:60). The early stages of the trance experience are reported to involve the ‘seeing’ of already-mentioned “entoptic phenomena ....luminous geometric shapes that include zigzags, chevrons, dots, grids, vortexes and nested U-shapes” (Ibid:60) - considered to be the identifying structural material of altered states experience. This is followed in the second stage by “construals”, which Lewis-Williams and Dowson identify as entoptic data elaborated by the brain into more familiar and meaningful imagery, as a way of making sense of the material: for example, nested U-shapes translate into honeycombs, because bees represent symbols of potency. The third and deepest stage of trance experience involves “iconic hallucinations” which “derive from memory and are often associated with powerful emotional experiences” (Ibid:60-67). Lewis-Williams and Dowson further note that one of the features of deep trance is the blending of different visual hallucinations - often human and animal forms - which they see as explaining the numerous therianthrope depictions to be found in paintings and engravings. They quote J M Orpen’s Bushman informant Qing, who, when asked about these images in 1873, “linked them to the trance dance and used three trance metaphors: ‘death’....‘underwater’....and ‘spoilt’” to explain them (Ibid:68).

Such paradigms locate Bushman art exclusively in the province of the trance world and the transcendental experience, seeing their strange blend of the real and visionary as representative of the shaman’s multidimensional view of reality (Ibid:51). In the light of such linked themes of meaning, discussion cannot properly proceed without some reference to the trance experience and its catalyst, the healing dance. Richard Katz, author of *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung* [sic] (1982), who undertook a study of the healing practices of the !Kung of the XaiXai

area of Botswana in 1968, asserts that the healing dance is at the centre of Bushman society, an important focal point of community life in which all take part, and the primary expression of !Kung “religion”, “medicine” and “cosmology” (Ibid:36). Katz records that one third of adult !Kung routinely take part in the all-night trance experience, “thereby releasing healing energy to the entire community” (Ibid:3). He points out that this ‘sacred’ ritual is not reserved for the privileged few with special characteristics or extraordinary powers, but is accessible to all. The dance invokes healing in its broadest “generic” sense. This may take the form of curing an ill body and mind, of mending the social fabric through the release of hostility and increased sense of social solidarity, of protection from misfortune through intercession with the gods, as well as enhancing consciousness (Ibid 35-36). What is remarkable is that the actual transcendental experience is generally achieved without the use of hallucinogenics. It is stimulated by the atmosphere generated by the dance, which sparks the experience of *kia* - an altered state of consciousness which is the key to the release of *n/um*<sup>11</sup> or healing energy. Women, sitting round a central fire, sing and clap the rhythm of special songs. The men, sometimes joined by women, dance around the singers.<sup>12</sup> As the dance intensifies, *n/um* or spiritual energy is activated in the healers, both men and women, but mostly among the dancing men (Ibid 34). The insistent chants, rattles and thudding steps “activate a supernatural potency that resides in the songs and in the shamans themselves. When this potency ‘boils’ and rises up the shamans’ spines, they enter trance” (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:32).

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<sup>11</sup> Also known as *num* or *nom*

<sup>12</sup> Lewis-Williams and Dowson note that “the shamanistic role of women seems to be increasing in the Kalahari today”, with the women’s Drum Dance steadily gaining ground. Although in this dance the women enter trance, they do not engage in healing, but rather use the occasion as a training opportunity for trance, some of them subsequently going on to practise as shamans (1989:46-47).

The healing energy of *n/um* is said to be very powerful and mysterious - a “boiling energy” that resides in the pit of the stomach and base of the spine, working its way up the backbone to the base of the skull, where it activates the transcendental state of *kia*, or altered consciousness (Katz 1982:41-42). Experiencing *kia* is a necessary prerequisite to healing, but it is painful and feared. The old !Kung healer Kinachau described it thus:

You dance, dance, dance, dance. Then *num* lights you up in your belly and lifts you in your back, and you start to shiver. *Num* makes you tremble; it's hot. Your eyes are open, but you don't look around; you hold your eyes still and look straight ahead. But when you get into *kia*, you're looking around because you see everything, because you see what's troubling everybody. Rapid shallow breathing draws *num* up. What I do in my upper body with the breathing, I also do in my legs with the dancing....Then *num* enters every part of your body, right to the tip of your feet and even your hair. (Ibid:42)

The onset of *kia* is said to bring searing pain in the *gebese* - the area between diaphragm and waist (possibly liver or spleen). And entering the trance state is as fearful as experiencing death, embodying with it the terror of not coming back, and the giving up of familiar identity to enter frightening, unknown spiritual territory (Ibid:46).

Such firsthand testimony provides a fascinating glimpse into psychological, experiential and existential states very different from the habitual Western ones. The similarities between these descriptions and the subject matter of rock art lend weight

to Lewis-Williams and Dowson's contention that "for the shaman-artists, the spirit world lay behind the wall of the rock shelter....The shamans reached through the wall, extracted the beings and events of the spirit world, and then fixed them on the rock for all to see" (1989:91). In this sense, they suggest, the paintings are not paintings in the ordinary sense, so much as the actual contents of the spirit world made manifest (Ibid).

When viewed in this light, even paintings depicting apparently straightforward historical events, such as violent skirmishes with whites, can be read for evidence of supernatural rather than purely realistic encounters. In one painting showing conflict with armed figures on horseback, Lewis-Williams and Dowson identify tell-tale motifs of trance posture, bleeding from the nose and other features seeming to suggest that the battle was as much in the spiritual as the material realm. This leads them to posit that "in more recent times the shamans used their supernatural powers to control and combat the newcomers even as, for centuries, they had used their powers to fight off malevolent shamans in the spirit world" (Ibid 147).

The work of Lewis-Williams and Dowson has had an enormous impact on contemporary approaches to Bushman art, their "shamanistic model" offering "a vastly more nuanced and sophisticated" interpretation and allowing "many previously enigmatic images [to] be elucidated" (Solomon 1995:50). Support for their approach has by no means been universal, however. Their tendency to see all rock art as the uniform product of the shaman vision, with "images as diverse as eland, flying buck, crabs, fish, bees, dancing humans, abstract designs, therianthropes, and more besides", has drawn its share of criticism. It is seen by some as too reductionist to account for

the huge complexity of the imagery, and offering little accommodation for other readings, such as the political and the sexual (Ibid:51-53). Anne Solomon points out that one of the drawbacks of the shamanistic model is its inability to account for “the very prominent sexual symbolism in the art” and its tendency to subsume images of women “under the rubric of trance and shamanism” (Ibid:56-58). She herself argues for a more politically rooted interpretation that embraces both historical controversies and gender dynamics.

Skotnes is another who takes exception to the ‘shamanistic model’, arguing for a more individual and iconographically diverse interpretation of the paintings. She finds the concept of a “southern San rock art....problematic, general and reductionist” in that it fails to give enough tribute to the individual artist or recognition to the “rich formal, iconographic and stylistic diversity that exists” (1996b:235). She is critical of current emphases on the notion of “a pan-San cognitive system with the trance dance and the trancing shaman as the central and most significant feature of it” (Ibid:236), with its accompanying tendency to reduce the huge diversity of paintings “to a purely causal relationship with the trance dance (which we do not even know to have been universally performed)” (Ibid:244).

While such points as Solomon and Skotnes make are well taken, there is no disputing the persuasiveness of Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s argument for a ‘shamanistic’ interpretation of the art. The recurring frequency of identifiable trance motifs in so many of the paintings would seem to confirm the strong link between art and the trance state. Particularly prevalent are the signifiers of animal death - one of the main metaphors for entering trance. Lewis-Williams and Dowson point out the

similarities between the behaviour of game - especially eland - dying from arrow poison, and shamans entering the 'death state' of trance: violent trembling, staggering, lowered head, hair standing on end, bleeding from the nose, excessive sweating, and finally collapse into unconsciousness (1989:50-53). They quote Orpen's Bushman guide Qing, who explains that when men enter deep trance, it is said that they have been 'spoilt' in the same way as elands that have been shot with poisoned arrow, the 'death' of the shaman merging with the eland death. The depiction of dying eland behaviour and posture thus becomes evocative of shaman trance 'death'. Evidence for such linked tropes is adequately provided by paintings such as the one found at Game Pass in the Kamberg area of the Natal Drakensberg (Appendix H). This shows a large fleshy eland, with an exaggeratedly elongated body, displaying all the typical symptoms of 'poison-death' as described above - lowered head, bent or 'stumbling' foreleg, erect body hair and crossed hindlegs. A therianthrope figure with buck head and shaman's cap stands similarly cross-legged, holding the eland's tail.<sup>13</sup> White lines emanate from the therianthrope's support stick, consistent with Lewis-Williams and Dowson's suggested "arrows of sickness", "invisible to ordinary people, that shamans remove and cast into the darkness from where [they] came" (1989:40). A small and obviously Bushman figure stands silhouetted on the eland's rump, as though emerging from the animal's spinal area above the tail - the region where *num* potency is said to reside.<sup>14</sup> Clearly implied in the linked contact and complementary postures of the two main figures is the transfer of supernatural potency from dying eland to "dying" or trance-initiated shaman (Ibid:51). Such portrayals led Lewis-Williams to conclude

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<sup>13</sup> Therianthropes such as the above, or "men with eland heads", were identified by Dia!kwain - one of Bleek and Lloyd's informants - as shamans "who have things whose bodies they own" (Lewis-Williams 1990:50). These 'things' - animal personae or spirit helpers - enabled them to 'see' what ordinary people could not (Ibid).

