

**A QUESTION OF IDENTITY:
EVANGELICAL CULTURE AND KHOISAN POLITICS
IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY EASTERN CAPE**

Elizabeth Elbourne

The ambiguities of colonial occupation and the brutality of unequal power relationships informed British missionary activity in the Cape Colony from the very beginning of mission in 1799. None the less, the clean lines of a dialectical model oversimplify the shifting alliances and beliefs on both sides of the dominator/dominated divide, and obscure the creation and re-creation of new cultures - the bastard children of belief systems which were themselves in constant flux.

In partial illustration, I want to take a further look at the role played by missions in Khoisan politics in the Eastern Cape during the first three and a half decades of the nineteenth century [1], focusing on the nebulous issue of the politics of identity, and looking at missionary and Khoisan culture and beliefs in conversation and contestation with one another, to adopt the striking terminology of Jean and John Comaroff. [2] I shall argue that British evangelical theology and culture were themselves not monolithic and changed significantly over time; likewise, many Khoisan made a *bricoleur's* use of evangelical culture as well as a propagandist's use of its communication networks. Overall, I want to suggest that power relationships intersected religious relationships in important ways but did not coincide completely with them: as the Comaroffs rightly point out, religious symbolism and what I would myself term the narrative myths of religion are plastic, available for appropriation and subversion by groups and individuals in a variety of different ways.

More precisely, I shall make the following arguments: Christianity was first adopted on a large scale by Eastern Cape Khoisan in the context of their political and economic defeat, symbolized by the Third Frontier War. It was initially spread in large part by Khoisan preachers themselves, mostly orally. Early European missionaries possessed a range of theological beliefs which shaped their message in perhaps unexpected ways; they tended, for example, to be fervently millenarian. Khoisan converts were attracted by the missionary promise that God would intervene on the side of the oppressed. Conversion was also used by the Khoisan both as a tool for the reintegration of a shattered society and as a means of gaining access to power which had been kept on the Christian side of a "heathen"/"Christian" divide; at the same time it accelerated the destruction of "traditional" culture. With the political failure of the early Bethelsdorp model in the 1810s, Khoisan converts attempted more consciously to mould themselves to a hardening British model of "civilization" and to act as loyal colonial citizens. In the late 1820s and 1830s British humanitarian evangelicals sought to present the "Hottentots" as an economically and spiritually redeemed people, who would present a model for the world-wide development of "aboriginal peoples" in contact with white colonization. Despite immediate political gains the implicit contract between white and non-white running through missionary history was in many ways continually abrogated, although the working out of its failure and the resort of a number of missionized "coloureds" to rebellion lie beyond the scope of this paper.

I

The London Missionary Society (LMS) mission to the battered remnants of the Khoisan [3] of the Eastern Cape contained a colonial alpha and omega: it was the first substantial British mission on South African soil, to the first African people to be fully incorporated within a

colonial settler economy and to be destroyed, in a multifaceted and complicated process. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Khoisan groups in the Eastern Cape frontier districts had already been decimated as independent cultural and political entities, and many individuals had been reduced to *de facto* slavery on Dutch farms.[4]

From the very beginning, the mission was profoundly implicated in colonial processes. The first station, eventually called Bethelsdorp, was populated by refugees from the Third Frontier War, and its establishment was seen by Governor Dundas as a concession to the Khoisan to keep dissatisfied Khoi labour quiet in future. Indeed, the mission station and a small grant of land to a key rebel leader, Klaas Stuurman (of which his brother would be dispossessed in 1808), were the only tangible gains of the rebel Khoi from a difficult four-year war. The Khoi expected better treatment from the British government than from the Dutch, and the mission station was a symbol of this supposed promise. [5]

This type of political entanglement was not at all what the first missionaries to South Africa envisaged. They came from an intellectual background in which belief in God's action in history and in human lives was central. They therefore expected to insert themselves into a divine narrative with familiar outlines and they in fact re-interpreted the political landscape to correspond with this narrative, initially seeing the war as "the strugglings of Satan with a view to exclude us and the gospel of Christ from Caffraria". [6]

The bulk of the early missionaries was drawn from the upper strata of the working class, being predominantly artisans and small-scale shopkeepers. As the LMS directors commented in 1797, "we expect to receive the chief Supply of Missionaries from Brethren in the lower orders of life, ingenious Artificers of any sort".[7] They were themselves products of the great evangelical revivals which swept England in the early and late eighteenth centuries. As evangelicals they believed fervently in the activity of God through history and his constant communication with humanity. A second key belief was the depravity of humankind - abetted by the devil, who fought against God to maintain evil. The lands of the heathen were literally held "captive" by Satan. [8] To be saved, a sudden, radical act of conversion was necessary: the individual must recognize his or her profound sinfulness and deliberately and self-consciously "fling" himself or herself on God. All those who did not in this way repudiate their past selves utterly were damned, whether they were nominal Christians or African "heathen". As Doug Stuart has suggested, the damnation of the heathen was therefore very much an extension of the idea of the damnation of mankind, through the sin of Adam: the heathen were internal sin externalized, a metaphor for evil. [9]

The intense conviction of the early missionaries of the judgements of God in history extended to the fate of nations in addition to that of individuals. "The judgement of God though slow is certain", wrote the Anglican evangelical *Christian Observer* in 1802, citing with approval Toussaint L'Ouverture on the slave rebellion in Haiti. [10] Many early missionaries, the bulk of them pre-millenarians, also believed that the success of the missionary movement and final evangelization of the world would precipitate the second coming. Violent events in the present were warnings from God of imminent destruction, calling the guilty to repentance. The first head of the LMS in South Africa, Johannes Van der Kemp, for example, solemnly warned the colonial government in 1801 that "there is no way of saving this country, than by the government doing justice to the natives. In no other way can the boers escape the hand of Providence than by acknowledging their guilt ..." [11]

