# Seventeenth Century Dutch Travellers in South Africa[1]

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In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* Hulme and Youngs write:

> Travel has recently emerged as a key theme for the humanities and social sciences, and the amount of scholarly work on travel writing has reached unprecedented levels. The academic disciplines of literature, history, geography, and anthropology have all overcome their previous reluctance to take travel writing seriously and have begun to produce a body of interdisciplinary criticism which will allow the full historical complexity of the genre to be appreciated.[2]

In the case of South Africa important contributions to travel writing were made by a host of seventeenth century Dutch explorers and travellers who, either on their own initiative or by order of the Cape commanders and governors, went into the interior for longer and shorter periods in search of knowledge, copper and gold. When studying their reports one should keep in mind that they followed (or were supposed to follow) specific

[1] This article derives from a wide-ranging current research project about seventeenth-century Dutch travellers' reports that touches on various aspects seen from contemporary theoretical perspectives.

[2] P. Hulme and T. Youngs, 'Introduction' to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–13, p. 1.

instructions regarding what to look for and what to include in their reports and how to structure them.[3]

At the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that we are living three centuries or more after these travellers, and thus the following remarks by Susan Bassnett should also be heeded:

> Contemporary readings of accounts of travels, inspired by differing methodologies deriving from gender studies, cultural studies and post-modern theory, expose subtexts beneath the apparently innocent details of journeys in other lands that enable us to see more clearly the ways in which travellers construct the cultures they experience . . . The map-maker, the translator and the travel writer are not innocent producers of text.[4]

This article will be structured around a number of reports by explorers and travellers before, during and after Van Riebeeck's time as commander at the Cape up to circa 1685 when Simon van der Stel undertook his expedition to Namaqualand. This chronology will, however, not always be rigidly followed, in order to be able to point out links and/or provide broader perspectives. The travellers reported in various ways and at varying length on such things as the fauna and flora and their daily lives, but in this contribution attention will specifically be paid to certain tendencies in their representations[5] of their own and indigenous cultures and the *topoi* that occur in them. In line with Bassnett's remarks above

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[3] Information about and examples of these instructions, which do not as such play a crucial role in this article, can be found in, for example, S. Huigen, *De weg naar Monomotapa* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), pp. 27ff., and 'Instructie voor den Corporael Wllem Muller', in *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. E.C. Godée Molsbergen (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1916), pp. 15ff.

[4] S. Basnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 92–93, 99.

[5] "Representation" is used in Meijer's sense as any utterance framed in language or image, always mediated by a person or institution and (therefore) never neutral or innocent: see M. Meijer, *In tekst gevat* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 1.

the analysis and interpretation of these representations will throughout – explicitly and implicitly – take place within the framework of modern approaches like post-colonial theory, (comparative) imagology (intercultural hermeneutics) and critical discourse analysis.[6]

## Before 1652: Van der Does, Lodewijcksz, De Graaff, Janszen and Proot

One of the first Dutch travellers to report on the Cape was Frank van der Does. In his Journal (1595–97) he referred to the indigenous people's speech, appearance, clothing, and eating habits, while he also hinted at their superstitions and cannibalism. Regarding the latter he wrote: 'They would also, as one could note, have eaten one of our people.'[7] He also pointed out the difference between the indigenous people's clothing and that of the Europeans, or rather their lack of clothing, their nakedness: not only were they short in stature, ugly and looking like villains (*dieff*), but they also went about 'naked except for the tail of a small wild animal that hung in front of their private parts, covering these only scantily; instead of shoes they wore two double pieces of leather that they fastened under their

[6] Although contributors to *Verhalen over verre landen: Reizen op papier 1600–1800,* ed. K. Bostoen *et al.* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001) and *Reizen en reizigers in de Renaissance,* ed. K. Enenkal *et al.* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998) refer to some of these representations as found in travellers' texts from various parts of the world, including the Netherlands, I shall focus on a number of texts that have not received much attention and/or have not been analysed from the perspectives mentioned. This should extend our indigenous knowledge as well as confirm (or qualify) the views expressed in Bostoen and Enenkel.

C. Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 336, defines *topos* as '[a]n older term for a motif commonly found in literary works, or for a stock device of rhetoric'. Comparative imagology (nowadays intercultural hermeneutics; study of image formation) is a field of study within comparative literary and cultural studies that investigates the images (Latin *imago*) that people, groups and (especially) nations have of themselves and others.

[7] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, p. 6. Here I quote my translation from the seventeenth-century Dutch; existing translations are used wherever possible.

feet instead of to their toes . . . There was some dried meat hanging around their necks, which, as some write, might be male genitals . . .' [8]

The first Dutch fleet to reach India was commanded by Cornelis de Houtman. In 1598 Lodewijcksz's report on this voyage, *Historie van Indien, waer inne verhaelt is de avonturen die de Hollantsche schepen bejegent zijn*, echoed Van der Does's observations about certain of the original inhabitants of the Cape: 'These people are somewhat smaller than the people in this country [the Netherlands], reddish brown of colour, but the one browner than the other. They go naked having an ox hide around them like a mantle, the hair against their bodies, with a broad belt of the same around their middle, the one end hanging in front of their private parts.'[9] In Nicolaas de Graaff's description of his journeys he noted in 1640 the following on the situation at the Cape: 'Nothing else but wild, heathen, filthy, and stinking people, who covered their nudity with sheep skins and knew nothing about God or His law, and in all their habits were more like animals than human beings.'[10] Later writers also referred to these phenomena,[11] while German travel descriptions of America included them as well,[12] thus strengthening the impression that these (biased) perceptions were shared by Western European travellers and travel writers in general.

