

A photograph of two men in white suits and hats, smiling and holding hands, standing under a large umbrella with blue and orange stripes. The background shows a crowd of people and a building.

# PEOPLE OF MIXED ORIGIN

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## INTRODUCTION

A unique grouping of people of mixed origin constitutes more than 3 million, or approximately 8,7% of the total population of South Africa. This group of people, with their own unique culture and customs and speaking mainly a unique dialect of Afrikaans, resides principally in the Western Cape. This group is sometimes called the Coloured people.

Within this group there are more specific cultural groupings such as the Malays and the Griquas.

## THE MALAYS

The Cape Malay people are descendants of the early Muslim people brought to South Africa from the East. In 1652, the Dutch brought a few Malays from Batavia to the Governor's Residency, at Cape Town and these people are thought to have been the first Muslims to set foot on southern African soil.

The arrival of the first free Muslims, known as 'Mardyckers', took place in 1658. The Mardyckers, from the Indonesian Island of Amboyna, were Malay servants of the officials of the Dutch East India Company. They were prohibited from openly practising their religion.

However, most South African Muslims regard the arrival, on 2 April 1694, of Sheikh Yusuf of Macassar at the Cape of Good Hope, as the beginning of Islam in South Africa. The Sheikh and his company were well received by Governor Simon van der Stel and were housed on the farm Zandvliet on the outskirts of Cape Town. Many of the traditions currently practised by the Cape Muslim community can be traced back to the Sheikh.

Despite bondage and isolation, South African Malays remained faithful to Islam and many of their traditions, ceremonies and feasts reflect their faith.

## THE GRIQUAS

The Griquas moved away from the Cape of Good Hope at the beginning of the 19th Century and settled in the present Griqualand West. Some, however, moved further east and settled in the Free State Province, Griqualand East in the Eastern Cape Province as well as in other parts of the Western Cape Province.

In 1862, Adam Kok, the local Griqua leader, and his people undertook one of the most harrowing and difficult mountain journeys in the history of South Africa. He led his people through rugged country and over the awesome Drakensberg Mountain Range to their “promised land”, an area that would later become known as the independent state of Griqualand East. Here they built their capital city, Kokstad, a reminder to this day of their leader Adam Kok and his endeavours.

The Griquas developed a culture of their own and a characteristic language that is a form of Dutch-Afrikaans with its own rich and peculiar forms of expression. They are well known for their prowess as choir singers, their love of sacred songs and their Christian faith.



## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Most of the people of mixed origin follow a western lifestyle, speak Afrikaans and attend a Christian Church. There are however also many English speakers. They are renowned for their sense of humour and uniquely descriptive proverbs and sayings. They also love dancing and singing and have developed unique dances and songs over the years.

The annual "Coon Carnival" at Christmas and on New Year's Day has become the highlight of the festive season in Cape Town. During this time, troops of people take to the streets of Cape Town, dressed in colourful costumes to entertain the people with lively songs, dances and music.

The modern day people of mixed origin have left their mark on the country and many occupy important roles in Government and business.

## The Malays

The Muslim Malay community is close-knit and deeply religious and their lives mainly revolve around their various religious activities. They guard their culture diligently and keep outside influences at bay as much as possible.

However, the Malay community is also renowned for its cultural activities such as the annual choir festivals when only original Cape Dutch songs, handed down from generation to generation, are sung. The Malays also have their own locally trained ballet and drama groups.

The Malay quarter, on the slopes of Signal Hill, in an old residential area of Cape Town, abounds with the typical, 18th century, flat-roofed Malay houses, many of them recently renovated. There are also several beautiful mosques in the area and there are numerous Muslim shrines, holy places and sacred graves (kramats) in this area and elsewhere in South Africa. Some of these are situated on Table Mountain. There is even one on Robben Island, the island on which Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for many years.

