



Currents, Chances, Commodities

The journey across arid stretches of land had been worth it. Back in 1894, Ernst Hermann, who had been working for the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (German Colonial Society), sent Englishman Walter Matthews to find out where all the seals had gone. They had become hard to find around Lüderitzbucht, a harbor in the south of the colony the Germans had claimed ten years earlier. Matthews, “one of the weirdest characters,” according to one newspaper,¹ traveled by ship to Walvis Bay. After landing, he must have heard about a seal colony at Cape Cross, located about 160 kilometers farther to the north along the coast. Since using a boat in coastal waters was too dangerous, Matthews, his two assistants, and several pack mules trekked overland, first to Swakopmund, then onward into a waterless and barren land. Any such journey required careful preparation, with multiple trips just to place water containers along the way to be used later on.² When they laid eyes on thousands of seals hanging out on a large rocky cliff, and even more so once they stumbled upon deposits of guano (Hispanicized Quechua word *wanu* for fertilizer/dung), all such burdens seemed worth it. Matthews did not hesitate: he reached out to C. J. Elers, a wealthy uncle and the managing director of Barret’s Breweries and Bottling Co. Ltd. in London, formed the Damaraland Guano Company, and obtained the required concessions from the German colonial government. Workers from Britain and the Cape, food, timber, even a locomotive, everything had to be brought in by ship.³ Landings were dangerous. After all, this was the infamous Skeleton Coast, part of Namibia’s almost thousand-mile coastline littered with shipwrecks turned maritime artifacts.⁴ In September 1896, the Norwegian bark *Erycina* sprang a leak and sank while unloading coal; that same year another ship stranded in the bay.⁵ In other instances, crew members simply refused to cross the hammering surf.⁶ Problems accessing drinking water also defined life at this commodity outpost, especially when supplies from overseas got delayed. At that point an ox wagon had to trek back to the ephemeral Omaruru River hoping to find water. Life was thus a struggle, defined by hard labor in virtual isolation, rampant diseases, limited medical care, boredom, and miserable damp weather.

Environmental infrastructure within the borderland sitting in-between the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and arid landscapes of an ever-encroaching Namib Desert were defined by human ingenuity, labor, non-human actors, and natural forces. Here, African societies like the Topnaar (also known as †Aonin), one subgroup of the Nama and thus part of the Khoisan, lived in outwardly inhospitable landscapes raising livestock and trading with groups in the interior; here European explorers sailed on the margins fearing wreckage and barren spaces. Both the dangerous ocean waters and arid desert landscapes initially protected Africans from European colonialism; that same frontier also laid the groundwork for an intricate ecosystem sustaining rich marine wildlife that attracted whales, seals, and all kinds of birds. By the eighteenth-century, the commodification of nature attracted Europeans and Americans to the region to plunder whale oil, seal skins, and guano. According to archeologists Jill and John Kinahan, “Isolated contacts with Europeans first occurred in the late seventeenth century, becoming more frequent a century later, and then permanent.”⁷ Although the Topnaar were originally able to take advantage of new trade opportunities, the goods they acquired, combined with rising cattle raids in the interior, eventually weakened them.⁸ Protagonists such as whalers, sealers, and guano miners, on the other hand, introduced new economic and governmental structures to the region. Non-human actors such as whales had to adapt and migrate. A study of this liminal space offers a sense of location, commodity trade, and early interactions. Moreover, it provides the basis for understanding how early structures ultimately framed and manipulated subsequent German colonization. Finally, this section further sustains historian George Steinmetz’s assertion that “There was not, in fact, a sharply delineated transition from precolonialism to colonialism in Southwest Africa.”⁹

Chapter 1 is organized along four sections, beginning with an introduction of the environmental borderland, or what archaeologist John Kinahan has titled the “last frontier of European imperialism in Africa.”¹⁰ A more in-depth discussion of the Benguela Current and Namib Desert are key when trying to make sense of natural forces that make this a non-equilibrium environment.¹¹ Historians are correct when noting that “the proverbial bleakness of the coastline . . . largely deterred Europeans from attempting to settle or trade until the second half of the eighteenth century, although the coast had been known to them since the early 1480s.”¹² However, and as emphasized in the following, the commodification of nature, a form of human agency, to follow Kreike,¹³ pulled cunning businessmen into the region by the seventeenth century. Three major booms are front and center: whaling, sealing, guano mining. Environmental infrastructure, shaped by geographical, biological, and ecological factors, as well as human ingenuity and labor, ultimately initiated early encounters and defined the incorporation of the coastline into the global marketplace.

On the Margins

The coastline of Namibia is littered with shipwrecks that tell stories of treacherous ocean waters and difficult navigation. North of modern-day Swakopmund, tourists can search for the now fully covered wreck of the *Gertrud Woermann II*. It stranded in 1904. The *Zeila*, a fishing trawler now bouncing back and forth between hazardous waves, as well as the beached wrecks of *Benguela Eagle*, *Montrose*, *Suiderkruis*, *Sir Charles Eliot*, and *Dunedin Star*, all long the fuel of adventures stories, are other maritime artifacts discarded along the so-called Skeleton Coast. According to historian Jennifer Jones, “They serve as icons for a unique historical and environmental context against a backdrop of desolate, desert landscape.”¹⁴ Take the wreck of a Portuguese vessel first discovered at Oranjemund in 2008. The diamond company Namdeb, a joint venture between the Namibian government and DeBeers, found its remains during excavation work.¹⁵ Precious diamonds were once deposited upstream of the Orange River. Over time those were flushed down and into the ocean, spreading along much of the southern coast of Namibia and the Northern Cape of South Africa. Namdeb now mines in a *Sperrgebiet* (forbidden zone) reaching from the South African border to about seventy kilometers north of Lüderitzbucht. In any case, after some of their workers spotted the seafaring relic, archaeologists identified it as the legendary *Bom Jesus*. Owned by Portuguese King João III, it sank on its way from Lisbon to western India in 1533. According to one expert, a combination of factors including excess cargo and bad weather likely resulted in the wreckage.¹⁶ Sailing along the coast of Southwest Africa in early days, and on some level even today, meant traveling on the margins.

Namibia’s coastline is a dangerous frontier space characterized by an array of natural forces. The country is located within what scholars call a swell wave environment. Those are defined by large waves traveling vast distances across the Atlantic Ocean from the southwest. Gale winds also push toward a rugged coastline. Then, there is the infamous Benguela Current, one of four main eastern boundary upwelling systems in the world. As a strong surface current, it arrives in the region with cold water from the southern Atlantic, wandering up the coast to around the mouth of the Kunene River. Anticyclonic winds drive such movements northward while counter currents below flow southward (Figure 1.1).¹⁷ An unstable process known as upwelling or lifting emerges as “cool waters from the deep offshore are brought to the surface of the coast,” to follow an explanation from the aquarium in Swakopmund.¹⁸ Coastal upwelling systems like the Benguela Current are what scholars call “the ‘powerhouse’ of phytoplankton production.”¹⁹ A rich marine ecosystem is the result of that, attracting fish, whales, seals, and all kinds of birds. At the same time, the system’s variabilities, overall currents and upwelling, and its pull away from

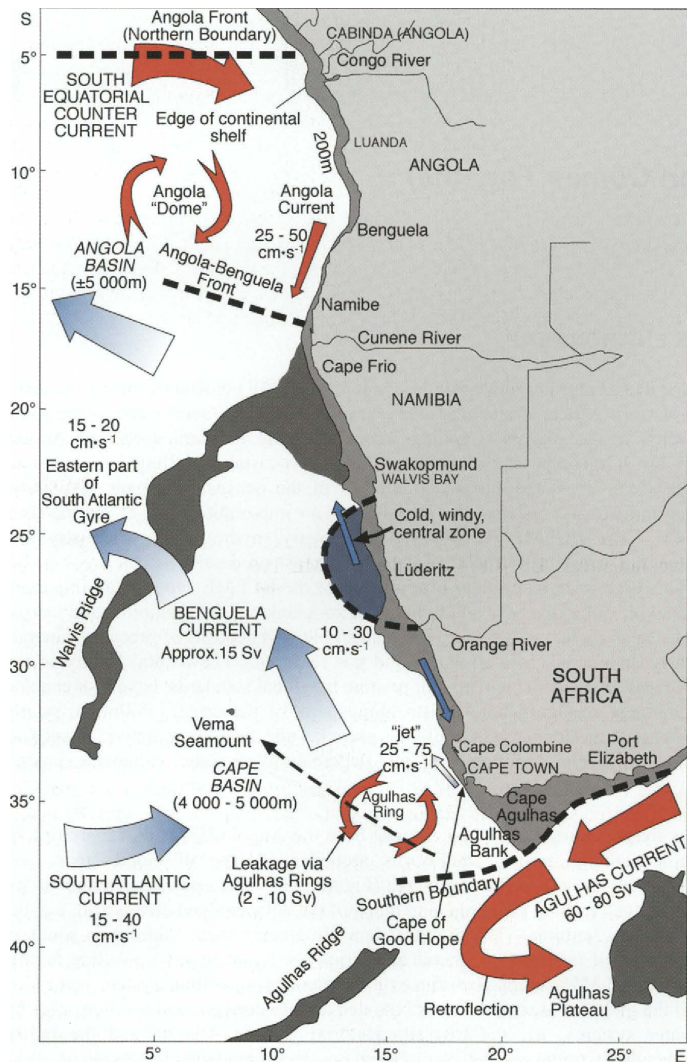


Figure 1.1. Benguela Current (2006), courtesy of Vere Shannon/Elsevier.

the coastline in a circular motion turns dreams of calm and predictable coastal waters into the plotline for nightmares. Ever-shifting beaches made the coast no more than a “fantasy line,” to follow one German missionary later on.²⁰ Sailors stayed away, if at all possible, fearing a more or less uncharted seashore that also lacked natural harbors. As a result, and as one scholar concluded, “The whole of the Namibian coastline was virtually terra incognita during the eighteenth century and had only been visited by passing ships on occasion.”²¹

The Namib Desert equally defines this borderland. Linked to the desiccating effect of water welling from the Benguela Current,²² that ancient arid backdrop dominates the country's geography behind hazardous ocean waves. Considered to be among the world's oldest deserts, the Namib (!*Namib*), a Nama (Khoikhoi language) term that means "shield" or "enclosure,"²³ extends for more than 2,000 kilometers and eighteen degrees of latitude. As outlined by biologist Mary Seely, "Most of the year the strong southwester blows. This results in maintenance of a cool inversion layer, that is, a layer of cooler air lying below a layer of warmer air. An inversion layer reduces the turbulence necessary for cloud development and thus prevents rain."²⁴ Estimates note an average of less than fifteen millimeters of rainfall on the coast to about a hundred millimeters on the eastern desert annually, precipitation that comes with great irregularity and variability.²⁵ The desert wall following the coastline is around one hundred to two hundred kilometers in width and contains a wide-ranging number of large and mobile dunes. Between Swakopmund and Lüderitzbucht, this Sand Sea creeps right down to the shoreline, creating a spectacular contrast of blue ocean water and yellowish sand. Natural havens are hard to come by, and Walvis Bay's harbor only exists due to the Khuseb River and its largely concealed subterranean or underground supply of water.²⁶

A lack of precipitation and broader variabilities provide limited potential for life. Deserts are rich spaces, of course, and the same applies to the outwardly lifeless Namib. As southwestern winds reach the ocean from the desert, they cool over the Benguela Current, the air condenses and forms fog. Once blown inland, such low-level clouds become trapped between less dense hot air. A nightmare for navigation, this rare moisture sustains life in the desert: animals bask in fog. According to one account from the 1890s, "By the bucket it drips from the rigging on the ship."²⁷ At times, dust storms from the east also blow all kinds of nutrients into the desert. As a result, tourists joining one of the many worthwhile desert tours can observe snakes, spiders, bugs, and a variety of other animals, including the stunning endemic shovel-snouted lizard (*Meroles anchietae*); they can also see several types of plants such as the equally endemic *Welwitschia* (*Welwitschia mirabilis*) and a diverse lichen community. Whereas such flora and fauna outline a surprisingly unique and assorted ecosystem, larger mammals and vegetation need more than drops of water. Mobility is key. Desert elephants once wandered in some areas, and jackals as well as brown hyenas still cross the desert, patrol beaches, and prey on seals. Similar to antelopes, these mammals rarely venture away from a stable supply of drinking water.

