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**Title: Investigating the role of media in the identity  
construction of ethnic minority language speakers in  
Botswana: An exploratory study of the Bakalanga.**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**Supervisor: Dr. Jeanne du Toit**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree in any other university and that it is my original work.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates the role of media in the identity construction of minority language speakers in Botswana, with a focus on the Bakalanga. The study is informed by debates around the degree to which the media can be seen to play a central role in the way the Bakalanga define their own identity. As part of this, it considers how such individuals understand their own sense of identity to be located within processes of nation-building, and in particular in relation to the construction of a national identity. It focuses, more particularly, on the extent to which the absence of particular languages within media can be said to impact on such processes of identity formation. The study responds, at the same time, to the argument that people's more general lived experiences and their broader social environment have a bearing on how they make sense of the media. As such, it can be seen to critique the assumption that the media necessarily play a central and defining role within processes of socialisation.

In order to explore the significance of these debates for a study of the Bakalanga, the dissertation includes a contextual discussion of language policy in Botswana, the impact of colonial history on such policy and the implications that this has had for the linguistic identity of the media. It also reviews theoretical debates that help to make sense of the role that the media plays within the processes through which minority language speakers construct their own identity. Finally, it includes an empirical case study, consisting of qualitative interviews with individuals who identify themselves as Bakalanga.

It is argued that, because of the absence of their own language from the media, the respondents do not describe the media as central to their own processes of identity formation. At the same time, the respondents recognise the importance of the media within society, and are preoccupied with their own marginalisation from the media. The study explores the way the respondents make sense of such marginalisation, as demonstrated by their attempts to seek alternative media platforms in which they can find recognition of their own language and social experience. The study thus reaffirms the significance of media in society – even for people who feel that they are not recognised within such media.

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. The background to the study: a personal story

This research was motivated by my personal history of involvement with the Bakalanga. My husband, Bakani, is a member of the Bakalanga and my marriage to him meant that I entered the world of his people. This provided me with insights into the way in which the Bakalanga experience their own location as minority language speakers in Botswana.

The story begins after my wedding party in Makuta in November of 2002. A group of elderly women and I were made to carry small bundles of wood on our heads. A traditional dance group led the procession as these bundles were delivered to the home of my husband's grandmother, Mma-Oketsang. This was part of my initiation into my husband's culture. I could relate to the beat and melody of the African songs, but could not make sense of the lyrics. This was not a problem, until I was introduced to Mma-Oketsang, who speaks Ikalanga, a language I neither speak nor understand. A translator was engaged to enable some intelligible conversation between the two of us – and this was to be the beginning of our life of 'mediated' communication.

Mma-Oketsang lives in her community in Makuta, a rural village in the northern side of the country while my husband and I live in the capital city Gaborone, 470 kilometres away from Makuta. There is no mutual intelligibility between our two languages; Setswana<sup>1</sup> and Ikalanga. Over time I got acquainted with the everyday lives of my extended family. I observed that, although Mma-Oketsang is only conversant in Ikalanga, she also enjoys listening to RB1, the state radio, which predominantly uses Setswana. Further, I observed that whenever there were extended family meetings, whether in town where most of the relatives live or back in the village, they are always strictly conducted in Ikalanga. This is so even in cases where all those attending understood Setswana and English; when, for example, Mma-Oketsang was not attending.

Since my marriage, I have worked as a media practitioner – and in this context I have had similar experiences of Batswana<sup>2</sup> not being conversant in Setswana. One such experience was when I was producing a television programme in Rapplespan, a village close to the Botswana boarder with Namibia. Most of the people I interviewed were only conversant in Afrikaans, which I did not understand. We had to engage the services of a village social worker

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<sup>1</sup> Setswana is also one of the two official languages in Botswana. The other one is English.

<sup>2</sup> Batswana here refers to the people of Botswana. It is however sometimes used to refer to Setswana speaking groups.

for intelligible communication. Such interactions deepened my interest in the way minority language groups in Botswana experience their own sense of identity, particularly in the context of their interaction with media.

Ten years later, I was studying at Rhodes University. Although I had worked in the media industry for all of those years before I came for further studies, it was the first time that I was exposed to theoretical perspectives on what I had been practising. I became fascinated, in particular, by arguments put forward in academic literature about the role of media in society. What interested me, in particular, was the proposal that the media has become central to society and that, through the media, citizens gain knowledge about the nations in which they are located. Scholars who hold this view argue that in the past people referred to more ‘traditional’ aspects of their lives to produce a shared understanding of their social worlds and their own location within this, while in the modern world the media has become central to such processes (Kellner, 1995). I became interested in the implications of these arguments for my own context in Botswana, and the role that media plays within this social space. I found myself wondering whether it is possible to argue that the media in Botswana bear responsibility for how different social groupings make sense of their own identity as citizens of this country. It is, after all, through the media that residents gain knowledge of their country as it exists outside their own immediate localities. Access to media texts would then also represent an important way in which residents of a village like Makuta, in the far northern side of the country, become connected to social life in the far away capital city and other places.

This scenario interests me in many ways. Firstly, I am concerned about how the grandmother in my story interacts with the world outside her immediate environment. I would like to know what it means to her to live in a country in which the dominant and official languages are English and Setswana, while she speaks only Ikalanga. Before my initiation into Bakani’s family, I had never met people from Botswana who could not speak or understand Setswana. It was therefore never my concern that other people might be affected by the dominant use of Setswana in the public domain in general and in the media in particular.

Secondly, I have thought about the fact that the one mass medium to which Mma-Oketsang is exposed in the context of Makuta is radio. As with other forms of media in Botswana, radio predominantly uses Setswana and English. Her interest in radio thus provokes a number of questions. What meaning does she derive from listening to the radio? What does the absence of her language on radio mean to her? Has it in any way shaped the way she thinks about herself or her community? I had never asked Mma-Oketsang these questions and many

others that were aroused by these experiences. Through this research, however, I was able to explore these questions within the context of my study.

It is perhaps also important to point out that the ‘tribal’ identities of my husband and me, or maybe the differences between them, are of particular importance to this study. I am a Mongwato from the Bangwato tribe, which is one of the so-called ‘major’ tribes in Botswana. My husband is Kalanga from the Bakalanga, a ‘minor’ tribe in the Botswana context. It is noted in this context that although Botswana is believed to have more than 37 so-called ‘tribes’, the constitution recognises only eight – and these are referred to as ‘major’ tribes while the rest are called ‘minor’ tribes. As a member of a dominant tribe, I was excluded from first-hand knowledge of the way that a marginalised group such as the Bakalanga experience their social reality. However, my husband’s membership to the Bakalanga has afforded me the opportunity to interact with members of this group, to be a part of their everyday experiences. I believe that this interaction, and my husband’s on-going mediation of such access, has contributed to my ability to engage successfully with the central questions that I have posed in this study.

## **2. The research question and objectives of the study**

This study investigates the role played by media in the identity construction of Bakalanga in Botswana, focusing on individuals whose first language is Ikalanga. It deals with the experiences of individuals who have migrated from rural environments, in which Ikalanga is broadly spoken, to urban spaces where English and Setswana are dominant. The study asks how such individuals experienced making this transition, with particular attention to the implications for the way in which they have come to define their identities in relation to the concept of nationhood. It focuses on the role that their engagement with media has played in such processes of identity construction and asks how they draw on their own lived experience as part of such engagement. The study aims to discover how the absence of Ikalanga within the media in Botswana has shaped the way such individuals have experienced these processes.

## **3. The structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter One consists of a review of relevant literature. It deals, firstly, with the broader social context within which the study is located. It does so by explaining the historical context of language policy in Botswana. As part of this it describes how colonial history has impacted upon the way in which different language groups in Botswana are currently located within relations of power. It also deals with the ways in

which these relations of power have been reproduced by the media. The chapter then goes on to discuss theoretical debates and perspectives surrounding the role of media in identity construction.

Chapter Two maps out the research design decisions that informed the empirical component of this study. It explains the methodological framing of the study and outlines the research methods and procedures employed. It provides the motivation for drawing on a qualitative methodology and explains why focus groups and individual in-depth interviews are the main data collection methods. It also reviews the extent to which the research plan was successfully implemented.

The final two chapters describe the findings of the fieldwork component of the study. Chapter Three deals with the research participants' general recollection of significant moments in their experiences of moving from a rural home environment to urban spaces. The focus is on the role that this experience has played in their conceptualisation of their own status as members of a minority language group. Chapter Four zooms in on the role that the participants' engagement with media has played within these processes. Both chapters tease out the significance of these themes when considered in the context of the theoretical principles and debates discussed in Chapter One. In this way, they attempt to make sense of the role that language and the media have played within the processes through which the research participants have constructed their own identity.

## **CHAPTER ONE LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter serves as a review of relevant literature and a contextualisation of this study. Part One deals with the broader social setting within which the study is located. It explains the historical context of language policy in Botswana and as part of this describes how colonial history can be seen to inform the current language inequalities in the country. It also offers an explanation of the role that contemporary media play in reproducing these relationships of inequality. Finally, it provides background on how the Bakalanga are located within the broader historical landscape of language policy in the country.

Part Two examines theoretical debates and perspectives that provide insights into these contextual issues. The aim of this discussion is to articulate a conceptual framework that can inform the empirical component of the study. The focus is on theoretical debates that help to make sense of the role that the media play within the processes through which minority language speakers construct their own identity. As such, this section draws on literature that facilitates understanding of the connection between media text, language and identity.

### **1.1 The social context of the study**

#### ***1.1.1 Historical background: language policy in Botswana***

Botswana is located in central Southern Africa. It covers a geographic area of 582 000 square kilometres with a population of two million, which makes it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world (Botswana Tourism Organisation, 2013). Botswana was a British colony from 1855 to 1966 and since then it has been governed uninterruptedly by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Since independence, Botswana has held democratic elections every five years which have consistently put the BDP back into power.

Botswana is generally reported to be one the most stable countries in Africa (Dunning, 2005; Nyamnjoh, 2007). Economic policies adopted at independence are believed to have led to it being one of the fastest growing economies on the continent. Having grown from being amongst the poorest nations in the world at independence, it is now classified by the UN as a

middle income country with a high per capita income<sup>3</sup> (Henderson, 1990; Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2003; UN, 2012). At the same time, in stark contrast to this image, Botswana is also identified by commentators to be amongst the countries with the highest income disparity between the richest and poorest members of the population. At the time of writing, Botswana's gini-coefficient<sup>4</sup> stood at 0.6 which makes it the second most unequal society in the region, the worst being Namibia at 0.8 (UN, 2012; Statistics Botswana, 2013). It has been suggested that although economic policy in Botswana has contributed to social stability, it has also reinforced these relationships of inequality (Good, 1999).

Commentators have noted that it is not only through economic policy that relationships of inequality are reproduced. Reference is made, within such discussion, to the role played by laws that are seen to discriminate between different social groupings on the basis of ethnicity, language and culture (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004). It is noted in this context that although Botswana is believed to have more than 37 so-called 'ethnic' groups or 'tribes', the constitution recognises only eight<sup>5</sup>. These eight groups are described in government policy as including the Barolong, Bakwena, Bangwaketse, Balete, Bakgatla, Batlokwa, Bangwato and the Batawana. Members of these groups are understood to speak 'dialects'<sup>6</sup> which are mutually intelligible and are jointly known as the Setswana language (Reteng, cited in Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2008). It has been pointed out that, within the current dispensation, only these groups are directly represented in the national House of Chiefs. Their language, Setswana, is the only so-called 'indigenous' language that is used in public settings and by officialdom. This practice is believed to have contributed to the countrywide spread of Setswana as a *lingua franca* (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004). It is noted, further, that the dominance of Setswana and English is expressive of a language policy that dates back to colonial times. The British

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<sup>3</sup> Per capita income is used to measure a country's standard of living. It is a measure of the wealth of the population of a nation, particularly in comparison to other nations. In simple terms, it is how much each member of the population would get, were the country's wealth divided equally among its population (UN, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Gini-coefficient measures income inequalities between richest poorest members of a nation. It ranges from 0 to 1. A low Gini coefficient indicates a more equal income distribution, while higher Gini coefficients indicate more unequal income distribution (Botswana Millennium Development Goals status report, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Scholars have contested the use of the terms 'tribe', 'ethnic group', and 'indigenous group'. The discussion of theory in Section Two includes reflection on these debates and, against this backdrop, explains how the terms will be used in the rest of this study.

<sup>6</sup> The study takes note that the term 'dialect' is sometimes used to refer to a language that is socially subordinate to the national language, but here it is used to refer to a variety of a language; a characteristic of a particular group of the language speakers (Merriam Webster online dictionary; Oxford dictionary, 2006).

authorities also recognised only these eight ‘tribes’, and founded Bechuanaland (the colonial name for Botswana) on the basis of such recognition (Nyathi- Saleshando, 2011).

The foregrounding of Setswana language and culture within the national identity of Botswana – what Parsons calls ‘Tswanadom’ (1985:27) – has led observers to assume that this country is a monolingual state. There is, indeed, consensus that presently Setswana is spoken by the majority of people within the population. This stems partly from the primary status of the language within public communication. Setswana is, for example, the medium of instruction in primary education, joined by English in the third year of primary school (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2003; Mooko, 2008). However it is not clear how many people speak each of the indigenous languages because the country’s census policy does not classify people according to tribes (Mooko, 2008:110). Nevertheless, the 2001 census show that at least 19 per cent of the population still use languages other than Setswana at home (Central Statistics Office, 2001).

It is believed that the decision to reconfirm Setswana as a national language after independence was meant to contribute to the establishment of a ‘united nation’ with one language and culture (Mooko, 2008). The primary focus of the new state was on the mobilisation of resources for economic development (Henderson, 1990). Commentators also point to two other factors that contributed to the adoption of monolingual policies in a multilingual state. The first has to do with power relations that existed even before colonisation. The colonial government first established itself in the southern part of the country, which is a predominantly Setswana speaking area. The colonists worked closely with the Tswana chiefs in this area and assumed that there were no other tribes in the country (Nyathi- Ramahobo et al., 2004; Ramsay, 1998). It is noted that this assumption was fuelled by the fact that, at this time, the non-Tswana groups were already subjugated by the Tswana. Given the existence of these relations of power, the colonisers did not see the need to officially recognise non-Tswana speaking people as groups with their own distinct identity. Even after expanding their influence to the northern part of the country, where Tswana is less dominant, the colonial government did not recognise the ‘newly found’ non-Tswana groups as independent from the Tswana. This also meant that Tswana-speaking groups, aided by the colonial government, tightened their dominance on non-Tswana groups. It is in this context that a system of governance was established in which only eight language groups were recognised and accorded a degree of self-governance, with chiefs who are ex-officio members of the national house of chiefs. Within the current dispensation, the remaining language groups continue to fall under the jurisdiction of each of these eight ‘tribes’ (Nyamnjoh, 2002).

The second factor that is understood to have contributed to the countrywide spread of Setswana as a dominant language and the continued subjugation of other language groups relates to the way in which such groups are described within public discourse. As noted above, marginalised language groups often do not have a chief of their own; instead, their headmen report to the chief of a Tswana group within their geographic location who has status within government structures (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004). In official discourse, such groups are then referred to by the name of the Tswana group who represents them. The Bakalanga in central Botswana are, for example, referred to as Bangwato, a Tswana ethnic group who represents them within the systems of government. The Bambukushu, Wayeyi and OvaHerero are referred to as Batawana, a Tswana group occupying the western side of the country (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004). A similar example can be observed in the context of the word used to describe the people of Botswana, who are referred to as ‘(Ba) tswana’. Within grammatical guidelines, this word serves as the plural for ‘(Mo) tswana’, meaning a person of Tswana origin (‘Mo’ is singular and ‘Ba’ is plural) (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2003; Chebanne 1997; Pansiri, 2011). As such, this choice of wording can be seen to be expressive of a policy that defines Botswana national identity in terms of Setswana. Commentators have criticised such naming practices, noting that they serve to render non-Setswana speaking groups invisible within the public domain (Solway et al., 2002).

From as early as 1969, three years into independence, minority language groups have shown displeasure at the bias towards Setswana speakers (Werbner, 2004). The government dismissed such objections, describing them as being informed by a divisive ‘tribalism’ (Henderson, 1990). In the early 1990s the ‘minorities’ question’ nevertheless re-emerged and dominated national debate (Solway et al., 2002:3). Ethnic minority groups have, since then, continued to campaign against what they describe as the discriminatory nature of the country’s language policies. They have lobbied for changes in policy by means of parliamentary motions, formation of linguistic associations, litigation and the engagement of United Nations procedures (Solway et al., 2002)<sup>7</sup>. Nyathi-Ramahobo (2003:6), who is a professor of languages and an advocate for the recognition of her language, Shiyeyi, asserts that what minority language groups continue to fight for is inclusion into the nation state. She explains that “...it is not nationhood itself that [they] challenge ... but rather, the character of that nationhood”.

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<sup>7</sup> Even during the current sitting of parliament, a bill challenging the current language policy was tabled in parliament. The bill requested that children should be taught in their mother tongue and not Setswana in their early primary school years (Mmegi, 2013).

Recent scholarship (Nyathi-Saleshando 2011; Solway, 2002; Pansiri, 2011) has focused on the implications of Botswana's language policies for the achievement of social inclusion. This research, which deals primarily with the sphere of education, identifies a link between the prioritisation of English and Setswana within the public domain and the social exclusion of minority language groups. The goal of this present study is to consider whether the prioritisation of English and Setswana within Botswana's media landscape can also be said to contribute to the social exclusion of minority language groups. It is with this goal in mind that the study investigated the relationship between the Bakalanga of Botswana and the media and how they understand the exclusion of their language (Ikalanga) from the media to contribute to the shaping of their identity.

### ***1.1.2 Language and the media in Botswana***

A review of the Botswana media landscape indicates an emphasis on Setswana and English as the dominant languages for communication (Mooko, 2008). The state broadcaster, which monopolised the broadcast sector until 2004, consists of two radio stations (RB1 and RB2) and a free to air television station, Botswana Television (Botswana Telecommunications Authority, 2008). RB1 broadcasts exclusively in Setswana, and all the other state channels are presented in a mix of Setswana and English. Since 2004, three private radio stations have been established, which also use a mix of Setswana and English. The private television sector is almost non-existent, with only one broadcaster (*e-Botswana*) transmitting in English and Setswana. The government-owned newspaper, the *Botswana Daily News*, is written in English and has a Setswana section. There are also fourteen private newspapers, all of which publish in English (Rooney, 2012). It would seem, then, that language usage within the media in Botswana contributes to the marginalisation of minority language groups in this social context.

