

DECOLONISATION OF THE MIND AND THE PROBLEM OF THE SAN ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract. The San—that is, the Khoisan languages speakers of Botswana—being an ethnic minority, are facing numerous problems due to the linguistic, cultural, economic, and political domination by the mainline Botswana society. As they are forced to transition from a hunter-gatherer mode of life, socio-political and economic dynamics also do not favour them. This paper seeks to critically analyse the position of the San in Botswana and demonstrate the need to decolonize the mind in order to free the San, who are reeling under linguistic and cultural dependence. Dependence is formed in part because more educated people enter into land deals to exploit natural resources with TNCs, with rural populations living in these territories. It is shown that the San communities are highly endangered both socially and linguistically. These dramatic phenomena are taking place now, in post-colonial, independent Africa. The theories that are employed in this research help to critically analyse the social conditions that the San find themselves in in Botswana. The paper further argues that the San are in almost a similar situation that other African societies were in during the rule of European imperialism. It is demonstrated in this paper that, without mind decolonisation, the imposition of the developmental power and the socio-political hegemony of the mainline society exerted on the San people can lead to sad consequences. There is therefore an imperative need for decolonising the mind for the ethnic linguistic minority to be liberated.

Keywords: Khoisan, San (Basarwa), Botswana, marginalized ethnic groups, mind decolonialisation, ethnic minorities, remote area dwellers

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-80-96

For citation: Chebanne A. (2024). Decolonisation of the Mind and the Problem of the San Ethnic Minorities in Botswana. *Journal of the Institute for African Studies*. № 3. Pp. 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-80-96>

INTRODUCTION

Numerous researchers (linguists, historians, and anthropologists) have made contributions towards the linguistic and ethnographic distinction of Khoe and San [Skold, Sandstrom, Bolaane 2015; Barnard 1992]. The analysis of their works confirms a cross-border cultural identity in southern Africa. Some of these publications indicate that the word Khoisan was often used as a racial term, referring to the two groups (Khoi and San)

as belonging to “a second species of the genus homo” [Köhler 1981]. This term had, to non-linguists, taken on a pejorative connotation, often relegating the people classified as Khoisan to a subhuman class [Chebanne 2010]. It was only after Schapera’s [1930] publication that the term was rehabilitated and transformed beyond racial and physical characterization. The use of the terms ‘Khoi’ and ‘San’ remains complex in academia, because some researchers insist that the more proper way of denoting these people is “Khoekhoe” and “Non-Khoekhoe” [Traill 1986; Vossen 1998]. As Vossen [1984: 33] notes, “whereas the Khoekhoe-speaking peoples (“Hottentots”) are cattle-herders, the culture of the other Khoekhoe-speaking peoples (Bushmen, Basarwa, San) is based predominantly on a forager mode of life.”

In response to the misunderstanding that still exists regarding the two terms “Khoi” and “San,” Barnard [1992: 7] explains that the term “Khoisan” has long been perceived as both a cultural and linguistic label. Khoi (in old Nama orthography) or Khoe (in modern Nama orthography) mean “person.” In traditional scientific terminology, this refers to South African and Namibian peoples with particular languages (Nama, Ora, etc.) and a culture of pastoralism. On the other hand, the term “San” does not refer to any particular linguistic affiliation, as the languages spoken by “San” belong to at least three different groups [Barnard 1992; Vossen 1984]. The term “San,” as it transcends a distinct cultural identity across the borders of southern Africa, is a collective term that refers to a diverse array of indigenous groups who speak the many languages and dialects within the Khoisan language family [Barnard 1992; Saugestad 2001].

In Botswana, the San, who are speakers of Khoisan languages, are called “Basarwa.” The term “Basarwa” as a designation for Khoisan speech communities appears in early ethnographers’ and anthropologists’ writings to denote what was variably called “Bushmen” and later Khoisan [Schapera 1930]. The terms “San,” “Bushmen,” and “Basarwa” have been used to refer to people with thousands of years of history of hunting and gathering in southern Africa [Silberbauer 1981]. This nomenclatural problem also contributes to the mishandling of the San communities in the general socio-political and socio-economic narrative of Botswana policymakers [Chebanne 2020; Saugestad 2001].

