

Dreams and Visions in Koranna and Griqua Revival in Colonial and Post-Apartheid South Africa

by

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Abstract

In this article, it is argued that the current processes of ethno-political awakening, self-representation and revival amongst the Khoekhoe are not taking place in a uniform manner. Moreover, the same criteria are not being applied for this purpose by all parties concerned. The ethnographical data presented in this article demonstrate that Koranna and Griqua leaders in the Free State have used dreams and visions to activate political discourse; that these dreams and visions serve as an instrument for mobilising support; and that they constitute a form of self-representation.

Key words: Dreams, visions, ethno-political awareness and revival

Introduction

The Griqua and Koranna form part of the broader Khoekhoe community of South Africa. Over centuries, various factors have contributed to the destruction of their social structures, cohesion and identity – so much so that by the 1930s it was generally accepted that groups such as the Koranna no longer existed. The last few years, however, have seen ethnic mobilisation and the creation and establishment of new political structures amongst people claiming Khoekhoe descent.

The relationship between language, culture and ethnic revival¹ probably comprises the dominant model in anthropological reflection on multilingualism; it underlies doctrines regarding the protection of group rights; it lends legitimacy to claims relating to nationhood; it comprises the point of departure of many political strategies; and it is regarded as an important building block of ethnic revival (cf. Woolard & Schieffelin 1994:60–61 and Urciuoli 1995:527). In the case of the Koranna and Griqua, however, their languages (!Ora and Xiri) have virtually died out². Thus, the point of view adopted in this paper is that current Khoekhoe ethno-political revival processes cannot be explained / understood in terms of a unilateral, exaggerated emphasis on the meaning of language only. The Khoekhoe have developed heterogeneous and often very subtle ways of establishing such processes of revival. The following examples corroborate this viewpoint: (i) Stavenhagen (2005:7-8), in his capacity as Special Rapporteur for the United Nations' Economic and Social Council, supports the idea of self-identification as a criterion of definition within the context of the question as to what constitutes an indigenous community³. (ii) Ethnic awareness in the case of the Nama and Khomani San is strongly centralised around land and culture (Besten 2009:142). The post-apartheid state recognised these people as distinct cultural groups who had obtained certain land and cultural rights. (iii) A core component of Griqua identity, according to Waldman 2007:162-163), is religion. The adherence to a church became a marker for allegiance to one or other of the political factions in various Griqua captaincies. (iv) Øvernes (2008:261), who argues that the Khoe-San have developed various new ways of living as Khoe-San (2008:261), points out that street-life is one such experience (2008:19). In this paper it will be argued that dreams and visions comprise another unique instrument which has been selected by Koranna and Griqua leaders in order to give expression to their ethno-political awareness.

Dreams and visions⁴ are experienced by all peoples; therefore, my reference to Koranna and Griqua dreams and visions must not be interpreted as implying that the Koranna and Griqua are “exotic” folk with “savage minds”. However, under certain cultural conditions, dreams and visions comprise a culturally defined means of communication, which has a particularly strong impact on the believability of conceptions of reality. This is also the case in many African cultures (Sundkler 1960 & 1961, Mbiti 1969 and Kiernan 1985), including that of the Khoekhoe. According to ethnographical reports (Schapera 1965:393, Boezak 2006:32 and Engelbrecht 1936:176), dreams and visions were always part of Khoekhoe religion, and were regarded as genuine revelations from God, ancestral heroes, or ordinary ancestors⁵.

Only those dreams or visions for which the dreamer himself (or herself) has given a meaningful interpretation, and which had previously been communicated to others, have been recorded⁶. An important criterion for the inclusion of material was that the interpretations should not be partial, hesitant or uncertain. It should also be emphasised that it is not the aim of the case studies to analyse or to classify the content of the dreams and visions⁷.

Before some specific examples of dreams and visions are discussed, the different factors which contributed to the disintegration and alleged disappearance of the Khoekhoe will firstly be considered.

The Khoekhoe: Their Disintegration

The Khoekhoe, together with the San, are the original/indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa. There are various theories concerning their origin. Older theories include a presumed Jewish, Asian or African origin, while there is even a shipwreck theory – which postulates that they were originally the descendants of the survivors of a shipwreck (Boonzaier, Malherbe, Berens & Smith 1996:12-14, Chidester 1996:46-52 & 63-67 and Schapera 1965:26-50). Today, anthropologists and historians (Boonzaier et al. 1996 and Van Aswegen 1989) accept the interpretation of, *inter alia*, Elphick (1983), namely that the Khoekhoe originated in the region of the northern border of the present Botswana, where their method of subsistence developed from that of hunter-gatherers to that of herders⁸. From there they moved southwards. There is archaeological evidence that their forebears settled in the present Namibia and along the West Coast towards the Cape approximately 1 600 – 2 000 years ago. The Koranna, for example, already lived in the vicinity of Cape Town before the arrival of the first white colonialists in 1652.

The Khoekhoe and the San occupied vast parts of the central interior of southern Africa (Boonzaier et al. 1996:4-27, Buys 1989:6-18, Engelbrecht 1936: ix-xii, Elphick 1983:2-84, Malherbe 1984:1-48 and Penn 1995:2-45). They possessed an own culture, language and identity (Carstens 1966 & 1985, Schapera 1965 and Engelbrecht 1936) and, according to Tobias (1955:263), a racial basis⁹.

