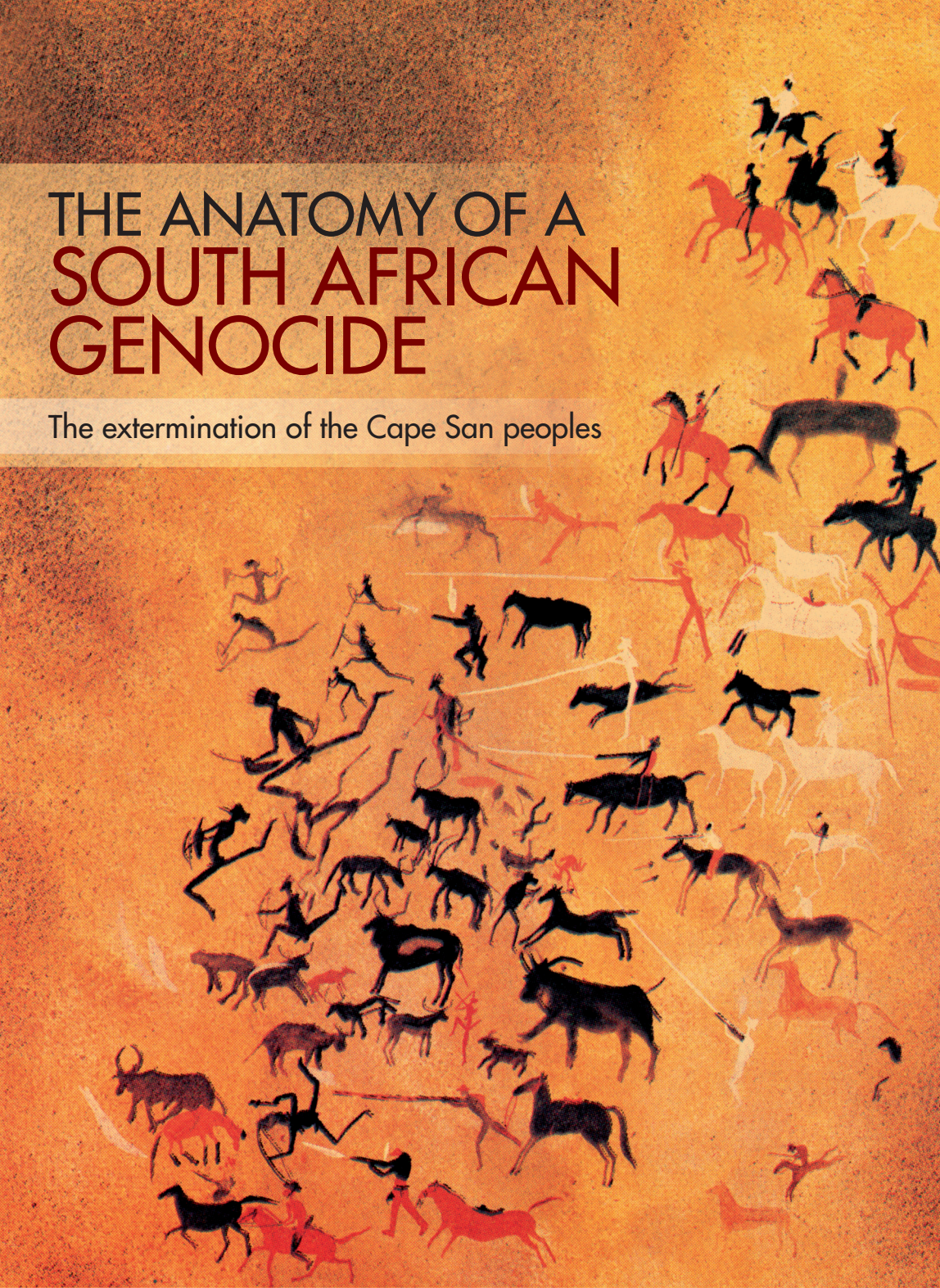
THE ANATOMY OF A SOUTH AFRICAN GENOCIDE

The extermination of the Cape San peoples



MOHAMED ADHIKARI

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For Rafiq and Zaheer

And in memory of the anonymous San woman whose preserved skin formed the centrepiece of a private zoological collection and was put on auction along with animal pelts in Hamburg in July 1840; Koerikei, the San leader, who shouted at trekboers from a clifftop, while out of range of their guns, to leave the land or face the wrath of his people; and the elderly San shaman, !Huin T Kuiten, who passed on the protocols of rain-making to a younger man despite being mortally wounded by a Boer commando.

Table of Contents

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Junior faithfully stood by me throughout the time this book was written. At one point he got a little hot under the collar, at another he was running cold, but depend on him I could! As always, this book is dedicated to my sons Rafiq and Zaheer, whose love and warmth make my life a joy. In their inimitable ways, they have constantly managed to remind me of what really matters.

Chronology

1652	DEIC established a refreshment station at Table Bay
1676	First official commando formed; against the Cochoqua Khoikhoi of the western Cape
1699	Ban on livestock trade lifted; many Khoikhoi dispossessed; ban reimposed in 1725
1700	Occupation of Tulbagh basin; opening of the pastoral frontier
1710s	Trekboers entered the Cederberg and Olifants River valley regions
1714	Loan farm system introduced; dispersed population into isolated groups across the landscape
1715	First official all-burgher commando
1720s	Farmers started moving into the Bokkeveld region
1739	Subjugation of Bokkeveld Khoisan; commando duty made compulsory
1740s	Trekboers reach escarpment of Roggeveld and Nieuweveld mountains
1770s	Sneeuberg and Camdeboo districts settled
1770s	Great increase in San resistance; halting of frontier advance; crisis for trekboer society
1770s–1798	Open warfare against San on the northern and northeastern frontiers
1772	Roggeveld rebellion stoked both Khoisan and trekboer anxiety
1774	General commando of 250 militiamen; 503 San killed and 239 taken captive
1775	*Inboekseling* system legalised; had existed informally before this
1777	DEIC sanctioned indiscriminate killing of San; a 'genocidal moment'
1792	Bounty placed on San captured by official commandos
1795–1803	First British occupation of the Cape to pre-empt French control

1798	Governor Macartney's reforms; livestock gifts, chiefs, missions, Bushmanland reserve
1799	Arrival of missionaries from the London Missionary Society; missions to San at Blydevooruitzicht Fontein (1799–1800); moved to Sak River (1800–06); Toornberg (1814–17); Hephzibah (1816–17); Ramah (1816–18); Konah (1816–18); Philippolis (1823–26); Caledon River (1828–33); Bushman Station (1839–46)
1803–06	Batavian rule; Macartney's reforms compromised
1806	Start of Second British occupation of the Cape; Macartney's reforms largely ignored
1809	Caledon Code tied Khoikhoi workers to employers through labour contracts
1824	Border of Cape Colony extended to the Orange River in the northeast
1828	Publication of John Philip's *Researches in South Africa*; Ordinance 50 passed
late 1820s–1830s	Intensified Griqua attacks on San in Griqualand West region
1847	Colonial border pushed to the Orange River in the north
1850s	Sheep farming and copper mining put pressure on Bushmanland San
1861	Anthing heard of San massacres; moved to Kenhardt to investigate
1863	Anthing report tabled in parliament; disregarded by Cape government
1868–69	First Korana war along the Orange River; San participation
1870s	Bleek and Lloyd started compiling linguistic and ethnographic record on /Xam
1878–79	Second Korana war along the Orange River; San participation

Definitions of genocide

Definition of Genocide Used in this Book

Genocide is the intentional[a] physical destruction[b] of a social group[c] in its entirety, or the intentional annihilation of such a significant part[d] of the group that it is no longer able to reproduce itself biologically or culturally, nor sustain an independent economic existence.[e]

a. Genocide cannot happen accidentally. Its execution is deliberate to the extent that there needs to be intent either to eradicate the social group in question or to cripple its social life permanently. The intent need not be explicitly declared and can take the form of an exterminatory attitude, as, for example, within a settler community towards indigenes, or may be inferred from the actions of perpetrators. Opposition to the killing from within the perpetrators' society, such as the church or even the government, does not invalidate such intent. It is sufficient only that the perpetrators exhibit genocidal intent. Genocidal intent does not have to be present at the start of the violence as objectives can change during the course of an atrocity. Once the consequences of socially destructive actions — which can include conquest, land expropriation, massacre, forced labour, forced migration, the destruction of environmental resources, confiscation of food, the spread of disease and child removal — are recognised as possibly leading to extinction, to persist in these actions is to display genocidal intent. It does not matter whether these acts are perpetrated in an unplanned, incremental fashion or as part of a concerted campaign. If perpetrators could reasonably be expected to foresee the genocidal consequences of their actions, the criterion of intent is fulfilled. Intent is therefore not equivalent to motive and does not require premeditation. The perpetrator does not have to be a state, a representative, or part, of a state.
b. For an atrocity to count as genocide there needs to be mass violence or actions that will lead, in the foreseeable future, to death on a scale large enough to debilitate the social life of the group in question.

Coerced cultural assimilation without extensive bloodshed does not constitute genocide. Ethnocide, crime against humanity and cultural suppression are more appropriate terms for this sort of abuse. Mass displacement or deportation on its own does not amount to genocide — neither do conquest or suppression of revolt without genocidal intent.

c. The target group can be defined in terms, or in any combination, of racial, ethnic, national, religious, class, political, gender or other criteria. While victim groups often identify as a community, they do not necessarily have to do so. Since the initiative lies with perpetrators, it is their definition of victimised groups and individuals that is most relevant.

d. Because the extent of slaughter and social destruction necessary for genocide is a subjective matter, there is little point in setting quantitative thresholds for determining genocide. It is the dynamic and the intent behind the violence, rather than simply the scale, that is significant. The killing of a relatively small part of a social group that is responsible for key functions, such as political, spiritual or intellectual leadership, can have a disproportionate effect on its social life. Also, relatively small bloodbaths may be more genocidal in nature than much larger atrocities where such intent is absent. Thus the killing of 80% of the Herero people (±65k) between 1904–08 is much more clearly genocidal than the random killing of 1% of the Chinese population today (±13.5m) might be, although the latter may result in many more casualties.

e. The degree of social destruction envisaged would include precipitous population decline, large-scale atrophy of the institutions and practices central to sustaining group identity, and survivors being reduced to forced labour or utter destitution. While it might have been the intention of perpetrators that the destruction or crippling of the enemy be permanent, the social lives of groups may over time be revitalised, though usually on a very different basis to that prior to the genocide.

Some alternative definitions of genocide[1]

Rafael Lemkin (1944)
By 'genocide' we mean the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group … Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except where accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a co-ordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against the individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the group … Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor.

United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) — Article II:
In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Peter Drost (1959)
Genocide is the deliberate destruction of physical life of individual human beings by reason of their membership of any human collectivity as such.

1 Taken from Jones, (2006: 10–13, 15–18, 22) and Shaw (2007: 154).

Irving Louis Horowitz (1976)
[Genocide is] a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus …. Genocide represents a systematic effort over time to liquidate a national population, usually a minority … [and] functions as a fundamental political policy to assure conformity and participation of the citizenry.

Henry Huttenbach (1988)
Genocide is any act that puts the very existence of a group in jeopardy.

Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1990)
Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership are defined by the perpetrator.

Helen Fein (1993)
Genocide is sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.

Israel Charny (1994)
Genocide in the generic sense means the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of essential defencelessness of the victim.

Barbara Harff (2003)
Genocides and politicides are the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents – or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities – that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group.

Adam Jones (2006)
Genocide is the actualisation of the intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in whole or in substantial part any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator.

Martin Shaw (2007)
Genocide is a form of violent social conflict, or war, between armed power organizations that aim to destroy civilian social groups and those groups and other actors who resist this destruction (2007).

Introduction

Settler colonialism and San society

In 1998 David Kruiper, the leader of the ≠Khomani San people, who today live in the Kalahari Desert in the furthest reaches of South Africa's Northern Cape province, lamented of his people that '… we have been made into nothing' (Crwys-Williams, 1999: 62). The ≠Khomani San are a tiny remnant of the foraging communities that once inhabited most of the land that currently constitutes South Africa. Whereas Kruiper was voicing concern about the marginalisation of the ≠Khomani San in post-apartheid South Africa,[1] his judgement applies in an even more literal sense to the fate of hunter-gatherer societies of the Cape Colony that were destroyed by the impact of European colonialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Much of the dispossession and slaughter happened in the eighteenth century along the northern and northeastern frontiers under Dutch East India Company (DEIC, also VOC)[2] rule, with continued displacement and killing under the relatively benign auspices of British imperialism through the nineteenth century. The main agents of destruction were Dutch-speaking pastoralists whose murderous land-grabbing and

1 The comment was made a year before the ≠Khomani San's successful land claim in the Northern Cape under South Africa's land reform programme and while they were still living in squalor at Kagga Kamma, a white-owned game farm in the Western Cape where they put on performances of 'traditional Bushman life' for tourists. The ≠Khomani San were awarded about 26,300 hectares of land in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park on South Africa's border with Namibia and Botswana (White, 1995: 8–9, 40–42; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 10–11, 88–89; Buntman, 1996: 272, 278–79).

2 VOC stands for its Dutch title *de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*. It was founded in 1602 to coordinate Dutch trading expeditions to the East Indies and curb damaging competition between companies involved in the lucrative spice trade. The VOC was at the centre of Dutch commercial supremacy in the East during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Eventually weighed down by debt and corruption, its charter was allowed to lapse in 1804 as the company was by then no longer commercially viable.

ecologically damaging farming practices ensured the virtual extinction of the Cape San peoples.

Historically, the destruction of Cape San societies can be viewed as part of a series of overlapping, essentially concentric, global movements of violent subjugation that were often genocidal in nature. The broadest of these is the 12,000-year history of the absorption, displacement and destruction of hunter-gatherer communities by farmers (Brody, 2000: 6–7, 43–50), an ongoing trend decidedly observable on the Cape frontier. Another worldwide process of vanquishment applicable to this case study is that of European overseas colonial conquest. The annihilation of the Cape San formed a small part of this five-century-long process which started in the Canary Islands in the late fourteenth century and included many instances of the complete extermination of indigenous peoples. Because European colonialism was such a hugely diverse and complex phase in human history, it is perhaps more helpful to view the destruction of the Cape San within the framework of a subset of settler colonial confrontations — those in which livestock farmers linked to the global capitalist market clashed with hunter-gatherers. The frequency with which encounters of this kind resulted in the near complete destruction of forager societies raises the question of whether this form of colonialism is inherently genocidal. It is possible to identify a number of shared features in conflicts between hunter-gatherers and market-oriented stock farmers that have served to intensify hostilities and tilt the balance toward genocidal outcomes.

One of the crucial dynamics at play in conflicts of this sort was the rapid occupation of extensive areas of land characteristic of capitalist stock farming entering virgin territory. Not only do commercial stock farmers move frontiers rapidly but their herds consume large amounts of grazing and water, damaging the ecosystem. This had an immediate, and often devastating, impact on the region's foraging societies, whose seasonal migrations were disrupted, and whose food supplies and other foundations of life were severely compromised. This almost inevitably led to spiralling levels of violence as afflicted indigenous peoples resisted encroachment, and settlers in turn retaliated, usually with excessive and indiscriminate force. Such conflicts often culminated in warfare and exterminatory offensives on the part of colonial society. The weakness of the colonial state and its tenuous control over frontier areas gave settlers, who had access to arms, wide discretion to act against indigenes.

A second dynamic was that access to world markets, and a concomitant desire to accumulate wealth, encouraged both intensive exploitation of natural resources for short-term gain as well as a resort to annihilatory violence to eliminate indigenes regarded as obstacles or threats to the colonial project. The privatisation and commodification of natural resources, especially land, undermined foraging societies fundamentally. Systems of land tenure based on exclusive usage, fixed boundaries, registration of title deeds, alienability and permanent settlement were completely foreign to hunter-gatherer world-views and effectively excluded them from legal ownership of vital resources. Privatisation generally meant the permanent loss of such resources and the backing of settler claims by the legal apparatus, and, ultimately, the armed might of the colonial state. Economic and political imperatives invariably resulted in the colonial state supporting settler interests and land confiscations, even in cases where both metropolitan and local governments tried to curb frontier violence (Levene, 2005: 77–78; Weaver, 2003: 147–51; Wolfe, 2006: 395; Wolfe, 2008, 104; Brody, 2000: 112–14).

A third common characteristic was the influence of Western racist thinking, modulated by local imperatives, that dehumanised the hunter-gatherer way of life as an utterly debased form of existence, proof of their racial inferiority and comparable in many respects to that of animals. Depicting foragers as merely inhabiting the land, much as animals do, rather than making productive use of it, usually underlay settler justifications for their dispossession. Stereotyped as particularly 'savage', as immune to 'civilising' influences, and their labour as unsuited to settler needs, hunter-gatherers were often regarded as expendable. That racist theorising often anticipated the dying out of the 'savage' (Brantlinger, 2003; McGregor, 1997; Finzsch, 2007: 12–13) further encouraged violence against indigenes and fostered an extirpatory attitude within frontier society. Because forager subsistence needs were irreconcilable with those of the settler economy, colonial society viewed the foraging way of life as one to be eliminated, whether through outright extermination, forced acculturation into some subordinate status in the colonial order, or neutralisation through segregation in reserves (Moses, 2004, 30–32; Levene, 2005: 11–12, 21, 66; Wolfe, 2006: 396–97; Jones, 2006: 28). In the case of the Cape San peoples, the interplay of these forces favoured the most radical of these options.

In cases where pastoralists producing for capitalist markets invaded the territory of hunter-gatherers, the global economic system tended to bring together the practices of metropolitan and colonial governments, the interests of providers of capital and consumers of commodities, and the agency of local actors — ranging from military commanders to graziers in remote outposts — in ways that fostered the violent dissolution of native society (see Wolfe, 2008: 104, 108). With the Cape San, the diverse impulses driving Dutch colonial expansion through the eighteenth century coalesced to radicalise settler animosity into an exterminatory campaign against them.

These observations are not in the least meant to diminish either the agency of foraging societies engaged in frontier conflict or the reality that settler society at times had a rather tenuous hold on power. It was after all hunter-gatherer resistance that usually precipitated extirpatory offensives against them. These comments are intended rather to indicate that, in the final analysis, such struggles were inherently very uneven and that the assault on the land, lives and culture of hunter-gatherer peoples was in most cases genocidal in nature. Because of its small scale and relative lack of social differentiation, almost any form of organised violence against foraging peoples took on the aspect of total war, and violence on any appreciable scale assumed genocidal proportions. That there was almost assuredly a blurring of distinctions between warriors and noncombatants in hunter-gatherer society, and that settler violence was often indiscriminate rather than targeted at fighters or stock raiders, made this doubly so (Moses, 2008: 26). This meant that in sustained clashes between foragers and capitalist stock-keepers genocide seems not so much an aberration as normative. The fate of the Cape San and the Australian Aborigines, as well as other hunter-gatherering peoples that once lived in what are now stock-farming areas of the United States, Argentina and Brazil, among others, testify to this. The counter example of San communities in Botswana's Ghanzi district cautions against making absolute claims in this regard, though.

Whereas comparable exterminations of aboriginal peoples elsewhere, most notably in Australia and the United States, have resulted in major public controversies and heated debate among academics about the nature of these killings, and whether or not they

constitute genocide,[3] in South Africa the issue has effectively been ignored. Aside from the occasional throwaway polemical reference to the destruction of South Africa's San population as genocide — the best-known example occurring in Thabo Mbeki's 1996 'I am an African' speech[4] — the matter has little presence in South African public life. Indeed, there is woeful public ignorance about the fate of the country's original inhabitants. It is not inappropriate to speak of this in terms of national amnesia, despite the odd gesture in the direction of the San.[5] The marginality of the San is painfully apparent in popular attitudes that range from intensely negative racial stereotyping, through indifference to condescendingly regarding them as quaint relics of humanity's 'primitive' past — 'living fossils' being a common designation. At its most benign this typecasting romanticises the San as innocent children of nature in need of protection from the vagaries of modern living.[6] In contrast, a number of scholars writing on the Cape San colonial experience refer to the destruction of their societies as genocide. This, however, is done in passing — sometimes almost

3 For recent evaluations of such debates in the United States and Australia, respectively, see Cave (2008) and Barta (2008).

4 The relevant part of the speech delivered to the Constitutional Assembly on the adoption of the South African Constitution on 8 May 1996 runs as follows;

> *I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape — they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence [sic] and they who, as a people, perished in the result.*

For the full text of the speech, see Mbeki (1996).

5 I am thinking here of the publicity surrounding the 1999 land claim in favour of the ≠Khomani San and the incorporation of San rock art and /Xam language into the national coat of arms. See also Westby-Nunn (2008: 40, 120) for photographs of a little-known 'San and Khoi genocide memorial (1702–1809)' near Graaff-Reinet. There has been a resurgence in San identity over the last two decades on the back of the Khoisan revivalist movement and global attention on the rights of 'first peoples'. A boom in eco- and cultural tourism and the attendant commodification of indigenous cultures have underpinned the process. See Comaroff (2009: 86–98).

6 For Western attitudes towards the San, see Parsons (2009: 2–5, 199–206), Guenther (1980: 123–40) and Gordon (1999: 266–90). For twentieth-century South African attitudes towards the San, see Adhikari (2005: 24, 28–29), Stone (1991: 386–87), Buntman (1996: 276–79) and Van Vuuren (2005).

inadvertently — and none have analysed this case specifically as one of genocide.

This book hopes, at least partially, to address both shortcomings. In the first place, it seeks to heighten awareness of the catastrophic impact of colonial conquest on the hunter-gatherer societies of the Cape. Secondly, drawing on the ideas and insights of the field of genocide studies, it makes the case that the annihilation of the Cape San societies constitutes genocide in terms of the relatively stringent formulation of the concept advanced above.[7] This study, in addition, aims to provide a succinct synthesis of scholarly knowledge on the encounter between European colonists and hunter-gatherer societies in the Cape interior.