Both cannibalism and nudity are important topoi or cultural texts[13] in

[8] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, pp. 5–6.

[9] *De Kaap: Goede Hoop halverwege Indië* , ed. M. Barend-van Haeften and B. Paasman (Hilversum: Verloren 2003), pp. 26–27.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 29; de Graaff's sixteen travel reports were published only in 1701, entitled *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff na de vier gedeelten des werelds*.

[11] From the eighteenth century, which is outside the scope of this article, we have, for example, the Lammens sisters' report ; cf. *Verhalen over verre landen*, ed. Bostoen *et al*., pp. 61 ff.

[12] See W. Neuber, 'Duitse reizigers in de Nieuwe Wereld', in *Reizen en reizigers in de Renaissance*, ed. Enenkel *et al*., p. 160.

[13] Meijer defines this concept (Dutch *cultuurtekst*) as follows: 'The cultural text is the cultural model that encompasses much more than the single text, and that is continually used anew. It is the endless *repetition* of certain cultural schemes that is reality- and subject-constituting' (*In tekst gevat*, p. 16; my translation).

travel literature and can, according to some (postcolonial) theorists, be seen as an aspect of the "terror" that the unfamiliar, the "other", struck into the Western Europeans. This in turn can be explained by the view that the Western Europeans were afraid of losing their "unique identity" through contact with others, in other words of "going native".[14]

A further unfamiliar aspect was the speech of the so-called *Hottentots*. This designation itself was, according to Saunders and Southey, 'an insulting imitation of their staccato speech',[15] replacing the term *Khoikhoi* (men of men) that probably functioned as a positive self-definition.[16] The European view that their speech was not only unintelligible but also inferior becomes clear when one reads the following entry in Van der Does's Journal: 'regarding their speech it is as if one heard the noise of turkey cocks; we could hear little but gobbling and whistling'.[17] From this last description it also becomes clear that

[14] B. Ashcroft *et al*., *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), gloss "going native": 'The term indicates the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs. The construction of native cultures as either primitive or degenerate in a binary discourse of colonizer/colonized led . . . to a widespread fear of "going native" in many colonial societies' ( pp. 147–48); cf. *Reizen en reizigers in de Renaissance*, ed. Enenkel *et al*., pp. 14 and 16.

[15] C. Saunders and N. Southey, *A Dictionary of South African History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), pp. 98 and 86.

[16] K. Schoeman, *Seven Khoi Lives: Cape Biographies of the Seventeenth Century* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), pp. 11–12, gives a somewhat different explanation, however, but note the (pejorative?) descriptive term 'meaningless': 'Around the middle of the seventeenth century the name "Hottentoos" or "Hottentots" became common, most likely as derivation from a meaningless repetitive refrain with which these people accompanied their dances.'

[17] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, p. 6, also see *Verhalen over verre landen*, ed. Bostoen *et al*., p. 70. It should be noted that English travellers who served in the Dutch fleet and visited the Cape, as well as Portuguese seafarers, make use of the same cultural texts in their journals, e.g. John Davis (1598), quoted in B. Maclennan, *The Wind Makes Dust: Four Centuries of Travel in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003): 'The people are not circumcised, their colour is Olive blacke, blacker than the Brasilians, their haire curled and blacke as the Negroes of Angola, their words are for the most part inarticulate, and, in speaking, they clocke with the Tongue like a brood Hen, which clocking and the word are both pronounced together, verie strangely . . . They go all naked, having only a short Cloke of Skinnes . . . we stayed by our Tents being belegered by Cannibals' (p. 22). In 1615 Edward Terry described the Khoikhoi as 'beasts in the skin of men' (*ibid*., p. 23). Francisco Vaz d'Almada mentioned how Negroes ate the roasted flesh of hanged slaves (*ibid*., p. 27).

one should in one's analysis always be on the lookout for figures of speech like similes, because these, at least from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, are never neutral, but one way of manipulating the reader's perceptions and constructing "reality" in a certain (biased) way. Other examples can be found on p. 156 of this article as well as in Van Riebeeck's journal.[18] In the entry for 18 to 20 May 1654 Van Riebeeck refers to a Hottentot woman who gave birth to a child 'on the bank of the river under some twigs piled up [and] without the help of either men or women as if she were a senseless animal [*een onvernuftich beest*]'. On 15 June 1656 he writes that the natives are 'beginning to speak the Dutch language fairly well, especially the younger children; but do not wish to live with us in the house, like birds that fly wildly rather than live in the best king's halls. It is also a big punishment for them when they may/can not mess and roll in dirt and filth like pigs.'

This brings us to another aspect, namely their eating habits, to which Van der Does directly linked his inference that the indigenes were cannibals (see above): 'They ate raw entrails, from which they removed the excrement only slightly with a finger, from which one can suspect that they had to be cannibals.'[19]

In their dealings with the Khoi the Dutch used such goods as copper and mirrors to befriend them and also in their bartering. Lodewijcksz referred to this custom:

> On 6 August we went ashore with three shallops. There I was sent to examine the land, which indeed offers a fine prospect,

[18] See R.E. Gordon and J. Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster* (Goodwood, Cape: Nasou, 1977): 'It was the rule for senior Company servants to keep a journal ("You are without fail to keep a true record of everything that happens about you") . . . Jan van Riebeeck's journal is therefore an official document, albeit full of human interest and vivid detail' (p. 9). Van Riebeeck's journal is entitled *Daghregister gehouden by den Oppercoopman Jan Anthonisz van Riebeeck* and has been published by the Van Riebeeck Society.

[19] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, p. 6; see below, pp. 155 and 157.

