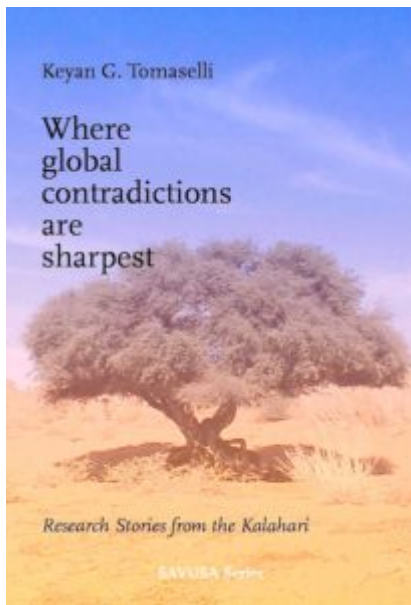


# Where Global Contradictions Are Sharpest ~ The Negotiating Research With First Peoples



## *Becoming not-strangers*

In moving from 'here' (Durban) to 'there' (Kalahari Desert), CCMS researchers and students had to rethink their research assumptions, identities and even their understanding of cultural studies.

The research team's respective journeys have positioned us, at different times, as insiders and outsiders, as heroes and villains, and as reporters evaluating the said in terms of the more usually unsaid. The complexity and tensions of relationships in Kalahari research is extraordinary, given the relatively small numbers of 'Bushmen' who are subject to the intense Western gaze (by researchers, NGOs, film makers, journalists, writers and photographers, many of whom serve audiences of hundreds of millions). Indeed, the nature of this kind of research can be seen as a passage through difficult and scantily known rapids, despite the volumes of published work on specific communities. But in another sense, the passage is more that of a group of individuals with divergent positions, interests or aims, researching together and establishing a consensual position on which their differences may be resolved or accommodated (Shepperson 1998: 348). How do we, the researchers, apprehend, write about and agree or disagree on our observations, interpretations and explanations, and how do we negotiate these with our hosts?

When the first draft of Chapter 7 was circulated for comment, the responses were striking, ranging from outright anger from one NGO-consultant to empathy from

most academics, researchers, development workers and those who have had long associations with the ≠Khomani. A few of our often marginalized ≠Khomani sources were ecstatic as it seemed to them that they had finally found a team of researchers who perhaps understood their frustrations, hopes and fears, and who were able to communicate these in understandable terms. We spoke to ordinary people, and to some who had married into the clan. Each engaged with us on our objectives and we on theirs. We soon realised that research encounters are often rearticulated by some of our informants into discourses of begging, poverty, hunger and complaints of exploitation at the hands of journalists, photographers and researchers (especially amongst the Kruipers of the Northern Cape).

We further sensed palpable relief from such correspondents that someone was at last critically examining development politics and research ethics, and engaging practices previously conducted in relative silence. Coming in from the cold (to Tomaselli, if no-one else), a few of these individuals started to write, dictate on tape, and e-mail him their own stories about themselves and their relations with ≠Khomani personalities, researchers, writers, video producers, and all manner of visitors. One or two expressed feelings of liberation as they no longer felt 'trapped' within their insufferable 'own experiences', some excruciatingly painful, and others extraordinarily heart-warming (cf. for example Bregin and Kruiper 2004). The unpublished stories are both horrific in their implications, and revealing in their stoicism. They had a sense of an emergent and empathetic community of researchers with whom they could do business, and to whom our correspondents could relate their frustrations, fears, and discontentment. But for obvious reasons many of these stories have to remain part of the hidden transcript, the unsaid contingent upon the community and the resolution of its participants.

'Paradigm fundamentalism' can easily occur if a scholar remains locked into the research programmes or theoretical structures inherited from preferred theoretical canons. Hidden transcripts, or at least their effects, tend to be suppressed by researchers because they are messy and get in the way of theory. In this kind of situation, students begin their assessment according to a canon provided *a priori* through the prescribed and recommended readings of various courses. What makes it specifically 'fundamentalism' is when the scholar either: (a) decides that items excluded from the canonical list *ought not* to be read; or (b) seeks to enrol with the consensus-making apparatus that establishes the

'canonicity' of prescribed and recommended readings. During our research period some scholars and films became *persona non grata* as epistemological battles were waged over legitimacy of interpretation (cf. Wilmsen 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990 and responses to them; Barnard *et al.* 1996; Marshall 1996; Biesele and Hitchcock 1999; cf. also Gordon 1990b).