It is difficult to reconcile this range of beliefs with any claim that the thought of missionaries reflected solely (a) the ideology of capitalism and/or (b) Enlightenment rationalism. It is particularly worth underlining that most of the early missionaries were not moral "capitalists" in the Weberian sense, investing in good deeds to get to heaven. Rather, they saw human beings as utterly at the mercy of God, tossed on a violent sea of catastrophe and sin; the religion described by Weber and by Jean Comaroff in her earlier *Body of Power. Spirit of Resistance* [12] is the settled religion of an established community, not the hellfire creed of popular religion on the move. Some early evangelicals were, in fact, torn by unspoken

contradictions between their religion and their economic beliefs.

II

Before turning to the colonial Khoisan, the initial impulse of the first LMS director of missions was to push through the turbulent frontier zone to the "true" heathen - the Xhosa beyond the colony who had never heard the gospel. In 1799, accordingly, Van der Kemp, defying Satan, headed to the interior, measuring the longitudes as he passed through the war zone, accompanied by a small group of colonists, a Khoisan guide and the terrified missionary Edmond, to reach the chieftaincy of the Xhosa leader, Ngkika. [13]

In his year and a half among the Xhosa, Van der Kemp had little success in proselytising, except among a kraal of probably Gonaqua Khoikhoi. It is significant, however, both that the missionary may have fitted into a pre-existing religious pattern and that the early evangelicals' intensely providential view of God's daily intervention in human affairs dovetailed at least superficially with Nguni ideas of the continuity between "sacred" and mundane. Like a Xhosa prophet, Van der Kemp called for repentance and promised cleansing. More mundanely, he was perceived by the Xhosa chief, Ngqika, and his followers as a possible route of access to divine power. He was asked to make rain on many occasions; when Ngqika was sick he asked Van der Kemp to pray for healing, in addition to having a witch smelt out. [14] Well after the departure of Van der Kemp in 1801, the LMS maintained a high degree of informal contact with the Zuurveld Xhosa until their expulsion over the Fish; indeed, the Gonaqua provided an intellectual link between the Gqunukwebe Xhosa and the Khoikhoi. The syncretic possibilities are suggested in the public discourse of Makana, better known as the Xhosa war-doctor Nxele, while passing through an early Christian phase in 1816.

... He said that God would come again, not with water, but with fire. That Dali (God) first sent them Jankanna [Van der Kemp], but that they would not listen to him, and he had left them; that he had gone first to the boers, and then to the dispersed nation, who had received the word. The Dali now had raised up a raw Caffer to warn them; and above all, had sent Jankanna's son [Read], and the child Tzatzoo to bear witness to his word - that the Caffers clung to their wives and concubines, but they must know they had to do with the Living God - that now he would not speak a single word more to them, but leave what he had said to their consideration.[15]

Early LMS experiences with the Xhosa are instructive for the Khoisan: they underscore the importance of the syncretic indigenous response, the different ways Christianity could be transmitted orally and transformed in the process, and the role a new source of spiritual authority might play in bolstering or altering existing power relationships.

III

Unfortunately, the early nineteenth century Khoisan left far less voluminous material behind them than the first LMS missionaries, and much of what does exist is naturally channeled through the highly ideological hands of the missionaries themselves. It is clear, however, that by 1799 the Eastern Cape Khoisan had reached a stage of great desperation and anger. Their dispossession from the land east of the Gamtoos (including land on which some had lived under Xhosa domination) had been substantially completed within the memory of adults. The Gonaqua, in particular, had very recently been brought under white domination. The end of the century had also seen the hardening of labour relations and growth of violence against Khoisan farm labourers as boer settlers consolidated control. The uprising of 1799, which

may be seen as a failed war of independence [16], represented a last and desperate throw.

The foundation of the mission to the "Hottentots" reveals deep rifts among the Khoi concerning the pursuit of war aims by 1802. Klaas Stuurman made peace with the colony using Van der Kemp as a mediator, while other captains continued to hold out; Klaas's brother, Andries, was killed leading an attack on the nascent mission station. [17] 1802-04, however, saw military defeat, the deaths of several leading rebel leaders and the reincorporation of the rebel Hottentots into the colonial economy.

A relatively large number - several hundred - sought at least nominal affiliation with what had now become the permanent mission station of Bethelsdorp, while Christianity began to spread among the general Khoisan population with surprising rapidity. Christianity influenced more people than registered at Bethelsdorp because the local authorities moved quickly to limit intake, and because Khoikhoi preachers themselves spread an oral Christianity among nearby farms, in the growing port town of what would be Port Elizabeth, and along waggon routes. The former rebel chief Hans Trompetter moved on to the station, as did members of the Boezak, Stuurman and Ourson families. Because of the station's political situation, however, not all those affiliated with Bethelsdorp were Christian. Indeed, the station was widely considered by the Dutch settlers as the refuge of war criminals.[18]

Bethelsdorp, and later three further Cape stations, would remain the focus of intense resentment and fear among the settlers for a number of years, and its members the targets of ongoing violence. In the early period local farmers frequently attempted to stop Khoisan from going to Bethelsdorp, tried to break up the institution, and even launched assassination attempts against Van der Kemp and Read. Both the Dutch local administrators and, after 1820, the English (who were far more hypocritical) struggled to exert labour control over the "mission Hottentots" through, for example, levying heavy demands for conscript labour, forcing non-farm Khoisan to pay unreasonably high levels of *opgaaf*, and making claims on mission land.

