

Tjwao



A New Age for the San in Zimbabwe

Davy Ndlovu



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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin my acknowledgements by first saying a few remarks pertaining to my journey into the San communities in Tsholotsho and Plumtree. Mine was not a planned research journey, but it was out of interest that I went to the San lands. I would also like to add that it was out of frustration of not finding any reference on the San people in Zimbabwe in any form. It was as if the San in Zimbabwe did not exist. The other thing was that, as I was trying to get different perspectives on the San people, I got negative responses. Were it not for people like Tshanyana Dlamini, Richard Dlamini and Adam Dube, I would have stopped and given up creating this book, but they urged me to go on and finish the book.

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The banning of hunting and gathering has contributed to loss of livelihoods for many San communities and as such, many San communities are living in poverty on the outer edges of society. (Illustration by Gracious Nyoni)

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

1. Motshwa, the San Storyteller

Her name was Motshwa Moyo and she was the driving force in San culture and language reclamation, reinvigoration and revitalisation. Motshwa is now late — she died in 2014. Her death was so sudden and it left the entire San communities devastated. Motshwa was born at a time when her people were practicing hunting and gathering life styles, and she grew up in a perfect world where the San had plenty of food and water, and in a friendly environment.

After getting married to Dolo Tshuma, from the Mtshuria family, Motshwa lost her sight and this completely changed her world. From here on, she could only see the changing world through the sight of other people.



Motshwa Moyo

Her blindness made her a good listener and this prompted her inquisitiveness. As she grew older, her knowledge of the San history grew and she became one of the most trusted elder where San history was concerned. Her command of the Tjwao language was phenomenal and she could proudly speak her language in traditional gatherings of any sort, whereas most of the San could not.

Motshwa was a lovable person and many times she spent her days surrounded by her grand and great grandchildren, teaching them the San way of life and most notable the Tjwao language.

It was during these episodes that one of her great grandson, Jonathan Moyo, became so interested in the Tjwao language that he started learning the language.

It was Motshwa's love of telling San stories that got my attention. At first it was just casual, but when she saw that I was also interested in telling the San stories to the outside world, we became friends. As we worked, she was not intimidated by my video recorder or camera, and unlike other members of her community, she did not demand any payment for her services.

Talking about the San family organisation, one morning Motshwa said to me, "Mr Ndlovu, life was not like this in the past. San families were usually very small in size (parents and two to three children) and we used to live in groups of 25-50 people that were linked through kinship, marriage and friendship. These groups or bands were linked to larger groups that saw themselves as having the same traditions, culture, history and associations with land and with each other."

"Unlike the San you see today, I was born at a time when the family played a pivotal role in bringing up children. Traditional education always emphasised the need to respect nature and the family. Some people say that our way of life was primitive, but to us it was very satisfying and we lacked nothing" she said with pride.

Motshwa attested to the fact that all San territories had the following features: First, they contained all the resources necessary to sustain a group including water, wild plants and animals, shade, materials for home construction, medicines, and body decoration. These territories were known both to the residents and to other groups. In general, the boundaries of the territories were not marked, but there were sometimes cut marks on trees indicating territorial boundaries. Groups from other bands had to ask for permission from a band leader

controlling an area outside their boundary in order to collect food there. The territories often included places where specific historical or cultural events took place which some members of the group were aware of.

“The San lived in groups, and a territory was an area which local people had all they needed to survive. It was usually a named area of land with natural resources that people depended on, including water, wild food and medicinal plants, trees for shade, firewood and construction materials, as well as stones used in the manufacturing of tools and other goods. In general, the size of the territory was based on the types and amounts of resources it contained, which theoretically at least should be sufficient to meet the needs of a group in an average year. Boundary-marking of territories was unusual, but some if not all people in a band or group knew roughly where the boundaries were” she added.

“My greatest fear or concern is that all the San today lead diversified livelihoods and that they now live in permanent villages, some with crops and domestic animals that they raise themselves, earning part of their incomes through informal employment. However due to numerous issues related to marginalisation, lack of access to services and changes in land and livelihood patterns, we are still poor and usually we subject ourselves to live as landless labourers under the Ndebele and Kalanga influence. To me, it is no wonder that most San households across the region are poor, and receive food and other support from the governments and non-government organisations,” she said.

Motshwa was worried that many aspects of traditional hunting and gathering knowledge were in the process of, or have already been lost and that the common usage of bush foods, medicines and other natural resources in many San communities had come to an end. Hunting and collection of animal meat, fats or hides is now considered a criminal offence.

Other traditional practices such as and *ibhoro* dances including healing ceremonies and medicinal use of plants has suffered due to encroaching western cultures that view these cultural practices as primitive. One other challenge for Motshwa was that most San children today were attending school, and learning the dominant languages of the area at the expense of their mother tongue language.

This book is my answer to Motshwa’s concerns. I have tried to follow her path as a storyteller in a new chapter for the San. Motshwa had only a small audience for her stories, but now there is a larger audience with greater interest in the San culture, both inside and outside of the community. We now have a new age of hope.

But before I tell you about my journey into the world of the San, let me give you a brief history of these wondrous people and say a little about where they live.

2. Who are the San in Zimbabwe?

The San people formerly known as Bushmen and various other names including, AbaThwa, aMasili, abaKhwa are believed to have been the first people to settle to what is known as Zimbabwe today. Most of their drawings depicting their way of life of hunting and gathering can be seen on rocks or caves around the country and most notable the Matopo Hills in Matabeleland South.

The Kalanga (part of the Shona group) arrived in the area of western Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana many, many centuries ago and built stone settlements. The San and the Kalanga seem to have co-existed but we know little of that period or their relations. The arrival of the powerful, armed and militant Ndebele tribe in the 1830s century overtook the Kalanga chiefdoms and pushed the San people to the drier parts of Matabeleland who subsequently changed their ways of life in the process.

The coming of armed British settlers led to the fall of the Ndebele kingdom in the 1890s, and forced the Ndebele also to those drier and semi-arid parts of the country, which reduced the freedom of movement and influence of the San. The San had nowhere to go and had to submit themselves to be slowly assimilated into the Ndebele/Kalanga pattern of life.

The expansion of the European population, with their mining and hunting expeditions, further accelerated the demise of the San/Tshwa/Tjwa way of life. The establishment of wildlife parks, especially Wankie Game Reserve (now Hwange National Park) in 1928, further reduced hunting and gathering space for the San and pushed them to the outer edges of the country, where they now live as landless and impoverished citizens.

The assimilation of the San has seen a drastic change in their social way of life. This has meant that they have lost most of their values and identity, most notably their language. The San/Tshwa/Tjwa are often viewed by their neighbours as troublesome people who are primitive, unsophisticated and are resisting change.

3. The home of the San: Tsholotsho District

The district of Tsholotsho used to be called Tjolutjo and is situated in the Matabeleland North region of Zimbabwe which is located about 110 kilometers northwest from Bulawayo.

Ndebele and Kalanga elders in the area say the Tsholotsho communal lands were littered with elephants' carcasses and because of that, the place became known as Tsholotsho, interpreted as 'Holo ya Hou' which means 'Elephant heads' in Kalanga.

But the San who were the first to inhabit the area says the name Tsholotsho has nothing to do with elephants but is derived from the word *Tsoro-o-tso*. This is a Tjwao word meaning 'Rotten tubers.' *Tsoroha* is to rot in Tjwao and *otso* is a type of tuber found in swampy places. So in Ndebele, we would translate *Tsoro-o-tso* as 'Igoba elibolileyo'



Tjwao

Tsholotsho is home to three ethnic groups namely, Ndebele, Kalanga and the San. The San are also known as the Tjwa or Tshwa. The principal language is now Ndebele, spoken by 90% of the population and is understood by everyone. It is assumed that the first people to settle in Tsholotsho were the San people. The San, who were often called 'Bushmen' before, are the oldest inhabitants of Southern Africa, where they have lived for more than 20 000 years. They were and are composed of many small mobile groups so it is not easy to know which specific groups lived where. Their recent home has been restricted to the vast Kalahari Desert. These groups have no collective name for themselves so terms like San, Khoi-san, Basarwa, Gwi, AbaKwa and many others are variously used. Most of the widely understood names given to them are imposed by outsiders and have some pejorative connotations. In Tsholotsho many people now use the term San or 'Amasili.' The San people speak a variety of languages, all of which incorporate the 'click' sounds.

The San in Tsholotsho live in small villages and dispersed extended family compounds ranging in size from 17 to 267 people. Some of these households were arranged along straight geographic lines, the result of land settlement practices of the colonial and Zimbabwe governments in the past. The San have maintained that their ancestors were resettled in Tsholotsho as a result of the founding of the Wankie Game Reserve (now Hwange National Park).

Despite all this, the San have managed to make a home for themselves in the area and have adapted accordingly.

Now the expansion of the Ndebele even to those drier and semi-arid parts of the country like Tsholotsho has reduced the freedom of movement and influence of the San.

CHAPTER 2:

Answering the call

1. Beginning the journey

My journey into the San or San communities in Plumtree and Tsholotsho communal lands started in 2010 just out of curiosity. Having grown up in Tsholotsho and Xhanixhani in particular, and also marrying a third-generation San woman, ignited my passion to want to learn more about the San. As time went by, a number of things about these people were clarified, as I met with different members from the San communities.



Davy

My entry into the San communities was not a planned research project. My aim was to try to get an understanding of their origins, the state of their language and culture, current and past lifestyles. As I delved further into their history, it became clearer to me that these people had lost a lot including their cultural value systems and identity. The revitalisation and restoration of San language and cultural heritage and value systems became my number one priority.

Discovering later that there were then only 14 elderly people who could speak the Tjwao language (out of an estimated population of \pm 2500 people) really got at me. At first I did not fully understand the magnitude of the language situation. My concern back then was to try and get as many San people interested in speaking the language as possible.

In 2008, I had met this young lady, who was related to the San people. We got married that year and in 2009 we had our first boy. In those first years, 2008-2010, this lady used to frustrate me: she used to go to her home and wanting to work her own way. When I spoke to my elders about this, they said “What do you expect if you marry into the San community?”. Because of this personal experience, I wanted to go to the San to understand about their culture and way of life.

During my first contact with the San in 2010, very few among them knew the name of their language and or even the name of the people. To me this was an indication that the San were a lost people. They complained to me that names were being imposed on them and yet on the other hand they had forgotten or did not know their original name. They told me that people from the Ndebele/Kalanga cultures called them “Amasili.” When I asked them, “What do you call yourself then?” they said “Amasili or AbaKwa,” but these were the names imposed by other people. The situation was a bit confusing to understand.

On further inquiry from the few remaining San elders, I was told that the San in Zimbabwe are called San for singular and Sanre for plural and their language was called Tjwao. I was glad to hear this hoping that it was going to make my reconstruction of the Tjwao history easy. Unfortunately the San have no written records that I could use as reference material except the rock art scattered all over the country.

Having the name of the people and their language, I hoped this would lead me to identifying their true origins. I also hoped that I was going to be able to link them up with other Khoe groups in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia.

As I researched further, I discovered that there was no listing of Tjwao as a linguistic group. My efforts were being frustrated by non-availability of reference material on the Zimbabwe San.

Going further in trying to reconstruct the history of the San was impossible at this point. The only option I had was to go back and dig deeper into the history of the San through oral tradition methods. In Zimbabwe it would appear that researchers concentrated more on the rock art than the people.

In the community, the elders told me that the San people in Zimbabwe were comprised of the, Kaitsum, Chaise/Xhaise, Xhawache and Ganade. From here on, I was able to divide the San into sub-clusters and was able to identify who the JiTjwa were up until all the groups were identified. Again available records on the San/Khoe people did not recognise the JiTjwa, Kaitsum and Xhawache, the only groups listed were the Ganade and the Xhaise.

The San or San people discussed in this book have not been researched enough and little is known about these ancient people, their past and current lifestyles, origins, language and their general cultural heritage. In Zimbabwe, the San people are regarded as primitive, unsophisticated and lazy. They are regarded as a people who like meat more than other people, and they therefore need to be made to change.

Gogo Khatsha Moyo once asked me “Does being of San stock make you a lesser human being?” The other questions were, “Are we less human, or are we not God’s creation? Does being San mean that you are a social outcast? Why are we been treated differently from other people or tribes in this country?” The San asked these questions during a group meeting attended by more than forty people. I was not able to answer the questions then and there because I did not understand what was meant by being lesser human being. Others from the San communities also told me that it has been said over and over, again and again, that they are resisting change. They asked me whose change were they resisting and who had the authority to ask them to change and to change to become what.

The first task I did with the San as a way of raising awareness on their plight was to organise a charity walk from Bulawayo to Tsholotsho. The journey was 114 km and was undertaken by myself, Christopher Dube, Malaki Tshuma and Gracious Nyoni. Dube and Tshuma are from the San community and Nyoni is an artist/painter.

During the 114 km walk, we met a lot of people on the way and very few of those knew about the San in Zimbabwe. For the first time, it became evident for me that Zimbabwe knew nothing about the San and this was maybe the reason why no one bothered about them.

Popular perceptions about the San were manifested along the way when people saw Christopher and Malaki. People expected to see a very short and lighter San in complexion not a tall or dark San, but when they saw Christopher, whose height is about 1,6m and Malaki whose complexion is dark, they became very confused.

2. Meeting people, understanding their culture

April 2010: The San of Mazibulala

With the perception that the San were short and very light in complexion, I first went to Mazibulala, one of the oldest San communities in Tsholotsho hoping to see a people different from the rest of us. Like other villages in Tsholotsho, Mazibulala village is comprised of homesteads arranged in a line along the Gwabazabuya-Tsholotsho gravel road. There is a sharp contrast between the Ndebele and San homesteads. Most of the Ndebele homes are nicely built and neatly thatched with grass, whereas the homes of the San were in a dilapidated state.

As protocol would dictate, my first port of call was with the village head Amos Moyo (of Ndebele-Kalanga heritage). Mr Moyo gave me some background information about the San in his jurisdiction. As soon as we sat down under a big mango tree, he ventured to say “Ha, Mr. Ndlovu! I’m glad you are here inquiring about these people. These people are so poor and they are always begging for food.” Amazed, I asked back “You mean to tell me that these people do not produce their own food like the rest of you?” He just brushed me off saying it was not in them to practice any form of agriculture.

After speaking with Mr. Moyo, I went and spoke with his mother who was in her nineties and asked about the origins of the San. “When we first came in the area around 1937, we found these San people already living in the area,” She said, she went on and said “There were many groups of the San here and there were lots of animals and grazing land. As many people came into the area, wild animal moved further and the San followed them. Some of the groups went towards the Manzanyma river and settled in what is Garia today; the other groups went towards what is now Hwange National Park. Very few of the San remained behind and these are the likes of Gogo Mota who you are going to see.” I thanked her and Amos and went on to visit the San in their homes.

As soon as I was seated at Gogo Mota’s homestead comprised of two huts that looked as if they were going to fall down any minute. After saying my salutations, I was immediately bombarded with questions as to who had sent me, my intentions, and whether I had brought some food for them. As I answered, I looked around and noticed that there were about a dozen people sitting outside of one the huts. There were two very old women, three middle aged women and two males while the rest were children. The children were wearing torn dirty clothes and appeared as if they had not had a bath for days.

The two old ladies drew my attention the most, I was interested in knowing their ages before anything else, but I did not want to rush things. In my African societies, it is rude to talk to women where men are present. As I sat, I deliberated on how to handle the situation and finally decided to start interviewing the men first. I introduced myself and told the group that I was from nearby in a village called Xhanixhani about eleven kilometres from Mazibulala. One male by the name of Khuhle said that he knew the place and people.

