6 The Meeting of Two Cultures

Indians and Colonists in the Magellan Region

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Introduction

The first sightings of strange phantoms floating on the sea like waterfowl must have filled the indigenous inhabitants of southern South America with a mixture of fear and curiosity. Their astonishment probably grew each time they glimpsed the beings aboard these leviathans, speaking loudly in incomprehensible tongues, clothed from head to foot and carrying sticks which spat fire amidst a thunderclap (fig. 75). This is how the European explorers and their ships must have appeared to the Indians during the early years of contact. The stark contrasts between these two different worlds would come to shape the character of all later interaction (fig. 77).

The first historical encounter between Ferdinand Magellan's crew and the Indians

Fig 75 Armed engagement between Dutch mariners and the Selk'nam at Cabo Orange on the southern shore of the Estrecho de Magallanes, Tierra del Fuego. Drawing by van Noort, 1599.

took place in April 1520 in the Bahía San Julian on the east coast of Patagonia. The Indians were a band of Tehuelche. The initial apprehension of the aborigines was most likely followed by a trusting curiosity, answered in kind by the newcomers, resulting in a cordial relationship that was reinforced by the distribution of trinkets. This type of contact was almost the exception to the rule during the first century of sporadic European presence on these southern shores. Violent encounters must have erupted frequently, probably fomented by the Europeans' rough treatment of the natives when

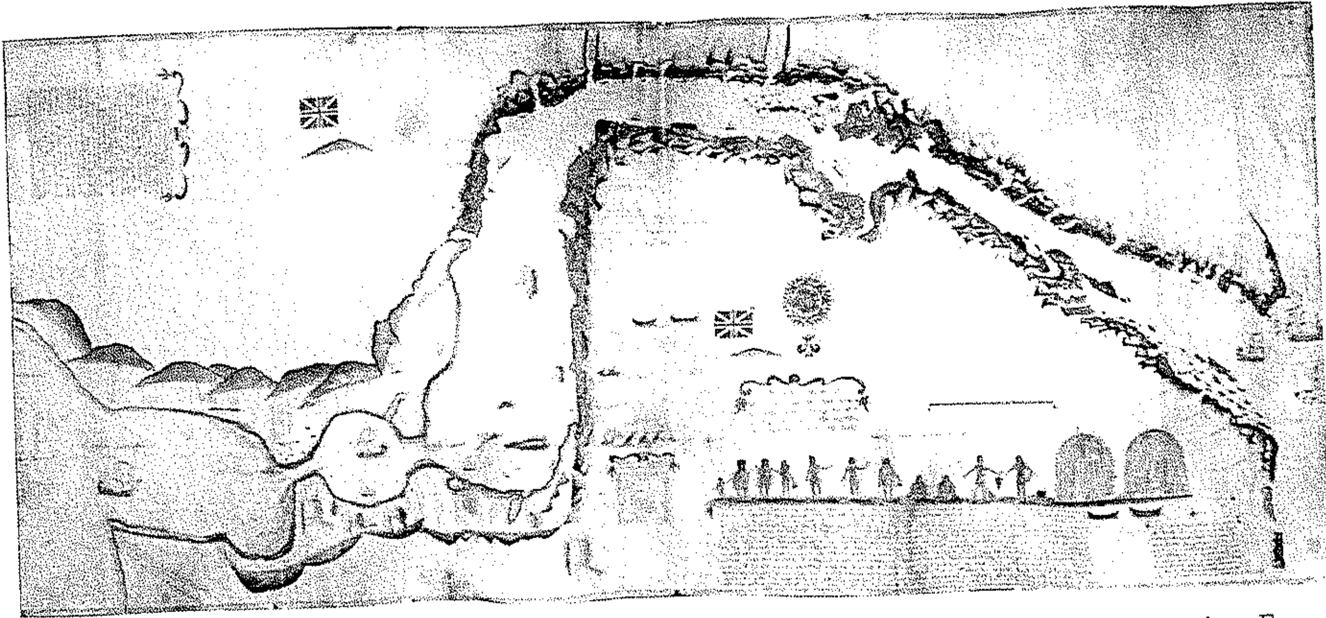

Fig 76 Estrecho de Magallanes as represented on the map made by John Narborough, c. 1670. See colour plate 2 for detail.

their brutal and unjustifiable aggression provoked in turn a defensive reaction. Examples abound, the most notorious being the events triggered by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa's men at Bahía Gente Grande, Tierra del Fuego (February 1580) and at Punta Dungeness and San Gregorio on the continental mainland (February and March 1584).[1] If these were only skirmishes, then truly cruel and bloody clashes were instigated by Francis Drake in the Cove of Cuaviguilgua, located in the western reaches of the Estrecho de Magallanes (August 1578), and by Olivier van Noort's crew at Cabo Orange on the northern coast of Tierra del Fuego (November 1599).[2]

However, after such an inauspicious start, the mutual hostilities slowly dissipated. During the seventeenth century European ships (including vessels which voyaged from Chiloé and the central coast of Chile and Peru) seldom sailed to this region and the memory of those bitter incidents probably faded.