IV

Why did Christianity become an attractive cultural option at this point in Khoisan history? On the most contingent of levels, Read and Van der Kemp upheld Khoisan concerns vigorously, and the early LMS missionaries were in general much committed to the "Hottentot" side in a climate of extreme hostility between Boer and Khoisan.

Their millenarianism may have been particularly attractive. Van der Kemp's frequently articulated belief in the imminent and bloody intervention of God on the side of the oppressed in South Africa doubtless resonated with the Khoisan, with particular significance for those who either possessed indigenously or had acquired from the Xhosa a belief in prophets with powers in war time.[19] V C Malherbe reports, for example, that the bandit leader Hermanus, in about 1806, was called a "Master Hottentot"; in a related court case a local Boer testified that this term meant a "Conjurer who could protect his people from danger", while a Khoi witness said that such a person was "a Magician, who knew everything they did", and that his followers therefore would not betray him. [20] It is conceivable that Christ was perceived along the same lines, and that the missionaries themselves filled roles of leaders with prophetic and spiritual power.

Be that as it may, a key message of the early missionaries to the Khoikhoi was certainly the prophetic one that God was on their side and that judgement was coming. John Barrow observed that at the Tarka River the Khoikhoi to whom Van der Kemp was preaching came to his room every night and sang psalm 118 [21]: ... The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?/ ... They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them ... The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner ..." (vv 6, 11, 22).

Fifty-odd years after the arrival of Van der Kemp, a "new and revolutionary brand of Christianity", as J B Peires remarks, was introduced to the Xhosa by the Khoi, highly devout "mission products all", as they fought in the war of Mlanjeni. A letter from one of their leaders demonstrates strong millenarianism:

Trust, therefore, in the Lord (whose character is known to be unfriendly to injustice), and undertake your work, and he will give us prosperity - a work for your mother-land and freedom, for it is now the time, yea, the appointed time, and no other .[22]

Whatever synthesis Khoisan made between Christian millenarianism and indigenous prophetic traditions, an activist, politicized Christianity was a legacy for some, characterized by an intense faith in divine intervention in human affairs.

In the realm of the everyday, the very act of adopting Christianity was, from the beginning, a politically charged, if ambiguous and painful, gesture. On the one hand, it required to some extent rejecting indigenous beliefs and culture. It also required adopting pacifism - and the other side of providentialism might be passivity, trusting to God rather than man, and abandoning political activism. On the other hand, the Dutch had used their own Christianity as a marker of humanity and of access to political and economic equality, from which many believed the Khoisan were constitutively excluded. [23] The Khoisan rejection of this position is epitomised in the testimony of Esau Prins at a public meeting held at Philipton, Kat River, in 1834 to draft a petition in opposition to a proposed vagrancy act.

I am a Boor's child, although I had to sit behind the chairs and stools, as my Mother was a Hottentot woman, and therefore I consider myself a Hottentot also. Men say I have Christian blood in me, but I know only of one blood that God has made. The so-called 'Christeman' steals the name. [24]

Possible day-to-day implications are suggested by the record left by the British botanist William Burchell of his encounter with Cornelis Goieman in 1812. Goieman had travelled to England in the company of his wife, a second "Hottentot" woman, and the Dutch missionary Kicherer. They had testified at packed churches through London, creating a sensation in the "religious world", and had widely been taken as proof of the feasibility of converting and instantaneously civilizing "savages". [25] The three had met the president of the Royal Society and the King of England. In 1812, Burchell encountered Goieman at Graaff Reinet, where he had become "too fond of brandy". By baptism he was allowed the same privileges as Dutch colonists, but the minister, Kicherer, and the landdrost had forbidden the *pachter* to sell him brandy unless he had a paper signed by one of them specifying the amount.

In this state, the man, finding his demands for more brandy resisted by the *pakter*, flew to the landdrost; and with violent and impertinent language, insisted in having his right. That step not availing him, he came to the minister, and in a turbulent tone, asked what right any one had to restrain him as if he were a Hottentot: Was he not a Christian! and could he not have as much brandy as he pleased, without being obliged to ask leave of any man![26]

Burchell engaged Goieman to travel with him into the interior as one of his servants. Goieman pretended to speak less "Hottentot" than he really could, and affected to command the others "in right of his being a Christemensch". Worse, he refused to work for Burchell. After Goieman had three times persuaded someone else to watch Burchell's oxen, Burchell called the people together and held a trial. The witnesses were proving unsatisfactory and Goieman denied everything, so Burchell brought out a bible.

I therefore, after repeating to him the substance of several passages in the New Testament, desired him to lay his hand on the book, and say, whether, in his own conscience, he really thought that his conduct towards me was influenced by the spirit of obedience which that book taught and commanded a servant to show to a master. Self-conviction instantaneously operated on his mind, and he answered, No. I then asked him, in a tone which might encourage him to give the answer I wished, if he now felt disposed to conduct himself in future as his duty demanded: to which he readily replied, Yes. [27]

This small and unpleasant fable might be taken to illustrate many things about the Christianization of the Khoisan - not least of which is the malleability of the biblical text. It also illustrates the social status presumed by Christian converts within the Khoisan community. "If a man is rich", remarked "Mr. Hendrik" at the Philipton meeting, "altho he is short in stature as I am then he is great, and if a man is baptized then he becomes a 'Baas' ... " [28]

