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Chapter IX - Triumph of disunity (1)

From the book: [The Role of the Missionaries in conquest by Nosipho Majeke](#)

The Griqua Nation

THE CONFLICT between Black and White in the north and north-east, beyond the Orange River, in Basutoland, and beyond the Vaal River, presents a complicated picture. Here the missionaries played an equally important role, together with that section of the Dutch who left the Cape Colony in small groups under different leaders—the Trek Boers. Inter-tribal strife, fomented by the Whites, was used to their advantage. The figure that presented to the invaders the greatest obstacle to their aims was Moshoeshoe, chief of the Sotho nation, and it is round him that much of the history of the north from the thirties on to the sixties revolves. Griqualand, too, on the banks of the Orange River, was a centre of conflict where a once independent people succumbed to the forces of disunity.

While it is convenient to divide this part of our history into two sections, one dealing with the part played by the missionaries in the breaking up of the Griqua nation and the second dealing with Moshoeshoe and more particularly the breaking up of the baSotho, the history of the north constitutes a unit where we must view in perspective the working out of British policy in relation to both the Africans and the Boers. Moreover, what was happening in the north must be seen as part of a whole, part of a continuous

process of conquest going on simultaneously throughout Southern Africa, and directed to single and, the subjugation of us 'inhabitants. Events overlap with those that were taking place on the eastern "frontier" of the Cape Colony, in the attack on the maXhosa and also along the east coast in what was known as Natal. While it is necessary to pause here and there to emphasise certain details, we must not lose sight of the continuity of the process. The parts acquire significance only if we place them in a rounded whole. As in the earlier part of our history, also, the missionaries are best seen as one agency of conquest operating in conjunction with the other agencies to a single end.

It may be added that the so-called "Great Trek" will not occupy the position it does in the familiar herrenvolk presentation of history. It suffers from the same distortions and falsifications common to the rest. In so far as the "Great Trek" comes into the present section of history, what we have to say about it will best find its place when we come to deal with Moshoeshoe. First, let us look into the breaking up of the Griqua nation.

Andries Stockenström once said that if it hadn't been for the missionaries the Colony would have had the whole Griqua nation down on it. And that pretty well sums up the situation. The Griqua were great lovers of independence. They had guns, which the Dutch sold them in exchange for cattle""this being one of the "artificial wants" they had acquired from the White man. The Griqua nation was actually made up of remnants of various tribes; there were Namaqua, Koranas and a few baThwa amongst them; there were slaves who had escaped from the Cape Colony; there was a strong admixture of Coloured people from the Cape Colony, descended from the Khoikhoi and the Dutch settlers. In other words, this unification of peoples was itself an indication of the upheavals that had been going on in Southern Africa since the advent of the White man. Their steady encroachments had pushed the Griqua northwards to the Orange River, where they maintained their independence.

This fact alone was enough to make the English Governor look with uneasy eyes at the Griqua situated on the northern borders of the Colony. There was always the fear that they would join the Bantu tribes and also cause disaffection among the Khoikhoi

within the Colony. But there was another reason why the British had to gain control over the Griqua. Two men with the imperialistic outlook, the Rev. John Campbell, visiting director of the London Missionary Society, and Dr. Philip, early recognised that Griqua territory constituted the gateway to the north. They saw two main lines of advance into Africa, through Philippolis, the route taken by the Trek Boers, and through Griquatown. Griquatown became the recognised starting point of the Missionary Road into the interior. The Rev. Robert Moffat went this way to set up an important mission station at Kuruman among the baTlhaping in Bechuanaland; from this point the Wesleyan missionaries also spread out among the Bantu tribes north of the Orange; the missionary-explorer, David Livingstone, was to follow the same route on his way to the Zambesi, and still later Rhodes and the plunderers of the maNdebele. The historian, Macmillan, writes:

"They (the Griqua) were in a position to bar the way to the North at a moment when the Bantu threatened to close the road to the east."

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The British therefore considered it imperative to keep this road open, and this they could only do by controlling the Griqua.

The land question was the core of the problem, as it was for all the peoples of Southern Africa. The Griqua had gone northwards seeking independence, but they could not shake off the missionaries on the one hand, nor the Boers on the other, those Boers who were forever creeping up over the horizon in search of cattle and pasturelands. As Moshoeshoe, chief of the baSotho, once expressed it:

"They have an interest in getting cattle. . . . They also have an interest in obtaining a war about cattle, to secure farms which they have obtained by fraud. . . . The real cause of dispute is the land. They wish to drive my people out."