After the destruction of most of the independent Khoekhoe societies in the Cape colony by the 1800s, European interest in the Khoekhoe, according to Chidester (1996:67), began to decline. Consequently, phrases such as “broken people”, “disappearing people” and “dying-out race” started to circulate with reference to the Khoekhoe (Chidester 1996:68-69). Various authors echo this view and maintain that by the early 20th century, the Khoekhoe were a disappearing group (Schapera 1965:47, Kies 1972:34-36, Boonzaier et al. 1996:129, Maingard 1932:103 and Ross 1975:575). A range of factors contributed to what Marks (1972:77) has called “the ultimate disappearance” of the Khoekhoe as an ethnic entity. Colonialisation, in all probability, was the single greatest reason for the disintegration of Khoekhoe communities, their absorption and assimilation into colonial societies, and thus their alleged “disappearance”. Under Dutch and British occupation, conflict with the Khoekhoe was mainly the result of disputes relating to land – as the colonial authorities extended colonial boundaries – and also to labour – as the settlers tried to obtain workers for their farms (Chidester 1996:45).

The Khoekhoe had also been restricted, by custom and law, with regard to their residence, way of life, employment, as well as certain compulsory services which were not required of other subjects (Tatz 1962:11). To escape from the discrimination and European settlements, many Khoekhoe trekked from their original places of habitation. In 1798, John Barrow, for example, visited Little Namaqualand and wrote: “The Namaqua Plains are now desolate and uninhabited. All those numerous tribes of Namaquas, once possessed of vast herds of cattle, are in the course of less than a century dwindled away to four hordes, which are not very numerous and in a great measure are subservient to the Dutch peasantry. A dozen years, and probably a shortened period, will see the remnant of the Namaqua nation in a state of entire servitude” (quoted in Hoernlé 1985:23).

Another reason for the alleged Khoekhoe extinction was what Marks (1972:77) refers to as their tendency towards acculturation. Marks claims that the Khoekhoe “literally acculturated themselves out of existence” and ascribes this to the fact that the social organisation of the Khoekhoe had not resulted in the formation of a close and integrated unit. This view is supported by Waldman (2007:164), who describes the Khoekhoe as “an open society which welcomed others”. The early history of the British colonial areas that would later be known as Griqualand West and British Bechuanaland confirms that extensive intermingling and integration occurred between the Khoekhoe, San, Bantu-speaking peoples and whites (Legassick 1969, Lye 1970, Lye & Murray 1980 and Ross 1974). This contact was mostly comprised of interactions relating to trade, war, intermarriage¹⁰ and cultural exchange¹¹, and facilitated the accommodation of “outsiders”¹².

As a result of economic factors, the Khoekhoe could no longer practise their traditional mode of transhumant subsistence; hence they were systematically forced to work as labourers on “white” farms, or to move to urban localities. Firstly, there was the influx of rebels, runaways, white “trekboere” and “bastards” into the interior, which placed the limited environmental resources under pressure, resulting in (renewed) clashes and conflict (Ross 1975). Secondly, the discovery of diamonds (1869-71) was an important catalyst for Khoekhoe transformation. Apart from the labour that Khoekhoe people supplied in the diamond diggings (Buys 1989:101-102 and Van der Merwe 1984:57), they themselves soon came to realise the economic value of diamonds and became involved in the diamond trade. According to Shillington (1985:35-44), the Koranna and Griqua found the largest share of diamonds along the Orange River, during the early years after diamonds were initially discovered.

Although missionary societies generally played an important role with regard to the establishment, regulation and transformation of Khoekhoe communities, the manner in which these missionary societies acquired large tracts of land that the Khoekhoe regarded as their own (e.g. Pniel and Bethanie, in the case of the Berlin Mission Society) made a definite contribution to the economic decline of the Khoekhoe, as well as the breakdown of their social structure and the destruction of their cohesion and identity.

Missionaries also played a part in the creation and/or perpetuation of negative stereotypes of the Khoekhoe. Schoeman (1985:88 & 2002:100) refers in this regard to the lack of understanding, as well as the impatience, censure and even undisguised antagonism displayed by them towards the Khoekhoe¹³. The haughtiness, callousness and intolerance of the missionaries detracted from their good intentions, to a large extent.

Lastly, there was the unavoidable influence of political factors. Prior reference has been made to the political events in the then Cape colony. The area that later became known as the Republic of the Orange Free State (which came into being in 1854) represents a historical area of concentration of the Khoekhoe. Article two of the Bloemfontein Convention determined the internal policy of the newly formed government with regard to the regulation of the relationship between the various population groups. One of the matters for which the assembly of the Orange Free State accepted responsibility was the termination of (what they interpreted as) the continual migration of indigenous Khoekhoe groups. In this regard, it must be pointed out that the Koranna, for example, were not comprised of permanent, settled, hereditary polities, but rather of people who had chosen a particular way of life, albeit a roaming, predatory, raiding one (Ross 1975:575-576). It was this very basis of their social organisation that brought them into conflict with the political rulers of the Free State. The Koranna were unable to adapt to the newly prescribed Free State society and were forced to give up the lifestyle that was inextricably linked to their identity as Koranna. They thus ceased to “be” Koranna. Being a Koranna no longer had any meaning, owing to the fact that they no longer had any space to occupy, or land to live on.

Apartheid defined race, ethnicity and nation in distinctive terms, and produced a set of practices concerned with the boundaries between these categories. The implementation of the apartheid policy of racial segregation held the following implications for the Khoekhoe: First, they were labelled “coloureds”¹⁴ and were politically, socially and economically constrained to renounce their origins (Jung 2000:168)¹⁵. Second, various Khoekhoe communities were affected by forced removals – so-called “black spot removals” – and were re-established in urban “locations” or “coloured reserves”. Third, they did not have a specific voice in the South African political discourse prior to 1994.