As a concrete indication of improved status, mission stations offered the symbols of white control: literacy, western clothes (to a limited extent), the Dutch language, access to the Bible. In the late eighteenth century, the Graaff Reinet Dutch gave their servants sheepskins, whilst reserving western clothes for themselves. [29] This may help explain the eagerness of some Khoisan to acquire jackets and trousers, as well as later associations of wearing sheepskins with poverty and degradation. The key symbolic acquisition, however, was literacy. Until 1806 it was illegal at the Cape to teach a Hottentot to write, creating a powerful association between literacy and freedom. At the 1834 Philipton meeting speakers exulted in the fact that young Khoi men were writing down the speeches. "Mr Bergman" (a Bushman) said, "I always saw pen and paper with my Master - but now I see them used by my friends the Hottentots"; another thanked God that the Hottentots were now able to write and defend themselves. [30] In exile from Kat River during the 1835 war, James Read, junior, the superintendent of schools, recalled:

The people expressed the greatest anxiety to have their children well educated. Every time that they returned from the market, every time they came home from taking out contracts to supply the troops with barley and oats, they would come into the schoolroom and say, 'Mr Read, you must teach our children well'... [31]

The desire for western education and the relative internalization of missionary ideas of "civilization" were far more characteristic of the Kat River period of Khoisan history, after 1829, however. In 1802, the situation of the "Hottentots" in the aftermath of war had created more basic needs. At first, Bethelsdorp was a *de facto* refugee camp. Later, many people came, escaping bad situations with the farmers. In addition, Bethelsdorp had the economic role of providing a home-base from which a Khoisan could hire himself or herself out if financially pressed, with the chance of escaping permanent serfdom; he would have somewhere he could legally travel back to after the expiry of his contract, for example, as well as a place to leave family and property, thereby lessening his master's leverage. Bethelsdorp, like later missionary stations, became popularly known as "the school"; in addition to learning to read, Khoisan could learn an increasing number of trades as more missionaries arrived. As a better economic base than a farm and a place for the acquisition of saleable skills, Bethelsdorp, despite its great overall poverty, enabled some Khoisan to regain a precarious prosperity. The San convert Andries Pretorius, for example, told John Campbell in 1813

...that when he came to Bethelsdorp he had four oxen, and has now ten and a waggon, and one horse, besides four stolen by

the Caffres. He stated, that from childhood until he joined the Institution in 1806, his thirty-third year, he had served a boor, for which long service he received one heifer and six ewes ... In one year at the Institution he earned two hundred dollars, with which he purchased a waggon from his former master. He has large fields and a plough; and provides for a wife and eight children of his own, and two orphans. [32]

On a more speculative level, it is arguable that in the chamber-of-horrors atmosphere of the early Eastern Cape, evangelical mission Christianity furnished a compelling theology of evil which provided an explanation for the apparently meaningless oppression of the Khoisan. In the end, the early LMS missionaries found the Prince of Darkness not as they had expected among the wild savages but at work manipulating the Dutch peasants. Bethelsdorp Christianity not only attacked white wickedness, but also explained it. The Dutch farmers were only nominal Christians, had never experienced rebirth, and were still sunk in original sin.

Many Khoisan took up this language of the evil of natural man. On the one hand, the purification of the rebirth experience probably provided an outlet for the deep anxieties pervading Khoisan society; there is a tremendously high level of outward emotion described in services, revivals and conversions at Bethelsdorp, with floods of tears drenching missionary reports, as well as a strong response to ideas of evil and hell. [33] The Khoi preacher Hendrik Boezak, for example, was said to have

a peculiar address, great boldness, and a heart burning with zeal for the salvation of sinners, and when surrounded with a body of hearers he rests not till most or all are in tears, which he calls laying down the weapons. [34]

Some Khoisan preachers and missionaries turned the language of fallen man and the equality of the reborn against the Afrikaners. A number of the Bethelsdorp converts became missionaries themselves; a greater number proselytized in the course of their daily activity. This was in keeping with the original LMS aim of proselytizing among the Khoikhoi only until they themselves were able to carry on the work, and then moving to other peoples. [35] Many Khoisan went to farms, and sometimes attempted to convert the farmers themselves, although this was fraught with problems. Certainly they tried to speak to mixed audiences, although their primary targets were Khoisan farm-workers. In looking at accounts of these Khoisan and slave missionaries, it seems to me that they are opposing an alternate discourse of Christianity to that proposed by the white settlers, entering into an implicit debate over the meaning of Christian language. The settlers upheld a Christianity of exclusion, whereby religion defined membership in the moral community - arguing that the Khoisan were constitutively incapable of becoming Christian. The Khoisan upheld a Christianity of equality, arguing for access to the moral community through grace alone - and implicitly in opposition to restrictions based on skin colour. By becoming missionaries among dependants of the patriarchal household, they were also establishing an alternate source of authority to the white patriarch.

Throughout, the interaction between Christianity and existing religious beliefs was complicated and often traumatic, and it varied greatly from person to person. This is well illustrated by symbolic contestation over music and dance - both central to Khoisan religious ritual. In the run-up to his conversion, for example, Hendrik Boezak

said he had got two Hearts, and between those two hearts was a continual warfare. 'The one Heart' (said he) 'will do nothing but sing all kinds of Hottentots and Bushesmans songs, and all that is bad, - and the one Heart strives to sing the praises of Christ; tells me to go to Christ, to pray to him.' [36]

Having chosen the Christian heart and become a preacher, Boezak found himself one day speaking at a farm on the "necessity of regeneration". The colonists listened attentively, but the Khoisan mocked him.