Despite the somewhat conspiratorial narrative inscribed in this thumbnail sketch of the academy, it is designed to illustrate one possible aspect of the shift in the intellectual vista open to South African academics, development activists, public intellectuals, and other such practitioners. Our (often retrospectively constructed) past as participants in the final struggles against apartheid frequently involved exactly this kind of struggle for canonical hegemony. Leftists of all stripes railed against the apparently monolithic preferences of bourgeois literary and theoretical canons, all the while engaging each other in (mostly) bloodless but nevertheless near-mortal theoretical combat over what should be the canon of the Left. The same kind of bitter conflict occurred over studies of the San, their naming and on who could speak for whom, when, where, and how. [i] The *aprioristic* nature of canonical thinking amongst both the observers and the observed is far more a feature of both postmodern and modernist thinking than their respective adherents would like to admit. As we discovered among the different subject-communities during our research, the inherent fundamentalism of these traditions (in much the sense that Alasdair MacIntyre [1988] deploys the term) tends to slide glibly over the pre-theoretical, 'shit happens' kind of realism that shapes the everyday conduct of peoples like the !Xoo, the Ju/'hoansi and the ≠Khomani.

We wanted to document our dilemmas and dialogues with ourselves as individuals, between ourselves as research teams, and with our hosts as individuals and as communities. The participants involved in the dialogue and performance want to recognise themselves in this writing. We have questions, but not always the answers:

a) How do we understand *Theory* as a hypothesis abducted from a community of inquiry's experience of phenomena? In other words, how much of our informants' (or sources' or hosts') explanation informs the products of our research, and how intelligibly is this done?

b) Where does a condition of liminality appear during the course of the research process, and how does this contribute to the knowledge so produced?

c) Does our making explicit of the processes of research interaction meet possible accusations of 'bias', lack of objectivity, and so on, especially from NGOs tasked with development briefs?

These questions all relate to the difficulties that inquiry poses for those who are engaged in practical efforts at development. Such agents - whether at community, organisational, or government levels - operate within well-established discourses like 'empowerment', 'development' and 'democratisation'. The problem that we try to resolve is whether these concepts are methods or ends. If they are methods, then we are practically constrained to conceiving such ideas in terms of their applications in concrete situations. What is empowerment, development or democratisation for one situation will not necessarily be the same for another. The Kruipers, for example, have squandered their development opportunities, the !Xoo are resisting opportunities, and the Ju/'hoansi have embraced a limited solution to their benefit.

If concepts and methods are *ends*, however, then the research programme depends on the *hope* that all distinct but comparable situations are relevant starting points from which communities can direct their successors to a qualitatively different way of relating to the world beyond the boundaries of their immediate experience. This is the route taken by the *westerse* ('Western', modern) ≠Khomani who have embraced modernity. In short, the above questions confront those researchers, academics, and activists who view concepts as situational in themselves, and not as possibilities applicable to situations across a range of contexts.

In addressing these questions, we need to be always aware of the genealogy of autoethnographic methods (Chapter 2). The principal data unit for these methods is not a communicable representation or entity present to the minds of a community of researchers, but the dialogue an individual researcher conducts with his or her own methodological and paradigmatic assumptions. This in turn determines the direction and normative basis of the subsequent dialogue between researchers and researched.

In this dialogical sense, the basic method of autoethnography is barely distinguished from the method of the therapeutic 'talking cure'. As such, therefore, these questions must accomplish more than self-absolution in a form of neo-analytical therapy. In a strictly therapeutic autoethnographic process, the

research topic shifts along a chain of more or less elaborated *dialogues* between a researcher and an ever-increasingly abstracted hierarchy of partners in the dialectic. The chain may well begin with a dialogue at the research site with culturally authentic sources (e.g., Chapters 2-4). But what happens if the subject matter of the dialogue is taken to the academy? Or to the publishing industry (Chapters 4-7)? Or to the NGO-sector which has assumed so much of the responsibility for development among the 'usual suspect' communities who form the subject matter of ethnography and anthropology? How does one attribute responsibility to a dialogue, in a way that raises it to the status of a communicable *record*?

