





Disentangling colonial legacies and promoting cultural justice: A study of the Batlokwa people in the Northern Sotho Context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Batlokwa people's history and contemporary marginalization as a result of colonial and postcolonial ethnolinguistic classification. It sought to understand how colonial systems, notably administrative and missionary practices, contributed to the subjugation of Batlokwa identity within the larger Northern Sotho framework, as well as to investigate alternatives for cultural justice and recognition today. The study tackled three research topics based on postcolonial theory, including Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's cultural decolonization, and Fraser's recognition theory. (1) How have colonial classifications influenced Batlokwa identity? (2) How do Batlokwa people today handle their identities within the Northern Sotho context? (3) What are the chances of attaining cultural justice for the Batlokwa? Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and archival analysis were used to gather qualitative ethnographic data from Batlokwa community members in Limpopo. The findings show that colonial linguistic groups and official recognition procedures have resulted in the symbolic elimination of Batlokwa identity. Despite this, community-led identity assertion and cultural restoration initiatives are actively rewriting the narrative. The discussion focuses on the persistent tension between state-imposed ethnic classifications and indigenous identity expressions. It proposes policy changes to identify culturally different communities and assist local heritage projects, including inclusive education and institutional recognition. This study adds to the literature on decoloniality and indigenous identity in South Africa by focusing on the Batlokwa as an example of cultural resilience and advocacy for justice in the face of long-standing colonial legacies.

Keywords: Disruption, Apartheid, Marginalization, Language Cleansing, Decoloniality, Indigenous

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of colonialism in Africa continues to impact sociopolitical, cultural, and linguistic institutions, obscuring the identity of many indigenous groups. One such case is the Batlokwa people of South Africa, whose particular cultural identity has been absorbed into the greater Northern Sotho ethnic group. Historically, colonial administrative systems and missionary ethnolinguistic groupings tried to simplify the continent's complex ethnic and cultural mosaics, homogenizing and marginalizing minority

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identities.¹ These classifications were further reinforced by apartheid and post-apartheid government structures that relied primarily on fixed, state-approved ethnic categories for cultural and political legitimacy.

Despite significant research on colonial ethnolinguistic legacies in South Africa, there is a notable gap in studies that particularly address how such legacies affect smaller ethnic groups, such as the Batlokwa in the Northern Sotho linguistic area.² The issue is exacerbated by the absence of state acknowledgement and inadequate representation of Batlokwa traditional narratives in national discourse and educational curricula. This marginalization has consequences for cultural justice, identity preservation, and the larger goal of inclusive nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa.

The goal of this research is to look at how the Batlokwa people have been historically classified, how they currently define their cultural identity, and what opportunities exist for cultural recognition and justice. This study is based on postcolonial theory, including Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity,³ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call for cultural decolonization,⁴ and Nancy Fraser's theory of recognition and justice.⁵ These theories contribute to an examination of the power dynamics at work in identity development, state recognition, and cultural survival.

The study is guided by three main research questions: (1) How did colonial and postcolonial ethnolinguistic classifications affect the Batlokwa's identity? (2) How do Batlokwa community members navigate and express their cultural identity within the prevailing Northern Sotho framework? (3) What are the chances of gaining cultural justice and institutional recognition for the Batlokwa? A qualitative ethnographic methodology was used. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and archival analysis were used to gather information from Batlokwa elders, community leaders, and local historians in Limpopo Province. The findings suggest that colonial and postcolonial classifications led to the symbolic erasure of Batlokwa identity. However, there is a growing grassroots movement in the community to reclaim cultural heritage through language revitalization, ceremonial practices, and agitation for formal recognition.

The conversation delves into the tension between forced ethnic categories and indigenous self-identification, highlighting the significance of making official recognition systems more inclusive. Recommendations include changing educational curricula to represent minority histories, sponsoring community-based cultural projects, and developing policy frameworks to support complex identity formations.

