

Debating San provenance and disappearance: Frontier violence and the assimilationist impulse of humanitarian imperialism

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Abstract

This article examines how ideals of humanitarian imperialism informed debate over the provenance and future of Cape San following the Second British Occupation of the Cape Colony. The discussion explores the plight of San along the Cape frontier and how their demise became a focal point in a trans-colonial exchange over the desirability of the incorporation of indigenes as British colonial subjects. Prominent humanitarian protagonists, such as John Philip, called for the integration of San as colonial subjects, owing to the supposed protection this would afford them. The humanitarian campaign for the extension of subjecthood over Cape San was argued on the grounds that it would fend off the devastating consequences of settler colonialism. The principle also applied to indigenous peoples in settler colonies across the expanding empire. This view was not without its detractors, who opposed humanitarian representations of settlers as rapacious and responsible for frontier conflicts. The article argues that the fate of Cape San held a more prominent place in early nineteenth-century contestations over settler identity, frontier relations, and the effectiveness of missions to ‘civilise’ indigenes than has been recognised.

Keywords: San; Cape Colony; humanitarian imperialism; London Missionary Society; John Philip; settler colonialism; frontier; assimilation.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel bestudeer die wyse waarop ideale rondom humanitêre imperialisme debatte oor die herkoms en toekoms van die Kaapse San beïnvloed het na afloop van die tweede Britse besetting van die Kaapkolonie. Die bespreking stel ondersoek in na

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die lot van die San op die Kaapse grens, en hoe hul ondergang die fokuspunt geword het in 'n transkoloniale gesprek oor die wenslikheid om inheemse mense as Britse onderdane op te neem. Vername humanitêre voorstanders, soos John Philip, het 'n beroep gedoen om die San as koloniale onderdane te integreer, ter wille van die veronderstelde beskerming wat dit hulle sou bied. Die humanitêre veldtog om onderdaanskap uit te brei om die San in te sluit is gevoer op die gronde dat dit die vernietigende uitwerking van setlaar-kolonialisme die hoof sou bied. Dié beginsel is ook op inheemse mense in setlaarkolonies dwarsoor die groeiende ryk van toepasingsgemaak. Hierdie siening was nie sonder sy teenstanders nie, wat gekant was teen die filantropiese uitbeelding van setlaars as roofgierig en verantwoordelik vir konflikte op die grens. Die artikel voer aan dat die lot van die Kaapse San 'n belangriker plek ingeneem het in vroeë-negentiende eeuse geskille oor setlaarsidentiteit, grensverhoudinge, en die geslaagdheid van missies om die inheemse bevolking te “beskaaf”, as wat daar tot dusver besef is.

Sleutelwoorde: San; Kaapkolonie; humanitêre imperialisme; London Missionary Society; John Philip; setlaar-kolonialisme; grens; assimilasië.

Introduction

In 1808, Colonel Richard Collins, at the behest of the then Governor of the Cape Colony, Du Pre Alexander, Earl of Caledon, set out on a tour of inspection that would take him to the colony's frontiers. One of the key objectives of this undertaking was to investigate the conflict between colonists and Cape San¹ on the northeastern frontier. The region had been experiencing an upswing in violent conflict between Cape San and colonists that had persisted since the mid-eighteenth century. In the year prior to Collins's departure, the Tulbagh district had seen substantial livestock theft at the hands of Cape San. Hundreds of cattle and horses had been raided. Three colonists and 14 Khoekhoe herders had also been killed by San raiders in the early months of 1807. Of particular concern to the frontier farmers was the colonial government's restrictions on commandos, which had to apply for permission from the colonial authorities before being despatched in retaliation for San raids.²

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1. The terms San and Cape San are used interchangeably in this article to refer to the Cape's hunter-gatherers. The most common contemporary labels for the Cape's hunter-gatherer peoples were 'Bushmen' and 'Bosjesmen' (or similar variations). Given the derogatory tones of these terms, they are avoided for the most part, except when appearing in quotes.
 2. N. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 271-274.

The scale of the conflict between the colonists and Cape San on the northeastern frontier had been radically reduced during the First British Occupation of the Cape Colony, from 1795 to 1803. This was largely due to measures introduced in 1798 by the then Governor, George Macartney.³ These efforts were intended to forge a more conciliatory tone towards Cape San than had been commonplace under the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC). However, Governor Macartney's more amicable approach failed to bring the conflict in the northeastern frontier zone to an end.⁴ Yet the protectionist, humanitarian tenor of his ideas was to prove influential long beyond his years as Governor and well into the era of the Second British Occupation of the Cape, which commenced in 1806.

In relaying his findings and recommendations to Governor Caledon, Colonel Collins asserted that while Governor Macartney had had noble intentions towards the Cape San, the violent conflict that continued across the northeastern frontier could only be brought to an end if the government's actions were directed at what he regarded as 'the root of the evil'. For Collins, a change had to be effected in the 'habits and manners' of Cape San. He noted that while such change would 'be the work of time', it would also be 'worthy [of] the greatness of the British empire to rescue this unfortunate race from the deplorable state of barbarism to which they [had] been so long condemned'.⁵

Contestations over Cape San, or 'Bushmen' identity and how they could and should be incorporated into colonial society were rife in the Cape Colony during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Debates concerning the provenance of San, their usefulness to the colonial economy, how they could be reclaimed from 'savagery', and what their legal status ought to be, occurred among and between colonial officials, representatives of the evangelical-humanitarian effort, and Cape colonists. There were disagreements over the origins of the Cape San: were they a distinct, ethno-linguistic group, or were they debased 'Hottentots',⁶ reduced to

3. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (hereafter HCPP), No. 50, 1835, *Proclamations and Orders Relative to Commandos and Institutions, from 1796 to 1824*, 51-55.

4. W. Dooling, *Slavery, Emancipation and Colonial Rule in South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 60.

5. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 272.

6. The pejorative connotations of the term 'Hottentot' are recognised. The label is retained in this article, as it is historically relevant. A large proportion of the Cape's indigenous peoples claimed the term and its attendant identity became the basis of a 'Hottentot' nationalism in the 1820s and 1830s. Single inverted commas qualify the sensitivity with which the label is used. See S. Trapido, 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of Hottentot Nationalism, 1815-1834', University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, *Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, 17 (1992), 34-60.

hunting and gathering by the detrimental effects of settler colonialism? Some commentators continued to express the predominant eighteenth-century viewpoint that San were irreclaimable savages, of no value to Cape colonial society, while others praised the services of ‘tame Bushmen’ as shepherds, stock runners, waggon drivers and domestic servants. There were differing views on how Cape San could be persuaded to abandon their foraging subsistence and adopt a more sedentary mode while also being ‘Christianised’ and ‘civilised’. Disagreements existed over the legal standing of San incorporated as indentured labourers. Many San servants in the northeastern frontier zone were commando captives. The British colonial authorities along with prominent humanitarians considered whether forced assimilation was a more desirable outcome for San in light of the exterminatory campaign that was waged against them during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, which amounted to genocide.⁷

The Cape San’s formidable resistance to the encroachment of settler stock-farmers along the northeastern frontier had been largely defeated by the time of the Second British Occupation. The commando-led programme of extermination during the late eighteenth century, coupled with the extensive loss of land and access to resources meant that the San’s ability to resist further colonial advances had been undermined.⁸ Sporadic violence still occurred, such as that which necessitated Colonel Collins’s tour of inspection. Many Cape San were also incorporated as forced labourers into the expanding stock-farming economy.⁹ This was an important aspect of the decline of Cape San along the Cape’s northeastern frontier during both the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From 1809 onwards, the British colonial authorities introduced legislative measures in order to regulate the employment and treatment of indigenous labourers. Given the propensity of commandos to take captive labourers, a substantial proportion of the labour force in the northeastern districts of the Cape Colony had an ambiguous legal status. In an attempt to address this, it was deemed appropriate to incorporate San children into the colony’s labour regime as apprentices, under the same regulatory framework as applied to Khoekhoe servants, or ‘Hottentots’.

