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Shifting frameworks for understanding otherness

The Cape Khoi in pre-1652 European travelogues, an early modern Latin letter, and the South African novel Eilande (2002)

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Chapter 2

Grevenbroek and the Khoi: Towards a Revolution of Knowledge

Vreemde lande het in biblioteke bestaan. Die hele wêreld was in boeke.
Strange lands existed in libraries. The whole world was in books.

Grevenbroek, in Sleigh (2002, 695)

After studying prominent chronicles of the Cape in the previous chapter I now turn to an author who spent years at the Cape. The Dutchman Johannes Willem van Grevenbroek (1644-circa 1726) was secretary of the Dutch East India Company's Council of Policy at the Cape from 1684 to 1694. A year after his retirement, he wrote a letter in Latin about the Cape's native inhabitants: *Elegans et accurata gentis Africanae circa Promontorium Capitis Bonae Spei vulgo Hottentotten Nuncupatae Descriptio Epistolaris* (*An Elegant and Accurate Account of the African Race Living Round the Cape of Good Hope, Commonly Called Hottentots*).¹ In it, he sets out to counter the 17th century European consensus about the various native peoples at the Cape, commonly called 'Hottentots' and typically ranked between man and beast in evolutionary theory as described in the previous chapter. In opposition to contemporaries like fellow-Dutchmen Willem ten Rhyne (1647-1700) and Olfert Dapper (1636-1689), Grevenbroek argues for the humanity of the Khoi (as I will refer to the large diversity of Cape native tribes and peoples for ease of reference).²

In this chapter and the next, I consider Grevenbroek's letter against the background of some of the more immediate political and intellectual concerns of a late-17th century European writer, and compare his position to that of peers such as Ten Rhyne and Dapper. The shared nationality of the three authors, the span of their treatises, and the exclusive focus on the Khoi set them apart from most contemporaries. In this chapter, I primarily focus on the political and religious dimensions of Grevenbroek's argument, while his

¹ The sole extant copy of the letter is kept at the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town Campus (Special Collections, MSB203). Unless otherwise stated, I cite Latin and its English translations from the only text edition, Farrington-Schapera (1933), published as Volume 14 in the Van Riebeeck Society Series. Where discrepancies with the manuscript exist, I show amendments in square brackets. See also Appendix 1. The letter probably was not correspondence in the modern sense, but the epistolary form might have been used for didactic purposes. See Chapter 3.

² See A Note on Nomenclature.

engagement with ancient (Greek and Roman) antiquity is the main concern of the next. The following sections centre on the content, structure and sources of Grevenbroek's letter. First, I observe that Grevenbroek's appreciation of native culture runs parallel to his scrutiny of settler ethics: he argues that Khoi are 'whiter of soul' than Europeans, whom he describes as hypocrite Christians. I then analyse Grevenbroek's rationale for his sourcework by discussing three framed narratives at the letter's centre that address recent engagements between settlers. He finds that these events show the Khoi to be human and thus refute common opinion about them. Finally, I take a closer look at the letter's assessment of Khoi religion, language and law to show how Grevenbroek relies on primary ethnographic criteria to present his argument for the authentically Christian nature of the Khoi.

From my analysis, it becomes apparent that Grevenbroek seeks to supplement the existent body of knowledge about the Cape as found in 'the writings of all [European] naturalists' with his own empirical observations, the fruit of a decade spent at the Cape. Grevenbroek's letter thus moves away from the prevailing pejorative image of the Khoi that J.M. Coetzee has called 'the echo chamber of discourse about the Cape'.³ In Grevenbroek's view, not the Khoi, but the European settlers have strayed from Christian ethics and 'virtus' (virtue), which the Khoi observe. Khoi and settlers have equal access to mankind's inherent virtuous nature – except that a corrupt leadership keeps Cape society from acknowledging this Godly in-spiration of all. I conclude that Grevenbroek's letter positions the Khoi at the centre of a major political and religious debate in early modern Europe on the nature of God and state, as expressed in Baruch Spinoza's revolutionary and contested philosophical treatise *Ethica* (1677).

