Khoisan Revivalism

The claims of Africa's first indigenous peoples

An unexpected development in post-apartheid South Africa is the revivalism of Khoisan identity, the truly indigenous of the country whose blood flows through many who now know themselves by different names. Anthea Garman reports.

Critical issues

Prof Jatti Bredekamp outlines the critical issues affecting the Khoisan as:

- Due recognition of Khoisan symbols by the Christian churches of this country (many Khoisan are converted);
- Inclusion of Khoisan languages and history in education in schools;
- Consultation on the dilemma - a depiction on the Khoisan as the colonialis encountered them - in the South African Museum in Cape Town before it is dismantled because the current director thinks it is "decontextualising". Many Khoisan argue it is one of the only places in SA which depicts their history;
- Repatriation of Khoisan remains - many bodies were taken over the years for scientific use by researchers impervious to Khoisan concerns about treating their ancestors with respect;
- Land rights;
- Protection of indigenous knowledge and;
- Fair representation in the media - on the issue of representation Bredekamp says "We are often still seen as 'boesmansk' and 'hotnot'. But he says, after this year's conference, the media are working to towards establishing a legislative body to oversee the fulfilment of these and other rights.

In pursuit of what is rightfully theirs, the council is working towards establishing a legislative body to oversee the fulfillment of these and other rights. "We want back our ancestral land and we want to protect our intellectual property. It's a big concern to the council that so many times people have come in, taken photos or made videos of our people and then gone off to make a lot of money without any real benefit for the Khoisan."

Anthea Garman is a senior lecturer in writing and editing in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, South Africa. Inzeko Kamudzai provided additional reporting for this article.

Khoisan broadcasting

Although the SA national broadcaster struggles to fulfil its mandate to broadcast in all 11 of the country's national languages, the Khoisan people - mostly concentrated in the Northern Cape - do have their own radio station. XQ-FM has 5 000 listeners and was launched in August last year. It has two producers who broadcast in the Khoisan language - the Xhosa and in a Khoisan language spoken by the Khoisan in the Northern Cape - do have their own radio station.

Producer Owen Knows says the station is situated in Schnildrift (an area notorious for the dumping of soldiers' barracks who were used by the apartheid defense force for cross-border raids).

Programmes cover news, current affairs, music, story telling, education and drama. "It is particularly our music and drama programmes that are the main crowd-pullers," says Owen.