This study adds to the growing body of research on decoloniality, identity politics, and cultural justice in postcolonial Africa by focusing on the Batlokwa as a case study of resistance and cultural resilience. It underlines the need of recognizing and restoring cultural diversity in South Africa's national-building processes.

The structure of this article is designed to ensure a consistent and logical presentation of the research. The introduction gives the study's history and context, defining the research challenge, its significance, and the motivation for studying the Batlokwa people as part of the Northern Sotho ethnolinguistic classification. It also presents the theoretical background and essential research questions. The literature study that follows will evaluate existing knowledge on colonial legacies, identity formation, and cultural justice in South Africa. This section outlines a research gap, specifically a paucity of concentrated studies on the Batlokwa within larger ethnic categories.

The theoretical framework part explores the study's guiding themes, including Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's postcolonial viewpoint, and Nancy Fraser's theory of recognition. These frameworks are used to investigate how identity and power interact within imposed and reclaimed cultural categories. The methodology section explains the study's qualitative ethnographic approach, which included data gathering methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus group

¹ Salikoko S Mufwene, "Worldwide Globalization, International Migrations, and the Varying Faces of Multilingualism: Some Historical Perspectives," 2017.

² Phalandwa Abraham Mulaudzi, "The Communication from within: The Role of Indigenous Songs among Some Southern African Communities," *Muziki* 11, no. 1 (2014): 90–98.

³ Homi K Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency," *The Location of Culture*, 1994, 171–97.

⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986).

⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* 3 (2000): 107.

discussions, and archival research conducted in Limpopo Province. Sampling methodologies and ethical concerns are also addressed.

The findings section covers the empirical evidence gained, with an emphasis on the consequences of colonial classifications, contemporary expressions of Batlokwa identity, and community-led cultural restoration activities. The discussion contextualizes these findings within the theoretical framework, emphasizing the persistent contradictions between state-imposed categories and indigenous identity disputes. The conclusion and recommendations summarize the important findings and provide actionable strategies for policy reform, curriculum inclusion, and cultural heritage projects. Finally, the essay discusses its contribution to academia, emphasizing how this research enhances the conversation around decolonial identity, cultural acknowledgment, and indigenous resilience in post-apartheid South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on African colonial legacies has repeatedly stressed colonial administrations' involvement in building and institutionalizing ethnic and linguistic identities, which frequently failed to reflect the intricacies of indigenous cultural realities.⁶ In South Africa, colonial and apartheid governments used rigid ethnic classifications to manage populations, frequently combining various communities into umbrella categories for administrative convenience.⁷ This procedure resulted in the formation of artificial ethnic divisions that ignored pre-colonial ties, political autonomy, and cultural distinctions.

One of the most lasting effects of these categories is the marginalization of minor ethnic groups, whose identities have been subsumed into dominant ethnolinguistic constructions such as "Northern Sotho" or "Nguni".⁸ These broad categories became institutionalized in school, governance, and the media, making it impossible for culturally different communities like the Batlokwa to claim their own identities. According to Alexander, the post-apartheid state has mainly maintained the colonial framework of ethnolinguistic recognition, despite its commitment to pluralism and reform.⁹ The usage of major African languages in official areas continues to drown out the voices of minority groups, creating worries about symbolic erasure and cultural misrecognition.

Research on identity development has also demonstrated how imposed classifications influence self-perception, social cohesion, and access to cultural resources.¹⁰ Cultural justice theories, particularly those articulated by Fraser, emphasize the importance of recognizing marginalized communities in order to achieve justice and equity.¹¹ There is an increasing interest in decolonial approaches to language and identity in South Africa, but particular research on the Batlokwa people is sparse.¹² Most present research treats the Northern Sotho grouping as homogeneous, ignoring internal differences and the voices of minority populations nestled within it.