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7. M. Adhikari, “‘The Bushman is a wild animal to be shot at sight’: Annihilation of the Cape Colony’s Foraging Societies by Stock-farming Settlers in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, in *Genocide on Settler Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*, ed. M. Adhikari (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2014), 40-51.
 8. M. Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2010), 86.
 9. S. Newton-King, *Masters and Servants on the Cape Eastern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120; and E.A. Eldredge, ‘Slave Raiding across the Cape Frontier’, in *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier*, eds E.A. Eldredge and F. Morton (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994), 93 and 103.

This article argues that the debate over the fate of the Cape San was influenced in large part by humanitarian-inspired concerns for the fate of San captives, especially children. The perceived vulnerability of San children in the context of the northeastern frontier zone was a significant factor in shaping humanitarian discourse about the Cape San and a desirable future for them. Yet, this has been a neglected theme in the related historiography on the Cape Colony's attitudes and policies towards Cape San. The article also illuminates the role of notable protagonists of the evangelical-humanitarian campaign, such as John Philip, in motivating for the incorporation of Cape San as 'Hottentots' owing to the subject status and concomitant protections and rights this would provide.

The following analysis proceeds with a discussion of the historical context of the Cape Colony's northeastern frontier zone in which interactions between San, settler and missionary unfolded in the early nineteenth century. The article then examines frontier trafficking in San children before highlighting the role of humanitarian ideas and ideals in shaping colonial attitudes towards Cape San. The final section advances the argument that the fate of Cape San featured prominently in humanitarian efforts to mould colonial policy towards indigenes and influenced calls for the extension of British protectionism. The ensuing debate over the fate of Cape San was of global significance, as scores of hunter-gatherer peoples found their ways of life undermined and often targeted for elimination in the context of Britain's expanding empire and the emergence of settler-colonial frontiers.

San, settler and missionary on the Cape frontier

As noted, San resistance to the advance of the trekboers¹⁰ had been weakened by the time of the Second British Occupation of the Cape Colony in 1806. The systematic loss of land and access to resources over the course of the previous century limited their ability to mount a concerted, collective challenge to settler encroachment, such as occurred during the 'Bushman Wars' of the 1770s to 1790s.¹¹ For the advancing trekboers, the commando system proved an effective means of clearing the land for stock farming. These mounted posse's, made up of frontier farmers and co-opted Khoesan¹² servants, were formidable enemies inflicting a reign of violence and

10. Trekboers were migrant, European stock farmers.

11. HCPP, No. 50, 1835, *Reports and Papers relating to Depredations of, and Expeditions against, the Bushmen, from 1817 to 1824, in the Districts of Graaff Reynet, Cradock, Beaufort, Worcester and Clanwilliam*, 56; and N. Penn, 'Fated to Perish: The Destruction of the Cape San', in *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, ed P. Skotnes (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 81-92.

12. The label Khoesan is anachronistic. However, the term is appropriate for the period under discussion. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the pre-

extermination on San.¹³ Thousands of San were killed by commandos, both official and unofficial, during the late eighteenth century. It is likely that thousands of San were also captured by commandos during the same period. The majority of these captives were women and children. While the capture of San during raids on kraals was not necessarily the primary purpose of commandos, the dearth of labourers, especially enslaved labourers, in the frontier districts of the Cape Colony meant that pliable, forced labourers were in demand.¹⁴ Commando captives were dispersed to farmers in need of labourers. Children in particular were sought after by frontier farmers who regarded them as more amenable to assimilation and enforced servitude than adult San.

The British colonial authorities were eager to see an end to the hostilities between Cape San and colonists along the northeastern frontier and wanted to pursue a more conciliatory course of pacification. Nonetheless, the commando system was retained. Though the British tended to frown upon the violence that was common to commando raids, it was understood that there were few other options available in the sparsely populated interior for the retrieval of stolen livestock and the capturing of San raiders.¹⁵ It was in this context that the London Missionary Society (LMS) established mission stations among Cape San. The first, initiated in 1799, was a short-lived mission located about a day's journey north of the Sak River. The responsible missionary, Johannes Kicherer, met with little success and the mission was abandoned in 1806.¹⁶ This early setback did not prevent subsequent efforts to try and settle, 'civilise' and 'Christianise' San.

In 1814 and 1816, two mission stations, Toornberg and Hephzibah respectively, were founded in the Seekoei River valley, a few days journey north of the frontier town of Graaff-Reinet.¹⁷ While drawing in large numbers of San, the two missions were ordered to close in 1817 by the then Governor of the Cape Colony, Lord Charles Somerset. His order was in response to concerns over the large number

colonial identities of Khoekhoe and San had been conflated as a result of dispossession and forced incorporation.

13. Adhikari, *Anatomy of a South African Genocide*, 86.
14. H. Cloete, *Three Lectures on the Emigration of the Dutch Farmers from the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, and Their Settlement in the District of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: J. Archbell & Son, 1852), 19; and M.G. Guenther, 'Bushman Hunters as Farm Labourers', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 11, 2 (1977), 195-203. A kraal was the basic social unit of the San, typically comprised of small, mobile, extended family groups.
15. Newton-King, *Masters and Servants*, 120.
16. J.J. Kicherer, *The Rev. Mr. Kicherer's Narrative of His Mission to the Hottentots, Transactions of the Missionary Society* (London: London Missionary Society, 1804), 6.
17. K. Schoeman, 'Die Londense Sendinggenootskap en die San: Die Stasies Toornberg en Hephzibah, 1814-1818', *South African Historical Journal*, 28 (1993), 221-234.

of San assembled at the two sites (estimated to have been 1 700 at the time).¹⁸ Due to the history of violent conflict on the northeastern frontier between San and the colonists, the concentration of so many San at the missions was considered a danger to frontier farmers. There was also mounting hostility between the frontier settlers and the missionaries over labour shortages.¹⁹ The farmers tended to tolerate the presence of the missionaries while they were ministering to those San considered ‘wild Bushmen’. The situation became untenable for the British colonial authorities when the missionaries at Toornberg and Hephzibah were accused of harbouring San servants who had fled from the service of farmers. It was largely in response to these accusations that the government felt obliged to act.

