

## **Public self-expression: Decolonising Researcher-Researched Relationships**

### **Abstract**

A case is made for research participants (normally known as 'informants', 'subjects', 'objects', 'sources', etc.) to be included in certain kinds of studies as co-authors and co-researchers. Self-narrative is examined from the perspectives of both the researchers and the researched. *Engraved Landscape*, a post-positivist visual archaeology anthology is our case study that draws on long-term lived field research amongst the †Khomani Bushman. The †Khomani, without access to social media, rigorously manage their global media exposure and have high social expectations of research done on, them. †Khomani media management is contrasted with the open-endedness of social media use by urban literate users. Issues of regulation connect the comparison.

### **Keywords**

Decolonising research, de-westernizing, †Khomani Bushmen, social media, self-expression, agency, prodsumer.

## Introduction

The growing call for 'de-Westernising' media studies backgrounds this study. Where Curran and Park (2000) enabled a wider research footprint extending to the Global South, but assuming Western epistemologies, Willems (2014) requires a fundamental theoretical shift that recognises epistemic resistance to re-activate largely silenced knowledges beyond this north-west axis. The study below offers a way of de-colonising research, not just de-westernising it. The 22 year research project through which this methodological and theoretical reconfiguration is done is titled Rethinking Indigeneity (Tomaselli 2011: Chapter 3). As Dyll-Myklebust (2014: 81) argues, the rethinking of indigeneity requires the jettisoning of imperialist epistemological assumptions of researchers as 'experts' and of indigenous knowledge as a barrier to progress. The application of critical indigenous methodologies – one devised in consultation with research participants – necessitates the self-reflexive problematisation of Self-Other, researcher-researched and learner-instructor relationships. The very nature of research encounters is not only critiqued but reconfigured. Our case study on how knowledge about a rock engraving site was negotiated with contemporary descendants of the First People (the ꞤKhomani) will offer an example of how methodological de-colonisation can be approached in practice.

Analogies are drawn below between two different contemporary public spheres in addressing the task of 'de-colonisation'. Firstly, is the carefully constructed and tightly managed inter-personal public sphere created by the ꞤKhomani, a contemporary group comprised from previously nomadic hunter-gathers, whose lifestyle currently spans pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity. Secondly and in contrast, is the global postmodern public sphere inter-connected by social media, which has re-constituted interpersonal communication into virtual interest.

Our analysis will compare the two spheres against the background of scientific methodology and institutional review boards (IRB) (or ethics clearance regimes) that regulate practices of research. Just as regulation was developed by states to manage broadcasting, and/or to ensure that broadcasters were subject to the state, the military and government, in many ways the management of academic research is now traversing similar paths. Our study is thus multi-layered in our attempt to unravel epistemological colonization on the one hand, to offer methodological solutions on the other, in the context of increasingly restrictive IRB regulation that assumes positivist biomedical experimental protocols that are contra-indicated as far as critical indigenous qualitative research methods are concerned.

### **Biesje Poort *Engraved Landscape* Case Study**

*Engraved Landscape* (Lange *et al.*, 2013) is the published outcome of an interdisciplinary and multicultural research project situated at Biesje Poort in the Northern Cape of South Africa. Amongst the intensively illustrated (photographs, graphics, drawings, maps) seven chapters are autoethnographic narratives, conventional academic writing, field discussions (in English, Nama and Afrikaans) and poems. The team consisted of professors and graduate students from the Universities of Pretoria, Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal, and the McGregor Museum, Kimberly, from cultural and communication studies, architecture, landscape architecture and archaeology. Included in the team also were four Kalahari crafters, and a traditional healer. The book's content is best précised by a University of Johannesburg architect as telling:

... two stories. It provides a valuable record of important pre-historic and historic artefacts that would ordinarily be inaccessible to many South Africans. But more significantly it showcases new ways of doing research in a contested and fractured environment. Using ... rock engravings as a springboard, the various contributors .... probe questions about the nature of heritage, about our differing cosmologies, and about our links to the land. These are inevitably subject to multiple interpretations and meanings (Melinda Silverman, back outside cover).

