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Cover Page Footnote

The author wishes to acknowledge the invaluable feedback from reviewers and delegates at the 2010 IDIA conference in Cape Town, SA where a prior version of this paper was presented; as well as feedback from the 2010 Research Voices from Africa Workshop held March 22-23 at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, where a similar paper but with different narratives was presented. The author also wishes to thank the people of the Happy Valley community for their friendship and hospitality.



Towards Self-Emancipation in ICT for Development Research: Narratives about Respect, Traditional Leadership and Building Networks of Friendships in Rural South Africa

Research Paper

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Abstract

In this paper, the author contends that if the outsider-researcher involved in Information and Communication Technology for Development really wants to make a difference and honestly address the emancipatory interests of the developing community, social transformation will have to occur on both sides of the “development divide.” This statement implies both an understanding of the researcher’s own ethnocentrism, prejudice, assumptions and inabilities as well as local concerns, needs, expectations and realities. Using critical social theory as a position of inquiry and learning from the enculturation phases of critical ethnographic fieldwork in a deep rural part of South Africa, the paper presents three confessional narratives where the author reflects on how he confronted his own need for emancipation. Research results include lessons learned on building networks of friendships, traditional leadership and respect and the typical people-orientatedness of deep rural South African communities.

Keywords Critical ethnography, emancipation, self-reflexivity, rural communities

INTRODUCTION

In most Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) endeavors the assumption is that there are generally two groups of people involved: those in need of development (the developing) and the outsider “doing” the development or researching the development (the developed). It is often a subconscious assumption that emancipation, empowerment and innovation occur primarily within the developing group, making them the primary focus of development efforts and research. The outsider on

the other hand is typically portrayed as the one who has to approach the local people in an “appropriate” way in order to do ICT4D and facilitate the emancipation of the insider. These observations can easily be detected in papers that present a meta-analysis of ICT4D literature (e.g. Avgerou, 2009, Weber, 2009 and Zheng, 2009).

Although ICT4D literature may be seen to exist for the purpose of helping the researcher to do and understand ICT4D research, it is seldom that the “outsider” or researcher is portrayed as the “deprived one” or the one in need of emancipation. It is for these reasons and based on a critical position of inquiry, that the author argues that if the outsider researcher-practitioner really wants to initiate social transformation through ICT (i.e., honestly and ethically address the emancipatory interests of the developing community according to local understanding, assumptions, agenda, needs and view of reality) emancipation will have to occur on both sides of the “development divide.” For the developing group in deep rural context this mostly implies the difficult cultural transition they have to make to understand and innovate with new or foreign ICTs, and to interpret it for their communities and context. For the outsider researcher-practitioner (often Western-minded) it means realizing the emancipatory interests of the community, understanding meaning from within the lifeworld and realities of the local people (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997) and building partnerships so as to introduce and critique ICT4D. Outsiders need to be empowered to treat the local people in such a way that their social fiber stays intact, that their agendas, values and dignity are acknowledged and respected (Lewis, 1994; Zheng, 2009), and that the detrimental consequences of the introduction of ICTs are anticipated to avoid further dehumanization of people (Roode, 1993).

Based on a critical position of inquiry and being ethnographically immersed in an ongoing ICT4D project in a deep rural part of South Africa (SA), the author contends that the process of self-emancipation and finding appropriate ways of community engagement may be more of a “reality check” for the outsider-researcher than for the local community member challenged by foreign ICT. To state this in another way, the outsider researcher-practitioner is often well aware of what ICT can do in industrialized contexts, but unaware of the issues and realities facing developing communities, how ICT should be viewed and valued in such contexts and how to relate to the local people. The local community member on the other hand, is generally aware of the local issues, tensions and context, but relatively unaware of what ICT can do or how to achieve development and emancipation through ICTs. What complicates matters is that the developed outsider often assumes himself or herself to be in empowered position (Lewis, 1994), while people in developing situations are often least positioned to complain when the perceived benefits associated with ICT do not materialize (Thompson, 2008). This situation has implications for power relations in ICT4D discourses and practice.

Moreover, literature puts forward the idea of cultural entrapment, which according to Thomas (1993) points to the variety of mechanisms, emanating from one’s own worldview, that are applied to assure social harmony and conformity to interactional norms, organizational rules, institutional patterns and ideological concepts (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 in Thomas, 1993) and which may affect assumptions about emancipation and development discourses (Hammersley, 1992). Cultural entrapment may be accompanied by ethnocentrism, which refers to the tendency of most people to think of their own cultural ways as the best or most sensible (Harvey and Myers, 2002). This type of false consciousness may ultimately lead to ICT4D failures. The implications of and delivery from cultural entrapment and ethnocentrism on the part of the outsider-researcher will be the critical focus of this paper.

