



A Nomansland Triptych: People, Pictures and Places

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Abstract. In recent legislation, South Africa seeks to legally recognize its First Nations—collectively known as the Khoisan. The process to achieve recognition is onerous and perhaps even impossible for some Khoisan-descendant communities. While rock art, most closely associated with San peoples, is a claim to country, the dearth of evidence directly linking identifiable San communities and individuals to painted places, makes it unlikely that most Khoisan communities could use the images in such claims. The biographical thus becomes vital to any claims for Khoisan recognition and their claim to country. Fortunately, there is archival evidence for some communities in some parts of South Africa that allow us to link people to places and to pictures in those places. Although incomplete, the archival evidence still allows some individual and communal San biographies to be linked to the land and its rock art.

Keywords: San; Nomansland; South Africa; Bushman Affair; Stanford; Maqoqa; Nqabayoy; Mdwebo; Biligwana, First Nations, Khoisan, land, *Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act of 2019*

A note on terminology

Southern Africa's historical lexicon is fraught with words that have acquired pejorative connotations over time. These include the words 'Bushman' and 'San'. I use 'San' throughout the text, except where the intended meaning of the original would be altered by such a change. Although a pejorative word in neighbouring countries, South African scholars prefer 'San' because of the historically-received issues around the word 'Bushman'. Words in square brackets in quoted historical texts indicate where spelling has been altered to standardise it so as to reduce potential confusion.

Introduction

In 2019, South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, signed the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act. This legislation aims to recognise the country's First Nations legally, thereby bringing the country in line with places such as Australia and the United States that have been more progressive in this regard. The official process for communities to apply for such recognition begins in 2026. The difficulty facing Khoisan descendants now is a series of obstacles to proving their legitimacy. For example, any group seeking recognition needs to demonstrate a historical community and a connection to place (Republic of South Africa 2019). These obstacles are difficult to overcome because settlers produced most of the South African archive. They thought of the Khoisan as wandering nomads or as illegitimate stock rustlers who had no community and thus no claim to country. The difficulties facing Khoisan descendants seeking recognition as communities is like that of peoples in other postcolonial countries. Gayatri Spivak, for example, in considering the archive for India, which was largely produced by white English colonists, asks the questions:

...how can we touch the consciousness of the people,

even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (Spivak 1988: 285).

We can ask almost identical questions for the Khoisan in South Africa today: Given that the settlers, with all their prejudices, produced the archive, how do we gain insight into how Khoisan thought about community and about country?

In this paper, I begin the process of answering this question. I do so by examining San communities living in and around an area known for part of the nineteenth century as Nomansland (Figure 1). San, of course, refers to the hunter-gatherer section of 'Khoisan', while 'Khoi' refers to the pastoralists. As scholars have pointed out, the categories were not that distinct in the past (see, for example, Schrire 1980). Nomansland, as with most areas of South Africa, is strewn with rock art sites known to be mostly of San authorship. The rock art sites are themselves a San claim to land. There is, however, little information on which group or which individual San made the images in a specific place. We are fortunate to have a range of archival documents. These include correspondence, journals, diaries, reports, and statements from people connected to the San of Nomansland. Together, they help link people to places and to rock art. The archival data, found in different repositories in South Africa, can be confusing. To assist with clarity, I group the discussion into three parts; each part concerns a cluster of archival records collected during a particular time period. These three clusters focus on the periods: 1848–1850; 1884–1909; and 1984–1990. These clusters resemble a triptych: each tells its own story, but together they form one larger narrative.

This larger narrative shows how people in Nomansland were related to one another, to the land and to pictures painted in those places.

Archival documents always need to be viewed through a cautious lens because they are subject to motivations and ideologies of the people engaged in producing them. Preferably, all evidence should be verified by an independent source. The three parts of the evidence that form the Nomansland triptych come from unrelated settlers and their descendants, acting independently of one another, and at different times. Yet, the evidence collected in all three clusters concerns the same San communities living in the same part of South Africa for well over a hundred years. The three parts of the triptych thus act to form a large picture when evidence in one part corroborates something from another one. The three parts, however, also act as constraints on each other when, as we shall see, evidence from one of the three archival clusters contradicts that from another.

The 'Bushman Affair' (1848–1850)

'Nomansland' is no longer called by that name. In the last 150 years, different authors have labelled it variously as Alfred County, East Griqualand, Transkei, North Eastern Cape, and today the north Eastern Cape, Alfred County (Russell 1903:6), East Griqualand (Knoll 1935), Transkei (Ross 1974), North Eastern Cape (Opperman 1996a) and today north Eastern Cape (Blundell 2004). The many names show how unsettled the region's status has been. Situated in the Natal-Cape interstice of the 1800s, this small area on the south-eastern seaboard of South Africa was very much betwixt-and-between two colonies (Figure 2). In this remote landscape below the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg peaks, the San made their last rock paintings. It was also from here that they launched their final resistance campaigns against the encroaching colonists. Both fearing and loathing the San, most colonists regarded them simply as 'savage' bandits who stole domestic stock. In a colonial mindset, the San were recidivists and thus had no rights to land. The area that they occupied between the two colonies was thus 'No Man's Land'.

While the word 'Nomansland' indicated an absence of ownership, archaeological evidence shows that hunter-gatherers—the predecessors of the San—lived there for at least the last 29,000 years (Opperman 1996b). Archaeological evidence shows that hunter-gatherers occupied the region continuously into the colonial era (Opperman 1987, 1996b, 1999; Reynard et

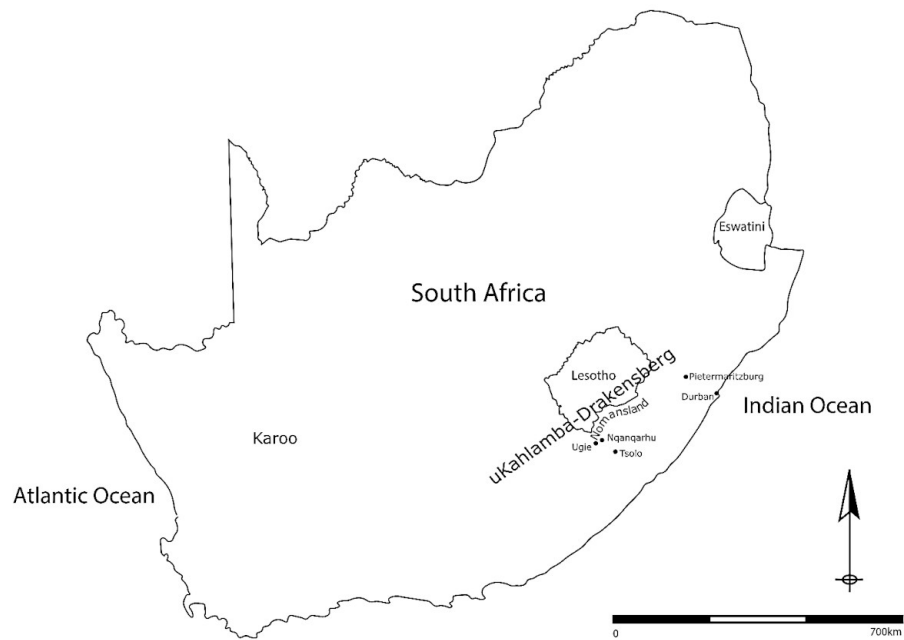


Figure 1. Map of South Africa showing the location of the area called Nomansland for part of the nineteenth century. The material discussed in this paper focuses on this area.

