Guns and Horses, c 1750 to c 1850: Korana – People or Raiding Hordes?

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Abstract. The aim of the present article is to discuss the question of identity of the Korana, one of many groups of mixed African/European culture which roamed South African Highveld during the first half of the 19th century. Among the scholars there is growing interest in frontier communities, such as Bastaards, Griquas and other Oorlam groups and the role they played in South African history and politics during the first decades of the 19th century. One of those communities were the Korana. But one of the problems the contemporary scholars have is the diversity of those communities. There were several predatory groups which roamed the Highveld: Oorlams, Bastaards, Griqua, Hartenaars, Korana and Bergenaars. They were very similar in their pedigree and shared many elements of material culture. Therefore specialists tend to define Korana by their lifestyle. But obviously such a definition is very wide, and in fact too inclusive. In this article author tries to point to other options, of creating more exact definition, of this community.

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The first half of the 19th century was a time of upheaval in South Africa, even if we accept the point of view of some contemporary historians that the difaqane/mfecane and the Great Trek were just historiographical inventions (Cobbing 1988; Wright 1989; Etherington 2001: 329-346). The fact remains that we may observe several important developments and changes in the demographic, political, social and cultural situation of South Africa in this period. One of the most

profound was the rise and expansion of peoples of mixed racial, ethnic and cultural descent, such as the Bastaards, Griquas, Korana and a few other Oorlam [1] communities. One of those groups were the Korana, whose bands penetrated deep into the South African interior. They were singled out as being responsible for wreaking havoc and destruction in Transorange. One contemporary author noted that they were: "Excessively vain and impudent, they have a great deal more of effrontery than true bravery. They are almost always at war with their neighbours – not that they delight in war, but they like the pillage by which it is attended" (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 26). In another narrative an author describes his meeting with the Korana band of Abraham Kruger: "In the afternoon the Corannas, to the number of twenty two, arrived with their chief. The first feeling I had on looking at those people, was one of surprise at their appearance. I expected a horde of naked savages, and I found a number of smart young men, dressed quite in the style of the most respectable farmers in the colony" (Philip 1828: 334).

But who, in fact, were the Korana? This is not an easy question to answer and this article has no ambition to clarify all of the nuances of the history of the Korana. Its goal is to ask some questions and propose possible answers and point out certain possibilities.

There are layers of problems surrounding the definition and description of this set of communities. The first problem emerges when we look into the early history of the Korana. In the later half of 18th century, the Orange (Gariep) River valley became a cradle for the development of several new communities, which, despite all the differences, shared certain common traces. Up to the first half of the 18th century, this region was dominated by several Khoisan groups and communities. The three largest were: Nama, Einiqua and Korana. But in fact, a closer look suggests that the Korana were not the original inhabitants of the Orange River valley. They were, according to some traditions and scholars, a group composed of two main sub-groupings: Great and Little Korana. The first seems to be a group of immigrants who arrived in the Orange River valley during the first half of the 18th century, most probably from the western Cape. [2] On the other hand, the Little Korana do not have any traditions of early migrations, and it is quite possible that they were just one of the branches of Einiqua, who were at that

[1] These terms define a character of certain groups. Bastaard meant a person of mixed white-khoi or white-slave parentage. Griquas were the independent communities evolved out of Baastard groups under missionary influence. Oorlam were mostly Khoisan (predominantly Khoi) groups which acquired certain traces of European culture, like the Dutch language, guns, horses, clothes. See: Penn (1995: 94, note 8).
[2] At least such were some traditions of the Korana. See: Arbousset & Daumas (1846: 24-26); Engelbrecht (1936: 3-4, 13-17, 25, note 1-2).

time living in the middle course of the Gariep river, and they were assimilated into the migrant group, or rather both groups merged together into one community somewhere around the middle of the 18th century (Penn 1995: 47).

But the process of formation of a new ethnic group was not finished. There was also another development, which influenced to a great extent the composition and character of most of the communities living along the Orange River. In fact, we should speak of two processes: the proliferation of certain elements of colonial culture; and the coming of new immigrants to the Orange River Valley. To a great extent, these processes were linked.

