

## THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF LANDSCAPE THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM PHOTOGRAPHY IN NAMIBIA

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*This essay discusses the cultural construction of the Namibian landscape by tourism advertising material, treating landscape photography as a language which can be analysed through signs. Nevertheless, since signs require a consensus of communication, a contextualisation of the pictures will also be made. Therefore, below I will attempt firstly, to discuss the theoretical context in which the pictures will be analyzed, secondly, to present the geographical context in which the pictures were born and thirdly to discuss the pictures as signs by locating the points de capiton within them.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Robert Gordon (1999:111) maintains that “If there is one thing, which characterises contemporary tourism, it is its visual aspect. Tourism is photography” (see also Sontag, 1977). After all as Christina Bonarou (2009) claims, citing Larsen, tourism and photography appeared simultaneously<sup>1</sup>. Images of places are very common in tourism advertising material and as John Urry (2002) reminds us, historically in the development of tourism, *places* were replaced by *landscapes*. Following this, the present article will attempt an analysis of landscape as pictured in tourism brochures in the context of which landscape is being “emphasized in its socio-symbolic dimension: as an entity that exists by virtue of its being perceived, experienced, and contextualised by people” (Ashmore and Knapp, 1999:1)<sup>2</sup>. Based on the above, the aim of this



article is to discuss the cultural construction of the Namibian landscape by tourism advertising material. .

This kind of material is produced by policy makers, such as state ministries and tourism organisations, as well as travel agencies, commercial companies, and local communities a fact suggesting that between them there is a consensus about the choice of images. Thus, it can be claimed that landscape advertisement is a common ‘language’ between them and since they are using it to communicate with tourists, it can also be claimed that it is a common language between them and the tourists. Umberto Eco (1974a) argues that in language there is a signification system in the context of which there is, on the one hand, a socially conventionalised generation of sign-functions and that, on the other hand, there is “an exploitation of meanings in order to produce expressions for many practical purposes” (Eco, 1974b: 4). Undoubtedly these characteristics can be attributed to an advertising attempt. The manipulation of specific signs in order to convince consumers is a common technique in advertising.

In order to find such signs the employment of what Jacques Lacan (1977) calls keywords (*points de capiton*), which represent key meanings in a discourse could be helpful. Nevertheless, since signs require a consensus of communication, a contextualisation of the pictures seems in order. Therefore, below I will attempt firstly, to discuss the theoretical context in which the pictures will be analyzed, secondly, to present the geographical context in which the pictures were born and thirdly to discuss the pictures as signs by locating the *points de capiton* within them.

## **THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF LANDSCAPE**

The term ‘landscape’ was coined in the 16th century and was used as a technical term by painters, aesthetes, and antiquarians (Bender, 1993; Hirsch and O’ Hanlon 1995; Abramson 2000). As Hirsch and O’ Hanlon point out, landscape as a concept emerges during the same historical period that mapping and picturing took on increasing significance as a reliable way of representation. Macnaghten and Urry (2001: 6) claim that landscape involves the appearance of look or leisure, relaxation and visual consumption of visitors, and Cosgrove and Daniels (1998:1) define landscape as a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings.

Nevertheless, nowadays in contemporary Western terms, landscape is not considered solely as being a way of picturing. Tilley (1994:25) for

example refers to 'landscape' as the physical and visual form of the earth as an environment and as a setting in which locales occur and in dialectical relation to which meanings are created, reproduced and transformed. In his approach the emphasis is on processes; landscape is not a static concept that represents only ways of seeing; it is not a passive way of understanding the surrounding world; it constitutes action as well as being constituted by it through a process of 'structuration'.

Similarly Hirsch and O' Hanlon (1995) theorise 'landscape' as a cultural process between a 'foreground' of everyday experience and a 'background' of social potentiality, taking the standpoint that the investigation of landscape as a pictorial method of representation excludes particular aspects of it, which would appear to be of considerable significance and interest. In their analysis the notion of 'foreground reality' represents everyday crystallised forms of experience whereas the notion of 'background potentiality' refers to the potential forms that everyday experience may be shaped from. The interaction between these two forms of experience shape and reshape the notion of landscape in a way that the latter emerges as a cultural process. As such, landscape can be analysed in various ways which stress the cultural and historical specificity of the notion. As Abramson put it (2000:2) "the constricted interior of a prisoner's cell, the entire universe of surrounding space suggested by any cosmology, or the cellular view through a microscope are only landscapes to us in a figurative or metaphorical sense. However, precisely because of the existence of all these human settings, land appears both as an object with use-value and a symbol with meaning".