<sup>14</sup> In Lewis-Williams and Dowson's reproduction (1989:50), this figure is unaccountably missing.

that “the great theme of Bushman art is the power of animals to sustain and transform human life by affording access to otherwise unattainable spiritual dimensions” (Ibid: Preface).

Similar unmistakable emblems of trance, healing and hallucinatory vision are evident in the typical trance dance scene depicted in Plate 28 of Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s *Images of Power* (Appendix I). This shows many of the entoptic phenomena, trance postures and signifiers of energy-transferral detailed above. Cross-shaped objects, which Lewis-Williams and Dowson identify as bees (significant for their perceived potency) emerge from a centrifugally-shaped ‘hive’ and form a linking mystic thread between the dancing figures. Nasal blood, one of the chief signifiers of trancing shamans, is clearly identifiable, as well as the “arrows of sickness”, flecks of healing potency and other tell-tale indicators of trance-in-progress, including the bending-forward posture of many of the figures - explained by Lewis-Williams and Dowson as resulting from the fact that as a shaman’s potency begins to “boil”, his stomach muscles painfully contract, thereby forcing his torso forward at right angles to his legs (Ibid:40). The interrupted wholeness of the shaman figures conveys a distinct sense of the disembodied liminal condition as the latter transfer from one reality dimension to the other. Some are clearly in the act of becoming present, their bodies not yet formed into the trance dimension. Others are headless, or have the featureless outline of animal faces suspended above neckless bodies, sometimes with hands-to-nose in the stylized posture used to indicate healing by “sniffing” or “snoring” out sickness (Ibid:48). One figure shows only the shaman’s head cap and nasal bleed - suggestive perhaps of a special potency. Alongside another of the figures, a horned antelope rests collapsed onto its knees, with head twisted sideways

and typically-raised body hair - suggestive of trance death metaphors. A supernatural entity in running motion shows clearly defined sexual organs linked by an umbilicus to a crouching figure below it. For the lay viewer, the overall effect is an evocatively bizarre one, conveying an explicit sense of the disordered and disrupted sensory and physical sensations typical of the altered states experience, of the fearful ambiguity of the supernatural realm, and the physical and psychic effort required to harness the potent energy of the spirit world for purposes of healing.

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The search for the Bushman voice - beset though it is with problems of accessibility, intercession and contested interpretations - reveals a complex and intriguing picture of Bushman identity and difference, very contrary to the one-dimensional alterity of colonial stereotype. Profoundly affected by the brutalizing and dehumanizing disruptions of their historical moment, the Bushmen leave behind them ample evidence of the unique and vital spirit that their societies once possessed. What the texts of folklore, mythology and rock art reveal is a people prolifically artistic, and deeply empathic, possessed of a highly developed spiritual and psychic sense, who lived their lives in close connectivity with each other and with the animal beings around them, at the junction of social, natural and supernatural realms. Such evidence speaks directly against the callous (and chilling) arrogance of the likes of George McCall Theal, who baldly remarked:

[The Bushmen] were of no benefit to any other sector of the human family, they were incapable of improvement, and as it was impossible for civilised

men to live on the same soil with them, it was for the world's good that they should make room for a higher race. (quoted in Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989:4)

### CHAPTER 3

#### **Myth, Spectacle and Commodity: Bushmen in Twentieth-Century Society**

##### ***ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!***

*Statement concerning exhibitions about the Khoisan*

*We are sick and tired of naked Brown people being exposed to the curious glances of rich whites in search of dinner table conversation. At the exhibition mounted at the South African National Gallery, we were exposed to yet another attempt to treat Brown people as objects. Our shocked eyes were greeted by the spectacle of a half naked clan sitting on the steps of the Gallery. Further on a white woman was animatedly taking snapshots of Brown people who had the misfortune to pass her lens. In the hall itself indignity was heaped upon indignity, culminating in the centrepiece - mounted casts of Brown breasts and penises. The people of whom these casts were made are long dead. They cannot tell of the humiliation suffered, or the pain they felt at being manipulated in this way. We can. As the descendants of the Khoisan, we must protest at the continuing objectification and exploitation of Brown people.*

*Ostensibly, the exhibition seeks to support the Khoisan in their struggle. It purports to lay bare European manipulations of the image of the Khoisan. Therefore the exhibition is obviously aimed at white people. We do not need to be reminded of the humiliations we have suffered, nor do we need to travel to the National Gallery to discover it. We feel it daily and hourly. We feel it the more when it is done under the pretense of supporting our struggle. We*

*condemn this exhibition as shameless exploitation which only enables whites to season their sexual excitement with cheap moral indignation.*

*The exhibition does nothing to oppose the forces which tried, and are still trying, to conquer the Khoisan. Instead it is yet another symbol of our status as a conquered people. Where is the Khoisan view of these manipulations? Where are our representations of the people who came here to steal our land, make us slaves and deprive us of our culture and our history?.... We will only believe that the conquest is over when we see half naked white families sitting on the steps of the South African National Gallery. We will only accept the good intentions of white liberals when they strip off their own clothes in public and take pictures of themselves for a change.*

!Hurikamma Cultural Movement pamphlet, criticizing Pippa Skotnes's "Miscast" exhibition.

The story of the Bushman past represents in many respects a Western exercise in historical amnesia. Wilmsen points out that "loss of historical memory has been a consistent concomitant of domination" (1996:186). But, as has been argued previously, in the case of the Bushman people, this erasure has been particularly extreme. In the canons of southern African literary and historical record, the Bushman story is (with few exceptions) recorded largely by default, the brutal facts of their life history read only in subtext, their image essentialized into a dehumanized collective from which all individual agency, personal suffering and heroism are excised. Such obliteration seems harshly ironic in view of the symbolic importance that stories hold in Bushman social and spiritual life, and their connection with notions of identity and

selfhood. Contemporary events continue the excluding trends of the past. Since the Bushmen have long been rendered invisible by history, it comes as no surprise that their suffering has been passed over once again, most notably and visibly by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission decision to concern itself exclusively with more recent and politically topical apartheid atrocities. Though slowly acquiring political voice, the Bushman people continue to be a largely phantom presence, spoken for and spoken about much more than they are spoken with - or speak themselves in official forums. In popular perception, the discrepancy between the 'actual' and 'imagined' remains as wide as it always was, with the material conditions of Bushman life very much at odds with the way those lives are represented. While in a superficial sense the Bushman image would appear to have undergone a dramatic transformation since the colonial era - from "Brutal Savages" to "Harmless" or "Beautiful" People (Gordon 1992:219) - the essential stereotype on which that image is premised remains virtually unchanged. The Bushmen today are constructed in the same discourse of primordiality they always were; a people out of time and out of history, stone-age remnants living in a state of "pristine primitiveness" (Tomaselli 1992:208), locked in a cultural inertia that admits no outside influence and precludes their survival in the modern world. While previously the urge was "to erase philosophically....and physically" such reminders of humankind's paleolithic (and apparently sub-human) past, contemporary trends are towards nostalgic conservation and iconization (Wilmsen 1996:186). The enduring Bushman image presented for public consumption in museum diorama, popular film, television advertisement and coffee table book is of the 'unspoilt' primitive First Man - the 'lost part of ourselves' - located in an untouched world of Western nostalgic imagining. While such representations may seem harmlessly idyllic, their danger, as Wilmsen, Tomaselli and others point out, is that they make a mockery

of both the history of unrelenting persecution and extermination through which the Bushmen people have suffered, and of the present abject conditions of their lives. More than this, they deny the Bushman people their place and identity, not as mythological figments or panaceas for Western identity crises, but as 'real' humans located in the harsh world of twentieth-century capitalist modernity. As the statement concerning the Khoisan "Miscast" exhibition (quoted at the start of this chapter) suggests, such issues of representation embrace pressing and difficult questions (of necessity only briefly explored in this chapter), about 'authentic' voice and the ethicality of speaking for others, the role of museums in mediating memory and shaping public perceptions of history, and political grapplings regarding who has rights over collective memories of suffering (Hall 1998:183).

