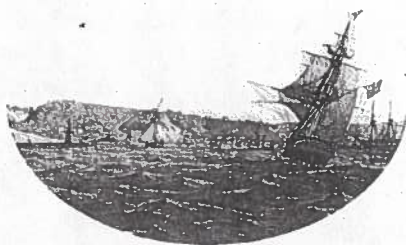


*Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of The Bushmen*  
ed. Pippa Skotnes (1996) Rondebosch: U of Cape Town Press

pp 343-353



## Native Views of Western Eyes<sup>1</sup>

*Carmel Schrire*

The Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert . . . have a few extra vertebrae that protrude and form a small but observable tail at the base of the spine . . . (Marks 1991:8)

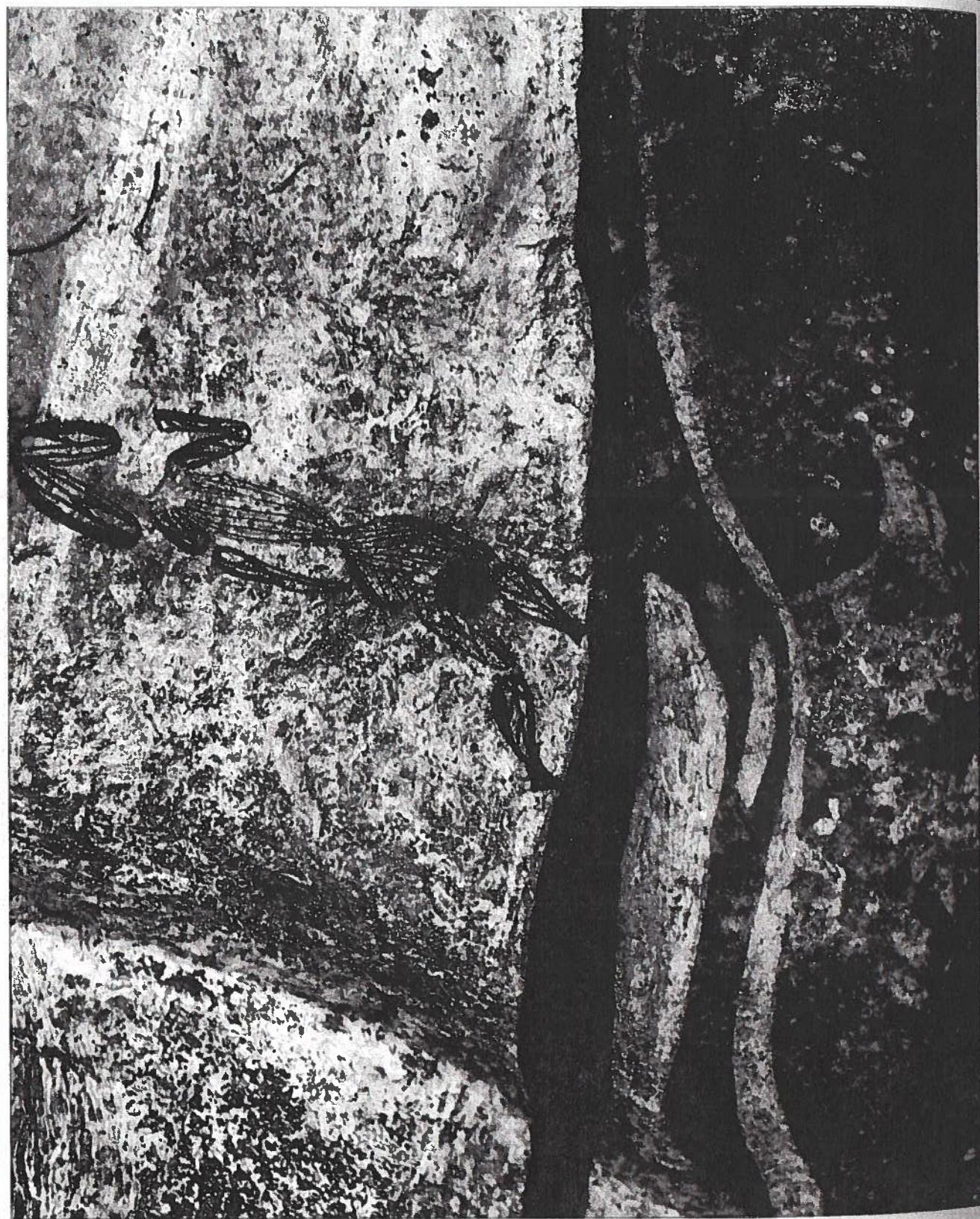
This strange and false assertion was published in the United States in 1991 and it goes to show that, even today, some people believe that the Bushmen are not as human as the rest of us. Incongruous though it may be, it serves to contextualise a tale of Gothic practices and strange perceptions, set in the heyday of colonialism, when, in the course of the exchange of money, diamonds, gold, spices, porcelain, cloth and bodily fluids, certain interested parties came to cultivate exotic tastes for native skulls, on the one hand, and European bodies on the other. Both sides were avid to possess each other, and both became consumers, metaphorically and literally, buying and hoarding body parts and, on occasion, roasting, eating, and displaying them as well.

The geography of our brief review will circumnavigate the globe, echoing colonial ventures of that time, where primary producers from the ends of the earth were bound in commercial networks to the markets of Europe. We begin our tale at the Cape of Good Hope and circle round to Australia, Tasmania, Hawaii, Paris and Piccadilly, before homing in on the Cape. Our tale darts from the Australia First Fleet to the Last Tasmanian, from murder in Hawaii to grave robbing in Hobart, and from pornography in Cape Town to pantomimes in London, touching briefly on the genitals of Khoikhoi women, and the sparkling eyes of British men. Many though its meanderings may be, its moral is clear: what was sauce for the native goose was indisputably sauce for the European gander.

In the Age of Enlightenment and beyond, for so-called civilised colonists, amassing skulls became so commonplace as to almost be called a 'rage'. This passion arose, in large part, from an effort to answer the larger question of whether all humans belonged to the same race, or whether, as the polygenists would have it, some might belong to a more lowly order than others. Had humans been more like birds or dogs, attention might have focused on the colour of their plumage and the scent between their legs. But, being what they are, attention focused on the most identifiable part of the body, namely the face and head. Scientists concentrated on the shape and size of the skull, and classified living, as well as extinct 'races', accordingly. Since the skull reflected the shape and size of the brain within, it was but a short step to assume that certain folk with bigger, longer, or rounder skulls, were smarter, than those with smaller ones.

Such correlations were far from perfect. The more that experts like Paul Broca perfected their protocols, the more patent was the failure of results to conform with expectations. But lack of confirmation did not hinder the pursuit of measurements. People continued to collect specimens in the firm belief that they would finally hit upon the proof that certain people were inherently closer to the apes than others. Nor was this belief confined to Western science. Indigenous people throughout the newly discovered realms sought to accommodate their newfound colonisers into the native belief systems, by taking certain aspects of their





Detail from a richly painted shelter in the upper Brandberg. Date not known.  
Photograph David Brown

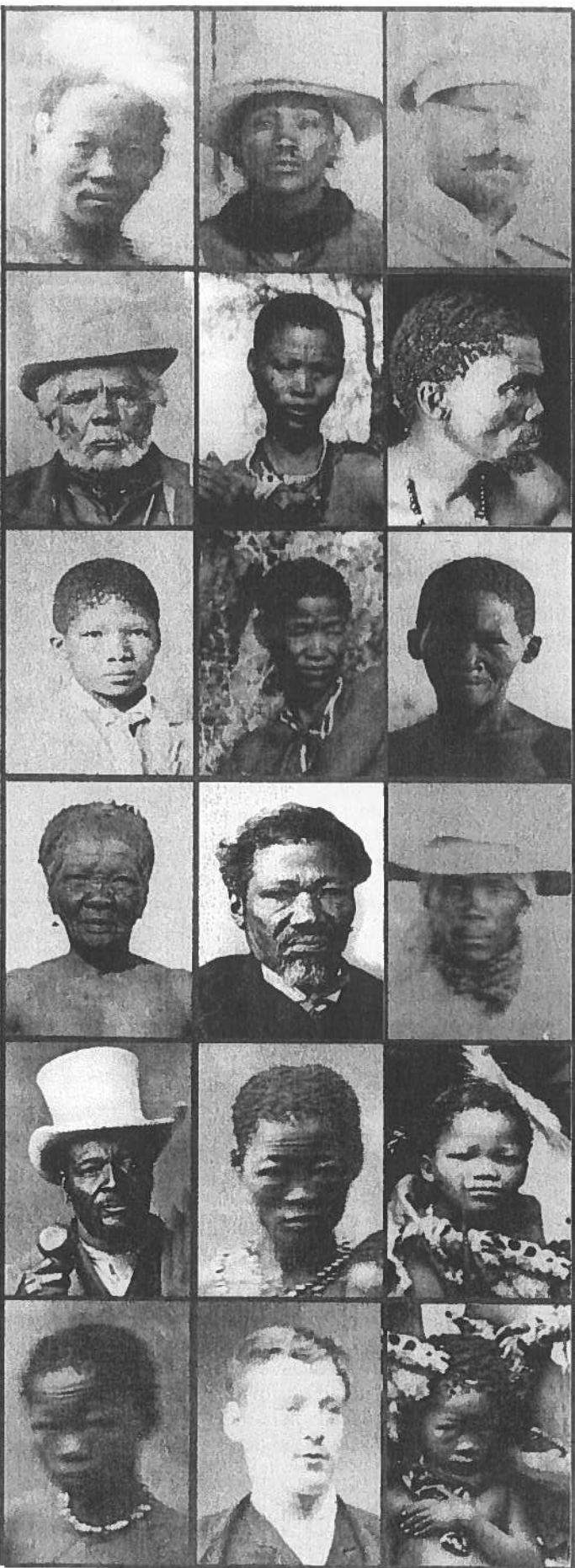
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physical peculiarity as signifying something other, if not less than, human.<sup>2</sup>

