THE EMANCIPATION OF THE RESEARCHER AS PART OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT WORK IN DEEP RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT
In this paper the authors contend that if the outsider-researcher involved in Information and Communication Technology for Development research really wants to make a difference and honestly address the emancipatory interests of the developing community, emancipation has to take place on both sides of the "development divide". Emancipatory research and practice need to be accompanied by an understanding of the researcher-practitioner's own assumptions, preconceptions, and limitations as well as local concerns, needs, and realities. Using a critical theoretical underpinning, the paper demonstrates how the outsider researcher and practitioner may recquire emancipation in order to ensure more appropriate Information and Communication Technology for Development. Through confessional writing and demonstrating critical reflexivity, the authors reflect on particular instances of self-emancipation as they present three narratives from the community entry phases of an ongoing community engagement project in a deep rural part of South Africa. Lessons learned include, the value of cultural interpreters as research partners, tactics for community entry, and a self-reflective approach to doing fieldwork.

KEYWORDS: Critical Social Theory, Critical Reflexivity, South Africa, Cultural Interpreters

1   INTRODUCTION
Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) endeavours in Africa are generally based on the often subconscious assumption that there are two groups of people involved: those in need of development (the developing) and the outsider "doing" the development (the developed). The party that is most obviously challenged (e.g. socially, economically, intellectually, culturally, and/or personally) is typically regarded as the developing group, and it is within this group that most emancipation and change is assumed to take place. This perspective can easily be detected in papers that present a meta-analysis of ICT4D literature (e.g. Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Weber, 2009; Zheng, 2009; Avgerou, 2010). It is the authors' contention, however, that if the outsider-researcher really wants to make a difference through ICT4D, and honestly address the emancipatory interest of the developing community within the context of local understanding, assumptions, needs, and realities, emancipation and enlightenment will have to occur on both sides of the "development divide".

For the developing or "client" group in a deep rural context, like the specific case presented in this paper, this mostly implies the difficult cultural transition they have to make to understand new or culturally-foreign ICT, and to interpret it within their community and context (Krauss, 2013a). For the outsider-researcher (often Western-minded), like the authors of this paper, it means making a transition from viewing their own mindset, culture, and artefacts (such as ICT) as superior (Escobar, 1992) or more sensible (Harvey and Myers, 2002) to recognising the validity and importance of the local culture and social organisation.

In ICT4D initiatives, the developing group is typically assumed to be the primary focus of developmental and emancipatory efforts. Moreover, ICT4D literature seldom portrays the "outsider" or researcher as the deprived party or the ones in need of emancipation. In this paper, the authors attempt to show that exploring appropriate ways of introducing the ICT4D artefact, and questioning the value of ICT to the community, may provide a greater learning experience and "eye-opener" for the outsider researcher and practitioner than for local community members who may be challenged by foreign ICTs. This highlights the need for the outsider-researcher to be enlightened and emancipated from preconceived ideas, assumptions, and repressions sustaining mechanisms before attempting emancipatory ICT4D work (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; Stahl, Tremblay and LeRouge, 2011; Krauss, 2013a).

We thus argue for a more self-emancipatory approach to ICT4D research and for critical reflexivity as a central component of the methodology of critical research. In line with this argument, issues of meaning and in particular issues related to the meaning of emancipation come into play. We demonstrate how the outsider-researcher could initiate an attempt to understand meaning from the point of view of the lifeworld and realities of the local people (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997), how that can assist in introducing ICTs, establish camaraderie and collaboration with community members (Stahl et al., 2011), and ultimately how these approaches may lead to a situation where the local people are treated in such a way that their traditional social fibre stays intact and that their cultural practices, protocol, agendas, values, and dignity are observed and respected (Krauss, 2013a).

To scrutinise these issues and to communicate tacit cultural knowledge, the authors present three narratives where they reflect on the community entry phases of critical ethnographic work in an ongoing ICT4D project in the Happy Valley community in a deep rural part of South Africa (To protect the identity of the people involved, pseudonyms have been used throughout). By means of confessional writing, where the authors explicitly expose their own initial ignorance, failings, misunderstandings, cultural entrapment, and other issues raised by their approaches, they give a self-revealing and self-reflexive account of the research process (Van Maanen, 1988; Whyte, 1996; Schultze, 2000; Myers, 2009) as it was experienced during a specific phase of the research.

In the sections that follow the authors present the Happy Valley project context, a view on their own cultural background and historicity, and the research objectives. This is followed by an explanation of the study's critical underpinning and the authors' view on the need for emancipation in ICT4D research. Critical ethnography as the primary research methodology is then briefly explained. The research results are subsequently presented in the form of three confessional narratives on self-emancipation and reflexive practice as they transpired during the community entry phases of ICT4D work in Happy Valley. Towards the end of each narrative, the authors reflect on lessons and values learned from their experiences. Fieldwork includes results from several ethnographic encounters supported by personal, self-critical reflection about observations, scenarios, assumptions, and stories.

This paper addresses the need for more critical work in IS and ICT4D (Walsham, 2005; Walsham and Sahay, 2006), the lack of empirical research in the critical tradition (Stahl et al., 2011), "the lack of agreement on what constitutes appropriate methodologies for critical research" (Stahl et al., 2011: 1), and the problem of the theory and praxis of critical research not informing each other (Ngwenyama, 1991; McGrath, 2005). The paper thus contributes to critical discourses on what constitutes methodological and empirical maturity in critical research, and by offering "special case of what is possible" (Bachelard cited in Bourdieu, 1998: 2) in ICT4D research.