It is important to note that this paper forms part of a greater study (see Krauss, 2009, 2012) where the author reflects among other things, on two practical aspects of an ongoing community engagement and ICT training initiative undertaken by the Department of Informatics, University of Pretoria in the Happy

Valley community (pseudonyms are used for people and places throughout this paper) in a deep rural part of SA. The first aspect deals with the issue of community entry and specifically how one should, as an outsider, approach ICT4D research and practice in deep rural communities. The second aspect deals with the difficulties and realities of introducing, interpreting and aligning the ICT4D artifact (such as ICT policy and training) for deep rural communities. Underpinning these two aspects is the issue of deciphering meaning from the local people to be able to address the above.

Although many lessons have been learned from the project, this paper only reflects on some of the themes that emanated from the enculturation phases (De Vos et al., 2007; Myers, 2009) of ethnographic fieldwork. The research is also a continuation of work reported in a prior paper by the same author and a colleague, where the same methodological approach was used to reflect on some of the other emancipatory themes discovered from the fieldwork (see Krauss and Turpin, 2010). The reader may also refer to further empirical work by the author – a model for community entry and introducing ICT4D (Krauss, 2009) and how lessons from this paper fit into the greater ICT4D project in the Happy Valley community (Krauss, 2009, 2012).

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section the research objectives are put forward. The critical theoretical underpinning is then explained. Following that, an overview of the research context and research methodology is explained. The research results are then presented in form of three narratives on self-emancipation as they emanated from ethnographic encounters. The paper concludes by revisiting the research objectives.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In a critical epistemology both the interpretivist approach of looking “from the inside” and critical reflexivity are required. As to the latter, the author contends that it is not only the emancipatory needs of the developing community that has to be taken into account, but also the need of the researcher-practitioner to be emancipated from preconceived notions, in order to develop an openness to act in the real interest of the developing community (De Vos et al., 2007). In a critical discussion of MIS research, Lee (1999: 25) poses the question: “In what ways do MIS researchers themselves require emancipation?” Similarly, one may ask: In what ways do ICT4D researchers and practitioners themselves require emancipation to ensure more sustainable and emancipatory ICT4D?

In scrutinizing this research question, the author relates to three confessional narratives on self-emancipation. The narratives are about building networks of friendships, traditional leadership and respect, and the typical people-orientated social system of deep rural South African communities. In addition to demonstrating the process of self-reflexivity in ethnographic work, this paper also puts forward a critical theoretical underpinning, that represents the departing values of the researcher and in essence also the epistemological approach required for understanding and building knowledge about the research topic.

It is hoped that this paper will shed light on the need for the outsider involved in ICT4D research and practice in Africa to honestly question their own values, attitudes, motives and understanding of reality, and the dire need for the outsider (often Westerner) and international community to be educated about their approaches towards ICT4D in Africa. Or to state it more critically; this paper aims to help the outsider critically assess their own cultural entrapment and consequent ethnocentric approaches, assumptions, expectations, and attitudes towards ICT4D projects in Africa.

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY IN ICT4D

Critical social theory takes a stance on what is observed about social phenomena (Neuman, 1997). It questions assumptions and ideologies underlying social phenomena to address the emancipatory interests of research subjects (Adam, 2001). Critical social theorists believe that they cannot merely be observers of social phenomena. Instead, they believe that, by their presence in social interaction, they influence and are influenced by the social and technological systems that they are studying (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997) and that social reality is produced and reproduced by people (Myers and Avison, 2002). This theory implies that inquiry into social activity focuses on understanding of meaning “from within the social context and lifeworld of actors” (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997: 151).

Critical social theorists extend the responsibility of the researcher beyond the development of explanations and understandings of social phenomena, which is the mandate of interpretivism and conventional social research (Thomas, 1993; Neuman, 1997; Klein and Myers, 1999) to a critique of unjust and inequitable conditions of the social situation from which people require emancipation, such as deprivation, oppressive ideologies, false consciousness or poverty sustaining circumstances (Hammersley, 1992; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997). Critical researchers recognize the need for social research to affect change (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993) and that their ability to affect change is “constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination” (Myers and Avison, 2002: 7). The critical perspective requires the researcher not only to strive for mutual understanding (or intercultural communication) but also the emancipation from “false and unwarranted beliefs, assumptions and constraints” (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997: 151) within both “developed” (or often more powerful) and “developing” (less powerful) groups (Lewis, 1994; Myers and Avison, 2002).