When the authorities of the present South African political dispensation – in keeping with the contemporary international climate, which favours the recognition of indigenous linguistic, cultural and identity rights (Darnell 1994:7 and Kuper 1994:537) – granted constitutional accommodation and recognition to all traditional communities and their leadership, a stimulus was created for ethnic mobilisation and revival amongst the Khoekhoe¹⁶.

The Khoekhoe: Their Revival

Perhaps the single factor that is most frequently cited by Khoekhoe leaders as a justification for the creation and establishment of new political structures amongst their ranks is their conviction, on primordial grounds, that they are the true and only indigenous peoples of South Africa (Besten 2009:135 & 139 and Ruiters 2009:121). Secondly, current processes of Khoekhoe self-definition are influenced by their perception that they are just as marginalised by the ANC government as they were by the previous one (Adhikari 2005:179 and Ruiters 2009:105). Thirdly, amongst the ranks of the Khoekhoe leadership, there is a growing concern that their right to conduct their own self-representation and to select the criteria that they wish to use in order to give expression thereto, is being disregarded, denied or questioned, or that it is being brushed aside as cheap opportunism (cf. the CR Swart Memorial Lecture, presented by Mr Cecil Le Fleur, chair of the Griqua National Conference, University of the Free State, 24 August 2006).

Social scientists differ in terms of their reflections on the distinctive ways in which collective Khoekhoe identities are being transformed and/or given meaning in the post-apartheid era. Some authors are inclined to be sceptical. Adhikari (2005:175) holds the view that although the racial hierarchy that regulated South Africa's social relations has broken down, intergroup relations have become more complex and expressions of social identity more fluid. In his opinion, the manifestations of Khoekhoe identity tend to be episodic, and are mainly in evidence on festive and symbolic occasions (Adhikari 2005:186). He asserts that Khoekhoe revivalism is a movement only in the broadest sense of the term, since a profusion of groups and individuals with a variety of agendas have claimed Khoekhoe identity since the mid-1990s. Khoekhoe revivalism is, in his words, both "exclusionist" and "coloured rejectionist" in nature. It is rejectionist in that Khoekhoe identity is proudly affirmed as an authentic culture of ancient pedigree, in place of colouredness – which is repudiated as the colonisers' grotesque caricature of the colonised. It is exclusionist, because the Khoekhoe's claim to being the true indigenes of South Africa, even when this claim is not articulated as a demand for first-nation status, nevertheless represents a new argument for a position of relative privilege. Khoekhoe revivalism is also exclusionist in another sense: during the Khoekhoe Consultative Conference (Oudtshoorn 2001), there was general agreement that Muslims and Malays did not qualify as Khoekhoe (Adhikari 2005:186).

Sharp (2006), too, questions the motives underlying recent Khoekhoe revivalist actions. He rejects the notion of a distinct, authentic culture – and thus, by implication, also rejects the concept of the retention of pre-apartheid/colonial cultural patterns and institutions of self-identification¹⁷. Øvernes (2008:267-268), however, maintains that although the Khoe-San were written out of history in approximately the mid-1800s – and although they disappeared from the social map and basically ceased to exist with a “traditional culture” – this did not stop Khoe-San self-ascription and self-naming (2008:267). Although Øvernes (2008:18) refers, in this regard, to the unifying function of the concept of “indigenous people”, she clearly emphasises that Khoe-San authenticity should not be defined too strictly in terms of distinctive traits and customs (2008:268), because they have subsequently developed various new ways of living as Khoe-San (2008:261).

In De Beer’s view, the South African constitution has stimulated the revival of the cultural identity of the Khoekhoe (1998:38), as well as the reawakening of their ethnic consciousness (2001:109). In this regard, Waldman (2007:168) distinguishes between the simultaneous processes of nation-building (homogenisation) and ethnic safeguarding (“othering”) amongst the Khoekhoe, adding that the latter is largely based on the application of indigenous rights. According to Waldman (2007:170), apart from human rights, the Khoekhoe are demanding collective rights associated with group identity, self-determination, culture and indigenous minorities (cf. also Ruiters 2009:123).

In order to reveal how (as has been argued) the purposive use of dream and vision narratives facilitates a unique effort towards ethno-political revival, it is necessary to turn to the empirical data of the study. In this regard, examples taken from history will firstly be considered. Dreams and visions of Jan Parel and A.A.S. Le Fleur I will be presented. In the second place, material provided by contemporary ethno-political Koranna and Griqua leaders in the Free State will be dealt with.

Examples From the Past

Jan Parel, a.k.a. *Onse Liewen Heer (the Good Lord)*: The experiences of Jan Parel, who was born in the vicinity of Swellendam in 1761, most probably represent the earliest examples of the role of dreams and visions in Khoekhoe political discourse. His rise as a prophet and rebel may, according to Viljoen (1994:3), be attributed to the vicious circle of poverty, deprivation and degradation that the Khoekhoe had experienced in a world created by the predominantly Dutch settler community of the Cape. As a member of the exploited class, Parel was highly sensitive to the social needs of his community. Driven by his passion for liberation, his faith in his own personal charisma and a remarkable political will-power, he led the Khoekhoe in a revolt that had strong religious undertones.

Immediately after having received his “revelation of a revolution”, by means of a dream or vision, Parel informed his people of the spiritual encounter with the ancestors¹⁸ that he had experienced. Owing to this encounter, he was convinced that he was duty-bound to urge his people to prepare themselves for the imminent return of the Good Lord. The instructions given in the prophetic message of Parel were four-fold. His adherents were told to slaughter white cattle (symbolising Europeans), burn their European clothes, and erect new straw huts with two doors. Fourthly – when all these rituals had been completed – they were to attack the Swellendam Drostdy on 25 October 1788, destroy farms and kill all Christians, including children (Viljoen 1994:7). This would pave the way for the return of the Good Lord, who would come to heal a society in pain and in the throes of a most distressing crisis.