al. 2024). Recent direct dates on black pigment from paintings at six sites from Nomansland confirm that the San were making rock art images in the area from at least 2000 BP (Bonneau et al. 2016, 2017, 2022). Images of cattle, horses, sheep, wagons, and soldiers show that the art was still made in the nineteenth century and possibly into the early twentieth century. While the archaeological evidence of early lives is limited, the archival records provide a clearer view of the San in Nomansland for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first archival cluster dates to the mid-nineteenth century and concerns the 'Bushman Affair'. The archive includes Henry Fynn's diaries and correspondence, the Harding Inquiry report, and the correspondence of various Wesleyan missionaries. This material provides valuable information into the San groups of Nomansland, the places they occupied as well as the relationship between the San groups, missionaries, colonists and the various Bantu-speaking communities. In 1848 Harry Smith, the Cape Governor, requested Henry Francis Fynn, a colonial agent who had worked in different capacities for two decades for the Cape Colonial Government, to stay as British resident in Mpondoland (Figure 2). The Mpondo are an Nguni-speaking, agropastoralist group, whose ancestors arrived in what is today South Africa some 2000 years ago. During the nineteenth century they lived south-east of Nomansland under their celebrated leader, Faku (Stapleton 2001:71). Famously, Fynn had been a founder of and trader at Port Natal (Durban) during the 1820s and he had a well-known association with the Zulu leader, Shaka (Wright 1974). Previously, in 1835, he had acted as a colonial agent for the Cape

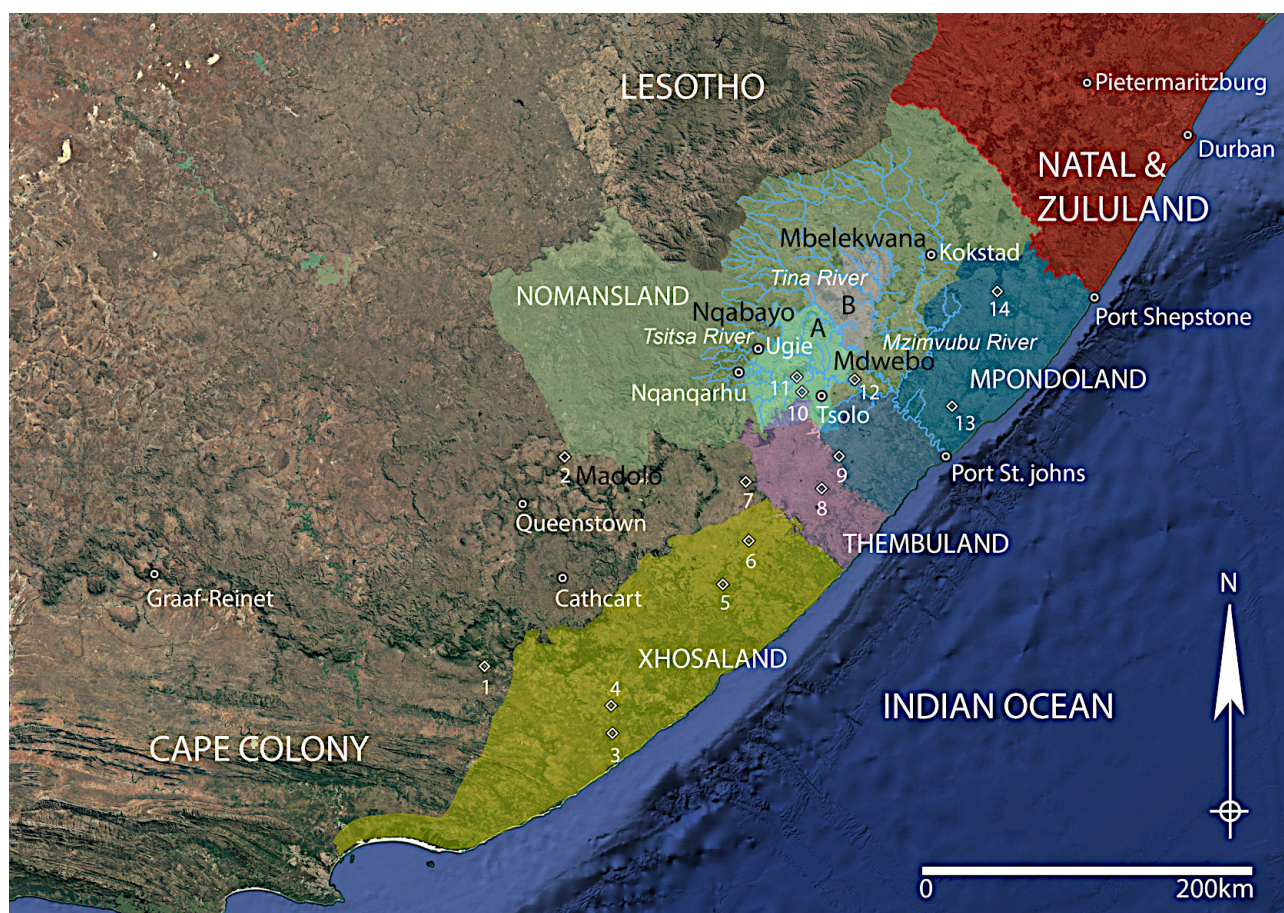


Figure 2. Relative locations of known nineteenth-century San (Madolo, Nqabay, Mdwebo, Mbelekwana) and other groups in the Nomansland region. Area A in Nomansland indicates Mpondomise and Area B is the location of the Bhaca. Both communities were closely associated with San peoples. The demarcated areas for all groups do not indicate impermeable, static or essentialist boundaries. Diamond-shaped symbols indicate mission stations, which are key sources of historical information about San and other communities along the eastern South African seaboard. 1. Kat River (LMS, 1829), 2. Mt. Arthur (LMS, 1840) 3. Wesleyville (WMS, 1823) 4. Mt. Coke (WMS, 1825) 5. Butterworth (WMS, 1827) 6. Beecham's Wood (WMS,) 7. Morley (WMS, 1829) 8. Clarkebury (WMS, 1830) 9. Bungtingville (WMS, 1830) 10. St. Cuthbert (ANG, 1880) 11. St. Augustine (ANG, 1865) 12. Shawbury (WMS, 1839) 13. Palmerton (WMS, 1845) 14. Lochenberg (WMS, n.d.). LMS=London Missionary Society, WMS=Wesleyan Missionary Society, ANG=Anglican Mission. Base imagery from Google Earth and altered in Inkscape.

government to the Mpondo. His command of the Nguni languages and his knowledge of local political matters made him an invaluable liaison between the indigenous communities and the Cape and Natal colonies. One of his duties during the 1848 residency was to learn about the relationships between the various peoples under Faku's rule, including the San. The colonial farmers in the Natal Colony had suffered heavy losses from stock rustling and they had long suspected that the raiders were San from Nomansland, an area meant to be under Faku's control (Liebenberg 1977:140ff).