2   PROJECT CONTEXT

The Happy Valley project is an ongoing ICT4D project that was initiated by the Department of Informatics, University of Pretoria, late in 2008 in a community in a deep rural part of South Africa. The Happy Valley community, which consists mostly of traditional Zulu people, is one of the poorest in South Africa and is challenged by numerous difficulties. These include poverty and a high occurrence of HIV and tuberculosis (TB) infections. According to informants from the community, Happy Valley is a community in tension mainly because of sickness, death, malnutrition, and extreme poverty. Most people are either infected with or affected by HIV and AIDS. Because of these conditions, there is a growing number of orphans in the region, while a general feeling of hopelessness impacts negatively on development initiatives. Other barriers to economic activity and well-being include Happy Valley's geographical isolation and lack of infrastructure and services (notably access to water, sanitation, and transport), especially in the remote areas.

Despite these dire circumstances, several very successful community-owned initiatives, facilitated by a local religion-based institution, have been started in the region. These include an orphan care unit, a hospice contributing to ground-breaking research on HIV and TB, and Happy Valley School, which is considered one of the best schools in the region despite the various difficulties it faces. Happy Valley School and the hospice are the primary focus areas for our ICT4D project, which aims to enable caregivers, teachers, and nurses to use ICT to perform information-related and developmentally-focused tasks more efficiently. These people are then empowered to serve the community better, not only through their daily tasks, but also by training others.

At Happy Valley School, a number of IT training initiatives have been started. At the time of writing, 34 teachers had been trained in basic computer literacy in a UNESCO funded training project (see Krauss et al., 2009; Krauss, 2013a). Several more teachers and other community members were empowered through train-the-trainer initiatives to provide ICT training in the region and as a result, a number of nurses from the local hospice have been trained in basic ICTs.

A number of non-ICT activities have also emerged as a result of ongoing engagement, such as an annual campus trip for Grade 11 learners and the involvement of child therapists from the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria. Lessons learned from the project have also been implemented at another rural school closer to the university (see Krauss and Fourie, 2010; Fourie and Krauss, 2011) and documented in other papers by the authors (Krauss, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b; Turpin, 2012; Turpin, Alexander and Phahlamohlaka, 2013).

3   ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

In ethnography and critical research it is important to understand historicity and prejudice (Klein and Myers, 1999; Harvey and Myers, 2002; Myers, 2009; Stahl et al., 2011). In this instance, the researchers' cultural background and associated prejudices affected fieldwork, the development of research themes, and the type of issues that emanated from it. The following brief confessionals explain the researchers' cultural historicity and some of their initial prejudices.

About the first author: As a white Afrikaner male, I experienced a number of difficulties during the community entry phases of fieldwork. Initially two key issues stood out, namely, the difficulties associated with intercultural communication and some ideological remnants associated with the Apartheid legacy. Because of Apartheid, I was initially somewhat oversensitive to race-related differences, mainly because I didn't know how the Zulu people felt about the issue. However, my apprehension very quickly dissolved

as I made friends with local people and learnt about the richness of diversity. A more challenging issue was that of learning new cultural mannerisms (and unlearning others). During the early stages of enculturation, which is a specific phase in participant observation during which one has to come to terms with a new cultural situation (De Vos et al., 2007; Myers, 2009), some of the cultural informants told me that because of my Afrikaner way of communicating, I unintentionally offended some of the more traditional locals. It caused me to reflect very carefully on my own behaviour and assumptions. At times I even experienced a sense of insecurity in this regard. Friendships with cultural interpreters, however, created an openness where they could correct and guide me in cultural mannerisms and intercultural communication.

As I progressed from enculturation to being-a-member I experienced what Van Maanen (1988) contended; that is, "… a description of culture can never be settled once and for all" (p. 45). Although it is the focus of a different paper altogether, it is worthwhile to note that as I learned about the Happy Valley community, their caregiving nature and the associated emancipatory practices, I adopted many of their values and principles in my own life. As I matured in the research situation, I experienced a gradual escape from the cultural entrapment (Thomas, 1993) that my own background and culture have afforded me. I became accepted into a community of caregivers in Happy Valley, because although I was different, the locals seemed to discern my motives and attitude. In addition, being a married man with children and in my late 30s offered me a type of social status associated with responsibility and leadership that was easy for traditional Zulus to relate to. My historicity, age, social status as married man, and position of outsider champion in the project affected the type and depth of data that could be collected. Moreover, being who I am allowed me to build relationships with more influential community members in leadership roles, which a younger or single person probably would not have been able to do. It affected the type of trust and rapport that I could established with people.

About the second author: I am an urban, white Afrikaans speaking female. Before visiting Happy Valley, my preconceptions about the area were very romanticised. I had read story books about Zulu boys herding cattle among green hills (Van Tonder, 1989; Scheepers, 1990). While these books were written by people with local knowledge of the region, I had an idealised picture of the traditional Zulu lifestyle. When we arrived in Happy Valley, I was unprepared for the dire circumstances in which many of the remote households found themselves, and equally unprepared for the warm-heartedness with which we were received by our hosts. As with the first author, I experienced that I had social status because I was married and had three children. We were also respected because we were from the University.

Since my formal training was in the hard sciences, I was not only naïve about the local culture, but also about ethnographic research and data collection. While we made numerous cultural blunders, I experienced that people were patient with us because they perceived our intentions were good, and because they believed the IT literacy project we were embarking on was potentially valuable. I believe that I am only partially emancipated from the ignorance with which I arrived in Happy Valley. Some of my learning experiences are documented in this paper. One of my most valuable gains from our involvement there was a spiritual enrichment, possibly due to the Ubuntu of the people, the different pace of life, and the atmosphere at the Christian mission where we were hosted.

