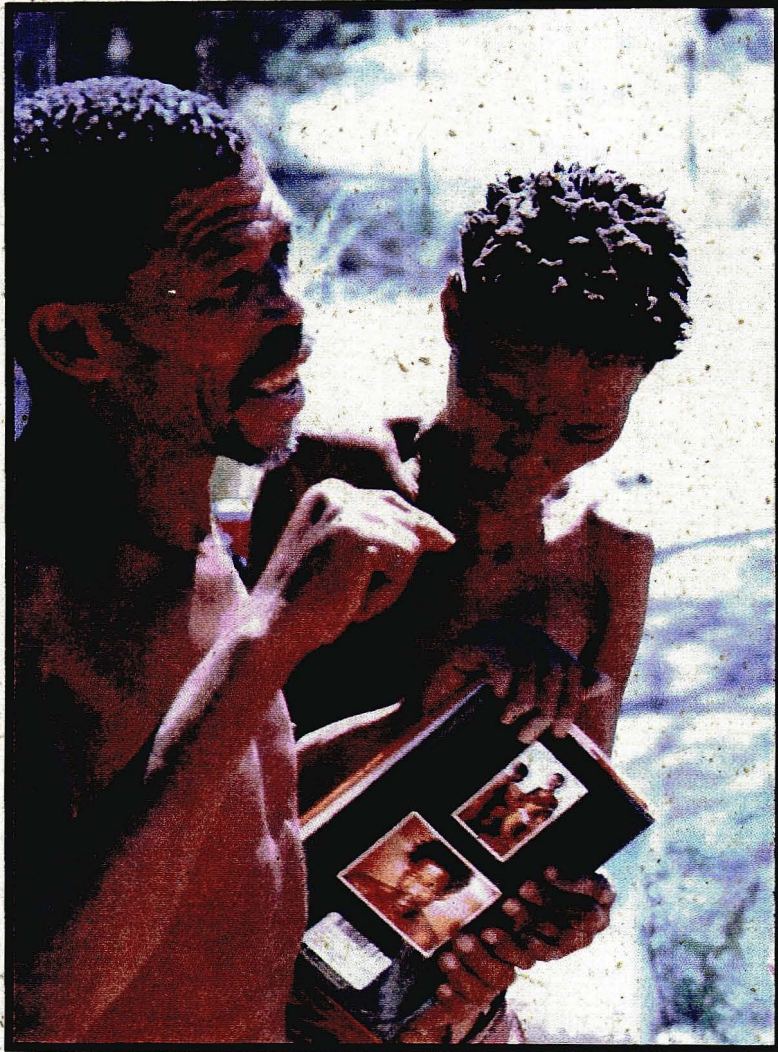


Reflexivity and Research Methodology in
Representing the San:
A Case Study of Isaacson's *The Healing Land*



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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Culture, Communication and Media Studies
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Supervisor: Professor Keyan G Tomaselli

Declaration

I, **Vanessa Dodd (student number 962112042)**, declare that this is my own work, except for the acknowledged supervision and referred citations. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts Degree in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of Natal, Durban, South Africa. It is submitted as 50% of the overall degree.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, or to any other university.

Signature 

Date 10/11/03

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Cover picture: Jakob and Lena Malgas, photograph by Sian Dunn, 5 April 2002

Abstract

The focus in this project is on the analysis of empirical evidence collected from the ≠Khomani and Ngwatle communities relating to representation, theories of reflexivity and research methodology, as well as responses to *The Healing Land* (2001) by Rupert Isaacson, in relation to research methodology, representation and ethical concerns. This project will examine if and how research can be beneficial to the San, and interrogate whether auto-ethnography/reflexivity as research methodology can be used as a way of representing indigenous people in ways that empower them.

Films and books often give little indication of how, by whom and for what reasons they were produced, which imposes limitation on the knowledge gained by the reader/viewer. Reflexivity is a methodology that incorporates the producer and the production process into the final product. Reflexivity directs attention to the process and the power relations involved in constructing cultural texts. Representation of the San Bushmen has had a long history of othering, of perpetuating colonial domination. The “Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but *made*” (Fabian, 1990:755). The application of reflexive methodology could have the potential to undo the perceptions and stereotypes projected by unidimensional films, writing and pop-anthropology which give no indication of/attempt to disguise the relationship between producer, process, product and viewer in the representation of indigenous people. Awareness of the interaction between observer and observed also leads to consideration of ethics, power relations and responsibility of academics and filmmakers towards their subjects.

This project discusses encounters in the Kalahari in relation to research methodology, auto-ethnography and representation. The primary text critiqued is Rupert Isaacson’s book *The Healing Land* (2001). The application of reflexivity to my own project incorporates discussion of methodology, the nature of the encounter, and negotiating my own subjectivities. “To be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is an audience aware of these relationships, but they are made to realise the necessity of that knowledge” (Ruby, 1977:4).

Unrealistic and disempowering representation of the San is related to their political and social marginalisation. This also relates to the issue of responsibility of researchers to the subject communities which are their sources of images and information. The subject communities have certain expectations of academics and filmmakers. If these expectations are not met or fulfilled in some way, the local informants tend to feel that they are being exploited. The San often have unrealistic expectations and are unaware of the differences between profit-making films and research; financial constraints on academics, writers and filmmakers; and the processes by which policy is implemented that prevent their hunger and thirst being immediately alleviated (Tomaselli, 2001a). I attempt to test these kinds of assertions and examine whether there are instances where the San feel that they have benefited from and are satisfied by the encounter, and how the principles allowing for a mutually beneficial encounter can be developed. Thus this project will deal with empowerment and development for the San.

Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resources Management
CCMS	Culture, Communication and Media Studies
CPA	Community Property Association
KD1	Kgalagadi District One
KGTP	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (formerly the Kalahari Gemsbok Park)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NKXT	Nqwaa Khobee Xeya Trust
RAD	Remote Area Dwellers
SASI	South African San Institute
SBB	Safaris Botswana Bound
WIMSA	Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa

Acknowledgements

I am privileged in this research dissertation to be part of and contribute to a wider project conducted by Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of Natal, Durban. This project is entitled 'Observers and Observed: Reverse Cultural Studies, Auto-Ethnographic, Semiotic and Reflexive Methodologies', and is sponsored by the Natal University Research Fund and the National Research Foundation. I am indebted to the National Research Foundation for scholarships that have allowed me to undertake this study. The project is led by Professor Keyan Tomaselli. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at in this dissertation are those of the author and not necessarily attributed to the National Research Foundation.

I would like to thank Mr and Mrs Burger at the Protea Hotel, Upington for their generous contribution to our accommodation on the way to and from the Kalahari, and Geanne and Riann de Klerk and Mevrouw Slabbert for their incredible hospitality. Thank you to Safaris Botswana Bound and the Nqwaa Khobee Xeya Trust for their assistance in facilitating our work at Ngwatle, as well as Anna Festus and the staff at the South African San Institute in Upington for their help and support.

Thanks are given to Keyan Tomaselli for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this project and the once-in-a-lifetime experiences this research has afforded me, as well as for being an insightful and supportive supervisor. I would like to thank Susan Govender for all her hard work at CCMS and for her invaluable assistance in organising field trips and every other aspect of administration. Thank you to Eunice Ivala for her vigilant copy-editing, and to Lauren Dyll and Mary Lange for their help and encouragement. Mick Francis, thank you for being a great mentor. I really value your encouragement and advice, and your friendship.

I am very grateful to Nelia Oets and Mary Lange for their endless patience as interpreters during interviews, and Nelia, thank you for all the transcribing and translating of tapes, this research would not have been possible without you. Thank you to Kamini Moodley and Thabo Loeto for their help in transcribing and translating yet more tapes. My fellow Kalahari travellers, these experiences would not have been the same without you. Caleb Wang, Nelia, Nhamo Mhiripiri, Sian Dunn, Linje Manyozo, Tim Reinhardt, Lauren Dyll, Mary, Charlize Tomaselli, Marit Sætre, Damien Tomaselli and Shireen Pretorius – thanks for each of your contributions and for all the memories. I am also indebted to Anthea Simões, Chantel Oosthuysen, Mashilo Boloka, Jeffrey Sehume and Darryn Crowe for interviews conducted on previous trips, which have been invaluable to this project. Thank you to Polly Loxton and Belinda Kruiper for their insightful letters, and to Rupert Isaacson and Paul Weinberg for taking the time to respond to my queries.

I would also like to thank Penny and Steph McLennan for their love and support, and Candice Bottcher and Grant McKenna going out of their way to gather information for me. Joel Dodd, thank you for believing in me, and for a lot of shopping at Cape Union Mart.

Most significantly I would like to thank the ≠Khomani and !Xoo communities of the Northern Cape, Ostri-San and Ngwatle, without whom none of this would have happened. Thank you for your hospitality, for welcoming strangers into your community, and for sharing your knowledge, experience and friendship. I particularly wish to thank Belinda and Vetkat, Elsie, Silikat, Isak and Lys, Abraham and Rosa, Oom Dawid and Sanna, Jon, !Nooi, Yuri, Oom Hansie, Toppies, Tina, Jakob, Lena, Gert, Ouma !Una, Miriam, Pedris, Kort Jan, Johannes, Jon-Jon and Vista-Jan. This work is dedicated to all of you, and especially to the memory of Elsie (Pili) Witbooi.

Introduction

Background

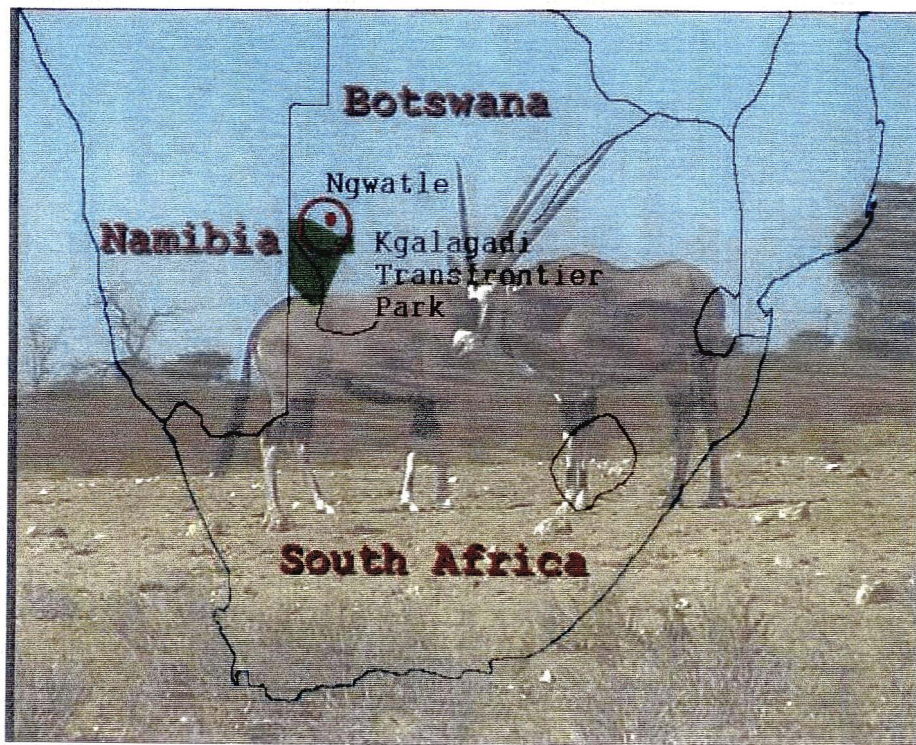
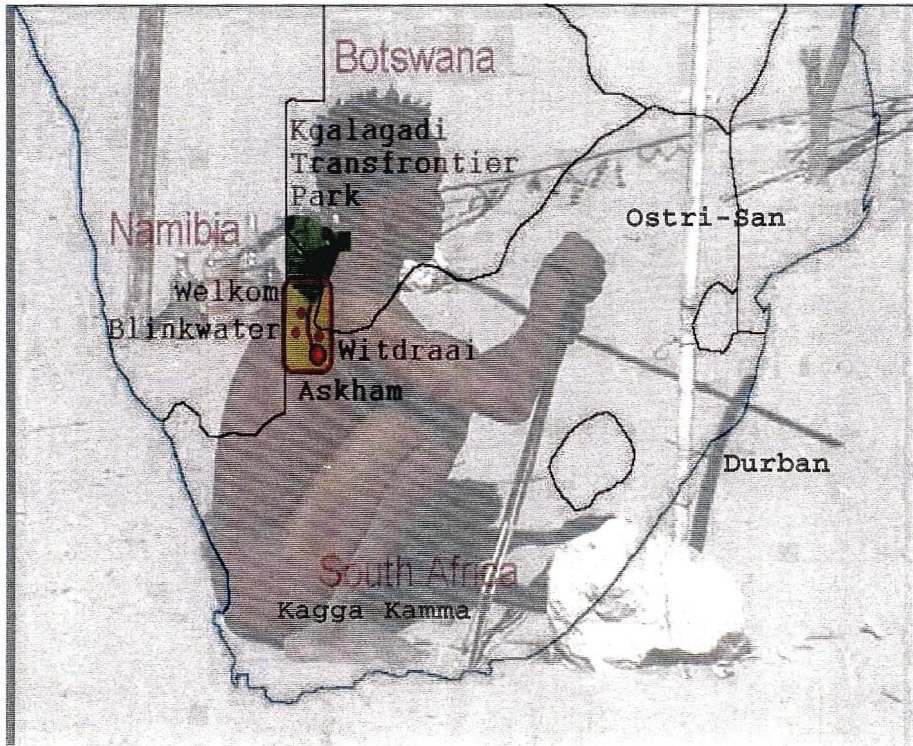
This dissertation forms part of a broader research project on 'Observers and Observed: Reverse Cultural Studies, Auto-Ethnographic, Semiotic and Reflexive Methodologies', which is headed by Professor Keyan Tomaselli of Culture, Communication and Media Studies at the University of Natal, Durban. Primary information for this research was available from four field trips to San communities in which I participated in 2001 and 2002, as well as material from previous trips in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Contributors to the growing body of research relating to this project include Keyan Tomaselli (1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003a, 2003b), Anthea Simões (2001a, 2001b), Mashilo (Gibson) Boloka (2001), Jeffrey Sehume (PhD thesis in progress), Belinda Jeursen and Keyan Tomaselli (2002), Caleb Wang (2002a, 2002b), Nelia Oets (2003), Nhamo Mhiripiri (PhD thesis in progress), Linje Manyozo (2002), Timothy Reinhardt (2003), Michael Francis (forthcoming), Lauren Dyll (MA thesis in progress, 2003), Marit Sætre (2003), Mary Lange (2003), Ntokozo Ndlela (2002) and Sacha Clelland-Stokes (2002).

My participation in this project on 'Observers and Observed' began with a field trip to the ≠Khomani San in the Northern Cape in July 2001. After this experience and during my study of Visual Anthropology in the second semester of 2001, I decided to direct my research towards representation of the San/Bushmen, and the methodological and ethical issues that relate to representation of another culture in terms of empowerment/disempowerment and development. Subsequent research was conducted during CCMS field trips to Ostri-San, a cultural tourism enterprise involving members of the ≠Khomani San in the North West Province of South Africa in November 2001; to the Kalahari Northern Cape in April 2002; and to the Northern Cape and Ngwatle in Southern Botswana, July 2002. All field trips were headed by Keyan Tomaselli. In July 2001 the research team included Nelia Oets (translator) and Caleb Wang (Masters student). In November 2001, Nhamo Mhiripiri (PhD student), Elana Bregin (writer) and Nelia joined the trip to Ostri-San. In April 2002 the research team to the Northern Cape included Sian Dunn (professional photographer), Linje Manyozo (Masters student) and Nhamo. The visit to the Northern Cape in July 2002 included Damien Tomaselli (student), Shireen Pretorius (Damien's partner), Linje, Timothy Reinhardt (Honours student and videographer), Nelia, Lauren Dyll (Masters student), Charlize Tomaselli (student) and Marit Sætre (Masters student and videographer). Damien, Shireen and Linje returned to Durban, and the group was joined by Mary Lange (Honours student and educator) for the journey to Ngwatle.

Research partners interviewed in the Northern Cape include ≠Khomani members Vetkat and Belinda Kruiper, Silikat van Wyk, Dawid Kruiper (traditional leader), Jakob and Lena Malgas, Ouma !Una Rooi, Toppies Kruiper and Tina Swarts, Petrus Vaalbooi, Jon Kruiper, Anna Festus, !Nooi Kariseb, Abraham Meintjies and Rosa Koper. Other people involved with the community are Roger Carter, Betta Steyn and Lizelle Kleynhans.¹ At Ostri-San I spoke to Isak and Lys Kruiper. Interviews at Ngwatle have been conducted with Kort Jan, Johannes, Vista-Jan, Jon-Jon and the late Petrus Nxai, as well as Miriam and Pedris Motshabise, Gadiphemolwe Orileng and Hunter Sixpence. In addition to interviews I conducted myself, I have used transcriptions from previous CCMS field trips from 1999 to 2001.

¹ See pages 8-10 for details of ≠Khomani and Ngwatle community members.

Maps showing location of communities visited



Maps by Timothy Reinhardt in *A Guy, A Camera, A Journey* (2002)

Research Partners

This section provides background to our San research partners, whose insights form a vital part of this dissertation. Specific references to interviews conducted can be found in the primary sources section of the bibliography. Throughout this project I reference my community sources by name. This practice aims both to make marginalised voices heard, and to indicate that comments and responses are those of specific individuals. I do not claim either to have interviewed all members of the community affected by issues of representation, or to present a generic 'San Voice'. This dissertation reflects the perceptions of particular individuals relating to a discourse of communal disaffection within a complex historical situation; not only leaders, but also disaffected, marginalised members of the community.

≠Khomani San research partners in the Northern Cape

Belinda Kruiper	Belinda Kruiper (née Matthee) lived in Cape Town before she went to work for the Parks Board in the then Kalahari Gemsbok Park, where she met members of the Kruiper family. She is now married to Vetkat Kruiper, and lives on a rented sand dune on a farm, Blinkwater, just outside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, as it is now called. She worked for the South African San Institute (SASI), but left due to differences of opinion with management and is now unemployed. Belinda functions as an organic intellectual in the community: she spent two years at university, and is highly articulate and fluent in both English and Afrikaans.
Vetkat Kruiper	Vetkat is Belinda's husband, and the younger half brother of Dawid Kruiper. He is a highly talented artist, and his work has been exhibited and sold at the Upington Museum, the Bergtheil Museum, the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, and the University of Pretoria. He lives with Belinda at Blinkwater where he has a small gallery in a grass hut which houses his sacred collection of paintings. Family conflict has resulted in their living at Blinkwater instead of one of the allocated farms.
Yuri	Vetkat's half brother, lives with Belinda and Vetkat at Blinkwater.
Oom Hansie	Friend to Belinda and Vetkat, who also lives at Blinkwater.
Dawid Kruiper	Traditional leader of the ≠Khomani San (perceived as leader by the traditionally minded San), lives at Witdraai.
Sanna Kruiper	Dawid Kruiper's wife.
Petrus Vaalbooi	Chairperson of the ≠Khomani San Community Property Association (CPA), has assumed the role of leader of the "western" Bushmen.
Silikat van Wyk	Artist and craftsman who was living at Witdraai until 2003 when he moved to Ostri-San.

Elsie Witbooi	Silikat's former wife. Since our last visit, Elsie and Silikat have separated. On 8 May 2003, Elsie was murdered by her new boyfriend.
Toppies Kruiper	Dawid Kruiper's son, lives at Witdraai, having returned from Ostri-San.
Tina Swarts	Toppies' common-law wife.
Jon Kruiper	Son to Dawid Kruiper, it is expected that he will be then next traditional leader.
Anna Festus	Field worker for SASI based in Upington and personal assistant to Dawid Kruiper, her mother is ≠Khomani San.
Ou !Nooi Kariseb	Friend to Belinda, lives at Welkom.
Jakob and Lena Malgas	This couple also sold crafts at Witdraai. Lena has now left Jakob, as he was allegedly abusing her, and is living in a shelter for abused women.
Gert Swart	Lives at Witdraai, previously at Kagga Kamma.
Anna Swart	Very old woman who lives at Witdraai
Abraham Meintjies	Living at Erin, previously at Ostri-San, ran the <i>tentepark</i> [campsite] at Witdraai.
Rosa Koper	Abraham's wife.
Isak and Lys Kruiper	Previously living at Ostri-San; Isak was seen as a leader by the community there. They have now moved to Erin, one of the farms that were handed over in the Northern Cape.
Ouma !Una Rooi	One of the much-publicised <i>oumas</i> [grandmothers] of the community, lives at Andriesvale
Roger Carter	A retired business man, Roger managed the Molopo Lodge in the Northern Cape, and became closely involved with the ≠Khomani. After he left the lodge, he continued living in Andriesvale for some time and remained connected to the community.
Danie Jacobs	Danie was the cultural manager at Kagga Kamma. He spent some time at Mabalingwe, and also worked with the ≠Khomani at Ostri-San. He has subsequently relocated back to Kagga Kamma. He is studying anthropology by correspondence.
Betta (Francoise) Steyn	Betta runs the Sisen Crafts project at Andriesvale. This project involves the Bushmen in making and selling traditional crafts, through their shop at Andriesvale, and through other outlets in various cities. This project is funded by the South African San Institute (SASI).
Lizelle Kleynhans	Lizelle works with Betta as the accountant for the Sisen Crafts project.
Heinrich and Pieter de Waal	Owners of Kagga Kamma Nature Reserve.

!Xoo Bushmen research partners at Ngwatle, Southern Botswana

Miriam Motshabise	Young single mother living at Monong. She was living at Ngwatle in 1995, and developed a close friendship with Charlize Tomaselli during their visit (see Tomaselli, 2001a). Miriam speaks English and completed her schooling up to Grade 11, but has been unable to return to school since the birth of her baby. She moved to Monong to be near the clinic, a facility not available at Ngwatle, as her sister has tuberculosis.
Pedris Motshabise	Pedris is Miriam's brother, and also lived at Ngwatle, but is now at Ukhwi, looking after camels for the Nqwaa Khobee Xeya Trust.
Baba (Kort Jan) Kies Nxai	Kort ["short"] Jan, as he is known to us, is an elderly man who is seen as a leader by his family within the Ngwatle community.
Katrina	Kort Jan's wife.
Nana	Kort Jan and Katrina's daughter
John John	Kort Jan and Katrina's son
Vista-Jan	Kort Jan and Katrina's son.
Johannes Nxai	Johannes was relocated to Ngwatle, his family were killed by South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) terrorists, and he was raised by Kort Jan.
Gadiphemolwe Orileng	Was living in Ngwatle in 1999. In 2001 he worked as a tracker for Safaris Botswana Bound, leaving their employ in 2002.
Kaptein	Kaptein [Captain] is a leader in the community. He was allocated this role by a local council under the Hukuntsi district and is paid a salary by the government. The position of Kaptein or chief used to be hereditary, but Kort Jan's late brother Petrus was the Ngwatle community's last 'Kaptein' of this Bushman family, as he died before he could select the next Kaptein. The present Kaptein is a Mokgalagadi, not a 'real San'. He is, however, recognised to some extent as a leader or figurehead in the community, although his authority is challenged in some instances.
Petrus Nxai	The late brother of Kort Jan, previously the leader of the Ngwatle community.
Hunter Sixpence	Community activist, works for Kuru Development Trust.
Joe Viljoen	Joe is the manager of Hukuntsi Trading Store, in Hukuntsi, the nearest town to Ngwatle.
Michael Flyman	Michael Flyman previously worked for the Thusano Lefatsheng Trust, and has been a helpful informant on issues relating to Ngwatle. He is now working in Gaborone.
Robert Waldron	Rob is a Johannesburg-based filmmaker who has visited the Ngwatle community on many occasions.

Focus

My unique focus within the 'Observers and Observed' cultural studies project is the analysis of empirical evidence collected from the ≠Khomani and Ngwatle communities relating to representation, theories of reflexivity and research methodology, as well as responses to *The Healing Land* (2001) by Rupert Isaacson, in relation to research methodology, representation and ethical concerns. This project will examine if and how research can be beneficial to the San, and interrogate whether auto-ethnography/reflexivity as research methodology can be used as a way of representing indigenous people in ways that empower them.

Films and books often give little indication of how, by whom and for what reasons they were produced, which imposes limitations on the knowledge gained by the reader/viewer. Reflexivity is a methodology that incorporates the producer and the production process into the final product. Reflexivity directs attention to the process and the power relations involved in constructing cultural texts. Representation of the San Bushmen has had a long history of othering, of perpetuating colonial domination. The application of reflexive methodology could have the potential to undo the perceptions and stereotypes projected by unidimensional films, writing and pop-anthropology which give no indication of/attempt to disguise the relationship between producer, process, product and viewer in the representation of indigenous people. Awareness of the interaction between observer and observed also leads to consideration of ethics, power relations and responsibility of academics and filmmakers towards their subjects.

This project discusses encounters in the Kalahari in relation to research methodology, auto-ethnography² and representation. The primary text critiqued is Rupert Isaacson's book *The Healing Land* (2001). The application of reflexivity to my own project incorporates discussion of methodology, the nature of the encounter, and negotiating my own subjectivities. "To be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is an audience aware of these relationships, but they are made to realise the necessity of that knowledge" (Ruby, 1977:4).

Unrealistic and disempowering representation of the San is related to their political and social marginalisation. This also relates to the issue of responsibility of researchers to the subject communities that are their source of images and information. The San often have unrealistic expectations and are unaware of the differences between profit-making films and research; financial constraints on academics, writers and filmmakers; and the processes by which policy is implemented that prevent their hunger and thirst being immediately alleviated (Tomaselli, 2001a). On the other hand, it does not seem unreasonable that poverty-stricken individuals should hope to be remunerated in some way for the giving of their time, their cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, and of themselves. I attempt to test these kinds of assertions and examine whether there are instances where the San feel that they have benefited from and are satisfied by the encounter, and how the principles allowing for a mutually beneficial encounter can be developed. Thus this project will deal with empowerment and development for the San.

² Ethnography is taken to refer to methods of observation and data collection. Auto-ethnography is a self-reflexive method of explaining the encounter between Other and Same.

Chapter One

Kalahari Diaries:

Locating the Study and Reasons for Choosing Topic

*Hotel Kalahari: 'You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave'*³

It is July 2001 and my journey to the desert involves a night and a day on an Intercap bus. The journey is far from a "dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair"⁴ experience, but it holds the same sense of inevitability. I am not sure what to expect from my journey and destination, but somehow I am aware that it will have an unavoidable impact on my life.

This begins with new perceptions of myself and my fellow South Africans afforded by two days' transition between Durban and Witdraai in the Northern Cape, just outside the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, and about two hours' drive from Upington. While waiting to see my luggage loaded into the trailer of the bus, we observe an encounter between an intrepid traveller who wishes to carry two enormous black rubbish bags of "stuff" with her, and the baggage handler, who seems equally offended by the volume of goods and their inferior packaging. In this context, my old green duffel bag appears quite the status symbol. On boarding the bus, I become aware that my carefully nurtured New South African principles (in need of nurturing, given my white middle class upbringing, where my first memory of political awareness was inquiring "Mummy, should we be more scared of the Blacks or the Russians?") do not appear to have extended to the sphere of my personal space. From the narrowness of my window seat I glare apprehensively at the potentially dangerous characters approaching the vacant seat next to me. I realise the stupidity of my fears when it becomes obvious that the other passengers are far more interested in sleeping than in harassing me.

The bus arrives at Johannesburg station at 5:30 am. I am tired, miserable, and very much alone. I am aware of how unfamiliar I am with travelling alone: where is the man to carry the heavy bag and watch my things while I go to the bathroom? I decide to be considerate, and wait until 6:15 before calling him to whine about this terrible state of affairs. I am very unimpressed by Johannesburg station: it does not present an attractive advertisement for tourism in South Africa.

My travelling companion from Johannesburg to Upington does not seem to share my desire to cultivate New South African principles. He asked if he could sit next to me as he preferred not to sit with any "green people." I did not question him about the origins of this term, as I was hoping that the African people sitting in the near vicinity would not be subjected to any more references to kaffirs⁵ than were strictly necessary. In conversation, I find out that he is thirty-five years old, *was* married (his emphasis) for five years, spent two years getting divorced, and has an eight-year-old daughter. I find this mathematics disturbing. I have seldom encountered a divorcé of my own generation. Myself and most of my non-single friends are just starting to settle into the newlywed stage, with no concept of anything other than happily ever after. Divorce is an alien, unsettling thought.

³ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

⁴ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

⁵ Derogatory term for Black people (similar to "nigger"), widely used during the apartheid regime.

I am (mentally and physically) very glad to reach Upington, and see the familiar face of our colleague and translator, Nelia, who is there to meet me. We spend the night with her friends, who live in one of the largest houses I have ever been in. This is another new cultural experience for me. They are an Afrikaans family, and I struggle to follow the conversations, although they speak to me in English. I am amazed by the respectfulness of the Afrikaans children, and the way in which they really do call everybody *Tannie* and *Oom*⁶, all the time. I mention this to Nelia, and she comments that this enforced politeness does not necessarily mean they have any ability to relate to adults. The family chat about holidays on a scale revolutionary to me: who can afford to purchase, never mind develop, forty rolls of film? They seem affluent but not aloof, confirming the rumours about Afrikaner hospitality.

The first Bushmen⁷ I encounter after finally reaching the Molopo Kalahari Lodge, which is across the road from the cultural tourism “*tentepark*” [campsite] at Witdraai, are selling jewellery and artwork on the side of the road. Half of them are dressed traditionally. The others are in Western clothes. I would like to photograph this scene but I am unsure of the protocol regarding payment. Photographs now cost up to R50 each, to ensure that the Bushmen receive a portion of the potential profits. They are tired of feeling exploited by finding themselves depicted in postcards, newspaper articles, and advertising campaigns without giving their consent or receiving any payment. “He makes money easily, makes money out of my people. That’s why I decided on a price” (Dawid Kruiper, 2000). I end up returning home with no photographs of Bushmen at all, I think to the unexpressed disappointment of family and friends. But it never seemed appropriate in the context of what we were trying to do.

The ≠Khomani San communities at Witdraai and Welkom (another settlement 40kms down the road) are heavily affected by alcoholism. An awareness of the dysfunctional family situations, broken relationships and psychological burdens that result from individual cases of alcoholism in Western society, causes me concern about the impact of this disease being so widespread in a close-knit community such as the ≠Khomani San: “Alcohol travels quickly into a people’s heart” (Katz *et al*, 1997:95).

Roger Carter, the former manager of the Molopo Lodge who remains involved with and sympathetic towards the ≠Khomani at Witdraai and Welkom, tells us more about this problem in the community. He relates incidents of alcohol-related violence that make me cringe: wife battering, stabbings, murder. Anna Festus, SASI fieldworker and member of the ≠Khomani community said, “alcoholism is a great problem too. And most of the time, if the guys are drinking too much, then problems start which they are fighting amongst each other and also fighting with the ladies” (Anna Festus, 2000b).

It seems that the San’s problematic relationship with alcohol grew out of dispossession and boredom: “...there is nothing for our people to do” (Anna Festus, 2000b). In the past they manufactured their own mild alcohol from bulbs, roots and

⁶ *Tannie* means ‘auntie’ and *Oom* means ‘uncle’. These terms are used by Afrikaans children not only to address their relatives, but in speaking to any adult in a tone of respect and affection.

⁷ I will use the terms ‘San’ and ‘Bushmen’ interchangeably. ‘San’ is generally considered to be more politically correct, although it is an imposed term which means bandit. ‘Bushmen’ is more commonly used by the communities themselves. See Chapter Two for further discussion on naming.

honey. I assume that this was no longer a simple possibility when they were denied access to the lands on which they used to gather, and that increased Western influence and interference brought with it increased access to Western liquor. This is much more potent than the San's traditional brews. Their small frames and cellular structure do not tolerate it well. As the Bushmen move away from brewing their own liquor, they become dependent on external suppliers: among the ≠Khomani as well as the Ju/'hoansi, "the cycle of dependence and economic exploitation becomes complete" (Katz *et al*, 1997:96). The low self-esteem of the Bushmen, imposed by the inferior way in which they are treated, probably serves to exacerbate their dependence on alcohol.

Roger tells us how someone in the community set a snare - to catch prey for food - and then got drunk and forgot about it, thus going hungry, and leaving a duiker being tortured to death over three days. The plague of alcoholism is affecting the structure of San society and further diminishing their ability to pursue their traditions or to improve the quality of their lives. Belinda Kruiper, the wife of Dawid Kruiper's youngest brother Vetkat "has a dream of Blinkwater, the sand dune they rent on a farm... as a place of therapy" (Dunn, 2001) where there is no drunkenness. It is apparent that this community has a long road to travel, but at Blinkwater I sense the ancient spirituality, and the feeling that "We don't have much, but what we do have is there for all to share. Our house is a shack, but it has love. We welcome all people who come to it for their own reasons and spend time with nature and the quiet" (Belinda Kruiper, cited in Dunn, 2001).

I wonder what will become of the children. They are so innocent - playing with tyres instead of Pokémon. At Welkom I pick up a baby and cuddle it. Such a small human. Just a baby, no different from any other. Maternal instinct (not that I have so much of it!) overrides concern about dirt and germs and protocol. We give the children a soccer ball and they play with it gleefully for the rest of the afternoon. They have so little.

We interview Vetkat Kruiper (2001) at Blinkwater. I struggle to understand the Afrikaans, but I relate so closely to what I understand of his discourse. He is talking about his individual identity within the community; how he wants to be his own person and do his own thing: "*ek doen my eie ding*" [I do my own thing]. His life is so different to mine, yet his thoughts and frustrations so similar. I wish I could express myself with such compelling eloquence. He is a gifted storyteller. His facial expressions and gestures bring to life even the words I do not understand. He speaks of the importance of respect: "*respek net daai klein bietjie. Dan kan ons ver kom*" [Respect just that little bit. Then we can go far] - a mantra for South Africa in such simple words.

Outside Dawid Kruiper's pink house at Welkom, I sit and listen to Belinda Kruiper, Elsie, and Maria talking. They are just like women everywhere. There is a funeral the next day and they are complaining about how nobody helps them with the work that it involves and discussing what they will wear. Belinda offers to lend Elsie a skirt. Elsie seems upset that Belinda has a new blue scarf, while Elsie herself has nothing new. I suggest to Belinda that the next time we come we should bring dresses for the women. Belinda thinks this is a good idea: the women need dresses because they need to feel feminine. Elsie grabs my hand and reminds me of my promise as we are leaving. She wants something that is just for her, in a package marked "Elsie." It seems easy to lose one's sense of individuality and beauty here.

I ask Belinda about gender roles in the community. She says that Vetkat and Elsie's husband Silikat are prepared to help with so-called women's work around the

house, but many other men in the community do not want to be involved and would rather be out in the veld. She says that the men who support their wives in this way are those who uphold the traditional value of respect. This seems a little different from Western culture, where it is the 'modern' '90's men' who are prepared to help with the housework. I am reminded in November 2001 when we visit Ostri-San – a new cultural tourism and development project in the North West province involving members of the ≠Khomani – of how removed the Kruipers and other ≠Khomani families are from the traditions we love to write about. The Bushmen community there are taken for the first time to 'their' cultural museum, where they exclaim in wonder at the artefacts, and watch intently as Danie (the white manager) demonstrates the use of the firesticks. Lys tells me that she is proud to see the things that her ancestors made, and that it is good that the copies of original rock paintings "*hier by ons is*" [are here by us].

We stay a night with Belinda, Vetkat, Silikat and Klein Dawid at Blinkwater, on the dune. It is so peaceful and beautiful there: the red sand is faintly rippled by the wind. We spend the evening round the fire, cooking and eating dinner, drinking red wine and amarula out of mugs, talking and laughing. The presence of alcohol does not seem to be a problem. Everyone enjoys it in moderation, and the one litre amarula bottle is not empty in the morning. Caleb smokes with the "*ramkatte*⁸," but I am not brave enough. There are billions of stars and a slender moon, their light so brilliant we can see our shadows long after the sun has gone down. Nelia wants singing because it is her birthday, so Vetkat brings out his guitar, and there are also drums and another instrument I have never seen before. Vetkat sings while strumming his guitar, and once his repertoire is complete, he makes up his own lyrics, serenading Belinda (who is lying in the hut, ill from stress and malnutrition) and the rest of us around the fire. The Bushmen are literally starving while rich Western women want to consume the Hoodia cactus supposedly used in the desert to lessen hunger pains to control their overeating (Hawthorne, 2001:27). Belinda tells Nelia that it has been along time since they last made music around the fire. "Some dance to remember, some dance to forget."⁹

Sleeping in the grass hut that night, I feel a lot warmer than I was in the tent. While we are packing our equipment back into the 4x4s the next morning, Vetkat and Silikat are hitching up the donkey cart. A real contrast in privileges. Despite the sand in my shoes and the lack of facilities to which I am accustomed, I am truly grateful for this experience.