In 1670 a scientific expedition led by John Narborough, a British naval captain, entered the Estrecho de Magallanes,[3] inaugurating an era of research in southern South America that would last for two centuries (see fig. 76 and colour plate 2). During this period peaceful relations were established with the various indigenous groups and this permitted the first investigations into their ethnic and cultural traits.

Narborough is credited with providing a promising start to the new relationship with

GUNUNA'KENA
(NORTHERN TEHUELCHE)
CHONOS
MECHARNUEKENK
Bahía San Julian
Río Baguales
AÓNIKENK
(SOUTHERN TEHUELCHE)
Río Vizcachas
Ultima Esperanza
Río Zurdo
Dinamarquero
Laguna Blanca
Bautismo
Punta Dungeness
Cabo Orange
Punta Anegada
San Gregorio
Bahía
San Felipe
Bahía Gente Grande
Caleta Josefina
San Sebastian
Punta
Arenas
Boquerón
Península
Brunswick
San Rafael Mission
SELK'NAM (ONA)
Candelaria Mission
KAWESKAR (ALAKALUF)
Agua Fresca
Fuerte Bulnes
Punta Santa Ana
Paso Brecknock
Ushuaia
HAUSH (MANNEKENK)
Bahía Buen Suceso
(Bay of Good Success)
Isla Hoste
Río Douglas Mission
Tekenika Mission
Isla Bayly
YÁMANA (YAHGAN)
Cabo de Hornos
Probable areas of population concentrations
Possible points of contact

Fig 77 *opposite* Indigenous territories, population concentrations and principal points of contact during the historical period.

the Indians which was pursued to various degrees by French navigators between the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first quarter of the eighteenth century. These contacts developed further in the 1760s as a consequence of a series of trips to the region made by John Byron,[4] Louis Antoine de Bougainville[5] and Antonio de Córdoba Laso de la Vega.[6] Somewhat later more sustained interaction occurred during the period of hydrographic exploration carried out by Captains Philip Parker King and Robert Fitzroy from 1826 to 1834.[7]

With respect to the Aónikenk, apparently amicable encounters took place mostly along the northern coast of the Strait, especially around Bahía San Gregorio. Initial contacts with the Kawéskar took place on the east coast of Peninsula Brunswick (fig. 78). However, the Europeans also came into contact with both the Kawéskar and the Yámana in

Fig 78 Kawéskar Indians signalling to a steamship in Canal Smyth, c. 1880.

the intricate archipelagos of western Patagonia and south and west of Tierra del Fuego, albeit with less frequency and intensity. They had only occasional encounters with the Selk'nam from the sixteenth century up until the end of the ninteenth century. Except for the clashes mentioned above, these meetings were mostly peaceful. While there was violence this was probably provoked by undisciplined crews of wayward vessels during the seventeenth century and subsequently, up to the middle of the eighteenth century, by seal hunters dedicated to the pursuit of marine mammals – rough and violent people, not in the least bit concerned about the indigenous population.[8]

Colonisation of the Magellan Region

Such was the tenor of the relationships between the Indians and the newcomers in the extreme south of South America when, during the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, colonisation began in earnest. Southern continental Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were originally incorporated into the dominion of the emerging Kingdom of Chile in 1554. In 1843 possession was formally confirmed by the establishment of Fuerte

Fig 79 Aónikenk and colonists trading at Punta Arenas, c. 1880.

Philippi set about trying to re-establish ties with the Indians, which he considered essential for consolidating the colonists' presence. However, this effort succumbed to the simmering resentment of the Indians, who remained outraged over the incident with Cambiazo. As a result the colonial authorities decided to prohibit settlers from having contact with the Indians. In 1855 ties were once again renewed and a more equitable relationship was gradually re-established. In time this became extremely important for the colonists. In fact, until 1870 trade with the Indians was the principal economic activity carried out in Punta Arenas (fig. 79). A bond of friendship evolved between the two groups which remained unmarred by aggressive acts and grew so strong that not even the dispute between Chile and Argentina in the 1860s over possession of Patagonia, in which the Indians became involved, could affect it.