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The missionaries made a great show of "protecting" the Griqua against the Boers, but actually it was the Boers who were being protected by the British in all their land seizures.

As early as 1800 the London Missionary Society had sent the Rev. Anderson and the Rev. Kramer to set up mission stations which became the nuclei of settled communities under missionary control. Dr. Philip subsequently stated that the mission-Griqua did not take possession of the land in their own name, but in the name of the London Missionary Society, which thus became the proprietors of a tract of African territory about the size of England. The chiefs at the three centres, Griquatown, Philippolis, Campbell, namely, Waterboer, Adam Kok II and Cornelis Kok respectively, seem to have been in the nature of vassal chiefs whose election by the people was valid only if confirmed by the missionary-superintendent and the Government who thus together acted as overlord. Waterboer in particular fell under missionary influence and was educated to assist the missionaries as a teacher among his people. The creation of a nucleus of mission-Griqua was the first step in the dismemberment of the Griqua nation. Each chief regarded the others as his rivals. Each chief, too, ruled over a divided people with a divided allegiance. He could not serve the Government (through the missionary) and at the same time safeguard his people, whose interests were diametrically opposed to those of the Government.

It is not to be supposed that the Griqua relished missionary interference. The Rev. Anderson gloomily reported to Andries

Stockenstrom, then Landdrost of Graaff Reinet, that the "rebel" elements were continually winning over his mission-Griqua. The attempt on the part of the missionaries to split the Griqua was not proving so easy. "They required only a bold leader such as Conrad Buis, to be a formidable danger," said Stockenstrom.

To counter this danger (1820) he at first contemplated bringing in burgher force under pretence of "protecting" the mission Griqua from their independent brothers, while actually keeping it in readiness to intimidate the people as a whole, break up the Griqua nation and transport the "rebels" far into the Colony as labourers. On second thoughts, however, he discussed the matter with the Rev. John Campbell, the Rev. Robert Moffat and the local missionaries and as a result decided to intensify missionary control. At the same time he appointed a Government agent to act as a further curb on the chiefs. There is no need at this stage to emphasise their joint function.

Soon after his arrival as missionary-superintendent. Dr. Philip had assured the Governor that "every portion of our (missionary) influence will be used to make the Grikwas serviceable to the Colony." The missionaries served British interests so well that they not only neutralised the military danger of a united and independent people by introducing multi-division amongst them through allegiance to different chiefs and different religious denominations.

They did much more than that. The Griqua, armed with guns, had learned the White man's mode of fighting; they were potential allies of the other resisters to invasion. But that very strength was turned; into an instrument to protect the British against the natural allies of the Griqua and at the same time to weaken their own position.

They became a buffer state carrying the military burden against the Bantu on the north of the Colony in some such way as the Khoikhoi of the Kat River Settlement were employed against the Xhosa, but on a much more extensive scale.

When Philip wrote to the American Mission Society in BOSTON encouraging them to begin operations in Southern Africa, he described the Griqua as follows:

"Ever since the Griqua mission commenced, the Griquas have been a bulwark of the Colony on the north and north-east frontier for 300 miles. They have saved the Government expense.

. . . They have rendered the greatest services to the Colony they are at this moment of the greatest importance to the Colony as the peace and order of that part of the Colony is dependent upon them."

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And again in one of his many reports:

"Such has been the beneficial influence of the missionary institutions among them that the Griquas might be more formidable than the Caffres, but it is not necessary to have one soldier on the more extended frontier of the Griquas to defend that part of the Colony."

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As the agents of British interests, the missionaries served yet another purpose. The mission-Griqua, particularly those under Adam Kok and Waterboer, were persuaded to look to the British as their protectors against the ever-increasing encroachments of the Boers. The next step was an obvious one—to annex them outright. In 1833, after a tour of the northern missions, Philip wrote "On my late journey I was empowered by the Griquas to solicit that their country should be taken within the Colony.

They are willing to pay taxes and be subject to the laws of the Colony."

Of course we are not deceived by the pretty affectation of soliciting when we know that the chiefs held their position under favour the missionary-superintendent. We might as well imagine the inhabitants of the present-day "Protectorates" -'how this liberal terminology persists! "" "soliciting" the Union Government to take them under its beneficent wing in order to enjoy its laws.

