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Land and Human Rights, Encounters, and the Central Kalahari Basarwa. Interviews with the Observers and Observed

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Robert Waldron is creative director of an advertising company in Johannesburg. He holds degrees in anthropology and communication, and is working towards a diploma in environmental conservation. A documentary film maker in addition to being a television commercials producer, Waldron met Keyan Tomaselli, who has been studying representation of the 'Bushman' in the media, in late 1993 [see Tomaselli 1992, 1993]. They soon realised their commonality regarding human rights concerns and research into the image of the 'Bushman'¹, and have been working closely since on this and other projects.

Waldron's company, Klatzko and Waldron, has not opportunistically exploited the mythical image of the 'Bushman' in its advertising campaigns as have many others (see campaigns for Telkom, Colgate, Mazda, United Bank, SpoorNet etc) [see Buntman 1995]. Yet Waldron is probably one of the few advertising executives, if not the only one, to have a personal and comprehensive knowledge of Basarwa groups and individuals, their locations and lifestyles in the Central Kalahari Desert. Waldron is making a video on changes in Basarwa tracking techniques with the help of one particular group which he has been visiting between one and three times a year since the late 1980s. Though my interview with him below does not deal directly with the video, it does reveal much about his underlying motivations in making the programme.

The second interviewee was Miriam Motshabise, a 16 year old young woman, part Basarwa and part-Tswana. The presentation of the interview differs from that with Waldron because of its fragmented nature. Miriam speaks English fairly well, which she learned at school in the nearest formal settlement at Hukuntsi. She grew up in the community we visited. She is completing Form 2 (Grade 9), after which she will go on to complete her education. At the time of my interview with her she was about to return to school for the second term of the year, each of which is three months. A truck is sent by the Council to fetch those children from the community who are enrolled at the school. Miriam studies Setswana, English, Maths, Religion, Science etc, all "traditional" Western subjects.

The interviews which follow were conducted in the Kalahari in mid-April 1995. I was invited on this excursion by Keyan Tomaselli who, with Waldron, had pulled together a team comprising two Ph.D visual anthropology / video students, Susan Manhandu and Dorothy Roome, an archaeologist/development worker, Conrad Steenkamp, and Tomaselli's eleven year old daughter, Catherine. My own interest is through my MA Research Thesis on the narratives of the /Xam [Jeursen 1994].

The aim of the visit was to:

- investigate Basarwa land rights issues and claims, and to assess what kinds of development projects might be appropriate for this remote group of about one hundred people. This group lives one hundred kilometres (3-4 hours drive) from the nearest formal settlement, where some of the Basarwa children attend school.
- compare the actual conditions under which this group lives with the mythical images created by the media.
- study the nature of the encounter between our visiting group of seven and the Basarwa community of about one hundred.

The first interview tries to assess the relationship that Waldron has established with the Basarwa group, how it has changed, and why he travels to this remote part of the Kalahari. These are important questions in the light of mythical Western media perceptions of the 'Bushman', the exploitation of this image in advertising and the media generally, and in the light of numerous philanthropists who couch their visits in the expeditionary discourses of 'saving the Bushmen' [Perrott 1992].

The mystique of First Peoples is both a resource and a curse. It is a resource because it provides opportunities for the 'Bushmen' to exchange the stereotypical image of themselves and their artifacts for cash income. But it is a curse in that the 'Bushmen' are manipulated by discursive forces beyond their control, and often, comprehension, to exhibit tourist-orientated behaviour, and to feed now discredited anthropological paradigms of a stone-age people frozen in time. It follows that anyone expressing an interest in the 'Bushmen' has to critically negotiate these discourses to ensure that they are not tarred with the same brush.

"A Woman and Vehicles Hell and A Man's Paradise" **

The slogan in the above heading was printed on a bumper sticker of the Hukuntsi Store, a crossroads some one hundred kilometres from our destination. The slogan gives some idea of the state of the roads, which are little more than cut-lines through the bushveld - on which we had to travel often at little more than 15-25 kms per hour in four wheel drive - to get to

our eventual destination. It also invokes all the stereotypical notions usually associated with safaris through inhospitable terrain which the Camel cigarette company popularises in 'The Camel Trophy'.