At the same time, despite the letter's uniquely developed argument for the Khoi, Grevenbroek's position remains ambivalent. His reliance on personally acquired empirical evidence rather than on the trusted, age-old library allowed him to redress familiar criteria for assessing Khoi civility. Yet the frameworks underlying these criteria remained unchallenged: Grevenbroek's focus on the presence of Christian virtues in the Khoi may have moved them away from being considered a degraded humanity but it also re-affirmed their Christian lineage. Grevenbroek thus still interpreted the novel as an extension to the familiar. Indeed, as a second conclusion, I argue that the letter positioned the Khoi in the

³ Coetzee (1988, Chapter 'Idleness in South Africa').

early modern intellectual transition which Anthony Grafton has called the Revolution of Knowledge: the transition from age-old trusted sources kept in libraries towards empirical observation as a source of superior knowledge.⁴ This was a slow and gradual process that played a decisive role in the transition from late medieval to early modern Europe. In this transition, Grevenbroek's letter presents an early and significant step forward but not a complete break.

Settlers versus Khoi

Books about 'newly discovered' peoples were very popular in 17th century Europe.⁵ Overseas explorations continued to bring home knowledge of nations that had existed on the pages of ancient books or in popular oral tradition but that until then no European had seen with his own eyes. Two Dutch examples of books about a 'new' people are *Schediasma de Promontorio Bonae Spei; ejusve tractus incolis Hottentotis (A Short Account of the Cape of Good Hope and of the Hottentots who inhabit that region)* (1668) by Willem ten Rhyne and *Kaffrarie of Lant der Kaffers, anders Hottentots genaemt (Kaffraria or Land of the Kafirs, also named Hottentots)* (1686) by Olfert Dapper.

The titles of such treatises typically introduce a particular people and the region they inhabit, and their content and structure were to a large extent informed by a conventional set of ethnographical items that would be commented upon.⁶ Ten Rhyne, for example, devotes a chapter to the 'nature' of the 'Hottentots', focusing, as was common, on their observed lack of virtue. It starts thus:

Cap. XIV. De Indole. // Enimvero nativa barbaries & otiosa solitudo illorum animis voluptatum omnium ac vitiorum genera miserabilis virtutum inscitia subjicit: levitate quippe, & inconstantia, mendaciis, fraudibus, perfidia ac infamibus omnis libidinis curis turpissime exercentur, nequissime sanguinarii nec enim imbelles satis est prostrasse, dum trucidatis multis etiamnum insultant telis & baculorum ictibus; ita durissima indole omnem eluctati humanitatem, in majorum feritate perseverant, furto deditissimi: alter enim alterius fraudulenter saepe ditatur pecore. Humaniores & magis casti fuerint *Africani* illi, qui tibi triumphale nomen imposuere, *Africane Scipio!* magnum urbanitatis & castimoniae exemplar!

Chapter 14. Their Character. // Their native barbarism and idle desert life, together with a wretched ignorance of all virtues, imposes upon their minds every form of vicious pleasure. In faithlessness,

⁴ Grafton (1992; 2007).

⁵ Kieskamp (2000, Introduction).

⁶ See Appendix 1. The order in which items were discussed varied. On the development of ethnography and travel writing as separate genres, see Stagl (1980; 1995) and Szaly (1983).

inconstancy, lying, cheating, treachery, and infamous concern with every kind of lust they exercise their villainy [...]. They are so bloody in their inclinations as to practise their cruelties even upon their vanquished enemies after their death, by striking their arrows and weapons into their dead carcasses. Thus in the hardness of their hearts, resisting every impulse of humanity, they persist in the savagery of their fore-fathers. They are so addicted to theft, that one neighbour does not stick to enrich himself by stealing the cattle of another. Those *Africans* who gave you your triumphal name, *O Scipio Africanus*, lofty exemplar of culture and sainthood, must have been more humane, more chaste, than these.⁷

In his concluding remark, Ten Rhyne advances a famous case from ancient history in support of his assumed distinction between the southern Khoi and the people of northern Africa. He mentions the Roman general Scipio Africanus, who ended the Second Punic War against Carthage (217-202 BCE), finally bringing victory to Rome.⁸ Scipio's campaign was regarded as a turning point in Roman history then as it is now, with Rome defeating an age-old nemesis and enforcing its authority over North-African shores. For his triumphs, the Roman senate awarded Scipio the honorary 'agnomen' (victory title) 'Africanus': Scipio-of-Africa.⁹ Ten Rhyne suggests that 'those Africans' whom the Romans deemed worthy of their efforts are indeed 'more humane' than their southern African counterparts, who 'persist in the savagery of their fore-fathers' ('feritas', literally: beastliness) – a native barbarism ('nativa barbaries') of unhindered indulgence ('otiosa solitudo') and resistance to any form of humanity ('omnem humanitatem').¹⁰

Ten Rhyne's paternalistic stance with regard to the Khoi was not unique, nor was his use of a parallel from ancient history in support of his argument. But the ancient reference is more than a derogatory remark. As the historian Anthony Pagden put it in *The Fall of Natural Man. The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (1982):

[N]atural scientists and travel writers from [the Roman] Pliny to John de Mandeville [14th century] constituted for many Europeans a mental 'set', a cluster of images which were thought to constitute a

⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 122, emphasis in text). The Latin and its English translations from Ten Rhyne and Dapper in this chapter and in the next are from Farrington-Schapera (1933) unless otherwise stated.