Applying a critical epistemology when conducting fieldwork requires that the researcher must, in addition to eliciting participants’ subjective view of phenomena as is typical to the interpretive paradigm, also encourage reflexive accounts in both the researcher and research subjects (Kvasny and Richardson, 2006). Avgerou (2005) advocates the explicit critical examination of the researcher’s own tacit knowledge, emotionally charged preconceptions, political convictions and moral values, and empathy with research subjects in building understanding and knowledge.

A critical position of inquiry, therefore, enables the researcher to be self-critical and self-reflexive in pursuing understanding of the lifeworld of local people from the position of local people and to understand their emancipatory interests according to local culture, view of reality and sense of dignity and self-respect (Lewis, 1994; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997). Being critical implies an appropriate position for learning about the needs, agendas, values and difficulties of the rural community. It also implies being subjectively and personally involved and pursuing self-emancipation as a form of self-delivery from unwarranted beliefs, misconceptions, perceptions and ethnocentrism that may distort the recognition and understanding of the emancipatory interests of the local people (Lewis, 1994; Avgerou, 2005; McGrath, 2005). This research, therefore, presents the concept of self-emancipation in ICT4D work as a position where outsiders can be delivered from a lack of an understanding of appropriate community engagement practices and an inability to intuitively do ICT4D that honestly addresses the emancipatory interests of the rural South African community. In this regard the researcher puts himself on par with the research participants by also analysing his own failings, motives, assumptions and inabilities.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research reported here evolved from the researcher's ethnographic immersion in a community engagement and ICT training project, entitled *The Happy Valley Project*, in a deep rural part of SA. As ICT4D practitioner, the researcher's role has been that of the primary driver and outsider project champion. Since 2008, the researcher, in partnership with several key community members, has been involved in several aspects of community engagement and ICT training that have evolved since the inception of the project. This involvement includes being part of how the Happy Valley Project started and gained momentum, how relationships with teachers and key community members developed and matured, how key community members were empowered through ICT and train-the-trainer initiatives, how the ICT training slowly progressed towards becoming sustainable and community owned, how project stakeholders were empowered, emancipated and delivered from false consciousness and cultural entrapment and how the researcher himself was inspired through relationships with the community and lessons learned from living among the people for periods of time.

From an ICT4D project management point of view, the researcher presided over activities such as preparing project proposals, acquiring international funding, implementing ICT training interventions, empowering key community members through ICTs, project reporting and feedback on ICT policy, and after implementation service and support of project stakeholders.

Ethnographically the researcher's role evolved from community entry, to becoming a member and to being recognized as a member of a community of development agents and caregivers in Happy Valley. Throughout this process, the researcher was intrinsically embedded in the social phenomena, i.e., he became the data, lived the data (Whyte, 1996) and was collaboratively part of data collection, interpretation and analysis.

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE HAPPY VALLEY COMMUNITY

The Happy Valley community is typified by strong Zulu and African traditions that in many ways still reflect ancient cultural practices and mannerisms, similar to those described in Willoughby (1928) and Giliomee and Mbenga (2007). A Zulu king and traditional leadership is to this day the ultimate authority in Happy Valley regardless of efforts by the apartheid and post-apartheid governments to lessen the influence of its traditional leaders. Even the acquisition of land is confirmed only by the Zulu king. Happy Valley is the heartland of the Zulu people in SA.

Happy Valley town is the administrative and business center of a small rural district in SA. Although the Zulu language is the primary means of communicating, a few people are also able to speak English. English was consequently the primary form of communication in the Happy Valley Project. The people practice three kinds of religions: Christianity, Shembe and Ancestral worship. Herding animals is the primary economic activity. The area is mostly unsuitable for crop farming, except for some plots along the Happy Valley River. Government social grants and pensions are the only source of a regular, cash-based income for many families. As the center of the local district, Happy Valley town enjoys a moderate basic infrastructure. The town has a tarred road that connects it to the national road network. Very few houses have access to electricity and running water and there is limited access to fixed-line and mobile connectivity. The Happy Valley district is one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in SA as measured by per capita income and unemployment statistics and according to some, the home of the worst run municipality in SA (Beeld, 2009).