The project privileged the ordinary person as a theorist to guide an understanding of his/her personal/collective/historical and social world as embodied in Biesje Poort. Team members were urged to consider what insights might be brought into each other's understanding of the cultural landscape and rock engravings.

The objective, as requested from our funder, the South African National Heritage Council (NHC), was to alert and assist the local authority and geographic community to the presence of a KhoiSan<sup>i</sup> heritage resource in the area and in developing its educational potential (NHC 2010 proposal), hence making the multiple self-narratives part of a public-expression or identity of the area. As the site is part of a private farm and as rock engraving clusters occur on expansive rock exposures embedded in the mountains, tourism was not a viable option of public expression (Morris, 2014: 649). The co-authorship was not the only way in which the project sought to embrace critical indigenous qualitative research, but this emphasis began in the field. While the †Khomani had no historical link to the engravings, what was of interest was the team's negotiation of interpretation, especially as no previous research on rock art had sourced the

opinions of the contemporary indigenous. The methodology we developed sought to address this enduring blind spot.

A sense-making (Dervin, 2003) and culture-centred approach (Dutta, 2008; 2011) was operationalised through participatory communication research methods in heritage field recording (2011 and 2012). The walls between traditionally oral societies and academia were thus arguably dismantled. The project involved a rethinking and application of participatory research strategies in the negotiation of Biesje Poort as a physical, spiritual and conceptual space: for example walking the land with the #Khomani. 'Walking' entailed the collapse of the traditional division of researcher/researched.

Performativity (just one feature of much autoethnographic work) is part of the decolonising process (Swadener and Mutua, 2008; Holman-Jones, 2005). Evocative texts often include *performativity* as an epistemological procedure. Performance ethnography and performative writing *show emotion* and "create texts that unfold in the intersubjective space of individual and community and that embrace tactics for both *knowing* and *showing*" (Holman Jones, 2005: 767; also see Jackson, 1998; Tomaselli *et al.*, 2013), much like the lived approach discussed above. Performativity refers to how, "through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study. They instruct our readers about this world and how we see it" (Denzin, 2006: 422). Walking the very extensive rock faces enabled participants to find this intersubjective space in fieldwork:

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

This performativity translates to the book in its content and design: photographs of actual rock engravings, participants tracing the engravings, and the general landscape from both field trips (2011 and 2013); transcribed field discussions as well as short stories told by the participants (from the field) with regards to the engravings, flora, fauna and material culture found on site (see for example Kruiper *et al.*, 2013). The cacophony of noise in the field is thus present in the book. It is autoethnographic, hoping to capture the nuance and self-expression of team member interpretations. Not only does the book include *English*, with shorter sections in *Afrikaans and Nama*, *by-lined with all team voices*, but it also captures the metaphoric language use of the Kalahari participants, as well as their sense of spirituality as

connectedness (see Lange and Dyll-Myklebust, forthcoming). This is illustrated in the excerpt below where Jan Org's (Lange *et al.* 2013: 113) discussion of the importance of conservation and their agency in research projects is imbued with fauna and flora metaphors:

It is the original nation that is actually a tree. But it has a primary root. If that root dies all the way down, then the entire tree will fall. You also do not have any seed of the tree. That is why we must conserve these things. Because if we consider the tree today - We make paper from the tree, we make any kind of thing out of the tree, but we do not keep reckoning, that is not our way. My seed is of course a little child that I make. That tree, how many seeds does it spread? How many trees sprout? Now if that tree falls away, then there will not be any small trees that sprout. Now you have nothing left of the tree. But see here, the police are there, but the people do it under the noses of the police. They are now chopping the wood. Poverty, everything cannot go unnoticed like this. But if we do not stand up now, then we will have nothing left... And, just as these things are neglected, we will also be forgotten, and then there is no remembrance of our lives and what we might have conserved. Because the conservation that we must do here today is in our hearts and work.

Decolonizing research's principle of multivocality was thus mobilised, living up to Kincheloe and Steinberg's (2008: 150) call to explore "multiple ways of seeing and making sense of the world" and refusing to uncritically accept the Western canon "as the only body of knowledge worth knowing". In this way both the creation of the anthology and the readability is more inclusive. The enddistancing relationship between 'formal researcher' and separate researched was dismantled by walking in the field together.

