

When Sally met Harry

A Fictocritique on the Use of Tablet Readers
for Indigenous Knowledge Transfer

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge; technological hegemony; folklore; San; marginalisation; ethnologically-informed interactive design

A Note on the Form

In this ficto-critique I am attempting to “allow the voice of the other to interrogate the voice of theory in such a way as to reveal its particularity and its partiality” (Gibbs, 2005). I embrace the irony that Harry, Sally and I are all ‘other’ in relation to the stakeholders in the proposed electronic folktales project. As Helen Flavell notes, “ficto-criticism’s practice interrogates the violence of representation inherent in speaking for and about another” (2009, p.2).

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In this piece I aim also to explore what post-modernist anthropologist, Michael Taussig claimed for his use of ficto-criticism, namely, an attempt “to duplicate in the writing something about the culture itself” (Taussig, interviewed by Eakin, 2001). San life is lived in dialogue, whether in the constant babble that emanates from bush camps, or in the exegesis that takes place after and sometimes during, storytelling. Furthermore, Indigenous Technologies research aims to discover the particular requirements of localized groups and to design solutions to meet their specific needs. For me this mirrors Gibbs’ view of ficto-criticism as “an always singular and entirely tactical response to a particular set of problems - a very precise and local intervention, in other words” (ibid).

Additionally, as a novelist, it feels natural to come at truth via fiction. Also as an auto-ethnographer (<http://www.candimiller.co.uk/research-project1.html>), I acknowledge and wish to interrogate the fact that as a researcher I am implicated in what I am investigating.

While I relish writing an alternative to the tradition of impersonal scholarly writing, I respect academic conventions regarding intellectual property rights. I have therefore risked subverting the fictive conceit of a ‘real’ dialogue or script, by inserting in-line citation, albeit ‘ghosted’.

As text must feature prominently in this piece, I’ve chosen to use script mode. It is closer to the oral form this project is concerned with, to the dense, intense, pervasive, dialogic approach of my research subjects, to any subject. It also permits me to use stage directions. I’ve deliberately focused on body language as part of the argument for producing San folktales in an audio-visual form. The San routinely use gesture as a form of communication, with or without verbal accompaniment. (See script). Jessica White, citing

Helen Flavell points out that “(t)he use of the body and personal details (in ficto-criticism) realizes a subjectivity that is quite different from the controlling academic subject’s with their voice from on high” (Flavell, 2009 cited in White 2010).

My characters are archetypes, as are those in San folktales. Sally chafes against ‘the peremptory dictation of the institutional superego’ (Gibbs, 2005), and Harry, who seems to be that ‘superego’ may, after all, ‘want what Sally’s (seemingly) having’ (When Harry Met Sally, 1989).

Finally, all the characters are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental — with the exception of the author, Candi Miller.

Background

In a prestigious research institute in Africa, two academics meet for the first time to discuss the opportunities and challenges implicit in the digitisation of the oral folktales of the oldest aboriginal culture, that of the San people.

The protagonists know that the San have an African heritage of great antiquity; San artefacts have been radio-carbon dated to 44 000 years ago; scientists believe that bands of San living in the Kalahari desert today are the descendants of those hunter-gatherers. The San knowledge system was sustained exclusively orally until 30 years ago.

Harry and Sally are both sensitive to issues of appropriation and to the difficulties that bedevil social enterprise projects in Africa. Nevertheless, Sally feels honour-bound to help a group of San students who are interested in producing an e-book featuring their folktales, so “the world will hear our stories told by us.”

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Harry is a high-profile human computer interaction (HCI) researcher whose current focus is on interactive design for storytelling applications suited to rural Africa. A match made in academic heaven, you'd think. But Sally is not a disinterested academic; she's over-protective of the San, the "most victimized and brutalized people in the bloody history that is southern Africa." (Gordon, Robert J., 1992, p. 10) She questions the value of more than a century of research, which hasn't noticeably ameliorated their underclass status. She's wary that the San eTales project may become just another notch on Harry's professional bedpost.

INT: A busy academic's office, late one sunny South African afternoon. Books are stacked on a desk whose drawers can't quite close due to the computer-related paraphernalia spilling from them. An empty tin of condensed milk sits atop the book stack, sucking holes punched into the lid. There are two visitors' chairs, both occupied by enormous, well-worn rucksacks.

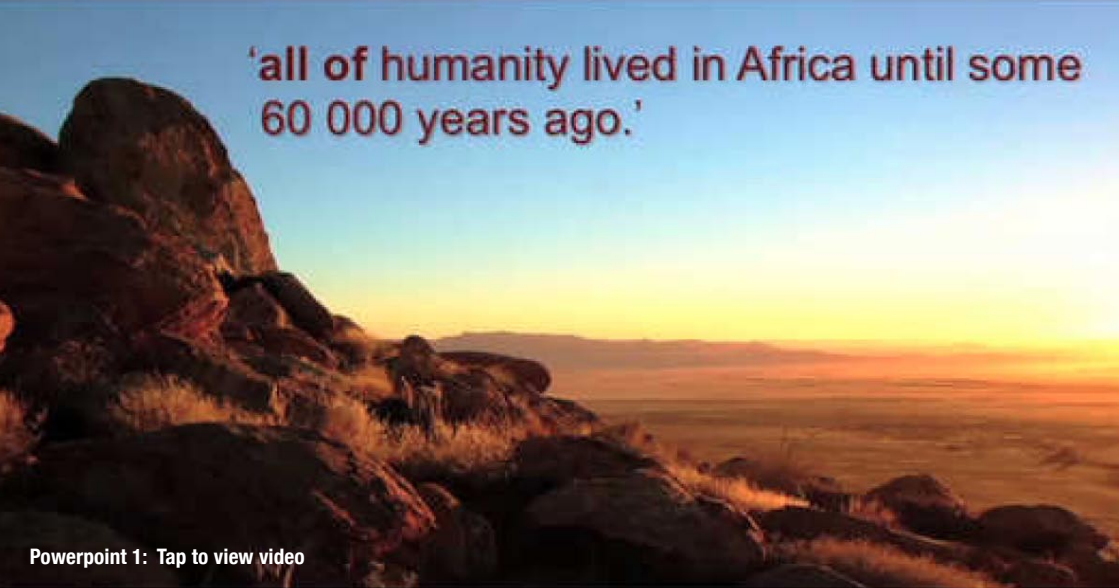
Sally: Thanks for seeing me; I know you're between field trips.

