

Kuela Kiema, *Tears for My Land: A Social History of the Kua of Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Tc'amnqoo*. Gaborone: Mmegi Publishing House, 2010, 171 pages, Pb ISBN: 978-99912-526-1-2,

Reviewed by **Christian John Makgala**<sup>1</sup>

Kuela Kiema is a San or Bushman/Mosarwa and one of those controversially relocated from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) or Tc'amnqoo by the government of Botswana to New Xade in 1997 and 2002. The book is primarily his autobiography, and it is told within the context of the history of his people and the reaction to loss of their culture and traditions as a result of the relocation. Although the San belong to various tribal groups, the author refers to all these collectively as the Kua, and he terms their relationship to the Tswana as the Tswana Bantu-Kua relations. He says the British colonial rule in Botswana sustained this oppression which was worsened by the post-colonial government.

Kiema is a member of the extremely tiny educated San elite. He argues against the long held perception that the San are nomadic people as 'Migrations of Kua people would take place only within their territories' (p.24). He writes with great passion and love for the culture, traditions, music, trance dance and worldview of his people. 'There are no spectators in our community; everybody is a dancer and/or a musician, and so am I' (p.32).

The settlement in Xade, which is within the CKGR, was set up by the post-colonial government in the late 1970s to provide social services, and this saw the settlement growing greatly. It was in Xade that Kiema started school, but a problem arose because they were being taught in Setswana language which they did not understand, by teachers who could not speak the San language. He points out that matters were worsened by the introduction of English as a medium of instruction. Teachers also did not help the situation with their traditional negative attitude towards the San. Hence, Kiema says that 'We loathed being called Basarwa [by the teachers].... It [took away] the dignity and pride we had before the arrival of formal education' (p.39). The teaching only focused on Tswana philosophies at the expense of San traditional philosophy, customs and history. 'Our parents saw that the school was making us disobedient and disrespectful of our traditions, and they started to complain about it. Because of this lack of respect for our ancestral laws, they said that we were the main source of a lot of natural disasters which occurred then.... Many children, helped by the support of their parents, began to leave school' (p.40). According to Kiema the production of traditional crafts by the San was the only aspect of his culture that was given serious attention by the education system.

Despite these serious challenges, Kiema passed his primary school leaving examination in 1989, and became the only student who obtained first class, and the first in Xade Primary School to obtain that grade. He went on to do secondary education at a school in Ghanzi Township. He thought that the teachers there were more professional than those at Xade. 'In spite of the odds, I gained popularity and respect from the teachers and other students in the school. I was the best shot-put and discus thrower... I was one of the top students in science, mathematics, agriculture, design and technology, and social studies, and I collected lots of prizes. I was also elected the head boy of the school, and of the hostel where we lived' (p.44).

Kiema writes that his study was adversely affected when his uncle was tortured to death by government's wildlife officials in 1993, and by a government truck accident in which four casual labourers from Xade were killed and many severely injured in 1994. He says two of those who died and many who were injured were his close relatives. His health was also badly affected, and this had a negative impact on his studies. He further notes that the intensification of harassment and torture

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Botswana

of his people by wildlife officers took a turn for the worse and forced him to stop attending Scripture Union (SU) prayer services. 'I hated the God of the Israelites [for] not rebuking our oppressors' (p.46). The helpless San were being made to relocate from Xade to a new settlement outside of the CKGR called New Xade, and this was intolerable to them.

Despite the formation of a San pressure group called the first People of Kalahari (FPK) Trust in 1993 and support from the Gaborone-based Ditshwanelo Centre for Human Rights the suffering of his people intensified. He says the Xade village leadership did not want to relocate and he led a secret group of like-minded people that campaigned against relocation unfortunately the government's campaign of torture become so intolerable that they yielded to pressure for relocation.

Upon completion of his secondary education he enrolled for the national service (*Tirelo Sechaba*) and the deep passion he had for his traditional music led to him successfully request to be posted to Gabane near Gaborone in 1995. This enabled him to work with Mambo Arts commune, a cultural organization he was familiar with. He was also able to introduce lessons of the traditional *setinkane* musical instrument to Botswana Music Camp and conducted numerous of music workshops on his traditional music for schools and other institutions. At some point he even represented Botswana at a Southern African Development Community (SADC) Music Festival in Harare, Zimbabwe. 'Why are educated people interested in our language and music while we are told at the same time that our culture is the cause of our backwardness?' he wonders (p.50).

This love for his traditional music saw him register for a programme in mathematics and music education at Molepolole College of Education (MCE) in 1997 as he trained to be a teacher. As a musician he travelled extensively which included representing Botswana at the 'Out of Africa Music Festival' in Munich, Germany in 1997.

While he was still studying at MCE the government embarked on the relocation of his people from Xade to New Xade outside the CKGR in 1997. However, there was financial compensation which enticed some people to relocate. He writes that 'My hut was dismantled in my absence. I lost my valuable items in the process, including certificates of participation, awards for being the best student and best athlete, my Holy Bible and Certificate of Baptism. I lost my traditional good luck charms and other objects of fortification which were hidden in the corner of my hut ... (p.53).