> adorned with sweet-smelling shrubs and flowers. We went about half a mile . . . inland . . . We found various tracks of men, cattle, and dogs, also partridges; and further on found broken the little mirrors and bells which we had given them the previous day, and the piece of cloth lying on the ground.[20]

Their observations confirmed his earlier remark that, when they gave the inhabitants these objects, they did not know what to do with them and therefore threw them away. From a Western perspective, and taking into account the comparative imagological and postcolonial approach, this, like the remarks about speech and food, could be interpreted as an indication of ignorance about the European world and "civilization", and through contrast it would have strengthened the Dutch self-image and identity. Other indications of "ignorance" are found with regard to the treatment of wounded or sick people. At a later date (1669 or later), Johann Schreyer, a soldier with the VOC who spent eight years at the Cape and made more than one journey to the interior, wrote, in his *Neue Ost-Indiansche Reis-Bescheibung*:

> [The Hottentots] are very unskilled in healing wounds. If a wound is deeper than they can see into, they at once cut it open, and indeed make it 3 or 4 times larger, without regarding whether some member or other may be damaged thereby. If a large vein or artery is cut they do not know how to staunch the blood, and thus must let the man die, because blood-letting is not customary among them. Their plasters and salves are nothing but the fat of the beasts, wherewith they over-diligently smear the wound and all the body. If they fall or are bruised, and see that the place has blood below it, they cut open the skin, suck out the blood, and rub the charcoal of a certain wood therein. For internal sickness they use no remedy other than that the surgeon smears the sick person with fat, and rubs, and rubs it well in, besides doing also some superstitious actions thereby.

[20] Gordon and Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster*, p. 6.

Schreyer then related an incident of the healing of a sick man to illustrate this:

> The sun was setting when they made a small fire, near which none of us might come, to which end also they built a separate fire for us. Around the fire they sat in a ring. The surgeon, after he had turned towards the sun with many movements and words, went to the patient, who sat quite naked on the ground, and began to pass his urine on him, from the head downwards and around the body, until he had no more, in which task 7 or 8 of the Hottentots then duly followed the surgeon. The sick man, after he was thus thoroughly bathed, went to sleep in his cloak, and next day was fit to continue the journey with us.

He also referred to other superstitious rituals to heal people or 'turn away the weapons of enemies'.[21] In contrast with this there are a number of references in the reports to the Dutch treating patients by means of blood-letting and purgation among others.[22] Their Christian beliefs of course were different from and opposed to these superstitions, too.

The last two documents from before 1652 that I would like to refer to here are Leendert Janszen and Matthys Proot's so-called *Remonstrantie* (Remonstrance) and Van Riebeeck's comments on it.[23] In the Remonstrance, dated 26 July 1649, Janszen and Proot recommended the erection of a fort and the laying out of a garden at the Cape of Good Hope. They also contested the current views on the indigenous people of South Africa by whom they had been treated kindly:

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[21] Maclennan, *The Wind Makes Dust*, pp. 35–36. Schreyer may have been trained as a surgeon, possibly a reason for his interest in indigenous medicine and operations.

[22] Cf. *Verhalen over verre landen*, ed. Bostoen *et al*., p. 65.

[23] The whole title reads: '*Remonstrantie* waarbij cortelijk werdt verthoont ende aangewezen wat dienst voordeel ende proffijt de Vereenigde g'Octroijeerde Oost Indische Comp$^{e}$ sal comen te trecken door't maecken van een Fort ende Thuijn aen de *Cabo De Bona Esperance*' ('A remonstrance in which is briefly set forth and explained the service, advantages and profits which will accrue to the United East India Chartered Company, from making a Fort and Garden at the Cabo de Boa Esperance'). Janszen was on the *Nieuwe Haerlem* that foundered in Table Bay in 1647. Proot was with the fleet that took Janszen and his men back to the Netherlands a year later.

> Some will say that the natives are savages and cannibals and that no good is to be expected from them, but that we must be always on our guard; this is, however only a popular error, as the contrary shall be fully shown; but that they are without law and civil policy such as many Indians have, is not denied; that some of our soldiers and sailors have also been beaten to death by them, is indeed true, but the reasons why, are, for the expulsion of our people who give them cause, always concealed; for we firmly believe that the farmers in this country, were we to shoot their cattle or take them away without payment if they had no justice to fear, would not be one hair better than these Natives.[24]

At least two things become clear from this: that Janszen and Proot also knew the topoi of cruelty and cannibalism (to which they did not, however, explicitly react), but that they at the same time attempted to justify the natives' actions by pointing out the lack of laws and policing, as well as illegal actions by the Europeans.

In 1651 Van Riebeeck – who had been at the Cape in 1648 – commented on the Remonstrance.[25] He was much less positive about the indigenous people:

> And although Mr Leendert Janszen does not appear to entertain much apprehension of an interruption from the natives, provided they are well treated, I say notwithstanding, that they are by no means to be trusted, being a savage set, living without conscience and therefore the fort should be rendered tolerably defensible, for I have frequently heard, from diverse persons equally deserving of credit (who have also been there) that our people have been beaten to death by them without having given the slightest

[24] Gordon and Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster*, pp. 10–11. For a slightly different translation, cf. Maclennan, *The Wind Makes Dust*, pp. 28–29.

[25] Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape in 1652 as its first commander and established a refreshment station for passing ships. In 1662 he became commander of Malacca.

