

Meat as well as Books

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Review Article

The Courage of //kabbo. Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of Specimens of Bushman Folklore

Edited by Janette Deacon & Pippa Skotnes

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It was typical of the plight of the Bleekmen, this conclusion to their trek. (Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, 24)

The Courage of //kabbo. Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of Specimens of Bushman Folklore originated in the conference organised to celebrate W.H.I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911). This was the fourth in a series of meetings dating from 1991 organised to celebrate the work of Bleek, his sister-in-law Lloyd, and Bleek's daughter Dorothea. The first meeting resulted in *Voices from the Past* (1996), edited by Janette Deacon and Thomas Dowsen. A second conference was held in Germany in 1994. Most significant was the 1996 *Miscast* exhibition that sparked the ongoing participation of those identifying themselves as San and Khoe descendants and appeared as *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Skotnes 1996). The present volume embraces the textual apparatus of Pippa Skotnes' lavishly illustrated *Claim to the country: the archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek* (2007) utilising graphic design to provide exquisite scanned images of various artifacts. Although primarily of interest to historians of linguistics and anthropologists, the Bleek and Lloyd archive has inspired visual artists, museum curators, sculptors, and poets. The work of the African philologists has become part of the décor of modernity.

Looking to the future the hope of editors Janette Deacon and Pippa Skotnes is that *The Courage of //kabbo* ‘not only celebrates both the achievements and the sacrifices that characterise the Bleek and Lloyd Archive, but that it continues to inspire faithful work’. In this spirit Skotnes reports the discovery in early 2011 of ‘a lock of Lucy Lloyd’s fine blond hair’ which ‘called to mind the hair of //kabbo which I had seen in 1995’ (12)¹. The final words of Isabel Hofmeyr’s concluding essay pay ‘A Tribute to the Courage of //Kabbo’, meaning both //kabbo’s courage as survivor (of colonialism, prison, intellectual enquiry, friendship, etc.) and ‘[t]he “Courage of //Kabbo” conference at the University of Cape Town’ (Hofmeyr 434), the event. The 2011 centenary at Cape Town, and its proceedings, ‘forms but one of the many ongoing trajectories’ (434) of //kabbo’s words, a link in the commemorative chain initiated by Bleek and Lloyd. The refrain ‘TO ALL FAITHFUL WORKERS’, the dedication from Bleek and Lloyd’s *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, has become a motto that unites a community of scholars bound together by debt to the founders and responsibility to the future (see Skotnes 11).

The Courage of //kabbo retells once more the origin of recent concern with the |xam textual remains, recounting the pioneering contribution of Pippa Skotnes and others to the recovery of the textual remains. The substance of Robert Thornton’s ground-breaking 1987 essay on Wilhelm Bleek is repeated. The inflation of the Bleek and Lloyd archive is signalled by Thornton’s move from his earlier argument the Bleek discovered Southern African literatures to make the more expansive claim that Bleek’s dedication ‘ultimately became the foundation of African studies’ (Thornton 117). The earlier circumspect claim that ‘Wilhelm Bleek’s thesis was the sort of linguistic potpourri that only the nineteenth seems to have produced’ (Thornton 1987: 137) becomes: ‘Wilhelm Bleek’s thesis was the sort of linguistic masterwork that the nineteenth century seems to have produced’ (Thornton 109; and see Thornton 1983a & 1983b). Other repetitions include Hermann Wittenberg on Bleek’s *Reynard the Fox in South Africa: or, Hottentot Fables and Tales*, reissuing an earlier publication (see Wittenberg

¹ References with author name and/or page number only refer to essays collected in *The Courage of //kabbo. Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Publication of Specimens of Bushman Folklore*.

2012), and Andrew Lamprecht's partial regurgitation of the story of Bleek's *Origin of Language* (1867).