Parel embarked on his crusade of resistance, in the form of a millenarian movement. To bolster his plan, Parel’s aim was to make the Overberg region ungovernable. The response of the Khoekhoe was overwhelming; and they immediately rallied to his call. Parel succeeded, within a relatively short time, in mobilising the Khoekhoe community. In order to achieve his goal, he combined his role as a prophet with that of a rebel. Parel saw himself as a divine messenger whose task it was to save the Khoekhoe from their colonial plight.

Needless to say, Parel’s prophecy did not come true. The rebellion was completely quelled; and Parel became a fugitive as he tried to escape Government officials. He was later arrested in Swellendam and imprisoned in Stellenbosch. He was released in 1793.

A.A.S. Le Fleur I¹⁹: In the historiography of the Griqua, the visions and dreams of A.A.S. Le Fleur I, commonly known as “Die Kneg” – the “Servant of God” or the Prophet – became a major point of reference. The visions of “Die Kneg” – as he is reverently referred to by his followers – were gradually transformed into the basis for a revived Griqua society, with these visions assuming tremendous religious importance. The religious point of reference imbued the visions with great prestige, as well as legitimacy.

Abraham Le Fleur, a stock farmer, served for a while as secretary to the Griqua chief, Adam Kok III, during the latter’s stay at Philippolis. When Adam Kok III and 3,000 of his followers trekked from Philippolis (in 1861–62) to the so-called No-Man’s-Land (present-day East Griqualand), Le Fleur remained on his farm in the district of Rouxville. His son, Andries Andrew Abraham Stockenstrom Le Fleur (who was born on 2 July 1867 at Hersche), was raised on this farm.

In 1884, Abraham Le Fleur and the 17-year-old Andries joined the East Griqualanders and settled at Matatiele. One day, Abraham sent his son out to look for a lost donkey. It was during this search that Andries received his first revelation, on 9 May 1889, on the Manyane Mountain. He had already searched in vain for the donkey for three days when he suddenly heard a voice call his name. His name was called three times; and then the voice told him that the donkey was just behind the koppie. The voice identified itself as that of God and told Andries to gather the dead bones of Adam Kok III. Andries doubted the voice, as he himself was not a Griqua; but once again, it instructed him to collect the bones. In addition to this instruction, the voice also told him that Lady Kok (the widow of Adam Kok III, who had died in 1875) would die at 8 a.m. on the next day, as proof of the truth of God's words. When he arrived at home, Andries told his father what had happened; and they decided to go to Kokstad. On their arrival there, Lady Kok was in good health; but five minutes before 8 a.m., she experienced a sudden spasm of pain, and by 8 a.m. she was dead. Then Andries's father believed him, for the Bible affirmed that only God could predict someone's death. After the revelation, Andries Anglicised his name to Andrew and began to devote all his energies to the task of righting the wrongs that had been done to the Griquas.

In 1895, Andrew joined the Griqua Independent Church, founded by the Edinburgh-born missionary, the Rev. William Dower of the London Missionary Society, who had come to work among the Griqua in the late 1860s, at the invitation of Adam Kok III. In 1897, Andrew married Rachel Susanna Kok, the youngest daughter of the late Adam Muis Kok (a nephew of Adam Kok III). Through this marriage, and also owing to the lack of interest in Griqua politics on the part of his wife's brothers, Lodewyk and Jimmy, Andrew managed to persuade many Griquas to look up to him as the inheritor of the Kok chieftainship (since Adam Kok III had allegedly left no children). Andrew embarked on a vigorous crusade to reinstate Griqua self-rule (which had prevailed until 1874) in East Griqualand²⁰. Andrew's activities elicited a strong reaction from both the Cape colonial government and the people on whose behalf he believed he was acting. He was betrayed, caught and eventually handed over to the colonial authorities. In April 1898, he was convicted of sedition and sentenced to 14 years' labour at the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town. Ultimately, he was incarcerated for only five years.

The legend regarding Andrew's release from the Breakwater Prison goes back to the night before his trial commenced in Kokstad. In a letter to his wife written years later, he reminded her of the vision he had had that night: three heavenly messengers appeared to him in his Kokstad prison cell, comforting him with the words: "We are sent to go before you. We are the three men you read [about] in the Bible who met father Abraham when he took his son to Mount Moriah as an offering to God. And we are commanded to go before you, fear not...". Years later, "Die Kneg" revealed that in his moments of despair in Breakwater Prison, a mysterious voice gently reprimanded him in a whisper: "You have no right to think that you have a long term [of] imprisonment".

Even today, every generation of his family and many of his followers unquestioningly believe in Andrew's early twentieth-century prophecies regarding his and other prisoners' release on the occasion of King Edward VII's coronation. At the beginning of 1903, Andrew predicted his own release: he would be discharged at 15:00 on the first Friday of April, with the officiating warden saluting him, he said. After much ridicule from the wardens because of his perceived "madness", events allegedly turned out in exactly the way he had predicted²¹.

After his release, "Die Kneg" began, *inter alia*, to create his own social and political movement for the promotion of the cause of the Griqua. In 1919, he launched his predominantly female Griqua choirs; he started a newspaper, *The Griqua and Coloured People's Opinion*; and he founded his own version of the Griqua Independent Church during the Easter weekend of 5-6 April 1920, as an alternative to the European-controlled mission stations. It was during this weekend that the members of the Griqua National Conference confirmed his position as their "Opperhoof" [Paramount Chief].

