

## Symbols of Social Transformation: BaTonga Search for Cultural Relevance in Zimbabwe.

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### Abstract

*How can marginalised groups resolve culture-related conflicts –conflicts that largely have a bearing on identity and survival for an ethnic group? It is not a new phenomenon that reality is a scarce resource and that itself is there to be struggled over. The experiences of the BaTonga are well documented mostly their physical dislocation from the Zambezi shores and the subsequent cultural turmoil associated with such dislocations. Research has had interest in BaTonga search for social as well as cultural transformation as a panacea to the physical dislocations experienced by the BaTonga in history. One area which has sadly received little attention has been the unique BaTonga cultural artefacts which by and large BaTonga have used in their search for cultural relevance in main stream Zimbabwean cultural as well as economic spaces. Using artefactual semiotics this article explores the ncelwa and buntibe pieces as symbolising BaTonga and how in their usage has changed the BaTonga cosmos in Zimbabwe socio-cultural and economic spaces.*

**Key Words.** *Ncelwa, Buntibe, Artefactual, Symbol, Semiotics, Visual, Artefacts*

### Introduction

The BaTonga are an ethnic group of people found historically along the Zambezi valley on both sides of the river, in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Today, they reside in areas such as Binga, Simchembo (Gokwe) and Kariba areas in Zimbabwe. Their experiences are well documented (Hughes, 2010, McGregor 2009, Colson 1971, Ncube 2004, Nyathi 2005,) mostly their physical dislocation from the Zambezi shores and the subsequent cultural turmoil associated with such dislocations. Research however has had interest in BaTonga search for social as well as cultural transformation as a panacea to the physical dislocations experienced by the BaTonga in history. One area which has sadly received little attention has been the unique BaTonga cultural artefacts which by and large BaTonga have used in their search for cultural relevance in main stream Zimbabwean cultural spaces (Saidi 2013a, Saidi 2013b), as well as even for economic survival especially in as far as they relate to tourism.

The BaTonga historical experiences are linked to the 1950s Kariba dam project from which their dislocation from their ancestral lands to the arid, for instance Binga and Simchembo (Gokwe) areas is more pronounced. Ncube (2004) studying their history appreciates that they are a group which is characterised by lacking a paramount ruler such as Mzilikazi or Lobengula when compared to the Ndebele for instance. As a people, there is evidence in the historical discourses on BaTonga that they were a group which was organised into a *cisi* from which geographical features such as huge trees, mountains and streams marked the beginning and an end to each *cisi*. Links are also made that the BaTonga's ancestral home is the Zambezi valley and the giant river was no frontier to them. Hence Nciito (2010) speaking of the Tonga of Zambia, draws parallels with the Tonga in Zimbabwe. There is general agreement in the discourses that colonial forces divided a single group into two creating what is now come to be known as the Zimbabwe Tonga and the Zambian Tonga.

It is clear from the historical experiences of the BaTonga that dislocation has been a key defining aspect. Colonialism divided the same group into two and making the Zambezi River a frontier. Of the Zimbabwe Tonga, they were further removed from their ancestral lands, on both sides of the river, to pave way for the construction of a hydroelectric power station. As a result the BaTonga lost their land, culture and visibility especially in Zimbabwe. This has caused conflicts, not of open direct confrontational, but subtle yearning to be accepted as well as participate actively in the development of Zimbabwe and in turn being recognised for their effort. To demonstrate existence of conflict, one needs to look no further but to notions of development, economic, cultural and social nature. For instance in education, by 1982 there was only one secondary school in Binga and about 45 to date. These areas too are quite distant from tertiary institutions.

### Methodology

Data for this study was gathered qualitatively. It involved several visits to Binga, Simchembo, Victoria Falls and Kariba areas over a period of two years. Participatory observations and face-to-face interviews with members of the public, officials from various government and pressure groups were done; and through volunteer BaTonga data was solicited from the Tonga as they went about either smoking the *ncelwa* or during gatherings where the *buntibe* was also played. While the basic methodological approach was relatively ethnographic, information found from published records and materials was also used to augment data gathered from the field.

There were a number of artefacts found during the study such as reed baskets, pottery, doors, chairs, fishing nets, musical instruments, walking sticks to mention

but a few. The researcher for the purpose of this study chose to focus on the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* drum to merely demonstrate how, BaTonga have for instance used them for self-cultural expressiveness and at the same time allowing exportation to other parts of the country and beyond through tourism.