Upon graduation from Molepolole College of Education in 1999 he joined Kuru Cultural Centre in D'kar village in the Ghanzi District, and this enabled him to pursue his love for the teaching profession by teaching interested people about his beloved Kua traditions. While he was at Kuru Cultural Centre he got a scholarship from the University of Botswana/University of Tromsø (Norway) Collaborative Programme for San Research and Capacity Building, and then pursued a Bachelor of Arts Degree in music and sociology at the University of Namibia.

Kiema is a harsh critic of the government's Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) which, he says, deprived San parents of their traditional powers and status. RADP provided San parents and children with their everyday basic needs, a practice which has reduced them to 'destitutes' in the new settlement. 'Both parents and children jump and sing with happiness and joy when the trucks of food arrive at the village.... The role of parents as the provider of food has been supplanted. Children cannot respect and honour a parent who does not put bread on the table' (p.61).

He says that this development and the age-old oppression of his people saw him quit the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which has been in power since the country's independence in 1996, to join the opposition and revolutionary Botswana National Front (BNF). However, his victory at BNF's primary elections in 2007 led to his Mokgalagadi opponent, who was also a member of the BNF central committee, challenging the results and engineering a fresh election. Kiema says that his appeal to the BNF hierarchy that his opponent's protest was based

purely on tribalism as the Bakgalagadi members of the party in the Ghanzi North constituency did not want to be led by a Mosarwa was ignored by the party, hence he decided to withdraw from the planned re-run.

He observes that when the British colonial government established the CKGR in 1961, the argument was that it was meant to enable the San to pursue their traditional lifestyle and sustainable natural resources conservation within the reserve. However, he doubts whether this declaration was in the best interest of the San because some San had already taken up livestock rearing and even had guns for hunting, and traded with neighbouring villages. He claims that they lost their land because of the British and they want the land back, and some other form of restitution.

Anthropologists are not spared of his condemnation even though he does not give names of these researchers and their works:

Missionaries had worked hard to improve the lot of African tribal groups, but the Kua were the preserve of the anthropologist....

As well as trouble brought to us by the authorities, anthropologists began arriving in large numbers. They observed such things as what our faeces looked like and how we made love. They measured our women's clitorises and the angle of our men's erect penises, as well as committing many other unspeakable deeds (p. 60 and 80).

He writes that the discovery of diamonds at Gope in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) in the 1980s led to President Quett Masire appointing a fact finding mission which, to the residents of the area, was a 'fault' finding mission because it found too many 'faults' about them living in the reserve. Despite the mission recommending that the northern part of the reserve be for animals, it is said that Masire ignored this and decided to kick the people out. Kiema observes that when Festus Mogae replaced Masire as president in 1998, he travelled all over the world countering the London-based human rights group Survival International which had argued that the San were being relocated from the CKGR for diamond mining, and had branded Botswana diamonds 'blood diamonds'. Sometimes Mogae was accompanied by Lobatse Beslag, the headman of New Xade, in these global crusades which made him to be viewed as a sell-out by FPK and others, says Kiema.

The campaign for return to the CKGR culminated in a court case against the government, and the verdict, which favoured the San, was made in December 2006 and was covered live by international media outlets such as the BBC, among others. The marathon case became the most expensive and longest in Botswana's legal history, and Kiema was part of this history as he interpreted in court from San languages to English and vice versa. 'Sometimes I felt great emotional pain. The judges and lawyers were professional and knew the laws of Botswana. Many poor Kua did not even know when they were born' (p.109). Despite the San victory the CKGR issue was far from over.

He dismisses government's provision of services in New Xade as having failed dismally and led to serious social problems such as loss of traditional livelihoods, crime, unemployment, deepening poverty, overdependence on government welfare, and political divisions.

Among the different San tribal groups found in the CKGR he cites the Batlhaping with a surprisingly Tswana name but he does not explain how these are related or not related to the Tswana-speaking Batlhaping in South Africa where all Tswana come from (p.29).

He also observes that 'We had less social interaction with the Setswana-speaking tribes. We really only encountered them after we settled in Xade [in the 1970s] and they arrived to carry out government business' (p.32). However, what is surprising is that names of Kiema's relatives in the CKGR stretching to the nineteenth century are predominantly Tswana, but he does not explain this. The same scenario applies to many names of other people found in settlements in the CKGR.

In chapter five titled 'The Meaning of Naming and Incomplete History' he says he looks at 'some biased accounts that historians have used to portray our [Kua] history' (p.72). Here he uses Thomas Tlou and Alec Campbell's book *History of Botswana* which he says portrays his people inaccurately. However, he refers to the 1984 edition of the book, but does not make reference to its 1997 revised edition. He also repeats the age-old claim that 'Three chiefs of Bechuanaland went to Britain [in 1895] to sign and legitimise British control over their territory to rid themselves of the troublesome Germans and Boers' (p.77). This is despite the long campaign by historians that the three chiefs had gone to Britain to appeal against planned handover of the territory to the private and excessively exploitative British South Africa Company owned by a British imperialist Cecil Rhodes.

Despite obvious subjective perspective, Kiema's book fills important gaps in the social history of the most marginalised community in Botswana. A liberal reader cannot help but sympathise with the account as presented by Kiema as a politician and human rights activists for his people. What is worth noting is that his experiences and those of his people do not affect his patriotism for Botswana.