

THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES IN THE DOCUMENTATION OF ORAL TRADITIONS, A CASE OF THE SAN PEOPLE IN TSHOLOTSHO AND PLUMTREE

The role of archives in the documentation of oral traditions

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ABSTRACT

The Tshwao or San people, formally known as Bushmen, are believed to have been the first people to settle in what is known as Zimbabwe today. The migration of the agriculturalist ethnic groups, especially the Ndebele and Kalanga kingdoms, into their territory has affected their social way of life. It has led to forced assimilation, marginalization and dispossession of their land, including their rock paintings and denial of land rights. This has meant that they have lost most of their cultural values and identity, most notably their language, land and religion. There is therefore an urgent need to document the activities of the San people in order to salvage their cultural activities. Various cultural activities of the San people are connected to their land. Their religion is connected to particular land, for example Matopo and Njelele. This land has been taken away from their control, meaning their religion has been compromised. The San are generally nomadic and more inclined to a gathering and hunting life style. The fact that they can no longer move around because of resettlements of the Kalanga and Ndebele people on their land has disturbed this way of life. This article is based on the use of oral history interviews in collecting data. Purposive sampling will be done so that specifically targeted San people will be interviewed in such a way that they tell their life histories. Literature regarding the San people will also be reviewed.

Keywords: Zimbabwe San, National Archives Zimbabwe, documentation minority languages, Tshwao

INTRODUCTION

Libraries, archives and museums (LAM) play a major role in collecting, documenting, preserving and giving access to socio-economic and political memories of nations. It is very interesting nowadays that this trinity of institutions (LAM) is a very hot topic as it is being realised that 'archives, libraries and museums share common ground in that we exist for our users It is of no importance to the user whether these sources are administered by an archive, a library or a museum' (Ostby 2003: 3). National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) and National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) have seen that importance and they are usually working together in documenting some of the oral histories of Zimbabwe. This is so because of the observation that oral traditions also come embedded in artefacts. NAZ and NMMZ have worked together, for example, in a programme christened 'Capturing the fading memory' in which it was intended to fill the gaps in written history concerning the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe. They have worked together again in coming up with a document that will enable the Njelele religious shrine to be incorporated into UNESCO's list of intangible world heritage sites.

It is from such partnerships that NAZ is able to document some cultural aspects of the San people in Zimbabwe. In this regard, it is mainly working with the Creative Arts and Educational Development Association (CAEDA), which has managed to collect much on San people using oral interviews.

The San community finds itself in the radar of NAZ after it was noted that it is far away from the 'total archive' because there is nothing much on minority groups of Zimbabwe stored at NAZ. By minority groups we mean the Venda, Sotho, Nambya, Xhosa, Shangani, Khoi-San, Tonga and Kalanga. These groups of people's social narratives are silent in the repositories of NAZ compared with those of Shona and Ndebele, hence the drive to also incorporate them into the national historical narrative of Zimbabwe and this is mainly done through oral traditions. Concerning the San, the situation is worse as the extinction of their language looms large. It is therefore important for NAZ to document all socio-economic and political aspects of the San people as NAZ is one of the institutions in Zimbabwe mandated with that task.

The archival institutions are ports of call when one seeks information and even sometimes to authenticate and solve certain disputes, for example chieftainship wrangles. Pickover (2009: 2) observed that archives:

... provide the bedrock for society's understanding of the past. They underpin citizen's rights, assert identities and are crucial to truth recovery. They are also irreplaceable evidential statements of human experience on which social equality is built. Archives, particularly in countries in the process of transition to democracy, are of fundamental importance as evidence supporting victims' rights for reparation, a means of determining responsibilities for rights violations, and a basis for reconciliation and universal justice.

It is therefore important for archivists to go out there into the society and seek those marginalised voices such as those of the San people.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The San people in Zimbabwe are mainly found in Matabeleland South in Plumtree and Matabeleland North in Tsholotsho. Madzudzo (2001: 78) described them in the following words:

San constitute a minority group in Zimbabwe both nationally and locally. They are socially and economically marginalised by national policies and by their neighbours Economically they do not have sufficient resources to ensure food security. This insecurity leads to their political invisibility and the subordination of their interests to those of the dominant ethnic groups.

