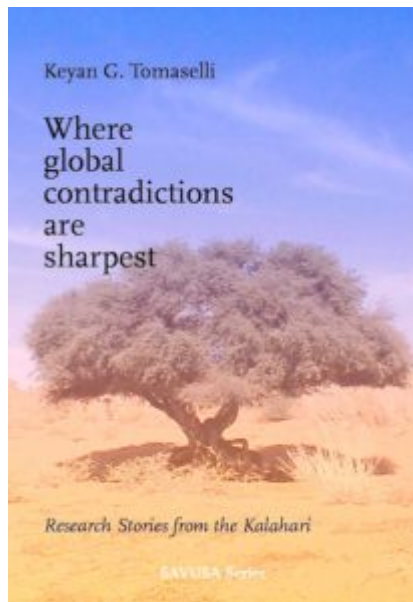


# Where Global Contradictions Are Sharpest ~ 'Op die Grond': Writing In The San/d, Surviving Crime



*I must go away. There to the sand, to the sand. To that Kalahari I must go. Where the grass is*  
(Anna Swart, interview, 2000).[i]

## *Getting there*

*Out of these sands and sunshine deeply embedded in our past is our future –*  
(Botswana World Tourism Day poster, 27 Sept 1999).

July 12, 2002. The armed guard at Makro, a giant wholesaler in Durban, was wearing a bulletproof vest. We were doing our last minute shopping. I'd never seen a guard *in-store* before. During apartheid, unarmed, mainly black guards, would, on entry to a store, politely and gingerly search customers' bags for bombs, guns and grenades. Nelia Oets, already in Upington, 1200 kms to the northwest, called just before my group left Durban. She had been mugged and had hurt her ankle, and might have to cancel her participation. This was serious as Nelia's 4X4 was crucial to the trip. We arrived at the Upington Protea Hotel, owned by Mary Lange's brother-in-law, 24 hours later. Nelia had called us by mobile phone earlier. She was on her way to the Molopo Lodge, her foot in a brace.

## *At the periphery*

The next morning in Upington I filled up with petrol. The attendant told me to

lock my car. A local gang was casing us. A retired couple at the Molopo Lodge 200 kms north mentioned to us later that they had been targeted while at an Upington supermarket. The receptionist at the hotel in Upington mentioned the busload of Taiwanese tourists who had recently been held up, Ned Kelly style, on the Maputu corridor highway. Two white members of our party complained of being closely shadowed by a security in-store guard: no one was above suspicion. At the supermarket a newspaper vendor insisted on pushing my trolley. He refused to loosen his grip until Vanessa McLennan-Dodd and I had unpacked its contents into the Sani. He was allowed to sell papers at the front of the store provided he prevented trolley theft. Stolen shopping was usually taken to the *lokasie* ('location' - black dormitory area near Upington) where there are few shops, where most of the working class, poor, and unemployed live. While clinging onto the trolley, the vendor vigorously shooed away the odd beggar and other would-be helpers/assailants/muggers. Not a policeman in sight. I bought a *Sunday Times* from the vendor in gratitude and paid off the ever-watchful car guard. In the newspaper the 'Careers'-section reported that the Western Cape was experiencing a recruitment boom, though hiring was flat in the other eight provinces (*Sunday Times Careers* 14 July 2003: 1). Maybe Upington, in the Northern Cape, was at the epicentre of this flatness?

When we got back to the hotel, ready to leave for the Kalahari, we learned that Marit Sætre, an MA-student from Norway, had become violently ill. It must be the soapy water, we thought. She explained that the four Norwegians registered in our Programme in Durban during 2002 periodically succumbed to a 24-hour tummy bug. In the future, I'll not make fun of First World students whose overseas doctors tell them not to drink the (very clean) Durban tap water, eat the salad, or forget their malaria pills. So we left Charlize Tomaselli and Lauren Dyll with Marit at the Hotel, which offered them free lodging. Both later complained of having been accosted by drunken white men in the streets during broad daylight. Vanessa and I drove on to Witdraai, two hours north on tar, where we were to meet Nelia, graduate students Linje Manyozo and Tim Reinhardt, Damien Tomaselli and Sherieen Pretorius, who had arrived there on the 11th.

Charlize reported that Marit was admitted to hospital that afternoon. The hospital demanded R1,000 in cash up-front for the ward. The manager refused to accept Marit's Norwegian medical insurance, her father's card number, or my gold card and ID-numbers, which I phoned through from the Lodge. Wealth before health!

Or, perhaps the fear of Marit not settling her debt was as great as was the fear of the vendor losing a trolley? A matter of degree perhaps? Eventually Charlize persuaded the hotel to advance the hospital's charge. The hospital obviously had little understanding of how to deal with international visitors or global insurance companies, in an otherwise remote province, which prides itself on its unique tourism attractions.

