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1

Language in the Land of the 'Hottentots' and 'Caffres': European Travellers to the Eastern Cape, 1652–1806

The southernmost part of Africa entered Europe's purview only gradually, through the development of maritime trade routes. At the end of the fifteenth century the Portuguese mariners Bartholomew Dias and Vasco da Gama successfully rounded the Cape peninsula, demonstrating as they did so a crucial new means of access to the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese exploited this new development, working to divert European trade with southeast Asia from the traditional routes via the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Soon Dutch, English, French, and Scandinavian merchant ships also started using the Cape route, landing at Table Bay in order to barter for supplies with the Khoikhoi people there. By the early part of the seventeenth century, as the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or Dutch East India Company) grew to dominate trade in southeast Asia, it became apparent that an established trading post at the Cape would offer a particular advantage, in allowing the Dutch fleet to restock supplies between the Netherlands and the Company's eastern empire. Consequently, in 1652 a party of 80 VOC representatives landed at Table Bay under the command of Jan van Riebeeck for the purpose of fulfilling this plan. Their original intention was simply to gather the necessary supplies through establishing trading links with the Khoikhoi people around Table Bay, but it quickly became apparent that the Khoikhoi were not much interested in extensive trade. Instead, the Dutch seized land and resources, establishing a small settlement around Table Bay whose economy was based upon its role as a staging post for the fleet of the VOC.

'A chattering rather than language': Descriptions of Khoikhoi people and early colonial typologies

Representations of language were a regular feature of written European accounts of the Cape from the sixteenth century onwards. Mariners, settlers, travellers, and VOC officials weighed in with their accounts of life at the Cape, in which descriptions of the Khoikhoi inhabitants of the region were often a particularly sensational feature, and almost all of which dwelled with frustration, puzzlement, or disgust upon these people's apparent *lack* of human language. John Milward's account of 1614 exemplifies early descriptions of encounters with 'Hottentots':

These people are most miserable, destitute of Religion in any kind, as farre as we can perceive, and of all civility; their speech is a chattering rather than language; naked, save a short cloake of skinnes on their shoulders, and a fox-skinne before their privities: have but one stone [testicle], naturally or ceremoniously I know not; eate that which dogges would hardly digest. They demand unreasonably for their Cattel. (Cited in Raven-Hart 1967, p. 70)

Such lists of the supposedly remarkable features of Khoikhoi life and culture were commonplace in European 'eyewitness' accounts. Observers attested, time and again, to a series of strange practices, characteristics, and cultural deficiencies – they reported that these people ate unwashed intestines; that they covered themselves in animal grease; that they draped dried entrails around their necks; that the women had elongated labia and enlarged buttocks while the men, whether by nature or by design, had only one testicle; that they had no conception of God; that they had no conception of money or of the acceptable rules of trade; that they were lazy and slothful; and that their language was bestial and incomprehensible. J. M. Coetzee, focusing on descriptions of the Khoikhoi as idle, asserts that such pejorative accounts reflected frustration on the part of European observers unable to process and classify the Khoikhoi people and their practices according to the categories of current anthropological discourses. As Coetzee argues, Europeans arrived mentally equipped with a 'table of categories' which together defined 'Anthropological Man', in other words 'Man with a developed Physical appearance, Dress, Diet, Medicine, Crafts, etc.' For the early travellers, 'The Hottentot is Man but not yet Anthropological Man' (Coetzee 1988, pp. 12–23). In place of these categories, European observers reported a

set of *absences*: the Khoikhoi were, as the mariner Ralph Standish put it, 'brutt and savadg, without Religion, without languag, without Lawes or gouernment, without manners or humanittie' (cited in Raven-Hart 1967, p. 57).

The Khoi language, with its phonological system characterized by implosive consonants alien to European ears, arguably represented the most significant of these absences. Repeatedly, observers attested that the Khoikhoi used gibberish or animal noises in place of articulate human speech. In 1634, the traveller Thomas Herbert described the language of the Khoikhoi as 'rather apishly than articulately sounded'; the mark of a people whose perversely alien nature and distance from the norms of European behaviour extended, in Herbert's account, to sexual intercourse between Khoikhoi women and baboons (1634, p. 18). Herbert's description of Khoikhoi language – a combination of baffled frustration and dehumanizing dismissal – is an extreme but by no means atypical instance of the attitudes of early travellers to South Africa, for whom the processes of communication in the colony proved at best problematic, and at worst deeply alienating and disturbing. John Davys wrote in 1598 that 'their words are for the most part inarticulate, and, in speaking, they clocke with the Tongue like a brood Hen, which clocking and the words are both pronounced together, verie strangely' (cited in Raven-Hart 1967, p. 20). These pejorative descriptions reflect in part the confusion of observers encountering languages so alien to their experience – accounts of the 'animalistic' nature of Khoikhoi speech were frequently accompanied by frustrated references to its unlearnability for Europeans. Peter Kolb, for example, called Khoi 'a Monster among Languages', before confessing that 'for my own part, tho' I resided many years among them, and in all that Time did my utmost to acquire it, I could never roundly succeed in the Matter' (1731: I, p. 32). At the same time, however, the 'monstrosity' of the Khoi language symbolized in graphic terms – and entrenched – the status of its speakers as the apotheosis of the unreadable and the strange.

The terminology which settlers and travellers used for the indigenous populations of the Cape was, to begin with, varying and unfixed. Early accounts often used variants of the term 'Caffre', from the Arabic word 'kafir' meaning 'non-Muslim' or 'infidel', adopted from Arab traders, for all people around Table Bay indiscriminately. In 1649, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier wrote that the inhabitants of the Cape were called 'Kaffers or Hottentots' (cited in Raven-Hart 1967, p. 179; see also for example pp. 9, 164–5). Gradually the term 'Hottentot' became the norm in referring to

the Khoikhoi pastoralists with whom settlers had regular contact (see for example Raven-Hart 1971: II, pp. 233, 236). The term 'Hottentot' may originally have derived from a word used by the Khoikhoi in dancing; but settlers quickly came to assume that it referred to their 'clicking and clumsy speech'.¹ Increasingly, as their grazing land was occupied by the expanding Dutch settlement, and their political and social structures were dismantled under the pressure of colonial expansion and introduced diseases, many Khoikhoi were forced either to migrate outside the Colony, or to become its servants. Thus, while the Dutch refused them the status of citizenship in the Colony, the colonial Khoikhoi became a servant class upon which the Cape economy depended (Schmidt 1996, p. 18). In the environs of the Colony, simplified contact varieties of Dutch and Khoi began to be used by colonists and Khoikhoi as *lingua francas*.

The term 'Hottentot' was also initially used to refer to the hunter-gathering San people (see for example Raven-Hart 1971: II, p. 483). As the Khoikhoi became a feature of settled colonial life for the Dutch, increasingly these San hunter-gatherers were separately designated as 'Bosjesmen' – later anglicized to 'Bushmen'. However, 'Hottentots' and 'Bosjesmen' shared a number of features in common, according to Europeans, notably their apparently bizarre, 'clicking' manner of speaking. The term 'Caffre' and its variants, meanwhile, became reserved to refer to the Bantu-speaking mixed farmers living to the north and east of the settlement. With these groups, however, settlers and other Europeans still had little contact, since by the end of the seventeenth century the furthest limits of European habitation were only 80 kilometres from Cape Town. Some trading ships landed at Port Natal and encountered the northern Nguni-speakers there; a few shipwrecked sailors also encountered coastal groups and wrote accounts of their experiences (see for example Moodie 1838–42: I, p. 425). But in this early period the Nguni peoples were still at the farthest periphery of a tiny far-flung outpost of the Dutch trading empire, hardly featuring at all in European written accounts of the region, which were largely restricted in their view to the environs of the Cape colony.²

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the area of European habitation around the Cape expanded considerably: this period saw the movements and migrations of hunters, traders, raiders, and finally Boer cattle farmers shift the colonial 'boundary' over 800 kilometres eastward, as Boer colonists established permanent settlements to the west of the Gamtoos River. Meanwhile, the limits of settlement of

the easternmost Xhosa groups also crept slowly westward, as shifts in the Xhosa leadership led minor chiefs and their followers to separate from the Xhosa paramountcy and establish autonomous chiefdoms. By around 1770, the two lines met at the Zuurveld, in a region which became known by Europeans as the eastern Frontier, between the Sunday and the Kei Rivers.

This region was anything but a static, well-defined colonial border. In social, political, and cultural terms, it was still complex and unstable, being the zone of contact between groups of Khoikhoi, Xhosa, Boers, and San, jostling for land and resources. Hermann Giliomee describes the eastern Cape in this period as an 'open' frontier, 'an area where colonisation is taking place' – adapting Mary Louise Pratt's useful formulation to emphasize it as a zone of contact, rather than a defined boundary between two separate spheres of political control (Giliomee 1989, p. 426). It was, in Pratt's terms, a 'space of colonial encounters', 'in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (Pratt 1992, p. 6). While many Khoikhoi in the region, for example, retained their autonomy, their position was increasingly embattled; others accepted Xhosa authority, or took employment with Boer settlers. Many San people, on the other hand, were captured as slaves by Boer armed commandos, and forced to work on Boer farms. The independent San were consequently pushed further into the inhospitable regions of the interior. In 1779 war broke out between Boer commandos and sections of the Xhosa; clashes would continue periodically until, in 1811–12, British forces drove the Xhosa over the Fish River, in what Giliomee sees as the culmination of the 'closing frontier'. Although relations of conflict and inequality characterized the region in the later eighteenth century, so did temporary and provisional allegiances. Linguistically, the frontier zone was polyglot, with varieties of Xhosa, Khoi, San, and Cape Dutch languages all spoken in the region, so that the use of interpreters was a commonplace feature of political relations.