### **The Bushmen Commodified**

Rarity has accorded the Bushmen unprecedented value in twentieth-century Western eyes. As early as 1929, the traveller W J Makin recorded:

As is usual with any disappearing race, the Bushmen have now become an absorbing ethnological study to many pundits in the professional world. Every year whites come to the edge of the Kalahari desert, camp out there with an array of cameras and scientific impediments, and try to entice the nomads of the desert to visit the camp. Tobacco is scattered lavishly as crumbs to ensnare birds. And the few Bushmen who are in touch with civilization, a type that like a nameless dog will hang about the place where a bone may be flung at them,

come into the camp and are scientifically examined. (quoted in Schrire 1984:196)

In the decade of the 1990s, the few surviving Bushman groups of any notable size - particularly the !Kung groups of Namibia and Botswana (who are the most accessible) - have become the “extraordinary international focus” of all manner of academic, commercial and developmental interests (Tomaselli 1998b:1). This lends weight to Gordon’s “recurringly published lament” that the Bushmen have become “the most highly scientifically (and commercially) commodified ‘disappearing’ group” on earth, their very disappearance becoming “consommé” for television and film audiences (Tomaselli 1992:209). While there is no doubt, as Tomaselli points out, that “cynical commercialism” accounts for a good portion of the upsurge of interest in the Bushman people, their artifacts, art and image (1993a:81-82), it is in the academic ethnographic field that the scrutiny has been most prolific, sustained and intense. Elsie Cloete, in her essay “Writing Around the Bushmen: The !Kung, Anthropology and Feminism” (1997), points out that “since 1951, close on one hundred and four anthropologists, not counting development officers, agricultural extension officers, game wardens etc, had all written about the three main Kalahari Bushmen groups” (Ibid:47). She points to the “singular determination by anatomists, anthropologists, and lately by exhibition curators, to re-inscribe, to preserve, to re-produce those [erased] footprints and stories scattered in the sand” (Ibid:46). This makes the various bands found in the Kalahari of Namibia, Botswana and southern Angola “probably the most written about, documented....research subjects in the world” (Ibid).

While in some instances research interest has been sincere, motivated by a genuine desire to redress the damaging myths of the past and enable some tangible improvement to Bushman lives, in other cases the motivation has been somewhat less altruistic. The Bushmen, as the flavour of the moment, have been appropriated as both exploitable commercial enterprise and academic research material, becoming in the process a fiercely contested site of academic debate. The so-called Kalahari Debate between proponents of the “cultural isolate” theory of !Kung development, such as film-makers John Marshall and Paul Myburgh,<sup>1</sup> and the revisionist school, among them Biesele, Gordon and Wilmsen, has occasioned heated and often acrimonious exchange. The latter group fiercely disputes the popular “separate development romance” (Voss 1987:34) version of Bushman origins which held sway as the dominant anthropological paradigm until the late 1970s (Tomaselli 1992:208), and which is still assiduously cultivated in the media today. This presents the Bushmen as ‘wild’ and pristine hunter-gatherers, living in a state of happy “primitive affluence” (Gordon 1992:217) far from the intruding influences of modernity and of other human groups. Labelling such stereotypes as “killer-myths”, Gordon, Biesele and others claim evidence for a long history of !Kung interaction with other groups<sup>2</sup> that exposed them to an ongoing process of modernization and adaptation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myburgh’s ethnographic film *People of the Great Sandface* (1985), which documents his ten-year association and periodic sojourn with the “isolated remnants” of a Kalahari Gwike group - one of the “last band[s]” of “wild Bushmen” in Botswana - attracted much “anthropological wrath” and many accusations of racism (Tomaselli 1993a:83). With its claims to ethnographic accuracy and its Jungian subtext of autobiographical exploration, it was insultingly retitled “People of the Great White Lie” by Gordon and heavily criticised for its fraudulent “denial of history” and perpetuation of the “killer-myth” of “the wild Bushman” (Tomaselli 1993a:82-84 & 1992:208).

<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough airing of the debates involved, see Tomaselli (1998a,1998c,1993a,1992), Gordon (1992), Wilmsen (1996), and Kandjii (1996).

<sup>3</sup> While such debates are mainly centred around the !Kung groups of the Kalahari, it is worth noting that testimony from the /Xam Bushmen would seem to give some credence to the ‘cultural isolate’ theory in the northern Cape region at least. In a letter from Stow to Lucy Lloyd in September 1875, he recounts that one of his Bushman informants, “a most ancient looking one - the representative of a race of old Bushmen captains, with a pedigree of five generations [told me that] *when he was a boy* the

Tomaselli points out that while the Bushmen are “discursively struggled over within the metropolises of academic and commercial media production, the subjects themselves get on with their lives as best they can” (1998b:1). His observation brings to mind Trinh T Minh-ha’s assertion that anthropology is “mainly a conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’, of the white man with the white man about the primitive-natured man....in which ‘them’ is silenced. ‘Them’ always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless....only admitted among ‘us’, the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an ‘us’” (Alcoff 1991:6).

Such objectifying approaches were certainly true of many of the data collection exercises of the 1950s, which went under the name of “empirical research”, in the course of which “the Bushmen produced urine samples, had every conceivable part of their anatomy measured, gave blood....explained over and over again kinship structures, naming rules, the properties of plants, the genealogy of their gods” (Cloete 1997:48). More current ethnographic research reflects a welcome revision in attitude. Detached scientific scrutiny has given way to a more participatory approach, with researchers often installing themselves as part of the community in order to record as ‘authentically’ as possible the experiences and cultural practices of group and individual. The intention is to build up a personal relationship with the studied subject in order to act as ‘transparent’ conduit for his/her life experience. However, such

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Bushmen (of his part of the country) believed that Bushmen were the only race of men on the earth, he never saw any other until he was a young man, when the Corannas made their appearance” (Schoeman 1997:63). In similar vein, Dorothea Bleek records hearing from a /Xam woman, called Sonkia-bo, (estimated age in 1911, 70 years) that “The Korana came first from the north and killed many Bushmen and women. Then the White men came from the south and killed more. When they were children, *only* Bushmen were in the country, many Bushmen” (SAL MSC57. Album 188).

attempts to obfuscate the presence and subject position of the researcher have recently been interrogated, and the work of more scrupulous current researchers - such as that of Biesele - reveals an awareness of the need to be far more self-reflexive about the processes of recording and research. The complexity of the issues under discussion is well-illustrated by the controversy surrounding American anthropologist Marjorie Shostak's testimony text called *Nisa: The Life & Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981), which was "hailed by feminist anthropologists and the Women's Movement" for its "centring of Nisa's voice as woman, as informant, as allegory for the base-line of human origins" (Cloete 1997:51). While presenting a fascinating account of a Botswana !Kung woman's reminiscences of her life from childhood to adulthood as part of a hunter-gatherer community, the work has drawn fierce criticism from some quarters on the grounds that by presenting Nisa as untainted by and unacquainted with the world outside the Dobe !Kung area, the book falsely perpetuates the traditionalist's myth of the !Kung as cultural isolates (Ibid:52). Other charges have centred around Shostak's "appropriation" of Nisa's story (despite her stated intentions to the contrary), through commentaries which "continually intercept Nisa's tale and deny Nisa and the rest of the !Kung a political, economic and intra-cultural history spanning many, many generations" (Ibid:52). Cloete points out that such problematics illuminate the "dilemmas of being an ethnographer [and] subsuming....the self into the so-called 'other'" (Ibid:55). She concludes that "working on someone else's story entertains even greater selectivity of material and is done in terms of all kinds of Western criteria: a knowledge of what is more likely to sell, a ruthless editing, an experience of monetary economy, and a need to place oneself academically on the map" (Ibid).

Similar concerns around lack of researcher transparency, the mediating effect of the ethnographer's presence on the events being recorded, and the extent to which ideological paradigms influence the form of the image presented are debated by Tomaselli (1998a), in relation to the 1950s and 1980s filmic records of John Marshall. Spearheading the "American invasion" of the Kalahari in the 1950s, the Marshall family - Lorna, Laurence, Elizabeth and John - made their first foray into "Bushmanland" in 1951 in search of the "wild Bushmen who hide behind bushes and shoot you with their poisoned arrows" (Van der Post and Taylor 1984:118), thereby initiating an association with the !Kung of the Nyae Nyae area of Namibia that spans four decades. Tomaselli notes that the 1950s field research of the Marshalls and their associates and John Marshall's filmic record represent "an unprecedented visual record and a crucially important moment in the development of visual anthropology" (1998a:2). He further points out that the Marshalls were "amongst the first Western observers to trash the prevailing stereotype of Bushmen as 'vermin', or as existing 'prior to humans'" (Ibid:3). Nonetheless, the extent of their contribution (in particular the "monumental study" undertaken by Lorna Marshall) has gone largely unrecognized, greeted by sustained academic silence and sidelined by intellectual proprietorship (Tomaselli 1998b:4), or censured for perceived methodological dishonesty. Whatever one's feelings about the sometimes questionable veracity of John Marshall's 1950s films as ethnographic data, it seems important to acknowledge, as Tomaselli does, the valuable contribution these films make to the debates regarding the politics and practices of representation, providing as they do an "almost uninterrupted record" of "rich visual data" - without which there would very little *to* debate (1998a:32).

