

Introduction

This special issue of *Pula* brings together some examples of current research into San/Basarwa issues undertaken by staff at or associated with the University of Botswana (UB) through the NUFU-funded collaborative programme between the Universities of Botswana and Tromsø. The programme started in 1996 with the objective of promoting research focusing on the cultural, historical, social, economic and legal situation of the people known as San, Bushmen, Basarwa, Khoesan, N/oakwe, or Kwe. These make up some 100,000 people living mainly in remote areas of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Angola. The second objective of the programme is to contribute to San capacity building by supporting research that enhances strategies for increasing San access to higher education and training, as well as contributing generally to San development. The project seeks to promote a comparative perspective on indigenous peoples, drawing on the experience of the University of Tromsø and its Centre for Saami Studies, as well as South-South links with the University of Namibia and of the Western Cape.

Why a programme for San/Basarwa research?

One comment, used so frequently that it has almost lost its meaning, is that the “Basarwa are over researched”. In some respects this is true. If we calculate published pages per capita, keeping in mind that the San of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa number less than 100,000 people, there is certainly a lot of research that has been done. And some groups have also resented the curiosity of not only researchers but also journalists, filmmakers and tourists. (Ngakaeaja et al 1998, WIMSA 2002). It may be a paradox, then, to promote more research. However, the Collaborative Programme for San/Basarwa Research recognizes the importance for developing a new type of relationship between the researchers and the communities where research is undertaken., and therefore tries to move the emphasis from a research *on* the San to research *with* the San and eventually we hope to reach a stage where more research is done *by* the San themselves (Saugestad 2001a). Thus, capacity building related to indigenous competence building can be understood as seeking to remove the old distinction between researchers and the object of research, and introducing a new situation where all parties are involved in all stages of the process.

The programme is significantly strengthened by an Oral Testimony Project initiated by the San-based organisation Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), which combines academic research (cultural documentation) with training and community empowerment. The programme has included a series of projects initiated by UB staff and linked up with ongoing research and research interests. These include seminars, workshops, research visits and publications, networking with other universities in the region, maintaining a collection of all contemporary written material on the Basarwa, and increasingly an emphasis on scholarships.

Moreover, the programme has devised specific guidelines, which all researchers receiving funding from the programme are expected to adhere to. These guidelines represent an attempt to formalise the *responsibility* and *accountability* of researchers associated with the programme, in order to ensure decent, respectful and constructive behaviour of researchers with respect to the communities in which research is undertaken, as well as the broader socio-political context in which the research is conducted. It is emphasised that host communities must be clearly informed about planned research activities, and should also be given opportunities to influence the aims and ongoing design of the research project.

In terms of the actual research sponsored, however, the programme has followed a rather eclectic line in identifying research priorities. The basic approach has been that projects should be *researcher-initiated*. Staff and potential staff have been encouraged to direct their specific disciplinary competence to aspects of San/Basarwa community life, history, languages and current status in the context of changing policy and general socio-economic and political environments. Staff in the UB Department of African Languages and Literature, for instance, initiated a research project on Khoesan Languages intended not only to identify and document linguistic and cultural characteristics of these languages, but to enhance the capacity of the young San speakers by attaching them to the project activities as well as training them in skills in conducting research in the fields of language and culture. The current volume of the Pula Journal contains one article indicating this research effort.

Similarly, staff in the UB Department of Sociology have been carrying out ethno-cultural studies focusing particularly on issues of identity and power relations as well as ethnicity and gender. In the new phase of the NUFU agreement, the Sociology research activities are intended to build an information base which can be used for policy intervention relating to the development of the San communities. It is also intended to encourage student participation and thus provide students with training in research and related practical academic and professional skills. Two MA dissertations have been completed in 2002 alone. One is on the implications of inter-ethnic relations for national unity, using Basarwa-Bakalanga relations as a case study, and the other discusses the economic impact of Botswana's national policy of community based natural resource management on two Basarwa communities. The latter study is summarized as a research note in this volume. Also included as an output from the Sociology programme of research is a substantive article on outsider activism and the positioning of Basarwa in such advocacy activities.