The two opening chapters review confrontations between San and settler under Dutch colonial rule. The first of these is mainly contextual, focusing on the driving forces behind Dutch colonial expansion at the Cape. The latter elaborates on the conflict between Dutch-speaking pastoralists and the hunter-gatherer societies of the Cape interior, tracing its escalation into all-out war and an exterminatory campaign by frontier farmers with the backing of the colonial state by the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Chapter 3 explains how and why the nature of conflict with the San changed after Britain first took control of the Cape in 1795. Despite the easing of hostilities in the nineteenth century, ongoing invasion of their territory, intermittent clashes, subversion of their culture and erosion of their ability to live off the land resulted in the complete destruction of independent San society in the second half of the nineteenth century. The discussion of the eighteenth century is of necessity more comprehensive and sure-footed than that of the nineteenth, as the historiography of the latter is patchy whereas the former boasts several detailed and systematic surveys.[8] The next chapter sets out my reasoning behind the charge that the destruction of San society constitutes genocide. It first surveys the spectrum of scholarly opinion on the nature of these killings,

7 It is even more clearly a case of genocide in terms of the more inclusive definitions set forth in the United Nations Convention on Genocide and that espoused by Rafael Lemkin, the originator of the term.

8 Refer to the 'Guide to further reading' for a list of key works. Nigel Penn is extending his research on the colonial experience of the Cape San into the nineteenth century.

paying particular attention to the writings of Miklós Szalay, the one academic who provides a sustained challenge to the idea that the Cape San had been exterminated. The chapter then evaluates the full array of objections I have encountered to the idea that the destruction of San society constitutes genocide, in the process elaborating my own opposing points of view. The conclusion offers some insight into San perceptions of their experience.

The terms 'San' and 'Bushman' are used to refer to the hunter-gatherer peoples of southern Africa who were its earliest inhabitants. Direct ancestors of the San were living in southern Africa as long as 120,000 years ago (Mitchell, 2002: 74–75; see also Henshilwood & Sealy, 1997: 890–95). San occupied most of the subcontinent south of the Zambezi Valley before it became more densely populated with the migration of herders and cultivators into the region over the past two thousand years. Today San communities numbering not much more than 100,000 in total are to be found as far north as southern Angola and Zambia, with the largest concentrations of about 50,000 in Botswana and about 40,000 in Namibia (Smith *et al*, 2000: 65; Hitchcock, 1999: 178; Crawhall, 2005: 1056).

The San lived in small, loosely knit, family-based, foraging bands of usually betweeen 10 and 30 people. Bands usually consisted of a few extended families covering three generations, with married siblings as its nucleus. These groups were sometimes as small as five or six, but hardly ever exceeded 50.[9] At the start of European colonisation in 1652, their numbers in what was to become the Cape Colony were in

9 Archaeologist Tim Maggs used group depictions in rock art to suggest that the average size of San bands was about 16, whereas Nigel Penn used the report of the General Commando of 1774 to arrive at a commensurate figure of between 13 and 14 (Maggs, 1971: 49–53; Penn, 1996: 86). Lewis-Williams reaches similar conclusions for the /Xam of the northern Cape using ethnographic descriptions in the Bleek-Lloyd archive (Lewis-Williams, 1982: 431).

all probability in the region of 30,000.[10] Hunting bands were known to amalgamate or split on a seasonal basis in response to environmental changes, social tension or for communal activities such as game drives, and there was considerable movement of individuals and families between camps. Hunting bands affiliated through kinship ties formed larger cultural groupings that might encompass several hundred people tied together through a range of reciprocal arrangements, which might have included intermarriage, the sharing of resources, gift-giving and various forms of exchange.[11] These extended social networks acted as insurance against localised fluctuations in the availability of resources, or more severe crises, most commonly drought, by giving bands access to means outside of their territories. Individual bands moved within a defined area, determined usually by the availability of water, following game and harvesting seasonally available plant foods. They lived in makeshift shelters or in caves and used a range of stone and bone tools fashioned to serve as arrowheads, knives, axes, harpoons, scrapers, needles and other implements. San are probably best known for their exquisite paintings on cave walls and other rock faces (Hewitt, 2008: 14–26; Smith *et al*, 2000: 5–9; Tobias, 1978: chs. 2–3; Parkington 2002; Lewis-Williams, 1982: 429–38; 1985: 54).

10 There is no way of determining the size of the pre-colonial hunter-gatherer population in the area covered by the Cape Colony with any accuracy. Szalay (1995: 108) puts the Cape San population at between 15,000 and 30,000 at the onset of colonisation, extrapolating from figures provided by Lee (1976: 5) that estimate the San population south of the Zambezi to have been between 150,000 and 300,000. Elphick (1985: 23) gauges the Khoikhoi population of the southwestern Cape to have been no more than 100,000 while Wilson (1982: 68) puts the Khoikhoi population south of the Orange River in the region of 200,000. Feinstein (2005: 254–55) rather conservatively proposes that the combined Khoisan population south of the Orange was approximately 200,000 in 1652. These figures suggest that the lower levels of Szalay's assessment are too modest. Even if one assumed an extremely low average density of no more than one hunter-gatherer per 10 square kilometres, the area comprising the Cape Colony by the mid-nineteenth century could comfortably have supported a forager population of 30,000, and perhaps even one as high as 50,000.

11 Our knowledge of specific reciprocal arrangements is mainly drawn from recent studies of Kalahari San. It is quite possible that fictive associations, such as name relationships, might also have been used. In terms of this precept, people with the same name, notwithstanding the lack of any other connection, are obliged to share resources.

While a variety of plants, mainly bulbs and roots, formed the mainstay of their diet, game was crucial to the welfare of the San. Smaller animals were snared, whereas larger ones, most typically buck, were shot with poison-tipped arrows. Spears and clubs were also used. There was a distinct gendered division of labour in San society in that men did most of the hunting and women most of the gathering. In coastal and riverine environments, fish and shellfish complemented their diet. Wherever available, they also harvested wild fruit, berries, honey and insects such as locusts, caterpillars and termite larvae. Anthropologist Alan Barnard indicates that San had 'a traditional knowledge … of several hundreds of different species of plants, as well as their seasonal locations, their ecological associations with other species, and how to prepare them as foods or medicines. They may know a hundred species of animal as well, their migration patterns, their social behaviours and psychologies, … [and] their life cycles' (Barnard, 2007: 4). In the dry Cape interior, hunting bands might have utilised territories as large as 400 square kilometres for their subsistence. Contrary to the popular perception that the San led a precarious lifestyle, most had a fairly secure existence, except for those displaced to more extreme environments (Neville, 1996: ch. 6; Lewis-Williams, 1983: 16, 39; Barnard, 1992: ch. 1; Wright, 1971: 3–4; Parkington 2006).

Anthropologist Mathias Guenther stresses that the 'key features of Bushman society, its organization, and its institutions and ethos [are] flexibility, adaptability and diversity, fluidity and amorphousness, ambivalence and ambiguity' (Guenther, 1999: 13). According to Guenther (1999: 26), this flexibility was necessary for the effective exploitation of migratory game and unevenly distributed plant food supplies that resulted from localised and unpredictable rainfall patterns. It also accounts for San resilience in the face of extraneous disruptive forces, whether they be prolonged drought or aggressive settlers intruding on their territory. Although in general displaced by invading Khoikhoi herders and Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists, San communities nevertheless interacted with them in complex ways ranging from coexistence, intermarriage and social absorption, through clientship and the provision of shamanic services such as rain-making and healing, to armed conflict (Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2004: 209–21; Jolly, 1996b: 30–61; Penn, 2005: 18, 57, 90). It is likely that some bands acquired sheep and goats from invading pastoral people and supplemented their own foraging activities with small-

scale herding (Parkington, 2003: 110–11; Mitchell, 2009: 30). Though there is no evidence of this at the Cape, there were instances of San communities in other parts of the subcontinent developing incipient state structures in response to encroachment by herders and farmers (Guenther, 1999: 14, 18). San society was thus far from static, uniform or unable to adapt to social change, as has often been alleged.

The San were not culturally homogeneous. Apart from regional variations in social customs, cosmologies, weaponry, rock art styles and material culture, they spoke a diversity of languages, many of which were mutually unintelligible and that are today classified into three distinct linguistic families. Although they shared a similar mode of subsistence, San economies differed considerably depending on the natural environment, with groups adjusting their foraging practices as they moved from one ecological zone to another (Guenther, 1999: 26; Smith *et al*, 2000: 14–15). The San had names for hunting bands and for larger cultural and linguistic groupings but not for hunter-gatherers generally, indicating that the San did not see hunter-gatherers collectively as a distinct social entity. Although the concept of the San is thus very much a colonial construct (Wilmsen 1996: 185–90; Jolly 1996: 197–210), it is nevertheless a meaningful social and analytical category because specialist foraging communities did share a distinctive economy and way of life, as opposed to pastoralists and cultivators.[12]

The labels 'San' and 'Bushman' are controversial because they are pejorative and their meanings contested. There is a good deal of confusion in the historical record itself about the identities of indigenous peoples and the names applied to them. 'Bushman' — or its Dutch equivalent 'Bosjesman' and its later Afrikaans version 'Boesman' — is ambiguous because it was used by colonists to describe specialist hunter-gatherer communities as well as groups of indigenous pastoralist Khoikhoi peoples (Hottentots) who had lost their cattle. Indeed, the terms were used generically to refer to anyone, including runaway slaves, renegades and destitute colonists who resorted to foraging.

12 For detailed discussion on how the world-views and life-ways of hunter-gatherer peoples differ fundamentally from those of farming communities, usually leading to conflict and displacement of foragers, see Brody (2000). For an examination of cases where interactions also include cooperation and symbiosis see Ikeya *et al* (2009).

Often colonists did not, or were not able to, distinguish between San, on the one hand, and Khoikhoi who had been stripped of their stock, on the other. There was a degree of mixing and intermarriage between San and other indigenous peoples, and they were known to be taken up as clients by Khoikhoi. Sometimes dispossessed Khoikhoi joined hunter-gatherer communities or resisted colonial encroachment in alliance with them. In such cases, the use of 'Khoisan' makes eminent sense (Marks, 1972: 57–60, 70; Penn, 2005: 8–9, 57). Because 'Bushman' has historically been a highly pejorative term in the South African context, connoting a wide range of negative associations, including primitiveness, ugliness, stupidity, thievishness, laziness, as well as mental and moral inferiority,[13] scholars from the 1960s started using 'San' as an alternative. But this term is also problematic because it is a disparaging Khoikhoi word applied to hunter-gatherers, indicating social inferiority and often meaning 'thief' or 'vagabond'. In recent years, some scholars have reverted to the use of 'Bushman' because existing San communities often prefer this name. Anthropologist Robert Gordon has opted for Bushman because, 'Changing the label does not reduce the racism … we have to confront the same terms and infuse them with new meaning' (Gordon & Douglas, 2000: 6). I favour 'San' because it is not gendered, is less pejorative, less ambiguous in denoting indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples than 'Bushman' and currently appears to be the term most widely accepted by leaders and organisations representing San people.[14]

13 For its pejorative connotations under apartheid and its relationship to coloured identity see Adhikari (2005: 24, 28–29) and Stone (1991: 386–87). For San identity in the post-apartheid environment see Besten (2009) and Comaroff & Comaroff (2008: 82–85).

14 For discussion around the meanings of the terms 'San' and 'Bushman', see, among others, Gordon & Douglas (2000: 4–6); Guenther (1986: 27–33); Wilmsen (1989: xv, 27–30); Jolly (1996: 197–210); Newton-King (1999: 59–63); Hewitt (2008: 1–2); Lewis-Williams (2004: xxvii); Mitchell and Smith (2009: 9); Wright (1996: 16–29); Hitchcock *et al* (2008: 4–6); Hitchcock and Biesele (n.d.: 1–4); Barnard (2007: 5–16, 138–40). Susan Newton-King tried unsuccessfully to skirt these ambiguities by referring to the San as 'mountain people'.

1

Colonial expansion through the eighteenth century

By the start of European colonisation, the San had largely been displaced to the drier and more rugged interior areas by Khoikhoi pastoralists and Bantu-speaking cultivators, both of whom had migrated into the region about two thousand years ago. The first European colonial settlement in southern Africa came in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company set up a refreshment station on the shores of Table Bay. The colony soon started spreading from this base because the VOC, in 1657, decided that allowing independent farmers to work the land was the most expeditious way of meeting the Company's need for agricultural produce. This opening of the agrarian frontier, together with natural population increase and immigration, ensured colonial expansion from the hub around the garrison and refreshment station from which the city of Cape Town would grow.[1] By the end of the 1670s, the indigenous peoples of the Cape Peninsula and the immediate interior, mainly Khoikhoi herders, had been subjugated and dispossessed of their land and livestock. This opened the way for the settlement of the fertile Stellenbosch and Paarl districts, as well as the Swartland area encompassed by the Berg River. It took roughly half a century for most of the arable southwestern Cape to be occupied by European farmers, whose main task it was to supply passing DEIC fleets and the growing settlement at Table Bay with

1 The town was initially known as *de Kaapsche vlek* (the Cape settlement). By the mid-eighteenth century it was being referred to as *Kaapstad* (Cape Town from 1795 onwards) to reflect its distinct urban nature.

fresh produce.[2] Colonisation of the southwestern Cape accelerated in the late seventeenth century as a result of the VOC encouraging immigration from Europe with land grants and offers of free passage (Guelke, 1989: 66).[3]

From the early eighteenth century, Dutch-speaking, semi-nomadic pastoralists rapidly infiltrated the dry Cape interior, the greater part of which was only suitable for transhumant pastoralism. The difficulties of getting produce to market, in any case, meant that pastoralism was the only viable option for farmers more than a few days' journey from Cape Town. Where feasible, they did cultivate crops for their own consumption. Population growth and a lack of economic opportunity in the more settled areas fuelled this expansion, while VOC policies also aided the dispersal of stockmen into the hinterland. In 1703, the Cape government lifted its ban on burghers grazing their stock more than a day's journey from their farms, and from 1714 started issuing grazing rights to extensive 2,400-hectare farms beyond the arable freehold areas in return for an annual rental (Guelke, 1984: 18–24; Botha, 1919: 3–4, 8–10; Giliomee, 2003: 21; Guelke, 1989: 84–91). This was the origin of the Cape's loan farm system, a form of leasehold which had the effect of accelerating movement into the interior and dispersing the population into tiny isolated groupings across the landscape (Terreblanche, 2002: 157; Elphick & Malherbe, 1989: 11–18). An important effect of the loan farm system is that tenants were not necessarily tied to a particular tract of land and could move on if they felt the need (Mitchell, 2009: 36).

The penetration of the interior by stock farmers brought into existence a new social group in Cape colonial society, the trekboers. 'Trekboer', which means 'migrant farmer' in Dutch, refers to the need for these pastoralists to move around with their flocks and herds in search of seasonally available grazing and water using their loan farms as a base. Even the more prosperous, established farmers, those with well-watered loan farms — who are perhaps more accurately referred to as *veeboeren* (stock farmers) — needed to engage in a degree of

2 By 1700, about 250 freehold farms, mostly large estates of about 600 hectares, had been granted in the western Cape, forming the basis of a prosperous and influential landed gentry that, together with the mercantile elite in Cape Town, dominated the society (Terreblanche, 2002: 155, 174).

3 The offer of free passage ended in 1707, and that of freehold grants in 1717.

transhumance.[4] The poorest graziers, unable to afford the rental, did not have loan farms. They tended to live wayfaring lives out of tented wagons, looking for pasturage and hopeful of finding a permanent place to settle. Several families might share a loan farm to reduce costs and for greater security (Penn, 2005: 17, 44; Guelke, 1989: 85–94; Giliomee, 2003: 31–32). They either sold surplus stock to Company butchers travelling through the countryside or, on occasion, drove the animals to Cape Town themselves, taking the opportunity to replenish essential supplies and maintain contact with their cultural and religious roots. Hardy and resourceful, but vulnerable because of their isolation, trekboers often felt insecure and generally were ruthless in their appropriation of natural resources and their treatment of indigenous peoples. Economist Sampie Terreblanche claims that the mercantilist mindset of Europe, which included the notion that a community was justified in using violence or military force against rivals in pursuit of its economic interests, had suffused the world-view and values of colonists at the Cape (Terreblanche, 2002: 154).

The decision by the DEIC in 1699 to lift its ban on livestock trading between colonist and Khoikhoi, in an attempt to improve meat supplies,[5] was not only a major impetus for expansion into the interior but also for violence against indigenous peoples. This policy change, and the resultant push into the hinterland, held dire consequences for the pastoralist Khoikhoi peoples occuppying the winter rainfall area of the southwestern Cape, and even for those further north, as far away as Namaqualand. Freebooting colonists saw this as an opportunity to enrich themselves and set up as stock farmers. Within a few years, most Khoikhoi in the region had been stripped of their herds as marauding gangs of colonial raiders, sometimes up to fifty strong, and generally consisting of poorer colonists, adventurers and desperados, spread havoc among indigenous stock-keepers (Penn, 2005: 38–41;

4 Newton-King (1999: 18, 23) draws a distinction between the more established stock farmer, or *veeboer*, and the poorer trekboer who was forced into a nomadic lifestyle. The distinction is of greater relevance on the better-watered eastern frontier than on the drier northern and northeastern frontiers.

5 In true mercantilist style, the VOC held a monopoly on all trade in the colony, in an attempt to keep prices low and maximise profit. There was nonetheless considerable illicit trade in livestock despite grim threats of punishment by the Company (Marks, 1972: 67–70).

Mostert, 1992: 171; Elphick & Malherbe, 1989: 21). Independent Khoikhoi society in the region had been destroyed by the time the VOC reintroduced the prohibition on livestock trading in 1725 (Penn, 2005: 54).

Their land occupied by Dutch-speaking interlopers, Khoikhoi societies along the frontier zone rapidly disintegrated. Some dispossessed Khoikhoi resorted to hunter-gathering, while others migrated beyond the reach of colonial influence. A number became stock raiders, at times in collaboration with San, putting up fierce resistance to further colonial incursions. Epidemics, in particular the smallpox outbreak of 1713, took a huge toll on Khoikhoi society (Ross, 1977: 416–28; Elphick, 1985: 179, 229–34, 236). Importantly, many Khoikhoi were also taken up as labourers by farmers. Their labour was valued by trekboers because the Khoikhoi had intimate knowledge of the natural environment and were highly skilled at animal husbandry. Useful also as guides, hunters and trackers, some became trusted servants. While it initially often suited destitute Khoikhoi to work temporarily for farmers in return for payment in food and livestock — just as it suited farmers to allow such servants to keep stock and exercise a degree of autonomy — their status deteriorated through the course of the eighteenth century. As options for leading an independent lifestyle diminished for the Khoikhoi, so farmers were able to assert greater control over their workers by paying subsistence wages, denying them the right to keep stock, confiscating their animals and retaining children to tie parents to the farm. By the end of the eighteenth century, most Khoikhoi in the employ of farmers were, in effect, forced labourers little better off than serfs (Elphick, 1985: 151–239; Elphick & Malherbe, 1989: 3, 18–53; Elphick & Giliomee, 1989b: 529, 531–33, 536–37, 546–52; Penn, 1986: 66–67).

As they moved beyond the cultivable southwestern Cape from about 1700 onwards, colonists started coming into conflict with hunter-gatherers. The dynamic behind the encounter with the San tended to be markedly different to that with the Khoikhoi. Whereas traditional Khoikhoi society crumbled in the face of colonial conflict, San social formations proved to be much more resilient. The basic reason for this contrast seems clear enough. The Khoikhoi pastoralist way of life was fragile when confronted with the superior military force at the disposal of settler society and was relatively easily undermined by stock raids or by depriving them of access to grazing or water (Elphick, 1985:170–74; Guelke & Shell, 1992, 820–22; Smith, 1991: 51–52). San

bands were, by comparison, hardy and adaptable, being much more mobile and able to live off the land. Their dispersal in small groups across extensive, rugged terrain made it considerably more difficult for the sparsely spread trekboer population to subjugate the San.

Although these farmers did participate in the international capitalist economy by supplying meat and products such as soap, butter, hides and tallow, to passing VOC fleets and the urban settlement at Cape Town, the trekboer economy was not principally driven by market forces but by subsistence considerations (Giliomee, 1989: 424; Guelke, 1989: 89–91; Penn, 2005: 15). Because VOC demand for meat was limited, prices set at levels favouring the Company and the environment harsh, trekboers were not so much commercial ranchers motivated solely by profit than pastoralists with access to a substantial market through which they could dispose of their surplus and procure the goods and services on which their way of life depended. Wagons, guns, ammunition and an array of tools and household goods were their main requirements. Frontier farmers were particularly dependent on their contact with Cape Town for firearms and ammunition, without which they would not have been able to hunt, defend themselves or take the offensive against indigenous people.

These links were also important for trekboer society to maintain an image of itself as Christian and civilised. Communal ties across the scattered settler population were continually reinforced through intermarriage, and a distinct identity maintained through the practice of European-derived customs and material culture (Mitchell, 2009: 75–76, 90–91; Newton-King, 1999: 20–25, 150–209). Besides the typical trekboer family conducting daily home religious services and saying prayers at mealtimes, frontier farmers usually travelled to Cape Town or the nearest village church to solemnise marriages and baptise children. They also intermittently employed itinerant teachers to impart a smattering of education to their children (Van der Merwe, 1938: 246–52; Newton-King, 1999: 45, 188, 208; Giliomee, 2003: 33–34; Guelke, 1989: 93, 96). Social networks were renewed at *nagmaal* (communion) services that periodically drew together burgher families from far and wide, and less regularly at auctions to settle insolvent estates (Mitchell, 2009: 126, 146; Newton-King, 1999: 254). Militia service was the communal activity that most starkly emphasised settler identity and interests in opposition to those of autochthonous peoples.