The retired couple had been scammed by credit card fraud in Upington – Nigerian cartels, they said, had ways of making impressions of cards, with accomplices in the banks. I remembered in Durban that MasterCard had declined to pay some of my large pre-trip purchases because of my Bank's suspicion that it had been stolen. Perhaps losing R30,000 is less painful than a broken ankle? A mini-bus had broken down near Loubos. The passengers were waiting for a local associate to bring a welding machine. We had seen and heard them the previous day at the Molopo Lodge, as they had stopped off for lunch and a booze-up in the camp *boma*, listening to the kind of *boere musiek* (Afrikaner country music) never played on KwaZulu-Natal radio stations, but repetitively relayed on the Lodge's music system. These fellows, as with most of the Lodge's guests, were the epitome of Leon Schuster's comedic movie characters: seventeen heavysset, Afrikaans-speaking men, clutching Castle Lager beer cans. Their demeanour – straight backs, beer bellies – was vaguely familiar. When we stopped to help them the next day near the Namibian border, they identified themselves as (plainclothes) policemen. Now I understood – in bygone apartheid times I would have instantly assumed them to be political enforcers – and avoided them like the plague. Now, we cooperated against criminals.

The three students arrived from Upington on 16 July, just in time for some exceptionally cold weather. That morning I talked to the <sup>1</sup>Khomani craftsmen across the dusty road from the Lodge, at their small fires, their tiny mock huts, and craft displays. Silikat van Wyk, the artist, came over, dressed in a tatty sports jacket covering his open chest and loincloth. Two tourists stopped and there was some light-hearted banter from the white male about '*ware Boesmans*' ('real Bushmen') not feeling the cold, and being dressed in '*Westerse gedrag*' ('Western garb'). Silikat's response was that just as *Boere* feel the cold, so do the Bushmen. There I met Toppies, who had painted the rock art impressions at the Kagga Kamma Game Park Hotel, 1200 kms south. I asked about Danie Jacobs, previously cultural manager at Ostri-San, in the North West Province, which we visited in

2001, where he, Isak and Abraham had worked. Danie had returned to Kagga Kamma, from where he had left in mid-2000 with a group of Kruipers to establish these other cultural sites.

I also asked Toppies about where the reeds from the *Groot Skilpad* (large grass structure looking like a tortoise) had gone. Toppies (interview 2002) explained that it had been removed bit by bit and used to repair the roofs of homes. The San organisations had not replaced the reeds, which had to be imported from another area. What was originally an imposing eye-catching structure was now just a bare skeleton, silhouetted against the cold blue sky – a metaphor, perhaps, for the cultural and physical state of this socially skeletal community. Someone in our group mentioned Maria Carey’s alleged remark in a satirical interview that, ‘when I watch TV and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can’t help but cry. I mean, I’d love to be skinny like that, but not with all those flies and death and stuff’.

On arrival at the Lodge, Vanessa and I learned that our researchers were scattered along 46 kms of road doing interviews, exposing video, game viewing, dune surfing, and conducting photo-elicitations with photographs taken by Sian Dunn in April. Vanessa was soon engaged as a translator, and was given a hard time by Jon Kruiper about ‘taking knowledge’ **[ii]** from the community:

Linje wants me to translate for him while he interviews Jon Kruiper about the photographs in Paul Weinberg’s book. I find translating awkward because I can speak enough Afrikaans to give people the impression that I understand them clearly, when in fact I only grasp about half of what they’re saying. This becomes a problem when we reach a dispute about payment for this interview. I’m not entirely sure what we agreed on in the first place and Afrikaans classes at school did not incorporate modules on negotiation and diplomacy. I try to explain that what we want to do for the Bushmen is about recognition and respect, not handing out money, but he isn’t buying it. Eventually I hand over R20, and tell Jon I hope he will understand our intentions when he sees the results of our work and that information is in fact sent back to our informants. He seems happy with me after that (McLennan-Dodd 2003).

### *A liquid economy*

Our team voiced many complaints, not so much about the often drunken state of particular ≠Khomani individuals who had claimed the prime retail location in front of the Lodge, their insistent begging, or constant requests for money, meat

and *mielie* ('maize') meal, but about the inconsiderate and often sexist attitudes of the mainly white men who visited the Lodge, who made a noise in the camp site, and who looked askance at this motley and strange crew partly consisting of long-haired, ear-ringed male (white) students. That a black Malawian was amongst them raised no eyebrows at all – racial tolerance in the post-apartheid transition had forged ahead at least. Nelia and I concur – stereotypes of white men do indeed encode a kernel of truth – that is why Schuster's movies are so successful (cf. Olivier 1992; Steyn 2003).

Sherieen, a representative for a national liquor company, was taking a 'working' holiday. She checked out the Molopo Lodge Liquor Store, being interested in the locally harvested plonk the ≠Khomani individuals were buying so cheaply. The roadside craft sellers were keen to make immediate sales, claiming that they were 'closing' soon. Sherieen realised that what was 'closing' was not the stall, but the liquor store either for lunch or at night – that's why the sale needed to be made in all haste! The consumption-production cycle involved small transparent liquor bottles as inputs: a) the liquid at 23 per cent alcohol permits almost instantaneous intoxication, especially on empty stomachs; b) the empty bottles are then recycled by filling them with colour sculpted sand patterns for sale to passing tourists; and this c) generates further cash with which to purchase yet more alcohol. When cash is harder to come by other means are used: the lavatory bowl from the ablution facility at the Witdraai *tentepark* (camp site) had been stolen – apparently for resale. No one admitted to knowing the culprits. The result was that no more tourists were expected to use the site. On talking to Joe Viljoen, a store manager at Hukuntsi, Botswana, we learnt that shortly after supplying meat he had shot on behalf of the Zutshwa residents' Trust, the town of Hukuntsi 40 kms away, would be awash with venison, and that the Zutshwa residents would use the proceeds to buy alcohol. Hunting and gathering was being replaced with an economy liquefied/liquidated by alcohol.

