

Introduction: Panel on Kalahari Family.

One of the Special Events at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association was a full screening of "Kalahari Family", John Marshall's epic series (5 episodes, 6 hours) which documents over fifty years in the lives of a group of Jul'hoansi (Bushmen) of southern Africa from 1951 to 2001 and John Marshall and his family's continuous engagement with them. It presented a richly detailed account of extraordinary change edited from over 2 million feet of 16mm film and thousands of hours of video, and took fourteen years to make. The series is incredibly rich. Every time I watch a segment I see something new

After the screening there was an extremely well attended discussion with John Marshall which featured a variety of distinguished panelists who were invited on the basis of their ability to provide a variety of perspectives on the series. Given the immense interest in the film series and the panel discussion we decided to broaden it even further by inviting other scholars to contribute as well.

Widely acknowledged as one of the pioneering and foremost ethnographic film-makers of the current era, the films of John Marshall are among the most widely used films in the teaching of anthropology and have allegedly had a considerable influence on the perception of indigenous people in general and 'Bushmen' in particular by those who study them. Undoubtedly another factor drawing attention to this prize-winning series was the 1996 letter drafted by Marshall's erstwhile co-worker, Megan Biesele, and co-signed by eighteen anthropologists (most of whom had never even seen the trailer and many had never even been to Nyae Nyae) raising issues about the 20 minute trailer developed largely for fund-raising efforts, and in particular the scene where Axel Thoma, the Director of the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation, is fired by the Jul'hoansi. The signers hoped that Marshall would address issues in a manner acceptable to the Nyae Nyae Farmers Co-Operative. Going public with such footage could have a negative impact on the Development prospects of the Jul'hoansi they felt. The writers urged that Marshall and Thoma settle their "differences by reaching consensus in a traditional Ju/hoansi way". (Barnard et al 1996) One could, of course, also speculate that such "publicity" had a negative impact on Marshall's efforts to raise funding for the series. What some see as ethical concerns others might interpret as simply self-interested behavior that is rather patronizing if not amounting to an academic lynching.

Controversy, if not conflict, has always dogged the Marshall Expeditions. After their initial visits to South West Africa, as it then was, suspicious settlers felt compelled to raise questions in the settler-run Legislative Assembly about what the Marshall's were up to going off to the outer margins of society, the Eastern Kalahari. Later the Administration refused John a visa for twenty years, from 1958-1978, on the allegation that he was having sex with San females while in the Kalahari. But it wasn't just white settlers who were dismissive. Academe, too, in the sixties and seventies were largely dismissive of the Marshalls' as Wilmsen has persuasively demonstrated (Wilmsen 1999:232-241). From the early eighties [I was sometimes able to observe at first-hand

John's often acerbic interactions with officials, especially Nature Conservationists. As the Bushman Development Foundation that he and Claire Ritchie started began to take shape, various Foundation associates felt that John was a bull in a china shop and had to be shifted aside so that more diplomatic relations could be established with the (white) Administration. (see van Rooyen 1995 for an insightful, critical and sensitive description of these early years of the Foundation). Given this long-term involvement it is rather naively presumptuous, if not arrogant, for the Letter-signers to call upon Marshall to separate his personal convictions from the "multi-vocal chorus of Ju'hoansi sentiments" writers. One could indeed argue that part of the strength of the series derives precisely from John's very visible personal albeit controversial involvement.

John's films must of course be placed in their filmic genealogy. He was not the first, nor the last to film the San or Bushmen. Picturing the San using modern technology goes back at least to James Chapman in 1862 and continued on through the efforts of Gustav Fritsch (Godby, 2001, Bank 2001), Farini and a host of others. The first movies were made by the Austrian anthropologist Rudolf Poch in 1909 and he was followed by several Safari-like expeditions in the Interwar years most notably the Denver African Expedition (Gordon 1997) and the Mohri Expedition of 1937. In the fifties and sixties the Marshall Expeditions were simply one of a crowded field which included the various van der Post endeavors as well as American popularizers like Marlin Perkins of "Wild Kingdom" fame.

Most of these filmmakers only spent a short time filming and then moved on. Others, like the South African filmmakers Paul Myburgh's *People of the Sandface* or the Foster brothers *Great Dance* spent a long period of immersion but once completing the film and garnering various International Awards have moved on to other projects.