Shortly after his arrival, Fynn began his investigation and it did not take him long to identify two distinct San bands. He also quickly compiled evidence that the San were working with the Bhaca, Mpondomise (both Nguni-speaking agropastoralist groups) and Mfengu people (a group of refugees of mixed descent) to rustle livestock from settlers. Holding this coalition together

was a man called Hans Lochenberg, the son of a Dutch dissident from the Cape Colony called Jan Nicolaas Lochenberg and his Khoi wife, Sarah (Blundell et al. 2022). Fynn moved to punish all these communities and seized livestock from them as compensation for colonial losses. His efforts were, however, thwarted by Hans Lochenberg's brother, Willem, who was a catechist for the Wesleyan missionaries in Nomansland. He pleaded his brother's innocence to the missionaries and they complained to the Colonial authorities about Fynn's punitive actions. Walter Harding, the Crown Prosecutor, went to Mpondoland to establish a formal inquiry into Fynn. The inquiry, which began on May 6, 1850, revolved around Fynn's journal entries and the testimonies of the spies he had deployed (Harding 1850). Harding took statements from Fynn, his spies, members of two San groups, the Bhaca, Mpondomise, as well as the brothers Hans and Willem Lochenberg (Harding 1850). Harding's inquiry confirmed that

there were at least three groups of San operating in the Nomansland region. The three groups were under the leadership of three different men: Mdwebo, Nqabayoy and Biligwana, respectively.

Soon after the inquiry, Fynn spoke to Qinti, a son of Mdwebo. Qinti helped clarify some misconceptions from the Harding Inquiry. We learn, for example, that Mdwebo and Nqabayoy were close and that they were enemies of Biligwana (Fynn 1852). The animosity between the groups came to a head when Biligwana's band killed the son of one of Nqabayoy's men. Mdwebo and Nqabayoy attacked and killed Biligwana and his sons in revenge. The remnants of Biligwana's group joined the

Thola, a group of people about whom little is known and even less is verified. During the Harding Inquiry, in what was a pre-planned defence, all the people that Fynn had accused of stealing colonial livestock pleaded innocence and deflected blame onto the Thola as being the actual thieves. Qinti described the Thola as being large in number while the bands of Nqabayoy and Mdwebo were small by comparison (Harding 1850; Wright 1971:126). Qinti also knew of a group of San who, many years previously, had lived at the headwaters of the Mzimvubu River, but he did not know what had become of them (Fynn 1852:72). Statements from Mdwebo's and Nqabayoy's groups support Qinti's account. They also confirm links between these San communities and the Bhaca, Mpondomise, and Hans Lochenberg's people (see Harding 1850).

Shortly after the inquiry, Mdwebo and Nqabayoy's groups mounted an expedition against the Thola (Z. 1850). They claimed to have killed and also captured some of the Thola in skirmishes and to have recovered colonial cattle and horses from their erstwhile enemies. This claim by Nqabayoy and Mdwebo, as relayed to the Wesleyan Missionaries, needs to be viewed with scepticism, as it is a cynical effort to take advantage of events around the inquiry. According to a newspaper article published under the pseudonym 'Z', Mdwebo and Nqabayoy wanted to retrieve cattle that the Thola had stolen from colonial farmers, thereby demon-

strating their own innocence. This defence strategy seems to have been coordinated by Hans Lochenberg through his brother, Willem (Blundell et al. 2022). Yet, as we shall see, both Mdwebo's and Nqabayoy's people were involved in stock raiding and their attack was an attempt to shift colonial suspicion away from them and on to the Thola. Care should thus be exercised when extrapolating historical narratives from the Harding Inquiry Report. Many of the statements made about the Thola during the Harding Inquiry are likely to be exaggerations, manipulations or outright lies as they are part of a strategy to deflect blame away from Mdwebo and Nqabayoy and their allies onto the Thola.

Although Qinti described the Thola as numerous, he stated that Mdwebo's band was small, numbering only some thirteen men (Harding 1850). The group had moved to the Mzimvubu River in about 1848 after having stayed on the Mkhomazi (Figure 3). Owing to encounters with colonial settlers, we can further establish the movements of Mdwebo's group. In 1846, Jacobus Uys, the well-known Boer, twice encountered Mdwebo in the Mzimkhulu-Mtamvuna-Bisi area (Figure 3). Information obtained from other sources shows that at this time, Mdwebo's band moved as far away from the escarpment as the Ngeli Mountains (see Wright 1971: 126ff). In June 1848, James Melville learned from people living on the Mkhomazi River that Mdwebo's band was living at the Bisi River. In