Scientific travellers in the eastern Cape

The first Western written descriptions of the languages of the eastern Cape frontier zone – of Xhosa, alongside Khoi – came from European scientific travellers. As the expansion in colonial settlement further from Cape Town made the region more accessible to Europeans, from the 1770s onwards, written accounts of organized expeditions to the

frontier zone began to appear in print in Europe in the final decades of the eighteenth century – a period of huge growth in the market for travel literature, and one in which interior exploration and observation took over from the sea voyage as the dominant mode in travel writing (Edwards 1994, p. 3). These accounts differed in significant ways from those that had gone before. The influence of natural history, and in particular of the work of Linnaeus, offered a new descriptive paradigm for travel writing which revolved around the rendering of experience as science, involving systematic investigation, description, and classification of the region's geographical features, flora and fauna, and human inhabitants. What Mary Louise Pratt has called 'the Linnaean watershed' intersected with the first attempts by travellers to describe the language of the Xhosa, so that these early representations of language in the frontier zone formed part of a developing global project of categorization that was the culmination of the Enlightenment zeal for classification combined with the ambitions of European colonialism (Pratt 1992, p. 39). In the sections that follow I examine the three most elaborate of these descriptions: those of Anders Sparrman, John Barrow, and Heinrich Lichtenstein. Although other travellers spent time among the Xhosa, and even – as in the case of the French naturalist Francois Le Vaillant – learned to speak some Xhosa, these three were notable for publishing vocabularies and descriptions of the language (Le Vaillant 1790: II, pp. 284–5). In this way they began, for the first time, to try to appropriate and represent Xhosa for a European metropolitan readership.

The collection of lists of words and phrases had been, for centuries, a common ingredient in Western ethnographic writing (see for example Hanzeli 1969, p. 17). In later eighteenth-century accounts of 'exotic' lands and peoples, such wordlists were considered to perform a number of important functions. Notably, they provided sets of data that could be compared with one another, so as to highlight linguistic difference or similarity on the basis of lexicon, enabling writers to make arguments about linguistic relatedness and linguistic origins; and they thereby permitted arguments to be made about the categorization and hierarchical ordering of languages. In both of these respects, they were also remarkably compatible with the methods and aims of natural science, and notably with the Linnaean system. One of the benefits of this system was, as Paul Carter has argued, its seductive simplicity. It suggested a universally applicable method of taxonomic classification of living forms based not upon detailed study of morphology, but on 'a superficial comparison of a limited number of characteristics'

(Carter 1987, p. 19). By extension, therefore, it provided a persuasive model for *linguistic* classifications, on the basis of the kind of limited observation and data encapsulated by the wordlist. We may use the analogy, as the Linnaean travellers themselves often did, of the collection of samples: languages were represented in these travel narratives not in the context of social praxis, but as limited series of artefacts and characteristics, to be compared for the purpose of differentiating one from the other. The natural scientific travellers applied to linguistic description a Linnaean paradigm which saw languages both as taxonomies in themselves and as objects to insert into a global classification, as theoretically amenable to the reification of peoples and languages, as to plants and animals.

This process of differentiation and taxonomic ordering, detaching languages from the particularities of their social environment and representing them as objects of scientific scrutiny, represents a striking attempt to assert authority over the contingency of experience. As we shall see, the experiences of travelling in the frontier zone were often baffling and disorienting, and languages – and the many possibilities for miscommunication – were among the greatest obstacles that scientific travellers encountered. Unable to speak more than a few words of most, if not all, of the languages spoken in the frontier zone, they were reliant upon interpreters, to whom they also had to turn to seek explanations for social relationships and cultural practices that, like the languages through which they were expressed, often simply confused them. But as we shall see, particularly in examining the work of Sparrman and Barrow, the ‘botanizing mind’ (Carter 1987, p. 19), delighting in the orderly exemplification of difference, set about recasting both languages and social categories as simple, unified, and straightforwardly referential, and in particular seized upon the distinction between ‘Hottentots’ and ‘Caffres’ in order to interpret and represent the linguistic and social order of the frontier zone.

Travel writing and natural science: Anders Sparrman’s *Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*

The first travel writer to ‘collect a sample’ of the language of the Xhosa people for his readers was Anders Sparrman, a renowned Swedish naturalist and prominent disciple of Linnaeus himself, who went to the Cape in 1772 to scientifically investigate the geography, flora, fauna, and human inhabitants of the region. When Captain Cook’s second circumnavigatory expedition landed at Table Bay later that year, Sparrman joined the party on board the *Resolution*, but afterwards he

returned to the Cape in order to conduct further exploration into the interior. The success of Cook's first expedition had brought fascinating evidence of exotic lands to a European reading public, in the form of pictures, description, and the collection of specimens and trophies on a mammoth scale. Interest in Cook's second voyage, so much more ambitious in scale than the first, was therefore at a premium. However, while Sparrman's association with the Cook expedition could only have served to make his account more appealing to the general reader, his real interest lay in the Cape portion of his travels, as the work's title indicates – in English translation it appeared as *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, and Round the World: But Chiefly into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffres, from the Year 1772 to 1776*.

As was quite customary in travel writing of the period, Sparrman justified his entry into print by emphasizing the ways in which his account of the Cape improved upon those that had preceded it. This was, he asserted, a narrative which not only described new regions of the African interior, but also inaugurated a new kind of travel writing, framed around the methods of systematic, accurate description developed within natural history. Sparrman emphasized his status within the scientific establishment, particularly underlining his connections to Linnaeus, who had backed the initial plan for the voyage (Sparrman 1805: I, p. xv). He was, he proclaimed, a reliable observer and a man of learning, whose twin commitments were, as the preface to the English edition of the *Voyage* puts it, to 'science' and to 'truth' (ibid., p. v). In this way Sparrman distinguished himself from the outlandish and 'marvellous' claims of earlier travellers, sternly cautioning readers that 'a great many prodigies and uncommon appearances, about which I have frequently been asked [. . .] are not to be found in my journal' (ibid., p. xvi).

The travelogue was arranged chronologically, interspersing narrative with natural historical data and analysis. Sparrman as 'natural scientist' justified this journal format by insisting that it served to highlight the role of experience in the arrangement of information presented. The narrative of his travels, in other words, would act as an index of the credibility of his observations:

The arranging by way of journal the occurrences and events which I have described, though in certain respects it be not the best method, is yet in general, the most natural. [. . .] The greatest advantage accruing from this method is, that hereby it becomes easier both for the writer and reader to distinguish, what is the actual result of the

author's own experience, from what he has, in defect of this, been obliged to advance on the strength of the information given him by others. (Ibid., p. xx)

Thus Sparrman, characterizing his work as reliable and orderly, used the format of a narrative while peppering it with scientific description and Linnaean binomial classificatory terms, by which he simultaneously named and classified the landscape he travelled through. His writing hinged on the relationship between experience and science, and his efforts to make the former conform to the latter; it was his stated intention to submit the vagaries of the travelling experience to the organizing processes of natural history.

It was the frontier zone, or 'country of the Hottentots and Caffres', which most interested Sparrman: a region which few European travellers had visited, and which had never been subject to his kind of scientific scrutiny. Travelling there, however, was by no means easy. Sparrman's narrative traced a journey eastward from the Cape into a social environment that was increasingly polyglot and alien, as well as dangerous and unstable. Staying with colonists in the Riet Valley, Sparrman described their attempts to teach him some basic words of Khoi which would be useful for the journey. He reported that Boer settlers, and particularly children in families with Khoikhoi servants, acquired the language as a matter of course. For his own part, however, he admitted that the distinctions of the Khoi 'clicks', explained to him by his hosts, eluded his less well trained ear: 'I own that my ears were not nice enough to attend to such minute differences. I must likewise confess, that I did not take pains sufficient to get this point cleared up to me.' Sparrman's own mastery of language in this multilingual setting was, he continued, limited to what he perceived as a minimal level of practical utility: 'it was sufficient for me to learn, in the course of my journey, partly for pleasure, and partly for use, some common words and phrases in the Hottentot language' (ibid., p. 242).

