

Hadza lezembgwe: a brief exposition of a Kalanga gastronomic intangible cultural heritage element

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the reasons behind the popularity of *hadza lezembgwe* (pearl millet thick porridge) among the Kalanga people. It explains what the product is and why some urban restaurants fail to produce it in the way it is preferred by the Kalanga people. The study was done within the dictates of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Therefore, the study aims to raise awareness of this important intangible cultural heritage element while alerting the impacted community to the need to ensure its survival for their benefit and that of future generations. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The researchers travelled to two districts, Bulilima and Mangwe, in the province of Matabeleland South in Zimbabwe, where most Zimbabwean Kalanga are found. Analysis was then done

within the framework of the critical heritage theory, a theory that demonstrates how rethinking heritage beyond fixed monuments opens up avenues to challenge structures of power and promote living cultures. It was established that the processing of pearl millet into *gwisa* (pearl millet flour) and *setje* (finer pearl millet samp) is the most important part of producing this special type of *hadza*. The study concludes by making recommendations that these traditional preparation skills be documented and safeguarded in line with the requirements of the 2003 UNESCO Convention.

Keywords

Pearl millet thick porridge (*hadza lezembgwe*), intangible cultural heritage (ICH), gastronomy, Kalanga cuisine, critical heritage theory

Introduction

The Kalanga people of Zimbabwe are arguably the 'pearl millet people'. This is due to their expertise in processing pearl millet (*zembgwe*) into several types of dishes, chief among them *hadza lezembgwe* (pearl millet thick porridge), which they hold in high regard. The dish is a delicacy that is always preferred ahead of other types of thick porridge, such as that prepared from maize flour. The investigators noted that consumers of this dish

are not satisfied with the product on offer in most urban restaurants. Something is missing when *hadza* is prepared commercially, the Kalanga customers of these food outlets maintain, so that the dish fails to meet their gastronomic expectations. In their perception, it is a counterfeit product.

This paper therefore seeks to answer the following questions: What is *hadza lezembgwe*? How is it prepared traditionally? What is its significance for the Kalanga

people? This study is based on the premise that the preparation of *hadza lezembgwe* is an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) or living heritage element for the Kalanga community which needs to be researched and safeguarded in line with the dictates of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003. Zimbabwe is a signatory to this Convention and hosts the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA). Furthermore, Zimbabwe hosts the Southern African Intangible Cultural Heritage (SAICH) Platform, a digital database where seven southern African states upload their ICH elements to their various ICH lists. These three reasons are, in effect, a challenge to Zimbabwe as a state party to take a leading role in the implementation of the Convention.

ICH and the 2003 Convention

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 17 October 2003.¹ The Convention is a comprehensive 15-page document that explains the value and importance of intangible cultural heritage. In the case under review in this paper, the value that the Convention seeks to protect is the process of making *hadza lezembgwe*. The keyword of the Convention is 'safeguarding', which is defined as:

... measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage. [Article 2]

Most countries and communities have always had ways and means of safeguarding their ICH. However, these local methods have often been limited by the lack of recognition they have received, especially by governments. It was determined, therefore, that an international system was needed to provide financial help and guidance to assist communities in their safeguarding activities, which may include the custodian communities commercialising some aspects of their ICH.

The above definition mentions key issues that are also needed for African renaissance, such as identification,

documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission, through formal and non-formal education of African values. Furthermore, the definition speaks to the revitalisation of various aspects of heritage and gastronomic elements, such as those that are the focus of this paper.

The main aim of the Convention is to protect:

... the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. [Article 2]

The first sentence in the above definition is voluminous in terms of what constitutes the intangible cultural heritage of a people. It starts by referring to the practices. These practices are very important, since they are the activities that the concerned people engage in every day or whenever necessary. It is these practices that shape the civilisation and industrialisation of these people. The making of pearl millet porridge by the Kalanga is one such practice.

Methodology

According to Best and Kahn (1993, 193), case studies examine a social unit as a whole. This unit can be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution or a community. This is in line with what Creswell (1994, 12) says when he states: 'in a case study, a single person, program, event, process, institution, or organisation is investigated within a specified time frame using a combination of appropriate data collection devices'. Yin (2009, 18) defines a case study as:

[a]n empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

Two important elements are identified in Yin's definition. First, the phenomenon under investigation must be contemporary, which means it must exist at that given time. If it no longer exists, then the second point will be impossible to achieve. Second, the phenomenon under study must be investigated within its real-life context. This means a case study does not work in dealing with phenomena that are not taking place in a real living context. In this case, the phenomenon under study is the skills and processes of the Kalanga people who make good-quality pearl millet *hadza*. The presence of these two elements therefore validates the choice of a case study as a data collection method for this research. The Kalanga people of Nswazwi Village in Bulilima District were chosen for the study, to make the research and data saturation manageable.