Seeking at once to neutralise the military power of the Griqua and utilize it to defend the Colony, Philip advised the Governor to incorporate the Griqua into the Colony "on the same footing as the Kat River Settlement." Better one big bite by the British lion than the slow but sure nibbling of the Trek ox. Better also to have a military power working with you than against you.

In point of fact, the Government, far from protecting the Griqua was contemplating using them temporarily as a pawn in the military game. Dr. Philip, in the role of political adviser, expressed the fear that, if the Boers were allowed to occupy Griqua territory too rapidly, they would not be able to protect either themselves or the Colony against the Ndebele Chief, Mzilikazi. It would require the Griqua to do that.

The British Government, however, was not yet prepared to undertake the expense of civil administration, which outright annexation would involve. Meantime a policy of laissez-faire, leaving the Boers to settle in among the Griqua unchecked, was all in favour of the White man and to the detriment of the Black. Failing annexation, Dr. Philip advised treaties for the purpose of ruling through the chiefs, "as we do in India." That is through paid chiefs.

Waterboer was the first to have the so-called treaty imposed on him and the result was as disastrous for him as it was for the Xhosa chiefs. His first duty was to defend the northern frontier (as it was called) against the maNdebele, who, under Mzilikazi, were coming into conflict with the baTswana and checking the advance of the Boers. Waterboer had also to use his military forces against any 'rebel" Griqua, that is, his still independent brothers. He was under constant supervision by a Government agent and a

missionary. The missionary, for his part, had to send in a monthly report to the field-commandant of Graaff-Reinet, giving all the information he could gather about surrounding tribes. Besides this, to invest Waterboer with a little brief authority, while ignoring the other Griqua chiefs, was to sow further seeds of dissension amongst them. Adam Kok at Philippolis, Cornelis Kok at Campbell and Chief Barends at Daniel's Kuil, refused to accept Waterboer's authority. Adam Kok apparently tried to receive similar "recognition" from the Government, and sent a petition begging them to put a stop to the Boers settling on his land. But he was ignored at this stage because the missionaries reported that he was too "weak." In other words he harboured too many independent Griqua who were too strong for missionary control and who objected to being pressed into military service for the British. To make confusion worse confounded, on the death of Adam Kok II the Wesleyans supported the claims of one son to the chieftainship, while the L.M.S. missionaries gave their blessing to another. Added to all this, Waterboer had an impossible task settling land disputes with Boers in Griqua territory. Here were all the elements for the ultimate dismemberment of the Griqua nation, Small wonder that "after 1834 (the year of the Treaty with Waterboer) the story is one of gradual but uninterrupted decline." (See "The Cape Coloured People," by Marais.)

The people of Griqualand West, Waterboer's territory, gradually sank into poverty. The herrenvolk historian would have us believe that this was due to their weakness of character. Missionaries and others have described them as "lazy, indolent, hopelessly improvident and given to drink. . . ." This is one of the many falsifications of the historical process. They were a small community in an increasingly arid region, with their advance in the east and north blocked by the Boers. And the truth of the matter is, their land became too poor to be coveted by the Boer or the British invader.

Then an all-important event took place. In Griqualand West, through which had passed the old missionary road to the north, diamonds were discovered in the late sixties. This, together with the discovery of gold, opened up a new chapter in South African history, for it made possible a great economic expansion. The claims of the Waterboers and the family of Cornelis Kok at

Campbell were swept aside and the Colonial Government annexed Griqualand West (1871) thus completing the subjugation of a once independent people. The territory was opened up to the petty land-shark, who bought up the land of the impoverished Griqua. They were forced to join the ever-increasing ranks of landless labourers in Southern Africa, for the new economic machine was greedy for cheap labour. How the history of colonial conquest follows a relentlessly similar pattern throughout: subjugation, landlessness, economic slavery! To-day the Griqua as a people have become almost extinct.

And their epitaph is "To the last they were a very religious people."

Philippolis

It was in the early forties that Dr. Philip, acting on behalf of the Government, turned his attention to the Griqua further east, at Philippolis, where Adam Kok III was chief. The Philippolis Griqua held land on individual tenure and had large herds of cattle. In warfare they used guns. They were a small but advanced community, and the strong element of independence in them always proved restive under missionary control. Above all things they feared the loss of their land.

By 1842 the tension between them and the Trek Boers had reached such a pitch that open battle between them was imminent. The Griqua were well armed and likely to win. At this point the missionaries took action.