During the 1870s Punta Arenas prospered under Governor Oscar Viel. Likewise, exchange between the Indians and the settlers intensified, especially in commercial terms. The treks traditionally made by the Indians to Punta Arenas proved to be inadequate to meet demand so the colonial traders and hunters began frequenting Aónikenk territory. There was a close relationship during this period which remained particularly strong throughout the decade. Paradoxically, this would eventually contribute to the decline of the Aónikenk population, as will be seen later.[10]

With the introduction of sheep-ranching in 1877–8 colonists began to encroach upon pasture land which belonged to the Aónikenk near the northern coast of the Strait. The continuing search for fresh grazing expanded inland to incorporate supposedly 'unclaimed' territories where the Aónikenk had hunted and roamed since time immemorial. By 1885–90 the ranchers controlled the areas of Dinamarquero and

Bulnes, a small military outpost situated on the summit of Punta Santa Ana (located on the east coast of Peninsula Brunswick), and in 1848 by the founding of Punta Arenas (north of Fuerte Bulnes).[9]

When Fuerte Bulnes was established five nomadic Indian tribes inhabited this extensive domain encompassing Chilean and Argentinian territory. The Aónikenk, or Southern Tehuelche, lived in the eastern part of continental Patagonia, east of the forests; the Selk'nam and the Haush – all terrestrial hunters – occupied the northern, central and south-eastern regions of Tierra del Fuego. The Kawéskar and Yámana were canoe tribes. The Kawéskar dominated the Patagonian archipelagos, the western part of the Estrecho de Magallanes and the adjacent Fuegian archipelagos. The Yámana resided in the southern Fuegian archipelago.

Population estimates for these ethnic groups vary considerably for this period. It is likely that there were approximately 1,000 Aónikenk, 3,000–4,000 Selk'nam and Haush and an estimated 3,000 Indians in each of the canoe groups. In 1843, when a handful of settlers founded Fuerte Bulnes, some 10,000–11,000 Indians lived scattered over this vast domain. The establishment of the fort marked the beginning of a permanent presence of colonists in the region and a new phase in the relations between the two cultures. To fully understand how the changing relations between the colonists and the Indians evolved, they must be separated both ethnically and chronologically. Since the two Chilean settlements were established in eastern Patagonia, the home of the Aónikenk, contact first began with this tribe for purely geographic reasons and lasted until their virtual disappearance from Chilean soil by the early 1900s.

Fuerte Bulnes was scarcely established when the first interaction with native Patagonians began. The latter came in peace, a custom confirmed by two centuries of experience. Nevertheless, they were received with suspicion because the settlers knew little or nothing of their ways of life or customs. The Chilean government sought a harmonious relationship with the Indians and imparted precise instructions along these lines to the leader of the expedition and the region's first governor.

After the colonists' initial fear of the Aónikenk lessened, an active exchange began. The Indians visited the settlers frequently and the latter began to penetrate into the areas where the Indians had their encampments. This was primarily a trading relationship, with the colonists offering goods such as food, trinkets, metals, utensils and tools in exchange for guanaco meat, hides from wild animals and leather garments (capes or 'quillangos') (see chapter 10). Thus mutual commercial interests solidified the tentative beginnings of the contact. In 1844 this symbiosis was ratified through a rare treaty of friendship and commerce by Governor Pedro Silva and Chief Santos Centurión.

A tragic mutiny led by the malevolent Lieutenant Miguel José Cambiazo in 1851 served not only to devastate Punta Arenas but to involve the Indians in the bloodshed and rupture trust. With the restoration of the colony in 1852 Governor Bernardo

Fig 80 Group of Tehuelche, c. 1837–40.

Bautismo and the plains in the Blanca Lagoon basin, traditional Indian hunting-grounds, as well as other areas in Argentina. In all of these areas sheep-herding was expanding rapidly, resulting in continuous pressure on the Indians to relinquish their access to favoured territories and resort instead to less productive areas.

Towards the end of the century the Aónikenk were restricted to the central part of Patagonia next to the international border and to the lands still uninhabited by the colonists in the Vizcachas and Baguales river valleys in Ultima Esperanza. The first area contained a ten-thousand-hectare reservation (the Río Zurdo valley), which was ceded to Chief Mulato by Governor Manuel Señoret in 1893. The Governor hoped that a 'legitimate' domain for these Indians would be respected by the colonists and would serve to bring a halt to their progressive reduction in number.[11]

This measure did not lead to either objective being achieved because the growing demand for grazing land caused some colonists to eye the potential of the reservation for settlement and to initiate hostile acts towards the Indians. In addition, during the early 1900s the Aónikenk suffered a viral epidemic – accidentally introduced by Chief Mulato, who ironically became ill when he went to Santiago to lay claim to his territorial rights before the Governor of Chile. Unfortunately, this disease proved a deathblow

to the Río Zurdo Indians. Within the space of a few years the majority of them died and the survivors migrated to Argentine territory (1906).