A tradition of confidentiality carries over from medical therapy to autoethnography as 'therapy'. Journals, film makers and others are often looking for personal roots, meaning and explanations (cf. e.g. Isaacson 2001; Van der Post 1988; Glasser 1996; Myburgh 1989; Tomaselli *et al.* 1992). It is thus hard to decide where along the chain of dialogue such representations must become knowledge, or be asserted as truth-claims. Medical (and therapeutic) *practice* is not to be confused with medical and therapeutic *science*. It is at the point we choose to assert something about the subject-matter to the general 'To Whom It May Concern' of an indefinite scientific future that ethnography must re-present itself as *communication* and no longer as dialogue or diary. Publication occurs at this stage. We have noted the various stages through which an autoethnographic dialogue can pass; the problem is to anticipate *how* any functionary (or activist, or practitioner) at one or more of these stages can appropriate the dialogue to ends not conceived as scientific (assuming the logic of science is itself presupposed by an ethics) (Peirce 1998: 196-207, 371-97). Practical ends drive NGOs, publishers, and indeed the academy, whereas the claims of science (which should not be confused with the claims *scientists* make in their professional or academic capacities) are potentially directed to ends beyond the immediate accomplishment of urgent matters. Without the normative shift, or better, the *ethical commitment* to do full justice to the reality of the subject-matter (or subject community) of a field of inquiry, *as it presents itself to the inquirer*, science becomes indistinguishable from engineering.

On this basis, the most urgent need in reviewing our research was to establish where the dialogues ended (or perhaps petered out) and the possibility for a bottom-up record began. Unless subject communities are informed about what is

to be asserted about their reality, they can have no effective say in what subsequent agencies in the dialogue do with their representations. But to do this in good faith is not enough: it was decisive that this contact generate a record, and after realising how these questions arose from reading the texts recommended to us, we began to consider our writing as *rapportage* - the base data for developing a record that contributes to inquiry and resists its appropriation by vested interests. This *rapportage* will be housed at the Kwa !ttu Museum in the Western Cape, amongst other archives.

The first *rapportage* that Tomaselli revisited was one that Belinda Jeursen had written on their 1995 visit to Ngwatle. He then excavated a highly unliterary lecture that Belinda had given to the English Department at the Natal University (Durban) following their subsequent trip to the Ju/'hoansi in July 1996. This had languished on his hard drive in the wake of Jeursen's emigration to New Zealand two years later. In working with Jeursen, who had previously studied /Xam oral literature (1994; 1995), they developed something of an autobiographic method which could incorporate both writers into her narrative. Jeursen and Tomaselli (2002) then, is offered as a prism and a backward glance of the state of play at the time fieldwork commenced in the mid-1990s. They aimed to provide readers with a useful multi-perspectival pre-history from which to assess the broader ongoing project (cf. also Tomaselli and McLennan Dodd 2003).

Autoethnography is a relatively recent form of writing which permits readers to feel the moral dilemmas confronting us as researchers, to think *with* our narratives, instead of simply about them, and to join actively in the decision points which define the method (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 735). This approach - in our case - also permits us to write as individuals while maintaining team coherence and project cohesion. This is an important strategy given the fact that individual student members of our research team are constantly changing as they enter and exit, and sometimes re-enter, our graduate programme (see Table 1).

*Table 1 Research Students and Research Affiliates (1995-2005)*

<p><i>Garth Allen</i> [Fieldwork: 2004] cf. <i>Tourism in the New South Africa</i> (2004, IBB Tauris) with F. Brennan [1995-2004]</p>	<p><i>British. CCMS</i> Adjunct Professor. Economist. Director of Institute for Social and Economic Research, Univ. College of St Mark and St John.</p>
<p><i>Gibson Mashilo Boloka</i> (2001) [Fieldwork: 1999, 2000-1]</p>	<p>PhD-student working on political economy of media.</p>
<p><i>Elana Bregin</i> (Bregin and Kruiper 2004) [Fieldwork: 2001-4] Thesis: <i>The identity of difference: A critical study of representations of the Bushmen</i> (1998).</p>	<p>English MA-graduate. Writer. Works for UKZN-Press. Wrote articles and press releases for Vetkat's Bergtheil exhibitions.</p>
<p><i>Sacha Cleland-Stokes</i> [Research: 2001-2] Thesis: <i>Representing Aboriginality: A post- colonial analysis of key trends representing aboriginality in South Africa, Australian and Aotearoa/New Zealand film and an analysis of three films in the light of these trends</i> (2002).</p>	<p>MA-student. Conducted textual analysis of <i>The great dance, The last wave</i> and <i>Once were warriors</i>. Drama and film graduate. Works as a professional TV- director. Her thesis is to be published by Intervention Press, Denmark.</p>

