# Writing Around the Bushmen: The !Kung, Anthropology and Feminism

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Ethnographers, historians, sociologists, development officers and even novelists always ultimately depart from their scene of research. They take away texts for later transcription, translation, interpretation and reconstruction. The text (and this includes tape recordings, field notes, films etc.), unlike many of the people who are being studied, can travel. The ethical concerns raised about cultural representation are central to the anthropological debate regarding description and/or representation in that the researcher ultimately has control over the keyboard. Marcus & Fischer (1986:ix) are of the opinion that much of modern ethnographic research and writing 'is potentially an experiment' and as such is engaged in

> ... exploring new ways to fulfil the promises on which modern anthropology was founded: to offer worthwhile and interesting critiques of our own society; to enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many; to make accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures.

One way of 'countering' the problem of representation of the ethnographic subject is to allow the subject to speak for him/herself. The extent to which the ethnographic researcher 'intervenes' in the story of the speaking subject has lent itself to experimental possibilities. The mediated life-history is one such device which highlights the relation between the researcher and the person recalling his/her life story. The life-story or memories of someone may be narrated orally on tape or recorded on film but then the story is arranged, presented, produced in writing by a writer/academic/official. Life-stories blur boundaries in that they shift and cross backward and forward between the geographical, linguistic and cultural contexts of the narrator and researcher and raise questions about authority and/or authorship. Does the person doing the writing call him/herself the author or the editor? Whose signature/name appears on the book? Local examples are that of *Poppie Nongena: One Woman's Struggle Against Apartheid* edited or authored by Elsa Joubert, and *Part of my Soul Went with Him*, the autobiography of Winnie Madizikela Mandela which was written/edited

by Anne Benjamin. Another Southern African example is an ethnographic text by an American anthropologist, Marjorie Shostak, called *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*.

In *The Songlines* Bruce Chatwin (1988:256) notes that the Bushmen

> have no idea of the soul's survival in another world. 'When we die, we die', they say. 'The wind blows away our footprints, and that is the end of us'.

By the same token, Nisa, the !Kung woman who collaborated with Marjorie Shostak (1981:epigraph) says:

> I'll break open the story and tell you what is there. Then, like the others that have fallen out onto the sand, I will finish with it, and the wind will take it away.

This idea is also echoed by Stephen Watson in his collection of poems on the Bushmen, *Return of the Moon* (1991). In the poem, 'What happens when you die', he writes,

> ... the wind blows dust/covering the tracks, the footprints we made .... If not for this wind, our spoor would still show,/our spoor would still show us, as if we still lived (Watson 1991:31).

In a note to his poem, Watson (1991:76) explains that the 'cavity in any new moon' was believed to be 'the "catching-place" for people who had recently died'. The wind may have erased countless footprints and stories left by hundreds of thousands of Bushmen[1], but the twentieth century West has, in macabre curiosity, nostalgia, in the name of empirical research and possibly also because it feels that the Bushmen still represent a self-contained unit for cultural analysis, decided that it has had to become the 'catching-place' for the Bushmen people.

In twentieth century ethnographic research, the various bands of Bushmen found throughout the Kalahari, Namibia and southern Angola, are probably the most written about, documented, 'caught-up' research subjects in the world. There has been, in this century, a singular determination by anatomists, anthropologists, and lately by exhibition curators, to re-inscribe, to preserve, to re-produce those footsteps and stories scattered in the sand. Marjorie Shostak, an anthropologist loosely connected to the Harvard Kalahari Research Group, is one of these. She has also, to use the words of the subtitle of the book, *Miscasts* (1996) edited by Pippa Skotnes, 'negotiated the presence of the Bushmen'.

[1] In line with academic trends in the 1980s, Shostak refers to the !Kung as members of the San throughout her text. I have followed Guenther's argument (1986) as well as more recent trends and called the !Kung members of the Bushmen.