Humans have long adapted to and transformed these outwardly inhospitable landscapes. Broadly speaking, and according to two scholars, "Namibia had, for centuries if not millennia, various populations of gatherers and hunters, of pastoral nomads breeding and managing small as well as large stock, of

sedentary groups supporting themselves largely on undomesticated fruits and vegetables, ocean or fish resources, and veldkost [field food] . . . or of peoples combining all or several of these agricultural pursuits.”²⁸ Drinking water was essential, of course, and environmental infrastructure that offered such supply could once be found in seemingly unwelcoming spaces. Archaeologist John Kinahan has written extensively about groups living near the Hungorob Ravine and the Khuseb River Delta, both areas that have become case studies for investigations surrounding settlement, trade, and pastoralism. He writes, “The pattern of pastoral settlement and land use that developed in the Namib Desert is a very close adaptation to the prevailing environmental conditions. Small, isolated homestead sites, comprising a few huts and some stock enclosures, were occupied during the long dry season. These sites were situated within a few kilometers of reliable water supply, usually hand-dug wells in dry river courses.”²⁹ Variable supplies forced nomadic pastoralist communities to cultivate the leafless !nara (*Acanthosicyos horridus*), a melon-like fruit growing in arid landscapes.³⁰ Apart from organizing their lives around this plant, they also made use of coastal ecosystems, catching fish, for instance.³¹ An ancient duality took shape, with some living in the delta while others spent more time along the coastline. According to ethnologist Kuno Budack, the former were herders of small animals and cattle, and were originally more dominant. The “people of the sea,” on the other hand, “represent the maritime element in Topnaar culture.”³² Archaeological evidence in the form of kitchen middens, maybe best defined as all kinds of scraps and toolmaking debris left behind,³³ has shown that these groups adjusted remarkably well to this borderland between the ocean and desert.³⁴

Further inland, behind the buffer of the Namib Desert, life and existence equally concentrated around the availability of water, cattle, and trade. Two groups over the years settled in the area of modern-day Namibia: Khoisan-speakers and Bantu-speakers. The former, known for the clicking sounds that define their language, have inhabited these lands for centuries. They include Nama or Namaqua, nomadic pastoralists living in central and southern Namibia, as well as the San people, hunter-gatherers that at times are known by the derogatory term “Bushmen.” The second group, Bantu-speakers, migrated into the area of Southwest Africa in the mid-sixteenth century. At times described as Bantu-colonization, oral traditions suggest that they came from East Africa, Zambia, and Angola. Herero (or Ovaherero) and Damara (or Bergdamara) were known as pastoralists with a deep connection to their cattle; they migrated to the central plateau and settled in central Namibia. As cattle farmers, they became intimately tied to seasonal patterns. Ovambo (Aawambo) and Himba, the latter of the two groups historically not separate from Herero, were two other Bantu-speaking societies. They established themselves farther north. Interactions with other groups, including Dutch settlers

in South Africa, as well as a variety of migratory patterns, resulted in numerous ethnic identities. Mixed-race Oorlam clans, for one, migrated into southern Namibia where they mingled with various Nama groups. Khoikhoi societies like the Nama had arrived from the south much earlier, with one subgroup having migrated into the area near Walvis Bay. Literally “people of a marginal area,” they became known by the Dutch name *Topnaar* (the point) later on.³⁵ All groups defined their surroundings. Water holes turned into spaces for settlements and trade, and over time environmental infrastructure consisting of an intricate and sophisticated trade system with strategically located contact sites took shape.³⁶ Historian Dag Henrichsen described such structures as a three-way triangle: agricultural and handicraft products from the Ovambo in the North, copper and salt from the area around the Otavi mountains, and the Etosha salt pan from groups like the San, respectively, and cattle mainly from the Herero.³⁷ “A clear correspondence between environmental features, local identity and specific economic forms of production existed among the various groups,”³⁸ to follow another scholar. The arrival of Oorlam cattle raiders from the Cape Colony later pushed the frontier further north, which turned Herero hunters and traders into middlemen or intermediaries operating between the Ovambo kingdoms in the north and the Cape.³⁹ All of that made regions along the Namib Desert and the coastline into a frontier space with a hinterland long connected to the interior and beyond.

The first Europeans to travel along the ocean-side of this border were Portuguese explorers in the late fifteenth century. Prince Henry the Navigator had famously called for and sponsored numerous seafaring expeditions; King John II [João II] later stepped into the footsteps of his great-great-uncle by supporting ventures southward. In June 1482, navigator Diogo Cão, known in the English-speaking world as Diego Cam, turned south. Covering thousands of nautical miles, he reached the mouth of the Congo River. After traveling upstream, and engaging with local groups that got little attention in European narratives, he sailed into the uncharted coastline of modern-day Angola. Cão did not travel beyond the mouth of Kunene River, the border between modern-day Angola and Namibia, until his second journey in 1485. Those aboard must have noticed changes in the landscape by the mile—forests of giant baobab trees slowly fading away as the vegetation became more and more sparse. The mouth of Kunene River was likely the last green spot they saw before coming across Namibia’s barren and desolate coastline: yellowish-grey rocks, looming dunes, all in contrast to rich, blue, cold, and dangerous ocean waters. A wall of mist and fog, or the haze of the desert sun, probably made it difficult to see the full scale of this alien landscape. An area soon known as Cape Cross provided a somewhat secure landing spot. Of course, and as pointed out by Henrichsen, that space had long featured in local African histories. In Otjiherero it was called *Otjzondera*, the place of birds; Damara people referred

to it in Khoekhoegowab as (Kai)||ganabes (the water of dumb [scared] people) or ||Gana||Khuibes (the place of the missing camelthorn tree).⁴⁰ African praise poetry also captured interactions with the area while giving a sense of environment and landscapes well before the Portuguese arrived. The latter eventually rowed ashore through a heavy surf. For them, that moment of stepping on land must have felt like walking into a different world: windy, rocky, cold, damp, barren, a place for noisy seals and nesting birds, not for humans. The Portuguese erected one of their famed *padrão*, a limestone cross nowadays usually surrounded by sun-bathing seals. It was 28 August 1483, the feast day of St. Augustine. Then they left. On his second journey later, and accompanied by German mapmaker Martin Behaim, Cão reached Sandwich Harbor.⁴¹ Cão eventually died at sea, or at least fell into oblivion some other way, by then having added more than 2,000 kilometers of coastline to European maps.⁴² It was thereby up to the much more famous Bartholomeu Dias to become the first European to reach Angra Pequena, the small bay. He did so by 1487, leaving behind a store-ship. According to contemporary Portuguese historian João de Barros, stormy weather held his two caravels in that region for about five days.⁴³ The fateful decision to turn away from coast and currents into the emptiness of the Atlantic Ocean paid off: the ships caught winds pushing them back only to discover that they had circumvented the Cape of Storms (later known as the Cape of Good Hope) already.⁴⁴ In 1488, Dias had thus become the first European to make it across the meeting point of two currents, the Benguela and the Agulhas Current—and likely the first to realize that avoiding the Namibian coastline made navigational sense.

Portuguese travelers making the lucrative expedition along Southwest Africa's coast to trade with the Mughal Empire in India knew they were sailing on the margins. Navigation was difficult and dangerous. According to the route-book of Portuguese seafarer and cartographer Duarte Pacheco Pereira, sailors in the sixteenth century stayed a good 400 kilometers offshore.⁴⁵ For them, the land sitting behind the fog was unwanted real estate: there were no harbors to land safely, and there was no drinking water; there was no thriving coastal populations to trade with or enslave; there were no broad rivers slicing into the heart of the continent to reach the interior; and there was no gold, there were no spices and no precious stones. From the decks of ships this land did not seem lucrative, a wasteland in European eyes, with a murderous coastline that only added weeks of perilous travel.⁴⁶ German missionary Heinrich Vedder would be much more direct later on when noting, "If there were not to be found on the shores of South West Africa even water and firewood, slaughter stock and slaves, to say nothing of gold and gems, it was sheer waste of time to pay it any further attention."⁴⁷ A later Portuguese writer summarized the Namib in one line: "All this coast is desert and without people."⁴⁸ After the Portuguese, it would be Dutch and British sailors equally steering their vessels

away from this borderland, or at least treading lightly along these margins. At best they got a glimpse of the coastline, like the Dutch who described the mystical figures standing on the beach as *strandloopers* (beach walkers).⁴⁹ At least for now, it seemed as if treacherous ocean waters and the impenetrable Namib Desert safeguarded and insulated the area from European colonialism.

Boiling Giants

Namibia's coastline must have seemed like the edge of the world to them. Thousands of kilometers away from home hunting one of the world's largest mammals, whalers found themselves on the margins. The narrative of Thomas Bolden Thompson, commander of the *Nautilus*, along with descriptions by marine surveyor Home Riggs Popham from the same vessel, paint a picture of their situation. As outlined by archaeologist Jill Kinahan, who has thankfully transcribed and published both accounts, erroneous maps, no luck in finding drinking water, and other problems frustrated both of them.⁵⁰ Eventually, they anchored in Walvis Bay. From thereon they traveled inland to get water, apparently unaware of its accessibility farther south in Sandwich Harbor. Thompson found the people around Walvis Bay friendly and unafraid, and accepted their invite to visit their encampment.⁵¹ And so the newcomers from beyond the horizon left the beachfront for the first time, walking into the towering and likely worrisome dunes of the desert. After several kilometers, they reached a settlement of about twenty huts. Popham latter wrote that those they ran into "had plenty of Cattle but would not suffer us to see where they kept them, and I beleive [*sic*] drove them further inland on our arrival."⁵² For Europeans, the sight of cows in an arid desert landscape, of pastoralists and their own environmental infrastructure, was puzzling.