The Courage of //kabbo is littered with testimonials to the tireless efforts of those who have provided a foundation for subsequent researchers, conduits and participants in the co-operative enterprise of interpretation and remembrance of a vanished people and their transcribers. If this mutual self-promotion and doctrinaire reciprocity hints at a certain defensiveness regarding the historical privilege of mainly white scholars who have studied the Bleek family texts, the contribution of Megan Biesele offers to salve the wounded impulse to self-justification. Biesele's inventory of twenty-five language and cultural projects, where language recording and revitalization often precedes mother-tongue education and the self-documentation of heritage, shows the role of academics in channelling funding and expertise. But bridging the gap between academia and communities is difficult. As a Botswanan MA student =ui|xi (Tshisimogo Lesley Leepang) writes to Biesele, 'we [must] teach people about the importance of their languages and make demonstrations. This is what I am interested in doing: the problem is there is no funding' (in Biesele 413). Ideally impoverished communities benefit from research into the Khoesan. And humanity benefits from the recording and inscription of endangered languages, feeding the archive, as well as the rejuvenation of cultural diversity: '||Kabbo and the |Xam people have truly inspired an enormous number of people to carry on their legacy' (=ui|xi in Biesele 414).

Major achievements include the digitisation of the Bleek and Lloyd collection under the supervision of Skotnes, and the interest of UNESCO's Memory of the World project and the South African government's inclusion of the |xam and ≠Khomani San lands in the Tentative List for World Heritage nomination. Research aims at making a difference in the everyday lives of people, particularly those continually marginalised in society. Deacon and Skotnes relay a telling quip about the similarity between the Bleek and Lloyd archive and another artifact: 'like the true cross[...] fragments of the archive have turned up in several other places in South Africa, Europe and the USA' (Deacon and Skotnes 1). Globalisation facilitates the inspirational unity of post-colonial scholars reclaiming artifacts bearing witness to the sacrifices wrought by that process. As usual with indigeneity studies *The Courage of //kabbo* reveals more about the function of intellectuals than it does about its ostensible subject.

Consider Lawyer Roger Chennels' reflection on 'San cultural treasure' (Chennels, 418) and traditional knowledge and intellectual property rights that ends with a plea that consideration be given to finding ways of sharing some of the cultural riches of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection with the modern San. For Chennels the problem is dissemination rather than preservation: 'What a pleasure it would be if all of us could shake off our Western reserve and allow some of our personal thoughts and feelings to come through and disinfect the formality of academic protocol' (418). Chennels seems unaware that the academic protocol of comprehensiveness might account for the inclusion of his own slight contribution punting the dedicated work of the South African San Institute. However, cynicism is curtailed by Botswanan Jobe Shautani Gabototwe's testimony to the uplifting consequences of advocacy and academic entrepreneurship. He concludes:

On the subject of commerce, I firmly believe community members should enhance business training significantly and think seriously about income opportunities[...] Two years ago we established a trust which was able successfully to apply for funds. In the not too distant future the trust will offer employment to the youth, who will gain income and be able to support their families, while serving the broader public. So in my view, a combination of steadiness, unity, education, creativity, critical thinking, healthy living, and business is the answer (Gabototwe 426-7).

No imaginary solutions to real contradictions here for the rural and community development outcomes are palpable and necessary. In this virtuous circle of commitment and gratitude the knowledge gained from research into the dynamics of cultural heritage tourism is seen as vital for heritage preservation and sustainable tourism in those destinations. Mining the Bleek and Lloyd archive has become a sub-discipline of human rights discourse: intellectual property rights, cultural rights, economic rights, constitutional rights, and ultimately human rights². An emergent humanitarian humanism defines the unexplored horizon. Indeed *The Courage*

² See in this connection Lawrence Hamilton's (2015) pointed critique of Saul Dubow's *South Africa's Struggle for Human Rights* (2012).

of //kabbo and the charged impulses Bleek's legacy attracts testify to the interweaving of indigeneity and the discourse of human rights *vis à vis* the nation state that shapes work on the Bleek and Lloyd archive³.