### Artefactual ethnisemiotics

To conceptualise the body of symbols of culture a society can allude to in its transformation we can invoke artefactual ethnisemiotics (Saidi 2013a) as an approach to artefacts. Artefactual ethnisemiotics is a modelled form of semiotics or an institutionalised view of semiotics. Semiotics broadly studies signs and sign systems and how meanings are constructed from such, in the maintenance of social life. From the broad aspect of semiotics, human life is made of signs. Pierce (1960) observed six types of signs from which symbols is the type of focus in this study. Interestingly, the relationship between signs and what they represent or signify (Pierce 1960, Saussure 1966), is arbitrary, in other words, semantic realisations of signs and usage is a matter of convention. Symbols too are a type of signs and collectively they make up a symbolic sign system crucial in the maintenance of a society.

In artefactual ethnisemiotic terms, artefacts as objects qualify as signs and their realisations as well as how they are put to use, allow us to see how they create a visual cultural communicate code and system. Thus, the body of artefacts belonging to a specific group of people like the BaTonga become ethnisemiotic in the sense that they are both signs and are conventionally put to use in an endeavour to define that which is BaTonga. This is in clear agreement with Eco (1981) who noted that any form of semiotics should be conscious of the context. In other words, signs observable in given specific contexts assume their identity largely because of that context and are equally used in the context and therefore should be interpreted based on the same notions hence the idea of artefactual ethnisemiotics.

In terms of symbols, following Leeds-Hurwitz (2012) who infers a social interactive context like the Zimbabwean visual cultural interaction between ethnic groups, are components of power struggle. This can be read as a critical discourse analytic view (van Dijk 1993, Fairclough 2003). Against this perspective artefacts can be seen to be an open text and a paradigm that creates a syntagmatic visual cultural discourse.

In national cultural discourses, where symbols or signs such as the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* are most realised, it follows, therefore, that they become components of power struggles over 'whose ideas, whose constructions of reality, whose interpretations will come to be accepted' (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2012:34) as part of a

national cultural norm. Carey (1989:87) interestingly brings another dimension when he says,

Reality is, above all a scarce resource. Like any scarce resource it is there to be struggled over, allocated to various purposes and projects, endowed with given meanings and potentials, spent and conserved, rationalised and distributed. The fundamental form of power to define, allocate and display this resource. Once the blank canvas of the world is portrayed and featured, it is also pre-empted and restricted. Therefore, the site where artists paint, writers write, speakers speak, filmmakers film, broadcasters broadcast is simultaneously the site of social conflict over the real. It is not the conflict over technology. It's not a conflict over social relations. It is a conflict over the simultaneous codetermination of ideas, technique, and social relations. It is above all a conflict not over the effects of communication but of the acts and practices that are themselves the effects.

This is a strong claim, one that alludes to the power and role of semiotic resources in not only the negotiation of visual cultural space, but one that makes a claim to 'reality' as a cultural necessity but scarcely available resource in any culturally defined space. Sebeok (2001) made a similar submission that signs/symbols are a map to reality and viewing symbolic interactional acts and practices to construct a valid ethnic reality we are also driven by the understanding that,

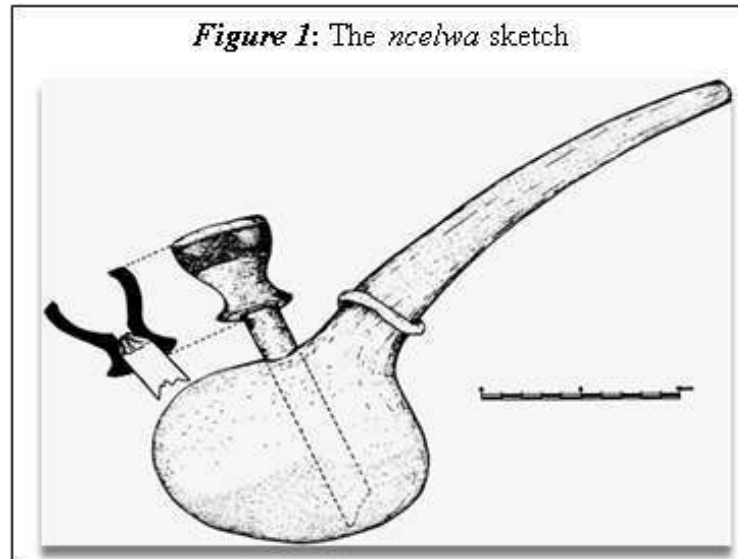
People construct identities out of specific configurations of semiotic resources, and, consequently, just as linguistic and semiotic repertoires and conditioned by dynamics of access, identity repertoires will like-wise be conditioned by unequal forms of access to particular identity building resources (Blommaert, 2005:207).