I have not asked all the questions I intended to ask, or acquired all the facts I may need to know later, but I feel I have gained something more. Something I could never find in any book or journal. I have sat beside the campfire in the sand, inhaling the ash, the smoke, and the tobacco. I've spoken to the people, and learnt how fundamentally similar we are. I've seen Vetkat's intricate paintings and known a little of the artist who created them. He never saw Bushman rock art before, yet those images are part of his consciousness. I have eaten the *pap*¹⁰ that is the main component of their diet now, cooked in the three-legged pot over the fire. I have learnt the importance of respect. I have walked freely in the dunes and spent the evening under the desert stars. I have felt the cold.

⁸ Translates literally as "tomcats", but refers to 'the guys', the young men of the community.

⁹ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

¹⁰ A porridge made from mieliemeal.

The desert and the San are part of my reality now. Although I am only a visitor here, I cannot “find the passage back to the place I was before,”¹¹ because my place is not the same. On returning home, the puzzled looks and the questions irritate me. People ask me “did you speak to the Bushmen?” or “what were the Hottentots like?” To them the Bushmen remain the Other. They might prefer me to maintain “the distance from the Same to the Other” (Mudimbe, 1988:81). I feel like they are insulting my friends, and that I can never make them understand my experience of this place. Although the Kalahari is not the “lovely place” one might imagine, but a desolate country, ravaged by addiction and poverty, I do not believe that there is no hope for it: “This could be Heaven or this could be Hell,”¹² or somewhere in between. Those who know it are not free to leave without giving to or learning from it.

Post-experience academic endeavours

I sit at home, the prospect of writing an MA proposal looming ominously, wondering what to do. Studying Visual Anthropology after spending time with the ≠Khomani San made the contradictions and tensions between representation and reality strongly apparent. The ≠Khomani live in a situation of poverty and alcoholism far removed from their romantic portrayal in many films. Books written and films made relating to these communities often seem to have very little relevance to the actual lives of the people involved. As John Marshall (1993:39) himself admitted with regard to *The Hunters*, many books and films reveal more about the subjectivity of their producers than they do about the subjects of the film. They create myths rather than knowledge. Thus there needs to be more investigation into and awareness of the processes and methodology involved, and the interaction between researchers/ filmmakers and their subject communities in the production of films and books about the San. The representation of the San as exotic Stone Age people is disempowering both socially and financially. Western discursive imaging has constructed the San into the Other. This perception has become so entrenched in westernised South Africa that I was almost surprised to find the ≠Khomani to be people to whom I could relate, who have aspirations and dreams and an awareness of their rights.

I know I can't solve the problems of a community in a hundred pages, neither can I reconcile myself to a hundred pages that mean nothing outside of academia. I want the people to be in those pages, as well as myself. To write about reality: who is there, what it is like and through whose eyes is it perceived, allowing ordinary people to speak out about their lives and how they make sense of their experiences (Denzin, 1997:26). To empower my research subjects by representing them with honesty and humanity. I intend to examine the theory of reflexivity in relation to representation of the San, as well as how it translates, through the practice of self-reflexivity, to my [as an academic] relationships with and responsibilities to my informants, as well as the expectations held of me by the communities in which I work.

This study links with Prof Keyan Tomaselli's larger project on 'Observers and Observed: Reverse Cultural Studies, Auto-Ethnographic, Semiotic and Reflexive Methodologies'. My component fleshes out the nature of negotiation between the San and observers, methodological issues, and the representation of authenticity in books and films about the Bushmen. The larger project deals primarily with methodological issues and questions of representation in relation to cultural tourism, whereas my

¹¹ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

¹² Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

research will focus on auto-ethnographic writing and filmmaking. The study will be relevant to the larger project as it brings in the issue of reflexivity in relation to representation of the San, and also deals with *our* responsibility as academics to our informants.

In April 2002 I returned to the Kalahari to begin my research on reflexivity, methodology, and *The Healing Land* by Rupert Isaacson (2001), a reflexively written account of the author's journey with the Bushmen of Southern Africa, including the ≠Khomani of the Northern Cape. I decided to study this book, as it provides a reflexive, subjective account of the author's experience of engagement with the Bushmen. Belinda Kruiper was Isaacson's Afrikaans translator, and one of his primary informants, as were several members of the ≠Khomani community I had already met. I later chose to examine Sandy Gall's book, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* (2001), which was researched and published during the same time period as *The Healing Land*, and is reflexive to some extent although much more factual and historically detailed. I also selected these books on the basis that both have moved beyond the Bushman myth to attempt a realistic portrayal of the present day Bushmen, and the challenges they face as First People in the Fourth World. Gall presents a particularly enlightening and disturbing history of the colonisation and oppression which have led the Bushmen to the circumstances they face today; while Isaacson examines himself as a western writer in relation to dispossessed San communities. The rapidly growing volume of this project as well as the lack of response from community members resulted in my abandoning *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* as a case study in itself, although it remains a useful point of comparison. I have chosen to use this reflexive, narrative style of writing in order to acknowledge my own subjectivity in the research process, as well as to portray the knowledge that comes from experience, through the "methodology of hanging out" (Tomaselli, forthcoming) and "getting involved" (Belinda Kruiper, 2002a).

***Tequila Sunrise: 'It's another tequila sunrise, this old world still looks the same'*¹³**

My second research field trip to the Kalahari in April 2002 did not commence with the consciousness-challenging bus ride into the unknown of my first adventure. The everlasting car journey culminated in the sense of returning to a place that was deeply familiar, impenetrably complex and fundamentally unchanging. My perceived position in the team as both veteran field tripper and capable Afrikaans translator – the only changes in my ability to speak the language since a half-hearted attempt during final exams at school have not been positive – gave me a much greater sense of the complexity of issues, problems and relationships among the San Bushmen as I tried to answer and translate the never-ending supply of questions posed to me, and through me to members of the community by my insatiable colleagues. I was even called upon by Nhamo and Linje, students from Zimbabwe and Malawi where Afrikaans is not spoken, to translate for them during an encounter in which their 'informants' were interested only in appropriating cigarettes and selling them the skin of an unfortunate wildcat for an exorbitant fee, so eager were they to connect with the Bushmen on their first day in the desert. I have found that a degree of cynicism does not take long to develop.

I was struck by how little has changed since our previous visit in July 2001. The same people are still trying to sell trinkets on the side of the road. We are told at

¹³ Lyrics from *Tequila Sunrise* by The Eagles (1973). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/desperado_1973.html#tequila_sunrise

the Sisen Crafts Project that several new developments are underway, and that the people involved are making progress (Kleynhans, 2002), yet from what we perceive on the ground, little seems to have changed. Development workers seem on one hand to be full of selfless ideals and positive goals, and then one overhears them in Afrikaans complaining about their salaries.

The sun rises scorching every morning, and the hot wind makes sand integral to everything: shoes, socks, tent, eyes, fingernails, camera equipment. Every activity here depends on the weather. Sian, a photographer who accompanied us, was to spend a day at Blinkwater where we were camping on the sand dune which is home to Belinda and Vetkat Kruiper, Yuri and Oom Hansie, taking photographs, interviewing Belinda, going to collect a sheep to be slaughtered... then the wind began to blow and everyone went to sleep. Time and things to be done have a different meaning in the desert. The days go by. Sian, however, was utterly frustrated by the wasted day.

Although I say it remained unchanged, the desert held many new experiences for me on this visit: attempting to wash myself behind a sand dune in a tub which, my mother assures me, was identical to the one she used to bathe me when I was a little baby. Disturbing. Also my first (and hopefully last) opportunity to eat porcupine. I became more aware of the complexities of our relationships with the Bushman community. I go to Silikat's stall and conversationally tell him that I wish to buy something for my mother. He tells me how he is struggling because he is no longer able to hunt for bone, leather and other materials to make crafts, and that he is so touched that I want to buy something for my mother because his mother is dead and that all he has left to sell of his crafts are these hanging things for R50. Of course I buy one. I'll get her a necklace next time... I ask after his wife Elsie, and he takes me over to greet her. She has no idea who I am until she connects me with the parcel and the dress she received. Then she is very friendly, introduces me to her family who are gathered washing clothes and graciously ensures that I feel free to send another parcel any time I want. I sense that the question of cash may be oncoming, and explain that I am now broke after buying Silikat's thing for my mother. She thanks me and says that she would like my mother to come and visit too.

My main aim on this trip was to interview Dawid Kruiper, traditional leader, about his role in Rupert Isaacson's book *The Healing Land*, an autobiographical spiritual journey/travel account of the San in Southern Africa, including the ≠Khomani of the Northern Cape. The process of locating Dawid Kruiper turned out to be more challenging than the much-awaited interview itself. We were told that he was living at Erin. When we went to Erin and spoke with Rosa and Abraham, they told us that he was busy with *vergaderings* [meetings] at Koopan Noord, and was living at Andriesvale with the *Oumas* [grandmothers]¹⁴. The next day someone told us on the road that he was now living at Witdraai. When we located the hut in which he was apparently living in the middle of the veld, we were told he had gone to the lodge. On the way back to the lodge, Belinda spotted him in the shelter at the entrance to Witdraai, just beside the main road. I imagine him wrinkling up his eyes and laughing at us as we drove back and forth in search of him. He did, however, consent to speak to me after Belinda introduced us and explained what I wanted to do (and fortunately retrieved my book, which he appeared to think was a gift). We sat under a tree, the traditional leader of the ≠Khomani San, wearing old tracksuit pants and a brocade waistcoat, smoking a home made cigarette, and me in dirty shorts

¹⁴ Similar to the use of *Tannie* and *Oom*, '*Oumas*' refers with love and respect to the elderly women of the community.

clutching a tape recorder, eyes locked in communication. I began to notice the importance and intensity of eye contact among the Bushmen. It was the first interview I had done without there being any one to ask, “what is the word for...?”, but it seemed we understood each other. I was worried about the issue of payment, as he has been reputed to demand R500 for interviews, but all he requested was R5 to buy some tobacco. After I finished my questions and switched off the tape recorder, we discuss religion and the afterlife for a little while, and laugh about it, then he promised not to die until we have spoken again.

On the previous trip I found it strange and yet refreshing that we were asked so little about ourselves. In the desert nobody cared how much I earned, what car I drove, what area I lived in, what my husband did, who my parents were, what size jeans I wore and with what label and whether I did yoga or went to gym. We were simply there. Now we seem to have reached a point where leaders are eager to talk to us, and people want to know what we are doing and even what we think. After speaking for some time with !Nooi at Welkom (2002), he began to question me, quite adamantly, regarding who I was and what I was doing there. I explained that I was researching Rupert Isaacson’s book, *The Healing Land* and also the craft project and the Ostri-San cultural village in the North West province, where some of the community were working, as part of my course on development. I then found myself in an entirely new position as researcher, as *he* wanted to know what *I* thought about Ostri-San. I really didn’t know what to say. I have become accustomed to assimilating the various different responses I get from people in my own head, but to formulate those different opinions, in stumbling Afrikaans, into a response to offer to a less than neutral inquirer, was a little complicated. It felt strange to be both researcher, eager to sponge up information, and to be perceived as reliable informant of the outside world.

Oom¹⁵ Dawid’s polite request for R5 for tobacco and the fact that the much-publicised Oumas were willing to be photographed by Sian suggest that we are beginning to be taken seriously by the community. For me, the journey to this stage has resulted in ever-increasing awareness that in the Kalahari nothing is simple. From the complexities regarding who is related to whom, to attempting to understand the attitudes and practices relating to western and traditional dress, to receiving different answers to the same question from each individual, I have learnt that the ≠Khomani Bushmen are not a homogenous community, that nothing can be generalised, and everything is more complicated than it seems. Money, or lack thereof, underlies many issues. Development and empowerment are perceived in terms of cash. It seems that everyone is waiting for the world to pay them what it owes. The land alone is not sufficient: hopes and plans lie dormant in its scorching dust.

*He was just a hired hand
Workin’ on the dreams he planned to try
The days go by*¹⁶

¹⁵ ‘Oom’ means Uncle. Members of the ≠Khomani community often refer to traditional leader Dawid Kruiper, as ‘Oom Dawid’, as an expression of both kinship and respect. In the Afrikaans culture, it is considered polite to address one elders as ‘Aunt’ or ‘Uncle’, not simply by their first names, even if they are not relations.

¹⁶ Lyrics from *Tequila Sunrise* by The Eagles (1973). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/desperado_1973.html#tequila_sunrise

A scream in the darkness awakened me to the sense of fear that pervades the Kalahari. Although it was only someone having a nightmare and I knew we were perfectly safe at Blinkwater, I was suddenly conscious of the terrifying despair that consumes those whose lives consist of violence, abuse and hopelessness. *'We are all just prisoners here, of our own device.'*¹⁷ In the darkness, I knew how it felt to be a prisoner of despair. When the sun rose my fear was gone, but the reality remained unchanged.

On our last day, we interviewed Jakob and Lena Malgas, who were also involved in *The Healing Land*. We found them selling their craft beside the road, sitting around a small fire in the dust under the blazing sun. Introductions having been made, I sat down with Jakob, once again locked in intense eye contact. He was dressed in his *velletjie* [traditional loincloth made from skins] and was less than sober. Lena was alternately shouting and singing drunkenly in the background, her flaccid breasts and scarred, anger-filled face epitomising worn out womanhood. Jacob was particularly dissatisfied with having received no payment for his involvement with the book. He wants me to tell Rupert Isaacson that Jacob Malgas is waiting for his money. He tells me so several times. Even after I thank him and switch off the tape recorder and start walking towards the car he is still shouting, his face inches from mine, his eyes searching, demanding. I start casting 'rescue me' glances, and eventually we drive away, almost shutting Lena in the door as she refuses to move. It is with relief that I leave the desert behind as we head for a petrol station and civilisation.

*And I was thinking to myself,
'This could be Heaven or this could be Hell'*¹⁸

There is yet hope in the desert, though. When we spoke to Rosa at Erin, she showed us photographs of the Oumas and her ancestors, in the Park, at the Land Claim, treasured memories of the past and hopes for the future. When asked what the pictures meant to her, she began to cry, grieving for the dreams still lying in the dust of their land which is not their land. But she also said the pictures gave her courage and determination to go on. A dream to strive for (Rosa Koper, 2002). Elsie, brutally beaten by a white man, has recovered and lives to hope for another parcel, a better life. Vetkat still paints amazing pictures. Amid despair and confusion there is courage and hope and laughter. The sun shines. The days go by.

¹⁷ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

¹⁸ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

Chapter Two

The Bushmen Communities of the Northern Cape and Ngwatle

San or Bushmen or what? The politics of naming

There has been much discussion about the correct protocol for naming the heterogeneous group of people known as the 'San' or 'Bushmen' (See Simões, 2001a for a comprehensive outline of the academic debates surrounding the issue, also Wilmsen, 1989 and Gordon, 1992). It is clear from these discussions that both terms can be seen as colonial impositions which served to categorise a diversity of peoples (/Xam, Hai//om, Ju/'hoansi, //Xegwi, /A'uni≠Khomani, !Xoo, Nharo, G/wi...) with different languages, different geographical homes and different histories into a single entity to be administered and bureaucratised. I will focus here specifically on the perceptions of members of the ≠Khomani of the Northern Cape and !Xoo of Southern Botswana (Ngwatle) regarding the naming of themselves and their people.

The many different responses received to the question of naming reveals the diversity inherent in the people Southern Africa recognises as San or Bushmen. Miriam Motshabise told CCMS researchers at Ngwatle in July 2000, "I don't want them to call us Bushmen I want them to call us Basarwa," because Basarwa is a local word, although it means the same thing. Petrus Nxai's (1999) response at Ngwatle indicates the importance of recognising diverse ethnic groups: "if it is me you call me Bushman, I can't even listen to you, but if you can say San...The difference is that you see, normally the bush, why do they call us the bush men? They say they find us in the forest... But if you can call me a Molala I can listen to you 'cause I'm a Molala". "I just know I'm a Bushmen because the life I live is the life of a Bushman," said Gadiphemolwe Orileng, a member of the Ngwatle community (1999). He seems comfortable with the name 'Bushman'. Petrus (1999) also suggested that "This name, Bushman, they do not like it because the Boer people says they find them in the bush...the nice name for them in San...a San, not a Mosarwa, he does not like that." It seems that negative responses to being called 'Bushmen' relate to the use of the term by tyrannical oppressors – the Boers [farmers] for whom they had to work:

they will agree to say they are called the San because of their colour is going same with the San. For the Bushmen it is okay...when we are starting and think about Adam and Eve you will see where the people are coming. We think that everyone is coming from the bush...That Bushman is also coming when our grandfathers were working for these white people at the farm. They said "Hey Boesman!" and then the person is having his name and they just call him "you fucking Boesman!" (Hunter Sixpence, 1999).

The connotations of the names 'Bushman' and 'San' relating to being part of the earth, or nature do not appear to be problematic. Resentment towards these names occurs when they are associated with oppression, with being treated as a subhuman and having one's individual human dignity ignored. "People will be proud of what they would want to be called" (Hunter Sixpence, 1999): Ouma !Una connects the terms 'San' and 'Bushmen' with earth and sand, not politics:

Ouma !Una: Because I'm very proud of my Bushmanness. Because I am a Bushman.

Chantel: Are you a Bushman?

Ouma !Una: I am a Bushman, out of the earth.

Chantel: But they must rather say San?

Ouma !Una: He must call me San.

Chantel: Why do you prefer that he says San?

Ouma !Una: I am the earth. This earth is the San/d. Now we are the San/d Bushmen.

≠Khomani, ≠Khomani. From the Sand (Ouma !Una Rooi, 2000).

“The Bushman is the same as the land. The land, the earth. The Bushman, it’s almost as if he lives with the earth” (Petrus Vaalbooi, 2000). The First People of Southern Africa seem proud to be called Bushmen or San when this is associated with the earth, with the land they value highly, yet these names also hold echoes of racial oppression. It seems that there is no one term which is correct to use, as people identify themselves in different ways: identification is “the moment when we invest in how we are hailed from the outside” (Hall, 1997:12). “Silikat once said to me, ‘every time I walk and I hear San, I keep on walking. When I hear “Bushman” I look, that’s me, that’” (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c). In recognising this diversity of identification with names, I will use the terms ‘San’ and ‘Bushman’ interchangeably, as well as ‘≠Khomani’ and ‘!Xoo’ to refer specifically to the respective communities of the Northern Cape and Kgalega District, Southern Botswana.

Research methods and ethical concerns

Empirical research relating to the ‘Observers and Observed’ project consists mainly of face to face, informal, unstructured interviews/discussions which are captured by means of tape recorders, video cameras, note-taking or memory, depending on the preference of our research partners and the equipment available. These interactions take place within the context of the daily lives of our research partners – with their family beside the campfire, in the car while giving transport, outside the huts, beside the road where crafts are being sold. The ‘sampling’ process is organic and chaotic – interviewees are ‘selected’ on the basis of relationships formed on previous trips and their willingness to talk to researchers. “Highly organised research is guaranteed to produce no new results” (Herbert, 1965). Where interviews are recorded they are then transcribed and translated as necessary, and the transcriptions are returned to our research partners, who are assisted by literate members of the community in reading them. Photographs taken are also returned to community members, and videos constructed from field trip footage are screened for the communities by means of a portable TV/VCR run off a battery in the back of the 4x4.

Anthea Simões (2001a) offers extensive theorisation of research ethics, author/community interaction and research methodology. I find Anthea’s discussion particularly interesting, as she participated in field trips prior to my involvement with the project and her elaboration on payment of sources, formal arrangements and negotiation for interviews points to the development of relationships between CCMS researchers and our ≠Khomani and !Xoo research partners. The research process – teams returning with new and familiar students, the sending back of transcriptions and photographs, the showing of videos, Belinda and Vetkat’s visits to Durban to exhibit Vetkat’s art, the way in which Kalahari fieldtrips have become prized opportunities for CCMS students – has resulted in a much greater sense of acceptance, familiarity and informality, even friendship, between researchers and community members. The methodology of ‘hanging out’ prescribed by Belinda on her first meeting with CCMS researchers in 2000 seems to have been effective. ‘The Professor’ is a household

name in Witdraai, Blinkwater and Ngwatle; Kort Jan calls him *'my oubaas'*¹⁹. Belinda told me on the phone the other day that she felt like 'a proud mother' after reading the essay I sent her. I think it is this sense of kinship that heightens my sense of responsibility towards my research partners, and inspires my desire to empower and honour them through my writing.

In writing this dissertation, in part as an attempt to provide a voice for the voiceless, I have had to deal with the concerns involved in including verbatim transcriptions: many of our research partners are neither English-speaking nor educated or literate, and thus their responses are comprehended with difficulty by academic readers. The quotation of statements which contain massive grammatical flaws could be argued to reflect an attitude of mockery towards one's informants and their lack of ability to communicate on a 'sophisticated' Western level. Such sourcing could also be dismissed as 'unscientific'. However, to paraphrase would be to negate the marginalised voice still further and to detract from the meaning inherent in their very words. Thus, my use of verbatim transcriptions intends not only to offer voices which are usually silent in representation discourse, but to indicate the further disempowerment of underdeveloped communities in dialogue which tends to take place within the confines of academic conventions.

A fundamental difficulty in these encounters is translation. Until I tried it, I thought translation was a simple matter of repeating what the interviewee said in the language of the interviewer. Not so much. Particularly when one has, in one's cleverness, inspired the interviewee with confidence that one is fluent in the language and understands every word they say. People are misguided enough to believe this of me, and then they start asking "*verstaan jy, verstaan jy?*" [do you understand, do you understand?] while I nod hopefully and the interviewer looks at me expectantly and I say, "I think he is talking about... I know he is very *ongelukkig* [unhappy] about something." It is also very difficult to maintain communication between interviewer and interviewee through translation. Because the interviewee doesn't understand a word the interviewer is saying, they get the impression that they are actually having a conversation with the translator (so-called translator in my case) with this other person just hanging around, and if they feel that the translator is in need to being told a particular story, they will tell it, regardless of what "*hy wil weet...?*" [he wants to know...?] And they are unlikely to pause for breath and translation purposes for at least ten minutes.

Sitting under a tree at Masetleng Pan in July 2001, Darryn Crowe, an English speaking student from Natal, Mashilo (Gibson) Boloka, the Afrikaans translator, and Johannes Nxai, from the Ngwatle community, experienced difficulty with similar sounding Afrikaans words. Darryn was hoping to learn about the Bushmen's responses to tourists visiting their community. He began to feel a little unwelcome...

Darryn: And if more tourists stayed here?

Johannes: I wouldn't have stayed here. I wouldn't have stayed here.

Gibson: You are talking about different things. You [Darryn] are talking about tourists. You [Johannes] are talking about terrorists. That's why he says a lot of the terrorists...

¹⁹ *'Oubaas'* translates literally as 'old boss' or 'old man'. Among the Bushmen, it is used as a term of respect for a superior, usually European, person. Contrary to the experiences of many Bushmen, Kort Jan and Johannes (2002) say that they were happy working for white farmers, as they were well-treated and provided for: "When you are working for the white man life is not hard. They clothe you, they feed you, you stay full all the time. Not once do you stay hungry". In this context, therefore, *'oubaas'* is used as a term of respect for a person who provides for and treats Kort Jan well.

Johannes: Man-eaters!

Darryn: People that come here and see the animals and [take] photos of the spaces...

Johannes: The people that come here and see the gemsbok and see any thing, it's us the people that say they must come to us so that we can walk with them and look at the things. The people that kill you, we don't want them.

Darryn: Oh yes yes, the terrorists

(Johannes Nxai, 2001).

The Bushmen communities have expectations and perceptions, which are often at odds with the expectations we have for our own roles and experiences as researchers. Community members often assume that we are able to help them financially and politically. They feel that they have been exploited in encounters with other researchers and filmmakers, where they have not been paid what they expected, or have not received copies of the final product or the information they provided (videos, photographs, books, articles, interview transcription, video footage), which they consider to be their right in terms of ownership of information. Often they perceive academics, filmmakers and others with whom they work as responsible towards them with regard to their well-being, and feel betrayed when the support they need does not materialise. Relationships of dependence are quick to develop. I will discuss further the expectations and outcomes of researcher/researched encounters in chapter five. Throughout this project and research process I attempt to interrogate my own subjectivity and the impact of my research and involvement on the communities involved. I think it is important that my research is located within the specific contexts in which my subject communities exist.

The ≠Khomani San of the Northern Cape

History, land and circumstances

The ≠Khomani of the Northern Cape number about 70-80 at the Witdraai area which we have visited and focussed on in our research, and the total number in the region is not certain, but is thought to be around 1500. The ≠Khomani originally lived and hunted in the area which is now the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KGTP), and were evicted soon after the formation of the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in 1931 (Chennells, 2002:51). More forceful evictions took place in the early 1970s. During the apartheid era, the San were classified as "coloureds", and lived in harsh, poverty-stricken conditions, marginalised for four decades. The violence and dislocation wrought by colonialism and apartheid resulted in the ≠Khomani being widely dispersed, and their language and cultural practices almost vanished. "In common with other displaced indigenous peoples, they had to a large degree become assimilated in or dominated by the local pastoralist groups, and their ancient cultural practices were sporadically maintained in isolated groups" (Chennells, 2002:51).

A series of documentaries about the impoverishment of the San, produced by the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1990 attracted the attention of the owners of Kagga Kamma Nature Reserve, situated in the mountainous Cedarberg region of the Western Cape (White, 1995:9), where there are many Bushman paintings. Heinrich and Pieter de Waal travelled to the Northern Cape, where they approached ≠Khomani leader Dawid Kruiper with a resettlement offer (White, 1995:9). According to Pieter de Waal, the Bushmen immediately agreed to go and live at Kagga Kamma, and their presence soon attracted the interest of tourists:

We went up there...and they immediately said yes, they want to try this. We told them they can come and live here, they can do their own thing. They can live off nature as long

as they only hunt animals – small springbok and smaller...that was the agreement from the beginning. Then it started developing into a touristic organisation with them. Visitors wanted to go and visit them...people wanted to go and see what they do there (Pieter de Waal, 1999).

In the midst of the uncertainty surrounding the land claim process, Dawid saw this as a possible opportunity for the ≠Khomani:

Look with the land claim I fell about and wandered around a bit. Didn't know which way. But the owner, Pieter de Waal from Kagga Kamma in the Paarl, saw me on TV, 50/50, that I am busy claiming land and also a place for my people to settle...he saw me on TV and he phoned me and asked about Kagga Kamma. There is partly ground and the rest is stones. "How do I feel? Don't I want to move down there for a while to Kagga Kamma?" So I immediately, with this that I didn't know which way to go, said yes to go to Kagga Kamma (Dawid Kruiper, 2000).

Approximately 30 members of the ≠Khomani San community moved to Kagga Kamma in 1990, where they earned income from tourist visits and the sale of crafts. There was, however, a strong sense that the Kalahari, and not Kagga Kamma is home to the Bushmen, and that this resettlement was not a permanent satisfactory alternative to a land claim.

In 1995, with the assistance of human rights lawyer Roger Chennells, (Robins, 2001a:7) the ≠Khomani San community lodged a claim for restitution of land in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. The lodging of a restitution land claim brought together about 300 San adults. For many of them, it was the first time they had met as a community. Their diverse backgrounds make it difficult for them to form a cohesive community identity, which contributes to conflict and division within the community (Robins, 2001b:26).

On 21 March 1999, the ≠Khomani's claim was finally settled, culminating in a ceremony attended by Thabo Mbeki, then Deputy President; Derek Hanekom, then Minister of Land Affairs; community leaders Dawid Kruiper and Petrus Vaalbooi; hundreds of San people and representatives of world media. Thabo Mbeki signed a land claim settlement agreement, which transferred the title deeds of six Kalahari farms (about 36 000 ha) to the ≠Khomani San Community Property Association (CPA). In addition, approximately 25 000 hectares within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, to be managed as a "Contract Park", in conjunction with 25 000 hectares transferred to the Mier community, was handed over. The rest of the calculated capital value of the claim was made available for the purchase of more land or for the development of the land awarded (Grossman and Holden, 2002). It was a joyous and triumphant occasion for the whole community.

Three years on, however, the land claim seems not to have resulted in much substantial change in standards of living amongst those who want to retain their 'traditional ways'. The ≠Khomani do not have the resources, the skills, or the motivation to generate productivity from the farms that have been handed over. Alcohol and drug abuse and violence are rife within this poverty-stricken community. A considerable amount of money has been injected into the community for development, but mismanagement and lack of education have rendered these funds ineffective. Delays in infrastructural delivery have resulted in little evidence of housing development, land use planning and the building of clinics and schools (Robins, 2001a:27). The rights of access to the Park have materialised on paper, but without the effect of allowing the San to return to their previously traditional lifestyle. The ≠Khomani at Kagga Kamma left there to live on their land after the settlement of

the land claim, but many have had to return to the Western Cape, as well as other tourism ventures, in order to earn an income and support their families. These remarks made by Anna Festus in 2000 give an indication of the ≠Khomani diaspora, and the reality of the situation after the land claim settlement:

...our people, the ≠Khomani San of the Southern Kalahari officially received their land from the government. That was last year, 21 March 1999. The original claim came from the Kalahari Gemsbok Park and consequently the government granted 6 farms, currently, to our people...There's also 50% allocated for traditional use so currently we have Witdraai where our traditional people are officially settled. We also have the negotiations with the Kalahari Gemsbok Park that is now the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The negotiations are going to kick off soon. That is the original land claim and then there are still some of our people in the Western part, Western Cape, at Kagga Kamma. And then we also have little communities at Rietfontein, Upington, Olifantshoek, Posmasburg, Loubos, Mier and Welkom. So that is where our communities are still staying currently (Anna Festus, 2000a).

I think Professor, the family probably saw that there isn't really the freedom here yet. Here's still hardships and that's why some of them went back, but we often feel we want to get our people back because it's officially their land for which they fought a long time and for which they had to give up a lot (Anna Festus, 2000a).

The land now officially belongs to the ≠Khomani, yet they have not experienced the freedom they expected that owning their own land would bring, as they do not have the resources to develop viable means of income and independence. Instead of living as a unified community, the ≠Khomani are scattered over several dusty settlements and tourism markets. The difficulties relating to rights of access to the Park mean that they have not really regained the spiritual and cultural heritage which was lost in their removal from the land on which they lived in the past.

We have worked mainly with the ≠Khomani at Witdraai, one of the farms which was returned to the community for traditional use. It is situated across the road from the Molopo Lodge where we camp (and where the facility of a liquor store is conveniently provided). Some of our research partners are located at Welkom, the original dusty settlement outside the KGTP. We have also worked with community members at Erin, another farm that was returned. Last year (2002) the former owner of the farm Erin obtained a Sale in Execution order from the court against the current CPA management committee, for debts incurred by individual members of the previous CPA committee. The people living at Erin were afraid that the farm would be returned to him in repayment of the debts, and they would be left homeless (Grossman and Holden, 2002). They were saved, however, by an out-of-court settlement between the Land Claims Commission and the creditor (*The Mercury*, 24 September 2002:5). While this is clearly to the benefit of the residents of Erin, a group that remains largely detached from ≠Khomani politics, the message sent to the CPA suggest that financial responsibility is not something to be very concerned about. Belinda and Vetkat Kruijer, some of our primary informants, live on a rented sand dune on Blinkwater farm, just outside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. They have not been welcomed onto the land that was allocated to the ≠Khomani due to intra-community tensions. We have also visited the ≠Khomani at Kagga Kamma, and Ostri-San, another cultural tourism venture in the North West Province.

Cultural tourism

Many community members move around the country in search of employment, as they did for thousands of years in search of water and food, mainly to cultural tourism enterprises such as Kagga Kamma in the Western Cape, Ostri-San in the North West Province, and Mabalingwe in the Limpopo Province. Kagga Kamma is a nature reserve and upmarket resort, where tourists can view Bushman paintings and meet the San in person on a cultural tour. Management experienced some difficulties with the Bushmen returning to the Northern Cape for the land claim, as the cultural experience marketed to tourists was suddenly not available (Heinrich de Waal, 2001). Their return to Kagga Kamma in 2000 was not very warmly received:

...they started phoning us from the Kalahari, asking us if they can come back because they don't have an income there...we said okay, stop phoning us, when you have a lift come down, you're welcome to. But it's going to be totally different. We're not going to give you the R13 portion of what tours pay...no, that's going to end now. So your only income will be to sell handicrafts (Heinrich de Waal, 2001).

Thus the income acquired by moving to Kagga Kamma decreased significantly. Development through cultural tourism does not take place on the Bushmen's own terms. The approach of management toward the ≠Khomani after their return was a lot more cynical than the initial encounter. Heinrich de Waal (2001) observed, "we don't want to rely on the fact that they're here again, because we realised that it can hurt us so much if we depend on them...Financially and...we've had very much problems with their alcohol and unreliability and so on as well. So you start later on not to care so much for them any more, as you initially thought, romantically". The resort management managed to work out a way of avoiding their dependence on the Bushmen, through cutting off the portion of the entrance fee given to them and by changing their marketing so that the 'Bushman encounter' was no longer a guaranteed feature of visits to Kagga Kamma (Heinrich de Waal, 2001). The Bushmen, however, struggle financially now that they have no fixed income on which they depend.

We noticed this dependency at Ostri-San as well, where the cultural manager saw himself as a parent figure to the Bushmen, and felt he had to warn them when he went away for half an hour as they might not cope without him (Danie Jacobs, 2001). Interaction with tourists consisted of being looked at and spoken about, which community members found disempowering:

I get so sad if the people come and they really want to talk to me and they can speak Afrikaans but they speak English. For me, it will be much better if they can come and talk to me, I can tell them I how feel, what I see and how I experience all the things. For me, it will be very good. Then you know if they leave me, he goes back with something, he goes back with a knowledge, he goes back with a good thought. And he can walk further and expand (Isak Kruiper, 2001).

Attempts at developing cultural tourism – facilitated by the ≠Khomani themselves – at Witdraai have thus far not been very successful, beyond the occasional roadside craft sales: "the ≠Khomani have found themselves in a position of dependence in relation to powerful patrons" (Robins, 2001a:32). Thus despite the availability of land, it still seems necessary for people to move away in order to make money – and thus not support local ventures, as Abraham, who was then managing the Witdraai campsite, suggested:

Yes look, the ≠Khomani have people everywhere at the parks. The reason why they went there is as a result of income here. See, here... the income isn't that good here.

Now they decided they'll go work that side first for a period with Danie Jacobs. And the others are down in Kagga Kamma to get a few rands just to make a living. Now that left everything in my hands (Abraham Meintjies, 2001).

The Sisen Craft Project, operating from Andriesvale, aims to help community members sell their crafts. Thus far it has not proved to be sustainable as there is too little income for too many people:

People busy working, and the struggle to get it self-sustainable from the beginning with a few people was easy, but now with new people coming in... what happened is like, twelve people receive money each week. Now there's 54 people receiving money once a month or lesser. So the income is not stretched because tourism is bigger. The money must now be divided by 54 people (Lizelle Kleyhans, 2002).

Several community members sell their crafts on the side of the road instead of through the project, as they prefer to remain independent. Often they go straight to the Molopo Liquor Store after they make a sale.

Language

Most of the ≠Khomani speak Afrikaans, learned from working as farm labourers, at school, and so on. During the apartheid regime, "people had hidden their Bushman or San identity in order to lessen the stigma they'd endured. An element of this survival strategy was to smother their language and promote fluency in Afrikaans amongst their children" (Crawhall, 2002:49). Most ≠Khomani San still speak the indigenous language Nama, and a few community members speak N|u, the ancient language of the ≠Khomani. The South African San Institute (SASI) has been involved in seeking out N|u speakers, recording the language, and facilitating the teaching of N|u to ≠Khomani children. N|u has become an "emblem of their aboriginality and authenticity" for some of the young people in the community (Crawhall, 2002:50).

...currently the first language is Afrikaans and then English as second language. But like you know the old ≠Khomani is practically extinct. So our people are busy again, and we have someone from Namibia at the University who is going to help to rewrite our old mother tongue so that some of our people can learn the old language again. This is the old Bushman language. They call it the ≠Khomani language...So currently most of our families just speak Nama which isn't the original language (Anna Festus, 2000a).

Nama is seen both as a language of unity among Bushmen: "... whenever I've been with the Bushmen I hear them speaking Nama to people they've never seen before...all over Botswana at the most remotest cattle posts they speak Nama together" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c); and as a common language which is not inherently 'Bushman':

Man, it [apartheid] broke us. It's also why I can't speak my mother's language today. I can't. My mother is teaching me at this age how to speak my mother tongue, but look how old I am. I have to learn through audiotapes, through different things...And we are now busy to see if we can get the children to learn to speak the language. But even the Bushman descendants want to keep the Nama language today. It's the only language they can speak. They can't speak Bushman language (Petrus Vaalbooi, 2000).

The use of language in the ≠Khomani community gives an impression of the extent to which the Bushmen are affected by the legacy of apartheid and the controversies that exist between different factions in the community.

Politics

The ≠Khomani's interests are represented by the South African San Institute (SASI), which is funded by the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA). There is widespread discontent among the ≠Khomani relating to the capacity of SASI to respond to the community's needs:

The ≠Khomani at Welkom and in the KGTP expect SASI to play a central role in the mammoth task of overseeing state housing and infrastructural delivery. The ≠Khomani have high expectations regarding housing and income. While the Government may be able to address some of their needs, SASI might find itself taking the flak for delivery hiccups and shortfalls (Robins, 2001a:28).