The original intention of the traditional ≠Khomani had been to house in the *skilpad* lean-to all the stages of their crafts industry for tourist viewing; now they sat at the roadside hoping that their meagre stock, small *skerms* (!Kung: 'grass hut'), and half-dressed individuals, would attract attention. Toppies (interview, 2002) then explained by means of an abstract drawing in the sand the enddistanced relation between the '*tradisionale mense*' ('traditional people') at Witdraai on the one hand, and the San organisations and '*Westerse San*'

(‘Westerners’ – pastoralists) on the other, locating the ≠Khomani Community Property Association (CPA) at the middle of the diagram. He explained that he was ‘*ongeletterd*’ (‘illiterate’) and that this inadequacy impeded his discussing the community’s problems with official San organisations. I suggested that our students’ research might be helpful in bridging this seeming communications gap. Toppies said he would bury his sketch in the sand, where it lay, and would recover and refer to it again when Lauren talked to him the next day. The future could be in the sand. But it’s also in government policy.

We were due to travel to Ngwatle, Botswana, on the 20th. The entrance fees to the ‘Wilderness Trail’ on the Botswana side of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park cost us an arm and a leg, as Botswana restricts access to one convoy per direction. Thus is total privacy ensured for the traveler. This attention to tourist needs contrasts sharply with the experience of the Central Kalahari Bushmen who were at that time being deprived of their rights to live in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) by the Botswana government – all in the name of development and civilization (Vinding 2002: 412-16). A court case brought against the government in 2004 by Survival International (SI) had resulted in international exposure for this displaced group and a growing militancy amongst Bushmen throughout the country.

The Botswana side of the Transfrontier Park has no facilities: we had to take all our water, petrol and food for the next 12 days, as we headed for Ngwatle. The South African side, however, was a veritable traffic jam with all kinds of 4X4s taking their dusty annual ‘off-road’ excursions where ordinary cars can go but which are worse for the wear on their return home. Tourists who stopped at Silikat Van Wyk’s stall opposite the Lodge 40 kms south, complained that even 4X4s were being damaged.**[iii]** A few days later my split battery charger refused to work. A local electrician over-rode the system, restoring power to the fridge and my laptop. The fear of my laptop not working was worse than my apprehension of the Sani breaking down. How would I record my story if my laptop faltered? I am too old to read my own handwriting any more. Thus have we become the slaves of machines, electronics and electricity.

Belinda Kruiper suggested that these difficulties were signs initially portending against the onward travel to Ngwatle. But she concluded that the ‘voices of truth’ through the research team were necessary in the light of the frustrations expressed by many of our Witdraai sources because of: i) their lack of education;

ii) the alleged extraction of knowledge by so many opportunistic researchers without due acknowledgement: 'We trust what goes out there is what we say. We don't get things back ...' (Belinda Kruiper, interview, 2001a); and iii) the fact that the community leaders often become a barrier between the development NGOs and ordinary people. She was concerned that NGOs take on lives of their own and lose touch with those they claim to be representing. Informing the Ngwatle group of comparative conditions would be useful, something she had realised when accompanying journalist Rupert Isaacson (2001) into Botswana.

On travelling onto the Botswana side of the Park, Charlize announced that she had lost her passport. When we arrived at the Kaa gate at the north of the Park two days later, the passport official advised that we return via the Park as the border formalities would be less difficult than going through a formal border post as we had intended. So we steeled ourselves for another two days of arduous deep sand driving which had already torn my spare wheel off the underside of my vehicle.

#### *At the core/centre*

I discussed a conference paper with Belinda that I had delivered two weeks earlier in Finland (cf. Chapter 7). This study differed from my previous publications on the Kalahari. It was explicitly conceived of as theory, an epistemological sojourn, in which I stood back from dramatic narrative, experience, and description, to reflect on what we had been doing methodologically for the past eight years. That the paper was delivered near the North Pole was an advantage, because I needed to get away from the dust of the Kalahari, the extreme stresses of being an academic during the relentless materiality of political, educational and ideological transition, and to think about my/our research practices without these encumbrances. Ironically, one delegate took me to task for being 'anti-theory', expressing severe reservations about E.P. Thompson's (1968) notion of 'experience', which I had invoked. She improbably linked it to George W. Bush's use of the term (sic). I am not anti-theory, but I question narrow enddistancing tantalisation, cut-'n-paste applications, the refusal and/or inability to interrogate Western-derived theory in terms of local perspectives, and theory which ineluctably assumes dualist Cartesian perspectives. Belinda commented that this reluctance might also indicate fear of the personal domain:

What's happening in the bush, the personal stuff that you don't want to know

because it's not relevant to your studies, because it's actually in your own home – but if one can find a way to talk about it without the judgement then whether you live in a house in Hout Bay or a squatter camp it could be very much the same except for the material stuff. It could be spiritually right there, spiritually rich here, or spiritually poor there or here (Belinda Kruiper, interview, 2002).

