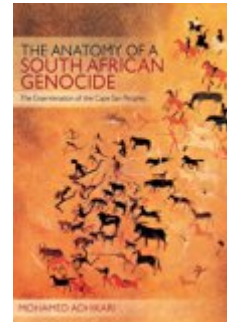


Mohamed Adhikari. *Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. 120 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1987-8.

Reviewed by Jill E. Kelly (Michigan State University)

Published on H-Genocide (July, 2013)

Commissioned by Elisa G. von Joeden-Forgey



The number of people who identify as Khoisan has surged in postapartheid South Africa. Khoi and San communities have formed their own advocacy organizations to ensure land and resource rights and have partnered with international “First Peoples” groups to further their aims. The extent to which Khoisan issues have been acknowledged in the new South African political and cultural agenda can be seen in the incorporation of San rock art and the /Xam language in the new national coat of arms, the 1996 *Miscast* exhibit at the National Gallery in Cape Town, and the 1999 land claim finding that returned sixty-five thousand hectares of land in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to the dispersed Khomani San who had been evicted in 1931.[1] On December 16, 2007, a memorial commemorating the major conflicts that shaped South Africa’s history called S’khumbuto (or place of remembrance in siSwati) opened to the South African public as part of the national Freedom Park. S’khumbuto was designed to “bear testimony to the various conflicts that have shaped the country and commemorates those who have sacrificed their lives for humanity and freedom.”[2] S’khumbuto includes a “Wall of Names,” 697 meters in length and inscribed with the names of people who died during eight conflicts: the precolonial wars, slavery, wars of resistance, the South African War, two world wars, the struggle for liberation, and, most relevant to this discussion, genocide.

Despite these public gestures, the destruction of some of southern Africa’s original inhabitants—the Cape San—has generated little public or scholarly debate in South Africa, especially in comparison to the colonial settler extermination of indigenous peoples in the United States and Australia. Mohamed Adhikari’s *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide* is not just a much-needed syn-

thesis of scholarly knowledge on the colonial encounter between the European settlers and the San hunter-gatherers of the Cape interior. Adhikari, a historian at the University of Cape Town who has written extensively on Coloured South Africans,[3] compellingly argues that the annihilation of the Cape San societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constitutes genocide. Many scholars of the colonial encounter in southern Africa recognize the destruction of the Cape San as genocide, but none explicitly analyze it as such. Adhikari thus makes a welcome contribution to the literature.

To make this case, Adhikari opens the book with a definition of genocide that is more stringent than that of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), as outlined by Article II, the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such” (p. 14). Adhikari instead weighs his evidence against the following definition: “Genocide is the intentional physical destruction of a social group in its entirety, or the intentional annihilation of such a significant part of the group that it is no longer able to reproduce itself biologically or culturally, nor sustain an independent economic existence” (p. 12). For nonspecialists in genocide studies, Adhikari includes several alternative definitions of genocide. Disappointingly, he does not elaborate on his own choice or the significance of such a decision to define genocide in terms of near-total physical annihilation. But this strict definition makes Adhikari’s argument all the more compelling as he provides evidence for even this demanding interpretation.

In chapters 1 through 3, Adhikari draws on colonial

sources and secondary scholarship to concisely synthesize the violent nature of the colonial encounter between the Cape San societies, on the one hand, and both the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and British administrations, on the other. He describes two cycles of violence as characteristic of this encounter. The first and immediate cycle was characterized by the encroachment of the original Dutch settlers (the migrant farmers known as *trekboers*), San retaliation, and *trekboer* retribution. The longer-term cycle across the eighteenth century was one of *trekboers* encroaching in phases further into the interior. By the start of European colonization in southern Africa, the San had been forced into the interior by Khoi pastoralists and Bantu-speaking farmers. After the VOC set up a refreshment station at the tip of southern Africa in 1652, the colony began to expand into the immediate interior in order to meet the agricultural needs of the settlement.

As the Dutch-speaking settlers pushed back the frontier, they increasingly came into contact and conflict with groups of the displaced San. The *trekboers* established farms around springs and water holes and controlled expanses of land disproportionate to their numbers. This encroachment caused the San to both withdraw further into the interior and ferociously resist. Withdrawal meant moving to less hospitable terrain and abandoning land with sacred and ritual significance. Thus, resistance became increasingly common as the San raided and killed settler stock, slayed herders, and destroyed crops and homesteads. Adhikari draws out the tenacity and ferocity of San opposition despite limited source material and without romanticizing their response. He tells the story of one San leader, Koerikei, who evaded the commando of David Schalk van der Merwe and stood taunting the militia from a cliff. San bands raided alone, in larger groups, in cooperation with dispossessed Khoi, and occasionally in collaboration with Khoisan farm servants. While initial San attacks were sporadic and small in scale, they increased in frequency as pressure on resources mounted. While the San were no match for the firepower of the settlers, that the San consisted of large numbers of small social units spread out over a vast territory enabled them to resist and survive throughout the eighteenth century.

Adhikari shows how this continuous San aggression shaped the responses of the settlers and colonial administration. The commando became the “main institution of military force at the Cape under Dutch rule and the main instrument of war against indigenous peoples” (p. 39). These retaliatory raids by armed, mounted militia units evolved through the eighteenth century to meet the mil-

itary needs of *trekboer* society and became an accepted part of life for most settlers. From about 1770 through the 1790s, state-sanctioned commandos led by local representatives of the VOC and stocked with VOC-provided shot and powder were organized annually against the San. These gave way to unofficial commandos that could be mobilized rapidly in response to San attacks and raids and that reported back to the local VOC representatives after the fact.