Young scholar Shanade Barnabas bluntly states the rationale of the philanthropic instinct and its derivatives: 'myth-making may be economically beneficial to those communities with strong financial dependence on cultural tourism', and what is rarely considered by critics of this fabrication 'is the impact that rejection of the romantic Bushman myth will have on those communities reliant on this myth for their livelihood' (Barnabas 379). First comes the grub, then you can moralise, as Brecht put it. Life-style alternatives and spiritual attunement are authentic purchases, part of the bouquet of re-enchantment. The question that remains is not so much about the part academics play in such mystification, which is clear from the epistemological and pecuniary relationship⁴. Nor is the matter settled by puritanical objection to the compromises and trade-offs dictated by less than ideal circumstances, not least because moral spectatorship and cloistral seclusion from the inhospitable world of real political and economic choices is itself part of the processes in question that we can and should judge. Rather the question that now arises concerns the academic protocol of critical self-reflection. In other words, what are the components of academic self-mystification at work here? What are we to make of the simultaneous urges

³ The intertwining of ethnicity and citizenship, freedom and economic subjection indicative of the new South Africa (see Comaroff & Comaroff 2009: 26) has a central marginal place for the Bushmen/San/Khoisan/Khoesan.

⁴ See Barnabas on the !Xun heritage site near Platfontein, Northern Cape, where, with an unemployment rate of 80%, artists serve up to tourists the type of authentic art they demand. More generally: 'Countless media products have contributed to the dominant picture of the pristine hunter-gatherer. This image is ceaselessly re-established in the mind of the viewer. The Bushmen are well aware of this representation and groups such as the ≠Khomani craftspeople understand what tourists want and diligently proffer this' (Barnabas 2009: 45; and see Barnabas nd). This most venerable accommodation was advanced by Plato: what is intrinsically untrue can also be subjectively good and true (see Adorno 1975: 17).

to stay loyal to the dead and form new ties with the living amid the redistributive capitalisation of the colonial legacy?

Let us note some markers to guide enquiry into the affinity between academe and folkways in terms of production and consumption, and the division of labour. At the most general level Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* distinguishes between productive and unproductive labour, lumping together in the latter category churchmen, lawyers, physicians, musicians and men of letters –none of whom add to the increase of capital (see Smith 1976: 352). Rather they live off the value of the labour produced by others, competing for the money that circulates from the augmentation of capital elsewhere. In *Theories of Surplus Value* Marx notes that Smith's brutal division, although correct, is indicative of the ascendancy of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, and it softens somewhat in time: 'when the spiritual labours themselves are more and more performed in its [i.e., the bourgeoisie's] service and enter into the service of capitalist production – then things take a new turn, and the bourgeoisie tries to justify "economically", from its own standpoint, what at an earlier stage it had criticized and fought against' (Marx & Engels 1976: 198). Marx modifies Smith's definition of unproductive labour as personal services consumed while being performed (all labours which satisfy and imaginary or real need of the individual), and includes in vendible things 'all material and intellectual wealth – meat as well as books – that exist in the form of things' (28). From the point of view of capital academic production and cultural production are the same for both are parasitic on real production. But nonetheless the spiritual labours are commodified. Today of course prudent academics do not need reminding that incentivisation is the ultimatum of measurable outcomes.

With this in mind it is notable that commodification of the pre-modern indicative of idigeneity studies repeats one of the central tropes of modernity, inventing tradition and milking nostalgia for origin and autochthony in the midst of a deracinated and alienating world for the ends of reconstitution and betterment. Ancillary to new age consumerism, integration into the market economy wears the badge of counter-modernity: the future is archaic!. The synthesis of an eco-spiritual handicraft alternative to techno-industrial alienation grounded in non-exploitative education and mutual self-benefit recasts the footprint of the beneficiating academic-as-coloniser. Meanwhile the marginalised and dispossessed engaged in the micro-process of craft labour are liberated into the harmony of interests of the 'free' relation

between buyer and seller, harking back to handicraft vendibles as opposed to mass production. Political freedom plus economic freedom equates to participation in capital's constant expansion by way of entrepreneurial activity in the pores of the market and the aura of authenticity manufactured in artisanal enclaves is reproducible and marketable. Rather than indigenous culture, both terms of which require interminable definition and qualification, do we not have here concern with mode of production?⁵ In this network of analogies, correlations and connections, conjoined with the reparative endeavour of current government policy, the relationship between the state and the contemporary dedicated ethnographic workers echoes the ambiguities of Bleek's own service.

