

THE MAKING OF THE “BUSHMEN”

Robert J. Gordon
National University of Lesotho

Abstract: The image of the Bushmen has altered several times over the last 150 years. These alterations reflect fluctuations in the relationship between power and knowledge rather than ethnographic “realities.” Some mid-Victorian scholars did not distinguish Bushmen from Khoi pastoralists. When Bushmen posed an impediment to German ambitions in Southwest Africa, they came to be represented as remnants of a primordial race, either dangerously bastardized or so pristine they could never be assimilated. Once white hegemony was assured, the “San” could safely become “harmless people.” In delineating these changes, the author notes that the supposedly anomalous genitalia of the Bushmen played a part in the construction of racial difference, revealing white sexual anxieties similar to those reflected in the images of Jew and Gypsy in Nazi racial science.

Résumé: L'image du Boschiman s'est modifiée plusieurs fois dans les cent cinquante dernières années. Ces changements reflètent plutôt les variations de relations entre pouvoir et savoir que des réalités ethnographiques. Certains érudits du milieu de l'ère Victorienne ne distinguaient pas les Boschimans des pasteurs Khoi. Lorsque les Boschimans entravèrent les ambitions de conquête allemandes en Afrique du Sud, on en vint à considérer les Boschimans, comme les derniers représentants d'une race primordiale, dangereusement abâtardis ou si primitifs que toute assimilation aurait été impossible. Une fois l'hégémonie blanche assurée, les “San” devenaient sans risque “un peuple inoffensif.”

En présentant ces changements, l'auteur remarque que les parties génitales, soi-disant anormales des Boschimans, ont joué un rôle important dans l'élaboration des différences raciales, mettant à jour les anxietés sexuelles des blancs. Ce sont ces mêmes anxietés que l'on voit reflétées dans les images du Juif et du Tzigane dans la science raciale des Nazis.

Men discern situations with particular vocabularies, and it is in terms of some delimited vocabulary that they anticipate consequences of conduct.
 — Mills 1940:906

Introduction

Judging by the number of pages which the great “Kalahari Debate” occupies in prestigious academic journals, a future historian of the current era would probably conclude that it was one of the besetting intellectual issues of our time. In brief, the debate concerns the status of those people most commonly labelled “Bushmen” or “Kung” who are surely one of the most heavily commoditized human groups in the annals of science. They are widely touted as the classic textbook example of what the Western world perceives to be “hunters and gatherers.” The orthodox view is/was that they provided a unique and valuable window into how our neolithic forebears lived. Recently this view, someone would even say paradigm, has been challenged by scholars starting with Schrire (1980), and most eloquently by Wilmsen (1989), who argue that far from being “timeless hunters” Bushmen or San were actually very much part of a wider social economy in which they figured most pre-eminently as an underclass. The debate has been acrimonious, indicative perhaps that more is at issue than personal reputations (see, e.g., Wilmsen 1989; Solway and Lee 1990; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990; Smith 1990; Lee and Guenther 1991).

The main aim of this paper is simply to emphasize that this current controversy did not drop ready-made from heaven but indeed has a lengthy intellectual genealogy, and that a consideration of some aspects of the socio-cultural milieu of the “primitive forerunners” of the current debate is important for understanding its impact. The debate by our primitive forerunners engaged some of the finest minds in Europe and served to propel those labelled Bushmen to the forefront of scientific interest. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see not only how trivial some of the issues became but more importantly how the debate had deadly consequences for the people who were objectified. If this paper succeeds in sensitizing current participants and interested on-lookers to the importance of critical self-reflection it will have achieved its main purpose. Our debates can have consequences beyond the halls of academe.

From Impoverished Pastoralists to Neolithic Remnants in 40 Years

In 1889 Sir Francis Galton, “one of the most skilful of travellers and explorers” (*The Advertiser and Mail*, January 29, 1878), second President of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and influential Victorian man of science, reflected the conventional wisdom when he claimed that Bushmen were simply impoverished Khoi pastoralists. His statement carried the added authority of

the fact that he had explored what is now Namibia in 1851 and personally encountered "Bushmen":

There is no difference whatever between the Hottentot and Bushman, who lives wild about the hills in this part of Africa, whatever may be said or written on the subject. The Namaqua Hottentot is simply the reclaimed and somewhat civilized Bushman, just as the Oerlams represent the same raw material under a slightly higher degree of polish. Not only are they identical in degree in features and language, but the Hottentot tribes have been, and continue to be, recruited from the Bushmen. The largest tribe of these Namaqua Hottentots, those under Cornelius, and who now muster 1,000 guns, have almost all of them lived the life of Bushmen. In fact, a savage loses his name, "Sean," which is the Hottentot word, as soon as he leaves his Bushman's life and joins one of the larger tribes, as those at Walfish Bay have done. (Galton 1889:42)

