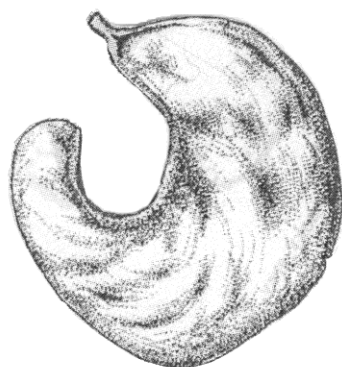




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Safeguarding the musical bows and associated rituals of the Ju/'hoansi

Ismael Sam*

Abstract

This article provides an overview of existing literature and previous research on the significance of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) globally. It also discusses the way in which Namibia implemented the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The article takes the form of a qualitative case study, which is interpretive in nature. A defining characteristic of case studies is the possibility of using a combination of methods to collect data. Thus, the author utilized a multi-method approach. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The article describes various musical bows that are found among and played by the Ju/'hoansi people in Namibia. The instruments are not only used to entertain the community's members but also function as mediating accessories between the living and their ancestral spirits, and as comforters among the Ju/'hoansi musicians and community.

Introduction

Namibia, with a relatively small population of about 2.540 million¹, is home to an astonishingly rich and diverse range of cultures. Among the indigenous peoples that contribute to this diversity are the Ju/'hoansi community whose unique customs, beliefs, traditions, songs, music and rituals are well-known. Their traditional music and songs are intrinsically linked to their cultural environment and life cycles. This traditional music not only plays a vital role in cultural and social activities like hunting, healing ceremonies, gatherings, rituals of birth and puberty but it also fosters social cohesion. Their performances, dances and musical instruments provide space for the manifestation of cultural expression, represent their values as the Ju/'hoansi people, and are part of their intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and tangible cultural heritage.

This article examines the importance of raising awareness of efforts to safeguard ICH and the methodology used to promote and preserve it globally. It also gives a brief history of the Ju/'hoansi, some of whose practices, particularly the making of the musical instruments

* Ismael Sam is Lecturer at College of the Art, Windhoek, Namibia, where he is lecturing ethnomusicology. He serves as Manager of Theatre School. E-mail: ishsam911@gmail.com

¹ The World Bank, "Population, total – Namibia",
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NA>

that relate to the rain dance as well as their associated rituals, are the object of this research.

In addition, the article provides an overview of existing literature and previous research and highlights the significance of ICH globally. It examines the roles of state parties in safeguarding ICH and the theoretical framework on which this work is based, focusing on how it is implemented worldwide in general and in Namibia in particular. The literature discussed also includes reports relating to culture and heritage as well as other publications online, such as material from the UNESCO website on Intangible Cultural Heritage.² Furthermore, this article is a descriptive and interpretive case study, and analysis is conducted using qualitative methods. To identify traditional musical instruments and associated rituals, research questionnaires were used. A descriptive method was used to analyse the data. Participant observation, face-to-face interviews, focus-group interviews and questionnaires were also used to collect data.

The article discusses various steps in the process of implementing measures to safeguard the Ju/'hoansi community's practice of making musical instruments and the rituals with which they are associated. In addition, the article identifies and describes some of the musical bows found among the Ju/'hoansi and concludes by discussing how Namibia is implementing or attempting to implement the UNESCO 2003 Convention on ICH.³

Literature review on safeguarding

Safeguarding measures are strategies that are adopted and implemented by a state party to ensure the continuation of the intangible cultural heritage present on its territory. With the participation of each area's communities, groups and other relevant non-governmental organizations the various elements of the ICH are identified and defined.

The activities can take place in various forms of engagements and training. Workshops to strengthen national capacities for implementing the UNESCO 2003 Convention on ICH, activities to raise awareness, workshops to strengthen national or international community base inventorying, involve representatives from various government departments, research institutions and non-government organisations or from international cooperation platforms. This is made easier through the creation and implementation of Arts and Culture policies that provide guidelines for those working in this area.

