

# Book Reviews

## The Tin Shack Bushmen of Kagga Kamma

*In the Tradition of the Forefathers.  
Bushman Traditionalism at Kagga Kamma.  
The Politics and History of a Performative Identity.*  
by Hylton White  
Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995, 60 pp.  
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Reviewed by Helize van Vuuren  
Department of Afrikaans and Nederlands  
University of Port Elizabeth

I went hunting today and I brought back a can of pickled fish  
This is the white man's world now. There's no more place for  
Bushmen (White 1995:49).

At the privately owned Kagga Kamma Nature Reserve near Citrusdal in the Cedar Berg live twenty-three Bushmen, originally from the Kalahari. These people are all patrilineal kin of the leader David Kruiper. When tourists are brought there, the group dresses in traditional garb and get involved in traditional activities such as bow- and bead-making. Sometimes they pose for adverts or movie-cameras. If they are lucky, they are paid. Close-by there is even a cave with Bushmen paintings. When the tourists have taken their photographs and departed, Kruiper's people return to the other side of the hill, to their plastic and canvas huts and don their clothes. The 'play-acting' has been going on since January 1991. In this manner they earn their keep: the right to stay on the reserve and to sell their beads and bows-and-arrows at the tourist shop.

Hylton White is a post-graduate American anthropology student who spent February 1992 with the group and then produced this monograph based on his fieldwork. *In the Tradition of the Forefathers* addresses issues

important to all South Africans concerned with identity and representation in our multicultural society.

White poses the question of 'what it is that makes Bushmen such a cornucopia of representation?'. He sees the answer in Western modernity's view of these people as 'the ultimate cultural and evolutionary "Others"' (1995:3). The myth of what White terms the 'Great Bushman Debate' holds that these hunter-gatherers lived a harmonious and isolated life based on collective values, untouched by conflict or 'the materialist individualism of the late modern world' (1995:3). This myth of authenticity of the 'pure Bushmen', has long been debunked by historians (Wright 1971) and anthropologists such as Wilmsen (1989) who pointed out that this was a utopian vision which did not hold true for the conflict-ridden reality and the inevitable evolution of most human communities. One of White's aims in his study had been to relocate the 'increasingly introspective and reflexive discussion of Western representation' (1995:5) in the reality of the flesh-and-blood people living at Kagga Kamma (and by implication one of the other remaining groups—the inhabitants of the tentdorp at Schmidtsdrift).

The Kagga Kamma venture is seen within the framework of ethno-tourist enterprises and the author claims rather glibly that

commodifying essentialist images of 'unspoilt' indigenous African cultures to attract an international market to South Africa, *have long been a vital and profitable sector of the local tourist industry* (1995:15, quoting Spiegel 1989 & 1994; e a.).

This statement is debatable: apart from the recent venture at Shakaland in KwaZulu-Natal and this Kagga Kamma 'tourist attraction' which started in 1991, there is little evidence of ethnic tourist enterprises and if there are, they are far from 'profitable'—with the exclusion perhaps of Shakaland. The contrary rather holds—the lamentable state in which the Bushmen rock art sites all over South Africa are in, was one of the central topics at the first conference on representation of the 'Bushman People of Southern Africa' (Wits university 4-7 August 1994). Very little money is spent on the upkeep of these sites and as soon as a site is marked or signposted, it opens up to vandalism, with the result that the discovery of new sites is not disclosed anymore.

White's recording of these #Khomani Bushmen's definitions of their own identity (in juxtaposition to other groups) is valuable in spite of the occasional blind spot. In one instance Dawid Kruiper defines a Bushman thus:

A Bushman's knowledge is in the veld, to make his living out of the veld *To live like a Bushman, from veldfoods and plants— I want to live like that, from tamma*

melons, from gembok-cucumbers, and from roots that I use to get water And with medicines from the veld—they work with me, because I believe in them .... A Bushman is a jackal, an animal of nature, and a Bushman has the intuition of a jackal ... A Bushman is the same—just like a lion and the whole of nature (White 1995:18, c.a.)

The expression of the heartfelt wish of the speaker ('To live like a Bushman ... I want to live like that') to become like his object of adoration ('a Bushman') suggests an irreconcilable rift between the self and the desired identity. On the one side stands Dawid Kruiper, a hybrid product of South African society, long-divorced from a traditional life-style and on the other a well-defined identity—a coveted 'Bushman-ness'. And although he and his group 'play-act' this identity, don it like overcoats for the tourist spectacle, the rift between hybrid self and 'Bushman-ness' is clearly illustrated in Kruiper's words. The two habitats they migrate between, Bushman cave and squatter shack, illustrate something of the alternative identities which the group adopts. To a certain extent they have also internalised the myth of the 'authentic' Bushmen.

White points out how this group shows a sense of 'cultural endangerment' and insists that they are superior to 'Basters':

The assertion of distinctiveness from Basters in this respect carries within it a threatening and apocalyptic subtext of Bushmen losing their heritage and thereby becoming Basters themselves (1995:20).