Having arrived after three days on the road, most of us felt, I think, a little unsure about camping in two tents on the edge of the Basarwa village (or werft). Although we were there as a team with specific aims, it was also a personal experience for each of us, not knowing what to expect. The community, in contrast, seemed to understand some Western notions of social and individual distance relating to their interactions with us.

During the first few mornings everyone turned out to greet us. We videoed and photographed the interactions, especially between Catherine and Miriam, who befriended each other almost immediately. The small children referred to our 35mm still cameras as "snappies", but paid no attention to the three video cameras, possibly because they were used to them from Waldron's previous visits.

With the exception of Waldron, we were amateurs when it came to trying to assess how to interact with their social conventions. For example, women with beads and other items to sell would walk towards our camp, and then sit on the edge of our space, waiting for acknowledgement. They would sometimes wait for a long time before one of us would make contact. The length of their waiting grew as the week passed by, and as we became increasingly reluctant to purchase yet more artifacts with our ever dwindling money supply.

Conversely, at first we tended to avoid the village, except when discussing 'business' such as development issues. On one occasion, two members of our party simply walked through the village in search of someone, only to feel that they had unconsciously violated a community space.

With regard to the Basarwa group's self-identity, they identified themselves as !Kung, and their language as Sesarwa, with some speaking Afrikaans and Tswana as well. Afrikaans had been learned by the men who had worked on farms in Namibia, particularly //Kuru!ka (Petrus) Nxai and his brother Baba (Kort Jan) Kies Nxai. The names in brackets are the 'white' names they have given themselves. Kort Jan identified the melons we had collected along the route as "Boesman se water" (Afrikaans - 'Bushman's water'), although they were too bitter in this case to be eaten. Both men sport tattoos of horses, stars and fish, which they say were all done by the same person on the farm where they worked, using a needle and battery acid, a process which they admit was very painful.

The community has been living in the area for the last 5 or 6 years. Before that they were situated about 100km away, at a site which had a borehole. They were then moved to the present site by the Botswana government. The only other visitors we saw during the week of our visit were the police, who arrived in a van and wanted to know what we were doing, a water truck and a Danish Aid worker who stopped over briefly as we were leaving to administer physiotherapy to a crippled child.

It is in the light of this introduction that I interviewed Waldron on the history and motivation of his visits to the Kalahari. This article is not intended to provide an exhaustive analysis of our ethnography, but rather to identify issues and questions for further discussion, especially with regard to the nature of the encounter [see Tomaselli and Sheppers on 1996].

Jeursen: What were the circumstances of your first trip to this particular part of the Kalahari?

Waldron: Friends of mine had come to the Western Kalahari, Botswana, many years ago and told me of the beauty of the scenery. I have had a long-standing love affair with the Kalahari. They mentioned that they had encountered a group of Bushman in the area. At that stage I thought that possibly it would be nice to meet them, but that was not the main focus of my trip. However, when I arrived, I met two young men on the pan, one of whom is here this time, Maleka, and he had been to school at Tepologo Primary at Werda, South Africa, so he could speak a little English. I heard them clicking in their !Kung language and saw their excitement, and they took me to their so-called headman, Hiwa Nxai. I found myself overwhelmingly attracted to the openness and friendliness of these people. When they invited me to stay and make camp here, I did. There was no primary focus to the trip, like "Should I go and see the Bushman and interface with them?" I just wanted to be with them; they were nice people to be with, similar to if you met someone on the Paris Metro and decided to go and have coffee with them. That's what happened, but obviously in communing with these people, and because they are supposedly the First People, one becomes curious, so that curiosity was a driving factor, finding out how their society works, how they could survive out here in waterless desert. I was interested and intrigued to see that they are still partially a hunter-gatherer society, but not in the romanticised sense.

Jeursen: Have you found that your reasons for coming here have changed?

Waldron: Yes they have. I grew to like the community very much but there are further reasons why I come here now. I now actively come here to find out a little more about their society. I'm also very concerned with the land rights of these people.

Jeursen: Could you tell me more about the land rights issues here?