The commandos became increasingly exterminatory in intent, especially after the June 5, 1777, VOC Council of Policy that explicitly sanctioned the eradication of the San. For Adhikari, this policy change represents the genocidal moment in Cape Dutch settler relations with the San. Commandos hunted the San with impunity and destroyed entire bands. They put San men to death on the spot and took San women and children captive as farm laborers. Adhikari argues that the assimilation of these captives also contributed to the genocidal process as those taken captive were effaced of their San identities.

While the San’s ability to reproduce themselves biologically and culturally and subsist as foragers was compromised under the rule of the VOC, it was extinguished after the British took control of the colony in 1795. While the British brought with them significant military power, the high cost of conflict as well as humanitarian and social concerns ensured a more humane policy toward the San. However, the British turned to deracination and acculturation to obliterate the San. “Whereas Dutch colonialism became exterminationist, and therefore genocidal, in its relations with the San, British colonial policy could be described as eliminationist and ethnocidal in outlook” (p. 61). The British implemented a four-pronged approach in their efforts to acculturate the San to colonial society and provide them with some protection against settler abuse. They encouraged settlers to make gifts of livestock to the San to prevent raiding and encourage pastoralism. They sought to identify and appoint suitable chiefs among the San with whom they could negotiate, a popular tenet of indirect rule applied across the British colonies that particularly faltered among the San who did not have hereditary leaders. The British also promoted missionary activity to “civilize” the San and prepare them for a sedentary life and declared the area known as Bushmanland to be a reserve for the San.

Racism played no small part in the extreme violence of the frontier commandos under both the VOC and the British. To settlers, the San occupied the lowest rung on this racial hierarchy and in their minds lacked the ba-

sic human characteristics of language, settled life, and social organization beyond the family. While the VOC sought to literally kill San society, the British sought to turn primitive hunter-gatherers into pastoralists and laborers. Adhikari insightfully points out the irony here: the immigrants who had traveled across the ocean and pressed inland accused the San of racial inferiority because of their migratory lifestyle. Those who labeled the San as savage undertook brutal exterminatory acts themselves.

But the San resisted the sedentary and pastoral life and showed little interest in Christianity. While the British administration had issued an injunction against commandos, a clause making exceptions where San aggression justified retaliation enabled continued state-sanctioned violence. Despite the more humane British policy toward indigenes, San society within the colony was extinguished in an incremental process of encroachment, enforced labor, and periodic massacre. The few bands that survived the colonial encounter did so in parts of the Kalahari Desert. Adhikari cites recent estimates that today 7,500 people in South Africa identify as San—6,000 of whom are recent immigrants from Namibia and southern Angola. The presence of this small community suggests a missed opportunity to seek out indigenous traditions about the colonial encounter.

While Adhikari provides ample evidence for the intentional destruction of the Cape San in the early chapters, it is in chapter 4 that he most explicitly makes the case for genocide. Adhikari converses with the larger literature on genocide and confronts the general reluctance among the public and scholars to label this historical episode as genocidal. Adhikari counters the anthropologist Miklos Sazlay (who devoted significant attention to explaining why the San's destruction did not constitute genocide), addressing doubts about the concept of genocide as a modern crime not applicable to preindustrial and colonial mass killings. In response to objections concerning the long time period over which the San were annihilated, nearly two centuries, Adhikari works with the literature on settler imperialism and genocide that argues that the eliminationism of settler colonialism is a structure- rather than a time-bounded event. He highlights the shared characteristics of modern genocide and the annihilation of the Cape San: intention to eradicate a national group coupled with large-scale killing of that

group.

The Anatomy of a South African Genocide is provocative and consequential. By compellingly arguing that the extermination of the Cape San is genocide, Adhikari makes an argument with cultural, legal, and political implications in postapartheid South Africa. Adhikari's clear prose and conveyance of complicated issues, accompanied by a chronology of important dates in the Cape colony's history and a guide to further reading on the Cape San, makes this short book suitable for a wider public audience and the college classroom. But this same succinctness sometimes leaves the academic reader wanting more analysis and engagement with the wider literature on genocide. However, as Adhikari hopes, this book should heighten awareness of the genocidal impact of colonial conquest on the Cape San.

Notes

[1]. South Africa Government Information, "The National Coat of Arms," <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/symbols/coa/index.htm> (accessed February 1, 2013). Much has been written on the *Miscast* exhibit, which was accompanied with a publication by the curator. See Pippa Skotnes, ed., *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Bushmen* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996). Several contributions to Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee's *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998) also analyze the exhibit. For an examination of the land claim, see William Ellis, "The Khomani Land Claim against the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park: Requiring and Acquiring Authenticity," in *Land, Memory, Reconstruction and Justice: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa*, ed. Cherryll Walker, Anna Bohlin, Ruth Hall, and Thembela Kepe (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 181-197.

[2]. Hendrik Prinsloo, "Freedom Park—South Africa's Flagship Heritage Precinct," *Innovate* 5 (2010): 74-77, <http://web.up.ac.za/sitefiles/file/44/1026/2163/8121/Innovate%235/Freedom%20Park%20%E2%80%93%20South%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20flagship%20heritage%20precinct.pdf>. See also www.freedompark.co.za (accessed February 1, 2013).

[3]. Coloured South Africans refers to people of mixed African and white descent in South Africa.

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Citation: Jill E. Kelly. Review of Adhikari, Mohamed, *Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. July, 2013.

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