⁸ At the concluding Battle of Zama, Scipio Africanus conceded to the Carthage general Hannibal the civic leadership of the Empire of Carthage, in modern Tunisia. Scipio's son, Scipio Africanus the Younger, would destroy Carthage and annex it into the Roman Empire in the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE).

⁹ Such agnomens were not uncommon for Roman generals: Marcus Antonius (Mark Anthony), for example, was granted the agnomen 'Creticus' (the Cretan) for his conquest of Crete.

¹⁰ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 122) translates 'feritas', the untamed nature as it pertains to wild beasts (literally beastliness), as 'savagery'. 'Otiosa solitudo' is translated as 'idle desert life'; 'otium' is the opposite of 'negotium' (work, labour) and too much of it was associated in ancient times with laziness, a vice. 'Solitudo', 'solitude', translated by Farrington-Schapera as 'desert', conveys a sense of unhindered indulgence. Grevenbroek aimed to write a Classical Latin; see Chapter 3.

real world of nature in the remoter areas of the world where, precisely because they were remote, the unusual and the fantastic were thought to be the norm.¹¹

During the later Middle Ages, the European observer had initially not been equipped with an adequate vocabulary or classification system to meaningfully describe ‘the unusual and the fantastic’ that they found out there. When the recognition of difference was finally expressed, there was a belief, as Pagden puts it, that ‘the new could always be satisfactorily described by means of some simple and direct analogy with the old’.¹² Ten Rhyne’s contrast of the Khoi with ‘those Africans’ that had been known to the Romans might not seem ‘simple and direct’ to the modern reader, but at the time was a sensible way to describe – and classify – the new. To the European observer, the Khoi were ‘new’, but, thanks to these analogies, felt not entirely unfamiliar.

It is worth stressing that Ten Rhyne’s description of Khoi customs as a negation of European customs was thus not unique. As Pagden wrote:

In European eyes most non-Europeans, and nearly all non-Christians, including such ‘advanced’ people as the Turks, were classified as ‘barbarians’. [...] Those who neither subscribed to European religious views, nor lived their lives according to European social norms.¹³

The vast majority of 17th century accounts explicitly or implicitly suggests that the Khoi are ‘barbarians’. Typically, their authors support their case by commenting on a more or less set list of ethnographic criteria. Occasionally, personal experience was included. Ten Rhyne, for example, spent about four weeks at the Cape in 1673.¹⁴ His account on the Khoi combines an account of his personal acquaintance with the people with the available (ancient and contemporary) literature on the subject. Like the accounts of many other transitory visitors, Ten Rhyne’s writings – despite his time at the Cape – are an affirmation of the early modern European horizon of expectations of the African as living in a negative primitivism. As explained in the Introduction, J.M. Coetzee noted that the reiteration of such motifs in the

¹¹ Pagden (1982, 10).

¹² Pagden (1982, 11).

¹³ Pagden (1982, 13; 24). The term ‘barbarian’ and its connotations play a crucial role in many attempts to characterise the Khoi and their way of life. Since Grevenbroek engages with the word’s connotations from Roman and Greek times, the term will be discussed separately in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ Nowhere in his account does Ten Rhyne state explicitly how long he was at the Cape for, but Farrington-Schapera (1933, 81) writes that ‘it appears from the official records that the ship on which he must have arrived, the *Ternaten*, reached Table Bay on 15 October 1673, from Amsterdam, and departed for the East on 10 November, after a stay of nearly four weeks’.

majority of European writing about the Khoi confirmed the dominant horizon of expectations about them and, therefore, knowledge about the Khoi did not actually advance.¹⁵

Grevenbroek, however, saw the Khoi differently. A decade of working and living at the Cape convinced him that, over the course of centuries, reiterations of 'knowledge' about the Khoi had reduced the people to the emblematic figure of the 'bestly savage' found in most books.¹⁶ The argument advanced in *An Elegant and Accurate Account* is, then, in part a negation of extant discourse about the Khoi. This is already apparent from Grevenbroek's opening remarks on the Khoi:

Caloris, frigoris, inediae, omniumque laborum supra fidem patientissimi, injuriarumque minime, quippe in vindictam proni, [...]. Aspectu rancidi, cultu feri, vita agrestes, bellicosi tamen et insuetae servitutis, aëripedes agilitatem pernicitatem nonnumque equorum, et Cretenses nandi facilitate, praevertentes.

