

in the military. Children followed. He could not have been more proud of his family, whom he gave the best of goods, vacations, and a lovely house. He began an energetic transnational life, with his family in New York and his successful business in Cuba. Then a financial crisis and Castro's nationalization of private businesses forced Miguel to flee to Puerto Rico, where he re-established his business. His last years were tragic; a thief enticed him, stealing his every penny. He also lost Louise, who tried to protect what little there was left. He died on October 17, 2006.

"Cultural relativism" as a sacred and uncomplicated principle of anthropology can no longer be taken for granted. Feminism, human rights, democracy—rising primarily from the "West," or the United States—override the cultural practices and values of a people. The world is torn by harsh and antagonistic ideological battles. Mendel simply could not take feminism, which he thought the root cause of people's loss of respect for him. He was an enormously talented man with deep compassion and love for his wife and his daughter, and yet could not see why they sought independence. He saw no wrong in the double standard he practiced. In this excellent study, the daughter-anthropologist captures the father's beliefs and their roots without scorn and with compassion.

The book will appeal to many young students in the United States, even if the boleros are too alien and slow compared with their contemporary music. With the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2015, Cuba has become an important tourist destination. But its history, experienced by Mendel/Miguel, is familiar; the problems of immigrants and their lives are receiving heightened attention today. A broad range of readers will bring their own life experiences and scholarship to learn from this book. It is an excellent candidate for large introductory courses as well as a variety of courses in anthropology, geography, international/global studies, Jewish studies, and Latin American/Caribbean studies; graduate courses on methods; and many others. We all will find here an opportunity to reflect on how we should represent the other. Finally, Routledge offers an innovative electronic version of *My Father's Wars*, with 100 hyperlinks that add richness to the written text. This serves as a model to scholars who wish to pack their data alongside their text and allows electronically savvy young students to access additional sources.

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## Old Wine in a New Bottle: Seeking Sustainability among the Earth Keepers

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*Down to Earth*. Written, produced, and directed by Rolf Winters and Renata Heinen. Edited by Andrew Quigley and Sahil Gill. Music by Stephen Warbeck, 2015.

When Robert Gordon wrote his groundbreaking book, *The Bushman Myth*, in 1992, it started with the now-famous sentence "Some films can kill" (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 1). He referred to the ever-increasing inequality that primordial depictions of indigenous people have often led to—in this particular case, of the Bushmen of southern Africa—and how they were portrayed in the popular, commercial slapstick *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Uys 1980). Portraying marginalized groups as if they harmoniously lived in nature activated nature conservation and tourism policies that tended to perpetuate these people's position as "primitives" and an "underclass" to be gazed at by a predominantly Western audience that longed to see "authentic" people. This, however, would seriously constrain the Bushmen's potential for further development by increasingly limiting their political and economic agency (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000). Thirty-five years after *Gods*, the film *Down to Earth* has become a rather unexpected hit in western Europe (specifically, Belgium and the Netherlands) and is promising for further distribution across the globe. Compared with *Gods*, the message in *Down to Earth* is a lot more serious, but it is similar in the sense that this is another film that suggests that indigenous groups (called "tribal people")—such as the Bushmen, Maasai, and Aboriginals—still lead a nonconsumerist/sustainable life in harmony with nature.

The film starts by showing how the Dutch couple Winters and Heinen, together with their three children, moved away from a consumerist lifestyle to live with Anishinaabeg on the north shores of Lake Michigan for 4 years. One of the people they were highly inspired by during these years was the now late Nowaten (He Who Listens). Throughout the film, Nowaten functions as a main commentator, while Winters and Heinen themselves do the voice-overs. Their stay in America has inspired the family to travel around the world for a year to find more "wisdom" among other "tribal" Earth Keepers like Nowaten, whom they find in Kenya, Australia, Japan, Ecuador, Peru, India, Namibia, and Ireland. In *Down to Earth*, we follow the family on this yearlong spiritual quest.

*Down to Earth* is a very pleasant film to watch; the shots are at times breathtaking, and the people who are being interviewed are a pleasure to listen to, making it, in a sense, a feel-good movie. The core message of the film is plain: live sustainably by learning from the wise Earth Keepers, on the basis of two main pillars: first, connect with and respect nature (many Earth Keepers show ontological ideas of being a part of their environment); second, understand that we are all part of a larger (social) collective, including spirits. It is important to note that the film has not been made as a documentary by or for anthropologists, and therefore it would be unrealistic to expect anthropological complexities to be fully taken care of. Nevertheless, representing people as primordial

to the rest of the world and critiquing society at large comes with responsibility, and in my opinion the film and its message could have had more strength if some essential issues were addressed more thoroughly.