For ten minutes we sat and spoke about this and that, my aim was to let them relax a bit. During the process, they each gave introductions and after that they told me about their tribe and why they remained behind when the rest of the group moved further. Of interest was when I asked Gogo Mota her age, she answered that she was born in the year 'Sinti bhuzwe.' Literally, she meant that she was born in the year 'don't ask.' She went on to say "During our days, we did not have your things that took pictures and recorded people voices. We did not write things down and this was a long-long time ago." Before I asked her another question, she kept on talking, "In our culture, we did not have time, we did not have days of the week, neither did we have months everything was just the same. Our lives were about waking up each day and gathering the food for that day and after that we sat and enjoyed the day. Today, life demands a lot and there is no time to rest." She complained that the Ndebele kind of lifestyle was too demanding, it required people to wake up early each day to work the fields, fetch water, pound corn and other household chores. This was not known within the San culture.

"We now regret staying behind when some of our people moved away, we are now the laughing stock of the community, poverty is rampant among us. We do have fields, but we do not have inputs and implements to engage in food production. Our children are the only ones who do not go to school because we do not have money to pay school levies." Gogo Mota said with wet eyes.

I asked about hunting and gathering. One of the males Khuhle replied that if you wanted to spend the rest of your life behind bars then you can go and hunt. "Hunting and gathering is no longer possible, if one is caught, there are serious consequences that can follow." I then asked them how they were surviving. This time Gogo Babili Mpofu, one of the elderly ladies replied that they were surviving by the grace of the God. "We live practically on nothing; our neighbours used to give us food in the past, but they are now tired of us."

The San of Mazibula community have lost most of their culture including the language. Babili and Mota, the two elders among this community attributed the loss of their culture

and language on the adoption of the Ndebele cultural way of life. “We are living as the Ndebele do, but the difference is that the Ndebele have got cattle and they can till their land, whereas we the San have no cattle. The Ndebele have got money and they can afford to send their children to school, while we cannot.” Gogo Mota said.

When I asked about any assistance they were getting from government or NGOs, the answer was none. Khuhle said it would appear that government was not aware about their plight or did not care to assist them. He also said even NGOs were not keen on assisting them.

The time was 15:37pm when we finished and I was exhausted. I have never seen such poverty in my entire life and I left with a heavy heart.

3. The Ndebele Memory

August 2010, Dlamini communal land: Interview with Ndebele community on their movement into the San territory.

The San had not mastered the art of reading and writing and had not kept any records about the past happenings, although some of them were good storytellers. So, I tried to find older people from other groups who could maybe tell me more about the interaction between the San and other groups, and also I wanted to find out more about the intermarriages and the linkages that were created during that time.

In particular, I thought it a good idea to interview some of the Ndebele families who were instrumental in establishing their communities among the San. One reason was that I hoped to get a second opinion on the San and the other reason was that Tshanyana Dlamini was married to Daisy Tshuma from the San of Mazibulala.

Mr Tshanyana Dlamini was the eldest surviving son of Mr Ziyacebana (nicknamed “Fifteen”) Dlamini, founder of the Dlamini community in 1934. The interview was conducted in the presence of Richard Dlamini, Ziyacebana’s nephew and Tshanyana’s wife Daisy Tshuma. Mr Tshanyana Dlamini was born in 1919 between Nyamandlovu and Plumtree. I started by getting a little background on the earlier history of the Dlaminis and how they ended up establishing the Dlamini community — This information can be found in the Appendix.

When the Dlamini came to the area in the 1930s, there were lots and lots of wild animals

roaming the land freely and the lions and hyenas used to kill one or two of his cows from time to time.

It was during this time that Dlamini came into contact with the San. According to Tshanyana, the San were living in a tight community under the leadership of Goledema Tshuma. Tshanyana said that the San did not run away when they first made contact, but they refused to live side by side with them. The San preferred to live among themselves and they did not bother the Dlaminis. At first, the Dlaminis were skeptical about the San and they thought that they were going to steal the cattle for meat. To their surprise, the San did not steal any of their livestock but offered assistance to look after the cattle and to protect them from the lions and other wild animals.

The San people taught Dlamini to respect nature, which trees to cut for the construction of huts and which to use as firewood. For building purposes, the mopane tree was recommended, and mangwe was to be used when constructing roof structures. For fencing of homesteads and field, thorny bushy trees (*ugagu*) were to be used. The San discouraged the unnecessary cutting of trees, and the starting of veld fires. Trees to the San meant life and according to them, trees had different smells when burnt. Some of the smells were used to chase away wild animals and some brought wild animals nearby.

Trees provided medication, shade and the San believed that trees held water in their trunks and roots that could be tapped into during the dry spells. The San also taught Dlamini and his folk which animals to hunt and when. Dlamini was also taught how to protect his livestock from wild animals using traditional herbs. Dlamini as a traditional healer himself used this knowledge of herbs to his advantage to treat and heal wounds, headaches, fever, stomach pains and many other sicknesses.

The San also taught Dlamini and company how to dig for underground water (*water wells*). A San by the name of Khanyiwe showed Dlamini how to dig for the ground water. He taught Dlamini how to look for water in hollow trees and how to suck up the water using straw from bamboo trees.

Then I asked Mr. Dlamini about how life had treated him with Daisy Tshuma a known San woman. His reply to that was, “When we first came here, there were very few people living in the area, the only people were the San. Yes the San life was quite different from ours, but that was no reason to treat them differently. To us, they were people and we respected them. But again I have to emphasise that was not always the case because there were some

among us who saw the San as primitive people and treated them as wild people. As for me, when I married Daisy, the whole Dlamini clan supported me.” He added, “Now things have changed though, the San are being called names and my children feel uncomfortable at times when people refer to them as half San because of their mother’s lineage. Today, things have changed, there are some people who cannot eat in the same plate with a San.

It was revealed to me that Tshanyana’s wife Daisy was born from a mixed parentage. Her mother Xhalanxa Vundla was San and from the Nxaphela Vundla and her father was Mzalelaphi Tshuma who had happened to come and join the Dlamini clan at a later stage.

Daisy Tshuma had two other sisters and a brother called Nduna Tshuma. Nduna Tshuma became my father-in-law and that story is for another book. The interesting thing about Daisy and her siblings was that they regarded themselves as San and half Tonga (Because Mzalelaphi Tshuma was thought to have originated from the Tonga people).

Mr Tshanyana and his nephew Richard’s accounts were very interesting in that they tallied with what the San had said before.

“When we first came into this area, there were few trees, the land was not overgrown with trees like now,” Tshanyana said. Richard added, “You could see far during those days and there were lots of wild animals around, the giraffe, buffaloes, antelope and one could occasionally hear the roar of a lion. The lions used to kill a cow or a bull from time to time” Richard said. “Water was also scarce during the dry season” he said.

There were no other settlements nearby except the Mabhanda community that was established by Jani Mabhanda somewhere in 1925-6. The only people they found in the area were the San. “The San, when we first met with them, were living in groups around the Mbuhulu water pan and were led by Goledema Tshuma,” Tshanyana said. He went on to say, “They used to hunt and gather food during the day and at night used to sing and dance the *ibhoro* dance. We were not allowed to watch, but we used to go and steal some glances at the dancing people. It was fun to watch the San dancing and there were no drum beats only they rubbed metals together and sang their songs in a strange language.”

Tshanyana and Richard agree that the San remained in the area for quite some time, and during that period they taught the Dlamni clan how to protect their cattle against wild animals and also to look for underground water during the dry season.

I asked Tshanyana the big question of how the movement of people into the San territory had affected the San. He answered by saying “The San liked to keep to themselves and they did not want to be bothered by other people. They did not welcome strangers into their camps and they kept moving from one place to the other.” The one good thing about the San according to Tshanyana and Richard was that they were a peaceful people and they tried to live by avoiding conflicts with anyone.

Tshanyana told me what he heard about the establishment of Mabhandu community by old man Mabhandu himself who was one of the traditional healers of King Lobengula (Ndebele King) and after the fall of the Ndebele kingdom, Mabhandu went to the country now known as Botswana. When he came back he was accompanied by Wada Mafengu Ngwenya and came to settle at Madziba near Mathupula. Mabhandu was made headman by Chief Magama and later under Chief Ngqoya, who had taken over from Magama. It was decided that Mabhandu should move and be under chief Mathupula. Old man Mabhandu died and was buried at Madziba. His first born son Jani Mabhandu took over as leader of the Mabhandu clan. Jani later sought permission from Chief Mathupula to move in the western direction in search of grazing land and thus came to settle at Mabhandu between 1924-6. The area between Magama and Mathupula was slowly being taken up by people who were being brought by the white government at the time.

The trio of Jani, Wada and Gove (who was an agricultural officer back then) travelled about 30 kilometers west of Mathupula and came to settle at Zemandana (current Mabhandu). On arrival, the trio found the San people who had established a community called Ntontonto. The trio established a community that they called Gubungane. This was done because the land was full of wild animals and they decided to stay together for safety reasons.

The San had chosen Ntontonto as their hunting ground because it was full of water, wild life and grass. It was one of their favorite hunting spots from time to time when they were not on the move on their hunting and gathering sprees.

Jani Mabhandu (the leader of the group) had plenty of cattle, goats and farming equipment. The San people would come looking for food and, when Jani gave them buckets full of un-ground maize; they would be angered because they never believed in food storage. Grinding maize back then was hard work and was done on rocks; this was too much work for the San. After such incidences, the San would be gone for months and when they came back they would have forgotten about the previous encounters with Jani. The San never held grudges against anyone and they were not the fighting type. There were a number of San people

who Jani convinced to work and stay with him and his friends; those included the likes of Gumbo Tshumo, Makhala and many others.

The white government had drilled about seven windmill boreholes in the area. Mabhandanda and friends found a windmill borehole at Zemandana. Chief Ngqoya and Chief Mathupula started sending people into the area and Govu Hadebe pegged stands and fields for them. The first people to come were given land around Gubungane. Gubungane grew to be a large community that was comprised of many families. Zemandana was later named Mabhandanda after Jani Mabhandanda's father. Some of the people who came after the trio of Jani, Wada and Govu were Hlabangani who was related to Govu, Tito, Zatshe and Bhuqa from the Ngwenya family, Mputshana Sibanda, Lufu Biya and others followed later.

Bhuqa Ngwenya, on seeing the other windmill borehole at Zemande, sought permission from Jani, who was still a headman representing Chief Mathupula, to build his homestead there. Jani told him that the borehole was for watering his cattle, but he gave him permission to set up his home there. Bhuqa was later followed by Makhalale Sibanda. Because Makhalale was older than Bhuqa, he was made kraal head and the community was later named Makalale after old man Makalale. The name Zemande is still in use even today.

From 1926 to 1930, communities started spreading. Zatshe Ngwenya went to Mpanedziba (a San word meaning a thicket of black mopane trees), Malindi went past Mpanedziba and established the Malindi community, Msukwani Ncube established the Moyeni community, Gwamula went to Garikari, and Kunene Xabanisa to Malapala and Tito Ngwenya joined Bhuqa and Makalale. Mathupula arranged for the drilling of 14 other boreholes in the area starting from Sibantshiba, to Makheni. Jani Mabhandanda Moyo went on to marry six wives. Phute Moyo was his first-born and became heir to the Mabhandanda throne.

As communities spread, the San moved away and little by little found themselves next to the now Hwange National Park.

11 August 2010: Interview with Marali Mabhandanda Moyo

Place: Xhanixhani

I also interviewed Marali Mabhandanda Moyo one of the sons of Jani Moyo from his five wives. Marali's account is that, he was born somewhere in 1925. By the time his father Jani Mabhandanda came to settle in Mabhandanda, he was just a baby. When he reached boyhood, he

started noticing strange people who used to come to visit his father at various times of day, selling game meat or looking for food. These people, he noticed, were lighter in complexion and spoke a language that he did not understand. He was told that these people lived in the bush. After this, every time he went into the bush herding cattle, he would be on the lookout of these people but did not see them. Because the San were not easy to spot in the bush, he and other community members started believing that these people had strange powers to disappear into thin air. Because of the perceived strange behaviour of the San, misconception started surfacing with the implication that the San were not humans but were like wild animals and that they could outrun any wild animal during their hunting sprees.

According to Marali, some of the San came and joined the Mabhandu community. He said the San were very knowledgeable on plant life, herbs and the general environment. He also said it was the San who showed them all the water pans and grazing lands. It would appear that the San played a very pivotal role in the establishment of Tsholotsho.

4. Meeting with the larger San groups

After having conversations with the San of Mazibulala in Ward 2 and on seeing their plight, I thought that it was time for me to get more information about these people. The journey to the further San communities was long and tedious and was about 220 kilometers from Bulawayo and was undertaken with Mr Jacqonia Moyo of the Mafeta Trust.

The first visit took place on the 15th of May 2010. I was accompanied by Mr J Moyo of Mfela Trust, who had worked with the San previously. We left very early in the morning on a Tuesday. As we were going there, I kept thinking about the stories that I have heard about the San running away when confronted by strangers. The other things that I thought about were: How tall were they? What language did they speak? What type of food did they eat what clothing they wore and many other things? I was told that the San from Gulalibabili were different from the San of Mazibulala.

From Bulawayo we went past Nyamandlovu, Tsholotsho and at Tsholotsho we took the Pumula Mission road that passes through Manqe, Wondola, Sasedza, Tshitatshawa, Sandawana, Karane, Bhumbu, Mpiriya and Nxuma. At Lubizi we took a turn that led us to Pelela, eMaganwini and Gulalibabili. From Lubizi, I was told that the San were present in these parts and that we could see them any time. Along the way Mr Moyo pointed out all the places and told me a bit of history about the places. For example, Pelela (meaning



Future San generation

“the end” in (Kalanga) was given this name because people back then thought that this was going to be the last community. At Gulalikabili, we were told that the San community was ready to meet with us, but first we had to go to the furthest San community at Sanqinyana/Paneni Area. From Gulalikabili we passed Tembile and had lunch, then we went on through Mpilo up to Sanqinyana, Sifulasengwe and Paneni.

On arrival, we were first taken to the big Mopane tree; here we were told that this was a sacred place where the San elders used to host cultural activities. After that, we went and met with about 60 San people including men, women and youths. As the meeting progressed, we were told that the San people faced a serious food shortage and that many were already starving. As is known, their preferred diet has always comprised of game meat, tubers and wild berries, but due to climatic changes, the land was failing to produce enough food for them and their families.

The San blamed the current state of things on the arrival of the cattle-rearing tribes and the white people, who upon arrival, took up land and built game reserves to enclose the wild animals and consequently took ownership of the wild animals and the surrounding land. They also blamed the government for not recognizing them as a people, their traditions and

culture. They said their culture has been eroded by the Ndebele/Kalanga cultures. According to them, the government had deliberately introduced strict laws aimed at making their lives miserable. The San people did not understand all the legislations that have been put in place; to them it was just a ploy by government(s) to make them suffer. They argued that their fathers and grandfathers had lived and supported themselves and their families in the bush for thousands of years and were wondering what has changed now. They said all the changes that have been put in place are of benefit to the government not them.

Nowadays if they ventured into the game park, chances are that they can be arrested for poaching and taken to jail. Their life has always been centered on hunting and gathering and since they did not have the draught power, how were they supposed to support themselves and their families. Many people today think that the San are resisting change, but the San beg to differ and say it is unfair for things to be imposed on them without being consulted first.

For them to survive, they now have to work for the cattle-herding Ndebele/Kalanga people in exchange of food and clothing. They complained that at times they are assigned huge fields to cultivate in exchange for food that do not last them a month. Since they did not have the draught power, it was impossible for them to engage in productive subsistence farming.

Old ladies at the meeting cried out loud saying it was maybe a curse to be borne from the San clan. Their lifestyle is regarded as primitive by many Zimbabweans, their language was not recognized and they also said that at other times they are treated like wild animals.

5. Meeting the community in Sanqinyana

In Tsholotsho town, in 2010, I met with Gokoniyo Moyo a Kalanga man who was involved in an NGO to spearhead development in Tsholotsho. He lived next to Sanqinyana and he told me there were San people there in a poor state whose culture was under threat. He asked if I was interested in meeting them. So in November 2010, he organized a meeting and drove me there and introduced me to them.

