

The Occidental Tourist: Discover, Discourse, and Degeneracy in South Africa

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Introduction

This essay examines the discourse of degeneracy and inferiority that Europeans constructed upon the South African landscape during the early period of Western exploration and colonialism. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, Europeans formed a relationship with the Cape of Good Hope's native Khoisan population that was grounded in a hierarchical paradigm of human perfection. This paradigm championed a notion of human similitude across the boundaries of gender, class, and skin-color, and posited Christian European males as the ideal against which all "others" were compared. Although the discussions of the Cape often employed familiar metaphors and associations from Renaissance and early modern Europe, this discourse developed within the context of South Africa itself and came to represent the conceptual framework through which the West understood this region.

European exploration of the non-Western world sought to assign foreign lands and peoples a place within the Occidental paradigm and Eurocentric cosmos. As such, colonial hegemony was largely achieved through the sometimes deliberate, often unconscious processes of systemization by which European explorers and thinkers configured the external world. Recent postcolonial historiography treats the discourses of exploration and travel writing as, "a malign system constituted by diffuse and pervasive networks of power."¹ The periphery emerged to invent the metropolis, nature was discovered to offset civilization, and the unearthing of savage humanity created the sophisticated and reasoning man. The power of these images resided in the West's assumed prerogative to identify, name, and in so doing invest with significance that which it observed on the colonial frontier. However, these were merely perceived dichotomies, the meanings of which were continuously redefined and contested by the various actors in specific historical dramas and discursive enterprises.

As scholars are quick to observe, travel writing and the images received from the imperial frontier effectively created the colonial subject for metropolitan audiences.² Today's historiography correctly insists that the endeavor to construct otherness on the periphery was in actuality a European project of self-definition.³ Travel literature sought to bring the colonial landscape under European conceptual control by creating a discursive power relationship predicated on gender, race, and class as categories of difference. As Brigitte Bailey attests, the available discourses for discussing otherness, "can also be used to give shape to the modern metropolis."⁴ In this regard, non-Western peripheries, and the discourses which they spawned, played a fundamental role in the 'dialectics of modernity' and the emergence of European conceptions of "self," beginning in the late fifteenth century.

Although South Africa was hardly an isolated occurrence of European exploration and colonialism in the early modern period, the present essay makes the argument that the Cape discourse evolved in a distinct and unique manner. The metaphors and associations of otherness imposed upon the Cape from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries possessed different semantics and connotations than the dominant imperial dialogues taking place between the West and the New World at this time. Both the African and the American discourses relied on familiar conceptual schemes such as sexuality, but as recent historiography illustrates, Europeans consistently represented "the 'discovery' of America as an eroticized encounter between a man and a woman."⁵ This New World discourse produced a seductive and sexually charged vision of the nascent colonial periphery that possessed a libidinal allure; the savage and the exotic converged in this discourse, articulating the range of Western fantasies and nightmares about difference in the early modern period.⁶

South Africa, unlike the Americas, did not represent a New World, but rather the farthest extremity of the Old World.⁷ The discourses of these two regions emerged simultaneously in Europe, employing the same motifs and conceptual metaphors in the construction of discursive power relationships between the West and the non-West. However, in South Africa these associations possessed different meanings and connotations than the convergence of sexual and gender difference in the New World. Recently, certain colonial similarities between South Africa and the United States have become the topics of comparative historical debate; both emerged from permanent colonial settlements, both were

slave holding societies, and both became highly identified with notions of the frontier, to mention a few of the historiographical debates.⁸ Following Kolchin's assertion that comparative scholarship highlights historical alternatives, this essay explores the divergent discursive trends between the New World and the Cape of Good Hope, and how these differences helped to produce distinct imperial paradigms.⁹

There existed two distinct periods of European discourse on South Africa before Great Britain assumed control of the colony at the end of the eighteenth century. The first period lasted, approximately, from 1488 until the middle of the eighteenth century. This period can be divided into two parts: the era before the foundation of the first settlement in 1652, and roughly the first century of Dutch colonialism thereafter. Throughout their pre-colonial contact with the Khoisan, Europeans discussed these indigenous through the same semantic vocabulary of "civilization" that characterized their own, Old World societies; the perceived differences between European and African were conceived as indicators of "Hottentot" imperfection and incompleteness, based on a patriarchal Western model of the human ideal. After 1652, and the establishment of a permanent European settlement by the Vereenigde Oost-Indisch Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, VOC), this discourse assumed new significance as settlers and natives entered into a period of sustained interaction.

The second period of Western discourse emerged simultaneously with the Enlightenment in metropolitan Europe and remained dominant from the middle of the eighteenth century until the middle of nineteenth century. In 1735, the publication of Carolus Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* inaugurated a movement to classify the 'natural world' into an ordered system of European knowledge.¹⁰ This enterprise included "scientific" treatment of racial differences and its "mixed character with anatomy," creating a "natural" racial hierarchy¹¹; "an explanatory scheme capable of objectifying nature and representing it to the knowing, synthesizing human subject."¹² This new discursive endeavor brought with it a moralizing imperative to aestheticize and cultivate the "dark continent" and its peoples, to alleviate their natural savagery and primitive ways through the injection of Western culture. While the Dutch colony at the Cape was largely isolated from this intellectual revolution taking place in Europe, by the middle of the eighteenth century Occidental visitors were frequently traveling to South Africa. These travelers brought with them new colonial semantics, grounded in Enlightenment epistemology, and represented the

vanguards of imperial modernity. Their discourse broke with the model of human similitude that characterized early Western notions on the Cape, rejecting the discursive paradigm that discussed native peoples through the framework of sameness. Instead, the later discourse treated the Cape indigenous as natural objects, subject to scientific scrutiny. This enterprise precipitated the British experiment in South African colonialism, a project that was partially grounded in and shaped by the dialogues and travel writings of the eighteenth century.

Although this second discourse of the Cape broke with the earlier paradigm of inferiority and degeneracy in regards to the indigenous, these same images and motifs persisted in Occidental thought as a way to discuss the Dutch Boer settlers who inhabited the Cape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Dutch settlers' racial intolerance and violent frontier practices offended the sensibilities of metropolitan Europe during the age of the Enlightenment, prompting Occidental discourses that criticized the Boers. Likening the settlers to their native African neighbors, this discursive enterprise employed a similar language of degeneracy in order to characterize both of these frontier communities.

In both time periods, the discourse of the Cape relied on familiar metropolitan metaphors and associations. As seen throughout imperial dialogues, the semantics of race, gender, and class often converged within the imperial imagination, resonating dialectically between the colonial "periphery" and the metropolitan "center."¹³ European colonialism and Western patriarchy depended upon the conceptual subordination of "natives" and women as naturally and inevitably inferior. Further, European discourses legitimized their endeavors by interrelating and equating sexual and racial differences.¹⁴ In South Africa, the first Cape discourse imagined the Khoisan through a paradigm of human one-ness that determined the "native" as an imperfect or flawed European man. This association mapped onto and reinforced existing Western notions of femininity that saw women as failed or incomplete men. As this discourse evolved, similar notions of idleness were employed in discussing both Europe's urban poor and the native peoples of South Africa. Thus colonial power relationships were couched within a discursive web of race, class, and gender that aimed to suppress these demographic contingents through the language of insufficiency and degeneracy.

The second Cape discourse perpetuated the triangle of race, gender, and class even as it redefined the meaning of these terms. The eighteenth century witnessed a new European interest in female reproduction and notions of maternity that mapped onto a nascent imperial endeavor to inseminate the African continent with the aesthetics and culture

of Occidental society. This period laid the foundation for the British “civilizing mission” of the nineteenth century and introduced to South Africa the faulty epistemology of Western modernity.

The study of Western discourse and textual reading of cross-cultural encounters hopes to illuminate the conceptual foundation upon which imperialism rested. Colonial axioms and systems of knowledge produced the most pervasive, hegemonic, and enduring consequences for the West and the non-West alike, and the effects of empire have persisted to the present day. Throughout Franco- and Anglophone Africa education is still filtered through the institutions, languages, and textbooks that were introduced by European colonialism; the terminologies and semantics of Western imperialism are still prevalent in all reaches of the globe. Thus, examining the historical processes that helped to shape this world order highlights not only the ironies and inconsistencies of imperialism, but also attests to the hegemonic structures that operate in contemporary society.

Historical Background

It is by now common understanding that the majority of the world’s history did not “begin” when European explorers “discovered” a particular region. Despite this awareness, contemporary educational institutions across the globe contribute to the perpetuation of this survival. In South Africa, Leonard Thompson observes, most school curricula and historians of the establishment, “start their history books with a brief reference to the voyage of Vasco de Gama round the Cape of Good Hope in 1497-98 and then rush on to the arrival of the first white settlers in 1652.”¹⁵ An obvious prerogative of postcolonial historians, then, is to look deeper into this region’s past to examine what forms, structures, and perspectives already existed that contributed and helped to shape the encounter with the West; to determine both the continuities and the changes brought to South Africa by the experiences of colonialism.

Since long before the Christian era, hunter-gatherer communities occupied southern Africa. Such collectivities were the ancestors of the Khoisan communities encountered by Europeans during the fifteenth century; Western travelers and colonists called these people by the pejorative term, “Hottentots.” The Khoisan skin color was copper, instead of black and their language was “distinguished by the exceptional number and variety of cluck, click, and tut sounds they employ, but this is a measure of their linguistic sophistication.”¹⁶

These people formed bands of various sizes, lived in caves or portable camps, and migrated seasonally as weather and climate dictated. Although these animals are not indigenous to this region, the archaeological record indicates the existence of domesticated sheep during the first century of this era, and the introduction of cattle in the seventh century. It is likely that domesticated livestock were transmitted southward, from tropical East Africa, through various hunter-gatherer communities until this livelihood eventually reached southern Africa.¹⁷ The Khoikhoi are the descendants of these early pastoralists, whereas the ethnic term San refers to those who continued to subsist as hunter-gatherers. The Khoikhoi and San considered together are referred to as Khoisan.