Furthermore, Bender (2001:3) claims that even within the Western-elitist notion of landscape, which suggests that the observer stands back from the thing observed, stasis is an illusion. Whether painting or viewing, movement is required before the correct vantage point is achieved. And even when the body is stationary, the eye moves from foreground to background and back again. Furthermore, landscape is perceived according to the cultural context in which the prevalence of sight over the other senses is not given in other worlds like the occidental. Other times and/or places give prominence to different aspects of landscape.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus embraces all the above approaches, by defining it as

*"The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence. Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures*

*predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu, 1989:53).*

In this sense Bourdieu proposes a continuous interaction between individual, social and non – social factors, which determine our practice and consequently our interpretations of the world and the landscape. As Abramson (2000:1) suggests “looks, maps narratives, experiences, contestations and memories: all these features of human land relations come into sharper focus with the theoretical promotion of land as landscape”. All these compose an image of landscape drawn with individual, social, and cultural parameters. Landscapes are first and foremost cultural products (Bonarou, 2009)

Consequently, the ‘reality’ known as ‘landscape’ has a very complicated existence. What makes it complicated are the different interpretations that can be attributed to it when seen from different perspectives. “All landscapes are bearers of meanings in the sense that they represent cultural values, social behaviours and individual actions within a certain time and geographical space” (Terkenli in Bonarou, 2009). In other words, landscape is a sign, which seems differently from different points of view. As far as pictures of landscapes are concerned, the way people look at them is historically, socially, and culturally defined (Bonarou, 2009) and the same applies for those who produce such pictures. Particularly, in the context of tourism “the gaze is constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of signs” (Urry, 2002:3). Thus not only landscape but also photography is a sign and this is what the next section is going to discuss.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY AS A SIGN**

Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) wrote that signifieds<sup>iii</sup> as mental concepts are interpreted differently in different contexts. This difference according to Eco (1974a) depends on cultural conventions, which determine the system of signification. Therefore Eco proposes a theory of language which studies the sign and as sign he defines:

*“...everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else. In other terms*

*I would like to accept the definition proposed by Morris (1938) according to which “something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter” (Eco, 1974b: 16).*

According to the above a sign is the product of a convention every time it is recognised as the vehicle for something else. Thus “semiotics iv, is not concerned with the study of a particular kind of objects, but with ordinary objects insofar (and only insofar) as they participate in semiosis” (ibid: 16). In this sense, culture itself can be studied by semiotics since it is signification and communication. All cultural processes are processes of communication and as such they are underlined by a system of signification. Consequently “the laws of signification are the laws of culture. Thus culture can be studied completely under a semiotic profile” (ibid: 28). Therefore, the meaning of a term is a cultural unit, which can be everything; a person, a place, a thing, a feeling. This is why Eco argues that visual communication is also part of the semiotic analysis. He claims that an iconic sign is not a word but it represents words or phrases or whole stories and this is why they can be analyzed like verbal signs. “Thus a general semiotics is simply a philosophy of language, which stresses the comparative and systematic approach to languages (and not only to verbal language) by exploiting the result of different more local inquiries” (ibid: 8).

But why is this approach relevant in the study of tourist pictures? Following Urry (2002:13) who claims that “tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism” and drawing on Jacques Lacan’s (1977)v theory of dominant key words (points de capiton translating into quilting or anchoring point) or the symbolic indexes (MacCannell, 1999), students of photography can simply look for those key words (Eco would call them iconic signs). Nevertheless, semiotics cannot explain how certain iconographic elements develop into consensus unless historic aspects are taken into account (Albers and James, 1988) and this in turn can only be achieved through the contextualisation of the pictures which will be attempted in the following section by presenting a brief account of Namibia’s recent history.