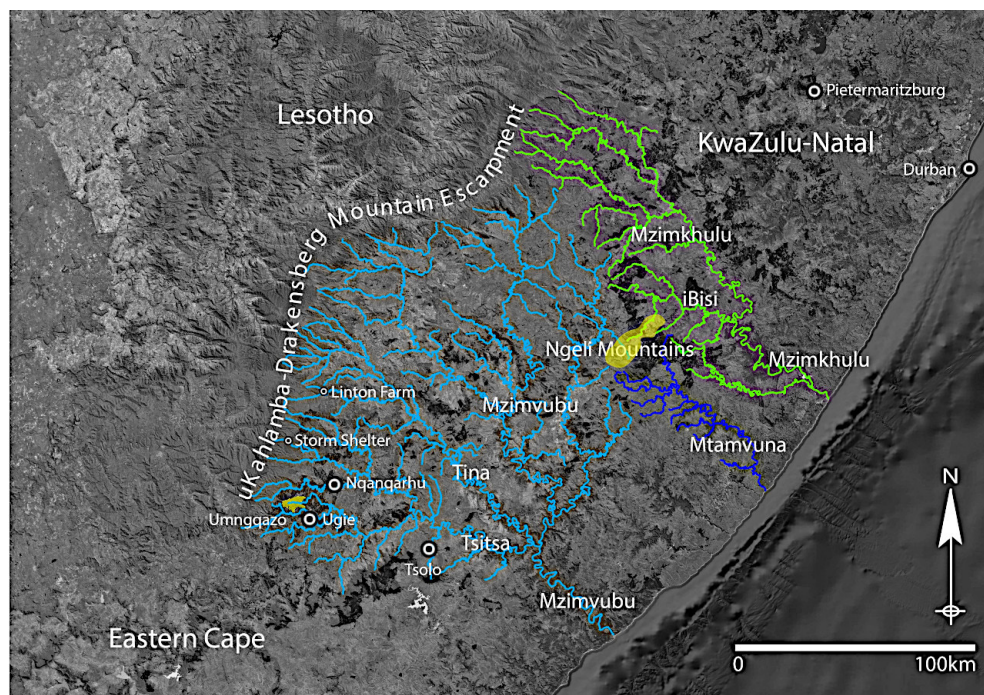


Figure 3. The Mzimvubu, Mtamvuna and Mzimkhulu drainage systems. Nqabayoy, Mdwebo and Biligwana all appear to have been resident in this region, even if they raided far afield. Nqabayoy's area was the southern headwaters of the Mzimvubu (on the Tina and Tsitsa Rivers), Mdwebo was observed on the Mzimkhulu and the Mtamvuna, and while we can be less certain about Biligwana, his group was said to hunt as far south as the Ngeli Mountains but to reside in the northern headwaters of the Mzimvubu. Base imagery from Google Earth and altered in Inkscape.

March the following year, Melville, learned from a local chief in southern Natal that a party of San living near the Bisi had moved away. At about this time, Mdwebo's band was observed farther south amongst the Bhaca (*ibid.*), who had themselves moved into the area of Nomansland after the Mfecane upheavals (ca. 1816-1824). Mdwebo's band was thus slowly moving southwards, back toward the Mzimvubu River, which runs through the heart of Nomansland.

The 'Bushman Affair' records provide strong information about San groups in Nomansland but no evidence of their rock painting. The 'Bushman Affair' documents thus only offer part of the full picture of the San in Nomansland, much in the way that a side panel of a triptych offers a scene that needs to be viewed in relation to the other two scenes to see the complete picture. Without this evidence, though, we would not have a historical context for the next two encounters between San and settlers that I discuss, which do provide insight into the practice of San rock painting. The archival data from these two encounters also allows us to see how some people mentioned in the 'Bushman Affair' were linked to place and to pictures through time.

Stanford's Magistracy (1884-1909)

Thirty-four years after the 'Bushman Affair', a colonial official met members of Nqabayo's group and a Thembu man who had once lived with them. The official, Walter Stanford, was born in the year of the Harding inquiry. He joined the civil service as a young man and became a magistrate in 1876. In 1885, he was promoted to chief magistrate of Griqualand East and was stationed at Kokstad, near the Ngeli Mountains

(Maquarrie 1962), located on the north-eastern edge of what had been Nomansland in 1850. In his travels as chief magistrate, he met small San populations in the territories under his jurisdiction, in whom he became interested. He also met Silayi—the Thembu man mentioned earlier—who had lived with Nqabayo's group in the mid-nineteenth century. His discussions with these San groups and Silayi provide the most detailed description known of one of the San bands in Nomansland. One small group of San included three individuals who were particularly interesting to Stanford. These three were the leader, Luhayi, another man called Mkahlila, and a woman known as Mamxabela. Mkahlila and Mamxabela were both between forty and fifty years of age when Stanford first met them on the Umnga River and then later again on the Tsitsa (Figure 4) (Maquarrie 1962). These three related their life experiences and history in Nomansland to Stanford at these two meetings.

Mkahlila told Stanford that he had been a small boy living at Gubenxa when a group of Thembu, under the leadership of Mgudhlwa attacked his group. The Thembu left him for dead but some of the band, who had been away hunting and so escaped the massacre, found him still alive. Stanford (Maquarrie 1962:29) describes the woman, Mamxabela, who could still speak some of her San language when she met him, as follows:

Mamxabela was a lively talkative little being. She told me that her husband who had died some years previously was a painter and she pointed to rocks in the distance where some of his work was to be seen. She evidently had a high opinion of his skill as an artist.

Silayi corroborated much of what Luhayi, Mkahlila and Mamxabela told Stanford. In his statement

made on the 7th May 1884, Silayi describes how he had gone to live with Nqabayo's people in about 1850. He had initially lived on the White Kei River, to the west of Nomansland (Figure 1), and closer to the Cape Colony, where there were still San groups living in close interaction with the Thembu who were under the leadership of Jumba. Silayi befriended a man called Hans and his nephew, Ngqika. Hans was Ngqika's mother's brother and Ngqika's father was a San man named Qako, who lived under the famous San leader Mado-
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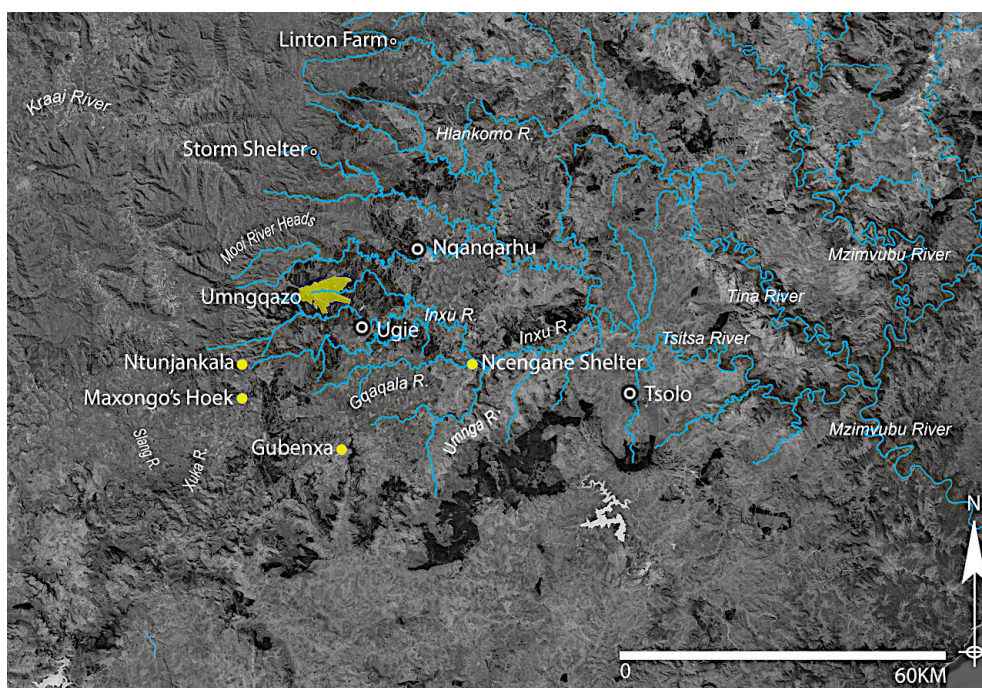


Figure 4. The heartland of Nqabayo's group centred on the area around the modern-day towns of Qanqarhu, Ugie and Tsolo. They were attacked at Gubenxa in 1858 by Jumba's Thembu. Base imagery from Google Earth and altered in Inkscape.

see Saunders 1977). Silayi's friend is most probably Hans Lochenberg, mentioned earlier (see Blundell et al. 2022).