In the Happy Valley district, several issues and difficulties complicate community development initiatives. These include high rates of HIV infections, a high occurrence of Tuberculosis including the

emergence of Extreme Drug Resistant Tuberculosis, high unemployment, poverty, many child-headed households, illiteracy and other complicating factors. The impact of these factors has been profound, and is intensifying. Large numbers of children are left orphaned and destitute while malnutrition, sickness and death result in a general feeling of hopelessness, which impacts negatively on programs aimed at empowerment, social development and improving health. According to key community members most people are either infected or affected by HIV. Happy Valley is a community in tension due mainly to deteriorating health and extreme poverty. Consequently a feeling of hopelessness and being a community in tension emerged as key factors to negotiate while doing ICT4D.

During the process of befriending several people at the Rock of Ages Mission and a number of associated development initiatives in the region, the caregiving nature of the people of Happy Valley emerged to be a defining and emancipatory feature of the community. This community of caregivers (i.e., teachers, nurses, community leaders, and other agents of development), therefore, became the primary informants and project partners with whom the researcher collaborated throughout the entire ethnography and who guided the researcher with regard to understanding and aligning with the local worldview, values and emancipatory practices. Ethnographically the researcher became part of a community of development agents in the greater community of Happy Valley.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A combination of critical ethnographic and participant observation was used to do fieldwork. Participant observation allowed the researcher to be both an emotionally engaged participant and a coolly dispassionate observer of social phenomena (De Vos et al., 2007). Critical ethnography on the other hand, allowed the researcher to step outside his own narrow cultural background and to set aside his own ethnocentrism to view the world from the viewpoint of other human beings who live by different meaning systems (Spradley, 1980 in Myers, 2009). Critical ethnography views the research as an emergent process in which there is dialogue between the researcher and the people in the research setting (Myers, 2009), thus allowing the researcher to view social life as constructed in contexts of power and open up to scrutiny, hidden agendas, power centers and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography allowed the researcher to address false consciousness and oppressive circumstances as well as seek out conflicts and contradictions from social phenomena (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993). This approach included various forms of cultural entrapment and ethnocentrism in both the researcher and the researched. For the critical theorist, this approach is emancipatory and an opportunity to be self-reflexive, as the researcher is empowered to investigate beyond explicit observations, values and assumptions to taken-for-granted-assumptions and unwritten rules and protocol.

Since community entry is an ongoing process and community gatekeepers and cultural interpreters are integral partners in the research process (De Vos et al., 2007), fieldwork implied that the researcher continuously reflected on and discussed observed behavior and engagement with cultural interpreters and research partners. This engagement can be observed from the narratives that follow. In addition, cultural interpreters played an integral role in deciphering meaning and interpreting social phenomena. Since these cultural interpreters are in varying ways enlightened about the researcher's as well as their own culture and ethnocentrism, they were able to articulate contrasts between the different worldviews and meanings attributed to development concepts.

Being ethnographically immersed in the Happy Valley Project, the researcher aspired to a number of key characteristics and tactics. He allowed for a time of enculturation (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Myers, 2009) to get a sense of the cultural context; he maintained a critical self-reflexive position of inquiry, as

it is as important as rigorous treatment of data (De Vos et al., 2007; Myers, 2009); he developed and maintained good, honest and open relationships with cultural interpreters; and both procedural aspects and analytical aspects of fieldwork were documented since they may reflect important characteristics, principles and values (Myers, 2009) that may only prove relevant later in the research.

Throughout many ongoing engagement opportunities, the researcher gathered and documented many stories, observations and quotes from community members and cultural interpreters. The researcher engaged in numerous informal, impromptu, opportunistic and spontaneous conversations with people, gaining access to the “unofficial” story and deeper meaning. As a result, the researcher is in possession of several sources of data. These include recordings of meetings, text messages, emails, narratives, feedback reports on work done, press releases and detailed field notes as a form of commentary taken during community engagement (Myers, 2009). Data were collected and analyzed almost simultaneously (Schultze, 2000). From the data, the various materials were collated into narratives that reflect stories of meaning making (Myers, 2009). From the narratives, specific values, themes, and principles are put forward that assist in answering the research question. It is hoped that by presenting these narratives, the author will not only explain and demonstrate the process of self-emancipation but also present key issues for successful community engagement and sustainable ICT4D.