Since the thirties and forties of the 18th century new groups and individuals, so-called *drosters* (fugitives), started to move to the north of the Cape Colony. There were among them fugitive slaves, peoples of mixed origin (Bastaards, Hottentot-Bastaards), culturally assimilated Khoisan or European (settler) deserters and outlaws (Penn 2005: 13, 20-21). Even the first migrants, Khoisan fugitives, were bringing some elements of colonial material culture with them. Later migrants, mostly people of mixed origin and slaves brought with them even more artefacts, social usages, and some of the colonial institutions.

The most important of these was the commando system, which was in fact much more than a military institution. [3] It was also, if not first of all, a form of social organization, a tool of the hegemony of local elites and a means of redistribution of goods. It was used to incorporate different groups (also ethnic) and individuals. Therefore it could be, and was, the basis for shaping separate and alternative social-political structures on the frontier (van der Merwe 1937: 26-27; Newton-King 1988: 4, 8; Storey 2008: 35). In the case of the peoples living in the Gariep (Orange River) region, among them the Korana, both dimensions of this institution were equally important. Both played an important role in a process of ethnogenesis at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. The adoption of guns and horses, and the knowledge of how to use them effectively, gave them considerable advantage over other communities living to the north of the Gariep, especially Tswana chiefdoms, which were expanding to the south during the first half of 18th Century.

At the same time the commando system was the means of achieving domination by new immigrants – *drosters*, mostly people of mixed descent. They had at their disposal new technologies, knowledge and indispensable contacts with the Colony. In effect they were in a position to consolidate their power, as patrons of numerous clients (Borcherds 1861: 116-119; Legassick 1988: 368-371). They could both be dangerous enemies as well as desired patrons, sometimes at the same

[3] The development of the commando system was described by, among others: van der Merwe (1937: 25-35); Tylden (1959: 303-313). However, it has not been thoroughly and exhaustively presented yet.

time. Violence was an integral part of the so called 'firearm frontier.' These new arrivals were, to a great extent, people in despair: outlaws, fugitive slaves and servants, army deserters or even criminals (Penn 1990: 15-40). Of course there were among them people of some standing, seeking new opportunities on the northern frontier. There were Bastaards who saw themselves as 'swarthy trekboers' or even 'swarthy Hollanders,' who, escaping from the increasingly exclusive colonial society, wanted to recreate a stable economic and social situation with them in the centre of the political and socio-economic system (Lichtenstein 1815, 2: 244-245; Moffat 1844: 65; Borcherds 1861: 116-119; Penn 1995: 35). But for each of those, there was at least an equal number of those who had seen the frontier as a place of easy chances, where horses and guns gave not only opportunity but in fact a licence for violence and robbery. Violence and robbery was the fastest means to accumulate wealth and clientage, and of building a stable base of operations. This tendency was strengthened by a demand for cattle and labour on the colonial market. There are several examples of co-operation between Oorlam communities and colonial notables, who supplied these communities with arms, powder and ammunition in exchange for cattle and apprentices. [4]

The influence of these immigrants seems to be critical for the future history of the Korana. Therefore they were usually classified as one of the Oorlam groups, the kind of community that which adopted several elements of European/colonial culture and institutions (Legassick 1988: 368-369, 410 note 49). But when did this process of the Korana becoming an Oorlam community start, and when was it finished? The answer is not obvious. Historians point to the fact that somewhere around the middle of the 18th century there was a dramatic change in Khoi-khoi – Tswana relations. Around 1760, the Kora (Taaibosches) started to attack the BaRolong and the BaTlhaping, and in their raids went as far north as contemporary south-eastern Botswana (Raper & Boucher 1988: 339-342; Penn 1995: 41). But the question remains, whether and to what extent this was already an effect of *droster* influence? There is some tendency to link this turn in mutual relations between Kora and Tswana directly to the influence of Oorlam communities, with their horses and firearms (Parsons 1995: 344).