This absence of dedicated scholarship on the Batlokwa is a serious research gap. There is an urgent need to investigate how the Batlokwa were historically classified and how they navigate their identity in a sociopolitical setting affected by colonial conceptions. By focusing on the Batlokwa experience, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of identity politics, cultural justice, and the limits of postcolonial recognition in South Africa.

⁶ X. Maqashalala, "Discourse and Decolonization: Analyzing the Impact of Colonial History and Culture on African Leadership Narratives" (Kansas State University, 2025).

⁷ Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, vol. 53 (Univ of California Press, 2023).

⁸ Yanga Lusanda Praiseworthy Majola, "Language, Identity and Culture: A Study of Language Maintenance and Shift among Amabhaca Raised in Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu Natal" (2021).

⁹ Neville Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa* (Berghahn Books, 2003).

¹⁰ Simon Ozer and Seth J Schwartz, "Striving for Unity in a Culturally Fragmented World: Nested Multiple Cultural Identifications Associated With Well-Being Through Self-Concept Clarity," *International Journal of Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2025): e70004.

¹¹ Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition."

¹² Finex Ndhlovu and Leketi Makalela, *Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa: Recentering Silenced Voices from the Global South*, vol. 26 (Multilingual Matters, 2021).

Marginalizing the Batlokwa Language in Teaching and Learning Language, Power, and Cultural Justice

Language is not just a means of communication, but also a source of power, identity, and cultural reproduction.¹³ In postcolonial circumstances, schools frequently maintain colonial-era linguistic inequalities, favouring dominant languages and marginalizing minority tongues and dialects. According to linguistic human rights and cultural justice,¹⁴ such marginalization is a form of epistemic and cultural injustice since it denies communities the right to teach their children in their own language and worldview.¹⁵

Despite constitutional commitments to multilingualism and cultural rights,¹⁶ dominant languages continue to be prioritized in education policy and practice. English has become the de facto language of upward mobility¹⁷ and even within African languages, certain standardised versions, such as standard Sepedi, take precedence over local dialects and variants.

Case of the Batlokwa Language

The Batlokwa people of Limpopo and Gauteng speak a dialect that is part of the larger Northern Sotho language domain but has distinct phonological, lexical, and cultural components.¹⁸ In schools serving Batlokwa students, the curriculum specifies "Northern Sotho" as the language of teaching. However, in practice, this frequently results in an academic, mission-based version of Sepedi that does not reflect Batlokwa linguistic identity.¹⁹

This causes a contradiction between the language spoken at home and at school. Learners may struggle to relate to instructional content presented in a language that removes dialectal subtleties. Furthermore, the lack of textbooks, reading materials, and instructional aids in the Batlokwa dialect contributes to their exclusion.

Teachers are rarely prepared to recognize and accommodate dialect variety in African languages. Standardized evaluation methods put further pressure on educators to conform to the prevailing version of the language, rather than promoting linguistic diversity. This marginalization has a significant impact on learners' academic progress, self-esteem, and sense of cultural belonging, as evidenced in international studies on minority language teaching.²⁰

Colonial Legacy in Linguistic Hierarchies

Certain dialects within African languages are given preferential treatment as a result of colonialism. Missionaries, colonial linguists, and apartheid-era language planners developed "standard" versions of languages to meet administrative and ideological objectives.²¹ In doing so, they disguised the great

¹³ Ruth Wodak, "Language, Power and Identity," *Language Teaching* 45, no. 2 (2012): 215–33; Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard university press, 1991); Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Linguistic Genocide in Education--or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁴ Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, "Linguistic Human Rights," *Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter*, 1995; Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition."

¹⁵ E Annamalai and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "19 Social Justice and Inclusiveness through Linguistic Human Rights in Education," *Handbook of Home Language Maintenance and Development: Social and Affective Factors* 18 (2020): 377.

¹⁶ Republic of South Africa., "Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996." (Cooperative Government., 1996).