Learning words and phrases might have afforded Sparrman any number of 'pleasures': the pleasure of achievement, the pleasure of speaking a new and unfamiliar language, the pleasure of making himself understood in this polyglot linguistic environment, as well as the pleasure – so vividly evident throughout Sparrman's account – of the natural historian collecting his specimens. However, for the most part it is abundantly clear from his narrative that he was dependent on other means than direct verbal communication in his travels around the frontier zone: either conversation mediated through one

or sometimes two interpreters, or the 'reading' of gestures, signs, and bodies. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in an account of the party's encounter with a group of Xhosa men: an interlude in which communication was carried out through a complex and, certainly for Sparrman, decidedly uneasy mix of body language, physical significations, and layers of mediated verbal exchange. One evening, having set up camp, the travelling party were concerned by the arrival of 'a hord of *Caffres*' numbering about a hundred men. Sparrman gave a context to the consternation and fear among his party by recalling the story of a Dutch colonist, Heuppenaer, who had recently been killed in the Xhosa territory while on an elephant-hunting trip. With this vision of Xhosa brutality firmly in mind, Sparrman reported that the Xhosa approached 'each of them armed with a few *hassagais*, or a couple of *kirries*', walking 'with an almost affected pride and stateliness in their deportment, as they approached nearer to us'. The swagger with which the Xhosa men approached Sparrman's party was met by Sparrman's attempt to bluff them into submission with a show of bravado, by shouting loudly, and emphasizing his superior weaponry by loading and waving his guns around. This mime of Western power – one which Sparrman identified as a common feature of colonial encounters, writing that 'I knew from experience, that by this means the Indians might be kept in awe just like children' – was at least partly foiled (as Sparrman tells it) by the actions of his Khoikhoi interpreter, Jan Skeper:

I called out Jan Skeper, the most alert and intelligent of all my Hottentots, and had the satisfaction to see him fly to me like a flash of lightning; a proof of his obedience which, indeed, was at this time very agreeable to me; as it was requisite in order to excite in the Caffres a high opinion of our authority and power: but the still higher ideas, and even dread which he had conceived of this nation, put his whole body into a tremor, so that even his teeth chattered in such a manner, that he could not utter a word. (Ibid., p. 274)

Naturally, the fear and the chattering teeth were Skeper's – Sparrman was at pains in his account to emphasize his own coolheaded control of the situation. However that may be, this evident display of fear was a visible reversal of Sparrman's show of strength, and his subsequent attempt to save the situation, disguising 'the real reason for [Skeper's] trembling' by 'threaten[ing] him very hard and accost[ing] him in the roughest manner', was only partially successful. He concludes by revealing that, rather than impressing on the Xhosa men the 'authority

and power' of his own presence, it was possible that the proceedings had simply amused them:

I am not certain, however, whether the Caffres were not more sharp-sighted than I wished them to be; however that may be, some of them fixed their eyes upon [Jan Skeper] and laughed. (*Ibid.*, pp. 273–7)

Sparrman plays this scene partly for laughs: a theatrical encounter in which the various players negotiated their relationship to one another through physical signification and dumb-show. However, it contains a thread of uneasy discomfort at the problematics of communication which the humour – achieved by loading fear onto the 'Hottentots' of the party – is able only partially to efface. Later Sparrman again displays concern to control a communication process which perpetually threatened to slip from his grasp. Jan Skeper's reaction of fear notwithstanding, Sparrman suggests that communication between Khoi and Xhosa – over which he would have no control, and the import of which he would not understand – was a serious threat to be guarded against:

Whenever the interpreter of the Caffres offered, which he did several times, to enter into a private conversation with my Hottentot, I constantly took care to prevent it. (*Ibid.*, p. 277)

Clearly the loyalty of 'his' 'Hottentot' was, despite the possessive adjective, a cause for anxiety. And in fact, although Sparrman's narrative emphasizes the ways in which he succeeded in retaining control of the situation, this control appears tenuous, constantly threatening to slide from under him in the face of disruptive laughter, incomprehensible language, and uncertain social relationships. He continues to relate the episode as a struggle to 'read' the situation and the intentions of the Xhosa men, to assert his authority over them, and to retain his status in the eyes of his Khoikhoi servants. For example, the party of Xhosa accounted for their arrival by telling Sparrman that they had come to see if he was intending to trade for their cattle, and he responds as follows:

In order to prevent their sitting down without previously being asked, I told them without delay by means of their interpreters, that they had my leave to sit down, whilst I gave my answer on the subject of their proposed commerce. (*Ibid.*, p. 277)

Finally, both parties separated to camp for the night. Sparrman, still uncertain and evidently anxious as to the intentions of the Xhosa, went to keep an eye on them, accompanied by his friend Immelman. The pair observed them as they slaughtered an animal for supper, noticing with some confusion that the Xhosa had abandoned their weapons for the night, and appeared utterly unconcerned by their European observers: 'indeed, they did not pay the least regard to our being present' (ibid., p. 281).

The whole account is laced with repeated allusions to the Xhosa as a physical threat, and intimations that they were thieves, but nothing in their behaviour appears to have corroborated these interpretations and ultimately Sparrman remained entirely in the dark as to their true intentions. As his party settled down for the night, having taken care to fortify their camp, he acknowledges his imagining of the Xhosa, and expresses an uneasily mingled sense of relief and disappointment that his sanguine fantasies had not been fulfilled, reporting tellingly that

Upon the whole we slept tolerably secure: and though, even after such ample preparations for our defence, we thought ourselves happy to escape being attacked by the enemy, yet still we could not help wishing that we had been able to gratify our friends with an account of an assault on the part of the Caffres. (Ibid., pp. 282–3)

Ultimately, Sparrman's story places him in control of the communicative situation he found himself in, despite his inability to speak the languages of the frontier zone. The narrative turns on a marked, three-way categorical distinction between its actors – the Khoikhoi as servants, timid and docile; the Xhosa as warriors, confident and proud, but unpredictable; and the white traveller, as choreographer of the situation, whose authority is put to the test (but ultimately confirmed) by the communicative difficulties of the situation. At the same time, however, the story also reveals the limits of Sparrman's power, particularly with regard to language. His power to interpret is severely curtailed, leaving him adrift in a situation in which social relationships are complex and hard to read, motivations appeared opaque, boundaries inchoate. Reliance on his Khoikhoi interpreters is revealed to be a risk, their loyalty by no means given, and it takes all of his ingenuity to keep (tenuous) control of this situation. For Sparrman, the encounter as a whole was one of partial communication, of double or uncertain meanings, one in which different groups imagined one another and which he himself,

with a combination of unease and delight, acknowledges as ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations on all sides.

When Sparrman returned to the question of languages, in an Appendix to his second volume, it was to reassert control over them by recasting them as natural scientific data, and thus part of the province over which he was master. He included two glossaries in his travel narrative, one of Xhosa and one of Khoi, compiled from data gathered from Boer colonists, and from Khoikhoi servants and interpreters. The former list comprises fewer than 70 lexical items, almost exclusively concrete nouns; the latter has roughly 150 entries, including a few short phrases from which an interested reader might deduce some minimal morphological and syntactic information. Although differing markedly from one another, both lists share roughly the same lexical semantic domains, typical of ethnographic glossaries of the period, including terms for elements, parts of the body, celestial bodies and natural phenomena, numerals, social and familial relationships, foods, and animals.

This whole Appendix contains, as well as the glossaries, a miscellany of material which Sparrman apparently could not, or chose not to, place within the journal format of his narrative. It includes several engravings of animals, and an account of a newly discovered species of rat. This appended material appears in some ways quite awkwardly heterogeneous – after all, rats and glossaries do not at first glance have a great deal in common. However, in fact the rat provides an indication as to how the glossaries are to be read. Sparrman presents it as a scientific specimen, whose classification on the basis of the existing Linnaean system exemplifies the capacity of natural science to encompass and order the new; and this, by implication, is also the purpose of the glossaries. Placing them next to one another, their tabular format reminiscent of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, Sparrman suggests that the languages of the frontier zone, too, were ripe for classification through comparison.

The glossary form presents languages as, in essence, lists of names for things; making them appear, in other words, very much like Linnaean taxonomies, as sets of labels by which the world may be named and known. Ignoring linguistic structure, this model of languages-as-labels suggests a stable one-to-one correspondence between words and their referents. It also, for this reason, suggests an immediate kind of equivalence or comparability between different languages on the basis of lexicon, rather than at a higher structural level; and this is precisely what Sparrman intended, suggesting the reader examine them 'with a view to their mutual comparison' (*ibid.*, p. 242). Just as, in Linnaean natural history, species are judged as analogous to or distinct from one another

through the comparison of a limited number of observable characteristics, so the reader was invited to compare the two glossaries point by point in order to determine the relationship of difference between 'Hottentot' and 'Caffre'. Sparrman underlined this oppositional relation with a brief reference to phonology, couching his argument in gendered terms by explaining that

The Caffres do not make a noise with their tongue against the roof of their mouths in speaking, as the Hottentots do, but pronounce their words in a manly and distinct manner, mostly with a strong accent on the penultimate. (Ibid., p. 350)³

Sparrman's comparative approach to the representation of Xhosa and Khoi operates within the classificatory framework of the work as a whole. The languages are placed next to one another, so that the reader can recognize the difference between Xhosa and Khoi by comparing them to one another. And with language standing metonymically for human group – an analysis invited not least by the description of Xhosa language as 'manly' – by extension two groups of human speakers, 'Hottentots' and 'Caffres', could be seen to be definably distinct.