In looking at the potential of cultural communicative messages carried by the BaTonga symbols, there is first and foremost contestation of reality especially at the national level however in a very subtle way. The point here is that, symbols like the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* were developed for their value on shared meanings. At national level therefore, as ethnic cultures interact how then and whose meanings are we to accept and repeat? Saidi (2013a) demonstrated the dilemmas emanating from struggles of identity, acceptance and participation when he studied the Joshua Nkomo and David Livingstone statutes concealing BaTonga visibility in public spaces.

### **The *ncelwa***

The *ncelwa* is a women smoking pipe for the BaTonga. It is sometimes called the *ndombondo* or *mfuko* in other BaTonga varieties. This is a smoking pipe which BaTonga women use for smoking tobacco. Men have their own smoking pipe

which is smaller than the *ncelwa* called the *chete* mentioned here for comparison but not subject for discussion here. **Figure 1** below shows the sketch of the *ncelwa*



**Source:** Van der Merwe (2005:147)

As **Figure 1** shows, the BaTonga *ncelwa* is a long handled gourd water-container through which smoke is inhaled. The gourd has a hole on one end where a male clay stem is fixed to hold embers and *polya*. The calabash-gourd to which the clay male stem is attached acts as a water chamber while the long second gourd-stem is then used to inhale the smoke from the gradually burning *polya*, placed inside the clay male stem but not directly on top of the embers. The *polya* is burnt slowly by conduction, conditioned by sorghum; and the smoke bubbles through water to give the women who smoke it an extended filtered smoking pleasure. The *ncelwa*, has decorations on it, most of the decorations are done using beads.

The *ncelwa* is made by BaTonga women who are also the users of the pipe using readily available material. The material includes squashes, reeds, clay and scrap metal. The squash is a plant, dried and has seeds removed from a small hole drilled on the bulb-squash area. Clay from the Zambezi flood-prone areas is used to make the 'cup' or bowl which makes the 'head' of the male stem. Beads of various colours are sewn together or coloured cloth is knitted together and hung around the neck of the *ncelwa*.

While the material used to make the pipe is cheap and simple, the created material piece is far from being simple. It is a sophisticated object that reflects a great degree BaTonga technology and ingenuity. It also reflects sophistication mostly as created

by women considered 'backward' and 'unschooled'. It is this technological sophistication and ingenuity that attracts, in part, tourists to areas like Binga. This same sophistication gives the *ncelwa* its unique place within the BaTonga cultural artefactual ethnisemiosphere.

It was reported that BaTonga women smoke tobacco using the *ncelwa* for socialisation as well as for health reasons. Traditionally, the BaTonga submitted that women began smoking as early as their puberty age because of the belief that smoking enriched their fertility. Hence, following Nyathi (2005), *ncelwa* smoking was a healthiest way of smoking, thus, revealing BaTonga indigenous knowledge on the dangers of smoking such as cancer and other ailments fully documented in the society today. Phillips (1983) says early western scholars linked water smoking pipes to the smoking of *marijuana* (cannabis). Van der Merwe (2005:147) however thinks the water pipe has Arab origins and he says 'The Arab water pipe (*hookah*), of possible Persian origin, is equally widespread in East, Central and South Africa.' This Arab link also coincides with the introduction of cannabis which according to van der Merwe (2005) became what he calls the widespread smoking material, later mixed with tobacco when it was 'introduced' to Africa by Portuguese.

The BaTonga popular smoking pipe has also been at the centre of controversy especially in terms of its functional use and interpretation by outsiders. The stereotyping of cannabis smoking has not been given grounding even in the contemporary times. This stereotyping can be traced back to the early western scholar-popularised-literature on smoking and smoking pipes. Phillips (1983:302) observed that African smoking pipes are of two general types:

...those with an angle between the bowl and the stem (or stem socket), also called elbow-bend pipes; and those with no such angle, also called barrel-pipes or tube pipes. The former type is found all over the continent and is ethnographically associated with tobacco smoking. The latter type is found in the eastern, southern and central areas of the continent where it is ordinarily attached to a chamber to form a water pipe. These water pipes are commonly associated with the smoking of cannabis in Africa.

