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**Oral Literature and Indigenous Knowledge:
The Case of the San People from Southern Africa**

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to establish a frame for arranging and classifying observations relating to the indigenous knowledge and oral traditions of the San people of southern Africa, mainly in Namibia. Oral literature of the San people serve, therefore, as a valuable source for re-constructing and reinforcing a positive collective identity of their history and cultural diversity. Several forms of expression such as folklore, poems, plants' names and personal narratives will be provided.

Keywords: San, Namibia, southern Africa, oral literature, narration, indigenous knowledge

Introduction

For many contemporary African societies the spoken word – transmitted from one generation to another – is a crucial source of the history and self-identity. Poetry, folklore, storytelling, myths, songs, performances, recitations and even children's literature form an important base of traditional knowledge. Many cultures did not write down their history, instead, they have told stories to the next generation and in this way information and knowledge have been passed on from generation to generation and kept alive. Certainly, this is what is called oral tradition. It articulates people's representations of social life. In the case of Namibia large segment of the population is recognized as indigenous people such as the Ovambo, San, Himba, Nama, Damara, Mbukushu, Herero, Lozi, Tswana and Ovazemba. The multitude of ethnic communities is the reason for a rich mixture of different oral sources that show the ability to formulate cultural issues. In the present article I aim at highlighting particular examples as a means of comprehending the universal

and general notion of the phenomenon. Specifically, I would like to introduce indigenous knowledge through oral traditions like oral narratives, which serve as an example of the San complex notion of orality.¹

The San people – the past and present

The San people, previously referred to as the Bushmen,² are scattered throughout many regions of southern part of Africa, residing in the vast area covering central and northern Namibia (30000–35000),³ northern Republic of South Africa (7500), northern, central and western Botswana (48000), southern Angola (3500), parts of Zambia (1300) and Zimbabwe (2500), with the total number estimated at over 90000.⁴ The term “San” does not refer to one ethnic or linguistic group. It includes a number of communities, who speak their own language and may share different cultural practices, distinct customs and histories. They are part of the Khoisan language family, which is characterized by the abundant use of the click consonants. The Hai||om (numbering 9000–12000 people) in Oshikoto, Kunene and Etosha National Park in the northern part of the country represent the largest group in Namibia, while the Ju/’hoansi is the second largest group (11000 living in Namibia and Botswana) of 7000 people mainly on the Kalahari Desert in the Tsumeb, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein and Tsumkwe districts.⁵ The other groups include: the Khwe (or Kxoe) and Mbarakwengo, in the Tsumkwe district, West, Caprivi and Katango region – 4400 residents, the !Xun in Okavango and Otjozondjupa region – 6000 residents and Naro in the Omaheke region, Gobabis district – 2000 residents.⁶ In the past, the San

¹ Here, my case study is based on the communities of San in southern Africa. The data described here was provided by a few complementary sources: secondary literature, in which San members describe the events and significance of orality and events in their own words; direct observation of gatherings, complemented by interviews with participants at these events; writings on traditional knowledge and practices by indigenous authors and non-indigenous authors. The research has been conducted in Namibia under the project “20 years of the independence of Namibia. The first generation of free Namibians” co-financed by the University of Warsaw, Poland.

² However, in everyday situations and conversations with the Namibians from different ethnic groups, the term “Bushmen” is still widely used and it sometimes even appears in the nomenclature of some organizations belonging to the indigenous movements. As indicated by Robert K. Hitchcock, Kazunobu Ikeya, Megan Biesele and Richard B. Lee, in late 1996 representatives of various San groups from Namibia agreed to allow the general term “San” to designate them externally. Given the fact that officially its usage is not continued as it might be seen as derogatory, in this paper the author uses the name “San” (“Bushmen” might connote a negative meaning, having its origin in abusive etymology and derived from the colonial times). See: Robert K. Hitchcock, Kazunobu Ikeya, Megan Biesele and R.B. Lee, *Updating the San: Image and Reality of an African People in the 21st Century*, “Senri Ethnological Studies” 70 (2006), pp. 4–7.

³ A. Takada, *Narratives on San Ethnicity: The Cultural and Ecological Foundations of Lifeworld Among The!Xun of North-central Namibia*, Kyoto 2015, p. 8.

⁴ Data estimated as of July 2010, obtained from the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA). M. Biesele and R.K. Hitchcock, *The Ju/’hoan San Of Nyae Nyae And Namibian Independence: Development, Democracy, and Indigenous Voices in Southern Africa*, New York 2013, p. 4.