There was a small group of San, a group of about 60 people, waiting for us. Then we spoke about many things but the priority for them was the food situation. I told them I could not promise food-wise, but I was interested in learning about their culture. We agreed that we needed a follow up meeting, where they would introduce me to the elders.

At that next meeting at Sanqinyana in the beginning of 2011, Christopher Dube took me to Motshwa, because she knew more than anyone else about the history of the San. That is when I met Gogo Motshwa, she had heard I was interested in the culture. We did not talk long, mostly about the current status of the San and she was blind, so she had stopped going to the post, where people keep their livestock during the dry season. But Motsho would stay behind. The language issue did not come up at that first meeting. She was concerned about explaining how they had lost their livelihood due to their move from Hwange National Park.

Then I went and saw Dombosi. She was hoarse so I could not understand some of the things she was saying. She was sometimes speaking in Tjwao and I could not tell because I did not know about this language.

Then later I came back and had several meetings with Motshwa and that's when I learned more about the culture and what the right name for the San was, rather than Amasilli. When I asked many people who they were, they would say "We are Amasili" or "We are San". But Motshwa always tried to talk about family organisation. She told then me about the language and about other older speakers like Msindo and Ngoli and Ndliso. I spend a many visits in 2011 in Sanqinyana, including doing some video recording.

6. Involvement in the constitutional process

At the end of 2011 and into 2012, we became engaged in the constitutional reform process. I had been running an organisation called Creative Arts and Educational Development Association and doing cultural activities in Tsholotsho (not with the San). So I was invited to the Food for Thought to talk at American Corner in Bulawayo about that. I mentioned also the San and Mr. Essie Ncube wanted to know more about them. He was running the Matebeleland Constitutional Reform Agenda (MACRA) and so he started to invite me to their meetings, and eventually to bring some San to attend a meeting.

MACRA came and conducted workshops on constitution making process in ward 7 and ward 8. MACRA also invited some members from the San community for a language Indaba held in Bulawayo in August 2012.

Seven members from the San community attended the Indaba. It was here that people started realizing that the San people were for real after years of denial that there were people of the

San origin living in this country. Then they wanted to hear someone speak the language. When the late Moffat Banini Moyo was invited to the podium to address participants in his language, he opened his mouth and spoke in Tjwao (the Zimbabwe San language). People were shocked and started commenting “This is a language we’ve never heard before.” From then on they took us seriously when we spoke about this language.

Suddenly numerous questions were asked about the origins of the San, current location, population and their status. Even COPAC (Constitutional Parliamentary Affairs Committee), the organisation mandated with the drafting of the new Zimbabwe constitution, knew nothing about the San and failed to get their individual input. By that time in 2012, the first draft of the Constitution was already out. When we were talking with COPAC they would ask what the name of the people is and we would explain that they were a Khoisan group and the people were called Tjware-tjwa, but it was hard for them to understand. As a result the name of language was entered as “Koisan” into the Constitution instead of Tjwao. Many people do not understand that the San have different clan names and identities and they just label them all as San or Khoisan.

7. Meeting the community in Garia

In 2012, I was still often meeting with Christopher Dube and some others and we decided to form an organisation and we launched the Tsoro-o-tso San Development Association in June 2012,

I started meeting other San like Maksim Ngoli Sibanda but it was not easy to reach him because he was still living in the bush. When I met with him, he told me straight away that he was a traditional healer and he also told me that he was very much into the traditional way of life. His main concern, unlike the others, was the forced assimilation. He felt the lives of the Tjwa were now like the Ndebele and Kalanga.

Before going to Garia, [???who] Moyo introduced me to the late Vice-President John Landa Nkomo, who was very much interested in the life of the San. He said that when he was growing up, his father employed a San boy to herd their cattle, so he and that boy grew up together until they were young men. By this time, I was understanding the issues of the San more.

As I was talking to Christopher Dube and the others in Sanqinyana, they told me about the other group of San in Garia. As I went into the Garia San community, I noticed something

different from the Sanqinyana group. The Garia San were somewhat organized under Amos Sibanda. They did not speak about the food situation but rather about their culture and loss of language. I went and met with Amos Sibanda and then in 2013, I interviewed him more fully (see below)

8. Language and the organisational development

Late 2012, we managed to link up with the University of Zimbabwe to start the San language revitalisation program. The language revitalisation program went on and produced the first ever San language transcription, the establishment of the San language committee and a number of people showing an interest in learning the language.

In 2013, Zimbabwe finally adopted a new constitution in a process, where a lot of input came from the general masses in Zimbabwe. The constitution making process took very long to complete. Even though the process was disputed, the end result was a constitution that went through a referendum and passed with a huge majority yes vote. It went on to sail through both the lower and up houses of assembly and the President then signed the constitution and it became the supreme law of the country.

The San people of Zimbabwe for the first time ever in the history of the country were afforded an opportunity to take part in the constitution making process, after a long and tedious journey of lobbying and advocacy. In many instances, the San people were not fully consulted; this resulted in the “Khoisan” language being included in the constitution. The San people would have preferred their language to be called Tjwao or San instead of Khoisan. Khoisan is a typological, not a genetic grouping, i.e. referring to African languages characterized by click inventories, excluding the Bantu languages, which have borrowed clicks quite recently

The launch of Tsoro-o-tso San Development Association in June 2012, came as a result of Creative Arts and Educational Development Association, whose mandate was to promote cultural diversity in rural communities of Tsholotsho. The association came at a time when the San people had heard enough of systematic neglect, discrimination, isolation, marginalisation and enslavement. The San people were fighting for recognition and wanted to take full control over their lives. This became the strategic objective(s) of 2013-2014.

In 2013, we started doing our cultural festivals. The first commemoration was the UN

International Day for World Indigenous People on 9 August. We started talking about revitalizing the language.

To have good data about the needs of the people and their location, we conducted a sort of census to identify all the San people in different wards (the results are described later in this book) and the speakers.

The other objective(s) was to continue advocating for the rights of the San, continue building networks, links, collaborations and partnerships local, national, regional and international.

Our association did three leadership training workshops and did policy dialogue meetings with officials from Parks, met with the Hon Senator and Min of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture David Coltart and the Minister for Water resources management Hon S. Sipepa Nkomo.

Later we established links with regional organisations like WIMSA, SASI and many others to share knowledge, skills, experiences and ideas.

9. The fulfilment of Motshwa's wishes

As the year 2014 began, Motshwa passed away. After her burial on Saturday January 11, we left for Garia and Makhulela on Monday with Christopher Dube on the instruction of the elders. The community felt that Motshwa had done a wonderful job in teaching all interested San people the Tshwao language, the elders so it fit to honour Motshwa by having a Language Learning exercise along the Manzanyma River during the 2014 International Mother Language Day, always celebrated on the 21st of February.

Though Motshwa had offered to help with the language project free of charge, few people within the Tshwao community realized her contribution until it late.

Before she died, I met and spoke with her during the second week of December and she practically asked me to build a sort of language center where all the San people can have free access to the place. She was bothered by the infighting among the Sanqinyana San communities. She ask me to move to the Garia San community who, she though were more organized and would appreciate my efforts. She also asked me to involve children.

When I told the elders this they agreed that we have to honour her wish and start implementing the language project at Garia. All the San agreed that the Garia groups were more organized than other groups.

When we reached Garia, we told the community members about the developments and promised to work hard so that Motshwa's will be in vain. They immediately started organizing themselves into learning groups.

At Makhulela, the community was itching to go, but the area councilor asked us to go and ask for the DA's permission. When we arrived, the community took us to the village head who is Kalanga/Ndebele who also asked to meet the councilor. We tried to tell them that all we wanted to do was to conduct a short assessment on the status of the San language. After this the community then agreed to meet at the no men's land i.e. Manzamyama River so that we could be able to document the language without any hassles from any-one. Then we organized the event for the 22nd of February 2014.

Motshwa was gone, but her vision for the community was not. We now had a community NGO, cultural festivals, a language recognized in the constitution, and a language documentation and revitalisation project was underway. All these continue to the present.

CHAPTER 3:

In their own voices, the story of the San

For many years, people have talked about the San but not let them tell their own story. In this chapter, you'll hear from some of the oldest members of the community who have seen their lifestyles completely changed over the last century.

1. Gogo Motshwa Moyo: Against the changing world

As I had indicated in the introduction, Motshwa Moyo was a good storyteller and she was always willing to talk, but the challenge with the San is that they never wrote things down; everything they said came from their heads. This interview took place at her homestead at Sifulasengwe in 2012.

Gogo Motshwa Moyo, married to the Mtsuria family was born at a time when her people were still practicing hunting and gathering lifestyles. Motshwa, like most elderly San people, does not know her date of birth. Even though her identity document says that she was born in 1920, Motshwa and other San elders say that this date is not true and does not reflect her true age. Motshwa says that her people came into this country a long-long time ago, when the land was full of wild animals, mountains, caves, water pans and when there were no human settlements and roads. They used to travel freely from one place to the other, picking all kinds of foods along the way.

“I remember all the stories that my grandparents told me about the many hunting and gathering expeditions that they undertook all over the country at the time. I also remember the stories about the great Zimbabwe, Nyanga Caves, Domboshava hills, the Matopo Caves, Khami Ruins and many other places that my grandparents went to.” She said this as we opened our discussions.



Caption

“My grandparents told me that amongst all the places that they went to, the Matopo Caves were the best and this is where the San made a home for themselves. Over the years, they became so attached to the place and it became one of their favorite strongholds. A number of traditional activities, rituals and festivals were held there from time to time. Spiritually, my people became connected to the place and could talk with their departed ancestors and their god called Mwariyara,” she said.

Since the San had not yet developed the art of reading and writing and did not possess photographic equipment, their memories were kept on rock paintings by spiritually gifted artists. According to Motshwa, the rock paintings were done to preserve some of their best memories and events and were only done by spiritually gifted individuals.

Gogo Motshwa said as the San were not used to staying in one place for longer periods, when they were moving about, they became accustomed to the geography of the land and could identify all the places that they had passed through and did not need maps to navigate their way around the country. Motshwa said even though the San are perceived to be unsophisticated, their navigational capability is one of the best in this world. When the time came for them to move out of the Matopo Caves permanently after the arrival of stronger tribes with superior fighting and signaling skills, they knew exactly where to go.



Caption

Moving out of their stronghold of the Matopo Caves, the San travelled west passing through where Bulawayo is today. Some went along the Manzanyma River and others went through Nyamandlovu towards Tsholotsho, passing through Lulwane and the Gwaai River. From the stories that Motshwa got from her grandparents, it would appear that the San met and interacted with other tribes from as early as the 16th and 17th centuries or even before that. The stories that the San used to run away from other

tribes are not true according to Motshwa and the San of Caunajena, though they might be some element of truth behind such stories considering their behaviour at times. It was during these interactions with other tribes that the San (San) started losing some of their indigenous knowledge, culture, traditions and rituals.

“In our culture men and women had different roles and there were gender discriminatory roles. Hut making was carried out by both men and women. The women used to set out in search of grass for thatching, while the men looked for flexible, tapered branches for the construction of the frame of the hut. When all the suitable materials had been gathered, the men marked a circle in the ground and then started digging holes at equal intervals around the circumference into which branches were firmly placed and secured. The next step was to attach horizontal wands, bound tightly to the vertical branches with the bark stripped from a knob-thorn tree. The finished frame looked like a skeletal dome. When the frame was completed, the women took the bundles of grass and start thatching the hut in layers. The completed hut was usually warm and waterproof” Motshwa said trying very much to give clarity on roles.

“In the dry season, we used to build lean-tos which served simply as places to sleep and for

family gathering. The rainy-season huts used to be sturdy and stood for quite some time, since we were constantly on the move in search for food. We used to build huts most often whilst moving around in search of water and game meat” she added.

“Amongst the many groups within San communities, men were great hunters, whilst women were basic providers. The women’s job was to bring lots of berries, fruits and tubers on a daily basis, whereas men would be gone for days or even weeks on hunting expedition. Meat has always been highly valued but not always available” she said taking a deep breath.

Many places in Tsholotsho got their names from the wondering San people. The name Tsholotsho according to Motshwa has no reference to the San, though some from the Ndebele and Kalanga clans have constantly maintained that it referred to “Elephant head” (Ikhandalendlovu). Motshwa’s story is that, as they were moving about from one place to the other, they came to a water pan looking for water-lilies and tubers. They found out that all the tubers were rotten and consequently named the place ‘Tsoro-o-tso’ meaning place of rotten tubers.

“Holo ya hou’ is Kalanga and has no relation to Tsoro-o-tso.” She maintains that in the Tjwao language, head is ‘mhaa’ and elephant is ‘Tswa’ so this proves that ‘Holo ya hou’ had nothing to do with the San, while Tsoro-o-tso meant ‘Place of rotten tubers.’ Other examples of places which got their names from the San are the likes of Mpanedziba, Hangapu, Matemaganyu, Xhanixhani, Tjitatjawa, Dzibalonkwe, Cuseculu among others.

2. Amos Sibanda: A century of assimilation

Having met with the San of Mazibulala in April of 2010 and subsequently meeting other San communities, I was yet to meet with the San of Garia who had migrated from Dadamjena, about 20km from Mazibulala.

Headman Amos Sibanda is an older man from the Goledema clan. He is a soft spoken person who dislikes violence of any form. I had this interview with him when we were preparing for the ‘International Day for the Worlds’ Indigenous People’ in 2013 at his homestead. Amos Sibanda is the village head for Garia 1 village.

It was a cool day in August and we were seated under the shade of one of Sibanda’s huts discussing the assimilation of the San into the Ndebele/Kalanga pattern of life and the challenges this brought about.



Amos Sibanda

I started about asking for a bit of background information on Amos' family. "My father was called Makhala Sibanda and was part of the group that was led by Goledema Tshuma. My people used to live in Dadamjena before the arrival of the Ndebele people." He said. "By the time of my birth, during the 1940s, the Ndebele/Kalanga people were already here and were living side by side with the San. One of my sisters, Saliwe Sibanda married into the Ndebele family to a man called Bhanga who is the nephew of Jani Mabhandu Moyo, the founder of the Mabhandu community between 1925-6. Jani Mabhandu Moyo was the Headmen of the area back then and the San were treated with respect." I told him that I understood all this but was interested in knowing more about the San of those days.

"I think my grandfathers were the first group to come and settle in what is Zimbabwe today from Mengwe through the Tekwane River, passing through Bhambadzi in Plumtree a long time ago." He said. "I also think this was the group that was responsible of the rock paintings at the Matopo Caves and many other places all over Zimbabwe. This group from Mengwe was comprised of the Tshuma (Goledema family), the Jani Mpofo, Makhala Sibanda, my grandfather, Butabubili Mtshina Maphosa, Garia Moyo and others. The second group that later, was from Spakwe and Nata regions and was comprised of

the Vundla (Nxaphela family), the Sibanda (Munambi family) and some of the Moyo (Mazebele family).”

Amos feels that the arrival of the Bantu people (i.e. the Ndebele and Kalanga) and the White settlers at the time was not a problem. They could live with the Bantu people, shared food with them and interacted with them well. Inter-marriages started a long time ago and back then it was only one sided. The Bantu could marry a San woman but the San men could not marry the Bantu women. “Maybe it was this culture of paying lobola within the Ndebele society that made the San men fail to marry Ndebele women” he offered as an explanation.

“The Ndebele and Kalanga on arrival in our territories were very dominating; they had huge herds of cattle, goats and donkeys. They tilled the land and started producing more and more food for their families. On the other hand the San had nothing, no cattle, fields, totally nothing” he said.