Harry: Ja, got a couple of Indigenous Technology projects on the go right now ... Here, let me move that stuff so you can sit down.

(He lifts the rucksacks as if they're helium-filled. She hovers over a dusty chair, wishing she hadn't worn white; dismayed that he's so good-looking and confident. He leans against his desk, towering above her, smiling politely down.)

So, your project: indigenous folktales into enhanced e-book form, huh? Tell me...

Sally: Well, umm... *(She touches her hair)* A group of computer-literate young San I've been working with...



'all of humanity lived in Africa until some 60 000 years ago.'

Powerpoint 1: Tap to view video

Davis, W. *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom matters in the Modern World*. (2009:8)

Harry: Lucky. I haven't worked with the San; other tribal groups but...

Sally: (*Sternly*) Actually, they are not a tribe. 'Tribe' implies hierarchy. The San are well known for their egalitarianism; much has been written about their consensual conflict-resolution and communal decision-making.

Majorie Shostak (1990, p.6) notes how (*she draws quotation marks in the air*) "disputes were defused by discussions that went on long into the night, in which all points of view were expressed until a consensus was reached." Writing of the Jul'hoan' people, Megan Biesele (1995, p.50) says "[t]hey are understood to be fiercely egalitarian by anthropologists" and Lorna Marshall (1961, p.231) wrote that: (*Sally closes her eyes, recites rhapsodically*) "The arduous hunting-gathering life would be insupportable for a single person or a single nuclear family without the companionship and cooperation of the larger group." And Katz et al, talking about one of the Bushmen or San groups, the Jul'hoansi, says (*again she recites*) "they enjoy a communal solidarity that goes far beyond Western rhetoric about sharing and healing"

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(KATZ, BIESELE & ST DENNIS, 1997, p.xi)

(Harry gapes at her. Has the woman memorized chapter and verse of the entire corpus of Bushman ethnography studies?)

Harry: That's a helluva memory you've got there. Mine's a sieve. And my anthropological knowledge's got gaps big enough to drive a bakkie² through.

(There's an awkward silence. Sally feels her face heating up. She didn't mean to bludgeon him with quotes. They rattle around in her head like porcupine quills and when she's nervous, up they spring. He's looking at her like she's some kind of freak.)

Sally: I'm sorry. I get carried away.

Harry: Ag-no. Passion's an advantage in our line of work, isn't it? *(But his arms fold across his broad chest)* So, how did you, living in England, get involved with the San?

Sally: I was born and brought up in Africa but left... *(Sally hesitates. Is it necessary to add 'during the Apartheid years'? Does she care if he thinks of her as a 'chicken-runner'?)* Umm, the **Kalahari desert** I visited some years after emigrating; I was writing a novel featuring a San girl and needed detail about her homeland.

After a bit of an off-road adventure involving a charging elephant and a massive veldfire racing towards my trailer full of petrol cans —

Harry: Ja, been there, done that; sand turns to glass from the heat, hey?

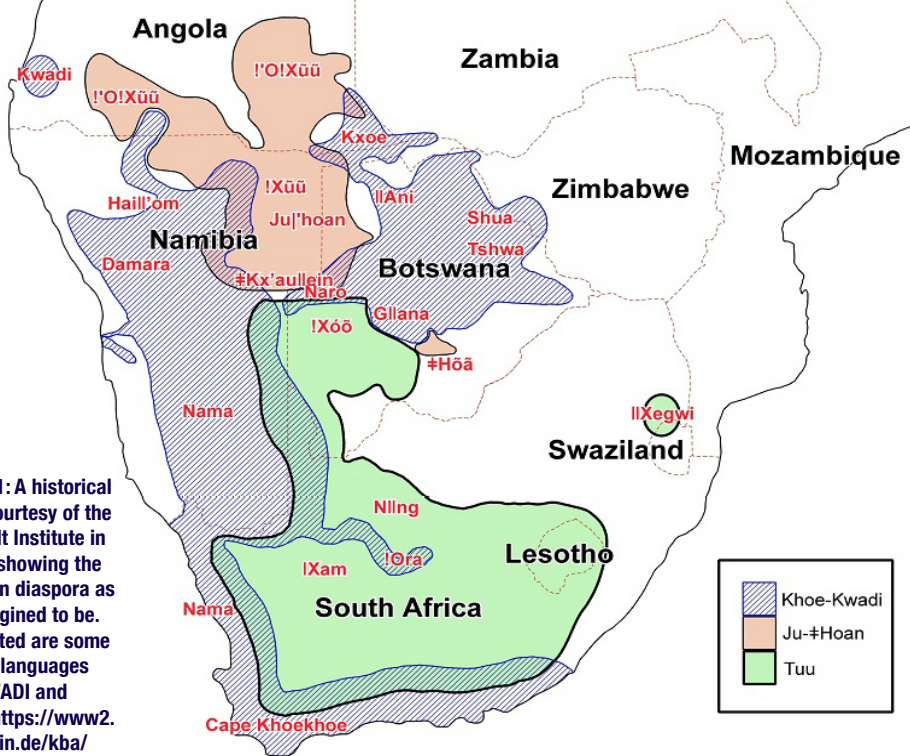


Figure 1: A historical map, courtesy of the Humbolt Institute in Berlin, showing the Khoesan diaspora as it's imagined to be. Also listed are some extinct languages like KWADI and IXAM. <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/kba/languages.html>

Tyres spin and you're going nowhere. Only thing to do is let some air out.