In 1822, there was a renewed effort to establish a mission among the San, this time at an institution whose namesake was dedicated to the newly appointed superintendent of the LMS in southern Africa, John Philip.²⁰ Philippolis, however, was to become part of a more ambitious scheme to consolidate the Griquas into captaincies officially recognised by the Cape colonial government.²¹ By 1826, four years after its founding, the San residents at the mission were being squeezed out by the Griquas.²² Two year later, in response to the marginalisation of San at Philippolis, the missionary assistant, James Clark, established a mission near the confluence of the Gariiep and Caledon Rivers, named Bushman Station.²³ Like Toornberg and Hephzibah, Bushman Station met with some initial success. A population of approximately 100 San was assembled at the site within a year of its founding and the prospects for the mission were promising, aside from the detrimental effects of a

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18. J. Philip, *Researches in South Africa: Illustrating the Civil, Moral and Religious Condition of the Native Tribes* (London: James Duncan, 1828), Vol. 2, 21.
 19. School of Oriental and African Studies (hereafter SOAS), Council for World Mission (hereafter CWM), South Africa, Incoming Correspondence, 7/2/B, W. Corner to Directors of the LMS, 26 Jul. 1817.
 20. K. Schoeman, ‘Die Londense Sendinggenootskap en die San: Die Stasies Ramah, Konnah en Philippolis, 1816-1828’, *South African Historical Journal*, 29 (1993), 132-152.
 21. M. Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010), 234-239.
 22. E. Cavanagh, “‘We exterminated them, and Dr Philip gave them the country’: The Griqua People and the Elimination of San from South Africa’s Transorangia Region’, in *Genocide on Settler Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*, ed. M. Adhikari (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2014), 100-102.
 23. K. Schoeman, ‘Die Londense Sendinggenootskap en die San: Die Stasie Boesmanskool en die Einde van die Sending, 1828-1833’, *South African Historical Journal*, 30 (1994), 85-9. See also J. McDonald, ‘Encounters at a Bushman Station: Reflections on the Fate of the San of the Transgariiep Frontier, 1828-1833’, *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 2 (2009), 372-388.

prolonged drought.²⁴ Still, increasing instances of Boer incursions into the territory meant that the mission's longevity was precarious at best. Dissatisfied with Clark's efforts, the mission was released by the LMS to the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society in 1833. Shortly thereafter, the mission re-directed its focus towards the BaThlaping.

Apart from the subsequent establishment of a San out-station at the Kat River Settlement – also referred to as Bushman Station and temporarily under the direction of James Read, Sr. – the efforts of the LMS among San of the northeastern frontier came to an uneventful end with the release of Clark's mission in 1833.²⁵ In the end, the LMS's track record among San was disappointing, if assessed according to missionary criteria. It appears San were reluctant to adopt a fully-fledged sedentary mode of subsistence, which was a requirement of mission residence, even though there were instances of a syncretistic acculturation to the missionary model, exhibited in the embracing of agro-pastoralism without a complete abandonment of hunting and gathering.²⁶

By the 1820s and 1830s, remnant San communities were an inconvenient reminder to colonial society of the conflict that had plagued the northeastern frontier for much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The fate of surviving San was to become an important point of contention in a contest over the legitimacy and desirability of expanding settlement in British territories. The San encounter with settler colonialism at the Cape bore striking similarities to that of indigenes facing processes of extermination and elimination in other settler colonies, such as New South Wales and Van Dieman's Land, and in North America during the same period. The San's demise was of particular concern to the evangelical-humanitarian lobby at the Cape, which during the 1820s and 1830s held considerable clout in the corridors of power in Cape Town and London. For humanitarian figures such as John Philip, it was crucial for the legitimacy of the LMS in the colony, and indeed in Britain, to establish that the disappointments of the mission effort to 'Christianise' San could not be based on anything distinctly San, but on other influences, notably, the violent excesses common to settler colonialism.

The debate that developed during the 1820s and 1830s concerning the prospects and likelihood of aboriginal peoples to convert to Christianity and adopt its markers of 'civilisation' was contested between missionary, settler and British colonial-governmental circles. Notwithstanding their participation in European

24. J. Philip, 'Report of the South African Missions, 1830', in S.H. Pellissier, *Jean Pierre Pellissier van Bethulie* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1956), 179-180.

25. M. Szalay, *The San and the Colonisation of the Cape, 1770-1879: Conflict, Incorporation, Acculturation* (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 1995), 46.

26. McDonald, 'Encounters at a Bushman Station', 382-383.

colonialism, missionaries were convinced of their moral authority in settler colonies. However, they occupied an anomalous position in settler societies. Like other colonists, they also sought to attain authority over indigenous peoples, yet they attempted simultaneously to fend off the most destructive forces of settler colonialism. The vibrant missionary movement in the Cape Colony of the early nineteenth century, spearheaded by the representatives of the LMS, became embroiled in defending the humanity of the San, and importantly, in advocating for the recognition of San subjecthood.

The narratives recounting the San's demise that were publicised by key missionary figures and widely disseminated in the official publications of the LMS endeavoured to re-cast these 'savage' figures in a mould recognisable to a British audience that had become increasingly sensitive to discourses of liberty in the aftermath of the abolitionist campaign. Contrary to settler notions of San savagery, protagonists such as Philip, drew on the LMS's links to trans-colonial networks to garner metropolitan sympathy for the plight of Cape San. The role of the commandos and frontier farmers in effecting the elimination of Cape San, through both killing and the enforced servitude of captives, became a focus of Philip's criticisms and his argument for the further extension of the Crown's protection. As the following section establishes, Philip embraced a Cape humanitarian tradition that supported San assimilation as opposed to San independence. However, the means to that end, as well as the nature of humanitarian intervention, were to be contested among those claiming to save the San from almost certain extinction.

San captives and the assimilationist impulse of humanitarian imperialism

From the time of its arrival at the Cape, the LMS focused its efforts on the Khoesan, or 'Hottentots' in contemporary colonial parlance.²⁷ The early work of Johannes van der Kemp and James Read, Sr. at Bethelsdorp set a trend in this regard. Philip took up this mantle following his appointment as superintendent of the LMS in southern Africa in 1819. The LMS was often at pains to stress the difference between the legal status of 'Hottentots' and that of slaves. Though prior to 1828 and the passage of Ordinance 50, which granted equal civil rights to Khoesan, 'Hottentots' were bound by the coercive clauses of the Caledon Code, Philip and his missionary colleagues

27. See E. Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and R. Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

were adamant that the ‘Hottentots’ were a free people.²⁸ References to the freedom of the ‘Hottentots’ by representatives of the LMS should, however, not be confused with a more modern understanding of the term. Legally speaking, ‘Hottentots’ were free in that they were not slaves. However, ‘Hottentots’ fell under the authority of a colonial power and as such, their social and political ‘freedom’ was bound up with their subjecthood.