## **NAMIBIA: THE COUNTRY**

Namibia, which was named after the Namib Desert is a country in the south-west part of Africa, bounded in the west by the Atlantic Ocean, in

the east by Botswana and the Kalahari Desert, in the north by Angola, and in the south through the Orange river by South Africa. It is divided into four main regions: the Okavango and Ovambo – land in the north, the Kaoko – veldt and Damara – land in the centre and the Nama – land in the south. A big part of the central country consists of rocky mountains and sandy plains (see Knappert, 1981). Namibia has a population of 2 million people, divided into four main linguistic groups: the Bantu language speakers, the Hottentots, the Bushmen (Gordon, 1992) and the Afrikaans. Bushmen are considered to be the group with the oldest history. They were expanded all across the south of the Rainforest when nomadic Hottentots and agricultural Bantu forced them to return to the Namib and Kalahari deserts (Knappert, *ibid.*).

The first towns were established by the Dutch settlers; the most important of these towns were Windhoek, which now is the capital of the country and Grootfontein. The first brick house was built by the German missionaries – the Albrecht brothers in 1806 who upon arrival complained about the country's poverty and the natives' lack of civilization (Knappert, 1981).

The land of San or Bushmen, was subject to a series of invasions for more than 130 years (Skotnes, 1996; Gordon, 1992). The first Western 'visitors' were Portuguese navigators, who were sent to discover a seaway to India. Their king, John II, hoped that the inhabitants of these regions would soon learn Portuguese and adopt the Portuguese customs. Ever since a lot of Europeans, settled in Namibia. From 1884, it was a German colony. Later on, after the World War I Namibia was administered by South Africa and after World War II it came under UN control as all former German Colonies. After many wars the Namibian land was declared open to settlers (Gordon, 1992) and this, in some areas, caused resistance from the part of the natives. Many of them were killed and their lands were sold to European and South African settlers. Indigenous groups of Namibia survived into the twentieth century and have been the subject of research by anthropologists, psychologists and other scientists. The destruction of their culture and language resulted in the homogenisation of different San groups, who came from different traditions, spoke different languages and had had different histories, into a single unit which is identified as Bushmen (Skotnes, 1996); "a specific physical who lived a primitive life outside of history and supposed to offer a view into a deep human past" (Skotnes, 1996:17).

During the apartheid period, national parks, game reserves and resorts were established serving, in many cases, as border lines between black and white territories (Silvester, 1999). This fact led to eviction and

dispossession of the majority of the indigenous groups from land and natural resources (Gordon, 1992), white settlers were given freehold tenure over land by a 1967 Ordinance. Ever since, they began to use their land for economic profit related to tourism. The leading settlers of Namibia sought to place the country on the map through the promotion of tourism and this is why they began to encourage exploration expeditions (Gordon, 1997; Haarhoff, 1991). What they wished to promote is an image of the country, not completely uncivilized in order to make it seem attractive to the tourists. In addition, the administration encouraged tourism through articles published in the South African Railways and Harbours Magazine. Thus, "Namibia waited to be a place where the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie could collect trophies in emulation of and eventually in competition with that thriving industry in East Africa – the great White Hunter Safari" (Gordon, 1997:103).

Namibia became independent in March 1990, following the war of independence and the new government recognised that Bushmen were a disadvantaged group and as such they had been given priority to development and preservation (Gordon, 1997). However this was not the only goal. Since the 1980s there was already a movement by NGOs such as IRDNC (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation), which intended to empower local communities in order to benefit from the link of wildlife and tourism (<http://www.newafrica.com/ecotourism>). In 1999 the Namibian government stated that in order to raise the national income and alleviate poverty there had to be projects regarding the sustaining of wildlife and environmental resources (Tourism White Paper, 1999). This would help towards the development of rural communities. In addition tourism industry through the idea of sustainable development vi could also contribute towards this direction (Ashley and LaFranchi, 1997). Thus there have been community based resource management (CBNRM) projects with the aim to preserve wildlife. Such initiatives were believed that it would lead to tourism attraction and consequently to rural development (<http://www.newafrica.com/ecotourism>). Today, tourism is a major industry in Namibia (<http://www.namibiaturism.com.na/tourism.php>) a fact that places it amongst one of the country's most important economic resources.

