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INSIDE ORANIA

A Contested Experiment in Self-Reliance and Cultural Preservation

Orania, a small settlement in South Africa's Northern Cape, is often at the center of national controversy and international curiosity. To some, it represents a bold experiment in self-reliance; to others, a symbol of racial exclusion. In a recent conversation hosted on the *BTH with Dr Q* podcast, Joost Strydom, a key figure from Orania, offered an unfiltered explanation of the town's origins, economic model, political stance, and its contentious labor and residency policies.

Orania, An Idea Before It Was a Place

Strydom describes Orania not merely as a geographical location, but as both "an idea and a reality." The idea traces back to 1963, rooted in the belief that Afrikaners should establish a homeland where they could govern themselves, practice their culture, and build their own institutions without ruling over or being ruled by others. According to Strydom, this vision was not a reactionary response to the end of apartheid but a long-held aspiration of self-determination. In 1991, this vision took physical form when a derelict town, once used to house workers building the Orange River Scheme, was purchased and transformed into what is now Orania.

Own Land, Own Labor, Own Institutions

The foundational philosophy of Orania rests on three pillars: own land, own labor, and own institutions. Perhaps the most contentious is the principle of own labor. In Orania, all work, from manual labor to professional services, is carried out by Afrikaners themselves. Strydom insists this is not about racial exclusion



but about rejecting historic systems of labor exploitation and reclaiming human dignity through self-work. "This is a reformatory labor revolution," he asserts. "We exploit no one. No one needs to say they built our future for us. We did it ourselves."

The Accusations of Racism

When asked directly about accusations that Orania is racist or anti-black, Strydom is unequivocal: "That is total nonsense." He argues that black South Africans and other non-Afrikaner visitors are frequently hosted in Orania for educational, political, and social exchanges. However, he acknowledges that the community enforces cultural and linguistic requirements for residency, meaning that only those who embrace Afrikaner culture, language (Afrikaans), and Christian values are admitted. Notably, even white English-speaking South Africans and foreigners have been turned away if they do not align with these cultural values.

Economy: A Model of Micro-Sovereignty

Economically, Orania is both ambitious and unconventional. With no financial assistance from the South African government, the town has developed its own currency, the "Ora", backed by Rands held in a secure bank account. The Ora circulates locally, discouraging capital flight and fostering internal economic resilience.

Agriculture is a key pillar, supported by major infrastructural investments like irrigation pipelines. Orania exports peanuts and continues to focus on value-added services, particularly in engineering and construction. Electricity independence is also a notable achievement. While the rest of South Africa endures stage six load shedding from time-to-time, Orania's lights stay on thanks to its battery-powered grid.

Political Structure: Anti-Party, Pro-Community

Orania has rejected political party systems in favor of community-based governance. Leaders are elected as individuals without party affiliations and serve voluntarily. Although residents can vote in national elections (South Africa), they abstain from municipal votes outside Orania as a gesture of political self-containment.

Strydom believes Orania's model could inspire other South African communities, including indigenous groups, to reclaim autonomy over land, governance, and service delivery. Several traditional leaders have reportedly consulted with Orania to

understand its infrastructure and land ownership models. He advises, "Create a reality no one can deny." He draws parallels to the Zulu Kingdom, suggesting that similar cultural enclaves could seek greater autonomy if the will and planning are present.

On Land Expropriation and U.S. Offers of Asylum

The town stands firmly against land expropriation without compensation. Strydom criticizes the data often used to justify such policies as skewed, and argues that it could lead to economic disaster. On the United States' offer for Afrikaners to seek refuge, Strydom responds, "We are not looking to be refugees in another man's land. We are a people of Africa."

Looking ahead, Orania aims to grow into a city-sized rural economy, expand its educational institutions, including technical colleges, and build diplomatic ties across Africa and the global north. At just over 3,000 people, the town plans to add 500 more housing units to meet demand.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Orania was envisioned in the 1950s and officially founded in 1991 to preserve Afrikaner culture through self-determination.
2. It operates on three pillars; own land, own institutions, and own labor, eschewing external workers and state dependency.
3. Although often called racist, Orania claims its exclusion is based on cultural identity, not race.
4. All jobs are done by Afrikaners as a rejection of exploitative labor practices and to preserve community autonomy.
5. Orania has its own currency (Ora), significant agricultural output, and is partially energy-independent.



6. Only culturally-aligned individuals can live in Orania; applications are vetted by a community panel.
7. The town rejects political parties, electing individual volunteers for governance roles.
8. Traditional communities have visited Orania to learn how to apply similar self-sufficiency models.
9. Opposition to Land Expropriation: Strydom argues such policies are unjust and economically dangerous.
10. Orania aims to expand physically, economically, and diplomatically, While maintaining its cultural core.

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