In reaction to the regrettable courage of Bleek's racial convictions the essays of Hermann Wittenberg and Jill Weintraub try to prise Lucy Lloyd and Dorothea Bleek free from the theoretical and mythological (read: colonial) ideology of Bleek himself. Empirical, practical observation, data gathering, and testing – that is the way to avoid complicity with Bleek's ethno-linguistics, we are told. Yet this proffered exit from the Law of the Father is also problematic. Not only because the claim for linguistics as objective science faithfully describing facts about the world ignores that theoretical paradigms influence what is seen as a fact (see Kuhn 1962: 127ff). In addition dealing with dead languages renders problematic the ideal of 'linguistics [as] empirical, rather than speculative or intuitive; it operates with publically verifiable data obtained by means of observation or experiment' (Lyons 1981: 38). According to Menán du Plessis, linguistic research always presupposes theoretical description (Du Plessis, 277-7 note 7). Du Plessis holds out little hope that the hundred years of neglect of Khoesan studies by linguists will end in the near future⁶. Similarly Robyn Loughnane, Mark

⁵ See Jairus Banaji's (2010) discussion of pre-capitalist forms, at once inside and outside the world economy of capitalism, caught up in the process of dissolution and reconstitution. Autonomous producing organisations are the food of capitalist development.

⁶ Elsewhere Du Plessis (2011) has objected to the ancillary status of academic work and 'the university's almost palpable lack of respect for my field [African Languages], which is inevitably associated with aspects of African heritage and culture'. Under the cover of the realisation of value the culture industry ingests critical inquiry.

McGranaghan and Tom Gülderman in their contribution also note the lack of a comprehensive modern linguistic analysis of |xam, without which translation is at best an approximate précis. Indeed, I would suggest, it is precisely this textual instability that renders the Bleek family archive enigmatic and allows the range of ideological investment in the |xam archive, an investment with a history that keeps repeating itself. Linguistic indeterminacy engenders meanings and attempts to contain the destabilizing effects of undecidability, and the discernable pattern of meanings that are privileged point to a process of selection that is not reducible to the individual taste of various interpreters. The literariness of the Bleek and Lloyd texts resides in their resistance to totalizations undertaken in the name of unity and meaning.

The Courage of //kabbo is framed by an economy of emotion yearning for what Fredric Jameson (2005: 383) has termed ‘the alternate dreamtime of another History and another present’, tinged with melancholia for the transience of life. Nostalgia for the present embalms the vivid communality of full meaning summoned up beyond modern technology; a purity that has for its prerequisite the technology that is the amber that makes possible the reproducibility and dissemination of the archive. So the aesthetic signifies the outlook of a people, *ethnos*, rather than an individual perspective which is pre-emptively subsumed into a prefabricated immemorial tradition. The essential part played by aestheticizing in ethnographic encoding is forgotten. With authenticity an effect of the performance rather than its cause, discipline is required to argue both that Bleek’s ethno-philological project is a part of colonial history and yet at the same time is an uncompleted project subject to transvaluation in a post-apartheid historical context. When the basis of this transfiguration is taken to be the diminished (official) racism of the present a sense of *déjà vu* is inescapable. That such a presumption echoes Bleek’s own faith in progress – the blind-spots of which are so clear to us today – apparently in no way disturbs the complacency of the well-intentioned. Canalization of the claim to indigeneity away from those whom Bleek named the *Bântu* majority to a marginal, unthreatening population group is not without continuing ideological force.