The peoples of the western Cape remained isolated from the non-African world until the end of the fifteenth century and were the exclusive inhabitants of this region until the 1650s. Both the pastoral and the hunting-gathering modes of subsistence required seasonal migrations, and their transient lifestyle allowed them to inhabit various regions in which stationary Bantu agriculturalists could not reside. The physical limitations on this way of life kept population density low. Scholars now estimate the presence of between 4,000 and 8,000 Khoisan on the Cape peninsula during the fifteenth century.¹⁸ Because of Khoisan seasonal migrations, early European travelers to the Cape received mixed impressions about the local communities, their population density, and the nature of their societies.

Bantu populations originating in West Africa colonized the eastern Cape more than a millenium before the first European visitors traveled to South Africa. By the third century of this era there is archaeological evidence of crop cultivation and the presence of iron tools in the eastern Transvaal and around Natal; the Bantu inhabitants of this region used such iron tools for a mixed-farming way of life that combined permanent agriculture with livestock farming.¹⁹ By the thirteenth century these mixed farmers inhabited most of eastern South Africa.²⁰ Interactions and contact between various southern Bantu communities was highly developed in the pre-colonial era, but like the western Cape, this region had very few links with the non-African world; as Robert Ross confirms, the extensive networks of the Indian Ocean economy did not extend south of present-day central Mozambique.²¹ Thus, when the expansion of the European colonialists in Africa collided with these Bantu farmers in the seventeenth century it marked the frontier boundary

of two epic migrations: one indigenous to the African continent and the other originating in northern Europe.

In the late fifteenth century, slightly before Columbus crossed the Atlantic, the European push toward maritime exploration reached the southern coast of Africa. In 1487 Bartholomew Dias traveled to Mossel Bay and ten years later Vasco de Gama crossed the entire Cape on his passage to the East. Each of these voyages made contact with the local Khoikhoi pastoralists who lived in the western Cape. Following de Gama, European voyages frequently traveled around the Cape to the East and by the seventeenth century visitations to the local Khoikhoi and San communities by Westerners en route to the Orient were commonplace, at least among British and Dutch ships. These stop-overs represented an opportunity for the Europeans to provision their fleets with sheep and oxen at seemingly very little cost. A Dutch captain of the late sixteenth century commented on such an exchange that his men bought, “three oxen and five sheep for a crooked knife, a shovel, a short iron bolt, with a knife and some scraps of iron, worth altogether perhaps four guilders in Holland.”²²

In the early seventeenth century Europe’s maritime powers sought to make corporate their mercantile interest in India and the Far East. With the wane of Portuguese influence on the high seas, the Vereenigde Oost-Indisch Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, VOC) formed in Holland in 1600 and Great Britain formed a rival company in the subsequent year. The Cape’s strategic positioning, roughly halfway between the Occident and the East Indies by contemporary maritime routes, and the region’s favorable climate, made it immediately appealing as a location for European settlement. In 1615 the British East India Company petitioned King James to authorize the deportment of English convicts to colonize the Cape. To this point Westerners had enjoyed congenial relations with the local Khoisan and conditions for a settlement appeared hospitable. Despite this, few convicts were actually deployed and the British attempt at colonization failed.²³ A generation later, however, in 1652 the VOC commissioned Jan Van Riebeeck to establish a permanent reprovisioning station on the Cape: to develop a meat supply from the Khoikhoi, create gardens of fresh produce, and to build a hospital, as well as to fortify the Dutch settlement.

Van Riebeeck arrived in April with 80 VOC employees and by May the labor shortage had already compelled Van Riebeeck to request that slaves be sent to the Cape.²⁴ He was unsuccessful in this and other early attempts to secure slaves, perhaps because the Company did not intend for the Cape settlement to expand beyond a small, fortified base for their ships.²⁵ In 1657, one year before the first import of slaves to the colony, the VOC released nine of its employees from their contracts, creating the first land-holding, free burgher community at the Cape. The Company intended for them to establish independent commercial farms that would provide the settlement with a consistent food supply, although they operated independently of the colony. Thus by the time Van Riebeeck turned over control of the settlement in 1662, three important components of the Dutch colonial project had begun to emerge: the existence of white settlers who made their permanent residence in South Africa, the development of a local economic infrastructure dependent on slave labor, and the expansion of white society into the Cape interior at the expense of local Khoisan who either vacated the territory or entered into the colonial labor force.²⁶

The VOC was fundamentally opposed to the enslavement of local Khoikhoi and San. Robert Ross writes:

That the Khoikhoi were not to be enslaved was a fundamental tenet of VOC policy, dating back to the foundation of the Cape under Van Riebeeck, and resulting from the experience of the Dutch in Indonesia, especially Java.²⁷

Initially the Khoisan were unwilling to help the Dutch by providing wage labor, a reality which infuriated the colonists who could not understand their refusal to work for material reward.²⁸ As Reader points out, though, the very idea of a permanent agricultural settlement violated the local inhabitants' land-use practices.²⁹ In 1658, the settlers finally succeeded in acquiring some Angolan and Guinean slave, initiating a process that would import over 60,000 bonded laborers from East Africa, the Indies, India, and Madagascar until the trade was abolished in 1807.

Until 1679 the colony confined its expansion to the Cape of Good Hope itself, but in that year, under the new Governor Simon van der Stel, the VOC began to grant land to settlers beyond the peninsula. In 1685 the Company started offering free transport to South Africa to any Europeans wishing to settle in the new colony, in an effort to boost agricultural production.³⁰ However, few Westerners chose this option and the majority of early settlers arrived there as sailors whose ships departed without them when they were detained by illness or who were motivated by other reasons for staying.³¹ Because most

colonists came to South Africa in the service of the VOC, the majority of early settlers represented the lowest class of Holland and Germany's hierarchical societies; Company employment was highly dangerous and paid relatively low wages, thus attracting the poorest elements of European society to its service.³⁰ Of those who did utilize the VOC's offer of free immigration, a group of several hundred French Huguenot dissenters from Holland, who brought with them the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in 1688, comprised the most significant group of immigrants.

Single white males predominated in the early Cape Colony, affecting a troublesome gender imbalance. Throughout the seventeenth century VOC shareholders opposed female immigration to its overseas colonies on several principles. The high cost of passenger transport (provided freely to South Africa from 1685-1707) made the immigration of women, who were seen as unproductive to the colonial economy, undesirable. Second, corporate holders feared that women's influence over their husbands might undermine Company authority and that wives might encourage husbands to make quick profits in the colonies and then repatriate to Holland. The VOC was concerned "that Dutch women would enrich themselves through private trade and encroach on the company's monopoly." Finally, the shareholders worried that women and children were more susceptible to illnesses that would force them (and their husbands) to return to the Netherlands.³³ Thus in 1685, when the commencement of free immigration coincided with the first laws outlawing marriage between whites and blacks in the Cape, the Company adopted a practice of shipping orphan or poor marriageable girls to South Africa. This practice was inherited from Dutch experiences in Indonesia and the East. Including women and children, there resided just over 1,000 white settlers in the colony by the end of the seventeenth century, the overwhelming majority of whom relied on livestock farming and required large areas of pasture for subsistence.³⁴

During the eighteenth century, while Occidental society experienced the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions, Dutch Boer society formed in the isolation of the Cape interior.³⁵ The Boer population (people of Dutch and German descent who were born in South Africa, also referred to as Afrikaners) increased steadily in the early part of this century, due largely to a prolific birthrate rather than as a result of continued immigrations from Europe.³⁶ The self-reproducing nature of Afrikaner society contributed to its isolation from the changes in European values and the shifts in metropolitan culture. The competition for land pushed this free burgher community increasingly north and east away from Cape Town and into South Africa, effectively displacing the indigenous Khoisan

with the colonial advance. Richard Elphick describes the Dutch colonial system: The Company and the settlers in combination...assaulted all five components of independence together: [they] absorbed livestock and labor from the Khoikhoi economy, subjugated Khoikhoi chiefs to Dutch overrule and their followers to Dutch law, encroached on Khoikhoi pastures, and endangered the integrity of Khoikhoi culture.³⁷ Most of the Khoisan population was slowly forced into the labor economy of the expanding settlement, and a smallpox epidemic of 1713, followed by later outbreaks in 1755 and 1767, significantly weakened the indigenous' ability to resist the Boer advance. By the later eighteenth century almost all Khoisan within the colony had been changed from independent pastoralists and hunter-gatherers into oppressed farm laborers.³⁸

South African society evolved in the eighteenth century out of this triangulated relationship between settlers, slaves, and indigenous populations. By the year 1711 more slaves resided in the colony than freeburghers and Company employees.³⁹ This subjugated workforce was never self-reproducing and thus required a continuous influx of new slaves in order to sustain the economy, for which bonded labor was deemed a necessity. By the later eighteenth century there were approximately 15,000 slaves living in the Cape Colony, imported at a rate of roughly 200 to 300 each year.⁴⁰ Ross has argued that because of their shared socio-economic status as oppressed farm laborers there developed a solidarity between the Khoisan and the imported slaves, which dually effected the distinction between 'free' (Khoisan) laborers and impressed (imported) workers.⁴¹

Among the settler population, this dominant white culture did have significant class divisions, even in the early years of colonial development. However, it was during the eighteenth century, with the decrease in settler immigration and increase in Boer births, that the Cape truly ceased to be an extension of Europe and became instead specifically a colonial society.⁴² Scholars debate the extent to which Boer religious beliefs and militant frontier practices were derived from an early Western social paradigm in this era. However, this period undeniably witnessed the emergence of a white frontier society that was unyielding in its ethnic intransigence.⁴³ Throughout the century, Leonard Thompson writes: "Compared with contemporary European colonies in the Americas, the tiny Cape colonial population was remarkably unsophisticated;" Thompson continues to relate the almost complete lack of formal educational institutions within the colony at this early time, and the Dutch settlers' disinterest in the transformative project taking place in Europe.⁴⁴

Great Britain exploited the chaos in Europe that stemmed from the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon to become the West's dominant naval power in the late eighteenth century. The English seized the VOC's colony in 1795, relinquished it back under the Treaty of Amiens in 1803, the British took control again in 1806, and their sovereignty was finally legitimized (in the eyes of Europeans) by a peace settlement of 1814. For the next 50 years South Africa would continue to be prized, mainly as a colonial stepping stone for eastern trade routes, especially, for the British, because it controlled the passage to India.⁴⁵ Not until the mineral revolution that began in the 1860s, and the growth of industrialization in the 1870s, did South Africa assume much imperial worth in its own right, in the eyes of metropolitan observers.