The most known example of the importance of this phenomenon was the case of Jan Bloem I, a deserter form a Dutch East India Company ship, who supposedly murdered his wife, and ran away into the South African interior, reaching the Orange River Valley. There he tied himself to one Petrus Pienaar, a crucial person among Boer notables on the northern frontier. Before 1786 he employed

[4] This was the case of Guiliam Visagie, Klaas Afrikaner or Jan Bloem I, who in the late eighties and during the nineties of the 18th century were raiding widely in the Orange River valley and to the north of it. See: Moffat (1844: 59-61); Lye (1975: 178); Engelbrecht (1936: 56-58); Penn (2005: 187-199).

him and settled on one of his farms at the junction of the Orange and Hartbees rivers (Engelbrecht 1936: 20; Legassick 1988: 369), near the settlements of Korana. In short time he came into contact with them and married himself into several clans of the Korana, taking altogether 10 or 12 wives mostly from Springbok and Kats clans. This allowed him to form alliances with several Korana groups and to build, by 1795, a significant following, sometimes also by forceful means (Lye 1975: 128; Eldredge 1994: 111-112). Around 1792 he moved to the north of the Orange River and using his Korana clients and allies, firearms and horses, and the knowledge of how to use them (the commando system) he raided widely among Tswana chiefdoms to the north of the Gariep, accumulating large amounts of livestock (Lye 1975: 128; Penn 2005: 181).

Such examples may be used to argue that, already at the end of 18th century, the Korana should be viewed as an Oorlam community. But there is some ambivalence when we go through the primary sources. On the one hand we have several records concerning bands or communities called Korana, which quite obviously were Oorlams in their character. But most of these narratives were produced during the second, third or later decades of the 19th century (Lye 1975: 41-42; Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 26; Moffat 1844: 132, 146, 149, 289), and only a few of them described the situation in the 18th century. What is more, those we have usually describe the situation in the last two decades of the 18th century. However, the turn in relations between the Korana and the Tswana is assigned to the sixties of that century.

There is another clue. Even by the beginning of the 19th century travellers describe the Korana as still living in a traditional Khoi-khoi manner and mostly using their traditional weapons. We do not have any information suggesting that they were widely using firearms and horses, or had other traces of colonial material culture (Barrow 1801: 404; Lichtenstein 1815, II: 252-254). In fact, Borcherds described the Korana as victims of Oorlam (in this case Klaas Afrikaner) depredations (Borcherds 1861: 91). Therefore the question arises: from where this discrepancy? How are we to define the Korana at that time?

One development is obvious. Raiding became an important activity of several Orange River communities, the Korana among them.

> They [Korana] are considered as being more cruel, and at the same time more daring than any other tribe of this nation. They possess a few sheep and cattle, but have the same wandering inclination, and the same propensity to the chase and to plunder, with other Bosjesmans. The Briequa Kaffers [BaTlhaping] , who inhabit country close behind them, are very considerable sufferers from such daring neighbours. Of these people, the Koranas not only carry off large herds of cattle, but they also seize and make slaves of their children [. . .]. (Barrow 1801: 403-404).

But what we see in the sources are typical Khoi-khoi societies, with typical Khoi-khoi weapons raiding their neighbours. What was new about those raids was the size of the raiding parties, which numbered several hundred warriors, and the scale of destruction they effected. We also learn that they traded the spoils, especially the slaves, to the colonial farmers (Barrow 1801: 404; Campbell 1822, II: 171-172; Eldredge 1994: 102-103).

Considering the testimony of 18th and early 19th century sources, one needs to accept that we can not definitely decide the character of Korana communities. There are several possible explanations. We may assume that what happened around 1760 was only indirectly an effect of colonial influence. We may assume that the Khoisan groups were withdrawing under the direct and indirect pressure of colonial expansion, [5] and that they migrated towards the Orange River valley. In effect, as we saw, the Korana emerged as a new ethnic grouping. There was a concentration of population, which changed the balance of power between the southernmost Tswana and Khoi-khoi communities of the Gariep valley. The growing demand in the Cape Colony for forced labour created during the last two decades of the 18th century was another incentive to raid Tswana chiefdoms or other Khoi-khoi communities (Eldredge 1994: 94-103).