> cause; we should, therefore, act cautiously towards them, and not put much trust in them . . . [26]

It should by now have become clear that certain representations about the "natives" at the Cape were repeated time and time again in the reports of the Dutch travellers; that there indeed existed a "cultural text"[27] in this regard that is taken up and confirmed by our texts as well. From this perspective the "reality" regarding the indigenous African people as well as their "identity" for the Dutch was thus at least partly formed by these repeated representations. At the same time their own identity was also involved as the subtext consistently seems to be: "We are different; we are civilized, not savages."[28] This is a clear instance of Bhabha's view on the role of racial stereotyping, of which Bertens supplies an informative summary:

> Bhabha offers us analyses in which the identity of the colonizer – in Bhabha's work the British colonizer of India – cannot very well be separated from that of the colonized, or at least from the supposed identity of the colonized . . . Instead of being self-sufficient with regard to his identity . . . the colonizer at least partly constructs it through interaction

[26] Gordon and Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster*, p. 11.

[27] "Cultural text" (also see footnote 13) shows similarities to the important concept "discourse" as explained by S. Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2004): 'Foucault has provided us with a vocabulary for describing the surface regularities which can be traced across a range of texts occurring within a certain context. This is particularly useful when we consider texts written about those countries which were colonised or which suffered a form of imperial relation. Edward Said has shown that that there are a number of features which occur again and again in texts about colonised countries and that these cannot be attributed simply to the individual author's beliefs, but are rather due to larger-scale belief systems structured by discursive frameworks which are given credibility and force by imperial power relations . . . Colonial discourse does not therefore simply refer to a body of texts with similar subject matter, but rather refers to a set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organisation of the thinking underlying them' (p. 95).

[28] Cf. Ashcroft *et al*., *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, pp. 258 ff.

> with the colonized. The colonizer's identity has no "origin" in himself and is not a fixed entity, but is differential, a "meaning" generated by difference . . . Bhabha sees signs of the colonizer's partial dependency on none-too-friendly "others" – and the resulting inherent uncertainty – in a whole range of phenomena. Racial stereotyping, for instance, first of all repeats the process of identity-creation in that it construes not only those who are stereotyped, but also the stereotyper himself – in opposition to the stereotyped. It functions to construe or confirm the stereotyper's identity. However, the repetitiveness of acts of stereotyping points to a continuing uncertainty in the stereotyper: apparently the stereotyper has to convince himself over and over again of the truthfulness of the stereotype – and thus, by extension, of his own identity.[29]

## Van Riebeeck and His Contemporaries

In 1652, the year Van Riebeeck set foot on shore at the Cape, Jodocus Hondius in Amsterdam published a fairly comprehensive description of the land and the people, *Klare besgryving van Cabo Bona Esperarança* by an anonymous author.[30] Although the author himself had never visited the Cape, he was clearly well-read. He relied heavily on Portuguese, English, French and Dutch sources, but what is intriguing is that the same cultural text, the same topoi, are found in his descriptions as in the reports discussed thus far, a fact that can be seen as additional proof of their influence in seventeenth-century Europe.

In addition to a map of the southern point of the Cape,[31] the author included a poem by a certain Wissink. In this one finds a reference to the cannibals (but fortunately they only eat each other!). What is furthermore

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[29] H. Bertens, *Literary Theory: the Basics* (London: Routledge, 2002 ), pp. 207–08.

[30] *De Kaap*, ed. Barend-van Haeften and Paasman, pp. 35 ff.

[31] The important issue of cartography does not as such receive attention in this article except regarding place names (see below, pages 164–65). Also see Bassnett's comment on mapmakers (p.148 above).

striking in the poem is the pertinent praise for the Netherlands and the Dutch (it was, after all, their "Golden Age"): he referred to the thunderbuses (guns) that made a noise in praise of Holland and to the courageous Dutch people. This self-image of the in-group with whom the poet obviously identified himself then contrasts with the image of the out-group: the ignorant and fearful Hottentots.

In his description of the Cape, the author started with the elements and the durable materials (for example pearls), then moved on to the vegetation and animals (including birds and fish) and ended with the characteristics of the people (especially the Khoi) at the Cape. The latter he described with reference to three aspects: their nature, their customs and their government. Regarding their nature he referred to the name *Hottentot*, linking it to their speech (see above), their appearance, that they were generally like animals (their human nature was only sometimes apparent), their speech, and the view that they were very suspicious, disloyal and thievish. In describing their customs, he started with their eating habits and pointed out that they ate herbs, livestock, wild animals and fish. More important, however, is the subtext, the (implied) difference between these indigenes and the Europeans: They ate the animals raw and also ate the entrails, while the so-called *Strandlopers* (Beach rangers) did not know they could catch fresh fish (they were in any event afraid of water) and therefore ate the carrion they found on the beaches.

Regarding their clothing, the refrain is repeated: both men and women mostly went about naked except for a small hide covering their genitals. Some had a leather belt around their middle to which a fleeced fox or cat skin, or something similar, was attached and which also covered their private parts. Still others wore a mantle made of such things as the hide of an ox, deer or goat around the upper parts of their bodies and hanging down to their buttocks. Around their necks (and arms) they wore animal entrails in which the women kept some trifles and the men tobacco and pipes among others. The result was that they stank at a distance. The author also paid attention to their trinkets, crafts, and their housing: they lived in the veld

'like the Arabs' and their huts looked like small pig sties. In his last remark on their customs, the anonymous author pointed out that one could not determine whether they had any law or faith. With reference to their government, it was mentioned that they had their chief whom they called king or lord, although they lived like exiles without king, policy or order. The subtext again is obvious: they are different from us. In an appendix the author reported that, according to the Strandlopers, in the interior there were other nations who lived orderly and wisely/righteously under good laws and government, apparently subjects of the emperor of Monomotapa. From this it becomes clear that the Dutch could also construct cultural and other identities from information they received from informants sharing their indigenous knowledge with them.