They are beyond belief patient of heat, cold, fasting, and every kind of toil, but utterly impatient of injury, and prone to vengeance. [...] They are offensive to look at, savage in their dress, wild in their mode of life, but warlike and unaccustomed to slavery. They are as swift as the wind, often outstripping horses in fleetness of foot and Cretans in swimming.¹⁷

The passage is an obvious break with primarily disgusted and paternalistic descriptions of the Khoi. Where Ten Rhyne referred to antiquity in painting a derogatory impression of the Khoi, Grevenbroek stated that they outdo its most notable swimmers, the Cretans (the truth of this statement is irrelevant). Also, the Khoi are presented as 'beyond belief [the most] patient [people]' ('supra fidem patientissimi'). Finally, however savage the Khoi may be in appearance, the fact that they were ready to wage war to defend themselves and had not been enslaved suggested to Grevenbroek ('tamen') that they did not live what Ten Rhyne described as an 'idle desert life'.

The introductory passage continues as follows:

¹⁵ The mental image became an objective reality. Another important issue that Coetzee (1988) addresses is that the early modern European image of the Cape was built around a body of exclusively white (European, colonial) writing. I will discuss this in Chapter 4.

¹⁶ As with Ten Rhyne and Dapper, the title of Grevenbroek's treatise introduces a particular people and the region they inhabit. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Maas (2017)), the title page was added on a later date by somebody other than Grevenbroek. See also Appendix 1.

¹⁷ Farrington-Schaperla (1933, 174).

Candore animi multis nostratium superiores sunt, corporis vero nonnullis, et arbitrato meo, forte omnibus albore pares, si nit[i]ori studerent, nunc adipe et radiis solaribus usti, asperoque faciei pigmento infuscantur, suntque coloris ravidu adustioris [...].

In whiteness of soul they are superior to many of our countrymen, and in whiteness of body they are equal to some, and, in my judgment, would perhaps be so to all, if they cared for cleanliness. But as things are, what with fat and the scorching heat of the sun and the sharp pigment they put on their faces, they have grown dark and are of a swarthy brown colour.¹⁸

This covers conventional ethnographic aspects: hygiene, appearance and skin colour. The Khoi habit of putting animal grease on their bodies was a recurring motif in early modern ethnography, and a ground for classifying them as ‘beasts’. Although there is a normative judgment also in Grevenbroek – the Khoi are deemed unclean –, he argues that outside appearance provides a poor ground for a judgment of Khoi character. In opposition to the echo chamber of discourse of the Cape, and in a radical inversion of the conventional image, Grevenbroek introduces the Khoi as superior to many a Dutchman in whiteness of soul.

In his letter, Grevenbroek oftentimes renegotiates the image of the Khoi parallel to a critique of his fellow-settlers. Personal gain-getting, for example, which Grevenbroek considers rampant among the settlers, seems absent among the Khoi, who, per Grevenbroek’s observations, share everything:

Non ingratum tibi, nec abs re fore arbitror si narravero me vidisse Afram, cui pro diurno labore in gabata a quodam Belga analecta dabantur, quae laeta haud aliter quam pipans gallina pullos convocat, suos conclamans populares, eis capturam tanquam in diribitorio dilargitur, vix bucellam sibi servans, hacque bonorum communionem promiscue gaudent omnes, ita ut tubulus nicotiani accensus ab ore ad os omnium accurrentium perambulat, donec in fumum et cineres tabacum conversum sit. A Barbaris certare beneficiis Christiani discant.