The community have become very disillusioned with the development process. Often, development attempts have been implemented without the community being consulted as to their needs and priorities. For example, the township of Welkom was recently electrified, with the result that all the homes are plagued by insects, while the residents still cook on fires because they cannot afford either to purchase electric stoves or to pay the bills. They constantly complain that they have no transport facilities to the nearest clinic, approximately 56km away, while the provision of electricity seems to have had little positive effect on their lives. Development goes unnoticed while basic needs seem to remain unmet. SASI, as an "independent, Non-Governmental Organisation that mobilises resources for the benefit of the San peoples of southern Africa" (SASI, 2002), advancing the vision that "The San peoples of southern Africa will achieve permanent control over their lives, resources and destiny" (SASI, 2002), is likely to be held responsible for unfulfilled expectations, even when these expectations are the responsibility of the national and provincial government. Community members tend to feel that nothing is happening in terms of development:

I think the other problems is also about developing, it's in great need here. We are still in the growing pains, our community. We are still in the growing pains. But it seems to me it's a bit too long time because really yet, because Anthie, really yet, nothing goes on here, I have to be honest (Anna Festus, 2000b).

Lack of community cohesion also hinders the development and mobilisation of the ≠Khomani San community. The community has become divided between the pastoralists, who tend livestock in an attempt to make a living, and the traditionalists, who are trying to generate an income out of their culture and traditions through cultural tourism and the selling of crafts. These different aims have resulted in tensions between factions in the community, and the fragmentation of leadership:

There have been serious divisions between the traditionally minded ≠Khomani San living at Witdraai under the leadership of Dawid Kruiper and their more 'westernised' relatives living to the west at Rietfontein under the leadership of Petrus Vaalbooi. Whereas Dawid Kruiper is seen to be the 'traditional leader', Petrus Vaalbooi has taken on a 'western' leadership style as the chairperson of the ≠Khomani San Community Property Association (CPA). This artificially constructed divide could negatively affect the long term development of the ≠Khomani San (Robins, 2001a:27-28).

Dawid Kruiper also attested to this conflict between 'traditional' and 'western' ≠Khomani San:

That is actually the biggest... because those Western, let me say those Western Bushmen they mess the game up, those Western Bushmen. They only know about sheep farming,

horses, driving cars and all those things. That is why that little difference is there. And us traditional people that are cold, what did they do? Let me tell you straight, what did they do? Because I am very unhappy about it. They sold and shot the springbok. Gemsbok, eland, camels, ostriches that the traditional people are proud of, they messed up like that (Dawid Kruiper, 2000).

A high degree of controversy exists between the goals of western development and traditionalism. Steven Robins (2001b) suggests that “these divisions were also a product of the contradictory objectives of NGOs and donors to provide support for traditional leadership, San language and ‘cultural survival’, and to inculcate modern/western ideas and democratic practices”. Thus community politics exist in a state of uncertainty, tension and waiting for things to happen.

Marginalisation – organic intellectuals and the Riverbed Children

One of our most significant informants in the Northern Cape community is Belinda Kruiper. Belinda’s position is complicated and intriguing: she is not quite insider or outsider; bilingual, educated and articulate, she can communicate with researchers, NGO workers, officials and tourists in ways that others cannot. She understands bank accounts and unemployment payments: she knows how ‘civilisation’ works. She is both spokesperson and leader, yet many resent her for their dependence on her. In terms of our research, Belinda’s role is significant as she speaks fluent English, is literate and can therefore comment on books and papers having read them herself. Belinda translates and discusses our documents with her husband, and others in her community around the campfire (Tomaselli, 2003a). In response to NGO criticism of our relationship with Belinda, we have begun to understand her role as an organic intellectual within the community:

Literate individuals like Belinda living on the periphery of the ≠Khomani at Blinkwater are organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971) of a kind...Belinda, like ourselves is both insider/outsider (‘family’), refugee/chronicler, and theorist/practitioner. She defies borders and policies, articulates what’s often felt to be best left unsaid, she is both ally and adversary. These are positions she reserves for all who work with and/or against her. Embedded in her comments is both the ‘ego’ and the collective discourse. Which is which is not easy to distinguish. How does one disentangle all of this in terms of webs of relations and impacts on policies? That she previously worked for SASI gives her a good insight into how to impact issues and attitudes from a variety of perspectives. To dismiss the contradictory positions of intellectuals like Belinda as non-San, as outsiders, is to ignore their discursive, intellectual and kinship roles within the communities alongside or within which, or against which, they conduct themselves. Resources are lost, excommunicated and silenced (Tomaselli, 2003a).

In response to the criticism I have received for interacting closely with a few members of the community in order to get deeply qualitative responses, based on relationships, rather than a quantitative survey, Belinda suggested that these individuals are significant, because they reflect the most marginalised of the ≠Khomani, those whose views are closely linked to their strong sense of identity as San, and who find themselves excluded from development and research activities. She told me how a group of ≠Khomani Bushmen became known as the Riverbed Children:

A group of individuals, all direct descendants from the late “*Ou*” [Old] Regopstaan Kruiper²⁰ – Bushmen of the Southern Kalahari, started referring to themselves as “*kinders van die vaal Rivier*”²¹. Lovingly and proudly they became known all over as the *Rivierkinders* [River children]. Their vision to be free and have peace. To carve a path of love and happiness for their children.... The group are high spirited, highly talented artists, storytellers, knowledgeable on medicinal and other veldplants, trackers, hunters, intelligent and embrace ancient wisdom (Belinda Kruiper, 2002f).

These individuals did not conform to the expectations of the community. Their focus was on the land, the culture and spirituality of the Bushmen, rather than the political issues:

Although facing Western influence like the rest of the family and having to see how power/politics and corruption started pulling at the seams of their culture, this group dug their heels deep into the land, They themselves became targets of the broader community always labelled rebels, drunks, trouble makers...In truth they stood up against unfairness, injustice, abuse...The landclaim was finalised two years ago and hopeful Rivierkinders joined the family on the land. No...leaders chased them off, in true rebel style they kept on going back. Focus from government and NGO level was always on the Community Property Association and members of Committee, Traditional leaders, etc. Truth remained under wrap...They have much to offer as far as oral and written history are concerned... (Belinda Kruiper, 2002f).

The conflict within the Kruiper/≠Khomani family, their rejection, the failure of the land claim to fulfil their dreams, the sense of dispossession and alienation from their community, culture, and traditions has resulted in their descent into violence, alcohol abuse and despair:

Today, lifeless, walking around directionless, they no longer sing or dance, their children are scattered around South Africa. Two of the truest trackers, hunters and great drama spirits were murdered three months after each other. Allegedly because they were not prepared to be quiet. No, they challenged anything unfair and untrue. They were almost desperate in their attempts to break the power of politics creeping into their minds. They saw their family being sucked into development/monitoring and religious orders. The land was not theirs, it was said in many ways, from putting them off to verbal/physical abuse (Belinda Kruiper, 2002f).

Thus my research focuses on marginalised individuals in a marginalised community.

²⁰ The previous traditional leader of the ≠Khomani Bushmen, Regopstaan was widely loved and respected.

²¹ “*Kinders van die vaal Rivier*” means children of the dry river. The river referred to is the Molopo River, a dry riverbed running alongside South Africa and Botswana from about 4kms inside Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in a southern direction towards Upington.

The !Xoo Bushmen of Ngwatle

History, politics and circumstances

A community of perhaps 100 to 200 displaced !Xoo people have settled near the Ngwatle Pan, joined by an assortment of Bakgalagadi, Batswana, Malala and others (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2003). This community “coalesced around two Afrikaans speaking !Xoo brothers in the late 1980s, facilitated by a deep sense of Bushmaness articulated by most of these sojourners, irrespective of their ethnic or geographic origins” (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2003). Ngwatle was formally recognised as a remote area dweller (RAD) settlement in 1998 (Cassidy, 2001:A-52), and is located in a controlled hunting area called KD (Kgalagadi District) 1 in southern Botswana, the south central Kalahari desert. KD 1 is 13 000 km squared, and three villages within its boundary include Ngwatle, Ukhwi and Ncaang, with a total population of about 800. This population has organised itself into the Nqwaa Khobee Xeya²² Trust, a community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) project, supported by the Thusano Lefatsheng Trust, via which community interests have been represented since 1996 (Tomaselli, 2001a:297; Rivers, 2001:54).

The KD 1 Concession area is managed by Safaris Botswana Bound (SBB), which caters to international tourists and hunters. In 2000 the Trust signed an agreement that gives SBB exclusive rights to conduct hunting and photographic safaris in KD 1. Prior to the implementation of CBNRM, some Bushmen owned hunting licenses issued by the government in recognition of their dependence on hunting. The implementation of CBNRM introduced the quota system, whereby the community is issued with a slip of paper for every animal they are allowed to kill, as well as set hunting seasons (Wang, 2002b). Hunting quotas are established by the Department of Wildlife (Joe Viljoen, 2002). The slips allow the government to account for each animal, and poaching is punishable by a prison sentence (Wang, 2002b) – in 2001 Johannes commented that the Bushmen “*jag met pampier*” [hunt with paper]. The hunting quotas are then purchased by Safaris Botswana Bound “because they have the concession...from the Trust” (Joe Viljoen, 2002). Apparently the Bushmen also have the option of giving their quota to the Safari company, and to have the meat returned to them. The Bushmen are now saying that they are “not allowed” to hunt (Kort Jan and Johannes Nxai, 2002). Michael Flyman, formerly employed by the Thusano Lefatsheng Trust observes that:

the Nqwaa Khobee Xeya Trust is now experiencing some financial difficulties and lack of proper co-ordination. The draft hunting quota for 2003 has also been drastically reduced (50% for some species). This has implications for the sustainability of the Trust since it has been solely dependent on revenue from hunting; it also means that community hunting in KD 1 may no longer be feasible because there are just not enough animals to distribute amongst the members after the Safari Operator has bought his share (Michael Flyman, 2002).

Ngwatle is a remote settlement, accessible only by 4x4 on very bad sand tracks (Cassidy, 2001:A-53). There is no telephone or postal service. This community has therefore, unlike the ≠Khomani, had only minimal exposure to researchers, camera crews etc. The Ngwatle community is severely poverty-stricken. Access to water is restricted, as they only have one water tank, which is filled approximately every two weeks by the government. The larger settlements are also provided with

²² Translates as 'living for tomorrow' in the local !Xoo language (Wang, 2002b).

salt water for their livestock, but Ngwatle is deemed too small, and therefore their water supply has to be shared with their animals. There is thus a sense that Ngwatle is marginalised in relation to the other two settlements. The community's main cash income is through craft sales to tourists and through the Trust. Several community members have moved to other settlements in search of improved access to water, employment, clinic facilities and other resources.

Language and interaction with researchers

The San at Ngwatle speak Tswana, Sesarwa, Afrikaans and !Kung. Research teams from CCMS, including Afrikaans and sometimes Tswana speakers have been visiting Ngwatle, as well as Ukhwi and Monong, since 1995. When visiting we camp at Ngwatle. The Safari campsite is a long way from the village, so we prefer to use the community's camping area, just outside the village, which has no facilities, and supply our own food, water and tents. Students take pula (Botswanan currency) to buy crafts from the community, as well as quantities of second hand clothes and shoes to donate to the people at Ngwatle.

Representation

Media representation of San Bushmen and other so-called "primitive peoples" is a contested issue, especially in the context of South Africa's transition to democracy. These debates, however, "[seem] to leave out the direct opinions and experiences of the San themselves" (Tomaselli, 2002:204). Historically, representation of peoples such as the San has been distinctly to the advantage of those who did the representing, rather than those represented. Depicting people as 'uncivilised' justifies the conquest of Africa (Young, 1997:110). "Third and Fourth world peoples have been argued to be quintessentially the 'Other' to the historical 'Same' of Europe" (Mudimbe, 1988). The representation of the Other as completely different seems to justify their being treated in a completely different manner. The relationship between the Other and the Same is based on differences which are assumed to define the European 'Same' in opposition to the African 'Other' (Tomaselli, 2001b:176).

In attributing savagery to the Other "popular stereotypes assisted in the colonial project, served to reinforce the hierarchical patterns of control and governance, and confirmed Western self-perceptions of mastery and power" (Young, 1997:112). 'Othering' creates a hierarchy of difference which depicts the 'Other' in terms of primitivity (Young, 1997:111). The stereotypes created by the representation of First Peoples results in the perception not only of difference, but also of inferiority (Young, 1997:113). "Stereotypes are instruments of conquest" (Young, 1997:113). Those who have the power to represent people have the ability to contribute to a political system advantageous to themselves: "Stereotypes not only speak to us of history's identities and exclusions, they are active in reflecting the skewed balance of power between Africa and Europe – and between black and white, but also serve to confirm, to promote and perpetuate this skewed history" (Young, 1997:112). Representations can be manipulated to take away individuality, allocate roles and keep the Other in his place (Young, 1997:112).

However, the historical representation of San Bushmen has not only been disempowering, but also unrealistic. These representations deal in the "projection of non-Western peoples that 'lack civilisation' backwards into the past" (Young, 1997:111) without taking into account or even observing their present ways of life. These stereotypes project the assumption that San Bushmen have always lived in

exactly the same way. They “characterise ‘difference’ as natural, lacking a history of its own” (Young, 1997:113). Tomaselli (2002:204) suggests that “popular commentators...narrowly refer to First Peoples in terms of a fixed location in time, before written history, and locate the San in a particular space/place (the desert).” This is inaccurate because:

San languages, cultures and identities, like all other societies, exhibit social practices that adapt, change and develop continuously *through time*, space and place. This process contradicts the many films and television programmes which depict the San as a ‘vanishing species’ as a culturally isolated desert people, frozen in time...(Tomaselli, 2002:204).

An example is Jamie Uys’s *The Gods Must be Crazy*, which depicts the San living as though it were still the Stone Age (without the mammoths) and too primitive and underdeveloped to cope with such an icon of modernity as a Coke bottle. The ‘extinction’ of Bushman people and culture may be the result not only of processes of dispersal, dispossession and genocide, but also of active promulgation by scholarly writing (and popular books and films) of a myth of the vanishing Bushman (Prins, 2000:1). John Marshall, who worked extensively with the Ju/’hoansi Bushmen in Eastern Namibia discusses the need to “urge documentary filmmakers to try to show reality” (Marshall, 1993:3), because:

Fantasies projected onto Ju/’hoansi by writers and filmmakers were among the worst threats the people faced in their struggle to develop their farms and keep their land. Documentary films showing Ju/’hoansi dressed in skins playing hunters and gatherers in the 1980s reinforced the fantasies and served as propaganda for the official and commercial interests seeking to establish the game reserve²³ (Marshall, 1993:3).

With regard to romanticised, unrealistic representations of the Bushmen, Marshall (1993:4) cautions that: “the contrast between the fantasy and the reality shows how myth and policy weave together. The myth that Ju/’hoansi are a kind of fauna, incapable of farming and economic self-development, is like a prophecy that is easily fulfilled. People with no land or water cannot farm.” Thus it is possible to conceive of “*death by myth*” (Marshall, 2002).

It seems that indigenous people have lost the power to represent themselves (Young, 1997:114). In recent times, however, as a result of the internationalisation of the struggles of indigenous minorities mobilised by First People’s organisations and global communications networks, filmmakers, photographers, anthropologists, development workers, politicians and funding agencies no longer have complete control over Bushman representations (Tomaselli, 2002:205). The first opposition to historical convention on representations of the San was evident when North American anti-apartheid anthropologists and filmmakers accused Jamie Uys’s *The Gods Must be Crazy* of being racist, pro-apartheid propaganda (Tomaselli, 2002:205). Oppositions such as this to the representation of San Bushmen helped to create an opportunity for indigenous peoples to argue, discuss, negotiate and define their identities in post-apartheid Southern Africa (Tomaselli, 2002:205).

The establishment of the Khoisan Legacy Project at the University of the Western Cape led to the securing of government recognition of the Khoisan as a ‘First

²³ The planned establishment of this game reserve involved the eviction of the Ju/’hoansi from the land on which they lived and produced a subsistence, and was supported by the perception that “Bushmen cannot farm” (Marshall, 1993:2-3).

People' and to the mobilisation of this constituency on the basis of the United Nations' Declarations on First People's rights. Partnerships with individuals and organisations focussed enabling First Peoples can further self-determination and empowerment:

One way in which this self-empowerment is occurring is via a strategic and structured alliance with filmmakers, academics, technologists and development workers. Not just any of them, but specifically those who understand the practice and power of participatory communication and research (Tomaselli, 2002:206).

The San are now able to mobilise their social agency and to influence films, programmes, videos and academic studies through which they are represented (Tomaselli, 2002:207-208). This is a source of empowerment. "Those who have represented the San are no longer the sole judges of what is in the record, of how to read it, or of framing it" (Tomaselli, 2002:215). The San have learnt that "we have to be concerned about ourselves...these days we have to work with our own heads, because in the past it was someone else's head that got us into trouble" (/Angn!ao/^un, quoted in Biesele, 1993). It is now possible for the San to form empathetic alliances with cultural intermediaries, through which their struggles can be made known on international media stages (Tomaselli, 2002:216).

The ≠Khomani Bushman community is internationally well known in movies, TV advertisements (Kalahari.net), photographs and academic studies. The remote Ngwatle community has had considerably less media exposure than the ≠Khomani, which is why I will focus more on the ≠Khomani in forthcoming discussion of representation and research methodology. Many films, books and articles about the ≠Khomani are disempowering in terms of the images of the Bushmen depicted, and in the way in which community members are treated by filmmakers and writers. Belinda tells us how, "these guys from Korea rocked up." They told the community that they just wanted to take some photographs for tourists, but Belinda was suspicious as they were carrying a professional video camera:

So I went into the grass hut there, into his house, and I said to !Nooi what's going on, because he was busy with the hi-fi, and he said no, he had to borrow a car battery, they want him to organise this hi-fi and see if it's playing. Next minute I hear in Afrikaans, "that woman must get out of the house". So I jump up and say, "hey, excuse me, don't chase me out of my place, where the hell do you come from? Do I come into Jo'burg or wherever you live and say get out of your house?"...This guy says to me, "no, we just want to show the modern Bushmen and how..." I said, "so you're doing a film"...In the end he was doing a documentary for Korea, to show them how Bushmen live, he wanted them to pose with a Coca Cola tin...Elsie started going off...they started rocking the kombi [minibus], and I said, "do it, get rid of them"...Bushmen don't usually do that kind of thing...When Vetkat saw it, he went off as well...They wanted to grab the film and the camera and destroy it... "This is why you must be careful" [Belinda told the Koreans]...They didn't even have the decency to be honest (Belinda Kruiper, 2001b).

This kind of disrespect implies a view of Bushmen as sub-human, which is often evident through representation. Many films and books still portray outdated stereotypes to which the San are forced to conform in order to survive:

[A group of filmmakers] just wanted to see what is shown all over already, how they got water in the egg and how they drink it...I said to them, "ag, do it" because these things have been shown all over, if we have to plant another egg in the sand and pretend to get it out, let's do it. But also, how to hunt an ostrich...I said to the guys, "how do we hunt an ostrich?" So they said, "we don't know. He says we're supposed to shoot it with a bow

and arrow.” But an ostrich is wild usually...They would bring this ostrich. So they planned they were going to tie it by the leg on the tree, and then like aggravate it to look wild, and !Nooi would target the arrow and all this...Of course they rock up with a baby, a chicken! They were horrified, the Bushmen! They didn't even want to go further, they said, “what do they think? Now the camera's gonna show us killing a baby.” And this group insisted. Eventually we just said turn it into a joke. I said, “the world is gonna see you people as savages, and typical of destroyers, because you're killing a baby ostrich.” But they were also so desperate for food at that stage, where 4 families were now at least gonna get R200 each and they could feed their children...The day before it was said they would get this money plus they could have meat and the ostrich. Now you think a big ostrich, that's biltong, the whole toot, and this chick rocks up!...They can laugh about it but it's serious stuff, it's out there in the media. And it projects something completely different. And nobody knows that back home it was a survival situation (Belinda Kruiper, 2001b).

The ≠Khomani often feel exploited because they do not receive any financial return for their work with filmmakers, photographers or writers, neither do they see copies of the films, photographs and books. Isak Kruiper observes that the community often gets nothing in return for their involvement with filmmakers: “...they send nothing back to us. That is actually what holds us back here sometimes for a film that we do. That we get nothing back” (Isak Kruiper, 2001). There is a perception that the Bushmen are giving their knowledge to researchers and other visitors, and that this also should not be given away for free. Recorded stories, photographs and other cultural records are seen as an important part of the Bushmen's heritage, which should be kept in the community for future generations. “All her - Ouma Antas's - research material must be given to the family...That's what she wanted. She wanted me to get all the stuff so that I can make sure the children get something back one day. She doesn't trust what's out there. And she's dead today” (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a). Members of the ≠Khomani seem to feel that being represented involves giving part of themselves, and often receiving little in return:

Chantel: And journalists, people from the newspaper and the radio, do they also come?
Ouma !Una: Everyone. They come and fetch anything and everything. Our complete souls, they've even taken our heartbeats...I've been talking since who knows when and I'm doing everything all over again. But it's our work...It's our work to talk (Ouma !Una Rooi, 2000).

Policy

The Bushmen's work is to talk, Ouma !Una suggests (2000, see above) – but there is considerably less policy and legislation relating to the regulation of this labour than in other employment sectors. Some of the grievances relating to representation of Bushmen, and their perceived exploitation by various filmmakers, researchers, anthropologists and writers seem to have come to the attention of the NGOs representing the interests of the San. The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) has issued a document discussing research policy relating to the San, as well as a formal research contract and media contract. According to WIMSA's statement on research policy:

WIMSA, as the organisation representing the interests of all San in Southern Africa, has noted that:

- The San are widely regarded as one of the most highly researched populations in the world

- Very little, if any, published research has however resulted in any tangible benefit for the San
- The San are seldom, if ever consulted about the nature and purpose of research, the possible benefits for themselves, and the possible consequences such as loss of intellectual property resulting therefrom
- The personal, cultural and social lives of the San have been exposed in an often unethical manner harmful to the collective dignity and privacy of the San peoples.

Nevertheless research is and can be of benefit to the San in various ways, and the decision has been taken that it should be managed and controlled by WIMSA in a proactive manner on behalf of present and future generations of San (WIMSA Research Policy, undated).

The Research and Media contracts respectively require the researcher/contractor to describe in detail the research project or production to be undertaken, to state whether the subject matter contains any sensitive material or intellectual property, and if so “what arrangements have been made to protect the rights of the San?” (WIMSA, Research/Media Contract, undated). Both contracts require the contractor to reveal exactly what remuneration will be given to all participants, and stipulate that “no ‘handouts’ (such as clothes, sweets, alcohol) will be given, only tobacco and meals are to be provided if requested” (WIMSA, Research/Media Contract, undated). In signing the contract, the contractor states that “The San will be paid as stated on the media[/research] contract in respect of the various services offered” (WIMSA, Media Contract, undated). By signing these contracts, researchers and filmmakers undertake to provide the San organisation involved in their project “with a copy of the final product prior to final edit and release, for the purpose of ensuring that the depiction of the San is appropriate and in accordance with the undertakings” (WIMSA, Media/Research Contract, undated). They also undertake to “respect the culture, dignity and wishes of the San throughout the conduct of the research[/production], refraining from publishing any facts or portrayals that might be harmful or detrimental to the San” (WIMSA, Research Contract, undated), to provide the San with any and all information they request relating to the research conducted, and to provide the San organisation with a certain number of copies of the final product, free of charge.

The Research/Media contract is to be signed by the contractor, a representative of each San organisation involved and WIMSA. The forms are then sent by the contractor to WIMSA or SASI for processing. This bureaucratisation, on behalf of a largely illiterate people, begins to point to the level of control WIMSA is attempting to exert over the process of representing the San, leading to the possible perception that certain NGOs “believe they *own* the Bushmen” (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a).

Although the WIMSA statement on research policy declares that “The San people alone shall ultimately determine what form of research, and under what conditions, shall be performed on or about them”, it also makes the following points:

- Decisions on research programmes are of broad impact, and should as far as possible be referred to WIMSA as the central San organisation for co-ordinated authority and approval.
- Only recognised San leaders, duly authorised by WIMSA, are thus entitled to provide permission to individuals and organisations wishing to conduct or publish any research on or regarding the San peoples (WIMSA, Research Policy, undated).

This sort of policy makes the Bushmen feel that organisations in authority are making decisions on their behalf. ≠Khomani traditional leader Dawid Kruiper is aware that WIMSA has “made the one or other contract” relating to productions and research

about the San (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Dawid feels, however, that “WIMSA decides for me, behind my back, and I don’t know how far I am in, where I stand” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). He also alleged that when he makes a film, “I have to give WIMSA 20% thereof...” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Whether or not this is the case is not made clear in the contracts. He does not express confidence in the likelihood of these contracts helping him or his community in the future: “people come and then they make films and then they screw me, I get nothing...if supposedly everyone wants to help me, they must help me with all their hearts...If there’s someone who wants to make a film, then he must come to me so that we can negotiate” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Dawid believes that WIMSA should consult with him about their policy decisions relating to the ≠Khomani: “WIMSA must also ask me what he must do, what must I do for him?” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a).

Belinda Kruiper pointed out the lack of potential for such policies to be effectively implemented:

...what WIMSA is hoping to do. They’ve apparently got a media policy in place and I’ve seen the document, and I had to sort of implement it when I was working for SASI. I gave the document one look and chucked it out...Because how is WIMSA, who’s sitting in Namibia, and SASI, who’s in Cape Town, going to implement that in the Kalahari? How? By the time people drive to the Kalahari, they say, ‘oh, we’ve been through WIMSA and we’ve signed the media policy document.’ I believe them, right...Okay, so now these people go, we’re not getting cash on the ground because its all going to WIMSA. At what stage do we get the money? After how many processes? (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

If the policy is going to work, it “should be implemented on the ground level. And in fact by the parties who they’re usually looking for to do the filming...they want Kruiper and his family. So it should be there, and then you must look at the Kruiper family and say, ‘who do we have there as a resource to implement it?’” (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c). This approach sounds like a logistical non-starter for a bureaucratic organisation working with isolated, rural, largely illiterate communities. Also an ethical nightmare for a researcher wanting to do justice to her research partners/subject communities.

This examination of the representation of Bushmen and the repercussions of representation experienced by San communities has led me to an awareness of the need for a methodology of truth, accountability and empowerment. The examination of theories of reflexivity and auto-ethnography which follows forms part of my search for a research methodology which forces me to examine my motivations, actions, expectations, perceptions, relationships, interactions, truthfulness and representations on every level, at every stage of the research process.

Chapter Three

Literature Review: Theories of Reflexivity and Auto-Ethnography

We want to mess up this textuality with context, politics, and economics, in trying to understand the mess and confusion of everyday life. We expect our students to get their hands dirty in the real world and to critically work with, alongside, and through nongovernmental organisations, communities, and organisations, whether at grassroots, in civil society, or within the realm of the state. Action and struggle have muddied the literary academic exercise perhaps, and the clean theories of making sense of the world via texts, texts, and more texts have been brought into conditional disrepute (Tomaselli, 2001c:152).

I first learned of the theory of reflexivity in relation to documentary film, during a course on Visual Anthropology offered by CCMS. Thus I will begin this section by discussing theories of reflexivity in relation to ethnographic filmmaking, referring to examples of productions about Bushmen which incorporate elements of reflexivity (*N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* – John Marshall, 1980; *The Great Dance* – Craig and Damon Foster, 2000; *Search for the Bushmen* – Agnieszka Piotrowska, National Geographic, 2002; as well as videos made within CCMS: *Kalahari Fires* – Mary Lange and Xolani Nxumalo, 2002; *Vetkat* – Timothy Reinhardt, 2002; *I Am You Are?* – Marit Sætre, 2003 and *Reading Photographs in the Kalahari* – Linje Manyozo, 2002). I will continue to examine how reflexivity can be applied to auto-ethnographic writing, discussing examples such as the work of Nate Kohn, Peter Metcalf (*They Lie, We Lie: Getting on with Anthropology*) and Richard Katz, Megan Biesele and Verna St. Denis (*Healing Makes our Hearts Happy*) as well as reflexive writing which is beginning to emerge from our own project.

Reflexivity in film

Theory

By revealing his role, the filmmaker enhances the value of his material as evidence. By entering actively into the world of his subjects, he can provoke a greater flow of information about them. By giving them access to the film, he makes possible the corrections, additions, and illuminations that only their response can elicit. Through such an exchange a film can begin to reflect the ways in which its subjects perceive the world (MacDougall, 1995:119).

Jay Ruby (1977:7) suggests that the origins of documentary reflexivity are with the Russians in the 1920s and 1930s and the French in the 1950s and 1960s. The concept of reflexivity in documentary can be seen to have been developed by Dziga Vertov and Jean Rouch. According to Ruby (1977:7), Dziga Vertov was “more concerned with revealing process than revealing self”. He wished “the audience to understand how film works...in mechanical, technical, methodological as well as conceptual ways, thereby demystifying the creative process” (Ruby, 1977:7). Vertov’s goal was to help the audience understand the “process of construction of film so that they could develop a sophisticated and critical attitude” (Ruby, 1977:7). This can be seen in Vertov’s *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) by the presence of the cameraman in the film. Rouch was also concerned with the response of his subject communities to his films, with the development of ‘participatory cinema’ (Tomaselli, 1996:166): “And the most marvellous dialogue that I had at that moment was when the fisherman

began to criticise me: 'what, when did you hear music during a hippopotamus hunt?'"(Rouch in Fulchignoni, 1989:274).

Ruby's argument for reflexivity is based on Fabian's (1971:27) concept of the "*dialectical unity* between producer, production and product". Fabian (1971:25) argued that "in anthropological investigations objectivity lies neither in the logical consistency of a theory, nor in the givenness of data, but in the foundation...of human *intersubjectivity*". A film cannot be entirely objective, but needs to create awareness of the producer as part of a process of 'human intersubjectivity', human interaction. "Social facts are given to us in a context of communicative interaction" (Fabian, 1971:27). Fabian (1971:35) argues for the need for a "unity of theory and praxis", that the "study of a people...must be 'communicative' rather than 'observative', i.e. it must be carried out as a common enterprise of understanding" (Fabian, 1971:41). Tomaselli (1996:152-3) refers to the way in which

the 'God's-eye view' of conventional documentary...denies alternatives, other ways of seeing things...Orthodox documentary relationships and those kinds of connections which become real through other-than-visual ways...significatory devices have the effect of mystifying and hiding the processes which make up the conditions of social, economic and political life.

Fabian's concern with the need for revelation of producer-process-product seems to relate to his awareness of the othering that takes place in anthropological filmmaking: "*distance*, spacio-temporal but also developmental, *was not the object* of explanation; it was a necessary assumption, a conceptual category involved in the constitution of the Other, i.e. the object of anthropology" (Fabian, 1985:13). A documentary film which gives no indication of the process by which it was made, is able to disguise the discourse of anthropology which requires that "its object - other societies, some of them belonging to the past, but most of them existing contemporaneously in the present - be removed from its subject not only in space but also in time, to be not yet what we are" (Fabian, 1985:14). The term 'othering' "expresses the insight that the Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but *made*" (Fabian, 1990:755).

Othering in documentary film is part of the process by which that film is made. Fabian (1985:19) suggests that criticism of this kind of othering representation comes from "theorists who seem to have been driven to their position by the experience of fieldwork as communicative praxis...they begin to think about the consequences this should have for other phases in the production of anthropological knowledge". John Marshall (1993:21) seems to have realised that "the impact of myths on people like Ju/'hoansi is fast and devastating, but projecting myths instead of facing reality can eventually hurt the audience as well". To acknowledge the "dialogical nature of ethnographic research" (Fabian, 1990:764), "that Self and Other are inextricably involved in a dialectical process will make anthropology not less but more realistic" (Fabian, 1985:20). This acknowledgement will not only allow for more realistic documentary, but less opportunity for othering, as the 'Other' is seen to be interacting with and imparting information to the 'Same'.

Ruby's argument for autobiographical and self-consciously made films (1977) derives from Fabian's concept of producer-process-product. According to Ruby, "most filmmakers present us with the product and exclude the other two components" (Ruby, 1977:3). He argues that unless audiences have knowledge of all three components, "a sophisticated and critical understanding of the product is virtually impossible" (Ruby, 1977:4). For a film to be reflexive,

the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way (Ruby, 1977:4).

Thus the audience has the opportunity to interpret the film in the light of the producer's subjectivities – his/her interests, intentions and ideological assumptions, and the process by which these were incorporated into the produced text. This kind of revelation is not necessarily a simple job for the producer:

To be reflexive is to be not only self aware, but to be sufficiently self aware to know what aspects of self are necessary to reveal so that an audience is able to understand both the process employed and the resultant product and to know that the revelation itself is purposive, intentional and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing (Ruby, 1977:4).

Reflexivity also places the filmmaker in a vulnerable position, as he is forced to “reveal that films...are created structures...articulations of the filmmaker and not authentic truthful reconstructions” (Ruby, 1977:10). “The reality portrayed is relative to the technology of the cinematic (or video apparatus), and the techniques and practices of production, and the objectives, attitude and ideology of the filmmaker... film and television are not objective/neutral” (Tomaselli, 1996:159).

N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman and The Great Dance

Films often tell the viewer “more about the ideology, attitudes and prejudices of the producers than they do about their subjects” (Tomaselli, 1996:200). “*The Hunters* was a romantic film by an American kid, and revealed more about me than about the Ju/'hoansi” (Marshall, 1993:39). By the time Marshall filmed *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman*, it occurred to him that, “What the people I am filming actually do and say is more important than what I think about them” and that it was more important to “investigate instead of create” (Marshall, 1993:20). This makes me wonder about the inclusion of giraffe hunting scenes in *N!ai*, which seem similar to those in *The Hunters*. Was Marshall not quite ready to give up the romantic, constructed images? Was he trying to show that his ideas had changed? Or was it an attempt to locate *N!ai*'s childhood in the context of his earlier films? I also wonder about Tomaselli and Sheppersons' (1997:281) observation that Marshall failed to find any “wild Bushmen” for *The Hunters* “so he constructed without acknowledgement an ethnographic present in terms of the dominant theoretical Western image of a ‘Stone Age’ people caught-in-time”. Was the depiction of *N!ai*'s childhood a realistic contrast to the non-idyllic present, or is the sad reality of 1978 a contrast to the rose-tinted perceptions of Marshall's youth?

Ruby's ideals for the purpose of reflexivity seem to be understanding, truthfulness, transparency and knowledge. “Reflexivity offers us a means whereby we can instruct our audiences to understand the processes of producing knowledge about the world” (Ruby, 1977:11). “Reflexivity reconstitutes ethnographic film in itself as a process towards producing knowledge” (Tomaselli, 1996:207). Jean Paul Fargier (1980:182) argues that, “in the cinema the communication of knowledge is attendant on the production of knowledge about the cinema”. It involves revealing methodology (Tomaselli, 1996:176). Description in film of the ethnographic method is necessary to establish anthropological validity (Tomaselli, 1996:198). Homiak and Tomaselli (1999:296) refer to the need for “locations and identifications of the people

or groups or societies” to be provided. This is seen in *N!ai*, where the text at the beginning of the film gives its location at Tshumkwe, Namibia, and that the shooting of the film took place over 27 years, beginning in 1951. The title obviously identifies the community as the !Kung, which allows the viewer to attempt to analyse the accuracy of its portrayal of a way of life and political situation. According to theories of reflexive methodology, “filmmakers, along with anthropologists, have an ethical, political, aesthetic, and scientific obligation to be reflexive and self-critical” (Tomaselli, 1996:206).

The works of many other theorists support Ruby’s concern for reflexivity in ethnographic/anthropological documentary film. Peter Biella (1993:49) argues that “Most ethnographic films exist without any scholarly support”. They are often perceived as inferior to ethnographic writing, because they lack scholarly apparatus such as footnotes and references, and suffer from a “loss of clarity and complexity” when many hours of footage is condensed into a film (Biella, 1993:149, 163). According to Heider (1976) the value of an ethnographic film is proportional to the significance of the research and analysis on which it is based. One often responds sceptically to a documentary that gives no indication as to the sources of its information. An awareness of the methodology involved in the making of a particular film would give one insight into the credibility of its content. “Revelation of process requires incorporation of the observer/anthropologist” (Tomaselli, 1996:206). “Ethnographic film should be understood as a record not just of another culture, but of an encounter between filmmaker and film subjects who between them achieve a form of communication across the cultural divide” (Henley, 1998:36). Crawford (1995:8) argues, “Whether the anthropologist likes it or not, he or she is forced into the position of and intermediary between the society in which research is carried out and the outside world” in a *process* of ‘othering’ and ‘becoming’.