Benbasat and colleagues (1987) assert that the case study method allows for the study to be carried out in its natural setting. This observation fits in well with the Kalanga, who are spread throughout the provinces of Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, the Midlands and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. Mouton (2001) adds that evaluating participants in their natural settings and environments allows for the establishment of rapport and trust between them and the researcher. It removes the inconveniences that may be brought about by displacement. Solberg Søilen and Huber (2009) state that case studies can be used for both descriptive and empirical research. The term 'case study' pertains to the fact that a limited number of units of analysis, such as an individual, a group or an institution, are studied intensively (Kumar 2011; Welman and Kruger 2000).

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and observation. Kumar (2011) argues that the strength of unstructured interviews is the complete freedom they provide in terms of content and structure. The questions that were in the interview guide were:

- What is *sadza lezembgwe*?
- Do you like it to be prepared traditionally or in the same way as maize porridge?
- Can you take us through the stages of preparing it?
- What are the threats to the sustainability and viability of this practice?
- How is the knowledge of preparing it passed on from generation to generation?

Informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowballing. It was the view of the researchers that there is a thin line between purposive sampling and snowballing. The snowballing technique was used to select the rest of the respondents. According to Oppong (2013), snowballing is useful when trying to reach populations that are hard to access. The subject under study required the researchers to purposefully identify informants who were fully conversant with the skills of making proper *hadza lezembgwe*. At the end of one of the interview sessions, the researchers had an opportunity to observe the whole process of making pearl millet porridge. This helped to put into perspective what they had been told in the interviews.

Theoretical framework

The study utilises the critical heritage theory. This is a theory that challenges Eurocentric notions of heritage as static, monumental and material. Instead, it emphasises the dynamic, contested and socially constructed nature of heritage, making it particularly relevant to ICH, which is inherently fluid and tied to living practices, traditions and communities. Scholars such as Smith (2006) have been pivotal in challenging the static and often Eurocentric definitions of heritage. Other proponents of this are the editors of the Cambridge series *Critical Heritage Studies* – Kristian Kristiansen, Ola Wetterberg, Shu-Li Wang, Francis Nyamnjoh, Michael Rowlands and Astrid Swenson. They cover different trends, from heritage and post-humanities to themes on class, gender and ethics. How do different theoretical discourses impact critical heritage in different parts of the world? Some of the tenets of this theory, which are relevant to this study, are discussed below.

Critical heritage theory advocates for centring the perspectives of local communities who practise and sustain ICH, rather than allowing external institutions to dictate its value or meaning. This is also called 'community ownership'. When safeguarding ICH, practitioners should critically assess whether initiatives empower the bearers of the heritage or reinforce existing inequalities. For instance, involving indigenous communities in decision-making about their oral traditions ensures that these practices remain authentic and meaningful to them. The process of making *hadza lezembgwe* discussed here is owned by the community. It is not an element that was imported to them.

Unlike tangible heritage, ICH is inherently dynamic

and ever evolving. Critical heritage theory rejects the idea of preserving heritage in a fixed state; instead, it recognises its ongoing transformation through interaction with contemporary contexts. One way of achieving this is intergenerational transmission. This term refers to the continuity of ICH as depending on its relevance to younger generations. Critical heritage theory supports efforts to reinterpret and revitalise traditions so that they resonate with current societal values. Safeguarding ICH should focus on supporting transmission mechanisms. These mechanisms include apprenticeships, festivals or digital platforms, which allow traditions to thrive without freezing them in time. As discussed later in the paper, the Kalanga have forms of apprenticeships to ensure the safeguarding of the element in question.

Critical heritage theory critiques the commodification of ICH, emphasising the need to balance economic benefits with ethical considerations. It calls attention to cases where ICH is appropriated by outsiders for profit or prestige, erasing its connection to source communities. Initiatives to promote ICH tourism should prioritise community-led models that ensure fair compensation and maintain cultural integrity. For example, revenue-sharing agreements or capacity-building programs can help local artisans and performers to benefit directly from tourism. This would also give the community concerned an opportunity to monitor the quality of the product.