We now try to draw out some contemporary insights from the above example. We will draw metaphorical comparisons between the noise of doing critical indigenous research and the noise of new media. Our intention is to alert readers to similarities rather than differences, whether pre-modern, modern or post-modern.

The noise levels of digital online media lack the static that once accompanied self-assembled crystal radio sets before the advent of broadcast regulation decreed who gets access, under what conditions, via which spectrum frequency, and broadcast to what signal footprints. The crystal broadcasters were usually

middle-class enthusiasts who occupied virtual spaces enabled by a new medium (Winston, 1998). The 1930s were the harbinger of unfettered electronically-driven public self-expression by prodsumers - enthusiasts who were simultaneously producers and who constituted their own audiences.

Contemporary social media largely mimics the crystal radio mediascape. The main difference now, due to the interactive global reach offered by the Internet, involves billions of prodsumers. Nothing in the digital age is drowned out. The Internet enables everyone to speak about anything, anyhow, to image themselves ('selfies'), often before thinking about the consequences.

### **Pre-modern Prodsumers**

The kinds of regulation that distanced crystal radio from the self-expression of announcer-broadcasters has not yet occurred with the Internet, though threats to Net neutrality often recur from both state and private enterprise (Bauer, 2007). Our study, while drawing on the prodsumer metaphor enabled initially by crystal radio and continued today with the popularity of social media, deals with a different non-electronic public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). We explore what occurs within the researcher-researched relationship and how it is perceived by both the academy and the  $\ddagger$ Khomani who are 'being studied'. While the public sphere emerged from bourgeois discussions during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, most contemporary researchers are students, academics and NGO workers, and thus middle class. In contrast, the indigenous research participants who comprise our *Engraved Landscape* case study are from the largely uneducated rural lumpenproletariat, who nevertheless, as will be shown below insist on access to the global public sphere and the record that it generates.

When research participants are included as co-authors they act like prodsumers as they are both significantly contributing to, and are users of, the research done – or done *with* them. Graphic design is used in *Engraved Landscape* to enhance readability and to co-researchers (or informants in the conventional sense) who are intrinsic to the outcome. Just as states sought to control who could broadcast under what conditions in the early radio environment, so have academic auditors similarly responded to curtail the cacophony that threatens when research is de-colonised, and when the researched are themselves brought into the research team as full members to promote their self-expression.

## **Decolonising Research**

De-colonization is an interventionist process that engages with colonialism at multiple levels. De-colonising practices resist the typical positioning of certain research players (read: researchers), paradigms and concomitant methods (read: positivism) as more “valid”, but rather works to create cross-cultural partnerships, with, between and among indigenous researchers and “allied others” (Swadener and Mutua, 2008: 31).

For researchers, one level of self-expression is concerned with generating a critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices (Smith, 1999: 20). This relates to the *written expression of the Other and the Self*. Where early broadcasting regulation largely silenced the crystal radio phenomenon, in the academy, the emergence of research methodologies similarly shapes who can speak, to whom, under what conditions and through what channels. Academia additionally elevates formal genres or codes of writing deemed to be scientific, while disparaging expression like narrative, poesis, performance, autoethnography and the like as unscientific. Academia thereby produces a discourse that “author-izes certain people to speak and correspondingly silences others, or at least makes their voices less authoritative” (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 90).

Much research has been published on the processes and implications of the often-colonising representation of the ꞤKhomani who reside in the Northern Cape of South Africa (Bester and Buntman, 1999; Buntman, 1996;; Finlay and Barnabas, 2012; Tomaselli, 2012; White, 1995, Magongo 2013), who are represented as having no agency in the process (Swadener and Mutua, 2008). Being First Peoples and the recipients of land and funding post-1994, research and massive media attention have positioned the traditional ꞤKhomani in relation to entertainment and intellectual production (Tomaselli, 2005). However, while their self-expression may be limited, they are well-informed of the power of the image. Their ‘selfie’ is a national one. With the status of First Peoples in South Africa they have come to learn that representation is both income-generating and offers promises of power (Tomaselli, 2005: 148).