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 5–6.

⁶ Ibidem.

were mainly hunter-gatherers, today, however, among their dominant livelihoods there are those who work on farms (as house servants or farm workers), growing crops and raising livestock, running small-scale businesses and services, for instance tourism in urban environments. About 3000 of them live permanently as hunter-gatherers. However, the government discrimination, poverty, social rejection and a loss of cultural identity have all left their marks on today's San. Unable to roam freely across the land as they would once have done, some are now workers in the nature conservancy, while others rely on state pensions for their income. However, the San are still respected by many for their survival skills, which include tracking, hunting and extensive knowledge of edible and medicinal plants. In some areas, they are able to live off these skills in a new way – by teaching them to the others as tourist attractions at cultural centers.

The San consist of various groups distinguished by localization, language, history and social practices. In order to understand them in the Kalahari Desert since the end of the 19th century interdisciplinary research have been conducted by linguists, missionaries from the Finnish Lutheran Church, anthropologists and historians, such as Wilhelm H.I. Bleek,⁷ Lucy C. Lloyd, Dorothea F. Bleek, Lorna Marshall,⁸ Irven DeVore and Richard B. Lee,⁹ and E.N. Wilmsen, to mention but a few. Among the large-scale researched and interviewed groups were: Ju/'hoan from the Nyae Nyae area between the present-day north-eastern Namibia and north-western Botswana and the !Xun, who have lived and still live in north-central Namibia, particularly in the Ohangwena region. Adaptation to the arid environment, livelihood analyses, economic association with other neighboring ethnic groups, the cultural dimension of ethnicity and social structures were the most important topics of these hunter-gatherer societies that concerned the next generation of researchers since the late 1980s, both traditionalists and revisionists. However, according to Dieckmann, from the very beginning of the study of the San people, the discourse of “Bushman” as helpless and undervalued victims, silent societies with no literature and no history was very common.¹⁰ The critique of that kind of discriminatory attitude made an impact on the more common critical attempts to find different tools for analyzing the San situation in various countries. Scholars reflected on the dynamism of identity and agency of all representatives of San cultures and transcribed their narratives. As it is evident from the recent studies, through their narratives the San people share notion of the collective and fluid identity as well as important values, and provide us with their valuable voices spoken from wide perspectives, explicable in terms of space and time.¹¹

⁷ L.C. Lloyd and W.H.I Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, Einsiedeln 2001.

⁸ L. Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*, Cambridge 1976; L. Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung Beliefs and Rites*, “Peabody Museum Monographs” 8 (1999).

⁹ I. DeVore and R.B. Lee, *Man The Hunter*, Chicago 1968.

¹⁰ U. Dieckmann, *Hai||om in the Etosha Region. A History of Colonial Settlement, Ethnicity and Nature Conservation*, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Basel 2007, p. 14.

¹¹ See more on the issue: S. Kent, *Cultural Diversity Among Twentieth-Century Foragers: An African Perspective*, Cambridge 2006; W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London 1982; K. Tomaselli, M. Wessels, *San Representation: Politics, Practice and Possibilities*, New York 2017.

The concept of the indigenous knowledge

In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the emphasis on the indigenous people has a specific social and political connotation. According to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) document, the indigenous knowledge "represents a major dimension of the continent's culture"¹² and is to be protected, effectively used and shared for the benefit of the mankind. It refers directly to the understandings, skills, philosophies, cultural competences, governance, education, health, and medicine, developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings.¹³ For indigenous people, local knowledge has a strong influence on the decision-making process about fundamental aspects of their day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complexity that also encompasses language, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality. Hence, it comprises "spiritual and material aspects, as well as complex relation between them [...] the tradition-based literacy, artistic and scientific works, inventions, scientific discoveries, designs, marks, names and symbols, undisclosed information and all other tradition-based innovations and creations resulting from intellectual activity in industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields. The term also includes genetic resources and associated knowledge".¹⁴

Furthermore, it applies to the knowledge of the specific communities that are indigenous to a particular space, context and time. This means that the understanding of the indigenous epistemology consists of food systems, socio-cultural systems, arts, crafts, materials, traditional medicine and health in sub-regional, regional, as well as international context. The need for adequate legal protection and promotion at the national level is articulated in the document published by The National Research Foundation, as it is mentioned below:

We have to understand indigenous knowledge (IK) and its role in community life from an integrated perspective that includes both spiritual and material aspects, as well as the complex relation between them. At the same time, it is necessary to understand and explore the potential

¹² A. Masoga, *Contesting Space and Time: Intellectual Property Rights and Indigenous Knowledge Systems Research Challenge*, in: *Indigenous Knowledge System and Intellectual Property Rights in the Twenty-First Century. Perspectives from Southern Africa*, I. Mazonde and P. Thomas (eds.), Dakar 2007, p. 3.