In 1981, Marjorie Shostak published *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. I do not know if Nisa is still alive—she was already in her fifties in 1971 when Shostak last visited the group of !Kung to which Nisa belonged. The book was only published ten years after Shostak's second and final field trip. The real-life Nisa was a member of a small band of !Kung Bushmen who mostly hunted and gathered in the north-west corner of the Kalahari in Botswana. In a series of 21 taped interviews, Marjorie Shostak constructed a life-story of Nisa, whose domestic life-history has been chronologically arranged from early childhood to old age. Preceding each staged chapter in Nisa's life, Shostak introduces aspects of !Kung life and customs in the desert. Nisa is not the woman's real name, neither are the names of settlements, water pans, wells and other characters in the book real. This was done ostensibly to protect Nisa and the people she talked about, her numerous lovers, husbands, friends and enemies. However, considering the remoteness of the area and a climate not altogether hospitable to the urban feminist, as well as the fact that from about that time on, the Botswana Government created a post of Bushman Development Officer, the first incumbent being of the opinion that 'all academics were "rip-off" artists' (Hudelson 1995:22), it is highly unlikely that scores of Bushman groupies from the American Woman's Movement would descend onto the Kalahari. Besides, 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. The majority of these 'outsiders', no doubt, would have encountered Nisa, her friends and family already. In a paper on the genesis of the book, published in 1989 Shostak (1989:229) recalls that

> I was fortunate not to be one of the first anthropologists to study the !Kung San—fortunate because by the time my first field stay was completed, a large body of data collected by other anthropologists and medical scientists was available. Without this work, my own ability to interpret, make sense of, and relate personal narratives—singular voices within a highly varied range—to a more generalized whole would have been compromised.

Prior to the 1950s there had been numerous 'expeditions' to the Kalahari by mostly South African researchers, including Dorothea Bleek, Raymond Dart and Philip Tobias as well as some British scientists. The American invasion began in the 1950s when Laurence Marshall, who has recently retired from a firm which invented electronic devices such as radar, microwave and 'high-energy trigger mechanisms used in the first atomic bombs' (Hudelson 1995:11), decided to come to the Kalahari with his family because he 'had heard about wild Bushmen who hide behind bushes and shoot you with their poisoned arrows' (Van der Post & Taylor 1984:118). Laurence Marshall's

wife, Lorna, produced an ethnographic work which is still today very highly rated; the daughter, Elizabeth Thomas, wrote a book, *The Harmless People* (1959) which is considered a classic by anthropologists; while the son, John, made movies, many of which are still shown in university anthropology courses and one of which is available as a *National Geographic* video. In between the desert circuses, anthropological safaris with their tent towns, trucks, drivers, cooks, interpreters and field laboratories and the time when the Botswana Government started insisting that any research must be tied to development, the Bushmen produced urine samples, had every conceivable part of their anatomy measured, gave blood, talked for hours to their interviewers, explained over and over again kinship structures, naming rules, the properties of plants, the genealogy of their gods, whether they had souls or not, and so on.

Marjorie Shostak arrived in the Kalahari in 1969, at the end of this era of so-called 'empirical research', at a time when the Women's Movement in the west was gaining strength and at the height of anti-Vietnam war sentiments. At the same time there was also a growing awareness by ethnographers about the predicament of handouts of money, clothes, blankets and especially tobacco, to the peoples they were studying. Shostak and her husband decided to put a halt to handouts, except when people actually worked for or with them. Shostak recalls that she 'was just devastated that [she] had to give out tobacco, the stuff [she] wouldn't put near kids or [her] own body' (Hudelson 1995:18). However, as Shostak (1981:26-7) recalls: 'Once we were on our own, our romanticism was attacked by the !Kung themselves'. The Bushmen, but in this particular case, the !Kung, who for generations had been prodded, pricked, measured, followed all over the place and had answered innumerable questions about their sex lives, were not so easily shut out. Shostak (1981:28) recalls that

> One morning when my husband drove the truck, loaded with empty water drums, five miles to the permanent well where we drew water, he found a mound of thorn branches barring his passage. The people from the nearby village soon appeared: 'Do you expect to draw water where you refuse people tobacco?' ... we realised we could not ignore such strong protests. The !Kung demanded a relationship on their terms, not ours.