Contemporary Examples

"Kaptyn²²" (Captain) Johannes Kraalshoek – a chief in the Free State Griqua Council: In 1968, Johannes Kraalshoek – so he and his followers believe – received his calling as a Griqua leader by means of a divine blessing²³. In this regard, he reports as follows:

On the Saturday evening, after attending a movie, I was on my way home. It was almost half-past eleven. I needed to visit the toilet, which was situated behind the house. As I was about to urinate, a bright light shone from my hand. I looked for the source of the light, since I could not see the shadow of my hands. I went back to the house, where my aunt informed me that my dinner was in the warming-drawer of the oven. I thanked her, but I was more concerned about the light. I resolved to return to the toilet, in order to find out whether I would see the light again. What had happened before, now happened once again. I became worried and decided not to eat my dinner, but rather to go to bed. There was a smoky smell in the room and my cousin half-opened the window above him, in order to get rid of the odour. I took my mattress and blanket and began to make up my bed, in the usual manner. When I climbed into bed, I began to toss about and my ears became blocked. The image of a cloud appeared before me. Two angels were standing alongside of it, while another angel was directly underneath, carrying the cloud. The cloud then readied itself to shift and at the same time, I raised myself slightly. However, I did not open my eyes, for I had begun to pray. The cloud moved closer to the window and then into the house, and I felt a cool wind entering the room. When the cloud was in front of me, it opened and I saw that someone was inside of it. This person began to speak, saying: "Blessed are you".

At the same time, he stretched out his hands and I could see the marks of the nails, clearly and visibly. While I looked at his hands, he said to me: “I bless you in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. He took my chin in his hand and lifted my face slightly; then he held his hands together and pressed them against my chest. He opened my chest and took hold of my heart with both hands. He then turned my heart a little towards the right and pressed it slightly downwards. I almost leapt up, but then he said once again: “I bless you in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From now on, you are blessed”. When he had said these words to me, I reached the end of my prayer. He went back into the cloud, which closed up once again. During these events, my cousin sat bolt upright and watched me in astonishment, while I watched the cloud departing. I noticed that the moon was red²⁴. After the cloud had left, I jumped up and began shouting. My aunt woke up and came and asked us what was wrong. My cousin replied that he had no idea. She asked me the same question, but I was unable to answer her. She gave me some sugar water to bring me around, so that she could find out more about the event, but I was still unable to answer her. (Interviewed on 19 February 2004)

Johannes Kraalshoek is not an elected leader, nor could he claim a leadership position on the basis of genealogical grounds. However, after his divine blessing, he became actively involved in Griqua politics. During 1974, for example, he established the Bethany²⁵ Committee, with the goal of regaining Bethany in order to “contain” the Griqua in one place. On the basis of his involvement, elderly family members requested Johannes to act as their leader; and when asked about his plan, he replied that he was engaged in a “three-point-one plan”: to “establish the Griqua people”, to “acquire the land” and to “reclaim the culture, identity and language of the Griquas.”

He was the first person to be registered in the Griqua National Survey²⁶ in 1983. According to him, for the first time, residents of Heidedal (the so-called coloured neighbourhood of Bloemfontein) were prepared to acknowledge that they were Griqua and not “coloured”. Johannes Kraalshoek was sworn in on 26 September 1997 as a member of the Council of Headmen of the Griqua National Conference of South Africa for the Free State province.

Jaftha Taaibosch-Davids, leader of the Free State Koranna Culture and Heritage Council: Jaftha Taaibosch-Davids is one of the contenders for the leadership of the newly revitalised Taaibosch Koranna of the Free State. He has based his claim to leadership on historical and genealogical data, on the one hand; and on the other, he has also put forward certain divine revelations in corroboration of his claims. Over many years, according to him, he received various revelations in dreams and visions, which are respected by himself and his followers as legitimate. During an interview on 16 March 2007, he provided the following examples:

1. Early one morning, I was sitting on a chair by the back door, smoking. Somewhere, I heard a bird making a beautiful warbling sound. While I was sitting and listening to it, a sparrow suddenly plunged towards me and then turned and flew past me, having dropped a feather into my lap. It was the feather of a “King woodpecker” [i.e., a crested barbet – *Trachyphonus vaillantii*]. I reported the whole episode to Tony Petersen and Walter Fry [two of his followers], who confirmed that this was a sign from the ancestors to confirm my leadership. Fry is also a seer and healer.
2. I was alone at home during the December holidays – my wife was in Johannesburg. I was feeling very dejected as I lay and watched television. Suddenly I heard a loud voice that ordered me to turn off the television. I felt as if I had fallen into a half-trance, but I obeyed the order. The voice spoke again, ordering me to pick up the Bible immediately and read it. I took my Bible from the top of the wardrobe and went and sat on the bed. I asked the voice where I should open the Bible, so that the purpose of the voice’s visit could be revealed to me. I opened the Bible at random and found myself reading Samuel 24, dealing with Saul’s persecution of David and the kingship of David.
3. I dreamed that all my deceased ancestors came and stood around me, while I was in the middle. They were joyful about the progress of [the revival of] the Koranna. My mother embraced and kissed me. She assured me that I should never have any doubts and that the ancestors would always protect me in difficult times ahead.

Susan Van Wyk: Susan Van Wyk is a Koranna woman who is almost seventy years old and a respected spiritual leader of Heidedal. She regularly receives revelations through dreams and visions which – so she believes – come from the Holy Spirit and from the ancestors. She was 13 years old when she had her first supernatural experience. She lived with her grandfather and grandmother on a farm in the Free State, where she looked after their sheep and goats on the mountains. She reports:

I stayed for days on the mountains and sat praying. I saw signs everywhere. A fish lay on a flat rock, but as soon as I touched it, it began to live. One day, a man appeared to me. He wore brown sackcloth around his body, but I could not see his feet or his head. I asked him: “Uncle, who are you? What do you want me to do? You cannot come here and bother me. I live with Grandpa and Granny. My mother also knows that I am living here. You cannot take me away; this is my place of prayer. Are you one of my ancestors?” The man answered me in Koranna language, saying that he was *Haitsi aibib*²⁷ and that, although I did not know him, he knew me²⁸. He said: “I allowed you to come here. You must go down now; you cannot remain here”.