Yet within 40 years orthodoxy had changed: the prominent South African publicist Hedley Chilvers could claim the Bushmen to be one of the Seven Wonders of Southern Africa (Chilvers 1928), and the traveller Makin was moved to complain that:

As is usual with any disappearing race, the Bushmen have now become an absorbing ethnological study to many pundits in the professional world. Every year white men come to the edge of the Kalahari desert, camp out there with an array of cameras and scientific impediments, and try to entice the nomads of the desert to visit the camp. Tobacco is scattered as lavishly as crumbs to ensnare birds. And the few Bushmen who are in touch with civilization, a type that like a nameless dog will hang about the place where a bone may be flung at them, come into camp and are scientifically examined. (Makin 1929:278)

How and why did this rapid transformation in the academic status of the Bushmen occur? This paper works towards answering such questions by examining aspects of the socio-cultural milieu in which academics "made the Bushmen." This "making of the Bushmen" is the product of discernible socio-cultural factors which are firmly located in history. This paper analyzes the interplay between this imagery, policy and history.

The Great Bushman Debate of 1906-12

A convenient starting point for understanding this transformation from impoverished Khoi to persona *sui generis* is that which Wilmsen and Denbow (1990) term the "First Great Bushman Debate" which raged from 1906 to 1912 and featured the (upstart) geographer Passarge, who argued that Bushmen were integrated into a wider economy, and the prominent anthropologist Fritsch who felt that Bushmen were unique representatives of a former epoch. As at the Contemporary American Anthropological Association, papers on the status of Bushmen at the staid Berlin Anthropological Society always provoked an animated discussion. Most of this debate was in German. Indeed

while English anthropologists were still largely operating in the antiquarian tradition, Germany had more professional anthropologists than the rest of the world combined. Until the First World War Germany led the world in anthropology. The Royal Anthropological Institute, despite blowing the trumpet of Imperial service, was comparatively unimportant. In 1920, for example, during the heyday of enlightened colonialism, the Royal Anthropological Institute could boast only some 484 members while the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, founded in 1869, could boast some 895 ordinary members, 103 corresponding members and 5 honorary members.¹ Smith (1977) has shown how structural features inherent in the social organization of German anthropology – the dominance of the Berlin intellectuals, generational rivalry, regional differences and ideological disparities – made such a “debate” inevitable. Yet this debate is symptomatic of an important issue and the intellectual detritus it spawned is still with us. It was more than simply a debate about abstract intellectual principles and has a long history dating back at least to the pages of the *South African Commercial Advertiser* of 1829.

The making of the Bushmen occurred during a period of profound social change. It was the period in which newly founded anthropological societies in the metropole and colonies were struggling to consolidate their often precarious position in “the Parliament of Science.” For example, anthropological societies were created in Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow, Vienna, Florence, Stockholm and Washington. The famous *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* was launched in Berlin in 1868 and the German African Society was founded by Bastian in 1871. In the professionalization of the discipline amateurs no longer carried weight and they rapidly moved to the audience. Their activities exemplified the interplay of ideologies and interests at home and abroad. In the 1880s physical anthropology was dominant in both France and Germany. The context in which these discussions took place was also important. The discourse was fashioned by the “new” science that promised a new way of controlling and understanding nature and was allegedly capable of providing a vigorous and single answer. Science was gradually accepted as authoritative. Despite the outside image of consensus there was little unanimity in key areas. Physical differences were thought by many to be the key to classifying human races and craniometry was accepted as a measure of human intelligence. A major tension in the shaping of modern anthropology during this period was how to get at the “mind” of Primitive Man. On the one hand, there were the philologists who felt that the way to do this was through the study of language. Not surprisingly they tended to be largely of missionary persuasion since they had a vested interest in translating the Bible into indigenous languages (Du Toit 1984), while the people struggling for the definition of “scientist” tended to go via the anatomical route. The political

and social predilections of the latter group were epitomized best perhaps by the likes of Virchow and the Anthropological Society of Paris (Harvey 1983). Scientists and especially anatomists in Europe had opportunities to examine genitalia of Bushmen brought over for ethnographic exhibitions. These exhibitions were in effect statements as to what people felt was important and in reality reinforced the already existing literary stereotypes. One show which attracted a lot of medical attention from the likes of Virchow, Muller and Plischka in Berlin was Farini's *Troglodytes*. (Observe how the very term troglodytes reinforced prior scientific conceptions given that it referred to denizens of the area below the earth, i.e., the area geologically prior in time to the present.) Such a focus on genitalia would occasionally be used as a boundary maintenance device by the anatomists to separate them from the missionary dominated philologists. More importantly, Germany was heavily involved in acquiring colonies, most notably in Southwest Africa, an area in which most of those labelled as Bushmen were living.