Their muted profit motive, however, did little to mitigate the ultimate fate of hunter-gatherer peoples on the Cape frontier, as trekboer

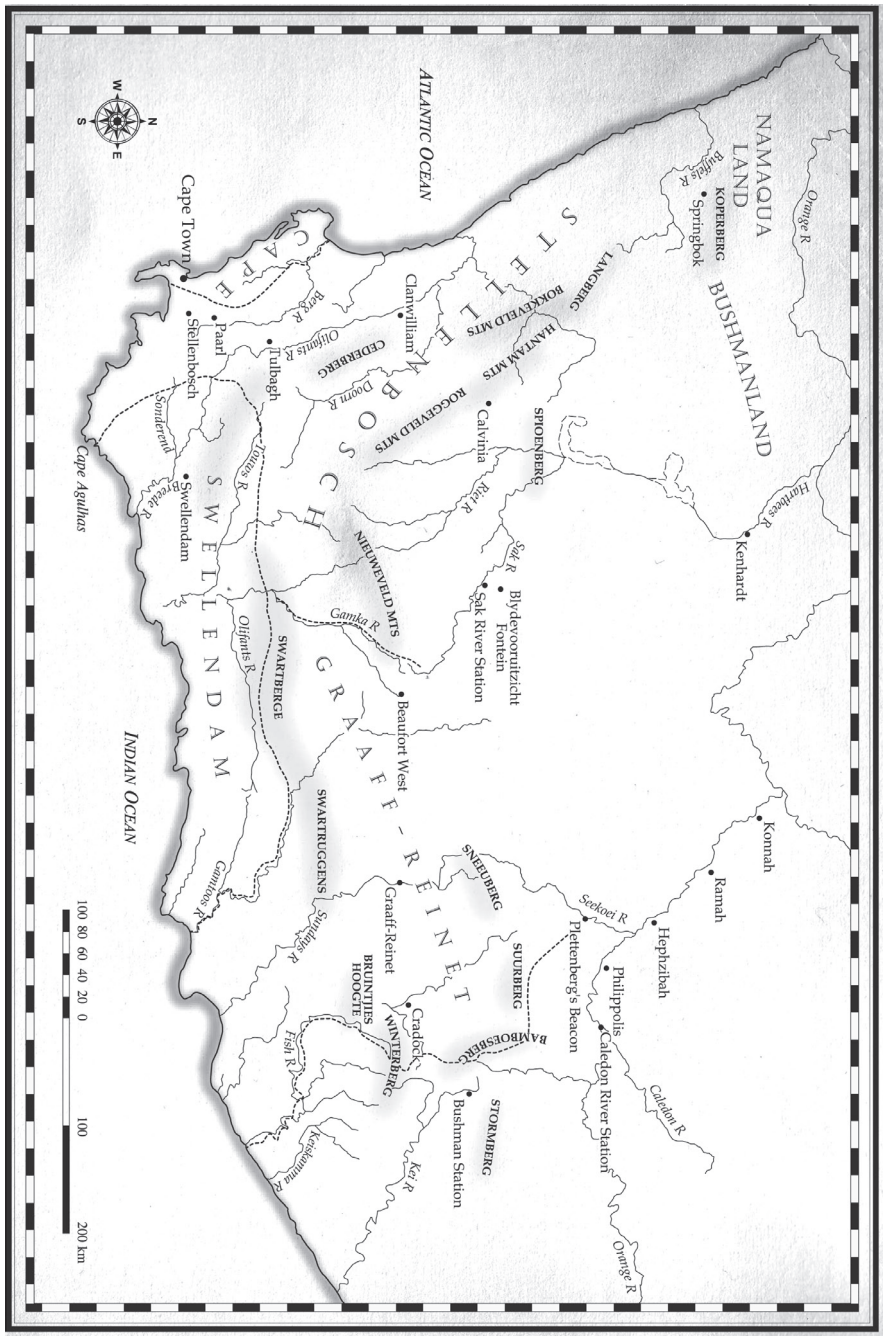
demographic growth, coupled with growing VOC demand for meat through the eighteenth century, ensured colonial expansion into the interior and the displacement of indigenous groups. The dynamic behind the violence between trekboer and San thus had less to do with a voracious, international, capitalist market for meat than with the far older, more pervasive displacement of hunter-gatherers by farming communities (Brody, 2000: 6–7, 143–50). Production for the market was not irrelevant to this process because overgrazing as a result of trekboer ignorance and a desire to turn a profit resulted in the progressive reduction in the carrying capacity of the veld as it was stripped of edible plants and replaced by vegetation their stock found unpalatable (Sparrman, vol. I, 1975–77: 238–39; Newton-King, 1999: 98).

Because of limited water resources in the Cape interior and the nature of transhumant pastoralism, the trekboer economy was expansive, and a relatively small trekboer population, together with their dependants, appropriated large swathes of land for their use. With a growing number of colonists entering the interior as farmers through the eighteenth century, and as the sons of trekboers set themselves up as independent graziers, there was intensifying pressure on resources and a continous drive to find new pastures to exploit. Trekboers, though thin on the ground — there being no more than about 600 independent stockholders by 1770, perhaps 1,000 by the end of the eighteenth century, with the total freeburgher population having reached nearly 15,000 by 1795 (Ross, 1994a: 127; Guelke 1989: 85) — were nevertheless able to control extensive tracts of land. Their access to superior military technology allowed colonists to take possession of scarce permanent water supplies, which in turn gave them dominion over the surrounding grazing (Guelke & Shell, 1992: 803–5, 816, 824; Penn, 2005: 111). By establishing their farms around perennial springs and water holes in the parched landscape, and by being able to defend their occupation of these strategic nodes, trekboers were able to exercise power over an area of land greatly disproportionate to their numbers, and had an incommensurate impact on the lives of indigenous inhabitants.

From 1700 onwards, settlers started moving across the Berg River into the Tulbagh basin about 100 kilometres from Cape Town. Here they encountered significant resistance, both from dispossessed Khoikhoi as well as from San, in particular a group known as the Ubiqua who had a reputation as fearsome stock raiders. By the early 1710s, pastoral farmers were migrating northwards into the Olifants River valley and beyond

that into the Bokkeveld across the Cederberg Mountains. The intrusion of trekboers into this region provoked concerted Khoisan resistance, and it was not until 1739 that this frontier zone was closed when a series of major military campaigns by frontier farmers, organised by the Cape government, quelled indigenous opposition. From about 1740, the frontier advanced rapidly as trekboers started moving north and east of the Bokkeveld Mountains and beyond the Olifants River valley into the harsher environment of the escarpment formed by the Hantam, Roggeveld, Nieuweveld and Sneeuberg mountains. The escarpment marked the transition between the narrow coastal plains and the open expanses of the interior plateau, as well as between the winter and summer rainfall areas. Farmers needed to be even more mobile in this environmental zone to exploit both summer and winter grazing to obtain year-round nourishment for their stock (Van der Merwe; 1937: 1–10; Penn, 2005: 19–22). The further colonists moved from Cape Town, the more tenuous VOC control over its subjects became, and the greater the degree of lawlessness in the border regions and beyond.

Across the escarpment lay the Cape thirstland, an uninviting prospect for both San and frontier farmer. Over the next three decades, a growing number of trekboers established loan farms along the escarpment in the face of sporadic but intensifying resistance from San and Khoikhoi refugees not prepared to retreat into the arid reaches of the Great Karoo and Bushmanland. By the late 1760s, pressure on resources reached critical levels, initiating sustained and coordinated Khoisan insurgency and guerrilla attacks against settlers along the length and breadth of the frontier (Penn, 1995: 195–96; 1989: 9; Newton-King, 1999: 77; Lye 1975: 21–22). During the last three decades of the eighteenth century, San resistance halted the colonial advance into the interior and in places even rolled it back (Marks, 1972: 73–74; Penn, 2005: 81–82, 164; Van der Merwe, 1937: 12–24). In some areas drought, and along the eastern frontier, horse sickness in lower-lying wetter parts, also informed trekboer decisions to abandon outlying farms. The stalling of the frontier advance precipitated a major crisis for trekboer society, which depended on continuous expansion to accommodate demographic growth and compensate for the deterioration of pastures in settled areas. During this period, trekboers, with the help of the VOC government, embarked on an exterminatory military offensive against the San (Van der Merwe 1937: ch. 2; 1938: ch. 3; Guelke, 1989: 84–93; Newton-King, 1999: chs. 4–6; Penn, 2005: ch. 4; Green, 1955: 27).



Adapted from *The forgotten frontier*, N. Penn (2005), Cape Town: Double Storey Books, p 220.

2

The dynamic of conflict on the frontier under Dutch rule

Trekboers, who derived considerable military advantage from their horses and firearms, severely disrupted the lives of foraging communities that had been living in the Cape interior for thousands of years. San and trekboer were bound to clash because they were in direct competition for the same environmental resources, namely, water, game, grazing and access to land, which included the right simply to be in a particular location at a given time. San bands suddenly found that they were denied access to traditional watering places by trekboers who occupied springs and water holes. Trekboer livestock muddied and contaminated water supplies, and trampled plants on which the San subsisted. Overgrazing damaged and, in many areas, permanently changed the ecology for the worse (Sparrman, vol. I, 1975–77: 238–39; Newton-King, 1999: 97–100; Penn, 2005: 18, 228). Colonists decimated the herds of game, a primary source of food for the San, with their firearms, and their stock consumed the grazing on which these animals fed. Trekboer hunting practices were extremely wasteful, for they not only shot game for sport but destroyed herds of buck to make biltong — dried, salted and sometimes smoked strips of meat that became a staple of the frontier diet (Thunberg, 1986: 94, 197; Sparrman, vol. II, 1975–77: 60; Stow, 1964: 35–36; Penn, 2005: 17–18; Newton-King, 1999: 100–1). That they were able to preserve the meat and that there was a ready market for biltong in Cape Town encouraged over-exploitation of this food source (Lichtenstein, vol. I, 1928: 120–21). Because game usually followed a similar migratory pattern to that necessary for herding, San and trekboer frequently competed for the same habitations and seasonal resources. A growing scarcity of game and the deterioraton of the environment often gave

hungry San little option but to raid trekboer livestock.[1] Trekboer destructiveness went beyond damaging the San's subsistence base because the natural environment, fundamental to San spirituality, was being desecrated and species of game, most notably eland — central to San belief systems — were being eradicated. The arrival of colonial graziers generally did not mean immediate dispossession for hunting bands but rather the disruption of their seasonal movements and their ability to exploit resources optimally. It nevertheless did not take long for the trekboer presence to put San communities under enormous stress.

During the eighteenth century, the San responded to trekboer intrusion in one of two ways. The first was to withdraw. This was not an attractive option as it inevitably meant moving to more marginal and inhospitable terrain and perhaps encroaching on another, usually hostile, group's territory. There was little unoccupied land in the Cape interior except for that which was barely habitable. Antagonistic neighbours might include other San bands, Bantu-speaking peoples, such as the Xhosa towards the east and Tswana in the northeast, or Khoikhoi pastoralist groups such as the Nama, Griqua or Korana towards the north and along the Orange River.[2] While on the one hand, colonial invasion resulted in a degree of cooperation among indigenous peoples against a common enemy, it, on the other, also gave rise to intensified conflict between them as groups were displaced and pressure on resources mounted. There is evidence that the time-honoured tradition of reciprocity, whereby San groups allowed other bands access to their territory in times of need, broke down as a result of the stresses brought about by settler land seizures (Smith *et al*, 2000: 44).

1 For a detailed study of the impact of trekboer farming and hunting practices on the plant and animal life of the Seekoei River valley, see Neville (1996: chs. 4–5 and 252–56).

2 The Korana, who spoke a distinctive Khoikhoi language, lived along the middle reaches of the Orange River. The Nama were located further west in Namaqualand. The Griqua were a predominantly Khoikhoi people who also incorporated runaway slaves and people of mixed racial descent and settled along the middle Orange, where they established minor states during the nineteenth century. For brief descriptions see Saunders and Southey (1998: 81–82, 100). For more detailed treatment see Ross (1975; 1976) and Strauss (1979).

As with hunter-gatherers generally, the San had a deeply spiritual connection to the natural environment. Given that particular features in the landscape were endowed with sacred import and ritual significance, they would abandon their domains only as a last resort (Penn, 1996: 88, 91; Newton-King, 1999, 96–97; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2004: 51–53). Pippa Skotnes explains that the /Xam people of the northern Cape had an 'entirely different sense of lived reality' to the Western mind, and that, for them, 'the landscape was peopled by spirits and shamans who endowed every part of it with meaning' (Skotnes, 1999: 39–40). Writing about the /Xam, Janette Deacon attests that in the San world-view 'the physical features of the landscape became congruent with mythical structure and are homogenised through spiritual and emotional ties', confirming 'a powerful bond between the people and the landscape in which they lived' (Deacon, 1994: 253, 256).

A second, increasingly common, reaction was for San to resist trekboer incursions using guerrilla tactics. This included raiding or killing trekboer stock, slaying herders, destroying crops and attacking farmsteads, which were sometimes burnt down. Not content with killing the enemy, San raiders might torture their victims or mutilate their bodies. It was mainly Khoikhoi herdsmen, exposed out in the pastures, who suffered this fate. San usually attacked at night, striking where farmers were most vulnerable — their herds (Lye, 1975: 35; Szalay, 1995: 17–18; Newton-King, 1999: 106; Penn, 2005: chs. 3, 4; Van der Merwe, 1937: 10–12). Sometimes San wreaked severe damage. Hinrich Lichtenstein, a German physician who toured the frontier extensively during the early nineteenth century, cited the example of the farmer who 'when he went out in the morning found near his house his whole herd, consisting of forty oxen, together with two hundred sheep, several dogs and horses, and some Hottentots who were employed to guard them, all murdered, not a single one having escaped' (Lichtenstein, vol. I, 1928: 444). Occasionally, large herds of sheep or cattle were rustled. In a daring ambush in 1792, the Van Reenen brothers, main suppliers of meat to the VOC, had 6,000 sheep and 253 cattle stolen (Penn, 2005: 225–26; Van der Merwe, 1937: 50; Newton-King, 1999: 107, 114). Stock raiders under pressure from pursuing farmers usually maimed or killed the animals to deny them to their foes, a tactic that enraged farmers. San sometimes also poisoned water holes (Van der Merwe, 1937: 58). It is clear that the motives for these offensives generally went beyond simply stealing stock. They were also intended to drive trekboers from the land. These attacks

were at first sporadic and small scale, but became ever more frequent and coordinated as the eighteenth century progressed and pressure on the San mounted (Mostert, 1992: 220–21; Elphick & Malherbe, 1989: 25; Green, 1955: 31).

It is apparent that San bands increasingly coalesced to fight off colonial intrusion, and that they were often joined by dispossessed Khoikhoi. These larger attacking parties drew on kinship and cultural ties to mobilise temporarily against what was clearly a mortal threat to their way of life. Although San society, because of its small size and egalitarian structure, did not have hereditary leaders, they must have developed some form of temporary leadership, akin to war chiefs, to coordinate their joint resistance (Smith *et al*, 2000: 43; Stow, 1964: 32–33). Khoisan raiding gangs that attacked farms and rustled cattle were sometimes several hundred strong, especially in the latter decades of the eighteenth century (Marks, 1972: 74; Van der Merwe, 1937: Newton-King, 1999: 64, 89; Neville, 1996: 257). There was at times a degree of collaboration between San attackers and farm servants, many of whom were captives or coerced into working for farmers. Increasingly, Khoisan deserters stole guns, lead shot, powder and even horses where the opportunity presented itself. In some cases, it was farm servants — 'the enemy within', in Newton-King's words — who instigated attacks or acts of sabotage. Fear of betrayal goes a long way toward explaining why masters often treated Khoisan servants with excessive cruelty, and why desertion was so severely punished (Newton-King, 1999: 42, 107–8).

Colonists responded to San aggression with individual acts of slaughter and the massacre of bands. They also organised retaliatory raids by armed, mounted militia units known as commandos. Beyond the limited reach of the VOC garrison in Cape Town, the commando was the main institution of military force at the Cape under Dutch rule and the main instrument of war against indigenous peoples. The first official commando was organised in 1676 against the Cochoqua Khoikhoi who were directly in the path of the earliest phase of colonial expansion because they inhabited the fertile southwestern Cape (Elphick, 1985: 121–33; Marks, 1972: 64–67). Initially, commandos were organised by the DEIC and consisted of Company soldiers and servants as well as colonists, but by 1715 officially sanctioned commandos consisting entirely of colonists and their dependants, and led by frontier farmers, were being formed (Roux, 1925: 151; Elphick & Malherbe, 1989: 25; Penn, 2005: 50). The institution

evolved through the eighteenth century to meet the military needs of trekboer society.

Commandos mobilised men between the ages of 16 and 60, who were organised by district, elected their own officers and were required to attend annual drills. These militias mounted state-sanctioned, punitive expeditions led by *veldwachtmeesters* (field-sergeants),[3] officials who represented the VOC government at local level. *Veldwachtmeesters*, who were usually the Company's only agents in outlying districts, were themselves prominent frontier farmers. They were appointed by, and were answerable to, the *landdrost* (magistrate), the chief administrator of the district, who was far removed from the frontier. The discretionary powers of the *veldvachtmeester* were thus usually the only means whereby the colonial state was able to assert itself on the frontier. *Veldwachtmeesters* had the authority to raise commandos on their own and only needed to report their activities to the *landdrost* afterwards. They thus had a good deal of freedom to act, and were usually extremely influential because they controlled ammunition supplies and had the right to requisition provisions, as well as conscript members. They also allocated captives and recovered livestock acquired during commando raids.[4] The VOC government provided commandos with powder, shot and usually guns for Khoikhoi members, and gave instructions regarding its aims and conduct. Instructions were often perfunctory and ignored by commando leaders. In addition to their principal functions of defending trekboer society and crushing indigenous resistance, commandos served as a means of acquiring forced labour (Van der Merwe, 1937: 29; Penn, 1986: 66). The earliest recorded instance of a commando taking women and children captive occurred in 1715, with the first all-burgher commando (Boeseken, 1944: 81).

Unofficial commandos that could be mobilised rapidly, and which in effect allowed farmers to take the law into their own hands, were a common occurrence along the frontier. Unofficial commandos

3 For an explanation of these terms and command structures on the frontier, see Roux (1925: 154–57) and Van der Merwe (1937: 27). Prior to 1774, the term *veldkorporaal* was used.

4 For a discussion of the commando as an institution on the Cape frontier, see Roux (1925: 139–202); Legassick (1989: 361–63); Marais (1968: 16–18); Katzen (1982: 226–27) and Penn, (2005: 108–54), among others.

were posses formed on an ad hoc basis, usually for the purpose of hot pursuit, but also for land grabs, pre-emptive attacks against San considered a threat, or for razzias to round up forced labour. From the point of view of the frontier farmer, it was essential that they be allowed to react immediately to San attacks and cattle raids, as it might take weeks to mobilise an official commando. There was no guarantee that such a commando would be raised or that it would act in their immediate interest. While leaders of unofficial commandos were required to submit a report to the *veldwachtmeester* upon their return, it is clear that there were many trekboer forays against Khoisan that went unreported. Nigel Penn, in his detailed history of the northern frontier, estimates that several hundred such unofficial sorties were mounted along the frontier during the course of the eighteenth century (Penn, 2005: 35). Though most informal commandos consisted of smaller parties in pursuit of stock raiders, there were some substantive, well-coordinated, informal expeditions as deadly as any of the official commandos (A 39-1863: 10). Historian P.J. van der Merwe considers it entirely possible that informal commandos and individual slayings could have accounted for as many San deaths as official commandos (Van der Merwe, 1937: 65). While this claim appears exaggerated, this category of killings clearly took a substantial toll.

Besides being necessary for countering the guerrilla tactics of the Khoisan, this flexibility and devolution of authority directly served the interests of the VOC. It allowed the DEIC government to withdraw from military activity on the frontier by giving colonists a free hand in dealing with indigenous peoples. Being a commercial enterprise concerned with its bottom line, and with a focus on servicing its maritime empire, the VOC was more loath than most colonial governments to incur the expenditure necessary to assert control over subjects on the frontier or to bear the costs arising from frontier conflict. Maintaining a permanent force on the borderlands was out of the question (Van der Merwe, 1937: 26–27, 49; Newton-King, 1999: 66). That local revenues at no point came close to covering the costs of running the colony reinforced this reluctance (Ross, 1989: 243, 245). The commando system fulfilled the Company's need for a cheap form of frontier defence because trekboers bore the greater part of the overall cost of maintaining it. Members were not paid, and brought their own provisions. They used their own guns, horses and wagons, all of which were costly items and suffered severe wear and tear on commando (Newton-King, 1999: 66, 109–10; Van der Merwe,

1937: 29, 57). Although it tried to curb, and in some cases punished, trekboer excesses against indigenes, especially those in the employ of farmers, the VOC generally overlooked the abuses of commandos and vigilante action by colonists because the system suited its interests so well (Giliomee, 2003: 59). Frequent and routine warnings against unwarranted violence indicates that the Company was well aware of needless cruelty towards San by trekboers (Marais, 1968: 17). The VOC nevertheless abetted settler violence by recognising individual trekboer title to land confiscated from indigenous people, and derived an income from it through the loan farm system.

As frontier conflict escalated through the eighteenth century, going on commando for a few weeks a year became an accepted part of life for many trekboers and their dependants. From 1739, the VOC made commando service compulsory for frontier farmers but allowed them to send substitutes, such as a *knecht* (white employee) or a Khoikhoi servant instead. Wealthier farmers, or those not directly threatened, were generally not eager to go on commando. Some evaded militia duty, and many sent surrogates. Farmers resented these arduous tours of duty because they consumed valuable resources, meant weeks of discomfort in rough terrain and insalubrious weather, and exposed them to danger. While they were away, their farms and families were vulnerable to attack and insubordination by servants. *Veldwachmeester*s thus often had difficulty recruiting members, and commandos were frequently undermanned (Moodie part III, 1960: 62–63; Barrow, vol. I, 1801: 235; Van der Merwe, 1937: 40, 57).

Trekboers nevertheless went on commando because they perceived there to be little alternative to eliminating or containing the threat posed by the San. There were some advantages to going on commando: it held out the promise of augmenting their workforce with captives, the possibility of gaining a share of recovered livestock and of opening up new areas for settlement. Official commandos against the San generally operated in late winter and early spring unless there was reason to take the field at another time. Not only was there enough water and fodder for horses in the veld but it was also a quiet period in the agricultural cycle, which made it easier for crop-growing farmers to join these offensives. An added advantage was that from August through to October it was still cold enough for San bands to light fires for warmth, making it easy to locate their camps (Penn, 2005: 124–25; Green, 1955: 25).