Being sorry for it, he laid himself down in a hut, upon which a number of Hottentots came, played on the violin and danced about him. Being very much provoked, he jumped up and showed his indignation not only with his words but with his deeds, for he was not satisfied until he had broken the violin to pieces and dispersed these disturbers of his rest. [37]

On another occasion, the missionary James Read requested a donation of musical instruments from LMS supporters for a Bethelsdorp orchestra, suggesting French horns, clarinets, a bassoon and two flutes, but on no account a violin. "The Hottentots are great singers and lovers of musick except the violin (against which those among us whose hearts have been changed by the grace of God seem to be much prejudiced on account of their former attachment to it)." [38] That the so-called "Hottentot violin" may have played a particular role in Khoisan worship is further suggested by the case of Klaas Trompeter at the Moravian station of Groene Kloof in 1809, who would "entice women and children, and others, to come to his house and join in a dance, connected with the most superstitious and indecent practices". The affair being betrayed by some school children, Trompeter eventually came to beg forgiveness from the missionaries. They said they would only grant it if he were to deliver into their custody "his violin, with which he had set his wicked dance a-going"; at this, Trompeter "got up, ran home, took the old violin down, and exclaimed 'Get out of the house, thou instrument of the devil!' - and brought it immediately to us." [39]

These examples suggest that much debate was going on as it were under the missionaries' noses but without their being aware of the full significance of Khoisan actions. In similar vein, John Campbell records another Khoisan preacher seemingly desecrating graves (or shrines) of the mythical ancestor figure *Heitsi-eibib*, while Van der Kemp describes the Khoi wife of James Read rushing to bathe in the river immediately after giving birth, in what could only have been a deliberate violation of Khoikhoi taboos surrounding birth and other periods of transition. [40] Some zealous individuals thus went further than missionaries required in rejecting older beliefs - in a way which many missionaries were incapable of "seeing", because, however conscious they were of pre-existing Khoisan belief in a God and a Devil figure, they did not think of the Khoisan as truly possessing a systematic and fully worked-out religion. Others in the Khoisan community clearly vigorously contested this rejection.

At the same time, early Khoisan Christianity was quite syncretic, at least as it related to beliefs concerning God and the Devil, for whom the Khoikhoi (if not the San) possessed analogues in *Tsuni-//Goam* and *//Gaunab*. [41] For example, dreams were a primary means of conversion, people replaced traditional night worship with all-night hymn singing, prayed in the direction of the east, and continued the tradition of praying in the bushes at dawn. This is in keeping with Alan Barnard's arguments that current-day Nama and Bushman religions are generally flexible and syncretic. [42] Overall, one observes a system in considerable intellectual flux.

V

Events between 1812 and 1817 signalled not only the personal humiliation of radical missionaries but the failure of the LMS effort to make the nebulous concept "civilization" a separate issue from religious mission. The death of Van der Kemp, the public humiliation of the black circuit, and the sexual scandals of 1817 [43] contributed to a growing sense of crisis.

managed to effect well publicized changes, which at the time at least appeared far-reaching. A key element was surely Philip's success in convincing the abolitionists, at a time of increasing ferment, that the Khoisan cause was essentially also an anti-slavery one, and part of the same debate about the nature of labour. [53]

In 1829, a free community of land-owning "Hottentots" was for the first time set up on the banks of the Kat River, on land taken from Maqoma's Xhosa. There is a great deal to be said about Kat River; here I want only to claim that it was a community of the imagination and a propaganda tool for both the inhabitants and for British philanthropists. Its Khoi defendants drew on the arguments of evangelical liberalism, but not slavishly, and with a greater emphasis on personal injustice. Before the foundation of Kat River, the Khoisan themselves found Ordinance 50 initially unimpressive; as petitions from Bethelsdorp made clear, inhabitants felt they could not receive the "just reward of industry" without land grants. [54] In 1834, however, Ordinance 50 at least temporarily became mythologized as a liberatory piece of legislation when it seemed as if its key tenets might be rescinded. In the debates of 1834 over a projected renewal of vagrancy legislation, the "Hottentot" spokespeople revealed a public language of national identity, shared past wrongs, and the desirability of civil liberty protections in order to allow them to salvage some economic freedom from the wreckage of their country. They believed that they were "civilized" but did not believe that their entitlement to equal economic access depended uniquely on the adoption of western habits. "The 50 Ordinance came out", said Stoeffels:

then did we first taste freedom - We rejoiced at the very word
freedom and Free Labour even before it was mingled with
Water and Ground - and now that it is mingled with Water and
Ground it is twenty times sweeter than forced labour. [55]

James Read, junior, in a letter to John Philip in the midst of the crisis of 1835, designed in part for a wider audience, mythologized Kat River:

The improvement of the Hottentots was such that their friends supposed them to be taking their final exit from that state to which slavery naturally reduces a people. Their enemies stood aghast. It was quite pleasing to a contemplative observer to see how gradually the people threw off the shackles which their circumstances had put on them, to see ignorance fall from the eye of the mind as it had been scales and they receiving sight; the sunken eye of despondency brightened with the hope of a better day. [56]

At the same time, Philip fed his British contacts a steady stream of favourable information. His abolitionist friends consumed it eagerly; they stood badly in need of a reassuring example for parliament of the beneficial impact of lifting labour restrictions on a black community. Buxton often talked of the use he made of the Kat River example: "... I am now going to a Bible Society Meeting in the Neighbourhood where I shall make a speech out of your letters and the Kat River - they do me frequent and good service at Bible and Missionary Meetings." [57] The *Edinburgh Review*, in January of 1834, upheld the example of Kat River as "a still more remarkable and unexpected proof of the advantages of freedom and free labour over servitude". [58]