More specifically, Nisa, the !Kung woman Shostak was eventually to work with, knew how to hustle and harangue. Shostak (1981:28) recalls the first time Nisa made a lasting impression on her by recalling two preceding researchers:

> Nancy and Richard? They were the best! Nancy, I greet you! Nancy, hello! Why, she and Richard gave us whatever we wanted: clothes, food and money, all sorts of things. They never refused us anything! Nancy, how I loved her! She was the best white person here. Write and tell her I said so. Ask her for some cloth and money too.

> Everyone was stingy compared to her. She was different. She wasn't a European, she was a !Kung! Oh, I would like her to be here right now. She really looked after me.

Nisa was persistent, always pitching up at the camp in the morning, talking about Nancy and Richard, the only common ground Nisa felt she and the new researcher had. Shostak (1981:29) dreaded each day, trying to escape the 'barrage of thinly veiled criticisms'. Finally, knowing that escape was impossible, Shostak decided to use Nisa's voice on her own terms and asked if she, Nisa, would work with her. *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, is the result of this collaboration. At this stage of the collaboration, Nisa is not a victim but the smart hustler who bullied Shostak into taking notice of her. The !Kung have for decades been the subjects of intense anthropological interest and ethnographers and other scientists arriving in the Kalahari arrive as known types, not as strangers. Marcus & Fischer (1986:36) note that:

> As a result of the intellectual trends at home ... (for example the hard-hitting critiques of Western representations of cultural others), and real changes in the third world, the kind of field sites anthropologists have traditionally sought can no longer be found, or even imagined without dissonance.

Once Nisa had achieved her aim, Shostak (1981:39f) writes early in the 'Introduction' to the book, that:

> Nisa and I 'worked very well together'. We often joked about how I (her 'niece') was a child and she ('my aunt') was a woman of vast experience whose task it was to teach me about life.

The kinship terms used, niece and aunt, were determined by Nisa's actual kinship to Hwantla, the !Kung name Shostak accepted. The real Hwantla was Nisa's aunt, and Shostak became the genealogical equivalent. On the final page of the Epilogue, Shostak (1981:371) evokes the kinship term again when her second and final visit (1971) to the Kalahari ends. In their goodbyes Nisa says 'My niece ... my niece ... you are someone who truly thinks about me'. However, in the final sentence of the book, Shostak (1981:371) subverts the kinship relationship, niece and aunt, and imposes a western category on the relationship when she writes:

> Almost every experience I have in this life is colored and enriched by the !Kung world and the way Nisa looked at it. I will always think of her, and I hope she will think of me, as a distant sister.

The word 'sister' is probably not intended to bring Nisa genealogically closer to Shostak, but no doubt refers to the sisterhood of early 1980s American feminism—a rather, at

that time, monolithic vision of all women across the world rising up together and reclaiming a place alongside men: a sisterhood conjured out of Shostak's ideal of women's politics and an emergent universal feminism. It is an irrelevant sisterhood for Nisa, as she cannot read the text of her life and words, nor can she intercept the interpretations given, the discourse produced, once Shostak, her notebooks, tape recorder and cassettes have left the Kalahari for an office in America. On her way home, Shostak cannot disassociate herself from the project of writing a book within the paradigms of her discipline and the feminist discourse of America. Nisa is a 'distant sister' in a faraway place where there are few prospects of a better life with less hardships and greater gender equality. Shostak has situated Nisa, but Nisa herself has no hope of situating herself within or even alongside the commentaries that mediate each one of Nisa's stories that break open into the sand. This is a book of many authors, Nisa, the illiterate, but highly articulate and self-reflexive !Kung woman, Shostak, the anthropologist 'putting Nisa's story into cultural perspective' (Shostak 1989:231) and Marjorie who is interested in the Women's Movement. Shostak is not entirely dishonest about her project. In her 'Introduction' she says that:

> The Women's Movement had just begun to gain momentum, urging re-examination of the roles Western women had traditionally assumed. I hoped the field trip might help me clarify some of the issues the Movement had raised. !Kung women might be able to offer some answers ... their culture, unlike ours was not being continuously disrupted by social and political factions ...! Kung were experiencing cultural change, [but] it was still quite recent and subtle ... (Shostak 1981:5f).