Waldron: It seems to me, according to the information I have, that the group I visit most, whom we are now with, don't have any entrenched land rights. These rights are not written into the Constitution from what I can divine. This is a concern for me because in numerous interviews and discussions that I have had with the Bushman here they have established that in their living memory, they have always lived in this area. When I talk about this area I am talking about one hundred kilometres in any direction from here, because when you are a hunter-gatherer you have to be mobile over those kinds of distances.

So it would seem that there are no rights entrenched for them, but I feel that there should be; that is possibly an imposition on my side, but we can speak further of my philosophy about empowering people with choice. My largest concern here is that if somebody comes along to you, for example, and asks if you own a piece of land and you then produce a title deed, you are enacting a role within a Westernised infrastructure. These people don't have a piece of paper entitling them to land that they and their forefathers have been born on. It is rather like asking a tree for the title deed. Because of this, and because of their almost total unfamiliarity with Western systems dominant in the area, they are not informed about the number of choices that they can make, to enable them to make an effective decision, whatever that decision

might be. So that has shifted the focus of my visits.

Also, I am particularly interested in the bonding that happens between men when they go hunting. I believe that this bonding, harmony and great friendship and deep love for each other that is evident and is echoed in their statements about each other, is a very valuable thing that we could learn something from and that all of us, having probably derived from hunter-gatherer societies at some time or another, would have had that would have united our societies rather than disintegrating them.

Jeursen: With regards to the male bonding you just mentioned, can you tell me about the incident you experienced on a previous trip between the two men you thought were fighting?

Waldron: I was over at what we could call the shebeen here; one woman makes fiery "sugar water" which people partake of on a fairly regular basis. I went to go and change some money so that I could buy some more ostrich egg shell beadwork. While I was there a friend of mine, Monday, started fighting with another man, and I grew alarmed and tried to separate them. Then on seeing my alarm they both backed off and laughed and I realised that they were having a mock fight. Immediately Monday grabbed the other man's hand and kissed it affectionately and then they both leaned forward and kissed each other warmly on the lips and called each other friend. It was wonderful to see two men alarmed at having alarmed me, so readily able to heal any possible friction that might have been interpreted.

Also, I went hunting with Petrus Nxai, also called //Kuru!Ka, which means greenery, the day before yesterday. Just myself and him went off with assegais, and whilst I have been on hunting trips with Petrus before, I have never been an active hunter. This time I was and we ran off with his dogs. It soon became apparent to me that he needed my reassurance that we could work together. His phraseology was "Saamwerk, saam lewe" (Afrikaans - 'Working together, living together'), and he was giving me a brief bonding and education lesson about this as we were running after the dogs, telling me what to do with my spear. Once we saw a gemsbok that was brought to bay by the dogs I was to throw my spear into the hindquarters of the animal while he dealt with the "working end". We walked sometimes, we ran sometimes, and we did follow the dogs which eventually brought to bay a Bat-Eared Fox which we killed and ate later. But what was particularly interesting was how we could converse while we were hunting and the camaraderie which developed between us, which was quite unique because I had a very strong sense of a longing fulfilled. I felt a deep sense of relevant meaning and I think that he did too. In that situation when two men are helping each other to survive and at the same time to find food for their brethren there can be no room for dissent, there is great pressure for harmony and brotherhood. I believe that that can be a great healing factor for all types of people, uniting in a common cause that goes beyond many of the so-called western bonding processes.

Jeursen: Tell me about the issues of exchange and negotiation that went on the day after the hunt.

Waldron: What happened was that we (the two 4 X 4s with myself, Keyan, archaeologist/development worker, Conrad Steenkamp, Petrus and his older brother, Babba (Kort Jan) Nxai) drove for three hours to the hunting area, which is also used by a safari company. We went with these men, in their territory, with their spears, with their skills and very little of ours. We

transported them and their dogs to the hunting grounds which are some forty to fifty kilometres away from the village because the animals are pretty wary of hunters and tend to skirt around the village. Under normal circumstances they have to travel very far by donkey with water containers. They ride or walk next to their donkeys, as the donkeys carry a lot of water. After the hunt by Petrus and myself, and whilst we were eating after we had rejoined the vehicles, I realised that Petrus had been teaching me a lot while we were hunting.

