

IF20 – Anti-Racism Initiative: Webinar Series 2026

“Same colonizers, different ships”?

On the construction of Amazon’s Africa Headquarter in Cape Town, South Africa, and its ecological costs for the First Nation Khoi and San

Concept Note

1. Abstract

Postcolonial theologies and spiritualities face the task of critically examining the historical and structural entanglement of colonialism, capitalism, and climate change, and of articulating alternative frameworks of meaning that make a departure from a prevailing “spirituality of money” intellectually and spiritually compelling. This requires acknowledging that colonialism and apartheid were not only political systems of domination but also economic regimes of extraction—grounded in the systematic appropriation of land, natural resources, and human labour through slavery, dispossession, and forced work—in service of the commercial and consumption-oriented interests of European and North American powers. The concept of “race” functioned both as a justification and as a driving mechanism of this extractivist project, continuously differentiated, reproduced, and stabilised over centuries, including through Christian narratives of legitimization. Consequently, racist structures persist today, manifesting in global value chains, labour migration regimes, and environmental and resource governance. Their endurance and impact render research on environmental and climate racism indispensable.

The externalisation of ecological costs—such as water depletion, air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem destruction—to countries of the Global South, combined with value creation and consumer satisfaction in the Global North, exemplifies an ecologically unequal exchange. Marginalised communities in the Global South, who contribute least to climate change, are most exposed to its consequences and therefore disproportionately vulnerable.

One actor that illustrates these dynamics of entanglement is the globally operating U.S. logistics and technology corporation Amazon. With a turnover of €551.61 billion in 2024, it is among the most influential—and simultaneously among the most environmentally damaging—corporations worldwide. Digitalisation itself generates new ecological pressures: Amazon Web Services (AWS) data centres require immense quantities of water for cooling, placing severe environmental strain on locations such as Cape Town (South Africa), a city that has already faced life-threatening water scarcity.

Despite these realities, Amazon has been constructing its Africa headquarters in the Cape Town neighbourhood of Observatory since mid-2021. This large-scale development has provoked significant criticism as well as legal and political resistance from various Khoi and San groups. They emphasize that the designated construction site lies within the Two Rivers Urban Park, a floodplain with high biodiversity that functions as the “green lung” of Cape Town. Moreover, it constitutes a central anti-colonial memory landscape for the Khoi and San, marking the area where they fought against Dutch and Portuguese colonial forces. Known as *Ingamirodi !khaes*, meaning “the place where the stars gather,” the site is revered as sacred and holds profound significance for the cultural-spiritual self-understanding and the already endangered collective identity of the Khoi and San as Indigenous peoples.

The case of Amazon in South Africa thus illustrates how socio-spiritual structures of human interrelatedness—deeply embedded in relationships with land, water, animals, and ancestors—are threatened and destabilised by neo-colonial capitalist power interests. The construction project has also generated internal divisions among Khoi and San self-representation bodies: some reject the development as a renewed form of colonial invasion, while others support it in the hope of economic benefits.

The controversy surrounding the Amazon development therefore stands as a paradigmatic example of the intersection of global corporate power, the intensification of the ecological crisis, and local struggles over Indigenous representation, land rights, and cultural survival.

2. Speakers

Eleanor Chief Krotoa Smith



Chief Krotoa Smith was born and raised in Cape Town during the mid-1950s, a time of great turmoil under the apartheid regime. Despite the challenges she faced, she excelled academically and rose through the corporate ranks in the banking industry, eventually opening her own business in tourism. She also worked on community empowerment projects, focusing on unemployed women and youth, teaching them art, craft, and business skills. Her organization was granted authority by the Nelson Mandela Foundation to create Mandela busts and artifacts.

Chief Krotoa's journey took a spiritual turn when she studied with African Shaman Credo Mutwa, leading her to reclaim lost knowledge and art of Spiritual Healing. She reconnected with ancient San and Khoekhoe rituals, ceremonies, and healing plants, which were passed down orally. Her love for ancient spirituality deepened as she lived among ceremonial healers and shamans in rural South Africa, participating in Bushmen fire dancing and learning from Indigenous Chiefs worldwide.

Chief Krotoa is a founding member of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice forum, reflecting her commitment to community empowerment and justice. Throughout her life, she has remained dedicated to preserving traditional knowledge and promoting healing and reconciliation.