Furthermore, an examination of the role that the government is currently playing in shaping the Botswana media landscape suggests that it is placing further restrictions on the emergence of minority language media platforms. Of particular importance, in this respect, is the revision of the broadcast regulation in Botswana. This includes the establishment of the Botswana Communication Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) and the repeal of the Broadcasting Act of 2008. Whereas this act endorsed the establishment of a three-tier system of broadcasting which includes public, private and community services, the BOCRA bill only mentions state and commercial broadcasting. This bill was passed by parliament and adopted into law in April 2013. Commentators have noted that this law makes the hope of ever establishing a community

media sector in this country, let alone a public broadcaster, far more tenuous (MISA, 2013; Media Sustainability Index, 2012).

It is arguable that the community media and the public broadcasting sector represent key sites for the establishment of media that target minority language groups. Community radio, in particular, has been identified as an important platform for the development of such media, given that this medium is so broadly accessible to potential audiences in this country (Botswana Telecommunications Authority, 2011; Mazrui 2007). The wider demographic scope offered by radio broadcasts is attributed to, among other things, the greater ability of this medium to reach both literate and illiterate audiences when compared with other forms of media. It is also said to be relatively affordable and therefore better suited to fill the gap left by other forms of media (Mazrui, 2007:36). Commentators note in this respect that, while 85 per-cent of the population of Botswana has access to state radio, there is concern that the media, both state and private, still "...cannot cover issues of minority language groups" (Media Sustainability Index, 2012:26).

### ***1.1.3 Brief history of the Bakalanga of Botswana***

The Bakalanga are said to be one of the minority language groups found in Botswana and are believed to be the second largest so-called 'ethnic' group in the country (Bagwasi, 2012). Communities belonging to this language group are predominantly found along the Zimbabwe-Botswana border on the north-eastern side and some parts of central Botswana. The Bakalanga are believed to be of Zimbabwean descent (Tlou et al., 1984). Scholars also suggest that the Bakalanga are a composite of what is referred to as diverse 'ethnic' groups who came together more than three hundred years ago and settled in present day Botswana. Their language, Ikalanga, is a Niger Congo vernacular and the dominant so-called 'dialect' of Ikalanga in Botswana is Lilima (Nyamnjoh, 2006). As with other 'tribes' in the country, the Bakalanga have over the years interacted with Tswana-speaking groups such that presently most Bakalanga are Ikalanga-Setswana bilinguals (Nyamnjoh, 2006).

As noted already, both in colonial times and post-independence, the Botswana government did not recognise Bakalanga as an independent 'ethnic group'. This is true despite the fact that, on occasion, the government would acknowledge the important role that communication in Ikalanga could play in facilitating processes of public participation. This can be observed on the eve of independence, when Ikalanga was one of the languages used in election materials (Winstanley 1966; Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2003). Commentators note that in light of such acknowledgement it came as a surprise that, after independence, Ikalanga was

relegated to private use while only English and Setswana were adopted as official languages (Mooko, 2008; Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2003).

One context within which scholars have traced the Bakalanga's experience of social exclusion is in the sphere of education. It is pointed out that, during the colonial era, Ikalanga was used in the first two years of primary education in the areas that were predominantly Kalanga speaking (Mooko, 2008). A lack of Ikalanga textbooks meant, however, that educators needed to draw for their teaching resources on Ikalanga textbooks from neighbouring Zimbabwe. Indeed, the process of developing Ikalanga orthography only started in the mid-1980s. This orthography, *Ngatikwaleni Ikalanga: A Manual for Writing Ikalanga*, is currently used as a guide for writing Ikalanga (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004).

This scholarship links the absence of minority languages in the school system with the high number of students who leave school before they complete their primary education. It indicates that comparatively non-Setswana speaking areas, which include the Bakalanga area, are over-represented in the numbers of children missing from basic education. This is said to stem from the fact that the learners find the curriculum, which is in Setswana and English, insensitive to their culture (Pansiri, 2011). Another factor raised by this research is that children from minority groups do not usually get along with their Setswana speaking peers. This is said to mostly derive from the existence of unequal relations of power between the Setswana speakers and children from minority groups, resulting in the latter quitting school (Pansiri, 2001). The empirical component of this study, as captured later in this dissertation, reconfirms the importance of the role that education has played in shaping the way the Bakalanga experience location as a minority language group in Botswana. The purpose of this empirical work is, indeed, to explore the extent to which media can be said to complement the role that education plays in this respect.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the purpose of the discussion below is to develop a conceptual framework that can assist in theorising the research problem that is being addressed in this study. The focus is, firstly, on conceptual tools that contribute to a critical reflection on the contextual issues that are mapped out in Part One of this chapter. The conceptual framework that is established in this way will then also inform the empirical component of the research, presented in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The first subsection below serves as a response to the recurrence within the literature reviewed in Part One of this chapter of the terms ‘ethnic group’, ‘tribe’ and ‘indigenous group’. It begins from the assumption that a critical examination of these terms provides important terms of reference for an analysis of the contextual histories reviewed in Part One. With this goal in mind, this section presents a review of literature dealing with the historical construction of these terms. The discussion makes use of scare quotes for such terms when necessary – but when this usage of punctuation becomes overly cumbersome, it is left out. This should not be understood to mean that the meanings of the terms are taken at face value.

The second subsection reviews literature dealing with nation formation in post-colonial Africa. The review focuses on debates surrounding the relationship between the national identity and the identity of cultural groups within a nation-state. The aim of this review is to establish a theoretical framework that can facilitate understanding of how minority language groups in the country make sense of their own identity in relation to nationhood. The focus is on how these groups interpret their positions within the nation in view of the marginalisation of their language by the media.

The third subsection focuses on literature dealing with the centrality of language in identity formation. This review pays particular attention to discussions of the relationship between the construction of identity and the formation of the nation state. It is demonstrated that such literature provides a valuable framework of analysis for making sense of the hierarchical relationships that come to exist within different language groups in a context such as that of Botswana.

The fourth subsection focuses on literature dealing with the relationship between media, language and identity. The aim of this section is to develop a conceptual framework within which to consider how an audience whose language is not used by the media can be seen to engage with such media.

### ***1.2.1 Debates about the terms ‘ethnic group’, ‘indigenous group’ and ‘tribe’***

A review of literature that deals with terms such as ‘ethnic group’, ‘indigenous group’ and ‘tribe’ suggests that such scholarship is embedded in a broader set of debates about the nature of social identity. Indeed, it is possible to identify, within this literature, two distinct conceptualisations of identity that are informed by different paradigms of social analysis. These two positions can be described, respectively, as ‘essentialist’ and ‘constructivist’ approaches to identity (Hall, 1992; Eriksen, 1993). The discussion below maps out some of these debates and shows how terms such ‘ethnic’, ‘tribal’ and ‘indigenous’ are appropriated in

each of these conceptions. It is demonstrated through this discussion that a constructivist conceptualisation of identity is of particular value to this study.

From an essentialist perspective, social identity is understood to be stable and coherent. To speak of an ethnic, tribal or indigenous group is then assumed to be a reference to people who share one clearly identifiable identity (Hall, 1992; Bhabha, 1994). It is also assumed that such identity is defined by distinct characteristics, such as the language spoken by that group (Werbner, 1996; May, 2005). In the most extreme form of essentialism, these characteristics are taken as authentic and fixed; they do not adjust in relation to historical change or the circumstances within which people live (Weber, 1997; Hall 1992). Since characteristics such as ethnicity are understood to be primordial, preceding any human interaction, it is also assumed that they cannot be diluted by mobility and human interaction (Barrett, 2001). From this perspective it is also typically assumed that, because tribal identity precedes the existence of the modern state and is organised on the basis of kinship, it is more ‘natural’ and therefore more homogeneous and stable than ‘modern’ categories of identity (Fried, 1975; Helm, 1968).

From the opposing, constructivist perspective, identity is understood to be a social construct. It is argued that the meaning of identity can never be fixed; it has changed through centuries and will continue to do so (Smith, 1999; Hall, 1992). Our social identity shifts continuously in relation to the changes that happen around us and, for this reason, it is understood as both a “becoming” and a “being” (Hall, 1990:52). It is, in other words, believed to be always in the process of being negotiated and renegotiated (Hall, 1996:5). Constructivists have argued that essentialist approaches to identity fail to account for the disappearance and reappearance of ethnic groups that happened through history (Motohiro, 2011; Geertz, 1990). They also challenge the assumption that tribal identity is coherent, arguing instead that it is internally heterogeneous, with fluid boundaries. Literature within the constructivist conception indicates that there are cases throughout history where members of the same tribe practised different rituals and in some instances even spoke different languages (Smith, 1999; Fried, 1975).

One argument that is often presented from the constructivist perspective is that ethnic or tribal identity exists in relation to what is often referred to as the ‘other’ (Hall, 1996:17). The proposal within such an argument is that individuals and groups make sense of who they are by recognising what they are not, or what they lack (Hall, 1996; Derrida, 1981). From this perspective, it is argued that identity is not something that is simply ‘there’ – readily available and visible, outside the specifics of context. Instead, it becomes meaningful when

different groups interact, and is reflected in the way in which these groups invoke a sense of difference from each other. Through interaction, groups establish and maintain boundaries which demarcate their own identity from that of others (May, et al., 2005; Hall, 1996). The argument is then that, viewed in isolation, identity has no meaning; it is through contact with others that people understand who they themselves are and what they stand for as members of a particular group (May et al., 2005). It is also often proposed, within such discussion, that identity becomes socially significant when there is contestation within or between groups. Bauman (1996) argues, in this respect, that identity becomes important when people are not sure of where they belong and do not know where to position themselves in relation to competing behaviours and practises. He notes that, within this conception, identity is understood as a response to uncertainty (Bauman, 1996).

Furthermore, whereas the essentialist conceptualisation describes identity as coherent and singular, the constructivist conception understands it as complex and cross-cutting. An individual can, for example, be defined by diverse identities simultaneously. Scholars who locate themselves within this school of thought maintain that one person can have aspects of identity that do not completely cohere with each other. The proposal is that such individuals are able to invoke these different senses of identity at different points in time, and find ways of managing the tensions between them (Hall, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; May, 2005).

It has been proposed, within constructivist social analysis, that essentialist conceptualisations of ethnicity and tribalism are often invoked in order to justify oppressive political systems. Minority groups may, for example, refer to such concepts in order to bolster their own political and economic authority (Cohen, 1967, 1974). This argument is sometimes employed to suggest that the denial of collective rights and distinct ethnic identity for particular communities by the modern nation-states is necessary for the maintenance and continuity of social order (Kabel, 2012).

Such arguments have been employed within critical discussion of the role that tribal, indigenous or ethnic identity has played within the history of particular countries, and how such history relates to the contemporary context. It is, for example, argued, within analyses of colonial history, that the meanings attached to these categories of identity are predominantly a construction of the colonial governments. Such governments are typically understood to have regarded so-called indigenous people's practices as primitive and uncivilised, deserving colonial civilisation (Mamdani, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2007). They then invoked the concept of tribal, indigenous or ethnic identity to separate, symbolically and geographically, the citizen from the colonial settler (Mamdani, 1996, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2007). It is argued, in this context,

that colonial leaders used the term ‘indigenous’ to refer to groups within a colonised country whose cultural practices and behaviours were different from those of the coloniser (Nyamnjoh, 2007).

Commentators who locate themselves within a constructivist paradigm have also cautioned that in the contemporary context these terms are used differently by different writers and should, therefore, be understood within context (Werbner, 1997). Some writers are, for example, ambivalent about the use of the term ‘tribe’, preferring instead ‘ethnic group’. This stems from the belief, among these writers that ‘ethnic group’ is not as degrading as ‘tribe’ (Wa’Njogu, 2009). They point out, in explanation, that the Western media often use the word ‘tribe’ to refer to communities in Africa, while European communities would be referred to as ‘ethnic groups’. This is seen by some as continuing the colonial usage of these terms (Wa’Njogu, 2009). Other scholars, like Cohen, have maintained that the term ‘ethnic group’ is an inaccurate label when used to refer to a particular group, preferring instead, ‘indigenous group’ (Cohen, 1978).

Commentators have also challenged generally accepted usage of the term ‘indigenous group’, in which it is assumed to refer to people who were born in a land or those who were the first to settle in such land. It is pointed out that, throughout history, Asian and African populations have moved around a lot and during those movements some groups were absorbed by others. This is believed to make it difficult to distinguish indigenous from non-indigenous groups. Some scholars therefore advise that ‘indigenous peoples’ should not be used to refer to Asians and Africans groups and should instead be restricted to the Americas and Australia (Hodgson, 2011). In addition, some critics have challenged the use of the term ‘indigenous’ in which it refers to “descendants of pre-invasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by nations” (Anaya, 2003). The problem with this definition, according to such commentators, is that it ignores places where the ‘indigenous groups’ are the majority or where the whole population is indigenous (Anaya, 2003). It has also been proposed that, over time, the term has become closely associated with people who hold marginalised positions within a given society (Mamdani, 1999; Nyamnjoh, 2007). Thus any group within a state, that is not dominant is in this meaning referred to as ‘indigenous’. Non-dominance is understood, here, to refer to the economic, social and cultural conditions of these groups relative to others within a nation-state (Douglas, 1999; Bowen, 2003). There is, nevertheless, some consensus that there is no single, universally accepted definition of indigenous people (Helm et al., 1968; Sutton, 1975).

In his research in Congo, Mamdani discovered that patterns of migration were used as a determiner of indigenous or non-indigenous status. Typically, the time at which a group

moved into a country would determine whether it is considered indigenous or not to that social context (Mamdani, 1996). In Congo, for example, Mamdani learnt that the Banyarutshuru are treated as indigenous while the Banyamasi are not, although they both speak Kinyarwanda. The explanation was that the former arrived in the country before colonisation while the latter came when Congo was already a colony (Mamdani 1996:659). This practice of differently privileging the population on the basis of whether or not they are indigenous is perceived as contributing to how citizens define their relationship with the state. In the case of Botswana, scholars have pointed out that the Setswana speaking tribes were among the last, if not the last to arrive in the country and, therefore, they cannot use the ‘early arrival’ argument to legitimate their hegemony over other tribes (Mooko, 2008).

The term ‘ethnic group’ is also sometimes used interchangeably with ‘indigenous group’ (Douglas, 1991). Commentators advise that the latter term is commonly used to refer to people with a “common ancestry who share a distinctive culture” (Tonkin et al., 1989; Leoussi et al., 2006). However, some scholars assert that in the contemporary context, it is used to refer to people with different cultural identities from the nation-state (Smith, 1999; Beard et al., 2005). Thus, to call a group ‘ethnic’ is said to mean “in opposition” to the state (Seidner, 1982:2). That is, the group that is referred to as ‘ethnic’ has cultural practices that are distinct from those that are regarded as reflecting the national culture.

It would seem, then, that a constructivist conceptualisation of social identity can be of assistance within social analysis dealing with the role that terms such as ‘ethnic group’, ‘indigenous group’ and ‘tribe’ play within the justification of particular social systems. It should be noted, however, that constructivist analysis of these terms can, in itself, be invoked in service of the maintenance of power.

The preceding debate on the constructions and uses of the terms ‘ethnic group’, ‘indigenous group’ and ‘tribe’ has implications for their use in this study. This debate reveals that when these terms are applied to a particular social grouping, they locate the speaker both epistemologically and ideologically. It is then understood that, within the context of this study, such terms need to be used with careful reflection as to their implications within the particular context.

Nevertheless, given their centrality to the subject of study, these terms cannot be completely avoided. For this reason, it was necessary to make choices about which term could be appropriated within the conceptual language of the study. With this in mind, it was decided that the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘indigenous’ would be used only in context of quoting scholars who invoke them. In other instances, the study will adopt the term ‘tribe’. The motivation for this

is that ‘tribe’ is a common term within the Botswana context, used in the everyday lives of the people and by officialdom. It is used to distinguish between people with different cultural backgrounds. This decision is not intended to gloss over the contestations that are inherent in the meanings and uses of the terms discussed in this section – instead, it is acknowledged that these terms remain debatable. Additionally, since the study has acknowledged and highlighted some of the tensions related to the meanings and uses of these terms, it will hereafter use them without scare quotes. It is assumed that they will be understood within context.

### ***1.2.2 Nationhood***

Another context in which constructivist social analysis is of value to this study is in the discussion of the relationship between identity and nationhood. It is proposed, within constructivist scholarship on this subject, that the concept of ‘nationhood’ is informed by an active labour of ‘making things mean’ (Hall 1982:64). In the context of the creation of nation-states in Africa, such labour is then described as being implicated in the construction of hegemony. It is also proposed that in many African countries such hegemony involves the close association between national identity and the identity of one particular group in society – so that this group comes to represent the nation as a whole (Mamdani, 2001:658; Billig, 1995: 27). It is proposed that this results from the fact that newly independent nations often take over colonial policies which ignore the ethnic diversity that exists within their own social context and instead impose the culture and language of dominant groups (Nyathi-Ramahobo et al., 2004).

Such arrangements are understood to give rise to social conflict, with marginalised groups typically demanding the rights to land and the recognition of custom (Mamdani, 1996:659). Governments often attempt to suppress such demands because they understand them to represent a threat to the achievement of national identity. Commentators have proposed that such reaction may help us to identify the definers of identity that dominant groups within such contexts wish to retain (Bruner, 2005). Bhabha proposes that conflict of this kind results from the “...ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation”. It demonstrates, furthermore, that a nation’s ‘narratives’ are not fixed; they are always contested and they change over time (1990:1).

It is pointed out that, at independence, most African governments built their new nation-states on systems of governance that had been established by colonial powers (Mamdani, 1996; Billig, 1995). The new states tended to reproduce the unequal relations of power that were inherent in these systems. The original colonisers are said, for example, to have divided local

populations across ethnic lines, "...empowering those considered indigenous and disempowering others considered non-indigenous" (Mamdani, 1996, 659). Within the new dispensations, groups that had historically been marginalised by the coloniser are again disadvantaged (Mamdani, 1996:658).