<p><i>Darryn Crowe</i> (2003) [Fieldwork: 2000]</p>	<p>Honours student and photographer.</p>
<p><i>Eduardo da Veiga</i> [Fieldwork: 2005] Video: Video on craft seller.</p>	<p>MA-student. UKZN Philosophy and psychology graduate. Studying video production and film.</p>
<p><i>Sian Dunn</i> [Fieldwork: 2002] Project: Photographs taken at Witdraai and Blinkwater. Exhibited at Bergtheil (2002). Dunn's practice and photos are analysed by Mlauzi (2002).</p>	<p>Rhodes University journalism graduate and professional photographer then working for the <i>Highway Mail</i>.</p>
<p><i>Catherine Dunphy</i> [Fieldwork: 2005]</p>	<p><i>Canadian</i>. Journalist and journalism lecturer, Ryason University, Toronto.</p>
<p><i>Lauren Dyll</i> (2003) [Fieldwork: 2001-2003] Thesis: <i>Close encounters of the first kind: What does development mean in the context of two Bushman communities in Ngwatle and the Northern Cape?</i> (2004).</p>	<p>MA-student. Drama and Performance Studies graduate. Was employed as a researcher and lecturer during 2004. Returning to do PhD in 2006 ff.</p>



<p><i>Matthew Durlington</i> (accompanied by Lauren Durlington) [Fieldwork: 2003-4] Video: Hunters redux (in progress).</p>	<p><i>American.</i> UKZN Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow. Video maker and graduate of Temple University's Graduate Program in Visual Anthropology.</p>
<p><i>Michael Francis</i> [Fieldwork: 2002-5] MA-Thesis: <i>Interpretations of development: Culture and the development encounter in rural KwaZulu-Natal.</i> PhD Thesis: <i>Onibonabonephi - I saw you where you were. Abatwa identity formation in the Drakensberg.</i></p>	<p><i>Canadian.</i> MA- and PhD-student, working on the KwaZulu-Natal project. Anthropology degree from Univ. of Alberta. Worked in Ngwatle, Northern Cape, Kutse and Kamberg (Drakensberg amongst the Duma clan).</p>
<p><i>Jo-Anne Hen-Boisen</i> [Fieldwork: 2004] Project: Autoethnography.</p>	<p>Honours student. Works for UKZN Development Foundation.</p>
<p><i>Belinda Jeursen</i> (1994; Jeursen and Tomaselli 2002) [Fieldwork: 1995-6]</p>	<p>English MA-graduate and CCMS research assistant.</p>
<p><i>Kaitira Kandjii</i> (1997) [Fieldwork: 1996]</p>	<p><i>Namibian.</i> Honours, MA. Journalism graduate from Natal Technikon.</p>

<p><i>Mary Lange</i> (2003a; 2003b; 2005; 2006) [Fieldwork: 2002-5] Honours Project: Reception Analysis of <i>Kalahari fires</i> (2003) MA Thesis: <i>Women reading the Gariiep River, Uppington: A reception study</i> (in progress).</p>	<p>Honours and MA-student. English and psychology graduate with archaeology as extra major, with diplomas in performance and drama. Works at the Bergtheil Museum, Durban. Is coordinator of CCMS-based Art and Reconciliation Across the World project in Durban.</p>
<p><i>Frederik Lange</i> [Fieldwork: 2005] Art project: Multimedia <i>Kalahari</i> representation.</p>	<p>Matric student, Westville Boys High.</p>
<p><i>Samuel Lelièvre</i> [Appointment: 2002-2003]</p>	<p><i>French</i>. National Research Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow. Representation in African cinema.</p>
<p><i>Susan Mahando</i> [Fieldwork: 1995] Project: Video documentation used in <i>Kalahari fires</i> (Lange and Nxumalo, X., 2003).</p>	<p><i>Zimbabwean</i>. Graduate in media studies from University of Zimbabwe.</p>

<p><i>Linje Manyozo Mlauzi</i> (2002) [Fieldwork: 2002] Video: <i>Reading photographs in the Kalahari</i>, 33 minutes (2002).</p>	<p><i>Malawian</i>. MA-media studies student. Drama Graduate from University of Malawi.</p>
<p><i>Brilliant Mhlanga</i> [Fieldwork: 2005]</p>	<p><i>Zimbabwean</i>. MA- student in media studies</p>
<p><i>Nhamo Mhiripiri</i> [Fieldwork: 2003-5] Thesis: <i>The tourist viewer, the Bushmen and the Zulu: (Re) invention and negotiation identities</i> (in progress).</p>	<p><i>Zimbabwean</i>. PhD- Student and media studies lecturer. Lecturer at Midlands State University. Also published in <i>Visual Anthropology</i>.</p>
<p><i>Mashaya Mkwetshana-Dambuza</i> [Fieldwork: 2005] Project: Performance amongst marginalized groups.</p>	<p>MA-student in ethnomusicology. Professional performance artist geared towards community work.</p>
<p><i>Vanessa McLennan- Dodd</i> (2003a; 2003b; 2004) [Fieldwork: 2001-3] Thesis: <i>Reflexivity and research methodology in representation of the San: a case study of Isaacson's 'The healing land'</i> (2003).</p>	<p>Honours and MA- student. Project manager. English studies graduate. Has published other articles on the topic not listed here in <i>Critical Arts, Kronos,</i> and <i>Visual Anthropology</i>, and in various books.</p>

