

Anthropology and its Construction of the 'Other'

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The West has long been fascinated with exploring 'unknown' and 'exotic' places and its people, such as the peoples of Papua New Guinea, Ecuador's Indians, the Waorani, and the Bushmen of Southern Africa. The Western imagination about the non-European 'Other' has been nurtured by the personal accounts of media professionals, geographers, archeologists and anthropologists and has resulted in popular myths and stereotypes about the latter. Referring to Harper (1990), Tomaselli (1996) states: "Early anthropology was strongly influenced by the then prevailing biological evolutionary theory, and its practitioners sought to classify and compare societies, much as scientists were doing in studies of plant and animal species" (98). Anthropology's early study of non-Europeans from a First World perspective has reinforced popular stereotypes and has tended to trivialize and exoticize the cultural 'Other' in written and visual accounts.

The main concern of this essay is to theoretically problematize discourses of 'Othering' in an African framework, by highlighting different debates on representational processes and forms of the intellectual construction of the 'Other'. The emphasis of this paper is clearly on theoretical assumptions on the issue of 'Othering'. However, practical examples drawn from filmic representations of the Bushmen and a fieldtrip, which was undertaken by the Graduate Programme for Cultural and Media Studies to the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in the Northern Cape of South Africa on September 2000, will underlie and support some of the theoretical claims. Therefore, the theoretical questioning of the anthropological constitution of the 'Other' will be related to the topic of ethnographic film as the field practice of visual anthropology, in some instances. Examples of the ways, in which the filmed image both exhibits the Bushmen's 'Otherness' and is able to subvert 'Otherness' to the achievement of the Other's ends will be given.

The discussion hopes to look at the suppression of the needs and interests of 'Others' as a feature of classical approaches to anthropology. In order to achieve this, the first section will try to establish the anthropological context for the discussion of filmic discourses of 'Othering' in terms of anthropology's approach to science and its study of images. Here, issues, such as the legitimization of visual anthropology as a sub-discipline of anthropology, anthropology's colonial heritage and the shift to a more reflexive mode of representation come to the fore. The paradigm shift toward reflexivity in critical anthropology, which occurred, roughly, in the 1960s, will play the central role of this section.

¹ There exists a controversy on the naming of the Bushmen or San. In this essay, I will refer to them as 'Bushman' as this is how members of the Kruiper family in the Kalahari identified themselves.

Anthropology and the study of images

"The history of anthropology has its own rhythm; it is more closely linked to colonialism and neo-colonialism than any other science. The end of political colonialism in the 1960s has hurt anthropology's authority more than that of other disciplines. However, now that anthropology questions its capacity to define authoritatively the non-Western other, it returns to the metropolis with fresh approaches of the Western self. Nowadays, ethnography and anthropological theory are developed to investigate and criticize the central metaphors of Western identity ... Thus, because of its sociohistorical position on the boundaries of Western culture, anthropology promises a more radical reflexivity, which can be of use to all scientists" (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 2-3).

The discipline of anthropology, the study of cultural knowledge, has, since its 'invention' in the 19th century, undergone a paradigm shift from its 'classical' form to 'critical' anthropology. Classical anthropology has had a colonial heritage (see, for example, Tomaselli, 1996: 3) and has been based on a positivist, cartesian world-view. Premises and epistemological assumptions, such as scientific, value-free knowledge and theory about its object, the 'Other', derived from fieldwork observations and recordings and the 'brokerage' of cultural difference (ibid.), characterize classical perceptions of the anthropological study of cultures². However, critique of classical anthropology's authority with its claim to 'political innocence' arose in the late 1960s by radical voices and their 'reflexivities' (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 2). The consequence was the 'reinvention' of anthropology through the emergence of critical anthropology, which illuminated anthropology's role and professional legitimization in colonialist and neo-colonialist practices.³

"Critical anthropology is hard to define, as it corresponds to no distinct social entity, subdisciplinary boundary, content or method" (Pels, 1991: 6), but Marxism and feminism are, arguably, the most influential streams occurring from this development. "Many critical anthropologists found a rival theoretical legitimization in Marx. The relegation of culture to the domain of ideology ... made room for a rival conception of difference which stressed the power differences created by global capitalism" (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 7). While the Marxist stream of critical anthropology investigates the global subjection of the world to capitalist domination, feminism illuminates and critiques the assumption of woman's universal subordination. Therefore, both Marxism

² Fabian (1985) states that anthropology, since the nineteenth century, has been viewed as a "science of disappearance", meaning a science of disappearing societies. In this sense, culture, understood as the guiding concept of anthropology, "has always been an idea post factum, a notion oriented toward the past ... descriptive of a state of affairs (and often a status quo), a nostalgic idea at best" (90).