They are locally referred to as *abathwa* or *amasili*. They are socially despised as an ethnic group because of their poverty and other groups' ethnocentric evaluations of their culture (Madzudzo 2001: 78), hence such derogatory terms as *amasili*. Theirs is the history of violation of human rights since colonisation to the present day. Chennells (2001: 271–272) argued that 'their history is characterised by mobility and living lightly off the environment, rather than the striving for control, power and wealth in the form of material possessions that has persisted amongst others'.

The origin of San people in Zimbabwe is not all that clear. The San themselves tell different stories about their origin. Madzudzo (2001: 79) stated that the:

San in Zimbabwe are autochthonous to this country, though some groups came from the Maitengwe areas of Botswana – allegedly having taken flight from persecution at the hands of Tswana chiefs who were reputed to commit violence against people who broke their laws. A major "settlement" which predates the arrival of sedentary agro-agriculturalist ethnic groups like the Kalanga and Ndebele has been found near present-day Ndolwane (previously Dzibanezebe) in Bulilimamangwe. Some of the elders in this settlement say that they came from Zambia via Botswana.

In Plumtree the San are found in the Bulilima district in the Makhulela Ward comprised of Thwayithwayi and Siwowo villages. The agriculturalist group in this area are the Kalanga. In Tsholotsho the San are mainly found at Sikente, Mgodimasili, Butabubili, Pelandaba, Mtshina, Mkandume and Maganga. Most of the San population is located in Tsholotsho, the place they originally called Tsoro o tso in their Tswao language (Ndlovu 2010: 17) than in Plumtree.

The oral history interviews carried out among the San people of Zimbabwe revealed the antagonism that exist between the San, the Kalanga, the Ndebele people and the Zimbabwean government. The San people complain about land dispossessions that affected them, claiming that the agriculturalist-ethnic groups took their land and that their cultural heritage, such as rock paintings, is not benefiting them as they think that these cultural and archaeological artefacts have been grabbed by the government from

them. Land dispossessions that affected the San date back to the colonial times when they were forced to relocate from the Hwange National park. They claim that these land issues have tended to affect their religious and cultural life. The continual loss of their Tshwao language is another issue affecting them.

The San people in Zimbabwe still suffer from negative stereotyping. It is believed that they are wild and primitive. Many people still believe that they possess powers to disappear into thin air, that they are short and run away when people come visiting them (Ndlovu 2010: 8). This clearly shows the ignorance and misunderstanding about the San people. Few people understand them and the problem is that their life is judged according to Western and agriculturalist ethnic groups' norm of civilisation. It is from that background that the National Archives of Zimbabwe thinks it is very important to document the history and all cultural aspects of the San people, and that this may lead to the demystification of some of the perceptions about them.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF MINORITIES HISTORIES

Dube (2011: 282) mentioned that the oral history unit at the National Archives of Zimbabwe was originally established in 1968 and it sought to fill the gaps that existed in the archival material by collecting the underdocumented and undocumented material. Murambiwa et al. (2012: 8) stated that initially the:

Oral history programme was originally established for the recollection of British colonial occupation and a remembrance for those who served the then Rhodesia in various ways. In essence, the African stories were largely neglected unless it had incidental or circumstantial relevance to the colonial occupation of the country. Following the attainment of independence in 1980, the Oral History Unit was eventually expanded to the whole society and diverse ethnic communities of Zimbabwe. By documenting the oral histories of African ethnic communities the Oral history programme set out to preserve and document the culture and traditional rites and practices that celebrated the African renaissance in an independent Zimbabwe.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe has mainly used oral history programmes to fill the gaps found in the national record. One of its familiar programmes was 'Capturing the Fading Memory'. In this programme the NAZ, National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and the history department of the University of Zimbabwe worked together in collecting stories of war about the Zimbabwe Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). This was done in realisation that the war of liberation was mainly narrated by the colonisers and the voices of combatants themselves were not heard.

Later it was noted that the voices of minority groups are silent and virtually non-existent at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). It was from then that it was decided that most of the oral history programmes should target minority groups such as the Shangani, the Kalanga, Venda, Xhosa, Chewa, Ndau, Tonga, San and the

Sotho people. However, much still needs to be done in this regard as lack of funding is crippling some of these programmes. It is therefore from these initiatives that the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Bulawayo finds itself in possession of the oral testimonies of the San people.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE SAN LANGUAGE

Losing a language, irrespective of the number of speakers of that language, deprives humanity of a part of our universal human heritage insofar as the language embodies a unique worldview and knowledge of local ecosystems (Nettle and Romaine 2000: 5, cited in Maja 2008: 4).