It is also noted that, even within contexts defined by such relationships of conflict, citizens<sup>8</sup> still tend to identify with the dominant conceptualisation of national identity and culture (Billig, 1995). This is understood to occur because such conceptualisation is continually reinforced through a range of cultural practices – that is, the active labour of ‘making things mean’ that Hall refers to above. Literature suggests that such practices include, for example, the maintenance, within the public arena, of shared symbolic reference points such as country flags. Another example would be the reiteration of national anthems and stories about the nation and its heroes as ‘remembrance strategies’. These practices are said to be used within the institutions of the nation-state to keep alive the preferred meaning of nationhood (Billig, 1995; Hall, 1997). They are said to have become so familiar to the residents of a particular country that they do not consciously recognise them as forming part of this process of ‘reminding’. Hence people end up taking the meaning attached to ‘nation’ and ‘nationhood’ for granted; what Anderson (1983) calls an ‘imagined community’. Scholars further argue that even when we cannot ‘show’ or ‘describe’ such national identity in distinct and concrete terms, it can be observed in the everyday social behaviour of the populace. It manifests, for example, in the way a nation is talked about and the kind of language used to describe it. Through such speech acts, ‘imagined’ national identity is reconfirmed (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995).

It is also held that people define nationhood by the way they understand themselves as individuals to be located within such a nation – often in comparison to the way other individuals may be positioned (Billig, 1995). Such understanding impacts significantly on the way in which people make sense of their own social identity as individuals. The understanding of the individual’s position in relation to the nation is also thought to enable people to have a sense of who is or is not a member of their more localised community. Again, it is pointed out that the language spoken by particular individuals often represents a key way of identifying members of such a community (Joseph, 2004; Edwards, 2009).

Such scholarship tends to operate as a critique of the strategies through which national identity is constructed and maintained. It is pointed out, for example, that the dominant

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<sup>8</sup> The study understands this term to be complex and therefore contested. It is here used for the sake of convenience – and also because it is invoked in this particular instance by Billig.

narratives of national identity are made possible by a process of exclusion, in which other social narratives remain unspoken. National identity depends, then, on the “forced absence” of aspects of particular people’s histories and social experiences (Bruner, 2005:314). Although the construction and maintenance of national identity empowers some groups, it also necessarily disempowers others (Shotter et al., 1989). Commentators often suggest that the dominant narratives of nationhood are a political fiction based on selective remembering and forgetting (Bruner, 2005:314).

It is also argued that societies that do not allow space for the critique of national identity promote unity at the expense of the public expression of diversity (Bruner, 2005). Commentators suggest that this is problematic, because critique of national identity increases visibility of alternative perspectives on what is known and believed about a nation. In this way, it can unmask and address the contradictions on which the dominant narratives are based (Bruner, 2005). Such challenges are understood to play a role in differentiating the material conditions that exist in a nation from the narratives that conceal those conditions. As such, they can help to reveal the material relations that inform contestations about what constitutes national identity. Commentators argue that challenges to the dominant conceptualisation of national identity can, therefore, lead to more open dialogue within the public domain. They suggest, furthermore, that it is only in the context of such dialogue that any sense of unity can be thought possible in a nation-state (May, 2005; Bruner, 2005).

Within such literature, it is argued that if the idea of nationhood is to be problematised, it also becomes important to reflect critically on the concept of citizenship. As part of such reflection, it should be noted that citizenship and national identity tend to be defined in different ways. It is generally understood that citizenship is not automatically acquired – it tends, rather, to be associated with duties and rights. Citizens are understood to have the right, for example, to participate in the public sphere without fear of intimidation – even by the state. They are also understood to bear responsibility for the maintenance of the national culture. At the same time, there are those who are considered ‘unfit’ to take on these duties and rights, and they are regarded to be ineligible for citizenship (Fieschi and Varouxakis, 2001; Weinstock, 2000).

Nationality, on the other hand, tends to be based on blood right; you are a ‘national’ because you were born into a particular nation. This does not, however, necessarily make you a citizen (Fieschi and Varouxakis, 2001). The ways in which the concept of citizenship and that of national identity are invoked, within a particular social context, can, therefore, stand in contradiction with each other.

Scholars note that, despite these distinctions in meaning, national identity and citizenship are terms that have for a long time been used as if they are interchangeable. However, due to prevailing social and political change, it is of increasing importance that the distinction between them be made clear. Such change is represented, for example, by the resurgence of minority groups' calls for recognition and the growing presence of transnational citizens (Oakes and Warren, 2007). It is argued that these trends require of nation-states to reconceptualise the notion of 'belonging' in a culturally diverse population. As part of this process, they need to find ways of accommodating demand for recognition by minority groups (Oakes and Warren, 2007:1).

### *1.2.3 Language and identity*

The value of constructivist analysis to this study can also be observed in context of scholarship about language and identity. Within such scholarship, it is proposed that language is not just a medium of communication, but also a vehicle through which people locate themselves within their social world (Hall, 1980). It is explained, in this respect, that when people speak a language they also 'speak' the world embedded and implied in that language (Fanon, 2008:9). In this way, social groupings express their own distinctiveness and their particular social reality (Warschauer, 2002; Howell, 1992; Hall, 1980). Language is, then, of crucial importance to the formation of the identity of individuals and of groups. Indeed, the suggestion is that language and identity cannot be separated.

It is also argued that language has the power to control how we think and act (Mwaura, 1980:27). For this reason, it often plays a crucial role in the way that one group dominates another, and the way that groups react to such domination. Power struggles around language are, for example, understood to play a central role within the processes of social exclusion and inclusion that form part of the construction and maintenance of nationhood. It is argued that such struggles were characteristic of African countries during the colonial era where the subjugation of local people through the imposition of the languages of the colonising nations contributed to "...cultural and intellectual domination" (Mazrui 2009:36). It would seem, furthermore, that such processes of subjugation recurred within the establishment of modern nation states in Africa. The languages that have become most central to such formation are those which have been accorded official status by government. Such language often becomes the foundation upon which a national culture is constructed and maintained (Anderson, 1983; Joseph, 2004). It is pointed out, however, that even within such contexts, minority groups often still regard their 'mother tongue' as having important cultural value (Edward, 1991:269; May,

2008:131). When the social status of such language is deliberately undermined, such groups often understand their own identity to be threatened. Within such contexts, marginalised groups typically look to their own members for security and moral support (Billig, 1995:14).

Some scholars propose that demands for the protection of minority language rights, within such contexts, should be dismissed because they threaten the establishment of a unified national identity. The suggestion is that, for the sake of social cohesion, minority groups should sacrifice their own language and adopt the dominant language of the nation state (Edward, 2001). It is often argued, from this perspective, that the establishment of a shared national language provides opportunities for social and economic mobility. Minority groups who protest against the marginalisation of their language can, then, be seen to limit their own prospects for social and material gain (May, 2005). Such groups are described as being static, because they resist social change and cling to a traditionalist past (Edwards, 2001).

Other scholars disagree with this analysis, arguing that to create a nation at the expense of the identity of minority groups cannot be justified. It has been proposed from this perspective that for a group to lose their language represents a form of conquest or even the elimination of a people (Edward, 2009). The enormity of such an act can only be understood if one accepts the constructivist argument that language is one of the most important means through which people make sense of their own existence. Within this analysis, even if one accepts the importance of the project of national identity, the protection of language rights must be held sacred (Edward 2009: 206).

#### ***1.2.4 Media, language and identity***

In formulating an approach to the study of media that would be of relevance to my research question, I set out to identify theoretical sources that were sensitive to the debates that I have outlined in this chapter so far. The study therefore refers, firstly, to literature dealing with the role that the media plays in the formation of nationhood. It is pointed out in such literature that people come to consider themselves as citizens of a nation if they can "...participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture" (Hall, 1992:292). Nations reproduce themselves, moreover, through cultural practice - such as the reinterpretation of myths, and the reiteration of memory, tradition and ethnic heritages (Smith, 2001). Cultural processes are said, within this analysis, to help people "... understand their identities and their place in the world" (Gaonkar, 2002:4). It is then also argued that the media plays a key role within such cultural processes. National culture is, for example, at least partly sustained through the media (Hall, 1997; Kellner, 1995; Thompson, 1998).

The research takes note, secondly, of scholarly work on the role played by urbanisation in the way audiences engage with media. It is important to remember that my study focused on people who have migrated from rural to urban areas. Tomlinson (1991:55) advises that such people, who have moved “out of their ethnicity” to what he describes as “developed” areas, react to media differently from those who “stayed at home”. He describes such individuals as forming part of “...groups undergoing cultural upheaval”, with “... special problems of national identity”. In his view, such groups relate differently to their cultural ‘roots’ than the people they have left behind (1992:55). My study focused on such individuals, who could speak from personal experience about the implications of urbanisation for the way in which they engaged with media.

It is further proposed in such literature that the kind of urbanisation that occurs in Africa in general and southern Africa in particular differs from that of western countries (Bryant et al., 1978). Individuals who relocate to towns and cities maintain remarkably strong links with life in the village ‘back home’. This is understood to manifest, firstly, as a strong bond with grandparents and other extended family members who have been left behind. It is also said to be common for such individuals to continue to have homes in their villages of origin to which they regularly return (Bryant et al., 1978). Migration to towns and cities does not, then, represent a complete relocation to a new home. The literature indicates that this form of urbanisation is also true for Botswana (Home, 2001). This commentary provides valuable terms of reference for the analysis of the histories of urbanisation that form the focus of this study.

The study refers, thirdly, to literature dealing with the role that media plays within processes of ‘modernisation’. It is argued within such scholarship that, whereas in the past people referred to ‘tradition’ in order to define who they are, they turn in modern times to the mass media to make sense of their identity (Kellner, 1995; Hall, 1997; Thompson, 1994). The media is understood, in other words, to be a ‘carrier of modernity’ that plays a role within processes of identity construction (Berger et al. 1973:16; Hall, 1997; Tomlinson, 1991). It is also argued that within processes of modernisation, the ‘imagining’ of who is and who is not a member of a particular group, such as a nation, is facilitated by the mass media (Smith, 2001; Anderson, 1983). The study assumes that such processes of modernisation, and the role that the media plays within these, are of significance to patterns of social change in Botswana.

Fourthly, the study takes note of debates about the extent to which media can be said to play a central role within processes of social formation. From one perspective within such debate, it is argued that the media has the power to shape social reality and to determine our view of such reality (Richardson, 2007). Not only does it shape public opinion and reinforce

beliefs, but it also influences policy (Allen et al., 1999). From the opposing perspective, it is argued that it is possible to challenge the assumption that the media is all-powerful as a vehicle of socialisation and social influence. Within such argument, it is proposed that there is value in ‘decentring’ the role that the media is understood to play within the production of social meaning by acknowledging the agency of audiences. Rather than “determining” cultural experiences, the media can then be seen to “mediate” such experiences. Tomlinson suggests, for example, that there is a “subtle interplay of mediation” between the media text and the lived experience of audiences (Tomlinson 1991:63). Commentators who support this argument often point to the importance of research about media consumption and more particularly about the role played within such consumption by the lived experience of individuals (Tomlinson, 1991:61). It is then also argued that an important aspect of such experience is represented by the languages that people speak (Kellner, 1995; Hall, 1992; Strelitz, 2008, Tomlinson, 1991).

Finally, the study takes note of scholarly work on the role that alternative media plays within the lived experiences of marginalised groups. Scholars advise, for instance, that such groups have over time used alternative media to challenge and subvert the existing hierarchical social relations (Downing, 2001). This stems from the understanding that mainstream media are often biased towards the interests of dominant groups in society and rarely allow for the voices of marginalised groups. For this reason, these groups use alternative media spaces to rediscover their voices and assert their identity (Rodriquez, 2001). In addition, such media is understood to offer opportunity for the articulation of unconventional points of view that are not found in the mainstream media (Downing, 2001). Such media is understood to be informed by different values and objectives from the mainstream – to give attention to views that mainstream media marginalise (Rodriquez, 2001).

It is indicated in this literature that social media platforms represent an important example of such alternative media. They are believed to allow for the formation of “alternative publics” that can give voice to social experiences that are marginalised by the mainstream media (Gross, 2003). Additionally, because of the interactive nature of such media, it is credited for privileging “involved” audiences over those that are simply “informed” (Atton, 2002:21). Thus, the audiences of such media are not constituted as passive; they are both producers and consumers of content (Lievrouw, 1994).

Scholars have also recognised these social media platforms for their potential to bring together like-minded groups spanning vast distances to form a community. They also point out, however, that access to the internet is confined to an elite section of society – which limits the role that it can play within such processes of empowerment (Atto, 2002). It is with these

discussions in mind that the empirical component of this study includes an exploration of the role that social media plays in providing speakers of Ikalanga with a space in which to articulate their own linguistic identity.

### **1.3 Conclusion**

Part One of this chapter dealt with the social context within which the study is located. It is proposed, as part of this contextualisation, that the prevailing language policy in Botswana is informed by colonial history. It is also explained that debates about language and their relationship to nationhood have played an important role in this country since the early years after independence. These debates deal primarily with the dominance of Setswana and English at the expense of other languages – which results in the marginalisation of the speakers of these languages. They suggest that the language policy that Botswana has been promoting over years has relegated minority groups in this society to invisibility and silence. Assimilationist policies can, therefore, be seen to benefit some sections of the society at the expense of others. The chapter also notes that the media in Botswana has to a large extent reproduced these language policies. It is, indeed, in recognition of these social problems that this study was conceptualised.

Part Two examined theoretical debates and perspectives that provide insights into the issues described as part of this contextualisation. The discussion focuses, firstly, on theoretical debates that throw light on the ways in which minority language speakers are located within processes of identity construction in this country. It then deals with theorisations that help to explain the role that media plays within such processes. As such, this section establishes a theoretical framework that facilitates understanding of the connection between media text, language and identity. In this way, it identifies elements of a conceptual framework that can inform the empirical component of the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the design and implementation of the empirical research project that forms part of this study. Section One describes and motivates for the decisions that were made with regard to the design of this project. It describes the methodological framework in which the study is based, the research design, the more specific choice of research methods, the fieldwork design and the approach to analysis. Section Two explains how the implementation of this research plan worked out in practice and reviews the strengths and weaknesses of such implementation. Reference is made, in this section, to changes that were made to the fieldwork design during its implementation in order to respond to opportunities that emerged within the interview process.

It is explained in this chapter that a key challenge of the study has been that it deals with the examination of the experience of absence. It does so by asking how a minority language group experiences the absence of their own language from their media environment. The chapter demonstrates how I have engaged with the challenges posed by such a question. As will be demonstrated, a key strategy that I employed in this regard relates to the inclusion of research participants involved in a social media site that concerns itself with the linguistic identity of the Bakalanga. Both sections of the chapter demonstrate how this decision has helped me to respond to the research question.

It should be noted that, in this chapter, I have chosen to write primarily in the first person. This enables me to talk more freely about the decisions I made in designing the research project.

#### **2.2 The research design decisions**

As explained in the introduction to this dissertation, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into the ways in which first language speakers of Ikalanga experience the marginalisation of their own language within the media in Botswana. The focus was on individuals who have migrated from rural environments, in which their language is broadly spoken, to urban spaces where English and Setswana are dominant. I wished to gain insight into how such individuals experience making this transition and to explore the implications for the ways in which they have come to define their identity in relation to the concept of nationhood. I also wanted, in

particular, to understand more about the role that the media – and particularly the absence of Ikalanga within the media – plays within this experience. The discussion in this next section describes the research plan that I developed in order to engage with this research task.

### **2.2.1 Methodology**

I have situated this study within a qualitative paradigm, drawing on theories of interpretivism and constructivism. (Deacon et al., 1999; Bryman, 1984). Scholars advise that a central aim of qualitative research is to increase understanding of a phenomenon within its social context (Bryman, 1984:77). This paradigm also allows for a research design that is flexible, so that it can adapt to the specifics of the context of the study as they emerge. Such flexibility is understood to be especially helpful in situations where the research takes an unanticipated twist, because researchers can alter their plans so as to address issues as they arise (Bryman, 1984). This principle is especially relevant for a study such as this one, which demands sensitivity to the specifics of the research setting and responsiveness to aspects of such context that only become apparent during fieldwork. Indeed, as I explain in Section Two of this chapter, such flexibility turned out to be of central importance to my implementation of the research plan.

My decision to draw on the interpretive tradition of qualitative research was informed by the argument that, within such work, there is a strong focus on the researcher's close involvement with the research process. Such involvement is understood to enable the researcher to develop a contextualised understanding of the subject of study. The aim of such understanding, as articulated within this tradition, is that of gaining insight into the ways in which particular individuals or groups make sense of reality. Interpretive research thus explores how people experience their social world and probes into how they express these experiences (Bryman, 1984). I regard this emphasis to be of relevance to my examination of the ways in which a minority language group experiences their own exclusion from mainstream media.

I have already motivated for my decision to locate the study within a constructivist framework in the context of the literature review that I presented in Chapter One. As we have seen there, within a constructivist understanding of social analysis, it is believed that people are always involved in the practice of making sense of their life experiences. Constructivist social research often serves as an examination of the process of construction and re-construction that is involved in such meaning-making. Researchers involved in such study

attempt to interpret a phenomenon based on the meanings people give to it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008:4-7). I recognise this approach to be of relevance to my research since the study concerns itself with the narrative account that members of a minority group provide of their experience of the absence of their own language from media environments.

### **2.2.2 Research methods**

The main investigative method that I chose for this study is that of the qualitative interview. I decided, more particularly, that the study would make use of focus groups and individual in-depth interviews. I felt that the focus group method would be of relevance because it enables open-ended and flexible discussion. It is explained, in literature about social research, that interviewers who make use of this method typically use broad and semi-structured questions so that they are able to respond creatively to discussions as they unfold (Deacon et al., 2010). This aspect of qualitative interviewing seemed to me to hold particular importance for my study, given the need for flexibility referred to above. I was also conscious that focus groups provide a context in which it becomes possible to recreate the way people speak in the everyday world about aspects of their social experience. This can include the conversations that people have about their consumption of media, and their interpretation of media texts (Schrøders et al., 2003). Due to these benefits of the focus group method, it becomes possible to generate rich interview material which enables detailed interpretive analysis (Deacon et al., 1999).

