Revitalizing the psyche of a Tsonga nation in a multicultural society

Steyn Khesani Madlome

Cogent Arts & Humanities (2022), 9: 2105991
CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Revitalizing the psyche of a Tsonga nation in a multicultural society

Steyn Khesani Madlome*1

Abstract: Africa is a multicultural continent whose member states have constitutions and provisions of uplifting various cultures and the lives of its people. Vatsonga among others are part of a multicultural society in Africa who by design or default, are facing a myriad of challenges pertaining to their culture and identity. Vatsonga are located in the south eastern parts of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland. In all these countries they have and are still being called by different names. This is so because the population was divided by frontiers which do not represent their linguistic and cultural identity. As a result Vatsonga remain as minority groups in different countries. This has caused Vatsonga to be disintegrated and come to believe that they are separate entities despite speaking one language and practicing the same culture. Vatsonga are sometimes called and quite a significant population of them call themselves by names such as Machangana, Shangani, Shangaan or Magaza basing on the misconceptions which were perpetuated by the narratives that their founder was Soshangane. Hence some use a double barrel identity of Vatsonga-Machangana. The aim of this paper is to discuss some of the cultural and linguistic identity challenges faced by Vatsonga in Southern Africa. It also seeks to challenge the portrayal of Vatsonga as a group which came into being only after Soshangane Manukosi of the Ndandwe.

About the Author

Madlome Steyn Khesani, The author completed a PhD in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Venda in 2017. He works as a lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University under the Simon Muzenda School of Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies, in the department of African Languages and Literature. His research interests are in the area of Culture, Decoloniality, Translation studies, Afrocentricity, Linguistic rights, Sociolinguistics and interdisciplinary research. Steyn Khesani Madlome has published papers in peer-reviewed journals. He also presented scholarly papers at international and national conferences and symposia.

Public Interest Statement

Vatsonga are an ethnic group found in a multicultural society in Southern African Nations such as: Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Eswatini. This group faces a myriad of challenges pertaining to their culture and identity as it is evidenced by different ethnonyms used in these countries. Vatsonga were divided by colonial borders an extent that they remain both linguistic and cultural minorities in the region. These boundaries have also caused them to perceive themselves as different entities. The Tsonga tag which is officially used in South Africa is not fully embraced in Zimbabwe and Mozambique where there is a significant number of Xitsonga speakers. This article seeks to decolonize the Vatsonga identity of Machangana which bases on the narrative of Sochangana, since tribes which make up Vatsonga are from various origins which lived more than 300 years before Sochangana’s era. The name Tsonga points to the easterners of Tshwa-Rhonga cluster.
subjugated part of their population. This study also endeavours to decolonize Tsonga history and revitalize the psyche of Vatsonga population by arguing from an *Ubuntu* and Decoloniality point of view. The article also argues that despite man-made boundaries, Vatsonga are one entity across countries in southern Africa who need be to united and identified as one group.

**Subjects:** Race & Ethnic Studies; Ethnic Identity; English & Literacy/Language Arts

**Keywords:** revitalising psyche; Tsonga; multicultural society

1. **Introduction**

This chapter unravels the challenges faced by many of Xitsonga speakers pertaining to their cultural and social identity in a multicultural society. Many people of the African origin have lost their self-consciousness and *Ubuntu/Bo'tho/ Vumunhu* values due to various pressures. Vatsonga are not spared in this phenomenon. Some have gone to the extent of denouncing their own culture whilst clinging to foreign or imposed identities. Oelofsen (2015:132–133) supports this view when she avers: “In other words, the values of the coloniser or oppressor, which judge the colonised to be inferior and backward, are internalised by the colonised, and thus she suffers a loss of self-esteem and starts to hate herself and what she represents in the worldview of the oppressor”. This shows that in a process of being colonised, one would lose self-esteem to the extent that she/he thinks the oppressor is always right.