Since the first freeburghers were released from their contracts in 1657 there had existed fluctuating degrees of anxiety and discord between the interests of metropolitan colonial administrators and the interests of independent Boer farmers within the colony. During the early years of the colony there also developed discord between the Afrikaner farmers and Cape Town itself. As this essay examines in the following section, metropolitan discourses adopted a similar language of degeneracy and inferiority as a way of discussing both the Afrikaners and the indigenous in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This tension was refined and intensified with the advent of British suzerainty in the 1790s. For one, the South African economy depended on coerced, oppressive labor practices and frontier society was predicated on militant racial intransigence. Conversely, the English had spearheaded the anti-slavery cause and had abolished the trade by 1807; indeed, the Cape Colony was the only settler-dominated, slave-holding society conquered by Great Britain during the nineteenth century, which served as a source of embarrassment for the new colonial power.⁴⁶

Second, as the Trekboer community had increasingly advanced into the interior, these white South Africans had begun to encroach on the more densely populated and politically centralized Bantu populations that inhabited the central and eastern Cape. This prompted a sustained period of ethnic conflict and anarchic militancy within the contact zones of these various peoples. In the military campaign of 1811-1812 British troops, assisted by Trekboer 'commando' units and impressed Khoisan soldiers, successfully pushed the Xhosa out of the Zuurveld region, forcing the Bantus east of the Fish River. The

British hoped that this effort would thus ‘close’ the eastern frontier. In 1820, in a combined effort to fortify this eastern barrier of the Colony and a manipulative political move by the Tory government in England, farms were granted to nearly four thousand lower class-British citizens, in addition to another thousand who financed their own passage, along the western shore of this river. The majority of these settlers quickly abandoned the frontier, due to the location’s susceptibility to Xhosa raids and attacks.

A third consequence of British sovereignty stemmed from the new ideological agenda that accompanied English colonialism. Along with the five thousand settlers of 1820 came the London Missionary Society (LMS), a Christian organization intent on converting the South African indigenous.⁴⁷ The Dutch colony had focused little attention towards proselytizing and missionary attempts, and until 1780 the Dutch Reformed Church (brought with the French Huguenots in the late seventeenth century) had been the only Christian denomination allowed to operate in South Africa. There existed no church or mission on the frontier until 1792.⁴⁸ The LMS missionaries carried with themselves a profound sense of the “civilizing mission,” the vanguards of a religious and ideological colonialism that exerted profoundly hegemonic effects upon the native population. Although they were often critical of Dutch behavior towards the indigenous and were the self-proclaimed advocates of Africans’ rights, these proponents of “benign imperialism” perpetuated a less overt colonial agenda aimed at destroying indigenous cultural autonomy. Discussing the LMS missionaries, Jean and John Comaroff write:

For they too were competitors in the battle to gain control over black populations. Fresh from an abolitionist climate, they tried to force the issue of “native” social and legal rights upon the administration. In the eyes of the Boers, their presence emboldened the “Hottentots” (Khoi) to resist efforts to press them into service, undermining the very basis of the colonial mode of production.⁴⁹

The missionary ethos and the culture of English colonialism conflicted with the Afrikaner paradigm and racial perspectives of the Dutch frontier. Tension between the Boer settlers and the British administration was already mounting, due to the English desire to contain northern and eastern colonial expansion, and for the government’s frequent criticism of cruel Afrikaner labor practices. In 1828, at the behest of abolitionists and the LMS, the colonial government passed Ordinance 50, which exempted natives or ‘free blacks’ from having to carry an identity pass, and protected them from forced entry into a labor contract.⁵⁰

It was also in the late 1820s that the vanguards of the “civilizing mission” began expressing direct contempt for the Boer community in general, framing their criticisms in what Du Toit calls the “degeneracy paradigm” of Afrikaner society.⁵¹ Noel Mostert contends: “Upon the Cape Colony’s military colonial frontier were focused the moral imperatives born of the abolitionist cause and the rise and power of evangelical religion.”⁵² Dr. John Philip’s highly controversial book of 1828, *Researches in Africa*, criticized the frontier Afrikaners as practitioners of oppressive labor techniques that spawned a corrupt and debased cultural mentality among the Boers.⁵³ At the height of this controversy came the announcement from London, in 1834, that within four years slavery was to be abolished within the entire British Commonwealth, and emancipation did indeed transpire in 1838.

These divisions in South African society intensified in the 1820s and 1830s and this, coupled with the population pressure and competition for land taking place on the Trekboer frontier, had two important consequences for South Africa. First, “the Great Trek was thus the consequence of the long-term northward movements of the farmers with the specific events of the late 1820s and 1830s.”⁵⁴ The Great Trek was to become a pivotal event in South African history, not the least because it brought white settler society into contact with the majority of southern Africa’s indigenous Bantu communities for the first time.⁵⁵ The Trek highlighted a fundamental conflict between the two dominant European paradigms in the Cape: the morally based and “civilizing” colonialism of the British, grounded in the Enlightenment, mercantilism, and significantly influenced by abolitionists and missionaries, versus the anti-commercial, anti-“progress” expansionism of the Boers who sought to escape the ideology and climate of modernity. The Great Trek resulted in a white frontier society that avoided industrialization and was necessarily unyielding in its defensive intransigence towards the indigenous. Conversely, the British imperial endeavor reflected the primacy of Commonwealth material interests, the intellectual framework of contemporary science, and a profound sense of paternalism inherent in the “civilizing mission.”

The second great consequence of emancipation in the 1830s was the subsequent transition to a society that was increasingly conscious of race and racial difference.⁵⁶ Within the chambers of official discourse the frontier Boers expressed relative acquiescence to slave emancipation. This was so in part because they recognized that they were powerless

to change London's mind, and partly because there was an already developed system of coercive and oppressive wage labor that would largely negate the effects of abolition.⁵⁷ Whereas before the abolition of slavery social and class distinctions were made within the context of slave labor, after 1838 a racial stratification emerged out of the changing economic and environmental circumstances of the Cape itself. The colonial economy continued to require a cheap work-force, the maintenance of which fostered an exploitative labor system; as Ross argues, without exploitation of laborers, the races would not have been unequal, and without the identification of laborers through a set of racial criteria, class exploitation would have evolved differently.⁵⁸

Thus, by the 1850s, before the mineral revolution and rise of industrialization in South Africa, as well as prior to the European colonial scramble to divide up the continent, complex social, cultural, political, and economic processes had begun in the Cape Colony which would continue to evolve and create problems for the next century and a half. Although speculations on the origins of South Africa's racial order continue to be quite polemical topics of academic debate, it is clear that the unique social order that was constructed in colonial South Africa stemmed from the convergence of distinct cultural groups in a historically confined place and time, all of whom contributed to this exchange. Undeniably, later events and histories have played a shaping role as well in South African development. However, the major transformations and changes to take place in the Cape originated prior to, and were well underway by, the middle of the nineteenth century, having grown out of the unique context of South Africa itself.

The Cape Discourse

During the late fifteenth century, Western explorers departed from Europe in search of an oceanic route to the Far East. This movement led to the collision of diverse peoples and cultures from throughout the globe over the next several centuries. Europeans sought both a western passage to the East across the Atlantic, and an eastern route to the Indies around the southern tip of Africa. These two approaches to maritime exploration produced two divergent discourses within which Western men of "reason" and "civilization" came to imagine the world and its inhabitants. As the colonial world emerged in the Americas, spawning European fantasies and restructuring global relationships in its wake, a very

different, perhaps anomalous engagement began in southern Africa, one discursively negotiated within a unique dialectic that varied in its semantics from the contemporary conversations surrounding the New World. While the discourse of America eroticized the colonial landscape, imposing on native peoples the images of exotic difference, the discourse of South Africa developed within a framework of human similitude that touted African inferiority and degeneracy.

Postcolonial studies on the discourse of discovery almost invariably begin their examinations within the Columbian world. Such treatments seek to identify the prejudices and axioms which early explorers carried with them across the Atlantic, how this cultural consciousness was read into the colonial landscape and then reified within the European imagination through letters and paintings, images and associations, hegemonies and epistemologies. In her highly influential, if not seminal work on the colonial imagination, Anne McClintock opens her book:

Consider, to begin with, a colonial scene. In 1492, Christopher Columbus, blundering about the Caribbean in search of India, wrote home to say that the ancient mariners had erred in thinking the earth was round. Rather, he said, it was shaped like a woman's breast, with a protuberance upon its summit in the unmistakable shape of a nipple—toward which he was slowly sailing.⁵⁹

Such introductions frame nicely the dominant strain of postcolonial thought regarding discovery: on the eve of the encounter with his ethnic other, the white male imperialist is preoccupied with images of his gender other (the convergences of race and gender are further triangulated with the inclusion of class), thus highlighting both his latent insecurities as well as the semiotic ambiguities of pre-modern Western culture. So goes the postcolonial argument: from this inciting event stem five centuries of contested imperial semantics and negotiated colonial dialogues grounded in the dominant culture's need to construct and represent otherness.

