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Research article

Perpetuating power through autoethnography: my research unawareness and memories of paternalism among the indigenous Hai//om in Namibia

Stasja Koot

Abstract

In this article, I reflect on my longitudinal relation with the indigenous Hai//om Bushmen of the resettlement farm Tsintsabis, in Namibia, exploring my position of power as a development fieldworker. I have been connected to the Hai//om since 1999, doing research and living and working with them while continuously moving between being an 'outsider' and an 'insider'. As an MA student, a development worker/boss (*baas*) and a PhD researcher, my knowledge of these indigenous people changed over the years. My longest stay on the farm was not as a researcher/anthropologist but as a development fieldworker, engaging with the people in manifold relationships. I argue that there is much epistemological value in an 'open retrospective analytic autoethnographic experience'. The article explores three under-analysed but crucial and related elements of autoethnography, namely unawareness, memory and power. Even when the awareness of 'doing research' is absent, knowledge is acquired. This can be used analytically at a later stage. However, this inevitably implies a major role for the researcher's memories, thereby perpetuating his/her position of power in the representation and interpretation of events and experiences.

Keywords: autoethnography, Hai//om, memory, Namibia, power, unawareness

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Introduction

Towards the end of 2006, I heard a knock on my door on a Sunday morning. I opened it and an elderly Hai//om[1] couple stood in front of me with a small coffin. They asked me if I could drive them to the funeral because the government car had not shown up. Standing at the funeral later, I pondered my plans to leave Tsintsabis and the Treesleeper Camp project, after having lived there for several years. Seven years later, I would write about this occasion:

> I never felt so strongly connected to the people around me as I did then because I felt honoured that I had been asked to help them. […] Often, when I dwelt in Tsintsabis, I had to reject requests for help, and it felt so good now to share what I had to offer. […] My goal when I moved into the village had been to start the Treesleeper project and this focus was there all the time. People often came to ask me for certain favours and in some cases I helped and shared, but mostly I did not. […] In some ways, this created a detachment similar to that of the 'objective' researcher. […] However looking back, I am not sure if I could have done this differently. […] In many ways, I was a *baas* [boss], taking decisions, being a fatherly person who cared for 'his' people, and many local people indeed behaved humbly towards me over the years. […] As 'some kind of a *baas*', just as happens when Bushmen cooperate with private-sector partners, I also had trouble giving away responsibility, being afraid that things would fail or at least not be done my way. […] So although initially thinking that I experienced the burial of the child as a symbolic experience akin to 'burying Treesleeper', I later realised this was not at all the case. […] The contradicting thoughts and emotions I felt at the funeral were not about Treesleeper but about the symbolic burying of an important part of myself and my identity in Tsintsabis. The part of myself that I then buried was '*baas* Stasja'. (Koot 2013: 265–266)

I often rationalised to myself that my aim at the farm was to build up Treesleeper, a community-based tourism project. I considered all the other projects suggested by the local Bushmen a distraction from my main reason for being there. The name *baas* (explained below) was given to me for fun for a while by three Dutch interns who helped out at Treesleeper in its early days. As a group of young and idealistic fieldworkers, we were often surprised to experience the Bushmen's humbleness (shown to us and, especially, to local white farmers) and believed they should act in a way that asserted their equality with others more strongly. However, we were unaware then of the deep sense of paternalism in the region and our own relatively strong positions of power.

This article is about my personal experiences of paternalism at the resettlement farm Tsintsabis. More than anything, my position of power created personal struggles when working for the 'community-based' development project. The article is also a methodological and epistemological exploration, because I analyse the knowledge I gained from holding different positions (insider/outsider/researcher/development

fieldworker), and examine how this knowledge was built up and changed over the years. I use autoethnography as a methodology – a type of ethnography that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation by the researcher; personal and cultural issues become blurred and are experienced as continually interconnected (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 739; Maréchal 2010). Autoethnography enables scientists to tell their personal research stories to professionals and other, non-expert people, including, for example, Bushmen communities (Tomaselli 2012a: 6–7). Using autoethnography in relation to a group of Bushmen, the article builds on earlier work by Tomaselli and colleagues (2007; 2012b; Tomaselli, Dyll-Myklebust and Van Grootheest 2013). In these works, the researcher's relation(s) with the 'other(s)', or the researched, in particular the indigenous Bushmen of southern Africa, is also problematised.