The more immediate dynamic of the encounter between San and settler on the frontier was thus one of trekboer encroachment, San

retaliation and trekboer retribution — an escalation that culminated in commando raids usually conducted with exterminatory intent. Another longer-term cycle of violence that can be identified through the eighteenth century was of trekboers encroaching in phases on successive ecological zones as they moved further into the interior. After entering a new zone, environmental pressures grew over time as more and more farmers moved into the area. This resulted in intensified Khoisan resistance to the point where trekboers felt seriously threatened, giving rise to concerted, state-aided, trekboer offensives that led to the comprehensive defeat of Khoisan resisters and the closure of that frontier zone. This did not mean an end to violence in that area, or that individual farmers necessarily enjoyed physical security. A period of relative calm on the frontier ensued as trekboers started colonising new areas further inland, setting in motion a similar chain of events. The peaks of violence in these longer-term cycles can be observed in the early 1700s in the Tulbagh basin, the late 1730s in the Bokkeveld region, the mid-1750s in the Roggeveld and then for over three decades, from about 1770, along the entire escarpment (Newton-King, 1999: 63–71; Penn, 2005: 19–22).

In the spiral of attack and counterattack in these frontier confrontations, trekboers enjoyed huge military advantages. Most obviously, this superiority rested on trekboer access to firearms. Though cumbersome by modern standards, their flintlock rifles were nevertheless far superior to the stone-age weapons of the San. Whereas San arrows could accurately be shot at a distance of 60 or 70 metres, the muzzle-loading muskets of the colonists were effective at more than twice that range (Sparrman, vol. II, 1975–77: 111–12; Mentzel, 1944: 217–18; Storey, 2008: 36). This commonly allowed trekboers to pick off hunter-gatherer foes at a safe distance. Muskets fired in volleys were extremely effective when opponents were massed together and allowed relatively small commandos to inflict severe casualties on much larger Khoisan raiding parties (Mentzel, 1944: 309; Sparrman, vol. II, 1975: 112). Most trekboers also carried pistols and sabres (Guelke & Shell, 1992: 810).

San were able to acquire a fair number of guns from absconding servants, by raiding farmhouses or taking them from armed Khoikhoi herders in the employ of trekboers. Although used against settlers from time to time, these firearms did little to alter the balance of power on the frontier partly because Khoisan acquired relatively few guns, and it took some skill and practice to use them effectively. Importantly, they did

not have ready access to supplies of shot, gunpowder or flints (Storey, 2008: 35; Neville, 1996: 198–200; Penn, 2005: 111, 134). That indigenes were able to lay their hands on guns nevertheless caused a great deal of anxiety among colonists and the VOC government, the latter on various occasions prohibiting the possession of arms and ammunition by Khoisan (Penn, 2005: 189, 193, 203, 229; Newton-King, 1999: 107). There were, however, isolated occasions, particularly toward the end of the eighteenth century, when Khoisan resisters were able to muster sufficient firepower to repel commando attacks. In 1790, a San group in the Kareeberg occupying a stronghold known as De Bossieman's Berg held a commando at bay for the entire day thanks to their muskets and reinforcements from neighbouring kraals. The commando was forced to retreat by late afternoon. In 1792, another commando in the Koup was forced to withdraw when they encountered a well-armed Khoisan party with as many as twenty muskets between them (Penn, 2005: 225). Such groups were greatly strengthened by deserting Khoikhoi servants, some of whom were skilled marksmen, having worked for trekboers as hunters and having served with commandos (Storey, 2008: 37, 40).

Importantly, the speed and power of horses gave trekboers the ascendancy in mobility, both in covering longer distances rapidly and in closer encounters. To paraphrase historian William Kelleher Storey, the combination of guns and horses allowed commandos to travel like cavalry but attack like infantry, a pairing particularly potent in the open country and low scrub of the arid interior (Storey, 2008: 36). Colonel Richard Collins, who toured the interior in 1808–09 on behalf of the governor to advise him on how to end frontier violence, noted that a small contingent of armed, mounted trekboers was capable of defeating a much larger throng of San on an open plain, but not in mountainous terrain (Moodie part V, 1960: 33; Sparrman, vol. II, 1975–77: 111–12; Mostert, 1992: 222). Horses were invaluable in instances of hot pursuit where farmers needed to catch up with fleeing adversaries. Few San tried to steal or ride horses themselves, but killed them whenever they could, whether in battle, ambushing them in pastures or burning down stables (Moodie part V, 1960: 33–34; Van der Merwe, 1937: 57; Lye, 1975: 22, 284; Newton-King, 1999: 108).[5]

5 See Szalay (1995: 38) for examples of San using horses for both hunting and fighting.

From about 1770 through till the late 1790s, official commandos against the San were organised annually, often more frequently, and generally consisted of between 40 and 100 armed men on horseback. The largest of these search-and-destroy missions, the General Commando of 1774, comprised 250 men. The preferred modus operandi of the commando was to locate San camps by means of their fires, surround the sleeping kraal under cover of darkness and then attack at dawn. Because commandos enjoyed the advantages of guns, horses, numerical superiority and surprise, San encampments stood little chance against their attacks. The small size of hunting bands, which rarely had more than eight males of fighting age, was a boon for trekboers because it meant that the San were heavily outnumbered in most hostile engagements (Penn, 1996: 86).

While many San bands were exterminated singly and with little risk, it was not always that easy for commandos; it was difficult to hide their presence in open country, and the San sometimes lived in naturally fortified locations. San could retreat to remote, inhospitable areas where horses often could not follow for lack of water or the ruggedness of the terrain, and where it became difficult to track them over stony ground. Mountainous country provided greater opportunities for defence as San could take refuge in caves or behind boulders. This could result in protracted standoffs in which the San usually came off second best if trekboers were prepared to lay siege to them. If prevailing winds were favourable, the commando might light fires at cave entrances to smoke out the fugitives, or they might advance behind a lattice of shields. San on occasion rolled boulders down onto advancing trekboers from high ground. But mountains also held perils for the San, as they were sometimes caught up against sheer cliff faces or the edges of precipices, or were cornered in gorges (Smith *et al*, 2000: 44–45; Lye, 1975: 22–23; Van der Post, 1958: 44–45; Penn, 1991: 33).

In commando raids San men were, with few exceptions, put to death on the spot, while many women and especially children were taken captive. Adult males were killed because they were regarded as extremely dangerous and as not having much economic value. They were generally perceived to be irredeemable savages who could not be schooled in any useful activity. The chances for escape and revenge on the frontier were simply too great for many farmers to contemplate taking them as forced labourers (Penn, 1996: 89; Newton-King, 1999: 112). Guarding and looking after a sizeable contingent of adult male

prisoners while the commando moved about the wilderness was difficult and potentially dangerous. For example, in 1775 Adriaan van der Walt reported that his commando took 82 prisoners. Because the commando had no manacles, the captives one night managed to free themselves and tried to flee. Several male escapees attacked the wagon in which their bows and arrows were stowed. Of the group, 42 managed to get away, 19 were killed and 21, all children, were recaptured (Moodie part III, 1960: 67; Van der Merwe, 1937: 53–54; Penn, 1991: 31–32).

San men were regarded as particularly menacing because they gave no quarter in combat and generally fought to the death. San fighters often displayed remarkable fearlessness, throwing themselves into suicidal assaults against attacking commandos in the vain hope of allowing women and children a chance to escape (Barrow, vol. I, 1801: 286). This is not to romanticise the San response, as the historical record is clear about the ferocity of San resistance (Moodie part V, 1960: 33; Gall, 2001: 68; Penn, 1996: 87–89; Jeffreys, 1978: 92–93; Green, 1955: 25, 31; Van der Post, 1958: 43–44). Surrender seems not to have been an option many San men considered — but then again it was rarely offered by commandos. Besides being a reaction to their desperate situation, Nigel Penn partly attributes their uncompromising resistance to the San's attachment to their territory being of such an intensely spiritual nature that 'to lose the land was to lose literally everything' (Penn, 1996: 88).

Women and children, especially the former, were also often massacred. The more brutal trekboers were not beyond smashing the heads of children against rocks or skinning the breasts of women they had killed to make tobacco pouches (BPP, 1966: 28; Mentzel, 1944: 309; Gall, 2001: 60). While South African historical scholarship has hitherto been silent on the matter because of the nature and paucity of the evidence, there is every likelihood, judging from the behaviour of similar aggressors elsewhere, that captive women were sexually abused.[6] Women not killed were taken as servants in trekboer households or as concubines for Khoikhoi dependants. Besides being used as domestic

6 Researchers largely depend on *veldwachtmeester* reports for information on eighteenth-century commando raids. These reports are terse, self-serving and generally amount to little more than tallies of casualties. Stow (1964: 48) makes passing reference to such abuse.

drudges, they could, with some training, help with the making of commodities such as candles, soap and hides that trekboers sold on the Cape market (Eldridge, 1994: 94). Female captives had added value in that their offspring would in time augment the farmer's labour supply.

San children were prized because they were more easily controlled and assimilated into the trekboer economy as menial labourers. They could, from a young age, be trained to work as herders and do a variety of tasks around the household. The vulnerability of child captives and children born into bondage made them an ultra-exploitable class of labourers. From 1775, what had for over half a century effectively operated as a system of child slavery[7] was institutionalised by the VOC through the *inboekstelsel* (apprenticeship system), whereby these children, or *inboeselings* (apprentices), were bound to masters until the age of 25 (Malherbe, 1991: 15–16; Stow, 1964: 48, 163; Eldridge, 1994: 98; Elphick Malherbe, 1989: 32). Since few San knew their precise ages and the colonial state was hardly in a position to police the situation on the frontier, farmers were generally able to coerce apprentices to remain in servitude till they were much older, and often for life (Philip, vol. II, 1828: 50, 265–68, 276–77).[8] John Barrow, who came to the Cape in 1797 as private secretary to the governor, Lord Macartney, and travelled extensively through the interior, summarised the plight of the apprentice as one in which the farmer:

> *... was allowed to claim as his property, till the age of five-and-twenty, all the children of the Hottentots in his service to whom he had given in their infancy a morsel of meat. At the expiration of this period the odds are ten to one that the slave is not emancipated ... Should he be fortunate enough to escape at the end of the period, the best part of his life has been spent in profitless servitude, and he is turned adrift in the decline of his life (for a Hottentot begins to grow old at thirty) without any earthly thing he can call his own, except the sheep's skin upon his back.* (Barrow, vol. I, 1801: 146–47; see also 280, 290–91, 292)

7 Officially, the apprenticeship system was meant to apply to the children of slave fathers and Khoisan mothers, but in practice was extended to all Khoisan by colonists (Du Toit & Giliomee, 1983: 53; Malherbe, 1991: 5, 15–16).

8 See Newton-King (1999: 118, 121) for farmers by the 1790s often interpreting the regulations as allowing them to indenture children for 25 years rather than up to the age of 25. The children of Khoikhoi workers as well as Bastard Hottentots, the offspring of slave fathers and Khoikhoi mothers, were also apprenticed.

The bartering and gifting of San, especially children, was a common practice on the frontier (Theal, vol. XI, 1897–1905: 257).

Captured San were subject to a grim regime of unremunerated labour and physical and psychological abuse, and had virtually no protection against the arbitrary power of masters. They were slaves in every sense except that they could not be sold openly (Morton, 1994: 3; Penn, 1989: 17). This much was apparent from one of the demands of Swellendam farmers who revolted against DEIC rule in 1795. The rebels insisted that they be allowed to keep San captives and their descendants as slaves in perpetuity and that they be allowed to trade them without impediment (Marais, 1968: 13; Giliomee, 2003: 73).

While commandos generally destroyed San kraals one at a time, there were a number of larger massacres. The Swedish naturalist Carl Thunberg, who lived at the Cape for three years in the first half of the 1770s and led three expeditions into the interior, reported the massacre of 186 San in the Roggeveld region in 1765 (Thunberg, 1986: 290–91). A decade later, in early August 1775, *veldwachtmeester* Adriaan van Jaarsveld used a deceitful manoeuvre with devastating effect against San along a section of the Seekoei River valley on the northeastern frontier. Van Jaarsveld was at the head of a commando of 77 men and intent on retaliation for stock raids in the Sneeuberg in the preceding months. Posing as a friendly hunting party, they obligingly shot several hippopotami which they left on the river bank for the San to consume, and moved on downstream. Guessing correctly that San from the surrounding area would congregate around the kill for a feast through the night, they returned stealthily under cover of darkness. In the surprise attack at dawn, Van Jaarsveld's commando killed 122 San and took 21 prisoner. Only five managed to escape by swimming across the hippo pool (Moodie part III, 1960: 44–45; Neville, 1996: 50–53; Giliomee, 2003: 70).[9] The commando killed a further 61 San and captured 15 in a foray into the Roode Bergen beyond the valley (Penn, 2005: 126). In March of the following year, *veldwachtmeester* Jacob de Klerk of the Nieuweveld judged that his commando was too small to engage a sizeable contingent of 'robbers' ensconced in

9 Van Jaarsveld demonstrated his deviousness in another ruse six years later. When confronted with a group of Xhosa whom he feared might launch a surprise attack against him, he scattered pieces of tobacco amongst them. His men massacred the Xhosa as they scrambled to pick up the tobacco.

fortified caves. He called for reinforcements from the Sneeuberg, and 111 San were killed by the combined commandos (Newton-King, 1999: 87; Penn, 2005: 128). In September 1792, an unusually large agglomeration of San raiders was attacked by a powerful and well-provisioned commando set up by the VOC to clear the Nieuweveld of San after a particularly audacious raid on the herds of the Van Reenen brothers in the Leeugamka region. An estimated 300 San were killed and 15 captured in this assault, and a further 180 killed in a follow-up operation along the Sak River two months later (Penn, 2005: 226; Van der Merwe, 1937: 51; Newton-King 114; Theal, vol. III, 1910: 214).

Despite being at a considerable disadvantage, San nevertheless put up fierce and protracted resistance to colonial invasion, and remained defiant. For example, in 1715, in one of the earlier clashes between colonists and San raiders near Tulbagh in which several robbers were killed, it was reported that the San audaciously promised to return and said that the farmers would not be able to catch them as they would hide in the high mountains (Boeseken & Cairns, 1989: 30). This was not an isolated incident. In 1731, a Khoisan stock raider who had eluded a commando that had killed or wounded most of his confederates shouted from a clifftop that the cattle they had killed and maimed were lost to the boers, that there were still many Bushmen, and that they would not leave the Dutch in peace (Marks, 1972: 71; Newton-King, 1999: 67). In 1754, a Roggeveld commando, unable to dislodge a San band ensconced behind a rocky outcrop, withdrew in the evening to jibes that the boers 'would not be able to hide their stock anywhere that [the San] could not find them', (Penn, 2005: 93). Perhaps the most telling instance of defiance is provided by the San leader Koerikei, whose name means 'bullet dodger', and who had lived with trekboers long enough to learn Dutch. This incident was narrated by commando leader, David Schalk van der Merwe, in November 1777 to Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, commander of the Dutch garrison in Cape Town who kept a journal of his travels into the interior in the 1770s and 1780s. Koerikei, having successfully evaded Van der Merwe's commando, stood on a cliff out of range of their muskets and shouted, 'What are you doing in my territory? You occupy all the places where eland and other game live. Why do you not remain where the sun sets, where you first were?' When asked why he did not live in peace with colonists as he had done before, Koerikei replied that he did not want to lose the land of his birth, that he would kill their herdsmen and chase them all away. As he went off, he added that

it would be seen who would win (Raper & Boucher, vol. I, 1988: 81; Cullinan, 1992: 34–35).

Not only were they defiant but there were times when San — perhaps more accurately Khoisan — were able to band together to provide formidable opposition to commandos. For example, in December 1728, 23 cattle belonging to the wealthy farmer Jan Valck were raided in the Sandveld along the Cape west coast by a group of San. When a hastily assembled informal commando gave chase, they caught up with a gang of 300 plunderers who challenged them to a fight and attacked them with spears and arrows. In the ensuing exchange, the firearms of the trekboers proved decisive. At least 12 San were killed and the rest put to flight. Eighty-five cattle in all were recovered (Penn, 2005: 57–58). In October 1738, the *landdrost* of Stellenbosch reported that when a group of farmers went in hot pursuit of San cattle rustlers they found that the gang of one hundred entrenched in a dense thicket was too large for them to attack. They sent a Khoikhoi servant to ask why the San were stealing trekboer stock. The response was that they did this to chase the boers out of their land and that this was just the beginning. They would do this to all the boers living there and if the boers did not leave, they would burn all the wheat growing in their fields as soon as it ripened so that they would be forced to retreat (Van der Merwe, 1937: 8; Newton-King, 1999: 67). In the 1770s, there were numerous reports of groups of San several hundred strong congregating on the frontier with hostile intent. These assemblages were far larger than would have occurred in pre-colonial San society and was clearly a response to settler encroachment. Trekboers felt seriously threatened by these gangs (Maggs, 1971: 53; Newton-King, 1999: 87–88; Penn, 1999: 134; Moodie, part III, 1960: 65–69, 88).

As the clients and servants of trekboers, Khoikhoi were frequently complicit in violence against San and many participated in commando raids as surrogates for reluctant trekboers. One reason for this animus was that it was often Khoikhoi servants who bore the brunt of San attacks, and many were killed while looking after farmers' herds. For example, in the Camdeboo district alone the records show that 107 herdsmen were murdered, and 24 guns stolen from them, in the eighteen months following mid-1786 (Newton-King, 1999: 106–7). Those Khoikhoi dependants who were allowed to keep stock were equally threatened by San raids. Some commandos, particularly in the latter part of the eighteenth century, had a majority of Khoikhoi members. There was some incentive for Khoikhoi to go on commando

in that they often got a share of the spoils, albeit smaller than that of trekboers. They might get some of the recovered livestock or captured San women as sexual partners (Newton-King, 1999: 61, 131–33). Khoikhoi were skilled scouts and trackers, and were routinely sent into dangerous situations where trekboers were not prepared to risk their own skins. Many Khoikhoi participants, in the words of Nigel Penn, probably made the calculation that: 'It was better to be a low-status member of a commando than a defenceless object of its wrath' (Penn, 2005: 139). However, the relationship between San and Khoikhoi was complex. Independent Khoikhoi pastoralist communities beyond the colonial frontier were often in conflict with San who raided their stock. Hunter-gatherers were sometimes also taken up as clients in Khoikhoi society, and it was not unusual for dispossessed Khoikhoi to join San in resisting colonial intrusion (Smith *et al*, 2000: 26, 28; Penn, 2005: 18, 57, 90, 161).

The effacement of San identities formed a significant part of the genocidal process. Those assimilated to trekboer society as forced labourers were usually referred to as 'Hotttentots' (Khoikhoi), and in time many came to see themselves as such. This would particularly have been the case with child captives, for whom their experience as hunter-gatherers would not have been all that formative and who would have acquired elements of colonial culture more easily than adults. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, the already ambiguous distinctions between Khoikhoi and San, and between forager and herder, had become even more blurred in the eyes of frontier society as increasing numbers of San were taken up as labourers, as Khoikhoi joined up with San resisters and as the status and freedom of Khoikhoi in the service of farmers declined. Generally speaking, in trekboer society 'Bosjesman' referred to independent hunter-gatherers living in the 'wild', whereas 'Hottentot' included 'tame Bushmen' in colonial service. Indeed, indigenes were often referred to as 'Bushmen-Hottentots', which indicates both uncertainties about the identities of the people in question and ambiguities around these categories (Smith, 1991: 51). Anders Stockenstöm, *landdrost* of the frontier district of Graaff-Reinet, reported to the governor in 1807 that in his district most of the 'Hottentot' labourers were 'generated from the Bosjesmen'. Fifteen years later, his son, Andries, who succeeded his father as *landdrost*, confirmed that in general San bound to farmers 'were confounded with the Hottentots' (Du Toit & Giliomee, 1983: 165; Smith *et al*, 2000: 31). With the promulgation of the Caledon Code in

1809, it suited farmers to classify all of their workers as 'Hottentots' because Khoikhoi were made to carry passes and enter into highly prejudicial labour contracts that tied them to employers, whereas San were exempt from these measures (Szalay, 1995: 98; Marais, 1968: 24–25).

Racism was an important determinant in the inhumane treatment and extreme violence visited upon San. Trekboers from the outset saw themselves as unequivocally different and superior to indigenous peoples. Settlers signalled this by referring to themselves as 'Christian' in opposition to indigenes. Thus commando leader Adriaan van Jaarsveld in 1775, for example, used the term as a racial descriptor when characterising his force as consisting of '… 46 Christians and 31 Hottentots' (Moodie part III, 1960: 44; Neville, 1996: 50; Guelke, 1989: 96). Similarly, in 1774 the war council planning the General Commando described the force it was hoping to mobilise as potentially consisting of '100 Christians and 150 Bastards and Hottentots'.[10] Settler racial attitudes were pithily summed up by *landdrost* Alberti from Uitenhage in 1805: 'According to the unfortunate notion prevalent here, a heathen is not actually human, but at the same time he cannot really be classed among the animals. He is, therefore, a sort of creature not known elsewhere. His word can in no wise be believed, and only by violent measures can he be brought to do good and shun evil' (Du Toit & Giliomee, 1983: 84).

San were usually judged to be on the very lowest rung of the racial hierarchy, certainly below the despised Khoikhoi. Being hunter-gatherers, San appeared to be living in a feral state not far removed from animals. To settlers, the San lacked many of the basic elements that characterised human society, including basic concepts pertaining to private property, commerce, law, government or God. Colonists were generally of the impression that San society had no art, industry, social institutions, philosophy, mechanical ingenuity or other refinements admired by Europeans. It appeared to many that the San did not even speak an intelligible language, a fundamental feature separating humanity from animals. Their nomadic way of life, phenotypical differences, degree of nakedness, apparent lack of

10 Moodie (part III, 1960: 22) correctly translates 'Christians' as meaning 'Europeans'. See also Van der Merwe, (1937: 28). Interestingly, Van der Merwe seems to accept the distinction at face value (1937: 31).

religion or social organisation beyond the family put them at the polar opposite of the trekboer ideal of humanity. The name 'Bosjesman', meaning 'people of the bush or wilderness', embodied this sense of extreme otherness.[11] This excessively negative stereotyping added up to a questioning, if not denial, of their full humanity (Guenther, 1980: 127–30). Not surprisingly, San as well as other indigenous peoples were referred to as *schepselen* (creatures, or more literally, objects of creation), which reveals a polygenist mindset among colonists (Marais, 1968: 15; Mostert, 1992: 175; Penn, 2005: 139; Chidester, 1996: 53–54). Even among those from whom one would expect a degree of sympathy there was often little but jaundiced prejudgement. For example, Johannes Kicherer, who led the first mission to the San, caricatured every aspect of their culture as being so barbarous and repugnant as to place them 'on a level with brute creation' (Kicherer, 1804: 7–8).