There was, however, an alternative dynamic begun in the fifteenth century, taking place in the "farthest extremity" of the Old World, where early European travelers to southern Africa both shared in and diverged from the emerging discursive agenda that concerned the Western Hemisphere.⁶⁰ In 1488, Bartholomew Diaz preceded by four years Columbus's search for an oceanic route to the Indies, he also introducing an unknown land and people to the Occident. Despite their contemporaneousness and shared backgrounds in Renaissance and early modern European paradigms, the discourse of South Africa never

fully merged with the discourse of the New World. Though grounded in similar conceptual frameworks and motifs—otherness, savagery, Christianity, gender, etc.—these images came to possess disparate meanings and significances in South Africa than in most of the early colonial world.

Human conceptual processes are metaphoric in nature. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson contend: “Because the metaphorical content is systematic, the language we use to talk about that aspect of the concept is systematic.”⁶¹ The extension of this argument implies an endless dialectic between one’s imperative to anticipate events through a preconditioned system of associations and metaphors, and the inevitable reality that those same prejudices and dispositions regulate one’s understanding of and responses to such events, often unconsciously or unintentionally. Thus, like McClintock’s Columbus, sailing for the end of the universe: “As European men crossed the dangerous thresholds of their known worlds, they ritualistically feminized borders and boundaries.”⁶² In the proto-colonial, New World setting the acute uncertainties and uneasiness of the periphery produced an almost laminal obsession with female sexuality.

The Iberian discourse of “discovery” was erotic and sexually charged, as the early reflections of Columbus himself makes clear. His journal reads, referring to the Admiral in the third person:

He says such things of the fertility, the beauty, and the altitude of these islands found in this harborage, that he implores the sovereigns not to wonder at so many praises, for he assures them that he believes he had not spoken the hundredth part of their marvels.⁶³

The earliest images of discovery, transmitted from the New World back to the Old, resonated with the iconography of female sexuality and allure, extolled in the rhetoric of fertility and beauty. The case can be made, as indeed McClintock suggests, that this complex discursive endeavor was a latent phenomenon, the unconscious revealing and reactions of a particular version of Western patriarchy. While the rendering of the American landscape certainly stemmed from a distinct contemporary paradigm originating in late medieval Europe, the particular images of a sexualized feminine beauty and an erotic ‘Paradise on Earth’ found at the end of the world was also a distinct phenomenon of the European vision of the New World.⁶⁴

Nor was this fascination with female sexuality unusual, because, for these men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the most internalized and readily available metaphor was that of gender relationships. Tomas Laqueur writes: “Biology and human sexual experience

mirrored the metaphysical reality on which, it was thought, the social order too rested.”⁶⁵ The feminizing of the New World landscape, then, conveniently reinforced and perpetuated prevailing metropolitan notions of male-female sexual identity while simultaneously conceptualizing and vindicating a similar configuration on the nascent periphery. The convergent metaphors of gender and ethnic otherness functioned hegemonically to produce and sustain a world-view predicated on hierarchy and inequality. As Louis Montrose insists, by the 1570s a fixture had emerged in European texts, paintings, and maps of personifying the Americas as a female nude.⁶⁶ America’s nakedness implied “her” exploitability even as it endowed Western explorers with an unambiguous quality of masculine sexual prowess. Such exposed femininity, perceived as the natural character of an entire geographic entity, mapped onto the New World a sexual availability and libidinal allure that invited white male conquest.

The semantics of gendered colonial discourse functioned quite differently in contemporary South Africa. Emanating from the same Occidental center, early travelers to the Cape were certainly grounded in a Renaissance or early modern, metaphoric paradigm of sexual relationships and gender hierarchies. But whereas the imperial imagination fantasized, eroticized, and constructed a landscape of sexual allure in the New World, less illustrious images of similitude coupled with inferiority, degeneracy, and failure of potential dominated visions of the Cape in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. This imperial metaphor also found its roots in contemporary philosophies of sex and gender.

Notions of human similitude in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe were fundamental to the Occidental discourse of the Cape. Similitude also underlay contemporary understandings of gender inequality. The *querelle des femmes* found its shaping form in early seventeenth century literature through a unitary biology that insisted on woman and man’s shared anatomy and like composition. N. H. Keeble reflects: This was a way of thinking which understood sexual identity less in terms of difference than in terms of similarities, likenesses and mirror images. It entertained what Thomas Laqueur has called a ‘one-sex model’ of human biology. Woman was analogically related to man; in gynaecological texts, physical organs peculiar to her were presented in terms of male organs and were often supposed to perform the same functions (so, for example, the clitoris is described as a penis, the ovaries as testes). Woman was distinguished from man less by her difference than by her insufficiency: she is an inferior or lesser or incomplete

man.⁶⁷

The Cape discourse dealt with the “savage” other within the constraints and familiar axioms of gender otherness. Antedating both Western theories of race and the development of the Great Chain of Being, dialogues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries characterized metropolitan women and the African inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope through a mirrored understanding of the imperfect white man.

Unlike Columbus’s extolling account of the Caribbean, early visitors to the Cape articulated little of the awe and novelty found in the New World discourse. An account provided by Alvaro Velho from Vasco de Gama’s 1497 voyage recounts:

In the land the men are swarthy. They eat only sea-wolves and whales and the flesh of gazelles and the roots of plants. They wear sheaths on their members. Their arms are staffs of wild olive trees tipped with fire-hardened horns. They have many dogs like those of Portugal, which bark as do those. The birds of this land are also the same as those of Portugal...And the land is very healthy and temperate, and has good herbage.⁶⁸

In striking contrast to Columbus’s myriad praises and fascination with his nascent American subjects, the language of the Cape discourse minimizes the novelty of its new “discovery” and is quick to locate the landscape within a European frame of reference. Not only is the fauna similar to the familiar animals of Portugal but, as will be discussed here shortly, the native inhabitants and the entire South African discursive framework locates the landscape within a recognizable terminology and conceptual structure similar to that of European society. Finally, Velho’s cursory assertion that the Cape itself is ‘healthy,’ ‘temperate,’ and has ‘good herbage’ appreciates the landscape within the vocabulary of known concepts.

Easily compatible with Renaissance notions of Mosaic ethnology and Christian degeneracy theories, European visitors to the Cape before 1652 clearly located the native Khoisan within the human community and conceived of these people through the same concepts, adjectives, and nouns by which they considered their own society. The salient characteristic of these early ethnographies and travel accounts lies not in the uniqueness and exoticism of their African subjects, but rather in their insufficiencies.⁶⁹ Consider, for example, an account from 1620:

The inhabitants of the country towards the point of the Cape are, I believe, the most miserable savages which have been discovered up to now, since they know nothing of sowing or of gear for plowing or cultivating the soil, nor anything of fishing... They eat certain roots, which are their chief

food... They cover their privities with the tail of a sheep, or wear a skin, of a sheep or other animal, like a scarf across one shoulder. For weapons they have an assagaye and a rather feeble bow, with its quiver.⁷⁰

As alluded to by Coetzee, Pratt, and others, such language inescapably engages the same discursive concepts upon which European “civilization” is predicated. Thus one detects notions of occupation, diet, dress, and technology in this short passage alone.⁷¹ Frequent observations of the same period include further ethnographic description of the Khoisan: “Their Houses little Tents in the field, of Skins, moveable at pleasure. Their language with a doubling of the tongue in their throat... The Negroes behaved themselves peaceably at Sinon [?Sermon], yet seeme of little or no Religion.”⁷² Though these accounts reveal no trace of Edward Tylor’s broad vision of humanity nor attach his didactic value to the study of man, these early ethnographies do engage the indigenous South Africans as anthropologic subjects, explained through the familiar concepts and systems of organization that Europeans attributed to themselves, and characterized by the perceived insufficiencies of these individuals to live up to European categorical standards.

In Columbus’s earliest ruminations on the New World and its potential he likens his “discovery” to a Paradise on Earth. Again in the third person his journal professes: “The earthly Paradise is at the end of the Orient, because it is a most temperate place, and so those lands which he had now discovered are, says he, at the end of the Orient.”⁷³ In a theme that would be subsequently taken up by Las Casas during the Great Debate, as well as by proponents of “noble savagery,” Columbus here inaugurates the Edenic discourse of the New World. Although this image would spawn a life of its own, adapted for a variety of ideological agendas and purposes, the notion of Paradise and its pre-Fall, innocent, virginal, sensuous, and spiritual connotations articulated a distinct way of envisioning the imperial landscape that displaced upon the New World the most superlative and imaginative fantasies of the Occidental imagination.