As representations of social reality, the wordlists also differ markedly from one another. The Khoi glossary contains terms for slave, servant, and master, and a predominance of imperatives, suggestive of a social and economic order in which the Khoikhoi were incorporated as a servant class:

Master, Master of the house, *t'Kukoi*.
Come hither, *Heva ha*.
—, *Jata ha*.
Come quickly, *Susa ha*.
Do not come, *Ha gutti*.
Give me, *Male gu*.
Give fire, *t'Ei mare*.
Give milk, *Bi mare*.
Order me some drink, *Ereka* (ibid., pp. 349–51).

The Xhosa list, by contrast, illustrates a quite different set of frontier relations revolving around travel, trade, and warfare:

A Road, *Usala*.
Javelin, Hassagai, *Emkangota*.
Knife, *Sifhatse*.

Waggon, *Noto*.

Copper, Brass, *Emsibemsopi*.

Glass Beads, *Sintela*.

Small red Glass Beads, *Lenkitenka* (ibid., pp. 353–4).

The semantic variation between the two lists offers readers a picture of the social order in the eastern Cape. Each list illustrates a different set of communicative scenarios, involving interaction between the Western language-learners and speakers of the language in question – with the Khoikhoi as servants, the Xhosa as warriors. In one sense, these features of the glossaries reinforce Sparrman’s power: they represent social reality and they also, simultaneously, simplify and polarize it, helping to fix it in place. However, they also display to the reader the limited and contingent nature of Sparrman’s mastery of the languages of the frontier zone, since they represent so very clearly a circumscribed model of traveller’s communication, just a few ‘common words and phrases’, ‘partly for pleasure, and partly for use’.

If eighteenth-century natural science set out to own the world by naming it, then, in a sense, Sparrman tries to do this twice over. For not only does he demonstrate his power over the landscape of the eastern Cape by apportioning to it Linnaean labels, he also appropriates the frontier zone’s own naming systems – the languages of the Xhosa and Khoikhoi – and attempts to demonstrate how they might themselves become objects of classification, folded into the overarching universal system of Linnaean taxonomy. By doing so, he converts an apparently protean and – for Sparrman – confusing social environment, in which language was a notable obstacle, into a seemingly stable social order. Here, Xhosa and Khoi were again placed side by side, as they had been in the complex and apparently indeterminate social space of the frontier zone, but now Sparrman had the power to reduce those shifting linguistic and social circumstances to an orderly, tabulated form in which difference was fixed: Xhosa and Khoi were separated from one another and converted into appropriate objects of scientific observation and classification. The mutability of social relations was made to conform to the stability of the table. And we see here one possible role of linguistic description in mediating experience: here, language was cast in a natural historical mode, and in this way Sparrman attempted to reassert his scientific authority over it. Language, far from being baffling and exclusionary, became an object of knowledge over which Sparrman

could assert mastery: his was the Linnaean power to name and classify a world apparently rendered domesticated and knowable.

By the end of the eighteenth century, relations around the frontier zone were becoming increasingly fraught and hostile, as Boers, Khoi, San, and Xhosa struggled over livestock and land. At the same time, developments on the European political stage were about to have an irrevocable effect on South Africa. The significance of the Cape to the British, who were rapidly becoming the dominant European maritime power, was appearing increasingly evident since it was the key to trade routes to India. This also made it a target for their enemies, the French. It was primarily the worrying prospect of a French takeover – not interest in the colony for its own sake – which led the British to take temporary occupation in 1795, seizing the Cape from the by-now bankrupt VOC. In February 1803, under the Treaty of Amiens, the Batavian Republic re-took possession, but then in January 1806 the British invaded once more, this time with a view to permanent occupation, and finally took formal possession in 1814–15, at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Although part of the region had been in European hands since 1652, this wrangling over the Cape, culminating in its institution as a British colony, initiated a new phase in its history, bringing it further into Europe's line of sight and signalling the beginning of serious moves to become involved in and to 'open up' South Africa.

In this period of political and military upheaval, during the course of the acquisition of the new colony by the British and immediately afterwards, several new accounts of the Cape appeared in print in Europe. The political significance of the region was acknowledged by a wave of books surveying the colony and its prospects; travelling and travel writing were facilitated by the increased accessibility of the interior, thanks in part to the spread of colonial settlement farther from Cape Town; and around the turn of the century, a new era of missionary activity and writing also began at the Cape. All of which, together with increased contact between Europeans and Xhosa people, generated new interest in representations of language on the colonial margins. The first European to attempt a more thorough description of the language of the Xhosa was John Barrow, a travel writer whose work combined the emphases of Linnaean natural history as exemplified by Sparrman, with a new thrust towards systematic information-gathering as a component of colonial control.

Colonization and collecting language: John Barrow's *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*

Sir John Barrow's obituary in the *Times*, written by his old friend Sir George Staunton, alluded to relatively humble and inauspicious beginnings. Barrow had, wrote Staunton, not been provided with 'more than the ordinary means of instruction', and yet he had 'seized on those means with avidity and industry, and it was his self-education that mainly conferred on him those powers which, when the day of trial arrived, he turned to so good an account' (Staunton cited in Barrow 1849, p. 207). The only child of North Yorkshire smallholders, Barrow's talent and drive for learning as a means to social elevation had indeed been the foundation of his career. Having left grammar school and formal education at 14, he went on to travel as a government employee to China, and thence to the Cape of Good Hope as private secretary to the Governor of the colony. When he returned to Britain, the travel narratives which he published describing China and South Africa contributed to the making of his reputation. It is clear, not least from the autobiography written at the end of his long life, that Barrow's ascent to the position of a powerful and respected public figure and man of letters was dependent on a number of key factors: notably, his assiduous cultivation of the patronage of powerful men, and his self-education, through which he promoted himself as an able and reliable, if essentially amateur, mathematician, cartographer, and natural scientist. In all these efforts, Barrow also presented himself as a dedicated patriot and servant of his country, ever eager to find new ways of serving Britain's overseas interests through exploration, diplomacy, and the gathering of knowledge. These motivations, characteristic of Barrow's career as a whole, intersect strikingly in his *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, published in two volumes in 1801 and 1804, during, and immediately following, Britain's first annexation of the Cape.

Barrow's stated motivations in writing the *Travels* were scientific, political, and patriotic. This was a period marked by a new interest in and ambition for the relationship between the Cape and Europe: Barrow was convinced of the great strategic and economic value of the colony to British interests, and determined to persuade his readership to adopt this view. He dedicated his first volume to his patron, the then Secretary for War and former Home Secretary, Henry Dundas,

Under whose auspices, the extensive and important colony of the Cape of Good Hope was acquired and annexed to the British Empire,

by which our political and commercial interests in the East-Indies have been secured and promoted. (1801, p. v)

This first volume, published with the Cape under British control, described the colony in terms of its natural attributes and resources, including 'sketches of the physical and moral characters of the various tribes surrounding the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope'. The second volume, published in response to the Dutch resumption of control of the colony, represented and sought to justify the Cape as a strategic asset to the British empire: 'as a naval and military station; as a point of security to our Indian trade and settlements during a war, and as a territorial acquisition and commercial emporium in time of peace: with a statistical sketch of the whole colony'. Barrow was intent on demonstrating the importance of the Cape to Britain in the strongest possible terms, not just as a temporary possession of strategic value but with a view to permanent colonization.

Thus Barrow's travelogue was designed explicitly to serve a legitimating function in supporting the drive towards permanent colonization of the Cape by the British. As a corollary to this, it was presented as a significant contribution to the consolidation of British power through the collection of knowledge about the colony and its environs. In opening his second volume, Barrow pointed out that the British had made mistakes in dealing with the Cape because of a lack of information, and that the French, 'our most inveterate and rancorous enemy', had gained strategic advantages by their more thorough knowledge of the region (1804a, p. 5). The work is hybrid in form: in part what Charles Batten has called an 'encyclopaedic travel book' (1978, p. 84),⁴ attempting to more or less comprehensively and systematically describe all the features of the region; but at the same time, it is laid out largely as an episodic narrative. Accounts of encounters and negotiations with local leaders, for example, are laced with 'manners and customs'-style ethnographic description, and anecdotes relating to Barrow's travels through the colony are interspersed with detailed maps of the coastline.

The paradigm which structures Barrow's account of his experiences in South Africa is that of natural history: his claim to authority, like that of Sparrman before him, rested on his self-presentation as a scientific traveller. As Barrow recounted later in his autobiography, the period leading up to his departure for the Cape had been taken up in the study of the gardens at Kew – that famous spatial rendering of natural history as spectacle. Spending three days a week among the hothouses, Barrow recalled, provided the ideal grounding in classificatory botany

which, in my future travels in South Africa, was the greatest service to me, Kew being in possession of a large portion of the flora of the Cape of Good Hope. We examined most of the plants in the order of their systematic classification, and the only interruption we ever met was a royal one, when George III and his Queen came, one day, suddenly into the hothouse where we happened to be; and, of course, we retired. (1847, pp. 1838–9)

In such a short passage Barrow managed to incorporate the themes that unified his career as a whole. The presence at Kew of ‘a large proportion of the flora of the Cape of Good Hope’ vividly evokes the relationship between the appropriative natures of Britain’s colonial ambition on the one hand and classificatory science on the other. Even George III and Queen Charlotte manage to make an appearance in the midst of Barrow’s botanizing, his deference in the face of this ‘interruption’ a reminder to the reader of his dedication to the service of King and nation.

