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The Image of Bushmen
From a Strange Wanderer to a Human Being

My study is focused on the actual missionary work among Bushmen in eastern Ovambo and Kavango in Namibia (mostly on three missionary stations: Okongo, Ekoka and Mpungu) and on the image of Bushmen conveyed by it.¹ The encounter of the cultures (the Finnish missions, the Bantu and Bushmen) gave rise to new elements of the Bushman way of life that are partly based on the tradition of the encounter of cultures in the area (symbiosis of the Bantu and Bushmen) and on the requirements of the local natural conditions. This helped to give the Bushmen the strength to resist acculturation, and the meeting of cultures brought regular elements, which I have called the **borderline culture** (or **border zone** culture), to the outskirts of the missionary stations. This term arises from being on the border in different ways: the border of the desert, stationary population, different cultures, as well as the border in a mental sense in human minds.

The term borderline culture is also related to the concept of the interface, in which the information surface of the interface has a central importance in conveying information from one group to another and from generation to generation. The borderline culture involves the meeting of three cultures in which common interests are felt to exist and in which there is a clear information area for conveying information and
therefore also an image. The image of Bushmen given by the Finnish missionary work was conveyed to different literary sources mainly in these regular everyday borderline culture encounters with the Bushman culture.

The Bushmen: part of the politics of missionary work

My research reveals the meaning of different kinds of information in conveying an image. Transference makes information diversified by introducing knowledge and feelings to the encounter. Some of these matters are conveyed as an image which reflects the encounter. The image of Bushmen in the early 20th century was distant, stereotyped and borrowed, largely due to the lack of any significant information surface. The encounters between the Finnish missionaries and Bushmen were rare.

Increased information reduces uncertainty. This fact began to come to surface in the 1950s in the descriptions of Bushmen by the Kavango nurses in which the emotions of fear, sympathy and care were present. The pressures for missionary work among the Bushmen towards the end of the 1950s broke the old image of Bushmen. The search for a sympathetic image was started partly for professional reasons. On the other hand, more frequent encounters inevitably resulted in transference which added to the knowledge and understanding of Bushmen's life. The requirements of the new situation made the missionary workers start to talk about their own work and the Bushmen's interests as if they were converging. The menaces claimed by the missionaries, suggesting that the Bantu were threatening the culture of Bushmen and preventing missionary work among them, were typical of the image of Bushmen presented by the missionaries, which aimed at exerting an influence on missionary decision-making in Finland. The Bushmen had become part of the politics of missionary work, in which publishing activities, among other things, were used to advance mission and its funding in Finland, so the missionary image of Bushmen does involve a certain amount of goal-directedness. By maintaining, for instance, that the Bushmen's old way of life was

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wretched and that they were becoming extinct, the missionaries could justify their work and its methods for the salvation of the Bushmen.²

The preachers controlled the methods of missionary work

In eastern Ovambo and Kavango, the missionary work among Bushmen which was expanding in the 1960s made the image of Bushmen a more everyday matter in the emerging borderline culture, in which it was typical to associate the image of the Bushman to work and success at work. Information brought everyday events to surface, and the missionaries described them. Information was clearly linked to these elements of the emerging borderline culture. The missionaries did not yet quite understand the life of the Bushmen, although they were clearly interested in it. They tried to dictate the conditions for the encounter in the 1960s in accordance with the old ideology of missionary work. Thus the 1960s was the era of a Bushman image that was controlled by the preachers who tried to defend strongly the justification and methods of missionary work.³ Nature was presented as a threat to the Bushmen as if it were a strong alibi for their missionary work. The special project nature of missionary work among the Bushmen linked it to the apartheid development in separation.⁴

² The analogy between the image of the Bushman in Finnish missionary work and in anthropology is much greater that one would have assumed to start with. This was particularly obvious in the case of the anthropologists (Richard Lee and his research team) who worked in the Dobe area in Botswana from the early 1960s to the early 70s. Their long stay and goal-directed activities to improve the Bushmen's future and conditions together with the government of Botswana and American foundations resemble the activities of Finnish missionaries a great deal, including the manoeuvring in Ovambo-Kavango. Manoeuvring from above using the power of knowledge, in which the researchers similarly to the missionaries claim that they know what is best for the Bushmen, is a relatively analogous western approach which manifests both cultural imperialism and welfare colonialism.