Does not the sun shine equally for the whole world? Do we not all equally breathe the air? Do you not feel shame at authorizing only three languages and condemning other people to blindness and deafness? Tell me, do you think that God is helpless and cannot bestow equality, or that he is envious and will not give it? (Constantine cited in Maja 2008: 1)

The San language in Zimbabwe is facing extinction. Ndlovu (2010: 8) observed that from the estimated population of 1 680 only 7 to 11 people can speak the Tshwao/San language fluently and these are between the ages of 70 and 97. The implications of this are far reaching as language is a medium of communication, it mirrors one's identity and is an integral part of culture. Ngugi wa Thiongo referred to language as the soul of culture. Put differently, a person's language is a vehicle of their particular culture (Maja 2008: 3). It therefore is important that the National Archives of Zimbabwe tries its best to document the San language so that it cannot be lost and that linguists do research on that which may be relevant for later generations.

WHAT THE SAN HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR LANGUAGE

Through oral history interviews, one of the interviewees (Peter, Interview 22 June 2012) categorically stated that because of their poverty, the Ndebele and Kalanga people despised them and in the process their language was looked down upon. For them, they were forced to learn Ndebele or Kalanga because they tended to work for these people in order to sustain themselves since their nomadic life was disrupted. Since the Ndebele people have cattle, milk and grain, the San women were indirectly forced to get married to the Ndebele and the Kalanga for survival. In these intermarriages, the San people lost control of their language as they ended up learning the Ndebele and Kalanga languages. Such trends in language loss are described by May (2000: 369), as cited by Maja (2008:3), in the following way:

... language loss is not only, perhaps not even primarily, a linguistic issue – it has much more to do with power, prejudice, (unequal) competition and, and in many cases, overt discrimination and subordination Language death seldom occurs in many communities of wealth and privilege, but rather to the dispossessed and disempowered.

The loss of language for indigenous groups such as the San also means the loss of traditional biodiversity-related knowledge in regard to their environment. Maffi, cited in Langton and Ma Rhea (2005: 44–45), argued that most of the world’s linguistic diversity is carried by very small communities of indigenous and minority people. These are languages, he pointed out, that have been and continue to be under threat, as a result of ‘ever-growing assimilation pressures that promote incorporation of their speakers into mainstream society and language shift (the progressive abandonment of a native language in format of an acquired majority language at the societal level)’.

This inextricable link between language and biodiversity loss is explained again by Maffi, quoted by Langton and Ma Rhea (2005: 45):

At the local level, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness has often developed even among human groups belonging to the same broadly defined cultural area or whose languages are considered to be historically related, and within the same bioregion. As local groups have adapted to life in specific ecological niches, they have developed specialised ways of talking about them, to convey this vital knowledge and ways of acting upon it for individual and group survival.

One of the interviewed (Jane, Interview 12 June 2012) bemoaned the dying of their San language, which they call the Tshwao. He noted that there are no publications in Tshwao as the language is yet to develop and be coded into a writing system or orthography. In relation to other San communities in southern Africa, it may appear that the San in Zimbabwe are lagging behind in their language development. It appeared that even those few elders (less than twenty) who can speak Tshwao have not passed the language to the younger generation.

It therefore becomes clear that this group of people are on the verge of extinction if urgent measures to try and redress the situation are not taken into consideration. However, hope is not lost as the new constitution of Zimbabwe has designated Tshwao as one of the official languages even though it is wrongly called Khoisan, which the San vehemently reject. What is to be seen then is concrete action on the ground, not just the words of the constitution. It is laudable that such institutions as the African Language Research Institute (ALRI) have for the first time transcribed some of the Tshwao language. The Creative Arts and Education Development Association (CAEDA), an organisation that seeks to uplift the living standards of the San people, has managed to collect many oral testimonies about the San. It also spearheaded the opening of a Cultural Heritage Centre of the San. So with all these organisations working together in trying to preserve the San people’s legacy and National Archives of Zimbabwe coming in as an official national repository, it means all is not lost.