The benefit of this alliance was evident in the 1834 Colonial Office over-riding of Cape vagrancy legislation. A central implication of this incorporation of the Khoisan into the evangelical mainstream, was that the "Hottentot problem" was coming to be seen as part of a broader question of the world-wide impact on so-called "aborigines" of contact with Great Britain - a question demanding the evolution of a complex body of theory rather than the *ad hoc* discussion of individual abuses. On the heels of the abolition of slavery a group of evangelical MPs, spearheaded again by Buxton, moved for the establishment of a committee

to investigate the conditions of aborigines in British settlements and focusing heavily on South Africa. A new element was heard in the debates over setting up this committee, as also in the 1837 establishment of the British and Foreign Aborigines' Protection Society: that of the duty incumbent upon Great Britain to atone for the evils she had committed against aboriginal inhabitants by introducing the blessings of civilization and Christianity - a far cry from questions in the 1800s over whether or not the wild Khoisan were constitutively incapable of adopting western habits. [59]

Andries Stoeffels, Jan Tshatshu, James Read, junior and senior, all came to England to testify. They gave speaking tours to religious groups, including speaking before thousands at Exeter Hall against vagrancy legislation and other restrictions on Khoisan activity. Ominously, Stoeffels testified before a parliamentary committee that, although the violent murders of the Dutch period had ceased, British rule had led to the economic oppression and degradation of the Khoisan, despite all the fine words. [60]

I want to conclude with a historiographical comment. It is tempting to see the missionary movement of the nineteenth century both as somehow the same through time and place, and as a text from which the story of the cultural colonialism of capitalism may be read. Thus, from a Marxian perspective, Kate Crehan argues in her thought-provoking MA thesis that "ultimately what institutions like Bethelsdorp [the flagship London Missionary Society station among the colonial Khoisan] were doing was transforming social institutions and practices alien to a capitalist system into capitalist institutions and practices". [61] Liberation theologians have made similar points, against the background of the struggle of African, black and liberation theology to redefine missionary Christianity. [62] In a significant recent article, even the Comaroffs present the early nineteenth-century missionaries as the "vanguards of British colonialism", not in the concrete sense of exercising tangible economic or political coercion, but in that of spearheading an inextricably linked ideological project and providing "rituals and routines of rule" for "European colonialism, the creature of the capitalist state in its expansive cycle".

In Southern and Central Africa, in particular, colonialism extended far beyond the reaches of British military might for much of the 19th century. And it was borne by soldiers who, armed with sextants and moral certainties, with trade goods and technology, conjured up new maps, new systems of human relationship, new concepts of personhood, time and labour - new orders of domination. [63]

It is not my intention to defend the missionary against the valid charge of cultural colonialism, nor to imply that missionaries did not struggle to transform the African economy and the African mind. It does, however, seem useful to ask whether from a historiographical point of view the totalizing paradigm of the missionary as cultural foot-soldier of capitalism is not unduly dualistic. First, the position contains a culturally and economically unitary vision of "capitalism" which arguably fetishizes capitalism, rather than seeing it as also a shifting set of economic beliefs, embedded in human practice. It seems important, in consequence, not to obscure economic debates, among Africans as among Europeans, and not to minimize African survival strategies and choices that at the time were rational rather than instances of false consciousness.

A second and in some ways related point is that it seems inaccurate inherently to postulate two systems of meaning in dialectical tension, whether in a dialectical relationship of "consciousness of the dominator/consciousness of the dominated" or of "pre-capitalism/capitalism". Despite the crucial insights the approach offers, notably the centrality of power, in practice it can risk not "seeing" the multiplicity of meaning systems among different African groups and among various sets of missionaries over time. The approach adopted by the Comaroffs in recent articles on missions among the Tswana and, I understand, in their forthcoming book, is exciting precisely because it argues for the development of

intermediary meaning systems and the use of bricolage, taking seriously contestation over religious symbolism. None the less, I wonder if the Comaroffs do not in fact interpret the Tswana/evangelical "conversation" as a series of compromises in a bipolar world, rather than as outright recreations of meaning systems: religion is the realm of signs, but contestation over signs ultimately relates back to a bleaker, more solid, bifurcated political landscape. In South Africa this is often true, and yet not invariably. Colonized peoples do not always act in function of the colonizers; religion is not always "really about" power; economic beliefs can also be mythical and quasi-religious; missionaries and converts, in certain extreme circumstances, can even become in some sense part of the same meaning system.

Be the larger point as it may, the interaction between Christianity and Khoisan politics was multifaceted, and changed in function of a range of complicated factors: too many, in fact, to encapsulate in a short paper. There were also a multiplicity of individual responses. It would be a mistake to see the Khoisan entirely as victims of this process, or indeed as passive. Christians came to preach capitalism, or at least what were believed to be the tenets of liberal political economy, in the 1820s and 1830s. Rather than being considered the advance wave of capitalism in an abstract sense, however, Christianity ought to be seen both in British and in Khoisan culture as a tool which could be used in a number of ways, both for and against domination: a text certainly, but one with a multiplicity of possible interpretations.

