

COLUMNISTS

MASILO LEPURU | The call for Cape independence, is the call for a Cape colony

Those who want to secede have a nostalgic desire for natives to remain servants

BY MASILO LEPURU - 14 February 2024 - 14:51



To fully comprehend the call for Cape independence, one must have a solid understanding of the long history of the idea and political formation that is called SA.

While the evolution of SA as an idea and political formation is complex, it can be reduced to two historical facts – the 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 SA.

Because the 1652 conquest entailed the violent dispossession of the land of the indigenous people by European conquerors, the national question in SA is the land question. It was through this violent 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



Sulyman Stellenboom hangs a poster on the Jan van Riebeeck statue in 2015 in Cape Town.



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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 colonisers, beginning with the so-called journeys of discovery undergirded by “the doctrine of discovery as an international law of colonialism”.

Vasco da Gama, Bartolomeu Dias, Francisco de Almeida and, of course, Jan van Riebeeck are some of the infamous names at the forefront of the European conquest of the indigenous people’s land. Because the current white people 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 ancestors.

It is interesting that they are relying on international law used by their conquering ancestors. And it is ironic 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.

This brief historical background is necessary to answer the fundamental question of historic justice —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.

The Cape was first conquered by Dutch settlers, beginning in 1652, through the Dutch East India Company. The same Cape was taken over by British settlers around 1806, and 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 indigenous people’s land.

They formed what we recalled Boer republics. One of these republics laid down the foundation for SA, 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 Afrikaanse Republiek or the South African Republic. This 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 “non racial” white nationalism and racial white nationalism. Racial white nationalism is embraced by Dutch settlers who are usually frank about their white supremacy, while “non racial” white nationalism is a fig that is used by British settlers to hide their white supremacy.

Now that the Union of South Africa, which was formed in 1910 as a white man's land, is dominated by the natives, the settlers want to reverse history. 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 that informs the calls for the white settler minority to secede.

■ *Lepuru is researcher and founding director of the Institute for Kemetic and Marcus Garvey Studies*



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