

## Rethinking the researcher-researched relationship: Research participants as prodsumers

### ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the conventional researcher-researched relationship that empowers the researcher over the researched. The orthodoxy of objectivity – claimed to locate the researchers as neutral observer – is here argued to be a power relation that has an excluding effect where subject communities are concerned. By means of an archaeological case study that included mapping and interpretation of ancient rock engravings we offer a new way of negotiating interpretations. This new way involved four members from a Bushman community who helped us navigate spiritual, ontological and environmental dimensions in making sense of rock art.

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## INTRODUCTION

The researcher-researched relationship involves performance. In traditional research it is assumed that the researcher is the all-knowing lead actor. However, our long-term research amongst remote communities lacking formal education on our Rethinking Indigeneity (RI) project has proven this a fallacy for our particular research context. Our research partners, drawn from the #Khomani, are a group of traditionalist self-styled Bushmen<sup>1</sup>, known as First People from whom all humans descended, who are in tune with the identities they can perform and display in order to gain funding, win land claims, or simply sell crafts. They are aware of the public interest in *who they are*. However, theirs is a self-made, fluid and hybridised identity. Although the #Khomani live on the margins of society their group and self-identity are influenced by forces of modernisation and globalisation.

In globalised regions, group and self-identity is constantly shaped and re-shaped from peoples' media exposure to 'difference'. We, however, discuss the periphery, as we research with the #Khomani who are perceived as 'the Other' - the assumed 'different'. The 'difference' is best exemplified in *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980; 1983) films directed by Jamie Uys (see Tomaselli, 2001; 2006). We adopt a participatory agentic perspective to highlight the way in which they publicly perform their local identity in research, which often leads them to: 1) establishing the parameters of the research interaction, or in a more participatory way, 2) to recognise them as our co-generators of knowledge, some of whom are also our co-authors. We examine development communication and critical indigenous research methods that have been generated in the RI Project (see Table 1. below). The article offers concrete examples of research participant-generated research that has resulted in a re-evaluation of conventional scientific practice. Our objective is to make a case for research participants (normally known as 'informants', 'subjects', 'objects', 'sources', etc.) to be included in certain kinds of studies as co-authors and co-researchers in a much less regulated methodological environment (see Gottlieb, 1995; Lange, Müller-Jansen, Fisher, Tomaselli & Morris, 2013). In this sense they act like prodsumers as they are both significantly contributing to, and are users (consumers) of, the research done. The term 'prodsumer' emerged from the digital environment that enabled everyone – as in the analogue days of crystal radio – to be interactive

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<sup>1</sup> 'Bushman' and clan names are preferred by our research participants, as a means of lexically subverting the politically correct naming of 'San', which is a Nama word that means forager, and in its pejorative sense, bandit (Barnard, 1992; Bregin & Kruiper 2004; Gordon, 1992; Tomaselli, 2012). Barnard (1992) further explains that "although 'San' is gaining wide acceptance among non-specialists, several ethnographers who formerly used it have now reverted to 'Bushman'". The primary reason that we use the term Bushman, however, is that our research partners refer to themselves as "Bushmen".

as both producers and consumers in the public sphere (Tomaselli & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. Here, we broaden its remit as a way of alerting readers to the ways in which the traditionalist #Khomani not only contribute to the myths already made about them but also how they are able to shape these in terms of their own livelihood objectives. They both produce the data for research and via ‘being researched’ shape outcomes (see, e.g., Grant & Dicks, 2014).

Table 1 offers a reflective overview of the research conducted and published in the RI project in which we aim to produce new theoretical insights based on the Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research Approach (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008).