A fascinating – but also enigmatic – example in this regard comes from a later date, namely from the Swedish ensign Olof Bergh's travel journal (1682):

> The Ensign asked the Amacquas all particulars as to the road and its condition; they spun us many yarns and told us there was no chance of getting further. They said we must pass all the undermentioned nations ere we arrived at the Bri[quas] and Gri[quas] . . . Aart Eyck Gamoere a people having eyes on their feet. When the Ensign caused them to be asked if they had in truth seen such and if a single one of them had been there, they replied, 'No', they had only repeated what other Hottentots had told them.[32]

What is intriguing is that the topos of monstrous races with strange anatomies was a European phenomenon known even before the Middle Ages. Sekules writes:

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[32] Maclennan, *The Wind Makes Dust*, p. 39. Olof Bergh was a VOC official and led a number of expeditions into the interior. In 1682 Van der Stel instructed him to go in search of the source of the copper ore the Namaquas had brought to the Castle. His journals can be found in E.E. Mossop's *Journals of the Expeditions of the Honourable Ensign Olof Bergh [1682 and 1683] and Isaq Schrijver [1689],* published by the Van Riebeeck Society.

Many sources contributed to the accounts of the Monstrous Races. They represented peoples encountered by Alexander the Great on his eastern journeys. According to information in the encyclopaedia of St Isidore of Seville, deriving from Pliny's *Natural History* and Solinus' *Collectanea*, which in turn had culled matter from Greek accounts on the matter, the races of strange and unfamiliar beings mainly inhabited the extreme eastern or southern countries, at the edges of the known world. Here the climates were known to be excessively hot and dry and the people consequently deformed and without reason. As these regions of the world became more familiar, sightings of Monstrous Races shifted to the frozen north as well. Reports of their existence were enduring and varied from the supposedly historical and scientific accounts of the encyclopaedists and, much later, the travel accounts of Marco Polo to the more dramatic fantasy of Sir John Mandeville's popular fictitious travelogues. The accounts varied from the embellished descriptions of real peoples such as the Ethiopians and the Brahmins of India to fantastic accounts such as the "Cynocephali" or dogheaded men who communicated by barking, the "Blemmyae", whose faces were on their chests, the "Anthropophagi", who drank from human skulls, and the "Panoti", whose ears reached their feet. In the Middle Ages these peoples were ghettoised in travellers' accounts and on *mappae mundi* as the heathen "other", representing the other side of the world.[33]

[33] V. Sekules, *Medieval Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 12, with image; see also M. Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2004), p. 63. That these kinds of "others" still played a role in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is clear from the following statement and admonishment by W.H. Sherman, 'Stirrings and searchings (1500–1720)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Hulme and Youngs, pp. 17–36: 'These rhetorical challenges, along with the novelty of their experiences, left travel writers with acute problems of authenticity and credibility. The myths and stereotypes which could be reproduced in otherwise sober and scholarly accounts led to associations between travel and lying . . . Baptist Goodall accordingly urged travel writers to reject "the least of lying wonders told / . . . of foothigh pigmies, dog-eared men / Blue black and yellow": there was no need for such "fables", he suggested, when the world offered natural wonders like cloves, elephants, and armadillos and architectural marvels like the Great Wall of China and the Egyptian pyramids' (p. 31). See also *Othello*, I.iii.141–44.

The question – to which I have been able to find no satisfactory answer yet – is how this topos found its way to the southernmost part of Africa, or whether it must perhaps be seen as an archetype, a part of all people's collective unconscious.[34]

From Van Riebeeck's response to the Remonstrance it is clear that he did not quite trust the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa. This is borne out by the fact that already on 9 April 1652 he and his Council issued a proclamation to regulate the relations between the indigenous people and the Dutch at the Cape. They felt negative towards the Khoikhoi but at the same time they wanted the Dutch officials to act in a friendly way towards them – an attitude one regularly meets in the commanders' and governors' instructions – and to take good care of their own possessions. If they did not, or assaulted these people, they could expect harsh punishments,

> as such new undertakings should be conducted with great caution, particularly as regards the wild people of that country, (they being very impudent) and especially great care be taken that we be . . . on our guard and in a posture of defence . . . that all kindness and friendship be shown to them . . . In the first place . . . as these wild tribes are bold, thievish and not at all to be trusted, each shall take care that his arms and working tools or whatever he shall be placed in charge of be well taken care of . . . that each shall have his stolen tools or arms charged against his wages as a penalty, and for his carelessness receive 50 lashes at the whipping post and forfeit his rations of wine for 8 days . . . And accordingly, whoever ill-uses, beats or pushes any of the natives, be he in the right or in the wrong shall in their presence be punished with 50 lashes . . .[35]

[34] Huigen also refers to these imaginary creatures, the so-called *Plinische rassen*, and indicates that empirical information in due course subverted the belief in them (*De weg naar Monomotapa*, pp. 34ff.). Unfortunately he does not explain how the belief ended up in South Africa.

[35] Gordon and Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster*, p. 17.

