CHAPTER ONE

“DIE GELD IS OP”¹ – STORYTELLING, BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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Confusion typifies fieldwork. Nothing is predictable. Two veteran Ngwatle hunters were frightened of a lizard, as Suzanne Berry, one of our research party, watched nonchalantly as a puff adder basked in the sun. (Field notes, Ngwatle 2009)

Storytelling around the campfire on warm days and bitterly cold nights is largely associated with indigeneity. The term ‘indigeneity’ as it is used here refers to remnant peoples on the margins of industrialized societies who are located primarily within an oral consciousness. Such people know few metaphors; they recite their experiences through fables, folklore and feelings. Things are what they are – concrete, known, explainable. Stories deeply rooted in mythology, framed through what is already known, underpinned by spiritual realms, provide the necessary understandings for birth, life, illness and death.

This chapter introduces readers to the journey that we will be taking in this book, how it came about, who the main story-tellers are, and why they are involved. The next three chapters will deal with conceptual frameworks, methods and the how of the doing.

One of the narrative strategies we will be using is the indented quotes taken from our field notes. The intention is to create for readers a sense of texture, of being-there, to envelop them in the experiences as best we can.

Storytelling in Modernity

The young boys at Ngwatle took delivery of the photos they had exposed on disposable cameras last year. Some of the photos are aesthetically sophisticated for beginners. Two years ago they took photos they thought we wanted.

¹ Afrikaans: “The money is finished”.
Modernity’s inheritance of oral traditions is found in homes across the world in radio and TV, in televangelism and in pop music. These media have reinterpreted the bardic function of medieval societies where roving bards travelled the countryside telling stories, updating the news, and offering social critique (see Fiske and Hartley 1978). Such stories were usually idiomatic, often drawing on myth and mythology, explaining how things came to be. Myth offers assurance, an already there-ness, what we all take for granted (Barthes 1972). Adam Bok, for example, told us a story at the Witdraai Bush camp of how the leopard got its spots by being stung by bees (Field notes, July 2007). The zebra, we learnt, got its stripes from the tortoise, the great artist of the Kalahari (Field notes, July 2009). These explanations are passed from generation to generation; they have no authors, and are taken for granted. Belinda Kruiper, the wife of the acclaimed artist, Vetkat Kruiper, told us the story of her life, love and experience over a period of many years. Her stories live on in many articles, theses, and books. Her autobiography is consolidated in *Kalahari RainSong* (2004), compiled by Elana Bregin. Bregin assumed the role of bard in this relationship. Belinda’s story mobilizes myth, but is also critical of policies, procedures and programmes. Academics are kinds of bards who collect stories, re-package them theoretically, and then circulate them in print form.

In July 2007, at !Xaus Lodge we interacted with a new kind of storyteller, a highly literate entrepreneur from the business community. I had known Glynn O’Leary for many years. Previously the owner of Cape Town’s Six Street Studios, he had also served on the board of the National Film and Video Foundation and consulted for the Department of Communication. He is an astute accountant with an unusually sophisticated aesthetic receptivity and sense of public service. Adding to his entrepreneurial bow, he briefly chaired Afri-tourism, but when the company went sour in mid-2004 he established Transfrontier Parks Destinations Ltd. O’Leary is a storyteller par excellence. His spellbinding oratory entrances audiences, sponsors, business partners, municipal officials, donors, development agencies and students. His even-handed and finely measured delivery

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2 I refer to ‘myth’ in the semiotic sense, in which it “refers to recurring themes, icons and stereotypes which claim common recognition within a cultural group with a shared ideology” (Tomaselli, 1999:66).