Around this same time the Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego, a company which had acquired most of the potentially useful grazing land in Ultima Esperanza

Fig 81 Aónikenk group under a soldier's supervision.

through public auctions held in 1905, proceeded to occupy its holdings. Consequently, an Aónikenk group traditionally camped near the Río Vizcachas was expelled to Argentina (figs 80 and 81).[12] This episode represented a turning point for the Aónikenk, marking the beginning of cultural mutations and their march towards extinction.[13] These noble Indians vanished forever from Patagonia's vast eastern limits where they had lived freely and ruled as a people, in harmony with their natural environment, through the centuries. A sixty-year relationship with the colonists was thus brought to a close. On the whole this had been characterised by limited harassment and direct violence against the Indians, with the exception of the episode mentioned earlier.

Proceeding in chronological order, the second aboriginal ethnic group with which the colonists came into contact were the Kawéskar dwelling in the western part of the Strait and channels of Patagonia. The term 'contact' is used here because a sustained relationship like that which existed with the Aónikenk was never achieved. Furthermore, over the years, and as a consequence of this contact, the Kawéskar were first punished, then robbed, and finally treated with compassion.

Groups frequenting the waters around the Peninsula Brunswick occasionally displayed aggressive behaviour. They launched several bloody attacks on the colonists

as well as on ships navigating the Strait, thereby earning an infamous reputation with the local authorities. As a result Governor Jorge Schythe commented in 1855 that these Indians were barbarians and that building any sort of friendly relationship with them was impossible. His opinion seems to have been corroborated in 1873, when word reached Punta Arenas that the Indians had rustled cattle from the colony's ranch situated at Agua Fresca and had also attacked the ranchers. Government reprisal was swift and drastic. A military search party was despatched which tried to capture the Indians. Instead a skirmish broke out and several Kawéskar were killed. The following year more cattle were stolen. This time, however, the ranchers themselves went after the rustlers, leaving eight Kawéskar dead and taking several children prisoner.

The violence which characterised the initial phase continued into the early part of the present century. While not intentionally fractious these encounters were invariably exacerbated by a vicious cycle which precipitated reciprocal retaliation: aggressive acts by the Indians against the lives and goods of the settlers and punishment, sometimes harsh and always disproportionate, meted out by the colonists.

The second phase of contact evolved with the whalers and sealers towards the end of the 1860s, when this activity intensified in the Magellanic region's wild, western archipelagos. These men were a law unto themselves, rough and disposed to aggressive behaviour by virtue of the very activities in which they were engaged and the miserable conditions in which they worked. Now and then they encountered the Kawéskar. The sporadic contact that resulted was never friendly. The supposedly 'civilised' intruders constantly harassed the Indians, who were provoked into responding in kind. Thus, open violence and vice combined to create deep mistrust and an ever more difficult situation for the Indians. This contributed greatly to their drastic decline in numbers. The demise of the Kawéskar people was delayed only by the 'protection' afforded by often ferocious weather conditions which served to restrict the intrusion of outsiders to a brief and occasional presence.

During the third phase of contact the Indians were treated with compassion. From the 1870s to the 1930s there was frequent contact between the Kawéskar and passengers and crews of passing ships, including war vessels and those involved in hydrographic exploration (fig. 82). Moved by the shocking spectacle of these Indians – nude, stiff with cold, hungry, stinking, crowded in flimsy canoes that seemed on the verge of sinking – the visitors gave them clothes, food and trinkets, or exchanged these for valuable otter skins.

The contact between the newcomers and the Yámana was far more complex and considerably less brutal than that with the Kawéskar, since missionaries were involved. It is well known that Robert Fitzroy's experience with four Canal Beagle Indians in the 1830s served as the foundation for the subsequent, sustained evangelisation of the Indians undertaken by the South American Missionary Society of England (see chapter 8). The mission work was marked by its own tragedies, such as when the Society's founder