Various intellectual arguments and assumptions in Europe served to push and mould Bushmen as anthropological object. Whether one subscribed to the great chain of being or to evolution, Bushmen occupied an important place. As Prichard put it:

Writers on the history of mankind seem to be nearly agreed in considering the Bushmen or Bosjesmen of South Africa as the most degraded and miserable of all nations, and the lowest in the scale of humanity. . . . [T]hese people are so brutish, lazy, and stupid, that the idea of reducing them to slavery has been abandoned. . . . It is no matter of surprise that those writers who search for approximations between mankind and the inferior orders of the creation, fix upon the Bushmen as their favourite theme (Prichard 1851 Vol. 1:177-178).

In the world of European intellectual life there were many factors which served to propel Bushmen to scientific prominence. In the emerging scientific professionalization, two approaches—that of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (roughly translated as humanities and social sciences) represented by philology, with Wilhelm Bleek its most distinguished representative, and *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) as represented by the physical anthropologists—shared the discourse on the Bushmen. While physical anthropology was to dominate, both used ethnology to plot their hypotheses, for, as Cust pithily put it, "the Physical features are therefore *determinative* of a Race; the Languages and Religion are only *descriptive*" (Cust 1883:51).

First into the field was the philologist Bleek. In 1852 he had predicted that Africa would be as significant for philology in the second half of the century as the Orient was during the first half and considered that an adequate understanding of Khoi was so crucial and long overdue that he expressed a willingness to spend years among the people of southern Africa (Ryding 1975:6).

Shortly thereafter he managed to ship out to Africa and spent the rest of his short life in Southern Africa trying to fulfill his own prophecy.

As a philological protégé of Baron Bunsen and Max Mueller, Bleek was initially interested in determining “how far a system of sounds like that of the Bushmen shows points of coincidence with sounds produced by the apes resembling man” (Bleek 1869:53). Folklore was to be his instrument for penetrating the mind of these “original people.” After some study he argued that on linguistic grounds Bushman language was distinct from Hottentot (Khoi). The ideological impact of his theories linking Bushmen and Khoi to the “ancient Coptic tongue of Egypt” (Wilmot 1895:47) was immediate and long-lasting, undergoing continuous tinkering to keep abreast of metropolitan theoretical fashions. Thus by 1875 he classified the Hottentots as kindred to the Bantu and distinct from Bushmen (Bleek 1875). Bushmen were not the lowest stage of humanity but in many ways closer to European culture (Bleek 1874) and this tied in well with archeological arguments of the day that saw European rock art as being created by a Bushman-like race. Indeed less than five years after Boucher de Perthes first identified prehistoric stone artefacts, Langham Dale, the Superintendent of Education in the Cape Colony, associated Bushmen with stone tools and thus suggested that they were representatives of the prehistoric era (see, e.g., Lubbock 1913; Keith 1914). As such, Bushmen were locked into an unchanging pristine condition in which history was ignored. Lubbock echoed the conventional wisdom of the era: “The Australians, Bushmen, and Fuegians lived when first observed almost exactly as they do now” (Lubbock 1913:431).

Linguistic theories pioneered by Bleek and later elaborated by Meinhof dovetailed well with the ongoing physical anthropology discourse to give credibility to the so-called “Hamitic hypothesis,” while at the same time reinforcing the notion that Bushmen represented some sort of *Urrasse* (another term difficult to translate, generally glossed as primeval race).

After Bleek’s death, the major Bushman entrepreneur was Gustav Fritsch whose classic *Die Eingeborenen Sud-Afrikas anatomisch und ethnographisch beschreiben* (1872) was based on some three years’ fieldwork in South Africa. He and Bleek admired each other’s work and regarded each other as authoritative. Fritsch was co-founder with Virchow of the Berlin Anthropological Society. In sharp contrast to the monogenetic orientation of the Bleekian philologists, the Virchowian physical anthropologists were polygenists. But both approaches had a vested interest in emphasizing the distinctiveness of those they labelled “Bushmen.” While dubbing them the “unfortunate children of the moment,” Fritsch (1872) emphasized that the term Bushman did not refer to some *Waldbewohner* but to *Waldmensch*, an unidentifiable and dubious zoological category somewhere between humans and apes.

A central part of this *naturwissenschaftliche* discourse concerning genitalia emerged out of earlier academic work and was justified by Linnaeus’ famous

taxonomy based on reproductive organs. Often it amounted to pornography dressed up in scholarly drag (see, e.g., Winchell 1880:71-73, 253; Keane 1896:251). Bushman genitalia were seen as clinching their intercalary role between humans and animals (see also Ploss 1935:335). Bertin is representative of such views. Basing himself on Fritsch (1872), he accepted that Bushmen were "anthropologically a distinct branch among the African races" (Bertin 1886:53). The distinctive characteristic of Bushmen was, he argued, the nymphae or *tablier*, and, when found among Hottentots, were simply evidence of intermixture (Bertin 1886:55; see also Waldeyer 1885). Bushmen, Bertin believed, were related to the original Egyptians since both shared the *tablier égyptien*. "Racial emnity" between Bushmen and Hottentots served to perpetuate these differences (Ratzel 1897:259). This view became dogma. Thus wrote Vedder, a pioneer Namibian missionary-philologist: "From the earliest times they were despised, hated, and fiercely persecuted by all other natives. . . . Distrustful of everyone who belonged to another tribe . . . they live, even today, their miserable Bushman life, *just as their ancestors have lived it for centuries*" (Vedder 1938:78).