This article takes from Chebanne et al [2021] and Chebanne [2020] who discussed the fate of the Khoisan languages speakers or San¹ minority ethnic groups in Botswana and raised the issue of their extrication. In the post-colonial academic literature, the question of decolonisation rarely looks into the internal dynamics of African societies and how they relate to themselves [Saugestad 2001; Silberbauer 1981]. Subsequent to decolonisation, those in power (mainly the dominant ethnic groups) simply put themselves in the shoes of the European colonizer and imposed themselves, their will, their language, and their culture on the minorities and vulnerable groups within their geographic borders [Chebanne, Dlali 2021; Chebanne 2020]. The narratives of the majority rule simply eclipse some socio-political situations that saw some ethnic groups impose the language and culture of those in power. Modernization became a tool to

¹ Though the terms Khoisan and San are used interchangeably in this discussion, they are not similar. San is a cultural term referring to people issuing from a hunter-gather mode without the practice of agriculture, while Khoisan is a linguistic term that describes click language speakers.

forcibly assimilate and cause some indigenous communities to abandon their ways of life [Batibo, Chebanne 2020; Barume 2000; Batibo 2015a, 2015b].

In the numerous definitions and discussions provided for post-colonialism, the emphasis is often directed to post-modern intellectual discourses that entail responses to, and examination of, the cultural heirloom of colonialism [Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1995; Chebanne, Dlali 2021]. In these discourses, post-colonialism covers a set of theories found in many disciplines, such as philosophy, political science, social history, sociology, feminism studies, religious and theological studies, in films and literature. The aim of post-colonialism discourse is geared towards the eradication of the colonial thinking as manifested in culture, economy, and social order. In Africa, and very often so, post-colonialism is an ideology that deals with extricating Africans not from the yoke of colonial legacies but just away from the period. It can therefore be interpreted as moving from the independence to an era of self-rule, often of the ruling elite. It is rarely a development into an era of mutual respect and understanding among African peoples. In Africa, also, post-colonialism does not create a conducive forum for the multiple voices of the hitherto downtrodden masses. Importantly also, in Africa, replacing the colonial master and maintaining his vices is the order of the day [Chebanne 2020].

In Africa, colonialism is most often viewed as something done from outside, similar to what African people underwent when European and Arab settlers imposed their political dominion and culture on Africa. What is most memorable to Black Africans is the “Scramble for Africa” of the Western powers, which started around 1870 and lasted up to the end of the First World War and beyond. It affected Africa in a multitude of diverse ways: 1) colonial borders did not respect ethnic and linguistic identities; 2) traditional kingdoms and territorial boundaries were disregarded; 3) European customs and laws were imposed to directly supplant African ones; 4) African religions were demonised and heathenised; 5) African languages were regarded as languages of ignorance and branded as “grammatically deficient” while African cultures were called cultures of primitivity; and notably 6) Africans were rendered strangers in their own land, and their lands were firmly put under the control of the settlers [Chebanne 2020].

Colonialism in Black Africa directly followed the abolition of the slave trade and the creation of independent states of the Americas. Buying slaves and sending them to the Americas and Europe could no longer benefit Europeans. Colonialism, thus, was primarily and predominantly concerned with land resources and economic gains from these conquered or claimed lands. In colonialism, Africans were made slaves in their own land. The dual exploitation, of the African people for labour and of their land for natural and agricultural resources for world markets, created economic fortunes for the colonial powers [Colchester 1995: 10–11]. Some European states, such as Belgium, Portugal, France, and Spain, intended that the claimed territories became extensions of their territories and the indigenous populations assimilated, decimated, or ruthlessly denied any land possession [Chebanne 2020].

Subsequent to the Second World War, as the colonial socio-political conditions became intolerable, many African countries started liberation struggles, which culminated in independence movements. In many instances, however, those who led these movements were themselves mentally colonised, for example, in the case of Mozambique and Angola or in the case of the French territories. In many cases, political

elites of these countries simply wanted to claim political and economic benefits for themselves. In the former British colonies, the educated and therefore the mentally colonised independence leaders also led their countries. The point made here is that Black African independence did not completely liberate the African mind, their culture and language and/or bring any indigenization order in any Black African country, and Barnard [1998] underscores this view for Botswana [Chebanne 2020].

Despite the fact that neo-colonialism is perceived as indirect colonialism, whereby European powers perpetuated their hold economically [Shillington 1995: 409; Rodney 1973], it had and continues to have dividing effect on the African population by imposing those exploitation mechanisms primarily on rural or uneducated citizens. The educated negotiate land deals with multinationals for natural resources exploitation in the lands occupied by the rural people. Multinationals exploit rural people as cheap labour, and thus the colonial cycle comes around in new forms, and this time perpetrated and perpetuated by African elites and governments. While for most of the population this pitiful situation is escapable through education and economic power, there are some population groups that remain in the vicious cycle of exploitation. These are the communities that cultural anthropologists term the “indigenous peoples” of Africa. The term will be debated later in the discussion when an identification of some of these peoples is made [Chebanne 2020].