**Table 1: Overview of RI project research**

<p><b>Phase 1: Media Representations of the San and the Zulu. 1986ff.</b></p>	<p>The initial interest was movie-induced tourism. The intention was to ascertain levels of media-induced tourism that arose as a result of commercially successful films and television programmes that traded in cultural myths. The “noble-savage” myth that captured the global imagination through Jamie Uys’ <i>The Gods must be Crazy</i> movies, as well as the <i>Shaka Zulu</i> (Faure, 1984) television series led to the investigation of tourism at ‘cultural villages’ such as Shaka Land see, e.g., Tomaselli, 2001).</p>
<p><b>Phase 2: Semiotics of the Encounter. 1995ff.</b></p>	<p>This phase interrogated the nature of research itself. Bushmen were amongst the most researched communities in the world. Were they not suffering from ‘research fatigue’? How could we engage with the Bushmen in a mutually beneficial way? Questions of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ representations led to the interrogation of the roles of researcher and researched. Auto-ethnographic and participatory field research methods were implemented in an attempt to foster dialogues and to expose the vulnerabilities of the researchers. The key areas of focus were cultural tourism, identity, and performance in both the Kalahari and KwaZulu-Natal. Issues of representation, cultural policy and ways of staging authenticity were discussed.</p>
<p><b>Phase 3: From Observation to Development: Method, Cultural Studies and Identity. 2003ff.</b></p>	<p>This phase involved: a) How to make our research useful to our hosts; and b) How to address the need for contemporary contextual information to supplement whatever other studies had been done on these communities’ conditions of existence. Bridging the ‘theory-practice’ divide. Theories are mainly produced in the developed world, while the practice of research and development occurs in un(der)developed countries. Funding is frequently based on proposals written by agents in the developed world, and on received conceptual models instead of observations deriving from the proposed beneficiaries. This phase attempted to create and align theories according to what was happening in the field as opposed to narrating incidents from the field to suit the theory.</p>
<p><b>Phase 4: The development of IXaus Lodge. 2005ff.</b></p>	<p>This phase mobilised semiotics in an analysis of safari lodge marketing, strategic positioning and lodge-community partnerships in relation to issues of identity, representation, and analysis of Same-Other relationships. Action research was applied to shape business decisions to recover a state-development project. The views of the public-private and community stakeholders were taken into account when prescribing a model to guide the partnership.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Toffler (1970, 1981) coined the term “prosumer” when he predicted that the role of producers and consumers would merge, envisioning a highly saturated marketplace as mass production of standardised products began to satisfy basic consumer demands. To continue growing profit, businesses would initiate a process of mass customisation, but where consumers would participate in the production process especially design requirements. We use the term “prodsumer”, which is similar to the aforementioned but is more specific to the interactive digital media of today and that does not solely focus on the production/consumption of goods and technology, but also of ideas and knowledge.

<p><b>Phase 5: Rethinking Indigeneity. 2008ff.</b></p>	<p>The notion of indigeneity was incorporated into postcolonial studies in collaboration with the Leeds University Centre for Post-Colonial Studies. The strategies and models created in the first four phases were replicated so that they could be implemented in other community-lodge partnerships in the region.</p>
<p><b>Phase 6: Co-creation of Indigenous research. 2012ff.</b></p>	<p>Indigenous and local communities work in collaboration with researchers to create contextually sensitive and useful research. Strategic partnerships offer ways for indigenous peoples to develop their own interpretations of their own material culture. Indigenous communities take an active stance in shaping their own representation and identity instead of passively conforming to prescribed roles. Dialogue and collaborative efforts are indispensable to this phase.</p>
<p><b>Phase 7: Psychological Dimension of Origins of Culture. 2007ff.</b></p>	<p>Study via the lens of over-imitation behaviour amongst pre-school children of a-literate parents in the Kalahari, in comparison with Australian Aboriginals, and literate parents of subjects in Brisbane. This phase (2007ff.) adds a comparative psychological component to the project.</p>
<p><b>Phase 8: Participatory Development. 2012ff.</b></p>	<p>Subject-generated media via the method of participatory development. Comics and body maps are used as tools to illustrate what the indigenous communities identify as pressing issues, instead of having their needs and wants prescribed by outside experts – with whom they might then work in a cooperative relationship.</p>
<p><b>Phase 9: Consolidating and critically examining previous research. 2015-2019</b></p>	<p>This phase critically examines the methods developed via the RI project in relation to the broader recent emergence of critical indigenous qualitative methodologies (CIQM). Further, it compares the RI project with work that is being done on transdisciplinarity. Additional, ground breaking work is being done on youth identities among the !Xun and Khwe Bushman groups. It critically reflects on what has been done, what has been achieved, and what should still be done within the project, working to consolidate the vast body of data, information and writings collected into a coherent body of knowledge.</p>

## 1. THE CONTEXT: KRUIPER CURRENCY

The landscape against which our lived ‘research performances’ are set is dramatic and hybridised: with the sharp contrast of a deep blue sky and rolling red sand dunes punctuated by local spaza shops, guest lodges, informal housing, liquor stores, donkey-drawn carts, cellular phone towers, failed decaying craft shops, rusted bakkies (vans), tourist vehicles, craft stalls, old farm houses and rocky terrain that is home to rock engravings. This is the southern Kalahari that lies north of the Orange/!Garib River. We have worked in the town of Upington, a farm called Biesje Poort in Kakamas, and going further north towards the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP) into Namibia and Botswana. Much of the Northern Cape, land bordered by Namibia and Botswana, was restituted back to the #Khomani and neighboring Mier community in the successful 1999 land claim (Grant, 2011). In order to survive on the land the traditionalist #Khomani have generated livelihood strategies based on the performance of the hunter-gatherer identity, commodifying this identity based on the Kruiper name<sup>3</sup>. To be a ‘Bushman’ in the tourism, media and research sectors holds currency, particularly if you are #Khomani and even more so if you are a Kruiper.

In spite of this, the research area and its people reflect the diversity of roots within southern Africa (Adhikanri, 2009). Studies with people of Khoisan<sup>4</sup> descent have found that shifting identities are

<sup>3</sup> This surname is important as the late Dawid Kruiper was the traditional leader during the land claim.