Our venture into skulduggery begins at the Cape of Good Hope, with the aspirations of a would-be head-hunter of the Age of Enlightenment, a purveyor of supplies to the new British colony at Sydney Cove, Australia. In 1789, on the day before he was due to sail from the Cape to provision the new British colony there, Capt. Edward Riou R.N. of the frigate HMS *Guardian* wrote a letter to Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society of Great Britain and Ireland, about the exciting promises of one Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon who, though he did not realise it at the time, was shortly to become the last Commander of the Dutch garrison at the Cape:

I mentioned to Col. Gordon, what you did me the Honour to write about respecting Human Skulls, & the Col. who shortly means to make a journey far Northward told me he would endeavour to get some of the Hottentots and different Caffres!" (Riou 1990:33)<sup>3</sup>

This was no mere aside. The exclamation mark denotes a flourish in intent, a triumph if executed. It would be a coup to make such a collection, at a time when men of learning greeted new discoveries with wonder and a sense of financial expectation. For most of the eighteenth century, the famous Swedish taxonomist Linnaeus sat like God on the day of creation, naming plants and animals, as well as those best-fitted in his learned opinion to carry on scientific work in foreign lands. Heads such as those that Riou hoped to collect would be but a tiny part of vast consignments of partial and intact life forms that were shipped to London, Paris, Berlin, and Amsterdam, where they were classified, drawn, waxed, set in microscopic slides, and even, on occasion, cast in glass, to create a vast comparative compendium of biological variation on earth. Passion for collecting spread far beyond these strict scientific circles, and efforts to own an exotic skull compelled would-be collectors to finger the object of their desire, even before its owner was dead. Around the turn of the century, a customs clerk in the Northern Territory of Australia kept a watchful eye on one Flash Poll, an old Aboriginal woman whose skull he longed to own. More successful collectors included a retired Cape Town policeman who, in 1960, was moved to donate to science one of his domestic ornaments. It was a pentagonal Bushman skull which had stood on his mantelpiece for many years, wired up to a red light bulb that cast a warm and, at the same time, scary glow, through the eye sockets and dental interstices (Searcy 1907:57-8).<sup>4</sup>

Skulls such as those Riou hoped to collect have since become *causes célèbres* in the late-twentieth-century

efforts to re-enfranchise the dispossessed peoples of the old colonial world. Aboriginal Tasmanians are a case in point, and a particularly poignant one at that. More than 30 000 years ago, when sea levels were lower than they are today and Tasmania was joined to Australia by a land bridge, their ancestors were part of the larger, continental population. Then, when the post-glacial sea rose to form Bass Strait, they were isolated for 12 000 years, until the turn of the seventeenth century, when they were put on the Western map, by the mariners of the Dutch East India Company. Idealised by the French, they were then invaded by the British and, by the turn of the nineteenth century, Tasmania was deemed the perfect place to hold the most recalcitrant British convicts.

The shock of contact reverberated in bullets, brutality, and disease, as the Royal Navy debouched its unsavoury load into the Aboriginal land. Sterility and death followed fast as reproductive tubes and lungs were strangled with foreign pathogens. Half-crazed European prisoners escaped from the fortresses that were built to protect and contain them, and plunged barbarically into the world of so-called savages. It took around 75 years for the British authorities to declare the Aboriginal Tasmanian extinct. The announcement was premature, if not downright inaccurate. Through no good intent on the part of the invaders, intermarriage, concubinage, slavery, and rape served to preserve Aboriginal genes, and helped to promote, in more enlightened times, a rapid burgeoning of cultural consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Today, descendants of the Aboriginal people demand reparations and, among other things, this involves the repatriation of their ancestral relics. An unpleasant skeleton in the cupboard this one: from first arrival of Europeans, human remains were shipped whole or piecemeal to the museums of Britain for scientific study. In 1869, when the supposedly last Tasmanian man on the mainland, William Lanne, died, competing head-hunters battled for his corpse on behalf of the Royal College of Surgeons in London and the Royal Society of Tasmania. The surgeons struck first. Their agent beheaded Lanne, and replaced the missing skull with that of a white man. Tasmanian scientists retaliated by snatching the hands and feet before burial: later they disinterred the coffin to get the rest.

William Lanne's wife, Trucanini, responding to these matters with appropriate horror, implored the Revd Atkinson to bury her remains intact in the deepest sea. Trucanini had good reason to fear her fate. As a young woman she helped the British Conciliator, George Augustus Robinson, to round up her people and relocate them in a series of squalid settlements. Although this was seemingly done for the protection of indigenous people, enforced containment provided a richer medium for fatal diseases than any of the groups, left

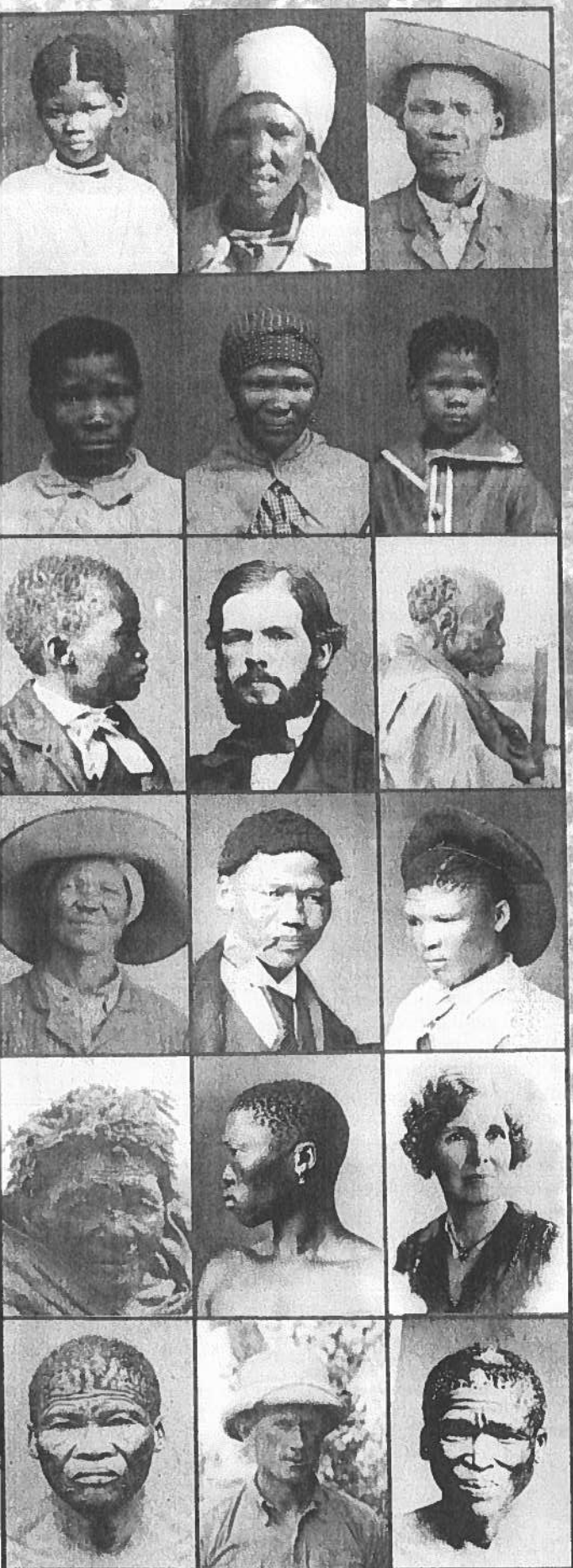
to their own devices, might have found. Under the control of their benevolent conquerors, Tasmanians began to sicken and die with alarming speed.<sup>6</sup>