Scholars also acknowledge that research material gained by means of focus groups is enriched when combined with findings generated through other methods (Deacon et al., 1999). Based on this principle, I decided to include individual interviews to be conducted after the focus groups. The purpose of these interviews would then be to further explore questions that arise during the focus group sessions. Individual in-depth interviews are believed to enable the researcher to explore topics that might be too sensitive to be discussed in a group setting or which other people may not be comfortable to discuss in public (Schrøder et al., 2003; Silverman, 2004). I understood this strategy to be important in view of the sensitivity of the subject under discussion. In my estimation, it was possible that research participants would feel cautious about being openly critical of the Botswana government's language policies even within the relatively safe space of a focus group. This judgement was based on the observation that the government has, in the past, responded with intolerance to such criticism, particularly in the context of arguments for the recognition of minority languages. I therefore felt that

research participants would be able to speak more frankly in the context of a one-on-one interview.

### **2.2.3 Designing the fieldwork plan**

The fieldwork was to be conducted in Gaborone. One reason for this was that it was convenient and cost effective for me to do so. My family lives in this city and so I had readily available access to accommodation and transport. In addition, I have lived in Gaborone all my adult life and therefore believe that I have established a reasonable understanding of the city and of the people who live in it. Although I was studying members of a tribal group different from mine, I felt that this knowledge would stand me in good stead. I knew that I only had a month in which to complete my fieldwork and, in my judgement, could not afford spending time becoming accustomed to a new place and its people. In addition, and maybe more importantly, I wanted to interview people who have settled in an urban environment – and this made Gaborone, the capital city, a conceivable research setting. In the discussion below I map out the decisions I made in designing the plan for this fieldwork.

#### ***2.2.3.1 Selecting participants***

I decided to make use of a purposive approach to the selection of focus group participants. It is explained in literature that, in the context of purposive sampling, the researcher decides what needs to be known and then looks for people who are willing and able to provide the needed information. Research participants are, therefore, deliberately chosen based on who they are and what they know (Seidler, 1974; Deacon et al., 2010). In the context of my study, the participants had to be Ikalanga speakers who identified themselves as Bakalanga. They also should have moved from their rural villages to cities and towns.

To gain access to such respondents, I decided to make use of a ‘gatekeeper’. In guidelines for social research, it is explained that a gatekeeper helps the researcher to identify appropriate interview candidates. This person often has knowledge of the social environment of the research participants which enables them to mediate between the researcher and the participants – explaining and facilitating. The literature also indicates that the gatekeeper often helps to establish the researcher’s credibility with respondents. They may, for example, be able to reassure respondents that the researcher has good intentions, thus acting as their ‘guarantor’ (Deacon et al., 2010).

With these goals in mind, I identified a former colleague, Bonani Zolani<sup>9</sup>, as a good candidate for the role of gatekeeper. Zolani seemed suitable because he is a member of the Bakalanga as a linguistic group. He had, furthermore, moved from a rural to an urban environment, and thus had first-hand experience of the kind of life history that I was interested in exploring. His membership of the Bakalanga also means that he had a network of contacts who could form part of my focus groups. Furthermore, Zolani was part of my own world, as a media practitioner. My sense was that, because of this, he would be well placed to mediate between certain aspects of my world and that of people from a Kalanga background.

I became aware of Zolani's 'insider knowledge' of the Bakalanga as a result of the stories he used to share with us in the newsroom when I worked for the state broadcaster, Botswana Television (BTV). These stories related, firstly, to his experience of being a journalist whose first language is Ikalanga. He noted that when he started school he could only speak and understand Ikalanga. He then learned Setswana as a matter of necessity, in order to survive within the school environment. As an adult speaker, he still felt most comfortable speaking in his mother tongue, and spoke Setswana and English with less fluency. He often mentioned that this lack of fluency impacted on his ability to participate effectively in news production processes. He found, for example, that his ability to contribute story ideas in editorial meetings was inhibited. He explained that he first had to conceptualise an idea in his mother tongue and then had to pause to translate his thoughts into the language that was spoken in the newsroom meeting. If the meeting was conducted in English, he would go through two stages of translation – first into Setswana and then to English. Such comments convinced me that Zolani was well placed to help me to better understand how the Bakalanga experience their exclusion from public debate through the use of language.

During the process of looking for potential research participants, Zolani drew my attention to the fact that there was, in fact, one media platform which did make predominant use of Ikalanga. This was a Facebook site entitled 'The History of Bakalanga', of which Zolani himself was a member. On this platform, members discuss general issues related to the social experiences of Bakalanga. He explained to me that members of the group are predominantly Bakalanga – and that they mainly use Ikalanga in their discussions. It seemed to me that access to members of this group would be of benefit to my study. Drawing participants from a pre-constituted group would, firstly, make it easier to identify the desired respondents (Hansen et al., 1998, Strelitz, 2002). In addition, it occurred to me that membership of this platform

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<sup>9</sup> Not his real name

afforded its users the opportunity to think through aspects of their linguistic identity. This might mean that they are particularly well placed to speak in an articulate manner about this subject. For these reasons, I decided that I would include two focus groups in my study, and that one of these groups would consist of members of this Facebook page. Zolani helped me to establish access to the group by putting me in contact with Abel, a member of the Facebook page. Abel had been a member much longer than Zolani and was also much more active in the Facebook discussions. He subsequently became my contact person for the Facebook focus group.

I decided that the second focus group would consist of Kalanga speakers with no affiliation to this Facebook page. The gate-keeper who I identified for the purpose of managing this focus group was a long-time acquaintance, Neu Tshaba<sup>10</sup>. Tshaba is a member of the Bakalanga and I have always known him to express his views freely and eloquently. I knew that he would be able to put me in touch with good candidates for the second focus group and mediate my relationship with them. My intention was also for Tshaba himself to take part in the focus group because he was such an appropriate candidate.

In planning around the selection of the Facebook group's participants, I started from the assumption that most members of this social networking service would be from a similar background. I assumed, more particularly, that they were likely to be members of the middle class, and that they would have experience of university-level education. Because of this, I thought it likely that members of the Bakalanga Facebook group might share similar social experiences, and also hold similar views on their linguistic identity. It therefore seemed important to ensure that the second focus group would contain a more diverse membership. In this way, I would enable myself to explore a wider range of perspectives on the social experiences that form the central focus of this study. I reminded myself that when Morley (1980, 1981) analysed focus group material that dealt with the 'Nationwide' current affairs programme, he established that audiences with different socioeconomic backgrounds gave different meanings to media texts.

I nevertheless wanted to ensure, in my selection of participants, that the members of both focus groups shared certain basic understandings of their linguistic identity and social background. They should, firstly, all be Ikalanga speakers who consider themselves Bakalanga. Secondly, they should be individuals who have migrated from rural environments in which their language is broadly spoken to urban spaces where English and Setswana are dominant. I decided to recruit six individuals for each focus group so that I would be able to interview a

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<sup>10</sup> Not his real name

total of 12 participants. I kept in mind that it is advised within literature about social research that six to ten participants tend to work well for focus groups (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996:160). Such literature further suggests that, when working with focus groups, a researcher should continue to convene sessions with new groups until the information produced by participants becomes repetitive (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996: 160). However, it is also noted that the amount of fieldwork material required for a particular study depends on the aim and scope of the research (Corner, 1996). Considering the limited scope of this study, as well as the limitations of time noted above, I concluded that two groups would provide me with adequate research material.

It should also be remembered that I planned to complement the focus groups with individual interviews. In my judgement, this combination of interviewing methods would allow me to gather enough material to ensure the validity and reliability of the fieldwork process. I took note of the fact that scholars advise that there should be enough participants to stimulate exchange and debate (Deacon et al., 2010:58). My sense was that I could guarantee this in the context of the two focus groups, complemented with individual interviews. I also knew that in qualitative research, validity tends to be obtained through systematic collection and interpretation of data rather than by generalising findings based on a representative sample (see Geertz in Pitout, 1998; Ruddock, 2001). Thus, within such research, the achievement of validity does not depend primarily on a high number of respondents.

Finally, I decided that candidates for the one-on-one interviews would be drawn from the focus groups. The candidates would be purposively selected, based on the respondents' participation during the focus group discussions. Literature states that candidates for one-on-one interviews should be selected based on a predetermined set of screening requirements (Wimmer and Dominick, 2001). In the instance of my research, I decided that I would look for focus group members who are especially articulate in describing their experience as members of a linguistic minority group.

### ***2.2.3.2 Designing the interview questions***

In designing the fieldwork process, I decided to make use of semi-structured interviews for both the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. I knew that, for such interviews, the researcher works from a predetermined interview guide but at the same time also allows for open and creative dialogue (Deacon, 2010; Lindlof, 1995). Literature proposes that, in context of such interviews, the process of questioning and answering takes on the form and feel of an

everyday conversation between two people, becoming open-ended and interactive. This approach enables the researcher to establish a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the views and beliefs of participants than might be possible in the context of a more rigidly structured interview (Lindlof, 1995:164; Deacon et al., 2010). The researcher nevertheless still retains control of the interview in order to ensure that the discussion stays on track (Deacon, 2010; Lindlof, 1995). The achievement of this balance between flexibility and structure seemed to me an important principle to strive for in my research.

I also decided to structure the focus groups around a discussion of moments in the participants' lives that are of significance to this study. I planned, furthermore, to prompt the participants to discuss such moments in chronological order, so that we explored consecutive moments in their life histories. With this in mind, I designed an interview guide that was roughly divided into three stages (see appendix 1). The first stage would deal with participants' lives during the time when they were still living in rural environments. The second stage would trace their migration to towns and cities. The final stage would deal with the way in which they currently experience their own identity as members of a minority language group. In this way, I hoped to tease out the participants' experience of the relationship between language, media and identity, starting from the time when they were still children and ending with their current contexts.

Literature suggests that in interviews dealing with personal memory respondents often present their own history as a coherent story, with a narrative logic that contains a beginning, middle and end point. In such situations, the researcher typically begins by posing a generic question that frames this story-telling process. Respondents then narrate their stories in response to this central question (Strelitz, 2002). My intention was not, however, to conduct detailed and comprehensive biographical research. As noted above, I aimed, rather, to explore specific moments in the respondents' lives that are of relevance to the research question. It was for this reason that I designed the interview guide so that I would be able to prompt participants to speak about their memories of specific moments in their experience of negotiating the transition from rural to urban environments.

The focus would be, firstly, on moments in which they become acutely conscious of their status as members of a minority group in a country where their language has been relegated to private use. Secondly, I wanted to find out about those moments (if any) in which they became aware of the role that their own engagement with media played within such processes. I decided, however, only to prompt for discussion of this second topic if participants did not volunteer to talk about this. The reason for this was that I was curious to find out

whether such references would emerge spontaneously within the interview process. This would provide me with some indication of the extent to which participants were conscious of the media as an aspect of their social world.

### ***2.2.3.3 Planning the interview process***

It is pointed out in guidelines for qualitative fieldwork that the setting in which interviews take place can impact in important ways on the research process. The venue for the interviews should, then, be consciously chosen, keeping in mind the needs of both the researcher and the respondents (Livingstone and Lunt, 1998; Morgan, 1988). Scholars suggest, for example, that such a venue should have a neutral status within the context in which the research is based. They also point out that the venue should be quiet and safe in order to encourage open and reflective discussion (Livingstone and Lunt, 1998).

However, because I was not based in Gaborone at the time of planning this fieldwork process, my options were fairly limited. For this reason, I decided that I could meet the requirements for an appropriate interview venue if I conducted the focus group meetings in my husband's office. This office is in the middle of town, with easy access to public transport for those participants who would not have cars. I was, however, conscious that the city centre is busy during the day and that at least some of the respondents were likely to be at work during this time. Consequently, I planned for the interviews to be conducted during the weekend. In addition, I decided that it would not be appropriate to pin down places and times for the one-on-one interviews in advance of the focus groups. I would, instead, discuss such arrangements with the candidates that I identified for these interviews during the focus group process. I nevertheless noted that, in cases where participants would not have access to an appropriate venue, the same office would be used.

I understood that, as a moderator of the focus group process, my role would be that of facilitating and stimulating the discussion (Hansen et al., 1989). Scholars emphasise that it is important for moderators to reflect carefully on the role that they play within such processes. Ang (1989:97), for example, advises that in studying media consumers, researchers should adopt a critical approach which she describes as "...self-reflective". She emphasises the need to be conscious of the inherent asymmetry of power relations during the production of knowledge that takes place in the context of focus group interviews (Ang, 1989). I planned to acknowledge these dynamics within the focus group process by discussing the need for full participation at the beginning of the meeting. As part of this discussion, I would explain to the

group that the validity of the research depends on such participation and that, for this reason, we needed to ensure that everyone felt able to speak openly. I would also explain that my role is purely that of a facilitator, who listens and asks for clarity if need be. The participants' role would be that of sharing as much of their thoughts and memories as they felt comfortable doing.

I was also aware that my particular cultural background might impede the discussion. I am from the Bangwato, one of the major tribes discussed earlier in this dissertation. Because of this, I was concerned that the respondents might see me as a representative of a social system that threatens their language and culture. I understood that, if this was the case, they would be unlikely to freely share their experiences of social exclusion with me. So I resolved to carefully monitor any impact that I might have on the participants, due to the way I asked questions and made statements. I also decided that, at the beginning of each interview process, I would discuss my personal motivation for conducting this study, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. As part of this discussion, I would describe my own entry into the Bakalanga community, through my marriage to my husband. My hope was that, by disclosing my own interest in the subject in this way, I would help to ensure that the respondents felt comfortable enough to speak openly to me.

#### ***2.2.3.4 Ethical considerations***

Literature advises that studies that involve human beings require special sensitivity. The researcher needs, in particular, to be conscious of the respondents' feelings and rights (Deacon et al., 2010:363). It is, for example, important to be conscious of the possible personal impact that the discussion of the research topic can have on the respondents. This principle is of particular significance within a study such as mine, which deals with social inequality. The discussion of this subject can, under certain conditions, place participants in a position of vulnerability – either emotionally or because open critique of their social conditions may pose a personal threat to them. The potential for either of these kinds of vulnerability needs to be acknowledged within the research process – both by the researcher and the participants (Deacon et al., 2010). In the case of my study, I believed that it was particularly important that the respondents be reminded of the government's attitude towards those who criticise the official language policy. In this way, I could be assured that I had ensured informed consent – with participants consciously agreeing to take part in the research process with full understanding of any risk that it may pose to them.

In order to respond to these requirements, I factored in time at the beginning of each focus group to discuss questions of informed consent and confidentiality. As part of this discussion I intended, as advised by Fritz (2008), to inform the participants about the risks involved in participating in the discussions. I would also speak about the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the focus group. The respondents would, then, be asked if they were prepared to give their full consent with regard to their own participation in the research process. At the same time, they would be made aware that even after providing such consent, they had the option to stop participating at any time during the process, if they so wished to do so (Deacon et al., 2010). I also resolved to inform the respondents that what they told me in the context of the interview process might be referred to in published work. I planned, however, also to explain to them that I would protect their right to confidentiality both through the use of pseudonyms and by storing all transcripts in a safe space (Deacon et al., 2010).

#### **2.2.4 Analysing the interview material**

Literature suggests that interviews on their own are not necessarily a complete account of the respondents' experiences and that, as such, they need to be interpreted to find the meanings that may not be obvious at face value. The researcher is, therefore, advised to look for patterns or themes in the interviews, and then to code them (Jansen 1988; 1982). Coding involves assigning unique labelling to interview comments which contain specific categories of information that follow a certain pattern (Gorden, 1992:118). In analysing the interview material, I planned to look for such patterns. I would then categorise these patterns into themes that could form the basis for analysis. I would refer to these themes in order to interpret what I understood to be the significance of the respondents' comments in the context of my research question. As part of this process, I planned to keep in mind key concepts and themes that emerged in the context of my literature review.

### **2.3 The research process**

This section describes how the research process worked out in practice. This description serves to contextualise changes that I made during this process to my research design. The need for these changes became apparent to me when I had completed the month of fieldwork that I had planned for in Gaborone. As will be explained below, the process of convening the focus groups was only partially successful. For this reason, I decided that I would need to conduct a

second cycle of fieldwork. Due to logistical constraints I was, however, not able to extend my period of stay in Gaborone. I concluded, therefore, that I would have to further my research by conducting long-distance interviews while being based at Rhodes University. In the discussion below I describe the strategies that I adopted in order to ensure that this second stage of fieldwork would remain valid and reliable, despite the challenge of working long-distance. These strategies were informed by insights that I had gained as a result of the interviews that I had been able to complete during my month in Gaborone. I decided, in particular, that the second cycle of interviewing would work best if I changed my fieldwork plan so that I focused exclusively on interviews with members of the Bakalanga Facebook site. The discussion below explains the reason for this decision. It also describes how this decision impacted on a more general reconceptualization of my research objectives.

### **2.3.1 Stage One: Gaborone**

One aspect of the fieldwork in Gaborone that worked well relates to the choice of venues. The meeting with the Facebook focus group was conducted in the foyer of the staff canteen at the national museum. While this is usually a busy area during the week, it turned out to be an ideal venue during the weekend. The focus group with no affiliation to Facebook was held in a small coffee shop, a quiet environment with few distractions. Individual interviews were conducted in the offices of the respective research participants. This was convenient for them and there were virtually no distractions.

I was, however, only partly successful in identifying appropriate candidates for the fieldwork process. I was able to find strong candidates for the Facebook focus group. I had decided that Zolani and Abel<sup>11</sup> would participate in this focus group, because they were both members of the Facebook site. In addition, with Abel's help, I was able to identify very strong candidates in Simisa and Ndie. These focus group members matched a number of the criteria for research candidates described in Section One. All four were Ikalanga speakers who identified themselves as Bakalanga. Further, as was the prerequisite, they had moved from their rural villages where Ikalanga is predominantly spoken and were now living in the city. It is also noteworthy to mention that Simisa and Ndie came from the same village of Sebina – and I was interested in finding out how their memories compared.

I was, however, conscious that I had not been able to realise my initial goal of identifying six candidates for this focus group. In addition, I took note of the fact that the group

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms were used for all participants

profile had some weaknesses. Firstly, Ndie was the only woman who participated, thus creating a gender imbalance in favour of men. Secondly, Ndie had no tertiary education, in contrast to the other three participants. I was concerned that these differences could lead to group dynamics that might inhibit her participation in the focus group discussion. In my judgement I could, however find ways of addressing this problem through the way I facilitated the discussion. I thus felt that, even given the limitations in the number of participants and the differences in their social positioning, this focus group would be able to generate valuable interview material for my study.