Although economic competition in a situation of acute resource scarcity was the main reason behind trekboer violence toward San, this dehumanisation, no doubt, made it easier for colonists to justify occupying San land, enslaving and killing them.[12] What is more, trekboer isolation, and their small numbers, fed feelings of insecurity and ruthless behaviour toward enemies. The San's fierce resistance only intensified the fear and hatred felt by colonists. It should thus come as no surprise that many frontiersmen shot San with impunity, arbitrarily and often on sight. Writing in 1775, traveller Anders Sparrman related: 'Does a colonist at any time get sight of a Bushman, he takes fire immediately, and spirits up his horse and dogs, in order to hunt him with more ardour and fury than he would a wolf or any other wild beast' (Sparrman, vol. II, 1975–77: 111; see also Sparrman,

11 Popular writer Lawrence Green notes that the earlier Dutch settlers sometimes referred to San as 'Boschmanneker', the Dutch term for orang-outang (Green, 1955: 22). See also Guenther (1980: 127–28) for the suggestion that this might have been the origin of the term 'bosjesman', and Van Riebeeck's journal entry of 24 April 1654 for reference to a baboon as 'bosmanneken' (Bosman & Thom, 1952: 220).

12 A worthwhile speculation is that the prevalence of hunting on the frontier coupled with the dehumanisation of San helped break the taboo trekboers might have had against the taking of human life.

vol. I, 1975–77: 194, 200–01).[13] Louis de Grandpré, a French army officer who visited the Cape in 1786–87, accused trekboers of being even more bloodthirsty than the conquistadors because 'they have hunted the Boschis as one would hunt hares; their dogs are trained for it' (Johnson, 2007: 543). A quarter of a century later, Barrow described how:

> *… the name of Bosjesman is held in horror and detestation; and the farmer thinks he cannot proclaim a more meritorious action than to murder one of these people. A boor from Graaff Reynet being asked in the secretary's office, a few days before we left the town, if the savages were numerous or troublesome on the road, replied, he had only shot four, with as much composure and indifference as if he had been speaking of four partridges. I myself have heard one of these humane colonists boast of having destroyed with his own hands near three hundred of these unfortunate wretches.* (Barrow, vol. I, 1801–1804: 85)

It is indeed ironic that trekboer society appears to have become precisely what it accused the San of being, namely, savage. Thomas Pringle, poet, journalist and supporter of humanitarian causes at the Cape, recognised his own complicity in colonial violence. He wryly commented that 'we back-settlers grow all savage and bloody by coming into continual conflict with savages' (Chapman, 2003: 95). Using the supposed savagery of indigenes to justify brutal behaviour, settlers embraced traits they ostensibly reviled in their opponents.

It seems clear that trekboer economic interests, anxiety about the dangers of frontier life, the dehumanisation of San and repeated exposure to violence against indigenes, all contributed to trekboer indifference to the suffering of San and the normalisation of brutality toward them. As conflict with the San mounted through the eighteenth century, trekboer society also developed an exterminatory attitude toward the San — that they were little better than vermin, and that San society needed, even deserved, to be eradicated (Penn, 1996: 83; Van der Merwe, 1937: 58–63; Wright, 1971: 35). By the 1770s, it was

13 Similarly, the traveller Benjamin Stout reported that 'the colonists hunt the Bushmen as they do the lion and the tiger. A farmer never thinks of giving quarter to these people, but slays them the very instant they are in his power' (Stout, 1820: 117).

apparent that San were being killed for no other reason than that they were San, for as Newton-King comments: 'To be identified as Bushmen was to become the target of the merciless search-and-destroy tactics of the burger commandos' (Newton-King, 1999: 61). It thus comes as no surprise that commandos hunted San bands often with the express intention of completely clearing particular areas of them. In 1927, W.M. Macmillan, generally acknowledged as the leading South African historian of his generation, summarised these attitudes pithily in *The Cape Colour Question*: 'The well-established colonial tradition came to be that the Bushman is a wild animal to be shot at sight; and unhappily it was on this inadequate theory that the Bushman of earlier days was usually dealt with and destroyed' (Macmillan, 1968: 27). Colonel Collins reported that, prior to governor Macartney's conciliatory policies of the late 1790s, 'The total extinction of the Bosjesmen race is actually stated to have been at one time confidently hoped for' by frontier settlers (Moodie part V, 1960: 8; Eldridge, 1994: 97).

The exterminatory impulse behind commando activity is clearly apparent in the way the largest of these state-sponsored expeditions, the General Commando of 1774, was conducted. By the early 1770s, San attacks against farmers along the escarpment, from the Hantam in the west to the Sneeuberg in the east, had reached such a level of intensity that no frontier farmer felt secure. Many had abandoned their farms, especially in the Sneeuberg, a newly settled sheep farming area of growing importance. Farmers complained loudly, and the VOC government felt compelled to intervene decisively on their behalf. The General Commando mobilised about 250 men under the leadership of Godlieb Rudolph Opperman in an attempt to purge the entire frontier zone of San. This force broke up into three squads that scoured adjacent, and at times overlapping, sections of the frontier between mid-August and early November. Despite being given instructions not to attack San of peaceful disposition nor to harm those who were defenceless[14] the commando in effect set out to annihilate any San kraals they encountered. Those San not killed were taken captive. Kraals were attacked without provocation and people were murdered for no other reason than that they were San or perceived to be such. The commando reported that 503 San were

14 See Moodie (part III, 1960: 28–30) for the instructions issued to the commando.

killed and 239 taken prisoner, at the cost of one settler death and a few minor injuries. The captives, consisting mainly of women and children, were divided among the commando members (Van der Merwe, 1937: 12, 27–32; Newton-King, 1999: 74–75; Penn, 2005: 112–25). The General Commando did not have the desired effect; the following year, Opperman complained that the San were continuing to rob and steal 'in a fearful manner', and many farmers subsequently abandoned their Sneeuberg and Nieuweveld farms (Giliomee, 2003: 65; Penn, 1991: 32). Besides fostering hatred for colonists, there can be little doubt that the General Commando, and others like it, ensured ongoing conflict by destabilising and displacing communities who then had little alternative but to live from plunder.

Notwithstanding that it was the largest military operation yet launched by the Cape government, the General Commando was nevertheless typical of official commandos with respect to its objectives, conduct and one-sided outcome. The larger official commandos of the latter part of the eighteenth century typically resulted in hundreds of San deaths, and captive ratios of one in three or four to those killed. Referring to the northeastern frontier, Colonel Collins reported that a former commando leader had informed him 'that within a period of six years the parties under his orders had either killed or taken 3,200 of these unfortunate creatures; another has stated to me that the actions in which he had been engaged had caused the destruction of 2,700' (Moodie, part V, 1960: 7; Theal, vol. VII, 1897–1905: 35–36; Marais, 1968: 18). George Thompson, an English merchant who travelled through the interior in 1823, spoke to a Commandant Nel, who told him that 'within the last thirty years he had been upon thirty-two commandos against the Bushmen, in which great numbers had been shot, and their children carried away into the Colony. On one of these expeditions, not less than two hundred Bushmen were massacred' (Thompson, 1968: 6). Government records of the Graaff-Reinet magistracy show that in the last decade of Dutch rule commandos killed at least 2,504 San and took 669 prisoner, a set of statistics P.J. van der Merwe correctly describes as 'definitely very incomplete' (Van der Merwe, 1997: 53). It is apparent that commandos of the Dutch colonial period targeting San, particularly after 1770, operated as mobile killing squads.

Commando raids without a doubt had a catastrophic demographic impact on Cape San society in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, when they became a regular feature of frontier life. At a

conservative estimate, an average of 300–400 San were killed annually and about one hundred taken captive during nearly three decades of intense commando activity. Official figures significantly underestimate San casualties because commandos did not make full disclosure of killings, captives taken or violence perpetrated. Importantly, such figures do not reflect casualties inflicted by informal commandos and gratuitous violence by trekboers. Significant numbers would also have died due to their loss of access to resources and disruption caused by the fighting. Such loss of life would have been particularly severe in times of drought not only because food would have been scarce but also because an ineluctable feature of life as a forager was that one, at any given time, needed to be within walking distance of a source of water. Often, being displaced or cut off from traditional supplies of food and water resulted in death for such bands with the coming of the next drought, a recurrent feature of the Cape thirstland. Difficult to quantify, but clearly of no mean demographic significance, was the impact of sustained conflict and chaos on fertility rates and the ability of San society to reproduce itself biologically.

While commandos generally operated with local exterminatory intent, the authorities in Cape Town habitually cautioned restraint. This changed in 1777, which marks a radicalisation in the attitude of the VOC government toward the San. Up to that point, the Cape government held some hope that the San threat could be contained either through a show of force, as with the General Commando, or through some peace initiative, such as negotiating with San leaders. By 1777 it appears to have lost hope of any such outcome as a result of escalating San attacks and the preceding years representing a particularly torrid time on the frontier (Moodie part III, 1960: 50–72). Whereas the governor previously gave instructions to commandos to subdue only hostile San, spare the defenceless and take captives as they deemed fit, for the first time on 5 June 1777 the Council of Policy explicitly sanctioned the eradication of San wherever and whenever they were encountered (Moodie part III, 1960: 70; Van der Merwe, 1937: 41; Smith *et al*, 2000: 47).[15] If ever there was a 'genocidal

15 The Council of Policy consisted of seven VOC appointees that assisted the governor in his legislative functions. Generally parsimonious with supplies, the VOC government on this occasion supplied *veldwachtmeesters* with the full complement of ammunition they requested.

moment' — to borrow Dirk Moses's term[16] — in Cape Dutch settler relations with the San, this was it.

Two years earlier, commando leader Adriaan van der Walt had asked permission to kill all San encountered rather than take any prisoners because of the danger they posed (Moodie part III, 1960: 67). A year after this came a similar request from Opperman, leader of the General Commando, asking permission to give the San 'no quarter' (Moodie part III, 1960: 51). Although the VOC government demurred on both these occasions, it did not take long for it to shift to an explicitly exterminatory stance (Moodie part III, 1960: 70). Under pressure from frontier farmers to act decisively against intensifying San offensives, Governor Joachim van Plettenberg decided to endorse a policy of systematic extermination of those San within reach of commandos (Van der Merwe, 1937: 41).[17] This policy shift was of greater symbolic import than of practical significance in that the governor was not so much implementing a harsher killing regimen than sanctioning what was already happening on the frontier. The governor and Council of Policy were prepared to leave San to the mercy of commandos by withdrawing any pretence of restraint and acceding to the requests of commando leaders that they be given the freedom to deal with the San as they saw fit. The contradictory accompanying injunction, that 'all possible care be taken that no kind of cruelty be exercised toward the wounded or prisoners or the women and children' (Moodie part III, 1960: 70), can be read as a routine cautioning, added through force of habit and which also helped salve the government's conscience.

The VOC government's exterminatory stance was subsequently softened. Unlike most of its citizens on the frontier, officials in Cape Town generally regarded the San as human, though it qualified this view. A 1792 resolution by the Council of Policy summarised its outlook pithily: '… the creatures against whom these measures are

16 Moses argues that the colonisation of Australia was not intentionally genocidal to start with, but had a potential for genocide. In times of crisis, when the colonial project was threatened by Aboriginal resistance, the 'genocidal logic' of colonisation manifested itself in 'genocidal moments' through the implementation of exterminatory policies (Moses, 2000: 91–92; Moses, 2005: 32–35).

17 For a discussion of the subsequent controversy around this 'extermination order', see Ross (1994: 207–8) and Bank (1997: 264, 277).

aimed, however wild and savage they may be, belong to the class of humanity and therefore their lives need to be spared as much as possible' (Van der Merwe, 1937: 45). This same resolution offered a reward of 15 rixdollars for every San, and 10 rixdollars for children under the age of seven, captured on officially sanctioned commando raids, in the hope that this would mitigate violence against them. Predictably this spurred some frontiersmen to hunt San purely for profit (Boeseken, 1944: 84; Smith *et al*, 47–49; Penn, 2005: 190).

Although settlers enjoyed great advantages in frontier conflict, and foraging societies were not able to match the organised firepower of the commando, it was not at all easy for trekboer society to defeat this enemy comprehensively or to annihilate San society completely. Trekboers were thin on the ground; commandos could operate only sporadically — at most for a few weeks at a time — and their impact was often inconclusive. That San society consisted of a large number of small, self-sufficient social units scattered over a vast, often inhospitable landscape operated greatly in its favour. In addition, San resisted fiercely, using guerrilla tactics successfully. Pockets of independent San living off a combination of stock theft and foraging on unused land between white farms remained even in areas where colonists were completely dominant, with many in time being absorbed into colonial society as a labouring underclass.[18] Although it had suffered severe loss of land and life, San society was not by any means completely defeated in the Cape Colony by the time the British first took control in 1795. The process of eradication was nevertheless far advanced, and the ability of San society to reproduce itself biologically and culturally, or to subsist as foragers, had been severely compromised.

18 Neville (1996: chs. 7–10) provides a study of these processes on part of the northeastern frontier from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century.

3

Attrition under British colonial rule

The dynamic of frontier violence against the San changed at the end of the eighteenth century soon after the British took control of the Cape Colony. An embattled administration representing a bankrupt VOC, facing revolt among citizens, and defeat by the Xhosa was replaced by one that could muster significant military force and was prepared to intervene in frontier conflict. When the British first occupied the Cape Colony in 1795,[1] they were disconcerted by the incessant frontier violence, not only out of humanitarian concern but also because they wanted to maintain social order, and because of the high cost of such conflict. In addition to direct military costs, meat production had been severely affected by the chaos on the frontier, and an increasing number of farmers were defaulting on their loan farm rentals (Newton-King, 1999: 112, 147). The strength of the British humanitarian movement — of which the missionary crusade was the most prominent manifestation and the eventual abolition of slavery its most notable achievement — ensured a more humane policy than that pursued by the VOC (Brantlinger, 2003: 68–69, 93). The British administration realised that, despite trekboer complaints of depredations by San, it was really the San who were the victims. The British favoured a policy of assimilation, what they thought of as 'civilising' the San and encouraging them to lead settled lives as pastoralists, servants and farm labourers.

1 The British occupied the Cape in 1795 after the outbreak of the French revolutionary wars in a pre-emptive move to prevent the colony from falling to France. Ambivalent about the merits of retaining the colony, Britain handed it over to the Batavian government in 1803, but took permanent control in 1806 after the onset of the Napoleonic wars.

There were two basic ways in which European powers and settlers dealt with indigenous resistance to colonisation. The first was to subdue, dispossess or destroy the colonised militarily, as happened with the San under VOC rule. The second was to try and convert the colonised to Western models of living and thinking, as the British attempted to do. The former strove for the death of San society in a literal sense, through killing, expropriation and enslavement, while the latter did so through a programme of deracination and acculturation, for to expunge their way of life was to obliterate the San. Whereas Dutch colonialism became exterminationist, and therefore genocidal, in its relations with the San, British colonial policy could be described as eliminationist and ethnocidal in outlook, its implementation not necessarily putting an end to state violence against the San or changing the genocidal mindset of the frontiersmen.[2] For the British, the fundamental step in eliminating the San both as menace and as 'savage' was to turn them into pastoralists and labourers. San were therefore encouraged to become herders, not only because it was regarded as appropriate for that natural environment but because stock-keeping was seen as the next step up in the evolutionary ladder from hunter-gathering.

To the British authorities, and Europeans in general, hunter-gatherering was the most 'primitive' form of human existence and the San's migratory way of life was regarded as both repulsive and proof of their racial inferiority. Getting the San to lead a settled existence was thus pivotal to the British policy of 'civilising' them. It was, however, not the San but colonial society that was not settled, constantly pushing forward the agrarian frontier and invading the territories of indigenous peoples. It is profoundly ironic that European interlopers,

2 I make an analytical distinction between the intentional extermination of a social group (genocide) and the suppression of a culture (ethnocide). The two are not commensurate — unless the latter is accompanied by large-scale killing. Because British policy toward the San was ethnocidal in its broad conception, however, does not mean that its implementation could not have genocidal consequences. In reality, the colonial state continued to perpetrate violence against the San and prosecuted the colonial project in a way that was inimical to the continued existence of San society. Although some frontiersmen supported British 'civilising' initiatives, many continued to hold exterminatory attitudes and continued to inflict violence on San. It is the intention of perpetrators, not simply that of the state, that counts.

who had come thousands of miles across the ocean and had pressed hundreds of miles inland, were accusing the San, who had lived in their ancestral lands for centuries, if not milennia, of being racially inferior because of their migratory lifestyle. Their lack of year-round settlements was, in addition, used as justification by colonisers to deny San title to their land, as was the case with hunter-gatherers in other parts of the world, by claiming that the land was unoccupied. In these rationalisations, hunter-gatherers were usually presented as ranging across the land, much as animals do, rather than being in possession of it, and uncultivated land as being open to colonisation because it did not belong to anyone (Weaver, 2003: 147–51, 171–72; Brody, 2000: 86, 152–53; Reynolds, 1992: 12–14, 23–29; Docker, 2008b: 34–35).

The British administration tried a four-pronged approach to putting an end to the relentless violence against the San. Firstly, starting with a proclamation issued by Governor George Macartney on 24 July 1798, the British encouraged farmers to make gifts of livestock to San.[3] *Veldwachtmeester*s were to collect sheep and goats from farmers by means of voluntary subscription and distribute them among the San. In addition to this being a gesture of goodwill and a practical step in short-circuiting the cycle of violence that had fomented frontier conflict for decades, it was also hoped that it would encourage the San to abandon foraging to become pastoralists. Besides providing for their immediate subsistence and tiding them over in times of drought, thereby removing their need to raid trekboer stock, the gifts of livestock were meant to 'impress them with a sense of the benefits arising from permanent property, preferable to casual and predatory supplies' as Macartney's proclamation put it (Theal, vol. VII, 1897–1905: 116–17). The idea of making gifts of livestock to San was not a British innovation because it was suggested to a receptive Macartney by Floris Visser and J.G. Louw, *veldwachtmeester*s on the northern frontier zone (Spilhaus, 1966: 251; Penn, 2005: 230; Van der Merwe, 1937: 67–68).

Secondly, the British sought to identify or appoint suitable chiefs among the San with whom they could negotiate and through whom they could assert their authority. Because of its small scale and egalitarian structure, San society did not have the hereditary leaders,

3 Macartney's proclamation can be found in the Cape Archives (CA), First British Occupation (BO), 174, Original Placaat Book, 24 July 1798.

or chiefs of any sort, that the British were looking for (Stockenström, vol. I, 1964: 231–32). The Dutch and British authorities both failed in their attempts to negotiate with the San through chiefs, or to designate chiefs, usually by giving them metal-headed staffs as an emblem of office. Potential nominees did not wish to act as leaders or to be seen as collaborating with the enemy, and in all likelihood did not have any mandate to act in this capacity. It would appear, though, that when the need arose, leadership within and beyond the limits of the hunting band did emerge within San society (Guenther, 1999: 32–33). The colonial encounter provided ample opportunity for such leaders to surface. The numerous instances of coordinated resistance along the Cape frontier would, at the very least, have required some form of temporary captaincy (Burchell vol. I, 1953: 112; Stow, 1964: 32–33; Smith, *et al*, 2000: 41–43; Penn, 1991: 31; Wright, 1971: 3; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2004: 185–86).

Thirdly, the British promoted missionary activity among San communities as another way of bringing stability to the frontier in the hope that it would 'tame' the San and teach them the benefits of a sedentary existence. San were regarded as lacking both the intellectual means and the moral principles for independently fashioning a 'civilised' way of life for themselves, and missionaries as best equipped to overcome these deficiencies. Missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS), which had been founded in 1795, arrived at the Cape at the end of March 1799 and set up the society's first mission to the San in August of that year at Blydevooruitzicht Fontein, one day's journey beyond the Sak River, which formed the northeastern boundary of the colony (McDonald, 2009: 382–83, 384; Szalay, 1995: ch. 4; Penn, 2007: 90–91; Philip, vol. II, 1828: chs. 1–3).

Fourthly, the Cape government declared the area known as Bushmanland, the northern Cape between the colonial boundary and the Orange River east of Namaqualand, to be a reserve for San and forbade colonists from entering it. Graziers were threatened with the confiscation of their stock should they move beyond the boundary, and needed a permit to hunt in the area. By the early nineteenth century, Bushmanland was in effect the last refuge of independent San society south of the Orange River, essentially because trekboers regarded the semi-desert of the northern Cape to be of little economic use besides hunting and occasional pasturage.

These measures were meant to provide the San with some protection against settler abuse and to encourage them to abandon

their hunter-gathering lifestyle. The British administration tried to curb settler violence against the San with threats of criminal prosecution against perpetrators and warnings that ammunition supplies would be cut off. It also issued an injunction that the San not be molested, nor their children stolen and that commandos against them cease — except in cases where San aggression justified their use for self-defence. It was this qualification that allowed for continued state-sanctioned violence against San and the organisation of official commandos against them. The British retained the commando system because deploying a permanent force on the northern frontier was neither economically feasible nor practical in any other sense (Van der Merwe, 1937: 91–92). The British authorities maintained tighter control of commandos than the VOC, trying to ensure that they were used only against offending San and to retrieve stolen stock. Thus whereas in the last decade of VOC rule government records indicate that 2,480 San were killed and 654 captured, in the first decade of British and Batavian rule they show that 367 San were killed and 252 captured (Van der Merwe, 1937: 53, 96). Although San casualties as a result of official commando activity were considerably lower under British rule than in the preceding thirty years, they were nevertheless significant, and indicate ongoing, if sporadic, offensives against the San (Theal, vol. XIX, 1897–1905: 19–20; vol. XVII: 507–8; vol. XXXI: 1–55; Szalay, 1995: 23). That intensified official commando activity under British rule coincided with periods of drought indicates that San were forced onto the offensive by hunger (Van der Merwe, 1997: 88–90; Wright, 1971: 27). It is clear, however, that intermittent unofficial commando activity and vigilantism continued to take a toll of San life (Penn, 2009: 8).