LAND DISPOSSESSIONS

It is not only the agriculturalist-ethnic groups of people that have suffered from land dispossession, as historical narratives tend to emphasise, but also the San people. The

San people of Zimbabwe were moved away from their original land when it was being divided into farms during colonisation. The establishment of the Wankie Game Reserve worsened their fate. The colonial and post-colonial governments viewed land as mainly used for farming. They did not take into account that the San communities treated land as a reservoir of natural resources. The state's policies therefore 'disrupted a vital link between San and the products of the land. Having effected this breach, successive governments have not provided realistic alternatives for San to embark on a new life' (Madzudzo 2001: 91).

The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 officialised the expropriation of land from the black people. The black population was forcibly removed from the prime fertile land to infertile tsetse fly infested areas. Madzudzo (2001: 91), writing about Land Husbandry Act in regard to the San people, argued that the Act:

Aimed to provide for "the control of the utilisation and allocation of land occupied by natives [racially but not ethnically defined] and to ensure its efficient use for agricultural purposes" Such colonial laws did not make provision for San as a special group that had hitherto relied not on agriculture or pastoralism, but on natural resources.

As the land and its natural resources became state property it meant that the nomadic way of their life was curtailed as they were no longer free to move around as they wanted. Other Acts such as the Game and Fish Preservation Act of 1929 meant that it became difficult for them to sustain their basic needs. They became poachers in the land that they have lived in harmony with for thousand years.

Through oral history interviews the San talk a lot about their removal from Hwange area when the Hwange National Park was established. Joshua (Interview 2012) said the area (Hwange National Park) was good for their livelihood both in terms of fauna and flora. The name, which is continuously mentioned in the interviews, is that of a person they refer to as 'Dabson', who victimised them in the process of establishing the game reserve. They said 'Dabson' forced them to pave roads that connect to watering holes. They say 'Dabson' even took their donkeys, which were fed to the lions. The San people also mentioned how some of their parents died or disappeared in the process (Samson, Interview 18 June 2012).

Ndlovu (2010: 90) stated that in fact 'Dabson' was Ted Davidson appointed as the first Game Warden who established his camp near Dete and started patrolling the area by lorry under the guidance of a local hunter, J.G. Lundin. Davidson's first task in the establishment of game reserve was to provide water, and in the process used San who knew the area in and out as scouts. Ndlovu (2010: 91–92) stated that:

After the identification of all the secrets waterholes, Ted hired more people from the San communities for the construction of roads that would link all the waterholes. Having mapped the area the way he wanted, Ted started telling the San that they were no longer wanted in the reserve area. He told them to move out and never to come back. The San were shocked by this act and

having lived in the area for so long, it was not easy for them to just pack-up and be gone. The area had many memories for them and they felt attached to the place. When they tried to protest, they were at times rounded up during the night and beaten up or at times they were imprisoned. Their possessions were confiscated on several occasions including donkeys, hunting tools and animal skins that were used as blankets.

It is not only the San people of Zimbabwe who were forced out from their lands when the national park was established. This same *modus operandi* was used against the San in other parts of southern Africa. Chennells (2001: 273) observed that:

[O]ne of the most widespread methods in Southern Africa was the removal of resident San in order to make way for nature reserves (for example the Etosha Game Reserve in Namibia, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana, and the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa ... in order to provide pristine areas of “wilderness” for tourism and recreation of the upper classes.

While the San people were being moved from the Hwange National Park to the surrounding areas, they were then surrounded also by the agriculturalist-ethnic groups who were being resettled by the colonial government. They no longer had control of the lands they used to sustain their livelihood. The other area they used to inhabit was Matopos, which unfortunately is now controlled by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) because of its rock paintings. During oral history interviews the San people were complaining bitterly that their heritage is being used but not benefiting them (Thomas, Interview 20 June 2012). They said tourists are coming to Matopos to view their rock paintings but the money received does not find its way to them while they are the authors of these rock paintings.

All these are clear cases of human rights violations and it then becomes important that they are documented. Archives are at the core of human rights, accountability and good governance (Masuku and Makwanise 2012: 190). The United Nations General Assembly on 13 September 2007 adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (DRIP) preamble, cited in Morse (2011: 4), outlined that this declaration is for:

Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources.