During the last interview Shostak (1981:369) raises the question of translating and editing the series of chronological interviews and 'putting them down on paper, paper that would be turned into a book'. After some more explanations, Nisa remarks:

> Yes, that's good. You'll leave here, and while you're away, you'll write. Then others will say, 'Eh, so this is what you and that woman talked about. These are her words. This is her name'. And if they like your book, they will buy it and help you with money (Shostak 1981:369).

Shostak however, undertakes to contribute some of the money from the sales to the Kalahari People's Fund, a project that would provide funds to erect schools, dig boreholes and wells and, as Nisa hoped, help her 'buy a cow' (Shostak 1981:370). In 1989 Shostak (1989:234) reports that Nisa received her cows and 'has become one of the people with wealth and stature in the changing world of the !Kung'.

During the interviews Nisa is well aware of the mechanics of a tape recorder. In the interview about her earliest memories, her first words are:

> Fix my voice on the machine so that my words come out clear. I am an old person who has experienced many things and I have much to talk about. I will tell my talk, of the things I have done and the things that my parents and others have done. But don't let the people I live with hear what I say (Shostak 1981:51).

During the last interview, the 'old man', as Nisa calls the tape recorder, will help the book to be written. Nisa says:

> He will talk and you will write .... Also the two of us—he and I. We will be the ones talking to you. Because I am the one who is talking, am I not? (Shostak 1981:370).

Shostak replies that she will take Nisa's talk home with her, and even though she may be alone, she will be able to write. And this is the moment, when the mediated text is produced, when the ethnographic fiction is fashioned, where the work has been enmeshed, as Clifford (1988:9) calls it,

> in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities ... [where] it enacts power relations, but where its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic.

This is the stage where the oral narrative becomes subsumed to scriptocentric principles.

The publication of Shostak's life-story of Nisa was hailed by feminist anthropologists and the Women's Movement. The centring of Nisa's voice as woman, as informant, as allegory for the base-line of human origins, did challenge the hegemony of a significant section of ethnographic research. In the first place, although women had always been considered in much research involving menstruation rites, kinship structures, and as economic providers in terms of gathered sustenance, this was one of the first times that a woman was exclusively used as catalyst in the rite of passage of the ethnographer herself enabling an understanding of her own womanhood within western society.

After the publication of the book Shostak (1989:231) reports:

> There was no doubt that Nisa, aged fifty and experiencing a difficult adjustment to menopause [all her children had already died], filtered her life story through her then-current perspective; there was also no doubt that Marjorie Shostak, aged twenty-four, recently married, a product of the American 1960s, asked questions relevant to a specific phase of her life. I asked Nisa to tell me what it meant to be a woman; her answer was her narrative.

By ostensibly foregrounding and naming, albeit in pseudonymic form, the informant, Shostak's text is part of the recent ethnographic trend:

> to name and quote informants more fully and to introduce personal elements into the text [thereby] altering ethnography's discursive strategy and mode of authority (Clifford 1986b:109).

But at the same time, the book perpetuates the traditionalist's[2] myth of the Bushmen people as a kind of 'cultural isolate' (Barnard 1992b:5). To a large extent, ethnographers from Harvard and later, the University of New Mexico, followed the idea of the Marshalls, considering the Bushmen, but especially the !Kung, as having remained largely unacquainted with, and by inference untainted by, the outside world of Tswanas, Hereros, missionaries, traders, hunters and white settlers. Shostak's text straddles a very uncomfortable position in this respect. Nisa herself often refers to events, people and cross-cultural contact which has profoundly influenced or altered her perception of herself. Shostak, on the other hand, is inclined to gloss over cross-cultural contact in Nisa's early life and only towards the end of the text, sadly, acknowledges that the 'old way of life' is threatened from all sides.