Nqabayo's group, according to Silayi, lived in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg at the sources of the Xuka (the largest tributary of the Mbashe River) and Qanqarhu Rivers (today known as the Mooi River; it is a tributary of the Tsitsa River) and he first met them in the Umngqazo Mountains (also known as Apryntje's Berg) (Figure 4). From here, Silayi, together with Nqabayo's band moved along the Kraai River, raiding livestock

from Boer farmers near the town of Dordrecht before moving back over the mountains of the Ntunjankala (also known as the Gatberg). There are other places that Silayi mentions by name—the Indenxa River, the Tsonio River, Waschbank, the Kowe River (Slang River), Hlankomo—where the band either stayed or passed as they raided livestock from the colonists. In other places, such as downriver on the Gubenxa or at Maxongo's Hoek, they fought skirmishes with Thembu or Boers. The places Silayi mentioned match, or lie close to, those named by Mamxabela and Mkahlila; the country that these two and Silayi lived and moved in was the same. Importantly, according to Silayi, Mgudhlwa's Thembu attacked Nqabayo's band in 1858 because they had stolen some of his cattle (Maquarrie 1962:36). The Thembu destroyed the group in this attack but Nqabayo and a few of his men got away, seeking refuge under Mditshwa, the leader of the western Mpondomise (another Cape Nguni-speaking group) (Stanford 1910). Almost all the women and children in Nqabayo's band died in the attack and the subsequent massacre of the San prisoners by the Thembu. Only two boys and one woman, Nqabayo's daughter, escaped.

Interestingly, the group that Stanford met at the Umnga and Tsitsa Rivers also comprised three individuals, two men and one woman—Luhayi, Mkahlila and Mamxabela. Mkahlila confirmed the linkage between his small group and Nqabayo's by his account of his survival after the attack by Mgudhlwa on the San at Gubenxa. Silayi, in his statement, identifies this as the location of the attack. Mkahlila, then, was a member of Nqabayo's group and, almost certainly, was one

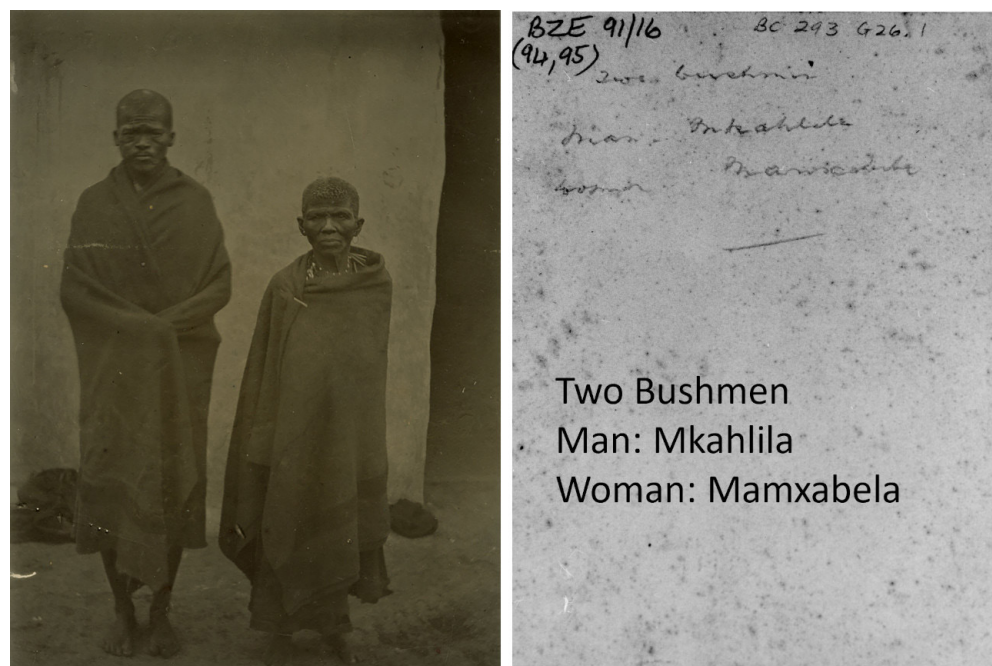


Figure 5. Front and back of a photograph from the Stanford collection. The names in pencil on the back identify the man as Mkahlila and the woman as Mamxabela. Mamxabela is the grandmother of Maqoqa (see Figure 8).

of the three survivors of the women and children (see below). Luhayi and Mamxabela, we cannot be so certain of, but it is easy to entertain the idea that they were the other two who survived the attack at Gubenxa. Indeed, Mamxabela stated that she had joined Mditshwa's band at some point in her life, further suggesting that she was a member of Nqabayo's group at the time of attack.

It is unfortunate that Stanford does not provide the dates for either of the two occasions on which he met Luhayi, Mkahlila and Mamxabela. Nevertheless, some clues to the dates are amongst Stanford's papers at the University of Cape Town. Within this collection there are several black-and-white photographs of San that have been published (Jolly 1992). Little information accompanies the photos, but the envelope notes a date of around 1885. In faint pencil on the back of one of the photographs (Figure 5), is the following: *Man: Mkahlila* and *Woman: Mamxabela*. One can identify these two faces in most of the other photographs (Figure 6). Stanford must have met this small group of San shortly after meeting Silayi—probably within a year following that event. The encounters with both Silayi and then later with this small group intrigued Stanford and although his diaries are surprisingly mute, both when meeting Silayi and then later when he met the small group of San, he maintained his interest in them until late in life. Two items amongst his personal papers held at the Jagger Library at the University of Cape Town attest to his sustained interest. First, in 1908, he collected a statement from Mgudhlwa (Stanford 1908), the Thembu chief responsible for scattering Nqabayo's small group of San. Mgudhlwa had this



Figure 6. Mkahlila, Mamxabela and other descendants of Nqabayo's group of San.

to say about the San:

I remember the Bushman chief Madolo. He was living at Bangindhala (Mt. Arthur Mission Station formerly known as the Bushman School). Ndhlela the father of Stokwe, Chief of a branch of the Quati tribe attacked Madolo there and broke up the tribe. Madolo fled to Sidutyini (St. Marks). Later Jumba and his tribe returned to Tembuland. It was about the time of Umhlahaza (1857) that I attacked the Bushmen at Gubenxa. The name of the chief was Nqabayo. It was before this that Silayi one of our young men had left us and joined these Bushmen. I attacked the Bushmen because they stole horses from us. Magombe and two others of the Bushmen stole the horses. They were followed. They fought. One of them was killed and one of our men named Nkani. A poisoned arrow killed him. At Gubenxa we surrounded the Bushmen and their families. We killed all the men who were there. Some—amongst them Nqabayo—were away at the time hunting. They escaped. We captured the women and children. On our way home and without my knowledge, the young men fell upon the women and children and killed them too.