I investigate my own position of power as a development fieldworker among the Hai//om. While I acted as a community member or 'insider' in various ways, I was simultaneously disconnected – functioning as an 'outsider' – in other ways. The article is a methodological and an epistemological exploration and an illumination of relations of power between the researcher and the researched. Paternalism is a subject *par excellence* for such an autoethnographic analysis, because 'authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions' (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 740). Consequently, the article adds three under-analysed but essential and interconnected elements of autoethnography, namely power, unawareness and memory. I argue that, despite the absence of any awareness of doing research, my experience as a development fieldworker nevertheless created important and useful knowledge. However, this unawareness also implies an autoethnography that is retrospective. Memories are crucial to it. As ethnographers tend to have 'rather poor memories', I heed Hunt and Ruiz Junco's (2006: 371) call for an 'ongoing consideration of memory among ethnographers'. I show that an 'open retrospective analytic autoethnographic experience' contains important epistemological value, but also acknowledge that memories are problematic because they are subject to change and decay. Memories, in my view, need serious consideration in autoethnography. By using my own memories it is clear that I perpetuate my earlier acquired power as a development fieldworker in my 'new' role as an ethnographer.

In the article I describe how I built up a body of knowledge during my different stays in Tsintsabis. The first one dates from 1999. I also provide memories from the years 2004–2007 when I lived in Tsintsabis working for Treesleeper Camp. Specifically, I investigate events that relate to my own position of power among this marginalised indigenous group. In the methodological analysis that follows, I reflect on the value of such a retrospective autoethnography, how this adds to analytic autoethnography, and the value of the fact that I was unaware that I was 'doing research', which created an 'open' research experience.

Living in Tsintsabis

Care, books and becoming *baas*

I have been connected with the Hai//om of Tsintsabis since 1999,[2] when I conducted fieldwork for six months as an MA student. Every day I strolled through the dusty gardens, doing interviews and exploring the farm and its many socioeconomic and cultural happenings. I learned about its different churches, the school, the history of Tsintsabis, the Hai//om's historical connection with the famous Etosha National Park, and lots more. I also participated in many joyful moments with community members, attended soccer matches and nightly healing sessions and regularly drank a few beers in the local *shebeens*. In that way, I participated, observed and learned. I also started to care for the people with whom I was living. I began to develop a proposal to start community tourism in Tsintsabis (Koot 2013: 309–311).

Many evenings were spent reading books by candlelight. Two books in particular influenced my ideas in those days. First, I was struck by the philosophical novel *Lila*, in which the anthropologist Dussenberry says of his relationship with native Americans that '[t]he only way to find out about Indians is to *care* for them and win their love and respect' (Pirsig 1991: 43). Reading *Lila* made me realise that I had to let go of my quest for objectivity; it was fine – even inevitable – to develop feelings of care for the people one studied. Second, this growing empathy was stimulated by a feeling for the 'victimisation' the Bushmen had experienced, as I realised from reading Gordon's *Picturing Bushmen* (1997). This book made me 'realise more and more how important the views of other people have been, concerning the contemporary situation of the Bushmen' (Koot 2002).

Today, approximately 17 years later, my ideas have become more nuanced, but my concern for the Bushmen has never left me. This raises its own questions. Exactly which Bushmen do I care for? Does caring not imply a certain level of patronisation? Although I do not have all the answers, I feel that my concern for the people was the start of my becoming a *baas* (boss), a word often used in Afrikaans-speaking areas, especially on farms, for the white authority. A *baas* is usually white and male (cf. Sylvain 2001). Since Tsintsabis has been surrounded by commercial farms for many years, people are deeply rooted in the social construct of *baasskap* (see also Plotkin 2002: 5–7). In this southern African patron–client relationship, beliefs about white superiority play a crucial role. This does not necessarily mean that it is only a top-down structure; in a relationship of interdependency between the patron and his clients, there is often also support for beliefs and assumptions 'from below' (Van Beek 2011: 40–41). The underlying assumptions of *baasskap* date back to the start of Western colonisation. The phenomenon is based on a family ideology; the patron is the father (*baas*) of his 'immature' children who are seen to be in need of development. Edification, care and protection are essential elements that also