Science, however, can strategically silence, not for malicious intentions but because of the conventions within which academics hide the subjectivity or “humanness” of both researcher and researched. But ‘to hide’ seems incongruous in a world that is soaked in self-images. The myth of objectivity can be replaced with reflexive methodologies, in the writing of research participants into the report, as co-authors (Gottlieb, 1995; Lange *et al.*, 2013).

The †Khomani exercise pro-social agency in restricting and managing their public image quite differently to the social media prodsumers who narcissistically ‘place themselves on display’ (Wen-bin *et al.*, 2014; Mehdizadeh, 2010, Gerbouda 2012. The care with which the †Khomani interact with the media may be because they are aware of the ensuing consequences of ‘over-representation’, having been subject to the global gaze for over 100 years. De-colonising of research calls for a “cacophony of subaltern voices” (Gandhi 1998). The privileged however make the most ‘noise’ with their use of social media, and in this way those at the margins remain ‘left behind’.

### **Research: Public-unfriendly / Researcher-friendly**

Like with the regulation of crystal radio, scientific silencing of the subaltern is an outcome of some kinds of research regulation (Dutta, 2011; Smith, 1999). Research is often conducted within an othering relationship that locates the researcher as all-knowing and the researched as not-knowing, but whose opinions are in any case captured in surveys. Ordinary people do come to know experientially - as ‘what happens’ affects them personally. They may not possess the methods and theory to explain ‘what happens’ in conventional scientific terms, as these comprise the restricted discourse of the abstracted lenses brought to bear by academics. In conventional science participants are constituted as objects of study, whose rich experiences are agglomerated into reductive representational forms, much as is done by audience ratings agencies. Research participants are often interpellated simply as tiny fragments of data. While humanities scholars rarely apply statistics, their jargon-laden analyses can be just as alienating and as endistancing from their subjects.

For our case study, the self-expressing ‘public’, our so-called ‘unit of analysis’, is the traditionalist †Khomani (see Bregin and Kruiper, 2004; Glyn, 2013; Kruiper, 2014). They are recognised by us as being our partners in research (i.e. we do not construct them as objects or subjects of study). On occasion, some might even conduct themselves as our intimate others (Dyll, 2007; Mhiripiri, 2012; see also Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust and van Grootheest, 2013). Research participants are sometimes employed as co-researchers (see Lange, 2014). Often, they claim that they consider *themselves* to be the professors, teaching clueless academics like ourselves about themselves.

Recalling the radio metaphor, our research participants are the announcers and we initially are the listeners, until we both know enough about each other to engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue. Like crystal transmissions, the noise levels are very high as conversations are conducted in groups with usually everyone speaking at once, all the time, competing for the within-earshot airwaves. The effect is similar to that recorded by an omni-directional microphone that catches everything in comparison to a directional microphone that silences noise (and information) considered peripheral by the sound recordist who focuses on a single element within the video frame. That's how the Bushmen often feel – peripheral to someone else's scientifically (or journalistically) framing agendas. One example of this directionality at work was the state sponsored funeral of Dawid Kruiper in 2012 where big men from the ruling party looking for opportunistic exposure actually excluded the Kruiper clan from the official tent that the state had erected in its own (rather than Dawid's) honour (Grant, 2012).

Normative academic practice assumes that academics are in control of their theories and methods, their field procedures and ethical obligations. On arriving in the field, a new researcher's first response might well be incomprehension. Nothing that they have been taught in the sanitised, reified or isolated spaces in the academy relate to the conditions encountered (Stoller, 1984; Gottlieb, 1995; Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis, 2008). Modern day announcers may not know how to assemble a radio set, they just turn it on. However, in the field, the researcher needs to know how to de-construct and de-colonise conventional methods to devise and/or re-contextualise a suitable method. Just 'turning on' a pre-given method is to accept the epistemological baggage that that received methods bring with them. A researcher's primary starting point of reference under these conditions is him or herself, as indicated in the opening and other sections of the book where contributors/participants reflect on their own experiences, subjectivities, cosmologies and links to the environment.

In framing 'public self-expression', researchers need to first frame themselves in relation to those whom they want to frame through research. Self/Other, researcher-researched relations examine the:

- 1) nature of the encounter between Self/Other or researcher-researched.
- 2) nature, regulation and bureaucracy of academia and how the institution itself ineluctably shapes and even imposes research practices and pre-figures actual findings, or
- 3) how we 'construct the indigenous research participant' in relation to:
  - the research participant's construction of researchers as both Other and Same, and

- their conception of ethics which may be diametrically opposed to the ethical regimes taken-for-granted by institutional review boards.