<p><i>Oyvind Mikalsen</i> (2004) [Fieldwork: 2004-5]</p>	<p><i>Norwegian. Sami.</i> Honours and MA- student. Worked in the Okavango Swamps on fisheries management, 2000-2004.</p>
<p><i>Kamini Moodley</i> [Fieldwork: 2004-5] Project: Technical Report: Kutse Lodge (2005)</p>	<p>Honours and MA- student. Research manager, [2004-5]. Natal University anthropology graduate.</p>
<p><i>Garath Morgan</i> [Fieldwork: 1996]</p>	<p>Anthropology MA- student, University of Durban-Westville.</p>
<p><i>Garath Myklebust</i> [Fieldwork: 2002-3]</p>	<p>Graphic designer. Assisted Vetkat with art supplies, advice and designed brochures for Bergtheil exhibitions.</p>
<p><i>Ntokozo Ndlela</i> [Fieldwork: 2001] Thesis: Representations of Zulu cultural identity in cultural tourism: A case study of Izintaba Zulu cultural village (2002).</p>	<p>MA-media studies student. Employed as a translator on other CCMS-projects and as an administrative assistant.</p>

<p><i>Nyambura Gachette Njagi</i> [Fieldwork: 2004-5] Thesis: Sustainable livelihoods: An analysis of household livelihood portfolios from the !Kung Group Basarwa of Ngwatle (in progress).</p>	<p>American of Kenyan extraction. Registered in Development Studies.</p>
<p><i>Nelia Oets</i> (2003; Tomaselli and Oets 2004) [Fieldwork: 1999-2005]</p>	<p>CCMS Research Affiliate. Afrikaans literature Honours graduate. Translation and interpretation, camp management and research.</p>
<p><i>Darren Oddy</i> [Fieldwork: 2004-5] Project: Publics in the Land Restitution Case.</p>	<p>Public Policy graduate student. UKZN Media studies and politics graduate.</p>
<p><i>Chantal Oosthuysen</i> [1999-2001]</p>	<p>MA-graduate. Research manager and translator.</p>
<p><i>Sherieen Pretorius</i> [Fieldwork: 2002]</p>	<p>Assisted Mlauzi (2002) in interpreting interviews and focus groups from Afrikaans.</p>

<p><i>Tim Reinhardt</i> (2003) [Fieldwork: 2003] Videos: Vetkat, a guy, a journey and a camera, and (with Sætre), The fire dance.</p>	<p>UKZN Electronic Engineering graduate turned video maker.</p>
<p><i>Dorothy Roome</i> [Fieldwork: 1995] Project: Video documentation used in <i>Kalahari fires</i> (2003) (Lange and Nxumalo).</p>	<p>PhD-student. MA in Media Studies from Arizona State. Now teaching at Arizona State University, Tuscon.</p>
<p><i>Marit Sætre</i> (2003) [Fieldwork: 2002] Thesis: 'I am, you are?' A documentary about the Bushmen and the Others in the Kalahari (2003).</p>	<p>Norwegian. MA-student in media studies. Worked with Reinhardt on the video of The fire dance.</p>
<p><i>Jeffrey Sehume</i> [Fieldwork: 1999-2000)</p>	<p>PhD-student. Now at University of Fort Hare.</p>
<p><i>Arnold Shepperson</i> (1998) [1999-2005]</p>	<p>Co-writer on project articles.</p>
<p><i>Anthea Simões</i> (2001a; 2001b) [Fieldwork: 1999-2001]</p>	<p>Honours and MA-student.</p>
<p><i>Bronwyn Spicer</i> [2005]</p>	<p>Honours student, editorial assistance.</p>