<sup>4</sup> Also spelt Khoesan. As these terms remain problematic, different conventions and spellings exist. Khoisan refers to speakers of click languages in southern Africa, historically known as ‘Bushmen’ (San) and ‘Hottentots’ (Khoi/ Khoe/Khoekhoe) (see Barnard, 1992; Morris, 2014).

largely due to displacement, social, political and religious influences, access to resources, and development or social change opportunities (Lange & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015:2; also see White, 1995). Whether performing a traditional Bushman identity, or a contemporary hybridised identity many #Khomani place importance on managing the representation of their own identity, either to gain an income or as a strategic impulse to combat exploitative representations (Bester & Buntman 1999; Buntman, 1996a; 1996b; Tomaselli, 2012), as will be discussed in this article.

Being First Peoples and the recipients of land and funding post-1994, research and massive media attention have positioned the traditional #Khomani in relation to entertainment and intellectual production (Tomaselli, 2007). However, while their self-expression may be hindered due to access to limited ownership of technologies, they are well-informed of the power of the image. Their 'selfie' is a national one. While their income-earning options may be limited, their ability to leverage the discursive historical card they have been dealt, is astute. They seemingly grasp the capitalistic notion of branding and the channels via which this sale occurs is through cultural tourism, media and through the researcher-researched encounter itself (see Ellis, 2014). This is one of the reasons that all sorts of gatekeepers, NGOs and civic organisations are now inserting themselves between #Khomani individuals and contracting organisations (Francis & Francis, 2010). As such, the endistancing effect between researcher and researched become all the more complex and contested as organisations, not always recognised by individuals or even communities, now act on behalf of, speak for, and levy access fees, from researchers and other visitors. Their opportunities for public self-expression are thus muted by NGO contracts, remote gatekeepers, proscriptions on who can speak to whom, where and how. The already marginalised become thus even more marginalised.

## **2. REPRESENTATIONS AND RESEARCH: WHAT IS ASSUMED?**

Like with Caesar's conquest of Britain in 44BC, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999:80) typifies the research encounter with Western researchers as "They came, They saw, They named, They Claimed".

Not only has Western science "Claimed" but it has also avoided aspects of local identity that could better explain the local research participant's<sup>5</sup> ontology. For example, historically, the social science research agenda, particularly in development communication "has systematically avoided the topic of spirituality". The reason is that spirituality is unquantifiable and is perceived a 'development taboo' (Ver Beek, 2000:31). From the 1970s the issue of 'spirit' in development was flagged when the Dag Hammarskjöld<sup>6</sup> Foundation urged for development to be more than industrial, but a process involving the 'whole person' – the self, society and spirit, thus challenging the top-down, linear, 'rational' model of social change (see Melber & Schoeman, 2011). However, there has either been a paucity of practitioners and researchers that have taken

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<sup>5</sup> We refer to the people whom we visit and with whom we research and sometimes write, as "research participants" (normally known as 'informants', 'subjects', etc.).

<sup>6</sup> A Swedish diplomat, economist, and author. The second Secretary-General of the United Nations, he served from April 1953 until his death in an aeroplane crash in September 1961.

this into consideration, and where it has been considered 'spirituality', is frequently thought to be synonymous with religion (Lange & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015:2).

Thus, the typical 'object/subject' of a study's rich lived experiences is codified into numerical tables and other abstractions. This data-led science is useful for policy, planning and teaching, but in this paradigm the tyranny of data rules supreme and the personalities and experiential texture are suppressed. The research participants of such research rarely recognise themselves within much of the published literature.

In dealing with this form of Authority<sup>7</sup> some #Khomani think of themselves as 'jackals at the mercy of the lion'. #Khomani healer, Jan van der Westhuizen describes the unequal power relationships in which they are located when dealing with Authority:

We call them the young male lion as he is a rich gentleman and we are the small jackals that just get a small bit of bread, or just wait for a small piece here and there of the bones, or to scratch open the stomach contents once the young male lion is finished. And we ask that they share those moments with us in a free spirit (Interview, Witdraai, January 28, 2007).

In response, the previously hunted (both figuratively and actually), have developed strategies to "police their own boundaries" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:563), both restraining and exploiting opportunistic visiting researchers, while cooperating with those that they come to trust.

Research has thus become a significant component in Bushman cultural economies. These self-styled jackals might not know theory or method but they do know how to shape what researchers do, how they do it, and they do call into question ethics regimes that they see protecting knowledge theft at their expense. They enable, refuse or negotiate research encounters and insist on culturally sensitive information gathering practices when research is permitted (Tomaselli et al., 2013).