³ Referring to the German anthropologist Adolf Bastian, Fabian (1985) emphasises the political nature of anthropological knowledge, in the sense that anthropology took an active part in the colonization of so-called "primitive societies" (see also the section on 'Visual Discourses of Othering') by investigating them (10). Strengthening Bastian's perception of anthropology, Fabian points to the "inescapable, necessary connection between knowledge, domination and, ultimately, destruction" (ibid.).

About the authority of the anthropologist, Pels & Nencel (1991) state "Political critique, reflexive analysis and the experience of multiple voices had combined to produce doubts about the authority of the anthropological expert, whose line of descent includes sexist, racist and imperialist ancestors" (1).

and feminism aim at shifting the power relations on a global scale and, in more particular terms, between observer and observed.⁴

However, Pels & Nencel (1991) argue that "in a sense, Marxists and feminists encountered a similar predicament in relation to non-Western others as the critique of classical anthropology had brought forward" (10). According to this view, classical anthropology, proclaiming value-free social science, kept silent about its political alliances with colonialism and its politics of knowledge, understood as the claim to professional status on the basis of a privileged access to 'other cultures'. Similarly, Marxism and feminism initially, although not keeping silent, failed to problematize their politics of knowledge. "While they did not hide their non-academic engagement behind a neutral object, the claim to speak from the viewpoint of the oppressed *did* conceal a politics of knowledge, a claim to authority which gave Western academics the power to define problems and solutions" (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 11).

Certain issues raised by Marxists and feminists, such as unequal rights of 'powerful' observers and 'disempowered' observed, seem to have impacted on visual anthropology and its emergence as a contender for status as an academic discipline. For example, "the methodological claims and counterclaims made with respect to ethnographic film have become prominent in recent years as people globally have begun to assert their right to a greater say in the ways in which their lives are represented" (Tomaselli & Shepperson, 1997). Visual anthropology, the analysis of patterns of culture through representation, has never been completely incorporated into the mainstream of anthropology.⁵ "Most academics continue to disparage media in favour of written modes of recording and communication. Yet the use of film and photography within social and anthropological analysis has been occurring for over a hundred years" (Tomaselli, 1996: 1-2).⁶ It seems that, as a result of its 'unofficial' status, visual anthropology teams up with other disciplines, such as visual sociology, cultural studies or film theory.⁷

In spite of its 'immaturity' (Tomaselli, 1996: 10), there exists a substantive body of literature on visual anthropology (see, for example, Heider, 1976; Hockings, 1995; Worth and Adair, 1972; Ruby, 1996; and Tomaselli, 1996), leading to 'emergent sophistication' (Tomaselli, 1996: 10) at communicating anthropological knowledge, documenting and conceptualising all patterns of culture that are visible, such as ritual and ceremonial performances and nonverbal communication. While visual anthropology lacks a tradition of a commonly accepted all encompassing theory

⁴ Pels & Nencel (1991) argue that Marxism and feminism also shared a similar epistemological approach: "Their stories gained their validity from the fact that they could claim to speak from a subordinate position: the world's truths were deemed easier to apprehend from the bottom up than from top down" (10).

⁵ Tomaselli (1996) identifies two impediments to anthropology's delay in accepting the benefits of the new tool (ethnographic, moving film) in recording social and cultural behaviour: Firstly, the expense of filming, the dangers of using inflammable nitrate stock, the extreme clumsiness of the technology, slow film speeds, and other technical limitations. And, secondly, "the almost total lack of ethnographic film theory through which to develop a production methodology" (3).

⁶ Ruby (1996) states in this respect that visual anthropology "is trivialized by some anthropologists as being mainly concerned with audiovisual aids for teaching. The anthropological establishment has yet to acknowledge the centrality of the mass media in the formation of cultural identity in the second half of the twentieth century".

⁷ See, for example, Tomaselli (1996) who discusses visual anthropology in relation to visual sociology and film theory, and Ruby (1996).

(Worth, 1981),⁸ its origins are to be found historically in positivist assumptions and notions of an objective reality and scientific truth.⁹ "Since 1974 anthropology has ... changed, and the more naive hopes expressed for "objective" film records are heard more rarely today ... It is more generally accepted that the positivist notion of a single ethnographic reality, only waiting for anthropology to describe it, was always an artificial construct" (MacDougall, 1995: 129). As in mainstream anthropology, the result of this change in perception was a shift in emphasis from positivist thought to a more contemporary and critical one, based on a reflexive manner.