Films such as *The Hunters* (1958) have attracted more than their share of criticism. By emphasizing the relative isolation and stability of traditional !Kung life in the Nyae Nyae area during the 1950s, they “cinematically anchored the evolutionary theory of isolate human material development” (Tomaselli 1998a:4&1992:217). This was achieved through what Tomaselli terms “structured absences” (1998a:8), involving the manipulation of image through deliberate or inadvertent elimination of signs of modernity, in order to represent the Bushmen (in accordance with the prevailing paradigms of the time) as ‘pure’, ‘unacculturated’ and ‘unspoilt’. This process entailed, among other things, the exclusion of evidence of the !Kung’s interactive economic and other relationships with intruding groups in the Nyae Nyae area. Tomaselli notes that examination of the Marshall film out-takes reveals a very different picture of the 1950s !Kung to that portrayed for public viewing in *The Hunters* and the *!Kung San Film Series*, (filmed 1953-1958) (Ibid:9). Marshall himself has also retrospectively admitted to “setting up” certain scenes, especially the “kills”, in order to maximize the “wild Bushmen” effect (Tomaselli 1992:210). Tomaselli suggests that such mediations should be seen as a natural outcome of Marshall’s specific perspectives, interests and subjectivity, rather than any deliberate deception (1998a:9). Nonetheless, such evidence decisively undermines Marshall’s claims for his films as “innocent...archetypal windows to the San” (Tomaselli 1992:216), and his notions of the camera as a “transparent lens” that merely records without influencing or intruding. As Tomaselli notes, “films about people are specific discourses embedded in broader, constantly changing social processes and ways of encountering others, whether or not these are acknowledged in the films themselves. Marketing success is intertwined with dominant discourses which determine what kind of representations are most vulnerable to commercial exploitation” (Ibid:216-

217). Tomaselli further notes that Marshall's 46-year film record is shaped by vastly changing discursive paradigms, and reflects both "the profound cultural and political transformations affecting the !Kung" and his own development from "self-acknowledged adventurer" and ethnographic romanticist, to political advocate for the !Kung struggles for land and water rights (1998a:4-11).

While the Marshall films, despite their omissions and mediations, appear to have been sincere attempts to represent 'authentic' Bushman life and culture, the same cannot be said of Jamie Uys's highly popular - and strongly controversial - 1980 commercial venture, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. With its stereotypical presentation of the Bushmen as lovable ingenues of the desert, it did much to cement the image of a stone-age people frozen in a technologically innocent Eden, still practising their environmentally attuned hunter-gatherer lifestyle in happy isolated splendour. While this depiction might seem harmless enough in itself, it acquires far more disturbing overtones when measured against the 'real' life situation of the film's heroes and heroines. These had for the most part long been dispossessed of the chance to live their 'natural' hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Some, like Dawid Kruiper of the ≠Khomani clan, were 'removed' in the 1950s to make way for a game reserve.<sup>4</sup> Others, like the star Kgau/hana, were fighting a grim battle for survival in the vicinity of the government administrative post of Tsumkwe, the 'capital' of the Namibian Bushman 'homeland' (Weinberg 1997:10-15) - a settlement rife with alcoholism, domestic violence, and the diseases of poverty and starvation, which Gordon described as "a place where one could literally smell death and decay" (1992:3). Elizabeth Marshall,

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<sup>4</sup> Now part of the "tourist attraction" at Kagga Kamma nature reserve and tourist farm, owned by local Cape businessman, Mr de Waal (Weinberg 1994:67).

in her epilogue to *The Harmless People* (1988), records that (despite publicity assertions to the contrary) it was at Tsumkwe that much of the filming for *The Gods Must Be Crazy* was done, with “the cameras shooting around the strewn trash, the mangy dogs, the junk, the barbed wire and the administrative buildings that characterize the town” (Ibid:245). She goes on to detail the fate of some of the individuals and their families who were featured in the film and mentioned in her own book. Her depressing chronicle of death by malnutrition, diarrhoea, tuberculosis and drunken violence lends macabre aptness to the various appellations coined by the Tsumkwe people for their settlement: “Face of Sickness”, “Face of Fighting”, and “Where the Fight Follows You” (Ibid:245).

This kind of cynical manipulation of the Bushman image for commercial or ideological gain, with the corresponding indifference to and denial of suffering that this entails,<sup>5</sup> is of course not unique to *The Gods Must Be Crazy* - nor is it a solely modern phenomenon. Skotnes’s book, *Miscast*, for instance (1996), shows a collaged photograph of a pitifully malnourished woman from Sandfontein, taken in 1910 by J Drury (referred to in the Introduction), as part of his quest to find suitable ‘specimens’ for his body-casting project, to be put on show at the South African Museum (1996a:17). Skotnes records that in his endeavour to find “pure”, “wild” examples of “the dying race”, Drury had to search through villages of “dispossessed, often starving

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<sup>5</sup> The grave repercussions that this denial of reality can have for Bushman lives is underscored by Gordon’s comment that “some films can kill”. He goes on to note that this “blockbuster” movie, “with its pseudoscientific narrator describing Bushmen as living in a state of primitive affluence, without the worries of paying taxes, crime, police and other hassles of urban alienation, has had a disastrous impact on those people whom we label ‘Bushmen’” (1992:1). One of the effects of the film’s success, as Gordon observes, was to give a “major boost” to the Namibian Department of Nature Conservation’s proposal to develop Bushmanland as a game reserve (in which the Bushmen were to be allowed to remain as a ‘tourist attraction’, provided that they “hunted and gathered traditionally”), resulting in the large-scale dispossession of the !Kung and other groups of their ancestral lands (Ibid).

people, and strip them of their rags and tatters” in order to comply with the desired stereotype (Ibid). The resulting thirteen plaster-cast figures were then put on display in ‘traditional’ unclothed state to demonstrate their ‘primitive’ anatomical difference and “preserve an exact physical record of a ‘nearly extinguished’ race” (Davidson 1998:143). In keeping with the changing ideological trends, the casts have since been moved to a more “idealized diorama, depicting a nineteenth-century hunter-gatherer encampment in the Karoo” (Ibid:144). In this display, they have been viewed by “millions” of museum visitors as the evocation of a lost and ideal past. Conspicuous by its complete absence, as Patricia Davidson notes (Ibid:143-144), is any reference to the ‘real’ condition of the thirteen /Xam men and women on whose emaciated bodies the casts were modelled, or to the brutal and bloody history of resistance and subordination that resulted in their extinction. This causes Davidson to call into question the perceived integrity of museums as archives of history, leading her to conclude that museums are places of selective - rather than collective - memory, more representative of the ruling ideologies of the time than of history per se. She points to the role of museums in shaping public memory (and national identity), by giving material form to “authorized” versions of the past, in a process that involves remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion (Ibid:143-147).

### **The Mythic Ideal**

The myth of the pristine hunter-gatherers (as discussed above), still living their idyllic lives as their forbears had done “somewhere in the southern African interior, unaffected by the modern world” (de Villiers 1997:7), has proved a popular and enduring one. Despite the best efforts of current researchers to debunk such myths -

and the by now well-publicized realities of contemporary Bushman life - such romanticized stereotypes are not easily laid to rest. The reasons for their enduring popularity are manifold and cannot be blamed on media and commercial perpetuation alone. Like all myths, they are only loosely predicated on reality. It is in the symbolic rather than the real that their power is vested. The image of the 'stone-age' child-man, harbourer of ancient, forgotten wisdoms - and its corollary, the politically unthreatening, spiritually unifying First Man - has been firmly clasped to the Western public bosom and is not so easily despatched. The extent of public identification with this reified Bushman - and public resistance to attempts at demystification - is illustrated by visitor reaction to the previously discussed "Miscast" exhibition held at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Steve Robins, in an article in the *Sunday Independent* (1996), noted that some whites appeared to have missed the point of the exhibition entirely, taking great exception to Paul Weinberg's photographs of "modern Bushmen living in poverty, dressed in shabby western clothing" (Ibid:24). They felt that by such depictions, the "pristine image of Bushmen was being compromised and 'spoiled'" - preferring the dioramas of the Natural History Museum displays that cast the Bushmen as "timeless and primordial hunters" (Ibid). The sick irony of this belated public identification with, and nostalgia for, a lifestyle now existing only in legend and memory is aptly captured in Weinberg's article on contemporary Bushmen, titled "The Gods Must Be Blind" (1994). In sardonic comment on the romanticized hype that surrounds their transacted image, Weinberg observes that: "The Bushmen' have come alive again. *The Gods Must Be Crazy* episodes and numerous ad campaigns have rekindled San culture. Always in traditional skins, bows and arrows at hand, dancing, at one with nature" (1994:65).