The trouble with the Trek Boers was that, while they were British subjects, they were adopting a hostile attitude to the Government. But they were in no position to play tough with the British or anybody else. Comparatively few in numbers and hopelessly divided among themselves, they were extremely vulnerable to attack either by the Griqua or Moshoeshoe. Having crossed the Orange River, they were steadily eating up the land of the Griqua, especially round Philippolis. They were also on Sotho soil. Dr. Philip, superintendent of the London Missionary Society, was informed by the Rev. Casalis, a French missionary near Moshoeshoe, that "Boers still creep in silently and settle (in the west) where they are aware he (Moshoeshoe) has least control."

With his imperialist outlook, Dr. Philip necessarily viewed their movements with some alarm, for he doubted their ability to hold the land they occupied by the simple expedient of asking for pasturage and then refusing to budge.

An observer in these parts expressed the opinion that "The Griquas will not tamely submit to the Boers," and he feared that they might start a war of extermination. This was a contingency that might have unpleasant repercussions for all the Whites; therefore SOME means must be found to avert it. The British knew very well that they could not afford to risk an explosive situation in the north while they were still busy on the Xhosa front. If the Boers were so foolhardy as to provoke it, it was the British who would have to protect these refractory subjects of theirs, even against themselves.

The French missionary, the Rev. Rolland, went so far as to say:

"I fear the Boers must feel the weight of the British arm before they will come to their senses."

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Dr. Philip, however, had another line of approach, and there was no better interpreter of British strategy. After a tour of the mission stations in the north, in Griqualand, "Basutoland" and "Bechuanaland," he was able to report to the Governor that Adam Kok III and Chief Moshoeshoe were "favourably disposed" to a treaty making them "allies pledged to friendship" with the British Government.

The question of Moshoeshoe we shall look into later, confining ourselves for the moment to the Griqua. Here we must once more totally reject the falsification of history by the liberal historian who would have us believe that the "humanitarians" were fighting to

defend the Griqua against the Boers. Macmillan writes ("Bantu, Boer and Briton"):

"The issue in the North was the maintenance of those same principles of justice which inspired Philip's vindication of equal human rights of the Coloured people of the old Cape Colony. "This is nonsense. Principles of justice had nothing to do with "liberating" the Khoikhoi into economic slavery. Still less did such considerations enter into the dealings of the Colonial Government with the Griqua. The treaty engineered by the missionaries is enough to explode that fallacy.

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There was a state of high tension between the Griqua and the Boers on the burning question of land. This was reported by the local missionary, the Rev. Wright, who indicated that the Griqua were holding themselves in readiness to attack. By means of the treaty with the British, however, Adam Kok was persuaded to withhold his hand. And what was the nature of that treaty? It defined the limits of the territory which the Griqua were expected to occupy, giving full recognition to the land that the Boers had grabbed them. In other words it legalised dispossession. Philip's delicate regard for Boer claims can hardly have struck the Griqua as being in accordance with the principles of justice.

"Let the Boers have guaranteed to them the land they possess," wrote Philip, "and forbid them to make any addition except by purchasing." In view of this remarkable delicacy shown by the protectors" of the Griqua for the land-grabbing of the Boers, it is not surprising that Adam Kok made some protest. The local missionary had to report that the Griqua were highly suspicious of the treaty and "not to

be played with." In fact they were again ready for war, whereupon Philip found it necessary to counsel moderation not on the rapacious Boers, but on the despoiled Griqua. His advice was typical of the latter-day liberals. He hoped that the Griqua were not listening to "rash counsels."

"The Griquas must not expect too much," he wrote to his local representative. "The Griquas will be sacrificed as a peace - offering to the Boers. . . . On the subject of leases, therefore, the people must be fair and reasonable. Anything unreasonable will transfer the sympathies of Colonel Hare to the side of the Boers."

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Then the missionary has the impudence to add:

"Supposing the farmers (Boers) are obliged to leave their farms at the expiration of their leases, what is to be done? The land cannot lie empty and the natives are not in a position to fill the farms with stock."

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This treacherous treaty was but the beginning of the further spoliation of the Griqua. The onus had been placed on Adam Kok to settle land disputes between his people and the Boers, who, needless to say, became more arrogant than ever. We find Adam Kok writing in vain to the Governor, asking his "friend and ally" for assistance to maintain law and order. The people, disillusioned in

their missionaries, no longer accepted them as advisers. One of these reported that "the Griquas resent any advice or interference in their temporal affairs by the missionaries." The missionaries for their part now adopted a passive attitude""where previously they had protested loudly on behalf of the people. They reported them as "weak and unstable" and concluded that "the great fault is with the Philippolis government and the people themselves."