This 'critical' view approaches the study of visual anthropology in more social terms and "emphasizes the socially constructed nature of cultural reality and the tentative nature of our understanding of any culture" (MacDougall, 1995: 129).¹⁰ Being socially constructed artifacts, ethnographic films, for example, are political and ideological tools and they stand for and stress two things: the culture of those filmed as well as the culture of those who film.¹¹ The idea of a reflexive ethnography and the reflexive and/or participatory use of technology (see, for example, Ruby, 1996) seems to have been a natural quest in response to an ideological understanding of representation. The aim of this reflexivity has been the alienation of "viewers from any false assumptions about the reliability of the images they see" (Ruby, 1996) and a shared authority of anthropologists with the people they study. According to Tomaselli (1996), reflexivity was welcomed as a "means to protect subject-communities from thoughtless academic and commercial exploitation" (13). He argues, however, that "apart from Jean Rouch's existential integration of himself into practices, behaviour and beliefs of his subjects, the concept and application of reflexivity remains grossly under-researched, under-theorized, often naive and uncomfortably forced in practice" (ibid.).

⁸ Tomaselli (1996), for example, meshes visual anthropology, visual sociology and documentary/ethnographic film (including photography), incorporating production and reception, textual analysis and contextual research (21), "in need of a unified theory" (23). "Clearly, a method of methods is required to overcome this conceptual fragmentation and inter-academic othering. *Semiotics*, the study of how meaning is made, offers one way of redesigning the differentially inflected lenses and replacing them with an inter-perspectival one" (22).

⁹ The positivist perspective believes in the neutrality, transparency, and objectivity of reality. According to this view, "reality can be captured on film without the limitations of human consciousness. Pictures provide an unimpeachable witness and source of highly reliable data" (Ruby, 1996). However, Tomaselli (1996) points out that, in semiotic terms, "different contexts of sign production and reception ... question the positivist idea that signs necessarily have totally fixed meanings" (35), due to historical processes into which individuals are born and of which they may be unaware. Examples are conflicting historical, social, economic, political, and psychological discourses, which in turn can also change "over time and across space ... Signs and their meanings are bound by social, cultural and historical experiences of groups of people who agree on broad meanings at particular moments" (36).

¹⁰ This understanding opens the opportunity to view, for example, filmmaking and photography as cultural behaviour and negotiation of meaning via the method of imaging.

¹¹ Tomaselli (1996) defines ethnographic film "as the means (academic practices) by which the discourses of one culture (the observed) are recorded, described and understood by another (the observers) culture" (41). He further states: "Without discursive access to the observed's culture through appropriate interpretive strategies applied by the observers, it may not be possible to reach an understanding of how the observed understand themselves" (ibid.).

Visual discourses of 'Othering'

"Indigenous groups, generally affirmatively imaged anthropological *subjects* in the modern era, become decentred and irrelevant, de-authored, discursive anthropological *objects* for consumption in the post-modern era. They are at the mercy of a new form of mass-mediated, confetti-like, post-scientific gaze, entertainment for post-industrial readers and audiences. Some of these readers are located within the academy" (Tomaselli, 1996: 18).

The constitution of the anthropological subject as the 'Other' has its roots in the early days of the Industrial Revolution (Tomaselli & Shepperson, 1997).¹² Since then, the tradition of intellectually constructing the 'Other' from a First World perspective has developed in ways which reflect the relation between the depicted societies under observation and those from which the observers originated. As Fabian (1990) points out "the Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but *made*. To me, investigations into 'othering' are investigations into the production of anthropology's object" (208). Academically dominant ways of describing 'Others', for example, discredited or suppressed the way these 'Others' preferred to describe themselves (Tomaselli, 1996). The debate over how social scientists should label the 'Bushmen' is a case in point.¹³

Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992) identifies the question of the representation of 'Otherness' as "part of the general question of representation and stereotyping in human cognition, perception, memory and communication" (225). Hence, representations of 'Otherness' are a special instance of the general problem of stereotyping.¹⁴ "Otherness, or alterity, is constituted on the one hand by *identity* – boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for the individual or group – and on the other by *hierarchy*, for the *difference* between identity and alterity, or self and others, is not neutral but charged with meaning and value" (225-226). Anthropology has differentiated between the 'Other' and the Western 'Same', defining 'savage man' as its object, and regarding the 'same' as the subject.¹⁵ While Fabian (1985) argues for an acknowledgement of the dialectical involvement of Self and 'Other',¹⁶ Tomaselli (1996) notes: "It is this Euro-centrism through which much of the anthropological enterprise has worked and which has

suppressed any sense of indeterminacy of translation between the observers and the observed" (Tomaselli, 1996: 93).¹⁷

An example of this Euro-centrism is the constructed myth of Africa's darkness, as exemplified, for instance, in movies such as *Denver Africa Expedition* from 1926 (see, e.g., Gordon, 1997; and Tomaselli, 1996).¹⁸ Tomaselli (1996) states that the notion of Africa's 'darkness' emerged towards the end of the 19th century, fusing all the stereotypical images of Africans, such as primitivism, cannibalism, gluttony, fetishism, sexual promiscuity, and heathenism – a notion that even remains today.¹⁹ Often, such paradigms serve the dominant political and economic interests in the social scientist's society of origin and of ruling classes in general, which seek to require knowledge about the dominated object (Tomaselli, 1996: 93). "Academia has, in many instances, become the myth-making process where factories called universities shape scientific explanations and descriptions in terms of dominant scientific 'paradigms'. These paradigms, as social and public texts, are really Western forms of myth" (Tomaselli, 1996: 94).