-----oOo-----

Notes

- 1 W M Macmillan, *The Cape Colour Question* (London, 1928); Kate Crehan, "Khoi, Boer and Missionary: an anthropological study of the role of missionaries on the Cape frontier 1799-1850", MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1978; Stanley Trapido, "The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of 'Hottentot Nationalism', 1815-1834", paper presented to ICS, London, Societies of Southern Africa seminar, February 23, 1990; Doug Stuart, "Of Savages and Heroes": discourses of race and nation in the evangelical missions to southern Africa 1790-1860", forthcoming PhD thesis, ICS, University of London; Andrew Ross, *Mission, Race and Politics in South Africa* (Aberdeen, 1986); Ido Enklaar, *Dr J Th. Van der Kemp* (Cape Town, 1988); selected articles in Hugh Macmillan and Shula Marks (eds), *Africa and Empire: W.M. Macmillan, Historian and Social Critic* (Aldershot, Hants, 1989).
- 2 John L Comaroff, "Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: models of colonial domination in South Africa", *American Ethnologist*, 14 (4), November 1989; John and Jean Comaroff, "Through the Looking-glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1, March 1988; Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power. Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago and London, 1985). The Comaroffs' book, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol 1 (Chicago and London, 1991) provides a thorough discussion of theoretical issues.
- 3 I use the term "Khoisan" as a means of capturing the ambiguities of colonial terminology, in a period of racial admixture in which it is both unclear what individual speakers meant by the terms "Hottentot" and "Bushman", and what the precise relationship was between so-called San and so-called Khoikhoi groups. Khoisan is an artificial and in some ways problematic label, containing as it does the term San, applied in a derogatory fashion by Khoikhoi groups to cattleless outsider groups; at the moment it is difficult to know what alternative to adopt, however, in the absence of a

more satisfactory portmanteau term. It should also be pointed out that groups such as the Gonaqua would have considered themselves Khoikhoi and have been indignant at the label San.

- 4 Richard Elphick, *The Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1985); Susan Newton-King, "The Labour Market of the Cape Colony, 1807-28" in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa*, pp 171-207. Susan Newton-King's forthcoming doctoral thesis for the University of London ought to shed a great deal of light on this process. A wide range of contemporary sources attest to the theft of Khoisan land and their reduction to quasi-slave status, including most famously John Barrow, *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798* (London, 1806), and John Philip, *Researches in South Africa* (1828).
- 5 The best account of the war from the Khoikhoi point of view is Susan Newton-King and V C Malherbe, *The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape (1799-1803)* (Cape Town, 1981).
- 6 Van der Kemp to Haweis, 12 August 1799, London Missionary Society Archives, Council for World Mission Archives, SOAS, London, South Africa Incoming Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 2, Jacket B. Hereafter annotated as LMS-SA 1/2/B.
- 7 LMS directors to J T Van der Kemp, London, n.d. (1797), LMS-SA 1/1/A. Cf also Stuart Piggin, *Making Evangelical Missionaries 1789-1858* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, 1984); Sarah Potter, "The Social Origins and Recruitment of English Protestant Missionaries in the Nineteenth Century", PhD thesis, University of London, 1974.
- 8 Thus the LMS directors encouraged Van der Kemp upon his arrival to make known the "precious and saving name" of Christ to "those miserable Captives of Satan who are in the chains of darkness and among the shades of death" (Hardcastle to Van der Kemp, London, 24 July 1799, LMS-SA, 1/2/A).
- 9 Personal communication.
- 10 *Christian Observer*, Vol I, March 1802 (London), p 202.
- 11 Van der Kemp to Fiscal, 12 November 1801, cited in Saxe Bannister, *Humane Policy or Justice to Aborigines of New Settlements* (London, 1830), p cxxxiv.
- 12 Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power. Spirit of Resistance*, p 131; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- 13 Van der Kemp to LMS directors, n.d. [circa August 1799], LMS-SA 1/2/B.
- 14 Van der Kemp to the Cape Fiscal, River Debe, Caffraria, 14 May 1800, in Bannister, *Humane Policy*, p cxxiv. On prophets, Terence Ranger, "Plagues of Beasts and Men: prophetic responses to epidemic in eastern and southern Africa", forthcoming. On Xhosa experimentation with different outsider groups to try and make rain, J B Peires, *The House of Phalo* (Johannesburg, 1981), p 81.
- 15 *Missions in Caffraria from their Commencement to the Present Time* (Dublin, 1833), p 84; J B Peires, "Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of the Xhosa Religious Reaction", *Journal of African History* 20, 1 (1979).
- 16 Newton-King and Malherbe, *Khoikhoi Rebellion*, p 10.
- 17 Van der Kemp to LMS, 1802 Annual Account of Bethelsdorp, LMS-SA 2/2/A.

- 18 "Report of the Commission of Circuit for the Districts of Graaff-Reinet, Uitenhage and George", in G M Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, Vol IX, p 75.
- 19 Information is relatively scanty on the historical functions of the *!gai aogu*, or Khoikhoi "specialists in the art of magic", in Schapera's phrase. Their roles none the less included some form of divination. In addition, the Khoikhoi practised various forms of war magic. However, it is hard to tell how far these practices overlapped and whether war-doctors were an indigenous Khoi form; certainly the Eastern Cape Khoikhoi, especially the Gonaqua, had come under heavy Xhosa cultural influence and the idea of a protective, all-seeing "Magic Hottentot" may have been a Xhosa import. Isaac Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa* (London, 1951; 1st pub. 1930), pp 355-56 and 389-92; Theophilus Hahn, *Tsun-i-!Goam, The Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi* (London, 1881), pp 82 and 90.
- 20 V C Malherbe, "Hermanus and His Sons", p. 62.
- 21 Barrow, II. Cf also, for example, Ulbricht to LMS, 29 April 1805 to 12 March 1806, LMS-SA 3/2/B.
- 22 J B Peires, *The Dead Will Arise*, (Johannesburg, 1989), p 135.
- 23 For one example among many, Vanderlingen to LMS, 5 February 1802, LMS-SA, 2/1/A.
- 24 Minutes of a meeting held at Philipton, 5 August 1834, Cape Archives, ASO.
- 25 *Evangelical Magazine*, December 1803 and January 1804; Haweis to Van der Kemp, London, 6 December 1803, LMS-SA 2/3/C.
- 26 W J Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (London, 1822-24), Vol I, p 111.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp 204, 330 and 332.
- 28 CA ASO, p 5.
- 29 Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol I, p 68.
- 30 CA ASO, pp 5-6.
- 31 James Read, junior, to John Philip, 16 November 1835, in Basil LeCordeur and Christopher Saunders (eds), *The Kitchingman Papers: Missionary letters and journals. 1817-1848, from the Brenthurst Collection* (Johannesburg, 1976), p 159.
- 32 John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London, 1815), p 89.
- 33 For a typical example of a dream of hell, cf Read to LMS, 30 January 1808, LMS-SA, 3/5/A. This also brings out the importance of dreams in Khoikhoi religious consciousness.
- 34 *Annual Report of Bethelsdorp, 1809*, LMS-SA, 4/1/E.
- 35 The missionary synod of 1814 in fact instituted Khoisan assistant missionaries. LMS-SA, 5/2/F.