One feels he/she has to belong to some group. However, many would not like to be associated with a group which is considered inferior or which is not prestigious (Forsyth, 2021). It is the aim of this chapter to interrogate the issues of cultural and social identities in the society. This study is also going to show that some of the things which people value are only a colonial hangover which rings in their minds. Shah (2020) argues that people whose minds are colonized suffer from an identity crisis since they grapple with old traditions which were introduced by their colonizers. Some boundaries which separate people today were only meant to rule inhabitants easily. This study endeavours to raise an awareness among the Tsonga nation across these man-made boundaries about their shared common values, norms, culture, beliefs and so on. This chapter also challenges Vatsonga to revisit their own history which seems to be inadequately covered and eventually this should lead to them rewriting their own. Some of the literature available carries a lot of distortions and misinformation about Vatsonga (Mathebula, 2014). This has led to some denouncing their identity or having a very low self-esteem. This study shall give recommendations on how to decolonizing the Tsonga cultural and linguistic identity by revitalizing language and history.

1.1. **Background to the study**

Vatsonga are a cross-border ethnic group found in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland (Mathebula, 2014). This group of people has a common language and culture even though there might be slight differences due to contact with other groups in their respective countries. Xitsonga, their language is said to be spoken by nearly 2 million people in South Africa, at least 1.5 million in Mozambique, over100000 in Zimbabwe and a few thousands in Swaziland and Zambia (National African Language Resource Centre (NALRC), 2017). Over the years Vatsonga have been and are still being identified differently in these different countries. Some have also come to the extent of accepting these labels. However, there seem to be some tensions among speakers themselves due to these labels which some view them as derogatory or misleading people in terms of their identity. Some of the protestant missionaries have got a hand in failing to identify Vatsonga properly (Maluleke, 2017). They could not realise that Vatsonga were from various clans. This Tsonga society is comprised of various clans such as; Varhonga (Eastern clans), Vadzonga (southern clans), Van’walungu (Northern clans), Vandzawu, Vacopi, Valenge, Vaxika, Vabil, Vahlanganu, Vahlengwe (HA Junod, 1927; Mathumba, 1993).
Many stereotypes have been associated with this nation and it goes unnoticed as a potential threat to their sense of belonging and self-esteem. Some of these names were used as terms of exclusion by fellow black people (Maluleke, 2017:40). Some of these mistakes were carried along and recorded as history. This ended up distorting the overall identity of the Tsonga people. This background is a point of departure where this current study is going to interrogate the psyche of Vatsonga to extent to which they understand their cultural identity. Hence this will help to recommends way of revitalising it.

2. Theoretical framework
This study is guided by three theories namely decoloniality, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and Ubuntu which is African in nature. In supporting the argument on identity, decoloniality was taken into consideration. Ndlou-Gatsheni (2015: 485) defines decoloniality as “an epistemological and political movement and advances decoloniality as a necessary liberatory language of the future for Africa.” It speaks to a movement which tries to redress inequalities which were brought about by slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism, as well as underdevelopment. The main thrust of this theory is on the liberation of the psyche, language, culture, etc. In the same vein, this article seeks to revitalize the consciousness of Vatsonga so that they come to fully realize who they are in a multicultural and multilingual society. The social identity theory was also chosen since it puts emphasis on beliefs and ideologies of ethnic minority groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1981). Vatsonga due to these man-made boundaries, end up being treated like minorities especially in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Members of a minority group try to reflect on their past experiences and look how they can go ahead in a more informed direction. That is they endeavour to come together as a group with a common understanding of who they are. Each and every member of the group feels he/she belongs to a specific group which should be acceptable, socially recognised and valued (Ololfson, 2015). Identity is a social construct created by human interaction (Delgado, 2007) and this is seen in a group of people who have come to live together. People who now become aware of their social identity can work against colonialism, and find ways of revitalising their identity. Adding on to social identity, the Ubuntu/Botho/Vumunhu framework was used as a tool to influence this study as well. In an African context someone exists as a member of the society because of other members. This means people live a communitarian kind of life where the community is put at the forefront. This theory is rooted in Afrocentric principles and it also portrays a spirit of oneness and harmony (Wilson & Williams, 2013:23). Addressing other people in dehumanizing manner is not ethical in an African perspective. Basing on this tenet of Ubuntu, the study shall raise arguments against name calling among Vatsonga and other ethnic groups in southern Africa.