One may argue that the process of cultural transformation was not finished by the end of the 18th century. Therefore the Korana should rather be rather seen as allies or clients of certain *droster* gangs or Oorlam communities (for example Jan Bloem I and his followers), than the members of such groups (Lye 1975: 128, 178; Moffat 1844: 141; Borcherds 1861: 117, 118; Engelbrecht 1936: 57). If we accept this point of view, what we see is a society in the process of transformation, which would be finished by the second decade of the 19th century. Only then the Korana would become a typical Oorlam group which adopted firearms, horses and the commando system, who were clad in European clothes and using broken Dutch as a medium of communication with outside groups (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 26; Etherington 2001: 51). We may assume that this was, among other factors, related to the process of assimilation of certain Oorlam and Baastard groups into Korana communities. This process was helped by intermarriage (Engelbrecht 1936: 57).

But there is also another explanation of the above-mentioned discrepancy in primary sources. Specialists point to the important fact, that during the first half of the 19th century, the term Korana became a generic name for nomadic, pastoralist and predatory groups and bands roaming the South African veld at that

[5] Migration of trekboers, cattle raids by colonial farmers and the Cape Colony officials, and smallpox or cattle sickness epidemics. Those are just few of the incentives for migration. See: Lichtenstein (1815, I: 110, 310-311; 2: 311-312). There is much more on the colonial Khoi-khoi relations in: Elphick & Malherbe (1988: 3-53); Marks (1972: 55-80); Penn (2005: 27-154).

time (Penn 1995: 45; Ross 1975: 561-562; Ross 2009: 25). This explanation could support the view, that with the assimilation and influence of *droster* groups, the Korana changed into these new predatory communities. But, if we accept that the name Korana became, from the beginning of the 19th century, increasingly a generic name for several unconnected or loosely connected groups, characterized rather by a similar, predatory way of life, than ethnic composition, then it is possible that already at the end of 18th century there were two different but interconnected groups of population called Korana. One were the communities living along the middle course of the Orange River, the mixture of Einiqua (Little Korana) and Khoisan incomers (Great Korana) from the western Cape, who still lived according to old Khoi customs, although already with some admixture of *droster*s, and therefore slowly assimilating certain traces of colonial culture (Penn 2005: 285-286). The second group would be several, dispersed, Oorlam-dominated communities, which included considerable admixtures of original Korana. These admixtures were so significant in numbers, that the travellers recognized such bands as belonging to one of the Korana groups. These communities could be styled as Oorlam-Korana. Historians such as Martin Legassick and Nigel Penn show the evolution of such groups which often started as bands of outlaws, usually with a criminal background, which by gathering clients from among local peoples gave rise to new communities like Griqua, Korana or Oorlam Nama (Legassick 1988: 358-420; Penn 2005: 157-287). They used contacts they have in the Cape Colony, and opportunities created by the demand for cattle and apprentices to consolidate their power and widen their scope of activities (Kinsman 1989: 2-4).

It is characteristic that four of the five most known leaders of the Korana bands in the Transorange: Jan Bloem II, Abraham Kruger, Knecht Windvogel and Piet Witvoet had no traditional, hereditary rights to chieftaincy, and were half-castes (Ross 2009: 25). It shows that those groups were *ad hoc* created bands, where Korana were just one, although probably the most numerous, of the composite segments of such a group. Sometimes Korana were described as allies of certain Oorlam groups, like in the case of Jan Bloem I and his followers (Lye 1975: 128, 178; Engelbrecht 1936: 57). At the same time, deep into the 19th century we may observe that some of the Korana chiefs still rather identified themselves as Griqua or Bastaards (Engelbrecht 1936: 57, note 1). This example shows that their self-identity was still vague.