The theory underscores the intersectional nature of heritage, acknowledging how factors such as gender, ethnicity, class and religion influence access to and participation in ICH. Many ICH practices are gendered, with women often playing key roles in transmitting oral traditions or crafting skills. However, patriarchal structures may limit their visibility or recognition. This includes the current element of preparing *hadza lezembgwe*. Women are the key players in this practice. Efforts to document and safeguard ICH must consider diverse perspectives and ensure equitable representation. Women are involved even in ensuring the continued existence of this element during the marriage process and by training young girls as they grow up.

The Kalanga and their cuisine

The Kalanga are an ethnic group found in Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Various submissions have been put forward as to the origins and meaning of the

term *Kalanga*. The researchers identified two plausible explanations. Wentzel (1983) and Chigwedere (1985) are of the view that *Kalanga* means 'people living in the land of the sun'. Both argue that the morpheme *ka-* means 'of' and *langa* means 'the sun'; therefore, *ka-langa* means 'of the sun'. Wentzel (1983, 16) asserts that the Kalanga people originated 'from East Africa from somewhere near Lake Tanganyika, from a place that was possibly called Uranga'. While this explanation sounds logical and plausible, the majority of the Kalanga people interviewed showed complete ignorance of the origin and meaning of the name of their tribe and language. The respondents seem not to worry much about the meaning of this term; the fact that they are Kalanga is enough for them. However, a few people said *Kalanga* means the 'people of a ruler called Langa'. So, from the above discussion, it can be deduced that the term *Kalanga* can either mean the 'people of the sun' or 'the people of Langa', as far as we know.

The Kalanga are largely found in the southwestern parts of Zimbabwe. Their biggest concentration is in the districts of Bulilima and Mangwe, which were previously one district that was separated in 2005 for administrative purposes (Dube 2015, 39). However, there is evidence of previous Kalanga settlements in areas outside of these two districts. Dube argues that the true Kalanga people descended from the Khami/Torwa culture. The rulers of the Torwa state were once a part of Great Zimbabwe before they broke away to found their own state (Beach 1984; Huffman 1974). Torwa state existed from 1460 to 1680. A civil war ensued, after an army general known as Chibundule rose to prominence. The name 'Chibundule' was given as a nickname to this general by his subjects, as he referred to himself as 'the one who roars' (Dube 2015). The Torwa state was later conquered by the Rozvi, who defeated general Chibundule. One of the councilors in the new state, who was called Mengwe, did not approve of the rule of the Rozvi and decided to move to present-day Bulilimamangwe. According to Dube, this place was named after him and was known as *Bulilima-gwa-mengwe*, which means 'the country of Mengwe'. The colonial officials corrupted this to *Bulilima-gwa-mangwe*, leading to the name *Bulilimamangwe*.

Very little has been written about the Kalanga in Botswana, and almost nothing at all about the Kalanga in Zimbabwe. The Kalanga survived by tilling the land. However, the area they occupied in Zimbabwe is considered semi-arid, which compelled them to grow drought-

resistant crops. There is a paucity of literature on Kalanga cuisine, save maybe that by Mathangwane and Chebanne (2013) and Dube (2015). Grain production, especially pearl millet, which the Kalanga call *zembgwe*, is integral to their culture. Mathangwane and Chebanne claim that *zembgwe* is distinctly Kalanga (2013, 17). This view is also shared by Dube (2015), who asserts that drought-resistant crops such as sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet are associated with the Kalanga to such an extent that, today, the Ndebele people refer to the Kalanga as 'the millet people'. Food in Kalanga culture is important even in the afterlife. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in the past, the Kalanga used to bury married women and the elderly with grains in their folded palms to symbolise the importance of crop production. Some have carried on this practice, although they now simply scatter the grain on top of the tomb.

Mathangwane and Chebanne identified that pearl millet was the only grain grown by the Kalanga people until the advent of colonialism and South African settlers. It is of concern, therefore, that the Kalanga now have more varieties of cuisines made from maize than from *zembgwe*, their former staple grain (Mathangwane and Chebanne 2013, 73). Maize is a crop that needs a substantial amount of rainfall. The regions where the Kalanga people are found in both Zimbabwe and Botswana do not receive much rainfall. Small grains such as pearl millet will do very well there, as these types of crops need little water.