¹⁷ Rosemary Salomone and Rosemary C Salomone, *The Rise of English: Global Politics and the Power of Language* (Oxford University Press, 2022); Kathleen Heugh, *The Case against Bilingual and Multilingual Education in South Africa*, vol. 3 (Praesa Cape Town, 2000).

¹⁸ M. Leshabane, "A Comparison of Three Northern Sotho Dialects for Possible Inclusion into the Standardized Writing Language Form" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020); Pothinus Carl Mokgokong, *A Dialect-Geographical Survey of the Phonology of the Northern Sotho Area* (University of South Africa (South Africa), 1966).

¹⁹ Neo Lekgotla Laga Ramoupi, "African Research and Scholarship: 20 Years of Lost Opportunities to Transform Higher Education in South Africa," *Ufhamu: A Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2014).

²⁰ Jessika Guerard, *The Impact of English Language Proficiency, Social Connectedness and Perceived Discrimination on Academic Performance and Self-Efficacy Amongst International Students* (The Florida State University, 2021); Nancy H Hornberger, "Multilingual Language Policies and the Continua of Bilinguality: An Ecological Approach," *Language Policy* 1, no. 1 (2002): 27–51.

²¹ Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa*.

diversity of local speech communities by erecting artificial borders between "language" and "dialect," often in ways that favored political and ethnic groups.

Post-apartheid schooling reforms did not completely remove this colonial language infrastructure. The marginalization of the Batlokwa dialect reflects a broader failure to address what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls the "colonial alienation" of African languages, whereby the modes of expression most intimately related to local identity are devalued in the public space.²²

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study follows three complementary theoretical perspectives: Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization paradigm, and Nancy Fraser's recognition theory. These frameworks provide crucial tools for examining how identity and power interact within both imposed and recovered cultural categories, especially in postcolonial contexts such as South Africa.

Homi Bhabha's thesis of hybridity questions rigid, binary notions of culture and identity. He claims that colonial interactions create a "third space" in which meanings are negotiated and new identities emerge.²³ This viewpoint is especially important in understanding how the Batlokwa people have historically been classified as Northern Sotho, despite maintaining a separate cultural identity. Bhabha's concept of hybridity explains how the Batlokwa manage and negotiate their identity in the face of colonial and postcolonial classifications that attempt to homogenize distinct ethnic groupings.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization viewpoint emphasizes the need to remove colonial cultural dominance by reinstating indigenous languages, values, and epistemologies (Ngũgĩ 1986). Ngũgĩ sees cultural decolonization as more than just political liberation; it also involves recovering colonized mental and cultural realms. This study used his methodology to investigate the Batlokwa's efforts to revitalize cultural practices and restore identity narratives that have been repressed or distorted by colonial and postcolonial ethnolinguistic classifications.

Fraser's idea of recognition adds to these perspectives by defining cultural identification as an issue of justice. According to Fraser, misrecognition, or the devaluation of a group's culture, can be just as detrimental as economic inequality. Her theory broadens the definition of justice to include awareness of difference, which is critical for the Batlokwa, whose marginalization is entrenched in both tangible exclusion and symbolic erasure. Fraser's paradigm contributes to a better understanding of the structural and policy components of cultural marginalization, as well as the necessity for inclusive recognition.²⁴

Together, these three theoretical lenses provide a solid platform for delving into the complexity of Batlokwa identity in the Northern Sotho environment. They emphasize the complex interplay of identity creation, power, and resistance, as well as the importance of cultural justice in postcolonial nation-building.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the lived experiences, cultural manifestations, and identity negotiations of the Batlokwa people within the Northern Sotho classification, this study used a qualitative ethnographic technique. In-depth interaction with participants' viewpoints and behaviors was made possible by ethnography, which produced deep, contextualized insights into the ways that historical and modern factors influence identity creation.