An example of ruling classes, seeking to acquire knowledge about dominated subjects and its suppressed, can be found in Southern Africa's colonial history in general and the Apartheid system in particular. The ruling powers created, reinforced and used popular myths about Bushmen as being 'sub-human' in order to justify their domination and colonial rule over them, manifesting itself in the suppression of their identities and the seizure of their land. Visual and written representations of Bushmen as 'infantile', 'authentic' 'First Peoples', 'living in the past' and leading a 'hunter/gatherer' experience,²⁰ have resulted in more contemporary, romantic myths and tend to reduce 'Bushman' culture to essences – contrary to their 'real', 'modern' existence. Processes of reductionism, naturalization and stereotyping characterise these myths, which aimed at maintaining the social and symbolic order. The Bushmen themselves seemed to be excluded from this order, which – as has already been mentioned – served as a justification for domination and colonial rule. The Bushmen myths have encoded sets of ideas, assumptions and conclusions, which reflect the broader social and political consensus on the way in which Bushmen have been understood and received as being 'harmless', Stone Age inhabitants.

According to Pieterse (1992), the negative stereotypes of non-Europeans by Europeans, such as savagery, bestiality, cannibalism and incest, were initially true of Europeans themselves (230). Westerners, then, were not very different from what anthropology considers the 'Other' and it has been argued that anthropology seeks to discover the collective and cultural unconscious of its own societies²¹ (Tomaselli, 1996: 17). It follows that the study of the non-European 'Other' equals Western anthropologists studying

¹² According to Fabian (1985), anthropology had become a science with an object "before field research became institutionalized as a requirement for professional certification and as a criterion validating knowledge of other societies" (13). With the institutionalization of fieldwork, the following happened: "Anthropology ... threw a wrench into the wheels of its theoretical machine" (ibid.) – because field research, according to Fabian (1985), is a process which starts with confrontation. It does not serve as a positive act in order to acquire "knowledge, skills, and habits which will enable a person to grow *into* a group or society, a role or status, a class or nation" (15). Instead, field research serves to apprehend the Other and Otherness by "negation of Self and the Same" (ibid.). Therefore, what was observed was not necessarily what was thought.

¹³ The paradigmatic set for the Kalahari people as Southern Africa's original inhabitants is 'Bushman', 'hunter/gatherer', 'San' or 'Khoisan'. "Which paradigms are chosen by the media or academics depend on whose interests in society they are serving – capital, a specific political party or academic constituency, the poor, and so on. Selection may even indicate a lack of awareness of the way that specific meanings have collected connotational meanings, whether positive or negative" (Tomaselli, 1996: 39).

¹⁴ Pieterse (1992) defines the concept of stereotypes as "oversimplified mental images" (225).

¹⁵ For an explanation of the roots of the myth of African savagery, see, for example, Tomaselli (1996: 92).

¹⁶ By acknowledging the involvement in a dialectical process between Self and Other, Fabian (1985) hopes to "make anthropology not less but more realistic".

¹⁷ Harris (1991) suggests a move away from the self-other dualism to a "recognition of difference in a more Saussurian sense, in which no signifier occupies a privileged position, and thus in which the Eurocentric 'we' are no longer a standard from which the other deviates" (159).

¹⁸ *Denver Africa Expedition*, made by the Universities of Denver and Cape Town and the South African Museum, is a "telling manifestation of the patronising Western gaze at the 'dark continent', seen to be partially populated by Bushmen people who, its producers claimed, sometimes looked and behaved like animals" (Tomaselli, 1996: 6).

¹⁹ Tomaselli (1996) refers here to Stoller (1992). For contemporary usage of the notion of darkness, see, for example, the media coverage of Lettrix (a German newsagency) on Sub-Saharan Africa (<http://www.lettrix.de>), which regularly refers to Africa as the 'dark continent'.

²⁰ I will explain these myths and elude on them at a later stage (see the section on 'difference').