The article notes that these days it is much less glamorous actually to be a Bushman (Ibid:62).

The exploitable potential of the Bushman as symbol has not been lost on the commercially astute. The Bushman image and art have been used to sell commodities as diverse as Lemontwist softdrinks, Spoornet rail service, Toyota motor vehicles and Nedlloyd container service. South African Airways flights currently distribute passenger meals in boxes labelled “Bon appétit”, illustrated with Bushman rock art figures. In the age-old tradition of Bushmen as spectacle, a Kagga Kamma tourist brochure invites visitors to “enjoy a trip with the small people. Participate in an informal experience with a Stone Age culture” (Weinberg 1996:66). In a further ironic twist, the Bushmen themselves have been swept up in the transactional potential of their own marketability. While researchers battle to debunk the ‘othering’ myths of primitivism in order to facilitate the Bushman people’s integration into sustainable twentieth-century living, they themselves often complicate such efforts, colluding with image-makers to perpetuate the more lucrative ‘traditional’ stereotypes. Tomaselli notes that the ‘naturalistic’ mystique of First People can be resource as well as curse, in that it provides opportunities for the Bushmen to exchange the stereotypical image of themselves for cash income (1998c:8). The Bushmen have learnt, he goes on to say, that pre-modern “authenticity” can be “an income-generating resource for ‘ex-primitives’ prepared to ‘act primitive’ for tourist-driven cameras....anthropologists and TV crews” (1998a:33). The Ju/’hoansi in particular have “partly absorbed their Othered exclusion by turning it into a resource” (1998c:8). In the Discovery Channel’s controversial *Hunters of the Kalahari* (1995), which focuses on Ju/’hoan storytelling, the protagonists co-operated with film-makers in representing themselves as

“traditionally-clothed pristine stone-age relics”, dressed in skins which, ironically, had to be obtained from curio shops, collectors and other sources (1998c:9)

While such ‘myth-information’ has become anathema to those well-apprieved of the grim reality of the Bushmen’s landless plight, social disintegration and losing battle for survival, it seems important, instead of simply dismissing such representations, to interrogate their foundations. The Western need to deny the Bushmen their modernity and keep them as stone-age anachronisms is seen by many to be strongly rooted in First World social and psychological lacunas. It is illustrative among other things of the profound existential angst that characterizes the postmodern condition, with its concomitant longing for the ‘lost Eden’ of pre-technological integration, “before we Europeans were cast out into the sorrows of self-awareness” (Wilmsen 1996:186). Tomaselli offers the further insight that “confirmation that some First Peoples have survived intact is somehow seen to hold a key to the West’s own redemption” (1998c: 8). At the same time, it also seems necessary to recognize that (as suggested in discussions of Bushman ‘difference’ in Chapter 1) the ‘affirmative’ stereotyping at the heart of Bushman iconization is not solely a figment of Western imagination or ideological projection. Gordon points out, albeit ironically, that it “was not only Europeans and settlers and troopers who imprint [sic] mysticism onto Bushmen” (1992:213). He notes that other groups have also engaged in what he terms “such exercises of the cultural imagination”, with Herero and Tswana often employing Bushman healers and trancers, and calling upon them to act as “ritual functionaries” to dance for rain, treat the sick and cast out spirits (Ibid:214-213). Gordon’s dismissive tone seems to beg the question of how such reputation is earned in the first place. Rather than mere projected “cultural imagination”, it seems more plausible to see the

Bushman myth as predicated on selective reality or “structured absence”. The unparalleled environmental knowledge, survival skill, community closeness and mystic ability that the Bushmen have come to symbolise *does* in fact appear to have been integral features of their societies of the past. To acknowledge this should not obscure the reality that these societies were also characterized by great physical hardship, danger and privation, unpredictability of resource, internecine tension and violent disruption from outside groups. Nor does it preclude recognition of the fact that the way of life embodied in “the popular fantasies and notions” is now “gone from the face of the earth at enormous cost to the people who once lived it” (E Marshall 1988:238).

Though I am fully sympathetic to the efforts of Gordon, Wilmsen and others to deflate the eulogizing myths and recast the Bushman image in a more realistic mould, it seems crucial to ensure that this should not be achieved through an act of reverse amnesia - by simply erasing all evidence of cultural distinctiveness. The much-vaunted ‘Bushman traditional life’ - as has already been asserted - would appear to be far more than the ‘pure invention’ of individuals in existential crisis that Wilmsen alleges it to be (1995:1-4). Traces of this traditional life - what Wilmsen dismisses as “a fictive primal world” (Ibid 4) - still endure today, even in the midst of the massive social disruption, cultural disintegration and psychological trauma that the Bushman people have undergone. Tomaselli, for instance, characterizes the condition of current Ju/’hoan life as a “scrambled mixture of the premodern, modern and postmodern” (1998b:2). The strong mystic vein that ran through the Bushman societies of old continues to manifest itself in the ongoing performance of the trance dance - still a

central feature of community life in many areas, though in somewhat adapted form.<sup>6</sup> Weinberg, himself an ardent critic of what he calls “the hyped-up, media-created myth that presented the Bushmen as a group for whom time stood still” (1994:75), complicates his own dismissals with his (albeit ironic) references to the clash between original culture and the less salubrious aspects of modernity. He offers this description of his 1984 visit to Tsumkwe, where most of the Namibian Ju/’hoansi live: “At the weekend, social dislocation reaches a crescendo. Ghetto blasters rule; men and women alternate between traditional rhythms and township jive. Alcohol takes its toll; some people pass out, and others fight. The modern world and a stone-age culture have met - with dire results, it seems” (1997:10-11). In the Schmidtsdrift settlement - symbolic epicenter of Bushman cultural and social displacement - Weinberg details the “cross-cultural chaos” that results as Machai, a “medicine man”, performs an exorcizing trance dance, accompanied by “frenzied clapping and dancing”, to blaring disco beat in the background (Ibid:19). Such depictions, while very far perhaps from the nostalgic ideal of popular Western perceptions, nonetheless offer valuable insight into the vested tenacity of ‘no-longer-lived’ traditions in Bushman psyche - particularly the strong mystic basis from which the previously-discussed stereotypes take their form .

In tracing the originary roots of this much-contested ‘nostalgic’ or ‘mythic ideal’, one finds them nowhere better exemplified than in the work of well-known author and philosopher, Laurens van der Post. His *Lost World of The Kalahari* (1958) and *The Heart of The Hunter* (1961) have raised many contemporary hackles with their (often misunderstood) Jungian denotations of the Bushman as the “child” of human

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon, citing Guenther, Katz and Lewis-Williams, notes that “trance dances are one of the most important mechanisms that Bushmen have for coping with the vortex of change that is sweeping them

development (with all the uneasy Social Darwinist echoes of such a conception), and their ‘politically unsound’ perpetuation of ‘primitive cultural isolate’ paradigms. Van der Post’s tendency to view the Bushman as “a kind of frontier guide” to collective interior zones - and through the Bushmen, “to understand imaginatively the primitive in ourselves” (Van der Post and Taylor 1984:124) - has been largely discredited among academics.<sup>7</sup> He has been much derided for his “quixotic odyssey to capture a last image of authenticity of human community and culture” (Wilmsen 1995:1), with critics such as Myburgh charging that he was “only perpetuating that same romantic myth found in most media and anthropological misrepresentation” (quoted in Wilmsen 1995:2). Yet, once again, such remarks would seem to constitute an overly facile dismissal, failing to interrogate sufficiently the ‘real’ Bushman attributes that inspired Van der Post’s romantically-skewed vision in the first place. Much of the controversy and denunciation that surrounds his work would moreover seem to have been conducted with the benefit of historical hindsight, largely ignoring the contextual parameters in which the Van der Post works are sited. As Van der Post himself says in reference to the work of Wilhelm and Dorothea Bleek, Lucy Lloyd, and George Stow, his books need to be read “against the whole trend of the imagination of the time” (1961:12). His idealised concept of the notional First Man - perfect prototype of all that is most truly human in humanity - must be set in dialectic with the prevailing ‘animalistic’ paradigms of sub-humanity into which the Bushmen had long been

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off their feet” (1992:212).