The notion of subjecthood relates to ideas and expressions of loyalty, primarily to the Crown, but also, by extension, to the colonial state. Subjecthood also invoked a sense of belonging to a British civic polity founded upon the imperial connection between metropole and colony. The political status of being subjects of the Crown implied a relationship of reciprocity between those who were subjects and the authority to which they were subjected. Though subjecthood existed as a result of colonial conquest and imposition, its reciprocal nature meant that it was appropriated to various ends by the subjects, including indigenous subjects.²⁹ For indigenous subjects, subjecthood had the potential to raise expectations of equality and protection, however unrealistic such expectations were in a colonial setting grounded in a racial hierarchy. At the Cape Colony, Khoesan subjecthood became entangled with a language of civil rights during the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Following the Second British Occupation of the Cape Colony, the British colonial administration set about introducing a more formal and codified labour recruitment system than had existed prior. The two most significant pieces of legislation to affect the Khoesan were the Caledon Code of 1809 and the Apprenticeship Law of 1812. The former law essentially coerced all Khoesan living in the colony into the service of the colonists, though it did stipulate conditions of contracting and remuneration, and provided legal recourse to Khoesan who were treated harshly or compensated unfairly.³⁰ The latter law allowed farmers to apprentice, or indenture, ‘Hottentot’ children who had been born to parents in their service. This new, codified labour regime of apprenticeship was to have important repercussions for the assimilation of San captives, because these regulations, which were intended to apply to ‘Hottentot’ children, were also applied to San children, including those captured by commandos. While apprenticeship placed certain obligations upon masters for the care and treatment of their servants, the system of child apprenticeship also made it possible for farmers to confound the status of

28. L.C. Duly, ‘A Revisit with the Cape’s Hottentot Ordinance of 1828’, in *Studies in Economics and Economic History: Essays in Honour of Professor H.M. Roberston*, ed. M. Kooy (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 26-56.

29. J. McDonald, ‘Loyalism in the Cape Colony: Exploring the Khoesan Subject-Citizen Space, c.1828-1834’, *New Contree*, 73 (2015), 109.

30. W. Dooling, ‘The Origins and Aftermath of the Cape Colony’s “Hottentot Code” of 1809’, *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 31 (2005), 50-61.

captive San children with those of ‘Hottentot’ children. For the colonial authorities, the forced assimilation of San children as ‘Hottentots’ was palatable. This was regarded as a suitable humanitarian intervention. The primary concern in the frontier districts was that San child captives were being enslaved and traded among the colonists.

These sentiments were apparent in 1817, when the *landdrost* of Graaff-Reinet district, Andries Stockenström, alerted the then Governor, Lord Charles Somerset, to an ‘ancient custom’ on the frontier.³¹ Stockenström noted that ‘Bosjesmen children’ were being regularly ‘transferred from one to another’ among the frontier farmers and that payments were ‘secretly taken’. He contended that many San children were being carried into the inner districts of the colony and ‘passed off as orphans’. For Stockenström, the practice amounted to a ‘traffic’ in captive and abducted San children.³² The *landdrost* was also at pains to stress that the San’s situation was so dire that many parents were forced to give up their children to the farmers as they could not provide for their survival.³³ Stockenström revealed an unlikely sympathy for the plight of Cape San. He was an advocate for the establishment of missions. He was also critical of the apprenticeship system, believing that it was open to abuse and ‘capable of being made most oppressive to the Hottentot race’.³⁴ Nonetheless, he considered it more desirable for San children to come under the legal purview of apprenticeship than to risk them becoming *de facto* slaves.

In response to the alarm raised by Stockenström, Somerset issued a proclamation intended to deal with the apparent enslaving of San children along the northeastern frontier. However, the Governor’s legislation did not prohibit the procurement of San children. Rather, it stipulated a series of principles to regulate San child apprenticeship. In doing so, Somerset’s 1817 proclamation provided a legal framework for the procurement and apprenticeship of San children and brought the practice in line with the principles of the Apprenticeship Law that applied to ‘Hottentots’. In 1822, Somerset reiterated to Stockenström the importance of exercising oversight over the practice of retaining San women and children by commandos and frontier farmers. He insisted that it ‘ought never to take place without the greatest precaution, for the future treatment of these unfortunates, and

31. HCPP, No. 202, 1826-7, *Accounts of all Commandos or Expeditions against the Bonshmen, which have Taken Place at the Cape of Good Hope, since 1797; stating the number of Bonshmen killed, wounded and taken prisoner; stating also what had been done with the prisoners*, 57.

32. HCPP, No. 202, 1826-7, *Accounts of all Commandos or Expeditions against the Bonshmen*, 56.

33. HCPP, No. 202, 1826-7, *Accounts of all Commandos or Expeditions against the Bonshmen*, 23.

34. Western Cape Archives and Records Services (hereafter WCARS), Verbatim Copies (hereafter VC) 883, Donald Moodie, manuscripts, Stockenström to Commissioners Bigge and Colebrooke, 5 January 1824.

the prevention of the possibility of their merging into the class of slaves'.³⁵ While the 1817 order declared that San children should be placed with 'respectable and humane' colonists and subjected to 'good treatment' so as to be 'tamed' and raised as assimilated labourers, it was impossible to enforce fully. It was also unlikely to be implemented and adhered to, given the history and scale of the practice of San child removals along the northeastern frontier and the complicity of local *veldkornets* and *veldwagtmeesters*. Nonetheless, the humanitarian interventions enacted and supported by Somerset and Stockenström reveal the colonial administration's desire to see Cape San legally incorporated and assimilated as 'Hottentots'. In theory, if not in practice, San were to be subjected to colonial jurisdiction and oversight. This was regarded as being in their best interests as vulnerable indigenes. As will be discussed in the following section, this approach to the fate of Cape San was remarkably similar to that espoused by evangelical-humanitarians in the 1820s and 1830s, who also promoted protectionism and San subjecthood.

Protectionism, subjecthood and the debate over the fate of Cape San

The failure of the mission project to Cape San amid their general demise has been regarded as insignificant in the overall standing of the LMS in the Cape Colony.³⁶ Yet, a closer reading of Philip's writings and publications reveals that these failed missions played a more prominent role in shaping contemporary humanitarian discourse at the Cape and in Britain than has been recognised. This was especially so with regards to the effectiveness of the missionary cause to re-mould and 'civilise' indigenes. The debate on the fate of the San which had begun during the First British Occupation and which had been influenced in large measure by concerns over San child confiscations and transfers during Somerset's governorship, continued into the 1820s and 1830s. Philip was a prominent humanitarian campaigner during this time. His public profile increased significantly in the years following his appointment at the helm of the LMS's endeavours in southern Africa. Philip was connected to an expansive network that included the metropole and several colonial sites. As such, he was conscious of the broader ramifications of the LMS's successes and failures in southern Africa for the reputation of the international mission endeavour. The LMS was a global organisation and Philip, like many other missionaries in other fields, was aware that he was working in an imperial setting that spanned continents.