¹³ On the topic of "Indigenous Knowledge" see more here: A. Agrawal, *Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge: Some Critical Comments*, "IK Monitor" 3 (2004), p. 1-9; C. Alum, O. Hoppers, *Indigenous Knowledge and the Integration of Knowledge Systems: Towards a Philosophy of Articulation*, Claremont 2002; J.-A. Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Vancouver 2008; M. Battiste, J. Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*, Saskatoon 2000; S. Brush, D. Stanbinsky, *Valuing Local Knowledge: Indigenous Peoples and Intellectual Property Rights*, Washington DC 1996; L. Le Grange, *Challenges for Participatory A Research and Indigenous Knowledge in Africa*, "Acta Academica" 33, 3 (2001), pp. 136-150; E. Dombrowski, L. Rotenberg, M. Bick, *Indigenous Knowledge*, in: *Theory of Knowledge Course Companion*, Oxford 2013.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

contribution of IK to local development. The protection of IK and its use for the benefit of its owners and the communities where it is practiced, require research. Research into IKS, however, should ideally be carried out with the participation of the communities in which it originates and is held.¹⁵

What should be noted is that this principle has been formally adopted by the Diplomatic Conference of ARIPO at Swakopmund (Namibia) on August 9, 2010, through the *Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Folklore Within the Framework of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO)*. In the Preliminary Provisions' part it is stated that the purpose of the Protocol is, firstly, to protect traditional knowledge holders against any infringement of their rights, as recognized by that Protocol, and, secondly, to protect expressions of folklore against misappropriation, misuse and unlawful exploitation beyond their traditional context. It means that the specific and diverse holistic conceptions of traditional knowledge, as well as cultural and artistic expressions, are implemented in order to ensure each local community to be given the formal right to be developed. Moreover, the dynamic, innovative and evolving nature of traditional knowledge, accepted in the Protocol, refers to "any knowledge originating from a local or traditional community that is the result of intellectual activity and insight in a traditional context, including know-how, skills, innovations, practices and learning, where the knowledge is embodied in the traditional lifestyle of a community, or contained in the codified knowledge systems passed on from one generation to another".¹⁶ The term shall not be limited to a specific technical field, and may include agricultural, environmental or medical knowledge, and knowledge associated with genetic resources. It is also connected directly to the so-called "expressions of folklore":

that are any forms, whether tangible or intangible, in which traditional culture and knowledge are expressed, appear or are manifested, and comprise the following forms of expressions or combinations thereof: verbal expressions, such as – but not limited to – stories, epics, legends, poetry, riddles and other narratives; words, signs, names, and symbols; musical expressions, songs and instrumental music; expressions by movement, such as dances, plays, rituals and other performances; whether or not reduced to a material form.¹⁷

And also a great variety of tangible expressions, such as "productions of art, in particular, drawings, designs, paintings (including body-painting), carvings, sculptures,

¹⁵ Masoga, *Contesting Space and Time*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Folklore Within the Framework of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO)*, Swakopmund 2010.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

pottery, terracotta, mosaic, woodwork, metal-ware, jewelry, basketry, needlework, textiles, glassware, carpets, costumes; handicrafts; musical instruments; and architectural forms”.¹⁸

Oral literature and storytelling

One of the significant aspects of indigenous knowledge is tradition-based learning. Through many oral traditions and histories, the accumulated – even for centuries – set of information or wisdom has been passed on to subsequent generations. San people maintain an interconnected relationship with the natural surroundings and in most cases the process of observing and learning all the signs from the sky, the water, the sun and the moon, the plants and animals, the desert and the spirit world is the base for environmental knowledge necessitated by qualification and guidance of the elders’ groups.¹⁹ Using oral narratives like naming terminologies, songs, myths, legends, familial or kin relationships’ stories, sacred creation stories and profane stories depicting historical events, cultural traditions, educational lessons, as well as personal life experiences, they recreate the common and very specific type of literacy. San societies are regarded as highly verbal. Members of each community from different regions can perform variations of principal or more detailed oral forms to reflect communal social, cultural or religious life and the spiritual world evidenced through visual signs.²⁰ The special issue concerning approaches towards the San oral literature is the understanding of an embedded worldview. Oral narratives – the characters, plots, and motifs – are still relevant in nowadays egalitarian society by connecting the past to the present. The San orator constantly and sometimes unchangeably balances customs with new ideas and approaches. It should be remembered that the role of orality in community life forms an integrated perspective.