He said the arrival of the white settlers and Bantu people brought new ways of doing things which were very unfamiliar with the San. “Our culture was that of group life and depended on the environment. The Whites and Bantu cultures were very individualistic in nature and group life was discouraged” Amos said. He continued and said “Coming from a background where material possession was not known, where things were shared among group members, where decisions were made by consensus, this Bantu lifestyle brought many complications. The coming of the Bantu and the white settlers and the establishment of the game parks and laws banning hunting and gathering threw the lives of the San into turmoil” Amos said.

As we sat talking, I could see that Amos was deeply troubled about these developments and according to him, it was no wonder the San were still struggling to adapt because of this forced assimilation. What is so worrying for Amos is that the San now live in conflict with each other and the neighbouring Bantu people and that they are failing to organise themselves into one single unit to fight their battles together, battles of social exclusion, human rights, leadership etc. The San are failing to take control over their lives but live by complaining that they are being undermined by their neighbours.

“We understand that in Zimbabwe there are many perceptions and misconceptions about the San people in general. We are being called names, like ‘Amasili’ or ‘AbaTwa’ or even ‘Bushman’ some people even think that we are not human but animals. It has been said that

we are lazy people and we like meat more than anyone. People are judging us by the kind of food we eat, is it wrong to like meat?” he asks.

“In any conflict situation, culture plays a significant role. Culture is not just the way people look, or the language they speak, the way they greet each other. Culture has to do with what people value, and how they value what they place importance on. That also, will be different from culture to culture, it will also be different from person to person, but in general it is very important to get a sense of what the cultural dynamics are in a community. Culture includes beliefs, patterns of thought, and patterns of expression transmitted in a society from one generation to the next, and the San unlike the Bantu people have tried to preserve their cultural heritage despite the encroaching western cultural influences” Amos said this with pride.

“The one thing that angers the San the most is lack of respect for our culture, we San people are proud to be San, though we now regret the loss of our language and cultural values” Amos said

Amos feels that the purpose of becoming culturally sensitive is not to just put people in a box and say, all people from the San community or any other part act this way, and think this way, and value this or that. That is not the purpose. The purpose is to give an idea of where the differences are in terms of cultural values systems. To assume that the San people are resisting change is not going to help the situation one way or the other. It is always good to check one’s assumptions. Just saying that, this is something that I know about this culture, or I have read about this culture or heard about it, and maybe it would be wise to check with a local partner or some cultural interpreter to see if that is at play. This is a very important strategy for cultural activism.

A lot of mistakes are made because of lack of awareness of the San culture and Amos would like to advise those wishing to understand more about the San culture to work with cultural interpreters but also with people who know the culture, who are from that culture, who can decipher some things from that culture. One would not be able to decipher if they are not from that culture.

“In conclusion, Mr. Ndlovu, I would like to add this; I grew up in Dadamjena next to the Dlamini community which was established by a man called ‘15’ because of the number of his wives he had. We used to play and even went to school with boys and girls from the Dlamini community. One of Dlamini’s sons Tshanyana married Xhalanxa Vundla from

the San community. The other community we had contact with were the Gombalume, Somlotha, Mahole, Magabelani and many others before moving to Garia. We never ran away when we met people outside our community, maybe the only thing the San demanded was not to be bothered by the Bantu people” he said.



Amos' sister once stayed with her sister who was married to the Mabhandanda (Ndebele clan).

3. Msindo Moyo: The San family organisation (Sanqinyana August 2013)

Msindo Best Moyo is the only legally married San in Zimbabwe, and is the only San who was trained in Church leadership. Interviewing him was marvelous and very enlightening. Msindo, through the Brethren Church, was once given an opportunity to visit places like the Wanezi Mission where he was taught the Christians values. When he came back to Pumula Mission in Tsholotsho, which was nearer to his home, Msindo started having the urge to go back into the bush. Unlike in the Wanezi Mission, the people at the Pumula Mission did not give Msindo the respect he deserved, because they knew that Msindo was San and many refused to be led by a Khoisan. Msindo had no choice but to leave the Mission and went back to his people.

When I first paid him a visit, I found him at Dumbutshe cattle post where he was taking care of his neighbour's cattle. I could just see that Msindo and family were enjoying themselves, they had plenty milk, mealie meal, mopane worms, water lilies and meat. Because it was summer, they had built some lean-to structures just for shed. As I got into his camp, he greeted me in Tjwao and asked me to repeat some sentences after him.

He said something like "Totanahae, tjantaie, tjakoa ma-nuu koa nuu" loosely translated "How is your day, how are you and where do you live or where are you coming from?" I was left speechless.

As we sat down under the shade of a Mopane tree, Msindo Moyo told me that the San of Tsholotsho have been drastically reduced in numbers from several thousands to a few hundreds. "Our lifestyle is seriously threatened by encroaching western cultures and the effects of continuous drought on available resources. The San People used to live in bands of 10 to 40 people, which contrary to popular stereotypes (in which they lead primitive lifestyles) occupied well-defined territories, where they had access to water, plant foods, game, and other resources. 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. There was no sense of collective San identity. Rather, communities labeled themselves by local groupings, which were usually based on linguistic differences," he explained.

"The San used to live in small groups and as such learned to act together for the continued existence of the group. In any given group, the men used to hunt together or in pairs as women went on food gathering expeditions. The focal point of the San life has been the camp life, in which groups came to relax in their hut or the sparse shade of a tree, the men repairing their tools, or making clothing from animal skins, the women preparing a meal, making beadwork or just talking, as children usually would sing and play amongst themselves. At night all the groups came together around a central campfire, played music and men related stories of great hunts. This kind of lifestyle is coming to an end because of to the hunting and gathering restrictions that have been put in place" Msindo said with finality in his voice.

"The San did not have chiefs, but each group had a leader. The leader used to be either a gifted traditional healer, or an artist or anyone who could articulate issues. The area occupied by one or two groups was separated into sections and each section was placed under a section

leader. The area was demarcated into sections for hunting purposes. If a group from one section ventured into another section's area in search of water or game meat, the section leaders from the two groups met and discussed the issue extensively. The San never denied each other water, so permission was always given for groups to share water. Water used to play a vital role in the San's lives, since for many months it could be in a critical short supply. Rain was most necessary for their personal survival and it also fed the plants and animals which the San depended on. The San used to store water in ostrich eggshells. While on the move, they used to dig water from underground or suck water from trees through a hollow reed at times; the most dependable water source was from moisture-filled tubers and melons" he added

"Among the San communities Mr Ndlovu, there were families that were respected for certain acts that they performed. The rain-making ceremony was strictly reserved for the Tshuma family according to the San communities at Sanqinyana in the Caunajena area. Other families were noted for their hunting skills and others for their craftsmanship. Unlike the well developed communities, there was no competition for recognition among the San communities and conflict was thus avoided" with that Msindo closed his narration.

4. Markson Ngcoli Sibanda: Tsholotsho the land of our fathers

Markson Ngcoli Sibanda, born in 1946 is one of the vocal San on land dispossession due to the establishment of National Parks during the colonial period.

Ngcoli is a traditional healer and a firm believer in African traditions, particularly those of the Khoisan. Ngcoli, unlike some of his kinsmen, lives in a community of only San people which is close to the Ndebele/Kalanga communities. He is the kraal head of this community. Ngcoli is also active in politics and attends regular political meetings. Unlike other San in Tsholotsho and Plumtree, he has travelled as far as Matopo in Matabeleland Province.

Ngcoli Sibanda is married to one wife with several children and grandchildren. Though Ngcoli is dark in complexion, all his children are lighter in complexion. Ngcoli is fluent in Tjwao and can be a good teacher of the language, his lifetime wish is to see Tjwao revived and being taught in schools.

This interview took place at his compound in Thula Village. Ngcoli started his story by



Markson Ngcoli Sibanda

telling me that the San practiced hunting and gathering lifestyles until the late 1950s. He recalls that, though they did not have chiefs among them, their system of leadership was different from other tribes. “Mtsuria Mganadi Tshuma was like a chief to the San and Mazebele Mchaise/Xhaise Sibanda acted like a headmen” he said.

“When I was growing up, the prominent families around here were the Nxaphela Vundla, Dziyahwa Mchaise Sibanda, Mazebele Moyo, Goledema Tshuma and others. The Tshuma family looked into rain matters and the Vundla families were gifted healers and hunters,” he added.

“We used to hold our traditional festivals to celebrate life and the abundance of food in the jungle and to seek guidance from our departed ancestors undisturbed. Nowadays, it is no longer possible because of the interference from outsiders. Our prayers are sacred and need to be respected, but the arrival of the Bantu-speaking people with their mixed cultures has eroded our once revered activities. Right inside the Game Park, we used to hold traditional rituals and had identified places where we conducted our sacred ceremonies. Such places includes; Bhongobhongo, Baukikabharaa, Chini and many others” he said.

“The other places we used to perform our rituals include the Chini Water Pan. Chini was a waterhole of sizeable radius and next to it was a big tree with a hollow in the middle. There was a big snake that lived in the water and from time to time, we used to visit the place and perform our traditional rituals. My grandfather once told me that when one found the snake out of the water, lying in the hollow of the tree, the visitor or visitors would throw snuff and anything that they had brought and speak to the snake. If their offerings were accepted, the snake would go back into the water and everything will be fine,” Ngcoli added.

According to Ngcoli and the elders, the other place of interest was Bhongobhongo. “Bhongobhongo is a huge waterhole with a tree stump of about 1.5 meters in height. The stump had powers to talk and from time to time, we visited the place and ask for guidance. If all was well, the stump usually answered by uttering words *enhe-enhe*. If things were bad, the stump just keep quiet. The other place is Baudikabharaa, it is a huge and scary water plain, where at night, visions of people could be seen moving about. Other places were at Gomo, Lompanda, Chamzeze and many others.”

“Traditionally, the San used to live, hunt and eat together. While on the move the San respected the environment and did not encourage random cutting of trees or starting of veld fires. When they arrived at a water point, they first paid tribute to the place by offering whatever gifts they had and always camped on the eastern side of the waterhole. The belief was that human smell drove the wild animals to the west, away from the people” he said

He added “During hunting sprees, the first meat was brought to the camp and everyone present would feast on the meat, while singing and dancing until all the meat is finished. Bone marrow was reserved for the elders and youngsters were not allowed to touch it”

According to Ngcoli things changed in 1950 when the District Administrator of Tsholotsho (Tjolotjo) back then came along the Manzanymyama River looking for the San people. “He was in an expedition of mapping the area and thought that the only people who could assist were the San. Among the San he became known as S’thwalamtshotsho and he worked well with the San. Nhlanganiso Sibanda, Mphaya Sibanda, Molo Tshuma, Fanisa Moyo and Kifile Tshuma were employed as scouts. They constructed roads that linked up Tsholotsho and in the process started drilling boreholes” Ngcoli said

The establishment of Wankie Game Reserve (Hwange National Park)

In 1926 the people in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) began talking about establishing a game reserve. The idea was put forward in the Legislative Assembly by Colonel Bogie in 1927. As such, all Native Commissioners were asked to suggest which tract of land in the country could be most suitable for the game reserve. As a result, it was decided to set apart an area of some five thousand square miles lying between the west of the railway between Bulawayo and Livingstone and south of Deka River. It was called the Wankie Game Reserve and Mr Ted Davidson was appointed the first Game Warden.

According to Ngcoli, among the San, Ted Davidson became known as Mr Dabson. Mr Ted, according to the San, did not consult them about the establishment of the Game Reserve, falsely told them that he was going to provide the San with jobs and better livelihoods. In return he asked the San to show him all the waterholes and underground water spots. Mr Ted's first task was to provide water for the reserve. Since the San were already settled in the area and had their secret water points and knew where ground water would be found, Ted decided to use them as scouts.

“The sad part Mr Ndlovu is that when all this was happening, no one bothered to explain to us about these new developments. The San were not prepared for events that were to follow” Ngcoli said. “After showing Ted all the secret water points, Ted became aggressive and chased us out of the Game Reserve. All of a sudden, the San discovered that they have been tricked and in the process had lost their ancestral land, can you imagine that?” he asked.

“When we tried to protest, we were met with serious intimidation and harassment. At times, we were rounded up during the day or at night, beaten up and imprisoned. Many groups lost their belonging including donkeys, hunting tools and sleeping material (animal skins)” he said this with an angry voice.

“There are many unreported cases where people were beaten up and some sustained injuries that led to death, while on the other hand some lost their sight and hearing capabilities. The few examples include Monstwani, who was beaten up and bled through the nose and ears and eventually died. Also Jicwa who was 70 years old and could not run was caught and beaten up to the point that he totally lost his hearing.”

“Jinkwani, Gxlamadau, Batani and many other were caught, beaten up and taken to Sihubu and beaten up again and again. They were made to promise that they will never go back into the Game Reserve. It was later discovered that the forced removals were not working, and seeing this Ted made agreements with the San that as long as they did not hunt illegally, ‘the then government’ would provide them with game meat from time to time. This arrangement worked well for some time and the San were given portions of meat. The San were also employed to guard the boundary fence and were also given meat and other necessities from time to time” he said.

“The establishment of this park has thrown our lives into social turmoil. The entire history of the San, which was stored at the park, has been lost and we are now just people. How can other nations respect us in light of this great loss? Our ancestors were displaced from the Matopo Hills, one of our strongholds, now we have been moved again. Like I said before, our elders used to hold their traditional festivals to celebrate life, the abundance of food in the jungle and to seek guidance from their departed ancestor undisturbed. Nowadays, it is no-longer possible because of the interference of outsiders,” said a dejected Ngcoli.

Right inside the Game Park, the Ngcoli claim that they used to hold traditional rituals and had identified places where they conducted their sacred ceremonies.

In summary, Markson Ngcoli Sibanda relates the story on how Ted Davidson the first Game Warden harassed and terrorized them. According to Sibanda, Ted came to them with false promises of employment and in return asked the San to show him all the waterholes and underground water spots. After showing him all their strongholds, the San were asked to leave the Park never to return. Because the San had nowhere to go, they chose to remain in the park and once caught, they were beaten, imprisoned and had their possession confiscated from time to time. Some of the San families who lost donkeys were the Garia Moyo, the Mtsuria Mganadi Tshuma, Munambi Mchaise Sibanda families. The argument from the San is that, when the whites came into this country, they never recognized the San as a people a fact that has continued to this day.

Problems at the Park

The Lompanda performing group got their name from an incident that happened in 1966 at Lompanda between the San and the game rangers. Although the San were not allowed into the game park, from time to time would venture back into the park to hunt (illegally). “It happened that one day a group of San comprised of Kaliziwa, some women and children

went into the park while the other men had gone hunting in the other part of the game reserve. Kaliziwa was caught and when the other men heard that Kaliziwa has been taken captive, they organized themselves and went to rescue Kaliziwa from the hand of the rangers” Ngcoli said as he continued with his story.

Some of the known but unrecorded conflicts in the history of the San took place over a period of time after the establishment of the National Park and after the arrival of the Ndebele/Kalanga people.

“The first incident took place in 1962 between the San and the Ndebele at Sihubu. Apparently, the Ndebele were accusing the San people of fishing at Sihuba and making the drinking water for their livestock dirty and smelly. The Ndebele, who had just arrived in the area, started accusing the San of spoiling drinking water for their livestock with fish smell. The San were angered by this attitude and mobilized themselves and fought the Ndebeles. It is understood that the Ndebele could not withstand the intensity of the fight and ended up running away” said Ngcoli. And I asked him about what has been said over and over that the San were peaceful people who avoided conflicts at whatever cost, he just brushed me off by laughing.

The second incident according to Ngcoli took place at Nsekesa between the San and the District Commissioner’s people. It happened that a certain woman from the San community went into Nsekesa with a chunk of meat to sell in exchange of maize meal. On arrival, she found the place crawling with game rangers and police from the commissioner’s office searching for game meat, spears and traps.