provide important benefits to the clients in return for their labour, such as transport, medical assistance, basic education and a place to live (Gibbon, Daviron and Barral 2014; cf. Rutherford 2001). Early signs of my authority were visible already in 1999, when the first ideas for Treesleeper Camp began to develop. Tourism was then seen as a panacea for development. The local development committee had had plans for tourism to stimulate the area's economy since 1993. The request for a tourism project originated from within the community, but under my influence this changed from an idea to build a luxurious lodge to plans for a community-based campsite. I had lived among the people for a few months already and simply could not see them running a lodge or any other type of upper-class tourism enterprise. So, as an MA student, I began to influence the plans and ideas of the community according to what I myself deemed good for them. I was a young *baas* in the making.

I went back to Namibia in 2002/3 for another six months to explore the possibilities for this project. This was the start of what would become Treesleeper Camp (Hüncke 2010; Hüncke and Koot 2012; Koot 2012 and 2013; Troost 2007). From January 2004 until June 2007 I lived in Namibia, mostly in Tsintsabis itself, initially with a friend of mine, Ferry Bounin (January 2004 until November 2005). My job was to support the founding of Treesleeper physically and institutionally, and to manage the project for the first few years.

In 2008, when I had been back in the Netherlands for more than a year, I started writing a book chapter about Treesleeper (Koot 2012). This initiated the idea for the PhD that I worked on between 2009 and 2013, including half a year of fieldwork in southern Africa and return visits to Tsintsabis in 2010. In this research, my stay in Tsintsabis and working for Treesleeper provided crucial sources of knowledge. Since 2007 I have stayed in contact with various people living in Tsintsabis, via email or Facebook.

The meaning of living in Tsintsabis for fieldwork

My long-term stay as a development fieldworker can be compared to Rousset's (2003: 18) stay of three years in West Caprivi, northeast Namibia, as an NGO facilitator. As she explains:

> [This] has given me the opportunity to familiarise myself with conservation and development issues from a practical, on-the-ground perspective. I am fully cognisant that my immersion in a development-focussed NGO world may also cloud my understanding and interpretation of events. But I believe this is balanced by the advantage of an extended period of time in West Caprivi that has allowed for a more in-depth understanding of attitudes and local politics than would have been possible had I only spent six weeks there.

Similarly, Hohmann stayed in Tsumkwe West, east Namibia, for 16 months, combining scientific and developmental work. This gave her 'the privilege to engage in participatory observation and to follow the discussion about CBNRM [community-based natural resource management] in the field from different angles' (Hohmann 2003: 209). I experienced similar advantages from my years in Tsintsabis. In relation to my PhD fieldwork, I could draw on my 'general knowledge' of and 'feel' for the people. I learned to speak Afrikaans, which turned out to be crucial for my PhD fieldwork later. Although the Treesleeper staff usually spoke English, I spoke Afrikaans to elderly people in the community and to white farmers. This not only improved my ability to communicate, it also infused my authority with the colonial legacy associated with Afrikaans.

For example, for my PhD I strolled through the the South African Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park with the local Bushman tour guide Toppies Kruiper, who would draw things in the sand to illustrate his stories. The Hai//om of Tsintsabis also often illustrated stories in the sand. There was usually no paper and pen available, of course. But there was an additional element to the practice. Belinda Kruiper (cited in Dyll 2009: 55) asserts that 'NGOs should let the Bushmen draw in the sand to explain how they feel and what they want'. Lauren Dyll (2007: 122) observes that '[b]y encouraging Western methods of communication *only*, […] development workers are in fact denying the validity of local methods and knowledge, and in so doing gain only a superficial understanding of people's development needs and requirements'. Bushmen, I learned, often communicate by means of the things at hand. They also refer to elements such as the wind, the sun, a fence, the rain or a stone in order to explain things. When I asked what day of the week an event happened, I might be told that it was on the day when the wind blew hard. When I asked for directions, I might be advised that 'at that round stone you go that way' or 'where the trees become higher' or 'where the bushes were eaten by a kudu'. Of course, today communication has become hybrid and people also use Western reference points (e.g., Tuesday, 21 September) and equipment (e.g., pens, pencils, cell phones and computers), but that does not mean that this 'other type of communication' has disappeared.

