



Regopstaan's Dream. First Run/Icarus Films.

Reviewed by Rob Gordon

Published on H-SAfrica (March, 2002)

The Dream of Abraham and his Sons (and Daughters)

As a gesture of national reconciliation the motto for the new South Africa is “!ke E: /xarra //ke:”, derived we are told, from the near extinct /Xam Bushman or San language and meaning “diverse people unite”. What is it about those called Bushmen that attracts the imagination? To be sure, there is a large cultural cottage industry built upon and reinforcing this imagery. Most recently the Foster brothers film, “The Great Dance” dealing with Bushman hunting, has garnered many international awards while *Regopstaan's Dream* has been shown on the BBC and numerous other prestige venues and is also available in a 24 minute version. <p> Of course the Bushmen or San in South Africa are not extinct. This video portrays the struggles of one surviving group, the /auni or komani to reclaim their land which was incorporated as the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, a vast stretch of largely waterless land located between the confluence of the Aub and Nossob Rivers. <p> Filmed over three years, the video starts at the (in)famous Bushman dioramas of the South African Museum and then features a variety of shots including, especially, interviews with the sympathetic and Robert Bly-like lawyer, Roger Chennels, who has been their chief legal representative and whose voice is one of the main sources for continuity in the video. He has been involved with the group since 1992 when they relocated to Kagga Kamma, a private nature reserve 260 km north of Cape Town where, in their loin clothes, they were a major tourist attraction. Fortunately for the group, with the election of the ANC government, land restitution became a major issue and because of their symbolic importance, this group was one of the first to be given back some land in a well-publicized

move when six ranches totaling some 40,000 hectare on the southern border of the National Park were handed over to them by Deputy President Mbeki himself in 1999. The allocation of this land resulted in many people who had previously “passed” for Colored now claiming San ancestry and leading to an inevitable increase in community conflict. <p> The video graphically portrays life on the periphery of the Park, with some eking out an existence hawking trinkets to tourists who sympathize with their plight, coupled to scenes of drunkenness, Church services, and rather romantically has some traditionally clad kids rolling down the sand-dunes. It suggests the possibility of a “cultural village” as a tourist attraction. <p> The main person to provide continuity in the video, however, is Dawid Kruiper who is “generally” accepted as “leader of the San”. He is the son of the late *Regopstaan* whose vision (and struggle) it was to re-inhabit the Kalahari Gemsbok Park from which the group were evicted in the early seventies. Dawid Kruiper proudly wears a loin cloth, indeed encourages traditional clothing and skills. Part of the allocated farms are going to be used for wild animals so that Bushmen can learn and show tourists tracking. The issue he is obsessed with is land rights in the Park itself. “Our hearts remain in the Park,” he says and he wants to visit the graves of his ancestors who lie buried there. Born in nature, he and his fellow Khomani claim to have an organic connection to nature and are “natural guides and trackers”. Left unsaid is that it is precisely this ideology as articulated by Europeans which contributed substantially to their annihilation. San were evicted from the Park because the animals ostensibly had to be protected from these hunters