By 1906 debate was largely about how to scientifically distinguish Bushmen from Hottentots. In short, what was unique about the Bushmen? By then it was generally agreed that the *tablier* was found to be so widely distributed in Africa that it could not be used as a differentiating feature. Craniometrical differences between Bushmen and Hottentot were insignificant and thus the issue had to be resolved by other means. Within a few years the focus had shifted to male penises as the differential. Especially influential were the research and photographs of Bushman prisoners by Seiner (see, e.g., Seiner and Staudinger 1912; Seiner 1913; Poch 1911, 1912) who argued that the semi-erect penis of the Bushmen was a distinctive racial characteristic and that Bushmen could be identified by the angle of penis: "Exceptionally interesting is the circumstance that Bushmen do not have pendular penises like the other human races, but are, in non-aroused circumstances, horizontal like four-footed mammals" (Siener 1913:288, author's translation).

It was a one-sided debate: by 1914 most scholars accepted the distinctiveness of Bushmen largely on the basis of their genitalia.

While few academics today concern themselves with Bushman genitalia, it is a topic which has become submerged hovering around under the surface of published discourse and still influencing the way in which we shape our academic investigations. It surfaces in odd places, indicating its widespread distribution. For example, an article by one of the greatest Afrikaner intellectuals, Eugene Nielen Marais, written in the between-war years and reprinted in 1965, ostensibly on Khoi literature, includes this strange but remarkable second paragraph:

Today the wild Bushman affords the strongest existing proof of the polygenetic theory of human descent. . . . [T]he profound somatic differences between the Bushman and the lowest human race precludes all idea of a common species. *The strange structural peculiarities in the sexual organs would alone constitute a divergence from type unparalleled in nature* [and then to re-emphasize the point]. . . . And it is not only the structure of the sexual organs which separate the Bushman from all human races. . . . (Marais 1965:40²).

Shaping the Facts to Fit the Theory?

But in accounting for the making of Bushmen one needs to move beyond the notion of science being the replacement of ideas by even better, more accurate or truthful ones. A potentially useful approach, I suggest, is to treat these scholarly treatises as accounts (Lyman and Scott 1970), that is, we should consider them as a form of linguistic utterance: “We must approach linguistic behavior, not by referring to private states in individuals, but by observing its social function of coordinating diverse actions. Rather than expressing something which is prior and in the person, language is taken by other persons as an indicator of future actions” (Mills 1940:904).

In short, did this Bushman debate serve any “social functions”? The decline of the term Bushman and its substitution by San illustrates not only the increasing mystification of the other but also the necessity of considering socio-economic context. San is glossed by contemporary academics as “original peoples” but when this interpretation was first popularized during the late 19th century it referred not so much to “first people” as to “*Urrasse*.” Is there any significance in the fact that the fashionable gloss of “original people” became stylish when scientists were interested in Bushmen as representatives of the paleolithic? “Original people” is simply one of many glosses for the meaning of San. Theophilus Hahn (1881) is usually cited as the definitive authority for this gloss. But the matter is much more complex. In his 1881 monograph Hahn writes:

The meaning of this term is not quite intelligible, and I frankly confess that, after nine years, of which I have spent seven amongst the Khoikhoi (Nama), I did not succeed in arriving at a quite satisfactory etymology, and I must still adhere to the interpretation which I first gave in the *Globus*, 1870, where I traced the word Sa-(b) to the root sa, to inhabit, to be located, to dwell, to be settled, to be quiet. Sa(n) consequently would mean Aborigines or Settlers proper. . . . (Hahn, in Nienaber 1989:831)

However, in 1870 Hahn says of San:

The meaning is unclear. . . . The nearest explanation is pariahs, outcasts, pursued [*Gehetzte*], an explanation which is grounded in reality. A second explanation is based on the root sau, “to follow” in which case they were the underlings [*Knechte*]. Wallmann, formerly Rhenish Mission Inspector, derives Sab from the root sa, “rest,” and explains this as the original “*Sesshaften*” inhabi-

tants. Also this explanation is not to be ignored. (Both citations derived and translated from Nienaber 1989:831)

Nienaber claims that Hahn's gloss of San as "Original Inhabitants" was copied from Wallmann who used it more as a term denoting teasing in the sense of "people who enjoy rest." Nienaber, certainly no radical, notes that this change in gloss was politically expedient to Hahn as it fit in well with the emerging theory that the Bushmen were the original inhabitants of the country who were then dispossessed by the Khoi-khoi and Herero and thus provided a valuable justification for European conquest of Khoi and Herero in Namibia. Such an interpretation calibrated well with Hahn's political activities in Namaqualand at that time (Nienaber 1989:834).