³ Erkki Hynönen was the leader of the missionary stations in Nkongo (Okongo) and Otto Makkonen was the leader of the missionary stations in Mpungu.

⁴ The apartheid vs. post-apartheid setup was observed in the case of both the missionaries and the researchers. The view of the 1960s and early 70s about development in separation, which is based on the ideals of apartheid, was thought to be the best for the Bushman culture. This was meant to protect the Bushmen's old way of life, and isolation from the grip of foreign cultures was therefore thought to be ideal. In the image of the Bushman, this was manifested in several studies in idealistic and ethnoromantic presentations of the Bushman culture. The image of the Bushman acquired an unhistorical element, which was, however, partly tied to the ideology of apartheid. There was little ethnoromanticism and direct links to apartheid in the case of the Dobe researchers, but they did want to influence the future of the Bushmen through special projects. Efforts to get rid of the ideas of apartheid can be observed both within missionary work and among the researchers. There was less analogy in the goal-directedness of the image of the Bushman. Due partly to its professional interests, Finnish missionary work may have presented a goal-directed image of the Bushmen's way of life.
A common feature in the activities of the Finnish mission was the introduction of Western ideas to local African life. These activities also brought western behaviour and tools. The encounter brought new elements to Bushmen's life in the form of schools, hospitals, roads and shops, among others. The meeting of cultures also requires new methods of adaptation in relation to other cultures. The know-how of the Bushmen's old way of life alone was not enough any longer when they faced the new requirements of the borderline culture. The information surface conveys information and makes it possible acquire more of it. The increased information also made the image of the Bushman presented by the missionaries more diversified. As a rule, the Bushmen did not lose their integrity or identity due to the pressures for change caused by the borderline culture. For its part, the borderline culture helped them to survive the difficult times. The Bushmen have had a traditional ability to adapt in this way to meet both nature and cultures. The Bushmen's way of life is based on the conditions set by the local natural circumstances and on the tradition of cultures that meet. These skills associated with their own culture have also been applied by the Bushmen to the borderline culture, making use of the possibilities offered by it.

Missionary work often relied on local power to ensure continued activity. In the case of Finnish mission, this took partly place in the early 1970s when commitment to the possible future power of SWAPO was started in Namibia. Missionaries felt sympathy with the movement and the people, and rose to criticise the oppression of the South-African government. In the 1970s, two former Finnish missionaries who had worked with the Bushmen were still presenting ideas about their future that were clearly linked to the apartheid ideology of development in separation. This caused problems inside missionary work, because the Finnish mission was officially opposed to apartheid.

This was a means of politics within missionary work, and for instance by maintaining that the Bushmen's old way of life is dying it was possible to defend the justification and methods of their own and missionary work. No goal-directedness could be observed in the researchers' image of the Bushmen, at least not in the team working in the Dobe area. The publications try to present a many-sided scientific image of them that is constituted from different points of view and in which it is difficult to see any value judgements. Lee's research team did, however, have goal-directed activity in relation to the Bushmen, which is why it was easy for them to see common interests, real or imagined, with the Bushmen. The economic, political and personal interests were intertwined in a vision of the future of the Bushmen, and it was claimed that the Bushmen themselves presented views similar to those of the researchers as to what was best for them. The field of common interests had thus formed at least in the minds both in the Dobe area and in Ovambo-Kavango. In this respect there is an obvious analogy between the images presented by research and mission.