Not only does the futile attempt to make a lost self present by recapturing past time uncritically enlist the category of the aesthetic⁷. A crucial departure from the Proustian reverie of undamaged experience produced only in memory is signalled by the attested good intentions of those commemorating the textual remains of the absent. I do not mean here to discourage the usefulness of nostalgia. At its best, nostalgia for the present transforms the readers' present into a historical period subject to critical analysis. At its worst critical nostalgia is displaced by a paralysing self-serving nostalgia and aesthetic ideology (see Jameson 1991: 285; and Boym 2001: 41-45). It is not merely that celebrating the living vestiges of foundational human experience recuperated from folkloric traces capable of communicating auratic experience has a history; 'a pity towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote' (Eliot 1948: 44). Promoting authenticity as a supreme value as well as a regulatory principle balances precariously between the therapeutic and the dogmatic⁸.

The appeal 'TO ALL FAITHFUL WORKERS' begs the question: Faithful to what or to whom? Presumably faithful to the preservative endeavour of the original founders who studied vanishing languages. However, it seems to me, the linguistic enterprise has been superseded by the nostalgia for lost cultures, which is closer to the ethnological perspective of Bleek *père*. Tanya Barben's rigorous attempt to puncture the filial intersubjective matrix does not appear to have penetrated the pathos surrounding 'the dead language (/Xam) of what has rather simplistically and incorrectly been considered a dying culture of a people' (Barben 121). The elaborate catalogue presentation of *The Courage of //kabbo* flags the brand

⁷ 'But art, if it means awareness of our own life, means also awareness of the life of other people[...] Through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own and which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist on in the moon.' (Proust 1983: 931-2)

⁸ Consider the parallels with reactions to modernity in interwar Japan: 'This move entailed finding a refuge from what many believed to be an inauthentic social life (based on inauthentic knowledge) in which the process of capitalist modernization was integrating people into larger impersonal units of organization and enforcing greater dependence on them' (Harootunian 202: 32).

management function of academic research into the Bleek and Lloyd archive. Accreditation is at issue both in the sense of academic publication subvention and certification of originality and authenticity essential to the ethno-tourism facilitating community upliftment. Academic production ought to mark its distinction from cultural commodification by reflecting on and interrogating its place within the field of production and consumption. Without this self-criticism subaltern academics are the latest recruits to the culture industry whose compliance lacks the alibi of the destitute and the oppressed. As honest brokers between the state and capital and the poor the academics become state-subsidised entrepreneurs faithful to Bleek's ethno-linguistic salvage mission. The parading of approbative intentions signals an appeal to ethics, the terminology of last resort and precursor to solicitations of loyalty.

More is at stake than the currency of good conscience for representations of the Khoesan are part of the fabric of a modernity that shapes our intellectual categories. Can we have a concept of history without such an originary figure, or such a figure without our particular conception of history? *The Courage of //kabbo's* framing narrative of a re-animating amuletic living Khoesan culture based on descent – immersed in the ramifications of consanguinity and biological phenotype – attempts to distil an antidote to race thinking from the connective tissue of racism. Caught in the crosshatches of the metaphorical thematization of a predicament not of their making, today the Khoesan are advised: Enjoy your allegorization! While this may be practical and realistic, and politically correct, counsel it is also the latest instalment in a process of *fait accompli* that can be made visible. At the very least reckoning with the colonial past involves overhauling our intellectual categories to register their complicity with the materiality of history. That is why in addition to linguistic, aesthetic and philosophical enquiry the terms of socio-economic processes that include contemporary attempts at upliftment need to be examined for reticulated techniques of erasure.

If these concerns seem academic or even esoteric it is well to note that the influence of the Bleek and Lloyd archive extends beyond South Africa in the form of the exemplary colonial subject. For example, Philip K. Dick's 1964 science-fiction novel *Martian Time-Slip*, set in 1994, explores colonialism and racism in the context of the destruction of the small businessman by corporate capitalism. Colonists on Mars consumed with property speculation on the arid Red Planet employ indigenous Martians as

house-servants. Connected to the land and telepathic, the indigenes are called 'Bleekmen' and still wander over the desolate landscape they call home, occasionally firing poisoned arrows in self-defence (a capital offense) at the prospectors. Gifted with presentiment of the future pollution (development) of their planet by the mega-corporation *AM-WEB*, a group of Bleekmen retreat ahead of the impending socio-economic wasteland into the desert. They are joined by a psychotic boy, Manfred, who, like the indigenes, has seen the future: he 'did not understand the words [of the Bleekmen], but he got their thoughts: cautious and friendly, with no undertones of hate. He sensed inside them no desire to hurt him, and that was pleasant' (Dick 2005: 225).