The exclusion of the ethnographic presence (Heider, 1976) from the product creates a huge gap in understanding the behaviour of the ‘object’ of study, as this is inextricably involved with the object’s interactions with the filmmaker. The ethnographic presence to a significant extent shapes the film, as “people under observation often act and react for the camera rather than behaving as if it was not present” (Tomaselli, 1996:197). Through reflexivity “filmmakers can build their presence into the structure of the film and actually show the effects that their observation is having on the behaviour of the people being filmed” (Tomaselli, 1996:198). Reflexivity deals with films as ‘structured creations’, underlining that ‘this is a film’ by revealing the presence of the camera and film crew (Crawford, 1992:77). *N!ai* to some extent includes the ethnographic presence, but does not really show the interaction and relationship between *N!ai* and John Marshall. Mostly it seems she is talking to the camera, not to a person. A filmmaker can never be a fly on the wall; the presence of an outsider will always affect the dynamics of the subject community.

David MacDougall (1995:125) concurs that “no ethnographic film is merely a record of another society: it is always a record of the meeting between a filmmaker and that society”. He argues that:

In his refusal to give his subjects access to the film, the filmmaker refuses them access to himself, for this is clearly his most important activity when he is among them. In denying a part of his own humanity, he denies a part of theirs. If not in his personal demeanour, then in the significance of his working method, he inevitably reaffirms the colonial origins of anthropology (MacDougall, 1995:124).

Making films about people without consulting or interacting with them in an atmosphere of equality among human beings contributes to objectification of the other and perpetuates racial dominance and supremacist attitudes. MacDougall (1995:125) argues for these patterns of Western hierarchical superiority to be reversed by the possibility of Participatory Cinema, “bearing witness to the event of the film and making strengths of what most films are at pains to conceal. Here the filmmaker acknowledges his entry upon the world of his subjects and yet asks them to imprint directly upon the film their own culture”. Tomaselli (1996:165) also refers to Participatory/Shared Anthropology, which involves “treating subjects as equals and building mutual respect. Subjects contribute to films and representations of themselves”.

The Great Dance (2000) to some extent attempts to achieve this criterion (see Dodd, 2002). The acknowledgement that the film was based on the original field recordings of !Nqate Xqamxebe indicates a degree of participation by the San in their representation. According to director Craig Foster, “we would go through each sequence of the film with them to get their detailed feedback” (Sterkowicz, 2000:37). Executive producer James Hersov stated, “our film was made with the full cooperation of the individuals and community involved...we have tried to let this film be the hunters’ story” (Hersov, 2001). The portrayal of hunting in the film seems to resonate with San people, as Belinda Kruiper (2000) said, “catching the truth and essence of what happened between man and beast...I was immediately at peace with this filmmaker”.

“Films about people are specific discourses embedded in broader, constantly changing social processes and ways of encountering others, whether or not these are acknowledged in the films themselves” (Tomaselli, 1992:216). One cannot fully understand a film outside the context of its production. “The problem for the viewer is how to distinguish between the mental text elicited by the representation on screen, the representation as it occurred or was enacted, and the pro-filmic event itself (what actually existed prior to the making of the film)” (Tomaselli, 1992:214). With regard to reflexivity:

The ultimate comment may be that Marshall’s *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980); the first edited ethnographic film to admit modernity amongst the San, was made at the same time and place as *Gods I* and includes a scene on the making of Uys’s film. The two films intersected each other, each a comment on different paradigmatic moments and ways of representing the San. These films may well articulate two sides of the same coin, the one side now legitimated at the expense of the other (Tomaselli, 1992:217).

The reason filmmakers such as Jamie Uys may resist the legitimisation of the reflexive film at the expense of the unidimensional product is that reflexivity carries the risk of forcing one to get inside a story one does not want to be in (Denzin, 1998:281). Far more comfortable to remain safely in one’s theoretical air-conditioned car or hotel, without having to deal with the poverty, the discomfort, the sickness, the drunkenness, the hunger, the fear. I wonder why Marshall included that scene, where we laugh at the white directors who cannot understand the actor when he picks up little “is this supposed to be my son?” for the hundredth time and greets him with an affectionate “Hey you little creep”. Is it supposed to show the difference between Marshall and filmmakers like Jamie Uys, or Marshall in 1978 and the naïve, idealistic American boy? Or to legitimate Marshall’s ethnographic presence and construction of a film at the expense of this more obvious one?

N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman was the result of Marshall's return decades later to the group he had previously filmed. Visibility of the director in the film "draws viewer attention to the nature of the subsequent encounter in the context of massive social changes which have occurred in the interim" (Tomaselli, 1996:207-8). The context of *N!ai* is quite specific, the film includes interviews with N!ai and also with government officials, visits to the school, the clinic, financial issues. The scene where "we joined N!ai at church" and listened to the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, whom N!ai thought was quite the slut for going around alone and talking to a strange man (Jesus) who was clearly trying to take advantage of her, gives a "being there" impression of the cultural imperialism that existed. Through his years of filmmaking, Marshall seems to some extent to have learnt the value trying to "put the surrounding realities into a context around the window of [his] camera" (Marshall 1993:83). Films such as *N!ai* offers "extremely uncomfortable scenes of San social integration, drunkenness, cultural alienation...They engage viewers at an emotional level not normally achieved by anthropologist filmmakers" (Tomaselli, 1996:200).

Reflexive film incorporates the voices, the ideas and the experiences of its subjects, as well as its producers. The voices in Marshall's film include N!ai speaking in !Kung, an African woman translating N!ai's story, and the white narrator giving additional information, the voice of the producers. To some extent, it is N!ai's story. *The Great Dance's* use of a black African narrator addressing the audience directly creates a sense of authenticity, as the viewer feels that in the encounter, the Bushman, rather than the white director, is speaking to him or her. The use of subtitles as the characters themselves speak in their own language increases the sense of hearing the voice of the Bushman (Nichols, 1981:182-185). These films begin to allow ordinary people to speak out about their lives. With regard to process: "...teaching the technical aspects of film and video; it is important to understand how photographic and electronic techniques, properly mastered, can influence narrative and post-narrative structures and contribute to new ways of story telling" (Kohn, Personal Statement).

The critical reflection – initiated by the application of reflexive methodology – on one's interaction with one's subjects raises the issue of responsibility towards them. After filming his original footage in the 1950s, Marshall returned to America where he studied anthropology. After that his footage was accompanied by anthropological study guides (Tomaselli, 1992:212-3). "The dominant anthropological paradigm until the late 1970s was that the San were remnants of the Stone Age. Living in a state of 'pristine primitiveness'" (Tomaselli, 1992:208). Marshall tackled this assumption by publishing ethnographies on the San, "concentrating on how to improve their material conditions" (Tomaselli, 1992:213). Reflection on his experiences filming the San led Marshall to consider their practical, social needs. Tomaselli (1996:120) suggests that the films Marshall made after his return to Namibia in the late 1970s "reflect an urgency, a commitment, and offer proposals and solutions that have already had some concrete effect for !Kung survival and dignity". "Through the !Kung Bushmen Foundation, Marshall facilitated resistance by the Namibian San to the South African government's destruction of this group politically, culturally, economically, territorially and socially" (Tomaselli, 1996:118).

It is difficult, however, to determine how effective a film can be in altering the standard of living of a remote community. "The literature is replete with claims by filmmakers on how films and videos have benefited 'their' subjects...claims like this need to be treated with scepticism and further evaluation" (Tomaselli, 1996:275). *The Great Dance* is the first film to be supported by WIMSA (Working Group of

Indigenous Minorities in South Africa), an organisation that aims to achieve political recognition for the San and to regain their identity and pride in their culture. This documentary is perceived to give the San “a more far-reaching and hopefully louder and clearer voice than they would otherwise have had” (Weldon, 2000). Roger Chennells, who works as a human rights lawyer for certain Bushman communities, states that, “WIMSA and the San heartily endorse the broad promotion of the film and strongly encourage broadcasters and distributors to give it as wide a screening and as much publicity as possible” (Chennells, 2000). It seems that the representation of the San through this medium has the potential to make a positive difference in their lives through the responses and awareness it creates. Time will tell what real changes are made as a result of the distribution of this film. The Bushmen in Botswana are still today victims of appalling human rights violations. N!ai in Tshumkwe may not have experienced any tangible, long-term benefits or liberation from dependence as a result of starring in a film that has been viewed by thousands of anthropologists, scholars and others:

If anthropologists are to guide constructive processes resulting from their encounter with communities, they need to theorise the nature of that encounter and to acknowledge the power structures and relationships that develop. This is done by Marshall in *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman* (1980) with his vignette on Uys’s concluding shots of *Gods I*. But this reflexivity about another film is lacking from his own films although a Documentary Educational Resources (DER) catalogue states: ‘Ironically, some of N!ai’s problems stem from the wealth she has acquired through her work with the Marshall film crew, as well as work from numerous other white photographers and filmmakers who have found her beautiful’ (Marshall Cabezas and Nierenberg, 1990:4). N!ai’s photogenic demeanour has become the community’s nemesis: they are just as dependent on her as she is on white film crews (Tomaselli, 1992: 216).

N!ai’s story is an example of how relationships within a community can be changed by filmmakers. In the first part of the film, set in the 1950s, she is part of a cohesive clan. By the end she is alienated from the community and her family. This was largely as a result of her income from filmmakers and photographers. The film includes many shots of N!ai being photographed. In the emergence of a cash economy, the community became dependent on N!ai and her income, which resulted in tension within the society and between family members (Tomaselli, 1996: 267). People resented and were jealous of her because she had more money than anyone else, and was not always seen to share it with the community. *N!ai* depicts with stark honesty the social violence caused by N!ai’s status as a ‘film star’ in the community, despite the fact that her payments were as little as R10 per day (Tomaselli 1996:116). So she was exploited as well as alienated:

...the subtext of *N!ai* is the indignity of multiple dependencies...She remembers her earlier uncomplicated independence, but now she complains about people’s dependency upon her, and her dependency on whites...The sequence where Marshall implicitly criticises Jamie Uys for directing his fictional story in *The Gods Must be Crazy*, is possibly also a self-reflexive comment by Marshall on his own direction of all the previous films in which N!ai has ‘starred’ (Tomaselli, 1996:110-11).

Tomaselli (1996:269) suggests that “it is also perhaps to Marshall’s credit that he has not shied away from filming the consequences of modernity partly imported by filmmakers to the Ju/’hoansi”. At the close of the film N!ai is despairing, mocked and abused, death is “dancing her ragged”. Her last plea is “don’t look at my face”. Her beauty, and hence the attention of photographers and filmmakers, including Marshall,

ultimately brings her more misery than success. N!ai's story does not exclude Marshall from those filmmakers and photographers that have perhaps contributed to her alienation: "People are yelling at me because of the work I have with you and other white people".

Search for the Bushmen

This brutal self-awareness does not seem to have developed in many more recent films about the Bushmen. "But who *are* the real Bushmen of Southern Africa?" asks Agnieszka Piotrowska, the director and narrator of *Search for the Bushmen* (2002), a National Geographic production in which she, defining herself as a European woman and filmmaker, intends to dispel the myth of the Bushmen's ancient way of life, to uncover history and to separate myth from truth. Piotrowska's quest to learn the truth about the Bushmen is undertaken in the company of three researchers: Dr Dieter Nou, a German archaeologist, James Suzman, an anthropologist, and Nigel Crawhall, a Canadian socio-linguist. It becomes apparent that the film is as much about researchers as it is about Bushmen. Whether or not this was intentional, it gives insight into the process of conducting ethnographic research and the interaction and political intrigue that goes on between scholars and filmmakers within a particular field of research. A degree of reflexivity is evident in the film, with the director making her presence known through a reflection in a rear view mirror or a camera lens, and her voice is heard asking questions during interviews. Piotrowska offers personal opinions and ideas as well as factual information. This self-consciousness does not seem to extend to discussion or questioning of her own preconceptions, research methods and subjectivity.

Piotrowska becomes concerned about academics building their careers on the Bushmen. "Wasn't their research a new kind of colonialism in which the western visitors somehow managed to benefit more from the situation than the community which is being researched?" "Do they give enough back?" She asks Dr Nou whether he is a colonialist. He responds that in order to colonise people, they need to be alive. His research subjects are very much dead. She then asks Suzman to define colonialism. He declines on the basis that this cannot be dealt with in the required soundbite. The European filmmaker does admit, to her reflection in the window, that "filmmakers are not exempt from the question. In my brief engagement with the Bushmen, will I be giving back enough?" She then quotes van der Post conveniently remarking that the only way to give to the Bushmen is to give them a place in our hearts and imaginations. I think they might prefer R20.

It is interesting to compare the stylistic ways in which the researchers are framed in this film. Archaeologist Dieter Nou doubles as mounted, rifle-bearing Namibian colonialist, and is also presented as a student of dusty artefacts that have no relevance to the search for the Bushmen. James Suzman is presented as a very laid-back character, hanging out with the Bushmen and talking with them, lying about beside the campfire, but not actually doing anything. No mention is made of his very extensive research into the present status of the San in Southern Africa, managing a research project commissioned by the European Union, implemented by the Legal Assistance Centre in Windhoek. Nigel Crawhall, socio-linguist, is portrayed in a more favourable light than the other two researchers, with emphasis on his giving back to the community, his involvement in the land claim, and in the restoration of cultural pride. This film shows very clearly the power struggles involved in the research/filmmaking process, and the ways in which researchers and filmmakers relate to one another, often based on superficial understanding of each other's work.

Search for the Bushmen gives the audience a certain insight into the work and characters of the three on-screen consultants, but we never meet Piotrowska. She is evident as the ethnographic presence in the film, and via reflexive filming/editing techniques, which show her reflection in a window, her voice asking a question. She is absent, however, as a person, as a researcher, as a filmmaker constructing interpretations. The style of the film is that of an autobiographical account of Piotrowska's search for the Bushmen, yet the subject of this autobiography remains a mystery, in contrast to her aim of separating the myth about Bushmen from the truth. Who is Agnieszka Piotrowska? What gives her the right to frame these researchers as neo-colonialists? It is evident that her knowledge of the Bushmen is very limited beyond what she has learned from her consultants. The lack of depth in Piotrowska's research relating to the Bushmen is evident in her conclusion that "these people MUST begin to imagine a different tomorrow!" It would be nice to be able to imagine effective political representation, redressing of human rights violations, water, food, housing and employment into existence. John Lennon would be impressed. This film, while it aims to represent the Bushmen in a realistic and empowering manner, illustrates the power held by filmmakers to represent their subjects in ways which reflect their own perceptions and interests. Years of research and field experience are capsuled into a few intriguing segments and presented to the world: such is the balance of power between the researcher and the film producer.

I Am You Are?; Reading Photographs in the Kalahari; Vetkat; Kalahari Fires

Students working within the 'Observers and Observed' project have produced videos about the Bushmen communities visited on field trips, drawing on reflexive methodology and theories of auto-ethnography. *I Am You Are?* (2003) is a video production conducted by Marit Sætre during the July 2002 trip to the Kalahari, which intends to reflexively describe "the meeting between the group of researchers that I am travelling with and the San Bushmen in the community" (Sætre, 2003). Sætre's written dissertation critically analyses the process of her production of the video, while arguing for the value of reflexive methodology: "Using reflexive methodology in depicting the Bushmen was an attempt on my behalf to visualise the 'making' and thereby maybe diminish the 'othering' of the depicted subjects" (Sætre, 2003). The combination of her writing and the video production itself gives extensive insight into the production process and the interaction between researcher, research subjects and filmmaker. My position in this process, as a "fellow researcher" who "often reacted more negatively to the camera" and "[got] irritated" when asked to please repeat something for the camera makes me a more critical examiner of this process and self-criticism. Where Sætre says that she "never asked the Bushmen to repeat themselves in such a manner", she did in fact ask a translator that a conversation with Kort Jan be repeated so that it could be filmed. This is clearly a minor criticism, and does not intend to discredit Sætre's work, but rather points to the extreme challenge of the level of self criticism required by the ideal of reflexivity.

Linje Manyozo's *Reading Photographs in the Kalahari* (2002) also provides a reflexive account of field research with the Bushman. In the video he introduces himself – we see him walking down the CCMS corridor in his bright red trendy sneakers, and sitting in his cubicle in front of the computer and a pile of 'ethnographic photographs' that comprise his subject matter. He discusses on camera his research topic and methodology. Footage taken in the field, usually filmed by other researchers shows him interviewing ≠Khomani Bushmen, with the help of a translator, and discussing the photographs he is studying. Although the field work footage does not

include critical analysis of his role as a researcher in the community, the video as a whole gives significant insight into the process by which his research was constructed.

Timothy Reinhardt (2002) used self-reflexive writing to analyse his video, *Vetkat* (2002), which describes a day spent at Blinkwater in the company of Vetkat Kruiper, as well as conversations about their home filmed at Mary Lange's house in Westville, and was screened at the opening of the 2002 exhibition of Vetkat's art, held at the Bergtheil Museum in Westville. Tim describes the video as "an attempt to soak up the atmosphere of what it was like to be at Blinkwater on the 19 July 2002" (Reinhardt, 2002). His analytical essay describes his experience of the field trip and of that day at Blinkwater, as well as the observational cinema camera techniques used to create the footage that later, at the request of the facilitators of the exhibition, became *Vetkat*. Reinhardt (2002) describes the video as reflexive, because "it reveals self, both of the researchers and I, and builds our *presence* into the video":

No attempt was made to exclude our presence in framing, or editing. The researchers' arrival and presence, from vehicles (4x4s) and possessions, to self, were included in the shots. The video breaks from its mould of still frames when I walk into the kitchen, not a smooth transition, but it brings back the cameraman, 'the I', into the video. I stepped out from behind the camera, to thank Belinda and Vetkat at the end of their interview, and returned to replace the lens cap before powering down (Reinhardt, 2002).

Vetkat was screened for Belinda and Vetkat before it was shown at the exhibition. Their feedback was very positive, and the only change they requested was the use of 'Bushman' instead of 'San'. They also helped with the captions used to identify the different building structures shown in the video. Belinda said after watching it that it was so beautiful, she just wanted to go home...The video will also be used by the Kruipers to promote Blinkwater as an artistic retreat.

Kalahari Fires (Mary Lange and Xolani Nxumalo, 2002) is the first video about Bushmen which to be produced within the project. At this stage, *Kalahari Fires* is the only production which has received extensive reception analysis, as it has been screened for San communities in the Northern Cape, at Ngwatle and Monong, as well as several local schools as part of the process of educating young South African learners about present day First Peoples (see Lange, 2002). *Kalahari Fires* was edited from footage taken on Tomaselli's first trip to Ngwatle in 1995. The 1995 research team was accompanied by eleven-year-old Charlize Tomaselli (see Tomaselli, 2001a), who narrates the video at age 18, reflecting on her earlier experiences of meeting the Bushmen. This reflexive technique makes the video relevant to primary school learners, as they see the San through the eyes of another child. Thus reflexivity in film engages the audience (and in some cases the subjects of the film) with the producer and the production process, as well as the final product, and heightens the sense of connection the audience has to the film subjects through the experience of the producer.

Films such as *N!ai: Story of a !Kung Woman*, *The Great Dance*, *Search for the Bushmen* as well as the video productions conducted by CCMS students illustrate ways in which reflexive methodology can be applied extensively or in part to the process of filmmaking, and how the application of reflexivity can contribute to understanding of the communities depicted and the experience of researching and filming them. The location of *I Am You Are?*, *Reading Photographs in the Kalahari*, *Vetkat* and *Kalahari Fires* within the 'Observers and Observed' project promotes a high level of critical reflexivity, as the producer is held accountable to and informed by the memories and perceptions of the other researchers, and the responses of the

communities depicted, who will have the opportunity to view and comment on the videos during subsequent trips. The extent to which producer and production process are integrated into these productions allow viewers to gain a deeper understanding of the research context through being able to relate to an individual's subjective, personal experience of the subject community.

Reflexivity in writing

We must invent a new language, a new form of writing... This must be the language of a new sensibility, a new reflexivity, refusing old categories. This new language, poststructural to the core, will be personal, emotional, biographically specific, minimalist in its use of theoretical terms. It will allow ordinary people to speak out and articulate the interpretive theories that they use to make sense of their lives... This language will be visual, cinematic, kaleidoscopic, rhizomatic, rich and thick in its own descriptive detail, always interactive as it moves back and forth between lived experience and the cultural texts that shape and write that experience (Denzin, 1997:26).

Experiencing reflexivity

At the start of my study of reflexivity, Keyan Tomaselli introduced me to the writing of Nate Kohn (see Kohn, 1995; 1998; 1999; 2000; Kohn and Lee, 2001; Kohn and Love, 2001): "There's plenty of time to read *about* auto-ethnography. I want you to *experience* auto-ethnography first" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:737). Reading Kohn's work was to experience auto-ethnography:

"Your teeth are green," I say.

"Like my eyes," she says.

And she laughs.

"Like your soul," I say.

"Like Africa."

"Like money."

"Like my hard hard petrifying heart," she says, and she laughs again.

Without a word, Pete puts a glass of orange juice in front of me, the plastic touching the formica with a certain hollow indifference.

"So," she says, "this is my diner. Isn't it everything I told you it was? Don't you just love it?"

I am drawing interlocking triangles on the yellow pad. New words, with the help of my index finger, have inched their way onto the computer screen.

Bhabha's Third Space is a possibility opened up only to those living in the colonised position, that is, the Third Space is a way in which the subordinate undoes and unsettles the dialectic of the coloniser. Agamben's Coming Community is born in oscillation, moving between communion and disaggregation, a community completely without presuppositions. Trinh Minh-ha's assault on binarisms finds the challenge in the hyphen itself. "the realm in-between where predetermined rules cannot fully apply."²⁴

"How could I forget the diner," I say. "I can still smell it."

I write "diner on the pad, followed by "liminal space...between here and here..." I write "Trix" with lots of Xs overlapping. (Kohn, 1998).

²⁴ Trinh (1991:157).

This extract from 'Wonder never seizes' (Kohn, 1998) informs, more than any theory of reflexivity could, my understanding of the essence of reflexive writing. It is, as Norman Denzin (1997) suggests, poststructural, emotional, biographical, personal, visual and descriptive rather than theoretical, evoking interaction between lived experience and cultural texts, between theory and reality. It disregards rules and conventions of writing. It creates intimate awareness of the personas, Trix and the author, as individuals, of the relationship between them. There is a sense of place, of being here or there, of the theoretical "third space" as a tangible location, of the interactivity between theory and experience. In a personal statement, Nate Kohn describes the aims, considerations and ideals he applies to his writing:

My goal always is to create evocative texts...In these texts, I am always aware of such issues as race, class, and gender, and how they are re-articulated in the world today, and exposed in its liminal spaces...My writings are designed to bring new ideas from my world to yours and in the process, to promote fresh ways of looking, writing and creating – to generate new metaphors...that open the word and the world to astounding interpretations and inspire new productions. Through these auto-ethnographic techniques of textual production...I hope to encourage positive changes in the academy, the industry, and even in that most slippery of spaces, everyday life (Kohn, Personal Statement).

Thus auto-ethnographic texts are designed to evoke context, to create a sense of place and to locate the event or idea described in relation to issues of class, race and gender. Auto-ethnography exposes readers and writers to new worlds and new interpretations and understandings, provoking a fresh and critical way of looking at everyday life.

The contact zones

This kind of writing is particularly applicable to describing encounters in what Mary Louise Pratt (1999:2) calls the *contact zones*: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today". My experiences in the Kalahari have involved the meeting of different cultures, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where the legacy of colonialism is still being lived and remembered every day. Pratt defines an auto-ethnographic text as "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (Pratt, 1999:3). She uses this definition in terms of so-called others representing themselves in response to the ways in which they have been represented: "if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), auto-ethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in *response to* or in dialogue with those texts" (Pratt, 1999:3). I think that this concept can also be applied to researchers representing their subjects in terms of both colonial depiction and their experiences in the contact zone, as well as representing themselves in the light of the ways in which they are perceived by their subjects of research.

An auto-ethnographic understanding²⁵

I am not going to attempt to define the different terms that are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature on qualitative research, ethnography, reflexivity, auto-ethnography, reflexive ethnography and so on. Rather, I will examine the concepts inherent in these words implying movement beyond definitions towards understanding and experience. Ethnography is about contextualising individuals, communities, events and experiences in terms of politics, history, representation, interpretation and personal understanding:

Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context. It is not simply the production of new information or research data, but rather the way in which such information or data are transferred into a written or visual form. As a result, it combines research design, fieldwork and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives (Tedlock, 2000:455).

In placing events, encounters and interpretations into a more meaningful context, the experience of the researcher becomes a significant part of making sense of research. Auto-ethnographic writing draws on historical, political and personal experience to make sense of research encounters. "Auto-ethnographers fold their own life histories and testimonies into the self-stories of others" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002c:71). There is "emphasis on an experiential approach", in which "the researcher acquires entrance into and at least partial socialisation by the society he or she studies" (Tedlock, 2000:457). In reflexive ethnography the writer is present in the text (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002b:1). As well as increased emphasis on the experience of the researcher, auto-ethnography involves awareness of research subjects as people, not data, and understanding through interaction: "by entering into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of their subjects than they can by using any other method" (Tedlock, 2000:471). The usual distinction between 'Self' and 'Other' is blurred (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002c:71). In auto-ethnography, knowledge is sought less in texts than in lived experience: "*how* we know is intimately bound up with *what* we know, where we learned it, and what we have experienced" (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000:1059).

"Interpretive ethnographers make the world visible through their writing practices. The reflexive ethnographer is morally and politically self-aware, self-consciously present in his/her writing, often speaking with the first person voice" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002a:xii). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2002b:3) assert that, in examining classical ethnographic texts, "we see their presumptions of authority, legitimation, and rights of representation as a claim to timeless truth. We are no longer so innocent". This dualism between innocence and experience calls for a new way of writing ethnography. The relationship between researcher and research subject in the social sciences, both historically and presently, has been "obscured in social science texts, protecting privilege, securing distance, and laminating the controversies" (Fine, 1994:72). Writing that empowers instead of others people has to be critically honest. "Writing for and about the community in which one has grown up

²⁵ See Barbara Tedlock (2000:456-458) for further discussion of the history of ethnographic methodology; how the "model of experientially gained knowledge...replaced armchair methods" with methodology based on ongoing participation in subjects' lives (Tedlock, 2000:456).

and lived, or at least achieved some degree of insider status, should produce engaged writing centring on the on-going dialectical, political-personal relationship between self and other” (Tedlock, 2000:267). The method of writing has to incorporate critical, existential self-awareness:

In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking ‘what do I want wanting to know you or me?’” (Trinh, 1989:76).

In writing auto-ethnography “authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740). Auto-ethnographic writers focus on their role in the community under study, and their methods of study: “participant observation has become the observation of participation” (Tedlock, 2000:471). The significance of the researcher’s experience lies in the way in which it illuminates the culture under study (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740). A methodology of writing which documents the “moment-to-moment concrete details of a life” provides a significant way of knowing about a different culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:737). The process of auto-ethnographic writing (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:739) has become a focus in itself as it creates knowledge of the representation, study and understanding of ‘other’ people:

Auto-ethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through and ethnographic wide-angle lens, focussing outwards 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 and Bochner, 2000:739).

The process of auto-ethnography involves examining social and cultural encounters in relation to personal experience and interpretations.

The purpose of auto-ethnographic writing is practical as well as academic. It is all very well to promote methodology that invokes critical honesty, self-awareness and accurate representation, but if this is of no benefit to the people being studied it seems like a waste of time. Denzin and Lincoln (2002a:ix) assert that “qualitative inquiry becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project, a project that joins the researcher with the researched in an on-going moral dialogue”:

It’s important to get exposed to local stories that bring us into worlds of experience that are unknown to us, show us the concrete daily details of people whose lives have been underrepresented or not represented at all, help us reduce their marginalisation, show us how partial and situated our understanding of the world is (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:748).

The application of auto-ethnographic methodology directs researchers to examine more closely and responsibly the marginalisation and underrepresentation of ‘other’ people and their ethical obligations and responsibilities in the research process. Michelle Fine and her co-researchers (2000) reflect on their research methods in terms of community, race, information and consent, stories, voice and responsibilities:

Our obligation is to come clean ‘at the hyphen’, meaning that we interrogate in our writings who we are as we co-produce the narratives we presume to ‘collect’, and we anticipate how the public and policy makers will receive, distort and misread our data. It is now acknowledged that critical ethnographers have a responsibility to talk about our

identities, why we interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report, how we frame our data, on whom we shed our scholarly gaze, who is protected and not protected as we do our work. What is our participatory responsibility to research with and for a more progressive community life? (Fine *et al*, 2000:123).

Reflexive writing requires the writer to interrogate his/her responsibility and motivation and to be transparent about the research processes and the impact of these processes on the final product and on the research subjects involved. Fine *et al* (2000:126-127) offer some questions on which researchers should reflect: "Have I connected the 'voices' and 'stories' of individuals back to the set of historic, structural and economic relations in which they are situated?"; "Have I deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analyses can be constructed?"; "Have some informants/ constituencies/ participants reviewed the material with me and interpreted, dissented, challenged my interpretations? And how do I report these departures/agreements in perspective?" The acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the writer emphasises the significance of the research partners' review and interpretation of the research product, to ensure that their voices have not been distorted in the writing process.

"Because ethnography is both a process and a product, ethnographers' lives are embedded within their field experiences in such a way that all of their interactions involve moral choices" (Tedlock, 2000:455). Norman Denzin told his story of coming to realise that a new methodology was needed in order to study life and human beings:

Right after I think it was Kennedy died, I was sent out to interview people. As I went house to house, I met people crying, unable to talk. Christ, I didn't have the heart to ask them the survey questions. I realised that I didn't believe in what I was doing. It was then, in this epiphany, that I decided there had to be a different way of doing research (personal testimony, cited in Ceglowski, 2002:6).

This sense of moral responsibility makes the researcher vulnerable to self-criticism: "the stories we write put us in conversation with ourselves as well as our readers" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:748). The researcher is cautioned, "if you're not willing to be a vulnerable observer, then maybe you ought to reconsider doing auto-ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:752). Fine and Weis (2002:292), in a reflexive analysis of the process of conducting their own research, observe that:

We feel the weight of academics; that is, as public intellectuals, we need to tell the stories from the side of policy that is never asked to speak, to interrupt the hegemony of elite voices dictating what is good for this segment of the population. And yet we feel the need to document the pain and suffering in these communities and the incredible resilience and energy that percolates.

In the auto-ethnographic encounter, research subjects are perceived primarily as human beings – whether as suffering victims or hopeful survivors, or both – rather than as policy issues.

The auto-ethnographic approach to research has been widely criticised for being unscientific and subjective. These thoughts are offered to critics of reflexive methods:

They think that if these personal voices can be silenced, then perhaps they can return to business as usual in the social sciences, protected against the contingencies of human experience, restored in their traditional belief in a transcendent position from which to speak (and interpret) with authority, freed of moral choices and emotional dilemmas, and

inspired to champion control over fate, facts over meanings and rigor over peace of mind (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:747).

Reflexivity is about making the personal voice heard, both the voice of the researcher and of the research subject, describing their encounters, experiences and understandings, where truth is valued over peace of mind and control.

They Lie, We Lie: Getting on with Anthropology

They Lie, We Lie: Getting on with Anthropology (Metcalf, 2002) is an example of reflexive ethnographic research. "This is an essay about lies: white lies and ones as black as night, evasions, exaggerations, delusions, half-truths and credible denials" (Metcalf, 2002:1). *They Lie, We Lie* highlights the power relations and the complexities that occur in the practice of ethnography, and specifically within the relationships that develop between researchers and their informants. It demonstrates that exploitation and deception are among the activities of the informant as well as the ethnographer, as both have their own particular agenda and motivation. "It is a matter not only of lies told *by* anthropologists, but also of lies told *to* anthropologists" (Metcalf, 2002:1).

This book, written from an auto-ethnographic perspective, describes Peter Metcalf's experiences among the people of a Berawan Longhouse in Borneo. Metcalf's discussion of lies, power and ethnicity gives great insight into the depth of complexity involved in ethnographic work. Few things are what they seem, and nothing is simple. The writer poses the question:

There is nothing self-evident about why anyone would bother talking to the would-be ethnographer – assuming they do – except perhaps for polite platitudes. In unfamiliar surroundings, he or she is usually socially inept, and often linguistically incompetent. Such people are generally avoided. Yet ethnographies are full of obliging informants, hastening to play Sancho Panza to the ethnographer's Don Quixote. We have to ask ourselves what transactions of power and knowledge underlie their motives (Metcalf, 2002:1).

Metcalf provides considerable insight into the relationships between anthropologists and their informants. *They Lie, We Lie* highlights the obstacles and complexities that arise from the power relations and the guarding of sacred knowledge inherent in many anthropological interactions and relationships.

Metcalf (2002:v) describes Bilo (Widow) Kasi, his principle informant in the Berawan Longhouse community:

She was for years an obstacle; a tiny woman with great authority, old even when I first knew her in the mid-1970s; who did not want me to know certain things, who wanted certain knowledge to die with her. She puzzled me then, although I think I understand her better now. Nevertheless, I had to circumvent her, and that is what I did; using every dodge I could find...

The anthropologist observes that, "I had enmeshed myself in a web of lies" as "everyone – I, Kasi, my old and new allies, was misrepresenting his or her goals and intentions in an ever-expanding web of deceit" (Metcalf, 2002:37). The role of the anthropologist as perceived by the community can also have great significance. Originally, the people of Long Teru thought that Metcalf was a communist agent because he did not seem to have missionary intentions: "Eventually, people accepted, more or less, my account of my goals, and assigned me a role accordingly: I was instructed repeatedly to 'make the Berawan name big,' a sort of global public

relations man". The author observes that "disempowered people everywhere will grasp at straws to gain some voice in public discourse" (Metcalf, 2002:14). Relations of power and dependency are easily manipulated. Perhaps more honesty on the part of the researcher could level the power balance in a context of truth.

The assertion that anthropologists misinform and exploit, and are misinformed and exploited by their subjects suggests a degree of crisis within the discipline: "...the assertion that it is fundamentally impossible to know anything or say anything about another culture" has a "distracting effect on those who – for one reason or another – want to get on with anthropology" (Metcalf, 2002:10). Metcalf (2002:10) observes that: "For many nowadays [anthropology] feels like trying to pick up a heavy object while simultaneously fending off a snappy dog" and that "fieldwork is a profoundly humbling experience". Among the metaphorical heavy objects are the weight of the vast socio-cultural and economic gaps that exist between researcher and subject, the association of anthropology with colonialism and the complexity of ethnicity and cultural difference, while the threat of writing a culture's obituary snaps at the anthropologist's heels.

"The peculiarity of relationships in fieldwork is that they bridge cultural boundaries that, almost invariably, also mark differential distributions of wealth and influence" (Metcalf, 2002:48). The anthropologist has a degree of wealth and power in the world, and the ability, which is resented by his subjects, to leave whenever he so chooses (Metcalf, 2002:45). Yet the author found it nearly impossible to consider himself empowered during his fieldwork, remaining "pathetically sensitive" to the way in which he was perceived by the community (Metcalf, 2002:45). Different ways of exercising power, as well as vastly different lives, ways of thinking and beliefs tend to impede the process of getting on with anthropology:

To presume...to see into other people's minds immediately defeats our purpose. It is only hesitantly that I can make out any part of Kasi's world, but, as any storyteller knows, hesitations have their dramatic impact. On this I have already taken my cue from Kasi: they lie, we lie (Metcalf, 2002:52).

Perhaps the point of auto-ethnography is for researchers to start telling the truth. This book, describing the anthropologist's personal experience in the field, creates awareness of the complexity of ethnographic research, of the long process of seeing just a little into other people's minds and other people's worlds, of the social, political and cultural boundaries that exist between 'us' and 'them', of the way in which truth can be distorted at so many stages in the process of ethnographic research.

Healing Makes our Hearts Happy

"You [three] know about papers. You write on them. This is how you can help us. Send a letter to those government people. Tell them about how we are no longer a people. And tell them that we need our land back to become a people able to feed ourselves" (Tshao Matze, Ju/'hoansi community member cited in Katz *et al.*, 1997:7).

Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy: Spiritual and cultural transformation among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi (1997) is an account by three researchers – Richard Katz, Megan Biesele and Verna St Denis, of time spent and research conducted among the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen of Namibia. I chose not to study this book as a primary case study, as I have not had the opportunity to visit this particular community and learn about their perceptions of this production and the research process it involved. However, it must be mentioned as it provides a clear example of the process of

applying reflexive methodology to research about the San. It shows how, in the case of researching a different culture to one's own, the critical auto-ethnographic awareness of one's role and responsibility in the community leads to very careful representation of the other culture. The book is permeated with a sense of respect for and awareness of the needs and values of the subject community:

The Ju/'hoansi asked the three of us to become paper people; to use the power of the written word to make Ju/'hoan needs and aspirations known to those who were now controlling their lives. This book, emphasising Ju/'hoan voices rather than academic theorising to better express the realities of their everyday lives, is one way we have tried to fulfil their request (Katz *et al*, 1997:xv).