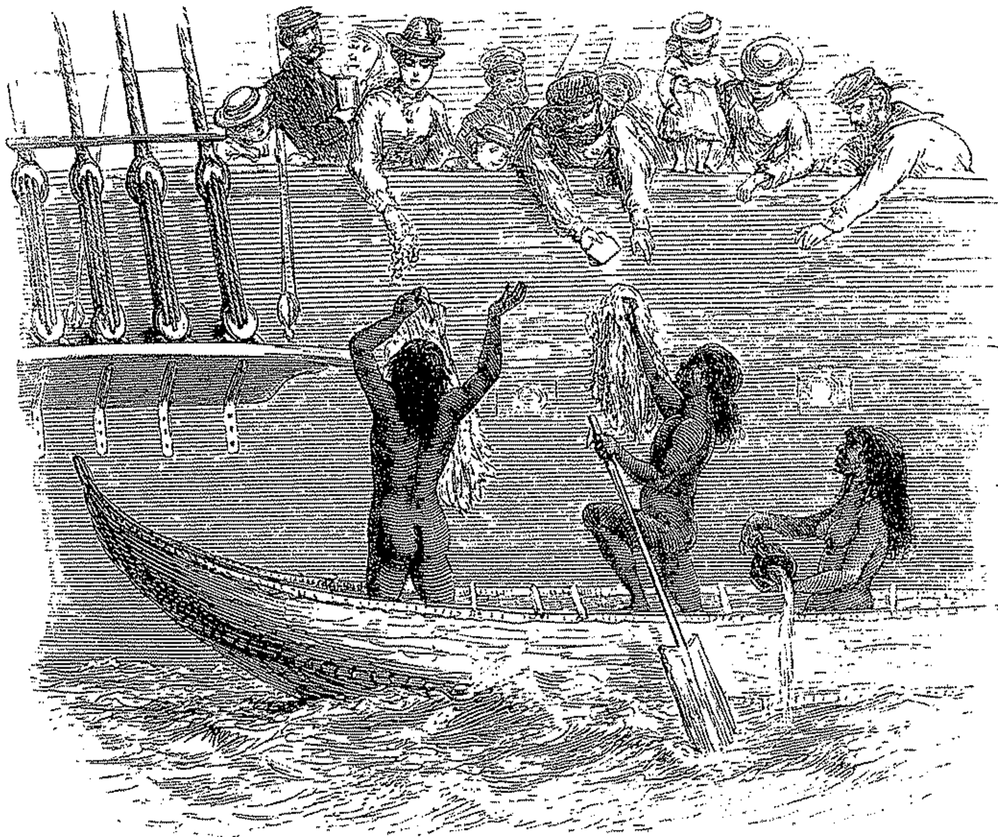

Fig 82 Fuegians (probably Kawéskar) bartering with passengers on a passing vessel, *c.* 1878.

Allen Gardiner and his co-workers died from starvation and abandonment, attempting to fulfil their vows (1851), and when other missionaries were slain by Indians (1859).[14]

Finally, in 1870–1, Waite H. Stirling and Thomas Bridges managed to establish a centre for 'civilising' the Indians at Ushuaia, located on the southern coast of Tierra del Fuego. With the disruption caused by the centre's activities, the missionaries moved south and south-west, seeking out the more remote Yámana groups in need of support. Consequently, missionary stations were established at Isla Bayly (Cabo de Hornos, 1888), Tekenika (Isla Hoste, 1892) and Río Douglas (Isla Navarino, 1906), where numerous missionaries worked in pursuit of their Christian and humanitarian ideals (figs 83 and 84). The missions were finally closed in 1917 when the Indians became too few in number and too scattered to make such efforts practical.[15]

During roughly this same period the Yámana had occasional contact with sea lion hunters, mariners and sailors shipwrecked in the course of attempting the perilous Cabo de Hornos passage. The Yámana never suffered the aggressive treatment and violence that the Kawéskar did with the seal hunters. Beginning in the early 1880s, gold prospectors and a handful of settlers sought to establish themselves permanently in the area. Contact was undoubtedly more frequent between the Indians and this latter group, but never reached the same level as that which existed with the missionaries.

Fig 85 *above* Selk'nam hunters in southern Tierra del Fuego, c. 1926.

Fig 83 *opposite above* Group of young children with their English 'tutor' at the Tekenika Mission on Isla Hoste, 1892–1906.

Fig 84 *opposite below* View of the Mission at Tekenika, Isla Hoste, with a traditional log dwelling in the foreground.

Chronologically, the last phase of contact involved the Europeans and the Selk'nam. Here, homicidal violence was the rule.[16] In contrast with continental Patagonia, and even the adjacent archipelagos, the hinterlands of Tierra del Fuego lay off the main exploration routes during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When colonisation in southern South America began, Tierra del Fuego was again ignored; settlements sprang up only on the mainland. In effect, the Selk'nam were relatively undisturbed during the first exploratory expeditions made into their traditional territories (fig. 85).[17] The situation changed, however, in 1881, when prospectors began arriving at Boquerón in search of placer gold which had been discovered in the north-western zone of the main island. The prospectors treated the Selk'nam harshly and without compassion, forcibly taking their women, for example. In self-defence the Indians struck back, but inevitably suffered the worst. Their population dwindled – the bitter outcome of an attempt by a small, crude group of invaders to settle this land. Consequently, when colonists established a sheep-ranch at Bahía Gente Grande in 1885, the Selk'nam were not in a receptive mood. Moreover, since the Indians were ignorant of the outsiders' ideas concerning property rights, they began stalking the docile sheep which they perceived as 'white' guanaco and which were particularly easy to capture. They became extremely adept at stealing sheep, an unpardonable crime in the eyes of the colonial ranchers, since they were expensive to acquire and to transport. This provoked retaliatory action that was excessively severe. Word seldom reached Punta Arenas of the

rancher-sponsored lynch mobs and killings that secretly took place. As a result, few inhabitants knew about the painful drama that was unfolding in the plains and mountains of the Fuegian north (fig. 86).