Triangulation of approaches was used in data collection to increase the findings' depth and credibility: Twenty-five participants, including younger Batlokwa members, educators, cultural leaders, and community elders, participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were able to share their cultural knowledge, historical narratives, and personal stories in a flexible yet supervised setting during these interviews.

Four groups of six to eight participants each participated in focus groups, which promoted intergenerational communication and group contemplation on identity, marginalization, and cultural

²² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986).

²³ H K Bhabha, "The Location of Culture," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Routledge, 1994).

²⁴ Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition."

resurrection. These conversations shed light on both common and differing viewpoints of the Batlokwa people's place in larger social and cultural contexts.

The classification of the Batlokwa under the Northern Sotho identity framework was aided by archival research, which reviewed historical papers, government records, missionary literature, and anthropological studies in addition to the field data. In order to place current identity negotiations within a solid historical framework, this archival component was crucial.

Participants in the study were recruited based on their familiarity with Batlokwa history, language, and customs, and the study was carried out in a few Batlokwa settlements in the province of Limpopo. In order to find more individuals with pertinent ideas, a purposive sample technique was used in conjunction with snowball sampling.

Throughout the whole research procedure, ethical issues were paramount. Participation was optional, and each subject gave their informed consent. When asked, anonymity, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity were all fully taken into consideration when gathering and reporting data. Respect, reciprocity, and community involvement served as the study's guiding principles, guaranteeing that participants' opinions and viewpoints were essential to the procedure and the final results.

With the use of this analytical framework, the study was able to uncover the complex ways in which the Batlokwa attempt to reclaim and acknowledge their ancestry while also interacting with, resisting, and reinterpreting imposed cultural identities.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

According to the Northern Sotho classification, Batlokwa identity is complicated and negotiated, as the results of this anthropological study demonstrate. Three main and connected themes surfaced from focus groups, interviews, and archival research: (1) the long-lasting effects of colonial and apartheid classifications; (2) modern reinterpretations and hybrid expressions of Batlokwa identity; and (3) community-driven approaches to cultural revitalization and justice.

These topics are examined via the prisms of Nancy Fraser's recognition theory, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization paradigm, and Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, which collectively provide light on the sociopolitical and philosophical aspects of Batlokwa identity reconstruction.

Colonial Heritage and Classification Politics

Participants repeatedly underlined how Batlokwa individuality was lost by the strict ethnolinguistic classifications enforced by colonial and apartheid regimes. According to missionary and state ethnography archival documents, the Batlokwa were categorized as "Northern Sotho" starting in the early 1900s, mostly for administrative reasons.²⁵ Community elders recalled how this categorization gradually eroded linguistic and cultural continuity. One elder clarified:

Although our ancestors were free to speak Tlokwa, we were taught in school that it was just another form of Sepedi. Our language began to vanish as a result.

This finding aligns with Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument that colonial systems weaponized language and classification to subordinate indigenous identities. Due to this institutional homogenization, the Batlokwa were unable to access resources, cultural recognition, and self-representation, all of which Fraser sees as essential components of cultural misrecognition.

Modern Expressions and Identity Hybrids

The Batlokwa identity is nevertheless vibrant and flexible in spite of historical marginalization. Younger participants, especially those between the ages of 18 and 35, expressed a sense of dual belonging, identifying as Batlokwa in familial and cultural situations and Northern Sotho in formal settings. Bhabha's idea of the "third space," where colonized people negotiate and reconstruct meaning from inside prevailing cultural systems, is reflected in this hybridity.²⁶

According to one young participant:

²⁵ Benjamin Wiggins, *Calculating Race: Racial Discrimination in Risk Assessment* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁶ Bhabha, "The Location of Culture."

"I speak Sepedi at school, but my grandfather teaches me about our clan's history and honors at home. I am Batlokwa first, but I am also Northern Sotho."