4   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A critical methodology requires critical reflexivity on the part of the critical researcher, i.e. "*interpretation of interpretation* [sic] and the launching of critical self-exploration of one's own interpretations of empirical material (including its construction)" (Alvesson and

Sköldberg, 2000: 6). The researcher should therefore be aware of issues raised by their approaches (Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; Stahl et al., 2011) – see also McGrath (2005), Kvasny and Richardson (2006), and Stahl (2008). The authors thus contend that it is not only the emancipatory needs of the developing community that have to be taken into account, but also the need for the researcher-practitioner to be emancipated of preconceived notions, in order to develop an openness to act in the real interest of the developing community (De Vos et al., 2007; Krauss, 2013a), and to be explicit about the "process of critical self-reflection and associated self-transformation" (Čečez-Kecmanović, Klein and Brooke, 2008: 129). In a critical discussion of MIS research, Lee (1999: 25) poses the question: "In what ways do MIS researchers themselves require emancipation?" Similarly, we ask: In what ways do ICT4D researchers and practitioners require emancipation, in order to ensure more appropriate and emancipatory ICT4D?

In the Happy Valley case, a number of lessons have been learned by the ICT4D project team in their interaction with the community. The authors will address the research question by relating to narratives and reflection on the researchers' own ongoing processes of self-emancipation. In the confessional narratives presented later in the paper, we thus demonstrate reflexivity in critical work as we show how we attempted to expose our own initial inabilities, mistakes, and repression sustaining assumptions during the community entry phases of the project.

5   ICT4D AND THE NEED FOR EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH

The role of ICTs in social development and community empowerment has been studied for a number of years (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993; Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Krishna and Madon, 2003; Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Chigona et al., 2009; Fong, 2009; Madon et al., 2009; Avgerou, 2010; Thompson and Walsham, 2010). Generally the contention is that ICT has the potential to contribute to socio-economic development and improved quality of life. However, several issues and concerns associated with social exclusion, the digital divide, poverty, and lack of access for sustaining basic human needs are raised in literature. While foregrounding the opportunities that ICT can afford, literature also shows that ICT failures in developing countries continue to outnumber success stories (Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Lunat, 2008; Zheng, 2009). ICT alone cannot guarantee development (Lewis, 1994; Chigona et al., 2009; Madon et al., 2009; Zheng, 2009), while the introduction and implementation of ICT4D may contribute to the continued trend of ICT failures in developing contexts (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993; Heeks, 2005; Lee et al., 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2010). Moreover, in the context of rural developing communities specifically, poverty, social development, health and education, recognition of the importance of socio-cultural context, intercultural communication, and community empowerment are noted as some of the most pressing issues in ICT4D research (Asante, 1983; Lewis, 1994; Avgerou and Walsham, 2000; Krishna and Madon, 2003; Phahlamohlaka and Lotriet, 2003; Heeks, 2005; Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Mukerji, 2008; Madon et al., 2009; Prinsloo, 2009).

A central concern in most ICT4D discourses is the need to critique the assumptions about ICT and what ICT can do in developing situations (Avgerou, 2005, 2010; Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Thompson, 2008). Deepening the debate, literature also expresses doubts about the value of ICT and ICT4D implementation in the first place (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993; Roode, 1993; Avgerou, 2010). Lewis (1994), for example, shows that the introduction of new technologies can cause damage to the fabric of local communities outweighing any economic advantages to be gained. Roode (1993) suggests that the detrimental consequences of the introduction of ICTs in societies should be anticipated to avoid further dehumanisation of people. "Not all societies can absorb information technology without harmful side-effects

such as loss of privacy, unemployment, computer crimes, technostress and similar woes". (Roode, 1993: 2).

Emerging and ongoing ICT4D discourses compel the ICT4D researcher to take a position of enquiry where he or she can question the underlying assumptions, expectations, motives, beliefs, and values that drive developmental work (De Vos et al., 2007; Krauss, 2013a), including those that developing communities have among themselves (Du Plooy and Roode, 1993). Myers and Avison (2002), for example, show that in critical discourses, people are potentially constrained by various forms of social, cultural, and political domination, which implies that one should not only strive for mutual understanding in development discourses but also the emancipation from "false and unwarranted beliefs, assumptions and constraints" (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997: 151) both within "developed" (or often more powerful) and "developing" (less powerful) groups (Lewis, 1994; Myers and Avison, 2002; McGrath, 2005; Krauss, 2013a). In support, Thompson (2008) argues that people in developing country context "are often least positioned to complain when the benefits associated with ICT do not materialise" (p. 822).

ICT4D discourses, of which some have been put forward above, appear to emerge from, as well as sensitises one to a potential non-understanding of the situation and the manner in which ICT is supposed to enable development. These discourses also draw attention to a non-understanding of and a non-enlightenment regarding the motives, assumptions, and expectations that drive the implementation of developmental ICT. It sensitises one to potential contradictions, collisions or conflicts between the different assumptions, values, and cultural systems of the "developed" and "developing", i.e. collisions between different views on how ICT4D should be introduced, valued, and understood (Jackson, 2002; Avgerou, 2010; Krauss, 2013a).

One may even argue that the term "development" is a discriminatory concept or an oppressive ideology enforced onto developing countries by developed countries (Escobar, 1992; Lewis, 1994; Heeks, 2005). In such cases a false consciousness on the side of those who consider themselves to be developed and "better off", may manifest in the belief that, one assumes that you are "developed" and that those you are "helping" or researching are in need of development, that it is inherently better to be "developed" and that you know how to develop the others. It is an oppressive ideology, that potentially keeps people in a state of non-emancipation and which needs to be challenged.

6   CRITICAL RESEARCH IN ICT4D

Attention has been drawn to disparities or conflicts between what ICT and ICT theory are perceived to do or enable (often associated with the perspective of the "developed", those "doing" ICT4D, or researching the ICT4D situation) and the unique realities and perspectives associated with the situation in which ICT is supposed to enable development and emancipation. The consequent need for enlightenment and emancipation in ICT4D work has been highlighted. In this section, the researchers will reflect on critical social theory as a research paradigm for investigating ICT4D discourses and practice, and for pursuing emancipatory ICT4D work.