- 36 J Read, snr., to LMS directors, 1804 Bethelsdorp Annual Report, LMS-SA 2/4/E; also quoted in Richard Elphick and V C Malherbe, "The Khoisan to 1828" in Elphick and H.Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1988), p 39.
- 37 1807 Yearly Account of Bethelsdorp, LMS-SA, 3/4/D.
- 38 Read to LMS, 30 August 1808, LMS-SA, 3/5/B.
- 39 *Missionary Register*, Vol II, February 1814, pp 100-01.
- 40 John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa* (London, 1815), p 82; Van der Kemp to LMS, Bethelsdorp 1804 Annual Report, LMS-SA 2/4/E. A woman was considered to be *!nau* after childbirth and was supposed to remain in seclusion and not to touch cold water for a certain ritual period. Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p 263; Winifred Hoernlé, "Certain Rites of Transition and the Conception of !Nau among the Hottentots", in Peter Carstens (ed), *The Social Organization of the Nama And Other Essays by Winifred Hoernlé* (Johannesburg, 1895), pp 57-74.
- 41 Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p 122; Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p.385; Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa* (Cape Town and elsewhere, 1984), p 69. Note that Khoikhoi names for these figures naturally differed slightly from area to area.
- 42 Alan Barnard, "Structure and Fluidity in Khoisan Religious Ideas", in *Journal of Religion in Africa* XVIII, 3 (1988).
- 43 Doug Stuart, "The 'Wicked Christians' and the 'Children of the Mist': missionary and Khoi interactions at the Cape in the early nineteenth century", pp 1-13 above.
- 44 "Minutes of the Conference held by the African Missionaries", LMS-SA, 5/2/F.
- 45 Report of the Commission of Circuit, in Theal (ed), *Records of the Cape Colony*, Vol IX, October 1813-April 1814, pp 72, 81.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp 74-75.
- 48 E Elbourne, "The Foundation of the Church Missionary Society: the Anglican missionary impulse", in J D Walsh, C M Haydon, S Taylor (eds), *The Church of England c1689-c1833: from toleration to tractarianism* (Cambridge, forthcoming 1992); Penelope Carson, "An Imperial Dilemma: the propagation of Christianity in early colonial India", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18 (2), 1990, pp 169-90.
- 49 John Philip, *Researches in South Africa* (London, 1828), Vol I, p 213.
- 50 Thomas Pringle, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (London, 1835), pp 279-80; Priscilla Buxton to J Philip, 30 September - 17 December 1833, T F Buxton Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford, Vol 13, pp 125-45; James Read, jnr, *The Kat River Settlement in 1851: Described in a Series of Letters Published in the South African Commercial Advertiser* (Cape Town, 1852).
- 51 Trapido, "Emergence of Liberalism".
- 52 Philip, *Researches*; John L Comaroff, "Images of Empire, Contests of Conscience: models of colonial domination in South Africa", *American Ethnologist* 16 (4),

- November 1989, pp 661-62.
- 53 Cf also Robert Ross, "James Cropper, John Philip and the *Researches in South Africa*", in Macmillan and Marks (eds), *Africa and Empire*, pp 140-52.
 - 54 Read to Kitchingman, 26 August 1828, *Kitchingman Papers*, p 98; Bannister, *Humane Policy*, p cclxxviii.
 - 55 CA ASO.
 - 56 James Read, junior, to Philip, 16 November 1835, KP, p 157.
 - 57 T F Buxton to Philip, 16 September 1834, Buxton papers, Vol 12, pp 206-16.
 - 58 *Edinburgh Review*, Vol 58, January 1834, p 363.
 - 59 For example, T F Buxton, "Heads of resolutions to be presented at the Aborigine Committee meeting", 26 July 1835, Buxton Papers, Vol 14, pp 73 ff.
 - 60 *Missionary Chronicle*, June 1836, pp 420-22; Evidence of Andrew Stoffels, *Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements)*, Imperial Blue Book, 1836 nr VII, 538, Facsimile Reprint (Cape Town, 1966), Vol I, p 589.
 - 61 Crehan, "Khoi, Boer and Missionary", p 156.
 - 62 Greg Cuthbertson, "The English-Speaking Churches and Colonialism", in Charles Villa-Vicencio (ed), *Theology and Violence: the South African debate* (Braamfontein, South Africa, 1987), p 15; V Y Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, Indianapolis, and London, 1988), pp 44-97 and 178-79.
 - 63 J and J Comaroff, "Through the Looking-Glass", pp 6-8.