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT ON THE SAN

Botswana is historically inhabited by the San, who are Khoisan languages speakers. There are more San ethnic groups with their Khoisan-associated languages in Botswana than in any country. Yet the country has not been paying sufficient attention to developing a cultural and linguistic policy aimed at preserving the San, which could provide for their development and intergenerational succession of their cultural traditions. Some reasons to explain this state of affairs are that language and cultural identity are not elements of human rights, but rather belong to what is termed intangible heritage, and in this regard, Hamel [1997: 2] states: “Persistent biological metaphors—languages are born, grow, decline, and die—contribute to a general common-sense belief that there is nothing to plan, regulate, or legislate about languages since they exist like living beings whose life cycle is largely resistant to social ordinance... that language laws as such have had little impact on actual language behaviour.” [Chebanne 2020]. This approach can be described as a variation of social Darwinism applied to languages and cultures: the fittest shall survive, and the weak shall perish, no matter what laws and policies are introduced. The introduction of special legislation in this respect is therefore deemed impractical and unnecessary.

This view that Botswana policy makers maintain in the management of ethnic issues overlooks the role of language and culture in the life of a people. Language and culture have a social and historical role to identify a people and give them even the biological reason to live in a given geographical environment. The questions of language, culture, and land are therefore critical in creating a people’s identity and in determining whether they enjoy or do not enjoy fundamental human rights. The San social history issues are critical to the discussion that is pursued in order to argue for their decolonisation, which

inevitably should start with the mind decolonisation Botswana policy makers [Chebanne 2020].

The argument made in this article is that that the necessity for mind decolonisation in Botswana arises from the fact that the state of dependency is imposed on some communities, especially those who, for socio-cultural and economic reasons, have not benefited much from the advancement that came about with political and economic liberation that other citizens obtained after the fall of colonialism. In Africa, such people are, for example, the BaTwa of the Congo, the Maasai of the Great Lakes plains in East Africa, and the Khoisan languages speakers in southern Africa [Chebanne 2020].

THE KHOISAN LANGUAGES SPEAKERS' HISTORY AND CURRENT CONTEXT

The current situation of San (the Khoisan languages speakers) has long interested anthropologists and other social scientists in Botswana and other countries. The arguments of author [Chebanne 2020] and his analysis with Batibo [Batibo, Chebanne 2020] on Khoisan colonization were a rejoinder of earlier critical arguments on the pitiful state of the San people in Botswana [Saugestad 2001]. Hitchcock [2002], when discussing the land and identity issues of the San, titles his article: "We are the first people." The question that has always been asked is: "Are the speakers of Khoisan languages the only indigenous people in Botswana?" The conception of "ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities" as it is understood comes from the text of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)². This text stipulates that in those states, in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language. Consequently, such minorities require protection from the state in order to guarantee them their basic human rights [Chebanne 2020].

In research, however, the term "indigenous" as is currently used is more problematic from historical and socio-political consideration, especially in Botswana. In strict ethnographic consideration, it refers to geographical autochthons, or aboriginals, provided that a cut-off date in the chronology of settlement or colonization is accepted. Thus, after the colonial era, in independent Africa, the term indigenous may be totally unmeaning or confusing in its usage. As disputed by Hitchcock and Holm [1993], the class of dominated people who opt to maintain their historical and cultural ethnic distinctiveness would, in this sense, have historical rights to certain territories, while the non-autochthonous people would be regarded as settlers or invaders. The political history of this categorisation of people should therefore be not construed to have lapsed with colonialism. In an attempt to provide a working definition of who is indigenous in an African context, Saugestad [2001: 43], as summarized by the author [Chebanne 2020: 27] may provide some guidance:

- 1) They have prior presence in the territory in question;

² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted 16 December 1966 by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). UN. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (accessed 18.09.2024)

- 2) They are subjugated and subjected to governance systems, which alienate them from their culture, language, and religious practices;
- 3) They have a traditional or cultural adaptation to their historical modes of subsistence using peculiar means of production that are different from those of the majority that subjugate them;
- 4) They have aspirations of maintaining their identity—habits, language, and culture different from those of their neighbours or their subjugators.

Hitchcock [2002] and the author [Chebanne 2020] use these criteria to define indigenous people of the San ethnicity as the “first-comers” to the territory in question, noting their maintenance of a peculiar lifestyle and socio-political exploitation by subsequent comers. In describing a similar position, Barume [2000: 32], has this to say: “These approaches (i.e., the approaches based on priority in time and colonisation—*A.C.*) consider indigenous peoples to be the aboriginal peoples, original occupants or prior inhabitants of a given land, who have become marginalized after being invaded by colonial powers or invaders who settled there and are now politically dominant over earlier occupants. Typical examples are the Indians of the Americas, the Aborigines of Australia, the Maori of New Zealand, the Inuit of Alaska, the Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa.”