When we accept the explanation offered above, it becomes easier to understand why in some records and narratives in the beginning of the 19th century the Korana were still described as a set of typical Khoi-khoi communities, when in others they were already presented as Oorlam groups or bands. But what should

be stressed is that the dividing line between these two branches of Korana was blurred and became even more so with time. We may observe two parallel and to some extent simultaneous processes. Among some of the Oorlam-centred groups there was tendency to adopt Korana identity related to those elements of Korana communities, which were numerically dominant among the client groups. This tendency was strengthened by marriages and other family ties. For example, Jan Bloem II, who took over the leadership of his father band/group in 1799, was himself half Korana (of the Springbok clan), which made the process of identification easier and faster (Engelbrecht 1936: 57-58). [6] What is more, among Oorlam-Korana groups there were also people of pure Khoi-khoi (Korana) extraction, who adopted the predatory lifestyle of the Oorlams. One of those groups were the Taaibosches, a section of Links Korana. From the second decade of the 19th century they migrated from their settlement between the Orange and lower Vaal rivers to the north-east, attacking BaRolong, and other Tswana chiefdoms. But in the beginning of the thirties of the 19th century, Hanto (Jan Taaibosch), the leader of the Taaibosch Korana, still recognized his descent from the Links Korana of the Orange River (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 24-25; Engelbrecht 1936: 34-35).

Since the end of the 18th century, up to the seventies of the 19th century, several of the original Korana communities extended along the Gariep from the Langeberge and Kheis (western borders of Griqualand West) in the east, up to Kakamas and the Hartbeeste River in the west (Strauss 1979: 7-11). As late as 1823 these groups were still using traditional Khoisan weaponry (bows and poisoned arrows) (Thompson 1827, I: 251-252, 441-446, 449-450; 2: 29-37; Stow 1905: 271). This shows that the ways of the two main branches of the Korana parted. This section of Korana adopted elements of colonial/Oorlam material culture much later than the Oorlam-Korana. But still, with time, they were adopting more and more of its elements. This process was related to the fact that they also were participating in predatory activities, similar to those of Oorlam-Korana groups (Stow 1905: 287). Another important factor was the influx of many individuals who were disaffected with their situation in more stable societies and polities, among them: Coloureds from the Cape Colony, Griqua from captaincies of Griqua Town or Philippolis, Namaqua, Tswana or Bushmen (San) (Strauss 1979: 18-19). There were also some groups of disaffected Bastaards and Oorlam, who settled along the middle course of the Orange River (Ross 1975: 566-568). Some of these immigrants were bringing with them elements of colonial culture. Two of

[6] This is somewhat similar to the case of Oorlam-Afrikaners. After their defeat in 1801, they moved further west and acquired a large following among the Nama. And when in 1823 they moved north toward contemporary Windhoek, they started to be recognized by this name. At the same time, some of the Nama groups remained south of the Orange River and became a distinct people (Theal 1899, IV: 407-408; Strauss 1979: 10-12; Lau 1986: 29-39).

the most important were of course horses and firearms. These two items greatly enhanced their efficiency as hunters and raiders, which became more important during the third and later decades of the 19th Century, when they were competing with Bastaards, Boers, Griquas and Oorlams, who were dominating the South African interior (Ross 1975: 562; Strauss 1979: 13-22).

Most specialists, analyzing the situation in the South African interior in the first half of the 19th century, take interest in the groups which spread to the Orange-Vaal area. The reason is quite obvious. These communities played an important role in the South African affairs at that time. At the same time the Korana communities living in the middle course of the Orange River then played only a marginal role. One of the exceptions was the riding party of one Stuurman. We do not know his ancestry. He probably had no family connections with the Stuurman brothers, the leaders of the Khoi-khoi rebellion on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony in 1799 (Newton-King & Malherbe 1981). The only thing we are sure of, is that he was one of the clients of the Kok family, and that he probably rebelled against them and moved into the middle course of the Gariep. In the thirties he started to raid Boer and Baastard farms on the northern and north-eastern frontier of the Cape Colony (Report of J.N. Redelinghuys, Nov. 1833 (?); T.F. Wade to Lord Stanley 1835, 39/252: 66; Ross 1975: 566-568). After the destruction of the Stuurman group by the Griqua in the beginning of 1834, this region ceased to draw much attention until the late sixties of the 19th century, when two wars were fought between the Cape Colony and the Korana, but this is outside the scope of this text. [7]