## **The First Images**

One of the first people who popularised Bushmen was Laurens van der Post. In his book "The Lost World of the Kalahari" Van der Post describes Bushmen as people who were in complete harmony with their

physical environment. Other explorers or settlers have pictured Bushmen as “the world’s most primitive people” (Gordon et al, 1996) or “Last Wild Bushmen” (Gordon, 1999; see also Buntman, 1996 and Gordon, 1997).

What is important to point out here is that photography for the settlers in Namibia began to play a major role in the construction of their private and public histories (Hayes et al, 1999). This means that settlers tried to construct an identity by mediating between the West and the South (Darian-Smith, Gunner and Nuttall, 1996). The symbolic aspect of those early pictures lies here since “they are devices that allude to meanings and understandings outside the picture”<sup>vii</sup> (Albers and James, 1988:141). Thus, if we accept, as Robert Gordon argues, that “the legacy of the Denver expedition<sup>viii</sup> is still very much with us” (Gordon, 1999:117), then this is something that one must pay attention to, while trying to read more recent pictures of this area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

During the time of the research I was living in London. Therefore, the material analyzed was collected from the Namibian embassy in London and from the World Wide Web. A second thought was to talk to some NGOs, which work on community based tourism in Namibia, in order to receive some information about the native’s point of view. The attempt to get in touch with some of these NGOs resulted in the response of WIMSA (Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa) and thus the data was enriched with information given from this organisation.

Initially there was a selection of photographs which was relevant to the subject that was followed by a classification according to their content: those presenting (a) picturesque landscapes, (b) animals, (c) historical landscapes, (d) a combination between wild nature and technology, (e) places familiar to Western eye, (f) those that in combination with the wild nature present the possible situation in which a tourist could be found, and finally (g) those of people working on preservation projects. The division followed the rules of the repetition of the images that were represented. The logic of these divisions is based on what Albers and James (1988:145) define as content analysis: “In the study of tourist photography, content analysis provides an empirical foundation for contrasting and comparing appearances within large data-sets”.

Another approach has been a semiotic analysis of the pictures. That is “treating each picture as a totality – marking the patterned relationships in

its contents, connecting these to parallel and contrasting structures in other pictures, and relating both to the written narratives that accompany them” (ibid:147). The semiotic analysis of the pictures was based - following Barthes ix - on the content of the photographs in combination with their ‘anchorage’ x.

## **‘READING’ THE PICTURES**

### **Picturesque Landscapes: The Romantic Gaze<sup>xi</sup>**

In this category the main image of the picture is an idyllic landscape such as a sunrise or a sunset, a vast valley, a big mountain, a big tree that cannot be found in the West, the desert, a cloudy sky, the ocean, big rocks, lagoons, huts and cabins almost invisible from the plants and the trees, and plants and bushes. Some pictures contain a combination between sky and land. There are also pictures in which there is an alteration between desert and less arid landscapes, desert and ocean and one of the photos shows a human skull in the desert. Some of the above photographs present just the Namibian landscape while others the landscape in combination with something else (the skull, the huts). However, the most dominant image it is that of nature, or better that of the undisturbed nature. Narratives such as the following accompany them:

Here on Impalila Island, where the mighty Azmbezi joins the graceful Chobe River you’ll find the wildlife experience of a lifetime.

A place so unspoilt that while you are there you will experience nature as it was first created.

The wonder of nature.

We will welcome you in a true wilderness atmosphere...

Relax in the African wilderness.

Enjoy the vastness and manifold of our beautiful landscape.

At night you can enjoy the clear African sky with its ever changing carpet of stars so typical of the southern hemisphere.

Spectacular by nature.

Experience the wild... Experience blue skies, open spaces... Experience unimaginable forces of nature as nature intended... Experience ancient sand dunes... Experience lingering sunsets...

Expansive sand and gravel plains and endless stretches of grass savannah alternate with majestic mountain ranges and dune belts of deep red sand partially covered with vegetation.

Exclusively with us: fossilised game tracks and underground water cave explorations.

The mythical baobab...

This region is the largest mountain desert area in South Africa...

If Wambo had a signature tree it would be the graceful makalani...

Walvis Bay: Nature's haven... older than mankind... well worth a visit.

The name Oropoko speaks for itself and is taken from the Herero language, where it means "beautiful cave between the mountains".