On being searched, the chunk of meat was discovered on her and the rangers arrested her. Resisting arrest, she cried, kicked and made a lot of noise. On hearing the noise the other San, came in numbers and started fighting the rangers and police. “These were hard times for the San who were used to getting all they wanted from the bush and all of a sudden come this drastic change” he said

The third incident took place in December 1964 at Headmen Sibindi’s residence. The conflict was between the San and the Ndebele people. Headmen Sibinda had brewed traditional beer and asked the San to be part of the celebrations. Having known the San for a while and particularly interested in their dance style, Sibinda asked the San to perform their dance called bhoru.

While dancing, the San held their hands up. The Ndebele were offended and started accusing the San of imitating cattle horn, when they did not have cattle of their own. This barbaric act angered the San. Once again, a fight broke out and once again the Ndebele were defeated.

Problems of the 1920s to the 1950s

As the San were busy trying to preserve what they termed as their natural habitat, once again they were caught unaware by the movement of people who were being resettled in the area by the then Rhodesian Government.

“In 1953, most of the land in Tsholotsho had been taken up; the only land available was next to the Game Park from the Caunajena area. As we were constantly being forced out of the National Park, we found out that the land around us was being taken up by cattle herding tribes, the Ndebele and Kalanga. This went on and on up to 1957. We discovered that we had no choice but to mix with the cattle herding tribes and we started building homesteads like the Ndebele/Kalanga people. This act proved difficult for us the San since we did not have cattle and other needed materials. For a people who were used to a simple life of hunting and gathering, this life proved to be difficult for us” Ngcoli said.

As has been reported before, the San people used to live in bands of 10 to 40 people and each band was comprised of members related to each other one way or the other. The current situation of the San people as they attempt to live side by side with each other has presented many challenges as witnessed by the infighting taking place amongst themselves, and the attitude of some who work against each other, bad mouthing each other. In Tsholotsho and Plumtree in Zimbabwe, the San people once lived in bands, occupying different hunting grounds. But during the establishment of the Wankie Game Reserve (Hwange National Park) for the first time ever, different groups (Bands) were thrown together, to live side by side. From that time onwards, the San started living a life that they were not used to.

5. Ndliso Sibanda: My culture, my heritage, my pride

Ndliso is so pleased with the news that he is going to be afforded an opportunity to teach San children the San culture and language. As a true traditionalist, he has promised to teach the children undiluted San history, including language, customs, traditions and rituals that he got from his father and grandfather.

He says that the San language is very difficult to learn, especially for beginners whether from San ethnicity or not. He says the language is a 'bush' language which is deeply rooted in the bush life of hunting and gathering. He says there is a spiritual element to the language and that is why many people from other communities have failed to grasp the language. Ndliso believes that the secrets of a people are hidden in their language. Ndliso says that the language problem lies in that there is no evidence that the languages spoken by San groups constitute a linguistic unit, despite the economic, phonotypical and cultural similarities among the people who speak them.

The San may share similar facial features, but the languages that they speak are different. The mistake that is being made is to classify the San as one people, speaking one language and living the same kind of life. He says his father once told him that among the San groups, there were some who did not eat meat, but ate fish and tubers and fruits only.

He also says the government is failing to understand the San people because they have failed to acknowledge the San language. He believes that the first recognition the San deserve today is the recognition of their language. He says traditions, rituals and customs are all manifested in the language spoken by a people or a nation. He says that it is now time for government to take a leading role in the development and revitalisation of the Tjwao language.

He still maintains that culture is not about how people look, dress, eat or talk. He says culture is what people value the most and that is manifested in the language they speak. He says language helps in the transferring of ideas and thoughts and it also helps in the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next. He says language allows people to be who they are and this is a key element of cultural diversity. He believes that the world was created like this, and people should learn to embrace this diversity and no one has a right to change it.

Ndliso believes that it is now time to teach the children to speak and embrace the San language. According to Ndliso, the San language lost its value sometime ago when the San people adopted the Ndebele/Kalanga languages as languages of convenience.

With the adoption of the Ndebele/Kalanga languages, the San were able to seek help from these tribes. The San language lost its appeal to the people from 1953 onwards.

Ndliso believes that the people who were born post-1953 are the ones responsible for the language loss. In 1953, Ndliso was only 5 years old and the Wankie Game Reserve (Hwange National Park) established (1928) is 20 years older than Ndliso. Despite all this and the problems of being chased out of the park, he still managed to learn the San cultural heritage. He does not understand why the San people always blame the problems of 1953.

Ndliso had agreed to help us during the second Bush Camp we had organized for the youths from the San communities around Sanqinyana, Sifulasengwe, Damlocingo and Thula line. The Camp was postponed until further funding was available for the logistics for the Camp. The camp was to take place as soon as schools closed to enable the likes of Motshwa's grandson Jonathan to take part.

Ndliso still practices a semi-nomadic lifestyle and is constantly on the move looking for water, wild fruits and tubers when they are in season. He is so attached to the bush and does not imagine a life away from the bush. He feels a strong connection with his ancestors when he is in the bush. Ndliso is a deep spiritual person and believes that his life is an inexpensive one.

Unlike his counterparts who have joined the Ndebele/Kalanga people, whose lives are muddled with confusion and mistrust, Ndliso believes that the San and Ndebele/Kalanga people can live together, but there would be a great deal of animosity between them and accusations and counter accusation will be the order of the day.

For him and his family, the kind of life that they chose to follow is very satisfactory to them. The only challenge now is that they have been given sugar and are now failing to live without sugar. He says that since their life is so fulfilling, this is why many San people are not willing to let go to this kind of life. Ndliso wonders why there is no place designated for the San people. In Zimbabwe, we have Matabeleland named after the Ndebele people, Mashonaland, named after the Shona people, Binga for the Tonga people, Plumtree for the BaKalanga people. He feels that there should be Sanland named after the San people.

Ndliso has laid down a program of action to follow if we want to be successful in the San language revival project. His concerns are that the San people have been assimilated into the Ndebele culture and that they now live as the Ndebele people, therefore the starting

point is to establish a ‘ Bush Camp’ away from the interfering Ndebele cultures. The next thing is for people wishing or willing to learn San to be re-cultured into San ways of life. Ndliso also points out that the people who have been identified to teach the San language should be prepared to assist without aiming for gains as many San people today have taken to money and material possessions.

He is aware that in Botswana, the San have been promised new houses in different locations but are resisting that. Many people believe that the nomadic life the San live is stressful and primitive, but Ndliso says only people who have not experienced this life before would say that. He says if anyone dares to try this kind of life, they will never go back to their old life. He does not envy people living in controlled communities paying all kinds of taxes, some even paying rent and other bills. What happens when one does not have money to pay for all these expenses? As much as he would want to send his children to school, he sees no benefit except to enrich the people owning the school.

Some of Ndliso friends and family bowed to pressure from the Ndebele/Kalanga and left, leaving old house ruins behind

Ndliso claims that since the time the Ndebele/Kalanga people were bused into the area, they have had enough time to learn the San language, at least they could have tried, but they thought that they are too important to learn an inferior language. He says the San are wasting their time trying to live like the Ndebele/Kalanga people because they will never be accepted, but only to be used as cheap labourers.

Ndliso believes that a lot needs to be done to see the language being revived and is suggesting that all those who speak the language must meet and formulate a strategy or a roadmap on the language development. Knowing the San people, Ndliso is skeptical and thinks that such a meeting will take forever to organise with others making excuses that are unfounded.

Ndliso is of the opinion that government must start committing to the San language and cultural revival project(s). He is also thankful of the involvement of ALRI and UZ, and the fact that they took one of the San people to Harare for the first ever San language transcription. He says this is a positive sign that things might change in the near future.

He is also grateful that the newly adopted Zimbabwean Constitution seeks to address and

promote culture. The one set back that he foresees concerns the attitude of the San people who are known to shy away from hard work. The San have been spoiled and want things done for them. The San cannot commit to work where there is no food or material gain.



Niso's children

CHAPTER 4:

The San Today — Assimilation and adaptation challenges

In this chapter, I want to tell you about a variety of challenges that the San face today. Shortly, you'll meet two of the community leaders who explain the situation as they see it. Then I describe the challenges with education and include the 2013 census I conducted which shows you more about the life of the small communities.

1. Christopher Dube: The new age San generation

Now I would like to introduce to you Christopher Dube who goes by the nickname 'M'stopher' among the San. When Christopher Dube was born, his father (whose ethnicity is not known) lost interest in his mother and Christopher grew up under the care of his mother. Dube is one of the few privileged San who went up to grade seven and he is able to read and write. Dube has been chosen by the San communities to represent them and has been elected to the position of Coordinator.

The interview with Dube was mainly concerned with how the young San generation was coping with assimilation and adaptation challenges. Christopher, like any other boy born from the wandering San, learnt the art of gathering food at an early age. Although his family was constantly on the move, he managed to finish his primary education at a very old age and became one of those very few privileged San who could read and write. He has taken it upon himself to bring change to his people the San.

“You know what Ndlovu? I grew up under the strict culture of my people the San, but like many other boys my age at the time, I failed to master the San language and because of people like yourself Ndlovu, I'm beginning to realise that losing the language of my grandfathers is actually a great loss and this is of major concern to me. My feelings are, if the language of my great-grand-fathers is not protected and revived, it is going to become extinct and this shouldn't be allowed to happen at whatever cost,” says Dube

Dube sees the need to establish a school that will be able to teach the San children, the



From the left, Dube explains the art of harvesting Mopane worms to D Ndlovu, right.

language of their forefathers. The other thing of great concern to Christopher is the level of education among the youth of San origin. “Education is still a major challenge for the San and nowadays we live in multi-cultural societies and the world is changing fast, whereas we the San have remained the same. It is disheartening to see the poor literacy levels among the San and it is at times troubling to observe the attitudes of the San who constantly argue that they are a disadvantaged people in need of humanitarian support in order to escape poverty, while on the other hand neighbouring villagers look down on them accusing them of alcoholism and refusing to embrace modernisation,” Dube said

According to Christopher, the neighbouring communities argue that the San are a troublesome people, always seeking attention from government officials and NGOs. They say that some NGOs and government tried to alleviate their situation by giving to them ploughs and beasts to farm, but because they love meat so much, they feasted on those beasts and sold their ploughs at ridiculously low prices to raise money to buy tobacco and beer.

“These allegations are not true, it is only an excuse used by the people and government

to delay the delivery of much-needed assistance,” explains Dube. On the other hand elders from neighbouring communities brushed aside these allegations that other ethnic groups in Zimbabwe discriminated against the San, saying they were the ones who isolated themselves, as they tried to resist change. However, some people observed that the San are a grossly misunderstood people and described their living standards as appalling. “MPs have to lobby the government to assist these people, but nothing positive has transpired so far. Life is generally difficult for them, as they do not have food, blankets and many other basics that are needed in life. They do not have any means of survival other than to work under conditions similar to those of slaves.”

Because of leading a frustrating lifestyle, Christopher could not hold back when interviewed by *NewsDay*, one of Zimbabwe’s daily newspapers on 7th of November 2012. The story reads;

“One of the leaders, Christopher Dube, said they were treated like animals by their neighbours from the two tribes (Ndebele and baKalanga).

“If their children fall in love with our children and they get them pregnant, when we go to report what their children would have done, they ask if we have ever seen a cow mating with a donkey,” he told the minister (Hon Moses Mzila).

“We are donkeys in this society minister, I would like to say that and I am not hiding it.

“The matter that pains us is the treatment we get from our brothers.

“Some come asking for land and we give them to build homesteads, but in a few days they change. They do not want to be directed, saying they can’t be ruled by the San, but when they came to ask for land they approached the San. What do we do as a people?”

Dube said there was a danger that the situation could degenerate into conflict if the government does not intervene urgently.

“One day, don’t be shocked when we give you back your identity cards (IDs) or when we get axes and axe each other to show that this place also belongs to us,” he said.

“However, we have realized that fighting does not help.”

He said the ill-treatment would force the community to go back to the game reserves where they led lives of hunter-gatherers.

“We will return your IDs and go back to the game reserves, we do not want IDs because we will be at our habitat,” he said.

“If you say we will be eaten by lions, let it be and the few that will remain will see what to do because our bothers are giving us problems.”

He said the San community was also left out of the government’s food distribution programs although they were being used by their Kalanga and Ndebele neighbours to till the land.

He urged the government to ensure they were empowered to look after their own affairs. Dube said the community had been pushed off their land in Tsholotsho by the colonial regime and deserved to be properly resettled.”

When I first met with Dube and some San elders, the question of citizenship always cropped up. I asked Dube who were the San and where did they come from? The answer I got was that they have always been here; they have lived here even before the establishment of borders.

“The San have managed to preserve their cultural heritage unchanged to this time in possession because they have managed to keep to themselves and where other tribes have completely discarded their cultures and followed the Western cultures. Meeting and mixing with the Bantu people has had negative impacts on our culture and way of life” Christopher spoke jokingly

Though some of the San do not have birth certificate and identity documents, to show their citizenry, Dube said “We were the first people to settle in Zimbabwe and the first people to be resettled in Tsholotsho by the white colonial government. The colonialists agreed that when they arrived in the area during the 1920s, the only people they found were the San. Most of the communities in Tsholotsho got their names from the San, the likes of Mpanedziba, Hangapu, Mbuhulu, Xhanixhani and even Tsholotsho which was called Tsoro-o-tso by our elders a long time ago” says Dube.

On the language side, Christopher Dube realizes that learning the language of their ancestors could be an emotional experience considering the fact that it almost died and that it can also provide them with a strong sense of pride and identity, which they have lacked before. “I personally believe that there is more power in having one’s language and being able to speak it than speaking other people’s languages.”

Christopher is pleased by the fact that many of the San were becoming more and more interested in learning Tjwao and he found out that learning the language of his ancestors is liberating and that it gives him and hopefully all the San a sense of identity.

The San, Dube included, feel that there is a strong link between culture and language, culture to them is not about how people look, or the language they speak or greet each other. They say culture has to do with what people value, (making reference to bush life). That is different from culture to culture, but also different from person to person, but in general it is very important to get a sense of what the cultural dynamics are in a community. Dube and the San elders maintains that the San culture included beliefs, patterns of thought, and patterns of expression transmitted from one generation to the next, and this created a strong bond between the San and their surrounding environment.

“My feeling is that the future of the Tjwao language lies in other communities becoming culturally sensitive to our unique culture and the richness of our language. It is not okay to put us in a box and say all the San communities are primitive, lazy and unsophisticated. Others say that the San are good at making babies.

Christopher Dube attests to the fact that, for thousands and thousands of years, the San people lived on hunting and gathering, existing in a hostile and unfriendly environment and in the process, became attuned to the environment. They managed to subsist on game meat, tubers and wild berries from the bush. The bush provided them with food while on the other hand the rains provided much needed fresh drinking water.

“For years hunting and gathering was our form of life, now things have changed and we are supposed to adapt and adjust to a sedentary lifestyle. In the past, San children were taught the art of surviving in the bush from an early age. Back then, education meant nothing to the San and material possession never meant a thing and was not known among my people. Families were taught to share food and their hunting tools among groups. This kind of lifestyle has stopped” Dube adds. “Organisations in the past had come to assist us with

farming inputs and implements, but the donated materials had been misused in many cases by some people from the San who at times had sold the ploughs, hoes, seeds to supplement their food needs. As such the donations have failed to yield positive results,” he says. “The challenge with this is that organisations and government are failing to understand that the San do not have a thing, any assistance given to them may be converted to food for the day and the San see no problem in that.”

Of importance is the food situation among them, as long as they cannot supplement their food reserves, anything that they get can be sold to obtain food for the day. At times the stuff is sold at cheaply. Subsistence farming is not one of their best choices for food provision as many do not have inputs and implements; at the most, the fields are neglected while they move around in search of food.

The other issue that angers the San is being treated as if they are not from Zimbabwe. Although some San do not have birth certificates and identity documents, they rightly say this does not mean they are foreigners to this country.