Belinda Kruiper described the research team's work as 'a voice of truth' and as a 'platform' for the community to make their voices heard (interview, 2002). I am transcribing Belinda's comments from tape as an old Ngwatle woman takes up residence in our camp, wanting to sell us a *gai*, two days after we have informed the community that we have already spent our P2,000 budget. We repeat that we have no more pula. She lies down on the sand, covers her head, and goes to sleep. We are not sure how to respond. As much as we would like to purchase the item, this single act would open us to a flood of other vendors. So we leave her sleeping in the sand just before sunset and get on with camp life. A student later gives her some food. She thanks her profusely, eats it, gets up, and leaves. Is this an example of the 'personal', which Belinda is talking about? Do we fear our own cultural inadequacies, class guilt, and asymmetrical power in dealing with such situations?

Or, perhaps we do live on different ontological and psychological planes. What, for example, does one make of the following comments by an initially sceptical white community worker (an accountant for the ≠Khomani Sîsen Craft Project) on the relationship between sand, San, and spirituality:

It's harsh here ... they're out of sand, they fit here, they are part of the trees, the bushes and the plants and the medical things and the spirits going on here. I see them each and every day eat sand ... This is something Lena Malgas told me...But eating sand is part of her. It cleans her. They sleep on the sand because, like she said, it's like a massage for her. It's a free massage. It's comfortable. Even there they go to cook. They cook their food on sand. Spirit, the spirits are in the sand. The food we eat, this is a desert, the food we eat, comes out of the sand. Underneath the sand they know much about, not on top of the sand but what's underneath the dunes. They will start digging a hole there ... There's a plant. They can survive. They can dig a hole and sleep in it ... then Jakob Malgas said that if he walks without shoes, on 56, the sand will be up to 60 degrees. He will walk 15 kms on hot, hot, hot sand and then he can't wear shoes. I asked him why doesn't he wear shoes because it was his birthday and I said let's buy him a pair



of shoes and he said, 'No!' You need to be in contact with the sand the whole time ... his magnetic field does not touch his soul when he's not on the sand (Kleynhans, interview, 2002).

I think about the relationship between researchers and researched, existentialism and essentialism, San and sand. How do I analyse this ontology and experience so obviously alien to my own? I came up with the following considerations:

- a) Are my/our informants/hosts/co-researchers able to recognise themselves and their experiences in my/our story/ies?
- b) Is our writing intelligible to our informants/sources/hosts, as represented/translated?
- c) Does the resulting narrative include, if implicitly, a theory (explanation) from below? Does it critically engage with whatever theories or methodologies we bring to the encounter?
- d) Are we using theory strategically? Is it useful in our sources'/hosts'/informants' daily lives? If so, how? Are our encounters mindful of power relations, deceit, and manipulation?
- e) Where does the noumenal world described by Kleynhans fit in?
- f) What do we return, symbolically, to the community?

### *Fire, method and symbolic exchange*

Answering these questions is our collective intention. I will dwell on some here. On symbolic returns and noumenal experience, the answer was gratifying. At Erin in the Northern Cape, Charlize had performed an aboriginal fire dance for the ≠Khomani. The spectators were in awe, and commented vigorously during the performance about the possibility of Charlize hurting and burning herself. In contrast, at Ngwatle, Kort-Jan's family were initially afraid and covered their eyes, fearing that the fire would bewitch them. After the first two of four dances, Charlize complained of being ignored by the group, huddled as they were around their own fire on that bitterly cold night, many with their eyes closed, singing, their backs to her. Then the !Xoo became interested, and they finally incorporated Charlize's performance into their own fire and trance dance. The two fires and performances initially ran parallel, and then merged as Charlize herself 'became' the fire. The dancing women formed a crescent around Charlize in her performative space. The Bushmen did three dances: an enactment of a trance dance; the enactment of a buck and a jackal, by the men, joined by a small child; and the women's dance. By this stage the women had bridged the space

between their fire and Charlize's fire. A ying-yang relationship fused what had previously been separate, almost antagonistic, but closely adjacent, performative events. No one had ever danced for the Bushmen here, though one old man, no doubt in response to the swirling fire chains, was gesturing wildly and shouting 'karate!' and 'Bruce Lee!'. Vista, one of Kort-Jan's sons, told him he was nuts (cf. Reinhardt 2003; Sætre 2003).

Earlier the community had thought we had asked them to perform a fire dance for us, and they wanted to charge us – groups of men and later women visited our site over two days to inform us of the costs involved. Mary explained that Charlize would perform for them, 'from the heart'. They could watch the dance, or not. We would not pay them to dance – our money had run out. Two days later, when they realised our intention, they danced spontaneously. What had started as an extended negotiation over commodification ended as an organic, intercultural unity. Two days later Charlize again performed the dance, mainly at the request of women who had not seen it. This time she performed in the enclosure of Kort-Jan's abode. The prediction made by Mary that the developing organic fusion of the first performative event would not be repeated was borne out – this time the women and some male spectators watched spellbound – the separation between performers and audience now firmly established.