From the start ethnographic observations were fashioned by metropolitan orthodoxy. The fact, for instance, that many Bushmen were actively engaged in copper mining was noted in such a way as to allow it to slide into intellectual insignificance. Examples are surprisingly common when one consults original sources. Here I simply provide two more obscure illustrations. When Brochado entered northern Namibia in 1850 he found:

On [Chief] Nangolo's periphery about 100 to 125 km away are *Kwankhala* (Kede and Kung) who contrary to most other members of this race, are settled and possess large copper mines and have copper in abundance. Only the [o]Ndonga trade with them (trading for copper and tobacco, beads and *pungo* [cannabis]). However, the Ondonga do not precisely know where the mine is. Even the powerful Haimbili of Kuanyama is not allowed direct contact with them. (Brachado, in Heintze 1972:47; see also Schinz 1891:293ff.)

The very notion of Bushmen being engaged in copper mining, clashed with the standard stereotype expected of Bushmen. Thus, the Reverend Hahn noted his first encounter with mining Bushmen in these terms: "We met two Bushmen today who were taking copper ore from Otjorukaku to Ondonga *on their own account* where they would sell it for corn, tobacco, and calabashes. *This I never expected from Bushmen*" (Hahn, July 18, 1857, as recorded in Hahn 1985:1034, author's italics and translation).

Far from being pristine hunter-gatherers many Bushmen were actively involved in mining, trade and other long-range activities. Indeed, some were willing and active accessories to the widespread and spectacular slaughter of elephants in the northeastern Kalahari. By 1860, when the renowned hunter Frederick Green and trader Axel Erikssen had established their hunting headquarters at Grootfontein, the town closest to what is now "Bushmanland" (Vedder 1938:423), it was clear that even the so-called "pristine Bushmen" of the most isolated parts of the Kalahari were involved in this ecologically destructive booty capitalism. So intense was the hunting in this area that within five years Green was forced to move his hunting headquarters north to Ondonga (Stals 1968). On Green's death an American trader in Namibia,

Gerald McKiernan, eulogized: "Frederick Green was one of the most famous of African hunters, Gordon Cumming or no other could compete with him." It was estimated that in his lifetime he killed between 750 and 1 000 elephants (McKiernan 1945:93).

Another notorious hunter, Hendrik van Zyl of Ghanzi, visited the Gautscha area (the heartland, if you will, of the later "wild" Bushmen) in 1874 (Tabler 1973). Van Zyl quickly discovered that the area north of Gobabis to the Okavango River, that is, the area where some of the most famous studies of Bushmen were later to be done (Marshall 1975; Lee 1979), was a "true hunter's paradise" (Burger 1978:42). He employed well over 100 Bushmen (Trumpelmann 1948:16), many of them "shootboys." Indeed, when van Zyl established his "world record" for killing over 103 elephants in one day (and over 400 elephant in 1877 alone), most of them were killed by his Bushman shots. This slaughter took place largely in the area immediately north of the present-day Bushmanland, and one traditionally held by the Bushmen. These kills yielded over 8 000 pounds of ivory (Tabler 1973:116).

Bushmen were aware of what was happening. In 1920, the oldest Bushman at Tsintsabis police station complained to a visitor: "Elephants, lions and game of all kinds abounded and have only disappeared since the white man came and shot them in large numbers" (H.J.K. 1920).

They could hardly not have been aware: so sickening did he find the situation in the German colonial heyday, that the Governor's brother, Paul Leutwein, complained that "almost all white hunters are 'Aasjaeger' (carrion hunters)" and that the "Boers sit on their ox-wagons, the Bible in the one hand, the rifle in the other and shoot all the game that there is to see" (as cited in Tabel 1975:89).

Bushmen played an active role in this path of ecological devastation. Many hunters and traders appreciated the qualities of Bushmen as hunters and trackers and, above all, as faithful servants; thus they armed them and encouraged them to hunt for ivory and ostrich features. Late 19th-century travellers encountered Bushmen armed with rifles hunting in the Okavango region who, on a good day, could net 145 pounds of ivory (von Moltke n.d.). Indeed, some "great white hunters" were so afraid of elephants that they left all the hunting to Bushmen (Chapman n.d.). It was also common for traders to trade ivory from Bushmen (Chapman 1868:157). In 1878 the South African Resident, stationed at Walwich Bay, reported that the Damaras (Herero) had dropped out of the hunting trade, preferring to develop their considerable herds of livestock than move further afield in search of game:

Today the Bushman is using the heavy elephant gun with a deadly effect as ever did Damara, Griqua, or Namagua, and the Damara ponders over the thought of what the Bushman will do with his gun when the game is gone. He

sees the trader pass by with the goods he once bought, to enrich tribes beyond over whom he feels he can lord it no longer. (Cape Colony 1879:136)

A strong case can be made that Namibia supplied a large proportion of the earlier ivory used in the United States for pianos (Gordon 1992). While the risks in both the ivory and cattle trades were high, so were the profits: estimates range as high as between 1 500 percent (Lau 1987) and 2 000 percent (Helbig 1983:38).