In South Africa, oral history was used by the San people to reclaim their land back. Chennells (2001: 274) mentioned that:

oral testimony by key San informants, backed up by initial research resources, established irrefutably that the Khomani San were one of the San communities that had since time immemorial lived, hunted, gathered and roamed over the Southern area of South African Kalahari ecosystem.

This saw the government of South Africa in March 1999 returning 40 000 hectares of land to the San people. This is how important oral testimonies can be. In Zimbabwe the San still do not have land rights. Therefore the National Archives of Zimbabwe, by documenting oral testimonies of the San people, may in future be able to assist them if they decide to fight for their land rights.

RELIGION

Religion is very important in identification of people as it is unique to a specific group of people. Some religious activities are associated with certain lands. Morse (2011: 2) echoed the same sentiments by stating that ‘one of the common elements among Indigenous peoples globally is their deep spiritual and cultural links to traditional lands and waters’. The role of archival institutions becomes challenging when it comes to the documentation of religion. For example, the NAZ has tried to collect and preserve the national song, which is sung by the Ndebele during the *inxwala*-festival (first fruits ceremony). This song functions almost like a national anthem of the Ndebele people. The NAZ has failed to find anyone who is willing to sing this song for its documentation as they find it very sacred and not just something to be sung lightly. However, despite the challenges of documenting religious aspects of indigenous groups, the NAZ has oral testimonies about that aspect concerning the San people of Zimbabwe.

The San people of Zimbabwe have a very different religious life compared with the agriculturalist-ethnic groups. They tend to be animistic in their approach to religion. Through oral testimonies it was noted that they valued trees in their worship (Peter, Interview 22 June 2012). They mention the tree called *Mbuyu Dema* found at Tshitatshawa in Tsholotsho as one of their meeting places where they used to perform traditional healing activities (Samson, Interview 18 June 2012). Ndlovu (2010: 20) said that in fact *Mbuyu Dema* is the Baobab tree:

[It is] thought to be one of the biggest trees in Zimbabwe. It is said that in 1973 about 23 school children from the area were lined together around the tree touching hands to measure the diameter of the tree. The tree was first discovered by the San people as they moved about in search of food during the 1900s.

The San people explained that they used to conduct some of their religious rituals in Hwange National Park. The places mentioned are Chini, Bhongobhongo, Bakikabara, Gomo, Lompanda and Chamzeze (Jane, Interview 12 June 2012). In these areas watering holes are mostly the centres of worship. Concerning the Chini watering hole, the San people will visit the place and perform their religious rituals by throwing in tobacco snuff and other gifts. If their prayers are answered, the ‘big snake’, which stayed there,

will go back into the water. If the opposite happened, it means their prayers are not answered. When the interviewee (Peter, Interview , 22 June 2012) was pressed further in regard to whether this snake belongs to the world of myth or the real world, the answer was that it was a real snake. However, it was observed that sometimes the respondents fail to differentiate the mythological world from the practical world as this for them is sometimes intertwined.

The dislocation of the San people from the land they originally occupied meant also the disruption of their religious life. Their forced assimilation into the agriculturalist-ethnic groups also meant they ended up assimilated into the religious arena of these groups. Some cultural dances of the San are part of their religious life, what it means then is that with the death of their religious life some of their dances, especially the *bhoro* dance, are in danger of extinction.

LEADERSHIP ISSUES OF THE SAN PEOPLE

The San people, before being displaced, used to stay in different small clan groups. Within a group some of the elders acted as group leaders. They did not have the chiefs and headmen like the agriculturalist-ethnic groups (Moyo, Interview 18 June 2012). This is supported by written sources, as Ndlovu (2010: 81) noted that the San people used to live in bands of ten to forty people with no centralized leadership structures. Decisions were made by consensus. Material possessions, though not encouraged, were distributed on an egalitarian basis (hunting sticks, knives etc.), and men and women, though they had different roles, were treated as equals.

With the forced assimilation into the Ndebele and Kalanga people, it means they are now paying homage to the chiefs of agriculturalist-ethnic groups. Through oral history interviews it is clear that the San people are not happy with this arrangement. They are now advocating for their own chiefs and headmen. However, they note the challenges of this as they do not know how this can be done as they are already chiefs in the lands they now occupy. These original ethnographic elements of the San people are fast disappearing as they continue to be assimilated into the agriculturalist ethnic groups. If these ethnographic tendencies are documented, this information may also be used in demystifying perceptions and stereotyping associated with the San people. It becomes important that these cultural traits are documented and preserved. These cultural traits, if they are preserved, can be used for research, especially by those civic groups that may want to ameliorate problems bedeviling the San people. This is very important because it will make them culturally sensitive when approaching the San people.