Academics usually ignore such important issues. Research committees often fail to see the value of multivocality and narrative in research, especially those that negate the neoliberal logic where everything and anything generated by research is patented, copyrighted, trademarked and thereby commoditised – to the extent of seizing ownership of even traditional stories from research participants (see Tomaselli, 2014; Gottlieb, 1995).

If these are the contradictions and problems, what are the solutions? The following culturally sensitive paradigms have emerged in response to these kinds of experiences and as part of the decolonising research project:

- 1) **Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research Methodology (CIQRM)** (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008) along with interpretive research practices that aim to be ethical, transformative, participatory, and committed to dialogue.
- 2) **Analytical and/or evocative autoethnography and self-reflexivity** (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellis and Rawicki, 2013; Anderson, 2006; Holman Jones *et al.*, 2013), where researchers continuously engage in critical self-reflective methodological discussion about researcher positioning and Self/Other relations.

Non-indigenous or ‘outside researchers’ can be instrumental in the reformulation of Western-centric forms of doing research:

- 1) with a “**centering of the landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories** in the indigenous world” (Smith, 1999: 146) researchers can try to understand the behaviour of researchers from the perspectives of the researched.
- 2) “Setting out in writing **indigenous spiritual belief and world views**” (Smith, 1999:143) enables researchers to break with ontologically alienating positivism.
- 3) Applying **reflexivity** – to disrupt the expert/object relationships by positioning the researchers in relation to both the researched and likely readers of such work or films or TV programmes (Ruby, 1982).

Our ≠Khomani research participants have learnt the value of public self-expression, positioning themselves as traditional hunter-gatherers, victims of dispossession and holders of indigenous knowledge. They commoditise language, image, expression and encounters according to these 'expressions' or frames of reference and as means to extract resources from both witting and unwitting researchers, journalists, film makers and others whose initial impressions of 'the Bushmen' may have been elicited by movies, TV series, books, postcards and by both academic and popular articles. The ≠Khomani have become the regulators of who does research, under what conditions, where and with whom, irrespective of IRB auditing. They have developed different regimes into which they package researchers, depending on how they are encountered and perceived (see Tomaselli, McLennan-Dodd and Shepperson, 2005).

It is during Observer/Observed encounters that the indigenous try to establish the parameters of the interaction. The researcher starts getting the uncomfortable impression that he/she is ceding control of the encounter...In terms of the crystal radio metaphor, the resulting cacophony needs its own form of local bottom-up regulation – one not imposed by far-off institutional review boards, but one that is negotiated *in situ*, in which it is agreed that both researchers and the researched speak to each other on a level playing field. This negotiation would be based on the landscapes, images, metaphors and stories (all often linked to expressions of spirituality) that emerge from the research encounter, and should be reflexively documented (Dyll-Myklebust, 2014; Lange and Dyll, forthcoming).

Our research participants study 'Us' as much as we try to study 'Them'. Where we make notes, take photographs, audio recordings and videos, selecting from 'what happens' – or what researchers think is happening – First Peoples especially enact a lived approach. Constantly testing and provoking us, they write nothing down, talk in parables, poesis and remember to remember only when conditions or the time is right. Eventually it dawns on researchers of First Peoples that their initial inability to make sense of the Other is rooted in positivism that disaggregates Subject from Object (Stoller, 1984). Positivism requires that researchers constitute themselves as all-seeing, all-knowing, like a static fly-on-the-wall, observing, objective, disengaged.