Authors writing on critical social theory in Information Systems often work in the ICT4D context. Examples include Adam (2001), Čečez-Kecmanović (2001), Avgerou (2005), Walsham and Sahay (2006), Krauss (2013a), and the International Federation for Information Processing Working Group on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries (IFIP WG 9.4), who are doing pioneering work on critical social theory (Avison, Fitzgerald and Powell, 2005). Avgerou (2005) suggests that the unequal power balance evident in the discourse between industrialized and developing parts of the world is one of the most critical issues of contemporary society. Walsham and Sahay (2006), in their analysis

of trends in IS in developing countries, specifically argues for the need for more critical research in developing contexts. Walsham and Sahay (2006) conclude that "c[C]ritical reflection by the research community is needed to try to identify research topics and approaches of maximum benefit to both theory and practice" (p. 21).

Critical social theory takes a critical stance on what is observed about social phenomena (Hammersley, 1992; Neuman, 1997; Myers, 2009). It questions assumptions and ideologies underlying social phenomena in order to address the emancipatory interests of research subjects (Thomas, 1993; Adam, 2001; Walsham, 2005; Čečez-Kecmanović et al., 2008; Myers and Klein, 2011). 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; Myers and Klein, 2011) and that social reality is produced and reproduced by people (Myers and Avison, 2002; Stahl et al., 2011).

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 situation from which people require emancipation" (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997: 151) such as deprivation, oppressive ideologies, false consciousness, or poverty sustaining circumstances (Hammersley, 1992; Walsham, 2006). Critical researchers recognise the need for social research to affect change and social transformation (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993; Myers and Klein, 2011), and that their ability to affect change is "constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination" (Myers and Avison, 2002: 7). Critical research should move beyond critiquing what the world is like to also give indications on what the world should be like (Stahl et al., 2011).

A critical approach draws attention to assumed power relations in intercultural communication (Čečez-Kecmanović, 2001; Gillard et al., 2008; Myers and Klein, 2011), as well as assumed power relations in development discourses, such as that people in developing situations are often least positioned to participate in development discourses and planning (Thompson, 2008). According to a critical epistemology, research is not a mere cognitive process of associating empirically discovered facts to theory. It also involves emotionally charged preconceptions and value-laden political and moral stances (Avgerou, 2005) as well as conflict, oppositions, and contradictions in the social phenomena and within the researcher (Myers, 1997; Myers and Avison, 2002; Avgerou, 2010; Stahl et al., 2011). The researcher, therefore, becomes a research participant who together with the research subjects, pursue social transformation (Thomas, 1993; Avgerou, 2005; McGrath, 2005).

Moreover, literature on critical ethnography (Hammersley, 1992; Thomas, 1993) puts forward the idea of cultural entrapment which 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: 3) and which may affect assumptions about development and development discourses. Cultural entrapment may be accompanied by ethnocentrism which refers to the tendency of most people to think of their own culture as the best or most sensible (Harvey and Myers, 2002). In this study, the authors argue that false consciousness regarding ICT4D research and practice is potentially rooted in a conscious or subconscious cultural entrapment on the part of people on both sides of the "development divide". False consciousness may ultimately lead to ICT4D failures. The implications of cultural entrapment, ethnocentricity, and false consciousness embedded in ICT4D research

and practice, therefore, needs to be challenged and exposed (Thompson, 2008; Zheng, 2009; Thompson and Walsham, 2010).

In a recent paper that applies a critical approach to introducing and implementing ICT4D in a deep rural community in South Africa, Krauss (2013a) specifically demonstrates the value of critical social research for understanding the "research context, practical involvement, and community engagement as well as for pursuing interpretation in fieldwork and introducing and aligning the ICT4D artefact" (p. 1). De Vos et al. (2007) and Krauss (2013a) (also the first author of this paper) in particular argue that little has been done to combine the role of the development practitioner (those uplifting and empowering clients, agents, patients, and so forth) and the researcher's role of producing knowledge, confirming the need for critical research in general to be underpinned by empirical evidence and praxis (Ngwenyama, 1991; McGrath, 2005; Walsham and Sahay, 2006; Stahl et al., 2011). Krauss (2013a) continues by putting forward critical social research as an appropriate orientation to knowledge for "forging and establishing genuinely practical and locally orientated guidelines" (p. 2) that can lead to the emancipation of the researched and ICT4D researcher. Building onto Krauss' (2013a) study, this paper demonstrates that critical reflexivity can empower the researcher to scrutinise and interpret contradictions and conflict between the preconceptions and assumptions of the outsider-researcher about how ICT4D methodology and fieldwork should be done and the unique realities at grassroots level as experienced by the local developing community.

7   THE RESEARCHER AS PARTICIPATOR IN EMANCIPATION

Literature shows that the concept of emancipation is problematic (Hammersley, 1992; Čečez-Kecmanović et al., 2008; Biesta, 2010; Stahl et al., 2011). The meaning of emancipation, enlightenment, or improvement might always present some disagreement (Hammersley, 1992). Emancipation or the improvement of a situation should always be viewed in the light of the values that one has accepted (Hammersley, 1992), while recognising that our understanding might continually change or be challenged through self-reflexivity, which also should be on-going. This has implications when doing ICT4D work in cross-cultural situations (Walsham and Sahay, 2006), such as in the case presented in this paper. Different worldviews may imply different value systems, which may affect issues of meaning (of emancipatory concepts for example) and therefore contradictions in how people evaluate social transformation or the improvement of a situation (Krauss, 2013a).