<sup>7</sup> Some, however, argue for the value of Van der Post’s “evocative symbol” of the San - both as the embodiment of the intuitive and integrated versus the alienated rationality of capitalism, and as the means to gain “a deeper understanding of ourselves and of others who live in Africa” (Tomaselli 1993a:81). Ntongela Masilela has tried to recuperate Van der Post’s idea of “First People” as a “metaphoric suture to close the wounds left by apartheid” (Wilmsen 1995:1). Masilela sees the concept as a way of “decentring competing nationalisms” and “identifying a common cultural heritage” - a “pre-racial, pre-nationalist” root which can bridge the deep post-apartheid divides (Tomaselli 1993a:85).

written. Van der Post's was in many ways a lone and unfashionable voice, speaking out against "the storms of abuse and misrepresentation raised against the Bushman" (1958:39). His vividly expressive and highly empathetic accounts of his encounters with Bushmen, filled with an unremitting sense of mourning and outrage at the brutalities that were perpetrated against the Bushmen people, did much to publicize their plight and humanize them in the public eye. Whatever the criticisms levelled against him, he deserves applause at least for his tireless crusade to recoup the humanity of the vilified 'other'; for his recognition of the need, when encountering 'difference', to "set aside our own bias and preferences, and....listen and observe" (Van der Post 1958:210); and for his unremitting efforts to stir the conscience of authority to take the necessary measures that would "let the Bushman have a corner entirely his own in the Africa that would once have been all his" (1961:125). As Van der Post himself says in his own defence: "I have told the story of the Bushman of southern Africa....in many parts of the world. I should have done more and done it better; but I have the melancholy justification that I did all I could do in my time and place" (Van der Post and Taylor 1984:123).

This is not, however, to deny Van der Post's shortcomings as a Bushman advocate. The seductive romanticism of his writing, beautiful and deeply felt though it is, often obscures the selective bias of his sympathy, which tends to reserve itself for and attach value only to those few 'pure remnants' of 'untamed' and 'unspoilt' Bushmen who correspond with his own idealized notions of 'authentic' First People. This racial predilection is clearly evident in passages such as the following:

Happily my introduction to the larger Stone-age man came at a time when he had not altogether vanished. I had only to ask and stretch out my hand to hear his authentic voice and touch his warm, smooth, apricot skin, and be startled by the electricity of immediate, utter humanity with which it sparked and against which we, in an arrogance of mind and hubris of our technological mastery of nature, are insulated. (Van der Post and Taylor 1984:135)

The essentializing subtext that runs through such depictions raises uneasy echoes of apartheid preoccupations with ‘racially pure’ versus ‘bastard’ and ‘inferior’, and feeds into ongoing ethnographic concerns to locate ‘authentic’, ‘isolated’ and - by implication - ‘uncontaminated’ human groups. Both Gordon and Wilmsen have noted the disturbing parallels that such categorization has with older colonial binaries of ‘pure’, ‘tame’ and ‘wild’ (Gordon 1992:217-218; Wilmsen 1996:185-186). Wilmsen points out that while “modern ethnographers” - Van der Post among them - “emphatically did not animalise while objectifying their subjects - indeed, strove to ennoble their humanity, they employed the same strategies of occlusion and exoticisation” as did the dehumanizing discourses of the past (1996:189). This continuing emphasis on “unevolved human authenticity” as a criterion for human worth does nothing to assist the survival of the real Bushmen, “dying faster than they are reproducing themselves” (Volkman cited in Tomaselli 1992:208), in the hybridized squalor of peri-urban squatter settlements.

The stresses and contradictions of modern Bushman life are nowhere better captured than through the lens of photographer Paul Weinberg, referred to earlier. One of South Africa’s foremost socio-documentary photographers, Weinberg spent

thirteen years traversing the reaches of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, visiting “nearly all the communities considered to be San” (1997: Prologue). His stunning textual and photographic record of his journey, *In Search of the San* (1997), with its impressively honest ‘warts-and-all’ portrayals of Bushman life, gives an evocatively human face to the ‘Bushman problem’, capturing unaffected studies of a people caught up in the detritus of social and cultural disintegration. The picture that emerges is of traumatized and degraded communities, almost universally land-deprived, clinging to the remnants of ruptured culture, in situations of squalor and despair. In most cases the practices of hunter-gathering lifestyle are a long-forgotten memory of the older generation. Even those with access to land, such as the communities in Bushmanland, Namibia, do not rely entirely on natural resources to survive but incorporate stockfarming and cultivation (Weinberg 1997:10-12).<sup>8</sup> Many work as farm labourers or tree choppers, for very low wages, eking out an existence on black and white farms. There is not much singing and dancing on full moons any more (Weinberg 1997:10-12). In the aforementioned Schmidtsdrift area, in the northern Cape, where displaced Namibian and Angolan groups of former SADF recruits and their families live in a ‘community’ of 4 000 strong (the largest concentration of Bushmen found anywhere) (de Villiers 1997:7), children were until recently not taught to speak their own language. Aside from the trance dances, the only connection with ‘authentic’ hunter-gatherer life involved the making of bows and arrows and other artefacts for sale at local fleamarkets (Weinberg 1997:19). Profound social problems of poverty, malnutrition, disease, alcoholism, endemic violence and prostitution testify to the spiritual and material bankruptcy of the ‘temporary’ tent town.

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<sup>8</sup> Researchers such as Gordon, however, suggest that such mixed economic strategy - including trade and labour transactions with surrounding neighbours - is nothing new, but has always been a feature of

Yet, in spite of all, the legends of the Bushmen's uniquely superior intuitive qualities and 'natural' abilities live on. Newspaper stories, for instance, periodically report moves by farmers in various parts of the country to capitalize on the famed Bushman tracking abilities in order to combat their stock theft problems. A recent article in *The Daily News* (Bradley 1998) reported "an extraordinary experiment" by Underberg farmers, which has "exciting potential for bringing Bushmen back to the Drakensberg Mountains" (Ibid:8). The "experiment" involved bringing two Khwe Bushmen and their families from Schmidtsdrift to the Underberg area, in the hope that "their unmatched tracking skills will help farmers combat the crippling stock theft problem"<sup>9</sup> (Ibid). Farmer Andre Truter, who initiated the idea, reported an unexpected "groundswell of community support" for his suggestion. He admits being dismayed by his first sight of the Bushmen, who were not "the small, wiry Bushmen he had expected", but tall and dark-skinned, and "sporting the trappings of modern life - sunglasses and peaked caps" (Ibid). In order to ensure that his recruits were of 'authentic' stock, Truter laid a test trail for them, which included running over rocks, and through water, and "peeing" against a tree. Truter reports that his protégés passed their authenticity test with flying colours.

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Kalahari Bushman life (1992:15-46).

<sup>9</sup> It was ironically these same 'famed tracking abilities' that initiated the events that resulted in the Bushmen's abandonment in Schmidtsdrift in the first place. Several hundred from the Caprivi area of Namibia and southern Angola were recruited as trackers by the SADF during its 'bush war' against Swapo and incorporated into the famous (or infamous) "Omega" 31 Battalion. It was soon discovered that their reputation exceeded their actual ability, since 'age-old' tracking skills, along with other hunter-gatherer abilities, had long since been lost. They were subsequently given training in general aspects of warfare (including in the art of tracking), and deployed as regular soldiers, earning much praise for their "acts of daring and valour, and...astonishing powers of perception" (Van der Post and Taylor 1984:112). As the war ended and independence came to Namibia, the ex-recruits plus their families, fearing victimization, were moved to South Africa, where they have remained stranded in the

## The Miscast Controversy

The thorniness of, and sensitivity around, issues of representation is nowhere better illustrated than by the furore aroused by the controversial and provocative exhibition titled “Miscast - Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture” (referred to earlier), mounted by Pippa Skotnes in conjunction with the University of Cape Town and the South African Museum at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town in 1996, and incorporating contemporary photographs by Paul Weinberg. As an attempt to “present a Bushman or San voice (or, better still, many voices)” (Skotnes 1996a:18), the exhibition achieved questionable success, largely because “the processes of dispossession and marginalisation have been so successful that this was exceedingly difficult to achieve” (Ibid). Skotnes was forced in the end to work through various organizations representing “San interests in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana”, and through legal advisors and anthropologists (Ibid:19). In Skotnes’s other stated intent, namely to challenge the popular and museum-endorsed stereotypes of the Bushmen as a people “cast out of time, out of politics and out of history” (Saunderson-Meyer 1996:34), and awaken public sensitivities to the full brutality and exploitation of their treatment, her exhibition was more successful. In a display interactively designed to draw the public in and make them feel complicit in the images of Bushman suffering, full-length mirrors placed strategically among the images and artifacts ensured that the exhibition was “as much about the viewer as the viewed” (Morris 1996a:18). Hard-hitting images of naked prisoners chained by the neck, mass hangings, emaciated children, and boxes labelled “human produce, dried

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‘temporary’ tent town since 1993. Some of the communities - the !Xu and Khwe groups - have since been given title deeds to land at Platfontein near Kimberley (Younghusband 1996:13; Barron 1996:25).