Commenting on ICH, Kamani Perera states that it is crucial to document, preserve and make generally accessible documented and preserved intangible heritage, and historical records for the community to which that heritage belongs and beyond, via museums and cultural heritage institutions.⁴ It is worth noting that many developing countries are

² UNESCO, "Intangible cultural heritage", <https://ich.unesco.org/en/>

³ UNESCO, "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage", <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

⁴ Kamani Perera, *Preserving Intangible Culture Heritage for Environmental Sustainability of Sri Lanka*, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2014: 4.

endowed with rich and diverse intangible cultural heritage, such as expressions, rituals and skills that help to identify a particular community. She further emphasises that it is important to safeguard and document heritage for present and future generations. This helps to strengthen sustainable economic growth in developing countries by expanding the cultural tourism industry. Furthermore, Shankar Bhavani and Swamy Chidambara point out in their paper that “awareness is a crucial part of any heritage conservation and management. The creation of awareness is time-consuming and it requires commitment and local support.”⁵ They also emphasise that awareness is generally the most well-known and accentuated component of cultural heritage administration and this is one of the most effective ways of promoting public respect for the cultural heritage. Shankar and Swamy have observed in their studies that inventories, by drawing attention to specific elements of ICH, can highlight their importance and stimulate the search for means to preserve and promote them.⁶ They further note that documentation does not, in itself, preserve or conserve intangible heritage. They also point out that creating and publishing an inventory list is not a neutral act, since the concern for ICH grows with the realization that, in the globalized age, traditions disappear as a result of a lack of interest among young people in participating in cultural activities and failure to promote awareness of cultural activities. Therefore, it is more important to protect the practitioners of the ICH than the ICH itself; without the practitioners, transmission of ICH is impossible.

Therefore, the protecting ICH involves more than tending to the arts and artefacts – the artists, craftsmen and practitioners must also be attended to. Unlike tangible heritage, ICH is alive and needs to be transmitted. Hence, to ensure its sustainability, the whole system of living heritage transmission must be observed and protected. This means that the responsibility for safeguarding ICH lies primarily with the community to which those ICH elements belong.⁷

Moreover, Shankar and Swamy note in their studies that inventorying should result in publication and should stimulate action; otherwise it does not serve its purpose.⁸ The entire inventorying process has to be carried out in such a manner as to avoid detrimental effects such as canonising the particular style of a performance. Such side-effects, they conclude, will grant a false stamp of authenticity which in the end can effectively freeze or even kill a living tradition.

The ICH of any nation and ethnic group is the product of a locality, environment, and way of life, language, and condition of cultural history that is very diverse and unique. Thus,

⁵ Bhavani Shankar and Chidambara Swamy, “Creating awareness for heritage conservation in the city of Mysore: issues and policies”, *International Journal of Modern Engineering Research*, 3 (2), 2013: 698-703 (698).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ayşe Selin Dülger and Beyza Hatırnaz, “Intangible cultural heritage museum in the heart of Turkey”, *Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Tourism*, 3 (1), 2018: 51-65.

⁸ Shankar and Swamy, “Creating awareness”.

the ICH of any nation symbolizes their identities and constitutes an integral part of world culture.

Artun in his assessment considers two types of ICH: cultural knowledge and cultural activity.⁹ Cultural knowledge is the belief system or knowledge base that is maintained and passed down over generations, including the categories of cultural concepts, traditional techniques and traditional forms of social organisation. Cultural activity is defined as an activity that represents expressions of social or cultural identity for a particular group in which multiple members of the community take part. Cultural activity can be divided into the subcategories of ritual, cultural expression and traditional life-ways. Cultural activities are often informed by cultural knowledge, but they are distinct in that cultural activities are event based (i.e. they take place at a particular time and place) while cultural knowledge exists in the consciousness of a community.¹⁰

ICH covers a broad spectrum and today, its protection has become not only an individual but also a national and an international issue.¹¹ A number of international foundations and conventions protect ICH. For example, the Convention for the Protection of Natural and Cultural World Heritage of 1972 is also based on the principle of protecting intangible cultural heritage¹², although it does not mention the word 'intangible', but the preservation activities that it promotes also speak to the protection of ICH.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was passed by the 32nd UNESCO General Conference which took place in Paris from 29 September to 17 October 2003, and it was unanimously adopted in the session of the Grand National Assembly on 19 January 2006. The "Law on the Approval of the Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (No. 5448) was promulgated on January 21, 2006 in the Official Gazette numbered 26056.

2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

The purposes of the 2003 UNESCO Convention on ICH are:

- (a) to safeguard intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- (c) to raise awareness at local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;

⁹ Emre Artun, "Exhibition in the Museum of Village of Theatrical Cultural Heritage", *Exhibition in the Museum of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Symposium Booklet, 2004: 147-151.