The same natural factors initially shielding the area had by then pulled whalers into the region. The aforementioned Benguela Current, which made navigation along the coastline so dangerous, was concurrently responsible for a rich marine ecology. Environmental drivers such as surface temperature, upwelling, and the distribution of nutrients are the reason for high levels of phytoplankton biomass.⁵³ As a result, the Benguela Current is a rich ecosystem. Its strong drift constantly scoops up plankton, which then attracts fish, birds, seals, and whales. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese explorer Duarte Pacheco Pereira was among the first to describe a natural haven as "angra da balea," a bay full of whales.⁵⁴ It would soon be known by its Dutch name Walvis Bay. Southern Right Whales (*Eubalaena australis*) in particular migrated into this area. From May until September, these giants bore calves deep within the safeguard of bays and coves. Fewer were humpback or razorback whales. The Southern Right Whale was much easier to catch anyway: high-fat con-

tent made them float, a massive advantage when trying to collect the prey. Plus, and unlike other species, the majestic animal rarely fought back.⁵⁵ When whaling became lucrative, the presence of the world's largest mammals caught the attention of those hoping to make money. That moment came with a spike in demand for whale blubber, a thick layer of body fat. Whalers extracted or rendered this commodity by boiling it, a process known as "trying out." The result was an oil that burned much brighter than petroleum. Due to its elasticity, whalers would also make use of individual baleen plates, which, in the absence of teeth, act like a strainer for whales to get nutrients. Whaling was a worthwhile business until the invention of the hydrogenation process in the early 1900s.

Originally the Dutch dominated the coastline and whaling industry. Of course, whaling ships are not miniature nation-states. Instead, and as outlined by historian Felix Schürmann, such vessels housed sailors from various locations and backgrounds.⁵⁶ Daily life on these boats had its very own dynamics and feel. Ships were at sea for months if not years, traveling into areas few had ever visited or would ever want to visit. The makeup of crews was thus less a representative mirror of a region and more a collection of lower-class workers, former convicts, and maybe adventurers out to make some money. With a more permanent presence at the Cape of Good Hope after its official occupation in 1652, the Dutch had begun exploring the coastline in lieu of later crossing the Orange River from the Cape Colony. The first two exploratory missions of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company) traveled north by the late seventeenth century. Yet little went according to plan.⁵⁷ Commander Gerrit Ridder Muijs of the *Grundel* had instructions to explore "the coast north of the Cape" and the hinterland; that ship reached Sandwich Harbor on 1 May 1670.⁵⁸ As they rowed ashore, an unidentified group that might have been Topnaar quickly fled. Muijs and his men followed them only to be surrounded by an armed faction. The only musket the Dutch had with them did not work—and so they fled back to their ship.⁵⁹ In 1677, Commander Wolna of the ship *Boode* ventured into the same region. The crew came across people living in huts framed out of whale bones, probably Topnaar again. Although the Dutch had brought some interpreters from the Cape along with them, communication remained difficult. Plus, and from a European perspective, those living in the region had no commodities such as cattle, ivory, or copper.⁶⁰ It took until 1726 before another Dutch vessel, the *Acredam*, anchored in what they called Walvisbaai. Although on a two-year whaling mission, its first stint flopped as well: they simply could not gather a sufficient amount of whale baleen. The vast distance from home, combined with navigational difficulties and the death of both captain and first mate, made matters worse. Subsequent expeditions by the ships *Sonnesteijn* and *Vrijheijt* had more luck catching and slaughtering whales but scurvy struck crews. Whaling was not going well for the Dutch.⁶¹

Whalers eventually returned in the 1780s. Actually, and as outlined by Schürmann, by then whaling took off.⁶² At that time, the British had begun exploring the area for a different reason: they were looking for a potential penal colony. In 1785 their naval survey ship *Nautilus* returned to England with bad news and an early description of the area: “So inhospitable and so barren a Country is not to be equaled except in the Desarts [*sic*] of Arabia, at least from the appearance of the Shore.”⁶³ As summarized by one scholar, travelers envisioned “wandering tribesmen, eating lice off each other for nourishment” in an area with no potable water, hardly what they had envisioned for a convict colony.⁶⁴ Whaling of the Southern Right Whale, on the other hand, resumed in the following years. More and more ships now anchored in Walvis Bay or in nearby Sandwich Harbor, from Great Britain, the United States, Portugal, France, and the Netherlands.⁶⁵ It got crowded. In 1789 alone, eleven ships from Nantucket stayed around Walvis Bay. One of them went beyond a thousand barrels of whale oil, a first for a US vessel.⁶⁶ It soon became even busier. Historians estimate that about twenty to thirty ships dwelt in Walvis Bay per year by the mid-1790s, the first climax for the whaling industry in the region.⁶⁷

The work of whalers was exhausting and dangerous. There had to be a whale to catch for Europeans first. Many times workers had to wait, bored out of their minds. Longer delays quickly became worrisome given that salaries were proportional to what the ship caught. Plus, there was not really anything to do. As historian Greg Denning put it, “whalers with nothing to do are restless and dangerous.”⁶⁸ Once there was a sighting, most participated in what is known as bay-whaling: ships anchored along the shoreline or in a bay as small surf boats were lowered into the water (Figure 1.2).⁶⁹ Soon a mad chase unfolded as boats tried to reach the prey, at times fending off rival hunters.⁷⁰ Sometimes animals fought back, easily hurting anyone and endangering the men, most of whom could not swim.⁷¹ Once close enough, whalers used harpoons or other devices to shoot the mammal. That required skill and a good amount of luck. After the kill, workers then dragged the dead giant ashore or aboard a vessel. Right away specialists began extracting baleen; they also removed and boiled blubber. All kinds of sharp tools and hot liquids could also easily hurt workers, especially if that process took place on unsteady boats.⁷² Such backbreaking labor, far away from home, with no comfort given the surrounding cold ocean waters and hot desert sands would make life miserable for anyone.

An array of accounts gives a sense of navigation within this liminal space sitting between sea and land, ocean and desert. The Dutch commander of the vessel *Meermin*, Sebastiaan Valentijn, wrote about Walvis Bay in 1793, “The headland of the bay . . . is nothing but a sand-bar covered almost entirely by the sea at high tide, which makes landing there very dangerous, for the weather is nearly always misty and a rapid current flows towards the North.”⁷³ Accidents happened well into the nineteenth century. In April 1859, the ship *Flora*, arriv-



Figure 1.2. “Whale fishery, attacking a right whale,” Currier and Ives, New York, ca. 1860, Library of Congress/public domain.

ing from Cape Town, tried to anchor in the bay. It got caught in the breakers, drifted onto a sandbank, and broke apart. Seven people drowned in the ice-cold ocean waters.⁷⁴ At least Walvis Bay had a safe harbor. “It is well sheltered from all winds & you lay in it as in a mill pond,” wrote one sailor in 1786.⁷⁵ British explorer James Edward Alexander agreed when writing in April 1837 that Walvis Bay “is a very safe bay, the holding ground is good, nothing can hurt a vessel anchored behind Pelican Point.”⁷⁶ Yet there were few resources available on the coastline, and especially the lack of drinking water was a major problem. One voice complained as late as 1830 that “[a]fter considerable labour in digging, we could procure nothing but salt water.”⁷⁷ Some unearthed the precious liquid at Sandwich Harbor further south. They apparently kept it a secret from the competition.⁷⁸ Firewood was a luxury as well, with the exception of driftwood.⁷⁹ Traveling inland might have been a way to solve that problem—but who wanted to venture into an unknown desert landscape with no vegetation in sight? As one sailor noted in 1803, “Nothing is to be seen of the serounding [sic] Country but sand hills.”⁸⁰

The Topnaar, who had long navigated their livelihoods within this frontier-space, on the other hand, saw additional opportunities once Europeans arrived. They already had advantages given long-existing environmental infra-

structure. For one, they knew desert and ocean, with some regularly venturing into the waves to catch fish.⁸¹ Most importantly, they understood where to find water. They even found ways to raise cattle. Livestock was generally kept away from settlements, at places like Khaeros, a small waterhole about twenty-four kilometers inland along the Khuseb River.⁸² Anyone telling Europeans gazing at desert landscapes from the ocean that pastures nearby produced up to six tons of fodder per hectare would have been declared insane. For them, tracks of livestock sometimes visible on the beach must have seemed like a desert mirage.⁸³ Once European newcomers became aware of the presence of livestock, however, they tried to get their hands on such resources. Yet the Topnaar ensured visitors stayed on the beach and behind the dunes, away from their cattle, waiting for days while they were getting their precious animals.⁸⁴ In some instances they also thwarted efforts by Europeans to find out more, eventually placing lookouts at the first line of dunes to warn of approaching ships.⁸⁵ That they also hid their women speaks volumes about their fears of ravaging Europeans, the latter themselves only traveling in groups and generally armed.⁸⁶ Environmental factors had forced them to hold their animals near water and grass anyway—although “even the apparent secretiveness about the location of cattle herds—which had been deeply frustrating for European traders—was an intrinsic part of a pastoral economy in which stock-raiding was an endemic threat to livelihood,”⁸⁷ as John Kinahan summarizes. Exchanges of goods then took place on the beach, that “double-edged space, in-between,” to borrow Denning’s framework.⁸⁸ Here, newcomers such as Thompson offered tobacco, alcohol, knives, and beads for cattle and maybe elephant tusks.⁸⁹ Overall, and to once more follow Kinahan, “that herd-owners needed almost no adjustment to their established patterns of settlement to dominate trade at Walvis Bay, and that they were able to exploit the trader’s ignorance of the terrain in order to maintain control over the supply of livestock to passing vessels. In this sense the evidence from the Namib Desert coast favours the view that—initially at least—traders were drawn into the indigenous economy and were for all practical purposes subject to the values, customs and preferences of pastoral society.”⁹⁰

The whaling boom eventually faded. International conflicts, namely the Napoleonic Wars and its connections to the War of 1812, shifted British whaling efforts toward the Indian Ocean. There, they searched namely for sperm whales along the East African coastline. Whereas this allowed the US whaling industry to dominate the hunting grounds off the coast of Southwest Africa for some time, the boom only lasted until the invention of gaslighting around 1840. Besides, these giant mammals had agency as well. As far as historical records indicate, and unless killed beforehand, they avoided the coastline and migrated elsewhere.⁹¹ By then whalers had made money with a vengeance.⁹² The Topnaar, on the other hand, had begun falling behind. This did not happen overnight. Amid early interactions, those without cattle—a group historian

Randolph Vigne has called “beach dwellers” or “people of the sea”⁹³—actually gained much from exchanges. Consuming yet unable to kill whales at sea, they now found the remains of dead animals on the beach.⁹⁴ “The whole shore is strewn with a great many carcasses of all possible shapes and sizes,”⁹⁵ noted a Dutch captain in 1793. Whalers had left behind such remains, virtually trashing the coastline around Walvis Bay. As another contemporary outlined, “The bay people catch and eat . . . the carcasses of whales, killed by the crews of whaling ships, afford them savoury repasts in the months of May, June, July, and August, or during the time the whalers are about the bay.”⁹⁶ A third account adds, “They subsist chiefly on the carcasses of the whales that are killed by the ships and are turned adrift after the blubber is taken off. They seem to like it best when it has been lying some days on the beach, and is getting tender and smells pretty strong, then they relish it as sweet as I would a beefsteak after a long voyage.”⁹⁷ Over time, however, and according to John Kinahan, those owning cattle were not trading as equals with those coming from across the sea: “the trade goods acquired by the †Aonin [Topnaar] did not have the same value in labour and livestock production in the merchant economy, and as the volume of trade goods increased, their value would have begun to decline.”⁹⁸ That kind of trade, together with the growth in cattle raids from the interior, would weaken them by the early nineteenth century.