Memories of development and paternalism at Treesleeper

Being *baas*

Bounin and I established the Tsintsabis Trust in 2004, as a local (community-based) legal owner of the project. Since this needed to be done in the capital Windhoek, it was almost impossible for local people to do themselves. This gave us the power to decide what would be in the deed of trust. Local trustees (some of whom were illiterate) only needed to sign before we returned the documents to the Master of the High Court in Windhoek. It took time for the older generation, especially, to

accept and understand the structure and vision of Treesleeper. As some schoolboys explained:

> They [parents and grandparents] were afraid that the white people [Bounin and I] were going to claim their land, like white people did during colonisation and the apartheid regime. […] After several meetings with Stasja and the [Tsintsabis] trust, they started to understand that the camp site was meant to help develop them. (Troost 2007: 66)

People did not necessarily distinguish us – young white male Europeans – from local white Namibians. Although most people remembered me from my MA fieldwork in 1999 and we arrived with a story about 'development' based on the principle of community participation, most of the elders also associated our being there with land theft, colonialism and apartheid.

Bounin and I started as trustees of the Tsintsabis Trust for pragmatic reasons: it made things workable. We were in a position to open a bank account, for example. While local people made up the majority of the trust, Bounin and I exerted a great deal of influence. An ex-employee and trustee said about me in 2006, a few months before I was to leave Tsintsabis, that she did 'not think it is a community project, but it is Stasja's [...] project. […] he takes most of the decisions and he can lay his opinion on the members of the trust and the personnel of Treesleeper' (cited in Troost 2007: 58). Organisationally, Bounin and I acted from a position of power. We controlled the funds in the beginning. Although it was a community-based project, I was the *de facto* 'baas'. It was not only that people regarded me as a *baas* based on colonial associations and skin colour, it was practically true as well. Despite the bottom-up principles of community-based organisations, external NGOs such as ours often inadvertently create top-down structures because they take many of the decisions relating to the projects they run (Hüncke 2010: 100).

Although there were similarities with *baasskap*, my position at Treesleeper also exhibited essential differences from it. For example, when I spoke to white businesspeople in the area, they tended to be amazed (and occasionally even disgusted) when I said that I lived in Tsintsabis. The boundaries between white farmers and their black workers on the commercial farms were rigid. When I visited a farm in the area in 2003 with a young Hai//om man, I was not allowed by the white farmer to stay overnight with the Hai//om man's family. The farmer insisted that I sleep in the farmhouse. Later, when I lived on the Tsintsabis farm 'with the people' this was often regarded as strange. Although I was not engaged in research as such,[3] I consider those years a crucial and meaningful ethnographic experience for my later writings. The experience went far beyond acclimatisation: I became acquainted with a multitude of social and power relations, cultural practices and learned a language, Afrikaans. Because of this lengthy stay, I was able to experience the daily realities of

the people I lived with, which helped me later when I began 'real' research fieldwork for my PhD, in the role now of a researcher instead of a development fieldworker.

I lived in the Treesleeper office. I often chatted to the cleaner, a young woman, about Treesleeper and the local dynamics of Tsintsabis. In this way, I easily found out about issues on the farm. These included different perceptions about a failed bakery project, family twists, controversial leadership questions and, last but not least, different opinions in Tsintsabis about the Treesleeper project itself. People who visited the young woman while she cleaned added their own stories and perceptions – they might be family members who would help with the cleaning or neighbouring villagers who just came over for a chat. Treesleeper employees would also visit regularly, and I held many conversations with them. I discussed national politics, local politics, Bushman traditions, and strategies for Treesleeper with the camp manager, Moses //Khumûb. Some employees would come over in the evenings to watch soccer on my television. On trips along the dirt road to Tsumeb (about 60 kilometres away), I had lengthy conversations with the villagers to whom I gave lifts. There would be friendly talks, requests for assistance or even malicious gossip. In addition to contacts with local people, I was also connected to the many outsiders that Treesleeper would bring in, such as NGOs, donors, volunteers and student researchers.

