



# Erwin Schweitzer Indigenous Struggles for Land in South Africa: An Anthropology of Griqua Organisations

## Research Problem

We live in a world in which marginalised people no longer tend to struggle for rights, recognition and resources in the name of class inequality but rather cultural identity. In the wake of this development we are witnessing the emergence of *Ethnicity, Incorporated*, a double process which involves ethnic groups adopting corporate-like forms and the commodification of cultural practices and products.

In my research project I scrutinise the strategies and relationships of organisations which represent marginalised indigenous Griqua in their struggle for land in South Africa. During colonialism and subsequently apartheid Griqua were dispossessed of their ancestral land by European settlers. Their struggle for land has gained momentum due to post-apartheid land reform policy and the global indigenous rights movement.

Through analysing Griqua organisations in the struggle for land from the perspective of *Ethnicity, Inc.*, we can learn more about (I) the collective strategies of indigenous groups, (II) the relationships between indigenous peoples, the nation-state, civil society and the corporate sector, (III) and the use of culture as a resource.

## Research Questions

- How do Griqua organisations act so as to acquire land and make use of land in post-apartheid South Africa?
- How do these organisations articulate with various public and non-public actors in this process?
- How do these organisations make use of culture in order to accomplish their goals?
- What is the outcome of this process?

## Ethnicity, Inc.

- Developed by John & Jean Comaroff (2008, 2009) and based on empirical data from southern Africa, North America and other regions
- Central Dimensions:
  - (1) Land claim as starting point
  - (2) Law as central tool
  - (3) Membership based on genealogy
  - (4) Rhetorical cultural differences
  - (5) Relevance of external actors
  - (6) Assertions of sovereignty
  - (7) Commodification of culture
  - (8) Ethnic groups as corporations



Fig. 1: Tourists visiting cultural village on restored Griqua land

## Findings

Griqua organisations: (1) perceive land as a precondition for cultural and economic survival & are involved in a wide range of land claims and land use projects; (2) make use of all mechanisms provided by post-apartheid land reform legislation, recourse to international human rights, and participate in the international indigenous rights movement to contest and change current national policy; (3) emphasise their indigenous ancestry, (4) despite few cultural differences to other ethnic groups due to processes of ethnocide and assimilation; (5) build strategic alliances with various state and non-state actors in regard to the land issue (e.g. World Bank, universities, human rights NGOs); (6) assert sovereignty and practice self-governance in various ways (7) commodify culture in ethno-tourist projects; (8) and eventually become *Griqua, Inc.*

## Conclusion

*Griqua, Inc.* presents “a process of becoming rather than a finished phenomenon, a total social fact in the historical making” (J. & J. Comaroff 2008); a local case study with global theoretical implications. It questions commonly ingrained conceptual antinomies between culture and economy, as well as civil society, business and state. Perhaps, future research should abandon unwarranted assumptions and focus on actual practices of organisations (cf. Burris 2005 et al.; Ferguson/Gupta 2002).



Fig. 2: Griqua land claim meeting with NGO lawyer

## The Researcher

Erwin Schweitzer (\*1981 in Vienna), MA Social and Cultural Anthropology (University of Vienna). Since April 2010 research assistant at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Hamburg

erwin.schweitzer@uni-hamburg.de