In critical studies, the researcher becomes part of the research situation and therefore has to put himself/herself on par with the research participants in the sense that he/she is also examining himself/herself as a research subject (Thomas, 1993; McGrath, 2005; Kvasny and Richardson, 2006; Myers, 2009). Discussing the emancipation of the researcher in critical IS research, Stahl et al. (2011) show that the "interaction and camaraderie" (p. 13) between the researcher and informants in the research setting can guide the researcher to reflect on preconceived notions and to challenge existing assumptions about findings, thus emancipating the researcher to explore alternative views on the social phenomena. One has to, therefore, develop a self-reflective openness to the guidance and roles of cultural interpreters, i.e. research informants who can provide guidance and articulate subtle cultural nuances and contrasts to the researcher. (In Krauss (2013a) the first author elaborates more on how the different types of cultural interpreters from the Happy Valley community assisted in making sense in the ICT4D project situation.)

Moreover, Avgerou (2005) advocates the explicit examination of the researcher's emotionally charged preconceptions, political convictions and moral values, and empathy with research subjects in building understanding and knowledge. Self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher seems to a central theme in critical IS research (Čečez-Kecmanović, 2005;

Howcroft and Trauth, 2005; McGrath, 2005; Walsham, 2005; Kvasny and Richardson, 2006; Myers and Klein, 2011; Stahl et al., 2011). The limitations of the researcher's own cultural entrapment cannot be ignored in emancipatory research. In fact, in this paper we argue that the researcher's emancipation is recognised as a precursor for the true emancipation of the researched and the deciphering of meaning from social phenomena. The researchers, therefore, should be primary participants in emancipation as they start off fieldwork by challenging their own prejudice and historicity (Klein and Myers, 1999).

During our ICT4D initiative in Happy Valley, we as a team of academics constantly had to question the value of ICT and the way ICT was being introduced into this community. We were also confronted with our own attitudes, beliefs, intentions, and assumptions that might have emanated from our specific "outsider" background. We needed to be aware of how our different views of reality might possibly distort the intercultural communication that took place during community engagement. We realised that a critical approach to ICT4D research and practice would assist us in this endeavour and therefore ensure the meeting of minds during ICT4D practice.

8   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In applying a critical methodology in fieldwork, a combination of participant observation and critical ethnography were used.

Critical ethnography is inseparable from critical scholarship. It is the implementation of a critical paradigm in ethnography which includes using as well as challenging established approaches of conventional ethnographic (Myers, 1997). In critical ethnography, the boundaries between ethnography and other critical research are blurred (Thomas, 1993; Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2001). Critical ethnography implies that common sense assumptions are not taken at face value, but questioned in order to gain access to deeper meaning (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography does not stand in opposition to conventional ethnography but rather advocates that common sense assumptions about reality be questioned in line with a critical epistemology (Thomas, 1993; Myers, 1997).

Because of cultural entrapment (Thomas, 1993), there is a good chance that the ethnographer may be unable to identify or "see" reality as the local people see it and therefore may be unable to decipher meaning or interpret and describe social phenomena. Critical ethnographers attempt to address this issue – hence the need for the researcher to also be emancipated. They "tend to open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain" (Thomas, 1993: 3).

The focus of critical ethnography is on absurdities, contradictions, oppositions, tensions, discrepancies, and conflicts in the social situation (Thomas, 1993; Myers, 1997). Devising ways to gain access to deeper meaning in conflicting and contradicting accounts may present challenges to the ethnographer's creativity, flexibility, and innovation (Thomas, 1993; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000).

According to Thomas (1993) and Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), in critical ethnography there is no fixed or standardised way of analysing data and critical thinking remains the main guiding factor. It is important, though, that there is a reflexive relationship between the processes of data collection, analysis, and research design (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Reflexivity is thus considered central to the methodology of critical social research (Stahl et al., 2011).

Participant observation allows the researcher to be both an emotionally engaged participant and a coolly dispassionate observer of social phenomena (De Vos et al., 2007). Since community entry is an ongoing process of enculturation, and community gatekeepers and cultural interpreters are integral partners in the research process, the researchers continuously reflected on and discussed observed behaviour and engagement with cultural

interpreters (Stahl et al., 2011; Krauss, 2013a). In addition, cultural interpreters played an integral role in deciphering meaning and interpreting social phenomena. Lessons learned were documented and incorporated in follow-up community engagements.

Throughout many ongoing engagement opportunities, the researchers gathered and documented a variety of stories and quotes from community members and cultural interpreters. The researchers engaged in numerous conversations with participants, as well as other more informal, opportunistic, and spontaneous encounters which gave access to the "unofficial" story and deeper meaning. At the time of writing, the researchers were in possession of several sources of data. These include recordings of meetings and interviews, text messages, emails, narratives, feedback reports, detailed field notes as a form of commentary taken during community engagement, and so forth. Data was collected and analysed almost simultaneously (Schultze, 2000). Themes were extracted from the data, and collated into narratives that retrospectively reflect stories of meaning-making (Myers, 2009). In the narratives, specific values, themes, tactics, guidelines, and principles are revealed that could assist in addressing the research question.

In each narrative, the authors use confessional or vulnerable writing (Van Maanen, 1988; Schultze, 2000) to reflect on the process of self-emancipation as well as the implications for ongoing ICT4D 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 (Van Maanen, 1988; Whyte, 1996; 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 researchers acknowledge and reflect 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 hoped that by presenting these narratives, the authors will not only explain and demonstrate the process of self-emancipation but also present key issues for successful community engagement and sustainable ICT4D.

It is important to note that the narratives presented in the paper reflect on experiences that occurred during the early phases of enculturation and community entry. As a result, the researchers started off with an "us and them" or "outsider/insider" perspective. However, the reality of ethnographic work is that as fieldwork progresses and relationships develop, the researchers gradually became insiders and therefore the "us/them" dualism faded to a certain degree. Ongoing and more in-depth fieldwork results from Happy Valley project are presented in other papers by the same authors (see Krauss, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b; Turpin, 2012; Turpin, Alexander and Phahlamohlaka, 2013).