In the peaceful land of the Bushmen, the direct descendants of stone - age man, you will find a sense of freedom and a clear African sky.

Your own piece of Africa in the heart of this unspoilt beauty, a place of harsh landscape, open spaces and

vast panoramas, rugged mountains, canyons and wildlife-rich savannas.

## **Animals**

The second category is comprised of animal pictures. It is interesting to point out the repetition of certain kinds of animals. While pictures of small animals are to be found, most of the pictures present lions, tigers, deers, elephants, snakes, large birds, rhinoceroses, zebras, giraffes, horses, sharks, and dolphins.

Some brochures use these animals as their logotypes. In some of them the animals are pictured alone in the wild nature and in others they are pictured with people, either natives or tourists. In the rest, the anchors on the brochures read:

Hunting is your ultimate holiday destination...

Guests can view the feeding of cheetahs, ensuring superb photographic opportunities.

A place so unspoilt that you can experience nature the way it was created. That place - nest of the fish Eagle – tucked away amongst the lush riverine vegetation on the banks of the mighty Okavango river.

Rarely seen but common throughout Namibia – the cunning and elusive leopard, *Panthera pardus*.

Namibia's arid north-western wilderness areas are inhabited by several game species, including the stately giraffe.

Nature is waiting to welcome you back.

The eland, *Taurotragus oryx*, the largest antelope and popular with hunters, is generally found in the northern regions of Namibia.

The return of the Whales.

We offer close contact with animals such as leopard, cheetah, caracals, aardwolwes etc.

## **Historical Landscapes**

On these brochures there are pictures showing some archaeological and historical landscapes. These images present ruins, caves, western - type churches, western – type buildings, and monuments. However, the number of these photographs is not big and the images of such landscapes do not vary as in the other categories. The narratives in this case are as following:

A walk to the ruins of an old police station...

Our castle is known for its 19<sup>th</sup> century charm.

You can see the impressive cave on the Farm Mooigoek. As well as “Fossilised” tracks of the modern game like lion, kudu, zebra, spingbok as well as a bushman foot print in the dolomite sedimentary stones.

The fort was historically used as a police station and veterinary checkpoint.

## **Nature and Technology**

In this category the most common picture is that of a wild landscape, such as the desert or the mountains above with the addition of an airplane. In addition there are photographs that present a train in the middle of the desert, vans or sport vehicles in the desert with people intending to do a desert sport, safari jeeps between rocks or in the middle of the desert. The photographs presenting modern vehicles and motorhomes fully equipped in a wild landscape are the most common in this category while you can find pictures with fast boats in the ocean. In this category we also find photographs that present a swimming pool or a modern building in the middle of wild trees.

Thus wilderness in combination with technology can also be traced to those pictures, which present a wild animal in a non-wild landscape like the one in which a rhinoceros is walking on an asphalt road surface. We can find these photographs quite often on the brochures. The metaphors

used in the narratives accompanying this category of pictures are of significant interest:

Where nature meets luxury.

We carry you on our trunk

Namibia's unique rail experience

The pool area is a sparkling blue oasis amongst palm trees, fountain and furniture made to laze on in unadulterated comfort...

EXPLORE THE NAMIBIAN HORIZONS

The first explorers trekked across the majestic African landscapes on foot – the labour of a lifetime. Today, our wings fly you across the length and breadth of Namibia - and beyond - in a few relaxing hours.

Let us take you to exciting natural environments

Your dreams will grow wings...

Adventure for Hire...

The Kunene Region is a remote wilderness area that presents many challenges to the serious 4x4 adventurer.

### **Places Familiar to the Western eye**

In the fifth category we find photographs presenting places familiar to Western culture. These places contain buildings of western architecture, restaurants, hotels and bars in the middle of a wild landscape or a totally urban landscape. Also warfs in the ocean and, as in the previous category, we find swimming pools amongst trees and rocks, western churches, and western monuments. In this category we can also find palm-trees landscapes, undoubtedly a kind of tree familiar to the West and typical of an exotic environment. Narratives accompanying them are as follows:

We live on a farm in Africa...

Luxury safari lodge

As is the trend worldwide, many former residences in Windhoek are renovated and modernised to serve as office buildings and complexes.