Bushmen as Problem in the Settler State and the Contribution of Academics Thereto

One consequence of this activity was that when the German state decided to place settlers in the northeast of Namibia they encountered fierce armed resistance from Bushmen and this is the immediate context in which the great Bushman debate of 1906-12 must be seen. It was a time when the German settler press was full of reports about the "Bushman Pestilence" and strident calls for Bushmen to be declared *Vogelfrei* (beyond the realm of the law and thus by definition "non-human"). There were two main sources for this settler moral outrage. First, a rash of stock thefts and, eventually, murder of Whites occurred in the prime settler farming area of Grootfontein. Secondly, numerous migrant workers returning to Ovamboland and the Kavango River region after a spell in the newly opened mines were robbed by Bushmen and this had a devastating impact on sorely needed labour recruits. Eventually the supposedly liberal governor, Seitz, issued a *Verordnung* (J.nr 26883/5391 dated October 24, 1911) allowing firearms to be used against Bushmen for the slightest case of insubordination. Most of Seitz's commanders felt that even this draconian measure did not go far enough. Of course, of greater importance was the fact that after the Nama-Herero War of 1904-06 in which the Nama and Herero were ruthlessly destroyed, Germany decided that one way to prevent uprisings was through massive white settlement. This, in turn, generated a further demand for cheap labour. Forager groups like Bushmen with their capacity to "drop out" of wage labour were the most significant grouping which refused to be drawn into this process. While slaving at their uneconomical small holdings in the Grootfontein district many of these inexperienced settlers projected their wildest fantasies upon the "vagabond Bushmen." And in this their fantasies sometimes meshed with those of influential academics like Seiner.³

Attempts at controlling vagrants by issuing metal "dog-tag" passes were so unsuccessful that settlers, the press and the *Landestag* even discussed the possibility of tattooing Bushman vagrants but this suggestion was dropped largely because of "technical difficulties" (Stals 1984).

Seiner's intervention was directly concerned with the issue of whether the German government should create a Bushman reserve in its Namibian col-

ony. He argued persuasively that almost all living Bushmen, by his penile measure, were hybrids of “bastard buschleute” (see, e.g., Schapera 1930:58) and thus were not an *Urrace* worthy of protection. The only way to “tame” Bushmen, Seiner argued, was to have the men deported to the coast and children and wives placed on farms where the children could be “rehabilitated,” divorced from their traditional milieu. Bushmen were in no danger of extermination by farmers because they had a vast “natural reserve” in the Kalahari. A far greater threat for them was bastardization with various elements in this “no-mansland.” At the same time, by having women placed on farms they could start miscegenating with local Blacks and this would lead to an overall better type of labourer (Seiner 1913a). Seiner’s ideas enjoyed widespread and influential support. His rival and colleague Siegfried Passarge had already concluded that Bushmen were totally unreliable (Passarge 1907:2). Bushmen, as a race, were on a closed development path. They were incapable of adopting to agriculture or pastoralism (Passarge 1907:132). Passarge concluded that the only policy in a settlement situation was to exterminate them: “What can the civilized human being manage to do with people who stand at the level of that sheep stealer? Jail and the correctional house would be a reward, and besides do not even exist in that country. Does any possibility exist other than shooting them?” (Passarge 1907:124, author’s translation).

Schultze, the renowned and influential geographer-anthropologist who occupied the Chair of cultural geography at Jena and coined the term *Khoisan*, summed up:

If we consider the natives according to their values as cultural factors in the protectorate, then one race is immediately eliminated: the Bushmen. The Bushmen lack entirely the precondition of any cultural development: the drive to create something beyond everyday needs, to secure or to improve systematically and permanently the conditions of existence, even the most primitive ones like the procurement of food. In the course of centuries he has come into contact with cultures of all levels; in conflict with them he has often enough had the knife put to his throat; tireless missionaries have attempted to save him from such struggle, to protect and to join him as the modest member to a civilized community; but the Bushman has always run away. He feels better out in the Sandveld behind a windscreen of thin leaf thorn-bush than in a solidly built house with a full pot and regular work—as long as he is *free*. Colonists cannot count on such people; they let them live so long as they at least don’t do damage. But when they don’t fulfill this requirement, they have been killed off like predatory game. The idea has been considered to preserve the Bushmen in reservations as the last remnants of the primordial past of the human race, just as elsewhere attempts are made to save endangered animal species. But we won’t be able to afford the luxury of leaving fallow the required land areas and everything else which man requires for the maintenance of the species without inbreeding. (Schultze 1914:290)