Research ethics committees rooted in positivist assumptions argue that the inclusion of research participant voices and actual names may lead to ethical headaches. It is safer to allocate a pseudonym or (even worse) a number and summarise the sentiments expressed in interviews. Our question is: how does one do this when research participants insist that their names be part of the public record and when the stories they tell us often take the form of self-narratives, slipping into storytelling that is imbued with local metaphors and meaning? (Dyll-Myklebust, 2014; Lange & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015). If academia ignores this nuance where research participants perform their local identities it becomes exclusionary as it produces a discourse that "author-ises certain people to speak and correspondingly silences other, or at least makes their voices less authoritative" (Usher & Edwards 1994:90). Our research participants appreciate the symbolic

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<sup>7</sup> South African National Parks (SANParks), government officials, ethnic councils, NGOs and possibly researchers also.

value of being included in research as co-researchers and beneficiaries of both the 'findings' and as means of establishing client-patron relations. For example, Gadi Orileng, a Botswanan who has assumed a Bushman identity and who lived amongst a displaced !Xoo community in south central Botswana, clearly highlights this desire to take an opportunity of being filmed: to construct his own story.

I want to do it because we Bushmen are a people...they aren't well known, they are just known by name, or by their traditional...There are people who don't know what a Bushman is, or what sort of nation a Bushman is. It would be better if they had such pictures. And I..., can show these pictures to people..., myself also, yes, because I'm a Bushman (Orileng, interview, June 1999).

The request for anonymity of those that take the time to share their stories with us highlights the uneasy relationship between orality, performing local identity and positivist research procedures.

### **3. PERFORMING PRODSUMPTION AND ESTABLISHING THE PARAMETERS OF THE INTERACTION: WHAT HAPPENS?**

The #Khomani exercise agency in restricting and managing their public image where and when they can. This is quite different to the prodsumers of social media today who jump at any opportunity to 'place themselves on display' whether it is what they ate for lunch, sharing celebratory moments, or what they feel at that exact moment. We wish to highlight here that the care with which the #Khomani interact with the media and researchers may be because they are aware of the possible ensuing social consequences of 'over-representation', having been subject to the global gaze for over 100 years. There is a certain form of colonisation inherent in constructing and representing Others if those that are represented have no agency in the process (Swadener & Mutua, 2008; also see Smith, 1999). Arguments are made as to the agency engendered to the users of social media in terms of individual or collective identity formation (Turkle, 1999). Those with access to social media perform their local identities fast and furiously, while those at the margins are still 'left behind'. This, however, is also an active decision on the part of the #Khomani, who attempt to control their image, knowing all too well how images can be manipulated, commoditized and circulated with or without their permission.

Our work amongst the Kalahari communities reveals that they have agency, teaching often ignorant researchers about themselves and their situations (see Bregin & Kruiper, 2004). It is during such encounters that the indigenous establish the parameters of the interaction (Dyll, 2007). In the process, researchers start to get the uncomfortable impression that their conventional methodology textbooks may not be able to explain the chains of relations witnessed and experienced in the field. The people constituted as subjects or objects actually are often aware of the academic scripts, they have seen the movies made on them by researchers and film makers; they have acted in them, subverted them in both vernacular dialogue and interpretation, and actively contributed to shaping Western myths about 'Bushman', which they then commodify

and sell back to Western audiences, academics and tourists as a livelihood strategy. While their income-earning options may be limited, their ability to leverage the discursive historical card they have been played is very astute.

One of the most perceptive #Khomani we had the privilege of engaging with in the Northern Cape was Silikat van Wyk. Lauren Dyll (2007) and Charlize Tomaselli first met Silikat on a research trip to the Kalahari in 2002. Silikat asked us to come out from the shadows and speak to him in the sun. Bending down he then drew what he called his “middlepoint” in the sand and told Charlize to stand in the centre of it. Pointing to his “middlepoint” he told us that this was an “old Bushmen game”. He explained to Charlize that he’d got her in his “middlepoint”, and because she was standing in it, she had taken *it* away. We found out what *it* was, his land, and because of this injustice Charlize owed him ten rand (see also Mhiripiri, 2012, on the nature of encounters).

Not only does this show Silikat establishing the parameters of the researcher-researched interaction but it also shows his agency in the encounter. Aware of their marginalising structural conditions in which he lives, in this case land dispossession, he mobilises this discourse and plays into the research agenda in order to secure payment. While the ‘subjects of development’ may be unfamiliar with development discourse, they are deeply aware of their positions within the chain of relations, and are therefore valid and necessary voices in the co-production of knowledge. Similarly, in learning the discursive game of strategic essentialism – or anthrospeak – many Bushmen have commodified language and encounters as means to extract resources from unwitting researchers whose previous impressions of ‘the Bushmen’ may have been drawn from movies, TV series, books and articles.

Where the Bushmen, without access to social media, rigorously manage their media exposure<sup>8</sup> and have high expectations of research done on, with or for them, ordinary hyper-individuated urban middle class social media users<sup>9</sup> who blog, tweet or Facebook appear to have much lower expectations. In spite of the #Khomani hyper-mediated image, theirs is *not* an indulgent fame-seeking selfie culture unless a financial transaction is involved to compensate for their cooperation. Their performance of local identity is strategic, a poverty-alleviation exercise.