This upmarket hotel offers all the sophisticated elegance and features that have made us one of the leading hotel groups in the world today.

Offering guests an unforgettable holiday in the African wilderness with modern accommodation.

Enjoy the ambience of the city, the beauty of nature, and the comfort of home

### **Within the Landscape**

The sixth category of the photographs depicts ways in which a tourist can enjoy the nature of Namibia. These pictures present for example friends under the trees or in the desert, around a bonfire having fun, people doing sports in the nature, swimming, going on a ride with horses, fishing, boating, walking, playing with wild animals, diving, climbing, hunting, and camping. This category is the most common and this is why the narratives here vary:

Nature drives, conducted in open 4x4 vehicles, guided nature walks, boat excursions and sunset cruises on the Kwando river.

Both morning and evening game drives, horseback excursions or horse carriage rides are a journey into the Africa of legend – where the leopard still hunts and the tension of its activities is felt by everyone.

Every visitor has the opportunity to experience the unspoilt nature on horseback, under the African sun.

Here you can enjoy the silence of the bush, relax next to the swimming pool or just enjoy the view of the contrasting African landscape.

Experience camping with a Difference in a rest camp run as a community enterprise by San (Bushman) in Western Bushmanland.

Taking indigenous people and their environment seriously and adapting to local circumstances without feeling isolated or lost.

Sunrise walks accompanied by bushman trackers give you a new perspective on how little is needed to survive in the desert.

Quests can see Cheetah, Leopard and Caracal.

The Swakopmund environs make for spectacular paragliding and skydiving.

Experience the thrift of dolphins leaping out of the water alongside your boat, seals fed by hand...

The angling potential of Namibia's coast is regarded as one of the best in the world.

## **Conservation**

Finally, the last pictorial category presents wild animals, people protecting endangered species, examining wild animals, participating in preservation projects, students conducting research, and people collecting garbage. They also present ecotourists having their holidays. This category of pictures is not very common and the narratives are specific and descriptive:

Lions are important to the ecology of the Etosha National Park.

The black – faced impala: One of Namibia's conservation success stories.

The Anmire Cultural Village is a community – based tourism enterprise that is locally owned and managed by the Khowarib community. Profits from the enterprise go to members of the community, to encourage them to care for and utilise their natural resources responsibly.

Examining an eagle...

Rehabilitation is an effort to release healthy animals back into their natural environment.

An increase in sightings suggests that there is a slow but steady growth in the black rhino population of north – western Namibia.

Students building gabions as a soil – conservation measure.

## **CONCLUSIONS: THE KEYWORDS THAT CREATE THE MYTH OF NAMIBIA**

Both landscape as concept and photography as object are constructed ways of seeing (Sontag, 1977). Namibia's landscape has been culturally constructed as wild and unspoiled both by the host society and the sending societies; one of the ways to do that is photography. The dominant signs of the pictures can be interpreted through the national myth of Namibia, which stands between Western symbols (modern hotels, historical remains of colonialism) and symbols associated with nature as unspoiled. In addition, these two groups of symbols are connected through technology which seems to provide tourists with the opportunity to admire the country's unspoiled beauty. Cars, motorhomes, swimming pools do not seem to disturb nature; tourists can enjoy nice places and technology gives them the means to do so. Thus the signs of the pictures can be divided into two categories. Firstly, those, which bring this exotic reality to the Western 'language game' in Wittgensteinian terms, and to the Western system of vision (see Bonarou, 2009). Palm trees, swimming pools, and European buildings bring the Other's reality closer to ours. Secondly, the photographs and keywords which refer to the true wild nature. The above description of the photographs and the narratives that accompany them, illustrate that the Namibian landscape is

presented as wild, unspoilt and therefore beautiful landscape. ‘Natures as it was first created’, ‘true wilderness’, ‘clear African sky’, ‘the direct descendants of stone – age man’; these phrases are very common in the brochures as are the pictures of such landscapes. Wild, strong animals in the unspoilt nature is a picture that strengthens the argument that nature in Namibia is undisturbed while old building and monuments are pictured in a way that show that they are absolutely in harmony, and they blend with the environment.

