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Lecturer: Paul Hills
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Title of essay assignment:

Write a critical analysis concerning your production of your 24 minute documentary.

I hereby declare that this essay is my own work. I have acknowledged all other authors' ideas and referenced direct quotations from their work. I have not allowed anyone else to borrow or copy my work.

Jans (C.J.) de Jager

Date

“The one that got away”, as produced by Shot Productions members Amanda Sibanda, Jans de Jager and Lindile Mpanza, is a comprehensively researched social documentary spanning twenty-four minutes and is the product of extensive study of critical theories of film production. The storyline, character development and narrative events serve the purpose of showing the reader disparate values and encourage changing values in the reader. These values relate to ideas of ownership, identity and “race”. The semiotic construction of shots and sound bites speaks from a framework of knowledge which is common to what can be called the discourse of television journalism. For the members of Shot Productions it was paramount to attempt the redress of inequalities through the use of imagery and narrative construction.

The media reports concerned with this story re-located the original emphasis on subsistence fishing to a conflict between the government and the scientific lobby. The initial talks between the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South African National Parks and local inhabitants about opening parts of the Tsitsikamma Park (placed between Humansdorp and Plettenberg Bay) could be described as the first arc of the story; outcry from conservation organisations such as the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) and marine-based scientists like Paul Cowley because of the environmental implications can be labelled the second arc. On 8 April 2007 the Cape Times (SAPA 2007a) reported that “Community’s request to fish in Tsitsikamma may be granted”. The same SAPA newswire story also ran in the Mail & Guardian Online (SAPA 2007b) with the headline “Govt considers Tsitsikamma subsistence fishing”. The Afrikaans news on SABC 2 (Van Rooyen 2007) reported on a visit by Deputy-minister Rejoice Mabudhaphasi to the Boskor centre in the Tsitsikamma area and balanced a quote from a community member about starvation and one from the minister about conservation. The change came with the story in Die Burger (Steyn 2007a) which read “Kritiek oor hengel dalk in Tsitsikamma toegelaat word” (Criticism over possible fishing in Tsitsikamma) and later the Cape Times (Gosling 2007:6) reported on 24 April that “Experts slate fishing plan for reserve” with one biologist calling the plan “diabolical”. On 28 April Die Burger reported further “WWF maan téén hengel in Tsitsikamma” (WWF complains about fishing in Tsitsikamma). A further change in direction seems to be represented by the following articles which all focus on the community’s story: “Community fishing vs. marine breeding” in the Mail & Guardian on 25 May (Newmarch 2007:3); and “Anglers impatient over opening of marine reserve” in The Herald on 13 August (Scholtz 2007).

In these articles the semiotic codes specific to this story were included in “The one that got away” to represent different interests. The study of signs, or “semiotics” was pioneered in Ferdinand de Saussure in France and C.S. Peirce in the United States and the main distinction that is made in this world is between the “signifier” and “signified” which make up the signs which make up messages (Hawkes 1977:123-126). The signifier is the part of the sign which is visible while the signified is the meaning which may be attached to it. Christian Metz was a forerunner of “film semiotics” with his book Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema (1974) in which he analysed how signs make meaning (Fourie 2004:217). In the case of the sign “Tsitsikamma Park” (whether written, spoken, photographed, painted, road sign or otherwise) is made up of the signifier which is the phrase itself (or photo or picture or road sign) and the signified meaning can be related to the Park’s position, history, and more relevantly here, the dispute over access to its marine resources by the community. The change in news articles from initial co-operation between the “government” (read representatives of the community) and the “community” (read historically disempowered) to blunt opposition from the “environmental and scientific lobby” (read practical knowledge) add to the signified meaning of “community” (now read destructive freeloaders) and “government” (impractical and misinformed). The further change by represent Newmarch (2007:3) and Scholtz (2007) change “community” again. These three main signs needed to be represented in “The one that got away” in such a way as for the reader to judge their signified meanings for itself.

The structure of the main narrative arcs was based on these shifts in meaning with the intention of giving the characters a voice to speak for themselves. The determination of who is able to speak and transform the meanings of the signified has historically always been that of the white person and following on this thought J.M Coetzee (1996:6-7) contends that it was only with the start of the liberation movement that white people could be disempowered with slogans such as “ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET”. During the Apartheid regime in South Africa the very word “Apartheid” itself signifies the separate racial categories (Derrida 1985:331) which were based on phenotypical features to distinguish between groups of people who could be afforded certain resources as well as influence on decisions regarding their governance (McClintock & Nixon 1985:341). This is reflected in the first main narrative in “The one that got away” which is named the “socio-economic arc” in the working script during which documents failed attempts by the community already in the 1970’s to cease the closing of the Park

to fishing and their grievances in regard to this fact. Their claim to historical connection to this area can be said to be confirmed by a report in 1887 by the Conservator of the “Zitzikamma” forests which documented that “The coloured wood-cutters [here] are without employment or provisions, and subsist mainly on fish,” (Brown 1887:78). One source from close-by Stormsriver Village revealed that he had worked on a fishing vessel with his family until the Park was closed (Sibanda, De Jager & Mpanza 2007). The second arc, as represented by marine biologist Paul Cowley, covers the environmental and economic arguments for why the Park cannot be opened. The third arc asks mainly what will happen next and what legal arguments exist for and against opening the Park. These arcs are broken into smaller narrative events which signal necessary changes in values in the subject characters where they are asked to atone for conflicts between their beliefs and those of others (Van der Walt 1998:16).

By and large the news reports are invested in a white discourse of power informed by a pastoral image of South Africa as a natural paradise, which furnishes its inhabitants with resources while conveniently under-representing disadvantaged groups of people who do not get an equal part of these resources and are integral to its creation. Discourses control actions and are created by discursive boundaries which differentiate who gets access to resources and whose speech is recognized as truth (Foucault 1970:55-56). Conservation in Africa developed out of the colonial intention of imposing European ideas of African onto its material reality by preserving the wild and natural “Eden” which had been lost to the European landscape and a chance for Man to rekindle the pastoral “harmony with nature and the natural environment” (Anderson and Grove 1987:4). One could say that the news reports have a “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipschitz 1997:3) because of amplified portrayal the environmental and scientific lobby’s story. Whiteness gains its power from not being labeled and bordered off as being such seeming to be the norm and those who speak from it seeming to speak the truth (Dyer 1997:9). Just so it is not seen as a wrong thing for the ruling government to simply consider to “locate the wood-cutters on suitable places” in 1887 (Brown 1887:166) or using armed soldiers to “force the Mfengu off their land to Keiskammahoek, Ciskei, about 400km away” in 1977 (Fakudze 2000:13).

By representing as many different opposing viewpoints as possible, Shot Productions succeeds in disinvesting itself from the white perspective which is generally common with the discourse of television journalism which regularly represent poor people as black and pro-active people as white. In this piece the ones taking action

are black and they are not just looking for a hand-out, they are fighting for recognition of their identities. The whites who complain of fish shortages are ironically the only ones allowed to fish in the Park. People like Paul Cowley and other whites are the only people in the piece seen fishing in the piece. The black people are sitting in their houses and in the Park where they face up to an invisible boundary which refuses them the inherited right to the marine resources of the area which are their homes. The imagery challenges the stereotypes of white people as intellectually upstanding and black people as freeloaders. Through this process the issue of “racial” difference is foreground in a story where it is not necessarily an obvious theme.

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