The application of reflexive consideration to the writing of this book has enabled the voices of the Ju/'hoansi to be heard more clearly. "We have been asked by the Ju/'hoansi to 'tell our story to your people'...How do we tell the story so that the reality of the Ju/'hoansi comes through, so that they come alive as 'real' people, as 'ordinary' rather than exotic?" (Katz *et al*, 1997:xxiii). The writers conclude that, "The fundamental principle that guides our work is that *we* cannot tell the *Ju/'hoan* story. We try to provide a venue for the Ju/'hoansi to tell their own story as far as possible" (Katz *et al*, 1997:xxiii).

The writers of *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy* assert that, "an important part of any project, especially when it is work done with another culture, is for the researchers to reflect upon and analyse critically their roles and contributions" (Katz *et al*, 1997:147). Throughout the book the researchers critically reflect on "troubling questions related to [their] research in the Kalahari and the responsibilities entailed" (Katz *et al*, 1997:xvii):

The question of power and control is central to our reflections. Is it possible to be fully aware of how disparities in power distort perceptions, allowing those in control, even when well-intentioned, to promote half-truths as truths and claim the voice of others? Have we as researchers used the power inherent in our role so as to help, or at least not hinder, the Ju/'hoansi? And can persons outside the Ju/'hoan community offer genuine help? If so, how? (Katz *et al*, 1997:xvii).

Power relations, control, and the impact of research on the community involved are issues that need to be considered in working with and representing marginalised people.

Representing 'others' is a complex socio-cultural issue. Depictions of disempowerment can be seen to disempower people further, yet a romanticised version of reality draws attention away from basic needs and injustices suffered.

We must always remember that through they have been disempowered in national or regional politics, the Ju/'hoansi are anything but powerless; though they have been victimised, their lives are not adequately described by the experience of being victims. Part of the purpose of *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy* is to present the actual and potential power of the Ju/'hoan people (Katz *et al*, 1997:xxiv).

In this case, the authors decided to best represent the Ju/'hoansi by making space for them to represent themselves as far as possible, which would have involved a very lengthy process of interview recording, transcribing and translating. Reflexivity does not often offer an easier way, but critical reflection on the needs to the Ju/'hoan community by these researchers has allowed the Ju/'hoan people's voice to be heard:

The Ju/'hoan people have here an opportunity for a degree of self-presentation, which they asked us to help them communicate. We decided the best way to do this would be to tape and translate as much of their own speech as possible and to call on them to speak for themselves as often as we could in writing this book (Katz *et al*, 1997:161).

Critical reflection on representation of the Bushmen also involved omitting material where its use seemed like an invasion of personal privacy or revealing too much about their lives: "The entire process entailed great responsibility for bringing the book into being" (Katz *et al*, 1997:160). This responsibility involved making sure that community members would be happy with the final product: "Megan sits down with Kxao |O|Oo and goes over this book, still in manuscript form, page by page to ask for his reactions. It is one effort in our commitment to be sure the book gives to the Ju/'hoansi their voice..." (Katz *et al*, 1997:174-175).

In discussion about the authors' reflections on the aims and outcomes of the book, Verna St Denis observes:

I was just talking to a new graduate student who had done a lot of work in West Africa. On this side of the ocean, her university group is quite pleased with themselves because they've been very productive, meaning they've published a lot on their research findings. But on the other side of the ocean, the people being 'studied' don't see what's come of all this, particularly in terms of their own lives...I continually struggle with the idea of whether we could have used that research money for something of more tangible benefit to the people (Katz *et al*, 1997:177).

In terms of financial contribution, the authors' royalties will be used to establish a trust for the Ju/'hoansi to use as they determine (Katz *et al*, 1997:xvii). The researchers state that:

Ju/'hoansi who worked with us benefited economically from their association with us and were able to pass these benefits on to their family and relatives. In addition to paying our research assistants and those we interviewed, we shared our food supplies and used our vehicle to help gather firewood and make hunting and gathering trips, an enormous boost for strenuous activities (Katz *et al*, 1997:150).

However, these researchers do not innocently regard themselves as benevolent providers, as they are aware that "these economic benefits also must have introduced tensions in the community" (Katz *et al*, 1997:150). Megan Biesele acknowledges that "the whole research enterprise has the possibility of skimming off the cream of people's cultures and giving nothing back" (Katz *et al*, 1997:177).

Verna St Denis introduced the issue of reflexivity to the discussion on aims and outcomes:

...possible reaction to our book in terms of debate going on now in anthropology about self-reflexivity. There are those who say 'oh, no, we don't want to hear again about the struggles of the researcher. Who cares about that? Why does that now become the main story?' I don't want our book...to be dismissed by such persons. We have to talk about ourselves in a way that adds to the book's content (Katz *et al*, 1997:179).

I think this book has achieved Ruby's goal of revealing aspects of self intentionally in order to create understanding of the producer and the production process (Ruby, 1977:4). The use of self-reflexivity in *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy* does not necessarily provide all the answers to the issues of ethics, representation and power relations that occur in ethnographic research, yet it creates awareness of these dilemmas and complexities, of the context in which research takes place, and of the

process of trying to forge an empowering, equitable exchange between researchers and research subjects. It gives a clear argument for respectful engagement with research 'subjects' or partners, and for researchers to critically evaluate their methodology at every step of the process.

Observing the observers: Semiotics of the encounter

Where celebrity scholars rarely permit the facts to get in the way of their exquisitely crafted, wonderfully jargon-laden, and often self-referential arguments...the field researchers are often confronted with the facts that are disparaged by theorists: vehicle breakdowns in the middle of nowhere, subject communities destroyed by structural and political conditions beyond their and the researchers' control, and student researchers who, unable to cope with poverty and degradation on mass scales, unadvisedly take on the liberal guilt of 400 years of colonialism (Tomaselli, 2001a:284).

Perhaps researchers who never take on field experiences are able to "protect themselves from the mess of the real world by inserting great walls of texts between themselves and material life in general" (Tomaselli, 2001c:153). In the Kalahari reality hits too hard to be described in theoretical terms: vehicles break down, wheels literally fall off, informants are drunk, stoned, starved or despairing, the roads are next to undriveable, getting lost and running out of fuel is an actual possibility. After my first trip in July 2001, I found I was expected to write a field trip report. Never having read or written such a thing before, I was a little uncertain of what was expected of me. Also lacking enthusiasm for any extra work, I simply typed up the diary notes I had made on the trip, headed the four pages 'Hotel Kalahari', hid them on my desk for about three days before sliding them into Keyan's in-tray, hoping he was in a tolerant mood. Next thing he was bursting into my office, waving said pages around and saying things like 'extraordinary', 'self-reflexivity', 'thesis', 'external examiner!' I thought I had been lucky, and then began the process of understanding this process, of making sense of methods of making sense of experiences. Tomaselli refers to his auto-ethnographic narratives (2001a, 2003a, 2003b) as a kind of cultural study done in Africa, "in which detail is as important as theory, in which human agency is described and recognised" (Tomaselli 2001a:285). Taking cultural studies from the office into the field means that the ways in which "theory, the PC, and the desk ensure form over content, sanitised theory (or sanitheory) over messy reality, and cleanliness over dirt and disease" (Tomaselli, 2001a:304), are no longer adequate or believable. Writing about our real-world cultural studies experiences has to include "the biographical, personal, anecdotal, and reflective" (Tomaselli, 2001:311) in order for researchers to make theoretical and practical sense of these experiences.

Kalahari tales have spread quickly in Durban, and an increasing number of students have taken an interest and become involved in Tomaselli's project and research on San and Zulu peoples. This has resulted in a wider range of experiences of the encounter, and thus an expanding body of self-reflexive writing about these encounters. Lauren Dyll, for example, who is studying development, wrote about development theories in terms of her encounter with ≠Khomani San artist Silikat van Wyk:

Silikat...explains to Charlize that he's got her in his 'middle point', and because she is standing in his middle point she has taken it away. We find out what it is, his land, and because of this injustice Charlize owes him ten rand. I think to myself Silikat is really a sly cat as he is aware of the socio-political issues surrounding Bushman land loss and has

either indirectly or directly brought in the discourse of colonialism, hoping that our white liberal guilt may pay up (Dyll, 2003).

Tomaselli (2003b) suggests that our concern in research/writing is “with methodology rather than ethnographic description, with the nature of relations between observers and observed, and with problematising relations between observers”. The methodology we have found ourselves using is entirely unscientific, self-reflexive and organic, allowing us to be as honest and realistic as possible in describing the experiences and perceptions of individual research partners within the !Xoo and ≠Khomani communities. This methodology allows for honest, critical and concrete discussion of research practices and ethical concerns (see also Lange, 2003; McLennan-Dodd, 2003a, 2003b). The following passages offer critical discussion of research methods and interview techniques, and the creation of expectations among community members, illustrating a reflexive approach to the research process:

Anthea²⁶ and Miriam discussed much more personal things on their walks that did the men. Later, Anthea tape-recorded more formal discussions of the same issues with Miriam’s permission. Anthea had a very clear idea of what she wanted to know, while at the same time she was highly concerned that her work would be a tribute to her informants, rather than merely objectifying them as occurs in so much academic research. While the men via Gibson and Jeffrey acting as interpreters would tend to be more formal in their interviewing techniques, our version of the ‘walk’ was the ‘drive’. With two or more hunters in the back seat, travelling to Masetleng pan, Hukuntsi and other places they and others wanted to go, we would record our passengers’ responses over long periods, getting both their chatter and their more serious comments (Tomaselli, 2003a).

Did we set up...expectations in 2000 when we handed out 500 items of clothing? We were not the first to do so, but we were the first to ensure a fair and proper distribution mechanism. Waldron in 1999 was very edgy about giving anything to the community, for fear of unleashing dependency relationships. His method was to pay for items bought, and for services rendered, like Petrus teaching him hunting. But we see and feel with the Bushmen the biting cold, and we believe that they have a right to choose whether or not to receive the clothing we have brought them. Perhaps it’s Hobson’s choice? (Tomaselli, 2003a).

Creating this critical space for consideration of ethical questions – how do we represent the Bushmen? Of what benefit is this research to them? How should they be recompensed for information shared with us? How do they respond to the way they are represented in our work? – forces one to think carefully about the needs, expectations and rights of our research partners. “That’s one reason why we send on our unpublished papers to our informants, and other researchers who may contest our analyses. We take our informants’ comments and criticisms seriously, and write about them as real people, as distinct personalities who have their own agendas, needs and hopes” (Tomaselli, 2003a). Keyan Tomaselli (2003a) describes this critical approach as “something of an auto-ethnography in which we are developing self-reflexive methodologies to explain the nature of our encounters with the people who talk to us, host us and sing about us”. There is a need to “engage real people under the often-debilitating circumstances in which they live, love and die” (Tomaselli, 2003a), in order to understand the real-life conditions under which people exist, how they experience and make sense of these conditions, and how these experiences relate to

²⁶ Anthea participated in several field trips to Ngwatle and the Northern Cape, see Simões 2001a.

the experiences of researchers, filmmakers, journalists, development agencies, and the civil service. Tomaselli (2003a) suggests that “auto-ethnography needs to be linked to the common experiences of both the research team and our informants/ sources/ friends/ subjects during the encounter. This ought to result in a kind of writing that evolves out of how all the parties together perceive themselves within the communal research experience”. This is what I hope and aim to achieve in my own work, and consider to be significant criteria for evaluating the work of other researchers in representing the Bushmen.

Chapter Four

The Healing Land – “Getting Involved”

This chapter intends to provide a detailed precis of *The Healing Land* (2001), focussing closely on Isaacson’s methodology, and the ways in which the story he tells is influenced and shaped by the writer/researcher’s perceptions, expectations and experiences. This process aims to demonstrate the degree to which reflexive methodology can lead to transparency and honesty, and allow the reader to develop a deeper and more complex understanding of the people and situations in the story. This synopsis will be followed by an intensive analysis of the author’s application of reflexive methodology; community involvement and expectations; the portrayal of principal characters in the book: Dawid Kruiper, Belinda, Polly Loxton; healing; and the process of ‘getting involved’. This analysis intends to reveal the function of methodology in producing a book and to demonstrate the strengths and obstacles involved in the process of doing auto-ethnography. Although Isaacson would probably describe himself as a travel writer or journalist, rather than an auto-ethnographer, his writing incorporates many aspects of auto-ethnographic methodology, as he locates his encounter with the Bushmen within his personal experience and frames of reference. This chapter, which focuses on *The Healing Land*, intends to provide a case study for my discussion of self-reflexivity and auto-ethnography. Issues of representation, research and critical reflexivity will be consolidated in Chapter Five, which deals with methodology in encountering and representing the San.

Synopsis

In the beginning

In the beginning, so my mother told me, were the Bushmen – peaceful golden-skinned hunters whom people also called KhoiSan or San. They had lived in Africa longer than anyone else. Africa was also where we were from... (Isaacson, 2001a:3).

The opening lines of *The Healing Land*, a book about the Bushmen of southern Africa, which can be categorised as travel writing/ spiritual journey/ history of the Bushmen/ personal quest/ advocacy journalism, indicate the origins of Rupert Isaacson’s inspiration to write the book, and the intentions or preconceptions with which he embarked on the project. Isaacson was raised in London by his South African mother and his Zimbabwean (then Rhodesian) father. His childhood was full of African stories and legends:

Though we lived in London, my sister Hannah and I inhabited a childhood world filled with images and objects from the vast southern sub-continent...In my earliest memories, these objects and my mother’s stories forged a strong connection in my mind between our London family and the immense African landscapes the family had left behind (Isaacson, 2001a:3).

The fuelling of his youthful imagination by the Bushman myth inspires him to seek the “peaceful, golden-skinned hunters” in Africa, yet does not prevent him from moving through the mythology into the reality of the Bushmen in the 20th century. This introduction also indicates the significant role that will be played by Rupert’s

mother Polly, both in Rupert's story and in the story of the ≠Khomani Bushmen. Maya Khankhoje (2002) points out that Isaacson's statement about the Bushmen having lived in Africa longer than anyone else, as well as being "the oldest culture on earth, possibly ancestors to us all", "demolishes the Eurocentric notion of distinct races and the ideological underpinnings of the apartheid system" (Khankhoje, 2002). Isaacson's very politically correct terminology "KhoiSan or San" gives an idea of the kind of book he started out to write: "I never meant to get into this healing thing. When I began researching the book which ended up being called *the Healing Land*, I thought I was going to write a very different kind of work. It was going to be a journalistic report..." (Isaacson, undated c). His engagement with the Bushman communities on a deeply personal level, as well as his fascination with their myths and magical legends, led to a shift in focus towards healers and healing. Thus *The Healing Land* became a deeply personal, autobiographical account of Isaacson's journey and the people of the Kalahari. The book contains a significant amount of information about Isaacson's background and family history, which relates closely to the role of his mother, Polly, in the story. The reader is drawn into the process of "getting involved" through which Isaacson engages with the Bushmen. His description of the journey includes his interaction with the Kalahari people; the relationships on which this story is based; his own dilemmas, frustrations and insecurities experienced in conducting his research; for better or worse the backstage personalities and lives of his subjects; and his own intimate experience of the quest for healing. Thus the book incorporates reflexive methodology in its revelation of the producer and of aspects of the process of conducting research.

Isaacson's childhood influences inspired his longing to visit Africa and influenced his perceptions of the land and its people: "Kalahari – what a beautiful word. It rolled off the tongue with satisfying ease, seeming to imply distance. A great wilderness of waving grasses, humming with grasshopper song under a hot wind and a sky of vibrant blue" (Isaacson, 2001a:5). The tales of his 'white African' relations also contributed to a legacy of white liberal guilt:

I later came to realise that these eulogies to Africa's natural beauty arose partly from guilt: the speakers came from families whose forebears had, almost without exception, carved out their wealth in blood. Many of these educated descendants of the colonial pioneers were haunted by the feeling that their ancestors should somehow have known better...the myth of a pure, uncomplicated Africa contrasted favourably with the Africa they actually knew (Isaacson, 2001a:7).

Isaacson's own sense of guilt relating to the marginalisation of African people becomes evident in his desire to be part of a process of restitution for the Kalahari Bushmen.

After visiting southern Africa in the late 1970s and seeing Bushman paintings with his family as a child, Isaacson (2001a:10) observes, "Back in the grey, drearily ordinary city of my birth, I found that the bright continent had worked its magic on me". Isaacson goes into detail about his family history. The information about Polly's background gives insight into her intense connection to Africa, and her need for personal healing and acceptance. When Polly was six, her mother left her and her sister in a children's home while she pursued her career as a freelance war artist on the Western front. Her parents divorced a few years after the war, after which Polly and Lindsay were "shunted off once more to grow up in institutions until they reached university age" (Isaacson, 2001a:13). As a student, Polly became deeply involved in anti-apartheid campaigns. Her mother and stepfather "decided it would be best if my

mother left the country before the inevitable arrest that must follow such activities” (Isaacson, 2001a:13). Polly moved to England where she met her husband and began to raise a family. Shortly after she returned to Africa to visit her parents with her small children, both of them died. The loss of her sense of roots and belonging compounded Polly’s grief over the death of her parents:

My mother went almost mad from grief. She had at last begun to know her parents, and now suddenly they had been snatched away. Throughout our childhood, she would be prone to periodic depressions, and the sense of being an exile never left her. Unlike my father, who fitted happily into London...my mother missed Africa keenly. She expressed it in her sculpture, her painting, almost all of which featured African people, African scenes. It was perhaps to make up for the loss of her parents, and of all that she hoped we children would have learned from them, that she became such a willing story-teller (Isaacson, 2001a:14).

Thus Rupert Isaacson grew up hearing stories about the adventures of his family in Africa, his ‘coloured’ relations (Frederik Loxton was married to a Baster woman, Anna Booyens), the landscape and the mysterious Bushmen. He observes that:

As childhood turned to adolescence, it became less comfortable to be caught between cultures, to be part English, part African. The stories, artefacts, white African friends and relatives that constituted my life at home began to clash more and more with the reality of living and going to school in England. I didn’t fit in...I continued to feel like an outsider. Still, it was oddly consoling to think of that great network of ancestors and relatives. Somehow the Kalahari, the dry heart of the sub-continent, seemed central to the inheritance and identity that I was – however unconsciously – trying to find (Isaacson, 2001a:19).

Isaacson’s first journey to Africa as an adult, in 1985, begins as a quest for personal identification, to find his roots through connecting with his relatives and the land of his ancestors.

African dreams and reality

‘Lessons in Reality’, the title of the chapter in which Isaacson travels to Botswana, is quite apt. He describes his first impressions of being in Africa:

I had never seen a landscape so desolate and unforgiving. I sneaked a look at cousin Frank. He matched the landscape; tall, spare, with the capable, practical air of a man used to fixing things himself. Sitting in the passenger seat next to him I felt soft, frivolous and stupid. I had come to expect that all white Africans lived in big houses surrounded by manicured gardens, where soft-footed black servants produced tea and biscuits punctually at eleven... (Isaacson, 2001a:20).

His experience in this case did not match the expectations. Isaacson seems to feel less and less African as he demonstrates his lack of skill in constructing buildings and changing tyres: “I began to realise how unrealistic I had been to dream of just floating into the Kalahari of my childhood stories” (Isaacson, 2001a:21). He is no more comfortable when ‘cousin Frank’ questions him, “so, at what stage of your spiritual odyssey are you?” (Isaacson, 2001a:21). His lack of spiritual awareness at this stage of the story contrasts his deeply metaphysical, supernatural experiences with the Bushmen later on. While visiting a ranch in Zimbabwe, Isaacson is hit by the reality of violence, as he witnesses a labourer being beaten and a steer slaughtered. He concludes, “I was too squeamish for life on an African farm, I left the guns in their locked cabinet and took long walks with the farm boys, who would show me animals

and birds and tell me their names in Shona” (Isaacson, 2001a:24). On returning to South Africa with a contract to write a guidebook, Isaacson visits the Bushman Diorama in Cape Town, and also studies their culture and history. He travels to the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in search of the Bushmen, but is firmly told there were none there: “once again, it seemed, the gentle hunters of my childhood stories were going to remain just that – fictional characters” (Isaacson, 2001a:26).

Rupert travels to Tshumkwe in Namibia on a subsequent visit to Africa in 1995, where he finally locates the Ju/'hoansi. The first Bushmen he meets there are Benjamin, who is able to communicate with them having learned English at mission school, and /Kaece, leader of the Makuri village. Benjamin works as a field officer/interpreter for the Nyae Nyae Farmer's Co-operative. Rupert and his girlfriend, Kristin, are delighted to be invited to go hunting with the Bushmen the next day. Their experiences at Tshumkwe give insight into the reality of life among the Ju/'hoansi. The hunters, instead of waking them at dawn, are sleeping off a hangover. While out on the unsuccessful hunt, Benjamin tells them,

‘We need money – not just for food. There are many problems here, man, many. There are cattle herders from Botswana – the Herero – coming in here, and nothing to stop them because we have no power, no money. And the young people going to the town to drink and not learning the skills because they say that this life is finished... Maybe people like you – tourists – might come here and see our life. There is money in this, I think?’ (Isaacson, 2001a:38).

It soon becomes apparent that this community perceives Isaacson as a resource. He reflects on the experience of paying for the hunt, where the Bushmen were “demanding money, thrusting out their hands”, and buying the crafts that were pressed on them until their money ran out:

Standing there with all out newly-bought artefacts, Kristin and I felt suddenly self-conscious, glugged, almost ashamed. We turned and began the walk back to camp. The hunt had been the true fulfilment of a dream. Benjamin had made us feel accepted, respected, welcome. Yet his sudden disappearance and our subsequent fleeing had revealed, with brutal honesty, what we actually represented here: money (Isaacson, 2001a:40).

Rupert seems to understand his perception by the Bushmen as a source of revenue – even becoming involved in generating tourism in Tshumkwe, but never quite accepts this mercenary role for himself.

A fascination with healers develops during Isaacson's next visit to the Ju/'hoansi in 1996. Benjamin tells him that they will be safe on the hunt because “‘The healers, doctors in the village, ask the lions where they are and then they tell the hunters not to go that way’ (Isaacson, 2001a:44). “...the enigmatic words lingered, tantalisingly, in the night air. Healers that talked to lions”, the author reflects (Isaacson, 2001a:45).

Isaacson acknowledges the lack of capacity journalists have to change the lives of their subjects. “Back home, I published a piece on the trip in the *Daily Telegraph*, but the anticipated reaction did not come. No tourists rang up, anxious to book their own Bushman adventure. In fact, during the course of that year, 1996, things became decidedly worse for the Bushmen right across the Kalahari” (Isaacson, 2001a:48). He learns about the existence of the ≠Khomani in the Northern Cape from a *National Geographic* article, and realises that “Not only had there been Bushmen in the region, but they had been ejected from the very park whose staff had denied their

existence to me” (Isaacson, 2001a:49). He makes contact with Cait Andrews, who had worked with the ≠Khomani for many years and fills him in on the background to the ≠Khomani’s historic and controversial land claim, which she has assisted in initiating. “If ever there was a time to be chronicling events on the Kalahari, Cait assured me, it was now” (Isaacson, 2001a:51).

What difference could I make?

On meeting Dawid Kruiper and the ≠Khomani in 1997, Isaacson (2001a:56) observes, “we were by no means the first journalists he had met. Many had come, asked questions, taken photographs, scribbled notes and pushed microphones and camera lenses into his tired old face. Yet here Dawid and his people sat, landless squatters on the edge of a poor coloured village.” Rupert interrogates his own role in this community:

And what difference did I think I could make? I now had a commission, having managed to persuade a publisher to let me write a book on the Xhomani²⁷ land claim and the plight of other groups across the Kalahari. But it would be years in the writing, and even when it was published, it might not be of any help to them. In the meantime, there was no guarantee that any articles I wrote would see the light of day, let alone provoke some action. It seemed to me that Dawid, this shrewd, tough old Bushman who sat watching us, could sense all this, yet he said nothing...Feeling a fraud, I looked away... (Isaacson, 2001a:57).

Isaacson seems to be aware of the expectation held by many ≠Khomani community members that representation of their needs in books or articles will result in effective action to improve their situation. He realises that this may not be the case, and struggles with the dilemma of whether to confirm what he believes Dawid already knows, and thus cause disillusionment for the Bushmen and loss of credibility for himself, or to hold onto the ideal of empowering representation.

Although it is not clearly stated in the book, Isaacson seems to experience a constant dichotomy between myth and reality, idealism and the cynic, a dichotomy which seems inherent to the process of learning to understand the Kalahari and its people. Belinda Kruiper, then working as a manager in the Park, had also experienced the contrast between her expectations and the reality of the Bushman’s existence, ““These Bushmen,’ she said... ‘I don’t know what it is. I came here for peace and quiet, and already I can see how political the whole thing is”” (Isaacson, 2001a:62-3).

From Cait Andrews, Rupert learns of the late Regopstaan’s (the former leader of the ≠Khomani) prophecy to his people: “*When the strangers come, then will come the big rains. And the Little People will dance. And when the Little People in the Kalahari dance, then the Little People around the world shall dance too*” (Isaacson, 2001a:58). He also experiences his first manifestation of Bushman healing, as Cait is approached and ministered to by Ouma Antas, who had no way of knowing that Cait had been diagnosed with cancer shortly before the trip. “I had heard before of the Bushmen’s reputation as great healers. Until now, this had not fascinated me as much as their wildness, their elusiveness” (Isaacson, 2001a:59-60). Cait tells him “You just have to get used to strange things happening when you’re around Bushmen” (Isaacson, 2001a:60).

²⁷ Isaacson uses the spelling Xhomani, instead of ≠Khomani, as well as Izak instead of Isak. In a largely illiterate community, it is often difficult to establish the correct spelling of names.

On arranging a hunting and gathering expedition to one of the local farms, Rupert begins to learn about the exploitation of researchers along with the exploitation of research subjects. On the way to the hunting place he grows impatient as they stop for Dawid to shop for a sheep, stop for everyone to have another smoke...

Cait caught my sour expression and smiled wryly: 'There's always another agenda with the Bushmen. It always happens like this – you arrange to do something and next thing you know you're driving up and down the road giving this person a lift, waiting while that person goes off to buy some dope, then going back to pick up someone else's stuff and take it to some other place, until eventually you forget what it was you originally set out to do. They don't often get a chance to be driven around, so when it comes they make the most of it. We're just the taxi drivers. They tell you whatever you want to hear, then take total advantage' (Isaacson, 2001a:66).

Isaacson and his companions planned to film the hunt, an experience that also did not match their expectations:

As the light mellowed and deepened, Dawid said a few words to Jakob and he and the rest of the clan came back down the dune. We should do our thing now, he said; this was the right time for filming, now that the light was *lekker* (nice). Surprised that Bushmen knew about light and filming we followed Dawid and Jakob to a flat space where a patch of dry grasses waved in the light wind, golden with evening, sparkling against the deep blood of the sand. What followed was a masterfully choreographed re-creation of Bushmanness. When I looked at the slides some weeks later there was no telling that everything had been staged... (Isaacson, 2001a:67).

Thus the Bushmen exploit the myth exploited by the filmmakers.

"Doubts began to nag at me again," Isaacson (2001a:68) reflects as he wonders whether the skills, the knowledge and the culture of the Bushmen are still in existence. He is disturbed by the stories of violence within the community: "I didn't like what I was hearing. The Bushmen were the gentle people, the only Africans without a warrior tradition, the ones who did not resort to violence to settle conflicts. Again the myth was being cast into doubt" (Isaacson, 2001a:69). Despite awareness of the reality, he seems to yearn for the Kalahari of his childhood stories.

Myth and reality

The Bushmen at Kagga Kamma embody the juxtaposition of myth and reality. They act out the idyllic Kalahari life for tourists, who snap pictures of them in their skins making crafts, while they live in cold damp poverty, far removed from the warm sand dunes of our dreams and theirs. Sitting in the smoky shack with the Bushmen, Isaacson (2001a:80) observes, "I took in the firelit circle of faces one last time and felt a glimmer of recognition. The scene before me could have been straight out of a painting by one of the early eighteenth-century adventurers that I had so often seen in the books of African history that filled my mother's bookshelves". History becomes part of his story as he reflects on what he has learned about the circumstances that brought the Bushmen to their present day reality. This gives the book a reflexive and personal quality, but does not allow for providing very extensive research information. It does provide a fresh perspective, however. One seldom encounters an anthropological study stating that "crowds of people thronged to gawk at Saartjie's bum and vagina" (Isaacson, 2001a:85).

The interaction between tourists and Bushmen at Kagga Kamma is all about offering the myth to the western stare:

The Xhmani were waiting for the tourists inside a neat semi-circle of traditional grass shelters...All had exchanged their ragged Western clothes for springbok and steenbok skins, which displayed their lean, golden curves and angles to the best advantage...Squinting up through his sunglasses, the big man put his arm around the elderly woman's frail, bare shoulders, and asked his wife to take his picture 'with my new girlfriend. Hey, how many wives do these people have?' (Isaacson, 2001a:84-5).

Isaacson clearly perceives the situation at Kagga Kamma as an opportunity for the Bushmen to be stared at and exploited by tourists: "the way in which they wandered among the Xhmani, pushing their camera lenses into faces, at working hands, at bare breasts, showed clearly that they had little concern for the feelings of the people they had come to see" (Isaacson, 2001a:87).

Isak Kruiper tells Rupert that they live at Kagga Kamma in order to make money to send back to Welkom, because living conditions are worse there, but that "It's not home. It's not the Kalahari. Not the red sand. You feel so free there" (Isaacson, 2001a:88). Isak also tells him:

'We have to stay here until we clean our souls. You know, it's true, there were Bushmen here before, we feel their spirits. We see the messages they left us, the paintings, in the caves here. Something terrible happened to them. A killing; but it was they who called us here from the Kalahari and we must stay here until they tell us we can go, perhaps to take their spirits up to the red sands with us' (Isaacson, 2001a:88).

The magic again. "I scribbled frantically. This was just the kind of spiritual talk I wanted to hear" (Isaacson, 2001a:89). He seems aware of his bias towards the magical, the mythical. Isak advises Rupert to keep his eyes open, and inform him of any strange things that happen among the animals of the veld. A little later he notices some odd things happening:

...There was a scuttling noise on the floor, and a mouse, bold as brass, sat looking straight at me. I took a step towards it. It didn't move, but faced me down. Then, from the room behind came a tapping noise. I turned to see a small brown bird flying up and down the window pane, tapping its beak on the glass. And directly after that came Cait's voice, 'Come and see!' In her room, on the curtain next to her bed, sat a large green mantis (Isaacson, 2001a:90).

That night, after dancing and singing around the campfire, Rupert decides to tell Isak about the mantis, the mouse and the bird. Isak responds that the mouse represents Chris, the filmmaker who accompanied Isaacson, as it "Goes about its business, working away quietly...creating, building" (Isaacson, 2001a:91). The mantis is Cait, because she is "one of us". The bird is Rupert: "You are the one that carries the message" (Isaacson, 2001a). Before leaving the next morning, Isaacson wants to buy a painting from Isak. Isak tells him to go to the little shop at reception and look at the painting he did yesterday. Perhaps he would like to buy it.

On the rock's main surface were painted three figures, a woman and two men, dancing under a crescent moon...The woman figure had an insect-like, mantis-like head. The male dancer on the right had the head of a mouse. The one on the left had the tapered head and short beak of a small bird (Isaacson, 2001a:92).

Isaacson says that Cait Andrews told him that Isak is a seer, that he was "subject to visions...visions which were often apt to come true" (Isaacson, 2001a:90). When we interviewed Isak, he told me that he had told Rupert the story of how he came to understand that he is a seer: "I told the story to Rupert very well...we spoke about

things a lot and we expanded on a lot of things with each other..." (Isak Kruiper, 2001).

Healers and shape-shifters

"Taking Izak's words to heart, I resolved to be that bird – to travel out into the Kalahari to 'bring the message' and learn what I could" (Isaacson, 2001a:93). Following the visit to Kagga Kamma, Rupert travels to Khekhenye, a small isolated village in south-central Botswana, where he finds another community in a state of transition and conflict between tradition and modernity. The !Xoo Bushmen of this community had lost their hunting rights, and their territory was being used for grazing by the local BaKgalagadi people. "The place looked more black African than Khoisan, composed of large, thatched rondavels... rather than the more traditional little grass structures...the clicking language we were overhearing as we walked was not !Xoo but BaKgalagadi, the language of their more powerful neighbours" (Isaacson, 2001a:94). He and the translator overhear a 'religious debate' going on between an "old pagan" and a Christian convert who insists that "all healing comes through Christ". Isaacson takes the opportunity to find out whether the Khekhenye people's traditional religion was based around healing:

The people, who seemed to accept both our arrival and my butting in without demur, murmured assent, and in response, two young men...grabbed a passing toddler and performed a quick ritual, dancing around him and taking turns to kneel and make sucking, blowing motions at his belly. Then, as abruptly as they had begun, they sat down again and the infant potted off undisturbed as if such things happened every day. Which they probably did. 'That was a healing dance for a child who is depressed because its parents are arguing,' translated Lydia, as the young men explained what they had done. This sounded more like middle-class New York than the deep bush but I made no comment (Isaacson, 2001a:95).

Out of place as it may seem, this incident suggests that the so-called 'other' and 'same' are not so different in terms of their needs and emotional responses.

Isaacson begins to experience his subjects' curiosity about his world and his agenda in the Kalahari. He describes an evening spent with the young people of Khekhenye, who were eager to find out about the sexual behaviour of white people and about "this homosexuality thing". "Red faced, I found myself being coerced into giving a hysteria-inducing (and ill-informed) description of gay culture, even down to the specifics of anal sex" (Isaacson, 2001a:97). At the local store, a "sumo-sized BaKgalagadi woman" demands to know what he is doing there. She becomes enraged when he explains that he is a journalist: "'A journalist! You're not that journalist who was trying to take the picture of the Princess Diana when she was dying, poor woman, in the car!' She advanced on me, eyes blazing. 'No!' I assured her, caught between fear and astonishment. 'I'm not that kind of journalist'" (Isaacson, 2001a:100). On requesting an interview with a community member at Kwaayi in the Okavango Delta, Isaacson is told "We are getting so sick of people like you coming here and asking questions" (Isaacson, 2001a:111-112). Very clear perceptions and pre-conceptions of the ways of white people and of journalists have filtered through to this remote community. This directs Isaacson to examine himself in terms of the ways in which he is seen by his research subjects.

Through a contact with the Hardbattle family, who are well known for their involvement with the lives of the Kalahari Bushmen, Rupert is invited to witness a trance dance among the Ghanzi Bushmen in Botswana. A hitch-hiker warns him to be careful of the Ghanzi Bushmen: "Some of their doctors even changed themselves into

lions, or leopards, at night and went out hunting, stealing livestock or even murdering people” (Isaacson, 2001a:117). Isaacson wonders whether the healer coming to the trance dance will be “the same healer from the north who could change shapes” (Isaacson, 2001a:119). Rupert describes his experience of the trance dance:

I got up from my seat at the camp table, went over to the circle and sat down. The women, smiling, made space for me. I picked up the rhythm and sat, clapping with them, basking in the deep, almost slumberous peace that the dance now seemed to have created...I passed a rough shelter of branches, standing slightly away from the camp site. The flap was up and my glance fell on the figures inside. It was Xwa, her huge, heavy-breasted body standing unclothed while one of the other women rubbed some oil or ointment into her skin. In that brief moment I glimpsed the old woman’s legs. The red swellings that had been there the previous night were gone (Isaacson, 2001a:127, 129).

Thus through the trance dance he experiences a sense of being welcomed by the community, of peace and contentment, and of the reality of the healing that took place.

A visit to New Xade in the Central Kalahari provides a sharp return to the reality of Kalahari journalism: “As he explained that we were journalists a man in his late thirties, thin and anxious-looking, stepped forward and said we should be careful – if anyone in authority saw us we’d all be in trouble. We would have to ask our questions quickly” (Isaacson, 2001a:131). Moving on towards Molapo, Isaacson makes camp at the now-deserted Xade, where he questions his Bushman interpreter Karnells about healers and shape-shifting. Karnells admits to some knowledge of such things, but Rupert “could tell from his tone that he was growing more and more uneasy, that any moment he’d clam up all together” (Isaacson, 2001a:134). Isaacson seems often to be aware of people’s reactions to him as a researcher, yet does not always allow his sensitivity to override his curiosity. At Molapo, he insists that Karnells questions the community leader, an old Bushman woman, about shape-shifters and whether she herself was a healer: “Karnells was obviously embarrassed but he made the translation. The old woman looked down at the ground a moment before turning up a face that no longer smiled, and answered, with finality, that no, she could not do this thing, nor could any other healer here” (Isaacson, 2001a:136). A hunt with some young men in the village transpires to be more of a walking smoke break...

This was no hunt, but a show for the tourists – an easy buck in other words. I wondered if I would ever learn. How could we expect to waltz in, flash some money around, say ‘Take us hunting, show us shape-changing’ and expect to be treated as anything other than the fools we were? (Isaacson, 2001a:137).

In all but the most exceptional cases, building relationships and trust with community members takes a significant amount of time, and most visitors are probably treated with some suspicion. When Isaacson accompanies the hunters the next day to catch a spring hare, the romantic myth recedes a little further:

Until I watched these three Bushmen dig out the spring hare I had not fully appreciated how desperately hard traditional life in the veld could be, the life that I and so many like me happily mythologised. Even a long hunt...does not compare with this digging down with bare hands through hard earth six feet or more to where the quarry, a small meal, but a meal nonetheless, lies snagged on the hook (Isaacson, 2001a:139).