It will not bore you, I think, and it will be *à propos*, if I tell you that I have seen a Hottentot woman, who in return for a day’s labour had been given some scraps in a platter by a certain Dutchman. She began to crow with delight like a hen gathering her chickens, calling her people together and making a regular distribution of her booty among them, and hardly keeping a mouthful for herself. All alike delight in this communion of goods. Even a pipe of tobacco when kindled is passed round from mouth to mouth of the crowd that keeps running up, until the weed has vanished into smoke and ash. Let the Christians learn from the natives to vie with one another in well-doing.¹⁹

Here, the initial contrast between the ‘Afra’ (‘Hottentot woman’) and ‘Belga’ (‘Dutchman’) tellingly shifts to an opposition of ‘Barbaris’ and ‘Christiani’ in the final line. As Pagden

¹⁸ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 174).

¹⁹ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 272).

implied by stating that ‘barbarians’ in the eyes of the 17th century Europeans were those ‘who neither subscribed to European religious views, nor lived lives according to European social norms’, Christianity was a key property of the European self-image, and many a non-European was defined through Christianity’s observed absence.²⁰ By concluding that the (Dutch) Christians can ‘learn from’ the (African) ‘barbari’, Grevenbroek inverses a dominant dichotomy, and shows awareness of the terms in which it is commonly expressed and the tradition from which it stems.

Moral qualities and Christian virtues are key to Grevenbroek’s settler critique and rehabilitation of the Khoi. A case in point is the story of a shipwrecked Dutch crew that tried to make their way back to the Cape. In February 1686, the Dutch ship *Stavenisse* was wrecked approximately 110 kilometres west of Port Natal (modern-day Durban). Failing in their attempts to reach the Cape on foot, the crew returned to a native tribe they had previously encountered, and which had generously re-supplied them. Grevenbroek observed that the hospitality of the natives surpasses the charity of even the early Christians. Also, such hospitality is wholly absent among settlers, who trick and enslave the natives, and are thus ‘Christians only in name’:

[I]llud sanè liquet Afros commercio faciles indulgentissimosque, diversitores suos domum reversos omnibusque rebus exutos, ne verbo quidem inclementiore appellasse, aut vultu contumelioso insequutos, mansuetudine vix primitivae Ecclesiae Christianis notâ: sed vae dedecus! in nobis patitur Christus opprobrium, in nobis patitur lex Christiana maledictum! dum nomine tenus Christiani excensu in hanc plagam nonnunquam è navibus facto, miseros incolas blanditiis, et crepundiorum donis pellectos, aut trucidant, aut vinctos plagarii, in suas naves, alibi magno distrahendos, contrudunt: et quid mirum! si hoc detestabili et infando lucro inescati redeunt Christiani ab Afris, cautius mercari doctis, jure talionis sontes cum insontibus caedantur.

[But] this much at least is clear that the Africans are so kindly and easy to deal with that when their guests again came back stripped of all they had, they did not address one word of reproach to them or cast at them the least resentful look, thereby exhibiting a charity scarcely known even to the Christians of the primitive church. But, oh, the shame of it! it is by us dishonour is cast upon the name of Christ, by us the law of Christ is made a thing accursed. Christians only in name, ever and anon there disembark upon these shores, men who deceive the natives with soft words and the gift of a few trifles, and then either slaughter them or kidnap them for the slave trade, bind them, thrust them aboard ship and sell them in strange lands at a great price. What wonder then that the Christians,

²⁰ Pagden (1982, 24). See also Chapter 1.

when they return again tempted by this loathsome and unspeakable traffic, find that the natives have become more particular in their dealings, and retaliate by slaying the innocent with the guilty.²¹

Ten Rhyne found that the Khoi live in a state of 'barbaritas', bereft of a European 'humanitas', but Grevenbroek highlights how they possess 'a charity scarcely known even to the Christians of the primitive church' ('mansuetudine vix primitivae Ecclesiae Christianis notâ'). Indeed, Grevenbroek describes the virtues that he finds in great abundance in the Khoi and finds lacking among the settlers as authentically Christian. Ironically, the European settlers – who, in the echo chamber, are the Christian benchmark against which the Khoi are gauged – seem to consistently shame the very values that Christianity seeks to uphold: they deceive the Khoi with words and cheap gifts, and ultimately pack them, bounded, in their slave ships ('vinctos plagiarum ... contrudunt').²² Grevenbroek presents Khoi counter-violence against the settlers as an understandable response to the dismal treatment they suffer. A waning Christian conscience not only seems to make the Europeans oblivious to their own behaviour, but also seems to keep them from acknowledging the Christian virtues present among the Khoi.