Marshall's involvement is different. Suffice to say that originally John was very much in the Safari Mode of filmmaking

I took shots of people in native costumes standing in rows and filmed an elephant running away. I filmed our Dodge Power Wagon winching itself out of an ant bear hole. The Wagon broke in half in Angola. I was having an adventure. Adventurers, like most TV hosts, are self-absorbed. I can't think of a single foot of film I shot that was worth using (Marshall 1993:25)

But unlike other filmmakers he kept coming back. This was not to achieve fame and fortune. On the contrary, it is clear that these continual return visits have extracted a heavy toll financially, psychologically and morally. I like to believe that it was a sense of noblesse oblige, altruism and concern for their welfare that were the main factors propelling his constant return visits.

I was in Namibia 1984 working on another project when I met John and Claire Ritchie. They were very concerned about the plight of the people in Nyae Nyae and asked me to accompany them to Nyae Nyae to see what could be done. John and Claire were already then thinking about creating a Development Foundation to help the local people and indeed John put up most of the initial capital to launch the Foundation. It was also on the

basis of this experience and with John's encouragement that I undertook the research that became *The Bushman Myth and the Making of a Namibian Underclass*, the purpose of which was decidedly political, to develop material which those labeled Bushmen could use to their own advantage. Determined to fight for what he believed was a situation that was daily becoming more desperate, John resolved to use the weapon he knew best, the video camera and in the next decade or so he made several advocacy videos and generally made himself unpopular with the mostly White bureaucrats who however could not afford the international political embarrassment of deporting him.

But the psychological costs of such near continuous long-term engagement were heavy. An Afrikaner academic and farmer, Piet van Rooyen, who was later hired by the Foundation describes his first impression of John in 1990 as a person on the verge of mental breakdown:

"I can't take it anymore, I'm going back to America" he said. I see him suddenly for what he is: a pitiful disenchanted, socially uprooted altruist repudiated by his ideals, a white Bushman in search of the traces of his lost self, but powerless to find it (van Rooyen 1995: 19 *my translation*).

It was on the basis of this ongoing relationship that John asked me to serve as a historical adviser to this series, but as Alexander Leighton is reputed to have said, "he uses advice like a drunk uses a lamppost, for support rather than illumination", and in a way this is a good thing because this series is very clearly John's own story about his complex relationships with the people of Nyae Nyae. My one historical quibble would be his flattening of history. On a visual level I would have perhaps started the historical story with a picture of the Baobab tree that has initials and dates harking back to the 19th Century. I would also have shown some old pre-Great War German maps which clearly locate Nyae Nyae and in the intervening years a few whites might have ventured here. A search of the Namibian Archives however did not reveal any permits issued to visit this area beyond what was then known as the Red Line. Much might be made of this but it is perhaps significant that the Preliminary Report of the Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen written in 1950 (Schoeman 1950) shows that even this high-powered Commission did not see its way open to visit the Nyae Nyae region until after the Marshall Expedition had "opened the Road" The question then becomes, given this documentary evidence of capitalist or colonial intrusion why do local histories ignore it? And the answer might concern, I suggest, the trauma of that contact. We know that several of the Boer hunters who traversed that area in the late Nineteenth century were avid "Bushman Hunters". Where kinsfolk, as was often the case, were involved in aiding the intruders by providing tracking and other services later generations often prefer to shoot such memories into outer space and ignore them.

Much has been made of the impact of John's films on creating what he calls the "Myth" of the Bushmen as noble hunters. Perhaps after now nearly two decades of attempted revisionism to no apparent effect, we should perhaps see the issue not as a Myth but as a Fairy Tale, because fairy tales get retold repeatedly despite solid empirical evidence disproving them. Framed like this we can pose a range of other more interesting questions. Myths are generally believed by rationalists to be based on ignorance. This is

something more sinister. Why do these fairy tales persist and if they are inevitable what harm and vulnerability do they create? How do people manage to view images but not see them? Are there psychological schemata at work that simply reinforce our basic beliefs and fantasies and if so what are the moral consequences if they effect the lives of other people? Of course to label a segment "Death by Fairy Tale" does seem a bit incongruous.

It seems to be commonly accepted that John's films have had a significant impact on the lives of the people of Nyae Nyae. Several people in *Kalahari Family*, both Julhoansi and outside experts aver thus. Similarly Piet van Rooyen notes that:

John was almost a sort of headman here with an honorary name =Oma Kxosi, and a place of honor in the Bushman society. If it wasn't for his films the foundation would not have possessed the funds it had to work with today. Today there are already millions of dollars already invested in Bushman Development, with difficult to measure results" (van Rooyen 1995: 151 *my translation*).