In all of the 150 or so travel accounts from the pre-colonial era in South Africa compiled by Raven-Hart, only one touches upon the notion of earthly paradise. Fittingly this reference was made by fleet Chaplain Patrick Copland, who voyaged to the Cape in 1612 and 1614:

The Bay of Soldania and all about the Cape is so healtfull and fruitfull as might grow a Paradise of the World; it well agrees with English bodies; for all but one in twentie dayes recovered as at the first day they set forth.⁷⁴

Copland's suggestion of earthly paradise bears little if any resemblance to Columbus's. The Chaplain's vision of this ideal is not found in an essential, primordial, innocent state lying beyond the borders of a fallen and corrupt Western society. The Cape environment offered instead the potential for 'growing' such a heaven on Earth with the introduction of "English bodies" to the African landscape. Although Copland was undeniably ahead of his time in imagining onto the landscape the seeds of European civilization, his notion of Paradise did not conclude that South Africa represented a natural Eden in its essential utopian form. Indeed, travel accounts portrayed the natives themselves as impediments to this idealized environment: in the same year as Copland's voyage Ralph Standish wrote, "yt is a greatt pittie that such creatures as [the Khoisan] should injoy so sweett a countrey.⁷⁵" Only through English cultivation of the South African soil might this possibility of Paradise be fulfilled and achieved.

Where the myth of a virginal and Edenic New World fostered many expectations and prompted much colonial enthusiasm in the Western Hemisphere throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, this function of the European imagination remained largely absent from the Cape discourse until the turn of the nineteenth century. As Coetzee asserts:

...(South) Africa could never, in the European imagination, be the home of the earthly paradise because Africa was not a new world... The Cape, by contrast, belonged not to the New World but to the farthest extremity of the Old: it was a Lapland of the south, peopled by natives whose way of life occasioned curiosity or disgust, but never admiration.⁷⁶

Although clearly not a region with which Europeans were familiar or with which they enjoyed a long history of exchange and interaction, from Dias's first expedition to the Cape, Western discourse located South Africa within a familiar interpretative framework and characterized the area with images of sameness and inferiority derived from metropolitan conceptions of gender and human similitude. In part this was due to the Cape's unique conceptual orientation within the larger Occidental cosmos; even the name "Good Hope" revealed the Cape's secondary status not as a destination in itself, but as the gateway to the East, a location of transient significance and expedience within the European endeavor to expand its boundaries. However, even when discussed as a location in and for itself, the Cape discourse remained committed to a language of similitude, degeneracy, and incompleteness.

Unlike the New World dialogues that elaborate on, contemplate about, and lust after the otherness of the periphery, it is through this paradigmatic discourse of sameness and

similarity that one recognizes both the convergence of gender and ethnic metaphors, and their shared preoccupation with deficiency and incompleteness on the southern tip of Africa; a woman's clitoris was a 'failed' penis just as the Khoisan's pastoral and hunting-gathering societies 'failed' by Occidental cultural standards. The prevailing assumptions of The medieval mind made no provision for the mutability of animal species, or, among human beings for the trans- mutation of cultures from incivility to civility. Nor did most minds in the Renaissance.⁷⁷

It is through this that one sees most fully how the paradigm of hierarchical or flawed sameness functioned within the pre-modern consciousness of Western travel writers and their audiences back in Europe. This particular discourse of similitude and insufficiency reverberated dialectically between the metropolitan center and the colonial periphery, each informing and perpetuating, reinforcing and solidifying a hegemonic world-view of imperfection and hierarchy. This, however, was in contrast to the emerging discourse of the New World.

For example, let one consider the intellectual climate of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe that stemmed from the Renaissance.⁷⁸ Prior to the great rupture in Western thought spawned by the Enlightenment, Europeans cast their thoughts backward in time for explanations of human diversity.⁷⁹ To quote Hodgen once again:

In the first flush of discovery, the old learning, transmitted by the Greek and Roman literatures, appeared to be more accomplished than anything the Middle Ages or medieval Scholasticism had to offer...[thus] medieval philosophy began to seem only another inescapable evidence of decay, decline, and degeneration.⁸⁰

Although the metaphysics of degeneracy theories resonated awkwardly with other contemporary notions, say, for example, that of similitude, nevertheless these two perspectives on diversity coexisted and formed the dominant paradigm. Further, degeneracy theories mapped on perfectly to Christian notions of the Fall, and human diversity easily conformed with the opinion that, after the Deluge, all men were descendants of Noah, some more privileged than others, and scattered throughout the globe since the Tower of Babel or the Israeli exile; "The Bible provided ample opportunity to slot the Jews into the coherent story of the families of Noah's descendants. The (American) Indians could have descended from Ham...or—if one felt more sympathy for them—from the Israelites lost in the Babylonian exile."⁸¹ As Evans illustrates, the Curse of Ham, and its pejorative connotations

of degeneracy and inferiority, occupied a prominent position in Europe's medieval and Renaissance attitudes towards Africa.⁸² Thus the oneness of humanity coupled with the reality of man's degeneracy, sustained a hierarchical division of the world, in that those closest to God, and thus most perfect, were rightfully superior.

This one-dimensional perspective on mankind would not last for long however, at least within the discourse of discovery taking place in the New World. Indeed the challenge to the Old Testament cum degeneracy paradigm evolved, in part, because of the distinct way in which Europeans imagined the Americas. Harry Liebersohn argues:

From Renaissance to Enlightenment, a discourse of noble savagery often determined Western visions of indigenous peoples. Travelers, theorists, poets, and artists chiseled out the many faces of noble savagery: natural goodness versus the corruption of European society, oneness with nature versus European estrangement from it, individualism versus social bonds, untutored wisdom versus sophistication, and equality versus European social hierarchy. These images transmuted older Western myths of a golden age (classical origin) or Eden (Christian origin) into modern images of Europe's "new worlds" of the Americas and the Pacific.⁸³

The discourse of noble savagery emerged out of the Occident's fascination with the New World and its preoccupied interest in displacing a European fantasy upon this hemisphere. Unlike the discourse of South Africa, which accepted savagery as part of the familiar framework of human hierarchy, the dialectic of westward exploration engaged in an active discussion and re-consideration of humanity, aimed at properly locating "Indians" within the eurocentric cosmos. Although noble savagery would become an enduring motif in Western thought, not until the nineteenth century were these images associated with the Cape of Good Hope and included in the discourse of South Africa.

Regarding the Americas, the discursive project to determine the "other" officially commenced at Valladolid in 1550, the site of the famous debate between Bartolome de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda. Over the following centuries this conversation sought to ascertain the correct nature of the New World inhabitants and the appropriate relationship between the indigenous and Christian Europeans.⁸⁴ Although clearly not a modern philosophical debate (Las Casas and Sepulveda justified the majority of their arguments in the teachings of Aristotle, Augustine, and Scripture ⁸⁵), the contemplation and reflection embodied in the Great Debate hinted at the dynamic intellectual processes affecting the Western imagination as a result of its nascent experiment with colonialism. Moreover, much of Las Casas's argument, later expounded on by the discourse of noble savagery,

conceptualized “natives,” not in the language of degeneracy, but rather in idyllic and Edenic tones:

Their rites and customs differ, but they all have in common the traits of simplicity, peacefulness, gentleness, humility, generosity, and of all the sons of Adam, they are without exception the most patient.⁸⁶

A product of the Renaissance and the imperial imagination, Las Casas’s arguments (like the letters of Columbus) undeniably displaced his own eurocentric metaphors, ideals, and epistemology onto the colonial subject. Further, the point can be made that Las Casas was limited to and prejudiced by a restricting Occidental discourse that revealed more about contemporary Europe than about the New World inhabitants. Unlike in South Africa, however, the discourses of the Edenic “native” and the noble savage reflected a European willingness, received from the periphery, to reconsider prevailing assumptions and perceptions of the social order. This dialectical exchange between the colonial frontier and the European metropole helped to usher in the rise of the Enlightenment and the advent of Western modernity.

If the emerging discourse of Eden and noble savagery sometimes likened “natives” to an essential and pure condition of living, then the counter-argument maintained the utter baseness and degeneracy of indigenous peoples. Liebersohn maintains:

Noble savagery alternated with counter-images of ignobility: the indigenous peoples as wild, ugly, childlike, irrational, and degenerate, horrific reinventions of classical and Christian notions of barbarism and depravity.⁸⁷

Significantly, it was only this discourse of ignobility and unredeemable savagery that dominated discussions of the Cape until the very end of the eighteenth century. Until post-Enlightenment Britain began to take an interest in the Colony in the 1790s, the Cape discourse developed in isolation from “the great debate—inaugurated so theatrically by Las Casas and Sepulveda . . . conducted thereafter on two continents and in many tongues” concerning the appropriate relationship between Europeans and indigenous peoples, or “whether the life of a Hottentot may not be a version of life before the Fall.”⁸⁸ As seen throughout the writings of European visitors to the Cape prior to 1652, the dominant adjectives and associations invariably imposed upon the Khoisan were that of stench, miserableness, dishonesty, and ugliness. Entirely absent from these accounts is any utopian vision of the landscape or an Edenicized understanding of the local populations.

Early travelers to the Cape grounded their observations of the Khoisan in Biblical analogies. Where they appear, these references are cursory and take for granted the

legitimacy of their comparisons without any digression or interpretative justification for such comparisons. Based on a voyage of 1627, Thomas Herbert, a minor British diplomat sailing for Persia wrote:

The Natives being propagated from Cham, both in their Visages and Natures seem to inherit his malediction their stature is but indifferent, their colour olive...only upon their feet have they a sole or piece of leather tied with a little strap, which while these Hatten-totes were in our company their hands held, their feet having thereby the greater liberty to steal, which with their toes they can do exactly, all the while looking us in the face the better to deceive.⁸⁹

Several important pieces of information surround this passage. First, as a diplomat, Herbert represented one of the few visitors to the Cape in this period who would have enjoyed both a metropolitan education and, in serving the British Crown in Persia, would likely have been familiar with the contemporary discourses of otherness surrounding the familiar world of the Mediterranean and the Near East. It is unfortunate that Raven-Hart elected to omit Herbert's "lengthy quotations from the classics" as irrelevant, for such commentary could no doubt aid one's reconstruction of Herbert's perspective and referential paradigm.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the fact that Herbert did include references to the classics within his commentary on the Khoisan and description of the Cape itself leads one to conclude that the author was writing from within a typical Renaissance outlook.

