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 en-
ticed 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 prin-
ciple of anthropology can no longer be taken for granted. Fem-
inism, 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 an-
tagonistic 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 dip-
losamic relations between the two countries in 2015, Cuba has
become an important tourist destination. But its history, ex-
perienced by Mendel/Miguel, is familiar; the problems of im-
migrants and their lives are receiving heightened attention
today. A broad range of readers will bring their own life ex-
periences 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 rep-
resent the other. Finally, Routledge offers an innovative elec-
tronic 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 elec-
tronically 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

When Robert Gordon wrote his groundbreaking book, The
Bushman Myth, in 1992, it started with the now-famous sen-
tence “Some films can kill” (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000:
1). He referred to the ever-increasing inequality that primor-
dial 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 na-
ture conservation and tourism policies that tended to perpetu-
ate these people’s position as “primitives” and an “under-
class” to be gazed at by a predominantly Western audience that
longed to see “authentic” people. This, however, would seri-
ously constrain the Bushmen’s potential for further develop-
ment 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 un-
expected 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, Nowa-
ten functions as a main commentator, while Winters and Heinen
themselves do the voice-overs. Their stay in America has in-
spired the family to travel around the world for a year to find
more “wisdom” among other “tribal” Earth Keepers like Nowa-
ten, 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 in-
terviewed 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 na-
ture (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 im-
portant to note that the film has not been made as a docu-
mentary 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 predominated by the makers before the trip, on the basis of convictions of what an Earth Keeper should be, essentially presenting the film 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 the tourist/ﬁlm gaze—is 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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