2. Mtshina Maphosa: Butabubili San community

Zimbabwe’s small San community of Butabubili next to Mgodimasili has laid the blame for their ongoing economic hardships squarely on the government, which they accuse of discrimination and neglect. Butabubili village founded by Butabubili Maphosa is a mixture of sprawling and dilapidated thatch and mud huts in western Tsholotsho. It is home to about 200 of the 3500 San people in the country. In comparison with neighbouring villages, just a few kilometers east of the parched soil, lies the neighbouring village of Sikente, which boasts neat houses with corrugated iron roofs. The unequal living conditions of the two communities brings into sharp view the undeniable poor living conditions of the San.

The existence of the San remains precarious, battling chronic poverty and hunger. “We the San are appealing to anyone, including government, to give us ploughs and other farm implements so that we can produce enough food for our families. We have pieces of land, but because we don’t have enough resources to till it, we are always faced with starvation, be it in a good or bad year,” Mtshina Madlela Maphosa, an elder of the San group, said. He said many families did not have blankets, and during the winter season life was very difficult. Although the San community still practices their ancient traditions, an increasing number of laws banning hunting have forced them to abandon their nomadic life as hunters and gatherers

and look to subsistence farming to eke out a living. “The life of hunting and gathering is no longer practiced because of laws that prohibit hunting, so most of us have become farmers just like other groups. But the difference is that we farm using our bare hands, as we do not have implements and cattle for draught power. The little grain that we produce quickly runs out before the end of the year,” Maphosa explained. He said, because the community was unable to produce enough grain for their families, they were forced to offer cheap labour to other communities in exchange for food. He regretted the lack of government assistance to combat the widespread poverty the San are experiencing despite repeated requests. Children are also unable to attend school because they could not afford the fees. “We are generally a poor people, but I think we can improve if government supported us. Our children also need to go to school, so that they can represent us in parliament,” said Maphosa.

3. Education Challenges

San communities display education levels and literacy rates that are significantly below national averages. School dropout rates during or just after primary school are very high, and are linked to barriers such as bullying, geographical isolation, costs associated with schooling, and a lack of mother-tongue education. The San would prefer an education that puts more emphasis on learning practical skills that have to do with their cultural aspects of life rather than spend hours on ends in a classroom seeking knowledge or skills that are not practicable in their lives. With proper education and proper representation the San could articulate issues that affect them, but talking of legislations, Acts of Parliament makes no sense to the San at present. The schools are far and the San have large families and cannot afford to buy their children school uniforms and pay school levies

Too often, education systems do not respect indigenous peoples’ diverse cultures. There are no teachers who speak their language and the schools often lack basic materials. Educational materials that provide accurate and fair information on indigenous peoples and their ways of life are particularly rare. Despite the numerous international instruments that proclaim universal rights to education, indigenous peoples do not fully enjoy these rights, and an education gap between indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical worldwide.

The San children are more likely to arrive at school hungry, ill and tired. They are often bullied, and the use of corporal punishment is still widespread. Ethnic and cultural discrimination at schools are major obstacles to equal access to education, causing poor

performance and higher dropout rates. Girls in particular experience difficult problems related to unfriendly school environments, gender discrimination, school based violence and sometimes sexual abuse, all of which contribute to high dropout rates. When children from minority groups are only introduced to the national discourse at the expense of their native discourse, they are in danger of losing part of their identity, their connection with their parents and predecessors and, ultimately, of being caught in a no man's land whereby they lose an important aspect of their identity, while not fully becoming a part of the dominant national society.

Many among the San do not have birth certificates and identity documents. When a child's birth goes unregistered, that child is less likely to enjoy his or her rights including the protection that is accorded by the state. Furthermore, the unregistered child may go unnoticed when his or her rights are violated. Later in life, he or she will be unable to vote or stand for election. These children are also at risk of falling victim to child abuse.

Despite all the positive developments in international human rights standard-setting, indigenous peoples continue to face serious human rights abuses on a day-to-day basis. Issues of violence and brutality, continuing assimilation policies, marginalisation, dispossession of land, forced removal or relocation, denial of land rights, impacts of large-scale development, abuses by politicians, and a host of other abuses are a reality for indigenous communities around the Tsholotsho and Plumtree.

For the San, education is most often irrelevant. San students frequently find that the education they are offered by the state promotes individualism and a competitive atmosphere, rather than communal ways of life and cooperation. They are not taught relevant survival and work skills suitable for indigenous economies, and those fortunate, often return to their communities with a formal education that is irrelevant or unsuitable for their needs. They are forced to seek employment in the national economy, leading to a vicious cycle of social fragmentation, brain drain and a lack of development, especially because the jobs and salaries available to them often will not match their educational achievements.

Here is a table of the 2011 School enrolment for San children

Butabubili Primary

Grade	No of Pupils	Gender		Notes
		F	M	
0	32	11	21	From the 32 pupils, 19 do not make it to grade one
1	13	4	9	Only 13 proceed to grade one
2	8	2	6	

Grade	No of Pupils	Gender		Notes
		F	M	
3	5	2	3	
4	1	-	1	
5	1	1	-	
6	2	-	2	
7	-	-	-	None makes it to grade 7

Mgomoni Primary

Grade	No of Pupils	Gender		Notes
		F	M	
0	6	3	3	From the 6 pupils, none makes it to grade one
1	-	-	-	No enrolment for San children in 2011 for grade one
2	2	2	-	
3	1	-	1	
4	1	-	1	
5	2	-	2	
6	2	-	2	
7	1	1	-	Only one makes it to grade 7

Thembile Primary

Grade	No of Pupils	Gender		Notes
		F	M	
0	4	3	1	From the 4 pupils none makes it to grade one
1	-	-	-	No enrolment for San children in 2011 for grade one
2	6	2	4	
3	5	4	1	
4	1	1	-	
5	3	2	1	
6	-	-	-	
7	-	-	-	None makes it to grade 7

Results from School heads from the above mentioned school 2011

The San lack educational knowledge and sustainable development skills compounded by poverty and marginalisation.

An unspecified percentage of the active San population from wards 1, 2, 7, 8 and 10 live and work in neighbouring countries like Botswana and South Africa. Many middle-aged San are not in any employment, nor did they have an education to attain employable skills, and thus many are forced to move from one place to the other in search for better livelihoods.

Few of the San children graduate from primary education, while one or two have attempted secondary schooling, but had to drop out due to intimidation, lack of means to pay school levies, uniforms and starvation.

School attendance is hardly sustained through the course of the full school term or school year period due to hunger and the fact that the San move about in search of food. The schools are far and the San have large families and cannot afford to support their children with their educational needs.

Education systems do not respect indigenous people's diverse cultures. There are few teachers (at times none) who speak their language.

As the unfortunate bearers of a wide array of negative stereotypes, the San people are regularly the victims of discrimination at the hands of others. Against such a challenging background, even small positive changes are noteworthy. Communities have started to get organized and to seek support to start development initiatives to diversify their livelihoods. More San children enter the formal school system, and governments, particularly in Namibia and South Africa, have started to recognise the plight of the San. In Zimbabwe more needs to be done to facilitate the speedy integration of the San population.

4. Tjwao Census within designated areas

Due to lack of information on the San in Zimbabwe, in the middle of 2013, I sat with the San elders and other stakeholders and agreed to do a census that could determine the total number of the San in Zimbabwe between Tsholotsho and Plumtree. Due to the limitation on resources, we failed to research some places and we then resorted to asking for village heads in those areas to send us the data we needed.

The 2013 San census was conducted within Ward 1 (4 households with 28 family members), ward 2 (4 households with 17 family members), ward 7 (147 households with 750 people) ward 8 (29 households with 215 people) ward 10 (50 households with 214 people), and Makhulela Plumtree 457 people)

San population 2013

	Kraal/Line	No of Households	Population
1	Mtshina 1	36	143
2	Mtshina 2	9	46

	Kraal/Line	No of Households	Population
3	Matopo	1	8
4	Mzimutsha	2	4
5	Diwa/Maganwini	8	94
6	Thabisa	7	24
7	Sifulaswengwe	76	334
8	Sanqinyana	37	188
9	Thembile	1	5
10	17	5	37
11	7	1	4
12	Sakhile	4	28
13	Thula	6	35
14	Vulamehlo	3	17
15	Gubungano	5	31
16	Plumtree		457
17	Gariya	24	184
18	Mgodimasili	5??	24??
18	Mazibulala ward 2	4	17
18	Total population		1680

Table 1: The population census was conducted from 18 March to 24 March 2013

Ward 1-Sakhile next to Pelandaba School, Tsholotsho

Sakhile is in ward 1 and the nearest School is Pelandaba Primary School. The village is composed of about 45 households, 6 belonging to the Tjwao people. From the 6 Tjwao households, there are 28 people most in the middle age bracket. The Sakhile Tjwao community is very connected to the ward 7 San community and they always take part in all the Tjwao cultural activities.

There is no-one within the Sakhile San community who speaks or understands Tjwao language. Many from this community understand the basics of the Tjwao language, like meat=koho, sun=dzini, water=tsaa. One other interesting thing is that this group can sing all the known songs sung during the *bhoro* dance.

Sakhile neighbours with ward 7 (Sifulasengwe, Damulocingo, Thula, Sanqinyana) and as such, are able to connect with other Tjwao communities.

I also gathered that there were other San/Tjwao communities within ward 1 in the places Nxlabamude, Xhojina, Arantici and these are nearer to Sipepa. As to how many San people are living in these communities, we have no clue.

Ward 2-Mazibulala

In Ward two, there are 4 households and 17 people within these household. There are eleven children between the ages from birth to 16 years. The community of Mazibulala is comprised of over 60 homesteads; only 4 belong to the Tjwao people. The remaining Tjwao people in Mazibulala were part of the Goledema group that used to stay in the place before the arrival of the Ndebele/Kalanga people in 1934. Unlike the Ndebele/Kalanga people, the Tjwao in Mazibulala are living in adverse poverty. The children are not attending school and the food situation is critical.

There is only one elderly woman who is thought to be over 90 years, the rest are middle aged. The Mazibulala Tjwao group has lost most of their cultural value systems and currently follow the Ndebele/Kalanga lifestyles. The language loss within this group is permanent. Currently there is no-one who speaks or understand the language. Nagugile, who is thought to be over 90 years old, has little recollection of the past. She only remembers the people, the places that they went to and the types of food that they ate and also some rituals that they performed. Both men and women in this community have shown interest in learning the Tjwao language and also the revival of the Tjwao Cultural Heritage. They have lived their entire lives secluded from the rest of the Tjwao communities in Zimbabwe. Their biggest challenge now is how they reconnect with the rest of the Tjwao groups.

Plumtree-Makhulela

Preliminary results: Makhulela 43 households, Siwowo 7, Mtshayeli 3, Manzamnyama Line 10.

There are quite a number of elderly people who have a bit of background on the Tjwao/San culture and value systems. There are some places like Sebasi/Twatwayi which are out of the way. Getting to these places is hard. Plumtree Makhulela is far either coming from Bulawayo direct or coming from Tsholotsho through the Manzanyama River. From Tsholotsho ward 8 in the Gariya area to Makhulela is a distance of about 7 hours (25km) and once in Makhulela one travels a further 7-15 km to connect with other villages.

I met with a few elders who gave me the names of others who spoke and understood the Tjwao language. These are: Kwenga Moyo, Sinyeyo Dube, Njahale Dube, Chipabi Moyo, Sibhono Moyo, Mamani Vundla, Chaha Vingo and NaFanyana Ncube (Women). With the male sector only Wuma Tshuma can speak the language partially.

Some of these people are classified as partial speakers, but it is yet to be determined whether this is due to lack of practice.

In Plumtree Makhulela, I lost my phone and \$67. The guy I shared accommodation with overnight ransacked my bag and took the stuff. It would appear that the boy was broke and was planning on going to Botswana but did not have the means. I became a soft target for him. As a result, I failed to get the recordings of the speech communities in Plumtree. There is still plenty to be done in Plumtree.

Makhulela

Most of the San people in Makhulela, Bulilima District in Plumtree are now found in Sabasi. According to Andrew Moyo, born in 1962, the San in these parts used to live in Twaitwai and were later moved by the CAMPFIRE project to Sabasi. Andrew is not sure about the dates, but he recalls that he came to the place in 1991 from Tsholotsho ward 7 and found the people settled in Sabasi.

There are several households led by Mám árèéKwenga Moyo also known as NaZangule. Kwenga is the current Village Head of Sabasi under senior Village Head Makhulela Khupe. Kwenga's mother was the famous gogo Dekedeke who had just passed away some three years back. Gogo Dekedeke was fluent in the San language and she was also well informed as far as the history of the San in Zimbabwe is concerned.

Kwenga, who is thought to be over 80 years of age, had five children. Her first born daughter Zankule, had since relocated to Botswana and is reported as having obtained Botswana Identity. She is currently living at New Sabasi in the Maitengwe region in Botswana. Other people who have relocated to Botswana from Zimbabwe are Major Moyo who is reported to be the headman of New Sabasi.

The San in Makhulela/Sabasi claim that it is easy to relocate and get identification in Botswana as long as one can prove his/her relationship with the San in Botswana.

The San in Sabasi are living under extreme poor conditions, where their food security is seriously threatened. Their financial state is also not conducive to afford them opportunities to send their children to school. Though Makhulela Primary is just nearby, the San do not see the need to send their children to school.

Kwenga's grandson, Last 'Nditsho' Ncube who does not know his date of birth has never been to school. Asked why, he said his parents did not register him. Asked whether he would like to go to school, he said he sees no value in obtaining an education. He says attending school will become a nightmare for him. He says his kind are laughed at and called names all the time. He also said that his parents would not afford to pay for his school levies, he will be chased out of school from time to time. Nditsho says he would rather take care of his goats because the more goats he has the more secure will his future and that of his family be.

Unlike in Tsholotsho, NGOs have been active among the Sabasi area where most of the San live. Zimbabwe Trust, ReddBarna (the Norwegian Save the Children Fund) have been involved in institution-building and strengthening in area and other districts since 1989 and also allocated the village of Makhulela/Sabasi fencing material for the establishment of a garden.

According to Andrew, in 1993 ReddBarna assisted in the establishment of a pre-school at Sabasi. The aim was to increase literacy levels among San. They also undertook to buy school uniforms for San school children attending Makhulela Primary and paid any fees required. The uniforms were bought and given to the headmaster to distribute to San children in need. The parents who were not keen on taking part in school development activities were encouraged to do so by the provision of the uniforms. An adult literacy class was also started with the assistance of this NGO.

Redd Barna also built Makhulela Primary in 1992 and Bhutshe clinic.

Redd Barna moved out around 2005 and maintained close contact with the project until recently. The project has since stopped and the pre-school has closed down. The San attribute this to lack of capacity to manage the project to lack of funds and resources.

In 2005, the Heifer program was launched in the Makhulela area. 20 households including the San, Ndebele and Kalanga each received two cows and a bull. The idea was to pass on the cows after having reproduced to other members of the community. Others were given 4 'she' goats and 1 male goat. The system of passing on the goats after reproduction also applied to the goat scheme. 13 beneficiaries were from the San communities. 2 families have since lost all their cattle, while 11 still have the cattle from the program. The chicken production scheme was also initiated for 20 beneficiaries as well.

In 2010, a Swedish organisation assisted the communities with the drilling of a borehole,

provision of a water tank and fencing material for the market garden project. The organisation also trained villagers in building and carpentry.

The market garden, depending on the season is used for production of vegetables and maize. The market garden has a management structure comprised of a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and committee members. The San occupy key positions in the structure. 50 households, 35 from the San and 15 from the Ndebele/Kalanga communities are involved in the market gardening activities. Crops are produced mainly for own consumption and the excess is sold to neighbouring communities.