Our own group had different takes on the process: two students were videoing, Tim's wider frame identifying the incomplete semi-circle forming around Charlize, with himself included on the other side, completing the circle; Marit, close to the fire, described a sensurround feeling of inclusion, of both us and the Bushmen, with the singing and clapping, a woman chanting words inches from Nelia's face, a crouched, face-to-face demonstration of how to make the clicks. Where Tim videoed wide shots, Marit had the frenetic Rouchian character of a *Les maîtres fous*. For three other students it seemed chaotic: Lauren feared that the initial exclusion of Charlize would be disappointing for her, and Vanessa described the strange mixture of the metaphysical/spiritual and performance unfolding, fearing a general charismatic meltdown of sanity. Later, however, she realised that perhaps 'healing could be effected through the unification of the group in dance, through the catharsis of self-expression' (McLennan-Dodd 2003b). For a few moments, the two cultures united as a group. Mary was the one who first identified the nature of the existential interaction. Vista was directing the Bushmen, commentating what would be done next, requesting that Charlize

dance again once her paraffin (kerosene) had burned out. The question of payment was never mentioned again.

### *Being there*

How does one respond to accusations of 'bias', lack of objectivity, and so on? I realise that I am now concerned with perception, memory and experience. If this is what people think or feel, then it is real, for them at least, if not for others participating in these relations. How do we understand what we are told, what do we ourselves experience during the encounter? Material veracity or otherwise can be checked, but it is necessary that the perceptions be taken seriously by all concerned as it is in the realm of the discursive that interpretation is in fact constructed. But, given Ngwatle's first encounter with the request, that they assumed that we wanted them to perform for us; and that for us the encounter originated in our desire (an emotion) to perform for them; the resulting explosion of unexpected interpretations clearly had a completely different sense of the encounter because of the unexpected way the experience turned out. In effect, the series of performances, reactions, responses, and discussions, all began with the two divergent encounters, and yet these outcomes showed a qualitative growth from their respective beginnings despite being something quite new. A wholly new semiosis had taken place under our collective noses.

What does this kind of interaction tell us about how we relate to, and interact with, the plethora of trusts, NGOs, committees, safari companies, government departments, local officials, and other bodies all jostling for, and claiming jurisdiction, over people and places, access and interaction? Power relations are at work everywhere. Not everyone benefits equally. The 'subjects' of 'development' are acutely aware of their positions in the chain of relations.

How do we absorb and learn from the experiential dimensions of intercultural interactions? 'Being there' is the prime mode of knowing for us; textualism mainly operates through codes - knowing via theory. The screening of *Kalahari fires* (videoed at Ngwatle in 1995) in July 2002 from the back of the Sani reconnects those depicted with a viewing of their 'labour' as 'actors'. They feel empowered in the process, especially when they recognise people and places. Kort-Jan became very emotional when he recognised his late brother, Petrus. Others expressed great appreciation for the distance we travel every year to visit Ngwatle, which they realised for the first time on seeing the map in *Kalahari fires*. Us watching the audiences watching the video is a greatly emotional experience as the

audiences interact with the images, talk to each other, and recognise themselves.

One Tampere delegate suggested that all this to-and-froing, endless discussion of our papers around campfires, on dusty verges, driving around to meet the clan all over the Northern Cape, Botswana and Namibia thousands of kilometres away from Durban must be time-consuming and an impediment to productivity. Papers may take a long time to prepare, but when they are published I know that they are, for the most part, consensual ethnographies. They are process rather than product, we theorise and write about everything we experience and can remember and/or record. Mary explains to Kort-Jan and Johannes as we drive to the hunting grounds that my Sani is my office, that I work as I drive, type on my laptop, and read and copy-edit when I am a passenger, and conduct seminars with the passengers, asking questions, reading narratives, discussing theory and observations. These kinds of writing, videoing, narrative, also reveal much about ourselves, our own insecurities and intra-group conflicts (cf. Sætre 2003), our own hang-ups and beliefs, to those with whom we work in the Kalahari. We are seen by them to be people like them, rather than just as passers-by, travellers-in-time, or as conducting information-trading/raiding parties. They also learn something about us. Damien was immediately treated with great respect by the <sup>1</sup>Khomani and felt an instant bond, contrasting with his experiences in urban Upington. This from a 20-year-old who, when first venturing onto the fringe of the Kalahari during a family holiday at the age of 14, asked, 'Is there M-Net (pay-TV) there?'

### *At the spiritual*

Dialogical autoethnography, as I shall now refer to our research practice, in the Third and Fourth Worlds at least, needs to examine the relations between both the real and noumenal dimensions. The positions inhabited by the ancestors are all important (cf. Kasoma 1996). Where Christians and Moslems cite their printed texts when calling on the 'truth/s' offered/interpreted by their respective deities, like all oral societies the <sup>1</sup>Khomani simply collapse signifiers into signifieds, and then persuade some of their more analytically inclined colleagues like Lizelle Kleynhans to do the same. Belinda Kruiper gave essence to the notion of '*op die grond*':

... they know every dune, they know every sand grain, they know the wind of death, they know the wind of joy, they know the rain of death and the rain of joy ... And, it's the sand, it's the crystals in the sand, and I think it's the magic of the

Kalahari, because, ever since I've been there from the first day I kept on feeling there's healing powers in the grains. There's just something about the sand, and they're out of the sand. And Tannie Antas said to me one day, '*ek weet, as ek bloei en ek gaan lê op die sand, daai bloed, dan word ek weer een met waar ek vandaan kom*' ['I know, if I bleed, and I go and lie on the sand, then I become again one with where I came from']. That's why, when we bleed we put a plaster on, they immediately cover it with sand, and it will stop the blood ... And Ouma Antas once said to me, every time you cut yourself or you hurt in the desert, you have to mix your blood with the sand, because you are the blood, you are the Kalahari (interview, 2001b).