In stark contrast, anyone who has lived in the field knows that researchers are more like flies in the soup, sticky, struggling, and enveloped in bewildering webs of lived relations, hidden transcripts and opaque multi-layered signs. Drowning is more like the resulting feeling than it is of 'knowing'. The people constituted as objects or subjects by researchers actually are aware of the academic scripts, they have

seen the movies made on them; they have acted in them, subverted them in both vernacular dialogue and interpretation, and actively contributed to shaping Western myths about 'Bushman', which they then commodify and sell back to Westerners as a livelihood strategy. While their income-earning options may be limited, their ability to leverage the discursive historical card they have been played is very astute. The channels via which this sale occurs is through cultural tourism, media and through the researcher-researched encounter itself (see Ellis, 2014; Tomaselli, 2012). This is one of the reasons that all sorts of gatekeepers, NGOs and civic organisations are now inserting themselves between †Khomani individuals and contracting organisations. Thus does the endistancing effect between researcher and researched become all the more complex and contested as organisations, not always recognised by individuals or even communities, now act on behalf of, speak for, and levy access fees, from researchers, film makers and other visitors. Their opportunities for public self-expression are thus muted by NGO contracts, remote gatekeepers, and proscriptions on who can speak to whom, where and how. The already marginalised become thus even more marginalised.

The battle over who owns representations of the researched is often fought out in the process of trying to decolonise research procedure and even in the courts. A recent example involved who has the right to screen representations of the †Khomani. A falling out between journalist Patricia Glyn and filmmaker Richard Wicksteed in March 2015 over rights to video footage saw the cancellation of Wicksteed's premiere, *In the Land of Ou Makai- a Bushman Odyssey* (Knoetze, 2015). This is just another example of how the †Khomani so often find themselves as the backdrop to the observers' own agendas, struggles over copyright and intellectual property- notwithstanding their respective contributions to that community.

If First Peoples find themselves backstage with regard to court actions over those professional media workers who work with them, they are also sometimes the victims of the academy's research regulation procedures. The †Khomani are infuriated - as are we- at the ways in which researchers are used and abused by their institutions, in the ways in which the spontaneity of their Self/Other interactions and negotiations are regulated by ethics committees, release forms, gatekeeper requirements and intellectual property rights regimes. Informed consent letters and survey instruments are distrusted and the †Khomani are aware of how the instrumentalist institutional regulation of research can endistance researchers from the very people they actually want to come to know. The subaltern often engage in their own forms of resistance. When employed as research data gatherers, for example, they have been

seen to manipulate the data (Ellis, 2014), and will ask trusted experts to caution observers when they feel that their interests and/or image is being distorted (see Biesele and Hitchcock, 1999). These responses are kinds of self-expression also.

The ≠Khomani individuals with whom we have worked for 15 years are angered when uninvited outsiders claiming to be insiders try to represent them, or assume that they have the right to control access to them, or claim to be protecting them. They feel that that they are subject to infantilising procedures when ethics committees code them as 'vulnerable' populations along with children and prisoners, notwithstanding their 400 years of resistance against, and accommodation with, in-migrating groups across Southern Africa.

### **Autoethnography – revealing the Self in relation to the Other**

Rather than falling back on the imperialist safety of positivism is an approach based on Stoller's (1989) humanist anthropology in which "individuals encountered in the field are presented as individuals, and incidents as incidents, not as exemplars of the author's theoretical preconceptions" (Moore, 1990).

What happens, for example, when the ≠Khomani 'play into' the discourse and preconceptions that they have learnt from previous researchers? The 'noise' increases and the researcher may feel it is his/her duty to excavate between what is and is not deemed 'authentic'. The most responsible practice in this situation is to reflexively document these instances of research participant self-expression. In so doing researchers can contribute to the dismantling of the all-knowing researcher, acknowledge participant agency and thus contribute to decolonising research via the use of autoethnography that maintains the ethnographic objective of "seeking to understand and make sense of complex social worlds of which we are only part (but part nonetheless)" (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003:7). A central tenet, thus, is that the researcher - like a radio announcer- recognises himself in his research. This signifies a shift towards the inclusion of researcher position, since Bronislow Malinowski's (1922:25) dictum that the ethnographer's final goal is "to grasp the Native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world". There is no longer a primary focus *only* on the Other; what becomes an epistemological prerequisite for ethnography is the idea of 'confrontation'. This 'confrontation' comes in the form of dialogue with data, research participants and oneself in negotiating one's position (through reflexivity) in order to understand a social setting, social group or social problem.