In each narrative, the author uses confessional writing (Van Maanen, 1988; Schultze, 2000) to reflect on the process of self-emancipation as well as the implications for emancipatory ICT4D work in deep rural SA. The value of confessional writing is that it highlights the ethnographer’s experience of doing fieldwork by giving a self-revealing and self-reflexive account of the research process (Whyte, 1996; Van Maanen, 1988; Schultze, 2000; Myers, 2009). It “presents the ethnographer’s role as a research instrument and exposes the ethnographer rendering his/her actions, failings, motivations, and assumptions open to public scrutiny and critique” (Schultze, 2000: 8). The strength of confessional writing is that the narrator is able to leverage both the ethnographer’s and the readers’ experiences (Schultze, 2000) also with regard to criticality and emancipation. Part of the confessional account is that the researcher acknowledges and reflects on his or her sometimes embarrassing ignorance and mistakes in ethnographic practice and how his/her view of reality has changed to where the ethnographer see things differently at the conclusion of the research (Van Maanen, 1988).

It is important to note that the narratives presented below reflect on experiences during the enculturation phases of doing fieldwork. As a result, the researcher started off with a “me and them” or “outsider/insider” scenario. However, the reality of ethnographic work is that as fieldwork progressed and relationships developed, the researcher in fact became an insider and, therefore, the “me/them” dualism faded to a certain degree. Ongoing and more in-depth results from Happy Valley Project will be presented in other papers by the same author.

Although, the narratives refer to some interviews that were done, the results from those interviews do not form part of the data analyzed for this paper. The interviews will be used for the purpose of data integrity and confirmation in follow-up research.

BUILDING NETWORKS OF FRIENDSHIPS

The following narrative tells a story of how friendships with key community members developed, how these friendships evolved into researcher partnerships and how the researcher was empowered to gain access to the unofficial story and deeper meaning.

Early in January 2010, I received a phone call from one of my 2009 “students” from the community. “We are on our way to Pretoria and would like to visit you,” he said. I had invited

Lebo to visit me before, but never thought that he would actually take me up on that. So, one Friday evening he, his wife and their son stopped at my place. For me it was a weekend where a lifelong friendship was cemented.

Although we socialized and spoke about many things during the three days, two themes stood out for me; the first is how important respect is in the local Zulu culture and how one should honestly learn how to show respect. Lebo and his wife told me many stories—stories about the symbolism of Lobola, about friendships and family, about traditional leadership, Zulu royalty and how important it is for them to respect each other. They also told me about the many difficulties of living in their context and how this tension has actually become part of their culture! Lebo said that if I'm interested, I should watch the movie "Yesterday" because it reflects what he has experienced growing up. Lebo said that if there is one thing that he would keep from his Zulu culture, it is the way people still respect each other.

The second theme was friendships. Lebo told me that when he was in Germany, he was amazed at how the people live in isolation and behind walls. "I will not be able to live like that, because friends are very important to me," he said. I came to realize that building networks of friendships might be key in community engagement. I also remembered that late in 2009, M'ni, another student from the 2009 training sessions and a teacher, sent me a text message that I didn't respond to immediately. I didn't value it at that stage. I now realized that this was probably his way of reaching out to me as was natural to his custom. It struck me that friendships and hospitality might be the way forward in the Happy Valley Project.

So when Lebo left on Monday morning, I texted to M'ni. I wanted to respond to his reaching out last year. This was my message: "*Hi, M'ni. Thinking of you lately. Lebo visited us last month. How's the training going?*" He responded almost immediately: "*Hi bro. I b liv u r grt im doing so fine. Wow thnx 4yo concern. hey did I tell the studnts invited us at their chrmas party thanking God for the chance they had. [M'ni was part of a group of teachers doing IT training for nurses at the local hospice] They even gave us some gifts. We enjoyed it so mch! Does UP offer burs 4 people who want to do teaching. Plz find it for me. B blsd mybro. Luv u.*" How is that for creating an opportunity? I responded: "*it is nice if the students ar so grateful. Me and u must go on UNISA website when I get there in apr. c u then.*"

I learned a valuable lesson. I also realized that to pursue the research that I am doing, I had to be personally and intrinsically involved with people from the community. It wasn't long before M'ni phoned me to arrange for a second campus visit for 11th graders at the school.