According to Mathangwane and Chebanne (2013), the Kalanga people also make *thopi* (known as *nhopi* in Shona societies), a dish prepared from melons and ground grain flour. Originally, they prepared it using only pearl millet grain flour. However, with the coming of maize, some now also use maize mealie meal. Some other common foods and beverages enjoyed by the Kalanga include *delele* (okra), mushrooms, biltong, *bhizha* (bean meal), *suswana* (marula fruit porridge), *shachile* (greens with fried cheese), *chitapatapa* (groundnut flour and oil relish) and *chishabashaba* (a drink prepared from peeled dried melon strips).

Results and discussion

It was established during the study that the quality of the *hadza lezembgwe* that a cook produces is determined by what takes place before the actual cooking process. These preliminary processes are as important as the cooking process itself and take a great deal of skill.

Presently, the Kalanga make a number of different types of *hadza*. However, *hadza lezembgwe*, which is prepared using *gwisa* (pearl millet flour) and *setje* (finer pearl millet samp), is generally considered to be superior. This section of the paper focuses on how this type of *hadza*, which, as it turns out, is of cultural significance, is prepared.

The Kalanga grind their grain using a wooden instrument known as a *nsi ne duni* (wooden pestle and mortar). The grain is loaded into the *duni* until it is almost full and is then hit lightly using a wooden *nsi*. This initial grinding, which is called *kuhokola* (pounding), is done to remove the tips of the grain. The grain is then poured into a basket to separate it from the tips. This is done through winnowing, which is known as *kupanda*, using a round basket known as *luselo*. The process is done in two ways. With the first method, the pounded grain is thrown gently into the air and is caught before it falls to the ground. During the brief interval when the grain is still in the air, the breeze pushes the light-weight tips to the front of the *luselo* while the heavier grain remains in the middle or towards the back. With the second method, the round basket is shaken and trickled slightly using the thumb. The contents of the basket will slowly separate, with the tips of the grain moving to the front, from where they will eventually be removed from the basket. This second method is the preferred one, and it involves a skill that, as the researcher observed, takes years to perfect. A woman who possesses this skill is considered to be an expert in the process and will produce *gwisa* of the highest grade.

What is apparent at this stage is that the tips of the grain must not be a part of the final *gwisa* after the grinding process. The process requires someone who knows the exact amount of force to exert on the grain during this initial stage of light pounding. If excessive force is applied, the main part of the grain may be crushed along with the tip, leading to loss of the cereal. Such knowledge is part of intangible cultural heritage, which needs to be retained and passed on from one generation to the next. Indigenous Kalanga people have no modern Western scientific ways of measuring force, but they know the right amount of force that needs to be applied and how to apply it in the stages of producing pearl millet *gwisa*.

Hulling

The removal of the grain tips marks the beginning of a process called hulling. Hulling is accompanied by the

removal of the outer layer of the grains (the hull), as well as the pericarp (Taylor and Duodu 2014). It also includes the removal of the pearl millet bran. The grain is poured back into the *nsi* and a small amount of water is added. (By this time, due to the lengthy storage of the grain in the granary, the grain seeds will be completely dry and very hard. This means the outer layer of the grain, which makes up the bran, will be difficult to peel off. The small amount of water added helps to soften the outer layer of the grain and make it easier to peel off without having to hit the grain too hard and risk prematurely crushing it into *gwisa*). Once it is determined that the mixture has 'ripened' sufficiently, it is removed from the *nsi* and poured into a round-shaped basket known as a *mola* in Kalanga. The product can be left to lie there for some time, even for days as the woman goes about her other business, but it was established during the research that most people today do not leave it for long. Some respondents pointed out that the damp mixture may develop moulds if left in that state for a long time. Moulding is not good for any meal, as it affects its freshness. In addition, because of the high temperatures in the area under study, damp cereals can easily begin to ferment or to produce a fermented cereal-like smell. A similar observation was made in a study on pearl millet done by Arora and colleagues (2002). They observed that when stored, pearl millet flour tended to develop problems of bitterness and rancidity, which limited its shelf life. These problems are caused by the activity of lipase enzymes, which cause the breakdown of glycerides and a subsequent increase in free fatty acid profiles (Arora et al. 2002). This again means that any dish that is prepared using that flour will not taste fresh. To curb the above problem, the researcher observed that the Kalanga women preferred to prepare just enough pearl millet flour for their daily requirements. The impression the researchers got was that the women appear to be prepared to perform the whole vigorous grinding process daily. Their guiding principle is like that in *Exodus*, Chapter 16, in the Bible, where God told the Israelites to gather enough to meet their needs for the day and not to keep some for the following day. Therefore, what came out of the research was that the best *hadza* or dish had been prepared from pearl millet flour that had been prepared on that same day.