It wasn't always easy. An important element of the learning process involved the harsh realities of marginalisation in rural Africa. I was shocked when I heard that a young man had hung himself one night. He was found by my neighbour, who also worked for Treesleeper. I witnessed hunger, unemployment, rape, drunken fights, the beating of women (including a Treesleeper tour guide student who had to leave the project as a result), illness (I sometimes drove sick people to the clinic) and the spread of HIV/Aids.

Another difficulty arose from the fact that a Dutch NGO, Kune Zuva, became interested in supporting 'spin-off' projects, often related to Treesleeper. I began to be seen as a milk cow who could be approached for funding for many different projects. I was also asked for managerial and organisational support to start these projects, as the local Bushmen did not consider themselves able to start them. Much of this could be attributed to their inexperience but it also betrayed a belief in 'white superiority'. Some people even stated directly that it was impossible to start anything without a white man. I had become a key figure on the Tsintsabis resettlement farm, not unlike the *baas* on a commercial farm. When outsiders came to Treesleeper, whether Europeans or local farmers, they usually approached me first. One black farmer from the area even asked if I could send over a few of 'my boys' to his farm so that they could build a beautiful campsite for him as well.

More NGO paternalism

After June 2007, when I left Tsintsabis, the NGO Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) supported the project for almost two more years by sending a volunteer. The position of project manager was handed over to the local camp manager //Khumûb. The volunteer's job was to assist him. Although //Khumûb valued what the volunteer brought to the project, he found working with a white (European) man in his fifties challenging. In the rural areas of a country where apartheid's traces are still highly visible, an older white man in a Bushman community is almost automatically considered an authority. Most local people listen to white people more than they do to others. This undermines local leaders. //Khumûb observed to me in 2010 that 'there is lots of involvement of different organisations, and not at the positions that they just advise but they are also directly sometimes involved in management to say things must be done this way and this way'. He believed not enough attention was being given to the communities' feelings and ideas, which fostered top-down development and paternalism. Similarly, in the early and mid-1990s in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy where the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen live, Elizabeth Garland noticed strong paternalist behaviour by many of the white expatriates working for the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia. This NGO was regarded as 'indigenous' but was 'white-driven' in practice, and some of the expatriates' assumptions were influenced by notions of white superiority. The Bushmen were regarded as not altogether ready for modern life. Agriculture and democracy were considered crucial tools for their economic and political development (Garland 1999: 83–85).

This sort of paternalism was also exhibited in Tsintsabis by the Connected to Namibia Foundation (CTNF), a small Dutch initiative that supported Treesleeper with a financial donation of about €3,000 in 2005. A CTNF member from the Netherlands planned to visit Tsintsabis at a time when I would be absent. //Khumûb and I decided it would be appropriate to take her to the Etosha National Park in the project's car. //Khumûb would be in charge of the trip, but members of camp management would join her on the visit. Upon my return I learned that the woman and the camp management had visited several other tourist places in northern Namibia. //Khumûb explained that the woman had wanted to visit these destinations and said he had not felt comfortable restricting her to visiting Etosha. She was an older, white woman, after all, and a potential donor as well. More members of this same foundation visited Treesleeper in 2011. Although they had had no prior involvement in the project, they reported as follows:

> Our foundation has been *heavily involved* in setting up Treesleeper. Today Treesleeper has become a well-run community campsite and *the foundation can withdraw*. During our short visit last Sunday the future plans of Treesleeper turned out to be highly ambitious. There are big and luxurious lodges and a swimming pool being built at this

stage. […] *The current staff will, regardless of their good intentions, simply not be ready to handle this.* […] *These people have good intentions, but they do not have what is necessary for this.* (CTNF 2014, my italics and translation)

This not only demonstrates how organisations can boast about a project in which they have only played a minor role, but it also exhibits a Eurocentric, derogatory and paternalistic attitude towards the project's staff. These people never even spent a night in Tsintsabis. Their attitude, however, is comparable in some ways to my own behaviour as an MA student when I dismissed the idea of building a lodge and argued for a community-based campsite instead. At least I had stayed in Tsintsabis and Namibia for a few months already by that time.