3. Methodology
This study used a qualitative approach to collect and analyse its data. Observation, interviews and document analysis were used as tools to gather the data. The researcher used participant observation in studying the behaviour of the participants. In this study the researcher used a naturalistic observation where he studied the participants in their natural surroundings (McLeod, 2015; Ciesielska et al., 2018:34). The researcher being a member of this group also used his intuitive knowledge about the language, culture and experiences to observe what other members were saying, doing or how they expressed their emotions. He was also checking on the behavior of people in different contexts to see whether it was homogeneous or not (Ciesielska et al., 2018:37). Observations were also made on social media platforms where the researcher was also a member. Sentiments and views were noted and analysed to see the extent to which Vatsonga understood about their identity. 30 interviewees were selected using convenience sampling to participate in this study. 10 of them were key informants while 20 were members of Vatsonga culture drawn from various places. Those in South Africa and Mozambique were contacted through telephonic interviews and social media platforms such as whos app and facebook. Documents which were referred to in analysing the conception of Vatsonga identity were also purposively sampled basing on the historical information they have.
Thematic content analysis was used to analyse these documents. These include literature which was written by both Tsonga and non-Tsonga academics. Contents from chats on social media were also looked at in order to examine the views given by Vatsonga about their identity.

4. An overview on Decoloniality, revitalization and identity

4.1. Decoloniality and revitalisation

Oelofsen (2015) writes on decolonizing the African mind. She first describes how someone is colonised in her mind by pointing out that one has to internalise the coloniser's views to reach that stage of colonisation. This means even on the aspect of culture, the colonised cultures become thoroughly assimilated to the cultures of the colonisers (Oelofsen, 2015:139). She further argues that this comes as a process rather than an event. In multiracial societies it has started in the classification of population according to races. This has resulted in racial identity, which she argues has a bearing on how most people think about themselves. Being identified as white or black has led to inferiority and superiority complexes in the society. Oelofsen argues for an African philosophy which she says can be used as a tool for decolonising African minds. She argues that concepts such as Ubuntu which are rooted in Africa should be engaged in the process of decolonizing the mind. Oelofsen's study is crucial to this current study since it explains how someone’s mind can be colonised. However, this current study goes a further mile in showing that even fellow Africans may contribute in colonising their own by failing to tolerate diversity and multiculturalism.

Adding to the issues of decoloniality, Baker-Williams (2006) writes an account of the Squamish language revitalisation where she begins by giving their colonial history. In her description of the colonisation process, she highlights interracial marriages as some of the causes. Racism was cited as another cause and this was evidenced by divisions between Christians and pagans. Issues of identity, pride in language and self-esteem were the main focus of the research. In the study she goes on to explain how the language declined. Baker-Williams uses revitalisation as a way of decolonising the Squamish people. Reasons and strategies for language revitalisation were given in her study. Among them, was the reason that language is a human right given by the creator which no other nation has a right to alter or take it away (Baker-Williams, 2006: 44).

Baker-Williams argues that revitalisation of a language is done step by step. Reversing language shift was cited as one of the ways of revitalising a language. She demonstrates how it can be done by first of all showing the status of a language at a particular point and then suggests a method which can be used. Some of the methods given are such as; providing with documents for the language, teaching grammar for adult pedagogy, promoting language use in homes and public places, mobilising elders and all speakers, use of oral history (Baker-Williams, 2006:44). Another step highlighted is laying down rules of engagement such as commitment, having a vision and fighting against stigma. Even if the issue of revitalisation is tackled, to a greater extent Baker-Williams’ study focuses mainly on the language issue and is based on non-African minorities. This current study focuses on revitalisation of the Tsonga nation mainly on their socio-cultural identity. The main tool used is decolonising their minds.