All four British initiatives to 'civilise' the San failed. Firstly, making them gifts of livestock did not work because the plan, though well intentioned, was ill-conceived and patchily implemented. Whereas some farmers were prepared to try the experiment in the hope of breaking the cycle of violence, many were reluctant to participate in the scheme. Over the next three decades, several thousand sheep and goats, but also cattle, were donated to San communities along the frontier, both for immediate consumption and to encourage them to take up herding (Theal, vol. XXXIV, 1897–1905: 437–38; Lichtenstein, vol. I, 1928: 104–5; Stockenström, vol. I, 1964: 230; Szalay, 1995: 35–36; Van der Merwe, 1937: 69–72). Some farmers also tried to help San by shooting game on their behalf (Theal, vol. X, 1897–1905; Van der Merwe, 1937: 72–73; Szalay, 1995: 89; MacCrone, 1957; 124–25). The

gift-giving scheme failed mainly because the San were more likely to eat the animals they got than try and farm with them in the semi-desert of the northern Cape. Not only did they need the food desperately but San society was extremely egalitarian, and everyone had an obligation to share provisions with the rest of the community rather than selfishly retaining stock for farming. Another problem was that San groups given livestock were vulnerable to raids by other San and the array of pastoral peoples on the frontier, including unscrupulous trekboers. By that time conditions on the frontier were such that few Khoikhoi were able to operate as independent stock farmers. To expect San, pushed into the least desirable areas of the drought-prone scrubland, to have done so to any significant extent would be unrealistic (Penn, 2007: 95). A number of San bands nonetheless took advantage of livestock donations and tried pastoralism. There are several reports of independent San kraals having accumulated small flocks of sheep and goats (McDonald, 2007: 64; McDonald 2009: 375; Szalay, 1995: 30, 36–37). These initiatives were generally short-lived, either because stock farming was not viable under those environmental conditions or because such groups were soon dispossessed by aggressive neighbours (Stow, 1964: 47, 205, 393; Szalay, 1995: 42; Van der Merwe, 1937: 245). It is not clear that San in all instances understood that they were expected to become herders. What is apparent, though, is that few San willingly discarded foraging as a way of life.

A small number of farmers tried to implement the policy for humanitarian reasons, while others gave stock as well as tobacco, knives, beads, hats, tinderboxes and other gifts to neighbouring San bands in the hope that this would buy peace. For more vulnerable farmers this was in effect a tributary payment (Moodie part V, 1960: 24, 37; Szalay, 1995: 38–39, 100–1; McDonald, 2007: 8). Colonel Collins noted that the gift-giving strategy did meet with a degree of success (Moodie part V, 1960: 33; Smith *et al*, 2000: 49; Giliomee, 2003: 65). The policy was more effective along the northeastern frontier, where San resistance was weaker, because their independence had been severely compromised by incessant commando raids since the 1770s (Marais, 1968: 20–21). Beyond the drier and more sparsely inhabited northern frontier, Bushmanland still afforded a significant number of San an autonomous existence.

Secondly, the British had little success in either identifying or designating San chiefs through whom they could govern. In general, the closing of the frontier inhibited the emergence of San leadership

by dispersing people, breaking social bonds and limiting their options for independent action. There are, however, indications that the closing of the frontier in some instances provided opportunities for the emergence of San leadership, not only for collective resistance but also to negotiate conditions of clientship or coexistence. The most prominent example is of three San 'captains', Vigilant, Slaparm and Orlam, sent by Floris Visser to Cape Town in 1799 to meet with the newly arrived LMS missionaries to request the founding of a mission to the San on the northwest frontier (Kicherer, 1804: 1–2; Du Plessis, 1965: 101–2). In the early nineteenth century, there are several references to San 'chiefs' or 'captains', some of whom were openly hostile to colonists and others who were cooperative and tried to adapt to changing circumstances (McDonald, 2007: 61–62; Smith *et al*, 2000: 42). The leadership that did emerge, however, was too circumscribed to serve British interests or to represent San broadly.

Thirdly, attempts at converting the San to Christianity had little success as few showed interest in either abandoning their world-view in favour of missionary teachings or leading a sedentary existence. This was not because the San were incapable of cultural adaptation or of understanding the Christian message, as has often been alleged (Theal, 1919a: 25–26, 76–77; Du Plessis, 1965: 106, 269; Walker, 1957: 97; Szalay, 1995: 114–16), but because they preferred their own way of life. By the early nineteenth century, few Cape San could have been left untouched by trekboer atrocity and many would have had experience of the brutishness of farm labour on the frontier. A legacy of mistrust thus impeded British humanitarian efforts from the start.

It would appear that many San exposed to missionary teachings adopted and adapted elements of Christianity into their open-ended and flexible belief system without necessarily becoming converts (Penn, 2005: 248; Guenther, 1999: 89–91, 224; Barnard, 1992: 261). Missionaries, on the other hand, did not take the trouble to learn San languages and gained little insight into the very different world-view and spirituality of San, making it extremely difficult for them to communicate the teachings of the Bible and the moral precepts of Christianity.[4] A pervasive racist sentiment among missionaries — that San lacked the capacity for spiritual understanding or acquisition of

4 See Brody (2000: 217–18) for the difficulty missionaries usually had communicating Christian teachings to hunter-gatherer communities.

religion in a meaningful way — hampered attempts at evangelisation and provided ready-made vindication when such undertakings failed (Guenther, 1999: 210–11). A number of San nevertheless attached themselves, often only temporarily, to mission stations. Few did so for spiritual reasons, regarding mission stations mainly as places of refuge from the dangers of frontier life and as a resource to be exploited for whatever it might yield. For those who had the option, it was almost certainly a more attractive alternative than servitude on settler farms. Given that residents were often attracted to mission stations because they wanted to avoid the privations of farm labour or dependency on farmers, missionary inducements to perform agricultural work proved unpopular and were often resisted. Indeed, many San living on mission stations continued to practise a degree of foraging (McDonald, 2007: 97, 112). After the closing down of mission stations, most inhabitants had little choice but to work for farmers (Schoeman, 1993a, 232–33; Szalay, 1995: 61–62; Macmillan, 1968: 132).

Missionary efforts toward hunter-gatherer communities were sporadic, with eight failed mission stations aimed specifically at San in operation between 1799 and 1846 along the northeastern frontier.[5] They all closed within a few years because of extreme isolation, inadequate funding from the LMS and because they attracted few San converts. Drought, repeated stock theft and the antagonism of indigenous peoples, including independent San bands, played a role in the failure of these mission stations (Schoeman, 1993b: 132, 141–43). For example, the LMS mission station at Blydevooruitzicht Fontein was forced to relocate to the Sak River because of the threat posed by nearby independent San kraals. In 1806, missionary Arie Vos reported that it was dangerous for them to travel even half a mile from the Sak River station and that hostile San bands in the vicinity regularly stole their stock (Szalay, 1995: 61–62; Macmillan, 1968: 132; Penn, 2007: 101, 111). Missionaries, in addition, faced hostility from colonists, for not only did they occupy desirable land and fountains but they were seen to be depriving farmers of labour. Farmers regarded mission

5 LMS mission stations specifically for San were established at Blydevooruitzicht Fontein (1799–1800), which was moved to the Sak River (1800–06), Toornberg (1814–17), Hephzibah 1816–17), Ramah (1816–18), Konnah (1816–18), Philippolis (1823–26), Caledon River (1828–33) and Bushman Station (1839–46). For the location of these stations, see map on p 35.

stations as havens for deserters and shirkers, and as undermining settler control by educating indigenous peoples and filling their heads with seditious ideas (Stockenström, vol. I, 1964: 212–14; Schoeman, 1994: 88; Macmillan, 1968: 129–31; McDonald, 2007: 79; Szalay, 1995: 53, 55, 57). 'Meddling missionaries', moreover, roused the ire of government officials, in particular that of Governor Lord Charles Somerset, for challenging colonial policy. Somerset, motivated by personal animosity and complaints from colonists, in 1817 ordered the closure of the successful Toornberg and Hephzibah stations beyond the colonial border on the pretext that such large congregations of San were a threat to frontier farmers (Schoeman, 1993a: 230; McDonald, 2007: 71–72, 78; McDonald, 2009: 378, 381; Neville, 1996: 227).

Difficulties with the missionary enterprise and ongoing San attacks had already, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, caused some to turn away from it as a means of assimilating the San into colonial society. Hinrich Lichtenstein and Hendrik van der Graaf, the *landdrost* of Tulbagh, who travelled together through the interior in 1805, for example, were persuaded that the use of force, imprisonment and hard labour were more effective ways of 'civilising' the San (Lichtenstein, vol. II, 1928: 240–41; Penn, 2005: 259–63). Mathias Guenther suggests that the pervasive, racially conditioned perception among Westerners that the San were a doomed people explained both the fervour of some missionaries to proselytise among the San, as well as pessimism among others that missions to the San could succeed, and a readiness to abandon such ventures in the face of initial failure or hardship (Guenther, 1999: 209; Brantlinger, 2003: 4–5). While the missionary project was well-intentioned and couched in terms of the 'upliftment' and 'moral redemption' of the San, it was predicated on breaking down their way of life and altering their view of the world to facilitate their incorporation into colonial society. As Patrick Brantlinger notes, 'humanitarian ideology was almost always a variant of white supremacism' (2003: 93).

As for the Bushmanland reserve, trekboers simply ignored this proclamation. No one, including government officials, knew precisely where the boundary was, because it was vaguely defined by means of imaginary lines drawn between widely scattered points in a semi-desert wilderness (Van der Merwe, 1937: 102, 123). Trekboers in search of pasture were not only ignorant of these proclamations but had little respect for them. Policing the isolated frontier areas of the Cape Colony was in any case an impossible task for the colonial government, and

it was simply not capable of maintaining the area as a reserve for San. Colonial hunting parties regularly traversed the territory, depleting game and robbing San of a major source of food. Stock farmers continually encroached on land occupied by San, pushing them into the more marginal areas, further compromising San ability to subsist off the land. In times of drought, graziers would move beyond the colonial borders in search of grazing, making temporary incursions into San territory. When it suited them, principally after good rains had fallen, trekboers used the area as communal grazing land, their stock damaging the ecology and undermining San subsistence. Through the nineteenth century, many San bands in Bushmanland succumbed to starvation and dehydration because of the destruction of game and their loss of access to traditional sources of food and water (Findlay, 1977: 23–24; Penn, 1996: 81–82; Van der Merwe, 1937: 153–54).

While British initiatives for peace had some success in reducing lawlessness and turbulence on the frontier, they failed to eliminate violence against the San. The unremitting warfare of the last decades of Dutch rule gave way to a fragile and uncertain peace puntuated by periodic bloodshed. After the British took permanent control of the Cape in 1806, the peace initiatives of its earlier occupation tended to be forgotten as the administration's attention was taken up by conflict with the Xhosa on the eastern frontier and issues around Khoikhoi labour and status. San numbers were small, and they were not of sufficient economic significance to attract much government attention. The humanitarian thrust also tended to focus on the Khoikhoi (Penn, 2009: 7–8). More settled conditions on the frontier and the constant search for new pastures served only to spur further colonial penetration of the interior. Although some San groups were 'pacified' by the new approach, others remained hostile. Violence on the frontier continued sporadically through the first half of the nineteenth century, with San raiding trekboer stock and farmers retaliating with both formal and informal commandos. Crucially, in the nineteenth century the Cape had a government capable of both intervening in conflict with indigenous peoples and of imposing its will on the frontier regions to a far greater extent than the VOC administration had been able. Its willingness to use force against San perceived as a threat to colonial interests sealed the fate of the Cape Colony's foraging societies (Freund, 1989: 331–32; Dennis, 1996: 257; Van der Merwe, 1937: 107–14).

Under the false peace of British rule, there were divergent tendencies in the ongoing dissolution of independent San societies on

the northern and northeastern frontiers during the first half of the nineteenth century. The predominant trend along the northeastern frontier was for the incorporation of surviving San into colonial society as an exploited underclass. More intense commando activity in this region over the preceding three decades had sapped San resistance. The farmers' need for labour and diminishing possibilities for pursuing a foraging lifestyle in this more intensively farmed region promoted this outcome. The calming influence of the British administration's attempts to quell frontier violence cannot be ignored either. Along the northern frontier, and beyond in Bushmanland, it was still possible for independent San bands to subsist as hunter-gatherers, although such existence became more and more precarious. In both regions demographic growth and a quest for new grazing, particularly by poorer landless farmers, spurred encroachment on indigenous land.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, along the northeastern frontier, San had little option but to enter the service of farmers in return for food and clothing, and perhaps blankets, or run the risk of starving (Szalay, 1995: 84–89). Some were no doubt coerced into becoming farm labourers. Where the possibility still existed, a few moved beyond the advancing tide of colonial settlement, inevitably to even more desolate and barely habitable terrain and to Crown land with little surface water. A small number might, for a while, have eked out a living by combining foraging on unused land between white farms with livestock theft. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the digging of boreholes led to farmers being able to occupy the drier parts of the Karoo, resulting in the further displacement of forager bands (Neville, 1996: 245; Van Sittert, 2004: 916). The fencing of land towards the end of the century further curtailed the movement of San.[6]

Hunting bands under pressure sometimes opted for the compromise of handing over children to farmers, often for no more than one or two sheep or goats, feeding the well-established frontier practice of bartering San children. The custom was sufficiently prevalent for Lord Charles Somerset to ban it in 1817. The prohibition was ineffective, as it drove the practice underground (Theal, vol. XI, 1897–1905: 326–28, 365–67; vol. XXXV: 325–26; Philip, vol. II, 1828: 265–68, 276–77;

6 For a discussion of the enclosure movement in the Cape countryside, see Van Sittert (2002).

Szalay, 1995: 91–94; McDonald, 2007: 106; Stockenström, vol. I, 1964: 214–15). Indeed, John Philip, superintendent of the LMS in South Africa, averred that the trade had by the 1820s taken on the aspect of organised trafficking, with 'itinerant merchants' sourcing supplies of 'orphans' for clandestine sale in the 'inner districts' (Philip, vol. II, 1828: 265–66).

It was not unusual for groups of San to first enter the service of farmers as clients for payment in kind while still practising a degree of foraging. There were instances of bands oscillating between service on farms and foraging, sometimes out of choice, often because of poor treatment, or occasionally because farmers, when it suited them, got rid of workers. Over time, the tendency was for such groups to become tied to farmers through threats of violence, the retention of women and children on the farm and growing dependence on farmers for food. By 1822, Stockenström reported that, when travelling through the northeastern frontier zone, he hardly found 'Bushmen whatever living separated from the Boers' (Neville, 1996: 228, 231; McDonald, 2007: 60–61; Szalay, 1995: 87–91; Wright, 1971: 28).

San generally worked as herders, or tended crops in areas where cultivation occurred, but were also employed as guides, hunters and trackers, their intimate knowledge of the terrain and its ecology being of particular value. Many were used as domestics and drudges to collect firewood and water, and to perform other tasks around the farmstead (Szalay, 1995: 79–80). A small number of San ended up in frontier towns, such as Colesberg, Beaufort West, Graaff-Reinet, Cradock and Richmond, where they lived by occasional labour or as vagrants. Often referred to as 'Hottentot' or 'coloured' once they became part of colonial society, these former foragers became part of a downtrodden proletariat prone to disease and alcoholism.[7]

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, attacks on farms on the northeastern frontier were mostly perpetrated by deserting farm workers and people who had to some extent been acculturated to colonial society (Szalay, 1995: 104, 106). This is an indication that there were few independent bands left. After 1810, San resistance, which had stalled colonial penetration north of the Sneeuberg since the 1770s, gave way under continued pressure. Stock farmers were

7 For a study of these processes at work in the Colesberg region, see Neville (1996: 230–44).

able to press on, opening up a new frontier further into the interior, resulting in the Orange River in 1824 being proclaimed the colonial boundary in the northeast (Legassick, 1989: 363). The efforts of the British administration to maintain peace notwithstanding, periodic commandos against San continued to be organised into the 1830s by frontier officials who were given the discretion to do so to protect settler interests (McDonald, 2007: 66). These later commandos on the northeastern frontier were less murderous than those of the latter part of the eighteenth century, and seemed more concerned with acquiring captive labour than with extermination. For example, in the magistracies of Graaff-Reinet, Worcester and Stellenbosch commandos killed 184 San and took 302 prisoner between 1797 and 1824 (Theal, vol. XIX, 1897–1905: 19–20; Dennis, 1996: 257); in Graaff-Reinet they killed 97 San and took 280 prisoner between 1813 and 1824 (Theal, vol. XVII, 1897–1905: 507–8).[8] In marked contrast to earlier casualty figures many more San were taken prisoner than were killed.

A different pattern of events were played out on the northern frontier. Here, independent San society continued to resist settler penetration into the latter half of the nineteenth century (Theal, vol. XXXI, 1897–1905: 1–55; Penn, 1996: 81–82; Findlay, 1977: 23–24). Ongoing settler incursions diminished San prospects for an autonomous foraging existence in a range of ways. There was a recognisable pattern to trekboer encroachment in Bushmanland, in that hunting parties might first enter an area, followed by seasonal graziers, a few of whom might remain behind, and who might later be joined by more farmers intending to live there permanently. Farmers rationalised their occupation of the land by convincing themselves that because the San had no stock, they had no need of grazing, and since trekboers could make use of the land, they had a right to do so (Van der Merwe, 1937: 259). As trekboers infiltrated areas occupied by San, there were ongoing disputes over specific parcels of land and access to water resources. Farmers often went on the offensive and organised informal commandos to settle disputes or to grab coveted land. Under conditions of precarious peace and vastly unequal power, the San invariably found themselves on the back foot when violence broke out. By 1825, about one fifth of Bushmanland had been occuppied by

8 Discrepancies in these tallies suggest poor record-keeping and understatement of San casualties during this period.

colonists (Van der Merwe, 1937: 153–54). Displaced San either worked for farmers, moved into the colony in search of employment or tried to live in even more marginal areas. The reality of settler penetration of Bushmanland was formally recognised by the colonial government in December 1847 when the Orange River was proclaimed the northern boundary of the Cape Colony (Szalay, 1995: 17).

Along the northern frontier, significant numbers of San were also killed by Griqua, Bastard, Korana and other pastoralist groups. As Griqua and Korana gained access to firearms and horses through colonial contact and trade, they became more formidable enemies and also formed commandos to kill San who raided their stock or occupied desirable land or fountains (Ross, 1975: 569; Van der Merwe, 1937: 271; Szalay, 1995: 29–30). Some San were also taken up by them as forced labourers, and their children sold into servitude, often in exchange for guns, ammunition and brandy (Stow, 1964: 48). Historian Robert Ross is of the opinion that the Griqua were more brutal in their treatment of San than trekboers under British rule because the 'restraining influence of the colonial officials was not present'. Griqua attacks against San in Griqualand and surrounding areas were particularly intense during the latter half of the 1820s and the early 1830s. In an 1830 report, Andries Stockenström, who, as commissioner-general, investigated these wanton killings, reported that Griqua justified their annihilation of entire San bands by claiming that, 'the Bushmen steal our cattle, we are determined to exterminate them … the children grow up to mischief and the women breed them' (Ross, 1976: 24). It is apparent that trekboers were not the only ones with exterminatory attitudes toward San and that such sentiments were not entirely racist in nature. They were primarily a product of incompatible economic needs in a situation of intense competition for resources.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the San of the northern Cape found themselves greatly outnumbered and squeezed from north and south by pastoralists who had access to superior technologies of war (Findlay, 1977: 24, 27; McDonald, 2007: 53–54, 56, 92). With Griqua and Korana communities established along the Orange River and trekboers pushing up from the south, the San faced adversaries on two fronts and were increasingly hemmed into the drier parts of Bushmanland. Furthermore, trekboer pressure on Khoikhoi in Namaqualand, and along parts of the Orange River, displaced some of these peoples into Bushmanland, putting further stress on the San. The degradation of the natural environment and the scarcity of game

undermined any chance of peaceful coexistence because famished San were forced to steal stock from neighbouring pastoralists, followed almost inevitably by retaliation. As Louis Anthing, resident magistrate and civil commissioner for Namaqualand, put it, 'Hunger is a terrible prompter' (A 39-1863: 7). This state of affairs, together with recurrent drought, led to the starvation and massacre of many San bands in Bushmanland during the nineteenth century. Others were forced to enter the service of farmers as virtual serfs.

The economic development of the northern Cape after its incorporation into the Cape Colony had dire implications for the continued survival of the San. In the mid-nineteenth century, it was found that merino sheep were able to acclimatise to semi-desert conditions (Smith *et al*, 2000: 57). As a consequence the number of wool-bearing sheep in the northern Cape increased dramatically from the 1850s onwards. In addition, the 1850s copper mining boom in Namaqualand (Smalberger, 1975) gave rise to a demand for foodstuffs locally and an equally rapid growth in the number of indigenous, fat-tailed sheep in the region.[9] In some areas of Bushmanland, and later Transorangia, boreholes had successfully been sunk, making such areas more habitable and allowing a measure of stock farming (A 39-1863: 9; A 30-1880: 35). The semi-desert scrub of the northern Cape, to which the surviving San had been confined, now had economic value. This guaranteed further settler encroachment as commercial sheep farmers moved further north, displacing poorer white graziers and 'Bastards' into more marginal areas and parts of Bushmanland.

Mercenary motives and growing environmental pressures precipitated a series of massacres of San bands by Boer and Bastard farmers in the 1850s and 1860s, which brought an effective end to autonomous San society in Bushmanland. In 1861, Louis Anthing heard complaints of San bands being massacred in Bushmanland by intruding Boer and Bastard stock farmers over the preceding decade. He reported this to his superiors in Cape Town, and was authorised by the attorney general to investigate the claims. Sympathetic to the plight of the San and determined to uphold the rule of law in his jurisdiction, Anthing relocated to Kenhardt for several months in order to conduct his investigations. In 1863, he produced a

9 For some sense of the increase in the numbers of sheep in the northern Cape during this period see (G 20-1866, xi; Nel, 1998: chs. 3, 5; Thom, 1936: 321).

government report documenting some of the atrocities (A 39-1863). Despite collecting evidence of several massacres of forager bands over the previous decade, including a few large, well-coordinated expeditions that resulted in the killing of several hundred people,[10] and suggesting measures for protecting the remaining San, nothing came of his efforts. He proposed a reserve be set aside for San and the establishment of a separate magistracy at Kenhardt so that the government could enforce the rule of law more effectively (A 39-1863: 7–9). The Cape government was flustered by his exposé but unwilling to incur the necessary expenditure. Anthing's work became mired in controversy to the extent that it eventually led to his dismissal.[11] Anthing estimated that there were no more than 500 San left in the whole of Bushmanland by the early 1860s. He also noted that besides those murdered, many San had died of starvation.