Tshaba and I were, nonetheless, only able to find one candidate for the second focus group, besides Tshaba himself. This person, who will be called Thapelo for the purpose of this account, was an Ikalanga speaker who identified himself as belonging to the Bakalanga group. He was, however, born and bred in town – and only visited the village where his family came from during school holidays. I decided to include him because he was likely to respond in valuable ways to aspects of the interview process that were not related to migration from rural to urban places. It was still my conclusion, even at this stage of the fieldwork process, that I had not been successful in identifying appropriate candidates for the second focus group.

The process of convening both focus groups also turned out to be challenging. Scheduled meetings were repeatedly cancelled, due to the unavailability of participants. In the end, it was only in the third week of the fieldwork process that we were able to successfully assemble the Facebook group. In addition, because we were by this stage in the final week of the fieldwork process, we did not have time to organise and conduct more meetings. This focus group discussion nevertheless resulted in thought-provoking interview material.

By the time that we had scheduled for the focus group with participants not affiliated to Facebook, only the two candidates that we had been able to identify were in attendance. We decided to proceed with the meeting, but in practice this did not result in a discussion that could be referred to as a focus group. Although I posed questions to both Tshaba and Thapelo, they seldom responded directly to each other's comments. The discussion seemed to have the status, rather, of two individual interviews. I felt, though, that the interview material that resulted from this process was of some value to the research.

Once the focus group meetings had been convened, I was able to put into practice the accepted guidelines for moderating focus groups. In my own assessment, I was also successful in creating a rapport with the respondents. One important reason for this appeared to be the fact that I shared my personal story of being a non-Kalanga living among the Bakalanga. It

was also important that I gave participants an uninterrupted time to introduce themselves and share personal experiences.

One weakness remained the fact that I do not know Ikalanga, save for basic greetings. In addition, I had decided not to make use of translation, so that the respondents spoke both in Setswana and English. Although these languages were understood by all, it is possible that their discussion may have been more detailed and forthright if they had been able to speak in their mother tongue. I am nevertheless convinced, given the openness with which the participants contributed to the discussion, that these factors did not jeopardise the validity or reliability of my research process.

There were some important distinctions between the kinds of discussions that were possible with the two groups of participants. It became apparent to me, in particular, that they engaged very differently with the discussion of the absence of their own language from the mainstream media. The group that was not affiliated to the Facebook site did not, in fact, have much to say in response to this question. This was despite the fact that I made all efforts to prompt them to link their experiences of social exclusion to the absence of their language in the media. They almost always ended up talking, instead, about the role language played in relation to their education. This is in contrast to the Facebook members who were able to speak about their personal responses to the absence of Ikalanga from the mainstream media.

Because the focus group meetings took place so late in the month that I had available for the fieldwork process, I had too little time left to arrange for individual follow-up interviews. It should be remembered that I planned to conduct these interviews after completing the focus group discussion, since the aim was to select candidates based on their contribution to this process. Furthermore, because fewer participants than expected were present for both focus groups, there were not as many candidates to draw on for the individual interviews as I had hoped for. For both these reasons, I decided to postpone the process of individual interviews.

I was nevertheless successful in conducting two further individual interviews. One of these was with Abel. When we met for a briefing meeting before the Facebook focus group, our discussion evolved into a substantial discussion which addressed all the questions that I had included in my interview guide. I recorded this discussion, and was, therefore, later able to draw on this as part of my fieldwork process. Secondly, I decided also to interview Zolani, given that his background made him an appropriate research candidate. In this way, both Abel and Zolani shared rich and detailed accounts of their lives with me.

### **2.3.2 Stage Two: Rhodes University**

On my return to Rhodes, at the conclusion of my month of fieldwork, I reflected on the success of my work. I was conscious, firstly, that the overall profile of the individuals I had succeeded in interviewing was fairly homogenous. The respondents were predominantly men who had at least a tertiary education and also had fulltime jobs. I concluded that one reason for this was that five of these individuals were participants in the Facebook site, which tends to be dominated by individuals from this social category. It occurred to me that the subject matter of my study might have been intimidating to candidates from other social backgrounds because their perception may have been that the discussion would require them to understand debates around language policy. Secondly, I was concerned about the fact that I had not succeeded in conducting interviews with the number of candidates than I had planned for. I had wanted to include at least 12 participants, and had ended up with six.

I was, at the same time, happy that the interviews that I had been able to conduct had provided me with rich material. Participants from both focus group sessions spoke openly to me about their personal experiences of social exclusion linked to their linguistic identity. My sense was that the discussions that I conducted with members of the Facebook group were particularly valuable. As I had predicted, these individual had established sophisticated terms of reference for reflecting on their own engagement with the relationship between language and media. Their comments about their engagement with the mainstream media were, indeed, more articulate than that which emerged in the context of the two individuals who did not belong to the Facebook group.

Based on the above reflection, I decided that the second cycle of my fieldwork would focus on members of the Facebook site. This was, of course, partly a matter of convenience, because of the practical difficulties that I faced with regard to returning to Gaborone. It was feasible, in other words, to conduct long-distance interviews with members of a Facebook group from my location at Rhodes University. Convenience was, however, not the only reason for my decision to prioritise these research candidates. The quality of the discussion that emerged from the Facebook focus group had convinced me that I could gain substantial insights into my research question by working with members of this website. For this reason, I felt that it was acceptable to compromise on my initial commitment towards ensuring diversity in the social background of respondents. I was now convinced that the fundamental question could still be answered without ensuring such diversity. Despite their status as members of an educated middle class, users of the Facebook group could respond to questions about a minority

group's experience of exclusion from mainstream media through the absence of their language. Also, they were still representative of people who have migrated from rural to urban environments.

I also decided to include additional questions in my interview guide relating to the participants' experience of being involved in the Facebook site as a platform that represented an alternative to the mainstream media. In doing so, my intention was not to change the focus of the research question. The overall aim of the research was still to explore the implications, for the participants of the absence of their own language from the mainstream media. I was conscious, however, that the comments that these participants could make about the role that the Facebook site played in their lives as an alternative to mainstream media could, in fact, assist in answering this question.

With these goals in mind, I launched a further set of discussions, conducted on-line with the focus group participants<sup>12</sup> that I met in Gaborone – that is, Zolani, Abel, Simisa and Ndie. To facilitate this process, I set up a Facebook inbox that would enable me to conduct group conversations with these individuals. I followed this up with individual interviews conducted through Skype.

I observed that the participants were not as forthcoming during these conversations as they had been when interviewed face to face in Gaborone. Some chose, in fact, not to participate. Those who did participate took a long time to respond, and only did so when the questions were sent as a 'private chat'. I concluded that one reason for this reluctance might be that the participants did not feel confident in expressing themselves in writing, especially in a 'public' platform. I was nevertheless able to use these conversations in order to pick up the threads of discussion that I had begun in Gaborone, and fill in important gaps in my understanding with regard to the participants' social experiences and perspectives.

With the help of Zolani and Abel, I was also able to identify six more candidates for interviews from the Facebook site. Their selection was based on their active participation on Facebook. I was able to involve three of these candidates in my research process. All three come from predominantly Ikalanga speaking areas in the northern Botswana. Mose comes from Sebina, the same village as Simisa and Ndie. Shanda came from Matobo village while Mbaaka comes from Nlapkhwane. Like Matobo and Sebina, Nlapkhwane is a small, rural village on the northern side of Botswana. It is also in a predominantly Ikalanga speaking area. Shanda, who was studying medicine at the University of Cape Town at the time of this research, is the

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<sup>12</sup> The study used pseudonyms for all participants

founder of 'The History of Bakalanga' Facebook platform. Mose is a practising lawyer while Mbaaka is an accountant. Although initially six agreed to take part in the discussion, only these three became active participants in the research. These participants did not seem willing to participate in a group setting. I therefore made use of telephone and Skype to conduct interviews with them.

During these interviews I followed the same guidelines that I had referred to during my fieldwork in Gaborone. I began the process of interviewing by introducing myself and explaining my personal experiences as they relate to the topic. This, in my observation, helped to make the respondents comfortable with me, so that they were able to trust me with their stories. They were eloquent and discussed the subject of study with ease.

#### **2.4 Analysing the interview material and writing up the findings**

I transcribed all the interviews, and as part of this process, translated those conversations that had taken place in Setswana into English. In doing so, I was conscious of the need to stay as close as possible to the actual meaning of what the participants had said. Thereafter I proceeded with the coding of the interview material. I found that it was possible to identify coherent themes and patterns within the discussions by clustering together statements made about particular 'moments' in the participants' lives. These moments included, for example, their reflection on their life experience when they were still living with their parents before they started school. There was also the phase in their lives which encompassed their move from rural villages to cities and towns. Discussion of this phase dealt with the participants' experience of the relationship between language and identity from the time that they were still children to their current context. Another important 'moment' was represented by their experience of first entering a new educational environment – first that of primary and secondary school and then later that of higher education. I became aware through this process of coding that it was at these moments of entry that the participants became more conscious of belonging to a minority language group. This observation became an important point of reference within my analysis.

As the final stage in the process of analysis, I mapped out the insights that I had come to in this way in two separate chapters of the dissertation. Chapter three thus addresses the respondents' description of their general experience of social exclusion, due to being members of a minority language group. Chapter four then addresses the question of their engagement with media. I understand the discussion outlined in Chapter three to represent an important

backdrop to the exploration of the participants' experience of media in the next chapter. It is, indeed, my understanding that the general aspects of their social experience described in this chapter have important implications for their relationship with the media. This is particularly true for the participants' discussion of their educational history, which provides important terms of reference for what they then go on to say about their engagement with the media in Chapter four. Furthermore, by representing my findings in this way, I was able to demonstrate how little consciousness there had been within the group in the earlier parts of their lives with regard to their own exclusion from the media. In chapter four I was able to demonstrate that such exclusion became apparent to them only on reflection later in their lives.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research plan for this study, and discussed and evaluated my implementation of this plan. The discussion acknowledges that this process of implementation required a mid-stream change of plan, which demonstrates how important flexibility and responsiveness is within qualitative research. In retrospect, I am confident that these changes enabled me to ensure the generation of valuable research material. They did not require that I change my research question, nor did they compromise the overall validity and reliability of the research process. The use of the two interview methods – that of focus groups and individual in-depth interviews – helped me to produce a rich and coherent body of interview material. I was able, finally, to subject the interviews to a rigorous process of analysis, guided by a conceptual framework that was of direct relevance to this material.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEWS PART I: EDUCATION, URBANISATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter is a discussion of the interviews that were conducted for this study. It deals with the research participants' recollection of significant moments in their experience of moving from a rural home environment to urban spaces. The focus is on the role that this experience played in their conceptualisation of their own status as members of a minority language group. Particular attention is paid to the role that engagement with media played within this process.

The first three sections of the chapter are structured chronologically. As such, the discussion deals firstly with the participants' comments about aspects of their lives from the time when they were still living in rural environments and then traces their migration to towns and cities. The division between sections, in this part of the chapter, is informed by the observation that the participants' understanding of the relationship between language and identity is defined both by their experience of urbanisation and by their exposure to formal education. With this in mind, Part One deals with the participants' experience of the relationship between language and identity while they were still children, before they started school. It is demonstrated that, during this time, most of the participants were not highly conscious of their own membership of a minority language group. Part Two, which is more detailed and extensive, examines their experience at primary and secondary school and then later of higher education. It is, as we will see, within particular moments in their experience of such education that participants became more conscious of belonging to a minority language group. Part Three overlaps with the latter part of the period described in Part Two but the focus now turns to the participants' experience of the transition from their rural homes to urban environments. This section describes the participants' understanding of the way this move and the subsequent process of 'settling in' impacted on their linguistic identity. It also deals with their description of the role that their rural homes have continued to play in their lives and the significance that this relationship to home holds for their linguistic identity.

### 3.2 Life at home before contact with school

Many of the participants noted that, during early childhood, they lived in what they refer to as ‘*masimo*’<sup>13</sup>. They generally stated that they spoke only Ikalanga at this time – and had limited or no contact with any other languages, including Setswana. Most of them also explained that they lived with their grandparents rather than their own parents. This experience is captured by one of the respondents’ description of family life:

I grew up in the country side in Sebina. I was raised by my grandmother who is a farmer. She stayed most of the time at *masimo*. She speaks predominantly Kalanga and does not speak Setswana that much. She understands very little of Setswana ... I have always been very close to my grandmother ... and we spoke Ikalanga [only] (Abel, 2013).

The fact that so many of the participants were raised by their grandparents can be regarded as significant within the context of this study. Some of the respondents indicated that their grandparents had lived all their lives between *masimo* and the village. They described them as members of a generation that have not been exposed to the forces of ‘modernisation’ to the extent that might be true for younger individuals. Most of the participants indicated, for example, that their grandparents had not had exposure to formal education. Those who did attend lower primary school did so at a time when Ikalanga was still the primary medium of instruction. Because of this, most of the grandparents had not experienced the emphasis on English and Setswana that, as we saw in chapter one, became prioritised within government schools in Botswana in the 1970s. In this part of their childhood, then, the social identity of the participants’ primary care-givers ensured that their linguistic environment was exclusively that of Ikalanga. This was further emphasised by Mbaaka:

My grandparents ... grew up with no contact at all with people who speak a different language. This was before a lot of mingling and moving around. They stayed in one area; they were not exposed to other cultures (Mbaaka, 2013).

The participants also explained that, within the environments of their early childhood, there was little evidence of formal government interventions into social development. They referred, for example, to the absence of primary education, primary health care and police services. Zolani explained, in this context, that he was born in his parents’ mud hut because the nearest hospital was based in a village far away from the *masimo* where they lived. Likewise, Simisa commented that health officials visited their *masimo* only “once in a while”. Other participants

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<sup>13</sup> These are cultivated areas situated a considerable distance from the local village where each family would have a few hectares of land on which they can grow crops for subsistence.

noted that in those instances where government services were available to them, an emphasis on the official languages of Setswana and English operated as a barrier to communication. In order to demonstrate this point, Zolani referred to an error on his national identity card which describes him as being three years older than his actual age. He explained that his mother only spoke Ikalanga, which made communication with the government officials responsible for his registration difficult, leading to the error on his identity card. The same experience was also pointed out by Mbaaka. His grandmother and uncle's ages were incorrectly captured on their identity cards, describing his grandmother as being younger than her own son, Mbaaka's uncle.

Mbaaka also described how his extended family members struggled to fill in government forms for temporary employment in a drought relief programme. The programme offered community members menial jobs in the local village – and employment was usually based on a 'first come first served' basis. Mbaaka stated that families that did not speak Setswana would usually lose out on these opportunities because the application forms were available in Setswana only.

The participants generally indicated that, at this stage in their lives, education did not play a primary role within the construction of their relationship to language. Some suggested that, if there had been access to pre-school educational facilities within their home environments, it is likely that they would have had more exposure to Setswana at this stage in their lives. The same point was made about primary schooling, which was sometimes available but to which it was difficult to gain access. A number of the respondents pointed out that they had to walk long distances if they wanted to attend such schools. One such individual is Simisa, who explained that he walked 10 kilometres every day in order to attend school. Most of the participants noted, however, that in order to go to school, they had to move away from home to more 'developed' areas such as that of local villages. In such instances, they would stay for the whole school term and return home only when schools close. Many of the participants noted that it was in this context that they first became exposed to linguistic environments in which English and Setswana were dominant. As we will see in the next section, they generally agreed that they faced serious challenges in adapting to these environments.

### **3.3 The participants' experience of education**

#### **3.3.1 Primary school**

A number of the participants noted that, initially, they struggled to adapt to the institutional culture of formal schooling. Abel explained that he sensed that he was expected to adjust his behaviour when he was on school premises. There was a need to "...behave in a certain manner", since this was a different environment from home, with different rules. It would seem, then, that even apart from the challenges of adapting to a new language environment, entry into formal schooling required participants to adapt to a new way of life.

For most of the respondents, however, it was the need to adapt to a linguistic environment dominated by Setswana that defined their experience of primary school. They described this process of adaptation as a significant moment in the shaping of their identity as members of a minority language group. They explained that, within primary school education, as a matter of policy, the use of Ikalanga was forbidden on school premises. In the first two years of schooling, the medium of instruction was Setswana, while from the third year onwards, children were taught in English. For many of the participants this created an intimidating learning environment. It was in such terms that Ndie talked about her early memories of school. She explained that there was in fact a school in Sebina, a village close to the masimo where her family lived. This meant that, in theory, she could have lived in Sebina while attending school. There was, however, a river that separated her masimo from Sebina. Her parents were worried that she would miss school during the rainy season when the river flooded. For this reason, they sent her to school much further away in Francistown where she could stay with her relatives during the school term. Ndie described her first days at school in Francistown as traumatising:

I was put in a class with so many children, all of whom spoke Setswana, I did not speak Setswana and I also did not understand it. The teacher standing in front of me did not speak my language, but I was expected to learn and understand what the teacher was saying. That was a challenge ... The teacher was there but I did not understand anything she was saying. It was so tough ... that many times I spent the whole day crying in class (Ndie, 2013).

It is important to remember that, like most of the respondents, Ndie had left behind the familiarity of the rural environment in which she had spent her early childhood and now confronted a very different social setting. Francistown is the largest urban settlement in the northern part of Botswana. One could argue, then, that the trauma that Ndie experienced also had to do with the challenges of adapting to formal schooling and to urban life.

It would seem, however, that even for those who were able to attend school close to home, adaption to a learning environment dominated by Setswana posed major difficulties. This can be seen from Mose's description of his first days at school. He, like Ndie, lived close to Sebina – but unlike Ndie, he started his education in the local primary school. His description of this experience is in many ways very similar to Ndie's:

When I started my primary education, in 1990 at Sebina Primary School, the only language I could speak was Ikalanga. I was received in a hostile environment where I would be scolded and at times receive a few strokes on the back for speaking this language I was born to know as my identity. It was so tough (Mose, 2013).

Zolani described his first exposure to primary school in Nshakazhogwe in similar terms:

The moment you entered the classroom, only Setswana was allowed. I opted to keep quiet, this language really scared me. I used to panic whenever the teacher approached my desk to ask me to read. It was tough ... I was struggling because I had a Setswana pressure (Zolani, 2013).

Zolani explained that the difficulty involved in learning within an environment in which the medium of instruction was Setswana resulted in him being "...an academically challenged child from standard one to two". Before he started school Zolani had not had contact with any other language group except Basarwa. He explained that, because of this lack of exposure, he only knew Ikalanga and a few Sesarwa words.