Mgudhlwa's statement further corroborates both Silayi's statement as well as those of Luhayi's group. The second item in Stanford's papers is a letter written to Stanford by Arthur Gladwin (1909) of Tsolo. In the letter, we learn of the fate of Luhayi's small group, when Gladwin writes:

I went up on Friday to see the Bushmen. Ha Luhayi is dead recently. Kahlila who was wounded at Gubenxa died. The old woman [Mamxabela] is getting mentally and physically feeble and I'm afraid her statement would not be satisfactory. Her son however is an intelligent boy, he went through the Kimberley siege and he seemed very well up in their history. Would you be satisfied with a statement made by him coached and assisted by the old woman and the others, alone he may be inclined to romance after his

Kimberley achievements but in the presence of the others he might 'toe the line'. Luhayi's successor seems rather a ruff. I again spoke to Ma [Mamxabela] about going to Cape Town to permit Péringuey to take a clay cast of her but she is still afraid. I however later when apart put it to her son who is quite game so I asked him to reassure his mother and get her consent. [Mamxabela] tells me she was not with her people when Mgudhlwa killed them at Gubenxa but with her husband at Tabankulu.

Gladwin's letter confirms that Mkahlila was one of the three survivors of the Thembu attack at Gubenxa.

After staying with Mditshwa's Mpondomise for some time after the attack at Gubenxa, Nqabayo returned to the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Mountains and the last Silayi heard of him, he was at the sources of the Mzimvubu River (Maquarrie 1962:36–37). Silayi left Nqabayo's group before the Gubenxa attack to return to the Thembu. At the same time Hans and Ngqika left for Qokolweni [Wesleyville] Mission Station and afterwards they went to Adam Kok's country, the site of present-day Kokstad (Stanford 1910). It seems that even after the dispersal of its members, many of Nqabayo's group stayed amongst the Mpondomise, acting as rainmakers for them (Hammond-Tooke n.d.). Importantly, Stanford's interviews with Silayi and Luhayi's group, some two decades later, confirm Fynn's mid-century suspicions that it was the San of Nomansland who raided colonial livestock.

Stanford's meetings with Silayi and the three San provide an independent counterpoint to the 'Bushman Affair' evidence. Silayi lived with Nqabayo's group at the time of Fynn's investigations and the Harding Inquiry. The documents concerning the 'Bushman Affair' need to be read in the context of a legal inquiry where reputations and freedoms were potentially at risk. Silayi's testimony shows that Nqabayo's people were livestock rustlers. They were rustling at the very time of the trial in which they denied being engaged in such activities. As mentioned earlier, this part of the triptych then acts as a constraint on how we should read statements in the Harding Inquiry Report that forms part of the 'Bushman Affair' archive. Silayi's account of the various places where Nqabayo's group stayed, travelled and raided allow for the building of a map of Nqabayo's homeland and, crucially, his interactions with both Silayi and the small group of San show that Nqabayo's group were rock painters, while

we have no direct evidence for Mdwebo, Biligwana or the Thola being rock artists.

Nevertheless, Silayi's statement, supplemented by the information that Stanford learned from the survivors of Nqabayos' group provides an unparalleled insight into the nineteenth century San of Nomansland. The Stanford archive hinges with the 'Bushman Affair' and the evidence from the third encounter between San and settlers that I discuss below, to provide our Nomansland Triptych. It allows us, even more so than the Harding Inquiry Report, to link people to places and, crucially, it provides us with the information that some of the San groups of Nomansland were rock painters, although it does not provide explicit information on rock art sites or specific images. The third and final panel of our triptych does manage this to some degree, and, remarkably, it was assembled 100 years after Stanford took down Silayi's statement on 7 May 1884.

The Revelations of Maqoqa Dyantyi (1984-1988)

The third encounter, which forms the triptych's final panel, occurred in the mid 1980s. An elderly woman was found living near the present-day town of Tsolo, a short distance south-east of the area that once was called Nomansland (Jolly 1986; Lewis-Williams 1986). Tsolo is 56km from the town of Maclear (now Nqanqarhu), where Nqabayos' heartland was located (Figure 1). The area around Maclear has been a fabled rock art area for a little over a century. In 1918, stone masons removed a panel of rock art from the farm called Linton and took it to the South African Museum in Cape Town (Lewis-Williams 1988). The rock art on that removed panel today sits at the centre of South Africa's national coat of arms (Smith et al. 2000). In 1959, the well-known South African artist, Walter Battiss featured on the front page of the Sunday Times and in additional sections of South Africa's largest newspaper by readership, as being the co-discoverer with Murray Schoonraad of a San rock painting depicting the 1782 shipwreck of the Grosvenor (Battiss and Schoonraad 12 April 1959). Later on, in 1962, the celebrated Australian palaeoanthropologist, Raymond Dart, famous for bringing the Taung Child to the world's attention, published that same image and claimed that it was a Phoenician ship (Dart 1962). Both interpretations are false and the image depicts an antelope-headed snake, a common image in San rock paintings (Mallen 2005).

In the late 1960s, the avocational researchers, Bert Woodhouse and Neil Lee (1970) travelled to this remote area by donkey, discovering several spectacular and now-famous rock art sites. In 1992, a new and spectacular shelter was found on the same farm where the site that Battiss and Dart published in the Sunday Times was located (Blundell and Lewis-Williams 2001; Blundell 2022). Known as Storm Shelter, the discovery received widespread media attention, including in *National Geographic Magazine* (Lewis-Williams 2001). Subsequent surveys over the span of four decades



Figure 7. This image of an eland near the town of Qanqarhu was discovered for academia by Ghilraen Laue in the late 1990s. Researchers now widely use this image as an iconic representation of San rock art. It is painted on a ceiling in a valley adjacent to the heartland of Nqabayos' group.

have brought to light many rock art sites previously unknown to academia and images at these sites have become iconic (Figure 7). Few other rock art areas in South Africa, then, have asserted themselves on scholarly and public imagination as much as Maclear and its environs, including Tsolo.