and especially their dogs. “I want to live with nature” Dawid Kruiper says, and so determined is he to achieve this that the film concludes with him traveling alone to the polar opposite of his wilderness, the Big City to meet the erstwhile (white) Minister of Lands, Derek Hanekom, who was responsible for making the farms available and to confront a rather uncomfortable senior Black official of the National Parks Board in scenes clearly set up for the video. The message is obvious: this feisty land rights campaigner is as determined as ever to get his land in the Park back. David vs. the Bureaucratic Goliath. “Regopstaan” is an Afrikaans word meaning ‘Stand up straight’ or ‘stand tall’ and this is what this video is all about. Originally the film was titled “Shame”. The ideological tenor of the video is obvious and one which this reviewer is in broad sympathy with. <p> As someone who uses film or video extensively in teaching I can highly recommend this video. It will be a valuable teaching resource for courses on Africa as well as the several issues it raises, such as Land Claims, Tourism, Indigenous Struggles, and Environmentalism. It is also a provocative “update” for the generations of scholars and students who have been schooled on “The Hunters”. To enhance its pedagogical value this review will include background material not normally included in reviews. <p> The problem with this film is that while it attempts to ride on the wave of nostalgia it does a disservice to history by collapsing the past and gliding over the contradictions. Its ahistoricism serves to perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes. A sense of history enables one to understand how the past has choreographed the script on which the video is based and distorted. Regopstaan’s Dream is not of recent vintage and several times we hear references to “Old Makai” but nothing further. Indeed “Old Makai” (who died in 1966) and his father “Old Abraham” or (!gurice) and his daughter /Khaneko as well as several others have an important part in what should more accurately be called “Abraham’s Dream” (and the Biblical association’s make it even more powerful). The history of this Dream is long, complex, and intriguing. Dawid Kruiper and Roger Chennels have important forerunners. What history the video does portray is problematic. <p> The historical clips it shows on the “Bushmen of the Kalahari” by the Denver African Expedition was not even filmed in the Kalahari but in the Etosha National Park in northern Namibia. And this is a pity because the people of this area have long experience of performing and posing for cameras. In 1885, Farini and his photographer son, Lulu, spent time here and in 1908 the Austrian anthropologist Rudolf Poech made the first African ethnographic film “The Bushmen” here. Incidentally, Poech, striving to be a competent sci-

entist, also made invaluable sound recordings of the language. He justified his effort by claiming that, following Fritsch, Bushmen were an Ur-race and what he photographed and measured were the oldest and most “primitive surviving south African race”. Others followed suit. We know, for example, that the prospector Fred Cornell also made Bushman movies in the area shortly before the First World War. In the fifties and sixties, numerous other film-makers followed, not only government propaganda film-makers but international travelers and voyeurs like the Danish adventure writer, Jens Bjerre who twice visited and filmed these people. Others included, more importantly, Marlin Perkins, of “Wild Kingdom” fame, who not only made a movie for his popular US TV show, but produced an illustrated book as well. <p> The land issue is, and was, complex. It was not simply about the keen enthusiasm of Park officials to protect the “pristine environment”. Even before the Park was proclaimed in 1931, the place of the Bushmen was an issue. Minister of Lands P. Grobler announced his intention in December 1929 to create a game reserve between the Auob and Nossob Rivers where Bushmen would be allowed to live and hunt (Cape Times, December 7, 1929) and given its newsworthiness this statement rapidly percolated into the international press. <p> From the very beginning, local settler interests were opposed to the notion. A few days after Grobler’s statement, the local Member for the Legislative Assembly argued that the land was unsuitable because over 60 farms in the area had already been proclaimed and Bushman extinction was inevitable “owing to their rapid assimilation with the Hottentots and Klipkaffirs and (their) low birth rate”. Many of the farmers “offer them employment and allow them to remain near their water holes”. He concluded that: “a great number of the so-called Bushmen in this area are renegade Klipkaffirs, Hereros and Hottentots. These, if given the protection of a reserve, would become a source of annoyance and irritation to the neighboring farmers”. (Cape Times, December 17, 1929). <p> Other stakeholders had different interests, and thus the Police were keen to see the area proclaimed a Game Reserve, as they were concerned about the large-scale “contract” poaching going on. There was also the issue of land pressure. One of the ways in which the “poor white problem” was being tackled was to allocate farms to them at bargain rates. The Kuruman-Gordonia Game Reserve, proclaimed in 1910 and located to the south east of the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (KGP) was reduced from approximately 8,000 square miles to some 3,600 square miles in order to provide for the land hunger of the poor whites in 1923. The idea then was to effect a land-swap. This undertone of local Euro-