Clubbing the Wing-Footed

“This island is formed of volcanic materials, and its shores are resorted to by multitudes of fur-seals; we took about a thousand of their skins in a few days.”⁹⁹ These are the words of an American sealer and captain Benjamin Morrell. Writing about his experiences in October and November 1828, he had cruised along the coastline from Cape Town to Walvis Bay. At an island of about one mile all around known as Ichaboe, he first ran into the Cape fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*). Hunted for their skins, these Pinnipedia, or wing-footed, mammals had been in high demand. Morrell had thus been excited by “[h]aving taken as many fur-seal skins as was practicable” before weighing anchor.¹⁰⁰ At Bird Island nearby, despite a shaky landing, he obtained “the skins of 1,400 fur-seal at one time.”¹⁰¹ Morrell returned to the area later on taking a few seals from Bird Island and Mercury Island. In one day alone he seized a stunning four thousand skins. “It really appears astonishing to me,” wrote Morrell, “that some men of capital do not see the golden opportunity at a single glance, and seize on it with avidity.”¹⁰²

Unlike commercial whaling in the region, seal hunting had begun much earlier. Local populations had long made use of these loud, stinky, and earless creatures equally attracted by fish-rich waters. Some research around seal

hunting points to the use of their fat in numerous areas along the Southwestern Cape;¹⁰³ local groups such as the Topnaar certainly hunted seals along Namibia's coastline.¹⁰⁴ In 1486, the Portuguese then spotted hundreds of thousands of Cape fur seals at Cape Cross.¹⁰⁵ Two years later João Infante, in command of Dias's second ship surrounding the Cape of Good Hope, began hunting fur seals and penguins near Robben Bay.¹⁰⁶ Efforts to pursue these sleek animals expanded with the arrival of the Dutch. As outlined by one scholar, "Dutch settlers took 45,000 seals from the islands of the Cape of Good Hope in 1610, and by the eighteenth century the seal population had plummeted."¹⁰⁷ New hunting grounds were thus needed elsewhere, and Namibia's coastline offered such opportunities, especially once the demand for seal skins as a tough and waterproof material for shoe leather, their fat, and their pelts skyrocketed.¹⁰⁸ On 3 January 1793, the ship *Meermin* came from Tafelbay looking for landing spots to drop off individual seal hunters.¹⁰⁹ Later the *Star* pointed out a useful anchorage spot at Thompson Island that "is very much frequented by the Southseamen who go there for the benefit of sealing which animals is in great abundance there; there have been as many as forty thousand killed in one season on the island." That entry also underscored the isolation and lack of resources when adding that "[t]here is neither wood, water or any kind of refreshment to be got there."¹¹⁰

Hunting seals was no easy job. Unpredictable upwelling and shifting currents, strong gales, dense fog, hidden cliffs, whatever makes an area difficult to navigate this coastline had it. Hydrographic descriptions include countless examples of tragic accidents. In one instance, a young sailor by the name of William Ogden sank "to rise no more."¹¹¹ This calamity took place off Mercury Island while the crew was sealing nearby. That area later known as Ogden Island supposedly offered refuge from currents; but the *Swallow* was unable to find it later on: "It is my opinion that if 'Ogdens Harbor' ever existed, the constant action of the heavy seas which always appear to be breaking on the shores have washed the reefs away mentioned by [Captain Benjamin] Morrell."¹¹² According to a log entry by the *Meermin* from 1793, navigating the coastline overall was tricky. Entries speak of sudden surfs, storms lasting for eight to fourteen days, and thick fog making any navigation risky.¹¹³ It was the promise of riches that continually pulled seafarers to the region. Once on site, getting one's hands on seal skins was a gruesome and laborious process as well. Hunters could easily approach screaming seal cubs and club them with a wooden bat. In the best-case scenario, seals either died right away or at least became unconscious—to be killed with a knife. Adult animals, on the other hand, fought back. Those creatures could certainly hurt anyone coming for them and their offspring. Shooting these oncoming giants became widespread—their fur was less valuable anyway. Benjamin Morrell described the rush of such a hunt on Mercury Island in 1828 when writing, "every nerve

and muscle was exerted, and we had reached the opposite side of the rookery [*sic*], killing several seal in our way, when we found that the other party, under command of Mr. Burton had been stopped in ‘mid-course’ about the centre of the rookery, by the immense number of seal that began to pour down the steep rocks and precipices, like an irresistible torrent, bearing down their assailants, and taking several of the men nearly into the ocean along with them. On seeing the danger, however, we ‘flew to the rescue,’ and soon relieved them by turning the tide of war in another direction. Several hundred fur-seal were left lifeless on the shore and rocks.”¹¹⁴

Morrell lost one of his most valuable men that day. An article in a German colonial newspaper painted a gruesome picture later on. It first set the scene as sealers arrived in small boats trying to avoid detection. Some positioned themselves near the water while others agitated seals to rush toward them—only to club them to death or beat them unconscious. Nets later helped hunters to limit injury from onrushing and desperate animals. Soon seals were skinned “with their bodies still twitching,” to still follow that description.¹¹⁵ The treasures were then hauled aboard by sweaty men soaked in blood, now ready to take off the fat before eventually spreading out the skins aboard, sitting in salt. The pelts, maybe some blubber, was all that hunters were after. The processing had to take place quickly in the early days since wind and weather, as well as daylight, mattered. The German paper saw sealing as “ruthless” and “brutal,” characterizing participants as “murderers.”¹¹⁶ Such rhetoric had more to do with criticizing British hunters than worrying about animal cruelty. Either way, anyone envisioning sealing in this region can imagine the demand and prices paid for the acquired commodities on the world market.

Over time the sealing craze drew more outsiders to the area. Few specialized in seal hunting originally—although over time some individuals and even whole vessels took up the profession.¹¹⁷ Sealing required no capital investments yet allowed self-sufficient hunters and adventures to try their luck. In most cases, however, sealing and whaling went hand in hand. In Angra Pequena, for example, British and American seafarers plundered both in the 1830s.¹¹⁸ The *Meermin* references that some English seal hunters shipped about 21,000 furs to Europe.¹¹⁹ Early descriptions of Angra Pequena painted a desolate picture. Captain Thomas Boulden from the *Nautilus* had commented, “it is much to be lamented that so fine a harbour as [Angra] Pequena should be formed by such a barren, unfruitful soil, apparently doomed to everlasting sterility.”¹²⁰ In 1825, remarks coming from the British vessel *Barracouta* added, “It affords neither wood, water or other refreshment; the surrounding country is barren and uninhabited.”¹²¹ But seal hunting like whaling was good business—even though it became more and more difficult over time. Seals made their own decisions, and avoided or left certain spaces altogether. By 1835 one hunter commented that “[t]he Seals having been harassed so much, the prospect was slim for the

next season.”¹²² He and his men were still able to secure about 1,000 skins. Once the Japanese flooded the market with Siberian seal skins following the Russo-Japanese War, business slowed down even more. Regardless, sealing helped put additional locations on the map; a growing presence of hunters also resulted in more encounters with the local population, more knowledge about the area, and the increasing establishment of some small settlements. In this sense, early environmental infrastructure took shape. Difficulties regarding access essentially became the reason why the German colonial government later saw sealing as unprofitable.¹²³ By then the battered animals had long migrated away from colonial entrepôts such as Walvis Bay and Angra Pequena, away from commercial interests and certain destruction.

Shoveling White Gold

One line triggered off the craze for white gold. The aforementioned seal hunter Benjamin Morrell wrote it down in 1828. Morrell, who commanded numerous ships along the coast of Southwest Africa in the late 1820s, had been sailing around Angra Pequena. He mentioned “the great numbers” of whales near Ichaboe Island, who “are in the habit of playing about the reefs of the island.”¹²⁴ Yet neither that nor his previously quoted reference to seals caught the attention of avid readers back in England. What they scrutinized was a sentence he had seemingly written down in passing about yet another commodity: guano, a substance consisting primarily of ammonia and nitrates that had become a highly sought-after fertilizer. By the 1840s, British companies had begun importing it from the Chilean coast. Now, a sentence, penned down by Morell on the other side of the world, got their attention. It read, “The surface of this island is covered with birds’ manure to the depth of twenty-five feet [about 7.5 meters].”¹²⁵ The prospect of a mountain of guano, basically a mountain of money, must have enticed retired master mariner Andrew Livingstone right away. A shrewd businessman from Liverpool long following the guano trade, he quickly encouraged enterprising merchants James Rae and Norman McLeod to provide the financial backing for a mission.¹²⁶ Ships eventually left Liverpool with sealed orders to ensure secrecy until the last moment.¹²⁷ The quest for guano in Southwest Africa was on.

The ecosystem off the Namibian coastline, combined with a demand for guano, provided perfect conditions for this boom. Although a nightmare to navigate, upwelling lifts plankton into waters near the surface. This process not only attracted whales but also fish then hunted by seals and birds. Scientists estimate that the Benguela sustains countless birds with some estimating up to eighty-two species (seven of them endemic)—the three most abundant when it comes to colonizing seashore and offshore islands are the Cape gannet (*Morus*



Figure 1.3. Island of Ichaboe, drawn on wood by J. B. Zwecker and engraved by G. Pearson, in Charles John Andersson's *The Okavango River* (1861), 399, HathiTrust/public domain.

capensis), the African penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*), and the Cape cormorant (*Phalacrocorax capensis*).¹²⁸ For them, avoiding landbound predators such as jackals and hyenas is essential. Ichaboe Island was such a good spot (Figure 1.3). Located a little over a mile off the desert mainland north of Angra Pequena, bird after bird had built a nest, thousands of them over the years. The relentless desert sun dried out their excrement, literally baking it. Evaporation of nitrate was thus kept to a minimum. The private journal of Washington Fosdick, who traveled on a US vessel into the region later, noted, “It appeared as though it [guano] had never been made for the use or benefit of either man or brute, but had sprung into existence through some of nature’s wild freaks, the vomiting of some subterranean fire.”¹²⁹ Another American voice painted a similar picture in 1845 when writing, “This Island is a wonderfull [*sic*] production of nature, surrounded as it is with reefs & a heavy surf continually rolling on it . . . the deposit . . . appears to have been formed by layers or strata of Animals, such as the Penguin, Gannet & Seal which by some means had been deprived of life, Generation after Generation the live depositing their excrement on the Dead for thousands of Years & the whole becoming decomposed has formed Guano. The skins or skeletons of the different Animals are perfectly fresh only are squeezed flat by the weight over them.”¹³⁰ Customers back in Europe certainly demanded more of this substance ever since its widespread use as

fertilizer, a dynamic scholars have described as “the first green revolution.”¹³¹ Although primarily focusing on the Chilean coastline, historian Edward D. Melillo showcases how the trade of this nitrogen fertilizer brought “significant shifts in environments and labor conditions throughout the world.”¹³² According to historian Hendrik Snyders, “The transformation of guano into a commodity and of the resource frontier into an economic and political frontier is directly attributable to advances in the science of plant nutrition.”¹³³ In this sense, human agencies based on the commodification of nature, combined with natural forces and animal agents, introduced new structures and turned Southwest Africa into a “guano frontier.”¹³⁴