I'm familiar with the basics of tracking but Petrus was teaching me the finer points of tracking, how to tell the time the animal had travelled through the area, male or female etc. It occurred to me that this knowledge, which is very valuable to me, should be paid for, because if I was asking a university professor or a professional consultant for my business for advice, I would pay him for this kind of information. So we discussed it and pre-negotiated a deal in the vehicle, coming back. However there was a misunderstanding.

Jeursen: Was it just the two of you in the vehicle?

Waldron: No, there was Kort Jan, who also speaks Afrikaans. However, he was in the back of my Land Rover looking after the dogs and Petrus was sitting next to me. I had negotiated 40 pula as a fee for him and 20 pula for each of the other hunters. However it seems that he has been a guide for a hunting safari company in this area when hunting was still allowed here. It is now going to be allowed again this year and they had negotiated 50 pula for him as the chief tracker and 30 pula for the others per day. In that negotiation I informed him that we are not one of the large safari companies that can pay for the privilege of hunting the animals out here, that we don't have those kinds of funds available but that maybe we could reach a compromise in between because we felt that the services should be paid for. At this point, his older brother Kort Jan interjected and said, "Yes, want julle is mos vriende, jy kom kuier hier" ('Yes, because you are really our friends, you come here to visit'). We haven't agreed on a final price but it will certainly be lower than the safari prices. It seems that they enjoy our company and we enjoy theirs; however we are taking up their time when they could be doing other things. Perhaps we are even impeding their progress in the hunt?

Jeursen: And they must also feel some sense of responsibility for you as you aren't experienced in hunting.

Waldron: Yes they were concerned, this was notable, especially in Petrus, who was the leader and was trying to get me to harmonise with his way. Once they were aware that we are not similar to a safari hunting group and they had of their own volition come to the conclusion that we are visitors and friends, we reached a different agreement, although a final price has not been reached, but certainly we will need to address this in the future. It also occurred to me that they have never asked before; they've allowed me to camp here for many years and I have never paid them any fee for doing so, although I have brought gifts of tobacco, sugar, tea etc.

Jeursen: You haven't been here with so many people before either?

Waldron: Yes, the most that have been here are three people; this is the highest impact on their resources. For the first time, we have some of their water from the water tank. So this is the anthropological version of fiscal creep, slowly starting to abuse their resources if we continue this way. We'll

have to watch that.

Jeursen: How has it been different for you being here with more than two other people, and particularly people that you don't know well?

Waldron: It has been enjoyable for me but I have deliberately tried to step back and not thrust anybody into doing anything. I rather wanted to let people have their own discoveries; that way I won't be biasing what they encounter, or at least to a lesser degree. It's been interesting for me to see the way that we interact with them, I think that there has been some very wonderful interaction. What I have noticed with the Bushman with this amount of people is that they have been more reticent, they haven't been as comfortable. Before I would be sitting and the tent would be surrounded with people from early in the morning, but now they have given us a lot more space. I'm not sure if there are other factors contributing to this apart from just our presence. Also my time has been divided amongst other people in this party, rather than solely focused on the Bushman. I've spent less time with them, which is not entirely satisfactory to me, there are other things that I wanted to do on this trip, but I don't resent this. I think it is just the natural outcome of there being more people on the trip.

Jeursen: Could you tell me more about your personal philosophy of why you are here, what you are doing.

Waldron: My personal philosophy is about choice. It's about providing people who do not have any knowledge of the range of choices they can make with an understanding of the further range of choices that are available to them. If you are a Bushman and you have been living in the Kalahari for hundreds of years, and in recent years been moved from one place to another when in fact this has been your native land, there is a lot of misunderstanding and frustration about not being empowered to do anything about it and not trusting those that are in power. Therefore, it is almost as though one has to be a midwife between one society and another, whereby you can protect the one society from the other by being a representative of the opposing society. I know that that is an awfully presumptuous thing to say but, in line with the philosophy of empowering with further choices, I believe that I am in a position to help the Bushman see the way that another society works and what it requires, to help them gain the rights that are basic to every human being, that they are not even aware of being in written form. Furthermore, they are not aware of the pressures that can be brought to bear on national and local Southern African states for their benefit. I feel that this has possibly been deliberately so on the part of some authorities. What we have is a situation where the first people of this land, the first recorded people that occupied this Southern African area are in fact the last people to have land rights.