BaTonga women and *ncelwa* smokers in Binga and parts of Gokwe dispute the cannabis claim and this is also supported by the fact that the smoking is openly done, (given legal issues and state positions on cannabis in the country). During social and cultural gatherings, BaTonga women smoked openly and by manipulating olfactory close to *ncelwa* smokers one got no traces of cannabis smell –only the aroma of burning embers and not even the smell of *polya* (tobacco) could be picked up. Nyathi (2005) also disputed the *mbanje* claim by confirming that *polya* is smoked by BaTonga women using the *ncelwa*. Thus, the *ncelwa-mbanje* is but a myth advanced by scholars and contemporary Zimbabwean citizens to misrepresent and denigrate the BaTonga by associating them with cannabis smoking in a manner that makes them appear as weed smokers. *Mbanje*

smoking is however observed to have been a BaTonga cultural practice, although further research to confirm this needs to be done also showing the instrument used to smoke the substance in the BaTonga culture. The representation of the flora-motif on the Nyaminyami Walking Stick attests in part to the presence of the *mbanje* plant among the BaTonga.

It is interesting to note that smoking as a social activity is not a new phenomenon among African people. Clark (1998) claims smoking in Africa was introduced by the Portuguese. While such claims could be substantiated in some parts of Africa especially the smoking of tobacco, van der Merwe (2005:147) disputes by observing that 'Khoisan peoples smoked a variety of aromatic materials before European contact....' Phillips (1983:308) advances the idea that 'tobacco was ordinarily snuffed or chewed among southern Africans.' Landau (2010) studying the history of the Tswana, finds smoking as central to rainmaking ceremonies as well as important to the social fabric of the Tswana people. He says among the Tswana smoking tobacco was associated with powerfulness or sharpness, and 'the head rush of inhalation, and the mini-orgasm of the sneeze, and so with "life force" or "breath" (*moya*)' (Landau 2010:82). He also notes that ethnic groups would also define themselves or were defined by others through the smoking practice. The other declaration made by Landau (2010) is that smoking is associated with fertility. He says,

In the 1950s, pouches of tobacco (*segwana*) were carried back and forth from the Tswapong Hills to the Blauwberg on the Mogalakwena River to bring rain and better the crops, marking chiefs' alliances that might prove critical during droughts. Old women even today pinch the scrotums of little boys – called *segwana*, tobacco pouch – and pantomime a huge *gogasmort* of their fingers, and exclaim "Strong!" or "He's going to be a man!". Rain and inhaling tobacco were linked in chains of signification because they entailed related activities. Tobacco was therefore one node around which power was "harmonize[d] with experience" ...in the rain-making activities of the chief. It was not the only one, of course. The idea of pula or rain attached among highveld people not only to smoking and snorting (Landau, 2010:82).

We, thus, note how smoking had a special place within the Tswana social and cultural set up. Landau (2010) does not mention what type of instrument they used, if any was involved. Among the BaTonga though smoking has always been part of their socio-cultural being and the *nchelwa* is evidence of this long cultural and historical practice which continues even to this day. Following Landau (2010) it is therefore no accident that BaTonga also spoke of the advantages of *nchelwa* smoking as aligned to fertility issues. BaTonga women smoke *polya* or tobacco using the *nchelwa*. Mapfumo (2013) also retorted that,

Smoking is essential in the life of BaTonga women. Most women enjoy the *ndombondo* or *nchelwa* smoke as they believe that the smoking boosts the immune system. They also see it as a unique way to relax and recharge themselves. Some of the BaTonga women say it helps them to have an open mind and see things differently and innovatively. Some cultural experts say the *nchelwa* smoking tradition has helped them to restore their pride and dignity in the wake of powerful Western cultural onslaught (Mapfumo, *The Herald* Saturday 25 May 2013).

What we observe is that smoking is part of BaTonga culture. The *ncelwa* is but a smoking instrument and a material object occupying an important domestic space within the BaTonga socio-cultural sphere.

### **The *Buntibe* drum**

Drums occupy a very important place in the matrix of most African lives. Most Africans treasure drums as they spiritually connect the African to the environment, the community and the spiritual world. In that sense, drums address pertinent identity issues for the African. In other words, drums provide a sense of belonging with the environment, the community and the spiritual world. The drum in most African communities provide notions of togetherness and communion. Owusu-Frempong (2005) says of the Akan people of Ghana that the drum and the drummer play a pivotal in the rendition and facilitation of the enactment of communication during the festivals where for instance the drummer performs also a pedagogic role of an artist. He further observes that to 'peoples of African descent, music is not only used to entertain. Music is also a source of energy and strength' (Owusu-Frempong, 2005:738). The BaTonga too use drums for various ritual festivals in the above said spirit. Their drum or drums are popularly known as *buntibe*. They define BaTonga as a cultural group given their shape and size as well as the cultural functions to which they are put.

One therefore notes that apart from being a mere musical instrument and an artefactual ethniseiotic piece of connecting the community to broad aspects of culture, the BaTonga drum holds much of spiritual nexus with the ancestral world. In that sense drums in Africa hold profound, symbolic, historical and cultural meanings worth pursuing mostly from the drum itself and its visual semiotic existence.