In his journal entry for 18 to 20 May 1654 Van Riebeeck, with reference to the Strandlopers, confirmed the inhabitants' unreliability and unscrupulousness: 'Harry's allies began to depart with their livestock . . . without ever wanting to trade a head of cattle or sheep with us, but always trying to steal from us, to raid and affront'. There are numerous similar entries. Therefore it should not come as a surprise to read in Van Riebeeck's prayer of 6 April 1652 (i.e., while still on board) of the wild and cruel people who, if possible, would be Christianised according to the 'reformed Christian doctrine' (and thus by implication civilised):

> O merciful, gracious God and heavenly Father, since it has pleased your Divine Majesty to call us to manage the affairs of the Dutch East Indian Company here at the Cape of Good Hope, and . . . [we] in your holy Name have gathered with our Council . . . to take decisions by which the best service to the Company will be furthered, justice will be maintained and, if it be possible, your true Reformed Christian religion will be spread and expanded in course of time among these wild/savage and brutal natives to the praise and honour of your Name . . . This we pray and desire in the Name of your dear Son, our Mediator and Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray: Our Father . . .

This brings us to a very important aspect of the images of the in-group and out-group in the reports of the seventeenth century Dutch travellers: the issues of faith and religion. Consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, the writers compared their own faith in God's love, help and providence with the indigenous people's (for them) strange and ambiguous rituals which they could not always fathom. In his prayer quoted partially above, for example, Van Riebeeck addressed God as merciful heavenly Father and prayed in the Name of His beloved Son and mankind's Saviour, Jesus Christ. The belief was also expressed that it was God's will that they should come to the Cape to supervise the affairs of the Company.

There are furthermore various indications in his Journal that the good as well as the bad was seen as coming from God, in the former case as

blessing, in the latter as punishment. It is also instructive in this context to read of the devotions held in the Fort and to find that religious holidays are explicitly mentioned, for example on 14 May 1654 (Ascension Day) and later when Wouter Schouten indicated that Easter was celebrated on 5 and 6 April 1665. There are numerous instances, also in other reports, of the writers professing their dependence on God and his omnipotence, stating that an undertaking was in 'the name of the Lord Jesus Christ'[36] or praising God for a safe expedition. Although not specifically linked to the Cape, the following remarks by Christopher Schweitzer, 'who signed up in Amsterdam as a steward on an Indiaman', are typical: 'These Dead Men, were (according to the Custom of our Dutch Ships) sew'd, each Corps by it self, in a sheet, and after our usual Morning or Evening Prayer, (with a Psalm sung at the end of it) thrown into the Sea.'[37] It should for our purposes be noted that these rituals were explicitly linked to the Bible and Christianity and were *customary*.

That the Dutch saw themselves as God-fearing people – part of their self-representation as in-group – is also apparent from at least two references in Van Riebeeck's journal to the anniversary of their coming to the Cape. In the entry for 6 April 1654, for example, one reads that it was the second anniversary and that they were planning to observe 6 April as a day in God's honour with thanksgiving for His mercy and blessings which enabled them to make a success of their undertaking. Their descendants would also not forget God's goodness and commemorate the day with thanksgiving and prayers.

What is further remarkable in this specific entry is that Van Riebeeck referred not only to a Fort but also to a Colony – this at a time when the Company had no plans other than using the Cape as a refreshment station

[36] Maclennan, *The Wind Makes Dust*, p. 29.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

for its ships passing to and from India. From this it becomes clear that the self-image of the Dutch at the Cape already early on included that of being colonists – an idea the realisation of which started when a number of Company officials in 1657 received permission to farm as Free Burghers.[38]

Within the context of this kind of self-image and the patriotism mentioned earlier, it should come as no surprise that in a number of instances the Dutch named locations at the Cape after places in the Netherlands or used designations that evoked the Dutch world. Obvious examples come from the entry dated 21 January 1657 where Van Riebeeck referred to the Amstel River (later the Liesbeek) and a place near the Amstel called the *Hollantse Thuijn* (Dutch Garden). More than once – and this is typical of colonial rule – places were also renamed. This happened in the case of the Olifantsrivier. In search of the treasures of Monomotapa a party departed in November 1600 from the Fort. After crossing the Berg River they came across a stream where between 200 and 300 elephants were grazing. They then called it *Olifantsrivier* (Elephant River). From a post-colonial viewpoint it is important to note that this name displaced an existing Khoi name, namely *Tharrakkama*, derived from the Khoi words */kora*, "shrubby" and *//gami*, "water".[39] As a matter of fact, the name "Cape Town" itself replaced the Khoi name *//Hui- !geis*, referring either to the mountain that looks as if it lifts its head or to the cloud that so often lies on the mountain.[40]

Although not necessarily instances of replacement, there are various other examples of appropriation through giving places names using the Dutch language, for example *Tafelbaai* (Table Bay), *Tafelberg* (Table Mountain), *Lupaerts-berg* (Leopard Mountain), *Leeuwenbergh* (Lion

[38] *Die Suidhoek van Afrika: Geskrifte oor Suid-Afrika uit die Nederlandse tyd, 1652–1806*, ed. K. Schoeman (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2002), p. 30.

[39] P.J. Nienaber, *Suid-Afrikaanse pleknaamwoordeboek* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1971), p. 309.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

Mountain), *Dasseneiland* (Dassen Island), *Robbeneiland* (Robben Island) and *Riebeeks-Kasteel* (Riebeeck's Castle) – named for the Commander.[41] These clearly illustrate the concept of place as "palimpsest" in post-colonial theory:

> Place is also a palimpsest, a kind of parchment on which successive generations have inscribed and reinscribed the process of history . . . Graham Huggan demonstrates how the map itself is decolonised in post-colonial constructions of place. The map is the crucial signifier of control over place and thus of power over the inscription of being.
>
> Perhaps the most detailed discussion of this process is Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay* which surveys at length the extent to which the language of travel, of exploration, of settlement, indeed naming itself, turned empty space into "place" in Australia and has continued to re-write the text of that place. This was not a place which was "simply there" but a place which is in a continual process of being "written". This is true of any place, but in post-colonial experience the linkage between language, place and history is far more prominent because the interaction is so much more urgent and contestatory . . . the "place" in aboriginal culture, rather than existing as a visual construct, is a kind of "ground of being".[42]

The naming and renaming of places, the idea of the palimpsest, can of course not be separated from cartography, and in the reports about travellers' expeditions at the Cape mapmaking is more than once mentioned. One of these maps resulted from Olof Bergh's expeditions in 1682 to the Amaquas and to Cape Agulhas.[43] As indicated by Bassnett, quoted at the beginning

[41] See *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, pp. 25–26 and 119–21, for various other examples.