35. HCPP, No. 202, 1826-7, *Accounts of all Commandos or Expeditions against the Bonshmen*, 17.

36. See for example, J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); J. du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (London: Longman, 1911); G. Stow, *The Native Races of South Africa* (London and New York: Swan Sonnenschein and Macmillan, 1905); A. Ross, *John Philip (1775-1851): Missions, Race and Politics in South Africa* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986); T. Keegan, *Dr Philip's Empire: One Man's Struggle for Justice in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2016).

Missionaries, settlers, colonial authorities, metropolitan Britons and, indeed, indigenous peoples, all constituted different, connected audiences in these trans-colonial exchanges of ‘knowledge’ and debate. Cape settlers were acutely conscious of the imperial reach that missionary publications had in Britain. Keeping in step with the LMS, settlers at the Cape were equally determined to craft their own counter-discourse, calling into question the justifications for missionary labours and how the treatment of the Cape’s indigenous peoples was being misrepresented to metropolitan audiences. The Cape’s British settlers were especially concerned about the way they were being portrayed as deviant, backward Britons by some evangelical-humanitarians.³⁷ Fears over Khoesan labour rebellion and Xhosa retaliation for encroachment on their lands meant that Eastern Cape settlers were sensitive to the perceived lack of sympathy on the part of the metropole.³⁸ Networks of communication between metropole and colony, as well as between different settler colonies, were central to the construction and defence of settler and humanitarian arguments, and in turn, identities.

By the late 1820s, the LMS’s greatest prospects for creating a viable, Christian peasantry lay among the Griquas of the Transgariep and the Khoekhoe of the Kat River Settlement. By this time, missions to San were being sidelined in favour of these more grandiose schemes. The Griqua had also launched commandos from Griquatown and Philippolis against San in retaliation for stock theft. Even so, some in the LMS, such as the missionary at Griquatown, Henry Helm, ‘proposed to the Griquas to incorporate the Bushmans [sic] with themselves’, especially given that the Griqua ‘wanted them to be their servants’.³⁹

By the early 1830s, Philip wanted to see the Griqua ‘incorporated into the colony on the same terms as the inhabitants of the Kat River Settlement’.⁴⁰ This was one of the clearest examples of Philip’s humanitarian-imperialist stance. The call for the Crown’s formal annexation of territories on the margins of settler colonies was a trademark of the humanitarian-imperialist agenda across the expanding empire. The Aborigines’ Protection Society, which was founded in 1837 following the completion of the investigations of the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines, actively campaigned for the annexation of territories that were susceptible to settler

37. A. Lester, ‘British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire’, *History Workshop Journal*, 54 (2002), 39.

38. See the discussion by A. Lester, ‘Reformulating Identities: British Settlers in Early Nineteenth-Century South Africa’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 23, 4 (1998), 520-523.

39. SOAS, CWM, Incoming Correspondence, 8B/5/D, H. Helm to Directors of the LMS, Griqua Town, 27 December 1822.

40. Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier*, 230.

encroachments.⁴¹ The concept of the ‘protectorate’ emerged as a result. This led to the further conquest of aboriginal lands in the name of protecting their occupants from colonists and resulted in the incorporation of yet more indigenous subjects.

At the Cape, the fate of the San continued to be debated in reference to the colony’s future relations with its indigenous neighbours and the opposing humanitarian and settler visions of the territory’s expansion. The so-called ‘Bushmen Wars’ some sixty years earlier became a crucial factor in the public contest over the legitimacy of settler and ‘Hottentot’ identities that occurred in the 1830s.⁴² The colony’s memory and settler identity were tested in a propaganda war during this time, at the centre of which was Philip. The debate was set in motion in 1828 when Philip published his widely read *Researches in South Africa*. The two-volume work caused a stir at the Cape. A libel suit brought against Philip by the *landdrost* of the district of Somerset was successful and he had to rely on the financial support of evangelicals in Britain to spare him financial ruin.⁴³ Philip’s unpopularity with the Cape’s settlers reached its zenith. The Cape Colony’s historical interactions with the San were key in the ensuing debate over the legitimacy of his arguments in the *Researches*.

While the Eastern Cape frontier wars with the Xhosa were the prominent flashpoints of the period, the earlier conflict with the San on the northeastern frontier was contested in the public domain owing to the important historical precedent it held for future frontier relations. The dispute was aired in public by the two leading newspapers in the Cape Colony: the settler-backed *Graham’s Town Journal* edited by the 1820 settler, Robert Godlonton, and the humanitarian mouthpiece *South African Commercial Advertiser*, edited by John Philip’s son-in-law, John Fairbairn. An emerging, assertive settler identity, especially in the Eastern Cape, informed the debate as settler apologists sought to defend and laud the settler character in response to humanitarian accusations.⁴⁴ Godlonton was a supporter of settler interests on the frontier and his rebukes of Philip and Stockenström were scathing, with Philip labelled the ‘Reverend agitator’.⁴⁵ Philip and Stockenström were also depicted as hypocrites, because they supported the establishment of the Kat River

41. J. Heartfield, *The Aborigines’ Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836-1909* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011), 6-9 and 303.

42. For more on the ‘Bushmen Wars’ of the 1770s, see Newton-King, *Masters and Servants*, 72-76; and Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 108-125.

43. R. Ross, ‘Donald Moodie and the Origins of South African Historiography’, in *Beyond the Pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), 201.

44. See the discussion by T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996), 196-201.

45. *Graham’s Town Journal*, 3 January 1839 and 5 May 1836.

Settlement on what used to be Xhosa land, while condemning white settlers for occupying similar lands.⁴⁶ While the Xhosa were a very different enemy to San, owing to their military strength and socio-political organisation, the earlier, and ongoing, plight of Cape San was emphasised by the humanitarian lobby as part of their trans-colonial alarm at the disastrous consequences of settler colonialism for indigenous populations.

In light of modern, ongoing disagreements over the cultural distinctiveness of San and Khoekhoe, it is necessary to note that the humanitarian use of the appellation ‘Bushmen’ in this contest did not necessarily imply a distinct racial or ethnic identity.⁴⁷ Rather, it was typically a label applied to those who existed on the margins of colonial society, driven there by the advance of the trekboers. Though the usage of the colonial labels ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Bushmen’ in his writings were far from consistent, it is clear that Philip regarded ‘Bushmen’ as dispossessed ‘Hottentots’. For Philip, the vilified, ‘thievish’ ‘Bushmen’ were a colonial creation. He tended to portray them as the manifestation of the evils of unrestrained European settler colonialism. Philip reiterated this when he claimed that ‘the most miserable specimens of the Bushmen race are to be found amongst the frontier boors [sic], or in the immediate vicinity of the Colony’, while ‘many of the more remote hordes, still remaining in a state of comparative independence, are much superior in stature, and have a vivacity and cheerfulness in their countenances which form a striking contrast with the others’.⁴⁸

While settler accusations against the mission stations as safe havens for vagrants and as islands of indolence continued, Philip claimed in *Researches* that missionary efforts had been obstructed by the laws of the colony and the actions of public officials, such as the *veldkornets* and *veldwagtmeesters*. He portrayed the San as victims of unchecked colonial advances, against which the missionaries were unable to resist. The amount of attention Philip granted to the closure of the San missions at Toornberg and Hephzibah in *Researches* reveals the extent to which this episode, which had occurred prior to his arrival at the Cape, concerned him.⁴⁹ The

46. *Graham's Town Journal*, 29 December 1836.