I believe that is an injustice and that the basic bill of human rights can be applied here, as anywhere, and they can be empowered to understand those choices. Ultimately, if they have been empowered to make those choices and are fully knowledgeable of the implications of those choices, they can choose, for example, to give over some concessions of their land to oil mining, diamond mining, cattle farming, or whatever they choose. Ecologists of the world might recoil in horror but these people have not had a choice and, worse than that, they have not had the ability and the knowledge to make the choice. They deserve that.

Jeursen: How can that be implemented on a practical level by you?

Waldron: It can't be implemented on a practical level by myself. What I have informed them about is what is required in terms of the land acts in Botswana, the importance of firmly establishing as far back as they can in living memory their rights to tenure in certain areas. I have documented this where possible. I have also transcribed the names of people with whom they have interfaced over a period of time, who can substantiate their existence in an area. It is not going to be an easy task because they don't have that piece of paper with the title deed on it. However, they do have their presence in the area and there are some indefatigable proofs as far as I am concerned, in terms of their knowledge of the land. They can take you fifty or even a hundred kilometres from here to a place or a specific pan and they can show you something there that they know is there. Other examples are the pans that they know and the names that they call them. I do believe that they have some sacred sites which I have not yet found out about; this could also be valuable as these will have markings and relics from those times. But that will require a lot more trust.

Jeursen: Each of us in coming here seems in some way to be creating some kind of myth for ourselves. Do you think you are doing this in any way?

Waldron: I suppose it is inevitable to create or recreate a myth in terms of your attitude, how one has been brought up, what kind of life/world background one brings with one to this environment, but even if you try and strip this away and get down to basics, you are creating another myth. So I doubt that it is possible to ever strip away one's ego entirely which is what causes the myth to surround one. However, again I go back to basic human rights as the fundamental here; if that is the focus of an interaction then rights that have been agreed upon by the vast majority of the world can be attempted to be entrenched. Of course there is the argument that asks who we are to have the right to entrench rights for other people or to inform them of their rights, but then that leads to insanity ...

Jeursen: What one is doing in that case is simply establishing very basic human rights I suppose.

Waldron: I think the real dangers lurk in people who are trying to create something that was never there, or was there in some convenient distant past, the loin cloth clad Bushman surviving off the land and living in harmony with nature. I doubt that that was ever the case.

* * *

I also interviewed Tomaselli, who took //Kuru!Ka (Petrus) and Babba (Kort Jan) Kies Nxai in his vehicle to the hunting grounds. In talking to //Kuru!Ka during the three hour trip, Tomaselli established that he and other members of the community had initially seen ourselves as a resource. One somewhat inebriated man living beyond the village, for example, had insisted that Tomaselli take pictures of him in front of his stick dwelling. He then demanded five gemsbok in payment for providing Tomaselli the opportunity of picture-taking. //Kuru!Ka had wanted payment for the tracking services being offered by himself. He also pointed out a variety of places to Tomaselli where he claimed to have nearly died of thirst during various hunting expeditions when no visitors were available to drive him to the hunting area. In the hunting area itself he had rigged a 20 litre plastic container in a tree, which was refilled with water carried in one of the 4 X 4s.

Tomaselli also witnessed the interchange between Waldron and the hunters the next day on the question of payment. He remarked that it was interesting that the hunters did not seem to consider that the costs incurred in driving to the hunting grounds could be part of a barter arrangement, but wanted cash payment irrespective of these costs. This could have been because the safari company includes these hidden costs in the hire of the trackers. The Nxai brothers seemed also to have some difference of opinion on the extent of the payment requested - Babba eventually insisted that Waldron (and the rest of us) were visitors, their friends. //Kuru!Ka conceded this point rather reluctantly, Tomaselli told me.

While our intention had been to video these kinds of interactions, this rarely happened. Tomaselli, who has eighteen years of experience as a documentary film maker, especially of the 'vox pop' genre, was reluctant to record the interchange mentioned above because he felt that this was "an intimate moment", one in which Waldron and the hunters were negotiating the future of their relationship. To have fetched a camera and intruded into the discussion might have destroyed the very essence of what Waldron was searching for, Tomaselli told me sometime later.