In her 'Introduction' Shostak (1981:6,27,e.a.) maintains that although 'the !Kung were experiencing cultural change, it was still quite *recent and subtle*' and that 'money had no place in their traditional economy and had only come to the area recently'. How recent is 'recent'? And how subtle is 'subtle'? It is this aspect of Shostak's text which is the most problematic in that, despite what may be called a successful experiment in foregrounding Nisa as a female informant and teller of a revealing life story, the commentaries by Shostak 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. The way in which Shostak treats Nisa and her fellow !Kung as cultural isolates, proceeds on two levels: Firstly, Nisa personally is considered primarily a member of a hunter-gatherer clan; secondly, the !Kung of the Dobe area in the north-west corner of Botswana and north-east part of Namibia were considered sufficiently isolated to have been spared the colonialist conquests of the more southern Bushmen. There is not much hard evidence to support this.

[2] The argument about the traditionalists versus the revisionists, known as the 'Kalahari Debate', has been cogently summarised by Barnard (1992b & 1996). Although Shostak can be termed a traditionalist in that she feels cross-cultural contact has only been recent and intermittent, she does not subscribe wholly to the Van der Postian mythology of the Bushmen as peaceful, harmless, egalitarian etc. Nisa's story, corroborated by interviewing other women about their lives, contains too many instances of violence, a troubled domestic life and gender inequalities to justify such a label being hung on Shostak.

On the first level, Nisa personally was exposed to a variety of other cultures, and at times adopted or agreed to other cultural practices. She was born in the early 1920s and in her earliest memories casually refers to cans as preferable to ostrich eggshell containers (Shostak 1981:97). When it came time for her to give birth to her first child, when she was between eighteen and twenty one, Nisa recalls that:

> [E]veryone says that childbirth is painful. I know what I'll do! When I'm near the end of my pregnancy, I'll go to the white people and give myself to them. They'll open the mouth of my stomach and take the baby out. That way it won't hurt (Shostak 1981:192).

Nisa herself as well as many of her husbands lived and worked for Tswanas or Europeans: they were aware of mechanised transport long before the first wave of anthropologists arrived, adapted to Tswana tribal law when they lived in their villages, and at one stage, when Nisa had left her brutal husband, agreed to a tribal hearing led by the Tswana headman (Shostak 1981:295). Her son-in-law who had murdered her daughter, paid a fine to Nisa as due compensation declared by Bantu tribal law (Shostak 1981:313). Nisa knew about European medicines and at one stage worked for a European household 'for a long time' (Shostak 1981:326,251). It is evident from the text, but largely unacknowledged by Shostak in her chapter commentaries, that the semi-squatter status many !Kung encountered when they were working for Tswanas and Herero pastoralists and herders, also quite often involved the adoption of Bantu ideals about gender roles—a move away from the supposed egalitarianism of the !Kung. In addition, Nisa's desire to get a cow from the collaborative deal between the narrator and the researcher is also a desire for a more sedentary pastoralist type of life.

On the second level, Shostak (1981:345) places the blame for the large-scale extermination of the southern Bushmen squarely at the hands of the Dutch, 'ancestors of the present-day Afrikaner population'. But she fails to mention what happened to the !Kung and other Kalahari Bushmen groups in the previous century, once Livingstone had documented his arrival at Lake Ngami, an area inhabited by the !Kung, and the subsequent ivory trade which sprang up and decimated almost the entire elephant population. She fails to mention the Farini expedition of the 1880s where this American showman journeyed through the Kalahari 'to capture Bushmen for a sideshow, to look for ranch land and ... search for diamonds', or the many hunting and photographic safaris through the area, or the fact that Bushmen, especially in Namibia, were 'hunted down and killed as predatory bandits' (Landau 1996:133,136). A photograph of a !Kung boy taken in Cape Town in the 1870s (part of the Bleek Collection) indicates that even the remoter !Kung were being captured and transported to metropolitan prisons as a result of settler/!Kung contact. Although Shostak admits to intermittent conflict between the Bushmen and their Bantu neighbours and of large-scale ex-

termination by the Dutch, there is no mention of the complicity by the British in most of southern Africa, or the Germans in Namibia or the Portuguese in Angola during colonial rule. Neither does Shostak trace or mention whether the !Kung have always inhabited this relatively inhospitable area covering relatively speaking a minute two hundred and fifty square miles or whether they were forced to move, or flee, from the south or the north.