The friendships that developed with M'ni and Lebo also opened up several interview opportunities for me and my colleague. When we visited in April, M'ni and Sarah, another student, literally took us by the hand and set up interviews with a number of key community members and visionaries at Happy Valley. These key community members include the local king, one of only four Induna's in the region (these men are like traditional community gatekeepers and guardians), a church leader, and a businessman and member of the local municipality (the results from these interviews fall outside of the scope of this paper, but is mentioned to illustrate how M'ni became a research partner). I recorded all of these interviews and engaged with the local people at an intimate level. In fact, M'ni and Sarah, having learned about my research and the things about ICT I am interested in, even guided some of the interviews and did the interpreting for me. In a sense, these relationships allowed me to almost sit back, observe and record. I found myself almost more interested in the process that unfolded

than with what the people actually told me. I learned a further lesson: friendships may well evolve into research partnerships. M'ni and Sarah especially helped me interpret and decipher meaning, set up contacts and explained many of the intricacies that I wouldn't be able to grasp or even perceive outside of the openness created through friendships and respect. I managed to gain access to the unofficial story!

My advice to anyone wanting to do community entry, community engagement or any real, sustainable ICT4D project, is to allow people into your personal space and allow them to be your friends. For community members, it is important to show hospitality and it is also their way of showing respect. You should respond. Learn from them, listen to them, do things with them and allow your boundaries to be expanded. You will be enriched as a person.

A NARRATIVE ABOUT TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RESPECT

Since my first visit to Happy Valley, I was told that the ultimate traditional authority in the community is the local Zulu chief and his leadership. The following narrative reflects on how I met him and some of the things I learned during this special engagement. To align with and identify with the people, I will refer to him as the king or his majesty as this is how the locals would address him.

Ever since we first visited Happy Valley I had hoped to meet the king, but never had a good opportunity up to now. I realized that I had to be introduced by a guide or spokesperson since I would not know how to approach the king on my own. I also realized that I had to build a relationship with someone who might be able to guide me and introduce me appropriately and correctly. Building such a relationship took time and I had to allow for a time of enculturation and to learn about some of the cultural mannerisms.

One of the values that I learned from the cultural interpreters during previous fieldtrips is that the community must experience ownership in any development project and that as an outsider, I should not storm in and implement what I think is right without their consent and support or without waiting for their sense of timing and readiness. Because I wanted the project to be sustainable, I had to ensure that local visionaries identify with the project to guide me as an outsider in implementing the project.

In addition to learning about these values, I was lucky to have the king's daughter as one of my students during the June/July 2009 training. She produced very good results, was quiet and seemed to understand the community well. I especially noted her as having a broader sense of the community and their needs (I later learned from another prince that royalty in South African context naturally have a sense of looking out for their people). Sipho didn't speak much, but when she spoke, one could listen and take note of it. For example, at one stage during a meeting, she mentioned that the ICT training should be taken to the rest of the community so that they do not see the mission and the school as isolated from the rest of the people. ICT4D literature shows that ICT implementation has the potential to create or reinforce social divides in a community (Lewis, 1994; Zheng, 2009). Being royalty, she seemed to be naturally aware of this possible situation.

Therefore, having this understanding and attempting to implement the training according to these values and principles for about eight months (Feb 09 to Nov 09), I felt that the time for meeting the king was close. However, I still didn't know when, how and who would introduce me. During my November visit, M'ni took Adam, another partner in the project and an indigenous man from Zambia, and myself on a sightseeing trip through Happy Valley (Adam, coming from

a similar traditional community, was especially instrumental in guiding me in ways of showing respect right from the start of the project). M'ni showed us many places while he explained many of the issues related to local traditions. One of the issues we spoke about was the scope of traditional leadership. M'ni pointed out to us the importance of the ultimate authority of Zulu kingship. He illustrated this by showing us that a king from another area specifically told his people that they should not cut down trees, because according to M'ni, they should protect nature. M'ni showed us the boundary of where the one king's area stopped and the other's started. Figure 1 shows the boundary between the two kingdoms and how many more trees there are on the one side. The local people respected the king so much that they would not cut down trees for wood, even if they might desperately need it for fuel.



Figure 1. Boundaries between two kingdoms, showing the value and respect for Zulu leadership

So on our way sightseeing, I noted to M'ni that I would like to meet the king. He immediately told me that he was related (I didn't know that M'ni was royalty until then) and that he could organize a meeting for us. He told me that the king was approachable and would be open to meeting us unlike some other local kings who really demand respect in particular ways. I immediately started inquiring about the conduct of respect and protocol. From that moment, I had a two-hour lesson on Zulu royalty.