The sense of scientific systematicity which Barrow had so enjoyed in his time at Kew provided a framework through which to interpret his subsequent experiences in South Africa. In the *Travels* he cites over and again his favourite works of classificatory natural history: Pallas, Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle*, Aiton’s *Hortus Kewensis* – but particular emphasis is placed upon Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae*. The text is authoritatively strewn with Linnaean binomial classificatory terms; here, however, in contrast to Sparrman’s earlier work, the language of natural science sits alongside the explicit language of colonial acquisitiveness. Barrow presents the Cape and its environs in terms of material and strategic resources to serve Britain’s interests. Tellingly, the region’s human inhabitants do not feature at all in the first 42 pages of the first volume. When they do finally appear, they are the object of the following sentence, once again justifying Barrow’s ambitions for British colonization: ‘most of the fatal diseases that prevail among the natives should appear to proceed rather from their habits of life than from any real unhealthiness in the climate’ (1801, p. 42). However, this was to be a *comprehensive* account of the region: a physical, natural, scientific, historical, and political representation of a desirable colonial territory. And so, while for Barrow the Cape was a space to explore and to possess without impediment, at the same time its human populations were of undeniable interest to him: as future colonial subjects, as resources to be exploited, as threats to be contained, and as objects of ethnographic scrutiny.

Both the classificatory gaze which characterizes the work as a whole, and Barrow’s colonizing agenda, are clearly in evidence when Barrow turns to

describe the colonial frontier zone of the eastern Cape. This was a major selling point of the *Travels*: Barrow offered, for the first time in print, a detailed, first-hand account of the eastern frontier region, compiled in the course of several quite lengthy journeys to the frontier zone. Barrow's purposes in making these trips were both political and scientific; he reported Governor Macartney's instructions to him in the following terms:

We are shamefully ignorant even of the geography of the country; we have no map that embraces one-tenth part of the colony; I neither know nor can I learn where this Graaf Reynet lies – whether it is five hundred or a thousand miles from Cape Town. I am further informed that the Kaffirs, with their cattle, are in possession of the Zuur-veldt, the finest grazing country in the colony, and that these people and the boers are perpetually fighting and mutually carrying off each other's cattle. These matters must no longer be tolerated, and my wish is that some adjustment should be made between these two people. Now, [. . .] information on these and various other points is my object, and my experience assures me that you are the person I can most confidently rely on to acquire for me that information. (1847, p. 141)

There is no doubt that this extract is typical of Barrow's self-presentation as a valued public servant, ventriloquizing Macartney's trust and reliance as a means to point up his own pivotal role in the colonial endeavour; it is also, however, illustrative of the unstable situation in which the new colonial regime had found itself. The British had inherited from the Dutch a situation of worsening instability in the region – simplified in the above account into a mutual process of fighting and the carrying off of cattle. In fact, as we have already seen, the Boer colonists there were involved in frequent clashes with the Xhosa; Boers continued to expand their settlements into land controlled by the Xhosa, which exacerbated tensions still further. In 1799 war had broken out again between Boers and the Xhosa chiefdoms, which lasted until 1802. All sorts of other people became involved in the conflict, too – individual Khoikhoi and San people, for example, joined up with Xhosa groups, as did Boer rebels, and deserters from the British forces.

Into this situation was sent the young Barrow, commissioned by the Governor as a colonial representative on a diplomatic mission to meet, negotiate with, and pacify the frontier populations. At the same time, as is clear from the above extract, this was to be a studied exercise in information-gathering. The Governor, acutely aware of the gaps in British knowledge of the colonial periphery, charged Barrow with the

systematic recording of his observations, and more particularly with the mapping of the region (see for example Barrow 1847, p. 141). He was also asked to report on what ‘Commerce or Intercourse might be carried out with the Hottentots, Caffres, or other savage nations on our Boundary with safety, propriety and advantage’ (Macartney to Barrow, cited in Theal 1897–1905: II, p. 111). So, as Barrow recorded in his autobiography, the equipment he packed to take on his first mission included the following:

A small pocket sextant of Ramsden of 5-inch radius, an artificial horizon, a case of mathematical instruments, a pocket compass, a small telescope, and a double-barrelled rifle-gun [...]. The only books I carried with me were Aiton’s *Hortus Kewensis* and the *Systema Naturae*, which were of great importance, affording me both comfort and assistance. (1847, p. 143)

Barrow’s list is quite dazzlingly succinct in its summation of the tactics of colonial control (Figure 1). But, while pocket sextants and double-barrelled rifle-guns were undoubtedly useful, it was his books of natural history which apparently afforded him the greatest ‘comfort’ as well as ‘assistance’. Offering the solace of the familiar, they also furnished the means to tame the unfamiliar, via an overarching global schema through which it might be interpreted, classified, and thus domesticated.

Thus equipped, Barrow set off into the colonial border region: the frontier zone at the periphery of British control, polyglot, shifting, and politically volatile. His diplomatic missions were concerned with the visible presence and exercise of colonial power, and with the establishment and enforcement of ‘proper limits’ to the colonial border between the Boer colonists and the Xhosa (Barrow 1801, p. 111). Diplomacy, and the attempt to consolidate British power over the colonial periphery, provided the narrative frame to Barrow’s account of the people of the eastern frontier zone: Boers, Xhosa, Khoikhoi, and San. Into this narrative, Barrow threaded his information-collection, observation, measurement, and painstaking record-keeping. And in keeping with the colonial remit of the mission, Barrow *assessed* as he observed, his acquisitive colonial gaze noting possibilities for trade and agriculture on this first political mission into Xhosa territory. Measuring and tabulating such things as a ‘Catalogue of Useful Woods’, Barrow anatomized his surroundings as resources available to an incoming colonial power.

The ethnographic description included in this section of Barrow’s first volume is thorough and elaborate, in keeping with the ‘encyclopaedic’

intent of his work. Barrow offered details relating to the practices, beliefs, history, physiognomy, and relations between the people of the frontier zone, notably the Xhosa and the Khoikhoi. He also discussed language in some detail, again focusing on Xhosa and Khoi, and included a pair of wordlists for the two languages – unlike Sparrman's, these were collected from native speakers of Xhosa as well as Khoi, although they are extremely sparse, with only 23 Khoi lexical items and 34 for Xhosa. The lists comprise the kind of terms which Barrow described elsewhere as 'most likely to have retained their primitive names': heavenly bodies, natural phenomena, and numerals, considered by Barrow as by other travellers, philosophers, and philologists, as comprising a 'core vocabulary' least subject to change or borrowing (Barrow 1804b, p. 243). In this sense the wordlists are *unlike* those of Barrow's predecessor Sparrman, whose collections and the variation between them placed the speakers

	KAFFER.	HOTTENTOT.
The sun,	Eliang,	Surrie.
The moon,	Inyango,	kā.
The stars,	Imquemqueis,	Kōro.
The earth,	Umclabo,	Kōo.
Air or light,	Amaphoo,	Kōm.
Fire,	Leaw,	Ei.
Water,	Amaanzee,	Kām.
Thunder,	Ezoolo,	hōōnoo.
Lightning,	Leaw Ezoolo,	hōōnoo-ei.
Wind,	Oomoi,	qūa.
Rain,	Imphoola,	Tōōkai.
The Sea,	Ooloanje,	hurroo.
A Man,	Abaantoo,	Quaina.
A Woman,	Omfaas,	Quaiſha.
An Ox,	Incabai,	Mnoo.
A Dog,	Eenja,	Toona.
	F F 2	To-day,

Figure 1 Wordlist from John Barrow's *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (Reproduced by courtesy of the John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester.)

	KAFFER.	HOTTENTOT.
To-day,	Emenie,	Hafai.
To-morrow,	Gamtzo,	Quātrie.
One,	Eenyé,	Qūæ.
Two,	Zimbeenie,	Kām.
Three,	Zintaté,	gõna.
Four,	Zeené,	haka.
Five,	Zincano,	gofé.
Six,	Zintantaat.	
Seven,	Zinnoné.	
Eight,	Zintoamnayené.	
Nine,	Tuamnumyé.	
Ten,	Leefhung.	
Eleven,	Leefang-gay-yé.	
Twelve,	Leefangbeenie.	
Twenty,	Amashoomomabeenie.	
Thirty,	Amashoomomataté.	
Forty,	Amashoomomazeené.	
A Hundred,	Ecoloo.	