Finally, Shostak (1981:349) cites the recruitment by the South African Defence Force (SADF) of !Kung trackers and counter-insurgent soldiers in the South African war in South West Africa/Namibia/Angola. What she fails to acknowledge, and subsequent researchers of the so-called revisionist school have been quick to point out, is that many !Kung enlisted with all sides in the war, not only the SADF. This would suggest that voluntary enlistment in the liberation armies and the SADF was already an acknowledgement of acute political sensibilities about where one's allegiances or best food-ticket came from. And yet, Shostak maintains changes in !Kung lifestyle have only been 'recent' and 'subtle'. In actual fact, Shostak is at the end of a long line of direct and indirect interpretative romancers. As far as the series of empirical researchers are concerned, Shostak finds it necessary, like her many predecessors, to place the !Kung as an untainted foil 'against the burden of the modern condition' (Wilmsen 1996:187).

Hudelson (1995:30) notes in a section entitled 'Why do we study the San?', that 'the world has chosen the San to represent a natural state of existence for which it has become nostalgic'. Hudelson (1995:31) opines that:

> Sometimes the social environment back home influences the venue of research, independent of theory. The Ju/wasi of NyaeNyae were the perfect salve for the despondent entrepreneur, Laurence Marshall, who had been overwhelmed by warlords of a growing military-industrial complex in the early 1950s. Likewise the remote blue Kalahari sky sheltered many American researchers from turmoil at home during the Vietnam wars. Free of malaria for the most part, and relatively accessible to the outside world, to good medical care and to Western food, the Kalahari is not the hardship site that many modern-day 'explorers' would like us to think.

If it had been Shostak's intention to avoid the turmoil back in America, (she accompanied her fellow-anthropologist husband, Melvin Konner), then she started off by believing in the egalitarian, turmoil-free !Kung society. It was only during the course of her interviews with Nisa, whose testimony was controlled by interviews with other female members of the !Kung, that the so-called 'darker side' of life emerged. Nisa testifies to a great deal of domestic violence—beatings by her parents and her various husbands, infanticide, homicide and murder were all regular interruptions in her seem-

ingly hitherto 'idyllic existence'. Shostak admits in a later publication that 'most of us have participated in one degree or another in the dissemination of utopian ideas about the [!Kung] culture' (in Biesele 1986:71).

Hudelson maintains that

> Regardless of how far or how close to reality this image of some San groups is, it has been the reason we continue to study them. They are considered a barometer by which the accuracy of contemporary social theory can be measured, evolutionism, diffusionism, functionalism, human ecology, political economy or sociobiology (Hudelson in Sanders 1995:30).

In similar fashion, Shostak hoped to understand womanhood among the !Kung, so that in one way or another, she could understand the nature of being a woman in her own part of the world. This presents us with one of the dilemmas of being an ethnographer—the subsuming of the self into the so-called 'other'. Shostak relies on an undifferentiated category of womanhood and is thus able to slide self into the other—assuming that the rite of passage is completed. Nisa says in her 'farewell' words that Shostak is someone 'who truly thinks about me' (Shostak 1981:371). But thinking is an awfully long way away from 'practising' like Nisa. There will remain the element of difference always: on the grounds of race, colonialism, culture, the ethics of ethnography, class, economic status.