Anthropological face

The breaking of the language barrier by the teachers like Terttu Heikkinen in eastern Ovambo (Okongo and Ekoka in 1969-1976) was an important factor on the way to the next change in the image of Bushmen which was seen clearly in the borderline culture which was established in the 1970s. Language meant improved and more profound information and therefore confidential relationships between the missionaries and the Bushmen. The understanding of ethnic cultures improved in general. The new ideals were partly due to the strivings for independence in the area and to more general international pressures in which mission and colonialism were subjected to criticism. Mission reacted to the change rapidly to keep its activities going. The image given by the preachers in the 1970s was the African image of the Bushman, reflecting the developmental trends. The borderline culture had been established, and the life of Bushmen was felt to be part of everyday life. The interest of the missionaries in the Bushmen's way of life was increased.

The interest is to be seen in the fact that some of the missionaries tried to research the Bushman way of life in the 1970s. They had experience about Bushmen as a borderline culture which also functioned as an inspiration to return to the old themes. This was part of the final image of the Bushman among the missionaries which had a clearly anthropological face, due partly to the influence of contemporary researchers and the attempts at cultural description. Research gave the image of Bushmen a background, explanations and broader elements, but also information about the issues in the Bushman culture which are difficult to approach. In this sense the image of the Bushman loosened from the image conveyed by the borderline culture, in which language and the senses were means to get information when the cultures met. The information received by the missionaries was increased in the borderline culture, and this provided the basis for a more diversified image of the Bushman which also involved some of the things which are more difficult to approach in the their culture.

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The missionaries' experiences in the borderline culture also partly inspired them to approach the Bushmen's way of life by researching it. This conveyed an image of the Bushman which partly remained the final image of the missionaries.  

**Familiar people in a borderline culture**

In the early 80s, the image of the Bushman had become much more diversified and uniform. The information conveyed by the borderline culture and obtained through research were brought into accord in an image of the Bushman which was analogous to the image of the Bushman presented in anthropology. The Bushman way of life was known quite well, although based on the description of a few missionaries only. The missionaries' image of the Bushman changed: the distant and strange wanderer of the early 20th century and the 1950s became a familiar human being when the three cultures of the borderline culture met. The image involved humanity and everyday realism.

As a consequence of the Namibian Civil War, the work of the Finnish missionaries ended in the stations (Okongo and Ekoka) in eastern Ovambo, but the work among Bushmen continued in the form of developmental aid in Kavango. The nurses' descriptions of the Bushmen were characterised by the concern for the war and unrest. The Bushmen were described as part of normal life in abnormal conditions in the

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7 Josia Mufeti and Paulus Andreas.
8 The interest in the Bushmen's way of life helped to add an anthropological air to the image, and the missionaries' image of the therefore approached the image that the Dobe anthropologists had. Despite this partial analogy, the missionaries' image of the Bushman cannot be considered to match even closely the analytical and scientific image of the Bushman that the Dobe researchers had. The strength of the image conveyed by the missionaries is manifested through the borderline culture, in which highly varied transference conveyed even an everyday realistic image of the Bushman, in which language and confidential relationships were important in participatory encounters. The information surface of the borderline culture conveyed information about the life of Bushmen, and the missionaries brought it to light as the image of the Bushman for professional or other reasons, thus reflecting the meeting of cultures.
9 This development is analogous to the researched image of the Bushman. The scientific image of the Bushman changed in such a way that a move was made towards greater realism from the early 20th-century stereotypes, in which the Bushmen could be seen as having animal characteristics or they were at least introduced as a lower race. Lee's team played a central role in breaking the old image of the Bushman. A long, thorough study and regular encounters by means of participatory observation were important factors here. The researchers also gave the Bushmen their humanity which had even been doubted before. The Bushmen came forward in their own natural environment as skilled, knowledgeable and strongly emotional people who love, are sad, cry, laugh, dance and sing.
stations. Missionary work among them returned to its initial roots in Kavango. The last image of the Bushmen there was given by the quiet missionaries, the nurses, just like in the early stages in the early 1950s. The concerns over care and everyday nursing were common in their descriptions, but the Bushmen were not thought to be strange, scaring and distant any longer. The information surface of the encounter reduced uncertainty and also added to sympathy through emotions; the information cumulated in the borderline culture and at the same time made the image of the Bushman in missionary work more diversified and realistic. The Bushmen were not any longer strange wanderers in the forest but familiar people in a borderline culture.

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