Figure 1 (Continued)

of Khoi as servants, and Xhosa as warriors. Instead, Barrow's wordlists represent nothing short of *specimen-collecting* to a set pattern. The lists are laid out as columns side by side in order that 'the following brief specimen of the Kaffer language, with the synonymous [*sic*] words in that of the Hottentots, may serve to shew how little resemblance they bear to each other' (1801, p. 219). In other words, the purpose of the wordlists was again, as for Sparrman, comparative, and the purpose of the comparison was once again the demonstration of difference. As well as the lists, Barrow provided an accompanying commentary in which he elaborated on some of the characteristics of the two languages and the distinctions between them. His description of Khoi, as with previous accounts, dwelled at some length on the implosive consonants or 'clicks' which he regarded as the defining feature of the language. Referring to its reliance on implosives Barrow wrote of Khoi that

Of all the methods that have been adopted in language by different nations for the purpose of expressing objects, and conveying ideas in a clear and unequivocal manner, that which has been hit upon by the Hottentots is certainly the most extraordinary. (1801, p. 160)

Elaborating on this extraordinariness, he further explained:

the noise made by the dental is exactly that which is sometimes used to express impatience, and the palatial [*sic*] is much more full and sonorous, and not unlike the clacking of a hen that has young chickens. This sound is never made to precede or to follow a syllable, but is thrown out at the same time, and incorporated with it. (Ibid., p. 160)

This strangeness can be seen even more starkly illustrated in Barrow's brief, comparative description of San, in which he wrote,

The nature of their language is the same as that of the Hottentots, though they are not able to understand each other. In the latter, the action of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, or the teeth, is seldom used on more than one syllable of a word. In the language of the Bosjesman, there is scarcely a syllable enunciated without it; and this action is performed by them much more forcibly than by the Hottentots. Notwithstanding the difficulty for a European to acquire such a language, several of the Sneuwbergers speak it as fluently as the natives, from their having been committed, in their infancy, to the care of Bosjesman nurses. (Ibid., p. 290)

Once again, we find a sense of wonder and dismay: these languages, so alien and apparently unlearnable, were nevertheless spoken by colonists in the polyglot frontier zone. Barrow's rendering of Khoi and San speech for his readers is dominated by a sense of unease at the languages' apparently 'difficult' and 'extraordinary' nature.

No such concerns, however, colour Barrow's description of Xhosa. We have already seen that he introduced the language by means of *difference*, emphasizing in no uncertain terms 'how little resemblance' it bears to 'Hottentot'. He further attempted to represent, and to categorize, it by describing its sounds: 'in the enunciation it is soft, fluent, and harmonious'. In other words, it *sounds* like a language, and what is more, one which is pleasing to Barrow's (British) ear. To make this difference, and inequality, between Xhosa and Khoi

recognizable, Barrow resorted to the mapping of one hierarchy through another. Xhosa, he wrote,

Has neither the monotonous mouthing of the savage, nor the nasal nor guttural sounds that prevail in almost all European tongues. It is as different from that of the Hottentots as the latter is from the English. (Ibid., p. 218)

In order to locate Xhosa, Barrow presented the language via a series of comparisons and analogies. He contrasted the language against the 'monotonous mouthing of the savage', directing the reader again to the Khoi and particularly the San languages so pejoratively described by him elsewhere. He also asserted the superiority of Xhosa, at least in phonological terms, to some *European* tongues – those characterized by 'nasal' sounds (notably, of course, the language of that 'most inveterate and rancorous enemy', the French) or 'guttural' sounds (the Germanic languages). Finally, he insisted that the difference between Xhosa and Khoi was as great as that between Khoi and English. Thus, very succinctly, Barrow outlined two separate but analogous linguistic (and, by implication, cultural and 'racial') hierarchies. In the environs of the Cape, a classificatory distinction and radical inequality was set up between the 'harmonious' language of the Xhosa on the one hand and the 'savage' 'mouthings' of Khoi and San on the other: languages which abutted each other geographically, but which were worlds apart culturally, conceptually, linguistically. Within Europe, a hierarchy is simultaneously implied between English, the superior language, and its 'nasal' and 'guttural' counterparts across the Channel. The way in which Barrow maps these linguistic hierarchies onto one another is somewhat crude, but no less effective for that. In using these methods Barrow inaugurated what was essentially a nascent system of ethnolinguistic classification: he implied that a European-centred understanding of language and nationhood or *ethnos* as coterminous with one another was appropriate to the analysis of the situation around the eastern Cape frontier zone.

A demonstration of categorical difference was the explicit motivation for Barrow's descriptions and lexical 'specimens' of 'Kaffer' and 'Hottentot', and this hierarchical arrangement between the two groups, already marked linguistically, was underlined by reference to other tropes of inequality. Barrow defined the Xhosa and the Khoikhoi physically, associating their appearance immediately with their psychological features, in gendered terms. For Barrow, Khoikhoi men were physically

weak and womanish, and this was a marker of their psychological inactivity or 'effeminacy': '[they show] no protuberance of muscle to indicate strength; but a body delicately formed as that of a woman marks the inactive and effeminate mind of a Hottentot' (ibid., p. 157). Under British protection, he assumed, they would therefore be the willing servants of the colony. The independent Xhosa, by contrast, were warriors, supremely masculine in both body and mind, as Barrow repeatedly noted and admired:

The men [. . .] were the finest figures I ever beheld: they were tall, robust, and muscular; their habits of life had induced a firmness of carriage, and an open, manly manner, which, added to the good nature which overspread their features, shewed them at once to be equally unconscious of fear, suspicion, and treachery. (Ibid., p. 169)

Thus the two-way division between 'Bosjesmen'/'Hottentots' and 'Kaffers', in which 'Kaffer' was the privileged term, was marked for Barrow not only in language, but as a gendered distinction in both body and mind. His arguments are reminiscent of Sparrman, who had also gendered the linguistic division between the Khoi tongue and 'manly and distinct' Xhosa. For Barrow's imperialist vision, the independent Xhosa provided an admirable model of masculinity, combining mental and physical strength, martial prowess, and moral virtue.

Finally, Barrow found evidence for the hierarchical relationship he suggested between Khoi and Xhosa by speculating briefly on the origin of the two languages. Khoi must, he suggested, be onomatopoeic in its formation:

The croaking of a frog is readily recognized in *kraal* or *kraaie*; the lowing of an ox in *'mnoo*; the mewling of a cat in *meau*; the neighing of a horse in *hahoe*; the breaking of the sea upon the shore in *hurroo*; all of which are correspondent words in the language of this people. Many instances, besides these, sufficiently prove that the vocables were adopted in imitation of the sounds proceeding from the different objects they were meant to express. (Ibid., p. 161)

Khoi apparently showed clear evidence of its imitative beginnings; this theory of linguistic origins was not unusual to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers on language. But this odd and odd-sounding tongue had, according to Barrow, *atrophied* at a very early stage in linguistic development, which he conceived as progressing from simple onomatopoeic

monosyllables to polysyllables. While most languages had come to be capable of the miracle of near-limitless recombination, Khoi had to make do with a little minimal compounding, and the notorious ‘clicks’:

All languages in their infancy consisted probably of simple or monosyllabic sounds; but, as these could convey only a very limited number of ideas, recourse was had to inflexion of voice and composition of the simple sounds to make the vocabulary more copious. The division of such simple sounds into their elements, and by the various combinations of these elements to form an almost unlimited number of new sounds, was one of the most wonderful inventions in the history of man, and much beyond the genius of a Hottentot. He has done, however, all that he found to be necessary by a very few compound words, and by the clacking of the tongue. (Ibid., p. 161)

In Barrow’s view the Khoi language was, therefore, defined by the supposed conceptual limitations of its speakers. In his account, linguistic development in human history had been driven by the need to find new words for new ideas; lacking the ideas that made these developments necessary, the ‘Hottentot’ had contented himself with ‘a very few compound words, and by the clacking of the tongue’. Approaching the Xhosa language, by contrast, Barrow was moved to marvel at the presence of such a splendidly melodious form of speech in what he terms a ‘savage nation’. Insofar as it offered an insight into the history of its speakers, the language must, he averred, be a relic of a previously more elevated state:

Not the smallest vestige of a written character is to be traced among them; but their language appears to be the remains of something far beyond that of any savage nation. (Ibid., p. 218)

Barrow’s discussion of language in *Travels in Southern Africa*, scattered through the 1801 volume, covers Khoi, San, and Xhosa, and offers lexical material, phonological description, ethnolinguistic classification, and historical/philosophical speculation on linguistic origins. Yet it is, however, based on precious little direct linguistic knowledge on Barrow’s part, nor does it appear in any way designed to facilitate communication in the languages concerned for future travellers to the region. This is a rendering of language predicated entirely on observation, comparison, and classification. Mary Louise Pratt has commented on the curious air of detachment in Barrow’s narrative, and this certainly extends to his

description of the languages of the frontier zone (Pratt 1992, p. 59). There are moments in the narrative, however, where interaction between European and African appears, behind or at the edges of Barrow's ostensibly detached, scientific gaze. In one such example, Barrow uses the language of the Khoikhoi as a means to diagnose the limits of their scientific knowledge. Beginning by using the authoritative, generalizing, ethnographic present, he writes that