In general, Bushmen in Tsintsabis show dependency on others (often NGOs) to help them obtain a better future. In their self-perception, they are subordinate to people who position themselves as superior to them (such as white farmers), and they ascribe to whites the ability to solve problems and fulfil their needs (Hüncke 2010: 102–105; cf. Koot 2015). These attitudes are transferred to NGO workers, including myself when I lived in Tsintsabis. The NGO workers unduly influence decisions as a result of their 'higher education' and 'greater knowledge' of the 'outside world'.[4]

Methodological analysis: open, retrospective, analytic autoethnography

The question that I wish to raise here concerns the value of my experiences in the field from an autoethnographic point of view. Autoethnography has been heavily dominated by so-called 'evocative or emotional autoethnography' that is distanced from analytic and realist ethnographic traditions. Anderson (2006), though, developed the idea of an 'analytic autoethnography' which rests on three main pillars: the researcher must be a full member of the group or setting that is being studied; s/he should be present in his/her publications; and s/he should work within an analytic research agenda in order to improve theoretical understandings of wider social phenomena (ibid: 373–375). Whereas the first two pillars do not necessarily distinguish analytic autoethnography from the evocative tradition, the third does. While Ellis and Bochner (2000: 739) stress that an autoethnographer needs to gaze 'outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience', thereby emphasising the importance of the connection between the researcher's personal experience and a wider, sociocultural analysis, Anderson (2006: 386, emphasis added) claims that evocative autoethnography 'seeks narrative fidelity *only* to the researcher's subjective experience, [while] analytic autoethnography is grounded in self-experience but reaches beyond it as well'. It might, for example, use in-depth interviews and other kinds of data. Anderson can be understood as emphasising the possibilities of a mature autoethnographic methodology, one which can provide for

realist ethnographies that take social settings and problems into account. Evocative ethnographers, on the other hand, continue to emphasise 'writing from the heart' since 'we enact the worlds we study' (Denzin 2006: 422–423). I researched and analysed paternalism (particularly within tourism) as a development strategy in my PhD and later research (see also Koot 2015), although the ideas I developed were strongly influenced by my prior working experience at Treesleeper. My research was analytic insofar as it embedded paternalism in a wider historical and political economic context. I gathered new data as well, along with an MA student (Hüncke 2010), and also conducted three more in-depth interviews during my fieldwork in 2010. However, the core findings that formed the basis of the PhD were derived from a retrospective analysis, rather than from an 'analytic agenda' (Anderson 2006: 386–388). I had no research agenda when I worked as a development fieldworker. In that sense, these experiences were completely 'open'.

Memories, unawareness and power

The fact that my research was based on prior experience of working as a development fieldworker (functioning as a community member in some ways while remaining an outsider in others) gave it three important characteristics: first, my writing was based on memory. A scholar once wondered when embarking on an autoethnography: 'I haven't been keeping notes or anything. […] Where would I start?' (in Ellis and Bochner 2000: 750). This question acknowledges the complexities of a retrospective approach. It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that my current perspectives have influenced my memory. Thoughts and feelings appear, disappear and reappear, and not necessarily in a chronological or linear way (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 751–752). Arguably, the analytic process that went into my PhD retrospectively changed my experience of Tsintsabis. When I started my PhD I was still working at a Dutch NGO, which changed my views about development and paternalism, not least because of the visibility of the power relations that prevailed between myself and my colleagues on the one hand, and the people among whom we worked on the other. Retrospective autoethnography is inevitably clouded. The least one can do is acknowledge this – something I neglected to do in my PhD dissertation (see Koot 2013: 309–311; cf. Hunt and Ruiz Junco 2006: 371). The past, we have to emphasise, is 'a social construct that only emerges referentially and selectively, inevitably formed and transformed by means of re-experience and interpretation', in which 'memory allows us to structure the past in relation to the present' (Argenti and Röschenthaler 2006: 33).