9   A NARRATIVE ABOUT CULTURAL INTERPRETERS

The first narrative is about how the team interacted with cultural interpreters from the community. In Happy Valley, we are fortunate to have the support of a gatekeeper who has worked and lived in the community for more than 20 years. Martha is well accepted and loved by the locals, whose language and habits she has come to know. Martha grew up in a Western environment, and has a background similar to that of the researchers. During our first visit as team of academics, she made great effort to inform the group about the not-so-evident cultural differences, and sensitised us to some of the basic practices of respect. The following is a personal reflection on an experience with Martha as a cultural interpreter and

gatekeeper and how she guided the first author in the process of self-emancipation and reflexivity:

During my first visit to the community, my family and I stayed for a weekend at the orphan care centre where Martha worked. The Saturday evening we had a braai (barbeque) on the front porch. While being there some local youngsters in their early twenties, possibly somewhat inebriated, approached us and insisted on having some of the food we were preparing. Initially the conversations seemed not too serious and more like teasing to me. However, at a certain point, the two men started making promises about what they would bring to us the following morning in return if I give them something to eat. In an effort to wittingly resolve the situation and in my ignorance, I told them that they were lying about their promises. I also responded in my indigenous language, Afrikaans. Their behaviour immediately turned very hostile as they started threatening us with various actions should we not give them food. I was surprised at their reaction, because I didn't mean any harm and was still trying to be friendly. Later they picked up stones, apparently trying to instigate us to some reaction or aggressive behaviour. They told us that we should leave the town before 5 am the next morning or "there is going to be trouble". The situation probably would have turned very nasty had we responded in a similar manner. Luckily, we had the sense to remain calm and keep on ignoring their threats. Inside I knew that I was on someone else's territory and could not respond in the same way I felt about these two fellows. For me it was a relief when one of our hosts called a security guard at the orphan care centre and the two fellows took off. Although these two fellows' state of mind might have played a role, I still had to do a lot of introspection after this first engagement with the locals on their territory.

Martha, our cultural interpreter, later on laughingly said that it is typical of my Afrikaner way of doing and saying things: i.e. assertive, to the point and often blatantly honest about what is wrong or right, even if we perceive ourselves to be teasing or polite. Apparently, telling a Zulu he is lying is a serious insult. I also learnt later that in their culture one should never refuse a visitor food. It is customary to share food with whoever comes along invited or uninvited. I, therefore, made two cultural mistakes, and became aware of two important values I should aspire to. Firstly, I learned about being aware of the other culture, including their protocols, practices, ways of showing respect, their common sense way of doing things, interacting and sharing. It necessitated me to reflect and think before I talk, respond or act in the same way I take for granted in my culture. Secondly, I learned something about myself. I did not realise that my apparent assertive way of communicating could potentially create a communication gap in this community. In my mind, assertive honesty is an acceptable and valued way of communicating. I had to assume a certain mindset to be able to function in the community.

During this encounter, I realised the value of a cultural interpreter that could assist in deciphering the culture and interpret meaning from what I observed. It took me a while to develop ways of being self-reflectively open about what I observe and aware of the fact that things are not necessarily what they seem or as I perceive them to be. I came to think that even body language could be interpreted differently in the rural Zulu culture. I found it frustrating that I could not "read" people that easily, which led to a sense of insecurity about how I dealt with people. I realised that I would not be able to interpret things that I cannot perceive and that I would need to "shadow" a cultural interpreter. At that stage, my strategy or tactic

was to always ensure that I align with a cultural interpreter, observed what they are doing, how they talk and respond to people and show respect.

My first cultural experiences made me read two types of literature, firstly, literature about the African view of reality, which I'm afraid is not easily available or documented well. Secondly, I read about critical social theory because I saw it as a way of emancipating myself to take up a position of enquiry that will allow me to be open, self-reflective and critical about my own understanding, beliefs, perceptions, observations and view of reality. Also, a critical stance allowed me to develop an openness to learn from cultural interpreters and community gatekeepers. My observation was that self-emancipation is the first step to community entry, having cultural interpreters as partners and friends.

Reflecting on Martha's role and planning the way forward, I realised that because she understood our outsider culture, she was the perfect partner and gatekeeper for this research. As a result, we invited her to visit our department and present something about the community. During the presentation, she explained and interpreted the culture and context in a way that we as outsiders were able to understand. In her presentation, which we recorded, she highlighted some of the social-economic difficulties in the community, things about the local culture and possible ICT projects that we as a department could become involved in.

10   A NARRATIVE ABOUT COMMUNITY ENTRY

Mrs Phiri, the headmistress of Happy Valley School and an important member of the Happy Valley community, was first introduced to us by Martha. In the following narrative the first author briefly reflects on how entry to the school and wider community was gained through Mrs Phiri as gatekeeper and how she became a partner in the ICT training project.

During previous encounters, Martha advised us that we should introduce an idea to a community visionary and then allow for the idea to mature in their social structures and in their own time. Martha said that it is when the idea has matured and been accepted by local people, that they will invite you to participate. She also said that this invitation may then be seen an indicator of successful community entry and acceptance and it is then when you may step in and participate by living up to the promises and expectations you created.

Martha explained that, based on her experience, ignorant and goal-driven Westerners have the tendency to storm in with an idea or possibility and then often unknowingly mistreat communities. They naturally assume a certain position of power or status in development projects and then cannot understand why the project is not accepted. We realised that we should avoid an approach that reflect any supercilious efforts by "developed" Westerners such as when they assume that a project will be accepted based on technical or financial possibilities. Martha said that "what integrity is to the white man, loyalty is to the Zulu" and that a loyalty-based approach would be key in selling an idea and gaining trust.