They have a name for the sun, another for the moon, and a third for the stars: but this is the extent of their astronomical knowledge. The division of time, by the motion of the heavenly bodies, was too subtle an operation, and required too much observation and profound thinking, for the careless and inattentive mind of a Hottentot. The period of a day may almost be said to be the extent of his reckoning. When he has occasion to refer to the time of the day, like all other nations who are without machines for marking the divisions of time, he will point out the place in the heavens where the sun then was. The periods that have past he can express only by saying they were before or after some memorable event. [...] I know not how far the numerals in his language proceed, but none of those of our party could tell beyond *five*, nor could any of them put two numbers together but by the assistance of their fingers. Yet they are very far from being a stupid people. (1801, pp. 159–60)

Barrow's tone is commanding and detached: the Khoikhoi have no knowledge of medicine; they have no knowledge of astronomy; their ability to talk about the past is limited; their minds are too restless, inadequate to the tasks of analysis. His words here are particularly significant when read alongside the Khoi wordlist which appears 50 or so pages later – that sparse lexicon appears all the more authoritative and complete, since it maps almost exactly onto this ethnographic description. 'They have a name for the sun, another for the moon, and a third for the stars'; the wordlist in its brevity encompasses, therefore, the Khoikhoi conception of the universe. Terms for 'today' and 'tomorrow' encompass their understanding of time. Numerals from one to five express the extent of their counting system. Thus the wordlist represents in a different, tabulated form the same information contained in this ethnographic description. Just as with Barrow's account of the origins of Khoi, the reader is invited to see this severely limited, referential model of communication as straightforwardly reflecting the features of the language, and mapping directly onto the Khoikhoi view of the

world. But there, at the end of the above passage, the *generality* of Barrow's writing slips to reveal something of the *particular*, the circumstances of encounter in which his knowledge – and the material for his wordlist – was gathered. 'I know not', he wrote, 'how far the numerals in his language proceed, but none of those in our party could tell beyond *five*, nor could any of them put two numbers together but by the assistance of their fingers'. Here we have the communicative setting, and the informants, behind Barrow's authoritative pronouncements on the Khoikhoi language, culture, and conception of the universe. Barrow, in the midst of his travels, trying to question the Khoikhoi servants in his travelling party. The communicative process was made more difficult, since his knowledge of Khoi was nonexistent. We can imagine Barrow pointing as he questioned: what is the name for this? And for this over here? The referentiality and the limitations are those of the communicative setting; but the specificity of this communicative setting is all but concealed by Barrow's air of scientific detachment. Its limitations are ascribed to what appear to be gaps in the Khoi lexicon, and in turn explained by the language's supposed conceptual inadequacy.

The specificity and extreme limitations of the communicative settings in which Barrow found himself are more clearly revealed in a later discussion with the chief of the Rharhabe Xhosa, Ngqika, and his advisers, in which Barrow was unusually candid about the difficulties he faced. And for once, Barrow made explicit reference to his reliance on interpreters, who elsewhere in his narrative are almost entirely obscured (see for example 1801, pp. 193–6). As he regretfully reported,

So different are the opinions and the feelings of different nations concerning religion, and so difficult do the most civilized people find it to express their notions clearly and consistently of the 'unknown God', that little satisfactory information can be collected on those points without a very familiar and extensive knowledge of the language of the people among whom the inquiry is made, which was far from being the case in the present instance. (1801, p. 214)

Through the medium of his Khoikhoi interpreter, Barrow conducted an interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory discussion with Ngqika on the subject of the supernatural, religion, and beliefs concerning death and the afterlife, and Barrow's bafflement and frustration are evident. Finally he concluded,

As little information was likely to be gained on such abstruse points through the medium of a Hottentot interpreter, the conversation was turned to other subjects less embarrassing, and such as came more immediately before the senses. (Ibid., p. 215)

Barrow implied that it is the use of a 'Hottentot' interpreter which made this exchange so difficult – either because this interpreter was mediating between two languages (Xhosa and, presumably, Cape Dutch) in which he was not completely fluent, or because a Khoikhoi interpreter was less likely to grasp such 'abstruse points'. But this is also tantamount to a more general confession that certain ideas – notably, about 'the unknown God' – pushed translation to its limits. Attempts at discussion of such complex, culturally specific topics as beliefs about death and the afterlife led, quite simply, to 'embarrassment'.

For all of these problems, however, Barrow like Sparrman treated languages not primarily as means to communicate, but as features of human groups by which they could be described and classified – and did so on the basis of very limited linguistic data. The paradigms of natural history, as laid out in particular by Carl Linnaeus, structured these eighteenth-century analyses of language. The process of classification through comparison, fundamental to natural science, was adapted to describe the linguistic and social environment of the colonial frontier zone. This region – polyglot, socially and politically complex – was interpreted through a bifurcated ethnolinguistic division between Khoikhoi and Xhosa. The Khoikhoi were cast as the servants of the colony; the Xhosa as warriors living outside the colony. At the same time, both Sparrman and Barrow relied on a referential model of languages-as-labels, implied by their wordlist models, which imbued them with a stability and a certainty analogous to, and certainly compatible with, their Linnaean projects of comparison and classification.

Classifying the 'nomade' language: Heinrich Lichtenstein's *Travels in Southern Africa*

The research methods employed by Barrow in gathering data for Xhosa – pointing at objects and asking their names, listening to its 'sounds', and talking to Xhosa-speakers through his 'Hottentot interpreter' – were treated scathingly by a traveller who soon followed him into the eastern Cape frontier zone. When the Batavian Republic re-took possession of the Cape in 1803, the German naturalist Heinrich Lichtenstein accompanied the new Governor General Janssens as a medical attendant and tutor to his son. He, like Barrow, travelled

extensively in the colony, including making a journey into the Xhosa territory in the company of Janssens, before returning to Germany after the British takeover in 1806. The two-volume account of his experiences, *Travels in Southern Africa*, was published in Berlin in 1810 and 1812.

To return to the epigram with which we began, Lichtenstein argued for the particular significance of language study to the student of 'savage nations' – in this instance, the Xhosa:

There is no doubt but that the situation of a savage nation, the degree of civilization which exists in it, and above all, the relationship which it bears with other nations, can never be accurately understood, and properly estimated, without a competent knowledge of its language; – without understanding equally the mode of pronouncing it, its structure, and its compass. (1812–15: I, Appendix, p. 1)

Language was, Lichtenstein asserted, diagnostic of the mentality and cultural development of its speakers, and a key to the relationships between different human groups. One needed, however, a 'competent knowledge' of a language in order to put it to such purposes. Among the several faults which Lichtenstein found with earlier travel writers on South Africa – not least, both Sparrman and Barrow – was their glancing and inadequate treatment of the Xhosa language. While confessing to being anything but an expert on the subject, he would endeavour, he assured his readers, 'to exculpate my work from being liable to the same observation' (*ibid.*, p. 6). Lichtenstein's more thorough description of Xhosa was, however, hedged around with uncertainty: regarding the frontier zone as a fluid and confusing environment, he saw the Xhosa language as fluid and confusing as well.

Just as Barrow's had been, Lichtenstein's mission to the frontier zone was one of militarized diplomacy. His narrative describes a mission in which General Janssens, with Lichtenstein in attendance, had attempted to broker peace between the Xhosa and Boers, to reassure the frontier Khoikhoi, to secure the eastern border of the colony, and to establish the authority of the colonial regime – in this case, the new, short-lived Batavian government. Lichtenstein provided plenty of natural historical detail, as he travelled around collecting specimens of the flora and fauna of the region; beside his list of equipment for the pursuit of natural scientific research, Barrow's appears thoroughly restrained. As well as compasses, a telescope, microscope, and thermometer, he included

A case of anatomical instruments, two points of orpiment for preserving birds and quadrupeds, and a cask of brandy for keeping reptiles, &c. Some thousands of needles of various sizes for fastening insects, tin boxes for insects, and butterfly nets. Twelve wooden boxes for receiving my daily collections, some stronger ones with divisions for minerals; and a large provision of paper for drying plants.

He also carried what he describes as 'my library', comprising the travel narratives of his predecessors, including Kolb, Sparrman and Barrow, as well as 'companions for my hours of relaxation', 'Goethe's *Works*, Lessing's *Nathan*, Schiller's *Don Carlos*, Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, and Tasso's *Aminta*'. He also included 'a variety of books on Natural History', particularly 'those that had all the latest discoveries' – but, he added tellingly, 'thanks to the inexhaustible treasures of Nature in Southern Africa, I seldom found them of much use to me' (*ibid.*, p. 20).