<p><i>Nasseema Taleb</i> [Fieldwork: 2004] Article: <i>A letter to myself: My trip to Ngwatle.</i></p>	<p><i>Mauritian.</i> Honours and MA-student, who worked at Ngwatle and Kutse.</p>
<p><i>Philip Tembu</i> [Fieldwork: 2005] Project: Field Research Methodology.</p>	<p><i>Kenyan.</i> Digital Media MA-student. Member of video production crew. UKZN Music graduate.</p>
<p><i>Ruth Teer-Tomaselli</i> [Fieldwork: 2005]</p>	<p>Professor of Media Studies. Telecoms interest.</p>
<p><i>Charlize Tomaselli</i> (Lange <i>et al.</i> 2003) [Fieldwork: 1995, 2002-4]</p>	<p>Undergraduate archaeology and anthropology student, Universities of Natal and Cape Town.</p>
<p><i>Damien Tomaselli</i> [Fieldwork: 2002]</p>	<p>Undergraduate drama and media student. Videoed interviews conducted by Mlauzi (2002).</p>
<p><i>Alexandra von Stauss</i> (2000) [Fieldwork: 2000]</p>	<p>MA-student. Professional photographer.</p>
<p><i>Caleb Wang</i> (2000; 2002) [Fieldwork: 2000-1]</p>	<p>MA-student. Volunteered for the Trust in January 2001.</p>

### Notes

- Unless stated, students were registered in CCMS.
- Fieldwork was not necessarily continuous, as students were required to complete course work during term. Many listed above were also employed as

tutors in the CCMS-Programme.

- Others who we participated with in various ways include Fiona Archer (development consultant), David Crichton (tourism consultant), Jake Homiak (Smithsonian), Christine Marcham (UKZN Sociology), Thaven Naidoo (SACOD), Frans Prins (Natal Museum), Sonja Speeter, Conrad Steenkamp (NGO-worker), Mzimkulu Sithetho (Lesotho journalist), and Rob Waldron.

Our hosts were initially mystified and even perturbed about the fact that after one or two visits, students with whom they had bonded and learnt to trust, no longer visited them. They feared a lack of a longer-term commitment from us; they felt that they had an investment with the students who had worked with them, and they suggested that they had contributed to my graduates' supposed success in the job market.

Where initially we did not know what to do with our written narratives and interviews, narrative and self-reflexivity have now become the project's prime mode of inquiry, thus redefining relationships between authors and readers. More significantly however, this form of inquiry and presentation is also one that is empathetically understood and creatively engaged by the project's host-communities. Individuals within these communities are beginning to appreciate the symbolic value of being included in someone else's story, whether in print, photography, or on video. Where conventional social science writing eliminates the observers and often the observed as well, our narratives attempt to write all participants into the encounter - and their observations and often their dialogue and their subjectivities - into the various story/ies being told. For example, an ongoing process of engagement, via independently taped and hand-written commentaries, is regularly posted to our hosts. (There is no postal service to Ngwatle, and few in the community are literate, so we return information via the Trust and by means of screening videos that we have made.) Campfire research, disseminations and interactions (including songs, music and dance, talk and banter, open-ended interviews, anecdotes, complaints and criticism) between researchers and subjects on the project's pre-published work, have resulted in an extraordinary process of civil, participatory collaboration, which joins the researcher with the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: ix). Apart from regular visits to the Northern Cape, we are in constant contact via cell phone when one of our informants, Belinda Kruiper, passes a transmitter on the main road while in her donkey cart or other transport, via the



postal service in Upington 240 kms to the south, via fax c/o the nearby Transfrontier Kgalagadi Park office, and sometimes by e-mail which passes through a number of hands before reaching its destination. **[ii]** Belinda and her husband Vetkat annually join us on our university campus in Durban, to work with our students, when they exhibit Vetkat's art at the Bergtheil Museum in Durban ([www.indigenousheritage.org/vetkat.html](http://www.indigenousheritage.org/vetkat.html)).

Durban is a very different environment to the Kalahari. Existentialism rules in the Kalahari - what is, is what is. We surmised during our April 2002 visit to Blinkwater and Welkom that people however do want things to happen, and want and need social services. Things happen or don't happen. Belinda and Vetkat did not buy the sheep from their neighbour (which I offered to pay for), because of the wind. The wind happened, so the sheep was not bought and skinned. 'We can't do anything against nature' - the same feeling of natural agency overpowering action is what led to photographer Sian Dunn's feeling of frustration as 'everything went with the weather' (Blinkwater 2002; cf. Mlauzi 2002). Dunn was unable to fulfil a day's photographic brief, because the Blinkwater folk simply returned to their huts to escape the wind. Linje Manyozo referred to Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism', and described this naturist energy-saving response by our hosts as environmental fetishism. Where industrial societies are shaped and managed by ruling elites via developing a desire for and consumption of largely unnecessary commodities, the ≠Khomani in contrast understand themselves to be at the mercy of the environment, an irresistible and invisible set of forces that shape daily decisions and prior arrangements, irrespective of needs. For them, there is no difference between the 'real' and the 'constructed' - what is, is what is. I am not sure about Linje's interpretation of the Marxist concept, but his comment sets off a semiosis. Perhaps what he presages is Levi-Strauss' (1971) concept of totemism, where the signifier is semiotically collapsed into the signified, and becomes the thing itself. The ensuing metonymic mystification perhaps would be better described as environmental fetishism in the semiotic sense than in terms of Marx's framework.