¹⁰ Petronela Tudorache, "The importance of the intangible cultural heritage in the economy", *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies*, 21 (1), 2016: 296-304.

¹¹ Artun 2004: 147.

¹² UNESCO, "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage", <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

(d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

The 2003 ICH Convention recognizes 12 measures as necessary in the protection of living heritage. The first four are the most important and primary among these is the identification and naming of an ICH practice. The second is research into the identified element while the third is documentation. The fourth safeguarding measure is inventorying.¹³

The other vital ICH safeguarding measure is preservation. The preservation, protection, promotion, raising awareness, revitalization and enhancement of an ICH element are critical. They involve the modernization of a particular practice by improving its status and importance among the community or practitioners. This is only possible if the element is recognized and accepted by its community of practitioners. The last and most important safeguarding measure is transmission.¹⁴

State parties to the Convention are obliged to take the necessary measures to safeguard ICH on their territory. As a preliminary safeguarding measure, they have to identify and register it in one or more inventories. It is also recommended that they take a number of administrative and legal measures, such as the adoption of a general policy aimed at promoting the function of the intangible cultural heritage in society, the designation or establishment of one or more bodies for organizing safeguarding activities, fostering research as well as raising awareness using formal and informal education.¹⁵

ICH is the basis of any nation's or community's knowledge, identities, wealth and development. Safeguarding and preserving it lays a foundation for present and future identities, innovation and development.¹⁶ Though preservation comes with challenges and ethical issues, the benefits far outweigh the costs. The benefits include good health, education, peaceful coexistence and sustained development. As a way forward, all stakeholders in the ICH sector should direct their efforts towards creating interventions to protect and safeguard intangible cultural heritage in times of crisis, conflict, natural disaster or in a phase of development. There is also a need to support projects to research, document, conserve, restore and promote heritage goods, both movable and immovable, and intangible.¹⁷ The promotion of projects to identify, inventory and document intangible cultural heritage should also be a priority. It should focus on finding ways which allow ICH to be used and promoted and to contribute economically, socially and culturally in a way that is both respectful to the heritage values and useful to the society.¹⁸

¹³ UNESCO, "Basic texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage". 2020 edition, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/basic-texts-00503>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fumiko Ohinata, "UNESCO's activities for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in the Horn of Africa", *African Study Monographs*, Suppl. 41, 2010: 35-49 (36).

¹⁶ Tudorache, "Importance".

¹⁷ Maria Bonn, Lori Kendall and Jerome McDonough, "Preserving intangible heritage: Defining a research agenda", *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 53, 2017: 1-5.

¹⁸ Orinda Okumu, *The Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kenya*, edited by Anne-Marie Deisser and Mugwima Njuguna, London, University College London, 2016: 58.

It is essential to note that treating heritage, as a something of universal, global value has been the predominant approach in international cultural policy-making. This has largely been the case since the second half of the 20th century, but the understanding of the significance of heritage to local and bearer communities has steadily improved. This duality has been particularly challenging when implementing the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹⁹ Thus Janet observes that practitioners and other stakeholders should not view inventorying and other safeguarding activities as an end in themselves but as the beginning of other activities that will bring value to practitioners-cum-host communities.

Safeguarding measures

Safeguarding cultural heritage measures in Africa

It is encouraging that 42 African countries had ratified the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) by the end of 2018. This shows that African countries are committed to implementing and safeguarding for future generations the Intangible Cultural Heritage found within their borders. According to the UNESCO website on the 2003 ICH Convention, the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority Funds-in-Trust (ADTCA) funded the project on strengthening national capacities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in eight countries in Africa and the Arab Region through assessing their needs and developing project proposals. The objective of the project was to lay a solid foundation to support the following eight countries in safeguarding their living heritage: Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Madagascar, Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. The project involved collaboration with national counterparts and was conducted in accordance with the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, the report on the UNESCO 2003 ICH Convention website explains that UNESCO developed multi-year projects based on the needs of the beneficiary countries under the framework of UNESCO's global capacity-building programme for strengthening national safeguarding capacities. This was initiated on the 1 May 2014 and was completed on the 1 March 2019.²⁰

In Southern Africa there is a further project: "Strengthening Sub-Regional Cooperation and national capacities in seven Southern African countries for implementing the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage" (Phase I – III). Twenty participants from seven countries in the Southern African region (Botswana, Eswatini [Swaziland], Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have benefitted from this project which is funded by UNESCO/Flanders. The report also explains that the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa organized a workshop on Policy Development in the field of ICH in Southern Africa. The purpose of this workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, from the 2 to 6 October 2016 was to brainstorm and share experiences on how to provide policy advisory services

¹⁹ Janet Blake, "Museums and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage – facilitating participation and strengthening their function in society", *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 13, 2018: 1-32 (6).