Data from focus groups also showed that ancient dances, ancestral ceremonies, and praise poems (diboko) are being revived as manifestations of cultural autonomy by the Batlokwa clan. The Batlokwa are recovering symbolic cultural marks that set their lineage apart, despite Sepedi's continued dominance in the media and in education. These results show how hybrid identities, which represent both adaptation and reclamation in the postcolonial environment, can serve as centers of resistance and continuity.

Cultural Renewal and the Search for Acknowledgment

The investigation also found a number of grassroots projects that support cultural justice and Batlokwa identity reclamation. These consist of oral history initiatives headed by elders that record migration narratives and genealogy; revival of initiation schools with a focus on rites of passage and Batlokwa rituals; Limpopo community cultural festivals honouring Batlokwa storytelling, music, and dress customs. These initiatives are a type of "self-decolonization," according to a cultural leader, who explained:

"We don't wait for the government to define our identity. In order to preserve our name, we are teaching our kids the Batlokwa way."

Ngũgĩ's decolonization paradigm, which supports the restoration of indigenous languages and epistemologies as acts of resistance, is in line with these initiatives. Furthermore, the Batlokwa's fight for official recognition is consistent with Fraser's recognition theory since it reflects a desire for cultural fairness, or fair visibility and respect within South Africa's multicultural context.

Identity Transmission and Intergenerational Dynamics

Another trend that surfaced is the transfer of culture from one generation to the next. While younger participants saw cultural revival as a means of empowerment, elders voiced concerns about the harm that modern education and urban migration pose to traditional knowledge systems. In addition to highlighting conflicts between modernization and continuity, this difference shows how creatively the Batlokwa people have adapted to reinterpret identity in modern settings.

DISCUSSION

Under the framework of Northern Sotho, this study explored how the Batlokwa people navigate, reinterpret, and resist the long-lasting effects of colonial ethnolinguistic classifications. It was guided by Bhabha's hybridity theory, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization paradigm, and Fraser's recognition theory. The conversation explains how identity, power, and justice interact in the Batlokwa community's pursuit of cultural restoration by interpreting the empirical data in light of these theoretical stances.

Hybridity and Identity Negotiation

The Batlokwa experience symbolizes the dynamic "third space" where indigenous worldviews and colonial impositions intersect, drawing on Bhabha's concept of hybridity. The results showed that despite the Batlokwa's official classification as Northern Sotho, which was supported by censuses, education, and linguistic policy, they nevertheless maintain cultural traditions that protect a unique identity.

This hybridity is an active process of negotiation and reinterpretation rather than the passive coexistence of two cultural forms. In addition to maintaining Batlokwa oral traditions, clan praise poetry (diboko), and initiation ceremonies in domestic and communal contexts, participants talked about speaking Sepedi in schools and at work. In line with Bhabha's claim that hybridity enables oppressed communities to resist dominant discourses by introducing indigenous meanings within imposed systems, such duality is a calculated tactic of cultural survival.

Batlokwa hybridity serves as a counter-discourse in this sense, a creative reaction that rejects complete assimilation while claiming cultural autonomy by utilizing the "in-between space." One example of how colonized individuals reassemble their identities from pieces of both resistance and dominance is the survival of Batlokwa identity inside the dominant Northern Sotho framework.

Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonization

The results also align with the decolonization paradigm of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, which emphasizes the importance of reclaiming indigenous languages, epistemologies, and narratives for postcolonial emancipation. Cultural self-determination is demonstrated by the Batlokwa's revitalization efforts, which include initiation school revival, cultural festivals, and elder-led oral history documentation.

Deliberate resistance to epistemic erasure is evident in the participants' remarks regarding teaching children origin myths and Batlokwa clan praises. These actions serve as a reminder that decolonization encompasses more than just political independence; it also involves cultural and mental liberation. The Batlokwa community contests the colonial legacies ingrained in South Africa's educational and cultural establishments by reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems.