Although prospects were high, the first clandestine mission almost failed. Vessels got blown off course, ran out of drinking water, or simply could not find what Morrell had been writing about. Schooner *Gallovidia* was fortunate enough to find the island but could not land due to heavy surf. It sailed to St. Helena. Two other ships never returned home.¹³⁵ Only a coincidence saved the day for the brig *Ann* of Bristol: during a layover in Cape Town Commander Francis Farr got into contact with some American whaler familiar with Ichaboe Island.¹³⁶ With much better directions in hand, the vessel returned to the region and found what they were looking for. Throughout March and April 1843, miners went to work, scraping up guano and hauling the dried substance aboard. Strong winds and currents, as well as cliffs, rocks, and sandbanks made that a difficult task. At one point a strong southern gale drove the ship off its anchorage altogether. Farr decided to set sail for England, at roughly three-fourths capacity. Once the *Ann* arrived with its smelly riches the secret about mountains of high-quality guano was out, and the “guano rage” turned wild.¹³⁷

In the following years, a boom brought hundreds of ships to the area, most from Great Britain. Both Farr and James Rae outmaneuvered Livingstone by attaching their names to the first official claims to the source—something Snyders has titled a classic case of “anarchic frontier behavior.”¹³⁸ A commentator writing in the *Nautical Magazine* was thus right when noting that the Liverpool party paved the way into “an epoch in the annals of British agriculture and commerce.”¹³⁹ Over time, however, efforts to establish a monopoly failed. By late 1843, vessels were not only sponsored by merchant houses from Liverpool but also from London and Glasgow.¹⁴⁰ Plus, the US schooner *Emeline* and a few French vessels showed up as well. In several instances, ships would load inferior guano from locations nearby; once they discovered Ichaboe Island they replaced their cargo right away.¹⁴¹ Over time the number of vessels on site skyrocketed, increasing from an estimated forty-six vessels in May to a hundred in July, three hundred in September to a stunning 460 in December of 1844.¹⁴² Around six thousand people were on site at one time!¹⁴³ Since much of the area was exposed to devastating gale winds and currents, safe spots were hard to come by. As a result, even just slightly protected spots to the

northeast became highly sought after.¹⁴⁴ Accounts of dangerous maneuvering give a sense of the madness. As one American sailor noted at the time, “with the immense number of British shipping crowding round it to the number of 300 Sail . . . I consider it to be a very dangerous anchorage amongst such a number of ships & I am not sorry I am going to leave it without loading.”¹⁴⁵ Not all had such an awareness, and there were countless wrecks.¹⁴⁶ Interactions with nearby groups, likely Topnaar, developed as well. Accounts mention encounters with a small group of people that seemingly inhabited an area near a brackish spring in a bay opposite the island.¹⁴⁷ “Here, then, we first set our feet upon ‘poor cursed Africa,’” read one source from 1846, “being saluted as we landed by a party of natives, consisting of seven men and two women, with a hearty shake of the hand, accompanied by the familiar words ‘How do?’ ‘how do?’ which were, however, speedily followed up with ‘Jacket,’ ‘Trouser.’”¹⁴⁸ Whereas such dialogue speaks to existing trade relations with English-speakers, engaging with sailors could open new opportunities for these inhabitants; yet it was also dangerous. Some at least kept their women and children out of sight.¹⁴⁹ Historian Arthur C. Watson described one encounter when noting, “In May 1844, a group of captains and some of their men, for want of better activity, went to the mainland and, rushing upon a temporary settlement of Hottentots [derogatory term for Khoikhoi people], killed their dogs, plundered their huts of bows and arrows and of the ostrich shells in which water was kept, and fired the settlement.”¹⁵⁰ It took some time before the exchange of provisions, clothing, and tobacco for ostrich feathers, skins, cattle, and labor between local groups and guano miners became more widespread.¹⁵¹ Drinking water was vital, of course. Delivery ships from Cape Town tried to transport it in wooden casks, a difficult endeavor. Containers holding the precious substance were often leaky and arduous to bring ashore without risking contamination.¹⁵² By then new environmental infrastructure defined by shipping routes and landing spots had long begun integrating the region into the global marketplace.

For workers on site, the task of mining guano was backbreaking labor. During the boom sailors and contracted non-seamen mined guano in an “ad-hoc labour regime.”¹⁵³ Early on, guano mining required scraping and shoveling the dried mass into some sort of container. Those bulky crates then had to be carried through cold surfs to the shoreline, before loading them onto ships. As summarized by Snyders, workers “had the aid of basic tools such as crowbars, spades and wheel-barrows. They also bagged and loaded it on board ship [*sic*]. Working offshore with inadequate or even absent mooring facilities and equally hazardous loading equipment meant that labour crews were engaged in an extremely dangerous work.”¹⁵⁴ After some time, workers tried to use planks purchased in Cape Town to build small jetties to then directly connect deposits on the island to boats. Wheelbarrows came in handy to move and load much larger volumes in a shorter amount of time. Simple

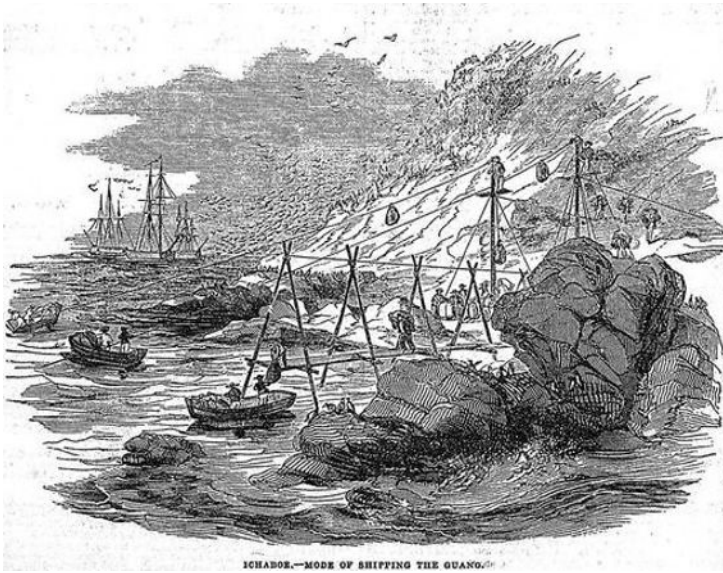


Figure 1.4. “Ichaboe, mode of shipping the guano,” *Illustrirter Kalendar für 1850* (1850), 83, HathiTrust/public domain.

structures, partially visible in a sketch from later on (Figure 1.4), eventually became rather sophisticated—and some could even be elevated depending on the reach of the water.¹⁵⁵ According to two scholars, such assemblies “consisted of crossed legs of spars lashed with rope and wedged into the most suitable niches in the jagged ocean floor. The spars formed shears that were linked by cross spars and plants to form walkways” that extended up to ninety meters into the ocean.¹⁵⁶ Few such operations could withstand strong surf and white-caps, however, and guano mining ultimately remained a slow, frustrating, and dangerous assignment.¹⁵⁷ Injuries were widespread, and even simple ailments could become fatal. In one instance, a captain hurt his finger, tried to amputate it unsuccessfully, and died within three days. It was thus not surprising that a visitor traveling along the Southwest African coastline in the nineteenth century stumbled upon numerous grave sites.¹⁵⁸ Lieutenant Ruxton from the British Navy gives some details when describing a rather grim encounter on Ichaboe Island in 1848: “On landing, which owing to the surf is always difficult, I found the whole surface of the island covered with skins and carcasses [*sic*] of seals and penguins, in every stage of decay. At the south-west point, are the graves of thirty or forty seamen and labourers killed whilst working in the pits, by the fall of guano. The skins and bodies of the seals and penguins had been originally the surface covering of the valuable deposit underneath; and had to be removed in order to reach the guano, to which they served, not only

as a protective covering from the damp spray of the sea, but also, in course of time decomposing themselves, formed new layers of this extraordinary substance.”¹⁵⁹ Just the stench must have been awful.

Irritations among workers grew over time. The environment was in no way inviting—“bleak, barren, and unpromising beyond description” with the “desolation of the scene being completed by the angry surf which with ceaseless and depressing rhythms rolls in upon the shore,” to follow one description.¹⁶⁰ Motivation to even be there came from the sight of the product, “The rich treasure however, lay before them, and energy and emulation soon attempted to overcome the natural difficulties.”¹⁶¹ Most ships had seamen and workers aboard, the latter generally unemployed men in need of a job or out for an adventure. Pay was poor, medical services and housing almost non-existent with most sleeping under old sails or wooden shacks on the island itself.¹⁶² Nosebleeds, a sign of scurvy, were widespread among workers and speak to a lack of adequate nutrition.¹⁶³ “Drunkenness and debauchery,” to follow two scholars, made the work site all the more volatile and dangerous,¹⁶⁴ especially since disputes were often “settled by the law of the fist.”¹⁶⁵ Snyders has vividly illustrated how workers organized and rebelled against exploitation, deferred wages, rationing, and unfair contract enforcement. “They actively resisted their exploitation and marginalisation based on their own developing worldview and growing understanding of their rights, particularly their rights as British citizens.”¹⁶⁶ Efforts to install an arbiter brought only temporary relief, and even the repeated arrival of the British Royal Navy helped little. In September 1844, Commander Sir John Marshall from the *Isis* tried his best to control several hundred ships and thousands of workers, asking his readers to imagine a scene of crowded and misbehaving men fighting over guano in a hostile coastal frontier environment.¹⁶⁷

Riots and mutinies, as well as everyday quarrels on site, had long-term consequences. The active promotion of guano trade as a way to fill US vessels by the US Consul in Cape Town, Isaac Chase, had brought more and more US ships to the area—the schooner *Emeline*, of Mystic, was the first to arrive.¹⁶⁸ According to one sailor, “The shipping here are all English, our flag being the only American one.”¹⁶⁹ The British certainly dominated the trade, with merchants trying to protect their monopoly in whatever way possible. One way to do that was to exert control over emerging platforms and landing structures. Once landing structures were in place, agents tried to prevent other ships from using them, or at least charged them exorbitant rates for doing so.¹⁷⁰ Early claims to the island also materialized. The captain of the bark *Douglas*, Benjamin Wade, took it in the name of the Queen of England, a move meant more to intimidate and disempower competition than illustrating control. The British Government at least did not officially endorse such a move until 1861—even if Wade called for legal backup.¹⁷¹ Wade also acted as a proper harbor and customs authority, a role not everyone appreciated. In March and April 1844,

some sailors revolted and established a “rogue guano republic,” to borrow Snyders’ phrase.¹⁷² It took the arrival of the British Royal Navy and its warship *Thunderbolt* in May 1844 to at least temporarily reestablish order.¹⁷³ By 1861, a sign read, “Notice. This land of Ichaboe is this day taken possession of for and in the name of Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria and is hereby declared a dependency of . . . Signed . . . Captain H. M. S. Furious, June 21, 1861.”¹⁷⁴ A twenty-one-gun salute could be heard as Captain Oliver J. Jones of *Furious* hoisted the Union Jack that day.¹⁷⁵ A policing authority had arrived.¹⁷⁶