²⁰ UNESCO, "Yemen, Project", <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/yemen-YE?info=projects>

in the field of intangible cultural heritage. It was again funded by UNESCO/Flanders Funds-in-Trust. The projects ran from the 1 May to the 1 June 2019.

Safeguarding cultural heritage in Namibia

This section focuses on how Namibia has implemented the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage and attends to the social gatherings of the Ju/'hoansi people. It also discusses the manner in which the conservancies where Ju/'hoansi people are now settled influence the meaning and values of their social gatherings.

Namibia is a country of close to three million people with a range of diverse cultures. The constitution has provisions to accommodate and respect the customary laws and traditional practices of each community.

In Article 19 the Namibia Constitution provides that:

All people have the right to their own culture, language, traditions and religion, but no one can use this right in a way that interferes with the rights of any other person or with the national interest of Namibia.

Other Conventions ratified by Namibia include the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the UNESCO 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Implementation of UNESCO 2003 Convention in Namibia

The Namibia Periodic report on the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 ICH Convention focuses on the status of elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The report states that the Republic of Namibia has undertaken some notable efforts to safeguard the ICH in the country. It is guided by the national and institutional policy and the legislative framework: The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, Draft Policy on Arts and Culture (currently under review) and the National Heritage Act 27 of 2004, which is also currently under review to accommodate ICH safeguarding measures. A National ICH Committee and ICH secretariat under the Directorate of National Heritage and Culture have also been established. The National ICH Committee office and the Directorate of Culture constantly encourage stakeholder participation in the management and safeguarding of ICH. Traditional Authorities and Regional Offices in various regions have already engaged with the Directorate.

In addition, the report notes that the National ICH Committee office works in close collaboration with the UNESCO Windhoek Cluster Office and the National Commission for UNESCO (NATCOM), as well as other regional and national stakeholders in the development and the implementation of the ICH National Strategy for the UNESCO 2003 Convention. The report furthermore, explains that the National ICH Committee facilitated a Trainers of Trainers Capacity Building Workshop on ICH for 17 participants drawn from across Namibia at Waterberg in April 2014. The main objective of the workshop was to strengthen institutional and national capacity for the safeguarding of ICH. The other training workshop was on the preparation of nomination files on ICH. It was held in Namibia

in December 2010 and attended by the Harare and Windhoek Clusters. In 2011 Namibia benefitted from international assistance from the government of Flanders, at which representatives from Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe were invited to exchange information, experiences and expertise with their Flemish counterparts on the ICH in their respective countries. A total of 85 people were trained of which 51 were women and 34 men. Each of these training sessions lasted two weeks and was then followed by a week of inventorying.²¹

Community involvement and safeguarding workshop activities

The documentation of ICH elements requires the involvement of government, stakeholders and communities. It is necessary to obtain permission from community leaders and practitioners to undertake documentation, preservation activities, etc.²² Therefore, community participation is mandatory for ICH awareness and protection programmes and helps to educate community members and leaders on the importance of documenting the ICH for sustainable economic development.²³

Community involvement in safeguarding ICH means engaging members of a concerned community to generate, recreate, transmit and sustain their ICH. ICH refers to the manifestations of a range of community based heritage products which individuals or a community recognize as their cultural heritage. UNESCO categorizes the heritage products under five domains of ICH: oral tradition and expressions, performing arts, social practices, knowledge and traditional craftsmanship.²⁴ It is important to state that UNESCO's efforts to safeguard ICH began in the 1950s when ICH was referred to as folklore.²⁵ The concern for ICH came about with the realization that some traditions were disappearing as a result of a lack of local culture reproduction in the face of globalization and in an era when the west was increasingly dominating the world culturally.

Therefore, conservators have raised two challenging questions for UNESCO on safeguarding ICH. Firstly: If the living heritage is to be passed on to the future generation, what are the forms of living heritage to be documented and how are they documented? Secondly: If the forms of living heritage were the practitioners of the heritage itself, what is to be transmitted to the next generation and why transmit it? UNESCO emphasizes that it is more important to protect the practitioners of the ICH than the ICH itself; without the

²¹ UNESCO, "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage", <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

²² UNESCO-ACCU, Expert Meeting on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards the Implementation of the 2003 Convention, 13–15 March 2006, Tokyo, Japan, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00034-EN.pdf>

²³ Perera, *Preserving*: 14.