Outside commentators like Keyan Tomaselli (1999) also acknowledge this, and John himself believes that his classic *The Hunters* (1958) contributed to the Bushman mystique. But what exactly has this impact been? Undoubtedly it has played well to American audiences but what has its impact been more directly in the field of play? In my experience it enjoyed limited circulation in educational film libraries. Two or three documentaries made by local producers directly address this issue. South African John Paul Myburgh's ten years in the making prize-winning feature-length documentary, *People of the Sandface* (1985) was highly acclaimed both in South Africa and in Europe. South African academics, feeling the bite of overseas academic sanctions and the resultant need for some ego-nationalistic-flattery, perhaps over-enthusiastically praised it as a break-through. It pertains to show the last of the Gwi Bushmen in the Central Kalahari and presents an essentially fabricated romanticized version of the place and people. Viewing it, I was struck by the similarities to Marshall's *The Hunters*, but in interviews Myburgh explicitly denied that he had been influenced by Marshall (see Gordon 1990; Myburgh 1990, Tomaselli et al 1992).

Similarly the recently released *The Great Dance: A Hunters Story* made by South African filmmakers Damien and Craig Foster has also garnered major awards at various Nature Film festivals. The film-makers emphatically deny that they were influenced, indeed had even seen Marshall's *The Hunters*, despite the striking similarities. Indeed they deny that the film is about Bushmen, rather it is about "conscience" (Douglas 2001:305). Unfortunately, like Jerzy Kosinski's Chauncey Gardiner in *Being There*, it is not what is said, but how others interpret what is said that is important.

The blurb from its web-page <www.senseafrica.com> describes the film thus: "Specially adapted mini-cam technology and never before-seen footage of the death-defying chasing hunt make the film a unique and remarkable experience". In an interview with a journalist, Craig Foster claimed:

They have an understanding of the natural world which would confound the greatest western scientists. They feel and see the bush in a way that we could

hardly grasp, reading signs invisible to our eyes and hardened sensibilities, ... Each tiny mark in the sand tells a story. They carry the weather of the last two weeks in their heads alongside an enormous understanding of tracks and animal behaviour. These skills take at least 25 years to master.

The Fosters took early cuts of the film back to the hunters who helped them edit the footage and even gave them the idea to put miniature cameras on to the animals to best show what they are feeling as they hunt.

They explained how eventually they become the mind of their prey, how they feel the stripe of a gemsbok on their cheeks, the prickle of animal sweat on their limbs and the trickle of blood on their ribs before they make a kill. Their hunting relies not on their weapons but on their uncanny ability to divine the animal's movements and the mood of the winds. It is like a sixth sense to them,....We had no idea how important hunting was to their culture until we began filming....They told us that even if the animals disappeared they would still hunt, for it is about them feeling the land, being in nature, divining the weather. It is a spiritual experience as much as it is to do with finding meat.(Graydon 2001)

The film has been implicitly contrasted to *Kalahari Family* by those who have seen both. It has also been richly praised by Megan Biesele who, given her role in the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation and in *Kalahari Family* deserves to be cited if only to understand the conflicts between the Foundation and Marshall's image of the Bushman future:

I believe THE GREAT DANCE is destined to become both an anthropological and a popular classic. From my own ethnographic work in San folklore and religion, I became convinced that despite the greatly changed lifestyles of many San today, a hunting-gathering ethos often remains an accessible part of their cultural repertoire. There is nothing mystical, and certainly nothing inherently racial, about this persistence of a set of cultural tools Both academics and the public yearn to grasp somehow that ultimate stretch of the human mind and spirit whose fullest expression we increasingly see in the long-lived cultures which preceded us.

The only thing especially "San" about the hunting, tracking, spiritual, and social abilities portrayed in THE GREAT DANCE is the unbroken connection with many previous generations of skills teaching and local knowledge. This news is, and should be, exciting to us in a profound way: it enfranchises us all, potentially, within the "primal" category we thought was reserved to remote, relict populations of hunter-gatherers and their ancestors.

But matter-of-factness does not in the San case interfere with what our culture regards as the mystical or paranormal. It is clear that !Nqate and the others are familiar on an everyday basis with the permutations of useful altered states-sand not just in the healing dance context. They lead us to an understanding of the power of identification with the animal they are hunting. They AND the film do

this by exhausting and draining us as we feel in our bones the arduous running down of an antelope whose life-business is to run..