Trucanini's role in this precipitous decline did not escape the notice of her fellows. Having been instrumental in leading the Conciliator to remote tribes, to say nothing of sharing Robinson's blanket out in the bush, she must, willy-nilly, have shared his intent to concentrate people in houses and watch them die. Or so they figured. One imagines that they might also have wondered if she shared his taste for human relics. For around 1837, when the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Flinders Island settlement began dying in earnest, Robinson hit his stride as a collector. His early diaries show that he was always something of a collector, accumulating, as he did, the Aboriginal vocabularies and legends, but as the pace of mortality quickened, Robinson turned to the bones of the very people themselves. He started with the adult mandibles and childrens' skulls used as amulets against illness and pain, and graduated to skulls of newly-deceased folk. This required a little more effort than amulets, for the bodies had to be decapitated and the skulls defleshed by cooking them down. Robinson, who professed indifference to his own "earthly tabernacle", took a great interest in watching the post-mortems that mutilated those of his former charges, and even acted as an agent, dispatching two of them off to the Governor of Tasmania, Sir John Franklin, and his wife.<sup>7</sup>

Although these actions paint him in a macabre light, Robinson was perfectly in line with the popular, educated thinking of his time. Some scholars go further, and see him as a pioneer for Aboriginal rights, who advocated that the native people be allowed to treat with their colonisers. One paints him as a working-class hero, struggling in vain, in a sea of British prejudice, to convince his superiors that his Aboriginal charges were civilised enough to be moved from their Tasmanian death camps to more salubrious quarters on the mainland. But whatever efforts Robinson may have made on their behalf, no official move was made to mitigate the trajectory of death. Trucanini felt the cold wind of peer disapproval, with each successive passing. She feared that she was cursed to witness the death of every one of her people. Her dread was fully justified. She outlived all others to assume the epithet 'The Last Tasmanian' when she died in 1876. Her body was not buried at sea as she had wished, nor did it remain intact in the normal sense of the word. Instead, her bones were exhumed and packed off to the Launceston Museum, where some Victorian curator threaded them into position and hung them out to rattle in the foyer.<sup>8</sup>

After he died, Robinson's ethnographic collection was shipped to Britain and sold for a song. Fruits of labours such as his could be seen in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, where rows of





Tasmanian skulls stood grinning on display. Scientists viewing them as strangely atavistic speculated as to the origins of these folk. Some thought they were a palaeolithic race, others wondered whether they had come from Melanesia or the Andaman islands. Idle speculation was cut short by the Second World War, when Nazi bombers inadvertently replicated a Tasmanian Aboriginal traditional practice—in fact, if not in intent—by incinerating the college and cremating all the skulls. As for Trucanini, it remains a mystery whether her purported skeleton was truly hers. Some speculated that it came from a taller person. By 1976, however, Tasmania was caught up in the reparations of the Aboriginal Land Rights movement, and Trucanini's remains, genuine or spurious, were cremated in a state funeral. Her ashes were scattered at sea, according to her wishes.<sup>9</sup>

But enough of this sorry tale and back to our original would-be head-hunter. A water-colour shows Riou with a strong nose, thin upper lip, and large, dark eyes framed by perfectly curved brows, gazing into the distance with a certain sadness. At the time he penned his excited letter to Banks, Edward Riou was 26 years old and had been in the navy since he was 12. A web of contacts with explorers like James Cook, Joseph Banks, and William Bligh, bound him deep into the colonial enterprise. He first visited the Cape in 1776, on Cook's third and fatal voyage, as midshipman on the *Discovery*. After Cook was killed in Hawaii, Riou transferred to the flagship *Resolution*, where he served under Captain Clerke and the master, William Bligh. It was Bligh who, ten years later, at the behest of Royal Society president Sir Joseph Banks, set out to transport breadfruit from Tahiti to the West Indies, where their fruits would provide a cheap diet for slaves working on sugar plantations. His ship, the infamous HMS *Bounty*, called in at the Cape in 1788 and sailed thence to Tahiti and into one of the most dramatic incidents in naval history. Men mutinied and cast him adrift without a log or compass. It would have done in a lesser man, but Bligh was made of sterner stuff. He directed the castaways to row, and they sailed 5800 kilometres to Timor in the East Indies.

History having a way of repeating itself, Bligh endured a second mutiny before he eventually reached Batavia. Here he became a mere passenger on the Dutch packet *Vlydt*, and trans-shipped home, touching at the Cape five days after Riou posted his letter to Banks and set sail for Australia.<sup>10</sup>

So much for historical congruences and back to our hero at the Cape. Riou loaded his supplies, and 20 convicts that he had transported from Britain, and headed south to the Roaring Forties for a fast ride on the westerlies to Australia. He was in a hurry. The fledgeling colony was starving. Aborigines stood on the edge of this newly settled continent, watching with

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mounting fear as birds of the sea sailed in from the Land of the Dead to disgorge their white, bloodless cargo. Things were edgy, what with the convicts, their keepers, and the vigilant watchers from the scrub. Clearly, Riou had no time to waste. He sailed into the cold, southern ocean, confident of a clear summer passage, only to strike an errant iceberg on Christmas Eve. Dispatching the crew to other boats, he held an erratic course for land. Six weeks later, everyone was safely back at the Cape and Riou found himself swapping yarns with the crew of the *Bounty*, en route to courts martial in England, and arranging pardons for his shipment of convicts, who had helped save the *Guardian* from sinking. Presumably, he found time, too, to renew his acquaintance with Colonel Gordon, commander of the Cape garrison, who, you will recall, was the would-be head-hunter to Captain Riou and his patron, Sir Joseph Banks. Riou managed to salvage some of the supplies and send them on to Australia, but the *Guardian* herself was destroyed in a storm in Table Bay. Her captain sailed home to a mandatory court martial for the loss of his ship. Like Captain Bligh the previous year, Riou was honourably acquitted of this loss, and promoted to commander and post-captain.

Colonel Gordon blew his brains out when his garrison surrendered to the British in 1795. His widow left his papers in Riou's care.<sup>11</sup>

Riou died enmeshed in the networks in which he had lived, at the battle of Copenhagen in 1801, fighting under Nelson, and alongside Bligh. Horatio Nelson put it this way: "In poor dear Riou the country has sustained an irreparable loss" (Ffolliott 1981:504).

And the heads? The heads were never delivered. They seem to have been lost in the rush. They are, in short, gone, setting us free to leave Riou and to turn to one of his many associates, the great British explorer Captain James Cook.

Among Captain Cook's interests (and truly there were many), was one he called the 'great question'. In 1770, Cook reached Australia in the course of his epic first voyage. Artists and naturalists charted these travels with great care, documenting every twist in a leaf, every kink in the hair of exotic natives. Cook mapped the east coast of Australia and, noticing a mouse-coloured animal that looked like a greyhound, except that it leaped in the air like a hare, and moved like a jerboa but was as big as a sheep, with the footprint of a goat—named it for its native appellation, 'kangaroo'. This didn't make as much difference to the marsupials, as his naming of the land '*Terra nullius*' did to the Aboriginal folk, who, by virtue of that announcement, were effectively dispossessed, by being declared mere occupants of land that no one owned. The rationalisation behind this declaration was that, having no apparent kings, borders, and countries, Australian aborigines had not yet evolved the necessary level of social

organisation to entitle them to the land. This was the charter for centuries of oppression, unbroken by treaties or restitution, whose legal rule ended only recently, with a 1992 landmark judgment, recognising native title to the land.<sup>12</sup>

Cook's classical allusions continued when he stopped, en route home, to water at Cape Town in March of 1771. Writing in his log, he noted that he would use this occasion to explore "the great question among natural historians, whether the women of this country have or have not that fleshy flap or apron which has been called the *Sinus pudoris*" (Cook 1846:327).

The 'great question' to which Cook was referring, concerned a reported peculiarity of Khoikhoi women, namely, their elongated labia, also called '*tablier*' and '*curtain of shame*'. It had been observed in the very earliest discourses on the Cape, and its functions and implications were a source of intense speculation for many people, from the great Linnaeus who classified all manner of life according to a multitude of peculiarities, to Colonel Gordon who examined at least two women with as much dispassion as the occasions allowed, to the famous philosopher Diderot, with whom Gordon later discussed his hands-on observations, right down to the lowliest sailor, who chatted or boasted about it with anyone who would listen. It was, in short, a great question, and the curiosity it engenders is active enough even today to generate discussion in anthropology, natural history, theatre, and even a chic volume on stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness.<sup>13</sup>

An actual sample of the object is housed today in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Although this is a public institution, not all curiosities are publicly displayed. Some are banished to dusty shelves in the ethnographic section, to be shown only with great reluctance to those petitioners who ask for them by name. I was reluctant to demand outright, because I was not certain whether the word I knew for female genitalia was acceptable, or even recognisable, in scientific circles. Instead, I asked to see the dissection of Paul Broca's brain that is reputed to sit on the shelf just below (Gould 1982:24).