²⁴ UNESCO, "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage", <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

²⁵ Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, *Intangible Heritage. Key Issues in Cultural Heritage*, New York, Routledge, 2009.

practitioners, transmission of ICH is impossible. Thus the protection of ICH requires more than just attention to the arts and artefacts but also the artists, craftsmen and practitioners. Unlike tangible heritage, ICH is alive because of its bearers and it is up to them to transmit it. Hence to ensure the sustainability of ICH, the whole system of living heritage transmission must be observed and protected. This means that the responsibility for safeguarding ICH is a very much a matter for the community to which a certain ICH belongs.²⁶

In an endeavour to be fully equipped for inventorying activities, Namibia conducted Trainers-of-Trainers (ToT) workshops from 2010 to 2015. Traditional Authorities from the 13 regions of the country were invited and nominated as representatives to the first workshop on raising awareness of the 2003 Convention. The first training on community-based inventorying took place in Khorixas, Kunene region from 11 to 18 April 2010. The second, on community inventorying and documentation, took place from 3 to 10 March 2012 at Waterberg. The third workshop was held from 1 to 5 September 2014, at Mariental.²⁷

Namibia has conducted community-based inventorying and has identified 11 elements from various regions. As a result of these activities, the *Oshituthi shomagongo* (The marula fruit festival) elements were inscribed in 2015 (10.COM) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Namibia benefitted from preparatory assistance in the preparation of the nomination of 'Ancestral musical sound knowledge and skills' which was submitted to the Urgent Safeguarding List (file no. 01418, 2017-2019). The contract for this assistance stipulated that the work should be carried out in accordance with UNESCO regulations.²⁸ The country received a letter of confirmation that the file was nominated and would be discussed in 2019 during the 14.COM session for possible inscription on the Urgent safeguard list.

According to the Namibia ICH National Committee Report of 2018, a request for International Assistance for the project entitled "Okuruuo: Holy Fire and the associated rituals" No. 01439 was submitted. The proposed 28-month project is intended to safeguard *Okuruuo* (Holy Fire and the associated rituals); a sacred ritual currently practiced in the Omaheke, Otjozondjupa, Kunene and Erongo regions.

Data analysis process

In analysing the collected data, part of the process required an understanding of how to identify the true meaning of the information. As such, my feelings as an author and outsider ranged between familiarity with that to which the participants attribute meaning in their lives and a sense that I could not identify personally with what they could be feeling or describing. Knowing that I would encounter this transitional or in-between experience

²⁶ Smith and Akagawa, *Intangible Heritage*: 24.

²⁷ UNESCO, Website on Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/>

²⁸ Ibid.

encouraged me to explore the data with a sense of flexibility and open-mindedness, improvisation and creativity as well as planning and adherence to steps and rules.²⁹

An analytical process is not precise or linear but tends to spiral. It calls for the volume of information to be reduced by sorting the significant from the irrelevant facts. There is also a need to identify patterns and trends, and to construct a framework for communicating the essence of what was revealed by the data. By being aware of this, the author read carefully through the transcripts and tried to gain an overall understanding of each session. He identified salient themes, recurring ideas and patterns of belief that link the participants. Clustered recurring patterns and commonalities repeated by participants into generative themes were also established.

The approach described above explains the interpretive paradigm of this article as far as theme generation was concerned and guided the interpretation process. Thus, themes were generated with an awareness of participant particularities and generalizations. What the traditional musicians expressed helped the author to understand and make sense of the Ju/'hoansi community's meanings.

Conversely, theme analysis also involved noticing how one participant's expressions fitted into a chosen theme, while another might have indicated a divergence from that same theme. To create order out of the different patterns and commonalities of participant expressions, I used the process of coding.³⁰ The coding of themes was important because it allowed clearer presentation of data when the themes were described and supported by quotations in the final paper. The first stage was open coding, which entailed reading and rereading the data in order to have an idea of how patterns could be clustered and coded. Three types of coding, namely open coding; which refers to the initial interpretive process by which raw research data are first systematically analysed and categorized. Second is axial; you read over your codes and the underlying data to find how your codes can be grouped into categories. Selective coding is the process of choosing one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category. These three were used in an ascending order with open coding being the first to be utilized.