So, as a team, we took Martha's advice and approached Happy Valley School. We met with Mrs Phiri and some of the matriculants to discuss study opportunities. In our initial interactions with Mrs Phiri, we observed her as very reserved and quiet and we remained uncertain about having her interest for a training project at the school. We proposed to Mrs Phiri how we as an IS department could possibly assist the school, but we left it to her to decide on in her own time. After a number of reaffirmations of our commitment and us waiting for several weeks, she finally called me and requested IT training for her staff. We realised that this was a turning

point in the prolonged process of community entry. It was now important to follow-up on the suggestions and promises we made earlier.

We had some ideas with regard to how we could do the IT training, but in applying lessons learnt from Martha, we asked Mrs Phiri her inputs about how she wanted the training to take place. Mrs Phiri explained her needs and desires and who she believed should be trained, and we did our best to respect that. As a result of this community entry approach, we were able to, firstly, empower Mrs Phiri as a community visionary for IT training at the school and secondly, we allowed ourselves to be guided by her and also learn from her and her staff. Had we not had the openness, patience and listening skills, we would have probably implemented something in a way only we assumed would be of value.

This self-reflective and open approach to community entry and engagement created a sense of partnership where Mrs Phiri and the teachers became primary stakeholders and community visionaries while we as outsiders took on the role of ICT training experts. Through a complementary train-the-trainer initiative, we also empowered a number of teachers to continue the training at their own pace and discretion.

What we learned later through further stories told to us by Martha and some of the teachers was that the honest quality time we spend with the schoolchildren during the university campus tour we facilitated earlier, really opened doors for us. The fact that we addressed their expressed needs and gave the school children more than what they expected from us, intensified and "fast-tracked" reciprocity, the establishment of community entry, and trust relationships. One teacher, for example, said that after our interactions with the schoolchildren, they asked her to explain why someone would make such special effort with them. Through feedback and statements like these, we learned about establishing rapport and building trust relationships.

Through this community engagement experience, we learned a number of important values. Firstly, we learned to respect the local way of letting a development idea mature within the community. We also learned the importance of creating and stimulating ownership and vision and to always remain the supporter of a local initiative rather than the owner, even if we do most of the work. We learned that we should be open to guidance from community gatekeepers and cultural interpreters as to how a new development idea should mature and be implemented. Ultimately, through self-reflection we realised that cultural interpreters are key partners in deciphering meaning and interpreting social phenomena and community visionaries are those we as outsiders should align with. These community informants are familiar with the cultural intricacies, the difficulties associated with living in their context, they can speak the cultural language and they are the ones that are able to receive new technological skills and then interpret it for their own people in their own way and in context, all which contribute to the feasibility of the ICT4D initiative.

11　PERSONAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCES

The third narrative relates to the second author's personal self-reflective experiences as she collected research information in Happy Valley. It is based on the critical observation that we must constantly remain aware of how our own language, culture, religion and value systems can hinder our understanding of the social context. The narrative illustrates this:

As a white Afrikaans speaking female, I take my individualism for granted: I assume the freedom to be outspoken, to say what I think when I want, and I expect the same from others. In the deep rural Zulu community, I am oblivious to the sensitive web of social norms that I am never directly confronted with. I have to hear from the cultural interpreters that much of my regular behaviour would be considered rude. The local people are too gentle and respectful to tell me in my face; that is not their way.

In one instance, I attempted an interview to gather data for my research. Baba Z, the respondent, was an elder Zulu man. He received us with hospitality at his traditional homestead, and presented us with food and drink. However, when we commenced with the interview, he was strangely unresponsive. I had to work through two interpreters, first a lady who translated from English to Zulu and then a Zulu male who addressed Baba Z as an equal. I put a lot of effort into phrasing and rephrasing my questions. Each time the response that returned through the lengthy translation process was a blunt "yes" or "no". I could not establish a rapport with Baba Z and eventually gave up. After we thanked him for the interview and began packing to leave, Baba Z started talking. He shared his life story, in his own time and his own way. I received a wealth of information that I was able to incorporate in my research. During this unforced conversation, I learned more than I did during the interview itself.

In another instance, I visited a number of remote houses, accessible only by foot, together with some Western ladies from a city church who wanted to minister to the local people. The ladies were accompanied by an elder from a local church who also did the translation. By this stage, I had become aware of the social distance between male and female, as well as between young and old, within the rural community. Yet, I observed how the Western ladies asked questions of a very personal nature to an older male, who freely shared information about his private arrangements and habits. I was amazed.

While still subconsciously processing these events, I have learnt the following. Firstly, being assertive and proactive in this context is not necessarily helpful - on the contrary. The respondent of the interview only "rose to the occasion" when I released control. He was not unwilling to share information, but it seemed that he wanted to do it in his own way. When performing visits along with the church ladies, I simply accompanied them, imitated their manners and observed quietly. Maintaining a "low profile" while observing, gave me an excellent information collection vantage point.

Secondly, with regard to male-female relations, I learned a two-fold lesson. Martha, the cultural interpreter, initially told us that there is a huge distance in social standing between male and female in this community as well as a clear division of roles and status. The two gender groups keep apart even during meals. Within the gender groups, age provided a further hierarchy, and one had to always show respect to your elders. This, according to Martha, was a simplified view of social relations of which she herself, after 20 years in the community, was still learning the nuances. I tried to keep this view in mind, only to see it overthrown in special situations. The dignified white ladies and their association with the church must have carried some special status that allowed the local people to respond as openly as they did. In the process, I learned that I could not just replace my personal preconceptions with new, simple generalisations. I had to remain open to the unexpected in order to be emancipated from both my previous as well as new

preconceptions and understanding. It is not wise to generalise too soon with regard to social behaviour in this context.