pean resistance to the Park and to Bushmen continues to have an important influence on later events and perceptions as we see in some telling interviews in the video with a White park ranger and a local farmer. <p> It was not as if the hand of everyone was against these Bushmen. On the contrary, perhaps the most famous friend they had was Donald Bain who in 1936 took a contingent to the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg where they were one of the most popular exhibits. This exhibit and the resultant “Bushman exhibition tours” by both Bain and Coenraad Macdonald generated what Hayes and Rassool call a “feeding frenzy of the eye” as scientists, film-makers and photographers converged on them (Hayes and Rassool, 2001). It was then, that in the words of Ouma /una, who was a five year-old child at the Empire Exhibition, that they discovered that “We liked to be photographed because they paid us money” (Schmidt 2001). <p> Bain’s, and later Macdonald’s, avowed purpose in displaying Bushmen was to protest their eviction from the Park and to pressurize the government to create a Bushman Reserve for them. Supported by academics like Dart and Maingard, he secured interviews with relevant Ministers and was assured that they would be allowed to remain in the KGP. Despite such Ministerial assurances, Bushmen continued to be persecuted for hunting in the Park. To protest this action, Bain took a well-photographed deputation of some 55 Bushmen to Cape Town, where he succeeded in having their plight raised in Parliament. General Smuts, as acting Prime Minister, expressed his sympathy for the Bushmen – “those living fossils” – and said that they would be allowed to hunt in the KGP as long as they used ‘traditional weaponry’ (see more details on Bain in Gordon 1995 and 1999). But the National Parks Board was still not moved, arguing that the Bushmen were not pure Bushmen, and moreover many of them spoke Afrikaans or Nama. It was “useless to spend money on protecting game for these people to exterminate and sell the skins to smugglers”. If these Bushmen were allowed to settle they would attract other squatters and soon the game would be “wild” again and difficult for tourists to view (Cape Times, May 11 1937). <p> Public support for the idea, at least as reported in the newspapers and in editorials, overwhelmingly endorsed the idea of a Bushman Reserve. This was not surprising, at least among the urban sector. Popular interest in Bushmen was a lively issue since the discovery of the Taung skull in 1924. The South African pavilion at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition had a banner draped over the entrance proclaiming “South Africa, the Cradle of Humanity”, and in 1929 the popular publicist Hedley Chivers had labeled the Bushmen one of the Seven Wonders

of Southern Africa. Even the Afrikaans literature of this era, most notably that of von Wielligh and the Hertzog Prize-winning Hobson Brothers romanticized the Bushmen. <p> Politicians felt that the Park could not be re-proclaimed a Bushman Reserve and suggested instead, that well-known stalling tactic, a Committee to investigate the possibility of proclaiming part of neighboring Botswana a Bushman Reserve. This committee eventually decided it could serve no useful purpose and disbanded on the eve of the Second World War. <p> Despite being personal friends with important politicians like Grobler and Reitz who were supportive of his efforts, Bain’s efforts were consistently undermined by senior bureaucrats who dismissed him as a “showman” and were concerned about the farm labor shortage that he was creating as many cattle-herders left their European employers to join the “troupe”. Certainly he was a singularly unsuccessful businessman and while he undertook to support the group until they had a Reserve of their own, he was forced to declare bankruptcy and the troupe were unceremoniously deposited back in the Gordon district in August 1937. Visiting them, the Magistrate complained that “unfortunately a number of these people, both men and women seem to have been thoroughly spoiled, and are disinclined to look for work at present. Most of them confidently expect Mr Bain to visit them again and hope to be allowed to camp in the Game Reserve. The daughter of the old “Chief” asked me to make representation to the Minister of Native Affairs so that some of the money which she says Mr Bain collected during their tour and which she alleges he collected for them, may be obtained from him and handed over to them” (August 19, 1937, cited in South Africa. National Archives, Native Affairs (NTS) files 9586 382/400). <p> Shortly thereafter, a British colonial official visited the area from Bechuanaland Protectorate. He reported that he “also met the Bushmen and the so called Bushmen queen ‘Feikie’ who asked me when we were going to move the people from the Nossop River so that they could settle at KijKij” (Botswana National Archives (BNA) Sec 108 S.108/2/2). /Khanako, //Aneku, Aniko or Anako or “Fytjie”, the daughter of the group’s patriarch, “Old Abraham”, appears to have been the leader of the group. The next year //Aneku approached another well known European “character”, Coenraad Frederik MacDonald and persuaded and assisted him in recruiting a group of “Bushmen” to go on tour again since they were starving. After a notorious case where he was charged under the Censorship Act, MacDonald returned the Bushmen to the Park in 1942 (NTS 9587 382/400 Bushman Reserve SAB Part 3 MacDonald Case). The press continually referred to