Most of the San in Sabasi have lost their cultural values and have since followed the Kalanga way of life. Kwenga, one of the elderly women among the San community, who was presumed to be one of the few remaining speakers of the San language, was discovered that she no longer spoke the language and she claims that though her mother Dekedeke was fluent in the San language, she never bothered to teach her. Others say that Kwenga was not interested in learning her mother tongue. Kwenga now speaks fluent Kalanga and she partially speaks and understands Ndebele.

I spent half my day trying to locate people who could speak the language to no avail. I was previously led to believe that there were 5 old women who could speak the language, and none of them could speak the language properly. When I had given up, someone told me that there was a middle aged lady who could speak the language and also there was one young lady from the San in Botswana recently married a Zimbabwean man from Makhulela and this young woman could speak the language and dance the *bhoro* dance. Na Andrew, the lady who speaks the San/Tjwao language once lived in Tsholotsho and this is where she learnt the language.

There were some small differences from her Tjwao dialect compared to that of the Tsholotsho speech communities. Some differences that I noted were: In Tsholotsho 'sound' is *em'dumu*, but she said *zhobaa*; 'hearing some's voice' in Tsholotsho is *em'dum tire xamaha*, but she said *tire xamaha em'kleyiwo*. But in general, her speech is similar to that of Tsholotsho.

The San in Sabasi know only of the *bhoro* dance ritual and they claim it has been some time since they held the *bhoro* dance rituals.

Youngsters from these communities work in Botswana and are always in contact with the San communities in Botswana. Some young males have married and brought wives from

Botswana. Most of them live in places like Maitengwe, Dogwe, Nkanke, Sinete, Tutume, Cross Bina, Spakwe, Mantsherengwa and Nata areas.

Gubungano Community

Samuel 'Vanya' Maphosa, descendent from Butabubili Maphosa is the founder of the Gubungano San community located along Manzamnyama River on the Tsholotsho side. Gubungano is adjacent to Siwowo on the other side of Manzamnyama on the side of Bulilima in Plumtree.

According to Sam 'Vanya' Maphosa, the reason that made him decide to establish the Gubungano San community was the way they were treated by the Ndebele/Kalanga neighbours. He says the Ndebele and Kalanga people had no respect for the San. When the Ndebele and Kalanga people first came into the area, they found a heavy presence of the San people. Waterholes, trees, swamps had Tjwao names and the Ndebele and Kalanga people did not like that and started changing the names to Ndebele or Kalanga. They did not respect the San culture and their nomadic life styles.

The Ndebele and Kalanga people did not acknowledge the San as the first dwellers in Tsholotsho. All this made people like 'Vanya' to realise that they did not belong together with the Ndebele and Kalanga people.

When Sam 'Vanya' Maphosa finally relocated to Gubungano, he took his household and established the Gubungano community, as time went by, he was joined by other San households including the Dube, Sibanda, his in-laws, his sister and mother.

When the village was established, it was not known to the authorities. Maphosa claims that the community is now known and is accepted by the authorities.

Samuel 'Vanya' Maphosa said that Tsholotsho has become overly populated by the Ndebele and Kalanga people and this has made the presence of the San obscure, such that people now believe that the San have gone extinct or have gone back to Botswana. 'Vanya' surmises that as long as the San live under the shadows of the Ndebele and Kalanga people, they will remain underdeveloped and will continue to suffer discrimination.

There is a road that connects Gubungano with Butabubili. There is no school, clinic and borehole(s). The source of water is the water pans and Manzamnyama River. There is high

illiteracy among this community as all children do not attend school. Most of the children do not even know their dates of birth and are not inspired to go to school.

Like most San communities, the Gubungano San community has lost most of their cultural values and indigenous knowledge, most notable their language. There is only one person, 'Gogo' MaSibanda, Maphosa's mother who understands and speaks the language.



Davy with group

CHAPTER 5:

Can we save the Tjwao language?

1. Tjwao: A dying language?

As I said before, one of my primary major concerns was hearing that Tjwao (the San language) had only a dozen speakers who could speak the language and the speakers were between the ages of 65 and 95. Saving this language became one of my priority areas. I have learned that many of the Khoisan languages are becoming increasingly rare and are becoming increasingly endangered. Some of them have fewer than 100 speakers. The number of speakers is fast diminishing, and several are known to have become extinct. One of the main reasons is that bilingual Khoisan speakers shift to the dominant language of the area and stop teaching their mother tongue to their children as is the case with the Tshara-Tjwao (San) of Zimbabwe. The San people of Zimbabwe have since adopted the dominant Ndebele and Kalanga languages as their own. Unfortunately, the Tjwao language has left behind no records, so the loss could be permanent if nothing is done soon to rectify the situation.

For most of last century many Ndebele and Kalanga speakers encroached into the San territory and created a language contact situation that has had far-reaching consequences for the Tjwao speakers. Ndebele and Kalanga became languages of survival for the San people who were and are used as cattle herders and field attendants. The acquisition of the Ndebele and Kalanga languages by the San meant that they were employable and, as such, managed to acquire food to feed their families. Children sent off to cattle posts at age 8 or 10 lost contact with their native language.

This situation meant that the San speakers are still involved in a trilingual situation. Most of them have now settled for Ndebele or Kalanga as their first languages. However, the coming of schools to the area in the late 70s and 80s further reduced the role of Kalanga since these schools taught in Ndebele and English.

In a population of about 2500, only a dozen elders between the ages of 65-95 now speak and understand Tjwao. The few remaining speakers are people like Ndliso Sibanda and Ngcoli Sibanda are now 77 and 79 years old respectively, while Msindo Moyo, Khatsha Moyo and Gogo Dombosi are all above 80 years old. Tjwao was once passed from one generation to

the next and was closely linked to the hunting and gathering lifestyle, but that lifestyle has gone. There are no fluent young speakers at the moment.

This scenario shows that the language is not going to survive another 10-15 years. The remaining native speakers including Mthandazo Vundla, Molo Tshuma, Magret Sibanda, Sinyeyo Dube and Mhlanganiselwa Mpofu and two others who are not interested in teaching the language to others.

As things stand at the moment, an orthography for the Tjwao language has been developed and now we can begin the huge task of documenting this language. But a challenge is the lack of cooperation from some native speakers who insist on payment for their services. Critics have suggested that since most of the San now speak Ndebele and Kalanga, why not let the language die and continue promoting the usage of Ndebele and Kalanga. To the San, their language is their cultural identity. Losing their language is like losing themselves.

There are 26 children between the ages of 4-16 years and several middle aged adults who have shown interest in learning the language of their grandfathers. Shortage of resources and lack of capacity has made the language learning process very difficult.

While some indigenous peoples are successfully revitalizing their languages, the San of Zimbabwe are fighting a losing battle where their language is no longer passed from one generation to the next. Language is not only a communicating tool but is often linked to the land traditionally occupied by indigenous people. It is an essential component of one's collective and individual identity and therefore provides a sense of belonging and community. When the language dies, that sense of community is damaged.

As had been said at the beginning, there were 14 active speakers of the language, two of whom have since passed on. Motshwa Moyo was the driving force behind the Tjwao language revival, succumbed to pneumonia in 2014. It was suspected that Motshwa could have been born between 1917 and 1918 and she was a living archive of the San history. Motshwa died with all her knowledge of the San history and language intact in her head. Whereas calls have been made highlighting the status of the Tjwao language, all this has fallen in deaf ears.

Due to social pressures and resettlement, the language stopped being passed on to the next generations. Even with significant immediate support, the language is unlikely to survive

more than 20 years. As the only survivors of the indigenous Khoisan language population in Zimbabwe (a country of over 12 million people), the community has a critical place in local history as the creators of the numerous rock paintings found in caves in different parts of the country.

Although the speech variety of the Khoisan community in Zimbabwe has just started to be studied, it is clearly part of the Eastern Kalahari Khoe group, mostly located in eastern Botswana. In fact it is the easternmost member of the Khoisan family (in the Tsoa group of Central Khoe) ISO 639-3: hio. The community's name suggests it is part of the Tsoa cluster, but the community also knows the names of other Khoisan groups (Ganadi, Ihaise), so dialectal research will also be important in the future.

Previously, there was little awareness of non-Bantu linguistics in Zimbabwe, so it is imperative that all stakeholders make concerted effort in revitalizing this language. The Zimbabwe government had never handled a situation of reviving a dying language but after the constitutional changes, the ministries are starting to show more interest.

2. The language documentation and revitalisation project

The language project came about after numerous discussions with the late Gogo Motshwa Moyo, the late Moffat Banini Moyo and Markson Ngxoli Sibanda. Our detailed discussions started in mid 2011 and were mostly concerned about the general history of the San people. From the onset, Gogo Motshwa was very much interested in sharing her knowledge on the cultural value systems within the San society. She was so concerned by the lack of interest that was being displayed by the younger generation on the San cultural way of life. It would appear that both Motshwa, Banini and Ngxoli were firm believers that the national ethos of any nation the world over is characterized by that nation's cultural value systems and institutions.

As we sat discussing the cultural background of the San, the loss of their culture, most notable the language, it became evident that Motshwa was concerned about the forced assimilation into Ndebele and Kalanga way of life styles. It appeared that most of the San in the middle age bracket were comfortable speaking Ndebele and Kalanga.

The other thing that angered Motshwa was being portrayed as wanderers. A wanderer in Ndebele is a person who moves between places aimlessly or without a purpose. According

to Motshwa the San did not just wander between places, but they occupied well defined territories organized around families and close relatives.

After the meeting with the University of Zimbabwe and the launch of the Tjwao language project during the International Mother Language Day in 2012, having realized that the Tjwao language was closely linked to the hunting and gathering lifestyles, we resolved that, since hunting and gathering was no longer practiced, we will be meeting every year to conduct a bush language festival to gather and share experience with elders (currently only a dozen native speakers). Each year during this time, as we gather, we are going to evaluate the status of the language and possibly come up with strategies to further develop the language. Since the language has left no written records, we would rather concentrate on teaching all interested groups using arts and cultural methods including oral story-telling, traditional song and dance, dramas and plays, customs, ritual and basic informal learning methods.

We agreed that all those who understood and spoke the language should start teaching family member the basics of the language.

When we started the Tjwao language revitalisation programme, the prevailing view was that reclaiming a sleeping language, such as Tjwao (San), was an impossible dream. The Tjwao language was viewed as “dead”, “extinct”, “gone”; and the general perception was to forget about it. But for the San people, it is their heritage and saving Tjwao is of paramount importance because of the identity issue.

The Tjwao language reclaiming process seeks to address the big gaps in their lives. For the San people, Tjwao is a beautiful, complex language that gives them a key to understanding aspects of San culture, the San way of seeing the environment and nature and for thinking about the world in a particular way.

The San hope that it will give them insights into early contact history and into their culture. The San now use Ndebele or Kalanga as their own languages and this troubles them a lot as this is a sure sign that their identity has been lost. The challenge of reclaiming and reintroducing a language that other linguists had written off and a language with no records is not an easy task.

As I started the language reclaiming process, I saw what this meant to them (San) as a people. Christopher Dube said that to him it was about identity. He said this was going

to give him back his dignity, pride and self-esteem. Many San echo the same sentiments saying, “it’s the roots of who we are”. They say culture and language belong together, the two cannot be separated. They have in the past tried to maintain other aspects of their culture, but at the same time neglecting their language.

Jonathan Moyo, a young San boy said it was going to assist him to discover himself and it was going to help him to pass that sense of pride onto his kids and peers, and also aim to spread that within his own family as well.

Clear Tshuma dropped out of school at grade 3 when she was about 9 years old and now she is 16 years old. She told me that she has lost so much in life including her cultural heritage. She concurs with the other San that language is a part of their identity and she added that San would teach them about the country that their forefathers used to inhabit. Tjwao would teach them about the connection the San people have always had with the country and it would also teach them about their relationships with other San groups in other parts. She attested to the fact that this is a big part of their identity as a people and a big piece of the puzzle of who they are.

As I went back to the San people with the aim of documenting the number of active and passive speakers of the language including their children, my findings were that; from Sanqinyana-Damulocingo-Sifulasengwe-Thula-Pelandaba all in ward 7, there was a high number of native speakers, numbering of about 9 women and about 6 men. These were Motshwa Moyo, Feyadube, Sibungwana Dube, Saziso Sibanda, Balisi Sibanda, Tsetsa Moyo, Khulile Dube, Sukolubi Dube and Nadumisane Moyo (Women). Males were Banini Moffat Moyo, Markson Ngcoli Sibanda, Mthandazo Khuphe Vundla, Ndliso Sibanda, MabandlaTshuma and Msindo Best Moyo.

During our gathering, as we were planning on strategies to employ to revive the Tjwao language, we were, for the first time confronted with the fact that none of these people had been actively speaking the Tjwao language. This has resulted in many of them forgetting some words to use during our conversations. It has been suggested that even the native speakers need to practice the language consistently amongst each other. Those we thought were partial speakers at first surprised us, because they had a fair understanding of the language and could speak the language.

From the above, Mabandla Tshuma and his wife Silibaziso Moyo were doing a sterling job in teaching their children the Tjwao language. The family is comprised of Clear 16 years of

age, Again 11 years, Samkelisiwe 8 years, Methembe 5 years and It-can't 3 years, all being Tshuma. The interesting thing about this family is that even Methembe who is 5 is currently building her vocabulary (Currently at 7 words).

Jonathan continues to work hard and has begun teaching his younger sister aged 5 the Tjwao language. His vocabulary is growing and he continues learning from his grandmother Motshwa.

The other children we have included in the program are:

Miziyabo Tshuma grandson of Motshwa

Sibusiso Tshuma 12 years, Tholakele Tshuma 9 years, Sizwile Tshuma 7 and Nelisiwe Tshuma 4 years.

Saziso Moyo (Elder)

Artwell Moyo 11 years, Siyani Moyo 10 years, Melisa Moyo 7 years and Phathisani Moyo 5 years.

Siphilanzima Sibanda

Do-it Sibanda 12 years, Derrick Sibanda 7 years, Delicious Sibanda 5 years and Definite Sibanda 2.5 years

Zeckius Tshuma – Motshwa's son

Mthandazo Tshuma 9 years, Sibonakaliso Tshuma 13 years, Nomvelo Tshuma 3 years and Thandazani Tshuma 5 years.

Altogether there are about 21 children currently learning Tjwao.

Part of our program with these kids is to look into the 5 essential needs of children i.e. Mental (Education), social (Belonging), emotional (Love), spiritually (Beliefs) and physical (Food) needs.

I personally believe that the learning processes between children and adults differ due to

prevailing situations and conditions. As things stands, the children are reacting positively to the program, whereas the adults are demanding a lot of things.

An introduction to Tjwao sounds and grammar can be found in the Appendix.



Elders at Bushcamp

CHAPTER 6:

Conclusion – The New Age San

In my journey into the San communities, the first challenge was concerned with breaking new ground. Having heard varying stories about the behavior of the San people in general, I was skeptical at first to go. Many times I sat and pondered the reasons why I wanted to go and work with the San people.

I think, being a culture enthusiast (some people might say cultural activist) finally got the better of me and eventually I mastered the courage to venture into the unknown. I'm very much interested in other people's cultures and in particular the San culture which has always fascinated me.

Working with the San people, I have noted that there are some internal conflicts going on among them and this is hindering progress. It has to be noted that in the past the San used to stay in bands of 10 to 40 people comprised of mainly family members and close relatives. Back then, different groups from different bands had different hunting grounds controlled by the group leaders who were traditional healers, gifted hunters or any-one with traditional leadership qualities. Material possession did not matter but family did and no-one among the Tjwao was regarded as rich or better placed than others.

This kind of lifestyle has stopped, largely because of the problems associated with the establishment of the Wankie Game Reserve (Hwange National Park) in 1928 and the arrival of the Ndebele people in 1953. Since the establishment of the National Park and after being moved out of the Park, different San groups came together looking for support from one another. After losing control over their hunting territories, the San became aware that the situation had turned against them.