Sally: Yes, and quickly. *(He laughs.)* Anyway, I eventually found a group of *(she uses her fingers to trace inverted commas in the air)* “Bushman”, Ju!’hoansi, actually, still living in traditional huts off food they gathered from the veld...

Harry: Not easy to find San living like that nowadays, hey? *(He shifts weight from one well-scuffed boot to another.)* I haven't read your novels. I'll ...

Sally: *(Defensively)* Just adventure stories; I hoped they'd advocate for San rights better than yet another academic article *(he snorts sympathetically)*

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or feature story that might appear in the Sunday newspaper and go out in the cat litter on Monday.

Harry: Ja-ja, better impact. *(He uncrosses his arms)* Now, how can I help?

Sally: Well, um... *(she feels herself reddening again and hopes her neck hasn't gone blotchy)* ... some kind of research partnership, perhaps?

(He hopes his nod is non-committal. Why do people imagine he can make things better for their indigenous friends with a screen swipe, he wonders? But this suppliant has readymade San connections; that would give him a full house of ethnically-diverse research projects in southern Africa. But she's no academic prize, based as she is at a minor university. And she's a zealot; about as useful for scientific objectivity as a Facebook Like.

Still, it costs nothing to listen, and he likes the way her neck blushes.)

I'll be honest, I'm less interested in the research than I am in helping the San get a foothold in the digital world. *(He groans inwardly)* One of my San associates wrote in support of the e-tales idea, saying *(she quotes, unable to stop herself)* "we are indeed going to explore the world and the world will hear our stories told by us."

Harry: So, a training scheme you need to disguise as a research project hey? Shoot.

Sally: *(She's irked by his peremptoriness. She takes a deep breath)* Okay. Together with a group of interested San, I'd like to make an anthology of their folktales, an electronic anthology, accessible via tablet PCs or lo-spec

Good day Candi

I and Tomsen went through your e-mail and we appreciate all that you mention in your e-mail and its very exciting, but it's a pity that we could not participate and personally meet you, but as you said, there are some options.

We suggest that you send us some working tools, like something that can guide us in this process.

Just a brief introduction of ourselves;

Moshe-I received training in film making, script writing, sound engineering, lighting, camera shooting. Last I made a documentary of my life with the help of the institution of justice and reconciliation and it was of big success. I did some studies after my matric, just additional information, I can also capture video in to the computer from a DV camera, internet familiar etc.

Tomsen - I have not attended a formal camera/video training. I am in position of dv camera and do filming and editing in my leisure time. I have a working experience of capturing and editing, I normally use pinnical studio video editing programme. Text writing wouldn't be a problem.

We fully understand all that you have mentioned and the new technology sounds very exciting and it will be very good as well for our personal develop. We hope and trust that our involvement in this project will be meaningful. For the past years we have planned to establish a project of ourselves, we wanted to make videos and tell SAN stories and even publications, these things had been very close to hearts, but with your project and our involvement, we are indeed going to explore the world and the world will hear our stories told by us, thanks for the opportunity by the way. Let's keep communicating about this and together we will make it a reality, thanks.

Regards,
Moshe and Tomsen

Figure 2: Moshe Maghund, July 2012, in personal correspondence with Candi Miller, about a non-fiction e-tale project proposal.

mobile phones, so the San themselves can use it. It also needs to appeal to western audiences so the San have a chance of earning money from downloads.

Harry: (*He raises his eyebrows*) Big ask, for one app. design.

Sally: Not an app. That's too ambitious at this stage I think, in terms of collecting content anyway. Not that there isn't enough – the San, specifically the Ju'hoansi, are referred to by Megan Bieseke, as "perhaps the most fully described indigenous people in all of anthropology." We've analysed their rock art, (*she uses her fingers to count off categories in the canon*) digitised the Holy Grail of San studies,³ the Bleek and Lloyd collection, gathered information about their plantlore, cosmology, ethnography, linguistics, their recorded history in all its horrors: genocide, enslavement, the San as hunters and as the hunted...

Harry: Hunted?



Figure 3: Eland (*Taurotragus oryx*), the largest African antelope.
Credit: Steve Garovie, photographer (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rainbirder/9516929865/sizes/o/in/photostream/>)

Sally: Oh yes. Around the 1900s one could still buy a license to shoot a bushman. It cost four hundred in the local currency if one intended to bag a 'Buschmann Frau'; double the price for shooting an eland.

(He looks stunned) One of these rate boards exists in a rural museum in Upington, South Africa. There's a shot of it in a film about the San called 'My Hunter's Heart'. Bushwomen are listed under a heading, 'Säugethiere', German circa 1900s for 'Mammals', I believe. *(He's frowning and thin-lipped. She changes the subject.)* Erm, as you can imagine, the app would be a lifetime's work and couldn't contain only stakeholder-generated content. So we're starting with what another of my San associates calls "Chapter One",



Jobe Gabototwe-Mosesane

25/09/2012 15:00

Oopsy. The adventure is still as vivid as if it was yesterday. Thank you very much for having sent the links to us. Kxaoga really saved us throughout our journey.

25 September 2012



Candi Miller

25/09/2012 19:14

Thanks for responding. Wonderful to have shared that with such special folk.



Jobe Gabototwe-Mosesane

25/09/2012 19:37

You are most welcome Candi. Can't wait to witness Chapter 1 being underway.

Figure 4: Chapter 1

an enhanced e-book. I propose to convene a San editorial committee and get funding for equipment so they can go into their communities and film oral storytelling. I'll also need money for training so they can produce an anthology of tales they have chosen.

Harry: Produce how?

Sally: Well, they might use iAuthor or Inking Habitat. The first programme's easier to work with; it's intuitive...

Harry: (*Snaps*) Intuitive to whom?

Sally: Well, um, to me...to them ... (*she feels her neck begin to blotch*)

Harry: Information and Communication Technology, ICT, and its organisational and operating systems are underpinned by Western ways.