The San people are not represented in almost any of the levels of government. Their exclusion from the political mainstream means their grievances are generally ignored. Their lack of a formal education means that there are unemployable and have to survive from hand-outs as starvation is the order of day for them. Those few San people who are formally educated have tended to disassociate themselves from them (Thomas, Interview 20 June 2012). It is from all these challenges that some of the San people who

were interviewed were calling the government to return them to the Hwange National Park where they were removed by the colonial government. They say the government has failed them and the politicians just want to use them.

The present government has been trying to correct some of the historical land disruptions that took place during the colonial period. This is seen through land reforms where the people are being resettled. The chiefs who were demoted by the colonial government to headmanship are now being reinstated as chiefs again. The San people appear not to be benefiting from all these programmes mainly because they do not have leaders to represent them. This then calls for archival institutions to archive almost everything concerning the San people so that their legacy is not lost forever. It is interesting to note that the oral histories for the agriculturalist ethnic groups collected in Tsholotsho and Plumtree do not reveal anything about the San people. It is as if they do not exist. That shows to what degree the San people are being removed from the national historical narrative of Zimbabwe.

THE VOICE OF THE ARCHIVIST

The archival collections tend to be influenced by those in power. This elitist approach to archival science means that those in power use archives to cement their political positions. The National Archives of Zimbabwe is not exempt from that, because during the colonial period the national memory was biased toward the colonial masters. The advent of independence in 1980 meant that this changed as the new rulers that are Zimbabwe African National Unity (ZANU) party cadres also altered the national memory to their favour to the detriment of other groups who fought against colonialism but did not win the elections in 1980, such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The historical legacy of ZAPU remains threatened because of selective memorialisation in Zimbabwe's institutions of heritage preservation. The indigenous groups of Zimbabwe that seem to be represented in the national social memory are the Shona and the Ndebele. Other minority groups such as the San are silent in the social memory of the nation. Their voices are not heard on national platforms. It is as if they are not part of Zimbabwe.

It is interesting that this is set to change as programmes are put in place to collect the narratives of minority groups. Archivists are now becoming aware that they have to go out there in the society and give the voice to those who are silenced. Such reasoning is well put by Cook (2001: 30–31), who:

[a]dvocated for macro appraisal of government records which is a method that searches for multiple narratives and hotspots of contested discourse between citizen and state, rather than just accepting the official policy line but it deliberately seeks to give voice to the marginalized,

to the “Other”, to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate.

What this means for the heritage institutions such as NAZ is to go out there and seek these marginalised voices of the San people so that their historical, social, political, religious and economic narratives are incorporated in the national historical narrative of Zimbabwe.

As mentioned above, as archival institutions can play a major role in land restitutions and other human rights violations, it becomes paramount that archivists in this postmodern era document these violations so that where possible they can be solved. Among the oral testimonies collected by NAZ the respondents in the San community complained about forced removals from the lands they used to inhabit. This evidence, which is now in the custody of the NAZ, can be used for litigation where possible so that the San people can be compensated or reclaim their lands.

The documentation of the San’s people’s history is very important because their elders are dying and the younger people are being assimilated into agriculturalist groups such as the Ndebele and Kalanga. This means that their heritage can be totally lost. It then becomes the duty of the archivist to document this endangered heritage. It is now time that the NAZ moves away from selective archives to ‘total archives’ where the voices of the minority groups and the marginalised are represented. Theories that postulate that ethnic social groups in charge of governance are the ones that shape the national narrative (as Sassoon and Burrows [2009: 1–2] argued by stating that ‘who gets remembered, and in what ways this occurs, remains an issue of deep contest, with the constituency of the social group in charge of remembering often influencing the patina of the collections contained within archives and other memory institutions’) should now not apply to archival institutions as inclusivity is now the popularised and recommended discourse.

CONCLUSION

The San people of Zimbabwe are facing a plethora of challenges. Their original cultural life is facing extinction together with their Tshwao language. It is from such a background that the National Archives of Zimbabwe is trying its best to salvage some of their cultural practices that can be documented and preserved including their language.

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