Although the guano boom eventually faded, it had drastically changed the coastline. By early to mid-1845 most deposits had been depleted. Lieutenant Ruxton noted in 1848 that Ichaboe Island had been “cut down nearly to the waters’ edge, and all the guano [had been] removed.” He added that “[t]here was still a depths of many feet, in many places, of an inferior guano but too much impregnated with moisture and sand to be worth removal, though at the same time very valuable as a manure.”¹⁷⁷ From one little island, 284,752 tons of guano were removed, which resulted in an estimated value of 1,993,264 pounds, or seven pounds per ton.¹⁷⁸ The island was bare, and birds did not return to replenish deposits. It was simply too crowded and dangerous for them. Instead, they had begun migrating to other spots along the coastline. Soon leftover guano combined with some sealskins could not fill ships anymore.¹⁷⁹ In 1861, Cape Governor Sir George Grey then annexed the guano islands, thus all but ending private exploitation. An array of islands off the coast of Southwest Africa, including Ichaboe, Plum Pudding, Pomona, Possession, Halifax, and Mercury Island, now lay in the hands of the Cape Colony.¹⁸⁰ By then the changes to the region had been far-reaching. Mining had disrupted migration patterns and pushed the bird population elsewhere. Newcomers from across the ocean had also interacted with Topnaar and others. Of course, and to follow Snyders, “natural features, its sense of isolation and its lack of life-sustaining resources such as food and freshwater” limited human settlement and offered no real entry point.¹⁸¹ At the same time, the “unbridled exploitation made inevitable the introduction of some form of control,” to build on another scholarly account.¹⁸² As summarized by Jill Kinahan, “The fabulous profits which had attracted the rush of private adventurers and all the major merchant houses of Britain, gave the Namib coast much publicity”—and many now began exploring the coastline for other commercial opportunities.¹⁸³

Scholars have long described how Namibia’s coastline became integrated into merchant capitalism and the global market economy,¹⁸⁴ and focusing on environmental infrastructure (human ingenuity, labor, animal agents, natural forces) helps our understanding of that process. Following the end of three commodity booms, traders linked through structures stayed connected—now

interested in ivory, copper, and cattle. In 1835, for instance, a report noted that a US brig had come to Angra Pequena solely to trade, expecting to purchase 2,000–3,000 cattle from Nama; in the 1840s regular trade would have also developed in Walvis Bay.¹⁸⁵ By then routes reaching inland had become more stable. There, in the hinterland shielded from the coast, border crossings of semi-Europeanized groups long defined daily lives, and their “influence . . . on the culture history of South-West Africa can hardly be overestimated,” to follow historian Alvin Kienetz.¹⁸⁶ Europeans coming from the ocean could now tap into those networks and structures. Soon individuals such as Aaron de Pass initiated a regular route between Cape Town and Walvis Bay, bringing all kinds of manufactured goods and returning with cattle and sheep; his ships would load guano and sealskins near Angra Pequena. His son later established a base at Sandwich Harbor, where an abundance of salted and cured fish, shark liver oil, sealskins, and guano made for lucrative business.¹⁸⁷ Global networks took shape, with guano from the coastline and fish from Sandwich Harbor used as fertilizer for sugar cane plantations and food for workers on the island of Mauritius off the coast of faraway East Africa.¹⁸⁸ In that process, some African groups became dependent on poorly paid and dangerous wage labor. As outlined by John Kinahan, “The decline of nomadic pastoralism began in the eighteenth century and involved a rapid depletion of the herds, combined with a disruption of pastoral alliances and renewed dependence on hunting and gathering for subsistence.” In his view, “the removal of livestock from circulation by translating them into beads” became a problem, especially for nomadic herders working within arid environmental conditions that required “highly mobile herding patterns.”¹⁸⁹ An ecological revolution tied to trade for commodities like ivory and ostrich feathers, as well as the increasing arrival of hunting expeditions, “undermined the earlier, more sustainable use of resources,” to follow historian Christo Botha.¹⁹⁰ In that sense, existing economies and social systems had to adapt to ever-shifting trade patterns and the fluctuating demands in faraway places, and it is in this process that local groups got the shorter end of the stick. The arrival of traders also impacted ecosystems. Whales soon avoided the area, it seems, as did seals and birds. As outlined by Snyders, on Ichaboe Island, “This led to the departure of a large number of birds and the killing of an equally high number of fur seals, which fundamentally disrupted natural life there.”¹⁹¹ The scraping of surfaces, noise pollution, and constant movement of workers frightened seabirds, disrupted their nesting and breeding habits, and forced them to migrate elsewhere. The removal of guano, which served “as a stimulant for the growth of phytoplankton,” also upset the ecosystem.¹⁹² In this sense, nature shaped human interactions in this frontier landscape and the other way around.

Newcomers brought along lasting governmental structures. Once there was a demand for oils, baleen, seal skins, pelt, and guano then those plun-

dering these resources descended onto the area in a mad rush. Commercial enterprises, traveling along increasingly well-established trade routes, soon directly competed for resources. In that process, traders as well as their financial backers began claiming certain areas to hunt and mine. Ivory hunts in the northwestern region of Namibia, for instance, further entangled that area with global commodity markets while devastating the elephant population by the 1890s.¹⁹³ Disputes had initially played out in that frontier space along the coast, which called for efforts to regulate otherwise potentially precarious commercial enterprises. The British most notably saw themselves as a police force, especially regarding guano mining. As the region got sucked into the world's commodity trade system, elements of colonial control showed up as well, primarily around Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbor, and Angra Pequena. One morning in March of 1878 that development came to a logical conclusion: a group of armed men from the *Industry* landed at Walvis Bay. Commander Richard Cossantine Dyer hoisted the Union Jack, thus proclaiming the annexation of this natural harbor. A statement was read to the few white inhabitants and "some of the neighboring Hottentot and Damara tribes," to follow Dyer's report. He also claimed the Africans "appeared well-pleased with the Imperial Government's action."¹⁹⁴ By then Walvis Bay had long become the prized possession and key for controlling commodities and access. Existing environmental infrastructure, namely around Walvis Bay, had thus stacked the deck against later colonial powers aiming to find a footing in the region, and in a way the die had already been cast well before German businessman Adolf Lüderitz ever arrived in Southwest Africa.

Notes

1. *Windhuker Anzeiger*, "Aus dem Schutzgebiet," 17 August 1899.
2. David Willem Krynauw, *Das Kreuzkap*, trans. Fritz Gaerdes (Windhoek, 1970), 37.
3. Peter Bridgeford, *Cape Cross: Past and Present* (Walvis Bay, 2002), 20. About thirty African inhabitants from the Brandberg and its surrounding areas also worked on site.
4. Lynn Harris, Jennifer Jones, and Kate Schnitzer, "Monuments in the Desert: A Maritime Landscape in Namibia," *Journal of Maritime Archeology* 7, no. 1 (2012): 111–40, here 111.
5. Krynauw, *Das Kreuzkap*, 50 and 37. Bridgeford, *Cape Cross*, 26–27.
6. Brenda Bravenboer and Walter Rusch, *The First 100 Years of State Railway in Namibia* (Windhoek, 1999), 11.
7. Jill Kinahan and John Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels are Ploughing the Main...: Archaeological Traces of the 19th Century 'Guano Rage' on the South-Western Coast of Africa," *Australasian Historical Archaeology* 27 (2009): 43–54, here 43.
8. John Kinahan, "From the Beginning: The Archeological Evidence," in *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1900*, Marion Wallace, 15–43, here 37–38 (Oxford, 2013).
9. Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, 75.

10. John Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert: The People History Forgot*. (Windhoek, 1991), 1.
11. Sian Sullivan, "Towards a Non-Equilibrium Ecology: Perspectives from an Arid Land," *Journal of Biogeography* 23 (1996): 1–5, here 2.
12. Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 57.
13. Kreike, "Environmental and Climate Change in Africa," 74–75.
14. Jennifer Jones, "On Desolate Sands: Beached Shipwrecks in the Namibian Coastal Landscape," in *Sea Ports and Sea Power: African Maritime Cultural Landscapes*, ed. Lynn Harris, 89–100, here 90 (New York, 2017).
15. "Namibia Finds Treasure Ship Wreck," *BBC*. Retrieved 11 April 2021 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7376259.stm>.
16. Gabriel Samuels, "Miners Find 500-year-old Shipwreck Filled with Gold Coins in the Namibian Desert," *The Independent*, 9 June 2016. Retrieved 20 April 2021 from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/miners-find-500-year-old-shipwreck-filled-with-gold-coins-in-namibian-desert-a7072221.html>. See also Christopher Torchia, "In Namibia, 1533 Shipwreck's Relics Hidden Away," *AP News*, 15 September 2017. Retrieved 20 April 2021 from <https://www.apnews.com/e407ec90485d4b06ac63037740460233>; Andreas Hauptmann, Gabi Schneider, and Christoph Bartels, "The Shipwreck Bom Jesus, AD 1533: Fugger Copper in Namibia," *Journal of African Archaeology* 14, no. 2 (2016): 184–207; Christopher Trochia, "Bom Jesus' relics treasure at Oranjemund," *The Namibian*, 19 September 2017.
17. Andrew Goudie and Heather Viles, *Landscapes and Landforms of Namibia* (Dordrecht, 2015), 18. See also C. D. Hutchings et al., "The Benguela Current: An Ecosystem of Four Components," *Progress in Oceanography* 83 (2009): 15–32, here 15.
18. Aquarium in Swakopmund, visited 1 June 2019. For a detailed discussion, see Jochen Kämpf and Piers Chapman, *Upwelling Systems of the World: A Scientific Journey to the Most Productive Marine Ecosystems* (New York, 2016), chapter 7. The Benguela Current is the only upwelling system with warm water at both the equatorward and poleward ends; upwelling is an extreme example for an unstable environment. See A. L. Sakko, "The Influence of the Benguela Upwelling System on Namibia's Marine Biodiversity," *Biodiversity and Conservation* 7 (1998): 419–33, here 419.
19. Kämpf and Chapman, *Upwelling Systems of the World*, 24.
20. Karl Gotthilf Büttner, *Walfischbai und Angra Pequena* (Heidelberg, 1884), 6. See also Karl Gotthilf Büttner, "Angra Pequena," *Über Land und Meer: Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung* 52, no. 45 (1884).
21. Bruno E. J. S. Werz, "Not Lost Without a Trace: The DEIC Ship Vlissingen, Assumed to Have Foundered Near Meob Bay in 1747," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 4 (2008): 47–74, here 50. See also Bruno E. J. S. Werz, "The Vlissingen: A Dutch East India Company Ship that Perished along the Namibian Shore in 1747," in *Namibia and The Netherlands: 350 Years of Relations*, ed. Huub Hendrix (Windhoek, 1999), 21–29, here 27.
22. Nick Middleton, *Deserts: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009), 11.
23. John J. Grotper, *Historical Dictionary of Namibia* (Metuchen, NJ, 1994), 332–33. See also John Kinahan, "The Impenetrable Shield: HMS Nautilus and the Namib Coast in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Cimbebasia: Journal of the State Museum*, Windhoek 12 (1990): 23–61.