According to Ngũgĩ's perspective, these acts can be seen as decolonial praxis, which is the deliberate reclaiming of indigenous identity and memory as instruments of empowerment. Under the pretense of administrative unity, such praxis reveals how colonial classification systems that are still in place inside the postcolonial state continue to marginalize minority identities.

Structural Marginalization, Justice, and Recognition

A vital lens for comprehending the institutional and social ramifications of Batlokwa marginalization is Fraser's (2000) theory of recognition. According to the study, the absence of Batlokwa representation in cultural organizations, limited access to cultural funding, and invisibility in educational policy are all concrete consequences of the official rejection of Batlokwa as a separate ethnolinguistic group.

Fraser contends that acknowledgment and redistribution are both necessary for justice. Cultural misrecognition serves as a systemic injustice for the Batlokwa, depriving them of material resources while also undermining their social visibility, dignity, and self-worth. Therefore, the participants' desire for Batlokwa culture to be included in public events and school curricula is a plea for cultural fairness rather than merely symbolic recognition.

This supports Fraser's claim that recognition is a necessary condition for participation parity, according to which all cultural groups can only engage in social life on an equitable basis when they are given equal value. Thus, the Batlokwa case highlights the shortcomings of South Africa's multicultural policy, which, although promoting variety, frequently perpetuates colonial inequalities by giving Northern Sotho and other dominant ethnic groups preference.

Synthesis: Rethinking Cultural Justice and Identity

When combined, these theoretical stances shed light on the Batlokwa's complex battle. Fraser's recognition theory places these battles within larger concerns of fairness and social justice, Ngũgĩ's decolonization paradigm emphasizes the active recovery of suppressed knowledge, and Bhabha's hybridity stresses the inventiveness with which identity is negotiated.

In order to recover narrative agency, restore language dignity, and gain institutional legitimacy, the Batlokwa's cultural revival initiatives thus constitute both acts of resistance and reconstruction. Their situation serves as a reminder that identity creation is a contentious, dynamic process that is influenced by agency, history, and power.

In the end, our research shows that decolonization needs to incorporate structural and epistemic acknowledgment of oppressed groups in addition to policy rhetoric. Communities like the Batlokwa help create a more inclusive and culturally just South African society by challenging colonial legacies and claiming indigenous voices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several suggestions are made to enhance the acknowledgment, conservation, and revival of Batlokwa identity as well as to advance more cultural justice within South Africa's multicultural framework in light of the study's results and theoretical analysis.

1. Institutional and Policy Recognition

The Batlokwa should be officially recognized as a separate ethnolinguistic and cultural community under national cultural policy by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and the Department of Sport, Arts, and Culture.

In order to guarantee that minority groups like the Batlokwa have fair access to cultural financing, documentation, and outlets for expression, government frameworks should be updated to decentralize cultural representation.

To include Batlokwa heritage places, oral histories, and festivals into official heritage preservation initiatives, provincial heritage councils in the province of Limpopo ought to work in conjunction with Batlokwa traditional authority.

2. Curriculum Development and Education

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and oral traditions, such as Batlokwa folktales, praise poetry, and clan histories, should be incorporated by the Department of Basic Education into the primary and secondary Life Orientation, History, and Language curricula.

Intercultural education and decolonial pedagogy should be incorporated into teacher training programs so that teachers may confidently and respectfully teach local cultural content.

In order to ensure that younger generations are taught real indigenous knowledge, community elders and cultural practitioners should be involved as co-educators and cultural resource persons.

3. Cultural revitalization and community empowerment

As long-term models of heritage preservation, Batlokwa traditional leaders and civic associations should keep funding community-led initiatives like cultural festivals, initiation school changes, and oral history archives.

To improve intergenerational continuity, youth-focused cultural initiatives such as storytelling classes, cultural clubs, and elder mentoring should be started.

For the purpose of preservation and broader distribution, collaborations with nearby academic institutions and cultural research centre may aid in the documentation, publication, and digitization of Batlokwa oral literature, language resources, and ceremonies.