²¹ Tomaselli (1996) identifies Rouch's use of the anti-logic of surrealism in his films as perhaps the only sustained attempt of "twentieth century academia to address this problem" (17).

their own societies. Fabian (1990) agrees: "Our ways of making the Other are ways of making Ourselves. The need to go *there* (to exotic places, be they far away or around the corner) is really our desire to be *here* (to find or defend our position in the world). The urge to write ethnography is about making the *then* into a *now*. In this move from then to now, the making of knowledge out of experience occurs. Both movements, from here to there and from then to now, converge in what I called presence. This is the way I would define the process of othering" (209).

Difference

The most elementary aspect of professional authority of anthropology was the postulate of cultural difference and the subsequent necessity to translate this difference into anthropological, Western terms (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 13). The analysis of the 'Other' is rooted in intellectual imperatives and discourses which were obsessed with 'difference', 'primitivism', understood as a 'lack' of civilisation, and 'the exotic'. 'Others' "are semiotic representations made to look different from 'us' as insiders. The 'Other' is the lack, the Left Out, the Unsaid, the Incomplete. ... The way the 'Other' is constructed is, of course, basic to the entire anthropological enterprise" (Tomaselli, 1996: 42). According to Said (1978), the 'Other' was subjected to a complicated apparatus of creating difference, which was part of occidental strategies to reproduce its global power, and which served the anthropologist's professional interests (Pels & Nencel, 1991: 13).

Discourses indicating racial 'difference' and 'primitivism' resurface, for example, in dominant myths about the Bushmen, which portray them as 'living in a primitive way', wearing leather skins and, when not busy hunting for food, gathering around a fire. The average coffee table book on Bushmen communities and Bushmen existence serves as evidence. Reduced to its essences, the successful and aesthetically beautiful movie *The Great Dance* (1999) by Craig and Damon Foster essentialises Bushmen identity to one of hunting and tracking existence. (It has to be stated, though, that the film also touches on other issues, such as land dislocation and gender relations.) However, this perception might represent a mere academic approach to the film, which does not correspond with the Bushmen's view of themselves and their own identity. Belinda Kruiper, an interviewee on the fieldtrip to the Kruiper family in the Kalahari Desert, for example, spoke passionately about the positive reaction of 'her' male group to *The Great Dance* (1999). According to her, they showed a high level of identification with the representation of the hunting Bushmen in the movie, referring to it as a 'real' interpretation of their hunting experiences and feelings in terms of Bushmen identity.²²

Constructions of 'Bushman-ness' are part of society's network of signs and value systems and are, therefore, not peculiar to the film industry, but also endemic to other industries, such as the tourism sector. However, they often seem to be linked to visual representations of the Bushmen. General representations of the Bushmen take on a naturalised, fixed form within a culture. They become conceptualised as if 'true' because constant repetition in a variety of forms and locales validate the oft-repeated image and lends credibility to mythologised forms (<http://www.museums.org>). Constructions of 'Bushman-ness' seem to evoke a quest for authenticity, difference and exoticism in the observer, be it the filmmaker or tourist, and the uncritical believe in the

²² Should this perception truly coincide with the majority of Bushmen's own identification, then Hall's first model of identity, as elaborated on by Anthea Simoes (1999) in an Honour's assignment, would apply: Identity, according to this model, is fixed, stable, fully constituted, separate, distinct and rooted in history. The second model, however, argues for an understanding of identity as always relational, incomplete, and, therefore, in process.

truth of images of Bushmen. "The idea of an essential Africa, represented by its 'First Peoples' becomes ... either a quest to undergo or an object to possess. Seeing the real people becomes incidental as long as the myth and associations with an imagined memory for a lost past are visible. In this way concepts of Bushman-ness are not unique but conform to an imagined universality associated with the special qualities of 'primitives' and isolates" (ibid.).

Distance in Time and Space

"Generally speaking, anthropology appears to have been a field of knowledge whose discourse requires that its object – other societies, some of them belonging to the past, but most of them existing contemporaneously in the present – be removed from its subject not only in space but also in time. Put more concretely, to belong to the past, to be not yet what We are, is what makes Them the object of our "explanations" and "generalizations" (Fabian 1985: 14).

Anthropological writing, according to Fabian (1983), has systematically used temporal categories in its rhetoric of 'Otherness'.²³ Concepts of time seem to be one of the most powerful metaphors of 'Otherness', placing the 'Other' at an earlier point on a linear time-scale than the 'Self' and its society of origin. This does not only differentiate, but also distance the non-European 'Other' from the European 'Self', while at the same time reinforcing the notion of the former's 'backwardness'.²⁴ Harris (1991) links the nature of personal identity to time concepts²⁵: "Positing the existence of different times evokes the possibility of racial differences between social groups both in their understanding of the person and human agency, and in their experience of the world. And this in turn leads to comparison with our own time concepts; if our time is different from the time of others, and if our time is scientifically based, then by extension the time of others is not" (148). Therefore, the dualistic concept of time in terms of the 'Same' and the 'Other' is not neutral, but incorporates a notion of judgement according to the seemingly different stages of (temporal) development.