Second, the fact that I was unaware that I was 'doing research' while living in Tsintsabis proved epistemologically valuable. The knowledge generated through the manifold experiences of everyday life is very different from that gained from a specific research perspective. Working in the community meant that I held an important social position, one that was very different from that of researcher. My experiences of the

community were very broad. I was 'open' to reality as I encountered it. Although in autoethnographic contexts social scientists are usually members of the group being studied, they also identify as researchers. These multiple foci set them apart from their subjects (Anderson 2006: 380). I stood outside the group in Tsintsabis in some ways, but not because I was *a researcher*. I was oblivious of the danger Anderson (2006: 389, italics added) warns researchers against:

> [T]he researcher must exercise extreme caution not to let his or her research focus fade out of *awareness* in the face of other pressing and enticing engagements in the field. Furthermore, the autoethnographer must not allow herself or himself to be drawn into participating heavily in activities in the field at the expense of writing field notes.

Maréchal (2010: 44) insists that the researcher should retain 'a distinct and highly visible identity as *a self-aware scholar* and social actor'. Such warnings did not apply to my situation. I was able to turn my experience into an interesting ethnographic analysis based on 'openness' and 'broad knowledge', rather than on awareness and field notes. I disagree, therefore, that an ethnographer should not 'participate heavily' in the life of the community and prioritise field notes instead – it is the participation itself that forms the core of the creation of knowledge in the first place. Despite their importance, field notes are secondary; they are a result *of* participation. And in my case, memories proved more meaningful than field notes. The knowledge I acquired was broader than it would have been if I had followed an analytic agenda. Furthermore, this knowledge proved to be 'fluid in time'; it was influenced and changed by my later experiences. This leads me to the third and last point: power.

Because of the autoethnographer's central position – in the end *his/her* memories are decisive – a situation arises in which the relation between the autoethnographer and the 'other' is always asymmetrical. In my case, I moved from one such asymmetrical, negotiated power relation (development fieldworker) to another (researcher) (cf. Tomaselli et al. 2013). If I had followed an autoethnographic approach from the outset, with a focus on my own experiences and memories, I might easily have neglected the voices of the Bushmen with whom I lived. Nevertheless, using the retrospective autoethnographic approach which I relied on, led to different forms of exclusion. The voices of the Bushmen in Tsintsabis who were not part of the Treesleeper project were arguably less 'visible' in my research than those of my former Treesleeper colleagues. Using my experiences as a development fieldworker as the basis of my research has afforded me insights into *baasskap* from an emic point of view – something that is very rare. Despite the limitations of my approach, it has produced important knowledge about social situations that could not have been arrived at in a different way.

Conclusion

While engaging in development work among the indigenous Hai//om in Tsintsabis, Namibia, I learned that paternalism is a widespread phenomenon among them, resulting from (often unconscious) assumptions about white superiority. There is a tendency among outside experts (young or old, male or female) to disregard local knowledge and systems, and assume a position of authority. The process is supported 'from below': many Bushmen allow whites to do this.

This analysis of NGO paternalism towards Bushmen would not have been possible without my experience as a development fieldworker. I was able to experience the situation both as a community member and as an outsider. I was in a position of power in the community. Even after I had become a 'real' self-aware researcher, using autoethnography, I acted from a position of power. Memory, unawareness and power are important issues in autoethnography because they position knowledge in different contexts. Various scholars argue that one should stay aware of one's position as a researcher in autoethnography, but this raises the question of what to do when this is impossible. In this article, I have shown that the value of experiences of power based on memories lies in the fact that they can create ethnographically enriching insights. Hopefully, many more retrospective analytic autoethnographies will appear in the future.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   The Hai//om are a subgroup of the Bushmen (or San), an indigenous group of (former) hunter-gatherers in southern Africa.

2   When I first arrived in Tsintsabis in 1999, most inhabitants were Hai//om, but today the population has become more hybrid.

3   This creates an unawareness on the part of the researcher *and* the researched (see also below), which raises an important ethical issue, namely that apart from my own unawareness of doing research, the subjects of my research were also unaware of their position. Of course this means that there was no informed consent. See also the discussion by Martin Tolich (2010).

4   We should be aware that not all NGO fieldworkers are white and that Bushmen have historically maintained patron–client relationships with various black groups as well (see, e.g., Wilmsen 1989)**.**

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