Open coding involved naming the identified patterns or categories of expressions, breaking them down into discreet parts, closely examining them, comparing them for similarities and differences, and questioning the phenomena that are reflected in them. Axial coding involved looking for links and connections between the themes that had come up so that the related ones could be merged into clusters. Anna De Vos et al. call this classifying or looking for categories of meaning. This critical stage involves searching for categories of meaning that have internal convergence and external divergence.³¹

²⁹ Valerie Janesick, *"Stretching" Exercises for Qualitative Researchers*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1998.

³⁰ Rachel Falmagne, "The dialectic of the particular and the general", *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, 17, 2006: 167-184 (181).

³¹ Anna De Vos, Hans Strydom, Crista Fouché and Catharina Delport, *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Science Professionals*, 3rd Edition, Pretoria, Van Schaik, 2005.

Selective coding was the final process whereby all themes documented for each individual participant were divided into groups that comprised the final presentation. This involved sorting the data, and reducing it to a small, manageable set of themes to write into the final narrative. Meaning we read and analyse the text and take only the most important data in this process.

Three themes that emerged from participant narratives on how to safeguard the ICH elements are:

- * Identification of traditional musical instruments and associated rituals.
- * Measures to safeguard the making and tuning of traditional musical instruments and associated rituals.

Findings

Background of Ju/'hoansi community

The Khoisan are among Southern Africa's most marginalized and endangered people. They are scattered throughout the region with 3,500 living in Angola, 48,000 in Botswana, 34,000 in Namibia, 7,500 in South Africa, 1,300 in Zambia and 2,500 Zimbabwe.³²

The Ju/'hoansi thus belong to a diverse group of peoples that is often referred to as Khoisan, and is the largest of the central !Kung-speaking peoples, as distinct from Khoi and other non-Khoi speakers in Namibia. The Ju/'hoansi population of the former Bushmanland stands currently at around 1,500, with comparable numbers across the border in Botswana. In the mid-1970s the border restrictions between Namibia and Botswana made access from one country to the other difficult; in more recent times border control has been reinforced, seriously restricting the mobility of Ju/'hoansi groups thus limiting contact between those found on either side of the boundary.³³

From 1970, the Ju/'hoansi were resettled in the town of Tsumkwe and various border areas. The most sweeping changes to the structure of the local economy came with the occupation of the country by the South African Defence Forces (SADF) in 1978.³⁴ In fact, the !Kung San people domiciled in Angola and Namibia were victims of the long war that the Portuguese and South Africans waged against African liberation movements. In addition to the calamity of war, a number of the San in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana were ejected from their traditional homelands as a result of the establishment of game

³² Caroline S. Chaboo, Megan Bieseke, Robert K. Hitchcock and Andrea Weeks, "Beetle and plant arrow poisons of the Ju |'hoan and Hai | | om San peoples of Namibia (Insecta, Coleoptera, Chrysomelidae; Plantae, Anacardiaceae, Apocynaceae, Burseraceae)", *ZooKeys*, 558, 2016: 9-54, <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/5957/>

³³ Alan Barnard, "Social and special boundary maintenance among southern African hunter-gatherers", in: Michael Casimir and Aparna Rao, (eds.), *Mobility and Territoriality: Social and Special Boundaries among Foragers, Fishers, Pastoralists and Peripatetics*, New York, Berg, 1992: 137-151.

³⁴ Ian Uys, *Bushman Soldiers: Their Alpha and Omega*, Germiston, Fortress Publication, 1993.

reserves and national parks.³⁵ Though the warfare that took place in Angola and Namibia had little direct effect on the Ju/'hoansi, the presence of the SADF had numerous consequences, especially on their cultural practices. Many who settled took the relatively well paid jobs that were offered by the SADF.³⁶ In addition to making the Ju/'hoansi groups more sedentary, it also introduced them to a cash economy. When the SADF pulled out in 1988/89, many Ju/'hoansi left their places in the towns and returned to the bush.³⁷

Their hunting and gathering activities reveal that elements of their culture are still in use, including music and its attendant instruments. Music and dance are part and parcel of their heritage, though most other aspects of it have been lost. However, based on the Ju/'hoansi's form of music Olivier states that most of their instruments were borrowed from other populations, and these were gradually assimilated into their musical heritage.³⁸ The musical world of the Ju/'hoansi features, among other aspects, the announcement of a successful hunt, seduction, praying to the dead before a hunt, and entertainment. One of their practices relates to the making of musical instruments for the rain dance and associated rituals.

