**16 June 2018, at The Castle, Cape Town, - memorial Lecture on the Chieftaincy of the !Aman//Aes**

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Firstly, because we celebrate the 16th of June: Viva to the students of 1976, Viva! They renewed our confidence 42 years ago in the power of internal people’s struggle when an evil force ruled this country. Viva the students who 42 years ago sacrificed their lives for respect, equality and dignity. Let us today again affirm that domination by one group over another, whether economic, religious or based on nationalism, is the fundamental threat to all human kind, here and anywhere!

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Thank you Martinus Feredricks and Daniel Tim Fredericks for inviting me here today to memorialize and put right, the unrecognised, unacknowledged and untaught history of the !Aman people of South Africa and Namibia!

Now - before I tell you about the remarkable woman Zara, a daughter of the !Aman 200 years ago, I think I should deal with an elephant in the room here today. You might not have noticed, but there is an elephant here. – The elephant is me! I am the elephant because I don’t come to speak to you as some white academic who studied the life and times of Zara. The fact is that I have a direct bloodline to the woman Zara, a Khoen-khoen, Khoi or Namaqua woman who is my great, great, great grandmother. Yes, I want to tell you about the woman whose genes I carry in my blood. I can trace the lineage exactly and I can prove it through my DNA. – I am, maybe to your surprise related to the !Aman.

With the elephant now cut down to the size of an ordinary human being, not different to any other, let me tell you a phenomenal story about a phenominal woman called Zara:

Zara was born around 1793 and died in 1831 from ‘tering’ (TB), not yet forty years of age. This was more than 200 years ago. She died three days into an ox wagon journey that started here in Cape Town. She was with her European-born missionary husband, Johann Hinrich Schmelen. They were going home after launching the first Bible in the Namaqua language. So impressed was the British Governor at the Cape with their achievement that he invited the two of them for tea – and promised help, should they ever require it on the Northern edge of the colonial border.

 A few years ago, I found the place where my ancestors grave is. Going from farm to farm it took us three years to find the place. Labourers on a farm between Riebeeck Casteel and Porterville, just the otherside of the Berg River and in the shadow of the Heuningberg knew where it was, hidden under renosterbos. The white farmer had no idea that a clusrer of old graves existed on his farm once known as Botmashof.

Allow me to explain why I believe, even if I am accused of blowing the horn of one of my own ancestors, - why I believe, that Zara, the daughter of an !Aman chief, deserves a very special place in history; not only the history of the !Aman, or of the Nama or the darker-skinned Afrikaans speakers here and in Namibia. On National Women’s Day, Zara Schmelen, born Zara Hendricks-//Gaixas, deserves to be celebrated by all the people in our country and beyond.

Here is why:

With her husband, they put on paper the first Namaqua grammar, and, they invented for the first time the ‘click’ sound in writing, and together, they translated the Gosples into the Namaqua language. Imagine, this was an incredible achievement in 1830. And, to top it all they travelled by ox wagon from Komaggas near Springbok, to Cape Town to have this first Bible in the Nama language printed and published\*. You can go to the National Library here at the top of Adderley Street, and ask them to show it to you. They will show you two Bibles; the first one has the ‘click’ signs entered by hand and a later edition - after, in London, they cast the ‘click’ images into lead so the local printing press could reflect this new invention.

Zara was not just the wife of a foreign missionary. In his diaries and reports to the London Mission Society her husband tells of a loving and co-operative and productive relationship. He often writes: without her I could not have done this. Affectionately he calls her Gwarretjie, meaning fountain or life.

I say again: What I have just told you is remarkable, and here is why I say this:

* 1. History is always on the side of men and notably missionary men take credit for things they often do not deserve. But Zara’s husband says it in his own words: he could only achieve things without her at his side. The time is now to re-write history and recognise women for what they have done. *When you go back to school on Monday, ask your history teacher if you can write an essay on Zara Schmelen, a remarkable women in our history, to this day totally ignored! Yes, I say it again, she is completely and totally ignored – no reference or footnote anywhere. Ask your pastors and religious teachers to find out who Zara was and tell congregations about her. Tell your local counsellors and even politicians that we want to hear the name of Zara Schmelen mentioned on South African and International Women’s Day.* Colonialism and apartheid and male domination has silenced half of humanity. Let us together stand up and change that. *Have I got your agreement? Have I got your support?*
* 2. Zara is more than deserving of a space in the pages of our history. She is a pioneer, a bridge builder between the ancient times of the Khoi and modern times. She did, it can be argued save a language when it was threatened with extinction. To this day there are those who care little for the culture and language of former Nama speakers. Even brown-skinned South Africans often care little for their own history. I submit that this is a grave error. We are here today to change this. Go home tonight and tell your parents about this Namaqua woman, part of the !Aman people, who was the first one to save her people’s language by writing it down so it could survive into the inevitability of a new era. Zara is a pioneer who helped ensure that Namaqua as a language did not disappaer. She helped build the first tools so that the culture of her people survived in the face of the new world that imposed itself from Holland first, the Great Britain and the rest of Europe.
* 3. The third reason Zara stands out is that anyone will be hard pressed to find a dark-skinned woman anywhere in Southern Africa, two-hundred years ago, who pioneerd the basic right to cultural survival, whether consciusly or not is not the point. She is the source for celebration and continued cultural stimulation. *I challenge you, anyone: write a poem about her, compose a music about her, paint her as she should be remembered. Rebuild that which the past took away. We can do it!*

Call me prejudiced because I am Zara’s child but today I want to offer you this snippet of history as my small contribution to re-write and correct colonial and male dominated history. I invite you to do this with me!

If you want to see and read about my endeavour, please go to my website, it is free and the material is there for you to use. Go to [www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za](http://www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za).