One of my concerns is revealed when Winters explains that, after 1 month of traveling, “Nothing has worked out as planned. . . . We are not getting to the right people.” Heinen consequently states that “We knew that finding Earth Keepers wouldn’t be easy.” This shows that what was regarded as “wisdom” was predecided by the makers before the trip, on the basis of convictions of what an Earth Keeper should be like (probably inspired by Nowaten), thereby mainly mirroring their own ideology instead.

This concern is strengthened on the website for the film ([www.downtoearthfilm.com](http://www.downtoearthfilm.com)), where Winters and Heinen support various “people-powered change” initiatives. I agree with their plea against consumerism and in favor of a more sustainable lifestyle, but the solutions they offer for global environmental causes and/or social inequalities through such people-powered change initiatives remain rather superficial; one can donate money to various charities or start one’s own initiative at school, at work, or at home. It seems as if their “critical” stance against consumerism and the wisdom we have gained from the Earth Keepers in the film remains without any further consequences for our current lifestyle. Ironically, these people-powered change projects are often market oriented and seem to have inspired the makers to start the enterprise DOWN to EARTH Collective BV. Based on the Earth Keepers’ wisdom, “the enterprise will facilitate this change by waking up people throughout our society, empowering individuals, communities and organisations and invite them to challenge their existing mind-set by **asking the right questions, to take responsibility for their own impact and footprint**” (DOWN to EARTH Collective BV, boldface in original). It remains unclear, however, which questions are “right,” why we need to ask them, and who is responsible for which actions. Altogether, it stays rather vague, and instead of a plea against structural problems of overaccumulation or unlimited economic growth, the enterprise supports the trend of a circular economy—the latest in a series of “new,” “sustainable” ideas about the world economy presented mainly by supporters of neoliberalism—that contradicts their plea against consumerism. Therefore, this uncritical enterprise bears the danger that it could easily become another institute for green washing, where it can be used by supporters to present themselves as (more) sustainable. An active support for “degrowth,” for example, would have made a lot more sense in their case, since it concentrates on the roots of consumerism. As such, their plea to break away from “the system” remains unconvincing.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that traveling to eight countries in 1 year with five people using cars and airplanes—as is done in *Down to Earth*—essentially presents and promotes a consumerist lifestyle that is mostly reserved for the global elite. This, of course, also contradicts the film’s anti-

consumerist message and resembles important contradictions of (sustainable) cultural (eco)tourism, as does the romanticized picture of “the other” (i.e., “tribal” people) that prevails in *Down to Earth*. These subjects of the tourist/film gaze are continually presented as people who are indigenous stewards of nature, a myth that has long been uncovered in anthropology and tourism studies; these “others” are members of modernization, and many also wish to enjoy its fruits (see, e.g., Fennell 2008; Hüncke and Koot 2012). For example, Mokoipo Ole Simel—the Loita Maasai leader in the film—stated in a meeting I had with him in 2009 (when I was working as a fund-raiser for an NGO) that education, in particular vocational training, was a good way for his people to “develop,” so that they would get “proper” jobs. Furthermore, despite some quick views of Indian garbage dumps, contemporary marginalization—the daily reality for most “tribal” people—is largely ignored, or it at least remains disconnected from the Earth Keepers’ wisdom. Such an ahistorical and apolitical presentation of the Earth Keepers merely displays them as noble savages.

What, then, can explain the film’s popularity in the western European lowlands? Is it simply a result of the Western search for authenticity? These days we live in a consumer culture more than ever, which led Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) to suggest that this “is an age that hungers for anything that *feels* authentic, just as we lament more and more that it is a world of inauthenticity” (3). Throughout the film, consumerism is presented as a spiritless mind-set, as the inauthentic, leading us not only to disconnect from but also to destroy nature. I believe the film’s popularity explains more about our search for authenticity than about the Earth Keepers, while the feel-good element does not allow for a serious critique of contemporary society. Essentially, *Down to Earth* shows various contradictions that we see more often in the sustainability discourse and neglects broader structural issues too much to be seen as an addition to the sustainability debate, despite its positive intentions, which I am sure have led some individuals to change things in their lives. Seen as such, it remains an enjoyable film to watch, but overall it is old wine in a new bottle.

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