



A performative encounter with artist Silikat van Wyk in the Kalahari

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Abstract

Cultural tourism involving people who claim to be Bushman or San has seen some 'Bushman' performers becoming iconic through using performative visual and oral archetypes. The late Silikat van Wyk, to some extent, became the visual image of the Bushman of the Kalahari Desert. Alone or in a team, he performed at tourist resorts and in the Kalahari. I use a performative style of writing where my presence and identity as a researcher are declared and my unique ethnographic encounter with Silikat van Wyk and his small cast in the Kalahari are enunciated and theorised. The contradictions in the observed–observer/researcher–researched relations, and how these are nearly subverted/ inverted in this particular research encounter, are outlined. Performative writing here is a synthetic style of writing that borrows from imaginative literary writing, (auto)ethnography and critical academic writing.

Keywords: anthro-tourist, (auto)ethnography, Bushman, cultural tourism, performance, performative writing

Introduction

I first met Silikat van Wyk in November 2001. He was performing for tourists at OstriSan, a restaurant, ostrich farm and cultural village along the road to the Sun City resort, in the North-West Province. We were 600 kilometres north of the Kalahari Desert from where Van Wyk had come. He stood alongside other ≠Khomani performers, such as Isak and Lys Kruiper, and Rosa and Abraham Meintjies, and

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