It is tempting to assume that Herbert's education and status, in contrast to the mostly lower class Europeans who comprised the crew of most sixteenth and seventeenth century voyages, may account for his application of Old Testament rationale in explaining the Khoisan condition.⁹¹ It is indeed notable that most descriptions of southern Africa in this time period focus rather exclusively on the nautical and geographical information likely to be useful in future voyages or of interest to the mercantile establishments that sponsored these early voyages. However, Herbert's mention of the Curse of Ham is revealing, precisely because it does not seek to justify its assertion, but rather assumes the veracity of this contention without extended explanation. Du Toit confirms that by the eighteenth century, the discourse of the Cape largely assumed that the "Negroes" were the descendants of Ham. However, as Martin Legassick points out, this analogy was only in its infancy during the early seventeenth century when Herbert wrote, and was most frequently employed by early exponents of abolition and humanitarianism.⁹² Thus one sees in Herbert's commentary, not the polemical intrigue that surrounded the discourse of savagery throughout the Western Hemisphere and its Occidental administrative centers, but rather the

proclivity within the Cape discourse to fit the indigenous people into a pre-existing framework and rationale without controversy and novelty. The remainder of Herbert's writing follows the course of contemporary writing on the Cape, attesting to the blatant deficiencies and incompleteness of Khoisan 'culture.' Thus Herbert's one-sentence invocation of Ham, juxtaposed immediately with several pages concerning the dress, diet, customs, religion, language, etc. of the 'Hottentots' clearly diminishes more philosophical ruminations on the other, in favor of the less esoteric language of degeneracy and insufficiency that characterized the Cape discourse.

Allusions to the Tower of Babel formed a second Biblical interpretation of the Cape landscape. Like the Curse of Ham this analogy supported rather than complicated the prevailing degeneracy paradigm of the era. An anonymous account from 1601 reads: for [the General, Sir James Lancaster] spake to them in the Cattels Language (which was never changed at the confusion of Babell), which was Moath for Oxen and Kine, and Baa for Sheepe... The people of this place are all of a tawnie colour...much giuen to picke and steale: their speech is wholly uttered through the throate...in seven weeks which wee remained here in this place, the sharpest wit among us could not learne one word of their language.⁹³

Here, again, the Biblical intervention is located in the text, not as a philosophical supposition, but rather as an assumed reality. The author's attention remains preoccupied by the dress and demeanor of the Khoisan, the reference to Babel only serving to explain why the Europeans were unsuccessful in acquiring more information from the natives about the environment and about indigenous customs. Further, the notion of human dispersal at Babel reinforced the paradigm of oneness—the shared "Cattels Language" that escaped humanity's fragmentation—and indicated the similitude between European and African. By invoking Babel and Ham as explanations for the Khoisan condition the Cape discourse was clearly located in a paradigm of monogenesis and degeneracy.

Unlike later observation-writing that occurred after the Linnaean-revolution, all of the sixteenth and century accounts of the Cape are not hesitant to locate the self (i.e. European observers) within the same frame as the other (indigenous Khoikhoi and San). Just as Western travel writings discussed the native Africans within the same discursive framework of Occidental civilization, Herbert and the above anonymous account, along with myriad other examples of contemporary literature from South Africa, readily incorporated the observer himself into the account. Mary Louise Pratt insists that until the end of the

eighteenth century contact between Europeans and “natives” was not narrated as such on the African frontier; instead, by the early eighteenth century “navigational paradigms” still dominated travel writing.⁹⁴

Pratt is correct in her comment that navigational paradigms dominated the Cape discourse from its inauguration until well into the colonial period. Indeed, one can hardly imagine that there would be any literature on the Cape at all before 1652 were it not for the larger body of knowledge concerning the sea-route to the East and the metropolitan interest in maritime affairs. However, prior to the arrival of Van Riebeeck, the navigational paradigm’s fixation with narrating adventures on the high seas did not preclude narration of terrestrial encounters, but rather extended itself to observations made on the Cape. Thus one sees Herbert frequently employing the pronoun “us” in relation to the Khoisan “they.” In the account of Lancaster’s voyage cited above, the anonymous author narrates the General reducing his stature to that of the Khoisan, mooing and baaing along with the indigenous in order to obtain food. As late as 1649 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier recounts, “I was inquisitive enough to touch many of them.”⁹⁵ These writings contrast with later accounts of the nineteenth century, where the European narrator never actually involves himself in the same discursive plane as the indigenous, but rather locates these people in a purely objective frame. Thus, in the early Cape discourse, there existed only one conceptual dimension, inhabited by Africans and Europeans alike.

The image of General Lancaster, prostrating himself with animal noises in an effort to obtain food is striking, particularly in comparison with representations of indigenous societies related by Europeans in the New World. Unlike the South African experience, where Western and African society occupied the same discursive place within the texts and theoretical framework of discovery, in America the foreign invaders are conspicuously absent within the discourse itself. Todorov relates:

Let us reread Cortes’s admiring observations. One thing is striking about them: with very few exceptions, they all concern objects: the architecture of houses, merchandise, fabrics, jewelry. Like today’s tourist who admires the quality of Asian or African craftsmanship though he is untouched by the notion of sharing the life of the crafts- men who produce such objects, Cortes goes into ecsta- sies about the Aztec productions but does not acknow- ledge the their makers as human individualities to be set on the same level as himself.⁹⁶

The binary construction of self and other within the New World discourses, unlike the case in early South Africa, consistently disassociated and systematically distanced the European

conquistador-observer from having to share a discursive space with the encountered natives. The colonial imagination presented a Western Hemisphere that was at once tantalizing and exotic, as well as objectified, lifeless, and different. This objectification reenforced the conceptual difference between “self” and “other” that Europeans imagined onto the colonial landscape.

The Occidental discourse of the New World possessed an obsessive fascination with cannibalism and monstrosity; the acute attention given to these topics stemmed as much from classical sources such as Herodotus (whose *Histories* are filled with such anomalies) as to the early representations of the Americas provided by Columbus and others. In his first letter to Luis de Santangel, Columbus summed up his “discoveries” with a specific section dedicated to monsters. Although earlier in the letter he had recently commented on hearing of people with tails and no hair, here the Admiral writes:

Thus I have found no monsters, nor report of any, except of an island which is Carib, which is the second at the entrance into the Indies, which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in all the islands as very ferocious, [and] who eat human flesh... They are no more malformed than the others, except that they have the custom of wearing their hair long like women... These are they who have intercourse with the women of Matinino, which is the first island found after leaving Spain for the Indies, in which there is not a man. These women engage in no feminine occupation, but use bows and arrows of cane...⁹⁷

Hulme and Whitehead observe that “the association between the name ‘Carib’ and the practice of eating human flesh has its beginning here.”⁹⁸ Such fabled peoples and cities—cannibals, Amazons, El Dorado, etc.—were to become a fixture in the New World discourses of exploration and discovery, coming to occupy an entirely different plane of existence from the familiar world of European civilization within the Occidental imagination. As with many of the inconsistencies and ironies of imperialism and conquest, these images often resonated awkwardly with certain Western assumptions and behaviors, but simultaneously contributed to the intrigue and fantasy that came to characterize the ‘new’ hemisphere.

European visions of cannibalism and monstrosity manifested themselves quite differently in South Africa during the early period of visitation and colonization. Raven-Hart’s compilation contains a relatively equal number of accounts both accusing and then vindicating the Khoisan of eating human flesh. Thus one sees Jon Olafsson’s claim that, “these wretches...are man-eaters: they had eaten seven men of these English on their outwards journey,”⁹⁹ counter-posed by De Beaulieu’s assertion, “but they do not eat

human flesh.”¹⁰⁰ The inconsistencies surrounding Khoisan cannibalism, in addition to the potential for embellishment and the rather frequent inaccuracies recorded by the early visitors, seems to concern an event from 1619 where Cape natives allegedly killed eight English sailors who were fishing in the Salt River. The rest of the company only recovered four of the bodies, commencing speculation as to whether the Khoisan had eaten the other three sailors. William Hore’s account, recorded at the time of the incident itself, however, does not hint at indigenous cannibalism, but rather:

The cause which should excite them to such an horrid and unheard attempt I cannot conceive, unlesse (as is most probable) some wrong offered by the Dutch lately gone hence, have moved them to practice and exercise this Treachery to us now...¹⁰¹

If one accepts that cannibalism was the ethnographic fixation of the New World discourse and the various images it produced, travelers to South Africa developed a fetish for a very particular Khoisan custom of quasi-castration, in which young ‘Hottentot’ boys had one testicle removed. Practically every account provided by Raven-Hart mentions the practice, although not a single observer offers a definitive explanation for the ritual. Those who do speculate on its purpose often relate this surgery with the Khoisan’s uncanny quickness of foot: “I have not been able to know for what superstition or reason [for testicle removal], unless it be to run the better, and in truth they surpass all others that I have ever seen.”¹⁰² None of the Cape observers reveal a serious consideration that the indigenous were born missing a testicle. Although different authors cite different ages at which the surgery takes place the prototypical account reads: “as soon as a male-child is born the mother cuts away his right testicle, and gives him sea-water to drink and tobacco to chew.”¹⁰³