Sally: (*Icy-toned*) And you're implying that digitally-deprived San cannot learn to operate an iPad?

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Harry: Not at all. I'm sure they can, and have already – unfortunately.

Sally: (*She grips the edge of her chair*) UNFORTUNATELY ?

Harry: (*He holds up a hand*) Now wait just a bit. Consider: embedded in computerised devices and ICT design processes are specific logics and literacies derived from the culture in which they are designed. That is (*he points at her then at himself*) our ways to recognize, organize and communicate about aspects of the world. Additionally, there is cultural ideology inscribed in the way we interface with devices like tablets. For example, the grabber on Macs, a white-gloved hand, which some suggest was inspired by Mickey Mouse (JONES, 2011, p.237) A cultural icon familiar to a certain Disney-generation, but what does it signify for others? And what about its alleged racist overtones?

Sally: (*Mollified*) You mean the trademark white gloves of blacked up minstrels?

Harry: Ja. Or think about the curled up page corner on electronic readers. Why does an e-reader have to ape a book?⁴ (*He holds her gaze and his tone softens*) We find that gestural interfaces with new media are increasingly commonplace and increasingly are embedded in technology offered to fragile indigenous communities as a way to curate, represent and disseminate their culture. There is a real danger that such technologies project the epistemologies and ontologies of outsiders at the expense of the knowledge systems of the vulnerable society.

Sally: I understand. And one could see the San as vulnerable. Most have largely abandoned their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyles due to harassment or

forced dislocation. Over time they've lost land to settler groups both black and white, to game lodges and parks boards, to governments at the behest of mining companies, and lately, in designated San homelands like Nyae Nyae in Namibia, they've lost their bush food supplies as the herds of invading pastoralists' trample everything. It's said that hunted meat is now sold instead of being traditionally shared, and beer-drinking is more popular than trance dancing. (KATZ, BIESELE AND ST DENNIS, 1989.)

Harry: Is alcohol abuse a problem?

Sally: In some areas, like |Kae|kae, yes. Katz and his co-researchers reported from there that when beer- brewing⁵ ingredients were available, they'd daily see a straggle of Ju|'hoansi stumbling home from one of the Herero settlers' homesteads. I don't know what the current situation is like. People are aware of the ill-effects of alcohol; they feel it increases the level of violence in their community – “people get angry and fight”– (XUMI NI!A'AN, IN KATZ, BIESELE & ST DENNIS, 1989, p.96) Of concern is the fact that shebeen-owners are now also the suppliers of mobile phone- and tablet reader-charging facilities. They are the ones who can afford the generators.

Harry: I see the problem; compounded by the fact it takes nine hours or so to charge a tablet reader using a solar-power/battery arrangement, provided others don't drain the power for lights. Mobile phones might be a better option, but the lo-spec ones people can afford have limited video capability. And ownership's not high in rural areas.

Sally: Some San have relocated to urban areas, for example the Omaheke townships in Namibia. Here there are people who don't speak their

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San mother tongue, or, they speak it poorly. They have more chance of accessing a mobile phone. These San say they have never heard a folktale told by their people. They've heard their people are renowned healers but they've never seen a trance dance. (PRATCHETT, L. 2011, PERS. COMM.)

Harry: Well...

Sally: (*Interrupts*) The point I'm trying to make – apologies for the circuitous route – is that despite socio-economic problems, I'm optimistic for San culture; I think the e-book could be part of a solution. (She closes her eyes and recites) "Many 'vanishing' or even 'vanished' people thrive today as they re-create their traditional wisdom." (KATZ, BIESELE AND ST DENNIS. 1989, p.159)

(*Harry decides he might come to enjoy her ardour.*)

Harry: Nice, but you still need to ensure compatibility of device and local cultural practices.

Sally: Of course, but for that (*she flashes an ingratiating look*) I'll need an indigenous knowledge HCI specialist.

Harry: (*Smiling.*) Your strategy is showing. (*In a less jocular tone*) But ja, there are precedents, projects launched to extend or preserve Africa's so-called 'Indigenous Knowledge', digitally. We've used a range of tools, from Web 2.0 to Geographic Information Systems and 3D visualization. Some archive aspects of knowledge or language, others aim to support applying indigenous people's practices to conservation and environmental

stewardship. Liebenberg et al. presented a good paper on this in Osaka in 1998. Then there's stuff on weather prediction, the innovation of new pharmaceuticals, Alberts, Khalala and Molefe, 2011, I think... I haven't got your memory. (*She blushes*) Other digital tools map places to establish land rights where those have been eroded. Ja, the digital transformation of San folktales suggests IK-design possibilities. But I can't stress enough how sensitive the researcher needs to be. Muwanga-Zake says "ICT is instrumental and held as responsible for inserting many Western ways of constructing and disseminating knowledge into African Indigenous Knowledge Systems." (2010,p.69) I say, at the expense of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Sally: (*Teasing tone.*) Good quote, and I take your point. (*She leans back.*) Now let's say, for example, that careful research shows that in terms of content design, rather than the codex system, the San favour interacting with something that looks more like a landscape – the kind of visualization one finds in digital games. Could you design...?

Harry: Now you're talking my language. The Aussies developed something like that to digitally represent Aboriginal Songlines. They created a virtual Outback, mapping the cultural heritage landscape including ancient rock art sites, by using imported satellite based geo-spatial data. Then they embedded a range of relevant objects for users to interact with: 3-D fauna and flora, sound, animations, layers of narrative. Hang on, I've got the paper here somewhere: (*He swings round and scrabbles through a pile of papers on his desk, triumphantly extracts one, kicks the chair out from his desk, sits, and begins to read:*)

"These narratives consist of the network of Songlines that traverse the

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country and reinforce Aboriginal knowledge practices. At any one location in the landscape the user may be able to access information from any number of Songlines, which offer different perspectives on what exists in that place, who can be in that place, what activities can be done in that place, how that place came to be, what needs to be done to maintain that place, the ownership of that place, and many other deep and subtle nuances of Aboriginal knowledge." (PUMPA & WYELD, 2006, p.241)

Sally: Impressive, but San ontologies and epistemologies won't mirror those of the Australian aborigines.