Various musical bows among the Ju/'hoansi community

In the course of this research three musical instruments were documented that were observed as being significant in the life of the Ju/'hoansi. These were the *g!omah* which is a musical bow, the *n!aoh* (unbraced bow) and the | | *oq'acè* (a four-string pluriarc). In the following sections the structure of each instrument, how and when it is played, as well as the accompanying rituals and dances are discussed. It is important to note that the following details were gathered through interaction with the respondents as part of the safeguarding measures. It was also observed that there is a gender dimension related to the three instruments.

The *g!omah* (musical bow)

G!omah is the name used for this instrument which belongs to the family of chordophones. These are stringed musical instruments that make sound by way of a vibrating string or strings stretched between two points. Among the Ju/'hoansi the *g!omah* is only played by any males who are about to go hunting. No reason was given on why this is but given the way of life of the Ju/'hoansi and other Kho-San peoples, the authors assumed this had to

³⁵ Robert K. Hitchcock, "Hunting is our heritage: the struggle for hunting and gathering rights among the San of Southern Africa", *Senri Ethnological Studies*, 59, 2001: 139-156.

³⁶ Richard Lee and Susan Hurlich, "From foragers to fighters: South Africa's militarization of the Namibian San", in: Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee, (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982: 327-345; John Marshall and Claire Ritchie, *Where are the Ju/'wasi of Nyae Nyae? Changes in a Bushman Society*, University Cape Town, Centre for African Studies, 1984.

³⁷ Alexander McCall Smith, *Tears of the Giraffe*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 2000.

³⁸ Emmanuelle Olivier, "Categorizing the Ju'hoan musical heritage", *African Study Monographs*, Suppl. 27, 2001: 11-27 (21).

do with traditions linked to the gender division of labour where the males are the hunters. It was also noted that the instrument is common not just among the Ju/'hoansi but is ubiquitous within the entire San community in Namibia as well as among the following ethnic groups in Namibia: the !Kung: n!aoh, the Haillom: khasa, the Damara: !gomakhās, the Ndonga: òkàmbúlúmbúbà, the Kwanyama: uuta and the Ovahimba: outa.

On its origin, in interviews and focus group discussions a number of musicians and traditional elders stated that the musical bow in all its various forms is an ancient instrument. Because it is so ancient, they stated that it is very difficult to trace its origin and thus its age was also difficult to ascertain. What was clear however, was that the musical bow is used in important rituals such as celebrating a successful hunt and ceremonies requesting rain. The respondents also stated that it is played in the evening at a socio-religious event before the hunters go on their venery activities. During the pre-hunting ceremony every musician creates his own melody. The melodies consist of lower and higher notes which are played in various ways. The community members can accompany the musician through different activities. Women for example, accompany musicians by humming and yodelling with very soft voices during the performances, but there is no hand clapping or dancing.



g!omah (photo by Dr. Minette Mans)

This bow is also important in that it is not only played before a hunting expedition, but also after a successful hunt. Following a successful hunt a ritual is performed with the purpose of informing the community the success. It was stated that the playing of the instrument was also a way of giving thanks to the ancestral spirits who are believed to have helped them search for, track and catch the animal(s). It was also pointed out that the Kxoe musicians use the same instrument to speak to their ancestral spirits when seeking help and the necessary energy to kill more animals on hunting expeditions. The

informants also told the author that throughout the ritual Ju/'hoansi women praise the hunters and look upon them as hardworking men. One of the elders also said that when a musician is too old to play the instrument, he can longer go on hunting expeditions.

The *n/ao*h (one stringed unbraced bow)

The second musical instrument that was documented in this inquiry is the one-stringed unbraced bow that is known among the Ju/'hoansi people as the *n/ao*h. This bow is also found in other regions among other ethnic groups and, as with the *g/om*ah, the functions of the instrument vary from region to region. The instrument is largely found among the following ethnic groups: the !Kung, the Hai | om, the Damara, the Ndonga, the Kwanyama and the Ovahimba.



The *n/ao*h (photo by Sam Ismael)

The characteristic of the hunting bow or musical bow without the resonator is an arc of wood with a string stretched between the two ends. This type of construction is used in many musical bows in Namibia. The bow stick has only one string. The branch can be made of wood from any tree that does not easily break.