This experience makes Isaacson aware of the harsh reality of the Bushmen's existence, in contrast to the myths he loved to explore. Their poverty is real and devastating.

Financial matters

The Healing Land includes some discussion of the reality of doing research, paying informants and arranging funding. At Molapo, Isaacson meets Bulanda Thamae, wife of Roy Sesarna, leader of the First People of the Kalahari, who was very clear about the financial obligations of researchers to the community:

She took control immediately, demanding to know, before we began the interview, what we had agreed to pay the hunters and how much we were going to give the village for the camping. We told her and she approved the figure, saying that the safari operators who came through from time to time with clients often paid next-to-nothing, or promised to pay and then reneged (Isaacson, 2001a:141).

Bulanda is at Molapo, instead of at Ghanzi where First People of the Kalahari is based, in search of healing. She believes she was a victim of 'bad *muti*'²⁸, inflicted by the BaTswana people, in return for the Bushmen's perceived threat to government policy. Isaacson takes the opportunity to turn the conversation from *muti* to healers and shape-shifters:

But how could Bushmen be a target for bad *muti*, when they had such powerful healers of their own, ones who could even turn themselves into lions, I asked? Bulanda smiled. Yes, First People had even thought of asking some of the BaKoko healers to take on lion shape to go and kill those people in the government who were hurting them. 'But,' she said, sighing, 'Bushmen do not make this kind of medicine...' I seized my chance and asked her if she knew one of those shape-shifting healers. Oh yes, came the reply. The most powerful BaKoko healer lived far to the north and west of Ghanzi...If I likes, the next time I came back she could help me find him. His name, she said, was Besa (Isaacson, 2001a:142-143).

At last, the myth seems to become a reality. In order for Bulanda to accompany him on the journey to meet with Besa, Rupert had to go "to the First People office to negotiate a leave of absence from her husband Roy Sesarna, the organisation's chief. He agreed that Bulanda could go, provided I paid a translator's fee" (Isaacson, 2001a:190). Isaacson (2001a:147) draws attention to the necessity of generating funds as an aspect of research:

I made up my mind to get back out there as soon as possible. However, it took me a few months of freelancing to raise the necessary funds to go in search of Besa, especially as the trip would also have to be long enough for me to follow up the Xhmani story and get to some other parts of the Kalahari I hadn't yet seen.

This is a challenge of which many readers and research subjects seem to be unaware.

Belinda's story: Healing and hatred

Isaacson's return to the ≠Khomani in 1998 epitomises the contradictory nature of the Bushmen's lives. On his first night back they dance at Dawid Kruiper's Red House at Welkom, singing the prophecy of Ou Mackai, the leader of the ≠Khomani before Regopstaan, "*Ou Mackai te Kiraha, Na ke !au Kwena Hocha* [Old Mackai is growing

²⁸ Medicine, also refers to magic.

old, and the strangers are coming]” (Isaacson, 2001a:150). Dawid tells Rupert and Belinda (who has once again agreed to accompany him as translator):

‘First Mackai growing old and the strangers coming. The Regopstaan’s prophecy, which you know...*when the strangers come there will be big rains, and then the little people will dance. And when the little people of the Kalahari dance, the whole world dances*’ (Isaacson, 2001a:150).

The following night at the Red House sees a fight between Dawid and Bukse, who stumbles in drunk, yelling “Who are you to tell me what to do? You aren’t the leader! The only leader I respect is Mackai!” Dawid, spitting with rage, demands, “how can I lead such a pack of fools?...I should take that boiling water and throw it over them all...But then I’d be a bad leader, wouldn’t I?” (Isaacson, 2001a:151). Belinda reports that frustration over the land claim has resulted in increased drinking and violence. Silikat says that he drinks because he feels like a caged animal (Isaacson, 2001a:152). Lena complains that Jakob almost kills her each night. “She could not show her face and body in daylight for the cuts and the bruises” (Isaacson, 2001a:157). Rupert says he “realised then that it was going to take a lot more than a land claim to heal the Xhmani” (Isaacson, 2001a:158).

Belinda’s own story of the quest for healing that led her to the Kalahari is revealed (to her surprise) in *The Healing Land*:

Born into an educated, politically active Cape coloured family, she had experienced her country’s special brand of violence and negativity from day one. Her father, a church minister and local political lobbyist much respected by the community, had – behind closed doors – beaten her and her brother almost daily. Later, despite being the perfect daughter, she had broken the rules and married a white man, incurring all her family’s wrath...Her husband had then repeated the father’s pattern, beating her whenever he felt himself not in control of his wife (Isaacson, 2001a:163).

After the demise of her marriage, Belinda moved to the Kalahari in search of peace and healing. Her story makes Isaacson aware of his own reception, as a white person, in the community:

‘So you see, Ru, there’s so much hatred, so much fear, so much mistrust, even among my own people. Even with you, there’s a part of me that says, here’s another white guy just wanting to use me for something. What does he want? To use me as a way of getting to the Bushmen? How’s this one going to hurt me? It’s probably the same for your cousins down in Upington...You can bet they’re nervous about your coming; nervous of what their neighbours will say, nervous to have a white guy, even if he’s a relative – especially if he’s a relative – staying on their turf’ (Isaacson, 2001a:164).

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa makes many so-called non-whites mistrustful of white people, fearing the prejudice and abuse they suffered in the past, and which is still prevalent in mindsets today. Hatred and healing are juxtaposed in the Kalahari, Belinda says:

‘So now you have my story – why I came to this Kalahari. To heal. Everyone comes here to heal, whether they know it or not...Even you. Whatever reason you think has brought you here, this interest in the Bushmen or whatever you say it is, the real reason is that you have something in you that needs to heal, you can be sure of that’ (Isaacson, 2001a:164).

Rupert's journey to the Kalahari was for healing, both within himself and for the alienation he experienced from his 'African' family.

The family tree

Rupert Isaacson's family connections form a significant part of the personal aspects of his story. The receptionist at the Park mentions that Piet and Steve Smith of the Mier community might also be related to the Loxtons, Rupert's cousins:

As luck would have it, I had brought a family tree that my mother had printed out for me. I raced back to Belinda's house to retrieve it. Sure enough, the connection was there – Piet Smith's father had been half-brother to Gert Loxton's father. It was tenuous, but the blood tie existed. Piet Smith, the head of the Mier, and the principal opponent of the Xhmani land claim, was my cousin (Isaacson, 2001a:165).

Rumour has it that Piet Smith had been given several farms in exchange for "co-operating with" (giving information to) the apartheid government, "farms to which he had no legal title and therefore stood to lose, without compensation, should the Bushman land claim be successful, and a compulsory purchase of Mier land go through" (Isaacson, 2001a:165). Isaacson is clearly unhappy about being linked to this particularly right wing sector of South African society. His meeting with Steve Smith is an awkward brief sequence of shuffling feet and uncomfortable silences. Dawid is not shocked by the news as Isaacson expected, but says that it means they have been going about the land claim the wrong way: "With hate and fighting in our hearts – not the Bushman way...And if the land comes, but not with love, then it will never be Bushman land. Not truly. We will never be secure in it if we claim it with fear and with hate" (Isaacson, 2001a:168). A lesson or a prophecy?

During a visit to his cousin Gert Loxton and his wife Cynthia, Isaacson observes: "At first sight there was nothing to distinguish Gert Loxton's farm from any other white Boer's"...until he notices a large picture of Nelson Mandela hanging on the wall: "That Cousin Gert – clearly a more prosperous coloured farmer than most – should be so openly ANC suggested something of an original turn of mind" (Isaacson, 2001a:170). A story Gert tells bites the heart of racial oppression in South Africa:

...back in the 1970s, during the height of apartheid, he had taken the kids up there [to stay in the Park]. They had pitched tents in Twee Rivieren's main campground, but when word reached the park warden that non-whites were staying there, rangers had made them take down their tent and forced them to move to a barren area without water, without toilets, behind the staff quarters, before making them leave next day. The humiliation in front of his young children, who had thought that they or the family must have done something wrong, still twisted his gut to this day (Isaacson, 2001a:176).

The methodology of listening to and reflecting on other people's stories within one's own creates a deeper understanding of the context in which the story takes place.

The search for the healer

Isaacson's search for Besa, the healer, takes him back to Tshumkwe where, despite the seemingly great political victory of the Ju/'hoansi's land being declared a game conservancy with them as custodians, the community is in chaos and people are constantly complaining of hunger. Rupert seems deeply disillusioned with his role among this Bushmen community: "I got out and was immediately mobbed. Hands grabbed at my arms, hair, voices demanded money, help, a ride, a talk, tobacco..."

(Isaacson, 2001a:179). Benjamin wants to know why he has come back to their village:

I told them how I had wanted to see if their tourism project had ever got off the ground, and how I was also writing a book, trying to get a picture of life right across the Kalahari. I told them of the Xhmani's land claim, and Dawid and Izak's injunction to be their bird, to go out, spread the word, find information...But /Kaece only responded with another litany of complaint, a vitriolic diatribe (Isaacson, 2001a:184).

On his departure, Isaacson observes, "I realised that...this would be the last time I would see Benjamin, my first Bushman friend, the one who had drawn me into the story, and whom I now wasn't sure was still my friend, or whether I even liked him any more. We embraced, but it felt empty" (Isaacson, 2001a:185). A worker from the Nyae Nyae Foundation (the subject of much of the complaining) tells him that "the reality is that soon they won't need us any more, and they know it...Our presence now is just a reminder of the days of disempowerment" (Isaacson, 2001a:185-6).

Besa

Rupert and Bulanda eventually meet Besa, the BaKoko healer, at the edge of Groot Laagte settlement in Botswana. Rupert describes the meeting:

I told him my story, beginning at the beginning with my mother and the childhood stories, of the years of not managing to get to the Kalahari, of the meeting with Benjamin at Makuri, of the meetings with the Xhmani, the land claim, the book, the mantis, the mouse and the bird...I spoke of the shape-changing stories which, for some reason I couldn't explain, seemed to lie at the heart of things, which led me here, to him, to this tree (Isaacson, 2001a:193).

Besa responds, "I know nothing of this shape-changing thing" (Isaacson, 2001a:193). Rupert's reaction is of deep, disillusioned disappointment:

I got up, hearing myself laugh, feeling the smile. 'Well,' I said through Bulanda. 'Thank you anyway. Thank you for your time, thank you for listening to my story. I understand; at least, I think I do. Goodbye.' And I walked towards the vehicle. 'Stop,' said the man. 'Stop,' translated Bulanda. I stopped, turned around. 'Sit,' he said. 'I will tell you of these things.' (Isaacson, 2001a:194).

Resisting the urge to "play the journalist, or the anthropologist" (Isaacson, 2001a:194), Rupert sits and listens as Besa tells how he sends his spirit forth, as a bird to heal, as a lion or a leopard to do mischief. At the trance dance that night, Rupert experiences Besa's magic:

Laughing, Besa danced over to me and put his hands on once again, pulsing his slow, calm current through my skull, into my brain, down my spine, and out in tingling throbs to the fingers, legs and toes; a subtle, heart-felt pleasure too good, too delicate to bear. Half of me wanted to break from his grip, the other half, to open the top of my skull like a lid and let him pour in anything he wanted, even himself, a little man tipped up, two legs kicking from the hole in my skull (Isaacson, 2001a:197).

The next morning Besa tells Rupert, "I went up there. I spoke to the old man. He says go on. Go on as you are" (Isaacson, 2001a:198). Isaacson's healing experience seems to have renewed his optimism about the Bushmen's future: "Despite the centuries of

genocide, of the collapse and loss of everything that supported them, these people were after all *still here*” (Isaacson, 2001a:198-9).

Back at Welkom, Belinda decides to organise a trip for Dawid and Sanna back into the Park to discuss Rupert’s visit to Besa and something Dawid wants to tell them. Belinda is highly amused about management’s possible reactions to Bushmen sleeping in the beds at their private rest camp. Instants later she bursts into tears. “Oh, Ru, it makes me so angry! You just don’t understand how it works in this country. They’re not going to kill Dawid Kruiper! Never while I’m here!” (Isaacson, 2001a:202). On the way to the camp she weeps again on Dawid’s shoulder. “Oh, God, Dawid, all I’ve ever wanted was a family. What did I have growing up? Church and beatings and an angry God and an angry father with a strap. I just want...a father” (Isaacson, 2001a:203).

Dawid speaks that night of his memories of the Park, of Rupert’s book, of healing:

‘...there is healing here, in this Kalahari. This book, this story, must have such a name that anyone from any place could see it and, before they even open the pages, feel some of the power of this land. You know, long ago I had a dream. I saw a man who would come and heal us, we broken Bushmen...I think this man Besa is the healer from my dream...We, I, need to get strong again. I the leader need to find my healing power again. I think that this man Besa is the healer that can give me back my power. You must take us there, Rupe-man, soon’ (Isaacson, 2001a:208-9).

Rupert promises that in three months, when he has raised the money, they will go.

There is one more thing he needs to know, Dawid says. He needs to know why Rupert is writing this book: “...why you came to us so that we would choose you to tell our story. What was it that brought you here? Not just money for a story, not just to see how things were, not just politics. Something else must have sent you here” (Isaacson, 2001a:211). Rupert was cautious about discussing his motivations for being in the Kalahari with the Bushmen:

Until now I had played the journalist, the man come to chronicle the political process, yet we had strayed far from that. I had not wanted to be exposed, I realised. And now, under Dawid’s gentle but unwavering eye, I felt afraid. Might he laugh at me, judge me? So I told him, starting with the earliest days, with my mother’s stories, the artefacts in the house, the tales of all the white African relatives, the feeling of displacement, the growing fascination with these Bushmen whom I had come to feel lay at the root of everything in the place where my family came from (Isaacson, 2001a:211).

After hearing this account, Dawid believes that Rupert’s mother had the vision before him, that she “kept the Bushmen alive in her heart...while we were dying here in the Kalahari” (Isaacson, 2001a:212). Rupert’s mother sent her son to the Kalahari to tell the Bushmen’s story, and when they go to see Besa, she must be there, “for the vision lies with her” (Isaacson, 2001a:212).

Rupert begins to feel daunted by the project he has taken on: “I began to wonder how I was going to manage it. I had assumed that my mother – now sixty years old – would agree to go. But would she? Then there was the money...I was already far into debt from the last two trips...what if we went all the way up to Groot Laagte and found Besa gone?” (Isaacson, 2001a:214). Before Rupert leave the Red House, Bukse gives him a gift of a bow and a small container of herbs: “Wherever you go when you travel, you are safe with this luck. And this bow; when you are back

in America, look at them and think of us here in the red sands, and remember what you have promised” (Isaacson, 2001a:219). He is held accountable.

The next night Polly in London says of course she would go – when do they fly? “It took the full three months to earn the money, cold-calling editors, lining up freelance work on anything, any idea I could think of that would earn the cash necessary to finance the trip...Belinda and I ran up terrific phone bills calling each other back and forth with updates” (Isaacson, 2001a:219-220).

Kalahari healing

Rupert finds a greater degree of chaotic Bushman politics relating to the land claim when he returns to the Kalahari in September 1998. He notices the strain Belinda is bearing as a result of her involvement with the Bushmen:

Belinda, too, was clearly exhausted, and looked as if she'd hardly slept during the three months I'd been away. The double life she had been leading between the Bushmen and the park was clearly taking its toll. The physical change in her was alarming. She had lost weight dramatically and her skin looked unnaturally pale and stretched too taut, eyes sunk too deep. She had a wild look to her, and began talking incessantly from the moment she picked me up in Upington (Isaacson, 2001a:222).

Belinda was experiencing hostility from management at the Park because of her association with the Bushmen. She was also burdened with the awareness of the terrible conditions faced by many in the community: “...she had made ugly discoveries too...the sadistic extent to which the men of Welkom beat their wives when drunk...The worst of it, though, had been sexual crimes within the clan – not rape, but selling the women for liquor and for dope” (Isaacson, 2001a:224). Belinda reacts by telling the women of Welkom to stand up for themselves, to fight back, until one night they attack the men and drive them out of the village. Isaacson is not sure about this: “...I felt a twinge of misgiving. Was it her place to put the women up to violence, whatever the reasons? Her eyes glittered a little too brightly as she talked about it” (Isaacson, 2001a:224). Isaacson may be right, but his response demonstrates that an outsider can never fully comprehend the reality of living with abuse and despair every single day.

At this point in his journey, Isaacson seems to reconsider his role among the Bushmen. Isak says to him, “*Ay, Ru, you have travelled since the last time we saw you. It is like I said that first time. You are the bird, the one that takes and brings the message*” (Isaacson, 2001a:226). Rupert responds:

I was flattered but I didn't agree. Not this time. Another picture had sprung to mind. ‘No man,’ I said. ‘You know what we are, Belinda and me? We're two little donkeys, and you and Dawid are the ones sitting on the buckboard, driving.’ Dawid roused from his light sleep, chuckled. ‘*Ja Mama, that's right: Giddy up!*’ (Isaacson, 2001a:226).

He is no longer in charge of the research process, a kind of partnership has evolved between researcher and researched.

In the manner of events in the Kalahari, the mythical is juxtaposed with the political: “No sooner had I arrived than I discovered our departure to see Besa would have to wait a week. There was to be, of all things, an election at Welkom” (Isaacson, 2001a:221). People outside the ≠Khomani, who could prove Bushman decent, were allowed to join the land claim in order to create greater numerical and political strength. This had led to conflict between the original clan and the newcomers, and the election was being held to form a committee to manage the land claim. The

election day consisted of many political and emotive speeches before the casting of the votes took place. Isaacson (2001a:233) describes the event: "Western politics done Bushman-style for the first time in the New South Africa. The air was heavy with a sense of the struggles to come." In the midst of this seemingly empowering occasion, was a reminder of the Bushman's 'place' in South Africa:

While everyone was eating their *braaivleis*, a tour bus loaded with white, old age pensioners from the town of Uppington came chugging up over the sand and parked right outside the marquee, disgorging a score or so of vague-looking grannies and granddads who came tottering over, asking if there were any crafts for sale, and if these were real Bushmen. Someone eventually found the driver and told him that now was not the time. Apologising, he rounded up his blue-rinsed flock, put them back in the bus and started the engine, only to find the vehicle was stuck in the sand. So all the Bushmen put down their paper plates of *braaied* goat and *roesterkoek* (ash bread) and heaved the bus out (Isaacson, 2001a:233).

Despite this measure of political empowerment, the Bushmen are still available to be inspected.

Polly Loxton, Rupert's mother, forms an instant connection with Belinda and the Bushman community:

At Belinda's house, it was a meeting of two glittering women. Two generations of South African women coming together across the old colour bar...My mother looked at Belinda and thought (or so her diary read): *A woman who definitely runs with wolves. Beautiful, golden and delicate like a steenbokkie*" (Isaacson, 2001a:228).

Polly is joyfully received by the community, as Elsie and Betty bring her a plant as a gift and take her to sit with them, Silikat and Kabuis, on the dunes, dusted with fragrant pollen...

Their hands were all over my mother. Off came her shirt, then her bra. At first she tried to hide her white nakedness, then she relaxed...I did as they bid, snapping my mother, laughing, delighted, almost naked in the sand with the four Bushmen. Then I offered to drive them back to Welkom, these happy, drunken people who had made my mother feel loved. I was grateful to them (Isaacson, 2001a:235).

Being in the Kalahari, in the country of her birth, seems to give Polly a sense of acceptance and healing she had never experienced in the northern hemisphere.

The journey to once again locate Besa reads like a litany of road trip woes: Polly driving like a maniac; no translator to be found; bickering between the researchers, one of whom terrorised and embarrassed a group of local young girls and insisted on conducting interviews with all the researchers, greatly annoying Rupert; driving here and there in the heat, vehicles overloaded with extra passengers; a flat tyre and broken exhaust; Belinda refusing to eat and trying to shave her head with nail scissors for no apparent reason; drunken villagers feasting with a headman dressed like a pimp; the disappearance of Besa's nephew who was supposed to know where he was... The apparent impossibility of the journey seems to emphasise the significance of the meeting with the healer to the ≠Khomani. On reaching the place where Rupert met Besa on the last visit, Dawid tells the people there...

...of the land claim, and how Belinda had come, and me, and how my mother had dreamed of the Bushmen in the cold damp air of England and kept them alive so that it could all come together here, at this tree. Of how he hoped that Besa would give him the strength he needed to go back and lead his people for the last sage of their fight, to hold

on tight until they got the land. He quoted Regopstaan: *'and then the little people can dance and the little people across the Kalahari, around the world even, can also dance'* ...I allowed myself to think of how very much rode on the us finding Besa, on the healing taking place. For if Dawid's leadership failed, if the land claim collapsed for want of a leader to take it on, not only would the Xhmani disintegrate, but what hope would there be for the Bushmen scattered across the rest of the Kalahari...? (Isaacson, 2001a:245-6).

After one more drive, one more hour of waiting in the heat, Besa and his wife Katerina are found by Dawid and the strangely-dressed headman, and greet Rupert and Polly enthusiastically, agreeing to go with them to Watering Sands, where there is a child also in need of healing.

Things become complicated again when Besa demands alcohol as part of his fee: "This time there must be alcohol: and he threw Dawid especially a challenging look, nodding emphatically as he did so" (Isaacson, 2001a:249). Besa and Katerina are soon drunk in the back of the car, "chuckling away like chickens" (Isaacson, 2001a:250), singing and directing the driver this way and that. Then suddenly Besa begins to clutch at Rupert, sitting next to him in the back of the truck. His wife still singing, "his hands clutched and opened in steady rhythm on the skin underneath my T-shirt, as if he wanted to pull something out from my body. Then he propped up on one elbow and flung whatever it was he had extracted out into the night, whooping as he did so" (Isaacson, 2001a:251). Isaacson (2001a:251) describes the sensation: "I felt brimful of wellbeing, as if some pure, nectar-like love had been pumped through me, cleansing me and making me glow from within". He wonders, however, "what did it mean, this private, intimate healing just for me?" (Isaacson, 2001a:251). He feels "wooden" trying to explain what happened to the rest of the group.

The healing dance takes place that night. In his trance, Besa lifts the sick child up, singing and offering her to the stars. He goes to Polly three times, and only twice to Dawid.

Whenever Besa danced close to him, Dawid would look away...On the two occasions that Besa touched him, Dawid submitted readily, eyes closed...But no sooner had the little man danced away again than Dawid's eyes were back on him, looking suspicious, unconvinced. Belinda's gaze, I saw, was more challenging still (Isaacson, 2001a:253-4).

In the morning, "the little girl stood upright on chubby legs...eyes bright as buttons, no longer coughing and wheezing as she had the night before" (Isaacson, 2001a:254). Dawid's face was "a closed book". Belinda seems angry and bitter: "Besa's a bullshitter. All last night while he was dancing I stared him right in the eye, challenging him. He wouldn't meet my eye. I looked at him and felt nothing. I felt nothing when he touched me..." (Isaacson, 2001a:254). Polly spoke to Rupert "of the sense of exile she so often felt in England, of the periodic depressions she had endured during my adolescent years, of the grief which had never left her for her lost parents, her lost country, her lost home" (Isaacson, 2001a:255). She wrote in her diary, which she later allowed Rupert to read, that her experience in the Kalahari, with the Bushmen, had been "like a rebirth". *"What have I learned? Nee Mama, Ek is reg – I have all I need. To be still and quiet and let things happen...That what matters is God within. The pure heart. Loving kindness. Forgiveness. Restitution. Reciprocity"* (Isaacson, 2001a:256).

Eventually Dawid speaks about his experience with Besa:

'It was a healing,'... 'What Besa showed me was that I have the strength here,' he thumped his old wheezy chest with a bony fist. 'He showed me that it never left me, as I had thought. It took me a while to realise this, but that is what he has done.'

'You know, this Besa is a truly powerful healer. You saw what he did with that child, what he did to you in the back of the car, even with the drink in him – for drink and healing do not mix unless you have a special purpose in mind. Besa is a man, like the rest of us. He has his weaknesses – he drinks, does wrong things, has followed the bad in order to know the good.'

That is what the drinking was for, to show me that he is weak too, but that his powers are the same as they ever were. That it was the same for me...That was his healing, to make me see that I still have the powers, the strength...' (Isaacson, 2001a:260).

The healing seemed to be about changing Dawid's own beliefs about his powers and role as leader, a healing of the mind and spirit. Dawid also points to the connection between Rupert and Besa. At the first healing, Besa called leopards out of the bush when he laid hands on Rupert, and immediately after the encounter in the car, they saw a leopard on the road. "That, Rupi, is your story, between you and Besa. Besa is a leopard – it is his animal, it is his spirit when he goes out...and you, Rru, you are a leopard too" (Isaacson, 2001a:261). Dawid tells him that the leopard "is strong but savage...You cannot negotiate with it...But when this great, this independent power is harnessed for something good, then see how the leopard can work!" (Isaacson, 2001a:261). On bidding Rupert goodbye, Dawid says, "Don't wait around here like a bloody Bushman. You know what to do, go home and write, get working, what about this book, eh?" (Isaacson, 2001a:263).

The end

The Healing Land ends with the land claim celebrations in March 1999, and a final visit to Besa. Isaacson observes the contradictions in these historic proceedings: "The land inside the park could not actually be lived in, but the agreement allowed the Xhmani to visit their ancestral graves, hunt a little, gather a little and run their own tourism projects there. How exactly this was to be arranged was left unclear" (Isaacson, 2001a:264). He cites a reporter from the *Cape Times*:

At times during the weekend's festivities, the needs of the people of the Kalahari appeared to play second fiddle to the whims of hordes of organisers, interested parties and journalists. If restoring the dignity of the claimants is indeed a key element of the land restitution process, was it right for people to be transported in three-tier cattle trucks to a ceremony celebrating the return of their land? Or to insist, when they are tired and have not been fed, that they dance around the fire in time for an advertised press call? (Isaacson, 2001a:265).

Despite all the political changes, "little changed fundamentally. Once the political fanfare surrounding the land claim had died down, months drifted by and still the Xhmani continued to sit by the side of the road as before" (Isaacson, 2001a:265). There were bureaucratic delays, shuffling of papers and ministries, the farmers had to wait for lambing to take place...the people became frustrated and violence and alcohol abuse intensified.

The journey back to Botswana was for a healing for Riekie, and also a filmmaking opportunity for Chris Walker. They found Besa emaciated and fragile. After food and rest he performed the healing dance, along with a powerful BaKgalagadi healer. At the end of the night, Rupert was left with the "sense of peace, of well-being that Besa always imparted to me...The Bushmen would be all right. The process had begun and the first battle was won. And I had been allowed to be a part of

it" (Isaacson, 2001a:270). Riekie left smiling, at peace. On Christmas Day that same year he was murdered. People said it was a sacrifice, "the pain could come out and healing could begin" (Isaacson, 2001a:271). The rains fell and the rivers flowed. Hatred and healing.

Analysis

The reflexivity of Rupert Isaacson

A great deal of Rupert Isaacson is reflected in the pages of his book, *The Healing Land*. He reveals a lot about himself as the producer of the book, and about the process of doing the research. As Belinda more cynically puts it, "He put a lot of his own ego...when I read it, I thought, 'jislaaik, Rupert, your ego is all over this book!'" (2001c) The book has been criticised for containing too much of the author, and praised for offering a unique personal, human perspective: "Too much of the author's personal odyssey was hooked onto the far more interesting and serious Bushman issues" (Rosenthal, 2001:4); "For anyone who wants to experience the Kalahari and its people, their past and possibilities for the future, their rituals and culture, all presented from a deeply personal perspective" (Amazon, 2001).

From an auto-ethnographic perspective, the author's 'personal odyssey' is significant through what it reveals about the author himself, his experiences, biases and preconceptions, and how they influence the final written product. The description of this odyssey also gives insight into the processes by which the research was conducted. This allows the reader to form a more in-depth critical analysis of the book, and understanding of the situations, people and places it aims to describe.

Reflection on Isaacson's personality and ideology as they are revealed through the book indicates a man caught between myth and reality. He "set out for Africa to follow these myths" (Isaacson, 2001b:59), which are constantly confronted with the harsh reality he encounters there. While drawn to the romance and the magic, he tries to deal with the reality as well:

White boy goes into the desert, seeking mystic union with the last remnants of Africa's first people. He never seems to quite find what he's looking for, but he comes back with something even better – a funny, touching and ultimately hopeful account of his bit part in the Bushmen's desperate struggle to find a place for themselves in a world grown hostile to hunter-gatherers. Some writing about Bushmen lapses into sentimentality; some is hopeless and cynical. Isaacson skirts all these traps, contemplating his subjects' drunken shortcomings with a clear eye, marvelling at the skill with which they manipulate him, but never managing to resist their charm (Rian Malan in Isaacson, undated b).

Isaacson's desire to find hope in these desperate situations drives him to seek out the mythical, the mystical, the power of healing.

In order to analyse the use of reflexive methodology in *The Healing Land*, I asked Belinda and Polly about Rupert's representation of himself. The author's mother responded: "I think he portrayed himself truthfully. I recognised him and those events I shared with him. He had an intense purpose in writing the book. It was very important to him" (Polly Loxton, 2002a). Belinda Kruiper wrote, after much consideration:

The author Rupert Isaacson's self-projection is strong and true. He managed to bring across many of which he is...determined, objective, alert, basically a 'boy', adventurous, loving, and always the ultimate search for self-fulfilment. I cannot elaborate any more

and will bore you with deeper analysis but will conclude only that self-projection is easy if events recorded are stimulated by clear memory of them, and the now focus remains connected to the then. Rupert remains connected and therefore he comes across in control of his self-projected image. Reflecting even insecurity, ignorance and ever gentleness mixed with longing to understand. He is very analytical at times (Belinda Kruiper, 2002d).

These comments give credibility to the use of reflexivity in the book, as the author appears to reflect truthfully on his work, his experiences, his engagement with the Bushmen. Polly emphasises the intensity of his purpose in writing the book, which necessitates critical reflection on the process of writing it. Dawid Kruiper also mentioned the importance of “*die waarheid*” [truth] in the book (Dawid Kruiper, 2002b). “I saw he concentrated on the book and his feeling is he also actually asks for help to see that light. Like he wrote there, he also saw but that which he wrote is the truth, more truth” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Belinda mentions that the connection Rupert has with his experiences in the Kalahari enable him to portray himself truthfully. She also observes that his writing reflects insecurity, ignorance and a longing to understand. Belinda points to Isaacson’s “ultimate search for self-fulfilment” which I think provides a key to understanding his focus on healing, the trance dance, the magical mystical aspects of Bushman culture, his desire to experience healing, the need to “be a part” of a process of restitution, healing and justice.

Dawid Kruiper (2002b) believes that Rupert did not know who he was, that he came to the desert to ‘find’ himself, to discover his roots and his ancestors (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). “It was never my intention to become a ‘spiritual traveller’”, Isaacson observes (undated e). It began, he thinks, with the visit to cousin Frank, who inquired conversationally as to what stage Rupert had reached in his spiritual odyssey. “I had no answer. I was a teenager, concerned with girls, adventure and, well, girls. It had never occurred to me that my life might be a spiritual journey. But despite my inability to respond, and my resistance to my cousin’s rather rigid brand of spirituality, the question resonated” (Isaacson, undated e). Through the medium of a website dedicated to *The Healing Land* (Isaacson, undated a), Isaacson gives readers access to further reflection on his book:

The Kalahari and Me

...I was going to find the last clans of Bushmen (Or KhoiSan, to be politically correct) hunter-gatherers still living in the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa. I was going to spend time with them, experience their culture, and at the same time report on the human rights abuses...that they have been suffering since time immemorial, and their fledgling attempts, in the form of political organisations and land claims, to right these wrongs. Instead I got hijacked by a man named Dawid Kruiper, traditional leader of the Xhmani Bushmen – who led me little by little down the healing, frankly magical path I have followed ever since. Although *The Healing Land* (Dawid’s title, not mine) does stay true to its original journalistic objective (it tells the story of the Xhmani land claim in South Africa, the eviction of Bushmen from Botswana’s Central Kalahari Game Reserve by their government, and the struggle for autonomy among Namibia’s Bushman clans), it became far more a book about healing (Isaacson, undated c).

Isaacson also discusses incidents which were not included in the book, and the selection process:

There are stories which I did not include in *The Healing Land*, fearing that I was already stretching the credulity of Western readers far enough, and that to include every magical happening, every incident of healing, might come across as too “New Agey”, and

therefore undermine the story, which would ultimately do the Bushmen a disservice and in turn undermine their own struggle for recognition both as healers and as people with basic human rights (Isaacson, undated c).

He was concerned that “too much magic and too many inexplicable occurrences could undermine the Bushmen’s credibility (and my own) in the eyes of Western readers” (Isaacson, undated d). He decided that he would “only include such incidents where they related absolutely to the main line of the story – the land claim and the Bushman struggle to come back from the edge of extinction...these were not always easy decisions for an author to make” (Isaacson, undated d). One of these stories involves a dream – Keyan Tomaselli tells students their dreams in the Kalahari can be significant (Protocols for Field Excursions: 2):

I was on my way to visit the !Kung Bushmen living at the Tsodilo Hills in Botswana...The night before arriving at the hills...I dreamed that I was already there and was busy interviewing the leader about the current state of affairs among his people. In my dream the old man shook his head sadly and said that no, he no longer made the bone arrowheads that I heard about. He didn’t make arrows at all, as his people were no longer allowed to hunt and the old ways were dying...Later...I went to meet the relocated Bushmen. They sat in a little group in the shade of a large tree...with their leader, a wizened, very old man, at the apex of the circle. I could have picked him out in a crowd. The same man from my dream two nights before. So, as closely as I could remember, I asked him the same questions as in my dream and he pretty much gave me the same sad answers (Isaacson, undated d).

I think this shows the extent of Isaacson’s involvement with the stories of the Kalahari; its people penetrated his subconscious. Some of his self-reflection, however, points to a degree of naïve idealism and raises questions about the accuracy of his information. I also read on this website the story of how the cover of the book was chosen:

Now, those of you who have read *The Healing Land*, may remember the scene in which old Dawid gave me the title of the book and made specifications about how he wanted the cover of the book to look. He had given me some really specific directions – including the colours, which – he said – should be the reds and ochres of the Kalahari – the ‘healing colours’ which he thought would help transmit some of ‘the healing power of this land’...I told Dawid that I would do what I could, but also pointed out that authors, especially first time authors, have little say in such matters, and that ultimately the final image for the cover would probably be chosen by the publishers. Well, a couple of days after I made the decision to cut the story about the dream and the old leader at the Tsodilo Hills, I received a package containing a tentative cover image from the publishers...The image was a picture of the old man from the Tsodilos, the man from my dream. Only it had been taken perhaps ten or fifteen years ago, when the man was still hunting, still making his giraffe-bone arrow-heads, still living among the paintings and spirits and hunting grounds of his ancestors. Not only this, but all the colours were exactly as old Dawid had specified (Isaacson, undated d).

Intrigued by this, I contacted Paul Weinberg, to whom the front jacket photograph is attributed. He observed in response:

I went and visited the website and read the stuff about the cover and who Isaacson claims the picture to be of. Well it is not of the man from Tsodilo Hills, it is of !Gwi, a Ju!wa speaking hunter who lives in a village on the way to Kaudum...it is about 30kms west of Tshumkwe in Namibia. The photo was taken in 1999 and was published in *Once We Were Hunters* (Weinberg, 2000) (Paul Weinberg, 2003).

Despite any inaccuracies, the communities involved in the book seem to feel that Rupert was committed to the pursuit of truth: “I told him everything, just the truth that he wants to know eagerly” (Isak Kruiper, 2001). “He went from us to the other Bushmen...the more he was with the other Bushmen, the more he found the truth, the truth” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Dawid also hinted that there were truths which outsiders could never discover: “there is something behind [hidden] that I can’t give him, that which is mine. That is a Bushman, that I can’t convey” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a).

Rupert Isaacson’s journey in search of the Bushmen’s truth has also been a journey in search of himself, his own truth. It is conveyed as a highly personalised story in terms of his reflexive analysis of his experiences and encounters, the healing and fulfilment he sought for his mother and himself, and the intimate connections he formed with the communities he visited. His method, while not explicitly discussed in the book, could be described as ‘auto-journalism’ – auto-ethnography that is written in a journalistic style. In examining Isaacson’s methods I have tried to interrogate how they intersect, differ and comment on my own auto-ethnography, and the theories of reflexivity I have encountered in this study. I think the most obvious difference is that his biographical method is taken for granted, there is no need for this approach to be explicitly stated and justified in the context of autobiographical, journalistic or travel writing. My use of reflexivity or auto-ethnography in an academic context, however, has to be explained, theorised and justified as a research methodology.