Thus, as much as he set about taking charge of his surroundings through the processes of natural science, Lichtenstein constantly reveals the limits of Linnaean classification as a frame for interpreting experience. As Carli Coetzee points out, Lichtenstein was concerned 'with placing the observing, narrating self in the text' (Coetzee 1992, p. 73). He was anything but a detached observer: the landscape through which he travels is dramatized as a place of human encounter, of diplomatic exchanges and hunting parties, of physical danger and discomfort, and moments of excitement. Indeed, it is precisely the distance between the secure detachment of the scientific observer and his own experiences of travel that lends dramatic structure to Lichtenstein's narrative: he repeatedly returns to the ways in which the people, animals, and landscape of the eastern Cape exceeded or evaded his attempts to classify and botanize them into submission, refusing to behave in the obedient manner of scientific specimens. At one point, for example, Lichtenstein celebrated the party's discovery of 'a great many scorpions and a species of large poisonous spider', making 'a rich booty for my collection'. That very night, having broken his camp bed, Lichtenstein was forced to sleep on the ground, only to discover in the morning that his would-be specimens had nearly been the death of him in the night:

This accident had put me into no small danger, for [. . .] I found under my coverlid a number of these dangerous insects, probably some of which we had chased the evening before from their hiding places, and who here sought a refuge, attracted by the warmth. (1812–15: I, p. 429)

Lichtenstein was not, by any means, the untroubled monarch of all he surveyed in the Xhosa territory. The physical and emotional experiences of travel – whether pain or pleasure, discomfort or delight – are constantly present in his narrative, making impossible any sense of detached observation. Over and again he reports his hunger or thirst, being burned by the sun or cooled by the rain, frightened by scorpions or covered in flies.⁵ Thus, if this was a journey (and a narrative) to take charge of the land and its inhabitants, animal and human, then it was not a particularly successful one. Rather than dictating the terms of engagement, Lichtenstein implied that just as often, the party found themselves dictated to instead. This uncertainty of perspective was at its most obvious when it came to the region's various groups of human inhabitants. All of these people were, Lichtenstein noted, unpredictable and peripatetic, prone to staying where they were not wanted, and moving about when they were required to keep still. Xhosa people in particular had, as he put it, the distinctive and unnerving habit of 'roving about' (*ibid.*, p. 418). Thus it was with a palpable air of relief that Lichtenstein recorded how the party's encampment, made in a different location but in exactly the same formation every day, served as an island of order in the midst of all this confusion and flux. The tents, the wagons, the horses, and oxen were always arranged by 'the same rule', so that

In this way our camp resembled a little wandering village, in which every one soon knew his place with the utmost exactness, and easily learned the business, which, as a citizen of the little state, was allotted him for the good of the whole. As the country in which from this time we generally encamped was very much the same, a small plain near the bed of a river, and under the shade of mimosas [...]; and as we always sent our wagons forwards that every thing might be in order against our arrival, so it often appeared as if we had only been out for the day, and returned to our home again at night. (*Ibid.*, pp. 413–14)

This 'little state' was a bulwark against the uncertainties of the frontier zone, being a space in which 'every one knew his place', and where 'every thing' could be predicted to be 'in order'. But, as Lichtenstein immediately acknowledged, the encampment offered only the illusion of social and spatial stability. In reality, the party were experiencing the flux which he saw as distinctive of all human and animal populations in South Africa, at the mercy of the instructions or compulsions of nature:

We were indeed become perfect nomads, sharing the lot of most of the inhabitants of Southern Africa, whom nature disposes, or compels, to stated changes in habitation. The colonists are driven by the snow from the mountains down to the Karroo; the Caffre hordes forsake their vallies [*sic*] when food for their cattle begins to fail, and seek others where grass is more abundant; the Bosjesman is fixed to no single spot of his barren soil, but every night reposes his weary head in a different place from the former; the numerous flocks of light-footed deer, the clouds of locusts, the immeasurable trains of wandering caterpillars, these, all instructed by nature, press forward from spot to spot, searching the necessary means by which that nature is to be supported. (*Ibid.*, p. 414)

Lichtenstein treated the 'wandering life' as a defining feature of the frontier zone, not just of particular groups within it – not only were the Xhosa prone to 'roving about', even English deserters 'wandered as vagabonds' (p. 391). The moral implications of this nomadic existence were clear: the 'roving life' of Boers in the region, he wrote, 'wandering hither and thither without any settled habitation', was 'calculated to increase [. . .] unamiable propensities in their disposition' (*ibid.*, p. 383).

How does one represent language spoken in such a disturbingly transient environment? Lichtenstein owned, in his Appendix on the Xhosa language, that it was partly his *own* travelling about that had made linguistic description difficult: 'he [. . .] who would catch and describe the spirit of it has no easy task, especially if that man be a traveller who has only had an opportunity of knowing one or two of the tribes' (1812–15: I, Appendix, p. 1). Some of the Vocabulary was, Lichtenstein reports, 'collected by myself in the course of my travels', probably from some of the Xhosa people he met, and from the unnamed Khoikhoi interpreter or interpreters travelling with his party.⁶ The rest was borrowed from a Dutch missionary, Johannes van der Kemp, to whom we shall return in the next chapter.

So, Lichtenstein recognized that his Vocabulary was possibly inaccurate, but he nevertheless included his whole collection of Xhosa words and phrases in order to make some kind of assessment of 'the situation' of this 'savage nation':

The number of wants and ideas existing among a people, whether that number is great or small, as well as their relative situation with the countries by which they are surrounded, can never be so efficiently determined as by procuring a collection of their words, the mediums

whereby those wants and ideas are expressed, and those relations are defined. (Ibid., p. 1)

Given this emphasis upon ‘wants and ideas’, it is not surprising that Lichtenstein’s Vocabulary is dominated by nouns, grouped into semantic domains. Lichtenstein also includes ‘specimens of their modes of speaking’, most of which he had apparently compiled himself and from which, as he pointed out, some morphosyntactic information might be deduced; it is presumably to this end that he sometimes gives word-by-word translation directly beneath a Xhosa phrase (ibid., pp. 5, 26–8). The phrases are brief, degrammaticalized and often inaccurate. In this, and the sorts scenarios they represent, they suggest a very limited model of linguistic contact on the road – short inquiries and responses, phrases relating to travel and the weather, comments and imperatives relating to food, as well as phrases indicating the routine problems of communication:

I do not understand	An diwa
I do not comprehend it	Au di kaas
Speak loud, that I may understand	T’heeta k’hakulu di ésiéh
I understand it	Di sihle (ibid., p. 27).

The final phrase appears perhaps the most unintentionally revealing of the experiences and wishes of the traveller on the road:

Let us go home Hambane kuduka (ibid., p. 28).

All in all, this was a far larger sample of Xhosa than those of Sparrman or Barrow – with around 600 lexical items, over half of them nouns. It was also one compiled and presented not primarily for the purposes of comparison, with Khoi or other languages, as had been the case for his predecessors, but rather to illustrate the language in something approaching a comprehensive way. And by including examples of the various parts of speech, as well as phrases, Lichtenstein went some way towards making the Xhosa language *look* like a language, a complex and structured system with grammar and syntax, rather than as a series of loosely-connected words-as-labels. This very recognition of complexity, however, appeared as a problem for Lichtenstein: once he acknowledged Xhosa as a system with internal structure, rather than a nomenclature, then he had to recognize that it was a system he did not understand. As we have seen earlier in the cases of Sparrman and Barrow, the simplicity

of the wordlist model partly constituted a response to the sense of troubling transience engendered in travellers by travel in the eastern Cape frontier zone. It implied stability: a transparent relationship between words and their referents, suggesting the ability to pin down meanings, and to pin down language. Lichtenstein, however, considered the Xhosa language to be mysterious, confusing, difficult to understand; the wordlist's stability, therefore, was illusory. Xhosa was, he asserted, characterized by 'intermediate syllables', the sense of which was 'little defined, being often very different in one case from what it is in another' (ibid., p. 28). Indeterminacy, ultimately, was the defining feature of a language as transient and unstable as its speakers:

Among a people where no such things exist as the palpable signs of language, who lead beside a nomade [*sic*] life, and are divided into numerous tribes, at whose rise and fall new dialects arise and old ones are lost – among such a people the language has in it nothing permanent, it shares the fate of those by whom it is spoken, it changes without being improved. (ibid., p. 1)

Thus Lichtenstein's pervasive concerns at the implications of the wandering life found their way into his Appendix on the Xhosa language. For Lichtenstein, learning language on the road was indistinguishable from learning a language *of* the road – Xhosa was, he asserted, worryingly temporary and unfixed, although he confessed that it would require more expertise and experience than he possessed to distinguish 'what is permanent' from 'what is fluctuating' in it (ibid., pp. 1–2). And so Lichtenstein presented his Vocabulary as little more than a snapshot of a fluctuating language in an inchoate social environment: resistant to the impulses of the natural scientist to pin down, reify, and label the phenomena of the natural and social world. But, looking forward, he optimistically suggested that, at the very least, his tentative study of the language might 'smooth the way for the future happier Inquirer, who has the same desire to investigate the Caffre language upon the spot' (ibid., p. 2). Referring, as earlier travel writers had not done, to the possibility of *learning to speak* the Xhosa language from linguistic descriptions, he concluded,

But however incomplete may be this Vocabulary, and the remarks annexed to it, I yet hope [...] that I may, with respect to enquiries into the Caffre languages, as well as on many other points, have

rendered myself useful to future travellers. No nation is so savage as not to see, with more favourable eyes, a foreigner who endeavours to express himself in their language; and this feeling, therefore, might be expected from the Caffres, even supposing them to be the most wild and untamed people upon the earth. (Ibid., p. 28)

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