But even those more liberal academics opposed to what Seiner stood for framed their pleas for a Bushman reserve precisely in terms of the scientific value of Bushmen as a unique race. The Kalahari was seen as the last asylum of the *vertreiebenen Ureinwohner* as von Luschan put it when he first mooted the notion in 1908 of creating a Bushman reserve in the "interest of science." The *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* (DKZ) took up the theme and argued that the suggestion was also applicable to Namibia (DKZ 1908:91). The following year, Lt. Gentz, an officer with many years of experience in South West Africa, made a strong plea: "With the deathknell of these people ringing, one wishes that there was a reserve for them, as there are for the lazy Herero and Hottentots. A reserve where they can live in peace and where they can maintain their lifestyle so important for scholarly research" (DKZ, 1909:452).

Dr. Siebert, a government medical doctor, also made a strong appeal.

(Bushmen) are unsuitable as settled employees and the relinquishment of their nomadic lifestyle spelled their doom. While they were of little economic value, they were of large scientific value. And even the Cameroons had a law which protected gorillas by placing them in reserves. (November 24, 1911, State Archives, Windhock ZBU 2043)⁴

While Seiner was expounding on the nature of "bastardization," the *Landestag* passed a law which not only banned mixed marriages but nullified all previous such marriages as well.

Deviance Amplification: From Difference to Genocide?

The parallels between these events and those which happened in Nazi Germany are striking, and indeed Hannah Arendt has controversially (see Gann and Duignan 1977 for a critique) argued for lodging the origins of totalitarianism in the colonial experience. Certainly events in Namibia *anticipated* those in Nazi Germany to a remarkable degree. Indeed a number of criticisms of Arendt's thesis are voided when it is noted that, like anthropologists, colonial administrators differentiated between *Buschleute* and *Eingeborene* in their discourses and that the focus of genocide is frequently on those labelled as "vagabond" Bushmen, "wandering" Jews or Gypsies, people who are believed to be beyond the realm of ordinary social control.

The Bushman discourse was premised on their alleged fundamental *unasimilability* in which genital distinctiveness played a central if, at times, submerged role. As a largely male-dominated discourse, Bushman studies demonstrated the power of *males*. Surely there can be no better display of the deployment of power than making people strip to have their genitals measured in 19th- and 20th-century Europe? George Mosse would argue that this male fixation was intimately connected to the nature of bourgeois respectabil-

ity and German nationalism (Mosse 1985). Interestingly, most of the participants in the great Bushman debate rapidly established radical conservative credentials. Seiner, Poch and Passarge were well-known activists for restoring greater Germany and many of the most prominent Nazi racial-hygienists cut their academic teeth on the Bushman debate (Proctor 1988; Muller-Hill 1989; Weindling 1990). Indeed, the last scientific article written by the most renowned racial hygienist Eugen Fischer concerned Bushman genitalia.⁵

Portrayals and policies toward Bushmen and Jews are frighteningly similar, and there are striking parallels of Bushman and Jewish imagery in this scientific discourse. Muller-Hill (1988) has noted that the sexuality of mental patients and Gypsies alarmed and frightened German scientists for a long time and argues that hating and exterminating Jews had its origins in ill-comprehended aspects of sexuality, which is why the extermination of Jews and Gypsies took on an almost ritual-like quality while the Slavs were worked to death. While there is not enough evidence to postulate a definite connection between this genitalic fixation and proclivity towards totalitarianism, recent work by Claus Thewelweit on male fantasies is suggestive and this topic certainly bears further investigation.

The relationship between the dehumanization of the other and genocide is well established, but what has intrigued recent commentators on Bushmen is how dramatically their image has changed from that of "Vermin" to "Harmless People." This change is generally attributed to two factors: first, since Bushmen no longer constituted a "threat," colonizers could afford to beautify them; secondly, perhaps in a rather self-congratulatory tone, anthropologists consciously worked to alter the image. There are, however, a number of problems related to this simplistic approach. For example, in Namibia the first white commercial hunters had a generally favourable image of the Bushmen, while at the Cape at the same time they were regarded as "obnoxious weeds." It was only with the arrival of white settlers in Namibia that a distinctive negative stereotype embedded itself. Moreover the social position of the expounder of the stereotype within the social hierarchy is more important than the notion that the given stereotype changed because of the cumulative impact of knowledge about Bushmen. Most of the works cited to support the thesis of the progression from brutality to beauty are aimed not at the general public as much as at a specific yet diverse metropolitan audience. As such, the changing image appears to be more the product of the increased alienation/urbanization of the writer than portrayal of the actual situation. Indeed, working through archival material, it is clear that the stereotypes held by farmers on the frontier zone have not changed that much. If anything, the divide between those who think that Bushmen were good workers and those who think the opposite has deepened. During the German colonial era these contradictory tendencies were already readily apparent. These differences are