Back from our trip, M'ni made a phone call and off we went to meet the king. As we approached the king's palace or traditional headquarters, I noticed both Adam and M'ni tense up. M'ni told me that even though he personally knows the king, he is still nervous every time he meets him. He said that the community has great respect for this man. I was determined to follow their customs and behavior in showing respect and, therefore, align with their way of doing things – almost in a sense imitating what they did. I did find it extremely awkward though.

As we sat and waited, both Adam and M'ni were quiet. When the king arrived, I noticed that he was driven by his son in a very simple but neat Toyota bakkie (truck). I later learned that he had no formal education, few Western literacy skills and had no driver's license. Yet he exhibited a tremendous authority and wisdom. I sensed that the people loved him very much. I was told by M'ni that I should allow the king to start the conversation and that I should wait for him to allow me to respond.

The king started by telling us about how important the development of his community is to him. He also said that what we were doing in terms of ICT training as well as the way we approached it was according to him right and appropriate. In fact, he thanked us for what we are doing with the words "*siyabonga khakhulu*" meaning "I am very grateful." After saying a few things about his view on what we were doing and his community he asked us three questions. I will reflect on two of those.

First, he asked how the training came about and how we got involved. I responded by thanking him for being able to be in his community and also told him what an honor it was for us to meet him. Learning from previous lessons, I knew that I had to acknowledge his leadership and position in the community. I told him about my earlier connections with Martha and some friends at the orphanage, UNESCO's involvement in the project and how we met up with Mrs. Ndlovu from Happy Valley School.

Another question from him was: What is our vision for the training? Having learned about the importance of ownership and transfer of vision, I noted that the vision is actually Mrs Ndlovu's vision to empower her teachers and schoolchildren and also other schools in the vicinity and that we at the university aim to support them with knowledge and skills. As a result, he turned to the M'ni who was also a teacher at the school and said that he hopes that the teachers will be faithful. For me this was a moment of symbolic transfer of ownership. I knew that the project is now viewed as a community initiative and not ours only.

I asked him if there was anything that he would suggest with regards to the way we do the IT training – I sincerely wanted his advice as he knows his people very well. He reiterated that he had no problem with what we are doing and continued by telling us how important the certification of the course is to him.

One of the things M'ni and Adam told me is to not stare at him or look him in the eyes directly. During our meeting, I noted Adam actually looking at the floor when he addressed the king. I tried to copy his behavior but found it quite awkward. I also noted that when I looked at the king during the conversation, he would look away. Adam later told me that it could be seen as me challenging him in a way.

Leaving his palace, we felt honored to meet the king and grateful for his open reception. On the way, back M'ni continued to tell me about the authority of the king and how he in two or three questions actually profiled me and the ICT training project. I didn't realize it at that stage. M'ni noticed it and mentioned it to me.

One of the key lessons I learned during this engagement was how well respected and loved the king was in his community – I could see it from M'ni's reactions. I also realized that for continued openness and emancipation of the local people and myself, I had to align with what the local people valued which in this case was absolute loyalty and respect for their leadership structures. I felt emancipated and empowered to continue with the ICT4D project under the

protection and support of the king himself up the point where I could say that I have encountered riches beyond what many outsiders can identify with. I believe that getting the approval and blessing of traditional leadership may be instrumental in successful ICT4D research and practice in rural South African communities.

A NARRATIVE ABOUT PEOPLE-ORIENTATEDNESS

The following narrative reflects on observations and interviews the researcher had with local community members and cultural interpreters that illustrate the typical people-orientatedness of South African rural communities. It also reflects on how one should adopt a people-orientated value system when engaging in ICT training or research in deep rural communities. It all started with Lebo's story of how valuable friendships and family are to him.

After Lebo's inspiring and empowering visit to my home in Pretoria, I was especially sensitized to the friendship and people-orientatedness of the local Zulu culture. I started asking about it and deliberately collecting stories about it. One of the stories occurred when I approached Peter to "set up and interview for collecting data."