Our research participants thus perform their local identity and act as prosumers in two ways:

- 1) Strategically performing the traditional image of hunter-gatherer, or adopting anthrospeak and positioning themselves as victims of dispossession or holders of traditional knowledge in order to earn an income.
- 2) Managing access to their image and the representations thereof in order to safeguard how they are presented, to limit undue exploitation and maintain control of encounters with visitors (see Von Stauss, 2012).

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<sup>8</sup> By charging for photographs taken of them, sometimes requiring contracts on permissible uses, refusing to cooperate with photographers, alleging exploitation etc.

<sup>9</sup> This that do not use new media for the purposes of social change, but rather to document their everyday activities.



As such, our research participants study 'Us' as much as we try to study 'Them'. Where we make notes, take photographs, and audio recordings, selecting from 'what happens', First Peoples enact a lived approach. Constantly testing and provoking us, they talk in parables, poesis and remember to remember only when conditions or the time is right (Tomaselli, 2007). Eventually it dawns on researchers of First Peoples that our initial inability to make sense of the Other is rooted in Cartesian conceptions of science that disaggregate Subject from Object (Stoller, 1989).

These moments result in a re-evaluation of conventional scientific practice, as has been adopted in the RI Project.

#### **4. A PARTICIPATORY TURN: CRITICAL INDIGENOUS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

Research within the RI project includes qualitative techniques of interviews, observations in the field and simply "hanging out". This has developed into long-term relationships even outside of formal research spaces, for example where we have assisted in hosting exhibitions for late-artist Vetkat Kruiper (Lange, 2006), and the publishing of *Mooi Loop* (Kruiper, 2014), an art and poetry book by his wife Belinda Kruiper. The trust that comes with time spent in building up these sorts of relationships before research participants feel they are in a space in which they would like to express themselves candidly is not underestimated by us. But if we are to try and understand or promote our research participants performance of their local identities we should take heed of Smith (1999) and Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) guidelines for a Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research approach.

Smith (1999:20) calls for a decolonisation of research methodologies "by generating a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices". She urges researchers to disrupt the rules of research towards practices that are more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful vs. racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research. Similarly, a Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research approach can be applied along with interpretive research practices that aim to be ethical, transformative and participatory (Denzin et al., 2008), and can recover the texture and nuance to illuminate our research participants' local identities and to problematise the researcher-researched relationship. "These recent moves in decolonization illustrate ways in which scholars engaged in decolonizing research remain constantly mindful of the ways in which the process or outcomes of their research might reify hegemonic power thereby creating marginality" (Swadener & Mutua, 2008:33), and instead promote self-expression amongst research participants (see Tomaselli & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015; Burger, 2015).

The RI project embraces this approach in a variety of studies via the use of 'transformative' methodological techniques and outcomes that have enabled us to research the 'less tangible' aspects of our research participants lives. Kalahari peoples have a rich storytelling tradition. Storytelling, art and craft can be considered aesthetic expressions of identities (Leuthold, 1998). Research with present-day Kalahari people regarding their artistic expression and places where

it has been, and is still practiced highlights that these expressions are informed by spirituality<sup>10</sup> (Lange & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015). Although the spiritual beliefs of the community are as real to them as food in their stomachs, as researchers we needed to ask ourselves how we make sense of these oral narratives which speaks in imagery and reflect both the tangible and intangible.

Non-indigenous or 'outside researchers' can be instrumental in not only understanding these local forms of expression, but can also provide a platform for them:

- 1) With a **centring of the landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories** in the indigenous world" (Smith, 1999:146) researchers can try to understand the behaviour of researchers from the perspectives of the researched.
- 2) "Setting out in writing **indigenous spiritual belief and world views**" (Smith, 1999:143) enables researchers to break with ontologically alienating Cartesian positivism.
- 3) Applying **reflexivity** – to disrupt the expert/object relationships by positioning the researchers in relation to both the researched and likely readers of such work or films or TV programmes (Ruby, 1977), allowing the recognition of **performativity** in the field and the adoption of it in our writing.

#### **4.1 Centering storytelling and landscape**

The landscape, including its fauna and flora, is the one enduring point of identity reference for the people north of the !Garib/Orange River. Specifically, they identify with the river and the desert sands; the landscape, rain animals and the celestial bodies.

The landscape often features in South African stories (Jenkins, 2004), whether folk tales or oral reminiscences, and land has become the focus of many development and social change projects in South Africa with the post-1994 land redistribution programme... Cultural identity, indigenous ontology and spirituality are inextricably linked with land (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Lange & Dyll-Myklebust 2015:4).