Fabian, who has extensively theorized the notion of time (cf. 1983; and 1985), offers an antithetical understanding of the conceptual structure of anthropology, in which the "savage man" has been the object (seen as without history, writing, religion, police and morals) and the "civilised man" the subject (Fabian, 1985: 11). He opposes the following structures, which form "integral parts of one and the same logical structure" (ibid.): the civilised and savage, present and past,²⁶ subject and object. These

²³ According to Harris (1991), many of the contradictory pulls of anthropological writing are exemplified by the topic of time. "As one of the Kantian fundamental categories of the understanding, it fascinates both by its ubiquity and its invisibility. It is universal and yet it seems to offer the possibility of entering into 'different worlds', so that it is a common means for expressing the exotic and cultural difference. As such it is one of the grounds on which the eternal anthropological debate between universalism and relativism is played out."

²⁴ The development model of 'modernization', dominant from the 1950s, with its perception of traditional society (vs. modern society) in terms of backwardness is a case in point.

²⁵ Harris (1991) defines the treatment of time in anthropological writing as a "means for reiterating difference which in its most elemental form is a function of identity and non-identity: 'I am like this, I am not like that.' However, in practice, difference is rarely neutral, thus 'I/we are not like the other' becomes either 'We are better than they are' or 'they are better than we are.' In anthropological discourse both these positions are articulated at the same time and this is in part what explains the pleasure of it, as anybody who has taught the subject knows" (155).

²⁶ As soon as the anthropologist enters the world of the "savage society", it does no longer exist in its "original, undisturbed condition" (Fabian 1985: 11).

oppositions not only indicate difference, but also distance (remoteness in space and time). As a motivation for anthropology's concern with these oppositions, Fabian (1985) identifies a link to the anthropologist's own experiences in the era of industrialisation and bureaucratic rationalisation: "The more doubts Western intellectuals developed about the progress of civilization ... the more important the savage became as an antithetical figure. In neutral, semiotic terms the savage became the signifier in an anthropological discourse whose signified remained Western society in transition" (Fabian 1985: 12).²⁷

One of Fabian's central arguments is that ethnographic writers not only use temporal categories to construct 'Otherness', but that they reproduce an 'allochrony' (Fabian, 1985: 13), which denies the living reality of the societies under study. In exchange, Fabian proposes the concept of 'coevalness', which involves the recognition that all human societies are of 'the same age'. "Time is made to lose its capacity to found coevalness, radical contemporaneity, which would have as a consequence that we experience the primitive (or his permutations: non-literate, underdeveloped societies, peasants, etc.) as co-present, hence as co-subjects, not objects of history" (Fabian, 1985: 14).²⁸ The public discourse of the 'Bushman-ness' is a case in point. Filmic examples of the denial of the Bushman's contemporaneity are movies like *The Gods must be Crazy* (1980, 1989) by Jamie Uys, John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1958) and, to a lesser extent, Paul Myburgh's *People of the Great Sandface* (1985). To differing degrees, they created the anthropological myth of the Bushmen being frozen in time, by portraying them "as an isolated pre-modern people" (Tomaselli, 1996: 95)²⁹ – applying the, in Tomaselli's words, 'orthodox anthropological interpretation of the San' (ibid.).

Another example of this orthodox anthropological interpretation is the travelling exhibition De Buschmanner, organised by the South African Museum in Capetown, for exhibition in several European cities. The photographs and their effect on the viewer, whether or not consciously intended, is to place the indigenous people in a timeless world. "Eternally fixed in sepia, the Khoikhoi are shown to inhabit an "authentic" pre-contact past which has little to do with the present of the dominant, picture-making culture, culturally shared technological change, or current political and economic realities" (<http://www.museums.org.za>).

For Fabian, ethnography, the practice of field research, is essentially subjective and intersubjective. The anthropologist, carrying out empirical practice, cannot distance himself from his object of study.³⁰ His/her preconceived ideas, for example the notion that indigenous societies do not co-exist in time, but live in the past, influence the outcome of his/her empirical research. This is not scientific in the empirical sense, but rather an "interpretative turn" in anthropology (Fabian, 1985: 19). Moreover, it creates dominant ideas and categories of non-Western people, such as the 'pre-modern', 'hunting' Bushmen. In the case of media constructions, for example, these categories

often appear as 'natural' and common sense and contribute to the success of films as the above stated (Tomaselli, 1996: 43). Therefore, "anthropology's major achievement has not been to construct the Other as a semiotic, hence scientific, object but to assure through the prescription of field research that our allochronic discourse on the Other is permanently contradicted by our empirical practice" (Fabian, 1985: 20).