The Kalanga, as observed here, have always had indigenous ways of dealing with indigenous problems. They may not have known scientific names such as 'lipase enzymes', but they certainly knew that some

micro-organisms remained active, limiting the shelf life of pearl millet flour. They prepared for this eventuality by subjecting the grain to heat treatment. Storing the grain heads on a wooden platform before threshing them for an extended period is another way of addressing the activity of lipase enzymes. This process exposes the grain to heat treatment, which is crucial for improving the shelf life of pearl millet. Studies have also shown that exposing pearl millet grain to dry heat treatment can significantly retard lipase activity and minimise lipid decomposition during storage (Rai et al. 2008). The heat treatment of pearl millet grains cannot be said to be an idea that Africans got from the West; it is something that they themselves tried and saw working long before they were aware of the existence of any Europeans.

Africans should not just accept a certain way of doing things simply because it is from Europe. A way of life is not sanctified as being the wisest one merely by being from Europe but by being the best out of the available options. In dealing with pearl millet, we certainly cannot claim that the European voice is the wisest in this regard. Studies have shown that the biggest producers of pearl millet are Africa and Asia. As of 2016, 29 million hectares were under pearl millet; however, Africa (15 million hectares) and Asia (11 million hectares) are the largest producers (Rathore et al. 2016). On the same note, Basavaraj and colleagues (2010) note that more than 95% of pearl millet production comes from developing countries, with India being the largest producer. With so much experience in growing pearl millet, we need to believe in ourselves and continue using that experience to get the best pearl millet dishes out of it.

Grinding

The process continues with the grinder subjecting the mixture to more winnowing (*kupanda*) to remove more pearl millet bran. At this stage, the grain will have turned a shiny, greyish colour. During their observation, the researchers could smell the pleasant aroma of processed pearl millet coming from the hulled grain. The remaining grain is then poured back into the *nsi* again. This third time, the pounding is done without adding water. It is believed that by this stage most of the bran will have been removed. However, if it is thought necessary, the third round is undertaken, and a close inspection is carried out, to ensure that no bran remains attached to the grain. All the respondents concurred that bran is what accounts for the bitter taste

of any pearl millet dish prepared from that *gwisa*. For this reason, the initial stages are all dedicated solely to the removal of bran. Previous studies indicate that about 12–30% of the outer grain surface is removed by decortication. If decortication is performed beyond this limit, there will be a substantial loss of ash, fat, micronutrients, fibre, proteins and amino acids such as lysine, histidine and arginine (Rai et al. 2008). Research has also been carried out previously on the effects of hulling on the nutritional content of pearl millet. For example, Serna-Saldivar and colleagues (1994) argue that decortication done up to a 17.5% level showed considerable improvement in protein and dry matter digestibility. However, a study done later by El Hag et al. (2002) showed that the protein, polyphenols and phytic acid contents of both varieties reduced considerably after hulling, which was due to the removal of outer layers. The researchers observed that the Kalanga people knew that hulling was a delicate process which, if not done properly, would lead to high losses. It was established that hulling had to be done by a very skilled person; otherwise, excessive force on the grain would cause it to be crushed prematurely. Grain breakage had to be avoided at all costs, since it is impossible to remove bran from crushed grain. It was also observed that hand hulling through pounding was labour-intensive, time-consuming and needed a lot of patience. It could take two women up to two hours to produce about 3 kilograms of hulled grain.

Questions that beg to be asked at this stage are: Is there no better and faster method of hulling? In the 21st century, must it be done manually? The answer to both these questions is 'yes'. Several hulling machines have been invented over the years, and some of them have indeed found their way to Zimbabwean communities. However, the cost of such hulling machines is prohibitive for most villagers. The grinding mills in this area are owned by entrepreneurs who are based in South Africa. They charge for their services in rand, a currency to which most indigenous people have no access. The villagers will therefore prefer to do the hulling manually. Over and above the prohibitive costs charged by the millers, it was observed that villagers do not trust the millers. They know that millers want only to maximise their profits; therefore, the villagers believe, the chances of the millers swindling them are high. Some respondents stated that if they were to take their grain to a miller, they believed they would be short-changed in the amount of hulled grain they would receive back. In most cases, millers would retain the bran and later sell it to other customers, they said. Villagers

would have loved to retain the bran and use it to feed their chickens.