In light of McClintock’s psychoanalytic argument that European anxiety over ‘savage’ cannibalism was the result of white male insecurity and a fear of emasculation upon the feminized, liminal frontier of the known and unknown world, the attention drawn to South African testicle-removal solicits further attention.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, one is again tempted to conclude that the almost universal recognition of this particular practice represents a parallel phenomenon of masculine unease within the discourse of the sub-continent. However, there exist several important distinctions to draw out before one considers the veracity of this argument. First, the imagining of the Cape landscape exhibited none of the overtly erotic and sensual images upon which McClintock predicates her argument. Second, the discourse of cannibalism was grounded in medieval prejudices, derived from antiquity, about what lay beyond the borders of Christendom such as the fear of the anthropophagi

(man-eaters); such human anomalies were never actually “discovered” by explorers in the Americas, but rather they represented the consummate fantasy of the European imagination. Conversely, the encounter with testicle-removal represented both an un-expected phenomenon, and one which Westerners actually came into direct contact with. Third, as demonstrated by the insatiable curiosity of several Cape visitors, there appears to have been little phallic Western anxiety or physical trepidation surrounding the inexplicably altered Khoisan. As one traveler relates: “I was inquisitive enough to touch many of them, and found nothing on them but the left testicles.”¹⁰⁵

Rather, European perceptions of Khoisan testicle-removal conformed quite characteristically with the existing discourse of deficiency and incompleteness surrounding the Cape in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Understandably, the image of a man with one testicle, to the European mind, would seem only halfway complete within the conventional understanding of what constituted masculinity. In the early modern period, as Keeble explains:

[There existed] age-old prejudices against the sinister or left side. Males were the product of hot sperm from right testicle deposited on the right (hotter) side of the womb, where the foetus was carried. Females, on the other hand, were produced by cold sperm from the inferior left testicle...a perfect man was produced by male sperm and a foetus carried on the right (male) side of the womb...and female sperm deposited on the right side, (would become) a virago.¹⁰⁶

Thus one recognizes how the particular phenomenon of Khoisan quasi-castration resonated within the contemporary European paradigm of sexuality and reproduction, and how it reinforced gendered notions of completeness and sufficiency. Since women and men were considered hierarchized products of a ‘one-sex’ biological model, whereby women represented incomplete men as a result of the testicular processes by which they were formed, one can grasp why the European imagination was fascinated with the exclusively left-testicled South Africans. “Man” constituted a single and inevitable category for humanity, in which women and ‘Hottentots’ were inferior versions of the ideal; moreover, perfect “man” could only be achieved through the right testicle. Thus the “degenerate” natives’ uni-testicularity automatically precluded the possibility for Khoisan ‘perfection’ and served as a clear indicator of and explanation for indigenous deficiency and incompleteness.

During the pre-Enlightenment era of European expansion, Western powers focused their attention on maritime exploration and desired a limited, that is extractive or

impermanent relationship with “natives” and new territories. The scramble to make new “discoveries” sufficed to discourage the establishment of centralized imperial administrations throughout the non-Western world. South Africa is a good example of this. Although from the 1480s Europeans had visited the Cape and located it within their geographic universe, there was no serious attempt to colonize the peninsula until the middle of the seventeenth century. Even then, “they had no intention of creating anything more than a small fortified base,” so as to ameliorate the commercial voyages between Europe and the East.¹⁰⁷ Several small-scale attempts by the British to populate the Cape with convicts had previously failed, but the first permanent European settlement in South Africa was formed in 1652 under the direction of the Dutch East India Company.

In the same year, an Amsterdam publishing house, Jodocus Hondius compiled the following description of the Cape from earlier travel accounts:

The local natives have everything in common with the dumb cattle, barring their human nature...[They] are handicapped in their speech, clucking like turkey-cocks or like the people of Alpine Germany who have developed goitre by drinking the hard snow-water... Their food consists of herbs, cattle, wild animals and fish. The animals are eaten together with their internal organ... They all smell fiercely, as can be noticed at a distance of more than twelve feet against the wind, and they also give the appearance of never having washed.¹⁰⁸

Coming at the beginning of the Dutch colonial experiment, this voice of the metropole neatly summarized contemporary European attitudes about the Cape. Hondius’s opening sentence embodied the full semantic weight of the South African discourse: “although the Hottentots may seem to be no more than beasts, they are in fact men.”¹⁰⁹ As the Dutch moved to establish a more sustained relationship with the Khoisan and their environment, the preceding paradigm of sameness and similitude, of engaging the indigenous within the same conceptual framework by which they characterized themselves, informed the colonial endeavor.

The seventeenth century was the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic and throughout this period the Hollanders achieved success and influence through their vocation as middlemen rather than as colonizers.¹¹⁰ Originally, the Cape Colony was intended to serve this Dutch role as intermediaries within the international scene. The VOC did not wish for Van Riebeeck’s settlement to evolve into a full-blown imperial experiment, but rather aimed at the development of a limited, self-sufficient provisioning station for Company ships that trafficked luxury goods between the Occident and the Orient. Dominance in the trade with

Asia was essential to the Netherlands's power within Europe, and by the middle of the seventeenth century, possession of the Cape was deemed vital to this endeavor.¹¹¹ Notions of indigenous deficiency escalated in this early colonial period. As sustained contact between the Dutch and the indigenous emerged, European discourse introduced a new allegation against the Khoisan. Still couched within the semantics of similitude, Western observers began identifying natives as idle and lazy.¹¹² A typical account of the seventeenth century reads: "Their native inclination to idleness and a careless life, will scarce admit of either force or reward for reclaiming them from that innate lethargic humour."¹¹³ Behind such language lay familiar associations with the lower classes of metropolitan Europe, who met with equal criticism back in the Occident; as Coetzee attests: "In the first hundred years or so of the settlement, the idleness of the Hottentots is denounced in much the same spirit as the idleness of beggars and wastrels is denounced in Europe."¹¹⁴ This characterization of the Khoisan stemmed from the limitations of the European paradigm to conceive of economic and cultural difference, coupled with Western resentment of the indigenous' reluctance to enter the colonial labor force. Indeed, throughout the colonial period, similarities between the inferiority of the urban poor and the degeneracy of the peripheral subject would continue to have a formative impact in the visualization of the South African landscape, and the convergence of these themes would have a sustained resonance within the discourse of the Cape Colony.

Theories of African and lower class idleness mapped nicely onto a contemporary understanding of gender. Just as the Old Testament provided justifications for racial diversity and inequality, so too did Eve's creation out of Adam's rib serve to explain female incompleteness and imperfection; assessing Genesis 3:16, John Bunyan wrote in the seventeenth century that, "Doubtless the woman was, in her first creation, made in subordination to her husband, and ought to have been under obedience to him."¹¹⁵ Woman's inferior condition was discursively construed as a type of arrested development in which the female sex was innately juvenile and unproductive. Baxter's *A Christian Dictionary* of 1673 claimed:

[Women] are betwixt a man and child: some have more of the man, and many have more of the child; but most are in a middle state. Weakness naturally inclineth persons to be froward and hard to please; as we see in children, old people, and sick people.¹¹⁶

This rendering of woman, not fully mature or complete, conformed with the semantics of African idleness, and sustained the similitude paradigm in which "man" was an absolute

category.

This interpretative framework of sameness coupled with inferiority persisted within the Western paradigm through roughly the first third of the eighteenth century. In one of the last major travel accounts of South Africa before the advent of the Linnaean revolution, Peter Kolb's *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope*, originally published in 1719, offers a quintessential look at the European perspective on South Africa up to that time. At times expressing an unprecedented enthusiasm for the "Hottentots," Kolb exemplified the Western conceptual framework of the Cape that had developed over the past two and a half centuries. In her critique of Kolb's work, Mary Louise Pratt writes:

With a humanism not found in later writers, Kolb affirms the Hottentots above all as cultural beings. He is acutely critical of European claims that they lack the capacity for religious belief... [he] emphasizes the depth of the Khoikhoi's commitment to their own religion—in other words, he insists they be understood by Europeans in the same terms Europeans understand themselves.¹¹⁷

Although clearly an exception within the early Cape discourse for the depth and ethnographic interest that Kolb took in the Khoikhoi, his account is definitively located within the discourse of similitude and hints at the emerging distaste for the Boer colonists that was rapidly developing within metropolitan opinion. To the extent that Kolb engaged the Khoisan as a human community with the same discursive characteristics as European society, the author's subtitle speaks for itself: "A Particular Account of the several Nations of the Hottentots: Their Religion, Government, Laws, Customs, Ceremonies, and Opinions; Their Art of War, Professions, Language, Genius &c together with A Short Account of the Dutch Settlement At the Cape."¹¹⁸ As such, Kolb's publication marked the last significant discursive enterprise at the Cape before the ascendancy of Linnaean ethnography and the pursuit of "science;" he epitomized the similitude paradigm that predominated in earlier Western thought, and hinted at the discourse of deterioration that was to follow.

While European culture transformed and evolved throughout the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the Cape Colony developed in relative isolation from the new Western cultural ethos, causing many Occidental observers to endorse a "degeneracy paradigm" of Afrikaner society.¹¹⁹ This degeneracy paradigm assumed many shapes and forms over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, but the essential argument maintained that the African environment and its seclusion from Western society produced a version of humanity strikingly opposed to the "cultured" and "reasoning" man of

Enlightenment Europe. The Boer's population growth in the eighteenth century increasingly pushed colonial society into the interior, so much so that by 1778 the VOC sought to limit expansion to the Fish River. The Afrikaner's eastward advance collided with the westward advance of indigenous Xhosa peoples in the Zuurveld, and as this region became more densely populated competition for grazing territory increased. The 1770s witnessed the first of the "Frontier Wars," during which time Boer society became increasingly militant and racially intransigent. Dutch "commando" groups adopted a practice of killing adult Africans indiscriminately and "apprenticing" their children, forcing them to work without pay well into their adult lives.¹²⁰ These conflicts and experiences on the frontier shaped and solidified Afrikaner racial ideology, and hardened the Boers against the nascent humanitarianism emerging in metropolitan Europe.