The Khoisan-speaking ethnic communities, as they are reflected in historical accounts about them, are considered to be the direct descendants of the Later Stone Age hunter-gatherers inhabiting the south of Africa. [Shillington 1995: 34]. They are always spoken about, and, until recently, very little by themselves has been recorded or published. Even the San people’s physical traits and skin colour have been a biological, historical, and anthropological issue of debate. For example, Shillington defined them so: “They [Khoisan hunter-gatherers] are shorter and lighter-skinned than the black Negroid peoples of central and western equatorial Africa. From linguistic and archaeological evidence it seems that in the Later Stone Age times they lived right across the [Southern Africa] region. The practice of herding sheep and making pottery seems to have reached them from the early Bantu-speakers of western Zambia and Angola” [Shillington 1995: 34–35].

As per author’s [Chebanne 2010; Chebanne 2020] arguments, since the elites have wrestled power from the colonial masters, African leaders usually do not accept the thought that they could be involved in the formation of a system of dependency in respect to other African ethnic groups. Some of the arguments they present are that the ruling class did not come from outside Africa and that, as Africans, they have equal rights to the land with any population group regardless of its purported prior settlement status.

In their review of some of the literature on Khoisan, researchers have shown that the discrimination against the San, in regard to their cultural identity, has become deeply internalized in post-colonial Africa [Hitchcock 2002: 797; Cassidy et al. 2001: xiii]. Saugestad [2001] argues that the socio-historical status of the San has always been that of inferiority and servitude. Their languages and culture, their social organisation, and their historical hunter-gathering mode were generally not appreciated in Botswana. This negative attitude towards the San is underscored in numerous academic publications, for example, in the book by Skold, Moa and Bolaane [2015], who made comparative

research on San and the Norwegian Sami. This only conformed the earlier views expressed in Saugestad [2001].

In Africa, therefore, the concepts of minority and indigenesness have always been regarded as a problem. Since minority communities were ruled and lorded over by majority native population settlers, the post-independence attitude has been that the majority group was homogenous with the minorities, and their socio-political situation were similar [Batibo 2015a, 2015b, Chebanne 2010]. Thus, the liberation movement brought by the elites was construed to apply to all without exceptions. The idea that the postcolonial inter-ethnic situation could be equated to a new dependency was not conceivable [Barume 2000].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Africa, the reflection on mind decolonisation is inspired by Ngugi wa Thiong'o [1992] who critically argued and revolted against the imperialistic use of the English language in Africa. This revolt was also taken up from the thinking of Fanon [2005: 1952] who criticised the colonial condition of a Black Man, his loss of identity, and his pitiful delusion in his pursuit of European culture and language. Black man under colonial and neo-colonial borrowed identity is what Fanon qualifies as wretched (*les damnés de la terre*). Language creates a false identity of an African mind—he does not think like himself but shuns his language and thus limits his intellectual aptitudes [Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1992]. Rukuni [2012] in his thoughts, "Being Afrikan," makes compelling arguments for the rethinking of an African society that adopts and pursues its identity from its indigenous resources, culture and language, and philosophy.

When Fanon argues against the Black man's way of thinking that the only destiny for a Black man is to be White [Fanon 2008], he is reflecting on the colonial condition that led Ngugi wa Thiong'o to rebelliously agitate for the decolonizing of the African mind. For Fanon, decolonising of a Black man's mind is not just freedom from colonial oppression and encumbrance, but from the acquiescent mind that was instilled by colonialism and that manifests itself in post-colonial developments in Africa. In the analysis of Quijano [2007], colonialism and post-colonialism are misconstrued for modernity or development. That is what makes an African country maintain ties with the Western world that colonised it: African leaders believe that the West equals modernity, that it is *the* modernity. In Africa, this has enslaved the African mind.

It can be argued that it was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who opened this discourse of writing against neo-colonialism with his statement. Since Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a tremendous anti-imperialist and anti-colonial revolutionary upheaval has been occasioned by the forcible intervention of masses in history. The first decade after the independence was a decade of hope; the people were looking forward to a bright morrow in a new Africa finally freed from colonialism, and Kwame Nkrumah was the single most important theoretician and spokesman of this decade. This independent prophetic freedom did not last for a long time, as corruption, coups, and exploitation of African people by Africans became pervasive and the norm of the new political order. It quickly became clear that new African leaders simply replaced the colonial master and continued, in his stead, to fleece their countries of their wealth and natural resources.