[42] *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. B. Ashcroft *et al.* ( London: Routledge, 1995), p. 392.

[43] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, pp. 135 ff.

of this article, cartography was not an innocent activity, and in post-colonial studies, therefore, much attention is paid to this aspect of exploration and colonialism. What Ashcroft *et al*. say about this is clearly applicable to what happened in South Africa, affirming Dutch identity:

> Both literally and metaphorically, maps and mapping are dominant practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures. Colonization itself is often consequent on a voyage of "discovery", a bringing into being of "undiscovered" lands. The process of discovery is reinforced by the constructing of maps, whose existence is a means of textualizing the spatial reality of the other, naming or, in almost all cases, renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control. In all cases the lands so colonized are literally reinscribed, written over, as the names and languages of the indigenes are replaced by new names, or are corrupted into new and Europeanized forms by the cartographer and explorer.[44]

It was, however, not only places that were (re)named using Dutch names or linguistic forms. In addition to the (possibly) onomatopoetic *Hottentot* referred to above (see p. 151), various other (nick)names, that sometimes show signs of stereotyping, were also used for (groups of) people. Barend-van Haeften and Paasman supply a number of examples but without commenting on the implications of the phenomenon.[45] Besides the *Strandlopers* whom we have already met (the Goringhaiconas), there were those who lived in the Cape Peninsula, the Goringhaiqua but called *Kaapmans* (Cape People), and the Gorachouqua who in 1657 stole tobacco plants from the gardens of the Free Burghers and were thus stereotyped as *Tabaksdieven* (Tobacco Thieves). Obvious examples of individuals who were renamed are Eva, whose Khoikhoi name was Krotoa, and Autshumato who became *Herrie* or even "King Harry". In other cases nicknames were

[44] Ashcroft *et al*., *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, p. 49.

[45] *De Kaap*, ed. Barend-van Haeften and Paasman, p. 8.

used, for example a captain of the Cochoqua was, according to Willem Muller's Journal (1655), called "the Black Captain" by the Dutch because he smeared his body with soot. Other instances are mentioned by Godée Molsbergen: in the Journal reporting on Pieter Cruythoff's 1662 expedition, one reads of a certain *Dickoop* (Thickhead), and in a footnote Godée Molsbergen adds *Diknavel* (Thicknavel) and *Platneus* (Flatnose), both relating to appearance as is often the case with nicknames.[46]

The Europeanizing went further than names, however. Eva for example became 'a *protégé* of Jan van Riebeeck. The young girl was taken into the Van Riebeeck home, instructed in the Dutch language, religion and customs, and baptised and married . . . according to European traditions'.[47] The use of the colonizers' language as a means of mastery and "civilizing" is also mentioned in the case of the Cape slaves. In the entry for 17 April 1658 in Van Riebeeck's Journal one reads for example:

> Arrangements were started for establishing a school for the Company's male and female slaves brought here from Angola by the 'Amersfoort', which had taken them off a prize Portuguese slaver. The sick-comforter Pieter van der Stael of Rotterdam has been entrusted with the task of giving them instruction in the morning and afternoon, besides his duties of visiting the sick, particularly because he reads Dutch well and correctly.[48]

The coexistence of these slaves and the Dutch colonists was not always peaceful; all kinds of problems and misunderstandings developed and at least once the colonists had to be warned not to tie up their slaves and flog them mercilessly with scourges.[49] This is an example of one role of the body in colonial/post-colonial studies – another is the dance, to which a

[46] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, p. 69.

[47] P. Joyce, *A Concise Dictionary of South African Biography* (Cape Town: Francolin, 1999), p. 138. For a biography of Krotoa, see Schoeman, *Seven Khoi Lives*, pp. 11 ff.

[48] Gordon and Talbot, *From Dias to Vorster*, p. 28.

[49] *Die Suidhoek van Afrika*, ed. Schoeman, p. 41.

number of references can be found in our texts, in Van der Stel's Journal among others,[50] and that was also the object of the Western "gaze". Ashcroft *et al*. make the following relevant remarks:

> The body itself has also been the literal "text" on which colonisation has written some of its most graphic and scrutable messages. The punishment machine of Kafka's nightmare story 'In the Penal Colony', which literally inscribes on the dying body of the transgressor the name of his "crime", is a powerful allegorisation of what was, too often, a literal reality in both slave colonies and penal colonies . . . The body, too, has become then the literal site on which resistance and oppression have struggled, with the weapons being in both cases the physical signs of cultural difference . . . symbols and literal occasions of the power struggles of the dominator and dominated for possession of control and identity.[51]

## After Van Riebeeck: A Brief Survey

One of the visitors to the Cape after Van Riebeeck had left, was Wouter Schouten, a vice-surgeon with the VOC. In his 1676 book, *Oost-Indische voyagie*, he reported on his stay in 1665. He also wrote about the 'wild nature' of the (indigenous) inhabitants and his and his companions' religious habits, for example saying grace before eating on the top of Table Mountain.[52] Instead of elaborating on these topoi and the self-image implied by them as opposed to the image of the "other", however, I want to point out an aspect that is related to the colonists' European/Dutch cultural identity. Schouten mentioned among others the changes that had taken

[50] Van der Stel was commander of the Cape from 1679, and was made governor in 1691. In 1685 he undertook a journey to the interior in search of copper. The journal kept of this expedition is entitled *Dagregister en beschryjvinge van de voyagie gedaan naar het Amaquasland, onder het beleid van den Ed. heer Simon van der Stel, commandeur van Cabo de Boa Speranca*.