The grinding method described above, which uses wooden tools, *nsi* and *duni*, does not always convert all the grain into fine flour. Unlike the modern diesel or electric-powered grinding mills, this method does not involve the use of a sieve. This means that some coarse particles of grain remain in the flour. These particles are in two forms, called *hogwana* and *setje*. When the grinder is satisfied that much of the grain has been turned into flour, she pours it into a basket and then uses a *lusele* for winnowing. During that process, fine flour will remain at the back of the *lusele*, larger particles of grain will move into the middle, and the smaller particles of grain will be right at the front of the *lusele*. The larger particles of grain are what is called *hogwana* and the smaller ones are called *setje*. These are usually stored in two separate baskets. Over several days, a sizeable amount accumulates as grinding and pounding is performed. They will usually be set aside for a day when a special meal will need to be prepared using these and not the main fine flour.

On that special day when it has been decided that the meal for the day will be *hadza* made out of *setje*, the grain is removed from where it has been stored and is poured into a round-shaped basket. By this time, it would have hardened back to the state it was in when it first came out of the granary as whole grain. Water would then be sprinkled on the grain to soften it a little. It is then left for a while to allow the water to penetrate and soften the endosperm. When it is judged to have softened to the required level, it is then poured back into the *nsi* for grinding through pounding again. At this stage, there would be no bran to remove since it would all have been removed on the day when grinding was done to produce *gwisa* for the ordinary *hadza*. What comes out during this stage of grinding is flour and smaller grains called *setje*. The mixture is poured into the *lusele* and winnowed to separate the two. This is done repeatedly on the *hogwana* until there is enough *setje* and *gwisa* for the meal the cook wants to prepare on that day.

The cooking process

The researchers observed that the cooking process for this type of *hadza* is slower than that for the usual *hadza*. This is probably because there are some coarse particles that need more time to cook fully. A pot full of water is put on the fire. The size of the pot is determined by the number

of people to be fed. A clay pot is preferred, as the villagers were unanimous in asserting that clay pots are better able to regulate the heat from the fire and so do not burn the *hadza*. This is important, because even slight burning of the *hadza* would produce smoke, which will spoil the quality of the dish. When the water is about to boil, *setje* is added in small quantities while stirring. The cooks use their discretion to see if they have added enough *setje* for the mixture to be left to bubble and seethe. Too much *setje* will cause the mixture to thicken up, causing it not to bubble. The result is known as *mbodza* (badly prepared *hadza*). The heat is reduced to just enough to allow the light porridge to bubble steadily.

After some time, a pleasant aroma begins to come from the pot. This is a sign that the porridge has been cooked and is ready for the next stage. The cook then gradually adds *gwisa* to the mixture while using a cooking stick. The ratio of flour to *setje* is also left to the cook's discretion. The cook has to rely on her experience to make sure she does not add more flour than the *setje*, or more *setje* than the *gwisa*. A skilful and experienced cook will strike the right balance between these two ingredients and produce good-quality *hadza*. When the porridge is thick enough, the heat is further reduced and the porridge is left to simmer for a while. At this stage, the burning logs that have been providing the heat for cooking are removed or extinguished. Only burning charcoal is left under the *hadza* pot to provide just enough heat for the *hadza* to simmer. Simmering will continue until a pleasant aroma comes from the pot. This again is a sign that the *hadza* is ready for one last round of mixing. It was observed during the research that, before this last round of mixing is done, some water will have accumulated at the top on the fringes of the *hadza*. The cook will remove this water before mixing, so as not to spoil the texture of the *hadza*. It would be like pouring fresh water into the already cooked *hadza*, one cook commented. She warned that this is where some cooks make a mistake. She also commented that another way to tell whether the *hadza* is well cooked is to observe whether it sticks to a wooden spoon while it is mixed. If it sticks, then something is wrong with the *hadza*. Well-cooked *hadza* will not cling to the spoon. It is these types of small indicators that the cook must be aware of if they are to successfully prepare good-quality *hadza*.

