



2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF  
Indigenous Languages



PanSALB  
PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD



# THE CENTRALITY OF LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY

By Cllr. Celeste Wannenburg



Cllr. Celeste Wannenburg

---

**Language is the key.  
Material culture is the corpus, but  
language is the soul that inhabits it.  
The push to salvage and re-spark our  
First Nation languages is already  
underway in the Drakenstein area, still  
inhabited by Cochoqua branch  
descendants.**

---

In a globalised and internationalised world where the future often sits foremost in many of our minds, it is vital to recall, celebrate, and hold fast to our rich cultural histories. Language shapes culture and has the power to reinvigorate it while deeply informing us about people, places, and things.

Many South Africans have had their pasts obscured or taken from them unjustly by positive acts, omissions, or calculated erasures by past colonial and supremacist regimes. Now, it falls to us to rediscover our beginnings.

The revival of First Nation material culture in present-day South Africa seeking to uphold the diversity of the Namaqua, Gurigriqua, Cochoqua, Goringhaikona, Gorachouqua, Goringhaiqua, Chamaqua, Hessequa, Attaqua, and Inqua (not an exhaustive list) clan identities is a lengthy but necessary movement.

It is surging all around us as many hurry to reclaim who they feel they always have been or should have been. Therefore, our local Youth Day and Heritage Day are pivotal moments during which to revise what came before, both good and bad, in pursuit of understanding, growth, and healing. However, schools can aid in this more consistently by being holistic in how they flesh out the syllabus to speak equally to all learners

where possible. Schools in the relevant cultural enclaves need to be readied to provide Khoekhoewab classes.

Language is the key. Material culture is the corpus, but language is the soul that inhabits it. The push to salvage and re-spark our First Nation languages is already underway in the Drakenstein area, still inhabited by Cochoqua branch descendants.

Alf Wannenburg contributed much to summarising literatures and reintroducing the belief systems, sacred sites, and the historical footprint of our country's forgotten forebears anthologised in his simple *Forgotten Frontiersmen* (1980) realised from 50 controversial articles published by him in the 70s. Wannenburg's *The Bushmen* summarised the once-obscure cosmologies of the ancient San people, recounting the old deities and accompanying mythos of the Ju/'hoansi or !Kung as it relates to their remote, continued existence elsewhere in Southern Africa un-subjected to the cruel odyssey of their southern relatives.

Books like these and those thematically like them can be the building blocks for the type of cultural renaissance needed to unearth what was buried and reawaken as our defragmented selves.