4. Academic Engagement and Research

Comparative ethnographic methods should be used in future studies to investigate how other Northern Sotho communities navigate cultural identity within comparable historical categories.

Documenting and reviving the Batlokwa dialect, which is still little studied but essential to cultural survival, should be the fundamental goal of linguistic studies.

To further comprehend cultural justice in postcolonial countries, researchers should look into how hybridity, decolonization, and recognition ideas overlap with those of other oppressed indigenous people in southern Africa.

In order to ensure that indigenous knowledge systems are researched, represented, and disseminated in ways that benefit the communities themselves, collaborative research between academics and communities should place a high priority on ethical reciprocity.

5. A More Comprehensive Framework for Cultural Justice

In order to redress historical injustices that still restrict minority voices, South Africa's language and multicultural policy should go beyond symbolic representation to actual cultural inclusion.

In order to place indigenous communities like the Batlokwa as co-authors of the national narrative rather than as supporting characters, the state and civil society should encourage discussions on cultural pluralism and heritage equality.

These recommendations restate the need for structural, pedagogical, and epistemological change in order to achieve decolonization and cultural justice. In addition to being a matter of cultural preservation, acknowledging and supporting the Batlokwa group is a step toward achieving the post-apartheid South African constitutional objectives of equality, diversity, and social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

This study used the theoretical frameworks of Nancy Fraser's recognition theory, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization paradigm, and Homi Bhabha's hybridity to investigate how the Batlokwa people negotiate, recreate, and proclaim their cultural identity within the Northern Sotho classification. Batlokwa identity is molded by long-lasting colonial legacies, but it is constantly recreated via acts of resistance, adaptation, and reclamation, according to the study, which included ethnographic data from focus groups, interviews, and archival research.

The results show that the Batlokwa are active participants in cultural change rather than passive objects of state-imposed categorization. The Batlokwa have carefully managed their position between enforced ethnolinguistic borders and indigenous authenticity inside the hybrid "third space" that Bhabha describes. A living identity that develops via both continuity and creativity is revealed by their continuous use of oral traditions, clan praise poetry (diboko), initiation schools, and cultural festivals.

According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization perspective, these revival initiatives are intentional attempts to recover suppressed histories and indigenous knowledge systems, which are examples of epistemic resistance. By questioning the enduring colonial epistemologies ingrained in educational and administrative systems, the Batlokwa community's oral history projects and language preservation efforts demonstrate a deliberate pursuit of intellectual sovereignty.

Fraser's recognition theory also highlights the systemic inequalities that perpetuate Batlokwa marginalization. In addition to reducing their visibility, the lack of formal recognition in cultural and linguistic policy also upholds material and symbolic inequalities. In order to ensure that excluded groups receive both material and cultural support within national frameworks, true justice necessitates both redistributive and recognitive reform.

When considered collectively, the study finds that the Batlokwa case reflects larger battles in post-apartheid South Africa for recognition, identity, and decolonial justice. It emphasizes how multiculturalism frequently falls short of destroying the colonial hierarchies that still favor dominant ethnolinguistic groups, despite being praised in policy rhetoric.

In order to achieve true cultural fairness, the government and educational establishments need to:

- Acknowledge and record indigenous minority identities, like the Batlokwa, within formal cultural and linguistic frameworks;
- Include oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems in school curricula;
- Encourage cultural projects led by the community that encourage the passing down of heritage from one generation to the next; and
- Encourage inclusive financing, language policy, and research approaches that take into account South Africa's wide cultural variety.

In the end, this research confirms that decolonization is a moral and cultural necessity. The Batlokwa narrative is a prime example of the tenacity of indigenous identity and the ability of tribes to rewrite their pasts according to their own interpretations. South Africa may go closer to achieving a diverse and equitable national identity based on acceptance, respect, and our common humanity by separating colonial legacies and promoting cultural justice.

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