The term of empirical practice in the context of this discussion relates to discursive practices, such as ethnographic writing and filming. According to Crawford (1992), these forms of representation are two different products of the same anthropological process, whose producers are engaged in and governed by conditions of intersubjectivity. Crawford seems to not only agree with Fabian on the issue of subjectivity, but he also bases his model of 'Othering/Becoming' (1992) on Fabian's triadic model of producer-process-product (1971), which identifies the 'Other' as the product of the representational process(es) of the anthropologist, the producer. In agreement with Fabian, Crawford (1992) refers to anthropology and film as two-stage processes of representation, which he defines as paradoxical in the sense that they require, at the same time, presence and absence of the anthropological subject and/or object to produce meaning. Crawford refers to these processes in terms of the distance between subject and object or, in Fabian's words (1990), between the knower and the known, and names them 'Othering' and 'Becoming'.

By 'Becoming' is meant the process of becoming the 'Other', of interpellation into the 'Other', whereby the anthropologist distances him/herself from his/her own culture. This 'sub-process' can be described in terms of 'presence'. The term 'Othering' refers to the re-interpellation into his/her own culture or, in other words, into the historical 'same' by the anthropologist's distancing from his/her assumed subjectivity. Crawford (1992) argues that one cannot pinpoint when these processes of knowledge ('Othering' and 'Becoming') begin or end, although they are temporarily and spatially divided. For him, it is not the two poles of the axis, which is interesting, but the relationship between them. Fabian (1983) has described this relationship: "On the one hand we dogmatically insist that anthropology tests on ethnographic research involving personal prolonged interaction with the Other. But then we pronounce upon the knowledge gained from such research a discourse which construes the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal. The Other's empirical presence turns into his theoretical absence" (xi).

Crawford makes an important point by highlighting the 'contradiction' of the two representational processes involved in empirical practice. Anthea Simoes, for example, faced this problem on our trip to the Kalahari Desert. In spite of the shortness of the visit to the Kruiper family, she managed to build up a relatively personal relationship with some of her interviewees, such as Anna Festus and, to a lesser extent, Belinda Kruiper. She found herself in a process of identification (and 'Becoming') with the 'Other'. After returning to the university enclave, Anthea Simoes had to come to terms with writing her thesis about the people she related to on a personal level and her findings on them. She, therefore, has to distance herself again from her personal, subjective experiences of 'becoming' the 'Other' and 'slip back' into her own cultural 'same'. It seems important, though, to note that the encounter between observer and observed and its nature changes the observed in a certain way and always leaves traces behind, for example in terms of overcoming or reinforcing stereotypes. A re-interpellation into the cultural 'same', therefore, can never be complete.

²⁷ The "savage" could only function as a signifier, since he faced vanishing as a result of his "discovery" by the "civilised man" – a process that Fabian calls the 'intimate connection between knowledge and victimisation'.

²⁸ Harris (1991), however, notes that Fabian's declaration "that "only through coevalness can ethnological knowledge be produced" (Fabian, 1983: 32, 71) is perplexing since he gives not a single example of coevalness in any writing" (160), thus leaving the reader to suppose that there is no such thing as ethnological knowledge (ibid.).

²⁹ According to Tomaselli (1996), this idea was taken to the extreme by the South West African Administration by wanting to 'conserve' the bushmen by means of a theme park where they were supposed "to live as neolithic relics to prevent the 'biological crime' of their extinction" (124).

³⁰ One of the few filmmakers to acknowledge this intersubjectivity in speech and filming is the French filmmaker Jean Rouch.

Idealization

Another important finding of the trip to the Kalahari Desert was that, although early Western discourses of 'Othering' have systematically depicted the 'Other' in a negative light, the 'Other' can also be subject to idealization and romanticization. Apart from Professor Tomaselli, our group consisted of three female students and one female staff member. Only one of them is black. While I can only speak for myself, I wish to believe from the romantic comments that were made during the trip that none of us white students was completely free from idealizing the Bushmen and their fight to define their own presence. Our desire to experience the mythical, authentic way of life in contrast to our own cultural background seemed to be awakened by Belinda Kruiper, who held our attention for four hours by her eloquence, outspokenness and insight. She seemed to nurture our romantic longing for the 'real' Bushmen, who lives in harmony with nature and resists the 'dangers' of corruption by Western influences, commercialisation and commodification. In a way, the visit to Blinkwater not only fulfilled our search for a spiritual adventure and the discovery of the exciting and unusual, but also nurtured the 'Nanook theme' of humans struggling with a hostile environment for their survival.