A-literates, theories of orality tell us, tend to be without metaphors (Jousse 1977). What is, is what *is*. The sand is part of the Bushmen; they are part of the sand. The weather, wind, and often the wine govern activities as well. Nature is seen to be capricious, but not malicious. Tomaselli learned about worlds without metaphor when first trying to make sense of the spontaneous Lament of old Piet

Draghoender, whom he videoed in 1984, in the Kat River valley, pending his family and community's imminent dispossession by the apartheid state. Blood, the ancestors/lineage and the ground, for him, were one and the same (Tomaselli 1997). The living are in direct relation with the departed, and are kept closer by going barefoot when dancing.

The contradiction is found in Belinda's Kruiper's attempts to bridge a fatalist natural existential cultural fetishism where 'things happen' (if one waits long enough) and the world of development and politics in which 'things are not happening' (because delivery is tied to a variety of processes, procedures and schedules even more invisible than the wind). The highly active South African San Institute (SASI) was perceived by many of our sources to be largely invisible in the body on the ground. The Khomani Community Property Association was alleged by some to be centralizing available resources; provincial and national governments work according to unknown mechanisms and time scales. (Similar comments are made about the Ngwatle situation by some of our !Xoo informants. In contrast, the Ju/'hoansi are highly involved in the agencies servicing their needs.) The CPA was also considered unrepresentative of the traditionals.

In the Northern Cape, significant resources are being delivered: schools, land, electricity, and reticulated water at the small urban settlement of Welkom, are amongst the new basic services, which attract the youngsters from Witdraai. But these are not 'seen' because they are not 'cash'. The people want more, they want to 'feel' their changes existentially - the 'what is is' factor. 'Our world is full of nothingness', complained Belinda Kruiper (July 2002). At that time of personal hardship their lives were spiritually empty but full of content at the level of the emotional interpretant, the birds and the bees, and the rustling of the trees. As one Ju/'hoan village told us, they deliberately represented themselves as 'poor' in order to leverage donations from visitors (Chapters 5 and 6). Here, the villagers were able to negotiate the rapids of modernity by constructing a realist meaning for the visitors notwithstanding their existentially pre-modern condition, supposedly lacking metaphorical signification.

Belinda's Kruiper's disturbance in the community - as an educated person who married into the Kruiper clan - is due to the fact that while she accepts existential totemism, she is also an indicator of the potential of personal and social agency (cf. Tomaselli 2006a). Things can be changed at a political and service delivery level even if not at the natural level. But she asks, why give the Welkom house

dweller's electricity, when they cook outside on the fire and when the lights attract the moths? The contradiction was evident when Elana Bregin in Durban, who was working on a book with Belinda, twice called Belinda on her cell phone at Blinkwater, which cut out both times. Belinda looked at us, phone in hand, and exclaimed, '%@#, I'm tired of trying to deal with technology! Technology doesn't work in the Kalahari!'

How does one begin to comprehend beguiling totemistic essentialism? The wind happens. The sunrise happens. The rain dance makes things happen (mainly in the rainy season). Things happen. But often nothing happens. That's because the wind is happening. Skinning animals in the wind invests the carcass with dust. So hunting does not happen. The land happens. It is not developed. Money happens - it comes in, it goes out. None of it is invested. That is known as development. It comes from tourists, visitors and charities. It does not come from NGOs or the government.

Life happens. The <sup>1</sup>Khomani at Welkom tell in July 2002 that development is not happening. We are told this as we sit underneath newly installed electrical cables feeding the house in whose yard we are sitting. People are fetching water from taps, and the streetlights sparkle in the wind and through the drizzle. The brand new craft showroom on the gravel roadside is empty, its windows broken and boarded up. In June 2005, Ruth in investigating the theft of the ceiling, startled an owl living in the rafters, and then found its mate's dead dried carcass on the sand. The surviving owl was disorientated, much like the people. What about the school? Few of the traditional <sup>1</sup>Khomani children go to school. No money for school fees, we are told. In 2005 some houses have satellite TV, and Belinda complains that parents cannot decode the ratings symbols, that children are watching late night soft porn on eTV and DSTV while their parents sleep. Road workers seduce young girls with drink and money, and AIDS is on the march. The people cannot identify the development/s. 'Give me R5 and food', a young boy demanded from me in 2002. Now, that is assumed to be development. Or is it? Like waiting for the wind to die before buying and skinning the sheep which Tomaselli offered to buy, perhaps individuals are waiting for R200 notes passed out at random by temporary visitors, rather than the millions which pay for the civic infrastructure. Perhaps the infrastructure is not needed or wanted, but the government provides it anyway. Lights cost money, they attract millions of flying insects; stoves consume electricity, while people prefer to cook over a fire. Debt

