

Sandy Gall. *The Bushmen of Southern Africa: Slaughter of the Innocent.* London: Chatto & Windus, 2001. xxxix + 264 pp. £20.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7011-6906-0.



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A tribute to John Hardbattle's hard battle

This is not an academic book and it would be easy to dismiss it by measuring it against academic standards. However, this book is also quite different from many of the unbearable coffee-table books on southern Africa's Bushmen. It therefore deserves more attention than many of the well-intended (or not-so-well-intended) books that are so blatantly wrong and sensationalist that they are not worth reviewing. Gall's book provides students and scholars working on southern Africa, and beyond, with an opportunity to rethink their own position on and their relation to the better examples of the works that are written in the genre of advocacy and journalism.

Bushmen of Southern Africa: Slaughter of the Innocent, according to the dust jacket, speaks "for the Bushmen" and "for the native indigenous peoples of the world". Advocacy is, therefore, the acclaimed objective of the book and it has the right qualifications to raise public attention. The author, Sandy Gall, is a distinguished senior journalist who has lived in many parts of the world and published not only media reports but is also sub-

stantial books on a variety of topics. He is seconded by none less than His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, who has written the foreword, and by George Silberbauer, the well-known retired anthropologist who was "Bushman Survey Officer" in Botswana in the 1950s and 1960s and who has written the preface. The book is published by Chatto and Windus with numerous photographs (old and new), maps and an index at an affordable price both in paperback and hardback. The stories it tells are at times moving and at times horrific, but always eloquent. There is little doubt, therefore, that this book will reach many more readers than most academic works and than any of the "grey literature" reports published by NGOs and international organisations.

However, academics who may also envy the wide spread of such a book will have ambivalent feelings. To begin with, they may find a foreword by Prince Charles to be a mixed blessing. The royal connection gives credit to the book and after all, it is the expressed hope of "Bushman" people in Botswana and of indigenous people elsewhere who have approached the Crown that internation-

al pressure on national governments will increase as important individuals in high-ranking places speak out in favor of the plight of indigenous groups. At the same time, the Royal advocate clearly proves himself to be an essentialist ("[t]he Bushman is the essence of Africa") and an isolationist ("survived in its pristine state at the heart of Africa") (p. xvi). He has no inhibitions in labelling them "an innocent victim ... of 'progress'", a "gentle civilisation ... on the verge of extinction" (p. xvii), and to attributing them with an "understanding of Mother Nature" that we have lost and the "instincts ... of survival" that he finds moving (p. xvi). But it is striking that he stops short of naming the perpetrators responsible for "progress" and extinction, proposing instead that "no single individual or government [is] responsible for this tragic tale" (p. xvii).

Sandy Gall only occasionally falls into such essentialist traps, when he talks of the Bushmen he encountered as "roaming at will as their ancestors" (p. 233) or when he attributes them with "natural rhythm" and to be "the world's first dancers" (p. 228). On the whole he treats and represents the San people he met in southern Africa as concrete, complex, contemporary persons caught up in problems, ambivalences and dilemmas of interpersonal and political affairs. At the same time, he is much more outspoken about those who create the problems for the Bushmen and who turn everyday dilemmas into matters of life and death. Especially his account of the outrageous ways in which Botswana --its government officials, civilservants, army and police--treat Bushmen today, leaves little doubt as to who needs to be accused of torture, land theft, discrimination and suppression. The current situation in Namibia is dealt with in less detail but is criticised in similar ways, whereas the new South Africa is praised for its restitution of Bushman land rights in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. Gall does not need to be considerate with regard to future research permits or with regard to relations with local authorities. His target is clear-cut and he seems to be

unaffected by the inhibitions, subtleties and internal divisions that characterizes much of the scholarly writing of anthropologists and historians.