*They lie, we lie: Getting on with anthropology* (Metcalf 2002) is the title of a book that comes to mind. Nelia said she wasn't always able to tell when she was being strung a line, though the increasingly elaborate yarns about why we should give to begging ≠Khomani were easily transparent. The point, however, is about issues of representation, and what our hosts want (or will permit) to go on the record. I wouldn't call what we do oral history, but we are producing something of a type-scripted record, writing the ≠Khomani and the Ngwatle community into history without eliminating their personalities and names. That's what seems to be confounding to some of our NGO-critics: they demand a balanced, objective, and logically dispassionate description, written up by 'trained anthropologists', from which the machinations of 'trouble-makers', whom we prefer to identify as organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971), like Belinda, are eliminated. Articulations and disarticulation, methodologies that can capture and represent memory in dialogical and dynamic ways, are at the core of what we are trying to understand. It is in these relations of force, indeterminacies of translation, and ontologies that bypass each other in the wind which we are trying to (discursively) root in the shifting sands of (interacting) experience. For example, at Klein Masetleng Pan, after a day of seeing few animals, Kort-Jan (interview, 2002) told us, 'this is a very sly pan because it knows that people (us) used to live here and a lot of people (tourists) come here. So it doesn't allow the animals to come during the day, they only come at night when it knows the people are asleep'.

When first applying for a grant to pursue our studies of cultural tourism in the Northern Cape, the National Research Foundation's (NRF) panel pointed out that the ≠Khomani were over-researched; a SASI official complained that the Kruipers were being researched to death; why not find another set of subjects? In contrast,

Roger Carter, then manager of the Lodge, told us he would refuse to talk to us on his and the Lodge's relationship with the ≠Khomani if we were 'bunny huggers'. He wanted to test whether we also opaquely had our 'heads in the sand', like so many development workers and agencies. The August 2000 thirty-minute interview stretched into two hours, then five years, of fruitful interaction and discussion. Roger told us about William Ellis, a University of the Western Cape agricultural researcher, who shared our position, who described the Kruipers as 'a text book people' engaged in 'organised begging', and whom development had passed by notwithstanding the R8 million which the government and donors had sunk into the area since early 1999. Belinda commented that little of the NGO-donor funding trickled down to the community. The main beneficiaries seem to be bureaucrats, NGOs, local committees, and the individuals associated with them. This, we agreed, is the bureaucratisation of development. The *tradisionele mense* ('traditional people'), certainly, have little to show for this investment – not even the roof of the roadside lean-to. If being researched to death was indeed occurring, perhaps a different set of questions was indicated? What drew this community in the first instance to a kind of poor-on-purpose existence? Why do they want to cling onto their 'traditions', now refracted through and responding to the Western World's construction of a pure, primitive people, who do not 'feel' the cold? Why, unlike the far greater number of ≠Khomani who are pastoralists and settled in small towns, does this small Kruiper clan persist in wanting a traditional existence? Apart from the more obvious explanations involving internal clan power relations (cf. White 1995), educational deprivation, and apartheid, something else appears to us to be at work, as indicated in the comments reproduced above from Belinda and Lizelle. 'The freedom to be', suggests Belinda, written on a plaque in her Blinkwater grass kitchen. 'They don't like to work when the wind blows. In the apartheid years they had to work for farmers, for the Gemsbok Park, and their freedom turned them into where they are today; they want to just not do anything for anybody but themselves. It's choices' (Belinda Kruiper, interview, 2002).

For our sources, the idiosyncratic choice made by the Kruipers seems to offer a connection in recovering an existential, essentialist, understanding of life and freedom. Our photo-elicitations identified such narrative streaks (cf. Mlauzi 2002). The condition chosen by the Kruipers cannot simply be measured in terms of freedom from poverty, from the presence/lack of material possessions (cf. Jeffries 2002), from spiritual dependency on the environment. '*Op die grond*', a

recurring epithet amongst our sources, is another take on the concept of freedom. Belinda contrasts the relative freedoms of the Kalahari and Durban: You could sleep in the Molopo Hotel and you could have the wines and dines, but you can have that every day. Every day! You can never have the sand and the risk of a scorpion and the risk of a snake, and just relax, and sleep and wake up, and realise that you're actually not dirty, you actually don't stink. It depends on where you are and what part of the country. In Durban I find I'm stinking all the time. And this morning Prof.'s wife spoke about the coast and the muck and then I realised that's why Glynis [Belinda's sister-in-law] and everybody's so cleansing here.**[iv]** Now I know it's necessary, but being so cooped up I suddenly just wanna be in the Kalahari because there's not such a big ... about washing your clothes all the time, because it's dust. It's pure sand. It's such a privilege to be there, because it's just crystals. It's just iron oxide and crystals, so who could be dirty? If you think in terms of the Kalahari dunes being a bath full of iron oxide and crystals, and it's rejuvenating for your body, and the stars as your blessings and the sun and the wind, because even if the sand blows in your eyes, it's just healing your skin as you go along, then research students can think about coming there differently, and see it as an adventure and just to be vulnerable. And trust Prof. Tomaselli, he knows (Belinda Kruiper, interview, 2001b).