Originally conceived by James Hersov, a South African with a Cambridge University masters degree in social anthropology in 1996, it was filmed on and off over a year in the central Kalahari with some !Xo San. They are rather vague about how much time they actually spent in the field, although reading between the lines one would suspect it was probably less than three months. Nor are we informed how the filmmakers communicated or what their linguistic skills were, apparently mystical empathy is more than adequate. Michael Bollig (2003) in his recent survey of the two western Botswana districts has chronicled a massively depressing situation where all San are dependent upon government handouts for survival yet this depressing socio-economic situation of San in the central Kalahari is largely and conveniently ignored.

Not only the filmmakers, but also savvy media scholars like Keyan Tomaselli (www.senseafrica.com) laud the film as a "totally collaborative effort" between the four filmmakers and the San as well. Such a stance assumes that genuine collaboration is possible despite it being a situation of gross power and economic disparity. Proudly, if ironically, sponsored by Coca Cola, the film is endorsed by WIMSA (Working Group for Indigneous Minorites in Southern Africa, the organization founded by Axel Thoma after he left the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation) and has been shown to numerous San groups to their reported approval. It is also announced that this is the first film where San will get part of the royalties. Sounds great, but lets not pry too deeply. Exactly how much is at stake and who will receive it, WIMSA or the !Xo San hunters? Recalling the payout for the Nature Conservancy in *Kalahari Family* should make one skeptical of such pious claims. We are also told that shortly after the film was completed the Botswana government has refused hunting licenses to !Xo San (thereby inherently enhancing the film's 'scarcity value'?). Unfortunately, we are not told how this might relate to the activities of the filmmakers because they are largely invisible in their production.

I have discussed *the Great Dance* at some length if only to show that *The Hunters* or for that matter *N!ai: the Story of a !Kung woman* has not had much of a direct impact in Southern Africa. There are clearly other complex forces at work shaping bourgeois primevilism which has captured the Bushmen as its archetype. Second, the contrast with *Kalahari Family* bares important conflicting images of the San future, but more importantly it suggests the root of the conflict within the "Development Set" between the New Agers and the Fanners.

John, and indeed most viewers, feel that Part Five "Death by Myth" is the most important, if controversial, part of the series. I agree. Not because it skewers Axel Thoma the erstwhile Nyae Nyae Development Foundation Director, who is a personal friend, but because it is one of the first attempts that I know of that problematizes the work of NGOs (non-governmental organizations). NGOs have become major conduits and links between Northern and Southern countries and seen as important development agencies. Their presence in many parts of the southern world is now ubiquitous. Generally with some notable exceptions (Garland 2000 and Robins 2000) they have not been the subject of

much anthropological scrutiny. Rather accounts have generally been positive, papering over the cracks of conflict and contradiction (see e.g. Biesele 2003) for fear that criticism might scare away potential donors. There have been too few analyses which self-reflectively critically yet sympathetically examine the role of NGOs. The case that much "aid" does not contribute to the prosperity of the recipients but rather assists in shoring up relations of domination is being made more and more frequently. In particular, the role of 'race' in narratives and practices of development needs to be acknowledged, especially the unacknowledged assumptions of middle class Western bourgeois "experts" (Goudge 2003). Their role as Gatekeepers also needs to be scrutinized. It is no accident that all the influential people in the NGO are White and the token black, the Zambian manager, believes that 'it will take centuries' for Bushmen to evolve sufficiently to accept agriculture. Indeed it is this "Whiteness of Power", so prominent a feature in Bushman Development which might in the final analysis be the major cause of future San problems. Thus in July 2003 Cambridge anthropologist James Suzman expressed (naive) surprise at the Namibian Government's hostile reaction to his report on Minorities in Namibia since it was largely favorable towards the Government. These were no petty bureaucratic functionaries, they were President Sam Nujoma and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Mocks Shivute. Shivute complained about "foreigners compiling reports on issues in Africa and Namibia should not base their finding on assumptions and hearsay". Nujoma's outburst was more significant. At Tsumkwe he warned San to be careful of people who work with NGOs and charity organizations as they bent on exploiting San and causing division while making money for themselves. NGOs "colonized us. They denied us education. Now they are the ones saying we are the ones who are marginalizing some portion of our *population*" (*The Namibian* August 1, 2003). This was not a new remark. On the contrary at least over the last five years Nujoma has been making increasingly critical comments about the role of Whites engaged in advocacy on behalf of indigenous groups. Thus, for example, in Divundu in the presence of several well-known white indigenous rights advocates, including Garth Owen-Smith of the Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRONC), Andrew Corbett of the Legal Assistance Center, Axel Thoma of WIMSA and myself, Nujoma threatened to "deport" "get rid of", "deal with" with "immediate effect" and foreign nationals who "disturb the peace". He was particularly incensed at such advocates role in hindering the proposed Epupa Falls Project (*The Namibian*, June 23, 1998). Nujoma's rantings should not be dismissed as those of an increasingly senile person. They express sentiments that are readily shared by large segments of Namibia's burgeoning bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Should the situation escalate into an anti-White dominated NGO binge by powerful Government functionaries then all the argument and struggles to create a Nature Conservancy in Nyae Nyae to preserve Julhoansi land rights from outside encroachment will have been for naught. If we genuinely have the interests of those popularly labeled as Bushmen at heart we have to have the courage to be self critically aware of our own role and the NGOs we support. Will the ideology of "indigeneity" which we have facilitated by way of this emerging worldwide network of indigenous groups promote their best interests? To be sure the rhetoric of indigeneity might work in advanced democracies with a large middle-class but what are its consequences in Southern Africa where most of the people also see themselves as indigenous and where the "Khoisan" rhetoric has now largely been

