

The enclosed page should have appeared on page 44 of our last issue. Unfortunately, due to a lack of space, we cannot reprint the film reviews that were mishandled. We therefore want to express our apologies to Messrs Peter Allen, Barrie Machin, Mathias Guenther and Paul J. Myburgh.

Warriors and Maidens is an ethnographic film in the true sense of the term: it is packed with descriptive information on a wide variety of subjects, most of which bear some relationship, although perfunctory at times, to the issue of gender relations. There are wonderful scenes of village activities: gardening, threshing and winnowing of grain, shearing and butchering of sheep, cooking and baking, spinning and weaving, a wedding, a funeral. In fact, one might argue that this tape is a mini-ethnography, containing comprehensive documentation of typical village activities.

Warriors and Maidens: A Discussion with Margaret Papandreou and Leading Greek Feminists is a companion piece to Warriors and Maidens which features a discussion of the film between Machin and a small group of Greek feminists. At the time the tape was shot, Margaret Papandreou was head of the Union of Greek Women and wife of the Greek Prime Minister. There is not much to be said about this tape. Most of the commentary is predictable. There are occasional insightful comments and Machin appears to be satisfied with the response to Warriors and Maidens by this group. But nothing extraordinary is said and there is little controversy. Everyone seems to agree that the tape is a reasonably accurate portrayal of sex roles and life in highland Crete, however much they still deplore the second-class status accorded to women there and throughout much of Greece. And although the tape seems to have been edited, there is considerable extraneous commentary that could easily have been eliminated. Margaret Papandreou's closing comment, however, is a gem: "My husband is a socialist in public and he is a fascist at home."

By far the most focused and coherent of these tapes is Passing Shadows. The film looks at the funeral of an old man from Asi Gonia, a traditional village of highland Crete. The presentation is straightforward: a chronological ethnographic account of the rituals associated with death in Greece; the wake, the singing of myralogia (dirges), the funeral procession, the interment, and the post-burial hospitality offered by the survivors. This production could easily serve as a definitive visual ethnography of Greek village funeral practices and beliefs.

The narration alternates between simple description and explanation, and deep interpretation. On occasion it becomes too didactic and begins to cloy, but it is mostly useful and accurate. Parts of the funeral service are translated; here the viewer recognizes such eternal Christian themes as redemption, forgiveness, justice, charity and mercy. We learn that the purpose of the funeral is to "purify the soul and incorporate it into the other world." Not very profound, but valid and relevant. When food and drink are offered, the association with communion is evident without being stated.

Because he had been a hero of the Greek resistance in World War II, the old man's funeral was quite grand: the procession

included a brass band, honor guard, and various dignitaries. Hundreds of people paid their respects. The tape captures much of the detail as well as the tone and atmosphere of the rituals. Although the photography is somewhat uneven, there are some scenes that are very powerful as well as esthetically appealing. Some are poignant: the opening scene shows the deceased's widow singing a doleful dirge as she keeps vigil at the head of his coffin during the wake. A voice-over translation of this haunting lament captures its poetry and raw sentiment. In another scene the coffin rests in the church, ringed by flickering candles, as loved ones and friends file by to kiss the old man goodbye.

Tightly edited and skillfully composed, Passing Shadows is a valuable ethnographic document. It is enhanced considerably by the lack of self-consciousness displayed by the villagers on camera. This is a tribute not only to Machin's skill as a filmmaker, but also to his abilities as an anthropologist and fieldworker. He has established an excellent relationship with the people of Asi Gonia which accounts, in no small part, for the success of this tape and underscores the importance of good anthropology as a prerequisite for the production of quality ethnographic documentary.

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REVIEW OF PAUL JOHN MYBURGH'S "PEOPLE OF THE GREAT SANDFACE"¹

(16 mm, Colour, 120 min., 1985
Distributor: Paul Myburg, P.O. Box
461, Melville, Johannesburg 2109,
South Africa)

by
Mathias Guenther

The creative and ethnographic mind-set of this film is one of melancholic romanticism. It is brought on by what is perceived by its author to be the doomed state of the disappearing pristine Kalahari Bushman hunters. Myburgh's view of the San foragers follows a long-standing tradition in the study of these people. The tradition begins, perhaps, in the 18th century with Rousseau's friend, Le Vaillant, continues through the 19th century with such writers as Philip, Stow and Ellenberger and into the 20th century with Jeffries, Marshall Thomas and van der Post. Just as van der Post presented his Testament To The Bushmen to TV audiences earlier this decade, so Myburgh offers his film as "the

final record of an old way of life." This pessimistic tone is especially seductive when the medium of documentation is film. The pathos elicited by the "disappearing Bushman" is underscored, sequence after sequence, through poignant images of the cultural and natural landscape of the people, memorable individuals and faces, and scenes depicting social and ritual activities and events.

Also consistent with the Rousseauian style of discourse is the sometimes patronizing reference to the subjects - "these little people of the Sandface" - as well as their portrayal as historyless pristine aboriginals, locked in a Stone Age mould. This applies especially to the old people, such as the aged /Gama who is "so absolutely primitive in all of his ways, his primal instincts always on the surface. He represents so closely the way in which Stone Age Man relates to his environment, almost as if he were a throwback from the Old People, the ancestors of today's Bushmen."

This Rousseauian and isolationist portrayal may grate the sensitivities of more than a few viewers, especially those committed to the current "revisionist" portrayal of these people. However, the genuine sympathy of the narrator (Myburgh) for the people manages somewhat to temper that annoyance. The revisionists stress the interdependence and encapsulation of marginal hunter-herders and categorically dismiss any portrayal as pristine aboriginals as an anthropological fiction or fancy (Wilmsen 1989, Wilmsen and Denbow forthcoming). Moreover, the fact that the film presents a vast and valuable body of ethnographic information - on a Bushman group that, for once, is not the !Kung - further serves to mellow the viewer. The people presented are the G/wi of the Central Kalahari of Botswana, who have been described by George Silberbauer (1981) and Jiro Tanaka (1980). This film is an excellent supplement to these ethnographic writings.

The film consists of four parts, each representing one of the seasons - a creative device with distinct romanticist overtones and incidentally, one that, in the G/wi context, seems somewhat arbitrary and Eurocentric, since the G/wi, along with the !Kung distinguish five seasons. Thus, the viewer is taken through a typical - if excessively dry - year in the lives of the members of a small G/wi band. Women are shown as gatherers and men as hunters in pursuit of a number of different species and employing a variety of hunting techniques (archery, snaring, digging out burrowing animals). Children are featured, from infancy to adolescence, as are the old; the passage through the stations of life echoes the seasonal cycle and lyrically, romantically underscores the attunedness to nature of this prototypical Naturvolk. Of special interest are the various dances the film presents, both ludic ones like the ostrich dance of the men, the melon dance of the women and the ostrich-against-the-steenbok dance of the children, and ritual trance-healing dance. In the depiction of the culmination of the trance-healing

¹ Editor's notes: this review was originally planned as a joint effort with Dr Robert Gordon, and it should have appeared in our Spring 1990 issue. See, "People of the Great Sandface: People of the Great White Lie", Robert Gordon CVA Review, Spring 1990