

life-cycle rituals. Aisha, Elizabeth Fernea's friend and long-time informant, is introduced and in much of the rest of the film her interlocutory presence guides both the filmmakers and the audience. Overall, the *Odyssey* film is edited to show the interactive relationship between the filmmakers and their subjects, and thereby to humanize both parties.

Examples could be multiplied by the many-leveled ways in which the *Odyssey* film, by rearranging the same footage used by Granada and offering more adequate contextual information, conveys an impression of women living lives that are intelligible (to us and to themselves) and, at least in their terms, shaped by the women's own choices. The film manages to convey enough of the female life-cycle, even in its brief space, to give a sense of lives that are patterned (hence meaningful to those living them), yet susceptible to individuals' shaping influences. Nor is the *Odyssey* film's dignified portrayal of traditional Moroccan women a whitewash: an interview with a professional dancer, discussing her reasons for choosing her unrespectable profession and her family's reaction, is particularly moving.

Granada, by contrast, insistently invokes stereotypes about public and private worlds and by contrastive juxtaposition of decontextualized views of male and female activities, presents an essentially static, polarized view of women's lives and male-female relations in Morocco. The two versions of *Some Women of Marrakesh*, shown together, constitute a lesson in film editing that would be a provocative addition to any course on ethnographic film. Unfortunately, at this writing, negotiations for distribution of the *Odyssey* film have been suspended indefinitely. It is possible that inquiries to PBS will hasten the release of the film. For teaching on the traditional lives of women of North Africa or Islam, the *Odyssey* version is much preferable on account of its greater coherency and significantly higher information content.

Saints and Spirits, cut from extra footage shot for *Some Women of Marrakesh*, expands on themes briefly presented in the first film. While *Saints and Spirits* stands alone as a coherent document on popular Islam, the two films supplement each other and work well when shown together. *Saints and Spirits* juxtaposes the religious domains of saint veneration (including local pilgrimage) and spirit possession, the latter involving a complex of musical and dance practices as well as trance and divining. Involvement with these popular phases of Islam, though not restricted to women, is presented largely through the participation of five women (a diviner and her clients; two women pilgrims) with whom Fernea developed considerable rapport. Some transitions in the film seem abrupt on first viewing. *Saints and Spirits* is considerably more informative if the audience has already had a general introduction to Islam. The visual information in the film is dense and tightly constructed, but the accompanying narrative is sketchy, leaving many striking scenes unexplained. The accompanying film guide and bibliography are helpful. Both *Saints and Spirits* and *Some Women of Marrakesh* (*Odyssey*) are highly recommended for their informative, nonpolemical presentation of Muslim women's lives. Until the *Odyssey* version of *Some Women* is available, the Granada film is recommended, with caution.

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Nlai, the Story of a !Kung Woman. By John Marshall, Adrienne Miesmer, and Sue Marshall Cabezas. 59 min., 16mm and 3/4 videotape, color. Fifty-six page study guide. (Documentary Educational Resources, 5 Bridge Street, Watertown, MA 02171)

The film opens with crawl titles which serve as an introduction:

In 1970, the South African government established a reservation on the Namibia/Botswana border which

restricted 800 !Kung to an area one-half the size of their original territory. The reservation lacks sufficient food and water for the !Kung to continue their gathering/hunting life. Filming for this program took place over 27 years, beginning in 1951 when the !Kung were an independent people.

The first scene of the film shows a group of people lined up to receive rations and introduces the central character of the film, N!ai, who reminisces in idealized terms of her tribe's life before the white man came. N!ai's verbal reminiscences, spoken in English by a black South African singer now living in Los Angeles, are accompanied by actual footage shot of her as a young girl and by voice-over narration which somehow manages to be less obtrusive than is usually the case when the technique is used. N!ai, for example, remembers her family's being great hunters when she was a child. The film images show a hunt that actually occurred during her childhood, and the omniscient voice gives relevant information about !Kung hunting practices.

N!ai next describes her wedding, and it is shown in the film (to be exact, the brochure indicates that what is shown is the very similar preparation for a girl's first menstruation rite). The brochure also quotes the filmmaker's thoughts upon observing N!ai's wedding in 1953.