Gratuitous violence of the sort already described as common on the frontier during the eighteenth century continued into the nineteenth century. Writing in the mid-1830s, Thomas Pringle recounted how some boers 'boasted that only a few years ago they used to lie in wait for the Bushmen and shot them like baboons' (Pringle, 1966: 223). He goes on to detail the wanton killing of innocent San by an 1829 commando operating along the Sak River and the failure of the attorney general to act against the perpetrators despite apparently damning evidence against them (Pringle, 1966: 230–31). In 1863, Louis Anthing reported that farmers in Bushmanland 'were in the habit of going out to hunt and shoot any Bushmen they might find'. He also cited the example of a Roggeveld farmer who boasted how he and his friends in their younger days had formed hunting parties to shoot 'Bushpeople "for the fun of the thing"' (A 39-1863, 11). Popular writer Lawrence Green also recorded several examples of 'border farmers' in the 1880s acting on the idea that 'Bushmen should be shot at sight' (Green, 1955, 30; see also 25).

10 Although much of the evidence he collected was second hand and circumstantial, there is little reason to doubt the general accuracy of Anthing's claims of atrocities against the San.

11 For details of these controversies, questions around Anthing's behaviour and his dismissal, see Findlay (1977: ch. 4). It seems as if Anthing may have been involved in illicit trading, and he incurred considerable government debt at a time of fiscal stringency.

The final throes of primary resistance by San within the Cape Colony came during the Korana wars of 1868–69 and 1878–79 along the middle reaches of the Orange River when remnant groups of /Xam-speaking San joined forces with Korana against encroaching white farmers and the colonial troops supporting them. Although the pastoral Korana were generally hostile toward hunter-gatherers, who preyed on their livestock, by the late 1860s both groups were under sufficient pressure from white farmers taking control of grazing lands along the southern bank of the Orange River for them to be pushed into an alliance against their common enemy. In both conflicts, in which colonial forces inevitably prevailed, a number of /Xam, including women and children, were killed by colonial forces, and an unknown, but substantial, number died of starvation as a result of drought and disruption caused by the conflict (Strauss, 1979: 37, 43–44, 53, 68–69, 111; Dooling, 2009: 403–5; Ross, 1975: 570–76). As a result of the first war, nearly 300 prisoners, including San, were indentured to farmers (Dooling, 2009: 406). Those taken prisoner in the second war — over 800 men, women and children — were apprenticed to farmers as far afield as Calvinia, Clanwilliam, Springbok and Beaufort West (A 30-1880, 35).

Some /Xam fighters taken prisoner were sentenced to hard labour at the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town where they worked on the building of the docks. This was the same punishment that over the previous decade had been meted out to a number of northern Cape San charged with criminal offences, primarily stock theft (Deacon, 1989: 19–20). Some of these prisoners were extensively interviewed by linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd. The collection of documents they produced constitute the renowned Bleek-Lloyd archive of manuscripts on /Xam language and culture housed in the University of Cape Town's Manuscripts and Archives Division (See Deacon & Dowson, 1996; Hewitt, 2008; Skotnes, 2007; Bank, 2006; Bennun, 2004; Hollman, 2004).

After the Korana wars, isolated incidents of violence against San continued in the far northern Cape as 'vagrants' continued to be forced into servitude and San children continued to be exploited by farmers and other settlers through the modernised apprenticeship system introduced by masters-and-servants legislation from the mid-1850s onwards (Rousset, 2007: Green, 1955: 30; Dooling, 2009: 405). Although no longer a threat to settler interests by the latter decades of the nineteenth century, the viciously negative stereotyping of San persisted. The *Standard and Mail* editorial of 18 December 1873, for

example, summed up colonial perceptions of San: 'He neither plows nor sows, he does not rear cattle or sheep, he is in truth a wild animal in human shape, preying on whatever he can lay his hands on, now stealing sheep, now grubbing up roots, now feeding on mere garbage when nothing else comes his way' (Hall, 1996: 144).

Despite the relatively accommodating British colonial policy, San society within the Cape Colony was nevertheless extinguished during the course of the nineteenth century in an incremental process of encroachment on their land, enforced labour incorporation and periodic massacre. A few independent bands managed to survive in parts of the Kalahari Desert, helping to cement a common contemporary misconception that the San are a 'desert people'.[12] By the 1970s, it was thought that fewer than 30 'unhybridised' San people remained in the whole of South Africa.[13] According to recent estimates, there are today about 7,500 people in South Africa who identify as San. Of these, about 6,000 are recent immigrants from Namibia and southern Angola who accompanied the South African army when it withdrew from Namibia in 1990, and about 1,000 belong to the ≠Khomani San (Chennels & Du Toit, 2004: 98; Hitchcock *et al*, 2006: 4).[14] Although San society in the Cape Colony was destroyed, and very few people of Cape San descent today identify as such, their genetic presence in the South African population is more substantial than these numbers would suggest because of the incorporation of captives and forced labourers into colonial society as 'Hottentots'. Taken up into the residual and homogenising category of coloured and classified as such by the state during the twentieth century, some are now reclaiming an identity as San or Khoisan.[15]

12 Even as well informed a commentator as Sandy Gall, the British journalist who authored the highly sympathetic *Slaughter of the Innocent*, repeatedly refers to the pre-colonial San as 'lords of the desert' (Gall, 2001: front flap, 96, 135).

13 Tobias (1970: 618) put the number at 20. He later estimated that about 25 'unmixed' San still lived in the northwestern Cape and on the shores of Lake Chrissie near Ermelo (1978: 12–13).

14 See also www.san.org.za/sasi/home.htm, accessed 10 September 2009; Hitchcock, 1999: 176; Smith *et al*, 2000: 65; Sharp & Douglas, 1996: 323.

15 According to Chennels and Du Toit (2004: 98), there are small communities of San in northern KwaZulu-Natal who feel sufficiently marginalised and discriminated against that they are reluctant to identify as San and refer to themselves, among themselves, as 'secret San'.

4

A case of genocide?

In recent years, there has been a growing corpus of scholarly literature that has interpreted colonial exterminations of indigenous peoples as genocide. Much of this writing has focused on the nature of settler colonialism, especially in Australia and the United States, and there has been a distinct tendency to view settler colonialism as highly prone to, if not inherently, genocidal.[1] This discussion has not yet included the Cape San, partly because few South African scholars have worked within the field of genocide studies or systematically applied its insights to local mass killings, and partly because of the marginality of San society. The relatively small size of the scholarly community involved in South African historical research, its tendency to focus on clashes between European settlers and Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists, a distinct dearth of historians who regard themselves as being of Khoisan descent and the effects of apartheid-era isolation on South African historiography may all be seen as having contributed to this situation.

1 I disagree with the idea that settler colonialism is inherently genocidal, unless the concept is so loosely defined as to equate the cultural and economic changes that inevitably accompanies such colonisation with genocide. South Africa provides a good case study for refuting such claims. In the case of the San, and perhaps less clearly that of the Khoikhoi, colonial rule was indeed genocidal, but with regard to Bantu-speaking communities it manifestly was not — except perhaps for isolated incidents such as the Makapansgat Cave siege of 1854, in which commandos from the Transvaal Republic exterminated the greater part of the Ndebele-speaking Mokopane chiefdom (Hofmeyr, 1993: 105–21; Naidoo, 1989: 120–32; Esterhuysen, 2006). Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as 'animated by a logic of elimination which is not invariably genocidal' is persuasive (Wolfe, 2006: 385).

Until relatively recently, their marginality was clearly reflected in South African historiography in that the colonial experience of the Cape San was relegated to little more than a footnote to the grand narrative of conflict with Nguni- and Sotho-Tswana-speaking peoples in the establishment of white dominion. In accounts focusing on the VOC period, hostilities with the San often appear as a sideshow to Dutch interaction with the Khoikhoi.[2] Sometimes the distinct experience of hunter-gatherer societies is glossed over, with the term 'Khoisan' being used mainly to refer to the Khoikhoi. Notable exceptions are G.W. Stow's *Native Races of South Africa*, which comments extensively on settler annihilation of the San, P.J. van der Merwe's *Die Noordwaardse Beweging van die Boere Voor die Groot Trek*, which analyses trekboer conflict with the San at some length, and J.S. Marais's *The Cape Coloured People, 1652-1937*, which reviews hostilities between San and settler because he sees 'Bushmen' as constituting an 'appreciable strain' in the making of the coloured people (Marais, 1968: xi, 30–31). In the last decade and a half, some semblance of balance has been restored by a few seminal studies that have addressed the killing of the Cape San peoples with sensitivity and insight. Chief among these are books by historians Susan Newton-King and Nigel Penn, and Professor of Fine Art Pippa Skotnes (Newton-King, 1999; Penn, 2005; Skotnes, 1991; 1996; 2007).

None of the works that deal with the destruction of San society explicitly analyse it as an instance of genocide. There is no consideration of precisely what genocide means, or systematic application of relevant criteria of a particular definition, competing conceptualisations or theoretical considerations to this case. This does not mean that authors do not recognise these killings as genocide or the Cape San peoples as having been exterminated. Several do so very explicitly but do not raise phenomenological, ontological or hermeneutical questions around the concept of genocide or the example of the Cape San. For those writing before the word 'genocide' was coined by Rafael Lemkin

2 Elphick & Giliomee (1989a) is a good example. Compare its index entries for Khoikhoi with those for San and Bushmen. In this book, Khoisan refers mainly to Khoikhoi.

in 1944,[3] or before it entered popular usage in the 1980s, the terms 'extermination', 'extirpation' and 'extinction' are commonly applied to the Cape San in ways that imply what would later be called genocide.

The first significant attempt at historical analysis of the destruction of Cape San society is to be found in John Philip's pioneering *Researches in South Africa*, published in 1828 and written with the express purpose of lobbying for the reform of government policy towards indigenous peoples. *Researches* set off a wide-ranging and acrimonious debate over the next fifteen years, often thought of as the 'origins of South African historiography' (Ross, 1994b; Bank 1997). The main protagonists were Philip, leading liberal campaigner for the civil rights of the Cape colonial oppressed, and Donald Moodie, a prominent civil servant and representative of British settler views. Moodie, among other works, published a three-volume anthology of translated, official documents, collectively known as *The Record*, to defend the settler establishment against charges of resorting to unwarranted violence against indigenes. The debate, essentially about the nature of colonial rule at the Cape, had as one of its key segments a polemic over whether colonists were justified in visiting mass violence upon the San, and whether the VOC government was complicit in the violence by explicitly authorising the 'extirpation' of the San by commandos (Ross, 1994b: 199–200, 207–8; Bank, 1997: 264, 276–77; Brantlinger, 2003: 78–79).

For Philip, the 'Bushmen' were nothing more than dispossessed Khoikhoi driven to desperation and who were intent on revenge. In his view, labour-hungry colonists, having killed large numbers of Khoikhoi and occupied virtually all of the habitable land, 'now penetrated into the deserts and mountains to seize their women and children, and to reduce them to slavery'. Frontier society, 'smarting' under the relentless reprisals of what had by then become an implaccable enemy, 'formed the project of making the colonial government a party in assisting them to enslave or exterminate all that remained of the original inhabitants' (Philip, vol. I, 1828: 41). Philip mistakenly claimed that, in the instructions to the General Commando of 1774,

3 Lemkin, a Polish jurist who led campaigns for genocide to be recognised as a crime in international law and for the signing of the United Nations Convention on Genocide (UNCG), first used the term in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944). It was enshrined in international law with the signing of the UNCG in December 1948.

'the whole race of Bushmen or Hottentots, who had not submitted to servitude, was ordered to be seized or extirpated' (Philip, vol. I, 1828: 42).[4] Moodie made the most of this error, repeatedly challenging Philip to provide proof of his assertion and disingenuously terminating his own collection of documents for that period in 1776, soon before the Council of Policy actually sanctioned extermination. At the time, Philip's humanitarian stance drew implicit support from Andrew Smith, a physician who led a privately sponsored expedition into the southern African interior in the mid-1830s to find out more about its resources and peoples. Smith commented that in spite of Bushmen 'having been gifted both with ingenuity and high intelligence they have been, from a numerous people, reduced to a mere handful, while the colonial territories have been almost completely cleared of them by the white man' (Lye, 1975: 25; see Pringle, 1966: 224–26 for more explicit support of Philip).

In contrast, George McCall Theal, prolific South African historian of the 'settler' school of South African historiography, regarded the San as 'almost inconceivably stupid' and barely human. He displaced onto Africans his own sentiments that 'Bushmen' were little better than 'a malignant species of ape' and no more capable of being educated than jackals (Theal, 1902: 9–13; 1969, 5–6, 56–57. See also Saunders, 1988: 30).[5] He did, however, recognise that the San had been exterminated, but regarded this as an inevitable price paid for their racially determined inability to adapt to European colonisation and the demands of modernity. They were 'fated to perish' because the 'wave of European colonization was not to be stayed from rolling on by a few savages who stood in its course' (Theal, 1919b: 49). Geologist and ethnographer George Stow was, however, highly sympathetic to these 'hapless hunters' displaced by 'stronger races'. Throughout *The Native Races of South Africa*, published posthumously in 1905,[6]

4 The instruction to the commando was in fact 'to attack the robbers in their dens and hiding places, and to reduce them to a permanent state of peace and quiet, or otherwise, in case of necessity, entirely to destroy them' (Moodie part III, 1960: 28).

5 Theal's analogies are interesting in that the former's evocation of the 'missing link' theory is unnecessarily malicious, and the latter resorts to a primary bane of farmers, one generally regarded as vermin to be exterminated

6 Stow died in 1882, and the preface to his book is dated 6 September 1880. (Stow, 1964: xii; Skotnes, 2008: 62).

he comments on their annihilation, their 'greatest crime being that they were the original possessors of the soil, a war of extermination was waged against them, until at last the miserable remnants of their once numerous race had to struggle for a precarious existence in a few almost inaccessible mountain fastnesses or in the wilds of the Kalahari desert' (Stow, 1964: 233, 575). W.M. Macmillan's *The Cape Colour Question*, which appeared in 1926, is clear that 'the eighteenth century all but completed their extinction at the hands of white and coloured foes' (MacMillan, 1968: 26), while I.D. MacCrone's *Race Attitudes in South Africa* a decade later confirmed that on the frontier 'Bushmen became a sort of "public enemy (no. 1)" to be shot at sight and out of existence' and that 'official policy itself had become one of extirpation' (MacCrone, 1937: 104–5). Likewise, P.J. van der Merwe concedes that, in addition to there having been 'conscious attempts to exterminate them … as a group', the San south of the Orange River had become extinct to the extent that only a small number managed to survive in the Kalahari Desert (Van der Merwe, 1937: 96, 58, 174–75, 259). In the *Oxford History of South Africa*, first published in 1969, both Monica Wilson and May Katzen agree that, during the eighteenth century, trekboer commandos systematically exterminated the San (Wilson, 1982: 71; Katzen, 1982: 184). Two popular writers of the 1950s produced wistful, chapter-long accounts of the eradication of Cape San society that recognised its genocidal character. Lawrence Green acknowledged that 'The policy during the last years of the Dutch East India Company was to exterminate the Bushmen' (Green, 1955: 27) while Laurens van der Post's melodramatic account includes an admission that his grandfather participated in 'the raid to kill off the last of the Bushmen in the hills of the Great (Orange) River' (Van der Post, 1958: 39)

More recent works use the word 'genocide' to characterise the colonial experience of the Cape San. For example, Newton-King describes the destruction of San society on the northeastern frontier as 'truly genocidal' (Newton-King, 1999: 112), while archaeologist Andrew Smith agrees that 'the commando system of settlers [was] intent on genocide of aboriginal hunters' (Smith, 1991: 510). Skotnes, in her landmark book *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, also unequivocally calls the eradication of the /Xam people genocide (Skotnes, 1996: 17; see also 1999: 15). Elsewhere in *Miscast*, Alan Morris, a physical anthropologist, refers to the obliteration of the Cape San as genocide (Morris, 1996: 67), while linguist Tony

Traill not only concurs with this view but recognises that, in addition to killing, other violations such as enslavement, child confiscation and suppression of their culture since the mid-eighteenth century progressively undermined the /Xam's ability to function as a viable social entity (Traill, 1996: 166, 183). Although Richard Lee, an anthropologist writing in 1976, does not allude to it as genocide per se, that is precisely the picture he ends up painting: 'The San were almost entirely wiped out south of the Orange River by 1850 as a result of a systematic Dutch extermination campaign' (Lee, 1976: 5). Roger Hewitt's study of /Xam life through the Bleek-Lloyd archive alludes to the 'slow genocidal process by which the /Xam ceased to exist' as well as to their 'gradual extermination' (Hewitt, 2008: 2; 1986: 30), while Mathias Guenther presents the extermination of the Cape San as 'at times out and out, unadorned genocide' (Guenther, 1999: 208). Sandy Gall, a British journalist, goes so far as to portray the killing of the San as 'worse in many ways than that of the Jews', although he does not elaborate upon this intriguing verdict (Gall, 2001: xxiii, 38, 51).[7] Poet Stephen Watson's succinct summary of the /Xam's experience of colonial conquest leaves little doubt about his stance: '… hunted down by the white colonists as if they were wild animals, regarded as little more than vermin by surrounding black tribes, they were virtually extinct, victims of genocide, by the end of the nineteenth century' (Watson, 1991: xvi). Perhaps the last word in this rough-and-ready review should be given to a prolific historian of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cape society taking stock of the situation in a general history. Robert Ross is of the opinion that 'commandos received permission from the Cape government to "extirpate" the San thus formalizing their genocidal practice which had been in operation for most of the century' (Ross, 1999: 23).

Despite broad consensus among scholars and popular authors who have written about the history of the Cape San peoples that their annihilation constitutes genocide, or amounted to extermination, there are, as one would expect, those who take a dissenting stance. Nigel Penn straddles the two views, in that he recognises the severity

7 One aspect Gall probably had in mind was that the Cape San suffered effective extinction whereas a third of European Jewry survived the Holocaust. For another passing comparison of Cape San experience with the Holocaust, see Mazian (1990: xi).

of the atrocities committed against the Cape San but feels that it falls short of genocide. In his detailed study of the northern frontier during the eighteenth century, he writes that after 1770 trekboers 'conduct(ed) a style of frontier fighting that approached the genocidal' and described the 'war against the San' as 'marked by genocidal atrocities' (Penn, 2005: 9, 123). While he does not explain his stance in *The Forgotten Frontier*, in a private conversation with me in mid-2006 his clarification was that the killing of the Cape San was a 'partial genocide' because not all San were systematically killed. Men were generally killed out of hand, but many women, and most often children, were taken prisoner. At other times, however, Penn appears to have accepted their destruction as genocide. Writing in 1991 specifically of the /Xam, he neatly summarised what is effectively a case for genocide by arguing that by the 1870s the /Xam '… were a dying people: their societies shattered by warfare, starvation and disease; their women and children enslaved; their men all but exterminated by the genocidal hatred of their enemies' (Penn, 1991: 24). And then in 2007 he asserts that 'San fell victim to the genocidal policies of their enemies and … their societies became extinct' (Penn, 2007: 90) Similarly, Hermann Giliomee's *The Afrikaners* implies that trekboer violence against San was not genocidal, although he is prepared to concede that, 'some of the eighteenth century campaigns against the Bushmen' were exterminatory and that the trekboers fought 'grim wars of extermination … in the 1770s and 1780s' (Giliomee, 2003: 60, 87).

Anthropologist Miklós Szalay is the one scholar who goes to some length to explain why he does not consider the destruction of Cape San society to be 'extermination', a position reflected in the subtitle of his book, *Conflict, Incorporation, Acculturation*, published in 1995. That the killing of the Cape San peoples might constitute genocide seems not to have occurred to him. While he recognises that extensive killing of San by trekboers took place over an extended period, Szalay denies the exterminatory intent of commandos. He asserts that there was a critical shortage of labour in the trekboer economy and that the imperative of commando raids was therefore to procure captives as workers and not to slaughter the San. In Szalay's interpretation, the need for labour overrode the murderous impulses of commandos even during the thirty-year period of most intense commando activity. Acculturation through forced labour, but also through missionary activity, conversion to pastoralism, clientship to trekboers and having no option but to enter the service of farmers to avoid starvation — rather

than extermination — more accurately describes the fate of the San, according to Szalay. Although he concedes 'extirpation' as having been the 'self-declared politics (sic) of the government' he downplays the policy as having been 'in reality only a plan, a slogan, but not the practice' (Szalay, 1995: 5, 11, 13–33). Szalay also counters arguments in favour of extermination by asserting that 'women and children were spared for the most part' (Szalay, 1995: 21) and that no more than between 3,000 to 4,000 San in all were killed (Szalay, 1995: 108). For Szalay, the notion that the San had largely been exterminated came about because 'after their incorporation into the colony as "Hottentots" and later as "Coloureds", (they) were no longer visible to the casual observer' (Szalay, 1995: 109).