Danab Gaob F'im (Dr. Gregg Steven Fick)

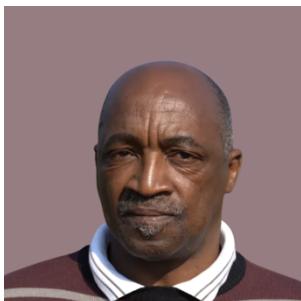


Danab Gaob F'im is a well-known San and Khoe activist who serves as the interim leader of FINSA (First Nation of South Africa). He has been a tireless advocate for the recognition of indigenous "Coloured People" as recognized Africans and Aboriginal people of southern Africa. His campaigns focus on issues such as violence against women in communities, tackling patriarchy and despotism in community leadership structures, and abolishing the Verwoerdian label "Coloured". He is a vocal proponent of non-racism and anti-racism within indigenous revivalist networks.

Danab Gaob F'im regularly conducts community awareness and education workshops on history, heritage, culture, and identity on the Cape Flats and in other major cities. He has also held workshops in strong Khoe-identified communities such as Genadendal. Born in the Eastern Cape, Fick was raised by his "medicine" grandmother, who taught him about traditional healing plants and rituals on the integrated frontier.

His activism is deeply rooted in his cultural heritage and community experience. He has been involved in various initiatives to promote indigenous rights and self-determination. As a founding member of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum, Danab Gaob F'im continues to work towards creating positive change in his community.

Goab Martinus Fredericks



Goab Martinus Fredericks was born on March 6, 1965, in Robertson, Western Cape, during the height of apartheid. He grew up as a "Cape Coloured," which he describes as a deliberate myth created by apartheid legislation to change the identity of the Aboriginal San and Khoe people.

Fredericks completed his matric in 1984 and went on to earn several tertiary qualifications, including diplomas in agriculture, farm business management, nature conservation, and environmental law. He worked as a farm manager, Environmental Officer, and Biophysical and Environmental Specialist for the City of Cape Town.

In 2014, Fredericks' family was mandated to establish a sister structure of the !Aman Traditional Authority of Bethanie in Namibia in South Africa, aiming to unify the !Aman // Aes in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and other parts of the San and Khoe Diaspora.

In 2016, he was appointed by the Royal Family in Bethanie, Namibia as the "Gaob" of the !Aman //. Fredericks is a founder member of the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum and leads research on rural land reform. His work focuses on preserving the cultural heritage and identity of the San and Khoe people.

Fredericks' background and qualifications have prepared him for his role in promoting the rights and interests of the !Aman // Aes, both within South Africa and internationally.

3. Webinar format

This webinar session is intended to be a platform for Indigenous activists and researchers from the Khoi and San communities to speak for themselves, articulate their own concerns, and share their knowledge.

The session begins with the documentary film "I am this water" by Mia Pentz, who accompanied Indigenous community members during their protest. Her film gives powerful insight into the struggle to protect *Ingamirodi !khaes* as their sacred site and foregrounds the activists' ritual practices, their connection to land, ancestors, water, animals, and the natural world, as well as their spiritual relationship to the place. The film provides the narrative and emotional foundation from which the activists will then speak directly.

The goal of the webinar is to help participants understand

- what Amazon is doing in South Africa,
- why the Amazon construction project is problematic,
- and how this conflict is intertwined with racism, Indigenous dispossession, epistemic violence, and environmental injustice.

At the same time, the webinar is not solely a critique of Amazon as a global corporation. It is also an invitation to learn more about the cosmo-spirituality of the Khoi and San, their relational understanding of land as living and ancestor-holding, and their ethical relationship to nature, animals, rivers, plants, and sacred sites. Indigenous knowledge is placed at the centre: How do the Khoi and San understand the cosmos? What principles guide their environmental ethics? How do they define responsibility and care?

Another key focus is on the decolonial practices of resistance that Indigenous communities have developed throughout their struggle against the Amazon development. These include ritual and spiritual practices, vigils, artistic expression, legal strategies, community organising, and transnational solidarity-building. Such practices offer alternatives to extractive and

consumption-driven ways of living and show what more sustainable, relational, and respectful forms of coexistence can look like.

The webinar therefore creates a learning space in which

- Indigenous voices and spiritual traditions become visible,
- the structural dynamics of land dispossession, coloniality, and environmental racism become understandable,
- and positive visions and alternatives are shared—visions of living beyond exploitative consumer logics.

The format brings together film, personal testimonies, Indigenous knowledge systems, and socio-political analysis. It is designed as a contribution to a decolonial interfaith learning practice grounded in listening, transnational solidarity, and deep respect for Indigenous authority.

4. Relevant Sources

Pentz, Mia, Reg. *I Am This Water – The Trailer*. Documentary. Produced by Kirsten Gobey. With University of Cape Town Centre for Film and Media Studies. 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hULeBs-zY-Y>.

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