Tomaselli told of another interaction which he observed but did not video. This occurred at one of the extensive pans in the hunting area where he, Steenkamp, Babba and another tracker were waiting for the return from the hunt of Waldron and //Kuru!Ka. Steenkamp had found some stone-age flints in the pan and was showing them to the hunters. The extraordinary thing about this discussion was that these two hunters claimed to be totally unaware of the history and use by their forbearers of these flints as arrowheads. Here was an academically educated archaeologist literally excavating the history of Basarwa hunting technology to two Basarwa who insisted that they had always used metal spear heads.

Bows and arrows are not used for hunting any more. The hunters use dogs to locate the game, and then trap the animal. They make assegais which consist of metal beaten flat and sharpened, then attached to a long, flexible wooden staff which has animal gut wound around it to attach the metal. Added to this, they make a leather pouch attached to a thong. The thong is slipped over the staff and the pouch over the spear-end to protect the point and the people who handle it. Single men riding donkeys, some with dogs, can be seen leaving the village to go hunting. They return a few days later, their dogs sometimes following in the days after that. When we asked the hunters about water for the dogs in their journey of at least fifty kilometres back to the village, //Kuru!Ka Nxai told us that the dogs were given water before the hunt. We could not make ourselves understood in our question about how long the dogs could go without water so we changed the topic of conversation. The dogs are also kept short of food to encourage them to hunt. Though hunting was clearly in evidence while we were there, the village is littered with rusting tin cans and decaying cardboard packaging. Our hosts always seemed a little surprised when they saw us burying our rubbish, and it is probable that this was dug up after our departure.

Report on Interview with Miriam Motshabise

Although Miriam Motshabise consented to an interview with me before I offered her something in exchange for information, I did feel that this means of operating was anticipated by her. Although I felt somewhat uncomfortable making such an offer, she readily accepted the exchange of clothing for the interview and did not seem to share my discomfort.

Motshabise told me that there are thirty-four students in her Form 2 class who are mostly Tswana. She expressed some dissatisfaction with her school life, saying that the other girls treated her badly, although she could not give any specific examples of this. She did say that the girls who do not like her are Tswana, and that their dislike stems from the fact that she is from a Basarwa community. She also spoke about a Tswana man in her own community who "wants to hit" her because she protects her younger sister from him. She told me about an incident that had taken place on the morning of the interview, and pointed out the man when he came to the camp site during the interview, but I could not establish the nature of the conflict.

During the holidays Miriam lives with her sister, who is married and has children of her own. There are about 15 people sharing the dwelling, a cross between a traditional Bushman skerm and a Tswana homestead, which is very crowded. Miriam has five brothers and sisters. Her mother died some years ago and her father lives in a town somewhere in Botswana and does not seem to take much interest in the welfare of his family.

Miriam expressed interest in becoming a teacher when she leaves school, but seemed confused as to whether she wants to stay and teach children in her own community or leave and go live in a town, like Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. She gave conflicting views on this to various members of our group; after telling Susan Manhando about wanting to leave the community, she later told me that she wants to remain and teach the smaller children. A school was in the process of being built while we were there, apparently to accommodate the younger children so that they do not have to leave the community to go to school at a young age. As the community has now been given bricks by the Botswana government to build the school it seems as if they are going to be given the chance to stay and settle in the area, even though it does not have a regular water source. Miriam said that some people in the community feel "sad" because they have been moved and that the government told them the area they were in before was a national park, necessitating the move.

Miriam said she finds life in the community difficult because there is not enough water and she has to fetch wood every day, a task which she does not enjoy. She told me that a Council truck comes every week with 5 000 litres of water for the whole community. (This water is transferred into two large water storage tanks, one of which has a tap at an incorrect angle so that only small containers can be filled, and the other a tap which is very difficult to turn on, impossible for most people). When I asked Miriam how the water is shared out, she told me they fetch it in containers. When asked if the distribution is equal she could not really answer my question, although she did say that her grandfather is in charge of the distribution of water. (From what we observed, it seemed that people came and went freely from the water tank, so it may be that there are (unspoken) agreements as to the sharing of water). By the end of our six day visit, our 500 litres of water had been exhausted, and we were granted permission to siphon some from the tanks, in exchange for one 20 litre plastic container.)