Szalay's arguments do not stand up to critical scrutiny. In the first place, the evidence is abundantly clear that throughout the eighteenth century, and especially during its last three decades, the violent subjugation and destruction of San society, rather than the acquisition of labour, were the main objectives of commando activity. Trekboers resorted to mass violence against the San either because they wanted to appropriate land occuppied by them, because they wanted to eliminate them as a threat or in response to San resistance. San labour was not greatly valued and was generally regarded as unsuited to trekboer needs. The high ratio of San killed to those taken prisoner during the eighteenth century bears testimony to this, even though a substantial number of prisoners were taken and San labour was used. Szalay himself quotes figures to indicate that, for the period 1786–95, for every San taken prisoner by commandos four were killed (Szalay, 1995: 22 fn. 38). There were many occasions when commandos could have taken able-bodied San captive but chose to slaughter them instead. Szalay also missed the import of the VOC government's policy change in 1777. It was not mere sloganeering but an endorsement of existing exterminatory practice on the frontier. While missionary activity, conversion to pastoralism and clientship to farmers did occur, relatively small numbers of San were affected, over a limited period of time. One should not, however, lose sight of the ways in which these developments contributed to the breakdown of San society, and that they ultimately failed to shield San from settler violence. What is more, the capture and enslavement of women and children supports, rather than mitigates, arguments for genocide because it contributed directly to the violent dissolution of San society. While captives

might, strictly speaking, not count as having been exterminated, the distinction is relatively trivial because it was as destructive of San society as killing. It needs to be recognised that Szalay's use of 'incorporation' and 'assimilation' are euphemisms that do not do justice to captives' experience of forced labour on the frontier. Terms such as 'bondage' and 'slavery' seem more appropriate. And contrary to Szalay's claim, large numbers of San children were killed and an even larger proportion of women were slaughtered. They were not 'for the most part spared'. Szalay's portrayal of assimilation through 'subjugation and incorporation'[8] mainly fits what happened on the northeastern frontier during the first half of the nineteenth century after San society had effectively been defeated and largely destroyed, and when the British administration tried to curb what it regarded as unwarranted violence against San. Not surprisingly, Szalay's analysis focuses mainly on the northeastern frontier during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Szalay's estimate of 3,000 to 4,000 San deaths in total at the hands of commandos is far too low even in terms of the numbers that he himself cites. For example, he accepts that the General Commando killed 503 San in 1774, and that in the last ten years of Dutch rule 2,504 San were killed in the Graaff-Reinet district (Szalay, 1995: 21, 22). These two figures alone total over 3,000. Bear in mind that the figure of 2,504 was only for one magisterial district, albeit the one where most violence occurred. It reflects killings only by official commandos, and is a total arrived at in 1824 by a government official collating evidence from incomplete records that tend to understate the violence perpetrated by commandos (Van der Merwe, 1937: 53). What about the killings by informal commandos, deaths resulting from gratuitous violence and individual trekboer action, killings in the Stellenbosch and Swellendam magisterial districts, which covered equally large sections of the frontier during this period, and, most importantly, fatalities that occurred outside of the eleven years covered by the two figures quoted by Szalay? What about the considerable but undocumented numbers who died of dehydration and starvation as a result of their loss of access to resources or being displaced by commando activity? What about the demographic

8 This is the title of his second chapter in which he sets forth the case he argues in the rest of the book.

impact of the unquantifiable, but undoubted, decline in fertility rates among San as a result of turmoil on the frontier?[9]

Although there was not complete extermination of the Cape San, there was in effect complete destruction of San society as a result of European colonisation. And while a number of San were incorporated into colonial society in capacities other than as virtual slaves, these alternatives were nowhere near the extent suggested by Szalay. Besides harsh servitude, one of the costs of absorption into settler society, whether it was as captives, clients, converts or labourers, was the obliteration of their way of life and identity as a distinct people. This was very much an aspect of the genocidal process.

Szalay's book is the only substantive, published example I have encountered that contests the idea that the Cape San peoples were exterminated, and, by implication, that they were victims of genocide.[10] I have, however, in addition, experienced a fairly widespread reluctance within the general public, among postgraduate students and on the part of a few colleagues to accept the destruction of Cape San society as genocide. These opposing points of view usually use one, or a combination, of four types of objection to considering this mass killing as an example of genocide.[11]

A common form of objection is that the killing of the San is not genocide because not all of the San were killed. A concomitant line of argument is that the men were killed but women and children were taken prisoner. As heinous as this might be, the argument goes, such selective slaughter is not genocide. At best, it was enforced assimilation, at worst, partial genocide. A point worth making,

9 Newton-King's estimate (1999: 105) of over 3,000 San casualties between 1771 and 1786, though closer to the mark, is also too low. My own estimate is of 8,000 to 10,000 San deaths and 2,000 to 3,000 taken captive as a result of commando activity between 1770 and 1800.

10 See Davie (2008: 18–19) for the suggestion that, in the Colesberg area: 'The Bushmen did not die out, just the name died out.'

11 Since these opinions have been expressed in seminar discussions or conversations, and do not exist in published or independently verifiable form, readers will have to rely on my summaries of them. It is nevertheless useful to review these objections because they provide insight into a range of misconceptions about the nature of genocide, especially in a colonial setting. At the same time, they present an opportunity for readers to evaluate the applicability of my own definition of genocide to this particular case.

though obvious, is that not all of the members of the target group need to be killed for genocide to occur. After all, in the iconic case of genocide, two thirds of European, and one third of world Jewry, succumbed in the Holocaust. It needs further to be understood that a large number of San children did die at the hands of commando members, and that, through the eighteenth century, many more San women were slaughtered by commandos than were spared. What is more, the effective enslavement of survivors was very much part of the genocidal process because this practice subverted both the biological and cultural reproduction of San society. What is important in determining the case for genocide is that intent to eradicate the San was present and that a large proportion of the San were indeed killed. While there may be debate about the numbers and proportions of people killed, what can not be questioned is that San society had been obliterated in the Cape Colony by the late nineteenth century, primarily as a result of land confiscation and settler violence.

A second kind of challenge to regarding the killing of San as genocide is that it was not the intention of perpetrators to kill all of the San. The reasoning is that commandos went out on discrete shooting expeditions in response to localised conflicts, and partly to acquire captive labour, rather than as part of a premeditated and coordinated exterminatory campaign. Although a large number of mainly smaller-scale massacres did occur, and this cumulatively may have destroyed San society, there was never an explicit intention to eliminate all of the San. In other words, the necessary criterion of intent is not fulfilled. What is often overlooked in arguments of this sort is that, in order to establish intent, one does not need an unequivocal or formal statement of resolve to annihilate a group on the part of the perpetrators. In my opinion, the exterminatory attitudes of settler society broadly, together with the exterminatory practices of the commandos, are sufficient to establish intent. Trekboer society might not have had an extirpatory frame of mind when it first came into conflict with San communities in the early eighteenth century, but had undoubtedly developed such attitudes toward the San by the 1770s. Judging by the conduct of the General Commando, which hoped to clear the entire frontier area of San, as well as that of larger official commandos, it certainly appears as if they would have killed all of the San in one go if that were possible. And since that was not feasible they did so in piecemeal fashion, attacking San kraals within their reach. Commando leaders on more than one occasion expressed the desire

to kill San indiscriminately, and commandos often displayed localised genocidal intent, of wanting to purge a particular area entirely of San. The DEIC government, usually a moderating influence on frontier violence, in 1777 radicalised its stance by endorsing the root-and-branch killing practices of commandos. In this 'genocidal moment' the exterminatory impulse behind Dutch colonialism toward the San was starkly revealed.[12] Even if the 1777 'extirpation order' had not been issued, government complicity in San killings is clear, as commandos were officially sanctioned and partially provisioned by it. Also, informal commandos were authorised by the state, and a great deal of gratuitous violence toward San was overlooked. The government condoned the confiscation of San land, and collected significant revenues from this through the loan farm system. The genocidal impetus in trekboer relations *vis-à-vis* the San was rooted in their incommensurate needs, and in general was triggered by San resistance. When San opposition precipitated a crisis in trekboer society by halting its expansion after 1770, frontier farmers embarked on an extirpatory drive against the San. Assaults on San kraals by commandos were no longer just massacres but genocidal massacres, and the modus operandi of the commando was that of the mobile killing squad.

A subsidiary argument often brought in support of the lack-of-intent thesis is that the new British administration and elements within settler society sought to achieve a modus vivendi with the San from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. They tried to protect the San, not destroy them, it is contended. This change in policy, however, needs to be evaluated in the light of continued colonial expansion, ongoing state-sponsored and settler-driven violence against San, particularly on the northern frontier, and attempts to suppress San culture. The deleterious effects of these developments far outweigh any benefits of the new dispensation the British tried to implement. One should be wary of placing too much emphasis on the attempted reforms of the short-lived Macartney governorship, as subsequent administrations paid little attention to them. Also, Nigel Penn is correct in pointing out

12 This impulse was much stronger toward the San than the Khoikhoi because the latter's labour was valued and the former were regarded as a lower form of life and of limited economic value. Both the VOC government and the trekboers, however, had few scruples about acting harshly toward recalcitrant Khoikhoi.

that the ambiguous peace on the frontier under British rule created a new form of vulnerability for San communities, in that they were often caught off-guard when settlers went on the offensive (Penn, 1996: 81–82). In its conception, British policy toward the San was not genocidal, but was clearly ethnocidal, in that it wanted to eliminate their way of life. The flawed and conditional implementation of this policy nonetheless had genocidal consequences for surviving San communities, and in a variety of ways contributed to the ongoing destruction of their society. Under British rule, official commandos continued to operate against San, albeit in a more restrained fashion, and settlers continued to kill them, dispossess them of their land and coerce them into labour. A point worth reiterating is that, in terms of the definition of genocide employed here, it is the intent of the perpetrators and not just that of the state that counts in determining genocide.

A third set of counter-arguments to seeing the killing of Cape San as genocide is that this view is anachronistic. The argument is that genocide is a modern crime and that the concept was developed in the mid-twentieth century to deal with a new form of atrocity specific to industrial society with its mass ideologies, totalitarian regimes, efficient bureaucracies and mechanised forms of killing. Pre-industrial colonial mass killings, though abominable, do not fit the concept of genocide. As a colleague has repeatedly asserted, 'There needs to be another name for that sort of killing', as they are the by-product of 'rational' struggles over resources rather than a deliberate, state-driven programme of extermination, often informed by utopian fantasies, as with the Holocaust. These arguments are based on faulty reasoning, however. Firstly, that this specific term was formulated in the mid-twentieth century does not mean that the phenomenon or concept did not exist before then. Lemkin described the term he coined as a new word that 'denote(s) an old practice' and himself applied it retrospectively to colonial cases, such as the killing of Aboriginal Tasmanians and various Native American peoples, as well as to several mass murders of ancient and medieval times (Lemkin, 1944: 79; Moses, 2008: 8; Docker, 2008: 85–87; Schaller, 2008, 87–90; Schaller & Zimmerer, 2009). Secondly, while there are significant differences between mass murders of the industrial era and earlier colonial exterminations, this does not preclude the latter from being encapsulated within the concept of genocide if they share its defining characteristics. As regards genocide, the applicable criteria are whether there was an intention to eradicate a social group coupled

with large-scale killing of that group. In the case of the Cape San, both criteria were present — to the extent that the group concerned ceased to exist as a social entity. The claim that the concept should not be used retrospectively borders on the absurd.[13]

The final type of objection is the claim that the annihilation of the Cape San peoples happened piecemeal over a period of nearly two centuries and therefore does not qualify as genocide. Can, or should, any time limit be placed on the perpetration of genocide? I would think not. All that this objection prompts me to do is to describe the killing of the San as an incremental genocide — or genocide in slow motion, as I have informally referred to it. To my mind, the killing and other forms of social destruction do not have to happen continuously, within a concentrated time period, or be conceived as part of a neatly articulated plan, for the destruction of a social group to be genocide. This cavil arises from the popular misconception that genocides are 'chronologically limited occurrences that punctuate time … [and are] spectacular eruptions of focused and intense violence' (Finzsch, 2008: 253). In this case, as in many other colonial genocides, episodes of mass violence and slaughter occurred intermittently as the frontier moved and as settler activities, needs and dispositions changed. As Patrick Wolfe puts it, the eliminationism of settler colonialism 'is a structure, not an event' (Wolfe, 2006: 385, 388; 2008: 103). Although colonial ventures might not start out as manifestly genocidal, many, especially of the settler variety, have the potential for genocide and in time might radicalise into exterminatory offensives (Moses: 2000: 91–92; Moses, 2005: 34–35). In the case of the San the killing was underpinned by a racially informed ideology of eradication and for a period of three decades was perpetrated in programmatic fashion. A question that the idea of incremental genocide raises is whether the killing of the Cape San is a single genocide or a number of smaller genocides, because one can argue that the eradication of a cluster of foraging groups that form a socio-linguistic entity, or have a concept of themselves as a separate people — such as the /Xam of the northern Cape, the Ubiqua of the Tulbagh area or the Swy Ei of the Sneeuberg

13 This point is worth belabouring because a prominent genocide studies scholar at a recent conference insisted that it was ahistorical to apply the concept to case studies that preceded Lemkin's elaboration of the concept. He got a surprising degree of support from the floor.

region — constitutes genocide. After all, as indicated at the start, the concept of San is in significant ways an invented, overarching category that simplifies the diversity of southern African hunter-gatherer social formations and identities.

What is apparent in these objections is the hegemony of the Holocaust in the way many people conceptualise and think about genocide. If a mass killing does not conform to the Holocaust's broad characteristics of being a massive, concentrated, state-led, industrialised killing programme, then for many it is not genocide. So large has the Holocaust loomed in popular culture and in certain areas of scholarship that it has for some become the yardstick by which other genocides are measured and found wanting (Stannard, 2001: 245–90; Moses, 2004: 3–6). What is also apparent here is the operation of what has come to be known as the 'Gorgon effect'. The term was first used by Inga Clendinnen, the Australian historian of Inca and Mayan cultures, who also wrote an acclaimed book about the Holocaust, to describe 'that bafflement … the sickening of the imagination … and the draining of the will' that seems to afflict so many scholars when confronted by the Holocaust (Clendinnen, 1999: 4, 16). In the same way that the hideousness of the three Gorgon sisters of Greek mythology turned to stone anyone who looked upon them, so the enormity of the Holocaust seems to debilitate the critical faculties of many scholars and commentators. Dirk Moses later applied the metaphor to colonial genocides, particularly Australian examples, where he thought it was 'perhaps less a matter of awed passivity than willful blindness' (Moses, 2005: 4–5, 19–20). That may well have been the case with an external examiner who was incensed that I could even suggest that the destruction of Cape San society was genocide by setting the following question for a second-year African History course examination: 'To what extent can the extermination of San peoples of the Cape be regarded as genocide?'[14] His response to this open-ended question was a dismissive hand gesture and a censuring exclamation: 'That's not genocide!'

14 University of Cape Town Archives and Manuscripts Division, University of Cape Town Examination Papers (Humanities), 2003, 'HST234S, Africa: Colonial and Post Colonial Encounters'. The examiner recorded his objection in his report on the examination scripts.

In the case of the Cape San, the destruction of their society was not simply the unintended consequence of land alienation and the blind pursuit of selfish economic motives by colonists, but a consciously desired outcome integral to trekboer society's vision of itself, its future and the nature of humanity. Referring to certain colonial mass murders not as extermination or extinction but as genocide is significant, as the latter term has legal and political implications. It may change such episodes from something of no direct consequence that happened in the distant past to something that may have immediate and future consequences. For one thing, genocide is a crime, and while prosecution is no longer possible in this case, issues of recompense, memorialisation, apology and recognition of past suffering arise. For another, in the public mind atrocities recognised as genocide are likely to take on a more urgent and serious aspect (Curthoys, 2008: 240–41). With the San, it might add significantly to white burdens of guilt about racist crimes of the past. That may well have coloured the indignation of the censorious external examiner.[15]

An important reason for contemporary society, especially in South Africa, to recognise the destruction of the Cape San peoples for what it was – an intentional attempt at extermination, and therefore genocide – has been neatly articulated by Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Professor of Japanese History at the Australian National University:

> *We who live in the present did not create the violence and hatred of the past. But the violence and hatred of the past, to some degree, created us. It formed the material world and the ideas with which we live, and will continue to do so unless we take active steps to unmake their consequences.* (quoted in Curthoys & Docker, 2006: 220)

15 While I did not know it at the time, I later discovered that this external examiner was doing research on an aspect of San colonial history. Proprietary attitudes towards the field of study may thus have played a part.

Conclusion

Xaa-ttin's lament

Unlike farmers, foragers do not want to change or control nature but live in communion with it, harvesting what they need in ways that are in harmony with its rhythms and that demonstrate respect for its precepts. As with all hunter-gatherers, the life-ways of Cape San peoples were closely attuned to the natural environment. They had profound knowledge of the ecology, an intense spiritual connection with their natural surroundings and in many ways acted as its custodians. The intrusion of market-oriented farmers into this finely tuned biosphere in the Cape interior changed it abruptly and irrevocably. The ruinous practices of these invaders destroyed the resources of the land, interrupted cycles of regeneration and desecrated the environment. Unleashing levels of violence unprecedented in San experience, colonisers in a relatively short time brought about the extinction of societies that had existed there for millennia.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a /Xam man used the metaphor of a broken thong or string to express his sense of loss at the fracturing of their world and the breaking of spiritual bonds with the landscape, laid waste by alien interlopers. Dia!kwain, one of Lucy Lloyd's informants, described a lament, the 'Song of the Broken String', composed by his father Xaa-ttin, who realised that the incursions of settlers, with their guns, horses and herds, sounded the death knell of his people. Stephen Watson's poetic rendering of Xaa-ttin's requiem for the /Xam captures a sense of irreparable loss, an emotion that must have seared the consciousness of many Cape San people contemplating the rupturing of their ancient culture and the demise of their way of life:

Because
of a people,
because of others,
other people
who came
breaking
the string for me,

the earth
is not the earth,
this place is
a place now
changed for me.

Because
the string is that which
has broken for me,
this earth
is no longer
the earth to me
this place
seems no longer
a place to me.

Because
the string is broken,
the country feels
as if it lay
empty before me,
our country seems
as if it lay
both empty before me,
and dead before me.

Because
of this string,
because of a people
breaking the string,
this earth, my place
is the place
of something –
a thing broken –
that does not
stop sounding,
breaking within me.

(Watson, 1991: 41)

The 'people … breaking the string' referred to here are clearly colonists. The /Xam believed that certain highly skilled shamans were able to create rain by entering the spiritual realm and luring onto land a water-bull or water-cow, rain animals that lived under water. Using aromatic herbs as inducement and throwing a thong around its horns, they would lead the water animal across the land, kill it and lay down its flesh in the area where they wanted the rain to fall. If the animal became agitated and broke the thong, it vibrated with a ringing noise that echoed across the sky, indicating that the water-bull had escaped back into the water and that there would be no rain. As a young man, Xaa-ttin had hastily been inducted into the protocols of rain-making by the renowned elderly shaman !Huin T Kuiten, who had been fatally wounded by a boer commando. Xaa-ttin, to his everlasting regret, did not practise rain-making. The broken thong thus symbolises the rupturing both of a spiritual connection with the natural environment and the transmission of cultural practices and specialised knowledge from one generation to the next, its reverberation echoing Xaa-ttin's own anguish that did 'not stop sounding, breaking within' him. (Watson, 1991: 65, 70; Bennun, 2004: 325–26; Hollman, 2004: 166–68, 171; Bank, 2006: 258, 306–7; Vinnicombe, 1976: 344; Deacon, 1996: 34–35; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2004: 138–47, 195–96).

Today, there is certainly a strong sense among Cape San communities that historically a great injustice was perpetrated against them, and that this is currently not fully recognised. In response to a request in the late 1990s for advice on what restitution be demanded from the South African government, one ≠Khomani elder responded, 'Land, water and truth' (Chennels & Du Toit, 2004: 98).

Guide to further reading

It is gratifying that the last decade and a half has witnessed the emergence of a growing body of scholarly work on the colonial experience of the Cape San peoples. Shula Marks's pioneering 'Khoisan resistance' still provides a serviceable overview of the subject while Smith *et al*'s *Bushmen of Southern Africa*, especially the middle section that deals with the colonial period, functions as a useful introduction to key themes covered here. Though aimed at a popular readership the book is based on scholarly research. The two most detailed studies of San–settler conflict, both on the eighteenth century, complement each other. Newton-King's *Masters and Servants* focuses largely on the northeastern frontier while Nigel Penn's *The Forgotten Frontier* deals with the northern frontier zone. Both are erudite, extensively researched texts that should serve as the first ports of call for readers seeking greater detail about the events and social processes analysed in this volume. P.J. van der Merwe's *Noordwaardse Beweging* is surprisingly informative and even-handed regarding the frontier conflict, particularly for a book that emanated from the University of Stellenbosch in the 1930s, then a bastion of Afrikaner nationalism and white supremacist thinking. Various contributors to Pippa Skotnes's edited volumes, particularly *Miscast*, elucidate important aspects of the topic. Although it has little to say about the San, *The Shaping of South African Society* furnishes indispensable context. The chapters by Guelke, as well as Elphick and Malherbe, are particularly useful, as are the earlier chapters of Giliomee's *The Afrikaners*, Mostert's *Frontiers* and Marais's *The Cape Coloured People*.

Our knowledge of the destruction of Cape San societies during the nineteenth century is patchy because little research has been done in this area. Szalay's *The San and the Colonization of the Cape* provides useful insight into developments on the northeastern frontier, though his overall analysis is flawed. Dennis Neville's Master's thesis has rich detail on the fate of San communities of the Seekoei River valley from the late eighteenth through until the late nineteenth century. The works by Findlay and Strauss, though narrowly focused, provide important glimpses into the final stages of the annihilation of /Xam societies.

Nigel Penn is extending his research on the northern Cape into the nineteenth century, and a comparative study with Australia is in the making. Also, Pippa Skotnes has started a project on Louis Anthing, which is sure to shed new light on the closing stages of the extermination of the /Xam. McDonald's Master's thesis contains copious information on LMS missions to the San, as well as their adaptation to colonial rule during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. The articles by Karel Schoeman contain much detail on LMS missions to the San. *Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg* by John Wright documents the destruction of San societies in Natal, allowing for some comparison with Cape San experience.

Nothwithstanding its intention to counter the claims of government critics, such as John Philip and other humanitarians, Moodie's collection of translated archival documents is edifying, particularly on the nature of frontier conflict in the 1770s. Travel accounts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are extremely useful for gaining some sense of daily life at the Cape and settler attitudes toward the San, while Theal's *Records of the Cape Colony* contains a number of relevant documents. Finally, I found Hugh Brody's *The Other Side of Eden* — part memoir, part learned but passionate disquisition on the nature of hunter-gatherer society — both moving and enlightening.

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Index

Entries are listed in letter-by-letter alphabetical order. Page references in italics indicate where you can find a map relating to the index entry term.

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