Some of the respondents noted that they were unable to adapt to this learning environment. Ndie explained that it was for this reason that, after a year of struggling to learn Setswana in Francistown, her mother moved her back home. She then attended Sebina Primary School, where she was required to repeat her first year of schooling:

I had to repeat a standard when I got to Sebina – starting standard one from scratch while my age mates were proceeding, just because of language (Ndie, 2013).

In Sebina, Ndie was better able to cope with the challenges of adapting to school because her teachers understood Ikalanga and used this knowledge to help students to learn Setswana:

It was better because the teacher used to explain Setswana to me until I understood it (Ndie, 2013).

A similar anecdote formed part of Mbaaka's explanation of his early primary school years. He went to school in Nlapkhwane, where his teachers spoke Ikalanga which, he said, made the learning experience pleasant:

Setswana was part of our subjects but because we had a chance of expressing ourselves in our mother tongue it was better (Mbaaka, 2013).

These descriptions suggest that the participants were better able to learn Setswana when they were based in environments in which they still had recourse to their mother tongue.

The participants who lived at home while attending primary school noted that, while school premises were designated ‘no Ikalanga’ areas, their parents often declared their homes ‘non Setswana’ areas. It is in such terms that Zolani described the rules that applied within his family home:

My mother never used to allow us to speak Setswana; she would get very cross (Zolani, 2013).

These participants explained that this meant that they could not practise Setswana outside school and, as a result, they took longer to master the language. This, in turn, impacted on their academic progress:

...back home it was not encouraged, such that what you were taught in school you could not go and practice at home at all. You could be punished at home for practising that language and then be punished at school for not practising. Outside school there was no other place I could learn Setswana, so you see it was a challenge (Abel, 2013).

The importance of being exposed to Setswana outside the school environment was further demonstrated by respondents who moved to Setswana-dominated areas from predominantly Ikalanga speaking areas. They explained that, within these environments, they were able to practice Setswana outside school premises, and consequently became conversant in Setswana. As a result, they developed confidence in their own ability to learn, which led to a steady improvement in their school work. It was in such terms that Abel described his move from Sebina, his home village to a school in Kgatleng, a predominantly Setswana speaking area:

That is how things started improving... I could now appreciate and learn Setswana and become comfortable. I improved and gained confidence in my studies and became better in class. In Kgatleng it was easy to practise Setswana outside [the] classroom and it was sort of mandatory to practise inside and outside the classroom. In terms of Setswana I became comfortable after moving out of the Kalanga area. I topped the class ... I even ... did better than children ... from Setswana [regions] like Kgatleng (Abel, 2013).

Simisa made a similar comment in relation to his experience of moving to his father’s household in Selebi Phikwe, a mining town in central Botswana. He described this move as “fortunate” because their “neighbours were Tswana” (Simisa, 2013).

A number of the respondents also noted that they found learning in English much easier than learning in Setswana. They generally suggested that, after the transition to English as a

medium of instruction in their third year of schooling, they experienced a general improvement in their school grades. Zolani described this as an empowering experience:

...I liked the English words. I still remember that the first time I passed; it was an English spelling test, not Setswana (Zolani, 2013).

They explained that this was because there was less pressure, both within and outside the school environment, to speak English perfectly. Abel noted, in demonstration, that whereas he was expected to adopt the accent of a first language speaker when he spoke Setswana, the same requirement did not apply to his use of English:

I picked English first, so to speak, because I could speak English much easier without having to refine my Kalanga tone ... I could read in English better than I could read in Setswana ... to speak Setswana I had to adjust my tone so it was tough (Abel, 2013).

The respondents' comments point to a struggle with adapting to a new environment which does not recognise their linguistic identity.

At this stage, the participants were still children, and most of them had not had contact with any other language except Setswana. It was, therefore, understandable that they found the emphasis on Setswana traumatic. The anecdotes that they shared above suggest that this experience of trauma was exacerbated by the fact that there were no systems of support in place to help them through this drastic change.

### **3.3.2 Secondary school**

The respondents' descriptions of their experiences of secondary school suggest that it was at this stage that they first began to reflect consciously on the significance of their status as minority language speakers. A number of them explained that one reason for this was the existence, within these schools, of groups of Bakalanga students who met informally to discuss questions relating to their own linguistic and cultural identity. Members of these groups, which tended to consist of students in their senior years, pointed out to them that their culture and language are not recognised at national level. They encouraged them to embrace and promote their own language.

Zolani noted that it was through exposure to such discussions at Shashe River School that he first became conscious that his own language was not recognised within national policy:

...we thought Setswana was a Sesarwa dialect that is why we used to look down upon Setswana speakers. But when I got to Shashe, it was the reverse of that, I realised that in fact Setswana speakers are superior to us (Zolani, 2013).

This description points to a subjugation of the Basarwa by the Bakalanga. This is noteworthy given that the respondents complained about their dominance by the Setswana speaking groups.

Another context in which the respondents came to confront their own status as speakers of a minority language was represented by the history classes that they attended at school. They pointed out that the history syllabus that formed part of their secondary education described Botswana as consisting of only eight tribes. Shanda noted that the construction of Botswana's history presented within this syllabus contained very few references to the existence of other groups, including the Bakalanga:

The history books were detailed on the eight major tribes but mentioned other groups only in passing, including my tribe, so I grew up knowing a lot about other groups but not mine (Shanda, 2013).

A similar experience can be observed in Abel's explanation of the kind of stories that were used within this syllabus to define the history of Botswana:

[In our history lessons] ... the teachers only highlighted the three chiefs who went to England to seek protection. These chiefs, from the major tribes, are a major part of the historical narrative ... and there is no way this kind of narrative could include other tribes like the Basarwa, Batswapong, Bakalanga (Abel, 2013).

A number of the participants mentioned that they looked for opportunities to discuss their responses to this selective construction of history with fellow Ikalanga-speaking students. Repeatedly, they found such an opportunity within the debating club at their different schools. The debates that took place in these clubs were often concerned with the role that tribal and linguistic identity plays in the social exclusion of the Bakalanga. Within such discussion, reference was also made to the absence of Ikalanga from the media:

...one of the issues we discussed was tribalism – and the examples that were used was the absence of Ikalanga – that it was neither taught in schools nor was it used on the radio (Tshaba, 2013).

Such anecdotes suggest that the respondents saw the debating clubs as environments in which they could express their displeasure at the marginalisation of their own language. The clubs provided them, more particularly, with the opportunity to articulate critical responses to the exclusion of their own people from the representations of their social environment that was offered to them at school, for example in the context of history lessons. It may be that, in this way, they began to develop terms of reference that enabled them to make sense of debates about language in Botswana and their own location within such debates.

The respondents generally agreed that, as they proceeded to the senior years of high school, they became more confident in their understanding of the status that was accorded to their language within national language policy. Zolani noted that, due to this realisation, his attitude towards Setswana hardened. This also applied to other Ikalanga speakers in his class:

This realisation made us very resistant. I was among a group of Kalangas who used to refuse to read Setswana when we were asked so by the teachers (Zolani, 2013).

Abel explained that he, too, was a member of a group of Ikalanga speakers who expressed such opposition. This group was particularly resistant to submitting themselves to Setswana as a subject of study because, besides the unfairness of being forced to learn Setswana, they did not need it for their career advancement:

We were not interested in doing well in Setswana and we told our teachers that we did not want Setswana; that career-wise there was nothing we would do with it. We were okay with our sciences, agriculture and all these other subjects (Abel, 2013).

Simisa stated, similarly, that he "... resented... Setswana" and he felt like it "... was a waste of time" (Simisa, 2013). Mbaaka noted that, although he excelled in other subjects, he did not put as much effort into the study of Setswana. This so strained his relationship with his Setswana teacher that he eventually decided to stop attending Setswana lessons:

I could top the whole school in mathematics, science, design, and do well in other subjects but get a zero in Setswana ... so our Setswana teacher ... thought I was disrespecting her. I ended up not writing Setswana in my final Junior Certificate examinations (Mbaaka, 2013).

Zolani also explained that he almost did not sit for the Setswana examinations as a way of showing his displeasure with being forced to sacrifice his language for Setswana.

It seems, however, that while the participants were starting to make sense of the national language policy and its significance to them, they may not have fully grasped the way that resistance to such a policy could impact on their lives. This can be seen in Mbaaka's description of his decision to not sit for the Setswana examination. He stated that he was not aware that, as in the case of English and Mathematics, he needed to pass Setswana in the junior secondary school examinations in order to gain admission to senior secondary school:

I sat for only six subjects and I passed most of them with a distinction ... but to my surprise I was not admitted for senior secondary school ... [I did not] know that ... [Setswana] ... was one of the core subjects that determined your passage to senior secondary school (Mbaaka, 2013).

Fortunately, Mbaaka had older siblings who, after learning that he had not been accepted into senior secondary school, registered him as a private candidate to continue his studies:

I was lucky because my senior siblings picked [up] quickly why I was not admitted and they ... sponsored me to study as an independent learner. I managed to get 6As, 3B s and an F in Setswana in my Senior Secondary Schools final examinations ... and went on to become a chartered accountant (Mbaaka, 2013).

Such anecdotes can be seen to demonstrate that lack of recognition of linguistic and cultural identity within the education system can easily result in children dropping out of school, even when they generally do well at their studies. It is also of interest to note that, in contrast to the description of primary school, the stories that the participants told about secondary school contained references to support structures that helped them to contend with the challenge of surviving in a second-language educational environment. It is, however, also striking that the reference is always to their older peers at school and to family members. These individuals were, perhaps, able to provide such support because, previously, they had experienced the same processes that the participants were now going through themselves – that of being forced to adopt a new relationship to their own linguistic identity. At the same time, it would seem that there was little recognition within the secondary school system itself of the need to provide formal support for minority language speakers. Instead, the environment seemed hostile and indifferent to how students felt about the absence of their language and culture in the school curriculum.

### **3.3.3 Tertiary Education**

For most of the participants, going to tertiary institutions meant leaving predominantly Ikalanga speaking areas for Setswana dominated ones. Perhaps because of this, their experience of higher education was characterised by an even sharper consciousness of the ways in which their own status as minority language speakers operated to oppress them. One reason for this was that, within these tertiary institutions, many of the participants were subjected to discriminatory behaviour from Setswana-speaking students. They noted, for example, that it was at this stage in their lives that they first experienced verbal abuse because of speaking Setswana in an “Ikalanga accent”:

...we now became aware that our Setswana accent was not refined so we could feel some repulsion when we spoke Setswana in our accent (Tshaba, 2013).

In addition, Setswana students would routinely make derogatory remarks about Ikalanga as a language. Abel noted, for example, that such remarks would occur whenever he and his Ikalanga friends spoke to each other in their own language within hearing distance of other students. He explained that such students would often refer to Ikalanga as “noise”, with the suggestion that it was disruptive nonsense rather than a meaningful form of communication:

I came into a society where we could just be told off, ‘you guys are making so much noise with your Ikalanga’... we felt like we were really in the minority (Abel, 2013).

Tshaba remembers instances in which Ikalanga was described as “gossip” – again suggesting that it is not possible to converse seriously in this language:

...the native Setswana speakers will say you are gossiping just because you are speaking Ikalanga ... they have relegated it to that level. They believe you can only speak it when you gossip. So when they want to stop you from using it, they just say, ‘you are gossiping’, they just cut your ego (Tshaba, 2013).

These experiences are not confined to tertiary institutions in Botswana only. Shanda, who is a student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, noted that Setswana speaking students at this institution would behave in similar ways towards Ikalanga speakers. He mentioned a few occasions when these students, who are also from Botswana, would ask him and his Bakalanga friends to stop using Ikalanga (Shanda, 2013). He noted that such students internalised the belief that Ikalanga belonged to the historical past while Setswana language and culture were representative of modern life. The respondents agreed that these comments from their fellow students made them feel that Ikalanga did, indeed, belong to the past.

Most of the respondents suggested that the reason why such students were intolerant towards Bakalanga and their language was because they had not had contact with Ikalanga before coming to university. Mose, for example, believed that “...many people ... had never heard a person speak Ikalanga before”. They also pointed out, however, that it is noteworthy that Setswana-speaking students’ reaction to a new language would be that of hostility rather than fascination or interest in an opportunity to learn a new language. For this reason, Thapelo suggests that students’ resistance to the public verbalisation of Ikalanga does not only point to ignorance but also operates as a form of intolerance. He proposed that this response results at least partly from the fact that, in Botswana, the marginalisation of Ikalanga is embedded in formal policy, both in tertiary institutions and more generally. The suggestion is, then, that this institutionalisation of social exclusion encourages a culture of intolerance towards Bakalanga:

By not allowing Ikalanga in the public space and officialdom, the government is teaching the public that the speakers of this language are

second class citizens whose language doesn't deserve to be on radio or in a book (Thapelo, 2013).

A number of the respondents explained that such responses from fellow students affected their self-esteem, and also that of other Ikalanga speaking students. For this reason, they increasingly avoided speaking their own language and started, instead, to adopt a 'Setswana identity'. Mose described the behaviour of some of his friends from secondary school days in this way. He noted that, when they came to university, they began to avoid any association with Ikalanga:

I have seen many young people I grew up with shun Ikalanga and would be at pains to distance themselves from the language. To them, Ikalanga is a backward language that doesn't sit well with modernity. Modernity sits well with Tswana. They want to be seen to be a part of modernity and cannot be stuck in the use of this outdated language and its culture (Mose, 2013).

Abel explained that such behaviour applied even when Ikalanga-speaking students were amongst themselves, away from the scrutiny of Setswana speakers:

Some wanted to disassociate themselves from the language or the Kalanga identity. They viewed Ikalanga as minor. My age mates ... at the university ... could not speak Ikalanga when we were in the minority. We would speak to them in Ikalanga but they would answer back in Setswana or in English (Abel, 2013).

Other respondents noted that exposure to the prejudice of their peers prompted them into taking deliberate and visible steps in order to demonstrate that they have the right to express their linguistic and cultural identity without fear of recrimination. This was, for example, how Tshaba describes his own response to prejudice:

Somehow that discrimination galvanised me such that I decided I am Kalanga and I have to show it, no matter the barriers (Tshaba, 2013).

Some of the respondents formed friendship groups with membership limited to Ikalanga speakers. They used these groups as support structures to help them cope in an intimidating and hostile environment. Abel noted that he and his group of friends at the University of Botswana would, in demonstration, walk as a group to most places around the university campus. He suggested that this helped ease the pressure of being despised by the dominant and intolerant Setswana speaking student community:

We would go to lecture halls and cafeteria together, the television room together to watch games such that where we were we became a sort of a majority such that we did not feel isolated. You surrounded yourself with five to seven friends and you made noise against the other groups. It helped us to have a sense of belonging (Abel, 2013).

Such groups would use language as a way of asserting their own identity in public spaces. Some groups did so by speaking Ikalanga at every opportunity, both on and outside the university campus. Abel noted that this operated as a way of making Setswana-speakers conscious of their presence as Bakalanga:

...we decided that we should stick to our language and we will not hide from the majority Setswana speakers and avoid speaking Ikalanga. We were outspoken ... such that we could use Ikalanga everywhere. At times we would go to the extent of addressing other people that we were aware were not Bakalanga, addressing them in Ikalanga in taxis, and public areas, shops and all those places (Abel; 2013).

He noted that, as much as they themselves had embraced Setswana, they expected Setswana speaking students to also understand and embrace them:

...we wanted them to appreciate us in the same manner that we appreciated them ... because we knew Setswana ... their language, their culture; we also wanted to be understood. Therefore my concern at university was to speak Ikalanga everywhere freely without apologising. I didn't care whether anybody was offended ... I wouldn't switch my language when speaking to Ikalanga speaking people ... for the convenience of the audience or environment I was in (Abel, 2013).

Other groups opted, instead, to speak English. Tshaba, who formed part of such a group, explained that they chose to do so because English was a foreign language to almost all students on campus. In addition, it was a language that provided speakers with a high degree of authority. Thus, to speak English operated as a way of levelling the playing field for Bakalanga. Instead of being victimised for speaking their own language, they were respected for their ability to master a language of power:

I preferred communicating in English since it is a foreign language to all of us; it blurred the differences between language groups. There was also prominence attached to predominantly speaking English. When you used only English you were highly regarded such that we could get back at anybody who mocked us for not knowing Setswana. We would tell them that they also did not know English (Tshaba, 2013).

Members of these groups also motivated each other to achieve academic excellence. Abel explained that they decided to “outsmart” the Setswana-speakers on campus as a way of claiming the university as a space they could also dominate:

We [resolved] to excel academically to prove that indeed we are not inferior, we decided to become dominant. We agreed that we should do better than others as a proof of superiority. We wanted to tilt the scales such that we can at least be in control in the classroom, although outside other groups dominated us (Abel, 2013).

It is of note that on realising that they were not winning in the language ‘war’ between Ikalanga and Setswana, they decided to find their place of dominance elsewhere. It is possible to assume that this strategy is an avoidance tactic, side-stepping the need to confront the subjugation of Ikalanga as a language and accepting the status quo. Alternatively, it can equally be seen to point to the respondents’ resolve to improve their visibility as legitimate members of the campus community.

### **3.4 Debates about linguistic identity: different points of view**

It should be clear from the participants’ comments so far that, while they were children and young adults, all of them relocated a few times to new environments. These relocations usually occurred when they reached a new stage in their educational histories. They moved, for example, from the lands to local villages and towns to start primary school; from there to new towns and villages to start secondary school and then, finally, to cities for tertiary education and subsequent employment.

The stories that the participants told about these patterns of relocation generally indicated that each move triggered in them a heightened consciousness of their own status as speakers of a minority language. Each adaptation to a new environment involved an attempt to make sense of the role that language played in defining their social experience and sense of identity. These moments also seemed to operate as times for reflection regarding their own responses to debates about linguistic and cultural identity.

By the time they had finally settled into particular urban environments, they had developed well-articulated positions within these debates. It was, indeed, possible to identify a number of different ways in which the participants now located themselves within such debate. One position was demonstrated by Simisa, who stated that, despite his original experience of marginalisation, he had come to believe in the importance of promoting Setswana as an official language. He argued that, although the official promotion of Setswana disadvantages non-Setswana speakers, it also played an important role in unifying the country. For this reason it was, in his view, not constructive to lay claim to one’s own tribal or linguistic identity at the expense of the project of nation building. He explained that when he interacts with people from other countries he often finds himself criticising those individuals who define their own identity in relation to their tribal background first rather than their country of origin. He argues that although, at community level, people should be encouraged to use their language

and practise their culture, tribal differences should not be visible at national level. Instead, the national culture and language should take precedence:

Although I have always believed that Setswana was a stumbling block in a way, I have a feeling that it also unified us ... Take people from other nations for example, they [identify] themselves with their tribes; I am Kikuyu, I am Luo, you see that is not what I prefer. That is why the Setswana situation is a bit complicated for me. I believe it played a positive role (Simisa, 2013).