24. Mary Seely, *The Namib: Natural History of an Ancient Desert*, 3rd ed. (Windhoek, 2004), 17.
25. *Ibid.*, 15.
26. Hungiree Wilson Billawer and Muriel Samé Ekobo, *A Human Geography Atlas of Walvis Bay: Beyond the Reintegration* (Windhoek, 2002), 18. A German traveler later described it as a “geographical curiosity.” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, “Drei Tage in Südwestafrika,” 11 November 1893. See also Nicole Grünert, *Namibia—Fascination of Geology: A Travel Handbook*, 8th ed. (Windhoek, 2017), 152.
27. *Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde*, “Ein Ausflug zu den südwestafrikanischen Guanoinseln,” 20 August 1898 (Passarge).
28. Brigitte Lau and Peter Reiner, *100 Years of Agricultural Development in Colonial Namibia: A Historical Overview of Visions and Experiments* (Windhoek, 1993), 3.
29. Kinahan, “From the Beginning,” 34–35. See also John Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 98; Peter Mitchell, *The Archeology of Southern Africa* (Cambridge, 2002), 246–47.
30. Seely, *The Namib*, 45. See also Melinda Silverman, *Between the Atlantic and the Namib: An Environmental History of Walvis Bay* (Windhoek, 2004), 14; Ursula Dentlinger, “The !Nara Plant in the Topnaar Hottentot Culture of Namibia: Ethnobotanical Clues to an 8,000-Year-Old Tradition,” *Munger Africana Library Notes* 38 (1977): 1–39.
31. Silverman, *Between the Atlantic and the Namib*, 14.
32. Kuno F. R. Budack, “A Harvesting People on the South Atlantic Coast,” *Suid-Afrikaanse tydskrif vir etnologie/ South African Journal of Ethnology* 6, no. 2 (1983): 1–7, here 2; Kuno F. R. Budack, “The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea,” *Khoisan Linguistic Studies* 3 (1977), 1–42, here 12–13.
33. John Parkington, *Shorelines, Strandlopers, and Shell Middens* (Cape Town, 2006), 7. See also M. L. Wilson, “The ‘Strandloper’ Concept and Its Relevance to the Study of the Past Inhabitants of the Southern African Coastal Region,” *Annals of the South African Museum* 103, no. 3 (1993): 293–382.
34. Budack, “A Harvesting People on the South Atlantic Coast,” 2. See also Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 125 and 134; Kämpf and Chapman, *Upwelling Systems of the World*, 255.
35. Budack, “The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea,” 1.
36. Jill Kinahan, *Cattle for Beads: The Archaeology of Historical Contact and Trade on the Namib Coast* (Uppsala, 2000), 94.
37. Henrichsen, “Herrschaft und Identifikation im vorkolonialen Zentralnamibia,” 140.
38. Henning Melber, “Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation: Society and State before and during German Rule,” in *State, Society and Democracy: A Reader in Namibian Politics*, 2nd ed., ed. C. Keulder, 16–48, here 19 (Windhoek, 2010).
39. Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923*. (Oxford, 1999), 26.
40. Dag Henrichsen, “Imperial Imaginations and Local African History,” *The Namibian*, 20 November 2020.
41. Bridgeford, *Cape Cross*, 4–11. See also Lisa Gebhardt, “Sandwich Harbour: A Sanctuary in the Dunes,” *SWA Annual* (1973): 97–103, here 97. They named it the port of islets or islanders (Port d’Ilhéus).

42. Roger Crowley, *Conquerors: How Portugal Forged the First Global Empire* (New York, 2015), 11–12.
43. Walter Rusch, Edda Schoedder, and Antje Otto, *Lüderitzbucht: Damals und gestern* (Windhoek, 1983), Vorwort. See also Eric Axelson, “Prince Henry the Navigator and the Discovery of the Sea Route to India,” *The Geographical Journal* 127, no. 2 (1961): 145–55.
44. Crowley, *Conquerors*, 20–21.
45. Eric Axelson, *Congo to Cape: Early Portuguese Explorers* (London, 1973), 85.
46. Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*, 17.
47. Heinrich Vedder, *South West Africa in Early Times*, trans. Cyril G. Hall (London, 1966), 8. Vedder’s descriptions are German-centric and he does not reference his sources. See Jill Kinahan, “Heinrich Vedder’s Sources for his Account of the Exploration of the Namib Coast,” *Cimbebasia: Journal of the State Museum*, Windhoek 11 (1989): 33–39.
48. Axelson, *Congo to Cape*, 87.
49. Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust*, 18. On the history of that term, see Budack, “The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea,” 6–7.
50. Kinahan, “The Impenetrable Shield,” 25. See also David MacKay, *In the Wake of Cook: Exploration, Science and Empire, 1780–1801* (Wellington, 1985), 35–36.
51. Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 99. See also Jill Kinahan, ed., *By Command of Their Lordships: The Exploration of the Namibian Coast by the Royal Navy, 1795–1895* (Windhoek, 1992), 39.
52. Popham’s Narrative as quoted in “The Impenetrable Shield,” 58. See also Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 118.
53. Hans M. Verheye et al., “Plankton Productivity of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME),” *Environmental Development* 17 (2016): 75–92, here 75. See also Kinahan and Kinahan, “A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...,” 44; John M. Mendelsohn, *Atlas of Namibia: A Portrait of the Land and its People* (Cape Town, 2002).
54. Felix Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom: Walfänger und Küstengesellschaften an den tiefen Stränden Afrikas (1770–1920)* (Frankfurt am Main, 2017), 53.
55. *Ibid.*, 84.
56. Felix Schürmann, “Die Wale, ihre Jäger und der Strand von Annobón,” in *Afrikanische Terräume: Historische Verortungen*, ed. Winfried Speitkamp and Stephanie Zehnle, 34–76, here 50–51 (Cologne, 2014).
57. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 96. See also Joost C. A. Schokkenbroek, *Trying-Out: An Anatomy of Dutch Whaling and Sealing in the Nineteenth Century, 1815–1885* (Amsterdam, 2008), 41–42.
58. Wolfram Hartmann, “Early Dutch-Namibian Encounters,” in *Namibia and The Netherlands: 350 Years of Relations*, ed. Huub Hendrix, 9–19, here 11 (Windhoek, 1999).
59. Gebhardt, “Sandwich Harbour,” 97. Hartmann notes that the local population “reacted aggressively.” Hartmann, “Early Dutch-Namibian Encounters,” 11. Scholars have long speculated about the specific group Europeans encountered. See Budack, “The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea,” 5.
60. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 96. See also Budack, “The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea,” 5.

61. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 54–56. See also Pieter Dekker and Cornelius De Jong, “Whaling Expeditions of the West India Company to Walvis Bay,” *Namibia Scientific Society Journal* 46 (1998): 47–63, here 50–61.
62. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 78–79.
63. Popham’s Narrative as quoted in “The Impenetrable Shield,” 54.
64. Emma Christopher, *A Merciless Place: The Lost Story of Britain’s Convict Disaster in Africa* (Oxford, 2011), 327–28.
65. “Kurzer Bericht Schmelens über sein (sic) Reise nach der Walfischbai,” in *Die ältesten Reiseberichte über Namibia 1482–1852, Teil I: Die 25 frühesten Landreisen 1760–1842*, ed. Eduard Moritz, 145–46, here 146 (Windhoek, 1999). See also Alan R. Booth, “American Whalers in South African Waters,” *South African Journal of Economics* 32, no. 4 (1964): 278–82, here 278–79; Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 62.
66. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 83. See also Edward A. Stackpole, *Whales & Destiny: The Rivalry between America, France, and Britain for Control of the Southern Whale Fishery 1785–1825* (Amherst, MA, 1972), 315–17.
67. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 63.
68. Greg Dening, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging Across Time, Cultures, and Self* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004), 116, as quoted in Schürmann, “Die Wale, ihre Jäger und der Strand von Annobón,” 53. Schürmann outlines that seafarers and workers on whaling ships made less money compared to those working on trade ships. Schürmann, “Die Wale, ihre Jäger und der Strand von Annobón,” 52–53.
69. Harris, Jones, and Schnitzer, “Monuments in the Desert,” 118.
70. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 85.
71. Schürmann, “Die Wale, ihre Jäger und der Strand von Annobón,” 47.
72. *Ibid.*, 51.
73. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 94. See also “Tagebuch über die Fahrt des Schiffes ‘Meermin’ von Sebastiaan Valentijn van Reenen,” in *Die ältesten Reiseberichte über Namibia 1482–1852, Teil I: Die 25 frühesten Landreisen 1760–1842*, ed. Walter Moritz, 77–92, (Windhoek, 1999). See also Lynn Berat, *Walvis Bay: Decolonization and International Law* (New Haven, CT, 1990), 17–18.
74. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 94.
75. Thompson, *Narrative of a Voyage Performed in His Majesty’s Sloop Nautilus* (1786), as quoted in “The Impenetrable Shield,” 44. See also Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 94.
76. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa*, vol. 2 (London, 1838), 100 and Owen, *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar*, vol. 2, 135, as referenced in Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 94.
77. *HMS Grecian*, 1851, in Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 110.
78. Lisa Gebhardt, “Sandwich Harbour,” 99; *HMS Grecian*, 1851, in Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 95.
79. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 110.
80. Edmund Gardner (1803) as quoted in “The Impenetrable Shield,” 50. See also Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 92; Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 99.
81. In one instance, local fishermen (likely “beach dwellers”) and sailors from the *Meermin* clashed when they earlier attempted to seize the fishing nets of the Dutch. Ran-