starts. Where are people to get the money to pay for the electricity? Begging perhaps? Development begets begging. Begging becomes development - money in the hand. William Ellis, an anthropologist from the University of Western Cape, describes the new economy as 'organised begging'. So the people wait for the better days promised by the liberation government. The NGOs get the blame because nothing seems to be happening; not the government, not the individuals who run the Community Property Association, which manages the ≠Khomani's not-insubstantial state-provided resources, and which are accused of squandering it. The villagers seem to have little understanding of where or how they fit into the new democratic structures. By July 2005, consumption had replaced community, loud thumping rock music and TV drowned out natural ambient sounds throughout the day and most of the night.

Our methodological problem, as Zimbabwean PhD-student Nhamo Mhiripiri suggested, is how to write an analysis of a situation and a people who have come to take us seriously, but who may not appreciate our analysis, our critique, and our logic. Will we be also identified for blame? It's easy and fun to be the flavour of the month; it's a much less happy situation to be excommunicated from a life's work, blamed for everything that went wrong, and to stick to one's principles through thick and thin (cf. Biesele and Hitchcock 1999; Barnard *et al.* 1996; Marshall 1996). The wind comes and goes; legitimacy waxes and wanes, and trust has to be tested over good times and bad. We are concerned with the webs of research, exploitation and deceit that so often cloud academic and journalistic research in the Kalahari. Who is drawing the line around whom?

The problem, as far as method goes, is that there can be no argument against a perception. If there is wind, we will perceive that wind together if we are both exposed to it, though we might disagree on its meaning. We cannot argue against either of our judgements as to the severity of the wind, because perceptual judgements are 'necessarily veracious' (Peirce 1998: 204). All we can do is, in effect, to engage in dialogue in the hope that (in good therapeutic fashion) we can amicably resolve any conflict of interpretation. But a comparative analysis of the kinds of *inferences from perceptual judgements* made about, say, the wind on the day a sheep was scheduled for slaughter, already constitutes something other than a dialogue about wind and sheep. For example, the fact that wind may affect a community's will to act at all makes it possible to consider what social or communal spaces are available to people, and what needs to be done to make up

shortfalls in these spaces such that wind (or rain, or cold) have less impact on the capacity to act. For the present, however, our research has highlighted the need simply to set about presenting these pre-theoretical dialogues so that those who critically participate in them can find a common starting-point from which to move on.

Our long-term research venture/encounter reminds us that (Western) theoretical constructs are not metaphysical ends or sets of values in their own right, but that they must always be laid open to re-examination and change when applied to (non-Western) empirical contexts and real-life subjects/informants. Moreover, by knowingly positioning observers and observed within specific, polyphonic communication circuits at given points in time and space, this endeavour over the decade of our research (1995-2005) problematises received models of authority in formulations of academic inquiry and writing, where the pecking order between researcher and researched, and among scholars themselves, is predetermined at the outset. Accordingly, it suggests new terms of mutual engagement for *cultural studies researchers* at various stages of inquiry, their *host communities*, and the targeted *readers* of the ensuing ethnographic accounts.

#### NOTES

**[i]** These discursive and ideological conflicts reached a crescendo with Pippa Skotnes' Miscast Exhibition in Cape Town in 1996 (cf. Jackson and Robins 1999; Douglas and Law 1997; Skotnes 2002).

**[ii]** As part of its public service mandate, Telkom, the national telecoms provider, was required to 'roll-out' significant new telephone lines to outlying areas throughout South Africa. The two major cellular phone companies, Vodacom and MTN, also extended their network significantly. From 2004 onwards, the Third Generation (3-G) value-added services such as e-mail, video and conference calling over both fixed line and cellular networks, resulted in an enormous infrastructural investment as towers are added to the network, and existing towers upgraded. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli documented much of this expansion, while conducting an independent survey of cell phone towers along the road to the Park in July 2005. By 2006 the entire route between Andriesvale and the park will be serviced by the cellular network.