The guide looked surprised.

"Wait a minute."

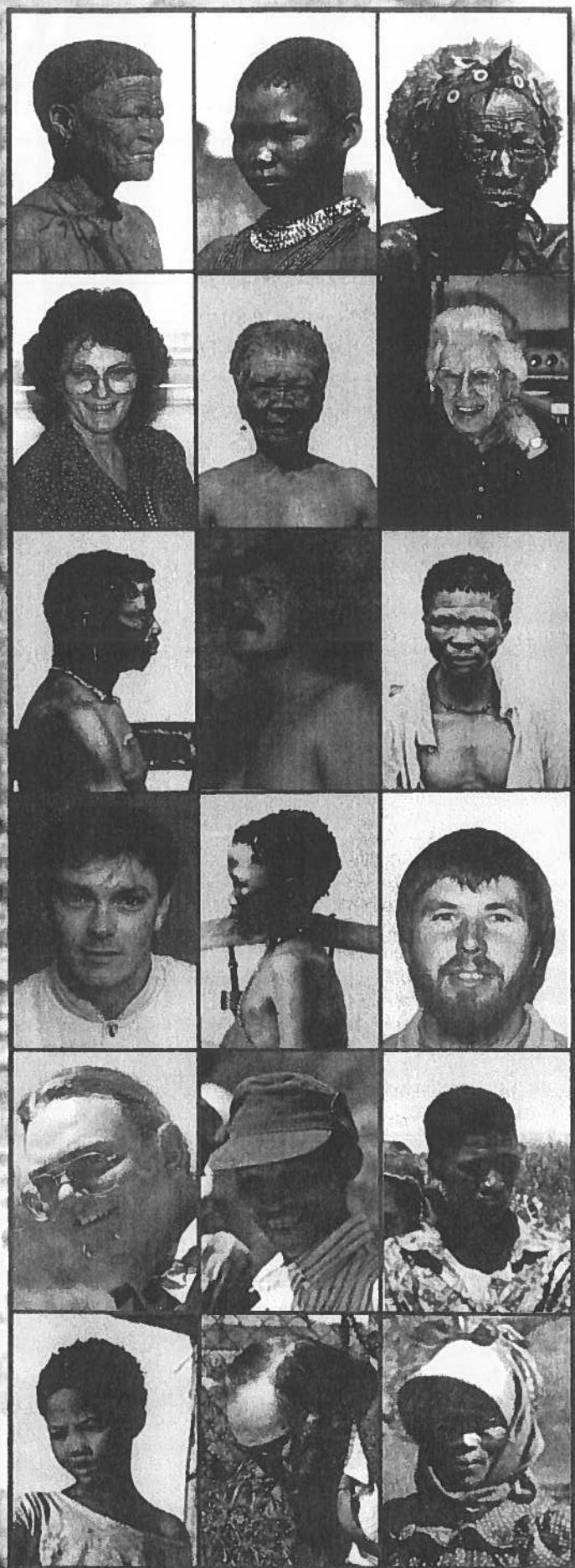
He walked away. Far down a dim corridor I noticed him gesticulating to another official. He returned, smiling gently.

"We are sorry, but we dropped Broca's brain last week."

He did not look sorry at all.

I pondered my next move, and then, remembering what the label on the genitalia read, I asked to see the '*Hottentot Venus*'. A harried curator eventually appeared. She click-clacked down the corridors between the shelves and pointed into the gloom.

"There! See for yourself."



A plaster cast of a small woman, naked, with a very large rump, gazed sightlessly back. This was not what I was after.

I drew a deep breath and asked straight out.

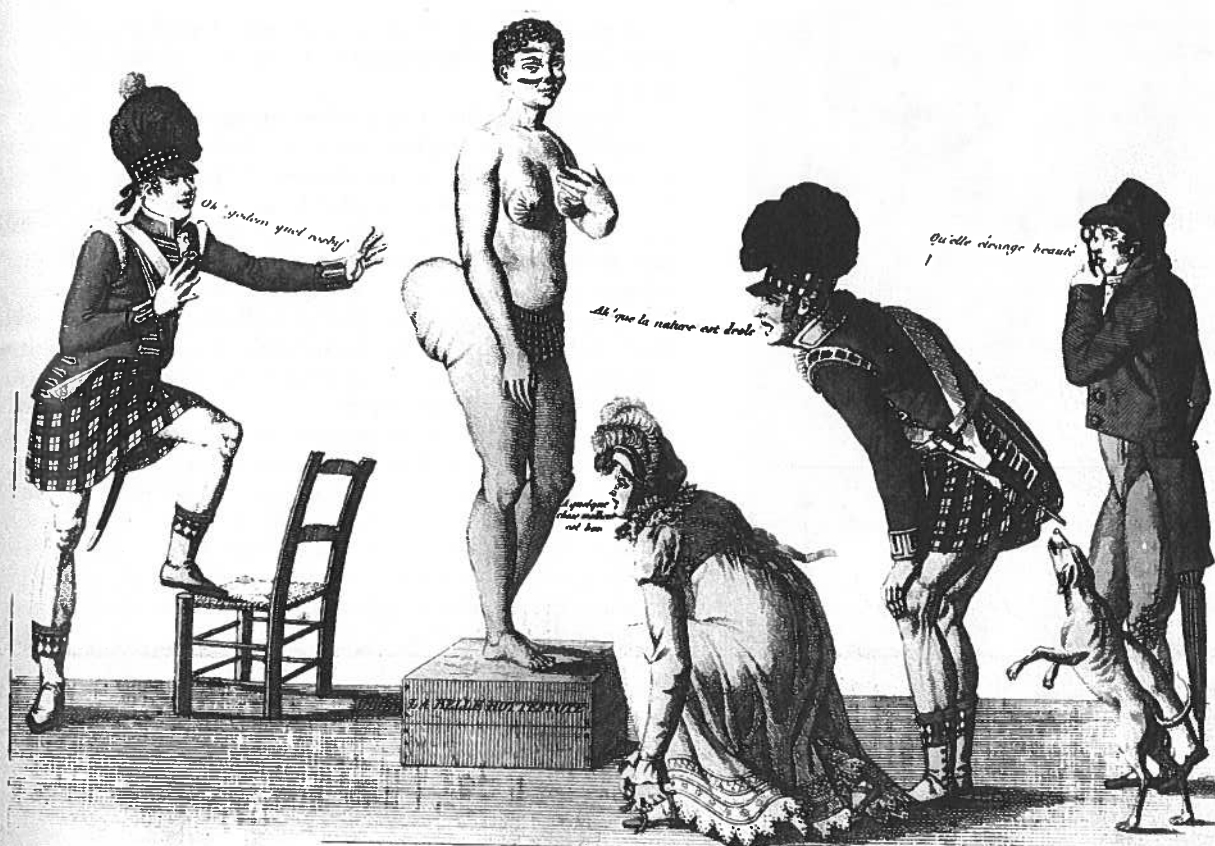
She whirled on her heel and took off down a dim passage between the storage shelves. We passed a set of bell-jars containing, among other things, the severed heads of a Chinese pirate and a felon from New Caledonia. Eyes filmed with formaldehyde peered through the cloudy wash. A flattened nose, whitened at the tip, pressed against the glass. Fine hairs floated over the hack marks on the nape of the pirate's neck.

My guide shot me a look compounded of impatience and fear. The morning's papers had told of crowds of disaffected natives milling in the streets. They came from the last of the French possessions in the South Seas to demand the restoration of their dignity and political rights. One small aspect of their discontent involved repatriation of their relics. I was quite certain they had never seen these particular examples and, watching the expression on my guide's face, was equally certain they would never do so.

I followed her anxious prompting and turned my gaze to another shelf.