When asked if she feels part of the Basarwa community, Miriam said yes, although she had expressed some doubts about this in an earlier conversation we had. I also asked her what she thought of our group coming to the area. She said she was pleased to be able to speak English with someone as she wants to learn the language. As for the other people in the community, she said most of them thought we had come simply to buy things from them.

(Waldron stated that on occasion he had spent upwards of 1000 pula (\$US350) on purchasing artifacts during his previous visits.) Miriam also said, however, that some people realised we had come to "visit" as we had arrived with Waldron, who had come before.

Miriam said that when someone in the community becomes ill they usually go to the clinic at a formal settlement. Some of the people in the area have tuberculosis and Miriam said that people had died from the disease. When we arrived earlier in the week Waldron was informed that the previous 'headman', Hiwa Nxai, had died of a chest disease. Some of the older people apparently think the doctors at the clinic will kill them; this may have stemmed from some sick people going to the clinic and not coming back or dying anyway. She said it is mostly men who contract the disease.

People in the community apparently get married at about 25, not before that, as at 21 they are supposed to build their own house, man or woman. Miriam said that when she is 21 she will move from her sister's dwelling and build her own hut with the help of her friends.

Miriam spent a lot of time with Catherine Tomaselli. This interchange is documented in the photographs and video, in which they can be seen teaching each other folk dances and songs, watched and joined by the assembled children of the village. This expressive intercultural interchange occurred during the two mornings after we arrived. The boys played a hunting game, in which one of the boys pretended to be a Gemsbok while the others took on the role of either hunter or dog. The girls played a variety of games, including the well-documented melon-tossing game. As the week drew on, Catherine and Miriam spent less time dancing and more time talking to each other. Catherine was invited by Miriam to the Basarwa werft on occasion, but was not invited on wood gathering expeditions or to participate in other chores. Catherine, Susan Manhando, Dorothy Roome and myself walked down to the nearest pan one morning with Miriam to look at a dried-up borehole. Miriam was very quiet on this occasion and remained so for the rest of the day.

Comments on the Encounter

So what then was the nature of our encounter? Language and cultural barriers, as well as time constraints, prevented us from interacting as fully as we might have liked most of the time. I would have liked, for example, to speak to the women of the village about their status within the community, but my self-consciousness and their shyness prevented this. I did not know how to approach them, and felt hesitant to force an interaction. The difference between what we have been led to believe about 'Bushman' communities, through the media and other sources, and the reality of the lives of the people we met cannot be emphasised enough. As an outsider, the idea of living in such naturally beautiful surroundings may seem appealing, but it is not possible to romanticise the kind of poverty, lack of rights and daily hardship we saw the community undergoing. Amenities many take for granted, such as water and electricity, were starkly highlighted for the group, and the tension this sometimes created within our group made it easier for us to understand the tensions which may arise in a community permanently deprived of such amenities.

To arrive in a remote community, stay for five days and then vanish again did not allow for any real communication to take place. Most of us were, it seems, left at the level of interfacing without understanding, and what we experienced led to questions rather than answers. We also have to ask ourselves what we

can offer the community. Copies of the photographs taken have been sent to Miriam, whose postal address at school is the only one we could obtain, but we have no way of knowing what kind of impact we had on the community. Future trips to the same area to carry out further research and to build up some kind of relationship of mutual respect and trust between the community and ourselves would be necessary for encounters of this kind to have any substantial significance for the Basarwa or for us.

Notes

1. We use the collective name the group gave to themselves, which is Basarwa. The preference for 'Bushman' underlined by Hunter Sixpence from the Kuruman Development Trust, Ghanzi, (about 200 kilometres from where we stopped) at the "People, Politics & Power: the Politics of R representing the Bushman People of Southern Africa" Conference, Johannesburg, August 1994, has since been revised. Sixpence stated that the "Bushman" peoples were discussing the naming amongst themselves and that until their Commission reported on the matter, the term 'Bushman' was quite acceptable. At "The Dancing Dwarf From The Land of Spirits First Centre For The Study of South African Literature And Languages Interdisciplinary Conference", University Of Durban-Westville, September 1995, a visiting academic from the University of Botswana, L Molamu, challenged speakers on the use of the terms "San" and "Bushman", saying that the term Basarwa is now being widely used by those communities.

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