The threat to the Selk'nam's homeland grew with the establishment of two new ranches in the regions of Punta Anegada and Bahía Felipe in the early 1890s. This situation intensified in 1894 when the Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego took possession of its vast holdings (amounting to more than one million hectares) and created two large estates: Caleta Josefina and San Sebastián. Thus, in less than fifteen years the Selk'nam endured the occupation of practically their entire homeland by foreigners who subsequently became the undisputed owners. It did not take the Indians long to understand that coexistence with the colonists was impossible, whether they were miners or sheep-ranchers, and especially the latter.

Fig 86 Ruthless 'hunting' forays were mounted against the Selk'nam who were armed only with bows and arrows. Tierra del Fuego, c. 1900.

For the colonists, too, living together with the natives in peace appeared impractical. With their drive, work ethic and investments they saw themselves as sowers of progress and civilisation in a vast virgin territory. In addition, their efforts were encouraged and supported by the State and their ownership was sanctioned by its laws. The pioneers in Tierra del Fuego viewed the Selk'nam as an obstacle to economic progress to be overcome or eliminated by force. The sheep-ranching companies in Tierra del Fuego defended their estates as well as their sheep at all costs. Indians who rustled sheep or were involved in acts of aggression against the colonists were captured and punished. This escalated into an all-out war which was kept clandestine, since such a reproachable situation would not have been publicly condoned.

Yet despite the attempts made to conceal the ordeal of the Selk'nam, the inhabitants of Punta Arenas eventually learned that a virtual genocide of this tribe was taking place. The ensuing clamour of indignation received international press coverage, sensitising Chile's National Congress and Administration to the issue. Nevertheless, while officially the government intervened to ameliorate the brutality, the atrocities continued in secret. Large groups of Indians were captured and forcibly transferred to the Mission of San Rafael, located on neighbouring Isla Dawson. The mission was opened in 1889 by the Salesians as a refuge for those Indians who fell victim to colonial expansionism.