The man dressed in sacking then burned up, right before my eyes. Only a heap of ash remained. When I touched the ash, it melted and I said: “Father, what do you want?” The man appeared again and said that he had to go now, but that he would leave certain signs for me: “You must follow these signs. Write them on the tablets of your heart”. I did not understand what was going on. When I returned to my grandmother, she asked: “What is going on with you? Who has been talking to you?” I answered: “That man in the hills – but I do not know who he is”. I went back to the mountains, because I wanted to know the answer. *Haitsi aibib* appeared to me and said: “A time will come when the nation will come to fulfilment, but it will not be easy – it will be very difficult. Be calm and small, and become humble. The breakthrough will come²⁹. This you must know, for you have received word of it from us.” I responded: “But who do you mean by ‘us’? After all, you are alone.” When I came down the mountain, *Haitsi aibib* appeared to me again and showed me certain signs on the flat rocks: I saw something like a fish or a skull. Suddenly I saw a fire on the flat rock and then, as I looked, all I saw was a heap of ash. *Haitsi aibib* then told me to eat some of it. When I touched it, it became like dough. (Interviewed on 9 March 2007)

Mrs Van Wyk describes herself as a devout Christian, and her revelations, in fact, display remarkable similarities to those encountered in the Old Testament; for example, in the narrative which describes how Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. Although she strongly supports all attempts at Khoekhoe revival, she is not directly or actively involved in any political activities. She does, in fact, have political influence in the sense that leaders, including Jaftha Taaibosch-Davids, have consulted her on a regular basis. In particular, she has been consulted in connection with the interpretation of dreams; and her prayers have often been requested for important decisions and meetings.

Discussion

Rich and varied discourses on the nature of dreams and visions have been developed in Anthropology (cf. Hultkrantz 1984, Tylor 1947 and Geertz 1960). However, according to Tedlock (1987:4), the topic has not yet been properly addressed. One of the reasons for the marginalisation of the study of dreams and visions in Anthropology, was the collapse of the Culture and Personality School in America (Tedlock 1987:ix)³⁰. Another reason is the fact that the discussion of visionary experiences is not a straightforward matter; hence the ethnography of dreaming is highly problematic. Not only are dreams and visions among the most private and personal of human experiences, but the relating of dreams and visions is also a purposive activity which can be manipulated with a view to achieving specific objectives.

In the first place, taking the above problematical aspects into account, it can be confirmed, on the grounds of the ethnographic material presented in this article, that dreams and visions are true spiritual experiences for those Koranna and Griqua who embrace their belief in them. However, secondly, dreams and visions do not only bring people closer to the sacred. The recounting of dreams and visions also allows people to possess their own understanding of these experiences, to extract meaning from them, and to relate this meaning to their everyday lives. In this way, dreams and visions provide a normative framework for understanding themselves and the world, thus offering a means for finding solutions for everything, from thwarted desires to the highest spiritual aspirations, as well as encompassing the practical problems and inconsistencies of daily life and the means to deal with these problems in an imaginative way. Through the enactment of imaginative events, dreams and visions reinforce a sense of reality; and the line between dreamed or visionary events and the events of everyday life more or less disappears.

Thirdly, the utilisation of dreams and visions as instruments to mobilise ethno-political support is not merely a present-day phenomenon. During the centuries of subjection to colonial and apartheid situations (which led to a sense of cultural inferiority and a perception of deprivation), dreams and visions played a role in the struggle against oppression and in ethnic revival attempts. The same can be said in respect of current, ethno-political Koranna and Griqua leaders who set out to reinforce their political engagement with the “new” South Africa, and to represent their people in this regard in a certain way, albeit on alleged primordial grounds, or on the grounds of first-nation status.

Fourthly, with regard to the recording of the dreams, specific themes or motives were not decided on beforehand. Nevertheless, a strong central theme is present in the dreams and visions, namely the fact that the leaders all received some or other divine revelation or command in respect of their position, task and calling. As a matter of fact, this divine sanction (which underscores the close link between religion, on the one hand, and dreams and visions, on the other) is probably the single most important basis for leadership, as well as for claims relating to ethnic mobilisation. On the basis of the empirical information, one could say that, just as religion may play a role as a form of political and social protest (Linton 1943 and Wallace 1956), it may likewise play a role in the ethno-political revitalisation of the Koranna and Griqua.

In this article, it has been argued that the current processes of ethno-political revival amongst the Khoekhoe should not be interpreted in terms of a single way of doing things, or the use of uniform criteria – different, and often subtle, forms of action and criteria come into play. Dreams and visions are viewed as one such unique instrument that is being employed in Khoekhoe revival. The ethnographic material that has been presented in respect of the Koranna and Griqua in this regard, indicates the unique role played by dreams and visions in the discourse of Koranna and Griqua revival.

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Endnotes

¹ In Anthropology, the concept “revitalisation” is generally used in a context that has a bearing on religion (for example, with regard to the principle that society can be improved through the adaptation of new religious beliefs / values – *cf.* Kottak 2000:661 and Nanda & Warms 2002:355). However, in this text, the term “revitalisation” will be used with a broader meaning - to refer to deliberate attempts (which may be religious in nature) by some members of a community to construct (in their view) a more satisfactory and justifiable ethno-political dispensation.