Some fighting did eventually take place between the Boers and the Griqua, with the Boers getting the worst of it. Whenever that happened, the British had always to step in. On this occasion they "chastised" the Boers in a small skirmish, then, having demonstrated their military superiority, they proceeded with the important business, the "proper" settlement of the land question.

This second treaty marked the second stage in the spoliation' the Griqua, Plans for the division of the land were drawn up by the local missionary, assisted by Dr. Philip, and these the Governor made use of when presenting his terms to the Griqua. In brief,' larger part of the land was made forfeit to the Boers. The Griqua were relegated to a Reserve, on the understanding that whatever parts of it were still occupied by White farmers, would be vacated.

In addition to this piece of land-robbery, Adam Kok had to receive a Government agent, who was to be paid out of the quit-rent paid by the Griqua for their farms. The Griqua were learning the sharp edge of this British "Protection" when it came to carving up their land.

The full implications of British strategy in relation to the Boers and the inhabitants of the northern territories, of which the Griqua formed a part, will be discussed in the following chapter where we review the situation in the north as a whole. For it was Moshoeshoe who was the main focus of attack and Adam Kok only subsidiary to their general plan. Here we shall content ourselves with saying that in 1848 Sir Harry Smith, as High Commissioner, proclaimed the sovereignty of the British Queen over the Griqua, the baSotho and the Boers, from the Orange River to the Vaal and east to the Drakensburg Mountains. Making short-shrift of Adam Kok's land claims, he deprived him even of part of the so-called "inalienable Reserve" by the simple trick of allowing the Boer farmers to demand compensation for any

improvements they had made to the farms they were expected to vacate. Smith was having some trouble with the refractory Boers in the north, but when it came to the question of land, the Whites always stood together against the Blacks.

By 1849 we find Dr. Philip being advised to "encourage the Griquas to make what use they can of lands that are left to them, than to go on quarrelling about what they have so unjustly lost." In other words, to make the best of it. Such advice was to become all too familiar whenever the rights of the non-Europeans were being attacked. The story of fraud and plunder, however, was not yet completed. By the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854 the British recognised the independence of the Boers in the "Orange Free State."

The land rights of the Griqua were swept aside, for by a secret agreement between the Boer leaders and the British Commissioners who had been delegated to settle the land question in relation to Griqua, all lands in the Reserve sold to Europeans were henceforth to form part of the "Free State." The following message, communicated to Sir George Grey from the Griqua, is eloquent of their bitter disillusionment in British "Protection" and "friendship" :

"The Griqua feel that they have been sacrificed to some policy they do not understand, and have been compelled to believe that no amount of fidelity, however great, can save the Natives from cruel injustice and insult by the British Government when it suits its purpose . . . An opinion is daily gaining ground that close friendships is to be avoided. For, however fair its professions may be, and however generous its actions may at first appear to the unsuspecting, its fixed purpose is to deceive and betray whenever a suitable opportunity occurs."

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It is not our intention to pursue the history of Adam Kok and people who, defrauded of their land, trekked in search of a new home and eventually settled in what became known as Griqualand East, south-east of the Drakensburg mountains. Here, in what the invaders chose to call "No-man's-land," Sir George Grey allowed the Griqua to remain, but under his control. They were stilt to be used as pawn in the game of "divide and rule," as a buffer state protecting the Colony from the baSotho and the maZulu to the northeast. In one of his Despatches to the Imperial Government, Grey describe Adam Kok and his force of armed and mounted Griqua as "a wall of iron" between the coast tribes and the baSotho. It is strange that when it is a question of finding reasons why the Griqua lost their land, they are frequently described, especially by the missionaries as weak and improvident, but when the Government required military assistance the Griqua were men of strength.

In a war of attrition involving Moshoeshoe and all the tribes adjacent to the Natal border, and north to the so-called Free State, the Griqua "allies" of the British suffered the same fate as all the rest. The tribes rent one another in internecine strife, thus becoming weak and poverty stricken. As the case of their brothers in Griqualand West, once their territory was incorporated into the Cape Colony (1880), they too became landless and entered into a state of economic slavery.

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