4.2. Cultural identity issues

This section focuses on literature which was written by both Tsonga and non-Tsonga academics or researchers. This includes what was done by missionaries. Maluleke (2017)’s PhD thesis investigates ways in which bible translation has enhanced Xitsonga cultural identity. He first of all gives a list of different clans which constitutes the Tsonga population. Maluleke argues that translation played a unification role among Vatsonga through harmonization of dialects spoken by those different clans. Maluleke (2017: 29) defines cultural identity as “characteristics, feelings and beliefs that distinguish people from others. In its basic form, identity refers to a sense of belonging, which includes a shared sense of companionship, beliefs, interest and basic principles of living”. This means people who belong to a certain culture need to have a common sense of belonging and feel
that they are part of that particular group. Cultural identity cuts across nation states even though some may have misconceptions on this issue.

Rajan (1998:2) avers “In other words, the cultural boundaries of a people are believed to coincide with the national boundaries of the state. There are enormous repercussions to this world-view, especially in post-colonial states”. This view is not true about various cultures which overlap into different nation states. Traditional views on identity did not look at these man-made boundaries. These views had been ignored by missionaries who based identity issues on positivist approach (Maluleke, 2017: 34). According to Maluleke, missionaries also identified people using stereotypes from fellow blacks and colonial sentiments. For instance, Vatsonga were called knobneuse by Afrikaners and later on were erroneously known as Shangaans. He goes on arguing that “Junod was obsessed with the fallacious notion that Soshangane and his marauding Nguni warriors united the Vatsonga into a nation.”(Maluleke, 2017:44). His argument pivots on the fact that the period they operated among Vatsonga was too short to realise such a great task of uniting many ethnic groups which were there.

In highlighting that foreign historians or anthropologists brought about misrepresentations about Vatsonga identity, some scholars pointed out sharp differences from missionaries in South Africa. This is clear when Harries (1989:87) points out that these missionaries did not agree in classifying the Vatsonga ethnic group by saying “He argued that Junod’s classification of the Ronga and other peoples was as arbitrary as the mission’s earlier categorization of Gwamba”. Harries was reffering to Berthoud who had classified them as Gwamba. According to Harries (ibid), Berthoud´ s argument was that Ronga should not be treated as a name of a tribe or language, but was just geographical description. Junod´ s arguments were that Ronga means easterners, some he had classified as Djonga (southerners) and N’walungu (northerners). Looking at the two missionaries in disagreement over the identity of Vatsonga, it seems plausible to consider Junod’s classification better than Berthoud’s. This is because up to now people still identify themselves with where they come from. Those who come from the east could be easily called Varhonga (easterners). On the other hand, Gwamba referred to by Berthoud was a name of a human being whom Vatsonga claimed was their chief who hailed from the east when they were asked in South African mines. The name Shangaans was also popularized in the mines but strictly speaking it was supposed to be used on the descendents of Soshangane (Harries, 1989:86).

5. Self-consciousness and the Psyche of Vatsonga in a multicultural society
In this section we examine how Vatsonga perceive their identity in a multicultural society. The influence of non-Tsonga is also interrogated to see its extent on the psyche of Vatsonga. This study through interviews, observations and documents has found that many of the Vatsonga folks still need to be emancipated and also emancipate themselves from mental bondage. Some show that they do not know where they belong. Some are still seeking to know where they really belong. According to the Zimbabwean constitution Amendment no. 20 (Act 2013) people have been given freedom to belong and to practice their culture. This right applies to any member of any cultural group in Zimbabwe, even those who belong to minority groups. In support of this view, Rajan (1998: 1700) argues that: “The rights of individuals within minority groups can be protected by granting them the right to association as well as the right to dis-association”.This means that for anything which will benefit a member of a group in a positive way, rights of association should be granted unconditionally. Being conscious of themselves as Vatsonga, also means that they can identify themselves in a way which is dignified. They have a right to tell the world who they are. Tajfel (1981: 317) argues that:

the new claims of the minorities are based on their right to decide to be different (preserve their separateness) as defined in their own terms and not in terms implicitly adopted or explicitly dictated by the majorities … the wish to preserve their right to take their own decisions and keep their own identity.
This implies that Vatsonga have got a right as a group to protect their identity and no one from outside should come and dictate who they are. As it is in the Zimbabwean context in particular, Vatsonga are called by all sorts of names and are not at liberty to define themselves as they please (Harries, 1989:86). This is evidenced by them being identified as Shangani in the Zimbabwean constitution (Constitution Amended 20: Act 2013). This is contrary to what Tajfel has highlighted above. This is the reason why there is disharmony among Vatsonga speakers who are called by different names in different countries, worse still using some derogatory terms such as Shangani, Muchangana, Jangani and so on. The seemingly unbalanced social status among rural folks could be the reason which contributes to somewhat acceptance of all sorts of these names by many Tsonga people. This study has found that people in the rural areas have no access to a lot of basic services which includes; education, media coverage and so on. This reduces the chances and the degree of self-consciousness of the Tsonga people. Asked some respondents simply said “a hi tivi nhumy hina, hi n’wina mi tivaku” [we don’t know anything, you know much better than us]. This shows that education and access to media help in conscientising one about her/his identity.

Vatsonga are scattered across boundaries in at least four countries in southern Africa and in some countries they are treated as minorities. This is evidenced by the status which their language is accorded despite declarations by their respective constitutions. The countries in which Vatsonga ended up dwelling on permanent basis after the movements before, during and after the Mfecane period do not have the same economies. Some are poorer than the others and as a result some Tsonga speakers have been moving to countries like South Africa in search of greener pastures. Jenkins (2008) put it in this way, “In recent years many Mozambican Shangaan have gone to South Africa for work”. When they are in South Africa they will try by all means to show that they are South African citizens. As we have shown before, Xitsonga has some dialects across boundaries of the countries in which it is found. However, some speakers would be seen trying to run away from this reality.

When they are among the fellow Tsonga they pretend to be South African Tsonga. Mostly when asked where they come from they would answer “ni huma eGiyani” [I come from Giyani] which is one of towns inhabited by many Tsonga speakers in Limpopo province. What it means is that some of the Tsonga speakers from Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Mozambique feel that South African Tsonga speakers have a better status than themselves. From observations made it was clear that even some South African Tsongs also believe this and they feel more superior to their counterparts. This leads to xenophobic tendencies where fellow Tsongs are called by various dehumanizing names and it also lowers one’s self esteem.

This could also be a reason why other South African Xitsonga speakers seem to have a big brother attitude towards their fellow brothers and sisters. In South Africa many Tsonga speakers are aware that their language is labeled as Xitsonga and they would not accept to be called Machangana. To add on to this “big brother” mentality they would say the Machangana term refers to other Tsonga from other countries like Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and not themselves. South Africa.com (2018) puts it like this “Tsonga people are also known as the Shangaans. According to the Tsongas, this is incorrect, as they believe that the Shangaans are those that live in Mozambique and not in South Africa.” Most Zimbabwean writers also view it in this way and they are more comfortable in labeling all Vatsonga as Machangana. This is a sign of failing to understand history and movement of people in Africa.

This kind of thinking is also supported by Mabaso (2007:1) when she says “Shangani, also called Tsonga in South Africa and Changa or Hlungwe in Mozambique …” “This kind of mentality shows that there are some people who still believe in being confined to boundaries. They tend to ignore all other similarities and seem to respect these man-made borders which divide them. Despite this ignorance, we can argue that Changana or Hlungwe are not languages but are simply dialects of Xitsonga spoken by people who belong to those clans only. It should be put clearly that in Mozambique the umbrella language is Tsonga whose main variant forms are known as Xirhonga, Xitshwa and Xichangana (Sitoe, 2006).
Some misconceptions come from the fact that many people seem to associate Vatsonga with Soshangane who was one of Shaka's generals. Some think he belonged to the same linguistic group with Vatsonga. In the Zimbabwwean context the Machangana label will be referring to all Vatsonga despite their origins. This may have influenced many people in Zimbabwwe to believe that Tsonga and Shangani is one and the same thing. Another issue is that they could be basing on the history which shows that some Tsonga migrated into South Africa from Mozambique upon the arrival of Soshangane who was also running away from Shaka the Zulu. This view is supported by South Africa.com (2018) when it says: “The arrival of the Nguni into Mozambique, brought along with them, unrest and wars, and therefore, the Tsonga people decided to move to South Africa.” This is not true since movements were there even before those wars.