According to the author [Chebanne 2022: 167] and the reflections of Oelofsen [2015], African elites used the colonial language to lord over the masses and created a language class that alienated Africans in their own land. Colonial languages became rehabilitated and entrenched as national languages. But no nation can develop on borrowed terms, be they linguistic, cultural, or technological, and it is a fallacy to believe that English has a role in servicing education and advancement in Africa. The hesitation to undertake mind decolonisation is therefore linked to the fixation on the use of foreign languages, subjugating of African indigenous languages, and refusal to revitalise ethnic languages.

In the argument of Mosime [2020], generally, the social policy of Botswana can be construed as deferring decolonisation, as it does not go as far as to address issues that would give equitable treatment to all social and ethnic communities in their socio-political situations. This governance mindset was also criticised by Good [2008], who believed that, in Botswana, the San ethnic minorities were suffering from dispossession and lack of democracy. Thapelo [2002] identified and qualified this dispossession of the San in mineral-rich postcolonial Botswana as their social exclusion that is accentuated by the market conditions they are facing. According to Kuela [2010] and Hitchcock [2002], while the land and natural resources of the San are being taken away, their social identity is left to undergo attrition under the assimilation by the hegemony of the mainline Tswana society. In the argument by Oelofsen [2015], the decolonisation of the African mind should start within the intellectual space of the ruling elite. These rulers, in many cases, have simply replaced European colonialists and now dominate the weaker ethnic groups in their countries.

The other argument for mental decolonisation and against postcolonial western intellectual domination is what Quijano [2007] views as their rationalisation of coloniality and modernity as a means to derive social and economic development. In Africa, the ruling elites behave as though development were what Europe prescribed for them. These are also the theoretical issues that Oelofsen [2015] argues against, insisting that the African mind, specifically that of the leaders, ought to be decolonised. And Rukuni [2012], in his philosophical argument, reminds Africans to be themselves, first and foremost, because, when they are African and not European, they can realistically solve their own social and economic development problems.

THE SAN IN THE CONTEXT OF BOTSWANA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL ORDER

The socio-political dispensation of Botswana does not show that it is conceived from a mind that is decolonised. Bennett [2002] elaborately discusses the Botswana socio-political condition of non-Tswana ethnic groups, such as the Basarwa (San), who used to hold the status of serfs. Under that social order, the Basarwa did not even qualify to be members of a ward in a *morafe* (tribe), and therefore their membership and rights in Tswana tribes were not recognized. How this situation of serfdom of the San evolved, is historically not clear, but as anthropologists suggest, it may be linked to their different modes of production: the agro-pastoralists encroached on the hunter-gatherers' lands and subsequently reduced them to serfs. Also, both historically and currently, land use and the land ownership pattern of the San generally differ from those of the agro-pastoralists who make material claim to the land they use [Chebanne 2020].

This negative social attitude is as old as the contact situations between the hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoralists. As Barnard [1992: 240] observes: “In more recent times, states (first colonial and later national ones) have exerted pressure through redefining the areas in which Bushmen may live and what activities they may engage in. There have been anomalies in Botswana. The most obvious is the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. This was established in 1958 for protection of the Bushmen; but in the 1980s its designation as “game reserve” as opposed to a tribal territory, led to pressure from European wildlife organizations, as well as the authorities in Botswana, to empty the area of its human inhabitants.”

Undoubtedly, this behaviour does not contribute to the decolonisation of mind, as it is comparable to the colonial means, by which people were disposed of their land in favour of what the settlers deemed economically viable or appropriate. Barume [2000: 20] observes: “The contemporary situation of African indigenous peoples is shaped by the African political environment which since colonial times has refused to acknowledge communities’ rights to existence as peoples” [Chebanne 2020].

As stated by author [2020: 21], Khoisan languages speaking communities in Botswana are in a very difficult situation. They do not qualify as an independent tribe with rights to live in a land that could be designated as tribal territory. They can only be allocated land that is under the tutelage of other recognized tribes. The land the San claim, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), is now considered a game preserve and tourism destination. As Barnard [1992: 241] aptly observes, “The problem with recent notions of land rights in southern Africa is that the technicalities of feudal land tenure, and with them the doctrine of aboriginal possession in natural law (as interpreted by Roman Dutch theorists) have generally been discounted, in favour of a notion of the state as supreme authority.”

Consequently, in Botswana, the state can dictate under which recognized tribe San community should fall. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve communities were divided and assigned to mainline ethnic entities, the Bakwena, Bangwato, and Bakgalagadi in Ghanzi in the 1990–2000s in the course of the state-initiated relocations of the San that started in mid-1990s. No Tswana tribe can be subjected to such division and dispossession. It therefore seems that, when it concerns San communities, the state is against any order that will facilitate for them to build tribal entities or constitute an identifiable ethnic group similar to the Barolong in the Ngwaketse-dominated Southern District and the Bakgatla ba ga Mmanaana in the Kweneng District [Cassidy et al. 2001; Bennett 2002]. Recalling the actions of the colonial powers after claiming the land from natives, Barume [2000: 23] observed that “the second strategy for achieving maximum and easy access to resources required the use of force to crush any attempt at resistance. People were forced to leave their villages to be integrated into more heterogeneous groups, located alongside the routes of exploitation such as railways, roads or rivers...” [Chebanne 2020].