12   SUMMARY AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

In this paper we highlight a number of repression sustaining assumptions evident in ICT4D discourses. We show that generally literature present two groups of people involved in ICT4D research and practice situations; namely the developed (i.e. the outsider doing or researching development) and the developing (the people or community assumed to be in need of developmental research and practice). Typically the assumption is that the party most obviously challenged and in need of emancipation and social transformation, is the developing group. In this paper we challenge this assumption. We argue that it is not only about the emancipatory needs of the developing community, but also the need for ICT4D researchers and practitioners to be emancipated from preconceived notions, cultural entrapment, and ethnocentrism, so that they can develop an openness to act in the real emancipatory interests of the developing community. We thus ask: In what ways do ICT4D researchers and practitioners require emancipation, in order to ensure more appropriate and emancipatory ICT4D?

To address these concerns, we present critical social theory as an appropriate position of enquiry for doing emancipatory ICT4D research and practice. Presenting critical reflexivity as a central component of critical research, we show how our own historicity and prejudices as researchers and some of our starting assumptions affected the fieldwork situation and our ability to make sense of (interpret and decipher meaning from) the intercultural encounters we were exposed to. We present our findings in the form of three confessional narratives where we reflect on our own need for emancipation and how we had to challenge some of our own initial assumptions and understandings of the ICT4D project situation. As outsider-researchers we thus argue for, and also demonstrate the value of critical reflexivity for exposing and challenging one's own inabilities, misunderstandings, failures, and ignorance in intercultural encounters and ICT4D fieldwork practice.

A further contribution of this paper is that it addresses the need for more critical work in IS and ICT4D (Walsham, 2005; Walsham and Sahay, 2006), the lack of empirical research in the critical tradition (Stahl et al., 2011), and it presents a special case of how the theory and practice of critical research informed each other (Ngwenyama, 1991; McGrath, 2005). The paper thus contributes to critical discourses on what constitutes methodological and empirical maturity in critical research and by reflecting on fieldwork encounters from a ICT4D project in a deep rural part of South Africa.

By reflecting on specific ethnographic fieldwork encounters that occurred during the community entry phases of an ICT4D project in a traditional community in a deep rural part of South Africa, we demonstrate a number of principles and lessons for emancipatory ICT4D research practice: We demonstrate the value of a critical position of enquiry; we argue for and demonstrate the self-empowering and self-emancipatory position of critical reflexivity; we reflect on the role of critical reflexivity in understanding intercultural fieldwork situations and collisions between the assumptions, expectations, views, and practices of the outsider-researcher and local community members; and we present a special case of how critical reflexivity and fieldwork was done at the grassroots level of ICT4D practice.

In the first narrative the first author reflects on the role of cultural interpreters in community entry and intercultural ICT4D work. He showed how his own cultural mannerisms and cultural entrapment were exposed and challenged, and how he needed a partner and cultural interpreter, to align with and who could assist in the process of self-reflexivity. In the narrative he reflects on how he discovered his own limitations and

inabilities in an intercultural fieldwork situation. A number of practical principles for ICT4D work can be extracted from this narrative, namely:

- a cross-cultural situation such as the one presented in the narrative, implies conflicting values, norms, assumptions, expectations, and practices;
- cultural interpreters may play a key role in deciphering culture and interpreting meaning from intercultural encounters;
- cultural interpreters may play a key role in assisting the outsider researcher and practitioner to be self-reflexive. As outsider one should therefore develop an openness to allow them to correct, advise, and challenge inadequate assumptions about intercultural fieldwork situations and assumptions about the improvement of a situation; and
- critical reflexivity as methodology and critical social theory as theoretical underpinning will allow the outsider to expose, challenge, and reflect on his/her own not-so-evident cultural ignorance, limitations, inabilities, and need for social transformation.

In the second narrative, the first author continues to reflect on some practical principles of community entry in the specific ICT4D situation he encountered. He demonstrates the role of cultural interpreters and gatekeepers in the community entry process, and elaborates on how critical reflexivity allowed him to develop an openness to challenge the assumptions and approaches he brought into the fieldwork situation. He also highlights the problem of goal-driven outsider-westerners who may make inadequate assumptions about the meaning of emancipation and their positions, roles, and power in the ICT4D situation. Self-reflexivity allowed for a sense of camaraderie and collaboration between the researcher and community members. A number of principles for community entry are put forward, namely:

- the need to allow for a development idea to mature and be accepted among the people in the community before commencing with any form of implementation or research;
- the need for local ownership to develop and mature;
- the need to establish rapport, reciprocity, and trust relationships; and
- the need to develop a self-reflexive openness to guidance and advice from local cultural interpreters during the practice of community entry and ICT4D implementation.

In the third narrative the second author reflects on how fieldwork practice and a planned data collection encounter evolved into something unexpected, and how she had to deal with the unplanned and unexpected manner in how things unfolded. Four principles can be extracted from this narrative, namely:

- being proactive and assertive can be unhelpful in contexts that are not well understood;
- one should release control in such unexpected and unpredictable situations;
- simplified generalisations about cultural practices may be overthrown in special situations; and
- one should continuously reflect on one's own preconceived notions by remaining open to the unexpected.

13 CONCLUSIONS

Results from this paper suggest that the emancipation of the outsider ICT4D researcher and practitioner is a precursor for emancipatory research. We demonstrate the importance of educating and empowering outsiders (who are often Westerners) and the international community on how to think critically about the approaches, assumptions, attitudes, and values that they bring into the ICT4D social situation in South Africa. We therefore hope that

this paper will highlight the need for outsider-researchers involved in ICT4D research and practice in Africa to honestly question their own values, attitudes, motives, and understanding of the development reality.

Although several other themes, e.g. issues of power relations, gender issues, and so forth, may have emerged from the narratives, the authors did not address them here and may do so in follow-up papers.

The authors have both completed their PhD research on the ICT4D project in Happy Valley. They have used different frameworks to help them make sense of and be more effective in the very different social context to which they were exposed. The research presented in this paper is part of an ongoing initiative; there is still much to be done in terms of ICT to empower the Happy Valley community, and the emancipation of the researchers is also ongoing.

14 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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