In most African traditions, music and drums are at the centre of ceremonial activities and or celebrations as has already been highlighted. Any performance or celebration requiring rituals such as rainmaking, funerals and various religious commemorations calls forth drums and music to aid the rituals. Garabha and Matandangoma in Mungoshi's (1975) *Waiting for the Rain* are taken into a different spiritual world from which their behaviour emerge differently as may be observed in the world of the living, mostly when they start beating the drum. Chirere (2006:112) says Garabha is actually 'intriguing as he is central to the events and the ultimate meaning of this novel.' This is also backed by the author himself when he narrates that,

When one day I went to my local beerhall...and there I watched that jerusarema drum expert (now the national news signal) and the people -his group and the sense, the feeling of being family, and all of them each with his unifying drum and how the drum has been inherited from the past and how these long-gone ones are present now with us in the drum and it was like a prayer joining people past and present...no time to dither seemed to be the message of

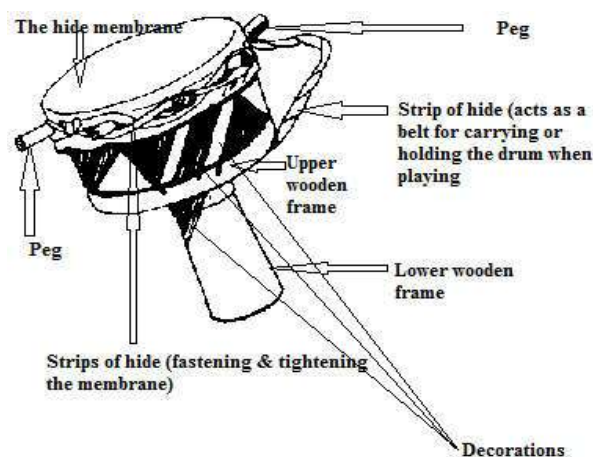


that drum...I had meant the chapter in which Garabha plays the drum to open *Waiting for the Rain* but felt it would like pre-emptying the story (Mungoshi, 2002:31-32).

We get to see how in an African setting the drum, drumming and rituals are unified to knit as well as defined the wellbeing of the village or family. The drum-function discourse is further taken up by Schudder (2005:3-4) who observed that, Possession dances (*masabe*) were especially important for women under stress in a male-dominated society. Their illnesses were apt to be diagnosed as due to possession by one of a number of dangerous or unfamiliar entities. Cure would require ritualized drumming and dancing paid for by kin, or an erring husband, that allowed the one possessed to be treated while being the centre of community attention.

One can therefore conclude that there is however no musical instrument in Africa which is as widespread as the drum. It comes in various shapes and sizes as designed in ethnic oriented ways. Most African drums are made from wood the reason being the readily availability of the cheap material.

The drums are either round, small or tall; wide or short and mostly defined by each ethnic grouping which has its own characteristic type. Emberly and Davison (2011) speak of a pot drum called *thungwa* used by the Venda when performing *Tshigombela*. Identification of drums is popularly made with reference the dance. We should, however, be mindful of the fact that drums onomastically do have their own specific names. For the *buntibe*, the same notion characterise the drum. While this is a musical instrument, some insight into the instrument is worthwhile pursuing. Below is a sketch of the drum



Sketch by Saidi U. 2014

Sketch showing the key features of the *buntibe* drum

The drum is one of the five to seven conical-shaped drums. It is the giant drum requiring one or two people to support it in addition to the principal player. It can be played individually or in an assemblage or orchestra. In Ghana the Akan drums are considered 'talking drums' (Owusu-Frempong, 2005:735) because of their orchestra nature like the *buntibe*. Owusu-Frempong (2005) observed that the Akan assemblage drums are called *Antumpan* in which there is a set of female and a set of male drums. The distinction made, as can be noted is along gender lines.

The *buntibe* drum, however, falls within a class of membranophones given that the sound device is a membrane made out of animal skin. For the *buntibe*, historically goats' and elephant skin were used to make the drum-membrane but today cowhide is used. The hunting of animals, such as elephants, is no longer in the hands of the BaTonga communities and the animals are now protected by the Zimbabwean government through the department of Wildlife and Conservation. Hunting elephants by the BaTonga community is now considered poaching. This explains a shift in the use of elephant skin for the large *buntibe* drum to use of cowhide given the domestic nature of the animal.