In the first part of the book Gall sets the scene by making elaborate reference to as to his own emotional encounter with the Tsolido Hills as well as Laurens van der Post and his mystical relation with "Bushman culture". Part two then gives a very disenchanted summary of Bushman suffering during the colonial period, especially in (then) German South West Africa, replacing romanticism about the Bushmen with the image of an underclass in similar terms as Robert Gordon has done in his writings. Part three, finally, is the most interesting and most original contribution of this book. It brings together accounts, which usually contrast rather than complement one another: the experiences of the Marshall family in the Nyae Nyae area between the 1950s and the 1990s, James Suzman's study of serfdom and brutality on the Omaheke farms ("the Namibian Gulag" [p. 159]), George Silberbauer's work in Botswana, and the recent history of Bushman resistance against attempts by the Botswana government to ban local people from nature reserves and to resettle them elsewhere. Gall has no interest in the competition and in-fighting amongst Bushman researchers and activists. While he does not deny that there are disagreements, he highlights what unites all these studies and all these people, namely the documentation of and the outcry against maltreatment against Bushmen.

A number of intersecting life-stories are told in this third part, which both anthropologists and historians may find intriguing. The biography of John Hardbattle is central to this part. John Hardbattle, "son of a half-Bushman mother, Khwa, and an English father, Tom Hardbattle" (p. 172) became leader of the First People of The Kalahari (a community-based organisation) and was--until his death in 1996--the best-known Bushman activist in Botswana. His life-story is interesting in its own right and has--to my knowledge--not been told in

such detail before. Future research may alter Gall's account, or at least add to it, but he deserves the credit of having highlighted the position of cultural brokers and intermediaries like Hardbatle, who act between the voiceless and the powerful. The same is true for Gall's, much briefer, treatment of the role of lawyers or of activists, like musicologist Cait Andrews, who feels that she was given "a mandate" to see to it that the trance dance continues to be performed and "to protect the tradition" (p. 239). One can see the complexity of rights, claims and duties to represent "the Bushmen" emerging from this part of Gall's account. At the same time this is exactly the point, where one is reminded of the limitations of a book like this. It lacks systematic sociological thought that would try to make acts of these named individuals intelligible by positioning them in a complex web of relations in which alliances, rivalries, motivations are formed and manipulated. The limitation of such a book has therefore not so much to do with imprecision in the interest of readability, for instance he leaves out all click symbols in local names and occasionally seems to take considerable liberties in compiling a coherent story from anecdotes and from bits and pieces of information. Rather, the limitation is that there is no comparative contextualisation of the people and the events that feature in the account. People and events are placed in time and space but no attempt is made to look behind the scene, for instance, by recognising structures of representational strategies in the ways in which locals, activists of various sorts, scholars, reporters and officials position themselves. Comparisons with other indigenous peoples are sometimes made in passing but the book makes little of these comparisons. A truly comparative perspective would allow us to identify the ways in which players position themselves in the political struggle over "Bushman" participation in economic assets and in political processes. It would allow us to see patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

George Silberbauer's preface to the book hints in the same direction and therefore is an important part to the book. He warns that "ritualistic tokens of sorrow and repentance" towards people like the Bushmen are not going to be sufficient (p. xxxix). He underlines that "the Bushmen are not one people" (p. xxviii) and that theirs is not a unique fate but "also a case-study of the systematic inhumanity so frequently dealt to fellow humans ... also by their governments and leaders" (p. xxx). He outlines a pattern by identifying the links "in the tragic chain of the circumstances of oppression" (p. xxxviii), namely accentuated differences, competitive exclusion, fear of the unknown, deliberate disinformation and intellectual closure. One may consider his view that anthropology, or enlightenment science more generally, can help to unlink this chain of oppression to be too optimistic, but it seems not necessarily to be an anachronistic view to me. It certainly adds an important dimension to the book.

What is somewhat anachronistic, by contrast, is the fact that Gall's piece of advocacy is once again about the Bushmen and not in any substantive way written jointly with Bushmen. Moreover, the reader searches in vain for a note saying that the profits of this book will go to such and such an organisation so that it is probably safe to assume that they will go nowhere except to the publisher and the author. Do Bushmen of today want to be presented as innocent victims? Or as internationally connected NGO-workers? Or as both? What kind of advocacy do they want? There are no easy answers since there is likely to be a diversity of views, but the question would need to be asked, also--and maybe particularly--in popular works like the one reviewed here.

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