Harry: That's why Indigenous Knowledge researchers like to situate the design locally, to co-create with stakeholders.

Sally: (*A bit patronizing, she thinks.*) Erm, Gayatri Spivak (1999, p.351) admittedly on the subject of literary evaluation, argues that a different standard "necessarily provisional, can emerge if we work at the (im) possible perspective of the native informant as a reminder of alter-ity." Do you think a different standard of HCI evaluation can emerge if you manage, somehow, to see tablet readers and other hi-tech devices from an indigenous knowledge holder's perspective?

Harry: (*With a too-tight smile*) A point I always make in my funding bids. And it's that pig-in-muck place where my research and my funder's objectives coalesce.

Sally: (*Smug, she decides.*) Fortunate, given your, um, limitations? (*He raises an offended eyebrow but her quills are up.*) What Michael Wessels (2010,

p.35) calls the 'cultural, linguistic and historical specificity' of the tools at your interpretative disposal?

Harry: (*Flushing red under his tan*) Ja-well, we are all what our experience has made us.

Sally: (*Arch*) Biased?

Harry: Of course! (*His gestures implicates her. She's taken aback.*) Guilty white South African?

(*He leans far forward, his long torso bringing his face closer to hers. She won't draw back. She focuses on his unusual eye-colour and a line from 'Burger's Daughter' comes to her: "Eyeballs of agate in which flood and volcanic cataclysms are traced" (1979, p.233). Lions have eyes like that, she thinks. She breathes out only when he pulls back.*)

Here's one quote I do always remember because it's burned into my brain: Moran, 2009, page 116, proposes that people like us have "the urge to restituitively acknowledge the injustices of the colonial past."

(*She feels ashamed. Perhaps he's more than the sum of his Afrikaner, scientist parts.*)

Sally: You're right, Moran's right. I'm sorry for being rude. (*He nods acceptance as his high colour begins to recede.*) It's this role of interlocutor for 'the other' I find uncomfortable. Over my shoulder I hear Foucault (1972, p.50) asking his killer-question: "{F}rom whom ... does {s}he receive... the presumption that what {s}he says is true?"

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Harry: (*Shrugs*) What can we do but be as self-reflexive as possible? (*She murmurs agreement*) Digital technology's unstoppable; more even than those vast migrations of springbok that used to cross San land. Eventually ICT will vault fences the springbok couldn't.

Sally: (*Pleased by the metaphor*) All the more reason to provide the San with the digital means to present their own folktales.⁶ There's a native American artist and writer whose work I admire and take heart from — Hang on ... (*she reaches into her bag for her iPad*) Candice Hopkins, 'Making Things our Own' (2006, p.342): (*She reads as if sharing a treasure. He notes only that Ms Mega-memory uses an aide-memoir, after all.*)

"Storytellers in indigenous communities are continually embracing new materials and technologies, including video and digital media. I would suggest that this shift does not threaten storytelling traditions in these communities but is merely a continuation of what aboriginal people have been doing from time immemorial: making things our own."

(*She snaps the cover shut and looks up*) Already with the e-tales project idea there is evidence of this. The San I trialled the pilot with, suggested there be San-language to San-language transcriptions of the stories, which, to the best of my knowledge, is a first in a San folktale anthology. The group was particularly keen on creating a resource that would enable them to learn one another's languages.

Harry: Really? Nascent nation building, hey? (*She's relieved to hear less hostility in his tone.*) How many San-related language groups are there, by the way?

Sally: Well, there are about 30 so-called 'Khoesan languages', that is languages

spoken by the former hunter- gatherers or by their pastoralist neighbours. Of those, I'm told at least 20 are language varieties spoken by different San groups,⁷ some critically endangered. Many other languages are thought to already be extinct.⁸ (*Harry winces*) I'm not aware of any San-language to Khoesan language translations of the stories; plenty of translations and transcriptions into western or Asian languages, though.

Harry: It's that old story of privileging reading-writing literacy.

Sally: Paper people's hegemony. (*Harry's involuntary 'huh' makes her giggle.*) A label given to the anthropologists who wrote 'Healing Makes our Hearts Happy', by the late Tshao Matze, a healer and advocate for the reclamation of the Ju|'hoan land-base in Botswana.

Harry: (*Amused*) Paper people? Eina⁹ Not an example of the San's sense of irony, I suppose?

Sally: (*Smiles*) Not in this instance. The healer tasked them as 'paper people' with sending a letter to the Botswana government on his behalf, saying they needed their land back so they could feed themselves. Richard Katz explains that Xumi Nla'an, an elder, had attended government meetings with rural people including the Ju|'hoansi, and was left feeling powerless and unheard. He said that 'words, to become powerful, must now also be written down,' (KATZ, BIESELE, ST DENNIS, 1997, p.7)

Harry: A shame, when people are skilled in other literacies – oratory, or reading the sand.