Another position, demonstrated by Mbaaka and Tshaba, was to express one's location within the politics of language by drawing a firm distinction between the personal and the political. Mbaaka, for example, noted that for most of his life he had a hostile relationship with Setswana and Setswana speakers. However, after living among Setswana speakers, his attitude towards them softened. He now felt that it was wrong to blame them for how the Bakalanga are treated because "...it is not them but the education policy and government" who are the authors of the discriminatory laws. He explained that this realisation has helped him to come to terms with the realities of living in a social environment dominated by Setswana. Tshaba explained his change in attitude in similar ways. He started to view the negative attitudes of Setswana speakers as indicative of their low self-esteem, rather than being indicative of discrimination against Bakalanga. This, he explained, is a change of attitude that he shared with many of the Ikalanga speaking friends that he grew up with:

...we became more tolerant ... we felt that some of the Setswana speakers do not really mean to discriminate but rather to feel important ... I had my own way of looking at it, not just because it was inculcated in me in the earlier years. Now I had my own views, own ideas (Tshaba, 2013).

It is evident that neither Mbaaka nor Tshaba relinquished the position of critique that they had adopted in their secondary school days because of a change in attitude towards them by Setswana speakers. Instead, they became more accepting of the status quo because they themselves changed the way in which they personally reflected on their own social environment.

Mose expressed a third position, which emphasized the importance of preserving the linguistic and cultural identity of minority groups. He believes that one of the best ways to preserve language is orally, using it in the everyday life and in this way passing on knowledge of language from one generation to the next. He noted, however, that whereas in the rural environment of his family home people emphasise the use of Ikalanga, this no longer holds true in the context of urban life. In cities and towns, the Bakalanga "... don't speak to their children in Ikalanga but Setswana". He suggested that this shift in behaviour occurs as a result

of the “indoctrination” that takes place through, for example, the schooling system. This system is so effective that people do not even realise that by not using Ikalanga, “... the numbers of Ikalanga speakers diminish generation after generation, which is a recipe for extinction”.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the research participants’ recollection of significant moments in their experience of moving from a rural home environment to urban spaces. The focus is on the role this experience played in their conceptualisation of their own status as members of a minority language group. Generally, the respondents’ comments support the theories discussed in Chapter One, in which it is proposed that the marginalisation of language groups leads to social exclusion. Such exclusion can, furthermore, be seen to impact on the ability of members of such groups to access rights that are associated with citizenship. These include the right to the acknowledgement of their own dignity, the right to access decent education, and to other services such as primary health care and assistance from the police. The respondents’ comments can indeed be seen to support the view that the existing language policy in Botswana contributes to the social exclusion of the Bakalanga. This marginalisation, it is clear, is not confined to the impact of law but is also linked to the general society’s perception of the Bakalanga.

The participants’ descriptions of bigoted responses to their language also demonstrate the argument, presented by theorists referred to in Chapter One, that those who ‘imagine’ a community different from the dominant one usually face further marginalisation. We are reminded, for example, of the proposal that the way dominant groups in society react to those who present a counter culture enables us to identify those aspects of society that they would prefer to render invisible and forgotten. It is clear, from the respondents’ commentary, that language is an important context in which power struggles around the representation of society can be seen to play themselves out.

Their descriptions of their own responses to social exclusion also point to the complexities and contradictions that they have needed to confront in making sense of this experience. On one hand, their responses can be seen to demonstrate the argument, referred to in chapter one, that when marginalised groups hold on to their linguistic identity, they may be placing limitations on their own prospects for social and material gain. At the same time, their commentary also shows evidence of the depth of cultural value that groups, especially the

marginalised, place on their linguistic identity. It is clear that each of the research participants understand their language as being essential to their own identity; they access and live the world through their language.

In this context, the description of the role that networks of friendship played within the strategies that the participants adopted in response to social exclusion also seems significant. These anecdotes support the suggestion, within the reviewed literature, that marginalised language groups often look to their own members for security and moral support when their language or culture is faced with possible extinction.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DISCUSSION OF MEDIA EXPERIENCES

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the participants' engagement with media. In organising this discussion, it has been kept in mind that seven out of the nine participants (Zolani, Abel, Simisa, Ndie, Mbaaka, Mose and Shanda) were members of the Facebook site entitled the 'History of Bakalanga'. The chapter has been structured to enable reflection on the extent to which their involvement in this site impacted on the history of their engagement with media. As such, it focuses, firstly, on their experience of such engagement before their involvement in the site, and then deals with the way this relationship changed after they joined the site. Reference to the remaining two participants (Tshaba and Thapelo) then occurs only in relation to the first discussion.

Part One thus deals with the ways in which media engagement formed part of the general history of the participants' conceptualisation of their own membership to a minority language group. For the seven Facebook members, the focus is on the time before they became members of the social media platform. The discussion returns to each of the 'moments' that the participants identified as being of significance within the processes of identity formation that they were involved in over time. As we have seen in chapter three, these moments are strongly representative of transitional periods in their experience of education and also of their passage from one social environment to another. The discussion therefore deals, again, with the time before school, the journey through formal education and the experience of adapting to an urban environment. It does so in order to examine the participants' description of the kinds of media they had been exposed to during these times and the way they responded to such media. The aim is to draw conclusions about the role that engagement with media played at each of these moments within their conceptualisation of their own identity. Part Two then deals in more detail with the role that engagement with 'alternative' media has come to play in the lives of the majority of the participants. The focus is on these participants' involvement in the above-mentioned Facebook site. Part Three discusses the participants' analysis of current media presentations as they relate to the construction of their identity.

## 4.2 Looking back: memories of early engagement with media

Most of the participants did not make much reference to the media when describing their early childhood years. It is only in upper primary school that any descriptions of their relationship with the media are introduced, and even here such references are few and far between. In reflecting on this absence, the participants generally agreed that they were not conscious of the media during their early years and that this was probably due to the exclusion of their own language from the media. Tshaba stated that he only learnt Setswana after he started school – and that, until this time, he used to “pick bits and pieces” from the radio, with “no coherence”. This, he said, made him to have “...very little interest in radio”, when it involved the spoken word – indeed, he only listened to music programmes (Tshaba, 2013).

When the participants did speak about media as a significant presence in their early lives, the reference was to radio. In such instances, the respondents explained that the receivers in their homes belonged to their parents or grandparents, and it would seem that this placed restrictions on their own engagement with this medium. It was the adults who decided what to listen to, and when such listening would take place. Abel noted that he developed a taste for his grandmother’s listening choices because the radio was only switched on in time for her favourite programmes:

When I grew up my grandmother listened to ... agriculture programmes, cultural programmes, death announcements and news. We mostly listened to what she listened to because she used to switch off the radio in between her favourite programme so as to save battery. We ended up just liking what she liked (Abel, 2013).

It would seem, then, that during their childhood, the participants’ exposure to radio was framed by their location within the power relations that define family life. As such, they listened exclusively to programmes that were not targeted at children.

It is likely that the participants share such experiences with individuals from other language groups in Botswana, including Setswana speakers. The respondents also noted, however, that the predominant use of Setswana on radio placed further restrictions on the programmes that their parents and grandparents could access. Because of the adults’ limited understanding of Setswana, there were very few programmes on radio that they could make sense of. Their programme selection was largely determined by whether or not there was a possibility of hearing fragments of language they could understand or relate to:

...we listened to death announcements for the simple reason that we could hear the names of people we knew – and we also liked a traditional music

and poetry programme because there was one artist from Tshesebe who was always in the program and he sang in Ikalanga (Mbaaka, 2013).

Zolani suggested that "...although they listened to the radio, they did not understand ... [it]" (2013). Within these family environments, then, radio did not serve the purpose of providing listeners with much access to their broader social context.

Such anecdotes were presented by some of the participants as being of personal significance. These individuals explained that they vividly remembered their parents' struggle to understand radio. They noted that these memories have stayed with them because they are demonstrative of their parents' social exclusion. Abel argued, for instance, that the fact that there was "...no media that communicated in Ikalanga" meant that his parents were disadvantaged. Zolani noted, similarly, that such exclusion impacted directly on his family's quality of life. He referred, in illustration, to an agricultural radio show which circulated information about government aid for subsistence farmers in rural areas. His parents refused to draw on this aid because they misunderstood what was being discussed on the show, assuming that it described a plan by government to take away their land. Their children, who were at this stage already based away from home and gaining knowledge of English and Setswana, had to mediate the content of such messages for them:

It was only after the children travelled from towns to go and explain the benefits of these government programmes that our parent agreed to use the programme. You see it is a barrier to government programme when only Setswana and English are used (Zolani, 2013).

As will become apparent below, the older generation in Ikalanga-speaking families would increasingly turn to their children to translate programming for them in this way.

In general, however, the participants did not appear to have given much thought to the exclusion of their own language from the media during their early years. Zolani noted that it was only later, on reflection, that the significance of such exclusion became clear to him:

I was not conscious of the absence of my language. There was no way I could say I was missing Kalanga or what. I only realised that when I was a little older and self-conscious (Zolani, 2013).

Tshaba explained that it was normal for young children to be disinterested in radio:

...before the age of five, there is really not much you could pick from the radio, we would just play [with] our mud cows with other boys (Tshaba, 2013).

It should be remembered here that in Botswana the age of entry to primary school is six. Tshaba's comment can, therefore, be interpreted in context of the fact that, from this age onwards, children from Ikalanga households become conversant in English and Setswana and

are thus better able to relate to radio. Indeed, the participants generally suggested that it was from school-going age onwards that children were expected to translate the content of radio programmes for the older generation in their families. It would seem, then, that there was a close relationship between these participants' engagement with media and their involvement in language-learning in the context of formal education.

A number of respondents noted that their engagement with radio was, in fact, directly mediated within the school environment through 'radio lessons' that formed part of their schooling. The reference here is to educational programming transmitted on state radio that was used as a teaching resource in classrooms. Tshaba noted that, for him and his classmates, exposure to such material triggered an interest in radio:

...the radio fascinated us then. I think mid-way through primary school – grade three or four that is ... I developed an independent interest in radio, not listening just so I could interpret for my parents. We started paying attention to radio (Tshaba, 2013).

The participants explained, in fact, that it was as a result of such access to radio at school that they started to interpret radio programmes for their parents.

It also appears that, for some of the respondents, the school 'radio lessons' was the beginning of a long term relationship with media. Zolani noted, for example, that these lessons exposed him to current affairs radio which sparked in him a love for this genre. After school, he would listen to such programmes on state radio. He was particularly drawn to a programme that was broadcast in English:

...I think [this] contributed to me liking it. There were times though when I could not understand as I was not fluent in English and I will ask my uncle what certain words meant (Zolani, 2013).

For a number of the respondents, starting school and learning Setswana also exposed them to print media. As a result of such exposure, some participants developed an interest in the *Daily News*, a publication that is owned by the state. Tshaba explained that he was interested in reading the paper despite the fact that his own language was absent from this publication:

The predominant language ... was Setswana and very little English and because we were taught in Setswana in early primary, my interest was to read the articles that were written in Setswana. Kalanga was not there, so the nearest language was Setswana (Tshaba, 2013).

Zolani noted that he used to pick up a copy of this newspaper from the local 'kgotla' (traditional court), where it was available to the public for free. He read only the sports section of the paper, and noted that this was because he had by this stage developed a particular interest in

football. He explained that this interest was first sparked by a song played on radio about Township Rollers, a local football team based in Gaborone. The first copy of *Daily News* that he read contained a feature about this team. Because he could personally relate to this image, he found it possible to identify with the newspaper:

...it had a group picture of Township Rollers players so my love for the team was strengthened. I then started to frequent the kgotla for the *Daily News* so I could see Township Rollers. I did not read the whole paper, just the sports section (Zolani, 2013).

For Zolani, then, engagement with this newspaper operated as an extension of his experience of radio – and he also recognised something that was of personal value to him within its pages.

Zolani explained that the scope of his media consumption widened when he reached secondary school. It was here that he first had access to commercial newspapers, which he said motivated him to read beyond sports:

At Shashe River School ... I discovered different newspapers. So I then used to come to Francistown from Shashe to buy newspapers. I started reading beyond sports, went into business, economics, and all these other things (Zolani, 2013).

It was also during his time in this school that Zolani first had access to television, which he said inspired his ambition to work in the media:

It was in Shashe that I first saw a television set but by then it was South African television; TV1, TV2 and CCTV1 to 3 and BopTV. That was an addition to my consumption of media (Zolani, 2013).

Zolani explained, however, that what he really wanted was to work in radio "... because it was the first media exposed to me" (Zolani, 2013). Zolani's love for current affairs did indeed ultimately lead to a career in media. He first worked as a television journalist, and at the time of the writing of this thesis was based at the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Botswana Chapter.

It is, however, clear from the above discussion that, for most of the participants, engagement with the media was of minor personal significance either during their childhood or early adulthood. The participants themselves generally argued that this can be explained by the absence of their language in the media, and also the absence of content that was of relevance to them.

### **4.3 Becoming involved in social media: an alternative platform for media engagement**

As explained previously, the majority of participants in this research project eventually became participants in the Facebook site ‘The History of Bakalanga’. It would seem, from their descriptions of such involvement, that the site provided them with a far more meaningful form of engagement with media than had previously been possible.

It should be remembered that one of the research participants, Shanda, was in fact the founder of this site. Shanda explained that he established the site in response to his local village chief’s concern about the dying out of Bakalanga culture among young people. He himself also observed that many people in Ikalanga-speaking communities were adopting Setswana cultural practices and forsaking their own. He explained that one example is represented by the practice, amongst some Bakalanga parents, that of giving their children Setswana names. The ‘History of Bakalanga’ Facebook site is his contribution to the resuscitation and preservation of the Bakalanga culture. Shanda originally established the site as a platform for circulating articles that he was writing on the history of the Bakalanga. It was his hope that, if the Bakalanga read such histories, “they would be encouraged to preserve their language and culture” (Shanda, 2013).

Shanda indicated that, over time, the site came to focus not only on the dissemination of such history, but served more generally as a platform for advocacy for the promotion of Bakalanga language and culture. The site’s membership also discussed ways of contributing towards the development of the villages that had been their original homes. This, Shanda said, resulted in the establishment of a number of community trusts, spearheaded by members of this Facebook page.

The other six participants with affiliations to the Facebook site all noted that their primary reason for joining had been the fact that contributions to the site were primarily written in Ikalanga. They therefore felt encouraged to express themselves in their own language in the context of this site. A number of these participants explained that this experience contrasted with the negative reactions they had so often been subjected to in other environments when speaking their own language. Here they are able to freely express their own views in Ikalanga, without feeling judged by members of a different language group:

That is why we are here, forming a group, we identify ourselves through language. We want to be able to speak our language fluently and freely (Zolani, 2013).

Simisa explained that the absence of Ikalanga in the public domain means that both he and other members of this site “...miss speaking Ikalanga” (Simisa, 2013). They regard their

conversations on the site as a way of satisfying this longing. He noted that the use of Ikalanga makes communication amongst them much easier:

...through language we can understand each other; we can share our culture (Zolani, 2013).

Abel proposed, similarly, that Bakalanga culture can only be discussed effectively in Ikalanga:

The language you use ... comes with cultural connotations. Our cultural practices cannot be taught in a different language (Abel, 2013).

These two participants are arguing, then, that a particular language, in this case Ikalanga, embodies aspects of the culture of the speakers of that language. For this reason, such aspects can only be fully explained and understood when conversation takes place in that language. This view was further emphasised by Ndie, who said that Facebook taught her that “you cannot express your culture with a different language” (Ndie, 2013).

It is important to remember that, before they joined Facebook, most of the participants did not know the ‘correct’ way of writing in their own language. As previously explained, during their school years, Ikalanga was excluded from the curriculum not only as a medium of instruction but also a subject of study. They were, therefore, never given the opportunity to study the way in which the language is written. Indeed, the ‘History of Ikalanga’ site represented their first contact with the formal way of writing in Ikalanga. It came to serve as a space in which they could learn to articulate themselves in this way:

...we learnt writing Ikalanga ... through Facebook. We now know how to write Kalanga. We are able to write our language (Ndie, 2013).

The respondents explained that they were tutored by one of the group members, a language specialist, who guided them in the ‘proper’ way of writing Ikalanga. It would seem, then, that the participants’ exploration of their relationship with their own language through their exposure to education continues even here in the context of social media.

The importance of being conversant with writing in ones’ language was demonstrated by Abel, who said he was now able to stay in contact with his grandmother:

I know how to write in Ikalanga, I can now write a letter to my grandmother. That is how I communicate with her (Abel, 2013).

It is worth noting that Abel, who is conversant in the use of electronic media, chose to refer here to the writing of a letter not in electronic form but on paper. The reference is, furthermore, to the experience of writing to an older family member who would not, presumably, be familiar with the use of electronic communication. It can be argued that Abel’s reason for highlighting this example is that the letter to a grandmother is symbolic of an important childhood

experience from which he had been excluded, due to his inability to write in his own language. His 'education' on the Facebook site has enabled him to reclaim this experience.

The respondents also noted that the 'History of Bakalanga' site has come to play a role in their lives that would usually be served by the mainstream media: that of contributing to their sense of being part of a community. Abel explained that such media do not provide Ikalanga speakers with ways of sharing and making sense of their social experiences. Instead, they have been able to do so through Facebook:

Facebook has given us a platform that the media do not give us – where a lot of people can share. We exchange and advise each other (Abel, 2013).

A number of the participants also explained that the site has provided them with a vehicle through which they can advocate for the recognition of their own language, and of the role that it has played in history. They noted that within official representations, the history of Bakalanga has for a long time been distorted. They therefore see the Facebook site as a space in which it becomes possible to share, within the public domain, what they regard as true historical facts about the Bakalanga, rebuffing the dominant narratives. Zolani explained that although he and his fellow Facebook participants were once of the view that "...Ikalanga is dead ... [and that we should] ... just bury it and go on with life", they have since reviewed their stance. Facebook revived their confidence in making a stand, advocating for their right to define their own identity as a social group:

Bakalangas are a nation with many tribes and we want to be recognized as such. We want to rebuild the Bakalanga nation that recognises all its tribes (Zolani, 2013).