heads, human tissue, human sperm, [and] labia casts” (Robins 1996:23) brought home as nothing else did the full atrocity that was perpetuated against the Bushmen people. But Skotnes’s good intentions sometimes backfired. Such strategies as papering the floor of the hall with newspaper representations and photographs - intended as “a visual metaphor for trampling a history underfoot” (Anstey 1996:20) - as well as the display of shrunken heads and other human remains, evoked outrage from many, among them Paulus de Wet of the Namas in the Richtersveld, who found it “a scandal that a floorcovering has been made of the suffering of our people” and that they should be forced, so-to-speak, to step on them as they walked <sup>10</sup> (Wyngaard 1996). Launching an exhibition about the oppression of Khoisan people, Skotnes ironically found herself under attack for the very same thing (Roussouw 1996:9). Among the invitations she extended was one to the already mentioned ≠Khomani group of the Kagga Kamma tourist resort, who turned up in ‘authentic primitive dress’ of ‘traditional’ skins. Press photographs, captioned “Setting history straight - or another chance to gape” (Ibid), record a barebreasted, skin-clad woman with near-naked child in the centre of the paper-strewn gallery - bearing an uncanny similarity to depictions of the ‘primitive African Earthmen’ from an 1880s Farini gawk show. For this and other reasons, the exhibition was strongly criticized in a public forum of representatives of Khoisan groups, which attracted more than 700 people (see extract from the strongly-worded letter from the !Hurikamma Cultural Movement at the start of this chapter), and which occasioned much heated debate. The protest centred particularly around the ‘spectacular’ exhibition of Khoisan nudity and body parts, the floor-covering made of Khoisan suffering, and the perceived ‘appropriation’ of

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<sup>10</sup> Translated from Afrikaans.

Khoisan history.<sup>11</sup> Advocate Mansell Upham, from the Griekwa Nationale Konferensie, described the display in the most uncomplimentary terms as “a reconfirmation of academic and intellectual hegemony and self-gratification”<sup>12</sup> (Nolte 1996:3). The exhibition also received strong praise, however, as “an extraordinary and compelling record” of the suffering of the Khoisan people (Saunderson-Meyer 1996:34). Skotnes herself has been applauded for her courage in tackling “thorny anthropological issues” - among them, the use of human remains and nudity to illustrate histories of suffering (Ibid).<sup>13</sup> In reference to the floor-covering controversy, Martin Engelbrecht, spokesman for the Khoisan Verteenwoordigende Raad (Khoisan Representative Council), representing the Namas of the Richtersveld, the Adam Kok V Griquas, the Josiah Kats Korannas and the !Xu and Kwe from Schmidtsdrift, expressed the view that “shock is an appropriate way to regain the memory loss of ‘murdered identity’”. He went on to say that: “Our past must be told. How our indigeneity, humanity and culture have already been destroyed and trampled on, should not remain a secret” (Nolte 1996:3).<sup>14</sup> In her defence against those who challenged her right as a curator and a white woman to represent the Khoisan past, Skotnes points out that the aim of the exhibition was not to make claims for any ‘true’ representation of the Bushmen per se, but to illustrate and redress the selectively skewed material already on show in museums and available in archives (Wyngaard 1996). She also records her amazement at the number of people present who now claimed Khoisan origins, considering that during the preparation for the exhibition,

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<sup>11</sup> Other criticisms centred around the “distorted, naive” nature of the presentation, with its selective focus on European land invasions and cruelties, while ignoring the equally complicit destructiveness of other invading groups (Tummon and Kibel 1996:8).

<sup>12</sup> Translated from Afrikaans.

<sup>13</sup> She did, however, take a decision not to feature the many photographs of women’s genitals.

<sup>14</sup> Translated from Afrikaans.

her exhaustive efforts to contact as wide a range of representative groups as possible had yielded little result (Nolte 1996:3).

The heated controversy notwithstanding, “Miscast” was important for a number of reasons. By forcing into the open many controversial issues, it provided a public space for debate around some pressing concerns. The exhibition coincided with a crucial moment in the Bushman battle for land autonomy and other rights, and gave a much-needed jolt to historical memory and the circumstances of history that have brought them to their present pass. The opening night speeches, including one by /’Angn!Ao/’Un, of the Ju/’hoan Bushmen of Namibia (chairman of the Nyae Nyae Farmer’s Co-operative), and the public forum for debate gave the Bushman voice a rare chance to be heard directly and in a public arena. Among the issues that emerged were demands for an ANC government to recognize pre-colonial aboriginal land claims; the ethicality of using human remains as exhibition display - and the struggle by descendants to gain custodianship over those remains; the question of who has rights to Khoisan lineage; the rise of “essentialist ethnic-nationalist” politics, which use the concept of Khoisan autochthonous status to transform “both Europeans and Africans into outsider settlers”; and the appropriation of historical memory “to serve the political project of Khoisan and Coloured nationalism” (Robins 1998:129-131). This last concern was clearly evident in the attempts by political hardliners - such as the militant Kleurlinge Weerstandsbeweging (Coloured Resistance Movement) - to hijack the exhibition for their particular agendas, by using the debate forum as an opportunity to take President Mandela to task for his slow response to Griqua demands for self-government (Nolte 1996:3). Also at issue was the TRC decision to restrict itself to the last three decades of apartheid as a starting point for the process of

public accountability for human rights violations. This has led to perceptions of ANC 'privileging' of African over Khoisan suffering (Robins 1998:129-130). Robins points out that public reaction to "Miscast" seems to indicate that many whites viewed the exhibition itself as a type of 'Truth Commission' - a "confessional space" that forced them to confront European colonial violence and genocide, thus enabling a process of national catharsis through revelations of truth (Ibid:130).

The end of the 1990s sees a new and slightly more hopeful chapter opening in the long and tragic Bushman story of exploitation, marginalization and abuse. Though in some senses the Bushmen still remain "quintessentially" the other (Tomaselli 1998c:1) in public perception, the material conditions of their lives are undergoing a slow and hardwon improvement. Though beset with severe social and survival problems caused by landlessness, cultural rupture and poverty, they are slowly - with the help of those campaigning on their behalf - gaining voice and winning recognition for their rights. The internationalization of their struggles via First Peoples organizations has "secured them a power beyond the intermediaries who have sought to image them, define them and....confine them" (Tomaselli 1998b:1). While in some areas the Bushmen still live in fear of removal, or under the constant threat of encroachment on their ancestral lands by surrounding groups (such as the Herero cattle-farmers in Namibia), for other beleaguered communities there is light at the end of the tunnel. Developments such as the restoration of land (however minimal and inadequate), the deproclamation of reserves, the joint management of conservancies, and co-operative projects such as the Nyae Nyae venture bring new hope. Riaan de Villiers reports that "in Namibia and elsewhere, non-government organisations are helping Bushmen to adapt to a market economy. Self-help projects have been

launched, skills workshops held and art schools and craft outlets established” (1997:9). In Bushmanland, children are now being taught in their own language. Among the southern Kalahari group, a project has been launched by Canadian sociolinguist Nigel Crawhall to re-establish the “extinct” !Kabi language (Olivier 1998:15). At an “emotional” ceremony to mark the “miraculous” revival of the “long-lost ancient” language, “tears of joy flowed freely” as “survivors of the southern San gathered under the full moon to be officially reintroduced to their language and to dance their traditional dance dating back more than 2 500 years” (Ibid).

Such trends, as de Villiers points out, do not mitigate the tragic past of Bushman dispossession and persecution, and “should not serve to obscure it” (1997:9); yet they can be seen perhaps to offer not so much a way back, as a way forward - to self-sufficiency, new purpose and community pride. As southern Kalahari San leader Dawid Kruiper commented, after being told of provincial government recognition for the ≠Khomani group’s access rights to ancestral land in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park: “This is the day our hearts have grown bigger. No longer will we have to tolerate being treated like dust” (Olivier 1998:15).





## CONCLUSION

*My dear Bleek. If once we catch a Bushman family, as you say, I do hope that I shall remember to plead your cause with the Natal Government, and if possible, get them sent down to you....There was a Bushwoman captured in the last expedition, who died in Gaol, I believe, being perfectly innocent of any offence, and in fact sacrificed to the cause of civilisation, as our authorities wanted to get some information out of her. She would have suited your purposes very well, still such opportunities may recur.*

Bishop Colenso's reply to W H I Bleek's request for obtaining captives for his ethnographic project: December 1870 (quoted in Hall 1996:147-148).

This thesis has been concerned primarily with examining representations of the Bushmen, from colonial times through to the present day, the extent to which these have constituted misrepresentation of the Bushman 'identity', and the ways in which they have been implicated in the tragic history of the Bushman people. Among the central themes that have emerged are the role of discourse in constructing these images of alterity; the way in which such discourse facilitated and justified the resulting acts of domination and extermination against the Bushmen; and the intolerance of difference that lies at the heart of alterity discourse.