The purpose and use of these methodologies in Isaacson’s and my work are different and yet similar. Rupert Isaacson is looking, as Belinda observes, for self-fulfilment, for his origins, identity and family connections. His Kalahari journeys are based on the search for biographical and familial links, and for personal history, as well as an altruistic quest for healing and restitution for the San communities he meets. My use of auto-ethnography attempts to answer broader questions relating to social research methodology – how can researchers reach a deeper understanding and more equitable and empowering representation of indigenous and marginalised peoples? This project comprises a search for methodology, for a way of explaining the nature of the encounter between observer and observed and describing what is learnt about the ‘Other’ and the self in the research process. My examination of Isaacson’s work has, however, pointed to answers to these questions regarding social research methodology through his self-critical approach which questions his role in and involvement with the communities, the suggestion that learning about the self incorporates learning about the ‘Other’ and about the research process, the relationships he formed with his research subjects, and the way in which his ‘informants’ are represented as individuals with specific ideas, hopes and needs (Tomaselli, 2003b).

The Healing Land, as a case study in my examination of auto-ethnography, demonstrates the value of locating events and encounters in a specific and meaningful context (Tedlock, 2000:455). The depth of detail and understanding Isaacson provides about the communities he visited enables the reader to clearly understand the context in which these people live and in which the events described in the book took place. His writing also reflects the way in which research encounters and the stories of the ‘Other’ can be made sense of in terms of personal experience, thus eliminating a rigid distinction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002c:71). Isaacson’s writing indicates that ethnographic knowledge can be sought in experience as well as academic texts (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000:1059). Writing that describes the moment-to-moment, specific details of life is a valuable means to learn about another culture

(Ellis and Bochner, 2000:737). The implicit auto-ethnographic method in Isaacson's work leads him to critically consider his role in the community, how he could represent them in a way that reduced their marginalisation and offer practical assistance in the situations they face (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:748; Denzin and Lincoln, 2002a:ix), asking himself the fundamental question, "what difference could I make?" (Isaacson, 2001a:57).

Reflection on community involvement and expectations

The relationships Rupert developed with many of his research subjects were deeper, more complicated and more personal than conventional researcher-researched interactions. Belinda (2001c) describes the ways in which they community interacted with Rupert the Author and Ru the friend and confidant:

Polly became their mom...Ru is a household name. Oumas love him, children love him, he's just Ru...from the day he started asking questions, Dawid said, 'we must take this man in our family, you must give him everything,' he said to me, 'you don't have to hold back. You can translate, you don't have to leave out.' So he became a loved name in the family, and some of the people, like Silikat and them, are pained by this, because again, the platform goes straight to politics, and the leadership, and they feel Rupert has betrayed them. 'Cause yet in the book the story that does capture you is the Riverbed kids' story, Betty's pain, Elsie's pain. Those are the issues that bring out the dimensions of really seeing what's going on. And these people are also like me now, we're out there, and our most personal stuff, and again, the stuff of the Riverbed kids was personal. It was when they came to visit me at my house, like they usually did in private capacity, and we sit on the dunes, singing old songs and they'd take Polly's top off and Kabuis would massage her feet. We never though all those things were going to be recorded for the book, 'cause that is the private moments where Rupert the author was just Ru.

The intimacy of the relationships Isaacson formed with his research subjects led to a depth of connectedness and expectation seldom experienced by Bushman communities with those that study them, or by journalists and researchers with those they research. The people I have spoken to about their impressions of Rupert and his work with the Bushmen seem to feel a complex intensity of love and betrayal. Sanna Kruiper (2002) said to me, "*Rupert is my kind, Polly is my ma*" [Rupert is my child, Polly is my mother". Toppies and Tina (2002) said that they had accepted Rupert as their son, as their friend; they trusted him and now they are heartbroken because the money they expected to come out of their book never appeared.

It seems that community reactions to *The Healing Land* are closely related to money. Jacob Malgas (2002) was particularly dissatisfied with having received no payment for his involvement with the book. He tells me that Rupert "put the money in someone else's hands and not in mine...He gave the money to Dawid Kruiper...We didn't get any" (2002). He seems frustrated at his lack of control in the financial process. He took the connection formed between Lena and himself, and the author, very seriously, as he appeared to be under the impression that "Rupert wrote a book about Lena", rather than about the ≠Khomani as well as other communities, mentioning Jakob and Lena a few times, mainly in relation to violence and abuse. He wants me to tell Rupert Isaacson that Jacob Malgas is waiting for his money: "Lena and I are struggling...tell him we are very angry" (2002). Isaacson points out, however, that "at no point did I make any of the Xhomi any promises as to proceeds from the book...it would have unwise of me to make any such promises knowing as I do how long it takes for any royalties to come in – if indeed they ever do" (Isaacson,

2003). The author states that he was ‘upfront’ with the community of the lack of possibilities regarding revenue from the book (Isaacson, 2003).

In July I spoke again with traditional leader Dawid Kruiper about the books I am studying. Unlike in our last interview²⁹, he refused to be recorded, but insisted on asking me what I was writing down and dictating what he thought should be written. He spoke a lot about how Rupert Isaacson’s book is “*die waarheid*” [the truth], how Rupert was sent by the forefathers to write this book, and how he loved Rupert like his child and Rupert’s mother Polly was like a mother to him. As we sat in the sand beside the fires, the books were passed round, and everyone noticed the pricetags still stuck to the back covers. The people wanted to know what happened to the R180 and R195. Dawid (2002) asked “*Is daar nie deel vir my nie?*” [Isn’t there something for me?] “*Wat van die mense wat in die boek is?*” [What about the people who are in the book?]. He wanted a percentage of the book sales to go into the Dawid Kruiper Family Trust for him to use as he sees fit to benefit the family. “*Geld is die wortel van alle kwaad,*” [Money is the root of all evil/anger] he tells me. Dawid thinks that people are stealing money from the Bushmen to get themselves to the top of the tree. “*Hoekom moet ‘n Boesman ‘n goue gans eier wees?*” [why must a Bushman be a golden goose egg?] he asked, making sure Nelia, our Afrikaans translator, wrote it down for me. Truth, respect and history are not seen as empowering without financial empowerment. Everything seems to be about money. The Bushmen are not really concerned about the respect and awareness that may come out of the publication of their stories. Maybe they have developed a hardened cynicism after seeing respect fail to materialise so many times. The intimate bonds the ≠Khomani shared with Rupert and Polly seem to be insignificant in comparison to the hardships which they blame, for the moment, entirely on Rupert whom they trusted and the money they did not see.

Toppies Kruiper (Dawid’s son) and his common-law wife, Tina Swarts (2002), whom I’ve never interviewed previously, wanted to speak with me as soon as they saw the copy of *The Healing Land* in my hand. Tina and I sat down on the bank beside the road, and she began telling me how “*hartseer*” [sad, heartsore] they are because they “*het niks gekry*” [got nothing] from the book. Rupert promised them money which they never saw, and now they are “*hartseer en ongelukkig*” [sad and unhappy]. These are words I’m beginning to hear frequently. They do not have money to send their child to school, and this is Rupert’s fault. Tina’s brother Dals Kruiper committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a vehicle. He wouldn’t have done it if the money had come. The trust and dependency is terrifying. Tina began to weep and I did not know how to respond. Does telling someone wearing R500 boots your problems make you feel any better? What will they expect of me after this encounter? I tried to explain that I want to help by creating awareness and respect for the Bushmen – but it appears money would be preferable and they seem to expect it more.

“*Die Kalahari is vol stories,*” [the Kalahari is full of stories] Belinda (2002a) tells me, and her story is that Dawid in fact appropriated R30 000 which was meant to be paid to the community for their involvement in *The Healing Land*. Perhaps the Bushmen are not just golden-egg laying geese to writers and filmmakers but also to those within the community who know how to take advantage of them. Belinda says that she had not expected to be paid for her work as an informant and translator. However, when she found out that Bulanda, the translator with whom Rupert worked

²⁹ See Chapter One: Kalahari Diaries.

in Botswana, had been paid a fee (Isaacson, 2001a:190), she felt that she had perhaps been treated unfairly:

I was an interpreter and also sort of a personal friend and, as the years went by, was keeping him informed of my own expense, as I spent loads of money phoning him to the States and supporting him with documents and papers that came out, to keep him alerted. Because he was really interesting to work with. So from the heart I didn't mind not being paid...he obviously said, 'it's low budget'. They all say it. I understand, it doesn't mean because you're from overseas you're gonna have a lot of money. So I also tried to think of people's pockets all the time, finances, and if Rupert could rather stay at my house and live off my house, I used to take my friend's car and take him to the Bushmen, I paid for the petrol...But if he had *told* me then that Bulanda, the interpreter in Botswana, was being paid high interpreter fees, I would also have asked for something. I thought from the heart we were operating, he should have done the from the heart thing, and if he could pay Bulanda, then he had money. And why didn't he pay me? Now to me it's a personal thing there, but on the other hand, if I had known my rights, if I had known I could have demanded a fee... I didn't know. To me it was just, 'ag, I'm doing this, it's no problem.' But now I've discovered you don't do things for nothing (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

Having read these observations, Isaacson (2003) responded that he had reimbursed Belinda for her telephone bills and groceries and that although he was unable to pay her himself for her work as a translator, he "negotiated a sizeable fee for her for her role as a translator in the *Regopstaan's Dream* film which, I hoped would go a long way towards making up for all the time and energy I had demanded of her during the previous trips".

The intense emotional level of involvement with the author seems to make it difficult for community members to distinguish between the professional and their friend, where they do feel such a distinction should be drawn. Belinda did not expect the personal information about her family and marital history to be included in the book: "I would have stopped him, or I would have said to him, 'put it in the right context.' 'Cause regardless of me speaking about my father's beatings, I didn't project it as a political thing and a minister...I was telling my friend my story of pain" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c). She felt she had confided these matters to Rupert as a friend, not as an author, yet as an informant she was not given the opportunity to respond at the pre-publication stage: "The first draft, I didn't know, it wasn't the stuff of me in yet...the family stuff was not in the draft, no" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

Community members also struggle to see the distinction between the friend who wishes to help and support them in every way and the professional who needs to earn a living, support a family, and try to succeed in a competitive professional field. Much confusion and anger have arisen out of the expectations of income from the publication of *The Healing Land* and the production of a related film. Many people feel that Rupert Isaacson did not deliver the money that he promised them, or that the funding was mishandled. It was widely expected that the ≠Khomani community was to receive R30 000. This funding was to come from the producer of the film *Regopstaan's Dream*, but many people believed it was promised to them individually by Rupert himself. Belinda (2001c) says:

Rupert and the filmmaker stood with us under a tree with the whole Kruiper clan, and everybody agreed, right there...the money must go to my account, of which we must take R10 000 and uplift the Red House into a children's home for the kids...And the other R20 000...I would speak with Dawid and his daughter Oulet, and ensure that at least all the people in the family get something from it, and then Dawid would also look at how we will apply the other money. None of that happened, and simply because the

NGO...went behind my back and said to the leaders, 'Belinda shouldn't get the money into her account, because it's going to cause problems.'...The money then went to Dawid, and he had an alcohol act on it...That's where the relationship with Rupert came to an end, because he should have done the right thing. He knows the intricacy of this family, he knew the dynamics, he knew that regardless of how the Bushmen can make stories, they love Billie and they trusted her. We'd sat under a tree, on camera, everybody agreed, it's safe with Belinda, because the community knew Dawid would fuck them. So then the stories did go round, I took the R30 000, eventually he had to say that I didn't, he spent it. But it was damaging already, the whole Parks Board thought I took R30 000 from the Bushmen. Everybody thinks I took R30 000.

The community was not made aware that the film *Regopstaan's Dream* (directed by Christopher Walker and produced by First Run/Icarus Films in 2000) and the book *The Healing Land* (written by Rupert Isaacson and published by Fourth Estate in 2001) were separate productions. According to Polly Loxton:

That film Rupert was involved with was a painful disappointment to us both. Rupert was only the chap who knew the people and arranged the meetings. That was as far as his influence went. Ru went back to America and the director Chris Walker took the shots back to London and cut the film and made an incoherent mess. I was so disappointed I could have cried - and angry. It was called *Regopstaan's Dream*, but it seemed that Chris had no idea of what that dream meant. I translated the interviews which were full of moving memories from the old ladies of the time in the park and with Mr Bain and the casting of moulds of their bodies and the exhibiting of them in Cape Town. None of this was used. I even spent a day in the cutting room in London when I brought the translations to Chris and saw wonderful and moving footage. Then he produced finally a dull, confusing, disjointed film that conveyed nothing of the history, the hope, the quality of the bushmen (Polly Loxton, 2002a).

In response to the question of the community's expectation of payment from the book and/or the film, Isaacson writes:

No payment from the book - too little money was involved for that. But there was money from the film, organised through Belinda and Dawid - and yes, all sorts of accusations were bandied back and forth about what happened to that. Dawid even accused Belinda of stealing it at one point. I think, however, that most of it ended up with Dawid...a lesson learned I guess (Rupert Isaacson, 2002).

Polly refers to the lack of income generated from publishing a book:

If Belinda and co are asking about money from the book, perhaps you could tell them about the way publishers work, which is to give an advance to an author to help finance the writing of a book. This is a loan which has to be paid back from book sales before the author gets anything for himself. Rupert only had a modest advance payment, since he is not a well known author with sure fire sales. The publishers are still paying themselves back, so he has made no money at all from that source yet...I know that hopes and expectations run very high among the Bushmen about what one can do, because they have little idea of the costs and constraints of our lives. This leads to a sense of betrayal, even though the people who work on their behalf can often barely support themselves, and are trying to move mountains of indifference and bureaucracy. Really difficult (Polly Loxton, 2002b).

This work requires dealing with vast chasms in understanding, a lack of knowledge of how 'our' world works as we try to fathom 'their's', and massive expectations driven by desperate hope.

'Oompie'³⁰ Dawid

The conflict Isaacson experiences with relation to the magical myths and the reality of life among the Bushmen is reflected in his portrayal of Dawid Kruiper. Reviewer Maya Khankhoje (2002) suggests that:

Rupert Isaacson's work is certainly informed by van der Post's ground breaking observations, but the author has gone one step beyond: he has tried to avoid looking upon the Bushmen with a paternalistic eye, to the extent possible for a Londoner with a South Africa mother and a Rhodesian father...Most importantly, he had avoided idealising a people he has learnt to truly love and trust.

However, others more familiar with the ≠Khomani community might argue that Dawid Kruiper has been idealised in *The Healing Land*. Paul Weinberg, for example, observes that "the struggle of the white Bushman continues" and that he does not wish to "read another article or book about how Dawid Kruiper gave them mystical insight" (Paul Weinberg, 2003).

This idealisation might be in part a reflection of Belinda's influence on the book; she related far more closely to Dawid during her earlier involvement with the Bushmen than she does now. Belinda writes:

Dawid and I were and always will be close. I have probably been closer to Oom Dawid than any other person alive if it comes to trusting as far as the heart/emotion/spirit side of him. We spent hours and hours talking, laughing, discussing life, religion, politics, him as leader, as father, about the family, media, plants, myths and legends, experiences, marriage, adultery, babies, vehicles, the universe, frauds, researchers, ancestors, 'spirits', healing, enemies, prison, stealing, love, but never about Vetkat. For some reason Dawid never told me he had a younger stepbrother Vetkat...Dawid welcomes me but not Vetkat therefore I choose not to get involved anymore (Belinda Kruiper, 2002c).

Dawid's hatred for Vetkat has resulted in the breakdown of the connection between him and Belinda. It also seems that her involvement in the community has made Belinda more aware of Dawid's controversial role as a community leader:

He's a manipulator, bullshitter, and that's what's killing the actual essence and why you don't want the mythology and romanticism happening. Because the real people have the romance and they do have the myth. And they wouldn't eff around, to put it that way, but they get ignored, because there's a leadership and there's a CPA³¹ in place and there's a political platform in place, and that platform has learned to capitalise, big time (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

There have been several implications that Dawid has not acted in the best interests of the community in matters such as the handling of the remuneration for *Regopstaan's Dream*, as well as allegations of spousal and sexual abuse. Belinda spoke about her love for the community and the awareness of the pain suffered by individuals:

...at the end of the day, I said to him, 'Oom Dawid, you know that to me it's about, I've just come to love you and your family, and that is truth. I really just absolutely love them, I just love them.' And I said to him, 'if I find out you are the one causing the pain, and I speak personal levels now, I'm going to fuck you up, and I'll put you where you must be!...'And Rupert knows this, the author of *The Healing Land*... (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

³⁰ Uncle, affectionate.

³¹ Community Property Association.

Isaacson's portrayal of Dawid indicates his ultimate desire not to accept the entire brutal truth he is dealing with. I must admit I sympathise. When sitting under a tree with this charming, crinkly-eyed smiling old man, captivated by his humorous turn of phrase, his mystical stories, I didn't feel an instant of fear; it was impossible to believe that this character was anything other than what he seemed. Isaacson 'justifies' his perceptions by saying that the Bushmen showed him:

"...sometimes very graphically, how leading a spiritual life does not necessarily require being a saint. All the Bushmen healers I know drank (though not to achieve trance). Many of them cheated on their wives, fought sometimes, and said and did thoughtless things" (Isaacson, undated e).

Dawid had more control over the situation than Rupert might have realised. Although he was surprised to find that *The Healing Land* was not in fact his biography, Dawid still referred to "the work that he did for me" (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a). Aside from the financial benefit, the book largely portrays Dawid as he would wish the world to see him: wise, spiritual, powerful, kind, a leader. Through his trust and need to see the good in the community, Isaacson makes Dawid Kruiper the hero of the ≠Khomani's story.

Belinda's story

The barriers of language and literacy prevent the ≠Khomani Bushmen from reading their story in *The Healing Land*, which limited my capacity to learn about what people thought of the way in which they were represented in the book. I had hoped to have it translated in the form of Afrikaans tapes to which the community could listen, but time and availability of translators did not allow for this. Belinda, however, has read the book, and made some interesting comments about the way in which she and her personal story are represented:

I think Rupert has been very honest about how he saw me in the different times in the Kalahari, but as far as my relationship with the Parks Board, from the political side of things, I don't think he represented me very well. Because this book would now damage my relationship with Dries Engelbrecht and the managers. It would highly damage me because we had a wonderful relationship, regardless of my rebel attitude (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

In terms of the information that was included about her family background, Belinda said:

Amazingly enough, *The Healing Land*, he's managed to do with that book what I think he was hoping for. Or perhaps I spoke a lot in the book about people come to the desert to heal and they don't even know it. But *The Healing Land* has healed my family. You know, my sister-in-law, when she read it she understood a lot about me more, and my rebel attitude and where I'm coming from. My mother has loved it. Everybody has been in tears reading it. So actually it's healed my family (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

She seems also to feel exposed by the publication of such sensitive information. As far as she knows her father has not read the book, but she is concerned about her ex-husband's reaction:

...my ex-husband, Paul, is also mentioned in the book, because he [Rupert] asked a lot of questions, we were looking through old albums...Like you would with a buddy hanging out...So my ex-husband was at my brother's house the other day...Ricardo brought the

cover of the book...And he was curious and I said to Glynis, 'shit! He's found a book and there's about when he beat me in it!' Now in essence he [Isaacson] was bringing it, he'd brought out the complex beauty in relation to apartheid and political issues and the ≠Khomani, and showing me and my link...ja, it's a shock. But anyway (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

Belinda suggests that the way in which she is represented in the book is overly theatrical at times: "it's always just sort of the activist girl and the dramatic...Also very dramatising me crying and saying I will stay here until Dawid gets his land and stuff like that. It's not in that context" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

Belinda expressed understanding of the way in which socio-political issues affect the way in which events, people and organisations are represented. She describes how an attempted murder took place in the community, and those involved were advised by an NGO worker: "do not lay a charge, please let us not do this, there's a very sensitive land claim going on...we can address these issues afterwards" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c). She observes that "*The Healing Land* projects SASI as a very on-the-ball organisation who's done wonderful things. They have, on black and white [paper]. They've done magic on black and white" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

The experience of getting involved with the harsh reality of the ≠Khomani people has given Belinda insights into many aspects of the community, as well as exacting a heavy personal toll. When I first met her in July 2001, she was suffering from severe stress and malnutrition; she was burdened by the weight of community despair. They did not have enough to eat – neither did she. She understand the debilitating effect of hunger:

But being hungry makes you then lose your dignity and in a country with so many resources, especially food, doesn't realise by now that the chief source of laziness and what seems to you like demotivation and people not wanting to work especially in rural areas, is hunger! You can scarcely gain enough strength to go and collect your firewood to cook the pot of water, to make the tea (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a).

In her life with the Bushmen she had experienced first hand the hardships faced by marginalised people and the frustrations of trying to help them and dealing with the constraints of bureaucracy and inequality:

I turned around at death's doorstep twice because of hunger and I ask myself in bitterness...why the fuck, if I'm so important and [name withheld, academic] can send me a letter in writing stating he's learnt more from me than from any other person in his entire time as an anthropologist, as a filmmaker, why then am I hungry and why am I still ... you know, with no capacity? (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a)

Her position within SASI, instead of enabling her to help the community, resulted in more frustration: "Why are they wanting to silence me all the time? Don't they realise they're busy with people's lives? Everyday you're silencing me as I'm speaking here with this weak heart that I'm sitting with on my way to the clinic? There's a risk of another one dying" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a). She was eventually fired, unable to remain true to her role in the community and to please the administration:

And when I started realising that these so-called drunks and rebels were the key people, they call them the Riverbed kids ... I tried to focus SASI on that. I didn't want to do the committees and the politics. I felt there were too many people already involved there... Also I think [certain people] felt a bit threatened because I was also surfacing a lot of things. The community was saying the lawyer had to come round the fire. So I spoke as

the people said and that got me probably in trouble both sides, I was the middleman (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a)

Belinda also experienced the reality of the love/hate relationship with community which is beginning to become more apparent in the aftermath of the land claim. Not everyone responded positively to her presence and her marriage within the community:

And yet there are people like Vetkat, my own husband, who's Bushman, who are sitting on rented land and is battling to pay R1000 a month. Now, you'd say the government gave them land, but he is not welcome on the government allocated land either, because of inter family dynamics and politics and that's just ... it's life threatening to him. He was threatened with his life and so was I (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a).

The Healing Land was written during the earlier stages of Belinda's journey with the Bushmen, yet it reflects the personal pressures her involvement was already causing her, the expectations and the massive dependence. This is evident in her desperate and dangerous confrontation of the violence against women in the community, her complete emotional involvement with the ≠Khomani, and the sense of their dependence on her:

...suddenly adamant that they had to come back to the park and see 'their *Belindy*', Betty, Kabuis, Silikat and Elsie refused to get out of the car. Somehow they had become even more drunk than before – they must have had another bottle stashed away somewhere. They had to see Belinda with their own eyes, they said, to make sure she was back safe from the road (Isaacson, 2001:236).

Her subsequent experiences reflect the depth, which was not yet reached by Isaacson in *The Healing Land*, of the despair, the demands, the expectations, the contradictions, the frustration and the complexity of existence in the Kalahari and of trying to change it. Belinda (2002a) observed wryly that her role in the Kalahari was "to understand the depths of the crap".

Polly: The mother's story

Why, [Dawid] asked, did I care so much about "the little people", as he called the Bushmen? What, besides journalism, had brought me here, to this remote place? I told him about my mother's African stories and how they had included the Kalahari tales that had captured me as a child. 'Ah,' said Dawid, looking up at the stars and smiling. 'So the mother had the vision before the son. Then she has to come out too. Without her the healing will not work. Will she come?' (Isaacson, 2001b:60).

Polly's role in the story is significant, both in terms of her own transformative healing, and her importance for the ≠Khomani as "The woman who kept us alive while all the time we were dying here in the Kalahari" (Isaacson, 2001:228). Polly describes her relationship with Africa, her need for healing in the Kalahari:

In answer to your question what the Kalahari meetings meant to me: a great deal and very complicated. I had left South Africa in 1959, shaking it off as a backward vicious barbaric place. I held the simple beliefs of the left. Whites guilty oppressors; blacks suffering subjects. I also had from infancy, from the adults in my family, an understanding and experience of liking and respect between the racial groups, on a personal, not political level. My father loved the world around him and the people in it...

He made me aware of the peoples who had gone before me. My own ancestors, the people they had displaced, the adventure of life.

I left South Africa at twenty-one, having been involved in left wing university politics. An idealist without experience of life.

I did not return to South Africa for nine years. I still felt England good, South Africa bad. In 1967/8 I brought my three-year-old daughter and Rupert aged one to visit my parents. Three months later they were both dead and that brought an end to my visits to Africa. I thought I didn't mind. Twenty years later, Rupert, observing my savagely depressed state, said, "You are home sick. Go back." It was a revelatory insight. I can hardly describe the joy I felt on that return.

The return to Africa, the journey to the Kalahari, her contact with the Bushmen and the triumph of the land claim healed her. She had not been aware of the impact her stories and visions of Africa had had on her son, and did not expect to be included in his book. In terms of autobiographical/reflexive method, however, her presence and influence is central to the story.

Rupert's book was a surprise to me. I wanted my children to share the Africa of my memory. I knew he was interested in the stories I told him as a little boy; he listened. I had no idea how deeply he was gripped, till he began to travel and find his path from story to experience. When it came to the book, I thought it was a bad idea to include me. Who wants to hear about the author's mother? He told me about his conversation with Dawid about the purpose of the book and Dawid saying I should come to the Kalahari. I jumped at the opportunity to join Rupert and travel with his friends and the experience was beyond anything I had expected. I felt I was back in the arms of Johanna, my coloured nanny whom I had loved, in the place where I belonged. The physical beauty of the Bushmen, the intensity of the personal contacts, the excitement and hope that was in the air then with the Land Claim, the magical power of the Kalahari induced a euphoria. It is such a rich gift that he should wish to include me in his life and work.

I was amazed and deeply touched to learn that Rupert believed I had opened a world to him. A parent always hopes to open worlds, but children generally shut off. That old stuff. The other two children heard and were not stirred (Polly Loxton, 2002a).

In terms of the way in which she is represented in the book, Polly observes that Rupert's interpretation of her is subjective, as are anyone's accounts of encounters, experiences and other people:

As for how he portrayed me, I did not exactly recognise myself. But that is how he sees me. I have to accept that one has a symbolic meaning to someone else which arises out of their experience of you. One is not able to choose or control what that is, any more than the food one eats has any say in how the body metabolises it. I do not think I am as great as I am written into the book, but then I realise that I myself am made up of the influences of particular people who would not recognise themselves either in my use of them. I don't mind if he uses me. I may protest at his interpretation of events but unless the facts are wrong, his interpretation is as valid as mine. But it is a strange experience to figure as a character in someone's book. I don't know if it was difficult for him to write about his mother. It was brave of him to do it, I think (Polly Loxton, 2002a).

She is remembered with love and warmth by the ≠Khomani. They describe her as their mother. Despite the euphoric and life-changing nature of her experience in the Kalahari, Polly does seem to have an understanding of the despair and hardships that exist:

I am glad that they remember me so kindly. They all sit in my heart along with a certain despair. I wish that there was a clearer and simpler way to distribute help. It seems to me that the only way is to take a bag of coins, divide it by the numbers present and hand it over in the sight of all. Or maybe food and clothing and radios and batteries instead. God knows (Polly Loxton, 2002b).

“A new African reality has replaced her old nostalgia,” Rupert (2001b:62) observes. Polly was healed of her depression in the Kalahari, but the reality and need remains part of her awareness.

Perspectives on healing

Different perspectives on healing emerge from discussion of events as they did in the book itself. For Dawid, the healing seems to have simplified: people danced, people were healed...

...just to heal, you have to dance...dance and sing. So that you can go into the trance later and then you can heal that person, and that is what happened that evening...We, Belinda, all of us, even Rupert, all of us, that evening we...that Bushman healed all of us. We just danced that evening...I got my forefathers back and I'm with them. And that is what Rupert also found and Belinda also herself found (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a).

Healing seems to Dawid to be about connecting with one's ancestors, one's roots. He thought that Rupert's healing was related to being in the desert: “It's not really the town life, but if you go into the bush then you can search. Then you find that life” (Dawid Kruiper, 2002a).

This is similar to Rupert's understanding of his mother's healing. Isaacson (2001b:59) describes Polly's state of depression before returning to Africa: “...she remained in self-imposed exile...She longed for Africa, yet she never went back there...All I knew was that my mother seemed to be in pain and there was nothing that I or anyone close to her could do about it”. Her return to Africa and journey to the Kalahari seems to bring healing in itself:

Three months later she was on the red dunes laughing, first with embarrassment, then with delight, as the Xhmani women stripped her plump white body bare and covered her skin with saun, a sacred powder of crushed herbs used to induce trance... ‘I can't remember when I last felt so alive,’ my mother told me on that first long drive. ‘Thank you for bringing me here.’ But it was I who felt grateful. As we travelled my mother began to transform before my eyes, turning from a tired, matronly woman back into the vivacious, beautiful woman whom I remembered. Simply being back under the African sky was healing her, she said (Isaacson, 2001b:60).

“Where was the depressed and anxious woman I knew in London? By the time we arrived at Besa's village the healing, for me, had already happened” (Isaacson, 2001b:62). Polly's healing was significant in her son's healing experience; removing the guilt relating to his mother's depression. “His healing had to be from Polly”, Belinda says (2002c).

The Kalahari itself is a place for healing:

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...So the magic is there, it's not lies and it's not myth, it's real, but that can only be from the heart to the heart. Not for academics that want to capitalise and forget that we die sitting there (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c).

But also for reality. I asked Belinda why she was apparently so cynical about the first healing, and whether she was angry because of the use of alcohol:

No, Besa is true and real one who knows about you long before you arrive...that first trip was definitely a healing dance where a baby was healed but the doctor, Besa, was weak he could not go into the /num state easily and merely drank for some form of muscle relaxant. He was not at all pissed, mostly acted. These fine lines are difficult, I guess it is like anything else something you must be exposed to daily/ often to be able to differentiate...Besa told me ...when I asked him about the first time, he said it was not for you. Also, Dawid sat explaining the entire time (first ceremony) what he (Besa) would do next etc. It was like a guided tour. It had no feeling... Remember I never romanticised, I came in from a point of hunger and love (Belinda Kruiper, 2002c).

Belinda believes that Besa is a true healer, and that the baby was healed that night. She points out that it is possible for healing to take place despite the dance being a 'show' for the cameras, for money:

Anyway the baby did receive the power through Besa being Gods' angel and healing could not happen if he was not in full acknowledgement of God to take over... Besa went on fast...before the second dance. He did observing, meditation and all without Rupert or the cameraman being aware. Riekie, Vetkat and Dawid alerted me... he was connecting with God in ancestral traditional way... Silence, alert, focussed, starvation... other healers, his (Besa's) trainers or tutors (guides) came and supported this dance... the trance started and his blood spilt all over me... I let my emotions out, focused on sand, movement, rhythm, silence, fire, voices, screeches... myself... I knew instinctively what was going on... By the time Besa's wife sat next to Vetkat... God ANSWERED my prayers... this healing is promised to help Vetkat, to heal his mind and help ease his pain. He was in the presence and protection of his tradition the way it still is and should be. Happiness, dancing, asking for love, strength, mercy, protection, peace, healing. ...Besa needed money, same stuff we face... so Ru discussed paying him for a dance before we went to find him. Whilst waiting with Spagan he know some people were here for a "show" incidentally he had to see a sick child in the area, but he could not get there, no transport etc. We were angels sent. So yes we saw a healing dance for showcase but in split time real energy was used to ask for the baby's wellbeing (Belinda Kruiper, 2002c).

Since writing *The Healing Land*, Isaacson seems to have come to a broader and deeper understanding of healing and trance dance, and their role in Bushman communities:

But almost more important than the individual healings is the effect these dances have on the communities themselves. Ancestral spirits are called in to flush out any tensions and conflicts that threaten the unity of the group. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised...the Bushmen were certain that this continual renewal of spiritual strength through the trance dance had given them the strength to survive... (Isaacson, undated e).

I have come to realise through my time with the Bushmen that the trance dance – or even just getting together to dance as a community on a regular basis – is integral to effective healing...For a Brit like me, this is revelatory. For someone like Besa, or Dawid, it is ordinary reality. It is hard for we Westerners, whose culture has tried to turn its back on nature, tried to tie the spirit down with organised religion and 'hard' science, to grope our way back to that older, authentic healing reality (Isaacson, undated d).

This insight makes me rethink my understanding of the fire dance we experienced at Ngwatle (*The Fire Dance*, Reinhardt and Sætre, 2002, see also Reinhardt, 2003). Charlize, a fellow student, offers to perform a traditional Maori fire dance for the community. It takes two days of negotiation to assure the community that we wish to do a dance for them, not that we wish to pay them to do a dance for us. When

Charlize begins to dance, the people refuse to look at her as they are afraid that she is an evil spirit and that the fire is going to attack them. Eventually they are convinced that this is not the case, and begin to clap and dance, fall down in trance and emulate different animals. This evening seems to me to be a strange mixture of the spiritual/metaphysical and performance. I'm not sure whether the Bushmen are entering the spirit of trance dancing through the fire dancing, or whether this is a performance staged for our benefit and financial contribution. I think my cynicism is heightened by a severe overdose of charismatic 'Christianity' which makes me very sceptical of this kind of outpouring of spiritual expression. I felt that the trance dance had to be "100% genuine" or else it would simply be a show for which we would probably be expected to pay. My experience of charismatic organised religion made me strongly aware of the capability of people to whip themselves into a spiritual frenzy and meltdown of sanity simply because it is the thing to do. It did not occur to me, until reading Belinda's and Isaacson's thoughts on healing through trance dance, that healing could be effected through the unification of the group in dance, through the catharsis of self-expression. That someone could be healed or changed even though it was for show, or perhaps simply because they sought healing.

Conclusion: Getting involved

Another book about the Bushmen, including the ≠Khomani of the Northern Cape, was also published in 2001: *The Bushmen of Southern Africa: Slaughter of the Innocent*, by Sandy Gall. This book provides a history of the Bushmen of Southern Africa, of the human rights violations suffered by the Bushmen across the region, and describes the conditions in which they live today, the ≠Khomani Land Claim, the plight of those that once lived in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Reviewer Jane Rosenthal, who wrote disparagingly of Isaacson's "personal odyssey", said of Gall's book:

The Bushmen of Southern Africa gives a wide, deep and very informative overview of Bushman history from early times, through horrific colonial extermination, up to the present crisis in Botswana where Bushmen are battling to retain their rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Extraordinarily well-written...this important contribution to the records on the fate of the Bushmen people (Rosenthal, 2001:4).

The Bushmen of Southern Africa certainly contains all the research *The Healing Land* was criticised for lacking (Smuts, 2001) and is acclaimed as one of the "better examples of the works that are written in the genre of advocacy and journalism" (Widlok, 2002). However,

What is somewhat anachronistic, by contrast, is the fact that Gall's piece of advocacy is once again about the Bushmen and not in any substantive way written jointly with Bushmen. Moreover, the reader searches in vain for a note saying that the profits of this book will go to such and such an organisation so that it is probably safe to assume that they will go nowhere except to the publisher and the author. Do Bushmen of today want to be presented as innocent victims? Or as internationally connected NGO-workers? Or as both? What kind of advocacy do they want? There are no easy answers since there is likely to be a diversity of views, but the question would need to be asked... (Widlok, 2002).

My endeavours to research this book were not very successful, as most of my informants did not seem to have met/remember meeting Sandy Gall. Certainly there was not the drama of the *Healing Land* interviews (Belinda Kruiper, 2001b, 2001c; Dawid Kruiper, 2002a, 2002b; Toppies Kruiper and Tina Swarts, 2002, Jakob and

Lena Malgas, 2002). Nobody was screaming at me about how I must tell Sandy Gall they were waiting for their money, nobody was crying on my shoulder about how they had trusted him and thought he had met them down. Nobody reminisced about the trip to do such-and-such and asked after his mother. No one had a nickname for him like Rupi (as Isaacson was affectionately known by the ≠Khomani). On reading Gall's book, Belinda observed that she "personally found him drawing too much on other written sources than his own research...I felt I was reading everyone else's written work on the San" (Belinda Kruiper, 2002e). Sandy Gall did not get involved with the communities with which he worked. He did not create expectations that might not be fulfilled. He did not create relationships that might falter under pressure.

I wonder where I fit into this system of observer-observed relationships, staring at the screen in front of me for inspiration. I am frantically trying to complete this chapter to meet my deadline. The words on the screen begin to blur and waver: My phone goes beep-beep. Beep-beep. Belinda: please call me. If I did this research out of books I would not have these interruptions. I would not spend the day running around in a panic because bad news has come from the Kalahari. I would not shiver by the fire in the smoky dust and convince myself to eat porcupine. I could stay away from the messiness and the cold, and forget the worries I have about what my informants have come to expect from me.

I think about the conversation I had with Belinda at Blinkwater, on a warm peaceful day in the red sand dunes. We spoke about Rupert Isaacson and Belinda's own hardships in dealing with the Bushmen – the stories, the demands, the violence and the problems. Rupert was involved with the people with whom he worked: he drove them around, he smoked with them, he raised funds for them. He was "relentless in his understanding" and he warned that people might get hurt, but he did his research thoroughly. The conclusion we come to is that "getting involved gets you into shit". Yet depth of understanding is not possible without getting involved. The expectations, the conflict and the pain are occupational hazards with which I have to learn to cope.