In 1984, Lewis Matiyela learned of two San sisters living near Tsolo. On visiting them, seemingly in the early 1980s, Matiyela tried without success to interview them over a period of two years (Jolly and Prins 1994:16). Matiyela also contacted David Lewis-Williams, a prominent San rock art scholar who, in turn, informed Pieter Jolly in 1984. In that year, Jolly accompanied Matiyela and visited the remaining sister as the eldest, Citiwe, had died in the interim. Scholars began referring to the remaining sister as 'M' in order to protect her identity but after her death in 1988, researchers disclosed her name as Manqindi or Maqoqa Dyantyi (Jolly and Prins 1994). Archaeologists

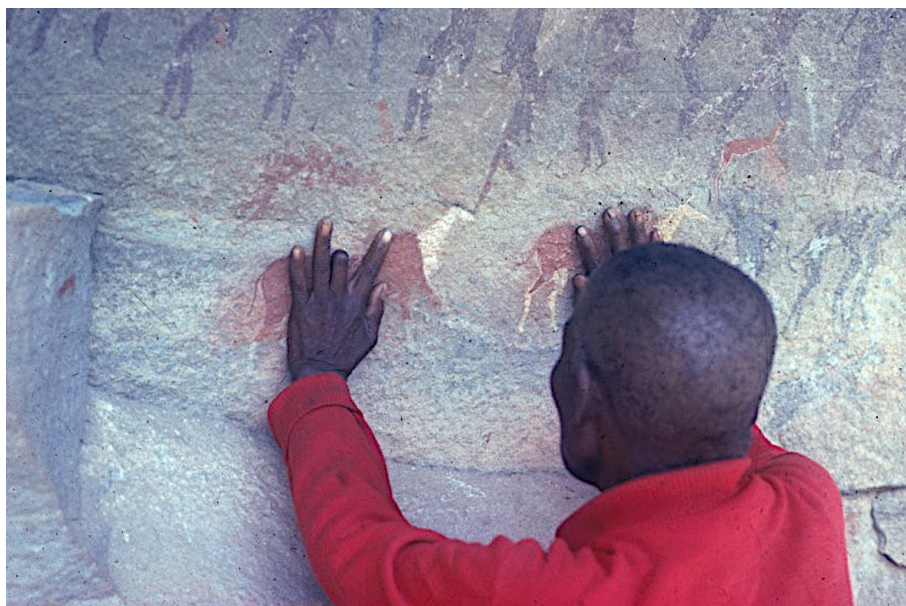


Figure 8. *Maqoqa or Manqindi Dyantyi, the granddaughter of Mamxabela and the daughter of Lindiso. Both her father and her grandfather were rock painters, and her sister was a rainmaker. Here she is describing to archaeologists in the late 1980s how San used to touch the rock art to harness supernatural power. Image courtesy of David Lewis-Williams.*

were initially sceptical of her claims, especially when it emerged that she could not speak a San language as she claimed. Nevertheless, over time and with additional evidence, her general testimony came to be seen as accurate and useful to understanding rock art (Lewis-Williams 1986).

Dyantyi was an elderly woman when she came to the attention of archaeologists (Figure 8). In interviews with different archaeologists, she offered information about her family and her past. According to Maqoqa, her father was a San man named Lindiso who had married an Mfengu woman and then settled down amongst the Mpondomise near Tsolo (Prins 1990: 110). Lindiso had been a rainmaker and an artist and had made paintings in a rock shelter, known as Ncengane Shelter, which is next to the Bushman Cuttings road close to the town of Tsolo (Figure 9); Maqoqa took archaeologists to the site on several occasions (Prins 1994). Her uncle, Masela, was also a rainmaker and an artist and her elder sister, Citiwe, had been a rainmaker but was not a painter (Prins 1990:113). Maqoqa's testimony concerning her family, along with other oral histories sheds important light on San ritual and painting in Nomansland.

First, her identification of her father, Lindiso, is important because it allows us to link Fynn's observations and Stanford's interviews with the three San and Silayi to the twentieth century. In 1913 Louis Péringuey, the director of the South African Museum, wrote to Stanford asking for his assistance in contacting Mamxabela so that he could learn more about the San method of preparing paint (Jolly 1999:61). Stanford referred the letter to M. Apthorp at the Department of Native

Affairs. Apthorp's response dated 14 July 1913 reads (first published in Rudner 1982:54): I regret to say that both [Mamxabela], the old woman and the native mentioned in the communication are dead. The magistrate of Tsolo, however, got into communication with her son and the former has furnished the following report. Her son, Lindiso, states that he was told by his mother during her lifetime that white, red and yellow clay and charcoal made from the wood of the [Coral] Tree were mixed with water and the fat of the bushbuck or other animal. The pigment was then applied to the rocks, etc., with a piece of grass, which was sometimes split to make it resemble a brush. Poponi, a relative of Lindiso's, corroborates him and says that he remembers, on one occasion, seeing [Mamxabela's] husband mixing and applying some paint.

Pieter Jolly (1999:61) points out that this is almost certainly the same Mamxabela that Stanford encountered in the 1880s. This means that Mamxabela, the mother of Lindiso, is the grandmother of Maqoqa and as Mamxabela was connected to Nqabayoy's band through her association with Luhayi, this means that Maqoqa, as the granddaughter of Mamxabela, is descended from Nqabayoy's band.

In addition to the 'Bushman Affair', Stanford's interviews with Silayi and the three San, and the testimony of 'M', there are also many other colonial observations as well as oral accounts by San descendants or Bantu-speakers who interacted with them. These accounts allow us to clarify further the history of Nqabayoy's people. In 1891, a San family was known to be living in a rock shelter overlooking the Inxu near Gqaqala (Gibson 1891:34). These San were rainmakers for Mpondomise people and a number of other accounts in the first two decades of the twentieth century also mention San rainmakers in the Tsolo area (Callaway 1919; Hook 1908; Scully 1913; see Jolly 1992 for a compilation of these accounts; cf. Butler 2001). Whether these accounts refer to one family or several is unknown but evidence suggests that there were certainly several San people living in the Tsolo District. Oral testimonies collected from Mpondomise peoples by the anthropologist, David Hammond-Tooke (n.d.), provide some idea of the number of San people living in the area in the first few years of the twentieth century. According to some Mpondomise peoples, in 1905 the chief magistrate of Tsolo ordered all the San living on the Umnga River (where Stanford had encountered Luhayi's group in the 1880s) to be collected together; some thirty men, women and children were present. There were apparently three family units present, one

of which was under the leadership of Luhayi. These San were last seen working on farms in the area of the town of Ugie.

Maqoqa's testimony connects her to Nqabayo's group and to a long line of rock painters. That line includes her father, Lindiso, and her grandfather, stretching all the way from about 1850 until the turn of the millennium, a period of some 150 years. Even today there are still San descendants amongst the Western Mpondomise engaged in rain-making. Having unfurled the three panels of the Nomansland Triptych, it remains in the final part of this paper to discuss its potential significance for Khoisan recognition in the forthcoming government process mentioned at the start of this paper.