[51] *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Ashcroft *et al*., p. 322.

[52] *De Kaap*, ed. Barend-van Haeften and Paasman, pp. 55 ff.

place since his previous visit in 1658 and then added that the houses of the Commander and the Company officials as well as a church 'where God's word was preached' were all built in the European way with lime and stone.

This kind of comparison with the familiar (European/Dutch) is often found in the travel journals and can be seen as a way of naturalisation. Let us consider first an example from Van Riebeeck and then a few from Simon van der Stel's Journal. In Van Riebeeck's entry for 10 April 1652 one finds a description of the Saldanha people. Although he also called them 'wild people', he was fairly positive about their appearance. And then he used a striking comparison: they were clothed in the hide of an animal, which they wore as handsomely on one arm, with such boldness in their gait, as any swaggerer/dandy in the fatherland could wear his mantle on one shoulder or arm. (The difference he mentioned, however, was again the nakedness of their privates, except for a small skin over them.) In Van der Stel's Journal (1685) one reads the following in the entry for 1 September: a kind of fish is found here that looks much like the *barm* in Holland, and also tasting the same. In the entry for 14 September we read that the Commander shot a *klipspringer*, much like the roe in the Netherlands but smaller. Two further examples are taken, the first from 15 and the second from 16 September. In the former, reference is made to trees that are called willows in Holland, and in the latter to fish having the shape of a carp, tasting like the salmon found in Holland and being as big as a cod.[53] Sometimes here and elsewhere (as above) 'fatherland' or *patria* is used instead of 'Holland' or 'the Netherlands'. Be that as it may, the crux of the matter is that in all these cases the references and comparisons betray as well as affirm the identity of the author(s).

Before returning to Van der Stel's report I want to refer briefly to that of Aernout van Overbeke (1668), an advocate and poet from The Hague. Although Van Overbeke's was written rather tongue-in-cheek and although

[53] All examples from *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen.

he was not always very enthusiastic about Holland, one again sees the suggestion of an opposition between the in-group and the out-group in his statement that it was good to be among people from one's own country in a heathen land.[54]

In Van der Stel's Journal a number of the earlier topoi are still found, for example the dependence on and praise to God for a safe journey and the view of the indigenous people as wild and uncivilized. What is "new" regarding ethnicity, however, is that when the participants in the expedition are listed, the fact that there were 56 *white* people is specifically mentioned. Furthermore the entry for 30 August states that the Commander, as the expedition was drawing near to the Hottentot kraals, issued an order forbidding all sexual relations with them. The reason for this is not quite clear. Although it might have been for fear of contracting an infectious disease, it might also have been for fear of "going native".

When Van der Stel returned to the Castle on 26 January 1686, he brought with him a Hottentot 'who seemed to be an intelligent man and to have good knowledge of the region. Therefore the Commander had him instructed as much as possible in the Dutch language and had him clothed in the Dutch way, in order to obtain complete knowledge of his country'.[55] Although in this case obviously for selfish purposes – being able to make better use of indigenous knowledge – as in the case of Eva and the slaves the Dutch language and customs and instruction in them were seen as important. Within post-colonial studies both language and education are crucial concepts because they are linked with power, reality construction and identity – that all in one way or another play a role in the incidents related here and with reference to which the actions can be explained:

[54] *De Kaap*, ed. Barend-van Haeften and Paasman, p. 73.

[55] *Reizen in Zuid-Afrika in de Hollandse tijd*, ed. Godée Molsbergen, p. 211.

> The control over language by the imperial centre . . . remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. Language provides the terms by which reality may be constituted; it provides the names by which the world may be "known". Its system of values – its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distinction – becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded . . . To name reality is . . . to exert power over it, simply because the dominant language becomes the way in which it is known. In colonial experience this power is by no means vague or abstract. A systematic education and indoctrination installed the language and thus the reality on which it was predicated as pre-eminent.[56]
>
> Education becomes a technology of colonialist subjectification in two other important and intrinsically interwoven ways. It establishes the locally English or British as normative through critical claims to "universality" of the values embodied in English literary texts, and it represents the colonised to themselves as inherently inferior beings – "wild", "barbarous", "uncivilised".[57]

* * *

To close this discussion I want to briefly refer to two other aspects mentioned in Van der Stel's Journal that may also be read as signs of power, colonization and/or identity. As in other reports the units of measurement used are European/Dutch, for example 'miles'. And then there is the entry for 21 September concerning the Gregriquas. When three of Van der Stel's company were sent to find them, they had left for fear that their livestock would be taken away from them because they had rebelled against their captains. These captains had after all been appointed by the Company and

[56] *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, ed. Ashcroft *et al*., p. 283.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 426.

had staffs with copper knobs bearing the insignia of the Company – in a sense they therefore had played along with the colonisers!

From this article it should have become clear that travel writing, analysed and interpreted from perspectives like post-colonial studies and comparative imagology, can make an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the construction of knowledge, identity and cultures in times of exploration and colonization and of the role power relations played in these processes. Much exciting research, however, still remains to be done.