The breakdown of principles in the quotation above shows us a situation similar to what the San experienced and continues to experience, which proves that the state has a mind that is not decolonised with regards to ethnic minorities. There is no liberation for these oppressed minorities. Nyati-Ramahobo [2002: 17], when discussing the question of ethnic identity and nationhood in Botswana, presents figures of existing ethnic

communities and languages—yet the country operates on the model of one national language, Setswana, and a foreign language for the “official written language,” English. All other ethnic languages are disregarded. And whereas, bigger and better organized ethnic groups were resilient under colonialism and neocolonialism, the same cannot be said of the San communities, whose small numbers and social organization are far from the complexity of other African societies [Chebanne 2020].

THE SAN HISTORICAL OPPRESSION AND THE NEED FOR MIND DECOLONIZATION

As the argument made here shows, the history of the San is full of dispossession. This historical situation has had disastrous consequences on these ethnic communities' existence as distinctive indigenous ethnic and linguistic groups, and not only in Botswana. For example, the neighbouring South Africa used to have so many of these communities, but to date it has lost some of them. Cultural and language assimilation into stronger ethnic groups occurred under their socio-cultural hegemonic influences, which are facilitated by the state. As of now, Botswana has no legal and social guarantees that such tragedies will not occur in future. The non-racial ideology, the widely acclaimed democracy, and the concomitant freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of Botswana have made the country a shining example of social and political governance in Africa, but it is far from the protection that the San direly needs [Chebanne 2020].

This situation and the problems of the San in general in Botswana have been aggravated by the expropriation of ancestral land from the San communities under the guise of development. In the arguments of researchers, the question of securing land rights for the San has been identified through various forums, including conferences and seminars, both national and international, as a critical component in programs for the improvement of the position of the San [Ng'ong'ola 1997; Saugestad 2001; Mogwe, Tevera 2000]. One of the ways that have been employed to take land from the San has been resettlement and relocation. Whereas the British colonial administrators had intended to allocate the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) for the San [Silberbauer 1981], the government of the independent Botswana initiated the process of the resettlement of the San outside the CKGR boundaries between 1997 and 2001, which has inspired a lot of international debate. The High Court of Botswana ruled out in favour of the San applicants on the 13th December, 2006³. However, the Government refused to comply with the ruling [Chebanne 2020].

The handling of land, culture, and language of minorities is an indicator that shows how a country decolonises its mind. As Kuela [2010] argued, land, culture, and language rights are intrinsically fundamental in any human community's existence, and leaving San minorities to enjoy their ownership is liberating. However, the history of oppression and assimilation of the San led to the fact that their land, culture, and language rights have been eroded in their interaction with the mainline society. Ancestral land, traditional culture, and native language make a human being, or, for that matter, a dignified human

³ Botswana court rules Bushmen evicted illegally. *NBC News*. 13.12.2006. <https://nbcnews.com/id/wbna16181993> (accessed 18.09.2024)

being with a connection to his or her people and their common history. In a democracy, those should be the universal values that define freedom and dignified living. When Kuela, one of the San evicted from the CKGR, sheds “Tears for My Land” [Kuela 2010], will he ever be pitied, listened to, will the things change to preserve his people? [Chebanne 2020].

There are examples of practical and humane solutions to this problem in some of the neighbouring countries, which shows that they have undergone mind decolonisation. South Africa has made an attempt to redress the San historical mistreatment, and one example is how the #Khomani San won a land claim in 1999, which provided them with 38 000 hectares of farming land that was taken away from them during the 1930s. The historic nature of the event was captured by South Africa’s President Thabo Mbeki, who announced that the victory marked “a step towards the rebirth of a people that nearly perished because of oppression” [Wilmsen 2002: 841].

In this regard, T. Mbeki’s conceptualization of the African Renaissance is decolonising, as it embraces the San minorities in a positive key. To eradicate this problem, Botswana, too, needs to decolonise its mind and ensure that a bill of rights and judicial review system are put in place to guarantee minority rights. In such a system, all persons, the majority and the minority alike, would have their rights to language, culture, territory, and all other human rights that individuals may feel entitled to. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, democracy based solely on majority rule does not achieve equity [Chebanne 2020].

