

Hi there,

Thank you all for your wonderful responses to the previous newsletter. I shall return to the matter of Zara and the graveyard (hopefully with pictures) in due course.

It is impossible to reconstruct the social and political consciousness of the Khoi or San people of 200 years ago in their own words. Despite the valiant effort by Ursula Trueper in her book *The Invisible Woman – Zara Schmelen, African Mission Assistant at the Cape and in Namaland*, the accounts of the time are exclusively provided through the filter of the Colonisers, the Europeans who asserted their culture on the local people.

I have tried to imagine what Zara might have thought about her family or her people whose lives were thrown into turmoil during her lifetime; having to leave their fertile land and give way to the ever encroaching land-grabbing colonists, the *Trekboere*, and in so doing, the vanquished adapted to life in the arid desert and semi desert plains of Little and Great Namaqualand. Zara's religious conversion to Christianity and being of the generation who largely replaced their own language with the Dutch spoken by the colonists, was surely not passively accepted by her father or mother, about whom we know nothing. Here is a stark contrast: In the year that Zara

and Hinrich started with the translation of the four Gospels into the Nama language, Kaptein David Stuurman, a prominent leader of the Khoi, after repeated spells of imprisonment on Robben Island, was banished to Australia. His resistance to the alienation of their land was his crime. The year was 1823.

For those of you who want to know more about the way the San and Khoi culture was wiped away in that period, I thought you might appreciate reading the text below. It is about David Stuurman (his Dutch name), whose life coincides broadly with the period of Zara's life. His resistance and resilience to retain what was theirs, is instructive.

The text below appeared in the recent edition of the excellent *South African History Online (SAHO)*:

Names: Stuurman, Chief (Kaptein) David

Born: circa 1773

Died: 22 February 1830

In Summary: Leader of the Khoi people

Dawid Stuurman was born around 1773, probably near the Gamtoos River in the Eastern Cape. From the 17th century onwards, the Khoi and San people were systematically robbed of their traditional lands and, to a large extent, enslaved. Dawid Stuurman fought against this injustice in the Eastern Cape.

Land belonging to the Khoi in that area was progressively occupied in the following years "on ordinance by the colonists", who pressed the Khoi into service. The Boers were brutal and on one occasion Stuurman was tied to a wagon wheel, whipped with sjamboks, salted and left in the sun for hours after a disagreement with his "baas", Johannes Vermaak.

In 1799 the Khoi on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony rebelled. Hundreds left the farms where in many instances they were forced to work and went to live with the Xhosa. Together, the Khoi and the Xhosa effectively attacked the colonists. The Khoi were valuable allies as crack marksmen and

trained soldiers, who instructed the Xhosa in marksmanship and were relied upon for the maintenance of captured weapons. They drove many whites from their farms and claimed a great many sheep, cattle, horses, guns and wagons.

At that time the Dutch East India Company rule had come to an end. In 1795, when the Cape was taken over by the British, the new rulers had a serious problem on their hands, as the Khoi took their fight deep into the colony. The British tried to lure the Khoi back onto settler farms and servitude, promising protection and better treatment from the Boer farmers. But the Khoi wanted their freedom.

The Khoi were weary of war and many of their captains and chiefs had been killed. The Governor General, Jansens promised to protect the Khoi, but instructed them to return to farms and work as servants to the colonists.

However, many Khoi refused to meet the Dutch and remained with the Xhosa. In fact many from the Stuurman group didn't go back to the farms but went to live at the Bethelsdorp Mission Station, near Algoa Bay.

The surrounding farmers felt threatened by the presence of the Stuurman clan and constantly complained that the Khoi were in alliance with the Xhosa and were sheltering bandits, runaway *servants and boosdoenders* (evil-doers).

Eventually, after Dawid Stuurman had refused to give up two Khoi who had deserted Boer farmers, and also refused to appear before Landrost Cuyler in connection with the matter, the authorities bore down on the settlement, bound many of those into service, confiscated land and livestock, arrested Dawid and three others and transported them to Cape Town.

Chief (Kaptein) David Stuurman had an additional grievance over which he wrestled with the authorities headed by Lord Caledon. This was the increasing recruitment of young Khoi men into military service. In 1808 antagonisms flared at Chief David Stuurman's village, an outstation of Bethelsdorp, near the Gamtoos River. The landdrost (magistrate) complained that Stuurman refused to fetch his staff of office due to differences with a recruiting officer.

His "crime", recorded on his return from prison was: "Suspicious conduct, living in a kraal near the boundaries of the colony". Without the benefit of a trial, Stuurman was sent to Robben Island. In December 1809, Stuurman and others escaped, probably using whaling boats to reach the mainland. Most of them were recaptured, but Dawid made his way back to the Eastern Cape.

Cuyler made several attempts at enticing Stuurman away from the Xhosa, promising him grazing, cattle and a peaceful life near Cape Town. Stuurman refused several offers, asking that his wives and children – who were being held in Cape Town – be sent to live with him among the Xhosa.

In 1811 it was reported that Stuurman was seen participating in a cattle raiding party near the Gamtoos River. From this it was inferred that Stuurman

had a hand in other “crimes” in the area. Landrost Stockenstrom of Graaff-Reinet described him as “an enemy more dangerous than the Kaffirs.” Indeed, Stuurman had become a formidable opponent and despite huge military efforts, which dislodged many Xhosas, Stuurman and his troops remained at large until 1819 when he was captured again and put to hard labour on Robben Island.

In the late 1820s, a convict named Johan Smit overpowered and disarmed a sentry on Robben Island. He freed others who gained access to the armoury. In the confusion several soldiers were injured and one killed. Whaling boats owned by one John Murray were seized and a group of about 30 prisoners made their way to the mainland in three boats.

The Xhosa prophet, Makana, was in one boat which capsized in the surf off Blouberg. Many, including Makana, drowned. Of the prisoners 14 drowned, 12 were recaptured (including Stuurman), two killed by commandos and three made good their escape.

As Stuurman had saved the life of Murray’s overseer, John Bryant, Murray gave instructions for Stuurman not to be harmed. He was sent back to Robben Island for the third time to await transportation to New South Wales, Australia.

In April 1823, the convict ship, Brampton, reached Sydney. Among the convicts on board were Stuurman and 11 other South Africans, including another Khoi, Jantjie Piet. His wife drew up a petition to Queen Victoria for his release, but to no avail.

After six years in compulsory government employ, Stuurman was given permission to work for wages for himself. A year later, on 22 February 1830, “The Last Chief of the Hottentots” died in the General **Hospital** in **Sydney**.

References:

'Chief David Stuurman the first of the Khoi to be exiled to Australia in 1823' from Cape-Slavery-Heritage [online], available at: <http://cape-slavery-heritage.iblog.co.za> [accessed 6 January 2011]

Public contribution - Email submission from Colin Abrahams – article by Garth King – 10 December 2010