Autoethnography is thus both a research methodology and a genre of writing within cultural and media studies, performance studies, social theory and anthropology (amongst other fields) that “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:739). *Reflexivity* is a *technique* that works to guide and problematise our research positions within the research process and the ensuing narrative often takes the *form of autoethnography*, reflexivity is thus a part of the autoethnography ‘toolbox’ with which the researcher can locate him/herself.

Autoethnography has a tendency of telling rather than showing as it does not work with hard data; it eschews evidence and cannot be triangulated. What it does reveal however is how data and phenomena are encountered in raw states, how observer-observed relationships are established and negotiated, how the researcher’s thoughts and feelings shape the nature of research questions, and how what is encountered in the field often reframes received theory. Textbook methodologies are often useless, if not actually contra-indicated, for the task of making sense of public self-expression as their positivist methodologies deny the negotiations that characterise the researcher-researched relationship. This is the fly-on-the wall scenario - that which empowers the radio announcer *vis-a-vis* her listeners, whose method of ‘talking back’, or ‘speaking’ to the audience is via the restricted one-to-one technology of the phone or text, neither of which places the caller in control.

Autoethnography follows the lived fly-in-the-soup metaphor. This genre enables the researched to appreciate the academic text as they are able to recognise themselves as actors in the autoethnographic stories about them being told and abstracted. This is empowering for informants as they feel that they are now being taken seriously by the researchers in whom they have invested time, effort and energy. Autoethnography is not applicable for every research application, however. It should be used with caution, to approach specific tasks, to enable particular kinds of research encounters or even personal thoughts.

### **The Response: The Fly Swatter**

In our experience, our critics can be both measured (and therefore helpful) but others are utterly destructive – hence the fly swatter metaphor as they try to eliminate the critical indigenous qualitative methodologies (CIQM) fly-in-the-soup presence. Where blind refereeing is concerned, the protective

cloak of anonymity enables the unleashing of prejudice, if reviews of some our works are indicative. CIQM is not a method to be used by the meek. In its application one has to confront:

- 1) the uncertain Self,
- 2) intractable critics;
- 3) the conceptually threatened; and
- 4) the methodologically bewildered, all the while
- 5) constructively engaging the Other/the research participants, who have their own weird and wonderful perceptions and expectations of researchers.

Beyond these dimensions are our CIQM peers, who offer the most challenging critical engagements we have ever encountered, and who have pushed us to the edge of the methodological universe when invited to contribute chapters to their Handbooks to enable us to move beyond it into new paradigmatic dimensions.

In proceeding from the known to the unknown one has to deal with one's self in ways quite unfamiliar to conventional science. The resulting experiences can be very stressful, anxiety-inducing and intimate. This self-expressive task is appreciated by our †Khomani co-researchers because it entails confronting Self in the service of the Other. It also connects us in organic ways with our participants, the characters (both the researchers and researched) in our research stories, in quite uniquely informative ways (see Tomaselli, 2005, 2007 where research participants are listed as in a play). CIQM, which includes autoethnography, offers one ways to delve beneath the hidden transcripts that First Peoples sell to conventional researchers.

Autoethnography that applies intimate revelation and addresses readers as a confidant. They are told a story in public that takes the reader on a journey deep into the psyche, the social, the personal and so forth (Ellis, 2007; Ellis and Rawicki, 2013). In such cases when is a story just a story and when is a story teaching us about something else?

### **The Swatted Speak**

Remote, largely Internet-unconnected, communities are often de-voiced, written out of the record by research protocols that acknowledge published sources but which demand anonymity of informants. .

The cacophony in the Kalahari is so severe that research teams often fall over themselves as they dash about interviewing, photographing, and getting in everybody's way – the crystal radio metaphor again. It is not surprising, then, that research on the one hand has become a dirty word for the indigenous (Smith 1999: 2), while on the other contributing significantly to local cultural economies. So intense is this scramble that the Working Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa NGO has formulated media and research contracts, to manage access, outputs and ownership of data. Every kind of interaction has been thereby regulated, commoditized and managed, from casual encounters to research relations.