² According to Ross (1974:29), the Griqua, Koranna and “Basters” used Afrikaans-Dutch as their first language as from 1700. He also refers to the adoption of Afrikaans-Dutch names, e.g. Kok, Barends, Taaibosch, etc. In this regard, in 1930, Schapera (1965:49-50) reported that: “A few of the older people still know their own language, but the great majority now speak only Afrikaans, which is the regular medium of intercourse even among themselves”.

³ Ruiters (2009:104) emphasises that the ending of apartheid provided opportunities for people to self-identity as they wished and to experiment with their identities.

⁴ According to Hayashida (1999:6–7), sufficient grounds exist for distinguishing between what is revealed during sleep (dreams) and what is revealed in the course of conscious activity (visions). In this regard, Kilborne (1987:171) refers to the differences between dreams and visions in terms of linguistic, perceptual and cognitive categories. Buck (1981:105), on the other hand, is of the opinion that dreams and visions are compounded in the African culture, since very often, no distinction is made in the vernacular between dreams and visions (*cf.* Kiernan 1985:304–306). Price-Williams (1987:249–250) suggests that the phenomena that have generally been encoded as dreams and visions respectively, might better be described as parts of a larger interface between dreams and “waking dreams” (visions). A vision is usually a highly idealised experience which reflects a value judgement. I could find no proof that the classificatory scheme of the Koranna and Griqua makes provision for a clear analytical distinction between dreams and visions – and no attempt will be made, in this contribution, to make such a distinction. In dreams, Koranna and Griqua often experience the sensation of seeing themselves being lifted out of their bodies, up into the air. Afterwards, it is not possible for a person to make an analytical distinction between what was dreamed and what was experienced as a vision.

⁵ The fact that the traditional religion of the Khoekhoe was largely ousted by Christianity (Schapera 1965:374 and Heese 2002:13) does not imply that dreams and visions are therefore less important, or that they no longer occur, or that they have now been relegated to the realm of the “non-spiritual”. In this regard it should be remembered that dreams and visions are also part of the common religious heritage that the ancient Near East bestowed on Christianity, Islam and Judaism (Miller 1994:37). For the indigenous peoples of Africa, according to Mbiti (1969:2–3), it was not so much a case of converting to Christianity, as of adapting the Christian message to their traditional values and religious beliefs.

⁶ The research was conducted within a participatory paradigm. The data presented are qualitative in nature and were mainly collected in the Free State by means of interviews, oral histories and case studies carried out since 2004. As a non-Koranna and non-Griqua, I am all too aware of the fact that I am faced with a great disadvantage in respect of my attempts to obtain some degree of understanding of Koranna and Griqua dreams and visions – especially in a world where science and technology have become the central focus of modern thinking and where traditional imaginative experiences as a source of guidance in life are greatly undervalued – and, moreover, are greatly at risk of disappearing.

⁷ Content analysis (Kilborne 1987:171–193) and the sociological approach (Kiernan 1985:304) have long been the major methodological approaches followed in the study of dreams and visions. Presently, the scholarly focus has shifted to relevant discourse frames and acts of recounting, in other words the need to recognise ways of sharing dreams and visions. This also reflects the point of departure that will be followed in this article, in its presentation of dreams and visions.

⁸ Colonial accounts, according to Chidester (1996:59), did not always distinguish between herders (Khoekhoe) and hunter-gatherers (San), employing the term *Hottentot* for both. Wilsem (in Gupta and Ferguson 1992:16), however, points out that the San often kept cattle and that no strict separation of pastoralists and foragers can be sustained.

⁹ Earlier natural scientists incorrectly identified the San as a distinct race (Chidester 1996:59).

¹⁰ As a matter of fact, intermingling with other groups seems to have been such a common occurrence that Beach (1937), as quoted by Buys (1989:55), observed that it is impossible “to find a pure representation” of the Khoekhoe – a view supported by Boonzaier et al. (1996:129), who indicated that by the 1950s it was widely accepted that there were “hardly any pure Hottentots left in Namaqualand”.

¹¹ In 1930 Schapera (1965:49-50) reported as follows on the inhabitants of Little Namaqualand: "Their tribal cohesion and culture have, however, been completely destroyed by contact with the Europeans, and they have also absorbed a good deal of white blood".

¹² People who were not Griqua, for example, would have been incorporated first as Griqua-dependants and later as full members who enjoyed full citizenship (Legassick 1969:242 and Ross 1974:29). Many who moved into Griqua polities for the sake of the sanctuary provided by such polities also tended to become full members. It was estimated in 1813 that there were 1266 Griqua in Griquatown and its outposts, and 1341 Koranna "who consider[ed] themselves connected with [the] Griquas, for the sake of protection" (Campbell 1974:256). People such as these Koranna tended to develop a Griqua identity on the basis of their association with the Griqua in the settlement and their identification with the polity.

¹³ Anderson (quoted by Arnot & Orpen 1875:150), for example, described the Griqua in 1800 as "a herd of wandering and naked savages, subsisting by plunder and the chase ... without knowledge, without morals, or any traces of civilization, [who] were wholly abandoned to witchcraft, drunkenness, licentiousness, and all the consequences which arise from the unchecked growth of such vices".

¹⁴ According to Erasmus and Pieterse (1999:169), the idea of being coloured had arisen among freed slaves and their descendants between 1875 and 1910. In Jung's (2000:168-169) view, the concept actually originated much earlier, as the social and political identities that had been created during the era of slavery were responsible for the development of coloured identities. Although the term was thus used long before the apartheid era, its meaning was more fluid in the nineteenth century (Lewis 1987:7-10).

¹⁵ According to the Population Registration Act of 1950, all South Africans who were not white or black were regarded as "coloureds" – the umbrella concept for the "residue" – those who did not fit into the first two categories. The Griqua, however, were later recognised as a distinct cultural group and were excluded from the definition.