Though this may be partly correct, it should also be known that some movements in the region had nothing to do with the Nguni wars. Jenkins (2008:1) argues that “Current international borders were established long after the arrival of these people in this area of Africa.” This simply means Tsongas had been in the region due to different reasons. If Tsongas would come to understand this, they would become self-conscious as a group rather than dividing themselves. These man-made boundaries have challenged the spirit of Ubuntu among Vatsonga who as well call each other some names. For instance, .there are some South African Tsonga who would call their fellow brothers all sorts of names which belittle someone. Words like “Rizambikwa [a belittled Mozambican] are used on those Mozambican migrants. This name is dehumanizing and this kind of behaviour militates against Ubuntu.

In Zimbabwwe in the 1990s when Mozambicans were running away from their war stricken country, they would be accommodated in refugee camps. Fellow Zimbabwweans would call them names such as Makarushi [some kind of fruits found in Mozambique]. One would wonder how a name of a fruit could be used to identify a fellow human being. This is just a way of othering and belitting other tribes. It was established that Zimbabwweans from various language groups used such names and this does not exclude Vatsonga.

Another factor which has negative effects on self-consciousness of Tsonga population is prevalence of distorted history, misconceptions, and inferiority complex. A lot of texts were written and they carry a lot of inconsistencies pertaining to the Tsonga history (Mathebula, 2014). Some would create an impression that Vatsonga were brought together by Soshangane. Some of those claims were unsubstantiated at all. Some even claim that Soshangane was Tsonga. Mabaso (2007), describes term Shangani to mean followers of Soshangane as also highlighted by Hachipols (1998). Mabaso (2007:318) goes on to give a misleading assertion by saying “Soshangana, a Tsonga himself, migrated northward and settled in present-day Zimbabwwe”.This statement is vague because Soshangane belonged to the Nd wandwe clan of the Nguni group and did not speak Xitsonga. It is also worth noting that it is no all Vatsonga who are not descendants of Soshangane from whom the name Machangana was coined. One of the informants argues that “Shangani is derived from a name of someone so it can’t be a name of an ethnic group”. He sees it not fit to name the Vatsonga ethnic group using a name of a person.

It is worth noting that in this study we found out that some Tsonga speakers out of ignorance are still proud of being associated with Soshangane. They even call him “our leader/ forefather”. Though this might be true for those direct descendants of Soshangane, it defies logic when a person from other tribes mentioned earlier on to claim to be Shangani. Ignorance is a major contributor on this issue of identity. One interviewee professed this ignorance by saying:

Maxaka ma swi tiva xana ke leswaku muchangana is an umbrella term. Xhiphiqo i mhaka ya ku loko Soshangane hosii ya hina a hluriwa hi Maphutukezi vo tala va tsutsume leAfrika-Dzonga laha va nga fika Giyani va tiendla Vatsonga. Mina ni mhlengwe aredzi Vatsonga. [realitives do you know that Muchangana is an umbrella term. The problem is that when our leader Soshangane was defeated by the Portuguese many fled to South Africa and upon
arrival in Giyani they began to call themselves Vatsonga. I am Hlengwe, I don't know about Vatsonga]

This person is inconsistent in his argument when he claims that he is Hlengwe instead of Tsonga but accepts to be called Muchangana a name which was derived from Soshangane. It also simply means that this person does not know himself since Vahlengwe and other clans were already on their land many years before Soshangane’s arrival when he left Zululand. Jenkins (2008:29) supports this when he avers “hi tile hi le n'walungwini] eNhianganu (Sabiela) hi takhonza ka Tembe (Makasana, n'wana wa Maputsu wa Mangobe) Manukosi a a nga si huma ka Zulu.” [we came from the north and became Tembe’ s subjects before Manukosi (Soshangane) came from KwaZulu]. Tembe is one of the oldest Vatsonga kingdoms found in Southern Mozambique and it stretches to South Africa. The history about Vatsonga is inadequate especially for those from Zimbabwe and some are still have an identity crisis. Another informant Matatise had this to say “I conversed with opinion leaders over this and they told me that while the Vatsonga identity was correct, they were comfortable with the Changana tag”.