Ethnic consciousness results in chauvinism and even aggression in the group against Sanna Draaier, Nama wife of Abejol Kruiper, who 'is denied Bushman status'. But ironically, these 'ethnic chauvinists' cannot speak the #Khomani language which 'they claim as their heritage ... they all speak a colloquial mixture of Afrikaans and Nama' (1995:25). (Their names also point to the strong linguistic link with Afrikaans: *Regopstaan*, *Doppies*, *Oulit*, *Sanna Bladbeen*, *Vytjie Koper*, *Sanna Draaier*. The only name reminiscent of Bushmen origin is *Makai*, the grandfather of Dawid Kruiper, 'who occupies a key symbolic position as the ancestor who passed the Bushman heritage on to present generations' (1995:21). But even his name is given an Afrikaans ring by the addition of 'ou' (old) as he is always referred to as 'ou Makai'.

White suggests that theirs is a fictive identity with invented traditions and an 'imagined community' (for this last concept he quotes Anderson 1983). The reason why this fictive identity of 'Bushman-ness' is so coveted, lies in the group's history. After the Kalahari Gembok Park was demarcated in the thirties a professional hunter Donald Bain 'led a Bushman delegation in a march on parliament in Cape Town ...' (1995:32). As a result of this

agitation some families were granted residence in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. Most adult people in Kruiper's group were born here. But in the early 1970's they were all evicted by a new park administration and had to do casual labour as farmworkers. From 1987 to 1989 they gained 'white patronage' when a Kuruman tour operator put on tourist shows at the Kuruman showgrounds with the Bushmen as main attraction (1995:33). After dispersing again, 'they reconstituted once more in 1991 to resettle at Kagga Kamma under yet another patronage arrangement' (1993:33):

Within the alternating experience of patronage and its loss, the Bushmen's representation of themselves as pristine hunter-gatherers and their assertion that they are thus distinct from Basters (sic!)—marks a strategic attempt on their part to position themselves as authenticated subjects of the global Bushman image that has generated patronage and its benefits (1995:35)

Their determined cultivation of the 'authentic' Bushman identity is thus a result of economic pressure: play-acting the roles designated by white patrons has become associated with survival and earning an easier livelihood.

In the final chapter, entitled 'Kagga Kamma: A Situation of Identity', White identifies two possible ways of looking at the Kagga Kamma situation—either as 'a fake that is generated by purely material interests' or 'as the site at which longer-term processes of construction and boundary formation currently operate' (1995:38). But he rejects the first perspective in favour of the second, especially considering the group's own psychological contortions to fit the traditional identity of 'Bushman-ness'.

Then follows the most shocking part of this monograph: the details of the 'contract' between Kruiper's people and the owners of this ethno-tourism project. White describes the squatter camp conditions they live in—in shacks that provide little protection against the elements, the lack of medical care (with tuberculosis present), the lack of educational or recreational facilities, a herd of donkeys provided as food (sic!) and their reliance on the farm store where

cash is generally withheld (by the manager, i.a.) even where there is no debt because the managers contend that if the Bushmen truly wish to live according to their traditional way they should have no desire for either cash or consumer goods (1995:42)

There is unspecified talk of a trust fund for the group, but nothing definite or in writing exists. White concludes that these Bushmen thus 'occupy a vulnerable and exploited position within the venture', even though it is a cultural survival initiative (1995:50).

This study of traditionality at Kagga Kamma is thought-provoking. It

comes as a timely reminder especially to literary critics and researchers focusing increasingly on the oral tradition(s) of these earliest inhabitants of southern Africa, of the question of advocacy. We use glib phrases—for example—such as ‘recovering our lost heritage’ or talk of ‘reconstructing voices from the past’ with reference to the extinct /Xam group’s oral tradition (which Bleek and Lloyd, 1911 and later G.R. von Wielligh focused on). It is all too easy to romanticise these ‘little people’ or ‘harmless people’ as symbolising the original South African presence. But are we perhaps merely recolonising exotic material into our defunct white canon with the aim of revitalising it? The politically powerless people of Kagga Kamma, Nyae-Nyae and the community living in tents at Schmidtsdrift act as shocking reminders of other pressures and issues than the merely aesthetic and literary.

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## Fiction, History and Nation

*Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa*

by Annalisa Oboe

Venezia. Supernova, 1994, 217 pp.

Supernova Edizioni, C.P. 58, Rialto, 30100 Venezia, Italia.

Reviewed by Jean-Philippe Wade

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University of Durban-Westville

After recently re-reading a disastrously inaccurate critical study of the novels of J.M. Coetzee by an American scholar, Susan VanZanten Gallagher, (*A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context* (Harvard 1991)), I have become wary of foreign scholars dipping desultorily into South African literature. However, Annalisa Oboe, a researcher in the Department of English and German Languages and Literatures at the University of Padova in Italy, has written a fascinating and scholarly book which is sensitive both to the specificity of our national space and to the research produced by South African literary critics.

*Fiction, History and Nation in South Africa* ‘focuses on the South African historical novel in English, from its first appearance to 1990’. While