

12.02.2024 FEATURE ARTICLE



Cape Independence and “the right of conquest” in South Africa

By Masilo Lepuru



12.02.2024 LISTEN

”The white man is coming, and it is he who will rule you, and you will be his servants” (*Chaka* by Thomas Mofolo).

To fully comprehend the call for Cape Independence, one must have a solid understanding of the long history of the idea and political formation called South Africa. While the evolution of South Africa as an idea and political formation is complex, it can be reduced

to two historical facts, namely conquest in 1652 and white settler colonialism. Without these two historical facts it is impossible to have a solid comprehension of the persistent problem of the national question in South Africa. Because of the conquest since 1652 which entailed the violent dispossession of the land of the Indigenous people by European conquerors, the national question in South Africa is fundamentally the land question. It was through this violent process of the military defeat of the Indigenous people, that European conquerors became white settlers. Those who are at the forefront of the call for Cape Independence are the descendants of these European conquerors, thus historically speaking, successors-in-title-to conquest. They conceal these historical facts by using terms such as “democratic will/ the will of the people” and “the right to self-determination”.

The Cape itself is a product of the military defeat of the Indigenous people by white settler colonizers beginning with the so-called journeys of discovery undergirded by “the doctrine of discovery as an international law of colonialism”. Da Gama, Diaz, de Almeida and of course Van Riebeeck are some of the infamous names of the Europeans who were at the forefront of European conquest of the land of the Indigenous people. It is in this sense that because the current whites who are leading the call for Cape Independence are the descendants and beneficiaries of this conquest, they are relying on the “right of conquest” of their pioneering

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ancestors. It is interesting that these white settlers are relying on international law which was used by their conquering ancestors in the form of the doctrine of discovery which authorised land dispossession. These white settlers are using the principle of self-determination to secede from “South Africa”. It is ironic that it is the same international law of colonialism which made it possible for their ancestors to deny the right to self-determination of the Indigenous people when they colonised them through wars of land dispossession.

This brief historical background is necessary to answer the fundamental question of historic justice, namely how did those behind the call for Cape Independence come to possess the territory now called the Cape? If it were through immigration as opposed to conquest, there would not be a call for independence because as a white minority they would not have the right to self-determination in a land that does not belong to them. As immigrants as opposed to descendants of conquerors, they would have been assimilated by the Indigenous majority who are the rightful owners of the land and the cultural and political majority. The Cape was first conquered by Dutch settlers beginning in 1652 through the VOC (Dutch East India Company). The same Cape was taken over by British settlers around 1806 and this is how it became a British colony. Around the 1830s some Dutch settlers wanted to secede from the Cape as a British colony. They extended the reach of the doctrine of discovery and “the right to conquest” into the interior of the land of the Indigenous people. They formed what were called Boer Republics. One of these Republics laid down the foundation for the current South Africa which some of the British and Dutch settlers want to secede from under the banner of Cape Independence and Orania. This Boer republic of 1852 was called *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* or the South African Republic. This South African Republic excluded the conquered Indigenous people, thus sowing the seeds of exclusive white settler nationalism which informed the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. It is interesting that around the same time of the formation of the South African Republic by Dutch settlers, British settlers in the Cape were sowing the seeds of a nonracial settler constitutionalism which informs the current constitution of 1996.

It is in this sense that white settler secession projects are based on “nonracial” white nationalism and racial white nationalism. Racial white nationalism is embraced by Dutch settlers who are usually frank about their white supremacy, while “nonracial” white nationalism is a fig that is used by British settlers to hide their white supremacy. British settlers prefer to act as “the friends of the natives” by denying their white supremacy in the name of the so-called Cape liberalism. Today the leaders of the call for Cape Independence use empty “democratic” slogans such as “the will of the people” and “self-determination” to conceal the historical fact that this call is based on “the right of conquest” of their white settler ancestors and that it is a continuation of their “civilising mission” which informed the colonial formation of the Cape as a colony. Now that the Union of South Africa which was formed in 1910 as a white man’s land is dominated by the natives who were excluded from its formation, the settlers want to opt out of the Union and reverse history. The Union was formed to protect and advance the interests of all white settlers by white settlers such as Jan Smuts through the unification of all settler colonies and republics. The call for Cape independence wants to go back to the Cape colony, while Orania seeks to go back to the Boer republics. The nostalgic desire for settlers to rule and for the natives to remain servants is the core of white supremacy. It is this white supremacy which informs the calls for white settler minority to secede. This is the “story” of the coming of the white man to Azania. When will

this “story” come to an end?

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The Author has 9 publications on ModernGhana.com

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White African | 2/12/2024 6:00:46 PM

Dear Masilo, Your piece unfortunately has a lot of Pan-Africanist racism which has a long way to go before enlightenment. Some facts. Cape Independence is nothing new to any group breaking away in Africa. Many other Africans did the same. Cape Independence is supported by all races that is fed-up with the ANC Communists and their foot soldiers, the Marxist EFF. People of all races that want progress, don't celebrate toilets and low standards that want a better life, want to break away...

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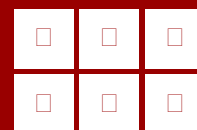
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