In an interview, Lisenga says: “I concur with you, Rhonga, Nyembane and Copi are dialects of Tsonga. But what were they called before Soshangane arrived and their origin distorted?” This somehow shows that this person knows that a language is made up of different dialects, but is not really sure about which ones build up Tsonga language. Another interviewee, a Zimbabwean based in South Africa also had this to say “Eka Mungenalanene laha Afrika-Dzonga siku lin'wana na lin'wana ku na un'wana la tshamelaka ku karhata vahaxi a ku a hi Xichangana kambe i Xitsonga … Hi ku twisisa ka mina swi ta tika ku swi twisisa la Joni ni le ka hina ka hosı Tshovani na hosı Sengwe”. [here in South Africa everyday there is someone who always complain at Mungenha Lonene Fm that the proper name should be Xitsonga instead of Xichangana. In our generation it will be difficult to understand this here in South Africa and under Chiefs Tshovani and Sengwe in Zimbabwe]. This shows that some people just received some bits and pieces in terms of their history and they are also skeptical if all people shall one day come to know their true identity. One interviewee supports this by saying “It is not any easy topic. A guy who said voralume kaya le va ta tika (uncles back home) is realistic. I am tying as I am having a discussion with other Shangane people. They seem reluctant but interested and intrigued by the conversation and revelations”. This shows many people might be appreciating the revelations on the truth of Tsonga identity, but the colonial hangover is still controlling them. Even this interviewee above refers to fellow Tsonga as Shangane.

This study has also found that in Zimbabwe Xitsonga is taught as an optional subject in other districts such as Mwenezi and the authorities there are reluctant to see this language being taught at all levels in both primary and secondary schools. Parents are equally not forth coming to challenge the status quo. Adding on to that, some Tsonga speakers in areas where the majority are non-Tsonga do not bother to be called by any name. Some have since lost the language and culture. Some have even changed their names which will readily identify them as Tsonga. They have opted for those names which will make them acceptable in the areas they find themselves in. This kind of mentality seems to be emanating from inferiority complex as well. Some also feel that the only chance which could have solved this identity crisis was through using the constitution. Xirelele one of the informants says “This identity crisis would have been dealt with once and for all during the COPAC (Constitution Parliamentary select Committee) and we missed the opportunity, can we or do we have power to redress it? If it has to be amended will it not pause questions like why were we silent until we got a community broadcasting license?” Here he is challenging community leaders who had a chance but didn't utilise it, worse still they went ahead and register other institutions using the Shangani tag. This shows ignorance and lack of will in redressing the identity issue.
6. Conclusion

Following the findings of this study, we can say that most of the Vatsonga speakers who are in Xitsonga predominantly speaking areas are proud of their language and culture. However, it is the issue of identity crisis which most of them suffer from. Some are now aware of whom they are, but there are others who are still caught in-between the valley of indecision. This could be caused by inferiority complex among such people who would try to give an impression that the word Tsonga is just a creation which was meant to cater for South Africans only. They would even come up with some versions which will try to convince otherwise ignorant speakers of the language. Even if Vatsonga come from various tribes and clans they should remain united despite some divisive messages which could be spread through various media. People regardless of their origin, should be accepted and be given freedom to practice their culture without any fear at all. This is enshrined in some constitutions of various African countries where Vatsonga people may be found.

This study concludes that lack of proper history and education on Xitsonga language and heritage contributes a lot in making many of Vatsonga ignorant of their true identity. The kind of history they receive does not say much about them and whenever it does, it will be just in passing and full of inconsistencies. Basing on the findings of this study we recommend decolonial education as a key instrument of revitalising Vatsonga identity and culture. To understand and correct history, it is also high time that Vatsonga research more into their origins and be the authors of their own history so that facts are not misrepresented. Fellow historians and linguists are also encouraged to write information which shows acceptance of diversity in a multicultural society. Above all, Vatsonga identity must be handled correctly in order to decolonize and hence revitalize the psyche of Vatsonga in a multicultural society.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

Steyn Khesani Madlome
E-mail: skhesani@gmail.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4006-0134
Lincoln Geraghty
1 Department of African Languages and Culture, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Citation information

Cite this article as: Revitalizing the psyche of a Tsonga nation in a multicultural society, Steyn Khesani Madlome, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2022), 9: 2105991.