Figure 9. Ncengane Shelter. The location where Lindiso painted and the place to which Maqoqa took archaeologists in the 1980s. It is probably the last place at which the !Gā !ne San made rock paintings before the tradition ended in the early twentieth century.

People, Places and Pictures

In South African historiography, there is a tendency to treat San groups as isolated and independent agents. In part, this is because of colonial prejudices that were part of settler thinking when producing the archival records. The three parts of the Nomansland triptych discussed in this paper show a different picture, one of communities of related San peoples in the nineteenth century. Nqabayo's group, for example, was related to the San under Madolo—mentioned by Mgudhla in his statement—who lived to the south-west of Nomansland. As we have seen, a temporary member of Nqabayo's group, Ngqika, had a father who lived with Madolo. It was a relative of one of Madolo's group at the Kat River Mission Station who first alerted missionaries to Madolo's presence further north (on the Kat River Mission, see Ross 2014). There were also other groups in and around Nomansland, such as those under the leadership of Flux Lynx (Saunders 1977), but the relationship between these groups and those under Mdwebo, Nqabayo, Biligwana and Madolo is not always clear. It seems that, at times, the San congregated around leaders such as Madolo in large numbers, while at other times they splintered off into smaller groups, such as that under Luhayi. What little evidence is available suggests that the various San groups in and around Nomansland—with the possible exception of Biligwana—largely co-operated with one another.

San languages are famously exclusive, with two contiguous languages being mutually unintelligible (Traill 1978, 1980, 1995). So the cooperative nature between the groups and the evidence that they were

related suggests that the San living along the base of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Mountains may have spoken the same language, although they may have communicated through another language, such as Xhosa. Nevertheless, in the early 1930s, Dr H. Anders (1934) encountered two San men, one of whom he described as an old friend, on the Bushman Cuttings road. It is a short walk from the Bushman's Cuttings road to the Inxu River and Ncengane Shelter and Maqoqa lived close to the Cuttings. These two men still spoke San and Anders recorded some 140 words. He labelled the language they spoke as !Gā !ne. Remarkably, the two men that Anders interviewed were called Lindiso and Poconi and, given their close proximity to Ncengane Shelter when Anders met them, this is most probably the same Lindiso that was the father of Maqoqa and the son of Mamxabela (cf. Jolly 1999). Nqabayo's group thus spoke !Gā !ne. Given the close association between Nqabayo and Mdwebo, it is highly probable that Mdwebo's group also spoke !Gā !ne. Despite the enmity between Biligwana and Nqabayo, at least some members of Biligwana's group seem to have been related to Mdwebo's group. In his statement to the Harding inquiry, Hans Lochenberg stated that Nqabayo and Mdwebo had told him:

... that [Biligwana] lay on this side of the [uKaHlamba-Drakensberg mountains]; and that some of the cattle had gone to another Thola kraal in payment for a woman, and that they heard from a woman, who came from [Biligwana's] kraal to visit her parents living at Mdwebo's, that the cattle were there.

If true, this suggests that Biligwana's and Mdwebo's groups, even with the animus between them, intermarried. In the case of Madolo, the apparent ease with which Ngqika (San) and his companions, Silayi

(Thembu) and Hans (Khoë), integrated with Nqabayō's group suggests that Ngqika, who facilitated the interaction between the three comrades and Nqabayō, spoke !Gā !ne and, through him, this implies that Madolo and his group potentially spoke that language. There seems, then, to have been a coalition of San communities, speaking the same !Gā !ne language, living along the foothills of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Mountains, in and around Nomansland for much of the nineteenth century.

It is amongst the hills and valleys of Nomansland, around, on top of and adjacent to all the places that Silayi and the other members of Nqabayō's group mentioned that one finds rock art. Mamxabela stated that her husband was a painter and in response to Stanford's questions, Silayi described how Nqabayō's group had made their paint brushes and pigment and then, apparently as an afterthought, he uttered, "They could paint very well". Nqabayō's band and their descendants made many of the images in Nomansland. Whether Mdwebo's band, Biligwana's group, or others made some of the images as well is unknown, as there do not appear to be direct observations of them painting. Although George William Stow (1905) claims that Madolo made rock paintings he does not provide the source of evidence for this claim; it seems more an assumption, albeit it a feasible one. It seems likely that, as San groups, they all made rock art. While we cannot say with certainty exactly which images were made by which group, all the San groups of Nomansland would have known the locations of many if not most rock art sites and they would have been consumers of the images.

In this paper, I have discussed three historical encounters between San and Europeans—Fynn's observations between 1848 and 1850, Stanford's encounter with Luhayi's band and with Silayi in the 1880s and the discovery of Maqoqa in the 1980s. Together with the many lesser accounts, it provides an unparalleled historical account of groups of San over a period of some 150 years. The historical material allows us to link known San groups and individuals over time and it allows us to link those groups and individuals to terrain. Most importantly, that land is one in which there are numerous painted rock shelters and through the historical material that I have discussed we know of at least three generations of San artists who were painting in and around Nomansland between the mid-nineteenth century and possibly as late as the 1920s. The importance of all this historical material lies in the attribution of real people to the painted spaces of Nomansland. We have to some degree, then, answered the question, derived from Spivak's postcolonial research, with which this article began: ...how do we gain insight into how Khoisan thought about community and about country?

Through a close reading of archival sources and mapping the evidence from those sources, we do get some idea about San communities and about how they

were tied to country. The people and the places in that archival material were linked to painting, as seen in the evidence provided by Silayi, Lindiso and Maqoqa. In terms of the 2019 *Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act*, then, the !Gā !ne San communities of the country, formerly known as Nomansland, could show a historical community as well as linkages to identifiable lands. To what degree this will actually happen is speculative. Maqoqa died in 1988 and her sister, Citiwe, died earlier (Jolly and Prins 1994). The last of Maqoqa's children left the Bushman's Cuttings area after her death (see Blundell 2004:179). One of Citiwe's sons was still residing in the Bushman's Cuttings area in the first decade on the twenty-first century, when I visited there. There are even today people who live next to the Bushman's Cuttings who claim to be descended from San. However, nobody speaks !Gā !ne, and they identify as Mpondomise, even as they recognise San ancestry. Other Khoisan-descendant communities face similar challenges as they seek legal recognition. Colonialism, and then Apartheid, stripped them of their language and their land, forcing them to speak Afrikaans and reclassifying them as 'Coloured' rather than 'Khoisan'. As admirable as the 2019 Act is, then, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that for many Khoisan communities, the effort at restitutive justice is too little and too late (see Blundell et al. 2022). We will have to see if the descendants of Nqabayō, Mdwebo, Biligwana, Madolo and others will receive adequate recognition.

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