However, a "determinist view of the Kalahari People's relationship with the land denies agency" (Lange & Dyll-Myklebust; 2015:7). In order to facilitate agency we, as researchers, need to engage with the original role of orality as a needed non-judgmental space for the sharing of spiritual beliefs, especially where they may differ from those held by the majority (Crisp & Beddoe, 2013). We need to view it as vital in the construction of individual identity as well as social cohesion. Rather, a constructivist approach that allows the relationship between society, history, local conditions, landscape, and political issues to be expressed is helpful in elevating our research participants out of the stereotype of romanticised hunter-gatherer living in the past. Stories may still be imbued with traditional metaphors, and locally-inspired codes and signs but these codes work to express contemporary issues, as can be seen with Jan's jackal and lion metaphor narrative to describe unequal power relationships

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<sup>10</sup> We agree that spirituality is "a *relationship* with the supernatural or spiritual realm that provides meaning and a basis for personal and communal reflection, decisions, and action" (Ver Beek, 2000:32).

(Dyll-Myklebust, 2014; Lange & Dyll-Myklebust, 2015). Similarly, Mary Lange and die Eiland women's *Water Stories* project undertook oral recording of Water Snake stories in 1998 close to the Orange River. The women expressed their spirituality (as a defining feature of themselves) not in compartmentalised traditional Khoisan and Christian beliefs but rather as a spirituality that shifts between these (2014).

#### **4.2 Reflexivity and Performativity**

One way in which to 'combat' the consequences of Cartesianism is to reflexively document the research 'performances' in which they find themselves. Reflexivity allows us to "write in" the nature of the encounter and the research process, thus illustrating how a research outcome is always *constructed* – made, negotiated, and renegotiated by both researchers and researched who are involved in the process (Ruby, 1977). Revealing the constructedness of research is crucial when working with groups Other to the researcher. Objectivity typically safeguards the Self/researcher's vulnerability and maintains not only his/her traditional authority, but also his/her "right" to know others while he/she is effectively insulated from being known. Reflexivity offers a step towards fracturing this insulation and the researcher's institutional authority and how their beliefs possibly changed over the research process. There is no longer a primary focus *only* on the Other; what becomes an epistemological prerequisite for ethnography is the idea of 'confrontation'. This 'confrontation' comes in the form of dialogue with data, research participants and oneself in negotiating one's position in order to understand a social setting, social group or social problem.

Both the centering of indigenous ontology and reflexivity leads to the guiding principle of performativity that is evident in autoethnographic writing. Autoethnography can be considered an interpretive practice that decolonises research:

No matter who one is, what one does, or where one lives, researcher and lived relations are always about negotiating insider-outsider dichotomies...Autoethnography excavates researchers' hidden transcripts concealed by the positivist conventions of objectivity and statistical data analysis (Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust & Van Grootheest, 2013:578).

We used Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner's definition as the first guide into autoethnography:

Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:739).

Not only do we use the *reflexivity* of autoethnography to consider our own subject positions in relation to people with whom we conduct research, but importantly, as cultural studies scholars we use the *performativity* of autoethnography to explore and document the role of

different modes of writing in capturing the researcher-researched relations and the intricacies of performing local identity (of both parties to the encounter) (Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust & Van Grootheest, 2013). As such, “through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study” (Denzin, 2006:422) and create texts that “unfold in the intersubjective space of individual and community and that embrace tactics for both *knowing* and *showing*” (Holman Jones 2005:763). In this way some RI team members embrace evocative autoethnography in their methodological writing (Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In addition, we have developed methodologies from the field and a strong social sciences influence in the cultural studies employed in the RI project introduced an analytical dimension in trying to triangulate our thoughts with empirical evidence and with what can be validated by the academy and research participants (see Anderson, 2006). An actual event in the field can be analysed, triangulated and verified by using autoethnography as *one of the methods* for triangulation. The encounter with Silikat is analytical ethnography, as it has historical social significance beyond the moment, whereas much autoethnography is evocative, that is it is self-referential and exists mainly in the moment of thought and encounter (Anderson, 2006). We thus mesh *techniques that work towards analytical and evocative autoethnography*: both subgenres can add to socio-cultural academic commentary, after all, the personal is political (Hanisch, 1970; also see Allen-Collinson, 2013). Due to its co-constructed nature and emphasis on analysis, the version of autoethnography generated by the RI project could best be described as collaborative autoethnography (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Chang, 2013; Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012; Ellis, 2007) as it expands enquiry to include others in the academic discourse.

In addition, reflexivity and performativity extends the research participants’ produser role as it enables them to recognise themselves and appreciate their presence in academic texts as actors in the autoethnographic stories. These interpretive procedures were all mobilised in the Biesje Poort rock art project.