her as “an intelligent bushwoman” who acted as an interpreter. The role played by /Khaneko raises important questions about the video in which women are largely absent or relegated to perform minor cameo roles. <p> Eventually the State decided to allocate the Government farm “Struis Zyn Dam” adjoining the KGP as a home for the Bushmen, and until the graziers lease expired, Bushmen were accommodated in the KGP. Bureaucrats eventually arranged for the farm to be sold to a white settler and the Bushmen were left stranded in the hands of their unwilling hosts, the National Parks Board, which for the next two decades did its utmost to have them removed. As their 1959 Annual Report complained: “It seems as if the Bushmen, like the proverbial poor, will always be with us. After several conferences to determine who should actually accept responsibility for these people, especially since they are neither Coloured nor Bantu, the Department of Bantu Administration and Development eventually agreed to assume responsibility for the small band and to transfer them to the Bushman reserve in SWA in due course. That is as far as it went, however, and in the meantime they enjoy the privileges offered them by the Park.” Officials felt that the Park’s inhabitants were making increasing demands. In addition to the “ex gratia” official rations, they now requested the right to keep dogs, to hunt in the whole Park, freedom of movement in and out of the Park, and freedom to receive any visitors; they also wanted improved accommodation. The official line was that they were neither “traditional” nor “pure-bred” anymore, and as such had abdicated any rights to reside in the Park. Indeed the only time they wore traditional clothing was when they saw a tourist with a camera because then they could collect a small fee (Kloppers 1970:190-1). When I visited the Park in the late sixties, I was told by officials that their begging and drunken behavior was offensive to tourists and that all, even Whites, who behaved in such a manner would be booted out of the Park. <p> In contrast to the video voice-over, which has the Bushmen retreating when faced by superior force, deportation to Namibia was actively resisted. Eventually in 1976, with the ever-present threat of deportation to Tsumkwe, almost all the Bushmen left the Park after a long war of social attrition and settled in the neighboring Mier Colored reserve at Welkom. Of course, the other option which an outsider might suggest is why not simply move to the other side of the Nossob river to Botswana? But this was unworkable because of Botswana’s long history of complicity with the South African Parks Board in suppressing these people. <p> Koos Kruiper takes up the story after the removal from the Kalahari Gemsbok Park: “At first

we were told that we had to go to Namibia, but my uncle, Regop Kruiper, who is our leader, refused to go there as we didn’t know the place and feared that we would not survive. We were eventually dumped outside the gates of the Park and came to settle here at Welkom. This was in 1976. <p> While we were at the Park, I was employed as a game warden. We were really exploited there because we were a tourist attraction. Some film-makers recruited us to make some films. I myself was involved in the making of the Mazda advert which was shot in the Park. I was only paid R250 and worked for two weeks. <p> We have also been exploited by a film agent, who recruited our clan to act in films and promised to buy us a farm with the proceeds of our earnings. This has now caused a division in our clan. We haven’t heard a thing about this farm. Some members live elsewhere, some have moved to Namibia, and now there are only a few of us left here at Welkom. <p> I make a living by making bows and arrows, and other implements and sell them to tourists on the way to the Park. Otherwise I act in films. I acted in the film “The Killer Instinct” shot in Namibia. I’m still owed R400. <p> I feel very unhappy, I’m alone and am no longer Koos Kruiper. If I could wear my skins and hunt, I’ll be very happy. <p> We eke out an existence here. There is no firewood and we are not allowed to gather dung to make cooking fires. There is no water and we are not accepted by the community. Some of our children go to the local school, but are not accepted. Recently when Minister Julies was in Welkom, I approached him about a place for us to stay. He told me that there was no place for Bushmen, unless they were stock farmers” (statement by Koos Kruiper, in Surplus People’s Project, 1990 Appendix.). <p> This statement needs to be contextualized. The Johannesburg <cite>Sunday Times</cite> (March 15, 1987) carried a feature article entitled “At 95, King Reg of the Red Dunes looks for a new bride to keep his tribe alive”. The article was instigated by a Kuruman tour operator, Lokkie Henning, who claimed to have found a band of 24 Bushmen all subsisting off Regopostaan’s government pension in 1983. Because of his own financial problems he was going public in order to raise funds to buy some land for the Bushmen. “We want to take them back in time to a time when there were no fences and no laws to restrict them”. He had won the trust of Reg’s son, Dawid who had worked as a tracker in the KNP for twenty years and would thus serve as gatekeeper. “The tribe will allow me to take parties to their territory and show the visitors how they live, but they don’t want any interference”. <p> In May, 1987 I received a circular letter from Mr Henning. He was working with the “Cradle of Mankind”