Harris (1991) agrees that anthropologists, far from devaluing the cultures they study by reference to an unambiguously positive model of Western culture, are much more likely to idealize them and characterize them positively – as a critique of Western culture and Eurocentrism (154). According to this view, anthropology works against the negative stereotypes of the non-Western 'Other' to present a positive and sympathetic account. However, Harris (1991) points out that idealizations or romantic accounts still see the 'Other' as the 'Other' and 'exotic', even if construed in favourable light, and, therefore, distance the Western 'Same' from the non-Western 'Other'.

"When the object of anthropological study is presented in idealized light, it has the effect of creating for the imagination of the reader an authentic, unfragmented and secure world in which to escape from the unpalatable realities of Western culture. Rather than constructing the self of the reader as coherent and uncontradictory through projecting the unacceptable elements onto another culture, in this case unity and plenitude are achieved *through* – rather than in opposition to – the other. It adds to anthropological writing a twist which Said's and Fabian's arguments, for example, do not allow for" (ibid.).

Anthropology's and mainly Western practices and institutions have for roughly two centuries defined the image and representation of the Bushmen. As traditional arguments and established myths about the Bushmen and their lifestyle have evolved from perspectives of Europeans and other non-Bushmen people, ideas about them need to be understood as the social constructs of 'Others', which reflect and reveal relations of power and domination. Common romantic preconceptions locating Bushmen as exemplars of primitive society, surviving as unique relics of 'Stone Age' and 'First People', as well as Western depictions of Bushmen as one of Africa's under-developed groups are entrenched in systems of thought which have become part of the dominant social structure. These concepts have formed a symbiotic relationship each informing the other which has resulted in the creation of a stereotyped image of Bushmen (www.museums.org.za).

The intellectual construction of the Bushmen in terms of difference, distance in time and space and idealization is based on a simplistic dualism concerning the cultural 'Same' and the exotic 'Other', which can never be neutral or value free. The striking divergences in the way anthropologists and filmmakers refer to the culture of the 'Other' and their own culture and the values attached to it signify this. Further, the

depiction of the 'Other' in terms of difference and distance in time and space, on the one hand, and idealization, on the other hand, is a good illustration of the paradox, which lies at the heart of anthropological knowledge. As Harris (1991) puts it: Anthropology combines "an Enlightenment passion for universal knowledge with a Romantic espousal of the relativity of cultures and disavowal of a single generalizable category of reason" (Harris, 1991: 154).

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Abstract



Visual Anthropology: Article

Anthropology and its Construction of the 'Other'

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The West has long been fascinated with exploring 'unknown' and 'exotic' places and its people, such as the peoples of Papua New Guinea, Ecuador's Indians, the Waorani, and the Bushmen of Southern Africa. The Western imagination about the non-European 'Other' has been nurtured by the personal accounts of media professionals, geographers, archeologists and anthropologists and has resulted in popular myths and stereotypes about the latter. Referring to Harper (1990), Tomaselli (1996) states: "Early anthropology was strongly influenced by the then prevailing biological evolutionary theory, and its practitioners sought to classify and compare societies, much as scientists were doing in studies of plant and animal species" (98). Anthropology's early study of non-Europeans from a First World perspective has reinforced popular stereotypes and has tended to trivialize and exoticize the cultural 'Other' in written and visual accounts.

The main concern of this essay is to theoretically problematize discourses of 'Othering' in an African framework, by highlighting different debates on representational processes and forms of the intellectual construction of the 'Other'. The emphasis of this paper is

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clearly on theoretical assumptions on the issue of 'Othering'. However, practical examples drawn from filmic representations of the Bushmen and a fieldtrip, which was undertaken by the Graduate Programme for Cultural and Media Studies to the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in the Northern Cape of South Africa on September 2000, will underlie and support some of the theoretical claims. Therefore, the theoretical questioning of the anthropological constitution of the 'Other' will be related to the topic of ethnographic film as the field practice of visual anthropology, in some instances. Examples of the ways, in which the filmed image both exhibits the Bushmen's 'Otherness' and is able to subvert 'Otherness' to the achievement of the Other's ends will be given.

The discussion hopes to look at the suppression of the needs and interests of 'Others' as a feature of classical approaches to anthropology. In order to achieve this, the first section will try to establish the anthropological context for the discussion of filmic discourses of 'Othering' in terms of anthropology's approach to science and its study of images. Here, issues, such as the legitimization of visual anthropology as a sub-discipline of anthropology, anthropology's colonial heritage and the shift to a more reflexive mode of representation come to the fore. The paradigm shift toward reflexivity in critical anthropology, which occurred, roughly, in the 1960s, will play the central role of this section.

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