The Hottentot genitalia were not immediately recognisable as such. The specimen resembled a marine creature, an exsanguinated polyp, drifting in a pale, topaz sea. It carried no personal title other than "Hottentot Venus", but, given her fame, that was more than enough. It came from a Khoikhoi woman of the Cape of Good Hope. Her name, or rather, her Dutch name, was Saartje Baartman, and she must have been a child when Riou wrote his excited letter of 1789, because 20 years later, in the full flush of womanhood, she travelled to Europe for purposes of exhibition, scientific study, and personal gain. Her chief, and most obvious asset, was her large, steatopygous, buttocks. Her hidden asset, was her genitalia, which were assumed to include uncommonly long labia, dangling down to form what scientists called the 'Hottentot apron' or *tablier*. Saartje was exhibited at Piccadilly in a cage, which prompted abolitionists of the African Institution to raise the matter of her freedom in the popular press. Under legal interrogation, Saartje explained the situation as she saw it. She had come to England of her own free will and was now the nurse, not the property, of her exhibitor. She garnered half the profits of the venture, which were sufficient, at any rate, to allow her to employ two servants of her own. True, she acted the role of a wild creature and she danced when her keeper held up a stick but, at the same time, this was all part of her show. Today, almost two centuries later, if one is so inclined, a visit to Times Square in New York City still affords views of working women offering their words and wares in cages or booths. It is still all part of a working girl's life on the





*Les Curieux en artase  
ou les Cordons de souliers.*

*chez Mouton Libraire rue du Cög N° 15. et chez Charon rue St Jean de Beauvais N° 26.*

Figure 1 The Hottentot Venus poses like her counterpart in Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (c.1484–6) on a plinth inscribed "La Belle Venus", as viewers voice admiration and astonishment, and a dog inspects a kilted man with ill-disguised curiosity. MA572.0 55/543

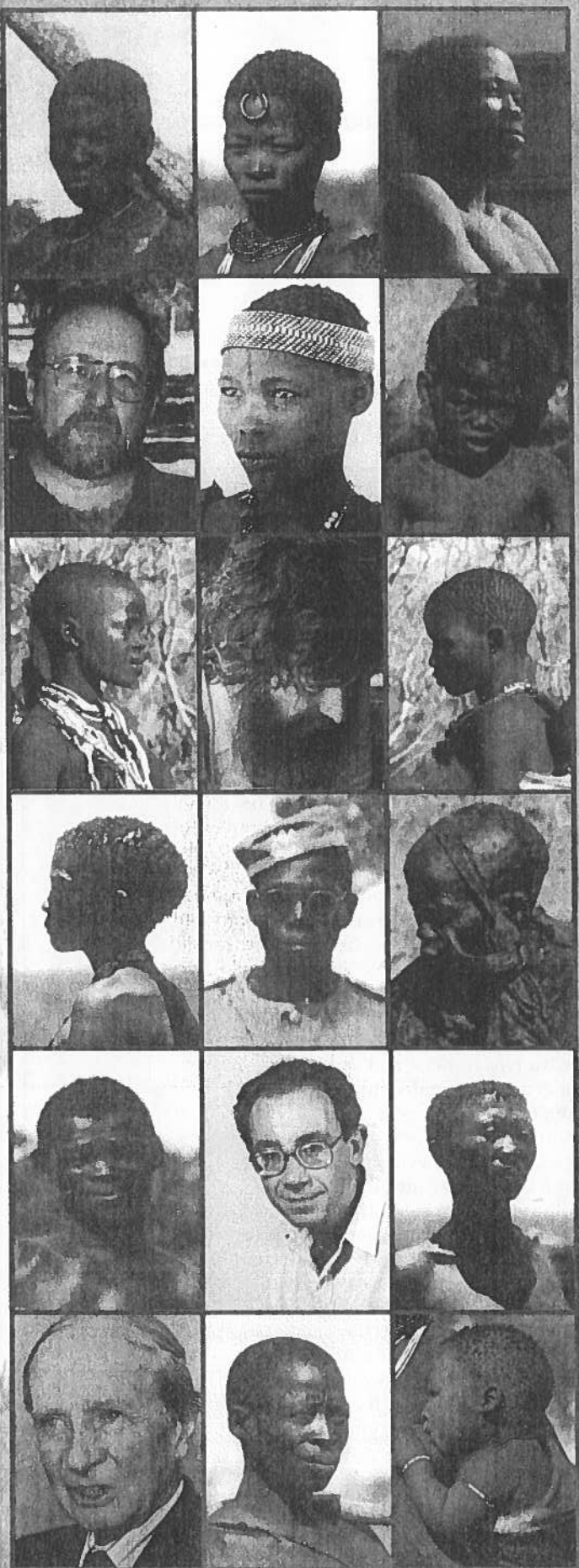
potential road to becoming a showgirl, perhaps even a star, and, for some, a more varied and amusing way to pay the bills than spending all day behind a more conventional counter.

Where Saartje was concerned, it is likely that the pleasures of life in London far outstripped the alternative, cooking and cleaning in the Master's house at the Cape, washing the Madam's feet, squatting on the stone floor next to the smoking hearth, keeping an eye on the heavy pots of rice, fish, and mutton stew, with only an occasional *dop* of wine on the Sabbath to sweeten the week's servitude. For all their legendary beauty, she surely saw more diverting sights than the Cape mountains and seas as she travelled from England to France, there to pose in Paris for science, as well as for the general public. But chilly Europe was not the sultry Cape, and in due course, she took ill and died. Georges Cuvier's table became her last pallet on this earth, and his dissection of her genitals was a landmark event in

centuries of speculative lasciviousness that characterised the European encounter with certain native people.<sup>14</sup>

The fascination of the *tablier*, or apron, was possibly preceded and certainly rivalled by the belief that Khoikhoi men were monorchids, with only one testicle. Controversy bubbled over the meaning of this. Some said that having but one ball helped men run faster, a plausible conclusion if the owner failed to run away fast enough to save the first. Others thought excision was practised to cool the ardour but this seems less plausible, given that Khoikhoi women's attenuated sexual organs were said to denote unbridled lust. Still others suggested that it was done as a method of birth control, or, conversely, to help beget sons, and the learned Grevenbroek, in a veritable cascade of misplaced logic, linked circumcision and testicular evulsion to conclude that the Hottentots had learned this (and many of their other rites) from the Jews. James Cook visited the Cape in 1771 and denied categorically that semi-castration





was a general thing, but noted, nevertheless, that those who had endured the operation were said to be the finest warriors and particularly skilled in throwing stones. Linnaeus, who classified Hottentots as *Homo Monstrosus Monorchides*, placed them on a side branch of human evolution. Georges Cuvier demurred. Knowing Saartje personally, he probably felt bound to equivocate. On the one hand, she had a certain charm. He noted that she was gay, she had a good memory for faces, and she spoke Dutch, a little English, and a smattering of French. She danced, she liked music, pretty baubles, and brandy. On the other hand, her quickness reminded one of a monkey and she had the disconcerting habit of pushing out her lips like an orang-utan. If this were not enough, there was her huge backside and strange genitals. They could not be allowed to pass unnoted, so that although Cuvier saw her as fully human in most respects, some deep sense of her evolutionary position triumphed over his empirical observation. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in his comments on her face. The illustration (Figure 1), shows a sweet visage, a woman, with a lush, curved mouth, and wide-set eyes, yet the opposite page declares: "The most disgusting part of this woman was her face, which displayed the characters of both the negro and of the Mongole countenance in its different features." In the end, therefore, whatever he might have known of Saartje herself, Cuvier spun a web between geography, skin colour, and sexuality, to create a trope of human behaviour and, by inference, human evolution, where the dark vengery of southern people like Saartje yielded eventually to the pale constraints of northern ones.<sup>15</sup>

The point is that, despite all that he knew of her accomplishments, Cuvier could not entirely shake off the animalistic implications of Saartje's nether regions. He was, after all, descended intellectually, if not directly, from a long line of European observers, all of whom itched to examine the Khoikhoi sex, partly to see whether it was fully human, and partly for its own sake.

Centuries of travel ethnographies are full of it: it was the thing to see. Sometimes men paid to look, sometimes they saw it for free, but each entry has its special moment. First, the sailor Wouter Schouten at the Cape in 1665:

They are avid, both men and women, for old iron, copper, tin, beads, and glass rings, but above all for tobacco, for which the women will even willingly let their privy parts . . . be seen by our coarse seamen who dare to demand such of them. Truly these sailors show by this that they are even more lewd and beastly than these wild Hottentots. (Raven-Hart 1971:85)

Next, David Tappen, an old dog of 80 years, who called in at the Cape with his teenaged wife in 1682:



LOVE AND BEAUTY -- SARTJEE the HOTTENTOT VENUS

Figure 2 Love and Beauty vie for the attention as Cupid poses enticingly on the famous rump of the Hottentot Venus. (Artist unknown, published October 1810 by Christopher Cruppien Rumford) AM 55/541

A Dutch woman of our ship had heard that the Hottentot women had over their privities a piece of flesh hanging such as turkeys have in front of the head, and that this covered the vulva. She wished to examine a Hottentot woman, but this was quicker, and lifted the Dutch woman's skirt up to her navel ... the woman ... perceived us and went off, but the Hottentot woman laughed. (Raven-Hart 1971:240)

Tappen decided to see for himself:

I had often heard that if one said to them *Kutykum*, they at once lifted the sheepskin and showed their little under-parts. It happened early one morning that a Hottentot woman came in front of my lodging, to whom I said *Kutykum*; she stretched out her hand and said *Tabackum*, at which I went and got a scrap of tobacco, and came back and gave it to her. When she had it in her hand she asked *Kutykum*? I replied Yes, and therewith she raised her sheepskin

high up and let me have a good look, and then laughed and went off. (Raven-Hart 1971:238)

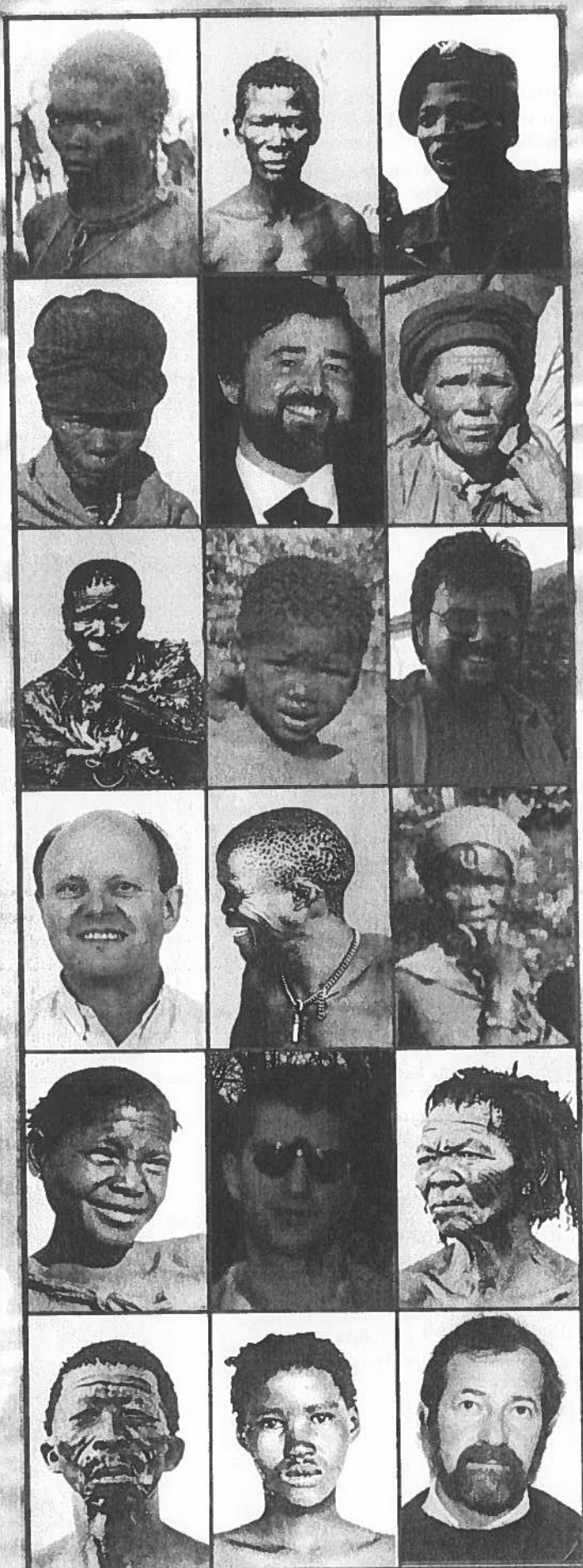
Notice how the Khoikhoi laughed. It contrasted with the serious mien of travellers and scholars who stayed locked in debate of this great question. The famous, if flawed, biological statistician Francis Galton, who coined the term 'eugenics', had something to contribute here too. Following the family tradition of his cousin Charles Darwin, he travelled to remote corners of the world, recording his impressions of strangers that would later be integrated into a broader view of humanity as a whole. In 1850 he visited what is now Namibia. There he met a "Venus among Hottentots", possessed of "that gift of a bounteous nature to this favoured race, which no mantua-maker, with all her crinoline and stuffing, can do otherwise than humbly imitate" (Galton 1890:53). Galton wanted to trace her shape but was unable to speak her language or to ask the missionary's wife for assistance. The solution, when it appeared, constituted such a triumph of ingenuity over Victorian reticence as to justify quoting in full:

The object of my admiration stood under a tree, and was turning herself about to all points of the compass, as ladies who wish to be admired usually do. Of a sudden my eye fell upon my sextant; the bright thought struck me, and I took a series of observations upon her figure in every direction, up and down, crossways, diagonally, and so forth, and I registered them carefully upon an outline drawing for fear of any mistake; this being done, I boldly pulled out my measuring-tape, and measured the distance from where I was to the place she stood, and having thus obtained both base and angles, I worked out the results by trigonometry and logarithms. (Galton 1890:54)<sup>16</sup>

Scientists taking a long, empirical look at these strange features concluded that the Khoikhoi men were always born with two testicles and probably never evulsed them at all. They noted, too, that steatopygia and elongated labia appear at puberty, with no artificial inducement. As for the function of steatopygia, Singer examined the evidence for its onset after puberty, its contribution in controlling heat loss in pregnancy, its failure to disappear with menopause, and its relationship to lumbar lordosis, and concluded that we have no idea why it exists! Clearly, since sexual selection has certainly not ruled against its survival, those who have it, like it (Singer 1978:120-4).

But, whatever the scientists may say, people reading between the lines of strange encounters with these nether parts all realised that Khoikhoi women laughed when they raised their skirts. Showing their genitals was the rudest insult the natives knew, and the failure





of strangers to understand this point rendered them all the more strange (Gordon 1992b:193).

Nor were the Khoikhoi alone in their view of invaders. On the other side of the world, Pacific islanders also regarded white and bloodless strangers as something other than fully human. In 1778, Captain James Cook returned on his third voyage to Hawaii and anchored in Kealahou Bay. After a long and lively visit, he finally departed, only to make an unscheduled return ten days later for repairs to the foremast. In contrast to the earlier joyful greeting, his reappearance drew a strange hostility, marked by thefts and aggression. Tensions mounted. As Cook hastened to set sail, a confrontation developed on the beach. He managed to loose a shot at one offender but was overwhelmed by a deadly onslaught. Cook fell beneath a welter of stabbing and battering so deadly that his men could only mourn from the safe distance of their ship. The following evening parts of Cook's cooked and defleshed bones were formally returned to his men.<sup>17</sup>

Cook's passing struck deep into European visions of the noble savage. The scene was later painted by John Webber, the artist on board at the time, and also by Johan Zoffany, who had narrowly missed sailing as artist on Cook's second voyage. These powerful images of death drew heavily on Benjamin West's *Death of Captain Wolfe*, in its mingling of heroic pain and noble loss. Webber shows Cook an instant before the *coup de grâce*, his right hand outstretched as though to restrain his men from retaliation. Zoffany achieved a similar message, with all the figures struck in classical poses, the Hawaiian headgear echoing Greek helmets, as the tragedy echoes Greek proportions. Pantomimes and plays ran in London, Dublin, and Paris, with the stranger and native locked into webs of misunderstanding from which Cook emerged as the tragic hero.<sup>18</sup>

Numerous scholars have tried to reconstruct the death of Captain Cook, searching to reveal how the worlds of the native and the stranger converged, overlapped, and finally exploded in daggers and gunfire. Sahlins argues that Cook segued into the Hawaiian domain as the unwitting reincarnation of the ancient god Lono. The Hawaiian perception of this millenarian miracle was heightened and confirmed by the way the track of the *Resolution* re-enacted Lono's procession through his realm, and by the manner in which Cook's crew distributed and shared their cargo. Unaware of his role, Cook might well have survived had it not been for the intrinsic hazards of navigation that forced him to return. This broke the appointed and mandatory cycle of godly behaviour, and threatened the life of the king. Cook's demand that the king be held hostage to the return of a stolen boat was therefore taken as an ominous challenge by the god to

the king. It was answered by a lesser chief, rightly possessed of a valuable iron dagger, who struck the first blow, not to kill, but to stay the god temporarily by setting him on the intended track that would bring him back to the island, at the correct time, the following year. In other words, this was not murder, manslaughter, or self-defence but, rather, the Polynesian way of setting things back on track.<sup>19</sup>

A counter-argument by Obeyesekere suggests that the myth of Cook as god emanated not from the Hawaiians, but from the British themselves. Cook was worn out and, far from being the benevolent leader he has been construed to have been, had become increasingly violent and autocratic towards all. By the time he returned to Hawaii, he had had occasion to flog almost half his crew, to cut their supply of grog, and limit their shore leaves. His summary treatment of the natives was therefore so much on a par with that of his own men, that he was lucky not to have been murdered long before the final encounter on the beach. This reinterpretation of native testimony, emanating as it does from the pen of a self-confessed native Sri Lankan, has prompted a brilliant, if excoriating, response from Sahlins, who sees it as an ironic combination of "a dubious anthropology and a fashionable morality . . . that . . . deprives the Hawaiians of their own voice" (Sahlins 1995:5).<sup>20</sup>