and had rescued some forty Bushmen from the settlement at Mier, although he claimed only 24 were "pure-bred". "Sensing their historical value to South Africa and also a deep sadness at their hopeless plight", he had undertaken several fundraising activities largely through the media and some air time he gained on the NBC had persuaded him to take them to the United States. I continued to receive occasional cyclostyled "Progress Reports". Fund raising was a perennial disappointment. Regopstaan and his sister Anna were now running "field schools" to ensure the survival of "traditional veld-skills". To challenge the belief that they were not real Bushmen he had enlisted the aid of some ethnologists. Finally the government had given him permission to keep them under his own personal supervision on some state land. Appearing on a popular South African television program he had challenged the relevant Colored Cabinet Minister who declined to respond. The <cite>Weekly Mail</cite> reported that, on the show, Bushmen had appeared wearing skins and that Henning had claimed: "You are talking here about a reasonably wild type of person. He loves nature, he's a man of the desert, he wants to feel the softness of the sand dunes underneath his feet". They had been kicked out of the KGP and resettled at Welkom where "they drew their water from troughs through which thin dogs meandered, until a neighboring farmer changed his mind. 'I told them they couldn't take that water anymore because my animals were going thirsty'". The idea was, he claimed, that Bushmen should work for the local Colored farmers and thus alleviate the labor shortage as White farmers found Bushmen to be lazy and drunk. Questioned, one of the Bushmen on the show "stutteringly revealed that he had been paid R1.70 and a tin of sugar for seven months labor" ("The Desert Folk Trek Across the Carpet", (<cite>Weekly Mail</cite>, January 29 1988). <p> The last Progress Report I received was dated September 1988. The highlight was a visit by: "... a couple of Government Ethnologists who stated that the majority of the 50 tribe members were Bushmen. They had been slated as not being Bushmen because some had worked (they are noted as a non-working race) but then on the other hand they are loafers because they don't work! A few of them may have mixed blood but this is the fault of legal systems and boundaries prohibiting them from traveling .. to find and mix with their own kind ...". I suggested to Mr Henning that he contact an international advocacy group, <cite>Survival International</cite> who then wrote to the Director of the National Parks Board protesting the eviction of San from the Gemsbok National Park and pointing out that such an action was contrary to IUCN guidelines. <p>