- dolph Vigne, "The Hard Road to Colonization: The Topnaar (Aonin) of Namibia, 1670–1878," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 1, no. 2 (2000): n.p.
82. John Kinahan, "Human and Domestic Animal Tracks in an Archaeological Lagoon Deposit on the Coast of Namibia," *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 51, no. 164 (1996): 94–98, here 94.
83. John Kinahan, "Cattle Paths and the Choreography of Late Pre-Colonial Trade on the Namib Desert Coast," *The South African Archaeological Journal* 69, no. 199 (2014): 96–102, here 99.
84. Kinahan, "Human and Domestic Animal Tracks," 94.
85. Kinahan, "Cattle Paths and the Choreography," 96.
86. Ibid., 101; Moritz, *Die ältesten Reiseberichte über Namibia, 1482–1852, Teil I*, 87.
87. Kinahan, "Cattle Paths and the Choreography," 101.
88. Denning, *Beach Crossings*, 16. Schürmann relies Denning's concept. See Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 39.
89. Thompson's Narrative as quoted in "The Impenetrable Shield," 43; Popham's Narrative as quoted in "The Impenetrable Shield," 56.
90. Kinahan, "Cattle Paths and the Choreography," 101.
91. Alvin Kienetz, "The Key Role of the Orlam Migrations in the Early Europeanization of South-West Africa (Namibia)," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 4 (1977), 553–72, here 557.
92. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 74.
93. Vigne, "The Hard Road to Colonization," n.p.
94. According to Budack, due to "inadequate tackle and hunting methods," Topnaar were never able to kill whales. See Budack, "The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea," 25.
95. Francois Duminy, Kapitän niederländische Fregatte *Meermin*, Feb 1793, in Walvis Bay, as quoted in Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 120.
96. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa*, 84, as quoted in Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 120.
97. Seaman Choyce, *The Log of a Jack Tar*, 4, as quoted in Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 120.
98. Kinahan. "From the Beginning," 37–38. See also Vigne, "The Hard Road to Colonization," n.p.; Kinahan, *Cattle for Beads*.
99. Benjamin Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Sea, North and South Pacific Ocean, Chinese Sea, Ethiopic and Southern Atlantic Ocean, Indian and Antarctic Ocean* (New York, 1831), 294.
100. Ibid.
101. Bering Strait Tribunal of Arbitration, ed., *Fur Seal Arbitration. Proceedings of the Tribunal of Arbitration Convened at Paris*, Volume II (Washington, 1895), 403.
102. Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages*, 294.
103. Curtis Marean, "Seasonality and Seal Exploitation in the Southwestern Cape, South Africa," *African Archaeological Review* 4 (1986): 135–49, here 135.
104. Budack, "The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuseb Valley and the Sea," 28–29.
105. Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, 16.
106. Richard Ellis, *The Empty Ocean* (Washington, DC, 2003), 170.
107. Ibid.
108. Victoria Dickenson, *Seal* (London, 2016), 112.

109. "Tagebuch über die Fahrt des Schiffes 'Meermin' von Sebastiaan Valentijn van Reenen," 78. See also Bering Strait Tribunal of Arbitration, *Fur Seal Arbitration*, 403. The records kept by the vessel *Sylvia* referenced one man who had been sealing nearly every year for twenty-three years. See Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 148.
110. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 35. Hydrographic information collected by British ships (1797–1895) also include such references.
111. Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages*, 306.
112. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 138.
113. "Tagebuch über die Fahrt des Schiffes 'Meermin' von Sebastiaan Valentijn van Reenen," 79.
114. Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages*, 305.
115. *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung*, "Die Robben an der deutsch-südwestafrikanischen Küste, Teil II," 2 October 1907 (Tismer).
116. Ibid. See also *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, "Deutsch Südwestafrika," 11 December 1897.
117. The sloop *Princess of Wales*, which wrecked on Crozet Island in 1821, was a cutter meant for sealing. See Charles Medyett Goodridge, *Narrative of Voyages to the South Seas, and the Shipwreck of the Princess of Wales Cutter*, 2nd ed. (Exeter, 1852).
118. Schürmann, *Der graue Unterstrom*, 87.
119. "Tagebuch über die Fahrt des Schiffes 'Meermin' von Sebastiaan Valentijn van Reenen," 78.
120. Thomas Boulden Thompson, *Narrative of a Voyage Performed in His Majesty's Sloop Nautilus* (1786), as quoted in "The Impenetrable Shield," 39.
121. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 61.
122. Bering Strait Tribunal of Arbitration, *Fur Seal Arbitration*, 404.
123. See BArch-B, R 1001/ 1824 Guanogewinnung in DSWA, Brief vom Kaiserlichen Gouvernement Südwest Afrika, 26. Aug. 1903.
124. Morrell, *A Narrative of Four Voyages*, 293.
125. Ibid., 294.
126. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main..." 45; Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 43.
127. "African Guano Trade," in *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1845. A Journal of Papers on Subjects Connected with Maritime Affairs* (London, 1845), 617–66, here 622. See also Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64; Günther Niethammer, *Die wertvollsten Vögel der Welt. Interessantes über Guanovögel* (1969), as quoted in Sigrid Kube, "Das Gold der Kormorane," in 1884–1984: *Vom Schutzgebiet bis Namibia*, ed. Klaus Becker and Jürgen Hecker, 98–101 (Windhoek, 1958).
128. Kämpf and Chapman, *Upwelling Systems of the World*, 298.
129. Journal of Washington Fosdick, 1843–44, as referenced in Arthur C. Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," *Geographical Review* 20, no. 4 (1930): 632–41, here 631.
130. Forrester 1845 [Log 508, Manuscript Collection] Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, as quoted in "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main..." 45. See also Lieutenant Ruxton, "Notes on the South-West Coast of Africa," *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* (1846): 4–16, here 10.
131. Edward D. Melillo, "The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade, 1840–1930," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 1028–60, here 1028.

132. Ibid. The historiography focuses mostly on the coast of Chile. See Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (New York, 2014); R. J. M. Crawford and J. Jahncke, "Comparison of Trends in Abundance of Guano-Producing Seabirds in Peru and Southern Africa," *South African Journal of Marine Science* 21, no. 1 (1999): 145–56.
133. Hendrik Snyders, "From Peru to Ichaboe: The Dynamics of a Shifting Guano Frontier, 1840–5," *African Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (2016): 1–23, here 5.
134. Ibid. See also Lance van Sittert and Rob Crawford, "Historical Reconstruction of Guano Production on the Namibian Islands 1843–1895," *South African Journal of Science* 89 (2003): 13–16, here 13.
135. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64; Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 45.
136. Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 634–35.
137. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 43. See also Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 63.
138. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 44.
139. James Thompson, "To the Editor, Liverpool 31 July 1844," *Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* XIII (1844), 568–569, here 569.
140. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 45.
141. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64.
142. Robert Craig, "The African Guano Trade," *Mariners Mirror* 50, no. 1 (1964), 25–55, here 35, as referenced in "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 47. See also Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 640; Kienetz, "The Key Role of the Orlam Migrations," 557.
143. *Kolonie und Heimat* IV, no. 31, "Die Guano-Gewinnung," 1911.
144. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64.
145. Forrester (Brig) of Mystic Seaport, USA, 1845, as quoted in "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 45.
146. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 45.
147. Ibid., 43. See also *Nautical Magazine*, "The African Guano Trade," London 1845, 616–66, here 647; T. E. Eden, *The Search for Nitrate and the True Nature of Guano. Being an Account of a Voyage to the South-West Coast of Africa, Also a Description of the Minerals Found There, and of the Guano Islands in that Part of the World* (London, 1846), 43.
148. Eden, *The Search for Nitrate and the True Nature of Guano*, 12.
149. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 46.
150. Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 638.
151. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...," 46.
152. Hendrik Snyders and Sandra Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today': Labour Relations Regimes of the Cape and Ichaboe Guano Trade, c. 1843–1898," *Historia* 58, no. 1 (2013): 51–73, here 54. See also Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 156–57.
153. Snyders, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 55. Workers from the Namibian mainland, including women, were directly targeted for employment by the end of the century. Snyders, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 62.

154. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 155.
155. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64–65.
156. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...", 45. See also *Nautical Magazine* (1845), 623; Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 64–65.
157. Snyders and Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 54–56.
158. *Globus: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde*, "Ein Ausflug zu den südwestafrikanischen Guanoinseln," 20 August 1898 (Passarge). See also Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 158.
159. Ruxton, "Notes on the South-West Coast of Africa," 4.
160. W. S. Fletcher, "The African Guano Islands," *The Cape Illustrated Magazine*, September, 1897, 21, as quoted in Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 156.
161. "African Guano Trade," 623.
162. Snyders and Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 55.
163. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 156. See also Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 65.
164. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...", 45.
165. Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 638.
166. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 154. See also Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 159–164.
167. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 66/67.
168. Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 635.
169. *Emeline* (Schooner) of Mystic Seaport, USA, 1844, as quoted in "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...", 45.
170. *Ibid.*
171. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 46–50. See also Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...", 45.
172. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 52.
173. Snyders and Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 57–58. See also *Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* XIV, "The African Guano Trade," 652–66; *The Illustrated London News*, "Mutiny at Ichaboe," 21 September 1844; Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 638–39; Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main . . .," 46.
174. *Globus*, "Ein Ausflug zu den südwestafrikanischen Guanoinseln," 20 August 1898 (Passarge). See also Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main . . .," 47.
175. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 99.
176. Snyders, "From Peru to Ichaboe," 13.
177. Ruxton, "Notes on the South-West Coast of Africa," 4–5. See also Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 640.
178. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main...", 47. See also Robert Craig, "The African Guano Trade," *Mariners Mirror* 50, no 1 (1964): 25–55, here 54; Watson, "The Guano Islands of Southwestern Africa," 640.
179. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 99. Control later passed over to Cape businessmen. See Snyders and Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 60.

180. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 107; Snyders and Swart, "Discontented Scoundrels Who Crowd the Mercantile Marine Today," 63.
181. Snyders, "From Peru to Ichaboe," 13.
182. R. W. Rand, "Guano Enterprise in South West Africa," *Ostrich* 23, no. 3 (1952), 169–85, here 169.
183. Kinahan, *By Command of Their Lordships*, 67.
184. Brigitte Lau, *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (Windhoek, 1987). See also Brigitte Lau, "The Emergence of Kommando Politics in Namaland, Southern Namibia 1800–1870" (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 1982); Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main . . .," 53.
185. Kienetz, "The Key Role of the Orlam Migrations," 556. See also Kinahan, *Pastoral Nomads of the Central Namib Desert*, 117.
186. Kienetz, "The Key Role of the Orlam Migrations," 560.
187. Gebhardt, "Sandwich Harbour: A Sanctuary in the Dunes," 99–100.
188. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels Are Ploughing the Main . . .," 47. See also Jill Kinahan, "The Historical Archaeology of Nineteenth Century Fisheries at Sandwich Harbour on the Namib Coasts," *Cimbebasia: Journal of the State Museum*, Windhoek 13 (1991): 1–27; BArch-B, R 1001/1863, Häfen an der südwestafrikanischen Küste, Der Sandwichhafen.
189. Kinahan and Kinahan, "A Thousand Fine Vessels . . .," 44.
190. Botha, "People and the Environment in Colonial Namibia," 172.
191. Snyders, "From Peru to Ichaboe," 19.
192. Snyders, "Stinky and Smelly," 11–12.
193. Bollig, *Shaping the African Savannah*, 54–55. See also Bollig, *Shaping the African Savannah*, 351.
194. C. 2144 at 6, Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of South Africa, Dyer to Foreign Secretary of the Admiralty, March 28, 1878, as quoted in Lynn Berat, *Walvis Bay: Decolonization and International Law*, 37. See also PRO Adm 53/11246 Tuesday 12 March 1878, as referenced in *By Command of their Lordships* (New Haven, CT, 1990), 116. According to the *Western Morning News*, local Herero and Oorlam were sent away after having become "most zealous and loyal British subjects." See also Budack, "The Aonin or Topnaar of the Lower Khuisab Valley and the Sea," 11.