As I type this first draft in the very cold and dark Molopo Lodge Lounge – I now mention that I am recovering from a nasty viral infection, which is why I did not visit the Kruipers with my students today – I am distracted by a large screen TV with a Discovery Channel documentary on Africa on my right, rock 'n roll music emanating from the pub behind me, children and their parents wondering through and playing snooker at the bar. Later, Tina, who asked for a lift home with her water canisters, filled up by a road worker from his truck, says that because she hasn't got anything to give me for the lift – she can sing to me. Tina and Toppies serenade us from the backseat as impala dart across the road in the sunset. Silikat and Jon-Jon hang onto the roof racks, urgently yelling directions that I already know. These are the ordinary people, the folks who feel ignored by the official organisations. The Discovery documentary is one about environmental romance, great rivers and spectacular sunsets, not about poverty, communal alcoholism, dispossession, and spiritual alienation. It's from the white, English-speaking Western presenter's perspective. When the three remaining students arrived from Upington, the first thing they commented on was the TV-set – they thought they were coming to the wilderness. That's next week, in Botswana, I tell

them.

'Groot' Koos Lamprecht, the then huge and imposing manager of the Molopo Lodge, tells me that business is good and that we are able to book a room at short notice for our injured and ill members. Koos' brother, who owns the Bimbo's fast food chain (my students' late night favourite), bought the Lodge in 2001. Belinda says she also heads straight for Bimbo's in Upington - it's clean, good and affordable. The Lodge's staff assure me that the fountains of water bursting through the sand in the campsite near our tents, despite the occasional wafts of soak pit smell, is just the swimming pool back wash, not raw sewerage. I just hope the stream bypasses our tent city - six in all. In the distance I see my Sani weaving over the countryside in the students' search for informants and those to whom we need to return photographic representations of themselves exposed on our previous trips. Damien, Sherieen and Linje, comment on how enthusiastically they are received by the ≠Khomani. On his arrival at Witdraai, Damien phoned and told me that the people they spoke to think of me as some kind of God. So when I get there I make myself scarce, later explaining that I needed time to get over my infection. They tell me they also have been ill. We agree implicitly - we are all human, imperfect. They also need to realise that we are a team, that I am merely a facilitator, not a saviour. Nelia, thanks to her Afrikaans fluency and empathetic personality, is the female deity - but she explains that none of us will give lifts to intoxicated individuals. They agree and apologise for harassing us the previous night - and then nag us again the next day.

Nelia is given an ankle massage by Elsie, who diagnoses a crack in the bone. Formerly a physiotherapist, Nelia later muses on the contradictions: illiterate Elsie had been totally drunk the previous night; the next morning she was demonstrating a sophisticated informally learned skill, repeating exactly what Nelia's doctor told her, expertise which Nelia joked had taken her nearly four years to master! I wonder why they need the alcohol. Belinda suggests that the 'true' ≠Khomani artists are the ones who tend to be drunk and possibly use their inebriation to retaliate against the alienation caused by disempowerment by disrupting CPA-meetings. I also wonder why spousal abuse is so rife. I wonder why this group is, in the words of Carter (2000), committing 'communal suicide' in their very moment of freedom. I think about Toppies' analysis of the situation illustrated in his buried sketch - is he perhaps an organic intellectual of the Gramscian kind, but one who feels let down by the technical intellectuals who



wield the real influence – compounded by the disempowerment he feels because of his own illiteracy? The politics is sometimes as complicated as it was in Gramsci's Italy of the 1920s (cf. Davidson 1977), but the resolutions are too often drowned by waves of alcohol, multiple cycles of dependency, and existential alienation. How does any development project respond to these kinds of difficulties? I explain that we can help to communicate Toppies' compelling illustrated analysis to the powers that be, but that he should not expect any miracles.

### *Chains of relations, relations of chains*

We know about the Enron, World.Com, and Xerox cowboys arrogantly riding off into the sunset with their ill-gotten fortunes, imperilling national and global economies, with Bush wailing on about the need for good corporate governance. Here in the bitingly cold desert sunset we wonder at the seemingly obscure chain of relations, and relation of nations, NGOs and beneficiaries, which seem to encircle the San, and possibly First Peoples everywhere. Toppies and his group say they have no idea if anyone pays the permissions requested, and if so, where the money is invested. Linje wonders at the incongruity of it all. Just who is dependent upon whom? This reminds me of the Botswana safari company's injunction that we get permission from the area's Trust to visit the Ngwatle community that invites us as 'friends'. Why do we need third party permission to visit them? Belinda does not need permission from the Durban municipality to visit us. But then, the city is not concessioned out to business, NGOs or anyone else, though Westville did once have a MacDonald's. The nearest Bimbo's is on Westville's border with Durban. Is this the ultimate commodification? **[v]** The ambivalence/indeterminacy/ambiguity of the researcher in the postmodern world, itself fractured into multiple realities, evades analysis, and eschews logic other than that of Thatcherist cost recovery by one means or another. What, then, does the safari company expect our research to look like? During apartheid the masses would chant: 'We shall break free of our chains'. Agitprop actors were often arrested for having chains amongst their props. What symbolic form do the post-apartheid, postmodern research, post-Thatcherist chains take?