The University of Botswana has created what by now is the world's greatest collection of all material connected with San /Basarwa/Bushmen. The ambitious aim is to include all written material, not only published works, but also the 'grey zone' of conference reports, evaluations, pamphlets and theses. The material collected so far (some 2000 titles) are all available on the shelves of the Botswana Collection of the University of Botswana, and an abstract of the first 1000 documents is available in Volume One of *The Khoe and San, An Annotated Bibliography* (Willet, Monageng, Saugestad and Hermans 2002). Another publication that may be of general interest to the reader of this Journal is the comprehensive volume on *The State of Khoesan Languages in Botswana* (Batibo and Tsonope 2000). This book reports on the most current debates in the development of orthographies and dictionaries, and considers the sociolinguistic dimensions of the development of Khoesan languages. A volume in a slightly different vein is *The Inconvenient Indigenous. Remote Area Development in Botswana, Donor Assistance and the First People of the Kalahari* (Saugestad 2001b). This book deals with the relationship between the Government of Botswana and its indigenous minority, and tries to understand why the San remain a marginalised minority in a country that since Independence has committed itself to a democratic and non-racial agenda. Last, but not least, topics of archaeology, history, sociology, law and linguistics have been addressed in a series of conference papers, some of them published in proceedings such as *The Khoisan Identities and Cultural Heritage Conference* (Bank 1998) and *Africa's Indigenous Peoples: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalised Minorities'?* (Barnard and Kenrick 2001).

The articles included in the present special issue of *Pula* reflect only some examples of the varied research activities reported on above. However, they illustrate rather well some issues of topical interest such as land rights, power relations, culture and identity, the meaning of development, democracy and human rights as well as the underlying social conflicts and

contradictions in government policies. Mphinyane's article addresses the contestation between government and non-governmental organizations and between local and foreign organizations claiming legitimacy to represent Basarwa in determining what is in their best developmental interests. Mphinyane highlights how Basarwa are practically marginalized in this power contest as in effect the parties which claim to represent them do not recognize them as capable of determining things for themselves. The specific bone of contention is government's policy of relocating Basarwa from what is left of their ancestral lands in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

The articles of Bolaane, Taylor and Mbaiwa highlight other dimensions to the land rights issue by providing historical accounts of how Basarwa lost their lands. Bolaane's article shows that early contacts between Bantu groups and Basarwa were based on mutual friendship and trade, and an underlying recognition of Basarwa land rights. With the coming of the more centralized Batawana, the land was annexed and Basarwa lost control over it: a process that continues through European colonialism and post independence conservation policies. Mbaiwa extends the theme of encroachment by Batawana and European colonialism to highlight the impact of loss of control on resource management. Taylor provides a meticulously detailed ethnographic account of one exercise where the community in question set out to document their traditional land use in an effort to gain further control. Chebanne adds to this theme by bringing out the impact of land encroachment on Basarwa language and culture, and the processes of minoritization that undermines ethnic identity and enhances assimilation into dominant Tswana culture.

Another main theme that is also captured by the articles is that of power relations between Basarwa and other social groups. In Mphinyane's article the position of Basarwa is graphically captured in her account of the lack of validation of their knowledge by both government and NGO's led by non-Basarwa. Bolaane highlights two aspects of power where Basarwa are the marginalized. One is with regard to their knowledge of the flora and fauna of their habitat where that knowledge is recognized as valid only for guiding others not as legitimate primary sources for posterity. The other concerns the disregard other social groups have over Basarwa's territorial claims, and the powerlessness of Basarwa to stake their claim.

A third theme that also needs particular mention is the impact of various government policies on the position of Basarwa. Botswana's policies on land use, conservation, settlement, language and education, and related development programmes are all indicated as negatively affecting the political, social, cultural and economic positions of Basarwa and hence their human rights. This is discussed by Molebatsi who examines the intended and unintended consequences of the Remote Area Development Programme, and demonstrates how even programmes designed specifically to address their needs fail to achieve their good intentions. Thapelo's article uses a historical perspective to examine the nature of public welfare and its assimilationist pressure. Thapelo sees the colonial and post-colonial structures as having eroded the rights of minorities, as market mechanisms have created a state of social exclusion.

The four brief Research Notes confirm the current interest in Community Based Natural Resource Management. The two case studies by Nklekang and Masilo-Rakgoasi confirm the wide gap between the intentions of the policy and the ability to realise the good intentions. A main problem here is the bureaucratic definition of community, to reflect geographical areas rather than social units. Thus the formalisation of community structure tends to strengthen rather than remove lines of social division, and recreates rather than removes relations of powerlessness for minorities within the new community organisations. Nthomang's research note addresses models for community development in a wider perspective, and drawing on his background in Social Work he indicates ways that may

bring about a better dialogue between policy implementers on the one side and local groups on the other. Finally, Oevernes presents plans for a project in its starting-up phase, addressing the nascent Khoekhoe movement in Southern Africa. The project broadens the perspective both geographically, to South Africa, and thematically to address new questions of indigenous identity and authenticity in a rapidly changing regional and international context. New research questions are being posed that hopefully will lead to further special issues on Khoe and San research in the future.

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