My study of *The Healing Land* has afforded me insight into the way in which Isaacson "got involved" with the people he was researching and how they responded to his involvement in the community, and into how his biographical, self-reflexive approach influenced the research project, the relationships formed between observer and observed, and the final written product. The following chapter will consolidate many of the methodological issues raised in this case study, referring both to Isaacson's work and to my own experiences in researching San communities. The heart of my discussion of research methodology and reflexive research relating to marginalised communities lies in this chapter, where I examine methodological issues in terms of the experiences of other researchers and a critical approach to my own research practises and experiences.

Chapter Five

Kalahari research and reflexive representation of the San: “You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave”³²

Wit Meisie/Morning Star: Encounters in the desert

And only now...am I coming to understand the length and breadth of outsiders' failure to impose themselves on Africa...To be here without doing everything wrong requires a new agriculture, a new sort of planning, a new religion. I am the un-missionary...beginning each day on my knees, asking to be converted (Kingsolver, 1998:592-3, 594).

“You can leave the Kalahari, but the Kalahari never leaves you,” Belinda Kruiper observed while sitting on her rented sand dune, Blinkwater, in the Kalahari Desert, talking to some researchers from the University of Natal in July 2000. I read these words, extracted from a thick stack of interview transcriptions a year later, in my windowless office in Durban as I prepared for my first research field trip to the desert, and wondered if they were true. On returning, I wrote in my diary:

I have not asked all the questions I intended to ask, or acquired all the facts I may need to know later, but I feel I have gained something more. Something I could never find in any book or journal. I have sat beside the campfire in the sand, inhaling the ash, the smoke, and the tobacco. I've spoken to the people, and learnt how fundamentally similar we are...I have eaten the pap that is the main component of their diet now, cooked in the three-legged pot over the fire. I have learnt the importance of respect. I have walked freely in the dunes and spent the evening under the desert stars. I have felt the cold. The desert and the San are part of my reality now. Although I am only a visitor here, I cannot 'find the passage back to the place I was before,'³³ because my place is not the same (Chapter One: Kalahari Diaries).

*'You can check out any time you like
But you can never leave'³⁴*

Field experiences of this nature do not adhere to the proper confines of academic experience, but overflow into the messiness of personal subjectivity, emotional reactions, and engagement with research subjects as human beings. Subsequent field trips, both back to the Kalahari, and to a cultural tourism enterprise employing ≠Khomani San, as well as my study of *The Healing Land*, have made me (cynically) aware of the ethical/ philosophical/ existential dilemmas involved in this kind of research. Rupert Isaacson quickly learned that journalists can be perceived as Princess Diana paparazzi (Isaacson, 2001a:100), or annoying people that bother marginalised communities with endless questions (Isaacson, 2001a:111-112). How do we reconcile driving round the dusty tracks in our 4x4's, wearing thermal jackets and shiny new boots, extracting information from people living in almost unimaginable poverty? Information that paves the paper path to a postgraduate degree and an academic

³² Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

³³ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

³⁴ Lyrics from *Hotel California* by The Eagles (1976). Available at http://lyrics.rockmagic.net/lyrics/eagles/the_eagles_live.html#hotel_california

career? What good does it do them? Are encounters in the Kalahari more about researchers than about First People?

'We are all expendable to each other, no matter what we say. You will go from here and I will go as well and perhaps we will return some time and we will remember the games we used to play and give some thoughts to each other and to the ones who are dead, resurrecting them just for a moment, and then we will go away and think of other things' (Poland, 1993:292).

At Ostri-San Cultural Village, I was given a Bushman name, *!Xori Ós*. I was enchanted with this concept, until I found out that it meant nothing less obvious than *wit meisie* [white girl]. In the desert, I am a white girl. At Witdraai in the Northern Cape Silikat van Wyk, an artist and craftsman, gave me a new Bushman name, meaning 'Morning Star'. This seems a lot more flattering, but what it meant was that he had a necklace decorated with stars burned onto a piece of bone which he wished me to buy. This naming/interpellating process forced me to interrogate what it means to be a white girl visiting the Kalahari, burning myself onto the bones of Africa, forever imprinted with impressions of the desert. In this chapter I intend to examine my role as a researcher in this environment, my relationships with my research partners in the Kalahari Desert, my research methodology, the images my presence will imprint on these communities. This will involve the interrogation of many different voices – texts, theories, fiction, interviews, poetry, ideas, previous sections of this project, the research in which I have been engaged, myself – employing a chaotic method of "literary montage – a messy, juxtapositional textual pondering" (Love and Kohn, 2001:2).

"Bushmen?" "Are there still real Bushmen?" "Do you speak to the Bushmen?" "Are they, like, civilised?" These are the standard responses I get when telling people what it is that I 'do'. I get the impression that I am perceived to have crossed some kind of fixed boundary between the Same and Other (Mudimbe, 1988). Encounters in the Kalahari are based on relationships very different from those operating in other research encounters. *The Healing Land* describes Isaacson's struggle with the conflict between the myths about the Bushmen and the reality of their lives: he found it hard to reconcile the 'peaceful hunter-gatherers' with frequent incidents of drunken, violent, abusive behaviour (Isaacson, 2001a:68-69). "The Professor" warns his students of the hardship of desert field trips:

At Ngwatle we will camp at the edge of the community village. There are no facilities at all here: no water, no electricity, no camp site and no ablution facilities ... water is rationed to between 5 and 10 litres per day per person, for drinking, cooking and washing. That's not a lot of water, so most water should be used for drinking and cooking. Food is also rationed (Protocols for Field Excursions:3).

Do not create dependencies or false expectations amongst our hosts/subjects. Always be truthful. We are academics, not development agencies or social workers. We can and should work along with such agencies where feasible and appropriate, but it is their job to meet community needs (Protocols for field excursions:8-9).

There will be five litres of water, per person, per day, and beware of white liberal guilt. I survived the five litres of water challenge by offering to wash people's clothes, thus ensuring that my hands were clean for some time during the day. It seems, however, that I was caught out by white liberal guilt:

Elsie seems upset that Belinda has a new blue scarf, while Elsie herself has nothing new. I suggest to Belinda that the next time we come we should bring dresses for the women. Belinda thinks this is a good idea: the women need dresses because they need to feel feminine. Elsie

grabs my hand and reminds me of my promise as we are leaving. She wants something that is just for her, in a package marked "Elsie." ...[when I see her again] she has no idea who I am until she connects me with the parcel and the dress she received. Then she...introduces me to her family and graciously ensures that I feel free to send another parcel any time I want...This time I bring her a jacket, and she is delighted and tells me she wants to give me a pakkie [parcel] also, because I always give her a pakkie. Shortly she presents me with a necklace she has made and a rock painted by Silikat, then tells me she needs R20 to buy food. I try to explain that I'll give them R20 because they are my friends and I know they need it, but the necklace and the stone are my gifts. Whatever. That afternoon they are wasted (Chapter One: Kalahari Diaries, McLennan-Dodd, 2003a).

Belinda and I discussed these dilemmas, the pain and dependence she experienced, and my own concerns about everything being related to money and expectations, and came to the conclusion that "getting involved gets you into shit". Yet those who are not involved, who have not experienced 'being there', are unable to understand...

We need to know
how others stare
into the eye of pain
and wade across the river
to talk to us again
(*Suicide* MacLennan, 1983)

Getting involved

The methodology of "getting involved" in research, which is evident in Isaacson's work among San communities, relates to Paulo Freire's concept of liberating education, in which,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow (Freire, 1972:53).

The research process is also a dialogue, in which researchers and informants both learn and teach, and interact as equals. Freire (1972:54) argues further that:

Whereas banking education anaesthetises and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.

Getting involved in research, interacting with individuals at the level of their daily lives, *unveils reality*. A clinical, quantitative approach towards the study of human beings which draws information from texts and statistics submerges consciousness, draws awareness away from reality. Research which exposes the student to reality forces the emergence of consciousness, the reflection on reality. "Reflection – true reflection – leads to action...when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (Freire, 1972:41). Getting involved means reflecting on the reality of one's subjects' lives, which tends to require the researcher to take some kind of action, as well as creating, through the research product, knowledge of what action needs to be undertaken in the context of the subject community.

My study of *The Healing Land* illustrated the nature of the process of ‘getting involved’, indicating how the researcher is forced to examine their own role in the community, to acknowledge that journalism and research often produce no substantive results or change in living conditions, and to ask themselves what difference can I make, will my writing provoke any action? (Isaacson, 2001a:57). Isaacson’s involvement in the ≠Khomani San community resulted in criticism, for his publication of personal information about Belinda Kruiper’s family life without her knowledge, for the lack of clarity regarding funding and payment for individuals involved in the production of the book, and the separate film, *Regopstaan’s Dream* (2002). His experiences researching San communities made him acutely and painfully aware of the ravaging poverty and hunger that exists in Africa (Isaacson, 2001a:139). His involvement resulted in a sense of responsibility and obligation, to “bring the message” as Isak prophesied (Isaacson, 2001a:93), and accountability to remember the promise he had made (Isaacson, 2001a:219). The repercussions of “getting involved” are challenging and complex, but in the case of *The Healing Land* the research product reveals a high level of commitment to the community, and a story of living individual human beings.

The practice of “getting involved” as an academic methodology meets with a certain amount of resistance. Research relating to encounters in the Kalahari has been criticised as subjective and unscientific. At a conference on development communication in Africa, I was accused of being irresponsible as I was quoting certain individuals within the community and claiming their opinions to be the voice of the San. I also should have divided up the community into groups of men, women and children in order to make sure that all the voices were heard. I tried to explain that the people I interviewed were sitting round the fire, had been sitting there yesterday, and probably envisioned sitting there tomorrow, and to ask them to move around and divide up in groups would be seen as a major disruption to their lives and for what purpose? I added the following paragraph to my paper in an attempt to reconcile the uninformed to this unscientific, undemocratic methodology:

The application of research methodologies to Kalahari communities is also a complex issue. Access to community members relies on relations of trust built up over several visits. The language barrier, community structures and power relations, and expectations/perceptions regarding researchers/development workers influence whether or not people can/will speak to us. In most cases, interviews and negotiations have to be conducted before noon, while our informants are still sufficiently sober to make sense (McLennan-Dodd, forthcoming).

Accepted, conventional methods do not seem to work in the desert. “ *#S%@! Technology doesn’t work in the desert!” Belinda exclaimed, throwing her cellphone, via which an anxious writer was trying to contact her, aside in despair.

‘You might as well bring the whole world over here with you, and there’s not room for it.’... If it was as easy as they thought it was going to be, why, they’d be done by now, and Africa would look just like America with more palm trees. Instead, most of it looks exactly how it did a zillion years ago (Kingsolver, 1998:92, 584).

Neither do objective, detached ways of writing: “And how can I invent my version of the story, without my crooked vision?” (Kingsolver, 1998:559). Rupert Isaacson could not write his Kalahari story without describing the search for his family and origins which drew him to Africa, and his own magical healing experience. I cannot write about these encounters without writing of the sand, the wind, the dust, the smoke, the red sand and blue sky and little yellow flowers that bloom and vanish, the cold, the

heat, the barefoot winter babies, the thirsty children, the porcupine meat, hopes and fears, guilt, expectations, understanding and misunderstanding, land, language, despair, drunkenness, the journey from here to there... Outside of this context, the words would be nothing but useless words. There is need for a new language, for a mindset that is relevant to an alternate reality:

To resist occupation, whether you're a nation or merely a woman, you must understand the language of your enemy. Conquest and liberation and democracy and divorce are words that mean squat, basically, when you have hungry children and clothes to get out on the line and it looks like rain (Kingsolver, 1998:435-6).

Beauty, wisdom, knowledge
are words engorged like ticks
with ink, too abstract to be
in apposition to my life,
but parasitic nonetheless

I must give up
my fruitless struggling with words
and throw myself upon the mercies of the world
(Maclennan, 1995)

Writing about the San needs to throw itself into their world, to allow them to speak out about their own lives, their ways of making sense, their needs and dreams. Respect comes through listening and accurately recording their words, and also acknowledging the subjectivity of the writer, who can never be completely neutral or infallible. As Jay Ruby (1977:4) observes, to write reflexively, one has to be self-aware enough to know what aspects of one's self and one's experience are relevant to the audience/reader, and to make the purpose of revealing these aspects clear.

The application of reflexive methodology, the revelation of producer and process, enables the reader to understand the context in which the research takes place, creates knowledge through experience. Reflexive writing provokes interaction between lived experience and cultural texts, between theory and reality. It allows the writer to interrogate "lived realities" (Wengraf *et al*, 2002:245) and their experience of the "contact zone" in which cultures meet, collide and struggle to relate to one another" (Pratt, 1999); to engage other human beings in the context of the real-life circumstances under which they live, love and die (Tomaselli, 2003a).

A significant application of reflexive methodology is the acknowledgement of the ethnographic presence. The exclusion of the ethnographic presence (Heider, 1976) from the research product creates a huge gap in understanding the behaviour of the 'object' of study, as this is inextricably involved with the observed's interactions with the observer. In auto-ethnographic writing, this impact is acknowledged, allowing the reader to understand the context in which the research encounter took place. I was trying to explain this research project to my husband, who is a biologist. "Oh," he said, "this ethnographic presence is just like the uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics".

Ethnographic presence reminds me of the uncertainty principle, which is the foundation of quantum mechanics. This states that it is impossible to know both the position and velocity of a particle because in measuring either value you will always affect the other. One can never know what the pure Bushman is because when one attempts to observe him he is changed in the measuring (Joel Dodd, 2003).

Auto-ethnography attempts to locate encounters, understanding and events and in a broader, more significant context (Tedlock, 2000:455). I think Rupert Isaacson accomplished this in *The Healing Land* through his focus on contact and interaction with the communities he researched and the search for knowledge through his own experience. The film, *Regopstaan's Dream* (2000), however, was a “disappointment” (Polly Loxton, 2002a) in this regard. The director, Christopher Walker, briefly visited the community to shoot footage, accompanied by Isaacson, who had no influence regarding the final production. Polly Loxton (2002a) described *Regopstaan's Dream* as a disjointed, dull, confusing film that failed to portray the history, the hope, and the humanity of the Bushmen. According to reviewer Robert Gordon:

The problem with this film is that while it attempts to ride on the wave of nostalgia it does a disservice to history by collapsing the past and gliding over the contradictions. Its ahistoricism serves to perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes. A sense of history enables one to understand how the past has choreographed the script on which the video is based and distorted. Regopstaan's dream is not of recent vintage, and sometimes we hear references to “Old Makai” but nothing further. Indeed “Old Makai” (who died in 1966) and his father “Old Abraham” (or !gurice) and his daughter /Khaneko as well as several others have an important part in what should more accurately be called “Abraham's Dream” (and the Biblical associations make it even more powerful). The history of this Dream is long, complex and intriguing. Dawid Kruijer and Roger Chennells have important forerunners. What history the video does portray is problematic...My son once described a raisin as a grape whose soul had been squeezed out. This video is very much a raisin (Gordon, 2002).

Auto-ethnographic research emphasises “an experiential approach” (Tedlock, 2000:457), in which one is aware of one's “research subjects as people” and engages with them on a personal level, interacting with them in their daily lives in order to understand their beliefs, motivations and actions (Tedlock, 2000:471). In auto-ethnography, knowledge is sought less in texts than in lived experience – what we know is directly linked to how we know it and have experienced it (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000:1059). Knowledge is also sought in the experiences of our research subjects:

The invitation to talk about the past, to recall from memory, puts the subject centre stage with the authority that comes with ownership of a scarce and unique resource: the personal account. The result is that boundaries between researcher and research, data and source, experience and fact, past and future are shifted, merged, and sometimes dissolved (Wengraf *et al*, 2002:254-255).

A focus on gaining knowledge through experience makes our research subjects partners in the learning process, as it is through our interaction with them, through our experience of the context in which they live, that knowledge is sought: “narrators of experience of exclusion, of life on the margins, of authority, and creativity all have the potential to change their own and others' lives through the process of telling and then differently telling their and other people's life stories” (Wengraf *et al*, 2002:255). Thus research partners are empowered through access to a platform via which to make their stories, their experiences, their reality heard. The Ju/'hoansi community hoped that the work of the researchers who visited them would make their needs and aspirations, and the reality of their lives, known to those in power (Katz *et al*, 1997:xv, 161). Tomaselli (2003b) suggests that “we develop arguments for participatory studies in which human agency is described and recognised, and in which

voices from the field/storytellers are engaged by researchers as their equals – in human dignity and thus as co-producers of knowledge”.

Qualitative research is a collaborative process, in which researcher and researched are engaged in on-going moral/ethical dialogue (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002a:ix). Thus the reflexive ethnographer is required to be self-aware in terms of his/her political and ethical approach to research subjects (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002a:xii). Reflexivity promotes a self-critical approach, as auto-ethnographers are subject to their own interrogation as well as that of their readers (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:748). The writers of *Healing Makes our Hearts Happy* (1997) assert that a vital part of the process of doing research, particularly relating to another culture, is for researchers to critically reflect on and analyse their role within and impact on the community involved (Katz *et al*, 1997:147). Tomaselli (2003a) suggests that our concern in research and writing is to critically interrogate our own methodology and the relationships developed between observers and observed. In the “Observers and Observed” project, we are “writing the ≠Khomani and the Ngwatle community into history without eliminating their personalities and names” (Tomaselli 2003b) through the “self-reflexive, open-ended, flexible, totally unscientific methodology we have developed in documenting the experiences and perceptions of many of the Ngwatle sojourners” as well as our research partners in the Northern Cape (Tomaselli 2003a). This methodology allows for honest, critical and concrete discussion of research practices and ethical concerns.

“Will making movies do the sheep any good?”³⁵

The ideal of reflexive film and writing incorporating engagement and interaction with subjects and the reality of their lives raises the issue of responsibility towards them. Interaction needs to go beyond the content of the film/book/paper itself, to deal with financial issues and quality of life. “Social science has often proved itself incapable of preventing historical processes destructive of particular groups of people. Often, the best it could do was to publish and make films on vanishing and disappearing peoples” (Tomaselli, 1992:210). The people I have spoken to mistrust and resent writers, filmmakers, and anthropologists who are perceived to take information and images away from the community, make a huge profit and never send anything in return.

As Belinda suggested, an attitude that seems prevalent among Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) workers, and researchers is that they *own* the Bushmen (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a). Little respect is paid to these sources of knowledge. This also relates to the issue of responsibility of researchers to the subject communities which are their sources of images and information. There is a need to address issues of the expectations of subject communities, the perceptions created among readers and viewers, and the importance of self awareness and consideration of one’s responsibilities in the encounter with the subject community. Belinda observed during her visit to the university, “it’s with what respect you come. Be open about what you’re doing” (2001b). Many San community members are eager to speak to visitors. Isak Kruiper (2001) expressed his desire to communicate his thoughts and experiences, for people to talk to him, and to tell them about his feelings and experiences, to create knowledge of his world. Often, however, they feel exploited by the outcome. Isak, who has been involved with many film productions, says that “what actually happens at the films is sometimes a lot of them don’t understand very

³⁵ Navajo medicine man Sam Yazzie, cited in Worth and Adair (1972).

well, that are not respectful” (Isak Kruiper, 2001). His concern is that they don’t know how they are represented in these films: “we don’t know what the people see, we don’t know what the people actually think about us now either. If we can maybe get some of it back, we will be very satisfied and feel happy” (Isak Kruiper, 2001).

The Bushmen’s grievances with regard to academics, writers, filmmakers, are not only to do with money, but with respect, or lack thereof. Belinda says, “up to meeting Prof [Tomaselli], my whole viewpoint changed about the academics, cause at least we got some feedback. It’s never about money or race, it’s about respect” (2001c). “Surely copies could be made...the researcher goes back, and transcribes and sends...Knowing this is not just about taking knowledge and going away, this is about...it’s an education sharing I think, it’s exchanging cultural information” (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a). The communities we work with do not have the means to record the stories, history, indigenous knowledge, hopes, dreams and plans which are their cultural heritage, yet often researchers who gain access to this information do not return copies of these resources to the people with whom they originated. The Bushmen also have little control over how the information people have about them is used. The sending of papers and articles back to the communities, usually before publication, means that they have some control over how they are represented (Tomaselli, 2002:304). Research partners should be given the opportunity to interpret and challenge the ways in which they are represented in the research product (Fine *et al.*, 2000:127). These are the ethical issues that need to be critically addressed in the study and representation of marginalised people.

The concept of informants as research partners challenges the expectation that one can do research purely on one’s own terms. Tomaselli (2003b) asks “Are my/our informants/ hosts/ co-researchers able to recognise themselves and their experiences in my/ our story/ies? Is our writing intelligible to our informants/ sources/ hosts, as represented/ translated?” The research product should make sense to the informants/ hosts/ co-researchers. We give all of our papers to Belinda, who reads and translates them to the Blinkwater community around the fire. Unfortunately we do not have contact with any other literate individuals among the ≠Khomani community, and as far as we know no one at Ngwatle is able to read in English. The very academic style of writing in some of the articles also makes them less accessible to community members. We also return interview transcripts to all our informants, but this, too, is an inaccessible resource for many. People were impressed with the letters printed on University letterheads, thinking they were certificates. The returning of photographs taken by Sian Dunn in the Northern Cape in April 2002 during our visit in July that year made a very positive impression. A man we met on the road asked Keyan if he was ‘the Professor that brings photographs back?’ A video, screened from a tiny television screen in the back of the 4x4, also proved to be a powerful means of returning information to the community:

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 (Tomaselli, 2003b).

I see our responsibility towards our sources of information as including reciprocation and empowerment.

It is important to listen to one's research partners, not just to hear the answer to a particular question, but to learn about different methods of communication. Lauren Dyll, who is researching development in the San communities, observes:

Belinda said something that is going to play a big part in my research for my dissertation. She said that for development purposes "NGOs should let the Bushmen draw in the sand to explain how they feel and what they want. They are not stupid or illiterate, they have different ways and one is drawing in the sand" (2002b). In all his explanations Toppies (2002) drew pictures in the sand to reaffirm what he was saying or perhaps explain more clearly. This points to the criticism of certain development communications strategies. By encouraging only Western methods of communication...development workers deny the validity of local methods and knowledge, and only gain a superficial understanding of the people's development needs (2003).

Individual members of the ≠Khomani San point to the unique knowledge that exists within the community: "But at the end of the day, who taught you? Somewhere from the day we were born, there was not a university. There had to be somebody who taught without the black and white behind his name. And those are the forgotten ones, and now it's just their children left" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a). Jakob Malgas informed me: "You see this Jakob, this Jakob Malgas, I am a Professor...Yes! I am a Professor. I, Jakob Malgas, can show you many things. Many things. Things in South Africa that South Africa's people don't know about" (Jakob Malgas, 2002). Academic knowledge is not the only knowledge worthy of commanding respect.

The level of interest shown by filmmakers, photographers and writers, who have flocked to the Northern Cape ≠Khomani Bushmen, has given the people the impression that their image is a valuable commodity:

Now then, things have started happening, and ja, they're making money out of our stories, they get awakened to people coming in and more and more cameras coming in, now they're thinking big money. Now they're thinking they are worth something because there's this image about them (Belinda Kruiper, 2001d).

The ≠Khomani have certain expectations of academics and filmmakers, i.e., hard cash, that can result in client-patron relationships of dependency if the informants feel that they can acquire handouts when necessary and that there is no need for development on their own terms. If these expectations are not met or fulfilled in some way, the informants tend to feel that they are being exploited. Possibly the lack of effectiveness of the NGO's in the area makes the people feel that their "employers" have some responsibility for their well being:

They [informants] get R50 a day [from academics], and yes, lovely biltong for the day and things, but when they leave, what then? ...And when Ouma Fytjie got very ill one day, she asked me, 'cause I really had no money, and I didn't have transport to take her, and she said to me, "is there any way you could call [a researcher for whom she was an informant]?" ...And [the researcher], when I phoned him, said, "I can't help you, Belinda, I'm on my way [overseas]." And I thought, "Fuck! You could have just put R100 in my bank account. You know that I take her to the dentist or the doctor, whatever." That was the clinic at the time (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a).

They also have a sense that they are helping people such as academics to further their careers, and yet gaining nothing in the process. Belinda (2001a) refers to individuals

who “learn and take away without returning...the student came, took her knowledge, became brilliant, now has a job and a car”. The old woman who assisted the student apparently never received the copies of information she requested. She is now dead.

There is often an expectation that the Bushmen will benefit from the work being done:

So many foreign journalists have come in here and collected information which the Bushmen have given to them, about their medicines and the spiritualistic side of this community, and the various aspects of their community. And they go away with broad promises, and these may not necessarily be firm promises by these people, it may be the interpretation that the Bushmen have as to what is being said to them. But the perception the Bushman has is that this journalist...is going to go away, and this information they will publicise it and they will get help from around the world to help improve the lot of the Bushmen...After a couple of months of nothing happening, the Bushman starts becoming disappointed...They've actually got to the point where they feed them any load of rubbish, and the journalist takes it away and publicises it, because they don't trust him any more...You've got to be so careful in how you portray yourself to the Bushmen (Roger Carter, 2001).

It must be easy for marginalised people to perceive anyone with access to vehicles and travel funds and electronic equipment as wealthy and politically powerful. They take our presence seriously. People often ask where are the students who came on previous trips, who were involved with their lives but have now moved on? We are held accountable:

When we study people's lives, it's not a game to play with. You can't just make assumptions on flying in or spending 3 hours and sitting in an air-conditioning vehicle, and in hotels in the evening, chatting about, “my God, did you see Oom Dave this...” and going back and playing the tapes to various people back home, and everybody getting the privilege of getting the information in Cape Town and overseas, seeing the Bushmen and listening to the stories. What happens to the recorded material at the end of the day anyhow? (Belinda Kruiper, 2001a).

What the researcher considers an interesting experience could be perceived by the community as playing games with people and taking information from them.

Being there: Interrogating the researcher

I have to examine my own research encounters in relation to the expectations created and my relationships with the people I observe:

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, 2003a).

Does the white girl in the Kalahari achieve nothing more than an illusion of passionate liberalism? Her trite images of respect, acknowledgement and

understanding burning, scarring fleshless bones bleached by the scorching sun? Will she be remembered with bitter words and unfulfilled expectations? Do the Bushmen think I see them as Natives with a capital *N*, in an *Out of Africa* sort of way?

From my first weeks in Africa I had a great affection for the Natives. The discovery of the dark races was to me a magnificent enlargement of my world... if someone with an ear for music had happened to hear music for the first time when he was already grown up; their case might have been similar to mine. After I had met with the Natives, I set out the routine of my daily life to the orchestra (Dinesen, 1937:18).

Blixen appears never to see the Africans themselves as beings with lives of their own, separate from herself. Rather, she uses them as screens upon which to project her own infantile yearning to be the omnipotent centre of the world, her intense need for love and approval and her desire for a sense of natural entitlement (Simmons, 2002:21).

Karen Blixen's affinity for indigenous people is hardly perceived by the critical reviewer as empowering them in any way.

"Werk jy vir die Boesmans, of werk jy vir die organisasie?" [Do you work for the Bushmen or do you work for the organisation?] Jacob Malgas demands of me. In 1999 Pedris Motshabise asked, "for a long time we have met and were interviewed by different anthropologists like you, whereby we end up discussing one and the same issues, my question is how does or how will this benefit us in the long run?" Many different agendas and motivations bring people to the Kalahari: to conduct research, to make films, advertising, reviving an ancient language, discovering traditional healing plants, the fulfilment of bureaucratic aspirations, a spiritual quest, a holiday, a new plan for modernisation and development, to find one's roots, to gaze upon the Other, to see the beautiful red dunes... The Bushmen have become very suspicious of these strangers in their 4x4's, extracting knowledge, implementing irrelevant projects and plans. White people blissfully unaware of their capacity to represent the brutal oppressors of the apartheid past and dispossessed present. Does the white girl's encounter with the desert fulfil anything beyond her own narcissistic needs? Does this ethnography contribute to any degree of liberalisation, or merely to the exploitation of indigenous knowledge for academic gain, and the entrenchment of unequal power structures? Would she have to conclude, like the missionary in *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (1991) that "It would have been better for them not to have known us"?

...And the Truth shall make you free

"What kind of advocacy do they want?" This question is posed by Thomas Widlok (2002) in his review of *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* (2001). Belinda Kruiper wrote these words in response (2002e):

To be left alone to make their own choices
To choose who they want to sit with, talk to, dance with, share with.
To have respect for who they are Today.
To not dwell on the past
To research others in reverse
To be seen as human beings
To be called Bushman
To love and be loved
To live as true South African citizens or Namibia or Botswana
And not just to be products that generate income, attention, international funding, World Cup cricket promotions...

Belinda Kruiper (2001d) described her perception of the work of this group of researchers: "It's the voice of truth for the community...dignity to the people, they are being recognised to speak". I am encouraged when Belinda says of the work we do and the sending of documents back to the community, "it leads to dignity...dignity and self-respect" (2001d). Belinda tells me that the main reason her community has respect for our programme and the work we do is that "*swart en wit het teruggekom*" [black and white came back] (2001d). She also said that the researchers approached the community in a respectful manner: "Prof stopped at Blinkwater and said good day...sat down and said, 'good afternoon, I'm Keyan Tomaselli,' introduced his students...said, 'look, we don't want to impose...we can go back and come back tomorrow, but we'd like to talk to you sometime...'" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001c). The community at Blinkwater talked among themselves and decided that "it was cool...none of us, if we had wanted money we would have said straight upfront" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001d). When interview transcriptions, letters of thanks and articles are sent to other informants, there is often no response at all, but it made a great impression on this community:

...the only thing we've said about you people, 'those people must come back.' I'm very honest about you, Vanessa, somehow, I don't know what Prof Tomaselli has done with his group of graduates, but I know, from my perspective, I think it's simply because a letter came back. *Swart en wit het terruggekom* [black and white came back]... *hierdie goetes...dit gaan* [these things... they go] it never comes back...
And then when Prof first sent the notes, which I was also surprised, it was so nice, even seeing my name in black and white. Like wow! And I said, '*Vetkat, kyk hier*' [Vetkat, look here]. Reading to... ah, Jakob... '*Jakob, het jy dit gesê?*' [Jakob, did you say that?]
So we're laughing, 'cause did Jakob say this? '*Ja, onthou jy...?*' [Yes, do you remember...?] That's how the document was discussed, and then I just phoned Prof the day, and said 'you must come back, we should speak some more' (Belinda Kruiper, 2001d).

Isak (2001) tells me that it is important for "*die waarheid*" [the truth] to come out, because of the way they have been represented in the past. I try to explain to Isak what I intend to do with this information, that I want my research to benefit the people. I give Isak's wife Lys a message from Belinda, and we become friendly. As we are leaving, Lys presents me with a bracelet, followed by a beautiful necklace she made, which is to remind me of her when I wear it. All I have to offer in return is a cheap bead bangle. Such open-hearted love and acceptance are offered to us in return for a little portion of conversation and respect. Belinda says, "what we are gaining is cultural sharing and education...It's also the gain of friendship" (2001d). The community are happy to see their "own voice going out there." The idea of friendship being involved fits in with my sense that I cannot leave the Kalahari.

Suddenly a big envelope comes from the University of Natal, and their names are in academic circles. And they're seeing it. Before that *die mense kom en praat en vat fotos, maar hulle sien niks nie* [the people come and talk and take photos, but they see nothing]. Just seeing your name there brings out a new thing. And I think other than just this exchange of academics and educational and dignity, it's also the gain of friendship... It's a level of respect, and it's about understanding... And also... the papers that I've read and the few things that I've read is how you transcribe and apply the word from the field in a way that academics can understand it again. So you see your own voice going out there linked with words like methodology and stuff, only in contexts because you've been partaking...I think it's mostly the dignity and the self-respect again, for everybody back home (Belinda Kruiper, 2001d).

Progress and development are not only about material resources, they are about inner dignity and self worth, about marginalised voices being heard, about healing through the power to tell one's story. Belinda (2001a) said she felt "here's a team that cares and that what's going out there would be the truth or close to the truth". Being there "is the best form of bringing dignity to people. Then all the stuff we complain about and the things become relevant in a new way, because the heart understands" (Belinda Kruiper, 2001d).

*Respect
Then you will learn to
Understand
Then we will find
Peace*

(Belinda Kruiper, 2002c).

The white girl has also been marked by Africa, her bones are burned with the images of the Kalahari: pain, despair, poverty and desolation, as well as the hope, respect and courage of the desert people are imprinted on her forever, visible to those who hear her stories.

Every life is different because you passed this way and touched history
(Kingsolver, 1998:608).

Conclusion

Through my study of reflexivity and research methodology in representing the San, I have found that representation of marginalised groups such as the Bushmen often further disempowers the individuals or communities involved. Disempowerment occurs both in terms of the unequal power relations between observer and observed or researcher and researched, relating to payment for interviews, photographs or filming, the returning of information and ownership of intellectual property; as well as in the way in which the community or individuals are seen by the wider world as a result of how they are represented. Belinda Kruiper (2001d) consolidated the issue for me by saying that representation is about respect and dignity – the San people I have spoken to and researched wish to be treated with respect in their interaction with academics, journalists and filmmakers, for their image to be reflected to the world with dignity, and to be empowered to tell their own story and have their voice heard. Rupert Isaacson describes how Elsie Witbooi once “invaded the administration building” at the then Kalahari Gemsbok Park, marched up to the manager and demanded of him, “Who am I? Do you even know who I am? I am Elsie. ELSIE” (Isaacson, 2001a:263). Elsie was murdered last week, but I will never forget her name and her story.

Getting involved gets one into shit – I have experienced the complicated politics, the drunken ‘informants’, the long stories about money, the white guilt, and the grief over the loss of a friend, but I truly believe that without getting involved in the encounters with these ‘other’ people, I would understand far less that I do now. And as Belinda writes, if we respect then we can understand, and if we understand we can ultimately find peace (Belinda Kruiper, 2002c). For me, the study of auto-ethnography and reflexivity has provided a way of making sense of these encounters in the desert, of linking theory to reality and text to experience. In reflexive writing, knowledge and understanding can be found in experience as well as in academic texts, being there is a way of knowing.

I have also found that it is difficult to reflect on my experiences without being far more self-critical than I would have to be if my knowledge could be kept separate from the reality of my own actions and my own subjectivity. I have been forced to look critically at my encounters and interactions with my research partners, and examine how my perceptions are influenced by my subjective position, my background, my thoughts, my previous experiences. I have also had to think about my role in the communities with whom I have worked, and what my involvement in fact contributes – have I empowered the individuals I’ve encountered in any way, or have my good intentions resulted in little more than a sense of patronisation and unfulfilled expectations?

My argument for the application of reflexive and auto-ethnographic methodologies to social research is based on my understanding that little can be learnt and understood about ‘other’ people without experiencing what it is like to be there, and relating the experience of their reality to theory and knowledge. This reflection on personal experience allows the researcher to reflect critically on their methodology, the research process, and the implications of the research product and the presence of the researcher for the communities involved.

Based on what I have experienced during my research in the Kalahari in the context of studying auto-ethnography, I have learnt several valuable concepts which I intend to apply to future field research, and which I feel may be relevant to the broader project on “Observers and Observed” within which this study is located. I have realised that it is important to be accountable to my research partners in terms of

promises I make, and not to create expectations I may be unable to fulfil. Accountability also entails returning all information, transcriptions, papers, videos, photographs to the subject community – this is their right as these records form part of their cultural heritage, and this practise is a tangible demonstration of respect and acknowledgement. Treating one's research subjects with respect includes being truthful and transparent about the purpose of the research being conducted, and consulting with informants about the way in which they are represented, recording and repeating their words accurately and in the correct context. Whatever is gained from the community should be shared with them, be it finance, recognition, experience, knowledge, healing... Researchers should also hold respect for local methods, knowledge, ways of communicating; and for the dignity and choices of each individual. The research process should ultimately result in a level of empowerment for the individuals involved, not increased dependence.

As a researcher in 'another' community, one should be self-critical and reflexive in all encounters, remembering that any other person is as human, unique and vulnerable as oneself. The researcher should remain self-aware, without being afraid of getting involved, remembering that knowledge and understanding are gained through dialogue and interaction with and listening to other people. Research partners should be engaged as equals in human dignity and as producers of knowledge (Tomaselli, 2003b). Research should create understanding of the contexts in which people live, focussing on reality instead of romantic myths, and allow the marginalised voice to be heard. In order to create understanding and empowering representation of indigenous people, the researcher should acknowledge the subjectivity of their experience, be truthful, yet sensitive with the truth, and morally and politically self-aware (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002a), remembering that research as critical reflection on reality leads to critical intervention in reality (Freire, 1972)

I feel immensely privileged to have had the opportunity to work with and research the ≠Khomani and !Xoo communities, and plan to return to them, and build on the knowledge, experience and relationships that I have gained. I hope also to work with and learn from other indigenous communities in the future. This point of my dissertation is, for me, the beginning rather than the end, as I hope the experience, understanding and knowledge I have gained in conducting this project will result in further research encounters which may lead to deeper understanding of and recognition and empowerment for people who have inspired and enlightened me as much as the !Xoo and ≠Khomani Bushmen.

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