The *n/ao*h according to the musicians who were interviewed does not have any gender restriction, but has a maudlin value in the community. It is found among many ethnic groups and plays an important role in the life circle of the Ju/'hoansi. The bow serves as part of the mediating paraphernalia between human beings and the spirit mediums of the community.

Like any other Ju/'hoansi musical bow the unbraced bow is played in the evenings before a hunting expedition when the musician-hunter prays to his gods and ancestral spirits to help lure animals during the hunt. The musicians pray to their gods for the hunting bow to be powerful. During this process the spirit mediums may enter a trance while the hunter is playing. The pre-hunt ritual can also change into a healing ritual. The songs of the unbraced bow are replaced with community members' ritual songs and dance during which any community member who is sick can be treated. The musicians performing this ritual are in a trance. A shaman can also enter a trance and ask the gods to help the hunter (usually a young boy) to kill an animal. After a successful hunting expedition, a ritual is performed as per customary law. The purpose of the ritual is to honour the hunters for a job well done. Such a ritual ceremony is conducted to bring all the community members to celebrate the success of young boys who have killed animals for the first time.

It was also interesting to learn from both the elders and musicians that when a hunter kills an animal for the first time he has to go through a sacred ritual. He makes an offering of some parts of the animal that he has killed. These are usually from the stomach, back of the shoulders and front legs. An elder who is a custodian of their practices burns body parts, mixes the bones with plants during the ritual and prepares supernatural medicine that is believed to make the hunters strong and to help them to be vigilant and fast when hunting. When the bodies of the hunters are anointed with the supernatural medicine they are not allowed to play any bows together for the duration of the ritual. In the Ju/'hoansi community two or more men are not allowed to play the unbraced musical bow at the same time, but women can do so.

The //oq'âcè (four and five-string pluriarc: bow lute)

The third most important musical instrument among the Ju/'hoansi is the //oq'âcè or pluriarc, which has its origins in South Africa and only came to be used for the first time in Namibia by the Ju/'hoansi community in the Nyae Nyae areas. It was introduced by Ju/'hoansi who returned from Tsumkwe. There are two versions of the instrument and they are not attached to any ritual or ceremony. However, the instrument's origins are based on the story of the musicians' background and history. This instrument can be played for any entertainment purposes. The pluriarc played by women has only four strings while that played by the men has five.

One of the senior traditional councillors mentioned a story of Nloce n!a'an and her husband ||Aô, from Hereroland, near the territory of the Nharo, who had travelled to interact for the *xáró* ritual with some inhabitants of the Nyae Nyae community. Nloce n!a'an is then said to have taught her companions how to play the pluriarc. She probably composed the first pieces, and then the other instrumentalists created new ones that are still performed in the villages.

Only men play the five-string pluriarc which is also said to have originated from the Nyae Nyae area. There is a story of a Kxao N||ae musician which explains the origin of the instrument. However, according to one of the respondents this may be a myth. One day



The //oq'acè (photos by Sam Ismael, left, and Dr. Minette Mans, right)

the musician went with his wife to visit her family. When his wife refused to return home with him he killed her, and then managed to run away before his brother-in-law could find him and avenge his sister's death. Kxao N||ae hid her corpse in the bush, made a five-stringed pluriarc and created a piece entitled 'Mangetti', which, in fact, is the name of the wood from which the instrument is made. After he had succeeded in hiding her body, he went back to his village playing the song he had created which helped him to find peace with himself. It is said that after that, the Ju/'hoansi musicians started making pluriarc instruments and creating music but it is said that many of the musical pieces were created by Kxao N||ae and by instrumentalists that came after him. There is no restriction on where the instruments can be played. It can be at a ritual or at any other place or time where an audience can be found. The instrument is for all community members who have the ability to play it as long as they adhere to the gender divisions relating to the types for each specific gender.

Summary

This article has discussed relevant literature by focusing on both the global and regional as well as Namibian literature. The article has also discussed reports that focus on ICH inventorying activities that have taken place and rituals that are performed when these instruments are played. These instruments are not only used to entertain the community's member but they also play a major role for the Ju/'hoansi as a mediating accessories and comforters between the humankind and their ancestral spirits.

The article also discussed the fact that they are important in mediating between the community and ancestral spirits. It noted that musical bows play a significant historical role within the Ju/'hoansi community. The instrument, the article noted, also serves as an entertainment tool.

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