47. Shula Marks has suggested that hunter-gatherer and herder modes of subsistence were interchangeable, depending upon opportunities to acquire livestock and access to sufficient water and grazing. See S. Marks, ‘Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *Journal of African History*, 13, 1 (1972), 58-60 for a brief discussion of this argument. Richard Elphick has also argued that hunter-gatherers and herders were on different stages of an economic cycle, which often exhibited a combination of the two modes of subsistence simultaneously. He sets out this argument in *Kraal and Castle: Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

48. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 7.

49. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol 2., 23-54.

return of Lord Charles Somerset to commence his second term as Governor of the Cape Colony in November 1821 deepened Philip's alarm as it was Somerset who had ordered the closure of Toornberg and Hephzibah. Somerset's contemporary, private correspondence with Earl Bathurst at the Colonial Office reveals the extent of his dislike for Philip. He referred to Philip's growing influence in the Cape Colony as 'hostile', asserting that he 'mingled' in political affairs in order to acquire influence for himself.⁵⁰ In response to Somerset's hostility, Philip adopted a language which placed increasing emphasis on the positive role the missionaries and mission stations could play in inculcating an appreciation for labour among San.⁵¹ In subsequent years, Philip was able to capitalise on his contacts with prominent humanitarian figures in Britain, finding a sympathetic ear with the likes of the MP, Thomas Fowell Buxton, who was influential in setting up the Select Committee on Aborigines.

Philip endeavoured to situate the plight of the San within a trans-colonial narrative that highlighted the devastating consequences of settler colonialism for indigenes in the emerging British empire. The primary concern for the humanitarian lobby, of which Philip was a prominent representative both locally and internationally, was the debasement of aboriginal peoples as a result of settler colonialism. It was claimed that unchecked interactions with European settlers resulted in social ills among indigenous peoples, such as alcoholism and vagabondism.⁵² The pristine, or 'noble savage', was thus reduced to a desperate life of wandering, robbery and addiction. Philip framed the San as an unfortunate product of settler colonial expansion. This view held that if it were not for the European settlers, San would have been able to return to their former status as 'Hottentots'. Further assimilation into Christian subjects could then occur under the guidance of missionaries. As such, by the 1830s the debate surrounding San provenance and incorporation was shaped in large measure by evangelical-humanitarian concern for the recognition of San subjecthood, along with its attendant rights and protection. Though Philip was often critical of the British Government, his goal was not the curtailing of imperialism, but the extension of it, as long as it was humanitarian imperialism. Central to this philosophy was the argument for the allocation of civil rights to indigenous subjects.

50. Cape Archives (hereafter CA), Government House (hereafter GH) 23/7/118A, Governor Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 11 Oct 1824.

51. A. Bank, 'The Great Debate and the Origins of South African Historiography', *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), 262-263.

52. D. Gordon, 'From Rituals of Rapture to Dependence: The Political Economy of Khoikhoi Narcotic Consumption, c. 1487-1870', *South African Historical Journal*, 35, 1 (1996), 83-85.

In *Researches*, Philip called upon the British Government to ‘do justice to the aborigines of the country, by imparting to them liberal institutions, and just and equal laws’.⁵³ Though the effects of settler colonialism on the Cape’s indigenes were regrettable, he believed that ‘Britain [could] redeem her character’ by ensuring that the ‘acknowledged civil rights’ of the ‘Hottentots’ were fully adhered to.⁵⁴ He urged the British Government ‘to declare to the world whether those rights [were] to be realised to them’, stressing that ‘the Hottentots, despairing of help from every other quarter, now look to the justice and humanity of England for deliverance.’⁵⁵ Philip believed he was merely asking the British Government to live up to the expectations it had created in the minds of the Cape’s Khoekhoe and San:

In the proclamations of the colonial government, in the official documents of the government at home [...] the Hottentots are, indeed, represented as a free people, free labourers, and British subjects: but it will be seen [...] that their real condition is that of the most abject and wretched slavery.⁵⁶

As noted, Philip discussed at length the closure of the San missions at Toornberg and Hephzibah in *Researches*. He argued that their closure had been due to ‘false representations of the farmers’ at a time ‘when [a] traffic in children was going on’.⁵⁷ He lamented the loss of these missions as the resident San were said to have shown ‘the greatest readiness to lay aside their savage life and become useful members of religious and civil society’.⁵⁸ In keeping with the humanitarian imperial underpinning of mission ideals, Philip avowed that mission stations were ‘the channels [...] by which the ideas of order, of duty, of humanity, and of justice, flow through the different ranks of the community’.⁵⁹ In addition to their Christian influence, Philip was also of the view that missions were crucial for the establishment of a civic identity among ‘Hottentots’.

Philip and the directors of the LMS in London stressed the need for the British Government to acknowledge that scores of ‘Hottentots’ had begun to submit to the authority of the monarchy it represented. While such representations were made to bolster the position and image of the LMS at the Cape, they also point towards the emphasis that Philip and his supporters placed on ‘Hottentot’ subjecthood. For example, in reference to the ‘Hottentots’ of Uitenhage who had become associated with the mission at Bethelsdorp, Philip insisted that ‘those people who had formerly been the terror of that District of the Colony’ had become ‘steadily attached to the

53. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 1, 381.

54. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 1, 400.

55. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 1, 400.

56. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 259.

57. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 277.

58. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 279.

59. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 361.

British Government'.⁶⁰ The Directors of the LMS agreed, declaring that the 'Hottentots' of Bethelsdorp, through service to the 'District and the Colony at large', had 'powerfully recommended themselves to the paternal care and protection of His Majesty's Government'.⁶¹

As far as the San were concerned, Philip held the view that missions provided the best means to return them to the status of 'Hottentots'. It is apparent that he was not the only prominent missionary to consider the San as despoiled 'Hottentots'. James Read, Sr. held the same view. He suggested that some of the tensions between San servants and farmers stemmed from the San's misunderstanding of colonial law as it pertained to 'Hottentots'. Read, Sr. suggested that '[t]hey have no idea of the laws made for Hottentots, but think themselves at liberty to return to their kraals at their pleasure, and to take their children back when they please.'⁶² He was also 'fully convinced that [San and Khoekhoe] were one and the same nation' and that 'no visible difference [could] be seen in their persons, and their manner of living customs'.⁶³ In promulgating for the extension of laws as they applied to 'Hottentots' to the San, Philip insisted that 'the liberty we ask is not an exemption from the law, but its protection'. He continued, 'we simply ask that the colonists, and the different classes of the natives, should have the same civil rights granted to them.'⁶⁴ For Philip and Read, Sr., as well as other equally enthusiastic humanitarian imperialists, it was desirable for the San to become 'Hottentots' because they could then claim British subjecthood.