EQUALITY OR THE PRESERVATION OF MINORITIES? THE NEED FOR POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION OF THE SAN

It would be unfair to say that the government of Botswana is not preoccupied by the issue discussed in this paper. The new Tribal Land Act of Botswana (Act No. 1 of 2018, which was passed in August 2017 and came into effect in 2022) is an evidence to this. One of the main reasons for the passing of this Act was that the previous Tribal Land Act (first enacted in 1968 and then amended in 1994) did not provide enough safeguards to prevent non-citizens from acquiring tribal land from the citizens of Botswana. As a result, while the old Tribal Land Act stipulated that for a company to be able to enjoy the privileges of a landholder under the Act, no less than 51% of its shareholders should be citizens of Botswana, the new Act raises the threshold to 100% percent. The land being one of the most sensitive resources in Southern Africa and most crucial for the well-being of the local population, it can be seen, therefore, that the government seeks ways to prevent the attempts of neocolonial powers and multinational corporations to gain hold on it, recolonizing the country in the literal sense of the word.

Unfortunately for the San, though, the new Act does not provide for them any better than the old one did. Nowhere in the new Act the San, or Basarwa, are mentioned; a grant of tribal land can be conferred by the tribal land boards to any Botswana citizen, regardless of his or her ethnicity. This ostensible equality for all is, in fact, just another manifestation of non-decolonised thinking, because equality in rights does not necessarily mean equality in possibilities.

As Saugestad puts it, “To pursue a policy of equality is not always enough to refrain from negative discrimination... In order to achieve equity in cultural manifestations for the minority, the state has an obligation to protect the exercise of this right, by preventing other members of society from hindering its exercise. The implication of this principle is that it allows not only for separate measures, but also for a positive discrimination of a minority, even for seeing positive discrimination as a fundamental human right” [Saugestad 2001: 43].

There is a multitude of ways how the positive discrimination in respect to indigenous peoples can be performed, in order to protect their rights to their traditional culture, way of life, native language, and economic and social well-being. A lot of countries worldwide have special laws that grant privileges to ethnic minorities. For instance, in China, non-Han students have bonus points added to their exam results when applying to institutions of higher education. In Russia, the indigenous minorities of the eastern and northern regions of the country do not pay land tax or income tax and may hunt and fish in their traditional areas without obtaining a license from the authorities. In the USA, there is a wide range of support programs, both at the federal and state level, which provide free healthcare, tuition, and other benefits to the Native Americans of the officially recognized tribes. But this is not the case in Botswana.

In the early days of the nation-building, directly after the independence, the homogeneity of the Botswana society was a very important idea for the sovereignty of the young state. It seems that, since that time, Botswana has been consistently and deliberately shunning the ethnic issues, substituting them with economic and social ones. A program oriented at poverty eradication, Remote Area Development Program, was introduced in Botswana in the 1970s, followed by the Revised Remote Area Development Program in 2009. Both programs were aimed at “remote area dwellers” of the marginalized rural and urban communities, regardless of their ethnicity and cultural affiliation. In 2013, Botswana’s Ministry of Local Government representative, when delivering a statement on RADP at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, stressed that the Constitution of Botswana protects the rights and freedoms of “every Motswana (i.e., citizen of Botswana—*A.C.*), irrespective of race, colour, religion, gender, political opinion or place of origin.” It is notable that, throughout her statement on the forum especially dedicated to indigenous issues, the government official only once mentioned the name (or, rather, the cover term) of an indigenous people, admitting parenthetically of the remote rural communities: “majority of whom are Basarwa.”⁴

Numerous reports by NGOs and resolutions of forums and conferences (for example, the Regional Conference on Development Programmes for Africa’s San/Basarwa Populations held in 1993 in Gaborone, Botswana) call for introducing a wide range of measures aimed at protecting the San’s rights to their land, language, culture, and traditions. Most of them agree that those measures require significant changes in

⁴ Statement by Ms. Halakangwa Mbulai, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government of the Republic of Botswana at the 12th session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. 23.03.2013. *Permanent Mission of the Republic of Botswana to the United Nations*. <https://cendoc.docip.org/collect/cendocdo/index/assoc/HASHe8ce/9838d277.dir/PF13Halakangwa296.pdf> (accessed: 24.09.2024)

Botswana's legislation and government policies. They would also require substantial financing, but that should not be a problem for the upper-middle-income Botswana, which in 2023, according to the World Bank data, ranked the 5th richest state in Africa with GDP (PPP) per capita of 19,383 international dollars⁵. The problem, it seems, lies in the lack of political will to introduce those changes, and that is the direct consequence of non-decolonised mentality.