Sally: Isn't it... (*Shaking her head, then tilting it to one side. He notices the graceful*

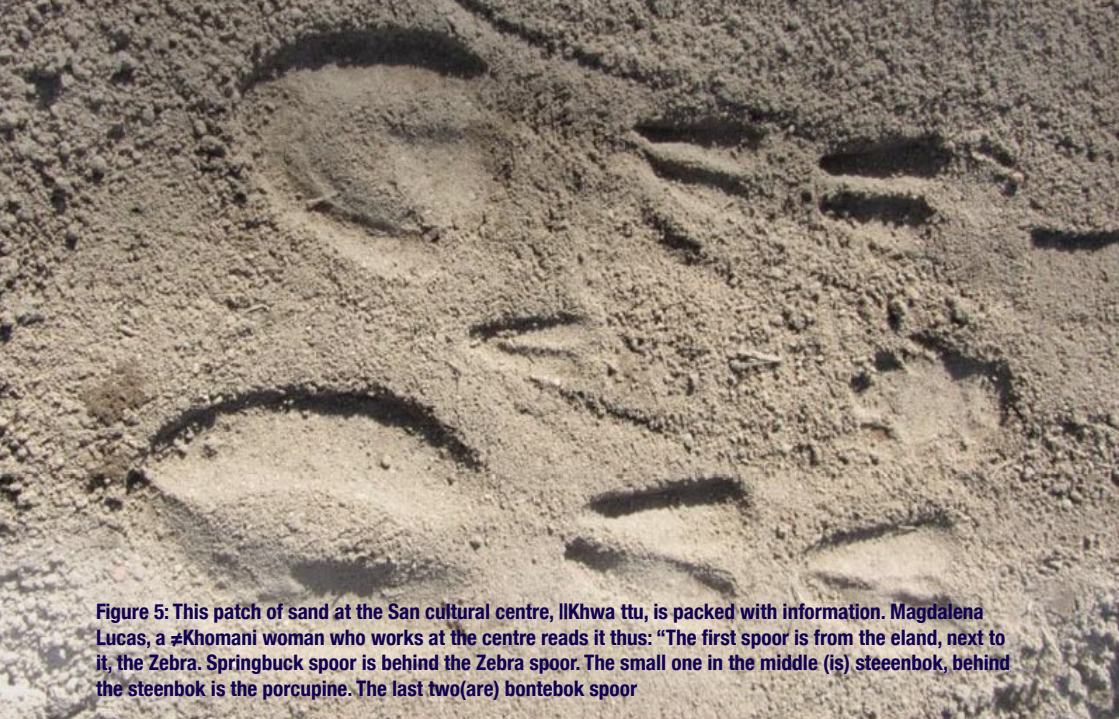


Figure 5: This patch of sand at the San cultural centre, lIkhwatlu, is packed with information. Magdalena Lucas, a ǀKhomani woman who works at the centre reads it thus: “The first spoor is from the eland, next to it, the Zebra. Springbuck spoor is behind the Zebra spoor. The small one in the middle (is) steenbok, behind the steenbok is the porcupine. The last two(are) bontebok spoor

curve of her neck.) On a lighter note, I heard of one woman who read a Kalahari pathway like a gossip column. So-and-so walked here yesterday. He was with Nǀaisa, not his wife, but old ǀTwi Beard's...

Harry: (*Chortles*) Well, there can be the equivalent of a gossip column in the e-book. A kind of backdoor, access restricted to stakeholders. Here they interact with the content in private, via their mobile phones.

Sally: (*Beaming*) A virtual campfire!

Harry: Ja, nice. But if they want to write instead of just use voice messaging, the notation used to represent the click-consonants will present a challenge.

Sally: Or an opportunity to adapt a standard keyboard?

Harry: There's KALQ, designed for thumb texters. It can be used on touch

screen devices too for faster typing. But I'd be more interested in studying some of the extra-linguistic gestures of the San that may be more intuitive for touch screen interaction.

Sally: Speaking of extra-linguistic gestures, I had an interesting email from an African/Khoesan linguistic scholar ... let's see if I can find it. (*Taps open her mail and scrolls down*) Here. We were messaging about how important gesture can be in learning a new language. As you can imagine, interpreting certain gestures, be it for an animal, a way of hunting, or even for a mobile phone, aids comprehension; one associates the foreign sound, or word, with a common or known gesture. My correspondent, Lee Pratchett¹⁰, gave this Jul'hoan example: (*she reads from the email*) "If I asked you 'where is my rope-rock' you'd think I was slightly crazy" (She looks up to see Harry looking bemused) "But if I hold my thumb and little finger to my mouth and ear, in a way that suggests to most of the world "phone" whilst I say rope-rock, you'll" ...

Harry: 'Pick up?'

Sally: (*Suppressing laughter*) Not punny.

Harry: (*He pulls a face that sabotages the perfect proportions of his face. Sally finds it appealing and looks away quickly. He's crestfallen.*) Ag-sorry. So, er, they don't say 'cell' or 'phone' or something like that?

Sally: No. It's rock-rope. Actually, the word 'rope' comes from the word for a plant used to make rope, so it comes out as ... hang on, I haven't memorized it... (*"Yet" he smiles to himself while she reads carefully from the screen*) 'Sansevieria aethiopica-rock'. A particular kind of rope, then, intricately

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encoded in the culture of the language, in the landscape. But grasp the gesture and you'll learn how to say 'phone'. I'm guessing that rope alludes to phone cords and rock refers to those old mobiles we call 'bricks'. (*She begins to laugh*)

Harry: (*Mock finger-wagging*) Okay, but I still say there are ICT logics that are not culturally universal. ICT's based on positivism so learning's seen as a conditioned response. Indigenous Africans take knowing as socially constructed. (MUWANGA-ZAKE, 2010)

Sally: Of course. (*She leans forward.*) The point I really wanted to make was one Lee Pratchett mentioned: it's hugely important to these people that their language can deal with the realities of the modern world. In one of my favourite anthropology books called 'Women Like Meat', there's another cool example of this facility for making up new words to fit new situations. 'N!áukxui' is the Jul'hoan word for it, by the way.

Harry: (*Exaggerating his South African English accent*) Ah big yaws?¹¹

Sally: (*Smiles broadly*) Okay, touché-teasing. Gôнна! (*Harry laughs out loud at her Afrikaans-slang riposte*) No-really, I haven't heard that expression since I left South Africa! (*She shakes her head*) Now, where was I? (*She looks down at her screen thinking what fun it might be to work with someone she shares a cultural history with.*) The Jul'hoan word is 'N!áukxui' – apologies for my pronunciation. I haven't mastered the clicks. Megan Biesele writes (1993, p.24) that this "process produced words like 'iguana fingers' for fork..."

Harry: I can't wait to discover the word and gesture they come up with for a tablet reader.