Manfred and the Bleekmen see that in the future the vast dormitory to be built for immigrants to Mars in the F.D.R. Mountain Range will become a home for the aged, the infirm, and the poor who cannot return to earth. That the colony will become a dumping ground for those no longer economically productive is revealed in a series of repetitive flash-backs, or rather flash-forwards. The Bleekmen curse on the land the settlers took from them sows a bitter harvest that confronts the dedicated work of the 'business-like and competent and patient' (Dick 2005: 231) colonists. In Dick's novel no one had conspired to exterminate the Bleekmen; it had not been necessary. History as economic competitiveness rendered the usual outcome. The Bleek and Lloyd remains are part of a wider colonial problematic.

Under the back-to-the-future narrative structure of the time-slip Dick's exploration of the compulsion to repeat as a manifestation of anxiety locates both a defensive reaction and a warning of approaching catastrophe (see Freud 1989; 2005) at the heart of settler society. At the end of the novel Manfred reappears from the future, a paralysed old man kept alive by machinery, in the company of his Bleekmen friends. He has come to say an overdue (for him) goodbye to his mother. She covers her eyes and cannot bear to look on what has become of her child – his and the Bleekmen's survival provides no solace. Fredric Jameson (2005: 383) reads this ending as cautiously utopian, holding up the value of 'the collective, the primitive community of the aboriginals', the Bleekmen, in the face of voracious capitalism. Salvation can be reached if one can escape the American Web and 'get in touch with the defeated, the marginalized people[...] the Preterite' (Rossi 2011: 104). While such a reading minimises the novel's nostalgia for small business capitalism and disengages its concern with colonial guilt, it

does foreground a dominant trait crystallised out of the Bleek family archive; the power of romantic primitivism to displace analysis. An omen of the past that is both a warning and a reassurance, the Bleekmen signal both the foundations of culture in the matrix of descent and authenticity that secretes racism, and the elegiac residue of any alternative to triumphal corporate capitalism. To bring the two world's together imagine Dick's Manfred as the aging executive of an eco-friendly merchandising company retailing Bleekmen memorabilia, returning with a signed copy of *The Courage of //kabbo* in his hand.

Writing from a triumphant settler colony, the USA, Dick's Bleekmen appear as the commemorated and displaced victims of modernity. Colonialism is acknowledged and redeemed, and its beneficiaries recast as melancholic, unwitting victims. *The Courage of //kabbo* echoes this ideological footwork in the context of celebrating the new South Africa made possible by colonial modernity with its attendant anxieties and inhibitions. If the comparison of USA colonialism and South Africa seems far-fetched recall that Mahmood Mamdani (2015) has recently recalled that when white South Africa became independent from Britain in 1910 the new settler government sent a delegation to North America to study how to set up tribal homelands which had been first been created in North America half a century before. Mamdani concludes that the American Indian reservation became the South African native reserve.

Dick's presentiment of 1994 in which the Khoesan would play a part in the redemptive symbolism of post-apartheid South Africa suggests the need to orientate the Bleek and Lloyd family textual crypt within the broadest interpretive horizon. *The Courage of //kabbo* brings home the need for a comparative approach that would constellate the range of ethnographic and folk researches (and researchers) from around the world. At once historical and philosophical such a project would not only critically reflect on Bleek's own global-colonial perspective but would also map the political and ideological forces at work in indigeneity studies. As integral coordinate in the spider's web of development, indigenes hold a special place in the relation between the economic thought of a given period and its ethico-political and disciplinary thought. In a world of ubiquitous *déjà vu* it is vital to retain 'the ability to distinguish reality from the projections of [our] own unconscious' (Dick 2005: 145).

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