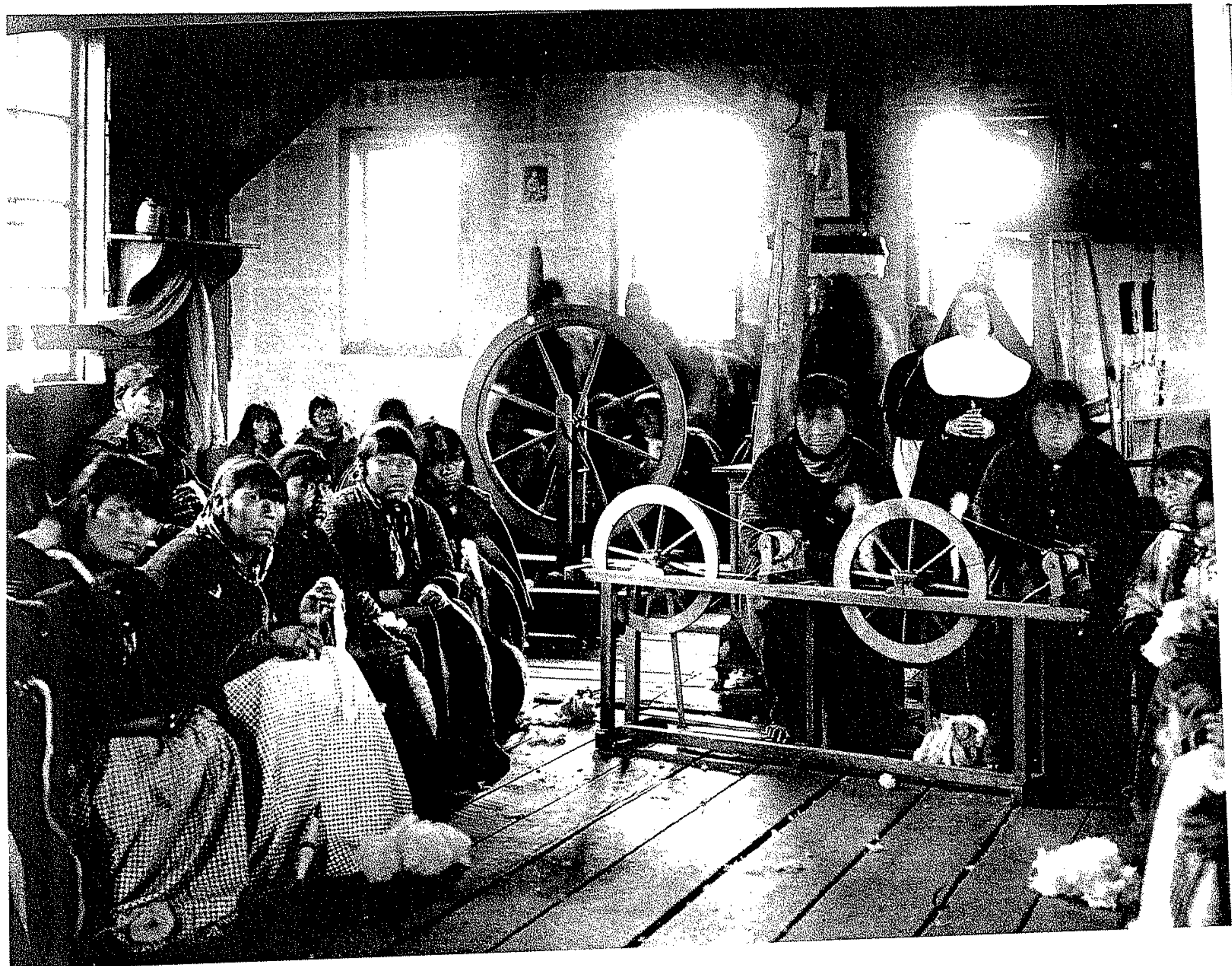

Fig 87 The Salesian Mission at San Rafael, Isla Dawson.

If this 'relocation' was not openly supported by the government, it was certainly tolerated (fig. 87).

In less than five years, at the end of the century, the Selk'nam had been virtually eliminated from their ancestral home. Those who managed to elude death or relocation scattered in the forests of southern Tierra del Fuego. In effect, genocide consumed the Selk'nam who had called the island their own for thousands of years. These deeds were an affront to the civilised conscience of the period and acts that each member of the community was responsible for, either directly or indirectly.

From the very beginning, a fractious and violent relationship existed between the settlers and the Selk'nam. It was a conflict weighted heavily in favour of the outsiders with their firearms and ruthless ambition. The only sustained relationship between the Selk'nam and the newcomers involved the missionaries, effectively also foreigners and colonists. It was a relationship different from others found in Magellanic territory, the character of which was largely shaped by the English missionaries: humanitarian and generous, but paternalistic and, as such, authoritarian. The missionaries did not treat the Indians as equals, nor did they seek to appreciate and preserve their culture. The

Austrian priest Father Martin Gusinde was an exception to this rule.[18] His personal efforts were extraordinary, in this case more scientific than religious, but were too late to reverse the process.

The Salesians carried out their work as best they knew, but the effect of their efforts was to concentrate the Indians far from their homelands, mixing tribes and altering their traditional customs and subsistence patterns. They sought to 'adapt' the Indians to the dictates of western culture. To some this is seen as a sound and well-intentioned effort, but it was tragically flawed since it simply accelerated their demise.

Consequences of the intercultural encounter

In sum, each of the aboriginal Magellanic cultures experienced its own particular set of relationships with the newcomers.

The protracted and largely peaceful colonist/Aónikenk relationship did not entail genuinely reciprocal cultural exchange, given the Aónikenk's limited and fleeting impact on the colonists; their influence did not amount to much more than the transfer of some nomadic skills and customs to the ranchers and hunters, some artisan skills (to produce tools and leather capes) and some proverbs and legends. The cultural exchange was overwhelmingly unidirectional, from the colonists to the Indians, and resulted in major changes which affected the latter's hunting and fishing tools and customs, relationship with natural resources, social behaviour, health and very survival as a people. Historical documents and recent archaeological findings confirm that, during the nineteenth century at least, the Aónikenk had virtually stopped producing their customary tools from stones and bones. These raw materials were gradually replaced by ceramics, glass and metals introduced by the colonists. Furthermore, they completely abandoned the bow and arrow for hunting after mastering the horse and bola and learning how to use firearms. Similarly, they incorporated new elements into their repertoire of tools, such as files, chisels, hammers, knives, needles and thimbles, for utilitarian as well as decorative purposes.