One morning I asked Peter whether I could come and talk to him later that day about my research. My intention and understanding was that I would address certain themes in an informal interview or discussion and that I was going to sit with him for about an hour, to ask questions and record the conversation. Later that day, I confirmed my visit with him. He asked me where my wife and children were (during that specific field trip my family joined my research endeavors). I told him that they were visiting some friends down the road and that it would only be me visiting him. What happened during the next few hours was a valuable lesson in hospitality and people-orientatedness. He immediately appeared very dissatisfied about the fact that my family was not going to come along even up to the point of disappointment. Luckily, we had an open relationship and he could verbalize how he felt about it. He was not offended, but he vividly explained how hospitality works in his culture. He said that if someone invites you it means that your family or anybody else that you invite may come along and that for him it was important that my whole family visit. I realized that this man was excited and that he valued my visit. I had to respect that and abide by the values that now emerged to me. However, being as task-orientated as I am and having to do research, I also realized that the intention of recording an interview or any vague interview structure was flying out the window. Therefore, I took the flow of things and submitted to what was happening to me. Again, I sat back and observed what was unfolding around me.

So as a result of Peter's insistence, Sarah and I had to walk down the road to go and fetch my wife and children. I realized that, although my intended interview would not go as planned, I now had an opportunity to observe culture and values much deeper and in a more relaxed manner than what an interview would have revealed to me. Thus, I allowed this newly acquired friend of mine to show me hospitality while I made deliberate effort of enjoying it. On the way back, I noted to Sarah Peter's hospitality and insistence on bringing my family along. She responded by telling me a further story about the importance of hospitality, family and friendship in their culture.

She told me about a certain German lady who visited Happy Valley. This lady told her that in Germany people appear sometimes "very rushed," while she observed people in Happy Valley much more relaxed. Sarah responded that it is their custom to always put people before work,

even if they are under pressure to complete something. She said that personally she finds it difficult to complete her work when there are people around because she has to put her work aside to entertain people (Sarah is the general manager of the mission). She noted that sometimes white people seem “very work orientated and always in a hurry.”

Back at Peter’s place, we were welcomed by a whole array of cakes and snacks for tea. Peter continued his prior discussion about hospitality. Among other things he said that it is customary to always finish all the food presented to them as a way of accepting hospitality. Luckily, he understood that my wife and I were not able or going to finish everything they prepared for us. During the visit, Peter asked me if I would help him install a new printer that he acquired. So as a result, I found myself assisting him with the installation process. An intended one-hour interview ended up in a three-hour very relaxed tea drinking and socializing event.

I learned a number of valuable lessons about the people that assisted me in understanding their view of reality better. First, their culture is extremely people-centered. For someone from the outside wanting to establish rapport, do research, introduce ICT or ICT training, one will have to align with and respect their people-orientated value system. A further lesson was that of allowing an interview or a discussion to develop naturally, even if it means deviating from the original intention or themes you wanted to address. Stories and memories of interactions might later on provide valuable access to the unofficial story and deeper meaning that one might not envisage at the beginning of fieldwork. As researcher-practitioner, I was emancipated through the lessons I learned and through allowing fieldwork to evolve as it did. I could align myself with what these people considered important as a community and subsequently utilize a people-orientatedness in future and ongoing IC4D endeavors. In fact, I was enriched as an individual because a people-orientated approach is potentially less destructive to relationships than the task-orientatedness I am so acquainted to.

CONCLUSIONS

The aims of this paper are to present critical social theory as a position of inquiry and point of departure for emancipatory research and practice as well as to demonstrate self-emancipation through confessional narratives on ICT4D work in a deep rural community in SA. The paper provides practical examples of instances where the researcher had no option but to change and adapt some of his preconceptions and views. A self-critical and self-reflexive position of inquiry allowed the researcher to be open to the guidance of cultural interpreters and to question his own implicit assumptions, values, protocol, and beliefs and their relevance to practical ICT4D work and research. Critical social theory and ethnographic approaches also allowed the researcher to formalize and communicate his learning by means of confessional narratives (Schultze, 2000; Myers, 2009).

Results from this paper show that the emancipation of researcher should be central to ongoing and sustainable community engagement in deep rural SA. Being reflexive and self-critical will also allow the ICT4D researcher and practitioner to be more culturally sensitive and open to address the real emancipatory interests of deep rural communities according to their needs, understanding and view of reality.

The author is busy with his PhD studies in Happy Valley. There is still much to be done in terms of ICT interventions in the community, including a need for further critical analysis of contradictions and collisions that emerged from the social phenomena. The author’s own social transformation is also ongoing as lessons are learnt and implemented in ongoing ICT4D work.

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