Where so many narcissistic Western consumers crave media exposure at any personal cost to ensure “their 15 minutes of fame” (a la Andy Warhol) on reality TV shows and on the Internet, the †Khomani strictly manage their encounters with visitors, media and researchers (see Von Stauss, 2012). They resent pictures or statements made by them or of them being plastered anywhere and everywhere, including postcards and facebook. Such use must be negotiated and the conditions of use agreed to. While they seek to manage their media image, they also wish to be identified, included and acknowledged in academic and media records (Bregin and Kruiper, 2004; Lange *et al.*, 2013; Dyll, 2007; Kruiper, 2014). Traditional healer, Isak Kruiper (interview, 28 Jan 2007) reiterates the sense of empowerment that may be instilled either by speaking to tourists themselves or being written into the record: “I will appreciate it because then our people will not be seen as just a tracker or a guide but also as a trained or educated person who has the knowledge and who carries the history”. Isak and other clan members allege a kind of symbolic violence when their own investments in the research process – whether as informants, guides, advisors, actors or as medical subjects – are written out of the academic record. Indeed, they insist on inclusion for fear that their nuanced story-told information will be lost in agglomerations of quantified thematic categories or generalised abstractions; forms that they consider kinds of indigenous knowledge theft.

The problem is that universities' ethics committees rooted in positivist assumptions argue that anonymity is an ethical requirement, even when research participants object to this form of silencing. Therein lies the contradiction that is social science, but not necessarily of oral history or anthropological fieldwork. Researchers who might themselves spend years in the field, living with single communities, are seen to betray their hosts' generosity when, in abstracting their data, their publications eliminate the very individuals who helped to generate it. When research participant communities are unable to recognise

themselves in the written up work, they feel an abject sense of loss, of alienation and of wasted investment in the research process and they then tend to distrust all research relationships.

For our research participants, as for us, research is a lived paradigm (Mboti, 2012). For most academics, however, research is an abstracting, agglomerative, endistancing practice, one that ultimately separates researcher from researched – even as the two parties needed each other during the research encounter.

For the ≠Khomani, tactical self-exposure must be of significant social import, it must have local relevance, and it must be accessible to *them*. Theirs is *not* a selfie culture, unless a financial transaction is involved. For academics, both media and research exposure is always linked to competition, advancement and career whether or not it is of relevance to the research participant community. For the †Khomani research really matters; for everyone else, research is a 5-50 minute intrusion, usually with a disembodied survey instrument. Whether or not research has any significance beyond these restricted outcomes, is not considered that important by academics as is the abiding emphasis with publication. The academic auditors could care less about impact and relevance but obsess with outputs and quantity, forgetting about the investment that our research participants have themselves invested in the research.

## **Conclusion**

Our Kalahari research participants still largely live in an analogue world, in remote areas, beyond affordability of the Internet. Where they try to manage and control what media and academic representations of them do get made, engaging, berating and cooperating with all manner of observers and researchers, digital natives tend to be far less discerning. The difference is in the expectation: for the indigenous, research has obvious social value and the commodification of media exposure is directed to specific income ends. The †Khomani thus are interested in our methods, our assumptions and our research practices, and how they are represented in the final publications. For digital natives, self-exposure, fame, and celebrity offer a momentary thrill that often has no particular path. They flit from one fleeting and vicarious digital representative moment to another. Both are forms of self-expression, the one socially based, the other hyper-individuated.

What research means for 'Us', the researchers, does not necessarily have the same meaning for 'Them'. Our methods are dedicated to renegotiating and, where possible, collapsing this binary in a mutually beneficial participatory way that offers interacting public spheres for both self and negotiated expression.

Conventional research mutes context because the soup is too messy. That's why it silences, de-historicises and sanitises. Our messy approach, however, tries to animate and populate the cleaned silence in relation to the sticky presence. CIQRM offers other lenses that enable self-expression in terms of relations, networks and different kinds of encounters. That is also the job of our indigenous co-researchers in their re-negotiation of researcher relationships. We need to understand the messy noise but without unnecessarily over-regulating research practice. Self-expression can be used constructively to bring issues faced by indigenous communities to the public sphere.

Decolonization of research is more than de-Westernization: the objective is not just to increase Western epistemological footprints, but to replace such approaches with the direct experiences of people in the peripheries who have been historically the subjects of research rather than authorised agents in such processes. Their voices need to be heard via new methodologies that do not colonise.

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<sup>i</sup> A general category of first inhabitants