The extent of Philip's influence on this debate was particularly evident during the investigations of the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines, convened in 1836. The establishment of this committee marked the apogee of humanitarian sway across the British empire. Philip's *Researches* was an important point of reference for the committee, which interviewed 46 witnesses in total, 29 of whom had had direct, personal experiences at the Cape Colony.⁶⁵ It was following the publication of the report of the Select Committee on Aborigines in 1837 that the disastrous effects of settler colonialism on aboriginal peoples found trans-colonial significance. As James Heartfield has emphasised, the report sent 'shockwaves across the Empire that were felt in Sydney, Cape Town, and Hudson's Bay'.⁶⁶ Philip's

60. CA, GH 1/39 591, Missionary lands at Bethelsdorp, J. Philip to Earl Bathurst, 1824.

61. CA, GH 1/40 608, Selected letters and memorials, Directors of the LMS to Earl Bathurst, 11 December 1824.

62. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 278.

63. SOAS, CWM, Incoming Correspondence, 6/4/B, J. Read to Directors of the LMS, 4 October 1816.

64. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, Vol. 2, 327.

65. Z. Laidlaw, 'Aunt Anna's Report: The Buxton Women and the Aborigines Select Committee, 1835-37', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32, 2 (2004), 23.

66. Heartfield, *The Aborigines' Protection Society*, 7.

testimony to the committee was published along with a number of appendices submitted by the chairman of the committee, Thomas Fowell Buxton. These included reports from Van Dieman's Land, New South Wales and New Zealand, all recounting the miserable state of the aboriginal inhabitants of these territories due to European settlement and the effects of land dispossession.⁶⁷ Settler treatment of indigenes stood as a glaring indictment of the British Government and its lack of control over its emerging settler societies, even those inherited from previous European administrations, such as the VOC. The demise of the Cape's indigenous peoples at the hands of wanton settler provocation was a conclusion the Select Committee drew in the opening paragraph of its findings on South Africa.⁶⁸ Philip's testimony and submissions were particularly impactful, such that the committee adopted his viewpoints on the 'Bushmen'/'Hottentot' question. The committee's published report declared that the aborigines of South Africa could be 'classed under two distinct races', namely the 'Hottentots' and the Bantu. Furthermore, the 'Hottentots' were said to be 'divided into two branches, the "tame" or colonial Hottentots, and the wild Hottentots or Bushmen.'⁶⁹

After 1806 and the advent of the Second British Occupation of the Cape the northeastern frontier was both less threatening and less economically important. However, the events that had occurred along this frontier in the late eighteenth century were to be a focal point in the debates inspired by the evangelical-humanitarian lobby during the 1820s and 1830s. As discussed, the humanitarian campaign promoted the rights of indigenes as colonial subjects and campaigned for the protection of indigenous peoples. These priorities provided powerful ideological validation for the extension of British imperial rule. Yet, at the same time, European settlers were cast in disparaging terms. Humanitarians made allegations of rapacious misconduct and cruelty towards colonial indigenes by European settlers. Alan Lester has shown how the ensuing contest over settler identity in imperial nodes such as New South Wales, New Zealand and the Cape Colony resulted in a struggle 'over the nature of Britishness itself'.⁷⁰ The combined indictment of Philip's *Researches* and the Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines upon settler respectability did not go unchallenged at the Cape. As Andrew Bank has argued, '[a]scendant Cape liberalism prompted Dutch settlers to defend their national character' and to 'actively construct a specifically colonial history and identity' in response.⁷¹ This identity was being

67. HCPP, No. 538, 1836, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements); together with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, 679-685.

68. HCPP, No. 425, 1837, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 25. See also *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 'Present State of Some of the Tribes on the Northern Frontier of the Cape Colony', 11 January 1826.

69. HCPP, No. 425, 1837, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines*, 25.

70. Lester, 'British Settler Discourse', 25.

71. Bank, 'The Great Debate', 261-281.

invented within the context of an ongoing, violent frontier conflict with the Xhosa on the eastern margins of the Cape Colony and its protagonists sought to refute the accusations Philip had made concerning the frontier conflict with the San of the late eighteenth century.

At the forefront of this endeavour was Donald Moodie, a former lieutenant in the Royal Navy who became a prominent Cape settler. In 1828, he was appointed Clerk of the Peace in the District of Albany.⁷² His compilation of documents relating to the history of the Cape Colony (published between 1838 and 1841 as *The Record, or A Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa*) was intended to serve as a rebuttal of Philip's arguments in *Researches* and the Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines. With regards to the investigations of the Select Committee, Moodie maintained that much of the evidence presented was 'dependent as much upon memory as upon political feeling'.⁷³ Moodie's own 'history' of the Cape disputed allegations of settler atrocities perpetrated against San during the late eighteenth century and that San were a colonial creation. Moodie rejected the claim that San had 'descended from the pastoral to the hunting state' and that this change was a consequence of European oppression.⁷⁴ Of particular controversy was Philip's claim that in 1774 the VOC's Council of Policy had issued an extermination order against the 'Bushmen'. Moodie contested this assertion, having failed to find a copy of the order in the archives. The implication for Philip was that he had fabricated the accusation. Moodie publicly questioned whether Philip had made a mistake or if he had invented the extirpation order so as 'to attain an ambitious object, by ministering to the morbid sentimentality of a weak and most mistaken set of men in the mother country'.⁷⁵ Philip had actually gotten the date wrong, as the extermination order was issued in 1777.⁷⁶

Apart from prompting the earliest debate concerning the history of the Cape Colony, this episode is significant given the centrality of the fate of Cape San. Philip was accusing the Dutch settlers of having committed horrendous acts against San during the course of the late eighteenth century. This was anathema to white settler consciousness and respectability at a time when Cape settler identity was becoming increasingly assertive. Moodie was at the helm of a settler-inspired discourse that

72. V.C. Malherbe, 'Donald Moodie: South Africa's Pioneer Oral Historian', *History in Africa*, 25 (1998), 172.

73. CA, VC 888, Donald Moodie, manuscripts, 'Notes by D. Moodie on Van der Kemp, Philip and Read', undated.

74. D. Moodie, *A Voice from the Kahlamba: Origin of the Bushmen* (Pietermaritzburg: May & Davies, 1855), 1.

75. D. Moodie, 'Dr. Philip and the Extermination of the Bushmen', *Graham's Town Journal*, 3 January 1839.

76. Ross, 'Donald Moodie', 207-208.

sought to distance the Cape Colony of the 1830s from the earlier period of extermination against San. Given Moodie's intentions, his collection of notes, some of which were taken during interviews with a wide range of respondents including both settlers and 'Hottentots', reveals some awkward admissions. One farmer living in the Camdeboo, named B.J. Burger, recalled commandos in the 1770s and 1780s being dispatched 'under orders to destroy the Bushmen'.⁷⁷ Burger also recounted one incident at which upwards of 300 San were killed. He added that the commandos 'always considered carrying away the children'. Notably, Moodie recognised how 'Hottentot' identity and subjecthood were being constructed and disseminated by the humanitarian lobby and in particular, Philip. He observed that the extension of equal civil rights to the 'Hottentots' by Ordinance 50 of 1828 had created challenges for frontier farmers in need of labourers. Farmers also complained that it was a struggle to maintain compliance and subservience. Moodie noted that '[t]he patriarchal power of maintaining household discipline which had naturally arisen out of the circumstances in which the remote inhabitants were placed was patiently submitted to by the Hottentot races while ignorant of their legal rights'.⁷⁸ Moodie attested to the appeal of subjecthood as a civic identity among 'Hottentots' when he noted that the political feelings espoused by missionaries and humanitarians 'induced the colored [sic] man of Albany, or Kat River, to call himself a Hottentot' and 'thereby entitled to a more immediate share of the sympathy produced upon the public mind'.⁷⁹