Debates such as this are central to the disciplines of anthropology, history, and their 'bastard child', ethno-history, because they address the thoughts and views of the otherwise silent 'Other'. The Talmudic attentiveness with which scholars like Sahlins and Denning dissect the native words in a sailor's log, furnishes the evidence for their case. The Cook debate will engage many scholars for many years but, for now, let us examine but one small detail that links Khoisan bodies and Polynesian minds. It concerns a Polynesian belief about eyes: the divine, creative power of chiefs is evident in their brilliance and their shining, which, in turn, is derived from the sun. Consequently, a distinguishing feature of gods, strangers, chiefs and sharks is their sparkling eyes, as opposed to commoners, whose folly in gazing upon a chief would render them 'burnt eyes', liable to have their eyes eaten in the course of sacrifice. Cook was said to have sparkling eyes, as were three other British victims, who were massacred 14 years later on the beach at Waimea, in Oahu. Only a few days before he was sacrificed, the young astronomer William Gooch wrote listlessly of sharks circling his boat. Gooch failed to recognise his commonality with the fish and he died for that ignorance, not because the Hawaiians were savage and the British lacking in savvy, but because Gooch was unversed in Pacific beliefs. With hindsight, then, Gooch, like Cook, might

be said to have died for a somatic feature he never knew he had, but which his murderers recognised in him only too well.<sup>21</sup>

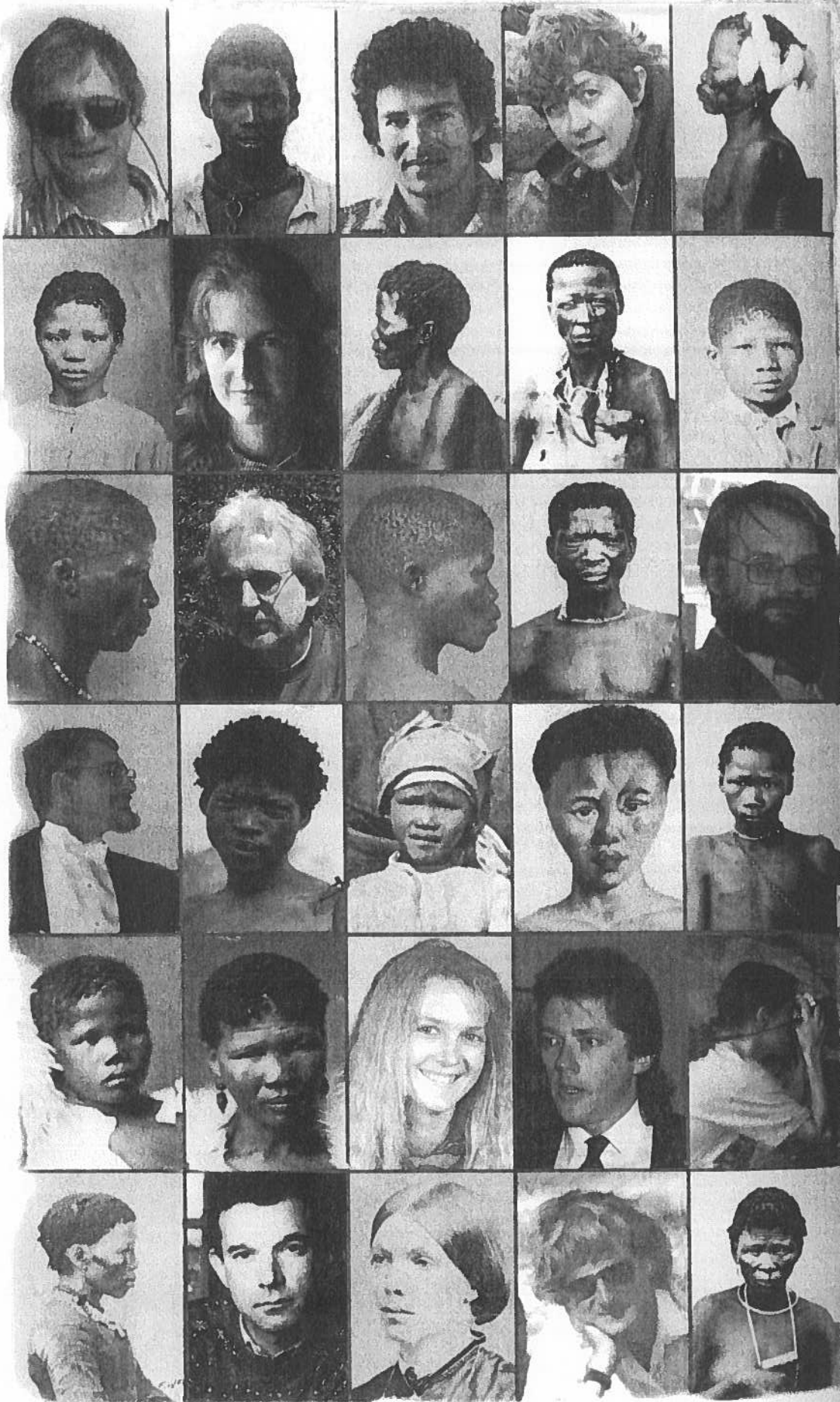
It is of little anthropological consequence to note that sharks have flat, dead eyes, whereas Europeans have regular human eyes, because, in the eye of the Polynesian beholder, both Gooch and Cook were invested with a dangerous commonality. Likewise, there was nothing in the hindquarters of the Cape Khoikhoi that was in any way remarkable among their own people at the Cape of Good Hope, until a new eye turned their way. Then, the size of their backsides, the length of their labia, and the number of their testicles became an issue. The supposed somatic oddness of the Khoisan people still pushes them to animality, so that even though they did not all display the same distinctions (indeed, none of them was born a monorchid), they could all be scientifically marginalised and socially ridiculed as if they did.

In the South African Museum in Cape Town is a series of photographs, mostly taken in the northern Cape, and filed generically as 'Bushman: genitalia'. It includes a few standard shots of naked women that show the thing quite blandly, as elongated labia, hanging down like tubes. Alongside these clinical examples is a sepia-coloured shot of a woman, partially clad in Western dress, with one foot resting on a chair. Her expression is bold, almost stern, its reproachfulness lending an air of eroticism to the purportedly scientific venture at hand. The inclusion of this picture in a scientific line-up is strangely shocking, and it provides a new focus for a series of intimate close-ups of some perfectly normal female genitalia. These were shot in the 1920s when close-ups required a greater proximity to the subject than is demanded these days by your average telescopic lens. Given that the photographer was a man, the bets are that he was also 'white'. This was no Francis Galton with a sextant, but a white man squatting with a camera between a Khoikhoi woman's legs. However 'scientifically engaged' he might have wanted to be, the photographer must have realised that there was an element of prurience in what he was doing.<sup>22</sup>

What we might be seeing here, is a mixture of legitimate anthropology and covert pornography. The combination is perhaps not as dissonant as it sounds. For power is more than wealth, more than goods and profits. In the end, it is physical control, control of breeding stock, of genes and the definition of who is whom in a competitive world. Implicit in these strange close-ups in the South African Museum files, is a mix of power, domination and sexuality that has marked the colonial venture from its sixteenth-century roots until the present day.

How Saartje would have laughed!





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Afterwards this tape is rewound back to the beginning, and inserted into recorder A, ready for play back. This recorder must be connected by cable to the input jack of recorder B, so that it will feed the bottom right-hand track. The microphone is connected to the jack on recorder B, so as to feed the top left-hand track. A clean tape is placed in recorder B.

The next stage involves the recording of individual performers (P1, P2, P3, P4 etc.). Each wears a set of headphones, so that all of them can monitor the TUTTI recording, and the playing procedures of each performer. Performer 1 listens to the TUTTI recording through his/her headphones, and performs his/her part in time with it, the performance being recorded through the microphone on the top track of recorder B, while the TUTTI recording is copied from recorder A onto the bottom track. At this point the researcher has made the TUTTI recording and this same recording on the bottom track, while Performer 1's part exists alone on the top track.

A similar procedure is followed for performer 2. The tape just recorded on recorder B is rewound and inserted into recorder A (the TUTTI tape being set aside) and a clean tape is inserted into recorder B. Thereafter performer 2 executes his/her part. S/he will hear performer 1's part through the headphones. Recorder B will record performer 2's part on the top track, and the synchronous recording of performer 1's part will be copied from recorder A onto the bottom track. This procedure will provide synchronised, but separately recorded individual parts of performers 1 and 2. The researcher can now choose to hear a playback of either performer 1 alone (on the bottom, right-hand track), or performer 2 alone (on the top, left-hand track), or even both of the players together.