¹⁶ In this regard Besten (2009:139) is of the opinion that the resurgence of Khoe-San identities in South Africa in the 1990s coincided with a number of international developments that stimulated growing Khoe-San organisations and the affirmation of their culture and identity. The United Nations declaring 1993 as the Year of Indigenous People and the subsequent declaration of 1995-2004 as the International Decade for the World's Indigenous People focused greater attention on the rights of indigenous people. Renewed Western fascination with, and romanticisation of, indigenous cultures and the attention boom in cultural tourism encouraged the assertion of Khoe-San identity.

¹⁷ See also Sharp (1997), Sharp and Boonzaier (1994), Robins (1997) and Van der Waal and Ward (2006).

¹⁸ The Khoekhoe conceptually distinguish between spirits (ghosts) and ancestors – spirits being evil and ancestors, good (Barnard 1992:256). From their beliefs, it is clear that the Khoekhoe are far from considering natural causes alone to be a sufficient explanation for death. Death is attributed in many cases to the influence of //Gâuab, or the spirit (ghost) of the dead (Schapera 1965:358 and Engelbrecht 1936:176). Although Boezak (2006:8), a former minister of the NG Mission Church, denies that ancestor worship was practised, there is overwhelming evidence of the occurrence of ancestor worship amongst the Khoekhoe (Schapera 1965:372 and Engelbrecht 1936:176). Informants who were included in the investigation not only confirmed this, but also emphasised the role played by ancestors in dreams and visions. As a matter of fact, for the Khoekhoe, ancestors are not really dead; rather, they are regarded as “living dead”. The relationship between those living on earth and the ancestors is very close (Hoff 1993:3). For example, when in trouble, the Khoekhoe pray at the gravesides of their grandparents and ancestors. This implies that dead people are not invariably dreaded as ghosts who cause sickness and death – they may also be invoked to help their descendants.

¹⁹ With regard to the information provided here, the following sources were consulted: Bredekamp (2003:133-154), Boezak (2006:90-95) and Cronjé (2006:14-24). In addition, the material presented in this section was confirmed by Mr Cecil Le Fleur, a member of the family of “Die Kneg”.

²⁰ No-Man’s-Land had been annexed in 1879 after a Griqua rebellion.

²¹ This prophecy had such an effect on the Griqua that to this day, they still hold an hour of prayer at 3 o’ clock on a Sunday morning.

²² Ross (1974:30–31), in an article on Griqua government, declares that the term “Kaptyn”, as adopted by various independent groups north of the Orange River in the nineteenth century, is still used by certain groups to refer to their leader, who is elected for life. However, his powers are greatly limited; and members of such groups are recruited on a very wide, non-ascriptive basis.

²³ This was not a once-off event in the life of “Kaptyn” Johannes Kraalshoek. He had various visionary experiences, which provided him with an abundance of material for the creation of vivid paintings of his mysterious imaginings.

²⁴ A prominent component of Khoekhoe mythology centres around the moon. The lunar cycle marks propitious times for dancing (as a religious act); and altered states of consciousness provide access to different types of knowledge (Chidester 1996:39-43 and Krüger 1995:316-321). The moon is associated with the origin of death, but according to Barnard (1992:254), it is not a Khoekhoe god (informants, however, disagree with one another in this regard); nor does the moon seem to be, or ever to have been, regarded as a separate deity. Rather, according to Schapera (1965:375), the moon is thought to symbolise the visible manifestation of God – a view that can be corroborated in terms of the material of the case studies.

²⁵ During 1965, Bethany had been declared a “black spot” under the **Group Areas Act, 1957** (No. 77 of 1957). In terms thereof, the residents were removed and the Berlin Missionary Society obtained control over Bethany.

²⁶ This was the initiative of a local minister (a Rev. Gordon) of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church.

²⁷ According to Barnard (1992:261), Khoekhoe mythology undoubtedly reveals systems of belief and explanation. One of the best-known myths is the one concerning *Haitsi aibib*. It is said that he was a great and celebrated magician among the Khoekhoe in prehistoric times, who could foretell what was going to happen in the future. He is regarded as their great-grandfather and is described as a powerful chief who conquered and annihilated all the enemies who tried to kill his people. He was born of a young girl who had chewed a type of grass and swallowed the juice, thereby becoming pregnant. The boy was as remarkable as his birth. He committed incest with his mother; he fought and killed various evil monsters; and he slew great lions. He could change himself into many different forms and was able to go through mountains and rivers when pursued. He died in many places, was buried and invariably came to life again. His graves are generally found in narrow mountain passes on both sides of the road. When passing these graves, which consist of great heaps of stones piled up, the Khoekhoe will throw pieces of their clothing, or skins, or the dung of a zebra, or twigs of shrubs and branches of trees, as well as stones, onto the heap. They do this in order to ensure that their journey will be successful.

²⁸ Although *Haitsi aibib* is a mythological figure, Mrs Van Wyk insists that she met him in her visions. This is not exceptional. Lohman (2000:81), for example, points out that the Asabano of Papua New Guinea frequently report having experienced a dream in which mythological characters appeared, as proof of their existence.

²⁹ Upon being questioned, Mrs Van Wyk stated that she believed this to be a reference to the oppression of Apartheid and the advent of the “New South Africa,” in which a black man would be the president of the country.

³⁰ Cultural and personality studies became unpopular mainly because of the realisation that there is no general uniformity in respect of any personality type within a culture. Attempts to extract patterns of culture and personality from the subjective reconstruction of the dream-as-dreamed, are therefore likewise rejected (Kiernan 1985:394).