Sally: (*Giggles*) Me too! Of course, gesture can also encode what is not said, like gesturing the time of day something might happen or someone might come via an arm pointing to where the sun is in the sky.

Harry: That's interesting! So does the angle of the arm indicate the height of the sun, or is it about the context – sky, sun, maybe shadow on the sand?

Sally: Lee writes that because context is more important than syntax in Jul'hoan storytelling, the gesture would be understood even if the words are absent.

Harry: Nice soundbite. Ask him if we can use it in a bid. (*She widens her eyes. Did he just say 'we' and 'bid'? She nods, casually, she hopes.*) Ja. I can see the advantage of having video footage. But then there's the whole question of whose eye one should look through... the lens of an alien interlocutor, etc.

Sally: (*Eagerly*) Footage will be shot by non-professional San camera operators so I see this as an opportunity to explore with stakeholders any oral-to-digital compromises they perceive. (*She reopens her iPad*) Back to "Making Things Our Own." Hopkins mentions an Inuit carver and film-maker who was "first drawn to the medium (*of video*) because of the similarities that it shared with Inuit oral traditions" (2006, p.342). Hopkins is a native American artist and curator and she describes the film work as "creatively depicting Inuit life ... in much the same way in which Inuit life has been represented and experienced within Inuit communities since time immemorial" (*ibid*).

Harry: Send me the link if you don't mind. And are you aware of the work of Nicola Bidwell et al with traditional healers in Namibia? (*She shakes her head*). The limitations of video as a means of passing on plantlore, emerged.

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Participants in the research “often reported that the content of clips incompletely depicted the knowledge they wanted to present.” Factors like the absence of sensory data, de- contextualisation from physical and social environment, etc. If storytelling is not dependent upon location this may not present a perceptual problem for native users.

Sally: Perhaps not, but I anticipate other problems peculiar to oral storytelling. For example, electronic fossilization of a narrative form that's by nature, protean. Over generations folktales change to reflect the values of the society they are told in. They change within minutes or miles to reflect the style of another storyteller. Biesele believes that this dynamic feeds the form. “(S)pecific storytellers now, as in the past, have done cultural work appropriate to their times and crucial to the continuation of the culture” (1995a, p.8). *(She looks down at her iPad)* John Foley¹² (2005, p.233) says that our habit of converting performances into texts is “nothing less radical than converting living species into museum exhibits.”

Harry: The audio-visual and interactive nature of an enhanced e-book should mitigate against that to some extent. And San editors could regularly update the content, allowing participatory curation.

Sally: What is that?

Harry: A bit like citizen journalism. The material comes from grassroots level. Distribute some digital video cameras and ask those with Internet access to send new recordings they've made in their communities, to the editors.

Sally: I like it, but it's going to need so much funding ... sooooo many aspects to this. *(She looks so forlorn he wants to reach out to touch her hand. Ringless,*

he notices.) And unless we can ensure that the stakeholders have access to the e-book, the whole thing's pointless. How do we do that, even with generous funding?

Harry: Technological marginalization of indigenous people is a big issue. And it's not only cost, lack of electricity or Internet connectivity that are problems. In the desert, tablet PCs are short-lived – the chargers corrode in the heat. (*She sighs*) However, when remote area dwellers do have access to tablet PCs, chances are they'd be used more cost-effectively than we in the West use them.

Sally: What do you mean?

Harry: Use would be communal. Take the Audio Repository system designed by Bidwell and Siya (2013) for rural Xhosa-speakers in an area where literacy is low. Here the problem wasn't just connectivity, it was about community members who live a day's walk from one another, unable to get governance news from the headman or social news from distant friends and relatives. The audio repository enables users to deposit and share voice files on a communal tablet, recorded via their own cell-phones or directly onto the tablet when passing through the headman's kraal. You may well be able to create a similar situation in San communities, users without mobile phones going to a central point to view the eBook and leaving comment.

Sally: That would square with traditional San values regarding the sharing of resources. Also, (*perking up*) a kind of exegesis could take place around every story, recorded and uploaded or not, and go some way to facilitating audience interaction – critique and banter is commonplace in peer-group story-telling sessions.



Harry: Sounds like a scene from a pub or round a braai.¹⁴

Sally: (*Laughs*) But the stories are much better.

Harry: I bet.

Sally: Think female super heroes, like G!kon||'amdima, the Beautiful Elephant Girl, roasted and eaten by her jealous brother-in-law, resurrected from a drop of blood by her canny grandmother, reunited with her daughter. Rife with metaphor, though whether these are signifiers for the San too, is unclear. Some tales are ribald or scatological, like the one about Pisiboro¹⁵ who defecates on a python, gets his balls bitten (Harry begins to laugh) they swell to boulder-size and gouge out what become the dry river beds and water holes of the Kalahari as he tries to cool them.

Harry: Imagine the film of that one.

Sally: (*Laughing*) Nooooo. Erm, just one more worry I'd like to air at this stage.

Harry: Shoot. (*Sally notes she no longer finds the expression irritating.*)

Sally: It's about the Intellectual Property Rights that reside in any e-book. Obviously the San get the royalties and divide them up as they see fit, but what effect, what consequences does this transformation of "knowledge from commonwealth to commodifiable" have? (BIDWELL AND MALELWA, 2014)

Harry: Another question that will need researching. But on the bright side, IK proprietary systems can be more flexible than their Western counterparts and they are less reliant for sustainability on profit-making (EMEAGWALI, 2003).

Sally: (*looking at her watch, glancing up nervously at him*) Well, I suppose the next thing to consider is whether or not we have a future together... (*she doesn't blush*). I mean, working on this project.