captured by formerly "Coloured" middle-class people rediscovering their San or Khoi heritage? Perhaps this should be seen as part of some Castellsian global network society?

P31 Megan "She is also a foreigner, an American ... who came to offer her life here for Bushman development in exchange for fame"

Ethics of letting the natives respond. We can see this is complex in Johns films and yes he hasn't tried The Navaho Eyes Experiment because it didn't work

Trade cattle for horses for hunting

151

Bank, Andrew

2001 Anthropology and Portrait Photography: Gustav Fritsch's 'Natives of South Africa' 1863-1872. *Kronos* 27:43-76

Barnard, Alan, *et al*

1996 Visual Ethics and John Marshall's *A Kalahari Family*. *Anthropology Newsletter* 37(5): 15-16

Biesele, Megan,

2003 The Kalahari People's Fund: Activist legacy of the Harvard Kalahari Research Group. *Anrhropologica* 45:79-88

Bollig, Michael

2003

Douglas, Stuart

2001 The Re-Enchantment of the World and the Threat to Reason: *The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story*. *Kronos* 27:304-319

Garland, Elizabeth

Godby, Michael

2001 The Interdependence of Photography and Painting on the South West Africa Expedition of James Chapman and Thomas Baines, 1861-1862. *Kronos* 27:30-42

Gordon, Robert J

1990 People of the Great Sandface: People of the Great White Lie. *e VA Review* (Spring):30-34

Graydon, Nicola

2001 The big picture. What happens when hunting is banned where it is truly a way of life? Nicola Graydon on an award-winning film that charts the decline of bushman culture. *The Guardian* January 23.

Goudge, Paulette

2003 *The Whiteness of Power*. London; Lawrence and Wishart.

Hohmann, Thekla ed

2003 *San and the State. Contesting Land, Development, Identity and Representation*. Koln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

Marshall, John

1993 Filming and Learning. *The Cinema of John Marshall*. Jay Ruby, ed. Pp. 1-134. Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers

1996 The Need to Be Informed: A reply to the Collective Letter. *Anthropology Newsletter* 37(5): 15-16

Myburgh, Paul John

1990 Letter from Paul John Myburgh on the Robert Gordon "Syndrome". *CVA Review* (Fall): 2

Schoeman, Piet J

1950 Voorlopige verslag van die kommissie vir die behoud van die Boesmanbevolking in Suidwes-Afrika, 1950. mimeograph accessible in the National Archive Namibia.

Tomaselli, Keyan, Teshome Gabriel, Ntongela Masilela and Arnie Williams

1992 People of the Great Sandface *Visual Anthropology*. 5(2): 163-66

van Rooyen, Piet

1995 *Agter 'n Eland Aan*. Cape Town: Queillerie

Wilmsen, Edwin

1999 Knowledge as the Source of Progress: the Marshall Family Testament to the "Bushmen". *Visual Anthropology* 12(3): 213-266.