Abel also argued that it is important that the 'true' stories of the Bakalanga are shared and known within the public domain:

We are saying we are a people, we are unique; our culture is important; our history has to be shared with other people, with the world in the same way that other groups' histories are shared with other people (Abel, 2013).

It would seem, then, that for the participants, the Facebook site serves not only as a space in which they can redefine for themselves what it means to be Bakalanga, but also as a vehicle for making this identity more visible within the broader public domain.

The respondents generally noted that their conceptualisation of their own relationship with their social environment changed significantly after they joined the Facebook site. This applied to their understanding of their own identity as members of the Bakalanga and also to the way this identity was given expression in their engagement with media. Zolani explained

that this change has been facilitated by the ideas and debates that he has been exposed to on the site:

It is through this Facebook page that I have learnt that I have been deprived of the heritage of my forefathers. The mainstream media could not write about these issues because the message was not easily made available since Ikalanga was not declared a vernacular (Zolani, 2013).

The site serves, then, not only to address the absence of Ikalanga as a language from the participants' media environments, but also the absence of particular kinds of content that is of relevance to Bakalanga. Simisa explained that availability of such content on Facebook provides him and other Ikalanga speakers with the sense that they are part of a coherent and significant community:

The platform makes us feel like we are one. Scattered as we are, you can feel like the whole Gaborone is speaking Kalanga (Simisa, 2013).

Abel noted that the sharing of particular kinds of social experiences on Facebook acts to reaffirm them as being representative of a 'normal', acceptable way of life. Indeed, the participants on Facebook can sometimes be seen to police each other, insisting that these norms are adhered to:

...it feels like an ... everyday life where we can share what is going on and also just discuss light issues. We exchange and advise each other. You can be easily told that the things you doing are not in line with Kalanga culture (Abel, 2013).

It is possible that this practice of 'policing' stems from the Facebook participants' sense that their own cultural norms are marginalised and in need of being actively promoted in order to ensure their survival. It also suggests that, amongst the Facebook users, there is a belief that there is a 'pure' Bakalanga way of doing things and that they are guarding it from violation by foreign cultures. Abel supported this idea of a distinct 'Bakalanga way of life' which he said gives him his identity:

...the whole thing of being given an identity that does not exist in my culture makes me fake, it is not me. It is like I switch between being the true Kalanga me and acting out a false identity of somebody called a Motswana (Abel, 2013).

The suggestion here seems to be that members of the Bakalanga can be alienated from their true sense of self if they are made to live as a Motswana, speak Setswana and practising its culture. They are, to use Abel's phrasing, forced to adopt a 'fake' identity. Within this understanding, it becomes deeply problematic to construct a 'national' identity by adopting the identity of one cultural grouping while excluding others.

A number of the participants explained that they have been able to make use of Facebook to directly address the inequity that has been caused by the marginalisation of their own people. Zolani explained that the site has sparked the establishment of support structures geared towards the improvement of the quality of life of Ikalanga speaking communities:

I believe we are succeeding, looking at the numbers that we have in that group. Some have already started in their villages setting up community trusts that will in future finance salaries of chiefs and other logistics (Zolani, 2013).

The community trusts that Zolani referred to here have been established to assist such communities materially, but also to resuscitate and maintain the cultural practices of the Bakalanga. Zolani explained further that the aim was to draw on these trusts in order to pay a salary to the local chief of the Bakalanga. The Facebook group believe that this will strengthen the Bakalanga's ability to advocate for recognition as an independent tribal group:

...we want to say our chiefs should not affiliate with the Bangwato chiefs. We will pay them from our trust. So we are planning to have structures that can pay our chief so that when we say our chiefs are no longer reporting to Sediegeng (Zolani, 2013).

The participants also explained that as part of the conversations that have taken place on the site, they have begun to explore the possibility of lobbying for changes to language policy in Botswana. They have, in fact, begun to work on the articulation of alternative policies, which challenge the exclusion of Ikalanga. Mose noted, however, that members of the Facebook group remain cautious of the wisdom of proceeding with this campaign. Even amongst this group, there is reluctance to be seen "... to be associated with the ... [language policy] ... debate for fear of being labelled a tribalist" (Mose, 2013).

It would seem, nevertheless, that Facebook has operated not only as a vehicle for individual self-empowerment for its members, but also as a platform to campaign for the general 'emancipation' of the Bakalanga.

#### **4.4 Reflecting on the current state of the media in Botswana**

An examination of the Facebook participants' comments about mainstream media as it currently exists contrasts sharply with their earlier conceptualisations of the media, as described by themselves in the first section of this chapter. These comments demonstrate a far greater sense of awareness of such media, and critical engagement with their content.

The participants were, firstly, able to provide a more nuanced analysis of the way in which practices of media production locate speakers of Ikalanga. This was apparent, for

example, in comments that they made about the state broadcaster's use of Setswana 'voice-overs' on stories that would have been originally recorded in Ikalanga. Ndie argued that by 'overlying' the original language with Setswana as a matter of course, the broadcaster begins from the assumption that Ikalanga cannot be understood and is of lesser importance. She also proposed that Ikalanga-speaking audiences often end up uncertain as to whether the translations are in fact a true representation of what had been said. She noted, in demonstration, that her grandmother can never get the "I am sure moment" that what is recounted in the voice-over is what was actually said in the Ikalanga originally. She proposed that this problem could be addressed if the state broadcaster took seriously the need to present such stories in Ikalanga:

The meaning is lost during translation ... but if the media could take ... an Ikalanga speaking journalist to get the story in Ikalanga and present it in Ikalanga ... our parents ... will get the whole truth (Ndie, 2013).

This view was also shared by Simisa who argued that all languages should be represented within the broadcast spectrum, without always translating to Setswana:

This thing of translating is very frustrating. Why do they have to translate to Setswana? Why can't they have different language for their different bulletins? Say Setswana for the 8pm bulletin and Ikalanga at 9? (Simisa, 2013)

These comments suggest an acute consciousness on the part of the participants that meaning can become lost in translation – and that translation can compromise the intended meaning of the original interview. Indeed, implicit in these comments is the argument that it is impossible to truthfully represent the views of a story teller by using a language different from their own. Abel saw the translation to Setswana as forming part of the reproduction of the national identity of Botswana as a monolingual state:

...the ... system ... allows such kind of reporting because the image they want to portray about this country is that other people do not exist or their existence is not as important as this thing called Botswana (Abel, 2013).

The participants' comments about translation in this discussion suggest that they have developed a higher level of sophistication with regard to the analysis of conventions of media production. It is possible that this sophistication has at least partly resulted from their engagement in such analysis in the context of the Facebook site.

The participants were, similarly, able to talk in complex ways about the content of media. They generally argued that the selection of content in the mainstream media tended to operate to endorse the official self-representation of the state. They noted, for example, that the history of Botswana that appears in the media tends to reproduce the historical narrative

that they were exposed to at school, as described in the previous chapter. This is a narrative that promotes the eight principal tribes to the exclusion of others:

...when they write about the history of Botswana, the only groups that are mentioned in detail are ... the so-called principal tribes and then in a very short paragraph, the writers would mention that there are other groups like the Bakalanga and Batswapong (Abel, 2013).

These comments suggest that the amount of time or space that the media allocate to the representation of a particular social grouping is directly linked to the status ascribed to that group. Like Abel, Zolani argued that this means that the media becomes responsible for reproducing unequal relations of power that serve conservative interests:

I blame the media. Our media ... follow the events. When they get articles where the writer mentions only eight tribes, they forget the reality. They are not able to take an independent stand and set an agenda (Zolani, 2013).

These comments also suggest that the respondents generally believe that the media almost always support the position of government.

Although the respondents seemed more engaged with mainstream media, they generally seemed to doubt that such media served their interests. They painted a picture of a media landscape which operates to ensure that the disenfranchised remain silent. Abel cited, for example, the indifference of the media to calls for a change to the country's name. He explained that it has been argued by language activists that the name 'Botswana' gives the false impression that everyone in this country are Setswana speakers. According to Abel, the media has, however, remained indifferent to this argument. This indifference demonstrates, again, that the media has simply become an extension of government:

...the media do not see anything wrong with the name of the country; that a country can be called Botswana. It is false because we are not all Batswana ... in the true sense. So if the media go with the government's language policy whose aim is to create a Setswana nation ... then that is wrong. The media are the vehicles that carry all that is happening in Botswana (Abel, 2013)

Abel's comments demonstrate a consciousness that what the media do is as important as what they do not do. Thus both the 'presence' and 'absence' in the media are significant and have meaning.

Some of the respondents explained that by watching foreign television channels, they have been able to observe broadcast systems in which programming is informed by the knowledge of a diversity of languages:

You see South Africans cater for almost all their people; there is no fear that different language can cause conflicts between people of different language groups like it is believed here. If it is working in a new democracy like South Africa, why can't it work here? (Abel, 2013).

It can be concluded that the conversations on Facebook empowered the respondents to be able to discuss their relationship with the media in more in-depth and sophisticated ways. Not only have their interactions with Facebook made them more aware of how the media locate them; these interactions also appear to have influenced their view of the mainstream media.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter explored the participants' comments about their engagement with media. Section One focused on their experience of such engagement before they got involved in the 'History of Bakalanga' Facebook page. This section also dealt with the non-Facebook participants' comments about their relationship with the media. It focused on the participants' understanding of the way the media located them at different points in their lives – and the impact this had on how they defined their identity. As we have seen, the descriptions of media that emerges from this discussion are suggestive of an absence: the absence of the participants' own language and also the absence of content that was of relevance to them. One is also left with the general sense that engagement with such media was of minor personal significance for most of the participants.

The remainder of the chapter dealt with the way the Facebook members' experience of engagement with media changed after they joined this social networking site. Section Two dealt with this question through a review of the participants' experience of Facebook itself. Here it is explained that their involvement in this site operated as a form of 'language education', that made them feel more empowered as speakers of Ikalanga. They also seemed to become more aware of the role that media can play as a means of identity formation both at the level of the individual and the community.

Section Three considered the Facebook participants' comments on the mainstream media as it currently exists. It is argued, in this section, that these comments are indicative of a change in these participants' ability to engage critically with mainstream media. It is proposed, furthermore, that this change has been made possible as a result of the 'education' that the participants were exposed to in the context of the Facebook site.

Generally, the participants' comments support the arguments presented in the literature reviewed in Chapter One, that one should be cautious of assuming that the media plays a central role in the processes of identity formation. Within such arguments it is pointed out that it is of equal importance to take cognisance of the role played by other aspects of people's lived experiences. It is believed that these experiences influence how audiences relate to the media. These arguments are supported, in particular, by the participants' arguments about the early period of their lives when they remained unaware of their own exclusion from the media. Based on their comments, it can be argued that the 'absence' of their language from the media resulted in their largely indifferent attitude towards the media during these years.

At the same time, however, the respondents' comments about their lives as adults, particularly after their introduction to social media, also supports reviewed literature with regard to the importance of media as a form of culture in processes of identity formation. Once they started interacting with Facebook, their indifference to the media was replaced by a more 'guarded' and somewhat 'oppositional' relationship. At this stage, although Facebook spurred their interaction with the mainstream media, they continued to read such media from within their marginalised location. From this position, they now saw the mainstream media as playing an important role in reinforcing the culture that excludes them.

It has been proposed within the debates reviewed in Chapter One that in many social contexts the media is in fact taking over this role from more 'traditional' forms of cultural expression. The participants' comments suggest that this can be true even for members of a language group that has historically been excluded from acknowledgement within the media. This is demonstrated by the respondents' resorting to and engaging in alternative media spaces to rediscover their voices and redefine their identity. In this way the alternative media became the space for cultural exchange and education. In the 'traditional' past the senior members of the tribal group would normally be the ones entrusted with passing on culture to the younger generations, this is now done by and through the media.

It can also be argued that, although the respondents comments show an indifferent engagement with the media in their formative years, this can, in fact, prove that the media have always been central to their lives. Their concern, from a very tender age, that their parents do not understand the language used on radio, for example, shows a belief in the important of radio in their everyday life. So in order to benefit they made the media fit into their lives by only listening to programmes they could relate to and from which they could understand something. They also adjusted their lives so that they were available to listen to these selected programmes.

The material also suggests that, in deciding whether one sees the media as central to processes of socialisation or not, one needs to consider the specificity of social context. It is, for example, important also to reflect on how exactly particular groups are positioned within a given social context. The participants' comments support the view that groups define their relationship with their nation-states by the way they understand themselves to be located by that particular nation – and, as part of this, the way that 'location' is portrayed by the media. The comments further affirm that indeed the media really did play a significant role in the way the participants locate themselves in relation to their social world.

## 4.6 GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study investigated how the Bakalanga of Botswana experience their marginalisation by the media due to the exclusion of their own language. Terms of reference for this examination were established in Chapter One by means of a review of relevant academic literature. A key conclusion of this discussion was that, within any study of the relationship between media and audience, it is crucial to consider historical specificity. Such specificity enables the researcher to engage with the complexity of the relationship between particular groups of people and their relationship to the media at given moments in history. In this way, it becomes possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of the role that the media plays in contributing to a particular group's experience of being included or excluded from aspects of the society in which they live. This is particularly important when you are dealing with a group of people for whom this experience is defined by absence, given that their own language is not represented within the media. Such absence adds to the complexity of making sense of the historical specificity of their relationship to the media.

In Chapter Two it is explained that acknowledgement of this need for historical specificity played a key role in the conceptualisation of the research design for this study. The findings of this study, as discussed in Chapter Three and Four, demonstrate the value of this research design. Chapter Three plays a crucial role in this, given that the participants' review of their own life histories, as reviewed here, provides a backdrop for the examination in Chapter Four of the way they engage with media. In particular, the description that the participants provide of the development of their own social and linguistic identity helps to put in perspective the comments that they then go on to make about the role that media has played in their lives.

As a result of this approach it becomes possible to observe that the participants' engagement with media is strongly defined by an uneasy relationship with the concept of nation-state, stemming from policy that does not recognize their language. This uneasiness becomes a thread that runs through their own description of most areas of their lives. They note repeatedly that the adopted national culture forces them to live a life of always negotiating or even justifying their own linguistic and cultural identity. This relationship with their own social environment informed the nature of their engagement with mainstream media. It leads, in particular, to limited interaction with such media. It also informs the participants' decision to engage with an alternative media platform, represented by the Ikalanga Facebook page, where their identity is more fully acknowledged.

The central question of the study has been to investigate the role that the media can be said to play in the identity construction of minority language speakers. We observed, in this respect, that engagement with the media was not significant for most of the participants during their childhood. As adults, however, they became more conscious of being marginalized by traditional media. Finally, in the context of their interactions with the Facebook discussions, they became more assertive about the expression of their own identity, and their ability to redefine who they are. One could argue, indeed, that media has always been significant to the formation of their identity – even in the early years when they were not conscious of its absence from their lives. Firstly, it was important because of the role that mainstream media played in their social exclusion. Later, it became significant because of the role that social media played in the reaffirmation of their identity.

Given the scope of the study, and also the research methods used, I was able to only scratch the surface of knowledge about the social experiences I have described. There is, I believe, a need for further research on the implications of the exclusion of Ikalanga from the media in Botswana. This study did not, for example, include interviews with media practitioners, policy makers or language and culture experts. It would be of value to find out how such individuals would make sense of the experiences of exclusion shared by the participants in this study.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Focus group interview guide

##### Introduction and welcome

Thank you all for coming. My name is Oesi Thothe. I come from Pilikwe and my husband comes from Makuta. It is about 20KM from Tutume. My research, as you might be aware, is about the Bakalanga and the media. It will get clearer as we talk.

My reason for wanting to do this research comes from a personal experience. My husband, Bakani Thothe, is Kalanga – and Ikalanga is his first language. His grandmother lives in Makuta. She speaks only Ikalanga. However, she religiously listens to Radio Botswana (RB1). I once asked her whether she understand what they say on radio, given the dominant language was Setswana and she told me it is just for company. She doesn't understand anything. That touched me. I started to have questions about Ikalanga and other languages that are not used in our media - wondering about the possible impacts of its non-use by the media on the likes of grandmother.

So my research basically is to find out how you relate with the local media given that they do not use Ikalanga. Please trace your experiences from the time when you were still young and staying with your parents in the village to your current context. Please will you start by first introducing yourselves, your name, and your home village, what you are doing now and then just share your story. I will not be interrupting you but will just interject for follow up questions.

##### 2. Urbanisation and modernisation

You moved from your village to live in town. Please will you share your life story taking us through the different stages of your life:

- when you were still living at home
- your move to the city and explain the negotiations/adjustments you had to make
- settling in the city
- how you relate with or refer to the past now that you are here

##### 3. Language, media and identity

The media do not use your language:

- Does this worry you?
- Please explain how you interpret the absence of your language in the media.
- If you understand both Setswana and English, why is it important to you that the media also use Ikalanga?
- Are there any disadvantages that you believe come with Ikalanga not being prioritised in the media?
- Why do you think it is not being prioritised?
- What do you understand the absence of Ikalanga in the media to mean?

#### 4. Media consumption and identity

- What do you regard as the importance of media in the society?
- Which media do you read/watch/listen to?
- How often?
- Why do you listen to/watch/read what you do?
- Are there any particular programmes/content that you follow?

#### 5. National identity/culture.

- What kind of things comes to mind when we talk about Botswana - things you think are exclusive to Botswana?
  - How did you know about it?
  - How often do you see this in the media?
  - What does it mean to you?
  - Do you believe that these are a true definition of who Botswana is?
  - Are there any other things that you believe should be included as part of Botswana's national identity?

## APPENDIX B

### **A2. Social Media and identity**

1. What would you say you benefit from being a member of the 'History of Bakalanga' Facebook page?
2. Besides acquiring knowledge, how has this page influenced your view and understanding of your identity?
3. Would you say it has in any way given you ideas on how the mainstream media should engage with the Bakalanga?

4. How would you say the Facebook page helps you address some of the gaps in the mainstream media?
5. Have you redefined, through FB conversations, what Botswana means to you and your position as a *kalanga* in Botswana?
6. Considering that the conversations happen in a secluded space, how do you make your voices heard to those beyond this group ... the general public and other Bakalanga?

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