For instance, nowadays the Nyae Nyae community is actively involved in several programs and movements that aim at oral heritage protection. The preservation activity draws on the initiative of trainers, who in collaboration, record digitally two kinds of oral tradition: oral history – peoples’ private histories, life stories, facts about animals, landmarks, mountains, and fictional stories – folktales, songs about gods and healers. It serves as a source of multiple information concerning, for example, its use with regard to oral literature. Apart from that, the results in a form of inner perspective are being published as books, articles, also on the Internet, so that the “word” is being transmitted. To put things positively, although the literacy among the San people does not encompass the whole population, for young generations, the technology is regarded as an important means of knowledge flow.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁹ More on the context of astronomy: Warner Brian, *Traditional Astronomical Knowledge in Africa*, in: C. Walker (ed.), *Astronomy Before the Telescope*, British Museum Press, London 1996.

²⁰ Yvette Hutchison, *South Africa*, in: *A History of Theatre in Africa*, M. Banham (ed.), Cambridge 2004, p. 316.

Forms of expression

One of the first manifestations of the San orality that gives certain knowledge to the people themselves, as well as observers, is demonstrated in the linguistic domain by the use of dialogue with gods and natural forces. Since the oral literature cannot exist without an orator, communities decide to take an active role in reclaiming their own voices, documenting and retelling tradition and history. They recall, praise and comment on a particularly remarkable issue, place or person and the spoken communication is the basic platform for information exchange. Sometimes, the storytelling is accompanied by music (singing and clapping) with instruments – *gut pluriarc* (bow lute), gut hunting bow, single-stringed bamboo fiddle and *sitengena* (thumb piano).

The hymns in the form of spontaneous solo invocations (there is no specific time) to the gods of the San in southern Africa reveal that there are no special priests, however, the praying person has a right to ask an open question to the god demanding some basic, daily and often material needs: the food, animals or water supplies.²¹ In one of the hymns, the performer seems to be preoccupied, calls for divine care, protection or a specific favor and stresses the importance of nourishment using the following expression: “You have created me and given me power to walk about and hunt. Why do you lead me in the wrong way so that I find no animals?”²²

There are certain definite methods of building poems and folktales, as in the following poem on “Habits of the bat and porcupine”:

Mama told me about it,
 That I should watch for the porcupine,
 If I saw a bat !/gogen.
 Then I would know that the porcupine was coming,
 For the bat came.
 And I must not sleep:
 I must watch for the porcupine,
 For, when the porcupine approaches, I feel sleepy,
 I become sleepy, on account of the porcupine;
 For the porcupine is a thing which is used,
 When it draws near,
 To make us sleep against our will,
 As it wishes that we may not know
 The time at which it comes;

²¹ R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 165–200. See more: M.J. Daymond et al. (eds.), *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, New York 2003; S. Krishnamurthy, H. Vale, *Writing Namibia: Literature in Transition*, Windhoek 2018.

²² L. Marshall, *The Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert*, in: *Peoples of Africa*, by J.L. Gibbs (ed.), New York 1965, p. 276.

As it wishes that it may come into its hole,
 When we are asleep.²³

The other section of oral narratives examines the content of a complex mythology and connotations of highly significant words and phrases that serve as the representation of several issues surrounding ethnicity, identity and history.²⁴ Like numerous /Xam myths, for which original-language records are available, several tales concern conflict between people and living creatures – animals, such as hyenas, lions, jackals, and leopards. That first illustration mentions two animals, the bat and the porcupine. The recitation deals with nature, physical characteristics of landscape and hunters' surroundings, as well as aesthetic judgments. Very often storytellers attempt to mimic the sounds of birds or animals in a stylized form, conventionally attributed to certain animals.