also reflected in academic work on Bushmen. The point is that the image of the Bushmen, whether they are portrayed as vermin or beautiful people, has *always been that they are ambiguously, strikingly different* (Guenther 1980). Our point is not to debate whether anthropologists can do anything but emphasize difference by the very nature of their intellectual enterprise. The point is simply that anthropologists should be constantly aware that their work can be used, perhaps as unwitting handmaidens, in the project of destroying people. It can take many forms as in contemporary South Africa where over the last decade there has been a strong emphasis on the romantic "pristine" Bushman image. Perhaps a major reason lies in the realm of international politics and the recently ended, low-intensity guerilla war in northern Namibia coupled to Black unrest in South Africa. Such romanticization exonerates the beleaguered Whites, in their own eyes, from accusations of racism. As David Maughan-Brown points out in his excellent discussion on this topic, the "noble savage" thrives in times of colonial war because there is a need for a statement that all is not spoiled in situations of destruction. Apart from catering to the nostalgia for the good, old days, the "Noble Savage" serves as an ideological compensatory mechanism when the previously pacified colonized revolt and disturb the stereotypes of the colonizers (Maughan-Brown 1983).

In sum, this paper is a plea and a demonstration of the necessity that the current debate should enlarge its scope. Rather than be exclusively concerned with the implications of research for our own intellectual positions and prestige, we should also consider the implications of the debate for those who are labelled Bushmen. The moral is simple: we should be aware that academic words have actionable consequences.

Notes

1. Figures calculated from membership lists published in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* and *Man*. Academics actively involved included Virchow, Poch, Fischer, Fritsch and von Luschan. A representative sample of work on this topic would include Fritsch 1880; Friedenthal 1910; von Luschan 1906; von Luschka, Koch, Goette and Goertz 1868; Poch 1911; Schultze-Jena 1928; Seiner 1913; Seiner and Staudinger 1912; Virchow 1886; 1887; and Werner 1906.
2. Nor has the issue of Bushman sexuality been relegated to the backroom of history. In a more or less submerged form it is still present. Consider the following statement by the late Carleton Coon:

The usual pubertal form of the feminine nipple, with its swollen aureola, is exaggerated among Bushmen girls, to the extent that the nipples look like bright orange balls loosely attached to the breasts, a startling sexual attraction. . . . Another Bushman specialty concerns the female genitalia. Owing to a deficiency of growth in the labia majora which thus fail to seal the vaginal entrance, the inner lips fall through the gap. As a Bushman woman grows older, her inner lips protrude all the more, and they may ultimately hang down three or four inches. Despite much study, no one really knows to what extent this sexual feature is a product of nature and to what extent of artifice. It is quite possible that both factors are involved.

According to early accounts, all unmixed Bushman males have penises which protrude forward as in infants even when not in erection, but this is not always true. Another oddity of Bushmen is monorchy, or the descent of only one testicle, but this also is not universal among Bushman males. (Coon 1965:112-113)

Most sordidly of all I understand that there is a Bushman pornography video ring now operating in Botswana which is being investigated by journalists from the *Vrye Weekblad*, an independent South African alternative newspaper. Paul Myburgh's acclaimed film *People of the Sand Face* also has a few scenes in it showing genitalia although these scenes do not enrich his analysis.

3. Indeed in a surprising change of role Seiner tried to sue an experienced settler newspaper editor for libel because the latter accused him of presenting reports laced with fantasy. In the libel papers the editor, Kindt, obtained sworn statements from Pater Bierfort, a Catholic missionary, on the Kavango who pointed out Seiner's numerous elementary linguistic *faux pas*. Other expert witnesses testified to Seiner's *übernervoes* and overanxious state: he was prone to take exception to the smallest thing and punished his *bambuse* (factotum) once with 25 lashes. Bierfort, who served as his interpreter, called his article on the *Buschmanngefahr* pure *Erfindung* (State Archives, Windhock B53/12 Seiner vs Kindt. GW 556).
4. See also missionary philologist Vedder in evidence before the South West Africa Constitutional Commission:

Their language alone justifies the preservation of this primitive race. . . . You have reserves for game, you have reserves . . . for the Hereros, the Ovambos, and the Okavangos, but you have no reserve for Bushmen, yet historically and scientifically Bushmen are entitled to far greater consideration than any other of our native tribes. . . . The difficulty today is, however, that his lands are gradually being taken from him. . . . He has been prohibited from trapping or shooting in parts which he regarded as his own for generations. (*The Cape Argus*, September 3, 1935)

5. In it he directly pointed out the simian similarities (and even assured his audience that during periods of sexual arousal the genitals of young Bushman women became a deep red! [Fischer 1955:63]—How did he know? Participant observation? He concluded that the distinguishing characteristic of the Bushmen was the natural *tablier*. Other indigenes might have it but amongst them it was a question of artificial manipulation! Fischer, of course, was studying *The Rehoboth Bastards* at the time that mixed marriages were banned in Namibia.

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