Academics work under similar cycles of exploitation where everyone – largely other than us – make a mint from our labour, alienating us from our work (for example, multinational publishing industries being multiply subsidised by taxpayers in the so-called free market where the writers and their employers are

relieved from ownership of their own published work). We also thus locate ourselves in this nexus of epistemological, ideological and theoretical confusion in which we regularly sign away our intellectual property. One of the advantages of visiting remote areas is to get as stark as possible a view of the complexly interreticulated matrices of often-bizarre contradictions and messy empirical clutter. We academics can at least obtain a degree of psychic income by theorising about our chains of exploitation – this is less easy for the uneducated to understand or accept. Hence their constant complaints about feeling used and abused; and arguments over who owns information gleaned from interviews and surveys. Our ≠Khomani subjects do not realise that we are all used and abused: some of us realise this, most don't. Certain kinds of theft are legal; other kinds are illegal. Some of us who have a modicum of class power can live with this regime and engage it; the *Lumpenproletariat* complain about theft and get *dopped* ('drunk'), doped and dumped. Is the burden of realisation freedom, or alienation? Periphery-core relations take on a whole new meaning – inversion, reversal – under such conditions. Commodification processes in the periphery are seemingly in advance of developments at the core. I wonder about the Aborigines now on the big-screen TV – the screen cuts to a large Australian city, and I lose interest. Now the set has been switched to *Reality TV*, a programme on mysteries and the paranormal – perhaps we have overly restricted ourselves to the 'normal' – the development paradigms of modernity don't understand the noumenal, the para-normal, and essentialistic spiritualistic realms of making sense. Why are there no less than seven churches in Loubos, which numbers but a few hundred people, a local white missionary from Port Elizabeth asks me. He answers his own question: it's a matter of class. Why have we forgotten class analysis in the postmodern world? Our aimless travels in the desert do sometimes come up with answers, if not the development solutions.

I worked through the first draft of this paper with Belinda in their prefabricated hut at Blinkwater, while Vetkat and Juri played their guitar outside in the sun, the students basking on the ground. Belinda offered instant comments as we scrolled down the screen. My wife and colleague, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, called to say she was leaving for Barcelona, the International Association of Media and Communication Research Conference, where she is also discussing development communication. She is presenting it in the political economy section. There is certainly a lesson in this choice. Politics. Economics. Why do so little power, investment and benefit trickle down to the folks on the ground? This is a question

that has sorely exercised the minds of thousands of development studies scholars.

### *Returning home*

We return to South Africa via the Park. Astonishingly, a tourist found Charlize's passport. A note was enclosed complaining about the mess, and the noise we had allegedly made at the campsite at which it was found. We think she is writing about others – we don't know which day it was found. Back at the entrance to the Park we are told to check in at the border post. We immediately realise that we had been accepted into Botswana without legally departing from South Africa. The affable South African policeman says he will have to charge us with the offence. Thus are we all administratively made into criminals. The San who used to roam all three adjacent countries are now restricted to the respective countries of their residence only. The policeman relents and lets us go – as tourists we still have some travel rights, even if we do break the law. The sand may have an existential relationship for traditional Bushmen. But the sand/San have no rights to the internationally shifting dunes from which they take their being. They are confined within borders, restricted by border posts and managed by a variety of structures that seem largely remote from their ways of making sense. They may be '*op die grond*' but being on the ground is not necessarily the same as being part of it. As Ouma !Una told us on being asked about what the appellation 'San' meant to her: 'I am of the earth. This earth is the san[d]. <sup>1</sup>Khomani. <sup>1</sup>Khomani. From the san[d]'. 'San' has no meaning except in politics. Sand means everything.

### NOTES

[i] Anna Swart was responding to a question regarding her preferred use of naming. She said that she understood 'sand' but not 'San'.

[ii] Pretorius, who was studying business part-time, observed: 'When we arrived, I felt like some sort of demi-God from the Western world (*The Gods must be crazy*). I expected the Bushmen to be humbled by our civilized culture wanting to know their opinions. They wanted to know what they would receive in return and were quite argumentative about allowing us to ask them their viewpoints – although this attitude might also have been due to the fact that they had consumed vast quantities of alcohol'.

[iii] Work on reconstructing the road began in early 2005.

[iv] In response to Belinda's view about being dirty in humid Durban as opposed to not being dirty in the Kalahari, Pretorius observed wryly: 'At least in Durban one doesn't have to be in a constant state of non-sobriety just to cope with the

elements that she claims cleanse her. I think their spiritual connection to the sand/the elements might also be due to the constant innate use of marijuana as it is purported to invoke or inhabit one's spiritual side and I've heard many users of the drug claim that they feel more spiritual when they're under the influence of marijuana'.

[v] No, says Marit, as she checks her hospital bill on the way back. The bill itemises each and every item, even those costing less than \$0.10, and she wonders at the cost of the bookkeeping labour imposed on nurses who are required to spend inordinate amounts of time on trivial cost determinations when they should be looking after patients.