For instance, the Blue Crane, each time adds “tt” to the first syllable of words, but when he hears the tortoise’s lisp, he changes all the clicks and other initial consonants into labials.²⁵ Here, the simple narrative structure with repetitive patterns of words ‘sleep’, ‘asleep’, ‘sleepy’ is juxtaposed to “I must not sleep”. Clearly expressing habits of the people, the recitation is directly telling a story of hunting practices. In some other cases, the invocation is directed toward the moon or sun with the pattern of the repetition and parallelism of expression:

Ho Moon lying there,
 Let me early tomorrow see an ostrich,
 As the ostrich sits on the eggs,
 Let me whisk out the yolk
 With a gemsbok tail hair (brush)
 Which sits together upon a little stick
 Upon which the gemsbok tail sits.²⁶

Young Moon!
 Hail, Young Moon!
 Hail, hail,
 Young Moon!
 Young Moon! speak to me!

²³ Hutchison, *South Africa*, p. 316. See more: G. McNamee (ed.), *The Girl Who Made Stars and Other Bushman Stories*, Einsiedeln 2001.

²⁴ Complex information about mythology is to be found in the publications: R. Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San*, Johannesburg 2008; J.C. Hollmann, *Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam Bushmen*, Johannesburg 2000; D.J. Lewis-Williams, *Three Nineteenth-century Southern African San Myths: a Study in Meaning*, “Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute” 88, 1 (March 2018), pp. 138–159; D.J. Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning: San-Bushman Folklore in Global Context*, Walnut Creek 2015; M. Wessels, *The /Xam Narratives: Whose Myths?*, “African Studies” 67, 3 (2008), pp. 339–364.

²⁵ Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, p. 373.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

Hail, hail,
 Young Moon! Tell me of something.
 Hail, hail!
 When the sun rises,
 Thou must speak to me,
 That I may eat something.
 Thou must speak to me about a little thing,
 That I may eat.
 Hail, hail,
 Young Moon!²⁷

As indicated by Yvette Hutchison, the division between poetry, prose and drama or performance is blurred. She points out that the narrative aspects of plot and characters are mingled with rhythm through sound patterning, pauses, abrupt breaks and fluctuations of tone as well as volume. The aforementioned example supports her suggestion that

(...) these strategies are reminiscent of prayer or lyric poetry, and are typical of oral literature, which uses repetition as a rhetorical device to build anticipation and create the narrative. The dramatic body movement, verbal animation, facial expression and gestures are as important as the narrative aspects of performance. The repetition emphasizes the circular structure of many of the narratives, which reflect how the peoples' life is defined by seasonal, solar and lunar cycles.²⁸

Recent stories also consist of metaphors related to music, dances, oppositions, transformations, connection to the creator deity, the trickster figure Kha//'an and myths of origin and initiation.

The land and geographic features are crucial for the Ju/'hoansi as they are symbolic spaces connected to the family members and history. The orature easily stores the geography and facts about which places belonged to them in the collective memory of the community. Biesele and Hitchcock present the explanation made by Tsamkxao, a representative chairperson of the NNFC, who shared his attitude toward the land and its connection to the family membership through narrative:

When my mother and father bore me and I was on this land, I looked at the land and they told me, This is your father's father's father's *n!ore*.' My mother said, 'This is my father's father's father's *n!ore*, and I hold rights in it, and so through me do you.'²⁹

²⁷ L. Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p. 415. The original spelling was preserved.

²⁸ Hutchison, *South Africa*, pp. 316–317.

²⁹ Biesele, Hitchcock, *The Ju/ 'hoan San Of Nyae Nyae*, p. 29.

These phrases deal with a form of spiritual conflict that has some social implications connected to the land, ancestors and family members. Many San people describe a special, emotional bond with the place or land, where their ancestors are buried.³⁰ They make adaptations in response to changing environmental conditions, maintaining that past and present reality still grounds an oral tradition as a continuum. A similar observation may be made when an old !Kung woman says:

The old person, who does not tell a story just does not exist. Our forefathers related for us the doings of the people of long ago and anyone who does not know them doesn't have his head on straight. And anyone whose head is on straight knows them.³¹

Apart from recitations and tales, among the many different genres existing in San culture, there are also names of plants, through which the Ju/'hoansi appropriate and recreate daily emblematic types of cultural and social competencies. Certainly, that kind of oral repertoires, often not written or recorded, are the source of information for all – about food, household, hunting, craft, obtaining fuel, for medicinal and ritual purposes, but may also be regarded as a way of affirmation of the culture, ethnic and regional sense of belonging to the land and its natural elements. As Biesele and Hitchcock clearly demonstrated, there are numerous trees, shrubs, fruits, nuts, roots, etc., that were exploited by the Ju/'hoansi habitants to a highly extended level (over 150 species).³² Crucial plants include for instance: *g//kaa* – 'a mongongo tree' (called manketti tree, *Ricinodendron rautanenni*) and *dshin* – 'a morama' (gemsbok bean, *Tylosema esculentum*), *kaqe* – 'a marula' (*Sclerocarya caffra*), with its edible fruit that is also used for the production of an alcoholic drink, *//xamsa//oqro* – a devil's claw that cures headache, = 'om – 'a baobab' (*Adansonia digitata*) for medical purposes and *n//hoq'oru* – 'an aloe for burns treatment'.³³ In particular, some San people demand recognition of all indigenous knowledge systems and protection of property including medicinal remedies derived from a particular plant.