As the supreme incarnation of otherness in Western eyes, the Bushmen and their story of suffering provide a sombre illustration of the processes and consequences of dehumanization that have characterized so much of human interaction. Their incontrovertible 'difference' of physical type, lifestyle, and belief has made them ideal

‘myth-magnets’ for Western prejudice and discriminatory ideology. The wildly fluctuating changes that their image has undergone, from the demonization of colonial days to the reification of contemporary times, are reflective of Western hegemonic power to determine ‘subaltern’ identity construction, and manipulate the image of others for ideological ends.<sup>1</sup> These changes are also illustrative of the essentializing tendency inherent in Western approaches to difference, with their insistence on binary categorizations, their denial of human variable, and their corresponding inability to allow others the chance to take their place, not as negative or positive symbols, but as integrated human beings in a changing world.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences of such stereotypical imaging for the Bushmen have been particularly severe. The nineteenth-century discourses of primitivism into which they were written, by casting them as beyond all society and outside of culture, provided ideal rationalization for their elimination. As Wilmsen notes, “it was this demonisation that transfigured violent deprivations upon human beings from slaughter to cleansing of the land” (1996:189). Similarly, the present-day mutation of the Bushman image from sub-human vermin to pan-human First People, while it coincides usefully with both the Western identity crisis and the post-apartheid urgency for unifying symbols that can transcend the divides of South African society, still denies the Bushmen the chance to integrate into the social and material fabric of modern life.

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<sup>1</sup> As Gordon notes, there can surely be “no better display of the deployment of power in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe than making people strip to have their genitals measured” (1992:215).

<sup>2</sup> Trinh T Minh-ha points out that “members of dominant groups have always defined their subjectivity as mobile, changing, flexible, complex and problematic - in other words, ‘safe for democracy’ - whereas the subjectivity of their others remains uncomplicated, unsophisticated, unproblematic, verifiable and knowable, that is, incapable or undeserving of ‘democracy’” (1996:15). See also Wilmsen (1996) for a fuller discussion of this subject.

Gordon points out that discourse on the Bushmen has been predicated on a fundamental unassimilability (1992:215). The recurring theme in the rhetoric of elimination and ‘regrettable but inevitable’ extinction has been the Bushmen’s refusal to be tamed and integrated as useful functionaries of ‘civilised’ society. Such unassimilability has long been used as the defining stigma for the other. It is no accident that much of the scientific discourse on which Bushman policy was predicated shows striking parallels with the ‘scientific’ eugenics rhetoric of Nazi Germany, which resulted in a similarly thorough genocidal policy against the Jews - long designated as the universal ‘other’ of European societies. Gordon notes that “portrayals and policies toward Bushmen and Jews are frighteningly similar”, with many “striking parallels of Bushman and Jewish imagery in this scientific discourse” (Ibid). This similarity is underscored by Steven Robins in his article “The Remembered Self” (1998), which explores problems of representation and memory embodied in histories of collective suffering, such as the Jewish holocaust and the Bushman genocide. Robins draws attention to the parallels between the way “the Jewish body was measured, photographed, and categorized in order to develop Nazi racial theories of Aryan collective identity and supremacy”, and the Khoisan experiences (Ibid 131-132). In both cases, policies of deliberate extermination were initialized by ‘scientifically-endorsed’ stigmatization. And in both cases, the primary location of difference was sited in the physical body, and body parts from the despised and dehumanized ‘other’ were turned into artifacts for human ‘consumption’. The implications of such observations are far-reaching, suggesting (as was noted in Chapter 1) that alterity discourse - far from being subject-specific - is expressive of a

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fairly fixed internal dynamic that is to some extent independent of 'actual' difference. As a rationale for the processes of othering, McClintock offers Kristeva's psychoanalytic trope of "abjection" - which she defines as the desire to "expunge" from the self - in order to become social - all the elements society deems impure, such as excrement, menstrual blood, incest and so on. "Abjection traces the silhouette of society on the unsteady edges of the self", where it does not go away, but remains to haunt the subject, imperilling the "social order with the force of delirium and disintegration" (1995:71). McClintock extrapolates this idea to the phenomenon of imperialism, in the course of which "certain groups are expelled and obliged to inhabit the impossible edges of modernity: the slum, the ghetto, the garret, the brothel" (Ibid:72). Without wanting to reduce the complexity of the issues under discussion, it is possible, in the light of such theories, to read into the genocide and other inhuman acts perpetrated against both Jewish and Bushman people, attempts by their persecutors to exorcize 'the other within'.

By providing counter-evidence of the Bushman humanity, the thesis has attempted to undermine the prejudicial stereotypes of primitivity into which they were so firmly written. Discussion has pointed to the Bushmen's unique cosmological vision, their complex and richly evocative creative output, metaphorical subtlety and spiritual sensitivity. Such vivid evidence of highly evolved humanity, however, even when registered, was largely ignored by the Bushmen's colonial detractors - or else dismissed as the "utterly absurd" inventions of ignorant minds "in the condition of early childhood" (George McCall Theal in Introduction to Bleek and Lloyd 1911:xxxiii-xl). This "principle of exclusion" has been identified by Foucault as a fundamental element of hegemonic power's dealings with subordinate cultures. He

sees it as the means by which the discourse of others is invalidated, by designating it as 'inauthentic' or 'naive' knowledge (McHoul and Grace 1993:15-17; Foucault 1984:110).

It has not been my intention in this thesis to present a comprehensive study of Bushman historiography, but rather to focus on processes of marginalization and the ways in which these have impacted on the events of history. As is inevitable in a thesis of this limited scope, much has of necessity been omitted. Very little space has been given, for instance, to exploring the gender dynamics of Bushman society and the way these articulate through Bushman literature and art (for debates in these areas see Jeursen (1994); Biesele (1993); Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989); Skotnes (1995); and Solomon (1995)). Also conspicuous by its absence is discussion of the role played by the missionaries; Bushman relationships with other race groups; and not least, of Bushman complicity in the acts of genocide that occurred. This complicity took the form of 'tame' Bushmen acting as spies, guides and trackers to lead commandos to 'wild' Bushman hideouts. Gordon notes a comment from the magistrate of Grootfontein that "without the services of an expert Bushman tracker, and some inside information, it is usually impossible to discover the slaughter places of these thieves" - let alone the thieves themselves (1992:218). There are also documented instances of Bushmen taking a more direct role in the slaughter of other Bushmen. Such evidence greatly complicates Western notions of imagined "pan-San community", to which the Bushmen themselves have never subscribed. This is borne out, among other things, by their lack of collective name for themselves as a 'racial' entity, and by the often uncomplimentary labels by which the various groups refer to each other.

This thesis has been written with an awareness that no academic study is politically innocent or transparent, but inevitably conveys the dominant perspectives, ideological paradigms and agendas of its time. The historical moment in which this study is located is one in which questions of identity, definitions of ‘otherness’, and the treatment of difference are of particularly pressing concern, and have far-reaching repercussions. In the apartheid aftermath, as South Africans struggle to renegotiate long-held prejudices, mutual suspicion and historical enmities, it seems particularly important that we should re-examine, not just our treatment of difference, but our ability to live with each other without collapsing difference. Amid the jostlings for power, political posturings, economic and social stresses - and inevitable ‘post-partum blues’ - the popular tropes of “simunye” and “Rainbow Nation” are showing signs of major strain. There are ominous signals that the old stigmatizing rhetoric of exclusion and demonization has not been eliminated, so much as found new targets. This lends an increased urgency to efforts to construct a national identity that is based not on homogeneous dominance, but tolerance for diversity. This entails fostering a national appreciation for the value of difference. As Lévi-Strauss observes: “Differences are extremely fecund. It is only through difference that [human] progress has been made” (1978:20). In similar vein, Ashcroft et al point out that “multiple forms and possibilities are lost forever by our inability to allow difference” (1989:102).

This is nowhere better illustrated than by the lessons of the violent, bloody and xenophobic South African past. Realization has come too late that the Bushmen, in all their non-Western difference, had much to teach their persecutors and disparagers. As the remnants of dispossessed Bushman communities struggle for physical and psychic

survival in the commodified world of Western capitalist modernity - light-years away from the hunter-gatherer existence for which they are belatedly being lauded - we can only regret what was lost, and look to the lessons of the past to illuminate the way forward. What the Bushman story requires from us, with all its “images of loss, destruction and resistance”, is at the least, a “particular...individual and social vigilance” (Ibid) - and a renegotiation of our own internal responses to others. In this latter regard, we can do no better than pay heed to the Bushman understanding of such matters:

Each and every game gets its food from different things.

A springbok will graze the grass on the plains; an eland will browse.

They don't all graze the same grass, and they also share.

This is how people should be living.

(Quoted in Weinberg 1997:76)

**APPENDIX****List of Illustrations**

- Appendix A: Johnson and Maggs (1979): Plate 1\_
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- Appendix C: Willcox (1956): Plate 8
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- Appendix I: Lewis-Williams and Dowson (1989): Plate 28\_

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