The third performer can opt to play with reference to either P1 or P2 (with recorder A playing both tracks simultaneously), or to the TUTTI recording, which can be placed on recorder A. Whatever his/her choice, the new recording will have Performer 3 alone on the top track, and his chosen reference music on the bottom track. As Arom rightly asserts, without this method of recording, the analysis of Central African polyphony and polyrhythm, which is the focus of his book (1991) would not have been possible. The advantage of this recording method is that it can be applied in different ways to suit a particular type and style of music. In much more diversified polyphonic music with fixed pitches, for example, music incurring xylophones, lamellophones and harps, an individual player will play two parts together simultaneously (using left and right hands), so the technical procedures—and the musical analysis—are more complicated. By extending the basic method described above, and by developing it, Arom has invented a method for recording virtually any kind of multipart polyphonic music. (cf. Arom 1991:109–11).

Bushman vocal polyphony, often supported by polyrhythmic handclapping, should be subjected to this method of recording, so that the researcher be able to arrive at a transcription in which all the constituent elements of the musical entity, produced by individual performers with reference to one another's individual patterns, and to the total musical result (TUTTI recording), are described.

#### "The ideas generally entertained with regard to the Bushmen and their mental condition"

J. David Lewis-Williams

#### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to colleagues who commented helpfully on drafts of this article: Geoff Blundell, Anne Holliday, Simon Hall and Rory McLean. The manuscript was kindly typed by Denise and Wendy Voorvelt and Anne Holliday. The Rock Art Research Unit is funded by the Centre for Science Development and the University of the Witwatersrand. Neither institution is responsible for the ideas herein expressed.

#### Prisoners of their Reputation? The Veterans of the 'Bushman' Battalions in South Africa

John Sharp and Stuart Douglas

#### Notes

1. The erstwhile National Party government approved plans for a housing scheme at Schmidtsdrift in 1991. However, these plans were never realised as a result of uncertainty about imminent political changes.
2. The ownership of Schmidtsdrift base has been under contention since 1990, when the Tswana-speaking Thaping clan began to demand restitution on the basis of ancestral rights of occupancy. Members of this clan were forcibly evicted from Schmidtsdrift in 1968 as part of apartheid 'black spot' clearances. Thaping leaders lodged a claim for the return of Schmidtsdrift in 1992, and despite their success in this regard, they have, as yet, been unable to reoccupy the entire Schmidtsdrift base.
3. The !Xu and Khwe Trust was formed at the request of the South African army, with the express purpose of assuming the responsibilities previously carried out by the military.
4. See footnote 3.
5. Pressure from the ANC resulted in the Schmidtsdrift 'Bushman' battalion (31 South African Infantry Battalion) and 32 Battalion at Pomfret being disbanded. The ANC associated the 'Bushman' battalion with South African mercenary activities in Angola (in support of UNITA), and with the largely Angolan-constituted 32 Battalion's horrific activities in Phola Park (The Star 27 January 1993).
6. The Angolans who served in the SADF during the Namibian liberation war were, technically speaking, mercenaries fighting in a colonial war. Moreover, they have been relatively prosperous, in material terms, as soldiers. Their past political allegiances together with the fact that they are not absolutely poverty-

stricken (nor have they been for the last twenty years) strongly militate against calls for assistance from the ANC government.

7. See footnote 2.

#### Native Views of Western Eyes Carmel Schrire Notes

1. This essay is a slightly expanded version of Schrire 1995:168–83.
2. For the historical context of these studies, see Stocking 1987. For development of craniology, see Gould 1981:73–112.
3. A biographical sketch of Riou appears in Ffolliott 1981:504–5; Nash 1990:xv–xxxix. The quotation appears in Riou 1990:33.
4. Flash Poll's problems appear in Searcy 1907:57–8.
5. Tasmanian sea-level changes are discussed in Blom 1988; Chappell 1993; Jones 1977. For a history of Aboriginal people there, see Ryan 1981.
6. For details about the lives of William Lanne and Trucanini, see Ellis 1981:133–44; Murray 1993:513–16.
7. Trucanini's dealings are related in his extensive diaries, in Robinson 1966. Her intimacy with Robinson appears in Ellis 1981:38–9. For Robinson's interests in relics, see Rae-Ellis 1988:129–31.
8. For a spirited and convincing exoneration of Robinson in the light of Rae-Ellis's accusations, see Ryan 1988; for indications of Trucanini's feelings, see Rae-Ellis 1988:132–3; for treatment of her remains, see Ellis 1981:154–6, and plate 27, facing 56.
9. The sale of Robinson's goods appears in Rae-Ellis 1988:262–5. Early views of the origins of the Tasmanians are discussed in Kirk & Thorne 1976; Sollas 1924:107–32; and in its broader intellectual context, Jones 1992. The final disposition of Trucanini's skeleton is related in Ellis 1981:158–72; Hubert 1989:150.
10. For a portrait of Riou, see Nash 1990, facing xxii, and for his relationship with Cook, Nash 1990:xvi. Cook's voyages are described in Beaglehole 1968; 1974. Riou's presence on the third voyage is noted in Beaglehole 1974:499. For an account of Bligh, see Denning 1992, and for the close call between Bligh and Riou, Nash 1990:xxv.
11. The Australian Aboriginal reaction appears in Cook 1846:205; Swain 1993:114–15; note 5. For Gordon's estate, see Nash 1990:xxxviii.
12. The allusion to "kangaroo" appears in Cook 1846:234, 240–1. For a recent statement about *Terra nullius*, see Treaty 88 Campaign 1988. The landmark judgment recognising native title to land is *Eddie Mabo and Ors, Plaintiffs vs. The State of Queensland, Defendant*, High Court of Australia, 3 June 1992.
13. For Gordon's hands-on examinations, see Cullinan 1992:31, 35, Gordon 1988:56. The exchanges between Diderot and Gordon appear in Cullinan 1992:22–3, quoting Diderot 1875–1977:445–6. Other writings on this subject include Gordon 1992b; Gould 1982; Altick 1978:268–72; Gilman 1985b:76–108.





14. For Baartman's story, see note 16. I am grateful to R.J. Gordon and R. Ross for directing my attention to the discussion of her financial affairs in Drescher 1986:43-5.

15. Cited reasons for testicular evulsion include faster running, in Raven-Hart 1971:19; cooling the ardour, Raven-Hart 1971:56; birth control, Raven-Hart 1967:122-3; more sons, Valentyn 1973:63. For relationship of Hottentots and Jews, see Grevenbroek 1933:209; and for Cook's observations, Cook 1846:326. For classification, see Linné (Linnaeus) 1767:29; and for Cuvier's impressions, Griffith *et al.* 1827:196-201.

16. Galton 1890. The 'Venus' is Galton 1890:53; the crinolines, and the extended quotation, 54.

17. For an account of Cook's death, see Beaglehole 1968:301-7; 1974:637-77.

18. Joppien and Smith 1988:126-7; Smith 1985:108-23. For a detailed analysis of the mutual incorporation of European and Pacific islander cultures, especially with regard to pantomimes and shows, see Denning 1986.

19. For expositions of these ideas, see Sahlins 1981:9-32; 1987:104-35; Denning 1982a.

20. For Cook as tyrant, see Denning 1982a:430; and for a full exposition, Obeyesekere 1992.

The passionate rebuttal of Obeyesekere is Sahlins 1995, and the quotation, Sahlins 1995:5.

21. The definition of ethno-history is Denning 1982b:35. For references to sharks, and burned or sparkling eyes, see Denning 1988:xviii-xix, 89, 94; Fornander 1969 II:25; Sahlins 1981, 20, 1987, 18-19. For Gooch's watching sharks, see Denning 1988:88.

22. The photographs in question are catalogued as SAM nos. 655, 655A, 1278-1307. They were taken by J. Drury, modelmaker to the museum, who made a large series of live casts for the South African Museum between 1907 and 1924. For particulars, see Drury and Drennan 1926, and for a comprehensive overview of this subject and an account of how the live cast collection was made, see Davison 1991:139-67; 1993.

The particular photograph described here is now missing. I saw it in the South African Museum in 1991. It was housed in a folder that contained those numerous other shots of female genitalia attributed above. When I returned the following year to check its acquisition number, the file was gone. My initial inquiries met with blank denial that any such pictures had ever been in the collection. When I persisted, I was told that since (but not on account of) my previous visit, all anatomical photographs had been placed in a special place to prevent them being used for pornographic purposes. A search of the newly hidden material failed to reveal the particular photograph that I was after, but it did elicit considerable concern from a senior curator, who was loath to imagine that the photographer (presumably Mr Drury), should ever be construed to have operated in a prurient way.



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