The Stuurman activities were just an episode, when, from the second up to the fourth decade of the 19th century Oorlam-Korana bands played an important role in the politics of the Transorange. Korana raiders led by Jan Bloem II, Abraham Kruger, Jan and Gert Taaibosches, Knecht Windvogel or Piet Witvoet roamed the High Veld spreading havoc among Sotho-Tswana communities and chiefdoms. They were to a great extent responsible for the disruptions of the late teens and early twenties and the migrations of several Sotho-Tswana (BaTlokwa, BaTlhaping) or even Nguni (AmaHlubi, AmaNgwane) peoples and chiefdoms (Eldredge 1994: 106-107; Legassick 1988: 368-376, 384-396).

The northern frontier zone of the Cape Colony, became an area where such predatory communities were born. As we have seen, this process started during the last decades of the 18th century, but the intensity of their activities and the raiding greatly rose in the second decade of the 19th century, and reached its apogee during the third and the beginning of the fourth decade. Why then? First of

[7] For more on these events, which are not very well known, there is a book dealing with the topic. See Strauss (1979).

all, because in the beginning of the 19th century there was a rise in the intensity of commercial penetration of the interior by colonial farmers looking for the possibilities of obtaining ivory (Wagner 1972/1973: 2). But ivory was not the only item for which there was a growing demand. Already during the last two decades of the 18th century Oorlam and Bastaard communities raided for cattle and apprentices, which were distributed among the Cape Colony farmers. During the first decade of the 19th century, after the defeat of Klaas Afrikaner in 1801 and under missionary influence, Bastaard and Oorlam communities adopted more settled ways and the situation became a bit more stable for a short while. [8]

In the second decade of the 19th century there was a collusion of interests between the colonial farmers and some of the Bastaards and Oorlams. With the rise of the Colony population and commercialisation of its economy, especially after the British took it over, the demand for cheap labour on the frontier grew considerably. In effect, trekboers themselves were raiding local communities for cattle and apprentices (Moodie 1960, V: 7-8). At the same time, the growing influence of missionaries, extension of the authority of the *kaptyns* (Griqua leaders), and the interference of colonial government into Griqua internal affairs led to the rebellion of disaffected sections of Bastaards (Hendrik Hendrickze) and subject communities (Legassick 1988: 384-387; Wagner 1972/1973: 2-4). Dissatisfied groups removed themselves from Klaarwater (Griqua Town) towards the Harts river (therefore they were called *Hartenaars*) and adopted a semi-nomadic and predatory way of life. Despite the fact that formally this rebellion ended around 1817, peace was not restored at that time. There emerged several breakaway groups, which never returned to Klaarwater, and remained in the Vaal-Harts area continuing their predatory activities. What is more, just a few years later, in 1822, another, more significant rebellion broke out. The elevation of Andries Waterboer to the captaincy (chieftainship) led to the secession of a large part of the Griquas, who moved to the east of the Vaal river (Extracts from a Report by Mr. Melville 1835, 39/50: 213; Schoeman 2002: 32-37).

These groups could safeguard their independence, and expand their raiding activities because they had strong connections with the Cape Colony market. They were able to operate independently of the missionaries, and had access to firearms, ammunition and powder. John Melvill reported that: "Powder and lead, guns, horses and brandy they get enough from the Bastaards and farmers for cattle and men" (Extracts from a Report by Mr. Melville, Dec. 1824). There are also other reports of their contacts with the Cape Colony. Quite a few Boers were

[8] Missionaries could gain a significant influence over the Bastaard and Oorlam communities, as they formally obtained monopoly for a trade with peoples outside the Cape Colony, also in firearms, powder and ammunition. See: Edict of J.W. Janssens (1835, 39/50: 163-164); Legassick (1988: 378-379); Penn (2005: 250-267).

active in Transorange at that time, and during the third decade of the 19th century the scale of illegal or semi-legal trade between Bergenaars rose dramatically (Philip 1828: 90-91; Extracts from a Report by Mr. Melville, Dec. 1824; Wagner 1972/1973: 3-4).