Well-cooked *hadza* prepared from *setje* looks different from *hadza* prepared using pearl millet *gwisa* alone. The normal *hadza* discussed above is dark grey in colour,

whereas a *setje* one is light grey, or the colour of cement. A Kalanga person can therefore tell the difference between ordinary *hadza* and a *setje* one simply by looking at it, without even tasting it. *Hadza* made from *setje* is tastier than the normal one even when eaten unaccompanied by any type of relish. The mixture of the fine flour and the crumbs of the *setje* give it a unique texture that is pleasing to the mouth. For this reason, it is considered a special type of meal that is reserved for special people and special occasions. One such special occasion is the initial part of the marriage process.

What became apparent to the researchers is that the skill required to prepare this dish correctly has to be learned. It is not an ability that one is born with or just wakes up with. It is passed on from one generation to the next, from teacher to student, from elderly women to younger ones, through an apprentice form of learning. One must make observations and do practical simulations if one is to fully master the process of making *hadza*. Pearl millet *hadza* is the backbone of the Kalanga people. Every Kalanga woman is expected still to be able to prepare a good *hadza* meal and prides herself on her ability to do so. She cannot afford to prepare a bad meal, as this will damage her reputation. However, the researchers noted that the most popular term for this type of *hadza* is *hogwana*, rather than *setje*. People – especially the Ndebele – who are from outside the Kalanga culture use the term *hogwana* to refer to both *hogwana* and *setje*. Some Ndebele speakers even extend the meaning of the term *hogwana* to refer to mealie rice or 'maize rice', which is the maize version of the pearl millet *hogwana*.

Threats to the element and safeguarding strategies

The respondents identified several threats to the continued existence of this heritage element. One such threat is the dominance of maize as the staple food in Southern Africa. Maize is more readily available and more easily accessible in most communities than pearl millet. Persistent droughts and dwindling annual rainfall have resulted in communities having to rely on aid from relief agencies and the government, which hand out maize rather than pearl millet. As a way of safeguarding against this threat, there are efforts to promote the growing of small grain crops in the concerned region due to the limited amount of rainfall it receives. Small grain crops such as pearl millet are drought resistant,

and agricultural extension officers are now encouraging communities in these areas to abandon growing maize and revert to growing pearl millet. This also speaks to one of the tenets of the critical heritage theory: promoting sustainability and resilience. Intangible cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with the Sustainable Development Goals, including education, health and environmental stewardship. Critical heritage theory emphasises the importance of integrating ICH into broader efforts in order to build resilient societies. ICH should be recognised as a resource for achieving sustainable development, ensuring that safeguarding measures address both cultural and practical needs.

The other main threat to this element emanates from globalisation, which has seen the importation of foreign cultural elements that include different practices and gastronomical elements. To guard against this threat, it was established during the research that families have an apprentice form of passing down traditional practices from the elderly to the younger generation. The researchers were shown smaller versions of the pestle and mortar, which are used to train children in how to do this traditional form of grinding. They learned that most households had two sets of these implements, one for use by adults and a smaller set for use by young children. Furthermore, these communities live in a communal way where they share such gadgets. Those who do not have them, borrow from those who do. Some locals also made a living by carving these important implements, so that they are readily available.

Cultural festivals are held in the area as a form of celebrating different aspects of the Kalanga culture. During the research, one of the researchers attended two of these – the Luswingo and TibaKalanga festivals – which provided a rich experience of the Kalanga heritage. As part of the festivities, cooks compete to create the most delicious and authentic Kalanga dishes. One of these delicacies is the pearl millet porridge. Cooks are monitored and graded on their dishes. For the pearl millet porridge, this included their proficiency in pounding and producing the flour, as discussed above. These festivals are instigated by the traditional leaders, who have taken it upon themselves to encourage communities to organise festivities. As the custodians of the culture of the Kalanga people, they felt it was their duty to ensure the safeguarding of ICH elements such as the preparation of pearl millet *hadza*.

The traditional leaders who were interviewed said that, to further safeguard the traditional method of preparing pearl millet *hadza*, this element is a mandatory part of the marriage process. When a young woman is accompanied to her new would-be in-laws, she is given pearl millet, a pestle and a mortar and is asked to produce her flour and to go through the whole process of preparing the dish. The procedure is meant to prove that the new bride will be able to prepare good meals for her husband. If the woman fails to carry out the process correctly, she is sent back to her parents for further training. This will be embarrassing to both the woman and her parents. To avoid this embarrassment, parents and young girls take it upon themselves to master the skill as they grow up.