The fate of the San's ancestral land, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve can be viewed as a sad and ironic example of this mentality. As mentioned above, it was established in 1961 by the British colonial administration of the Bechuanaland with the purpose of preserving the "Kalahari Bushmen's", as the San were called then, traditional way of life. The position of the independent Botswana government was that a wildlife reserve can not preserve both the wildlife and the indigenous population, so the latter have to move to other locations [Saugestad 2001: 222]. The forced relocations of the San started in 1997 and were, as Survival International, a human rights organization, claims, connected with the discovery of a diamond deposit within the Bushmen community of Gope in the CKGR⁶. The global diamond monopolist De Beers, who owned the Gope Exploration mining company, stopped all activity in their Gope mine in 2003 due to its unviability and later sold it to a London-based Gem Diamonds. Gope mine, renamed Ghaghoo mine, was officially opened in 2015, but had to be put on care and maintenance in 2017 due to technical and economic difficulties. As of March 2024, it was still closed and its future fate remains unclear. Given that De Beers was founded by Cecil Rhodes, this story of evicting the native population in order to exploit the natural resources they were sitting on bears close parallels to the history of diamond-mining in the Southern Africa during the colonial times, and it is an illustrative example of a non-decolonised mindset.

CONCLUSION

The paper has argued for the need to decolonise the mind with regards to ethnic communities, because the government still fails to recognize the fundamental human rights to land, culture, and language of the San minority, who are Khoisan languages speakers (Basarwa). Botswana's socio-political model of governance of ethnic issues cannot preserve the San, as the hegemonic perspective to development denies minorities socio-political recognition as independent ethnic entities. In the current situation, the language, cultural, and land issues of the San communities cannot be left to themselves, because then these communities would be absorbed into the mainline society through relocation and resettlement, where minority ethnic groups will suffer the loss of their distinctive ethnic or cultural social characteristic that identifies them as the San.

The problem raised in the paper is that, when the San communities have no claim to a special status, the future existence of these communities with their distinctive identity is

⁵ GDP per capita, PPP (current international dollars) – Africa. *World Bank Group*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=A9> (accessed 23.09.2024)

⁶ Government lies: "There is no mining in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve." Timeline. 5.09.2014. *Survival International*. <https://assets.survivalinternational.org/documents/1272/diamonds-timeline.pdf> (accessed: 26.09.2024)

problematic. However, if all the elements that construct a human community are accepted as rights—land, culture, language—it must be admitted that the San are short-changed in Botswana’s development agenda. They are increasingly and de-culturalised, rendered paupers, and made to exist as dependents. The dignity they need over and above is that which will ensure their existence with the preservation of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity – like all other Africans after colonialism. There is therefore need to decolonise the mind to change the situation of the San minorities in Botswana.

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РОЛЬ ДЕКОЛОНИЗАЦИИ СОЗНАНИЯ В ЗАЩИТЕ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ МЕНЬШИНСТВ САН БОТСВАНЫ

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Аннотация. Проживающее на территории Ботсваны этническое меньшинство сан – носители койсанских языков – сталкивается с многочисленными проблемами в условиях языкового, культурного, экономического и политического доминирования со стороны большинства. Социально-политическая и экономическая динамика складывается далеко не в их пользу, не в последнюю очередь потому, что сан оказываются вынуждены отказываться от своего исконного охотничье-собирающего образа жизни. В данной статье предпринята попытка критически проанализировать положение сан в Ботсване и обосновать необходимость деколонизации сознания, которая позволит освободить их от языковой и культурно-лингвистической зависимости. Зависимость формируется в том числе из-за того, что более образованные люди заключают земельные сделки на эксплуатацию природных ресурсов с ТНК, при этом на данных территориях проживает сельское население. Автор демонстрирует, что сообщества сан крайне уязвимы как с социальной, так и с лингвистической точки зрения. Столь драматические процессы все еще происходят в наше время, в постколониальной, независимой Африке. Теории, использованные в данном исследовании, помогают критически взглянуть на социальные условия, в которых оказались сан в Ботсване.

В статье утверждается, что в настоящее время сан находятся в чем-то похожей ситуации, что и другие африканские сообщества во времена правления европейского империализма. Автор приходит к выводу, что без деколонизации сознания навязывание народу сан политики развития и социально-политической гегемонии большинства приводит к печальным последствиям. Таким образом обосновывается настоятельная необходимость деколонизации сознания, которая приведет к защите этнического и языкового меньшинства сан.

Ключевые слова: койсан, сан (басарва), Ботсвана, маргинализированные этнические группы, деколонизация сознания, этнические меньшинства, жители отдаленных районов

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-80-96

Для цитирования: Чебанне А. Роль деколонизации сознания в защите этнических меньшинств сан Ботсваны. *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2024. № 3. С. 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-80-96>