## 5. ENGRAVED LANDSCAPE: AN INTERCULTURAL TAPESTRY OF IDENTITY

The idea of self-narrative as performance of local identity is examined from the perspectives of both researcher and researched. Our case study resulted in an illustrated book, *Engraved Landscape: Biesje Poort Many Voices* (Lange et al., 2013), a postmodern archaeology<sup>11</sup> where graphic design is used to enhance readability. It is the outcome of an interdisciplinary and intercultural research project situated at Biesje Poort in the Northern Cape. The chapters are densely illustrated with photographs, graphics, drawings, maps. The chapters are a collection of autoethnographic narratives, conventional academic writing, field discussions published in

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<sup>11</sup> Or in archeological discourse; “postprocessual” or “postcolonial” (see Morris, 2014). A term used to describe our analysis of ancient rock engravings ‘dug up’ via the interpretations of contemporary Bushmen in discussion with an interdisciplinary team, rather than via theories developed by academics alone. The narratives developed were multifaceted, and include environmental, spiritual, technical and the ontological experience of the contemporary interpreters.

English, Nama and Afrikaans, and poems. The team consisted of members from an educational non-profit grassroots art organisation, ARROWSA, professors and graduate students from the Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal, and the McGregor Museum, Kimberly. Team members were drawn from cultural and communication studies, architecture, landscape architecture and archaeology. Included in the team were four Kalahari crafters, and a traditional healer. The book's content is best summarised by John Butler-Adam who described it as a:

montage (in this case, a textual collection of both images and analyses) of personal observations, poems, translated poetry and serious scholarly chapters. The chapters cover the project methodology, and also history, rock art, archaeology, conservation, and the nature of indigeneity as they pertain to the landscape of Biesje Poort. ...[A]part from the new discoveries, information, insights and imaginings presented, one of the most valuable collective contributions that the book offers in the field of landscape analysis is that it is one of very few recent texts that speaks directly to the interpretation and meaning of the messages that people leave behind as additions to, and statements about, their places... making it...For it is not just the rock art but also the 'Western' and 'indigenous' mapping of the Biesje Poort landscape and its meanings that receive careful attention (Butler-Adam, 2015:1).

The objective, as requested from our funder, the South African National Heritage Council (NHC), was to alert and assist the local authority and geographic community to the presence of a Khoisan heritage resource in the area, and in developing its educational potential, hence making the multiple self-narratives part of a public expression or identity of the area. As the site is part of a private farm, and as rock engraving clusters occur on expansive rock exposures embedded in mountains, tourism was not a viable option of public expression (Morris, 2014:649). The team from the Centre for Media, Communication and Society wanted to investigate the potentialities and challenges of a participatory approach from a development or social change communication perspective.

### 5.1 Participatory principles and practice

The participatory turn<sup>12</sup> in development communication “reinforces collective identities and promotes the diversity of communicative competences of plural cultural expressions through horizontal dialogue” (Gumucio-Dragon, 2014:109)<sup>13</sup>. The cultural diversity and plurality of the research team was championed in the project’s multivocality, not only in the published outcome but in the research process as well. Multiple voices or multivocality includes the voices of not only academics and researchers but also those of illiterate or community members with limited education with a view to not only including scientific but also indigenous knowledge (Hodder, 1999). The importance of this lies in its transformative impulse as it challenges the hegemony of the mainstream and “offers an entry point for listening to the voices at the margins” (Dutta, 2011:7). This complements a heritage recording and communication approach that is inclusive of the intangible and ‘multivocal’ in that it addresses not only previously excluded phenomenology of the marginalised, ethical issues and ordinary day practices (Marstine, Bauer & Haines, 2011), but it also promotes the sources’ accessibility to their knowledge (Masoga & Kaya, 2011).

While the #Khomani had no historical link to the engravings, what was of interest was the team’s negotiation of interpretation. The project privileged the ordinary person as a theorist to guide an understanding of his/her personal/collective/historical and social world, as embodied in Biesje Poort. Team members considered what insights might be brought into each other’s understanding of the cultural landscape and rock engravings. The walls between traditionally oral societies and academia were thus arguably blurred. The project involved a rethinking and application of participatory research strategies in the negotiation of Biesje Poort as a physical, spiritual and conceptual space: for example, walking the land with the #Khomani. ‘Walking’ entailed the collapse of the traditional division of researcher/researched. Walking the very extensive rock faces enabled participants to find this intersubjective space in fieldwork:

It is...not only by being in the landscape that allows one to perceptually engage and gather knowledge, but specifically by moving through the landscape that the full spectrum of body sensing in conjunction with perception allows one to gather the clues to meaning (Müller, 2013: 23).

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<sup>12</sup> Mariekie Burger (2015 265) provides a comprehensive view of ‘the participatory turn’ in political communication, development communication, media studies, celebrity studies, Internet studies and youth culture. Her explanation is framed by the “intersection of public participation, identity and self-expression, and thus focuses on how people publicly express and work on their identities in different communication site”.

<sup>13</sup> Space does not allow for a substantial discussion on the limitations of participatory approaches. While we celebrate a participatory methodology from below, we also acknowledge that its challenges centre on the fact that it is largely a normative theory that operates a method and identifies data that would normally be concealed in a positivist approach, and is not easily repeatable from one study to another. As such, while participatory research enhances understanding and many action research strategies have been developed, robust methodologies are necessary to translate emerging concepts into viable communication approaches that can be applied at scale (see Parker & Becker-Benton, 2016). Much research based on participatory approaches is thus context specific and inductive, adopting a case study design, much like the Biesje Poort project discussed here (Lange et al., 2013).