Shostak does not begin to respond to the fact that she belongs to a group of researchers who can literally afford to be patronising. Neither does she tackle the fact that she is privileged with regard to the woman she has chosen to study, and she fails to acknowledge that the power relations inherent in encounters between ethnographers and their informants can be conveniently erased via gender affinity. Subverting the kinship category of niece into 'distant sister' demands a critical rethinking as to whether there can ever be a sameness within these vast differences. It is significant that Shostak entitles the book *Nisa, The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*, for, in her 'Epilogue', Shostak (1981:350,e.a.) underlines one of the fundamental problems of ethnographic research when she says: 'It was *my* work, certainly ... but it was *her* story'. The difference between words and work is significant. Working on someone else's story entertains even greater selectivity of material and is done so 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. The mediated commentaries leading into each chapter dealing with an aspect of Nisa's life are intended to place and situate the words of a woman living in the Kalahari within a social and historical context—but, in effect, these commentaries say more about Shostak than they do about the !Kung. By saying this is 'my work' as

opposed to 'her story', Shostak's claim raises the question of the ineluctability of fictionalisation in any textual 'story' that arises from fieldwork. Certain literary conventions are very consciously used, and acknowledged by Shostak: she admits to extensive editing, to rearranging, to selectivity, to playing the publishing world. This is not unusual and such conventions are used when it comes to arranging so-called empirical research as well. Shostak combines Nisa's voice with her own—but inevitably, it is not so much Nisa's story that matters, but Shostak's voice of contextualisation. It is Shostak's voice which raises issues of publication, of ethnographic power, of scientific and fictional control that give rise to questions about her complicity in new forms of voice colonisation. Shostak, to use Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon, occupies the central supervisory tower—while Nisa, and the other men and women she interviewed as controls for Nisa's story, occupy the supervised cells: they have lost all control over what happens to them in the final piece of work, and they have no recourse to saying, 'this was so, but that wasn't so'. This is a dilemma of ethnographic representation. Who is being represented, and to whom. Do those who are being represented ever have any control over their final representation? Isn't the situating of Nisa, much like her !Kung compatriots, a kind of Kalahari-ism—much in the form of Said's *Orientalism*?

In a sense, Shostak controls the self-definition of Nisa by her mediating commentaries. Shostak asks Nisa, 'what it is like to be a woman?'—and indeed Nisa's story revolves around her position in !Kung society as a woman. In the blurbs on the back cover of the book, *Choice*'s review is quoted:

> ... their work results in the revelation of the universality of women's experiences and feelings despite vast differences in culture and society.

But Nisa's story is that of a woman without a history within the broader context of her people. She has been made into a woman who only gathers, bears children, reads spoor, mourns deaths, and has a great deal of sex. We do not know whether Nisa suffered from a loss of historical memory or if Shostak edited it out from the transcriptions. In any event, it is Shostak (1981:6) who provides a cultural, political and economic history, a history assumed to be representative of generations of sameness, where the changes from outside have been only 'recent and subtle'. This kind of nostalgia for cultural purity or isolation is Shostak's unacknowledged predicament. It places her, as the history maker, in a position of tremendous power. Womanhood has been reified, in terms of the beginnings of the Women's Movement in America, and the ethnographer decides on the place the !Kung specifically, and the Bushmen generally, should occupy in history. The unexplored areas of Nisa's contact with whites and blacks in the area, of a war taking place in traditional !Kung territory, of communal

history, are placed in the control of Shostak. Nisa's value, as a woman, is contingent upon Shostak's own interpretation of an undifferentiated category of woman—but womanhood without a sense of place or even an historical narrative.

We do not know if Nisa was ever asked what her views and perceptions on change and social interaction were before and during the anthropological safaris. The only indication we are given are in the opening scenes of meeting, when Nisa hustles and harangues Shostak for tobacco, blankets, clothes and money. It is in this basic exchange of goods that Shostak acknowledges pangs of guilt, and not in her complicity in depriving Nisa and her people of a past unmediated by a westerner. Nisa is allowed only a domestic and by inference a domesticated memory: she has been reified into a manageable object, and rendered 'authentic' by the researcher. Despite Nisa's own narrative of her life, the anthropologist continues to write around her and, by implication, around the Bushmen.

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