The stem of the drum is made out of wood from the Mahogany tree readily available in the BaTonga forest areas. BaTonga chose elephant skin especially from the ear of the elephant and now cowhide, for its durability due to thickness. The type of tree chosen also falls within the class of hardwood trees. A combination of hardwood for the wooden drum stem and a durable membrane guarantee durability and assurance that the drum will not burst or the stem cracks during performances. The chosen wood reflects Nthala's (2009:60) observations that '...drums frames from any other tree leads to premature cracking of the drum frame or general deformation of the drum.'

The *buntibe* drum, thus, has three basic parts: the wooden frame, the skin hide and the pegs or cords. The hide skin-membrane is fastened or fixed tightly around the mouth of the drum with pegs forming the head of the drum. The pegs are primarily to tighten the skin. Strips of hide are also used to create belts for carrying the drum or for holding when playing. The stem itself has two sections, the hollow upper part and the nose-like pipe at the bottom part of the drum. The bowl-like upper part and the nose-pipe below give the *buntibe* its uniqueness, making it different from other common cylindrical Zimbabwean drums.

*Buntibe* requires space as opposed to say the Chewa gulewamkulu *nyau* of Malawi (Nthala, 2009) for example where the drums have fixed positions from which players can operate from. Given that the drum is heavy and that the drum has to be played while in motion most of the time, it is thus designed to allow carrying

from one position to another within the defined arena. Thus an extra cowhide 'belt' may also be fastened to the drum for purposes of carrying.

Traditionally BaTonga elders say the *buntibe* was primarily played during funeral or spiritual rituals and both women and men participated in the playing of the *buntibe*. Manyena, Fordharm and Collins (2008:308) say the *buntibe* had functional roles when 'performing religious ceremonies, such as appeasing the ancestral spirits (*kupiila*) or rainmaking (*kupundula*)....' They also took stage during entertainment which has become its focal point in contemporary times especially during any BaTonga gathering involving BaTonga rituals, cultural expression and performances. Owusu-Frempong (2005) observed the place of rituals and their conduction in the cultural expressive life of the African people. He says,

African festivals are a tool of community gathering and unity and place us at the centre of our culture and social environment. They are also a medium of cultural education and intergenerational communication and play an important role in the preservation of our cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge and our experiences as a people to future generations (Owusu-Frempong, 2005:730).

Owusu-Frempong's (2005) conclusion is relevant to the BaTonga. Given their geographical and historical terrain much of their cultural practices are still observed such as the smoking of *ncelwa* and various other cultural festivals although they face erosion from forces such as Christianity. Historically, BaTonga elders spoke of hunting and fishing, victory or coronation festivals. This was in line with what Owusu-Frempong (2005:733) found that 'In the life of the community, there are planting festivals, hunting and fishing festivals, victory, coronation festivals, and many others.' What is important to observe however is the fact that the festivals or rituals are tied admirably to the community by the drum and for the BaTonga, the *buntibe* does exactly that.

### **What does the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* mean to the BaTonga?**

For the BaTonga the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* symbolise their connections to their ancestral creations and practices. The *ncelwa* for instance visually signify BaTonga women's presence and active cultural expression. Today to identify or represent BaTonga women would not be enough without women figures without the *ncelwa*. Given too that BaTonga hurriedly left the Zambezi shores during relocation, personal tools such as the *ncelwa* were easily packed and taken along while ancestral graves for instance succumbed to flooding. Because the *ncelwa* further makes women gather to smoke, it means women take time to share various experiences as a community thus strengthening community togetherness.

With regard to the *buntibe* drum, for the BaTonga this is a key instrument that triggers historical or memories of their past in spiritual terms as the sound it

produces during its time of playing reveal much of the BaTonga cultural practices. The *buntibe* too symbolically brings the community together as performance is communal.

### **Towards value addition –Heritagisation for economic beneficiation**

When pieces are brought into the existing national space where BaTonga are in an undeniable relationship with other groups, their pieces have to mark their presence in what Sebeok (2001) referred to as the marking of reality. BaTonga either show their pride or showcase what they know about themselves through the *ncelwa* and the *buntibe* drum. They do so with pride and when they dance to the drum, one clearly sees the metaphoric plucking out from their immediate physical space into some spiritual space from which after the performance they cannot explain the experience linguistically. The pieces, thus, assume various and new roles, manipulating that which is beneficial to them for example the smoking of tobacco.

From this inter-semiotic realisation, we hence have processes of heritagisation coming into play. Heritagisation is taken here as a systematic, deliberate way of selecting and preserving specific cultural forms to create a national cultural identity. Heritagisation creates important cultural discourses as theories that inform it define what qualifies and what does not and with what meaning for what purposes? Furthermore, notions for whom should they be preserved and used to represent say BaTonga also become prominent. This means, we have a set of sign systems that should be taken together and speak with one voice, one message.