These signs constitute an established tradition since the first pictures of Laurence van der Post and the consecutive pictures of the first travelers and settlers were taken. As Bonarou (2009) claims, in the case of Greece, tourism brochures picture Greece as historical and authentic destination of the romantic gaze and the case of Namibia doesn’t seem to be much different as far as the ‘myth of the unchanged’ is concerned (ibid). This myth was cultivated all through the colonisation era and the apartheid period, it survived the independence of the country and is evident until today. As mentioned in the official website of the Namibia Tourism Board

“Namibia is a gem for those in search of the wilderness... The perfect choice for nature lovers and amateur photographers alike”

([http://www.namibiatourism.com.na/country\\_pro.php](http://www.namibiatourism.com.na/country_pro.php)). The lions, the cheetahs, the elephants the exotic and wild places are symbols. They are the stereotyped images repeated in almost all the brochures and the reason they are accompanied with anchors as the one above ‘nature the way it was created’. On the other end the historical landscape pictures represent the familiarity of the place. “Germanic influence can still be found in the country's good road infrastructure, well-equipped rest camps throughout the country and most cities' architecture” (ibid). They represent the advertising codes, which give the sign the universality it needs in order to be understood.

In this sense, it seems that Namibian landscapes assume different meanings according to the employment of the keywords. The cultural significations of the signs in the pictures are not arbitrary meanings. They inscribe symbolic relations, embedded in culturally constructed systems of vision. The tourism brochures as produced by the publishers based on professional, aesthetic and ideological criteria in order to represent meanings (Bonarou, 2009) create and project an identity of place to be consumed by the tourists (Galani – Moutafi, 2002).

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> A tourist picture is defined as the pictures taken by tourists as well as the pictures produced and distributed to tourists by host societies and the tourism industry (Chalfen 1979:437).

<sup>ii</sup> Similarly, Westland (1998:1) claims that “Beyond the materiality of rocks and weather, plantlife and population, the landscapes we are now trying to understand are made in our minds”.

<sup>iii</sup> According to Saussurian analysis, language is a system containing signs. These signs are composed of signifiers, which are the ‘sound words’, and signifieds, which are the mental concepts, which the sound words describe. Their relationship is fluid because signifieds, as mental constructions, are differently interpreted (Saussure 1974).

<sup>iv</sup> The term semiotics was first used in English by Henry Stubbes in a very precise sense to denote the branch of medical science relating to the interpretation of signs. It was Saussure however that viewed semiotics as a realm in the social sciences.

<sup>v</sup> For Lacan (1977:303), the *points de capiton* are points at which the “signified and signifier are knotted together”. In other words it is “the point in the signifying chain at which the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of the signification and produces the necessary illusion of a fixed meaning”.

<sup>vi</sup> The concept of ‘sustainable development’ was coined in 1987 in the Brundtland Commissions report “Our Common future” and it was defined as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generations” (Serageldin 1994).

<sup>vii</sup> Albers and James (1988) argue that a photograph can be seen as a symbol when it uses the analogy, it stands for something other than itself.

<sup>viii</sup> In 1926 the University of Denver sent out an expedition in order to make a cinematographic record of the Kalahari Bushmen (Gordon 1997).

<sup>ix</sup> According to Barthes (1973) in photography there is a coexistence of two messages: the message that has no code and is related to the object of the picture and the message which has a code and is related to the rhetoric of the picture.

<sup>x</sup> ‘Anchorage’ is a term used by Barthes (*ibid*) in order to describe the words used to accompany the pictures in order to excluded certain meanings and include

other, urging thus the consumer to adopt the meanings chosen by the creator of the picture.

<sup>xi</sup> As Urry (2002) claims, the tourist gaze can be divided into two categories, the *romantic gaze* which refers to virgin unspoiled landscapes and the *collective gaze* which refers to collective events occupied by people who participate in the event. In addition as Galani-Moutafi (in Bonarou 2009) claims, the collective gaze refers to popular pleasures and requires high levels of popular participation; a tendency of the post-modern condition that influences the public through immediate lust rather than aesthetics.

<sup>xii</sup> According to Barthes (1973) a *myth* is a locus where two systems meet: the language and the meta-language system. The latter is the one that after having assimilated the first evolves in a separate and sometimes autonomous system. In the case of photography this can be seen in the 'reality' manufactured and consequently imposed by the pictures.

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