Part of walking the land included cultural mapping with a global positioning system (GPS). One of the crafters, !Klankie David Kruiper, became proficient in the use of GPS recording following training by Liana Müller. This aspect of the Biesje Poort project is clear evidence of prodsumption at play as it generated a desire for further action from within Kalahari crafter group who requested that a similar project be conducted in Andriesvale where they live. A second fieldtrip to this area took place the following year.

A sense-making (Dervin, 2003) and culture-centred approach<sup>14</sup> (Dutta, 2011) was operationalised through participatory communication research methods in heritage field recording (2011 and 2012) where all team members shared their interpretations, trace rock engravings and assist each other. Sharing knowledge is at the heart of any participatory process and this requires valuing all within the team as equals. At Biesje Poort all members were considered experts. While some team members shared knowledge from tertiary education and professional sectors, others shared their indigenous knowledge of the engraved rock depictions and material culture in fascinating stories of their own. These varying perspectives are presented in the pages of the book. Storytelling was given priority in the recording methodology of the project. Telling stories is basic to our human nature, and hence is a useful technique in actively performing local identities. "Stories allow us to shape who we are and to present ourselves and our experiences to those around us" (Dyll-Myklebust, 2013:84).

Daily evaluation meetings were held. "Participatory evaluation of communication for development will always, to some extent, involve challenging power relationships and structures. This is because it depends on actively engaging a range of people, encouraging voice but also prioritizing effective and active listening and respecting alternative forms of knowledge" (Tacchi & Lennie, 2014:302–303).

As with any funded project carefully planned timetables facilitated the projects' daily objectives. One day some of the team members slaved away in 50 degree heat, whilst others recuperated in what little shade they could find. This led to resentment. In one daily evaluation meeting it became clear that the Kalahari team members wondered at the auditing requirements that drove us to foolishly work in the excruciating mid-day heat when any Bushman knows that's when one sits in the shade under a tree, shielded until the sun tilts later in the day. It was agreed that the same amount of hours would be worked, however, we would begin earlier and take a longer lunch break to avoid the midday sun. Thus the balance of structure and agency that is integral to participation that is effective and goal-oriented (Ashley & Haysom, 2006) was arguably achieved.

Communication was thus constantly valorised in every step of the project. All members were included in all phases of the project, from proposal writing (where relevant) and logistical

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<sup>14</sup> A culture-centred approach to communication for social change, "envisions the capacity of communicative processes to transform social structures, and in so doing, it attends to the agency of the subaltern sectors in bringing about social change" (Dutta, 2011:39).

planning, to vetting the final publication of their stories in their own names. The inclusion of their stories and the outcomes thereof was made transparent from the beginning through dialogue and discussion (Magongo, 2013). This inclusion of the storytellers as full members in the project dismantled the traditional division of researcher/researched and facilitated interculturalism that Gumucio-Dagron believes goes further than many participatory projects that are only founded on multiculturalism:

If *multiculturalism* is the recognition, acceptance, and tolerance of “other” cultures, *interculturality* goes further because it incorporates dialogue and interaction. It is not enough to the cultural existence of others and continue living in separate social containers: communication becomes an essential trigger necessary to make effective knowledge exchanges and dialogues between cultures. (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014:108).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The researcher-researched relationship brings those that usually exist in “separate social containers” (Gumucio-Dagron, 2014:108) into a shared place. We have shown that our research participants have agency in performing their local identities, whether this be as co-researchers and authors as in the *Engraved Landscape* (Lange et al., 2013) project, or whether it be in the form of policing representations of themselves. “Speaking about others needs to be backed up by speaking with others” (Fabian, 2006:148). Anthropology and social science research has recognised this, but what we valorise in terms of our research participants’ agency in performing local identities is that this ‘conversation’, as Butler-Adam (2015) characterises both the form and content of the book, is not only experienced in the field, or scribbled into a note book, but rather that these local identity performances of both the researcher and researched are recorded in the published report.

Working *in situ* and recognising that detail is as important as theory results in us identifying issues from the field; questions from below, concerns and expectations from research participants, complexities and contradictions observed, and how research participants change the nature of our research method in performing their local identities, resulting in a reflexive and participatory approach. We value theory and thus adopt an analytical autoethnographic and collaborative approach (see Anderson, 2006) where we triangulate our thoughts with empirical evidence and with what can be validated by the academy and research participants. Methodology and theory is thus at the service of life in making sense of the local (Mboti, 2012).

Finally, our use of ‘prodsumer’ - a child of the digital era - tries to include the marginalised in the globalising world for, even if they lack systematic electronic access their management of researchers and, in our case, being recognised as co-producers of interpretation, does help to shape our methods and conclusions.



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