We should recall that heritagisation in most cases is a defining livelihood aspect as most people 'rely on these heritage elements for various socio-political, economic and developmental agendas' (Chong, 2012:4) and should we fail to value add each piece then, we are likely to miss out on how certain pieces contribute important aspects of cultural development as sustainable development without culture consciousness is meaningless.

It is important to note that the Zimbabwean identity is now being re-defined to be in tandem with the modern constructions. Geographically, the space was marked by colonialism and the current state is a modern construct which, regardless of geographical spatial politics, the modern demands cultural constructions too. Through these cultural constructs, other forms of socio-economic development are easily laid down. Thus, culture in this sense offers a supporting context for sustainable development. But given the Zimbabwean context, all ethnic groups and their unique cultural symbols need to be represented in the ultimate national cultural body of symbols.

We can thus in the same breadth also talk about de-heritagisation –a process of systematically overshadowing cultural forms once prominent in the determining

national identity and character. The call to destroy Rhodes' grave in Matopos as well as that of David Livingstone's statue in Zimbabwe (Saidi, 2013a) is an example of de-heritagisation. Ironically, Zambia offered to have the David Livingstone statue should Zimbabwe succeeded in pulling it down. Hence, in the event of Zimbabwe overshadowing cultural forms of ethnic groups considered to be marginalised in the country, one can claim that sustainable development would thus merely favour ethnic groups whose cultural forms are visible in the national symbolic cultural systems.

As a group BaTonga have, against their history of dislocation, achieved recognition by locality mostly in the physical landscape of their origins, the Zambezi Valley. From these physical places of locality, they continue to express their being and through their expression we find them within the national cultural discourses of Zimbabwe. However, the dominance of cultural expressions during national gatherings far removed from their physical locations is questionable. If we take nationalism as well as sustainable development loosely to mean an effort to create, participate and define a nation through value addition of resources biased towards the so called dominant ethnic groups, one can quickly observe obvious emergencies of conflicts along ethnic lines since beneficiation will be centralised rather than decentralised. We should recall that Africa nationalism is no longer a mere 'synthesis of various intellectual histories, protest traditions, specific cultural institutions, and unique lived experiences' (Akudinobi, 200:124).

Thus, we note that even heritage in itself becomes a discursive space full of contestations. In the work of nationalism the popular advancements are those that aim and seek to advance selection and promotional of items that are representational in reflecting that which is of national interest. From this, creators and authors of such items subsequently benefit as their symbolic pieces would qualify as sustainable resources being used in various programmes of sustainable development. Through this kind of culturalisation we realise notions of cultural nationalism which too have become quite topical in Zimbabwe today especially as the nation grapples against neo-colonialism, globalisation and so on. Heritagisation comes in as a way of materialising culture in the production of cultural identity which can be used in various spheres for national survival.

Scholte (2008) made an important remark that contemporary democracy or the rule by people has shifted its parameters from the historical understandings of democracy. He loosely views democracy as encompassing the idea of inclusion and recognition by modal representations of community aspects that make up a whole. In Scholte's (2008:306) thinking,

earlier democratic practice was constructed around the interconnection of country, state, and nation, contemporary democracy wants reconstruction around the interconnection of transscalar space, polycentric governance, and plural collective identity.

He finds and suggests, over and above other political tasks, a need to 'nurture positive practices of intercultural recognition, communication and negotiation' (Scholte, 2008:307). While this article does not advance any democratic procedures or principles in the revival of the country's reconstruction process of democracy in the political sense of it, a comment on it is vital as it allows us to appreciate the centrality of cultural communication and its representational manner. In the BaTonga case and Zimbabwe at large, we view cultural expression broadly as a cultural practice that has a bearing in the national discourses of nation and state.

African community set ups are different from the so called Western societies and communities. As such aspects of recognition of communities such as BaTonga are not driven through civic open confrontations with the central government. Instead, the inclusive and available non-confrontational as well as participial ways of engagement have been pursued and found to be effective especially for BaTonga. We observe first the structural oneness of BaTonga, the communal reflection of cultural and historical expression when they partake their everyday social practices. The smoking of the *ncelwa* is a case in point. The *buntibe* presence as a deciding factor on social gatherings or in the playing out of rites of passage go a long way in defining various points on which even the smallest pieces such as the *ncelwa* have in that passage of that rite. It becomes a connection of an invariably well-defined set of visual cultural symbolic systems that work in tandem with the rhythm of life of the BaTonga as well as with a community's desire to play out its social and cultural bravura. Ultimately spatial permanence and security become more pronounced.