Harry: (*Leans forward, bringing his face closer to hers again. He's smiling broadly.*) You bet! It's the project I've been waiting for. This kind of science/ ethnographic collaboration is invaluable. (*Sally's having trouble concentrating on his words. She sees them sitting around a campfire, sipping coffee made with condensed milk. Overhead, stars fizz in the infinite Kalahari sky.*) You see, Indigenous Knowledge technologies doesn't just aim to foster cultural preservation and economic and educational development for marginal

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groups. Shifting the focus onto communication practices and meanings, onto indigenous ontologies, widens the scope for HCI design precisely because of the diverse and unique knowledge ecologies of indigenous communities.

(She gives herself a mental shake. Harry's keen, he's capable, he's a hunk, but is he the one? She's read Muwanga–Zake too and the part she remembers is: "The author has observed that failure to reveal underlying intentions have sometimes created animosity against new research projects..." MUWANGA-ZAKE, 2010, p.71. What's that respect term the Ju' hoan use for lion? 'Westerners'. Harry would like that joke, she thinks.

Harry's still talking, bossing the air with his finger.)

Local knowledge and community participation in the design process of tablets and their content could result in novel ways to interface with digital devices. Ja-no, this project might lead to new HCI design paradigms.

Sally: *(reaching for her bag.)* Wow! And I was worried about the IPR in one little e-book.

Harry: *(Big, bluff laugh.)* It can be sorted, believe me. So where to from here? A drink? You got time for dinner?

Sally: *(standing up, offering her hand to be shaken)* Thank you, no. I'm grateful for your time and advice. I'll be in touch.

Harry: *(Stands up quickly, looking confused, deflated.)* Er... okay... Listen, can I have your...

Sally's quick to leave the room. Looking back she sees him gesturing frantically, thumb and little finger to his ear and mouth. 'Rock-rope number', he's mouthing at her. She laughs. He's cute, is Harry.

Notes

1. "'Ju|'hoan' meaning 'real or ordinary people' is the name the people previously called !Kung in anthropological literature use for themselves." (Biesele, 1995, p.70).
2. Bakkie: a light motor truck with a cabin and open back for conveying goods, animals or persons (Branford, J & W. 1991, p. 18).
3. "In the opinion of archaeologist and rock art researcher, David Lewis-Williams, "The Bleek and Lloyd Collection is surely the most amazing ethnographic source in the world. Nothing comparable preceded it, and nothing like it has been compiled since." (Lewis-Williams, 2007, p.180). http://esaach.org.za/index.php?title=Bleek_and_Lloyd_Collection. Accessed 29-10-2013.
4. "In a keynote address on e-books at a Higher Education Academy meeting in the UK, July 2013, Dr Caroline Bassett said that "the cultural imaginary of the book remains book-like." She referred to terms like the iBookshelf, the iBook, the paper white Kindle and pointed out that the devices indicate a corporate realm of ownership – the Apple icon stamped on the metal covers of an iPad, for example.
5. [Kaece China in 'Healing Makes our Hearts Happy', 1997, p.95. The authors, Katz, Biesele and St Dennis, observe that !xari, homebrew, is made regularly only by the Tswana and Herero peoples, both colonizers of San territory. "They are the only ones who can afford non-local ingredients ... They brew it not only for their own consumption, but also for sale to the Jul'hoansi, thus turning this !xari into a weapon of sociopolitical oppression."
6. "...provide the San with the digital means to present their own folktales."

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In relation to this the author notes Katz, Biesele and St Dennis: "It is all too easy for literate and privileged outsiders to come up with an ambitious plan for a communication project and carry it along with insensitive enthusiasm, missing the fact that the local collaborators' nod of agreement may be one of bemusement or conventional politeness." *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy*: 1997.

7. For a guide to the notation and some basic San click-consonants, please refer to the slide show.

8. Click on Audio link on the Britannica page for recordings of some San languages: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/316792/Khoisan-languages>.

9. 'Eina' is Afrikaans for 'ouch'.

10. My information on Khoesan languages was provided by L. J. Pratchett from the Humboldt Institute, during a series of communications between October 22 and 28, 2013.

11. 'Ah big yaws' is 'Sow Theffricun Inngliss' for 'I beg your pardon' and was commonly used by white, urban, English-speaking South Africans during the 1970s and 80s. It's also the title of a book by Robin Malan. 1972. Cape Town: David Philip Publisher.

12. John Foley on Oral performance conversions: "... because our culturally sanctioned ritual of converting performances into texts submerges the fact that in faithfully following out our customary editorial program we are doing nothing less radical than converting living species into museum exhibits, reducing the flora and fauna of verbal art to fossilized objects. In a vital sense textual reproductions become cenotaphs: they memorialize and commemorate, but they can never embody. 'From Oral Performance to Paper-Text to Cyber-Edition'. *Oral Tradition*, 20/2 (2005), pp. 233-263.

13. The storyteller here is Itibitseng Motsokwe. She is an ||Anikhwedam speaker from Botswana. She chose to tell a story in the language of her

government, Setswana. It's a tale about a second wife who is poisoned by the jealous senior wife, after being fed taboo meat. Many of the customs implicit in this tale are alien to San culture, but Itibiseng wished to demonstrate how the San are able to incorporate the tales of others into their storytelling traditions. Itibiseng accompanies the story with a traditional Zebra song. This performance was recorded at ||Kha ttu San cultural centre, South Africa, August 2012. It is used here with Ms Motsokwe's permission.

14. Braai: A gathering at which the main feature of the meal is (barbequed) meat. Branford, J & W. 4th ed. *A Dictionary of South African English*, 1991, p. 47.

15. Pisiboro/Pishiboro: This trickster figure has different names and guises in Khoesan oral traditions. Mathias Guenther retells a version of this story called Pate and the Puffadder. Guenther, M. (1989) *Bushman Folktales. Oral traditions of the Nharo of Botswana and the |Xam of the Cape*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, p.121.

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Author biography

Candi Miller teaches Creative Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. She is the author of two novels about the San (Bushmen), *Salt and Honey* (2006, Legend Press. Reprinted 2011, Tindal Street Press) and *Kalahari*

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Passage (2012, Tindal Street Press.) She is currently seeking funding for research around the digitization of San oral folktales.

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