Almost on script, the Director responded by denying that they were Bushmen because they were so "intermarried". Moreover, they had "completely lost their traditional lifestyles of hunter-gathering and speak Afrikaans". They had "filtered into the area" but were "unable to live off the land like their true San ancestors, they squatted near Twee Rivieren (the Park Headquarters)" and lived on charity and handouts from visiting tourists in later years (Ignoring perhaps that this was indeed a form of foraging behavior). He denied that they had been resettled. They had moved on their own free will to join relatives outside the Park and "the lure of western civilized life style proved too strong". The Director concluded that: "... the only true San surviving in Southern Africa today are those in the remote regions of the deep Kalahari (in Botswana), in Bushmanland and South Eastern Angola where they do not make regular contact with the insidious degrading effects .. of western cultural influence....Any attempt at 'civilizing them', by well-meaning 'do-gooders' will have the same tragic consequences as with the last San remnants in South Africa." The television appearances had an impact. A group of Cape entrepreneurs were so taken with the plight of the Bushmen that they offered them a haven on their private reserve Kagga Kamma in the Cedarberg and they moved there on January 15, 1991 where, advised by a couple of anthropologists, they were allowed to demonstrate their "traditional" culture to up-market tourists. Slick marketing ensued, including a Cape wine, <cite>!Um Hap</cite> , in their honor ("a portion of the sale of this wine will go to Bushman preservation"), dinner in a Bushman "cave" and sleeping in slickly derived "Bushman huts" but with all the creature comforts affluent tourists would require. Hylton White has written incisively about this episode (White 1995). By 1999, when the Kruiper group decided to leave Kagga Kamma and return to the Kalahari, the management was so dependent upon them that they had to hire "Coloureds" to pretend to be "Pure Bushmen"(Independent On Line June 30, 1999)! <p> The Kagga Kamma publicity also attracted a number of White activists who took up their cause and helped slot them into the global indigenous rights network. By 1994, Dawid Kruiper was invited to address the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Rights in Geneva. Here he and other Southern African indigenes rapidly learnt the global universalizing discourse of the value of "indigeneity". Perhaps the most striking example of this is possibly the continual reference to being able "to visit the graves of the ancestors". Most ethnographers who worked with the San report that when a person dies the group moves as far away as possible from

where the deceased is buried. Especially noteworthy in facilitating such discourses was the formation in 1996 of WIMSA, (the Working-group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa), and SASI (South African San Institute), organizations which worked to empower indigenous minorities in the region. They did this by helping such groups develop networks to other indigenes in North America, Europe and Australia, assisted them with legal representation and facilitated access to development agencies, both governmental and non-governmental. <p> Dawid Kruiper is very much a contested leader, not only by Park officials, but by others who define themselves as Bushmen and who dispute his claim to authenticity by pointing out that he does not speak N/u, a near extinct San language. Visitors to the area, journalists, academics and tourists have found him to be well aware of his celebrity status as a Bushman and that he uses this to his own advantage. Visiting journalists are charged R500 for an interview. This, he says, is what he would earn as a traditional healer for a consultation. But realizing the importance of the Press in the making of his celebrity he usually settles for less after haggling. He charges R20 to pose in white man's clothes and R55 in "traditional skins". One recent journalist asked him if the commercial romanticizing of the San was not simply a continuation of their historical obliteration, that tourism was the final nail in the coffin, "He shrugs it off, say-

ing: 'That's all in the past'. But his answer is too brief, however casual. It suggests deep waters that he does not care to fish with a stranger" (Schmidt 2000). <p> My son once defined a raisin as a grape whose soul had been squeezed out. This video is very much a raisin. <p> References <p> Gordon, Robert J. (1995). "Saving the Last South African Bushmen". <cite>Critical Arts</cite> 9(2):28-48 <p> Gordon, Robert J. (1999). "Scene(s) at the Exhibition: Bain's 'Bushmen' at the Empire Exhibition, 1936" in <cite>Africans in Show business</cite> B. Lindfors (ed.) Indiana University Press, Bloomington. <p> Kloppers, Hannes. (1970). <cite>Gee My 'n Man</cite> Afrikaanse-Pers, Johannesburg. <p> Rassoool, Ciraj and Patricia Hayes. (2002). "Science and the Spectacle: /Khanako's South Africa, 1936- 7" in Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley (eds.), <cite>Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in South Africa </cite> Rodopi, Amdsterdam (forthcoming) <p> Schmidt, Michael, (2000). "Reaping the desert", <cite>Sunday Times</cite> August 20. <p> Schmidt, Michael, (2001). "A People in their own words" <cite>Sunday Times</cite> October 14. <p> Surplus People's Project, (1990). <cite>If one can live, all must live </cite>. Appendix. SPP, Cape Town. <p> White, Hylton, (1995), <cite>In the Tradition of the Forefathers</cite>. University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town. <p>

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica>

Citation: Rob Gordon. Review of , *Regopstaan's Dream*. H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. March, 2002.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14988>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.