The colonists' growing demand for feathers, pelts and leather goods eventually surpassed the Indians' traditional supply capacity which was derived primarily from their food needs. To meet this demand the Indians had to increase their hunting and artisan activities, and profit-making made its way into their culture. As hunting increased new demands were placed on the region's ecosystem. Also, more women were required to prepare the additional hides. The technological response to increased hide-preparation was the production of more scrapers. Glass was used as a raw material for manufacturing these instruments because it was easier to work with than stone and at the same time resulted in greater productivity (figs 88 and 114).[19]

Just as the advent of the horse into the culture of the Indians brought about a dramatic change in their society, the introduction of alcohol also had a powerful but deleterious effect.

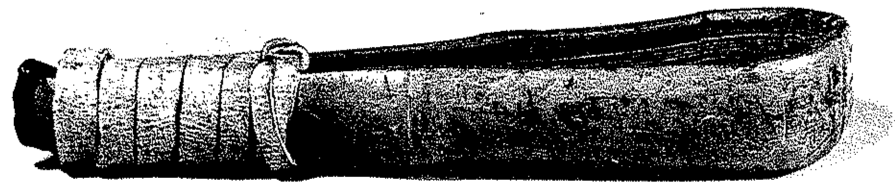

Fig 88 Aónikenk scraper used for preparing hides. The scraper itself is fashioned from glass derived from bottles obtained through contact with travellers and settlers during the historical period. Length 19.5 cm.

Both the Yámana and the Kawéskar's relationship with the colonists contrasted sharply with that of the Aónikenk's, as did the consequences. Contact proved destructive for the Kawéskar. Initially, their camps were raided; later, they were treated with compassion. Essentially, the colonists brought death to the Indians through violence and lethal, contagious diseases which substantially reduced their number. The survivors rapidly lost their spiritual values and customs. The historical case of the Kawéskar is a perfect example of the cultural and physiological impoverishment of an Indian tribe through contact with the colonists and merits further study.

The Yámana tribe had different luck, having been exposed to fewer negative contacts, and was able to affirm and prolong its culture until well into the twentieth century. Only when their number sank below the point of no return, however, did they become progressively more assimilated into western ways, causing the tribe to expire culturally before physically disappearing. A few scattered survivors are all that now remain of these historical, native canoe tribes that once inhabited the southernmost region of the Americas.

The ill-fated Selk'nam were devastated by confrontations with the colonists. In effect, the confrontations were so swift and brutal that in scarcely two decades this ethnic group disappeared almost completely from Tierra del Fuego. The few remaining Selk'nam lived on at the San Rafael Mission and Isla Dawson, the Candelaria Mission and in the forests of southern Tierra del Fuego. In the long term this would prove equally disastrous. At the mission they were assured of sustenance but were prevented from living in accordance with their ancestral customs because the missionaries wanted to fill their time and 'civilise' them by teaching them how to work and by administering religious instruction. Unintentionally, the Salesians adversely affected the Selk'nam by forcing them to adopt a foreign way of life, one which was completely at odds with their former culture and freedom.

Contagious diseases, particularly pulmonary infections, were especially harmful to the Indians. Their immune systems could not cope with the new strains which they invariably contracted through contact and living together with the new settlers. The

Fig 89 Group of Kawéskar women at the Salesian Mission, San Rafael, on Isla Dawson, 1892–1912.

semi-crowding in which they lived aggravated the transmission of epidemic diseases, despite the efforts of the missionaries to teach them hygienic practices. Tragically, during the winter of 1884 half of the Indians at the Protestant Mission of Ushuaia died from pneumonia. But it was tuberculosis which was the most devastating of these diseases, eliminating almost two-thirds of the total Indian population at the Mission between 1896 and 1900.

The efforts of the Salesians to alleviate the agony of the native Indian groups proved futile. In September 1911, when the San Rafael Mission closed, only twenty-five Indians remained out of the one thousand that had entered between 1889 and 1898 (fig. 89).

The dramatic reduction in the population of the Indians was perhaps the most conspicuous consequence of the relationship between the indigenous peoples and the newcomers. By 1910 there were probably fewer than 1,500 Indians in all of southern South America and the irreversible decline of the survivors was by this time inevitable. In scarcely six decades colonisation had succeeded in profoundly altering, and eventually destroying, an ancient order of life and culture.

NOTES

1 Martinic 1983, 1984.
2 Martinic 1977.
3 Martinic and Moore 1982.
4 Byron 1768.
5 Bougainville 1772.
6 Vargas y Ponce 1788.
7 Fitzroy 1839.
8 Martinic 1977.
9 Ibid.
10 Martinic 1979.
11 Ibid.
12 Martinic 1979, 1995.
13 Martinic 1995.
14 Martinic 1973a.
15 Ibid.
16 Martinic 1973b, 1989/90.
17 Pertuisset 1877; Serrano Montaner 1880.
18 Gusinde 1951.
19 Martinic and Prieto 1985/86.