After describing her wedding, N!ai tells of her rather stormy early married life (again accompanied by actual footage of her shot during the period), her husband's learning to trance and becoming a healer, and her gradual acceptance of him. Suddenly the viewer is wrenched from the past to the present by superimposed titles that inform us that in 1978 the tuberculosis rate among the !Kung was ten percent and by the interjection of footage of N!ai playing a *//gwashi* and singing, "Don't come to me now. Don't look at my face. Death is dancing with me now." The powerful performance is followed by a scene showing an interview with the Bushman Affairs Commissioner who complains, "These bushmen don't work. They loaf around all the time," while in the background a !Kung servant is shown dusting a *//gwashi* and tuning it.

The next section of the film shows an argument among the !Kung and then deals with present-day giraffe hunting as a game warden explains government prohibition of hunting. The film images illustrate the discussion with footage of a present-day hunt. The game warden, who strongly supports the government prohibition on hunting giraffes, permitted the special hunt so that it could be filmed. We see the government doctor examine a sick child and prescribe medicine for her, and we also see a special !Kung healing ceremony held for the child. The baby died; and again N!ai is shown singing, "Death is ruining me. Death is stealing from me. Death is dancing me ragged."

A group of soldiers from the South African Army arrive at the village to trade canned rations for native crafts and to recruit for their forces. The film also shows another film crew making a feature, and an explosive brouhaha involving N!ai, her husband, her daughter, and her son-in-law. After seeing the film of the filmmaking and observing the argument, we follow N!ai to church where the sermon, apparently directed at her, was a retelling of the Biblical story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The sermon was well intended perhaps, but N!ai's interpretation was, "Now really! Those two at the water hole had never even met before. How can a woman go down in a water hole with a perfect stranger calling himself 'God's son!' It would have been very bad."

The film returns to the subject of the militarization of the !Kung, and we see one of N!ai's uncles marching off with the army (his whole attitude clearly shown is that this white man's marching is pretty funny stuff). We hear him tell her that they will have coffee when he gets back and are also given the officer's interpretation that most of the enlistees will spend the rest of their lives in the army.

The film closes with N!ai singing, "Now people mock me and I cry. My people abuse me.

The white people scorn me. Death mocks me. Death dances with me. Don't look at my face."

The intelligent, articulate use of footage shot over a 27-year period makes this film a unique ethnographic document. As the subtitle indicates, the film is the story of a !Kung woman, but it is also the story of the !Kung people as they move from their past as a hunting/gathering society towards an uncertain future. The sensitive structuring and editing of the large body of available film makes it a masterpiece whose use of truncation, symbolism, and incremental repetition describes inevitable mutability and adjustments to it as essential parts of folkloric process and the human condition.

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Folk Performers

D. L. Menard: Cajun Musician. By Stephen Duplantier and Marc Porter. 11 min., 16mm, color. (Picture Start, 204 1/2 West John Street, Champaign, IL 61820)

Don Montoucet joue l'accordeon. By Stephen Duplantier. 15 min., 16mm, color. (Center for Gulf South History and Culture, 816 Decatur Street, New Orleans, LA 70116)

I thought for a long time about how to review Stephen Duplantier's short films on D. L. Menard and Don Montoucet. Following the scathing review of Duplantier's *Gumbo* by Bruce Lane in Volume 94 of this journal, I find myself hesitant to add to his funeral pyre. I agree with that reviewer on the importance of not misusing the relatively few opportunities available for the making of ethnographic films, but Lane said it with clarity and conviction; I don't think I need do it again.

Typical of Duplantier's past work, these two short portraits are beautifully shot and recorded, but do not have very much to say. D. L. Menard is shown at home and in his chair factory in Erath; Don Montoucet in his back yard and at work in his garage in Scott. Both films are full of shallow testimonies about Cajun music and culture. (This was particularly distressing to me, since I had assisted in making contacts for the short on Mr. Montoucet.) I know both musicians well and feel that they have much to say, but the message doesn't come across in these films.

I am a firm believer in the eloquent wisdom of the folk, but translating that wisdom into film or any other medium is not automatic. It is not enough to point a loaded camera and/or microphone at people. The folklorist has a responsibility to present information given by informants with the same excitement and sensitivity with which they give it. It takes time to penetrate the surface, and artful scholarship to determine what will translate well, what best expresses the message of the informant.

Cajuns have been parrying shallow questions with shallow answers on film for years, at least since Les Blank's trips to South Louisiana. These films are more of the same: very expensive, full color home movies.

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