Another threat to the element is the lack of quality control measures. Some of the respondents in the research commented that some food outlets provide pearl millet *hadza* that does not meet the standards of the traditionally prepared one. Such *hadza* would have been prepared using flour that has been produced by diesel- or electric-powered hammer millers. This non-traditional method affects the taste and quality of the *hadza*. For example, it has a slightly bitter taste, probably because the hammer millers do not remove all the tannin from the grain. Respondents raised concerns that if young people are introduced to this kind of *hadza*, they will shun it because of its bitterness. As a result, the younger generations will have a negative attitude towards pearl millet *hadza* and its consumption will eventually die out. This concern is also raised by the critical heritage theory when it discusses commodification and tourism. The theory laments that the commercialisation of ICH poses significant challenges, as it risks reducing complex cultural practices to consumable products for tourists. Critical heritage theory critiques this commodification, emphasising the need to balance economic benefits with ethical considerations.

To guard against this, it is recommended that quality control measures be put in place. One way of doing this is to ensure that pearl millet flour that would have been produced using hammer millers is clearly marked and easily identified on the shelves in those shops that sell it. The same applies to pearl millet flour that has been produced using the method described in this paper. This would give would-be consumers the information they need to make informed choices when buying flour. They will know what they are buying and be prepared to consume what they expect.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted that *hadza lezembgwe* that is prepared from *gwisa* and *setje* is an important part of the cultural heritage of the Kalanga people. The process of preparing *hadza lezembgwe* starts by preparing the flour, which is the main ingredient. The quality of the flour, which has to be prepared in a traditional way, determines the quality of the final product, *hadza lezembgwe*. The ICH element discussed in this paper is an indigenous way of preparing an African dish. The commercialisation of this dish may be one of the reasons why the product that consumers are served in urban restaurants is not meeting their expectations. Most restaurants have eliminated the part of the process where *gwisa* is produced manually through pounding and prefer to take their grain to hammer mills. The researchers noted that *hadza* produced using *gwisa* that has been produced using a diesel-powered milling machine is different from that produced using the traditional method of pounding. This is the main reason why the quality of the *hadza* differs. While critical heritage theory rejects the idea of preserving heritage in a fixed state, instead recognising its ongoing transformation through interaction with contemporary contexts, it also emphasises the need to balance this with maintaining quality. It is a fact that commercialisation creates a high demand for the product, which ends up forcing the restaurant owners to abandon the slow, traditional method. We recommend that both products be made available so that consumers may make their own choice. This is better than completely denying them the opportunity to sample the authentically made dish and limiting them to the counterfeit product only. We also recommend that this method be documented and be sustainably preserved from one generation to the next in line with the dictates of the 2003 Convention. The need for preservation is necessitated by the fact that people still want this kind of a dish, as seen by the demand for it in

restaurants. The whole process of preparing this dish is Afrocentric. The Western use of hammer millers has failed to match the quality of the traditional dish.

Recommendations

As noted above, the best pearl millet *hadza* is cooked using *gwisa* that has been prepared on the same day. This makes it seem a rather tedious task in order to prepare a single meal. It is therefore recommended that further research is needed on how the preparation of pearl millet needs to be stabilised so that it does not spoil and thus enables the women cooking it to also attend to other matters that require their attention. More research is needed on how shelf life of the *gwisa* can be improved, so that women are able to prepare enough *gwisa* to last if not for a week, then at least for a few days.

Since it was also established that a good-quality *hadza lezembgwe* depends on other ICH elements, it is therefore recommended that more research be carried out on elements such as pottery. It is believed that the Kalanga people inherited this tradition from their ancestors in the Leopard's Kopje era (Robinson 1966). They make pots (*hali*) in various sizes for different purposes, including for storage and cooking of (among other dishes) *hadza lezembgwe*.

The Kalanga women are also known for their expertise in plaiting and weaving baskets (Holub 1881; Wood 1974). They use them for domestic purposes and may sell some as a source of livelihood. All of these gadgets that the Kalanga women are skilled at making play a part in the preparation of *hadza lezembgwe*. As such, they are other areas that the researchers recommend for future research. 🇳🇷

ENDNOTES

1. unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf

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