Among those groups were also the bands of Oorlam-Korana, men such as: Jan Bloem II, Abraham Kruger or Piet Witvoet who used the opportunity created by the Hartenaar rebellion and Bergenaars' secession to free themselves from Griqua patronage. It was probably during the first and second decade of the 19th century when those Korana communities, which were dominated by Griquas, adopted crucial elements of the Bastaard version of colonial culture (horses and horse riding, firearms, broken Dutch and the commando system) and were turning into Oorlam. They became very effective raiders, who during the second, and especially the third decade of that century were raiding widely, attacking mostly Sotho-Tswana communities (Arbouset & Daumas 1846: 26, 210-211; Arnot & Orpen 1875: 190-191).

As in the case of other Bergenaars, the contacts with the Cape Colony were vital to them. They needed constant access to horses, weapons, ammunition and clothes. Therefore they cooperated with both Boer and British farmers and traders from the Colony selling to them the spoils (mostly cattle and apprentices) taken during their raids. In fact, Griqua captains accused Boers, that they encouraged Korana to plunder neighbouring chiefdoms and communities (Schoeman 1996: 24; Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 211).

But again there is an issue surrounding their identity. In fact there were two main dimensions to this issue. The first were the divisions among Korana the themselves. There were several groups described as Korana, which settled mostly in the Valleys of the Vaal and Harts Rivers and roamed the Highveld. Those groups were more often identified by the names of their leaders, than by traditional clan names, therefore it is even harder to ascertain their identity (Engelbrecht 1936: 33-39, 50-55, 57-66; Ross 2009: 25-26).

The second dimension is the problem of definition – who we should call Korana. There were several predatory groups which roamed the Highveld: Oorlams, Bastaards, out of which the Griqua had evolved, or Hartenaars and Bergenaars, who were subdivisions of Griqua or Bastaards, as they preferred to be called (Schoeman 1996: 15-16, 17; Schoeman 2002: 24, 32, 34-37, 41-54). There were also some mixed AmaXhosa/Khoisan communities which grew around leaders like Nzwane (Danster) or Nongola (Thole), which shared with the Korana and Bastaards not only many cultural traces, but to some extent also ethnic composition (Kallaway 1982: 143-160). There were, last but not least, trekboers, like the famous Coenraad de Buys, who migrated into the Transorange around 1814 and

built a small, mixed following of his own (Wagner 1972/1973: 2-4). Just looking at the diversity of the communities, one realises how difficult is to distinguish Korana from other bandit groups, roaming the Veld at that time. It is even more difficult, considering that some of the names had no ethnic connotation. It was the case of Oorlams, but also of Hartenaars or Bergenaars. Both those names had political rather than ethnic meanings. In fact, Korana, in at least one source were described as one of the subdivisions of Bergenaars (Arnot, Orpen 1875: 191). What's more, the Korana bands and chiefdoms were heterogenous in their composition. We may assume that most of them were Koranas, but there surely were some Bastaards and other Oorlams, and with time Korana chiefs also had more and more Sotho-Tswana subjects. [9]

Therefore specialists such as Robert Ross or Nigel Penn tend to describe the Korana as "those who followed a style of life which entailed nomadic cattle herding and raiding in smallish hordes, led by a theoretically hereditary, Kaptyn" (Ross 2009: 25; Penn 1995: 45). But such a definition is very wide and could describe nearly any predatory group of Khoisan descent which were active in Transorange for the first five decades of the 19th century. Also, there surely must have been a problem with clear definition and the dividing lines between communities were not obvious. Most of these communities were quite inclusive and incorporated remnants of many shattered and displaced groups. Therefore none of them were ethnically homogenous. It is tempting to present the Korana as a kind of warrior/robber community, a band of soldiers or professional troop of raiders, who sometimes served as mercenaries or auxiliaries of African chiefdoms or as allies and business partners of Boer or Griqua farmers, or as robbers acting on their own account. And they surely were these kind of communities. But in this respect they would not have differed from Oorlam-Afrikaners or some Bergenaar bands like the Karolus Baatje Newlanders or Peter Davids Griquas (R. Gidely to J. Montagu, 11th June 1845 and J.P. Becham to J. Monatgu, 16th June 1845).