Cultural expressions become communicative acts and BaTonga are able to recognise the visual cultural codes in these cultural practices which by and large reflect their identity and aspirations. One cannot help but appreciate that which still exists although forces of erasure are at play. So, what we also have is communication of existence within social-space and time.

### **Final thought**

We should put in mind that when calls for cultural rights, land and indigenous demands for autonomy become a real block central governments have to face, heritagisation and discursive determinism play important roles in placing where heritage struggles may emerge 'as well as the artefacts around which they emerge, as social, semantic and physical spaces of ontological multiplicity' (Lazzari and Korstanje, 2013:394).

When BaTonga use their pieces, either through smoking as we have seen with the *ncelwa* or BaTonga partaking to the command of the *buntibe*, they are marking

their domestic cultural space and this makes them able to reclaim their cultural agency. Cultural appropriation in any given society is determined by the cultural systems that maintain the communicative connections of the society. In cultural communication, we begin to identify instances of cultural redeployment where cultural semiotic pieces are placed within a larger cultural continuum. In our case the BaTonga pieces are placed within the Zimbabwean cultural continuum where they are re-interpreted or are supposed to be re-interpreted from their materiality and symbolic texture. The traditional usage and form remains rather unchanged. In other words, ethniartefacts undergo national heritagisation.

When the *buntibe* is being played, its form and function together with the sound produced and the various roles community members play; is tantamount to making us see the *buntibe* as a physical ethniartefact transforming participants into the world of imagination. The *buntibe* becomes a metaphor in the imagining of the BaTonga cultural spaces in Zimbabwe –that alone is loaded with socially, culturally and historically as well as symbolic meanings advanced by BaTonga. These are meanings of spatial inscriptions signifying alongside the conventional language BaTonga cultural contents. It should be noted that the *buntibe* performance requires movement and domestic space; immediacy and agency are all tied to a triad relationship where the drum, the community and space are brought into a visual cultural semiotic trichotomy.

BaTonga are not only negotiating for space, they are simultaneously negotiating for ethnic and cultural identity. And this is reflected in their pieces which have created a narrative of cultural significance. Fabian (1999) observed that the visual element is a determiner to recognition. Existence and heritage are thus connected by the concept of recognition. Thus, heritage does not therefore merely mean anything that connects people to their past. It becomes their everyday possession; something which has been authored in the past remaining active and significant in the present.

We should realise that symbols serve as markers of identity. Hence Ngugi's (1986) language as a carrier of culture concept and Vambe's (2013) provocation because in these two aspects, language as a system is read as a symbol therefore marking identity. Thus, displaying symbols in various stipulated ways is but one way of conveying a particular identity of affiliating with a particular group. Smoking the *ncelwa* is observed in Zimbabwe as done by BaTonga women and playing as well as participating in the *buntibe* reign are both ways of BaTonga signalling their affiliation to the BaTonga group. From these symbols we find them defining the group boundaries, spaces; who the BaTonga are and are not. Furthermore, BaTonga identity is easily investigated in the context of globalisation because the identity is performed through artefacts by the BaTonga as actors and naturally their identity

in the country becoming a 'form of socially meaningful practice' (Blommaert, 2005:208).

Hence, the government seriously needs to consider a vibrant cultural policy, one that is conscious of the existence of all ethnic groups in the country. This policy would thus be central in promoting cultural expression, exportation and protection of cultural forms such as the *ncelwa* and the *buntibe*, from which BaTonga communities can for instance use their cultural forms as the only sustainable resources for development in their communities, especially as tourism has for years been a vibrant economic activity in those areas. This was ZIMASSET may not be interpreted by the BaTonga as another ESAP, Land Reform Programme or Operation Murambatsvina.

### Conclusion

This article has argued that BaTonga have used their artefacts in their search for relevance in the country. Given their long history of neglect and spatial dislocation, artefacts remain the focal symbolic point on which they make sense of themselves as well as assert their presence within the spatial ethnic spaces available in the country and therefore ZIMASSET should support these through value addition by promotion and protection. Artefacts were viewed as important symbols of transformation in that the BaTonga have emerged as a powerful group within their geographical space as well as in cultural discourses as their artefacts cannot be ignored when Zimbabwe sells its culture to its locals and international visitors in the form of tourism. Tourist discourses along the Zambezi capture the *ncelwa* and *buntibe* among other artefacts, marking BaTonga space and presence. It is hoped that this study will go a long way providing information especially in the formulation of a cultural policy to support the national agenda currently in place, the ZIMASSET.

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