References

Baker-Williams, K. 2006. Squamish language Revitalisation: From the hearts and the minds of the language speakers. University of British Columbia.
Ciesielska, M., Boström, K. W., & Ohiander, M. (2018). Observation Methods. In M. Ciesielska & D. Jemelniak (Eds.), Qualitative methodologies in organization studies 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65442-3_2.
Delgado, V. (2007). You’re Not Indian, You’re Mexican. Turtle Island Press.
Forsyth, D. R. (2021). The psychology of groups. In R. Biswas-Diener & E. Diener (Eds.), Noba textbook series: Psychology. DEF publishers. http://noba.to/trfxbkhm
Hachipols, S. J. (1998). A survey of minority languages in Zimbabwe. University of Zimbabwe Press.
Harries, P. (1989). Exclusion, classification and internal colonialism: The emergence of ethnicity among the Tsonga-speakers of South Africa ttp://lexikos.journals.ac.za. In L. Vail. (Ed.), The creation of tribalism in Southern Africa. Currey University of California Press, 83–110. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft158004r.
Jenkins, O. B., and Hooten, LD 2008 People profile the Shangaan (Tsonga) people of SouthEastern Africa http://strategyleader.org/profiles/shangao.html
Junod, H. A. (1927). The Life of a South African Tribe (2nd ed.). Macmillan & Co.
Mabaso, P. (2007). Lexicographical practice and lexicological research: The case of Shangani in Zimbabwe. Lexikos, 17[AFRILEX-reeks/series 17-2007], 316–328 doi:10.5788/17-0-1175.
Maluleke, M. J. 2017. The role of bible translation in enhancing Xitsonga cultural identity. PhD Thesis, Faculty of Theology, University of Free State. RSA.
Mathebula, M. (2014). 800 years of Tsonga history. Sasavona Publishers and Booksellers (Pty) Ltd.
Mathumba, D. I. (1993). A comparative study of selected phonetic, phological and phonetic lexical aspects of some major dialects of Tsonga in the Republic of South Africa, and their impact on the standard language. University of South Africa.
McLeod, S. A. 2015. Observation methods Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/observation.html
National African Language Resource Centre (NALRC) 2017. https://nalrc.indiana.edu/doc/brochures/tsonga.pdf. Accessed 08/02/19
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2015). Decoloniality as the future of Africa History Compass. 13(10), 485–496. doi:10.1111/hic3.12264.

Oelofsen, R. (2015). Decolonisation of the African mind and intellectual landscape. UnisaPhronimon, 16(2), 130–146. https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/3822

Rajan, N. (1998). Multiculturalism, group rights, and identity politics.

Shah, N. 2020 The murky remains of colonialism Spiegeloog. https://www.spiegeloog.amsterdam/ the-murky-remains-of-colonialism/ (Accessed on 06/09/21)

Sitoe, B. (2006). Matsaile moyokatsa hi Xichangana. Monograph Series No. 59. Cape Town. South Africa.com 2018. Tsonga language in South Africa. https://www.southafrica.com/culture/languages/tsonga/ (accessed 05/09/21)

Tajfel, H. (1978). Interindividual behaviour and intergroup behaviour. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), Differentiation between groups (pp. 27–60). Academic Press.

Tajfel, H. (1981). The social psychology of minorities. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), Human groups and social categories: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations (pp. 309–343). Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. 1985 The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour Worwel, S, Austin , W.G Psychology of Intergroup Relations 2nd (Nelson Hall) 7–24 accessed 26 07 2022

Wilson, D., & Williams, V. (2013). Ubuntu: Development and framework of a specific model of positive mental health. Psychology Journal, 10(2), x-xx researchgate.net/publication/261706211_Ubuntu_Development_framework_of_a_specific_model_of_positive_mental_health.