However, despite our problems with an unequivocal definition of the Korana as a group, it seems that contemporary writers had no such problem. Although it is impossible to delimit clear cut lines of division between these communities, we may observe, that not all 'raiding hordes' were called Korana. In fact the Korana were distinguished, in primary sources, from other communities, similar in lifestyle and organisation. Despite the fact that some of their leaders were of mixed descent, contemporary sources recognised the Korana as belonging to the Khoisan peoples (Barrow 1801: 403; Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 25-26; W. Shaw

[9] In the case of the Gert Taaibosch chiefdom in the Caledon river valley, besides a 1000 Koranas, he had more than 4000 African subjects (mostly BaTaung and BaRolong). See: Gert Taaibosch to John Montagu 11th June 1845.

to H. Hudson, 18th April 1844). Usually, even when they were a part of another chiefdom, they had their own chiefs, and always were treated as distinct community (Schoeman 1996: 93; A. Waterboer to H. Hudson, 1st Aug. 1845; Arnot & Orpen 1875: 191).

This is, as it seems, the problem of our tendency to delimit societies and populations as clearly as possible. The key to this problem is self- identification. So-called Oorlam-Korana groups were called Korana because, probably, they identified themselves as Korana. It seems to be a similar case as that of Germanic peoples and chiefdoms of later Roman times. For a long time scholars regarded them as homogenous ethnic units, but Reinhard Wenskus changed this attitude (Wenskus 1961). After the publication of his most famous book, scholars accepted that Germanic tribes were in fact "constantly changing institutions focused in a 'kernel of tradition' (*Traditionskern*) and held together by political leadership and the consciousness of a common origin and tradition. Thus, their names are no more than 'collective terms' for various groups of different origin" (Goetz 2003: 39). Therefore we should not look so much at ethnic composition of such communities as Korana, and which component was in fact numerically dominant. We should rather turn our attention toward the 'kernel tradition' of the Korana, understood in this case as a memory (even artificially created) of common origin, a set of common social and legal traditions and practices, because they defined their common identity and self-identification of those groups as Korana. [10] It could seem that this comparison is to far-reaching. In the case of the Korana, we do not have large troops of warriors and kingdoms in the making. What we have, especially in the case of the Oorlam-Korana, are bands of warriors acting on their own account or serving as mercenaries or rather a *foederati* of African or Griqua chiefdoms. The name Korana was then a 'collective term' for various groups of different origin.

Answering the title question is not easy. Firstly, because both answers are correct. The Korana were both a people and a raiding horde. There was in fact no contradiction between these two. They were a loose conglomerate of diverse and fragmented peoples, whose main activity was robbery and raiding (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 26). But at the same time they shared consciousness of a common origin and, at least to some extent, a common tradition. They identified themselves as a people distinguished from other similar groups. They defined themselves and were defined by others as being chiefly Khoi-khoi. There is no great doubt of that in the case of communities living in the Orange River valley

[10] Again it is somewhat similar to the situation of so-called barbarian peoples in late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. The ethnic and linguistic component was to some extent important, but the legal and historical tradition was in fact the key of self-identification. See: Wormald (2003: 21-46); Goetz (2003: 39-60).

since the second half of 18th century. Their descent is quite obvious, and with all the external influences we may trace their development from the typical Khoikhoi societies to Oorlam-like communities. It is a more difficult situation with the bands living in the Vaal-Harts area and roaming the steppes of Transorange. But there the most important is not the real composition of those groups but their self-identification.

Recognising the difficulty of this problem, one may argue that it would be instructive to look at the studies of late Antique and early Medieval so-called barbarian communities and their composition and sources of identity, as a potentially enlightening comparison.

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