For the humanitarian lobby, the fate of Cape San served as a historical warning against the kind of settler colonialism which was occurring at the time along the Cape's eastern frontier, highlighted by the Sixth Frontier War (or Hintza's War), which erupted in December 1834. Philip was well aware of the negative representations of the frontier Boers in the travel literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He referred regularly to the writings of John Barrow in *Researches*, for example. Barrow had toured the northeastern boundary of the colony in 1797 at the request of Governor Macartney. His detailed accounts of the commandos' modus operandi influenced 'British perceptions of Boer brutality towards the San for a long time thereafter'.⁸⁰ Barrow's accounts were a convenient reference for Philip as he sought to delegitimise Boer claims to land and predominance on the eastern frontier. The argument followed that future relations

77. CA, VC 874, Memorials, instructions to field cornets, reports of returns of stolen cattle, 1801-1839, statement of B.J. Burger, Camdeboo, March 1836.

78. CA, VC 888, Donald Moodie, manuscripts, Social Position of the Coloured Classes since 1780, undated.

79. CA, VC 888, Donald Moodie, manuscripts, Social Position of the Coloured Classes since 1780, undated.

80. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 224. Barrow's recommendations also formed the basis for Governor Macartney's 1798 initiatives towards the San.

between the Cape Colony and the Xhosa were to be viewed with the lamentable precedent set by the colony's interactions with the San in mind. During the 1820s and 1830s, contests over settler and indigenous identities, inspired by competing histories of previous events on the frontier, were relayed with much enthusiasm to the metropole. This was done with the aim of influencing public sentiments in Britain and its colonies in respect to the impact of settler colonialism on indigenes.

The 1840s would witness the beginning of 'a shift in the discursive terrain', as 'an increasing turn to the language of race to explain and justify the inequalities and persistent differences between peoples' started to take hold in Britain.⁸¹ Andrew Bank has argued that the initial decline of the civilising mission during the course of the 1840s was influenced to a large extent by the Frontier Wars in the Eastern Cape, especially Hintza's War of 1834-5 and the War of the Axe of 1846-7. Historians have tended to focus on later events, such as the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865, in search of reasons for why 'the age of humanitarianism' was replaced by an 'age of imperialism' during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁸² Bank suggests that the Xhosa Frontier Wars were an earlier, significant precursor in the decline of humanitarian imperialism across the empire. 'Cape liberalism was thrown into crisis' by these wars and even missionaries and humanitarian supporters became disillusioned with the prospects of assimilation.⁸³ In 1848, William Elliot, a missionary and colleague of Philip, argued that the LMS had arrived at a crucial juncture in the Cape Colony and required a complete change in its management and direction. Philip was quick to respond to the challenge and to reassure his British audience. He continued to espouse the value of humanitarian imperialism as follows:

The conversion of so many individuals from among a people supposed to be the lowest of the human race, whose claims to be regarded as of the same stock with the rest of mankind, had been long denied and practically rejected; their elevation from savage to civilised habits, and the education of their children, and the deliverance of their whole nation from the fate of the aborigines in so many other countries, when seized by Europeans, and the effect which all this had on the condition of the coloured people generally, not only in South Africa, but throughout the British dominions, are known to all the world.⁸⁴

81. C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 338.

82. P. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1965), vi.

83. A. Bank, 'Losing Faith in the Civilising Mission: The Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism at the Cape, 1840-60', in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, eds M. Daunton and R. Halpern (London: UCL Press, 1999), 366.

84. J. Philip, *Letter to the Directors of the London Missionary Society, On the Present State of Their Institutions in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: London Missionary Society, 1848), 25.

Conclusion

Those in favour of a more assertive humanitarian imperialism endorsed the assimilation of San as colonial subjects and labourers under the purview of colonial law in order to prevent their destruction and eventual extinction at the hands of settler colonialism. The provenance and incorporation of San captives, especially children, was a focal point in this debate during the governorship of Lord Charles Somerset. Following the arrival of John Philip in the Cape Colony, the ongoing plight of the San continued to influence wider contestations about indigenous subjecthood and the role of missions in promoting assimilation. From a humanitarian perspective, colonial, or ‘tame’, San could claim British subjecthood and the supposed protection that was meant to accompany it, while ‘wild’, extra-colonial San could not. Subjecthood stood for protection and was regarded as in the best interests of Cape San. This article has argued that the subsuming of San, especially San children, under the category ‘Hottentot’ was welcomed by key humanitarian figures following the Second British Occupation. Furthermore, this issue factored into a trans-colonial exchange of ideas about the desirability of humanitarian imperialism and the preferred outcomes for indigenous peoples facing overlapping processes of marginalisation, transformation and extermination.

Indeed, the debate over the provenance and disappearance of Cape San featured prominently in a global dialogue about the impact of settler colonialism on indigenes. This was most apparent in the report of the Select Committee on Aborigines. Though the committee did not have our modern terminology at its disposal, it was raising the alarm about processes we would describe as genocidal and drawing insightful links with the role of settler colonialism in the steady erosion of the means of survival of hunter-gatherer peoples. As settler colonies became more established in the nineteenth century and settlers more assertive in expanding frontiers and advocating settler rights, so the displacement and demise of indigenes intensified.⁸⁵

Prominent theorist of settler colonialism, Lorenzo Veracini, has noted that settler colonialism is not always genocidal. However, this is often because settlers fail to eliminate an indigenous group completely, as opposed to the settlers not trying.⁸⁶ In the Cape Colony of the early nineteenth century, the extinction of San was widely anticipated, including by those who were appalled by the prospect. The debate over

85. On the ‘settler revolution’ of the nineteenth century, see J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 180-182.

86. L. Veracini, ‘Colonialism, Frontiers, Genocide: Civilian-Driven Violence in Settler Colonial Situations’, in *Civilian-Driven Violence and the Genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Settler Societies*, ed M. Adhikari (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2020), 270.

the imminent disappearance of San and possible ways to curtail this – while still facilitating San incorporation into the colonial economy as labourers – resulted in diverse views and speculations over San provenance. As has been shown, San provenance was central to the debate around San disappearance, for both had a bearing on the settler character at the Cape. And as with other emerging settler colonies in other parts of Britain’s advancing empire, the treatment of vulnerable indigenous peoples was a powerful symbolic yardstick by which the settler character was judged, for metropole, colonist and humanitarian-imperialist alike.

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