

The Seduction and Denial of Khoisan Rights

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Most problematic to the Khoisan, since the first European arrival, tends to be that of denial, dispossession and reclassification, which eventually devastated the first frontier and noted Khoisan negotiator Adam Kok during the nineteenth century. Similar to the derogatory names, such as Hottentots, Strandlopers and Bushman, which were given to their forefathers in the Cape Colony, after their properties were seized, the Griquas were also discredited as Bastards, Khoisan impostors, who have adopted the Griqua identity. The forceful reclassification, as a result, disqualified the authentic position of the Griqua, to negotiate the rights of the Khoisan, the aboriginals of South Africa.

Today, we must utilise our past, how bad it may have been and exploit it to our own benefit. We must tell our own story, market and sing our own blues.

The Khoisan story is an intriguing true drama story, never really been told by the impoverished and dispossessed survivors. After being oppressed, denied and dispossessed from their own aboriginal heritage and land, it is time for the Khoisan, especially after this terribly long bloody war against colonialism and Apartheid, to rise. It is time to take up the responsibility of our freedom. Therefore, we must learn to articulate ourselves, express ourselves and manifest ourselves in all walks of life.

As Seretse Kama said, 'a people without a past is a lost people'. We must also remember our past, fight to restore our identity and the damaged structures of our society. It is also said somewhere, that 'those who cannot remember their past, are doomed to repeat it'. Therefore we must seriously try to regain our consciousness to soberly face the future and its challenges.

My story is the story of Adam Kok (1710 - 1800). The story of Adam Kok is the story of the Khoisan or Quena Griqua tribe, and the story of the Khoisan is the story of South Africa! The Griquas and their base at Piquetberg/Elphants River region has always been known as the refuge, the comfort zone, of the orphan Khoi and San victims and of the first democratic leadership of aboriginal South Africa!

Instead of teaming up against the colonial settlers, to repatriate their losses, the Khoisan democratically united under the Khoeque (pronounce more or less like cooke), Adam 'Kok'. They then exodus into the interior where their cultural and linguistic compatriots were, away from the brutalisation of slavery and pestilence of the marauding land pirates. The name of Adam Kok was deliberately corrupted and portrayed as that of a slave cook, whereas the name Kok, came from an authoritative Khoisan title, for the chief tribal head leader or king, Khoeque. As the Khoeque, Adam, the first, was recognised by the Khoisan and acknowledged with a mace, which was a gift of honour, by the colonial governor of the Cape Colony, maybe during one of his sly 'diplomatic' visits. It was later interpreted and denied by historians, as a token of appointed leadership.

For too long the Khoisan have been forced into silence, to adhere to and submit under their alien oppressors. The Griqua story is undoubtedly the starting point of South Africa's first big time economical and political rise. It is the story of diamonds and mining development. It is also the story of the racist jurisdictional development. The story of the first biggest, notorious, longest land court cases, the Bloemhof arbitration Court case, the famous Keate award, and the incriminating judgement of Judge Stockenström, all centred around the Griquas. The only way to destroy the Khoisan land ownership and custodianship, was to discredit and eliminate the Khoisan Khoeque, through ethnocide and cultural genocide, by means of intellectual denial and a court ruling, which would legalise and ensure complete dispossession. A culminating effort was then launched by academics, judges, missionaries and so-called historic writers who proclaimed to vindicate the Khoisan extinction and edit them out of SA history, as Bastards and later Coloureds. A major break through for the Colonial Settlers was the court judgement of Judge Stockenström, in 1876, when he ruled out Griqua ownership, on the diamond fields!

"Like all chiefs of nomadic tribes they exercised personal jurisdiction over their followers, but territorial jurisdiction was to them a thing unknown." The Khoisan were hit by a group of smooth criminals who have left no traces of evidence and restitution. They have employed academics to write themselves into the minds of the Khoisan as heroes. They have discredited Adam Kok as a slave cook, and the Griquas as marauding, Bastard pastoralists without territorial sense. They locked up and hid all Khoisan whereabouts and archive material in archives reserved for Europeans only. They have employed a cover-up, which cost millions by forceful reclassification, reserves, military and police enforcement. All majestic efforts and constructive contributions, which aimed to build South Africa, were discredited, refuted and suppressed, e.g. South Africa's first autonomous coinage of 1815, the first autonomous minted money and South Africa's first sterling pounds of 1868, were presented by the Griquas. (Never mind whom they've mandated to do it, they've contributed to it!)

The former South African Government shamelessly disregarded the Griqua identity, saying: "There is no reason to be a Griqua since a Griqua is a Coloured and a Coloured is a Griqua on the grounds of the definition that, a Coloured is neither White nor Black nor Asiatic, and thus all the other Coloureds must be classified in this class." This ruling of a group of whites in a commission in 1983 certified the Griquas as Coloureds - and without identity.

Although many want to deny the importance of a distinct cultural identity, a mistaken identity can easily misplace a people and alienate heirs of their rightful heritage. The paternalistic behaviour to seize absolute power and heritage control over the Khoisan, are expressed in the way of the missionaries and in the way Britain annexed and proclaimed their sovereignty over the Griquas. The Custodianship of the Khoisan must be restored today, but that can only be achieved when the Khoisan are liberated from denial, and when the new South African Government truly acknowledge and recognise their existence and indigenous identity.

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