The "degeneracy paradigm" of Dutch colonial society developed in the eighteenth century and came to fruition in the early 1800s. Critical of the Afrikaner's frontier practices, Occidental discourse about the Cape "often condemned the Boers in much the same terms they used to condemn the Hottentots, with 'indolence' and 'idleness' being key words."¹²¹ O. F. Mentzel, who lived at the Cape for several years in the mid-eighteenth century, wrote: "[the Boers] have accustomed themselves to such an extent to the carefree life, the indifference, the lazy days and the association with slaves and Hottentots, that not much difference may be discerned between the former and the latter."¹²² As the Enlightenment progressed and Great Britain became more involved with the Cape Colony, notions of Boer degeneracy increased and continued attention was paid to Afrikaner backwardness.

The first half of the eighteenth century marked the emergence of a new European obsession with "natural history" and an intellectual quest for scientific knowledge. The 1735 publication of Carlus Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* inaugurated the movement to classify the natural world into an ordered system of Western knowledge.¹²³ The ramifications of this movement for the imperial world were two-fold: first, "natives" themselves began to assume new significance as subjects of scientific scrutiny. No longer viewed exclusively as expedient objects in transatlantic commerce or degenerate instances of failed human perfection, the racial and anatomical differences of indigenous people became increasingly important to Westerners in the 1700s.¹²⁴ As the vanguards of Western epistemology, "scientists" became obsessed with identifying "native" peoples, flora, and

fauna through the more insidious vocabularies of racial and biological truth. This movement shifted the Cape discourse away from a singular conceptual framework inhabited by Africans and Europeans alike, and towards a detached and “objective” discourse in which European observers were conspicuously absent.

Second, the stability of imperial commerce, coupled with the ascendancy of “natural science,” redirected explorative interest towards the interior of unknown continents.¹²⁵ Although mutually beneficial for both colonial economies and eurocentric epistemologies, this thrust to the interior reflected the birth of a movement that valued unknown lands for their intellectual worth (conceived of, of course, through an inherently subjective perspective) and championed the pursuit of knowledge as intrinsically valuable. These changes in the European agenda developed out of its exchange with non-Western periphery and marked the advent of modernity. This era would tout the belief that knowledge progressed and that history followed a continuous forward trajectory. Alex Callinicos comments: “It was precisely from the prospect of infinite future improvements that the new age sought its legitimacy.”¹²⁶ Thus the desire to expand European civilization into the interior of foreign continents coincided with the belief that history advanced upon a trajectory of sophistication and the notion that these unknown regions represented fields of new and acquirable knowledge. As such, the shift in metropolitan concerns inaugurated a new mechanism for imperial conquest; less concerned with military subjugation and the extraction of material wealth, the new scientific endeavor sought to classify the periphery through a narcissistic epistemology that lay claim to universal truths.

William Paterson’s *Narrative of Four Voyages in the Land of the Hottentots and Kaffirs* exemplified the discourse of the Cape that predominated in the later eighteenth century. This popular travel account first appeared in 1789 and championed the Linnaean model of naturalism and scientific scrutiny. Paterson wrote in his preface:

If ambition never instilled in the conquerors of the world the desire to extend their empire to the deserts of Africa, if commerce has not tempted men to examine a country whose outer appearance could never seduce anyone whose sole object is to increase his wealth...nevertheless there exist men who, despite all the terrors of these countries find them objects capable of adding to their satisfactions.¹²⁷

This excerpt highlights the self-consciousness of eighteenth century naturalists to break with earlier colonial designs. As seen throughout such narratives, these scientists invested their enterprise with a sense of innocent curiosity, the benign endeavors of ‘enlightened’

European men seeking to enrich the fund of human knowledge. Within this discourse, the “native” would assume a place alongside the various “natural” wonders of the South African landscape.

Naturalism’s preoccupation with anatomy stimulated a nascent interest in racial classification on the periphery while giving rise to a new consideration of gender difference within the metropolis. During the eighteenth century, the anatomical dissection of the female reproductive system lent support to a movement that redefined women in maternal, rather than sexual terms, as agents of reproduction.¹²⁸ So too did the already conceived affinity between imperial landscape and female bodies adapt to this new schematic conception of gender:

[In the eighteenth century] the body generally, but especially the female body in its reproductive capacity and in distinction from that of the male, came to occupy a critical place in a whole range of political discourses.¹²⁹

Thus there existed a triangulated relationship between the changing cultural status of Occidental women, emerging anatomical discourse on the nature of femininity, and the reapplication of a sexual metaphor onto the imperial frontier. Where formerly the equation of female bodies and virgin lands signified a lustful male invitation, or alternatively, the innate deficiency of the colonial landscape, throughout the Enlightenment the new rhetoric of maternity and reproduction gave rise to an imperial agenda of “civilization,” aestheticization, and insemination.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Cape Colony was one of few places in Africa where Europeans had access to the interior of the continent.¹³⁰ The strong European desire for geographic and scientific “enlightenment” prompted the formation of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa (the Africa Association) in London in 1788. The founding members of this organization reflected on Africa:

...the map of its interior is still but a wide extended blank, on which the geographer...has traced with hesitating hand a few names of unexplored rivers and of uncertain nations ...Sensible of this stigma, and desirous of rescuing the age from a charge of ignorance...a few individuals, strongly impressed with a conviction of the practicability and utility of thus enlarging the fund of human knowledge, have formed the plan of an Association for Promoting the discovery of the interior parts of Africa.¹³¹

The conceptual priorities of the Enlightenment manifested themselves in the semantics of the Association’s mission statement. The blankness of unexplored lands highlighted the European prerogative to name and “discover” these territories. Their rhetoric, however, was

unambiguously couched in the language of scientific discovery; cartographers and knowledge seekers had replaced conquistadors, slave traders, and mercantile colonists as the vanguards of Western expansion. Even the Association's name, "Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa," mirrored the anatomical imagery of dissection and autopsy that characterized the era. Whereas the pre-modern endeavors, such as Van Riebeeck's initial mission on the Cape, were sponsored, either by the state or a corporate representative of the state (i.e., the VOC) and were profit-seeking by design, the African Association utilized an academic, even philanthropic vocabulary to describe its agenda. The founders professed their (seemingly benign) desire to contribute to human knowledge, modernity's consummate endeavor, in order to incorporate the entire globe into a coherent European vocabulary of science and reason.

As illustrated in the Association's statement, Enlightenment Europe repeatedly treated Africa as a blank map, and it displaced upon that map a quality of darkness that signified at once the amorphous anonymity of the interior, the black skin of its native inhabitants, and its inverse relationship to Western "enlightenment," civilization, and sophistication. Christopher Miller discusses the conceptual origins of African blackness: "Black and white are to color what promiscuous concubinage, squeaking, and nakedness were to marriage, speech, and clothing: they negate the category they occupy."¹³² As the Comaroffs suggest, the portrayal of Africa as a dark recess equated the continent with a bodily interior, both ripe for European exploration.¹³³ Unlike the earlier Cape discourse, however, that saw in the African landscape an imperfect model of Western masculinity, the darkness of Africa came to symbolize a nullity or void in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This contrast in imagery highlights the changing design of colonial thought. Conceiving of Africa as a dark nullity, like the nascent maternal focus of female anatomical theory, empowered a European fantasy of inseminating, impregnating, and enlightening this continent. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century Enlightenment thinking and modern epistemology had come to dominate the Cape discourse, replacing the earlier paradigm of similitude and inferiority. This new discourse was firmly established in South Africa when Great Britain gained control of the colony in 1795 and had laid the foundation for England's "civilizing" agenda. In the following century, the rhetoric and semantics of Linnaean naturalism would occupy a paramount position in the colonial project and Europe's increasing fixation with the African periphery.

Epilogue

There existed two distinct phases of European discourse on South Africa before the turn of the nineteenth century. In the first period, notions of human similitude and the oneness of “man” combined with theories of racial imperfection and degeneracy; moreover, this early discourse was a unique expression of the colonial imagination in its time period, deviating in its semantics and connotations from the dominant imperial dialogues of the New World. The second Cape discourse emerged simultaneously with the Enlightenment, and it embodied this era’s fascination with rationalism, knowledge, and scientific inquiry. These dialogues represented the dominant European perspectives toward South Africa in their respective periods, and formed the basic Western conceptual paradigms.

Postcolonial histories bear a responsibility to address the flawed assumptions and hegemonic norms upon which Western imperialism existed. The term ‘postcolonial’ implies that colonial history is the history of imperial wrongdoings and misnomers; a canon of faulty epistemological assertions and the subjective beliefs of a certain class, race, and gender belonging to Europe from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries, that sought to dominate (with greater or lesser success through its letters and representations, schools and churches, administrations and vocabularies) consciousness throughout the world. The errors and prejudices of this system, its ironies and inconsistencies, are ostensible and manifold. But correcting and reinterpreting this world view is a daunting task, in large part because the very act of deconstruction has discredited the reliability of traditional sources and methods.

European discourse was neither the only, nor even the most overt mechanism of colonial domination. The potency of discourse, however, stemmed precisely from its ability to infiltrate consciousness, develop subtle systems of prejudice, and discursively construe the social order through the power of metaphor, allusion, and association. Today’s postcolonial agenda seeks to illuminate the structures and mechanisms within which colonialism functioned, revealing their fallibility, in order to deconstruct the lingering hegemonies of Western imperialism. By focusing on discourse, one hopes to unveil not only colonialism’s faulty assumptions, but to also determine the culture and character of imperialism.

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