It is worth mentioning the combination of flora and fauna as reflected in the poem "[Xue as a ||Gui Tree and as a Fly". The ||gui is a tree with thorns. People eat the ||gui fruit, they do not put the ||gui into a pot, but eat it raw:–

The sunset, and |Xue was |Xue, and lay upon the ground, and slept, was alone, and lay upon the ground and slept. And the sun rose, and |Xue awoke and... and stood up, and saw the sun, a little sun, and was ||gui, and was a tree. And his wife saw the ||gui, and went to the ||gui, and went

³⁰ More on the impact of religion: D. Chidester, *African Traditional Religion in South Africa: An Annotated Bibliography*, Santa Barbara 1997.

³¹ Hutchison, *South Africa*, p. 317.

³² Biesele, Hitchcock, *The Ju/ 'hoan San Of Nyae Nyae*, p. 44.

³³ Ibidem.

to take hold of a ||gui fruit, and the ||gui vanished; and |Xue was a fly. And his wife laid herself upon the earth, and cried about the ||gui, and died. And |Xue was a fly, and settled upon the grass goo and the grass broke. And his wife lay down upon the earth, and cried about the ||gui.³⁴

According to Van Wyk, “the notion of knowledge in its social context would, therefore, embrace both declarative, i.e. the specific cultural, traditional and community facts, as well as the procedural, i.e. the peculiar or general processes in knowledge construction.”³⁵ In that case, the professionalization in plants’ naming and using them in songs, show that there is a conscious action towards recreating the botanical skills, craft production (making baskets, nets, bows, arrows, digging sticks, bags of skins, leather clothing) and observation, also among women. The farming, such as growing crops, melons, maize, sorghum, millet, is also popular as an additional form of mixed economy. Hence, oral stories reveal the attitude toward the organization of environmental features that affect the day-to-day socialization. What is more, these types of San identities are practical examples that continue to appear globally in media and popular culture. As noted previously, the San communities in Namibia or South Africa comprise various types of oral literature, however, unchangeably connected to the transmitted set of information and unique experiences. Alpheus Masoga, the South African researcher from the University of the North, in his hypothesis of the indigenous epistemology indicates that

African belief systems demonstrate the nature and usefulness of certain medicinal plants and animals. The assumption is that many of these beliefs are embedded and therefore unsaid. It is the task of the researcher to uncover them and demonstrate their significance. The study is based on the further assumption that the medicinal plants themselves are merely surface indicators of deeper socio-cultural realities. As signifiers, they are gateways through which researchers may access these realities and try to understand their social significance.³⁶

Conclusions

The widely shared oral tradition of several groups among San serves as a marker of the cultural survival of the group and means of reconstructing historic identity and cultural heritage. The knowledge as a social phenomenon is being transformed and molded to suit the contemporary needs of the San people in different environments. Still, the context of

³⁴ G. McCall Theal (eds.), *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, London 2009, p. 225.

³⁵ J.-A. Van Wyk, *Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications for Natural Science and Technology Teaching and Learning*, “South African Journal of Education” 22,4 (2002), p. 307.

³⁶ Masoga, *Contesting Space and Time: Intellectual Property*, p. 4.

each San group strongly influences how specific elements of it operate. In other words, as pointed out by Ladislaus M. Semali and Tataleni I. Asino:

the presence of indigenous knowledge with its complex histories, cultures, and lived realities are currently re-emerging in a response to a growing awareness of the marginalization and displacement of the world's subordinated people and their values. While the characteristic of indigenous knowledge is the absence of colonial and imperial imposition, such knowledge emerges in a contemporary sense partly in response to colonial and neocolonial intrusions.³⁷

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³⁷ L.M. Semali, T.I. Asino, *Decolonizing Cultural Heritage of Indigenous People's Knowledge from Images in Global Films*, "Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society" 2,2 (2013), p. 39.

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