From 1928 onwards, the lives of the San people were turned upside down, their lives lost direction and they were forced to live each day in uncertainty. Whilst they were busy trying to understand the system, they managed to live by tolerating one another. When the Ndebele/Kalanga people arrived in the area in 1953, the San realized that their lives were bound to change forever and started coming to live side by side with the Ndebele/Kalanga people.

When the first Ndebele people came into the area, they first sought permission from Nxaphela Vundla who was like a kraal head at that time. The transition happened so fast that one moment the Tjwao were living a comfortable hunter-gatherer lifestyle and the next moment they were adapting to a lifestyle quite foreign to the one they were used to. They started fighting for survival on one hand, and on the other they were trying to re-establish themselves.

This was the worst period in the lives of the San people, having people being relocated into their area, people who were having problems of their own. The situation spiraled out of control as the San who were regarded as the original inhabitants who were supposed to give direction as to how the communities should be shaped, had no idea on how to handle the situation. It is assumed that Nxaphela Vundla who had seen other neighbouring communities established, tried to do the same and started giving the newcomers pieces of land to build their homes.

Most of the San, back then were still living the nomadic lifestyles. The newcomers, seeing this started taking control of the land previously regarded as San territory and firmly established themselves in the area that was once the stronghold of the San.

As Msindo indicated, the number of the San in Zimbabwe has diminished drastically. It has been alleged that, in 2005 there were about 500 families of the San living in and around Tsholotsho from Wards 1, 2, 7, 8 and 10.

The San people have been trying to adapt to the community lifestyle similar to that of the cattle herding and Bantu speaking people and are finding it difficult to cope as they are not used to eating what the cattle herding community members eat. Also, they lack of means of production to enable them to engage in productive farming.

The other problem the San face is inter-marriages that are targeting young San women who, once married to Bantu tribes, tend to forget their culture. Many young San women are marrying into the cattle-herding tribes for the mere fact that such marriages bring good prospect in life. Further investigations have revealed that many San women are marrying into the Ndebele-Kalanga speaking tribes and once married, they tend to forget their culture, traditions, customs and values. The San men feel that if this trend continues, the San tribe will be reduced in numbers in the near future.

Until very recently, most San were hunter-gatherers, using their exceptional knowledge of local flora and fauna to subsist in some of the world's most inhospitable lands, including the Kalahari Desert. The extent to which San were reliant solely on hunting and gathering and how much they interacted with other groups is still being debated and documented by anthropologists, but there is no doubt that the traditional way of life has all but come to an end in most parts of southern Africa and in Tsholotsho in particular. With the expansion of socially dominant African groups as well as European settlers and their farming economies, the San communities were dispossessed of vast tracts of their traditional lands. Gradually, they were either pushed towards the margins of their ancestral territories, or incorporated into the new social order as impoverished landless labourers. In the wake of this upheaval, some communities lost languages, cultural practices and important indigenous knowledge. Also, many have become riddled by social problems.

After decades of land dispossession, most San are almost entirely dependent for their subsistence on extremely lowly-paid jobs or state welfare or drought relief. There are very few San-run enterprises, and the employment of San in the state sector remains negligible.

Traditional knowledge and traditional resources have been managed by indigenous and local communities since time immemorial, using customary law embedded in spiritual cosmology. A great deal of traditional knowledge, including customary laws and folklore, have been undermined and destroyed by colonizers and post-colonial states who imposed their own systems of law, knowledge and worldviews on indigenous people.

Today, however, there is an increasing appreciation of the value and potential of traditional knowledge and language.

APPENDIX 1:

An introduction to the Tjwao language

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This appendix gives a brief introduction to the Tjwao language. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the sounds, or phonology of the language, with a few sample sentences. Tjwao falls under the Eastern Kalahari Khoe subgroup and its sister languages are spoken mainly in Botswana, Zambia and Namibia. Studying the Tjwao language is complicated by the fact that the few remaining speakers speak different dialects.

Below are examples of Tjwao basic vowel phonemes:

ibi ‘egg’ /i/

ebe ‘he’ /e/

sam ‘breast’ /a/

gudo ‘baboon’ /o/ (a word borrowed from Kalanga)

tjaru ‘firewood’ /u/

The contrasts distinguishing the Tjwao long vowels are exemplified by the minimal word set below (“c” indicates the same labio-dental click as in Ndebele or Zulu)

Phoneme	Word	English
[i:] cii	song	
[e:] cee	fire	
[a:] caa	belly	
[o:] coo	end	
[u:] cuu	near	

Some phonological features of Tjwao are long vowels, nasal vowels, diphthongs, and tone. In general there are only two series of clicks (labio-dental and alveo-palatal). Nasalised vowels are symbolised by placing a tilde [~] or circumflex [^] over the vowel or the use of the letter -n- after the vowel. The following example illustrate tone differences: ábò ‘go up’, cáme ‘two’.

1. Tjwao orthography

Vowels

A/a [a] aba [ʔaba]	‘dog’	Â/â [ã] nxââ [n ãã]	‘horn’
E/e [e] c’’ee [ʔee]	‘fire’		
I/i [i] ibi [ʔibi]	‘egg’	Î/î [ĩ] tshîî [tsʰĩĩ]	‘to sneeze’
O/o [o] tsoo [tsoo]	‘heart’		
U/u [u] tuu [tuu]	‘rain’	Û/û [ũ] c’’ûû [ʔũũ]	‘hair’

Non-click sounds

B/b [b] baara [baara]	‘my father’	P/p [p] paa [paa]	‘to bite’
D/d [d] dao [dao]	‘road’	T/t [t] tuu [tuu]	‘rain’
G/g [g] gee [gee]	‘cow’	K/k [k] kao [kao]	‘long’
Dz/dz [dz] dzââ [dzãã]	‘family’	Ts/ts [ts] tsââ [tsãã]	‘hot’
Dj/dj [dʒ] djore [dʒore]	‘bark’	Tj/tj [tʃ] tjwa [tʃoa]	‘person’
Th/th [tʰ] thwi [tʰui]	‘wound’	Tsh/tsh [tsʰ] tshaa [tsʰaa]	‘water’
K’/k’ [k’~kx’] k’ui [k’ui]	‘talk’	T’/t’ [t’] t’ûû [t’ũũ]	‘good, beautiful’
(Tj’/tj’) [tʃ’] tj’wa [tʃ’oa]	‘come from, exit’)	Ts’/ts’ [ts’] ts’ââ [ts’ãã]	‘to steal’
Ng/ng [ŋ] ngûû [ŋũũ]	‘earth, land’	Nk/nk [ŋg] nkabe [ŋgabe]	‘giraffe’
Ny/ny [ɲ] nyûû [ɲũũ]	‘to sit down’	’Ny/’ny [ʔɲ] ’nyûû [ʔɲũũ]	‘to eat, food’
Ndj/ndy [ndʒ] ndjuu [ndʒuu]	‘house’	Nts/nts [nts] ntsuu [ntsuu]	‘black’
M/m [m] maa [maa]	‘head’	N/n [n] nao [nao]	‘what’
Mb/mb [mb] gomba [gomba]	‘antbear’	R/r [r] dzira [dzira]	‘bird’
Sh/sh [ʃ] shoro [ʃoro]	‘monitor lizard’		
H/h [h, x] hîî [hĩĩ]	‘to do’		
H/h [h, x] ham [xam]	‘lion’		

Click sounds

C/c [l] cwâ [lũã]	‘child’	X/x [l] xama [lama]	‘beetle’
C’’/c’’ [lʔ] c’’wâ [lʔũã]	‘bone’	X’’/x’’ [lʔ] x’’oo [lʔoo]	‘to die’
C’/c’ [l’] c’wâ [l’ũã]	‘tonsils’	X’/x’ [l’] x’ae [l’ae]	‘to meet’
Gc/gc [g] gcana [g ana]	‘leaf’	Gx/gx [g] gxoo [g oo]	‘big’
Nc/nc [ŋ], [ŋg] ncuu [ŋ guu]	‘leg’	Nx/nx nxoe	‘moon’
Ch/ch [ʰ, x] chii [ʰii]	‘rhinoceros’	Xh/xh xham	‘to follow’
Ch/ch [ʰ, x] churu [ʰxuru]	‘cold’	Xhh/xhh xhhore	‘fingernail, claw’

2. Some Tjwao Sentences

Greetings in the morning: (basically "did you awake?")

To-a tanaha-e? (to the elders)

Tja tanaha-e? (to a male)

Sha tanaha-e? (to a female)

We reply:

Tire tanaha. 'I'm awake.'

Ti kwa tan. 'I'm standing.'

Or:

Tja u-dira muunwaha-e? 'Did you see the morning?'

We reply:

Ovumayo-e, tire dira mûwaha, tja ntai tanaha-e? 'Yes, I saw it. How about you?'

Greetings in the afternoon:

Tja dzeeha-e? (male)

Sha dzeeha-e? (female)

Or:

Tja dzee-dira mûwaha-e? 'Did you see the afternoon?'

Other sentences:

Tire kwa tjii. 'I am sick.'

Tire muun-ta. 'I cannot see, I am blind.'

Tshaa tiya maa. 'Give me some water.'

ti kwa chhuru. 'I am feeling cold.'

ti c'un e Msindobe. 'My name is Msindo (male).'

Tire Sanqinyana ae kwa nûû. 'I live at Sanqinyana village.'

Hiitshee tire kwanya Ndlovu m ae wa kûû. 'Today I will go to Mr. Ndlovu's home.'

Hiitshee tire Ndlovu m ae wa kûû, tire yii ndjuu kwa xoe. 'Today I go to Mr. Ndlovu's home, and I sleep in this house.'

This is just a short introduction to Tjwao. More field work is being done and will be published in the next few years.

APPENDIX 2:

The founding of the Dlamini Community by the Ndebele

August 2010, Dlamini communal land:

While interviewing the Ndebele community on the establishment of their communities and movement into the San territory, I interviewed Mr. Tshanyana Dlamini, the eldest surviving son of Mr Ziyacebana (nicknamed “Fifteen”) Dlamini, founder of the Dlamini community in 1934. The interview was conducted in the presence of Richard Dlamini, Ziyacebana’s nephew and Ziyacebana’s wife Daisy Tshuma. Mr Tshanyana Dlamini was born in 1919 between Nyamandlovu and Plumtree.

Mr T Dlamini’s account was that old man Ziyacebana Dlamini was born in Mozambique after his parents had moved from Swaziland in the 1800s. According to Mr T Dlamini, his father was born somewhere around the 1870s, his first born child was born in 1904. In his early youth, Mr Ziyacebana decided to go back to Swaziland to the land of his ancestors. Unfortunately, Dlamini did not make it to Swaziland but ended up in South Africa where he joined the railroad construction workers. He was promoted to work with the cattle drawn carts and he became part of the team that was building the Cape to Cairo railroad network system. Mr Ziyacebana Dlamini and his co-workers were part of the team that built the Zambezi River bridge here in Zimbabwe. Dlamini later decided to go back to South Africa, but ended up in Bulawayo. It appeared that Dlamini had befriended a certain Hadebe who persuaded him to stay. Together Dlamini and Hadebe went and settled at West Acres. This was around 1902-4 and this was the time when he got blessed with his first-born child who he named Tamkwana.

By this time, Dlamini realized that it was time for him to settle down and start a family and he decided to finally settle in Tsholotsho in the Magwadeni area. Dlamini went on to marry several wives and got caught up in traditional healing methods. Dlamini started moving around helping people with all health problems. In the process Dlamini got rich and was respected by many. His traditional herbs did wonders for many and his bones could predict the future. Little did he know that his talking bones were going to bring him trouble from the white colonial government. One of Dlamini’s wives was a sister to Mkosi Magaba. Dlamini and Mkosi became close associates.

It happened that one day Dlamini decided to visit his brother-in-law Mkosi, who was staying at Guma with some missionaries. Along the way Dlamini was helping people, for some he cast his bones and told them their problems, for some he solved their health and personal problems. When he arrived at the mission, the white missionary heard that Dlamini was a traditional healer and that he had bones that could predict the future. The missionary could not believe a thing; he thought that Dlamini was a con-artist who was robbing people of their cash and livestock. The missionary decided to call the police and Dlamini, on seeing the hostility that was displayed by the missionary, decided to leave. The police followed Dlamini to his homestead and arrested him. Mkosi was also arrested and both were taken to the Nyamandlovu police holding cells.

One of his wives naMaphangu took Dlamini's traditional healer's bag and hid it. When the police came back looking for the talking bones to be used as evidence in court, they could not find the bones. Mkosi was also implicated and was arrested with Dlamini. Mkosi and Dlamini spent some weeks in jail at Nyamandlovu holding cells awaiting trial. Dlamini was told on several occasions to admit guilt and surrender his traditional healer's bag. Each time Dlamini refused and thus he and Mkosi were kept in jail indefinitely. Dlamini was later advised by a sergeant by the name of Siboho to seek legal representation and he recommended the Hogging Law Firm popularly known those days as Hogi.

During the whole time of the trial, Dlamini was afraid that his cattle could be confiscated; his thoughts were that since he was a traditional healer, his methods of healing people were perceived to be barbaric by the white people at the time.

Hogging successfully defended Dlamini and Mkosi. All charges were dropped and this meant that Dlamini and Mkosi were free to go. Before being released, Dlamini and Mkosi were told to pack their things and go, that is; they were banished from the area. This proved to be problematic for Dlamini because he had a lot of cattle scattered around the area and as far as Plumtree on the other side of Manzanymyama River. Dlamini had dug a water well at his place and had other things at his place like goats, two cattle driven carts and loads of equipment, household equipment and tools.

Dlamini decided to visit Nkosi at the administration offices at Nyamandlovu to protest against the decision to move him forcefully. Nkosi told him that his place had been allocated to someone else (a white family) who had just arrived in the country. Nkosi advised Dlamini to move as soon as possible or risk losing all his property. Dlamini was not to be compensated for his water well and his land even though he had letters permitting him to dig the water well.

While he was busy trying to put his affairs in order, he sent his eldest son Bhenyu to trail around the area collecting all the cattle that he had hired out to people in preparation for a speedy departure. After collecting all the livestock, Dlamini sent Bhenyu and his cousin Manata to look for grazing and farming land.

While all this was happening, Dlamini had no contact with the San who had moved further westwards to what is now Hwange National Park. Stories that Dlamini heard about the San was that after moving out of the Matopo Hills, they went and settled at Mbuyazwe Mountain about 20km from Nyamadlovu. They moved away from Mbuyazwe after the arrival of the Ndebele who upon arrival, started raiding smaller clans.

Bhenyu and Manata, who was already staying in Chief Mathupula's area in a place called Maqethuka left and went towards the west. Back then there were three chiefs in the area, Chief Gampu was in the North (North Nata), and Hadebe was in the Magama area and Khumalo in the Mathupula area. They went past the present day Ngqoya, Magama, Tsholotsho (where the business centre is today), right up to Maqhetuka. From Maqhetuka, they started going around looking for a better place for grazing and farming. They could not find a suitable place right up to the Mbuhulu water plain. The whole journey was over 200 kilometers and back then there were very few people in the area and there were no roads.

When Dlamini was ready to travel, he left Nyamandlovu in early 1934 and went looking for a place. Unknown to him was the fact that Manatha and Bhenyu had already found a place. It seems that Dlamini was not satisfied with the place that Bhenyu and Manatha had found for him. His first port of call was with his friend Manatha at Maqhetuka in Chief Mathupula's area.

On arriving at Manatha's place, Dlamini discovered that there were communities that had been established already. The oldest community was Mabhanda that had been established between 1924-6 by Jani Mabhanda Moyo, Wada Ngwenya and Govu Hadebe brother to Chief Ngqoya Hadebe.

[The rest of Dlamini's story can be found in Chapter 2.]



Bhabhu Books - Celebrating Hunhu/Ubuntu
Wisdom does not always Speak in English