Throughout the letter, many similar examples illustrate that morality has been waning among the Europeans. In contrast, the Khoi are shown to be incorruptible in their standards, such as here: 'Nullo aere quantovis pretio extraneis eos mancipio distracturos. Liberis quippe servitutis pretium ingratum est', 'No money, no price will tempt them to sell themselves into slavery to strangers. Freeman despise the price of servitude'.²³ Yet passages like this one and the previous should not be read merely as counter arguments to the dominant discourse about the Khoi. Importantly, in a dominant discourse that explains civility as Christianity, it is fundamental to Grevenbroek's argument for Khoi humanity that they are Christians.

²¹ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 222; 224).

²² Dapper (1668, cited in Farrington-Schaper (1933, 46)) admits that the Khoi have their 'lapses', but explains them benevolently and, like Grevenbroek, contrasts their lifestyle positively with that of the Dutch: 'In generosity and loyalty to those nearest them, they appear to shame the Dutch. For instance, if one of them has anything he will willingly share it with another; no matter how small it may be, they will always endeavour to share and divide it amongst themselves in a brotherly manner. It is true that stealing does sometimes occur among them, owing to their consumption of the root dacha, which they mix with water and drink, thereupon becoming drunk and unwittingly driven to excesses. Others, hard pressed by poverty, also try to smuggle away something here and there; but if discovered they must pay for this with their lives'.

²³ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 196).

Grevenbroek insists that Khoi customs are grafted onto the same Christian stratum as European customs, for example in the case of a European trading mission that ventured into the Cape hinterlands. The Europeans were carefully groomed, as was their habit when doing business. Yet, they soon found out that the Khoi had different ideas of a cultured appearance:

Nostrates procul hinc profecti, mercaturam facturi, in gentem, cui non cornea fibra est, quae nostris tum forte comptis rasisque, aut imberbibus, merces suas distrahendae explicantibus indicantibusque, joculari convicio exprobrat, maritos suos vocarent, si secum pacisci vellent, cum in(s)titricibus sibi nullum negotium. Talia Barbari!

Our countrymen went on a trading expedition some distance from this place and encountered a people whose wits were not all of wood; for when our men, who as it happened were nicely groomed, and had either shaved or not yet come to grow a beard, were spreading out their wares for sale and inviting purchasers, this people cast a humorous scoff at them, that they should summon their husbands if they wished to come to terms, for they never did business with women. This from savages!²⁴

Grevenbroek implies that, in contrast to contemporary expectations, it is the Khoi who set the grooming standard. But Khoi custom is also again shown to be grafted onto a backbone of rules that is readily intelligible within a European framework – the trading settlers would hardly have rejoiced in a denial of their masculinity. Grevenbroek's concluding exclamation, then, is one of pleasant irony and posed a crucial question: what did it mean to say that the Khoi were barbaric, and the Europeans were not?

'This from savages!' echoes an issue about cultural difference that had been posed a century before by Michel de Montaigne for the French and the Italians: 'What truth is that, which these Mountaines bound, and is a lie in the world beyond them?'²⁵ It still weighed heavily on the minds of 17th century anthropologists. Relativism could not provide an answer, for the acceptance that other worlds were simply other did not shed light on the meaning of exotic behaviour. Grevenbroek's implied answer is that there existed little difference between Khoi and settlers, insofar as Khoi and European customs both answered to a Christian rationale – although the former's may be covered with a rustic veneer during long years of separation from fellow-Christians.

²⁴ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 176).

²⁵ See Chapter 1, 'Conclusion'.

In what follows, I substantiate the Christian framework Grevenbroek discerns in the Khoi. First, however, I want to point out that Grevenbroek illustrated that the Khoi were a race of man – not animals driven by instinct – by elaborating the rationale to their behaviour. When a Khoi chief meets his nemesis for peace-making, for example, Grevenbroek explains that the chief offers his strongest hand for a particular reason:

[...] pactaeque societatis signo, manus invicem sociant: sed hic sinistram, ille dextram jungit: quod miratus, hujusque novitatis mihi causam rimanti inquirentique, *malum hunc accolam finitimumque gravem scaevam esse, sinistram qua viribus praepollet noxiosissimamque in fidei pignus obtulisse nervosè paratissimèque argutulus attendenti respondet Barbarus.*

[...] and as a sign of established amity they shook hands. But the one gave his left hand, the other his right. I was surprised at this, and on my seeking and enquiring into the reason for so strange an action, the native, a shrewd fellow, replied to my query boldly and promptly, saying that this bad and troublesome neighbour was lefthanded, and had therefore offered his left hand which was the stronger and the more apt to mischief as a pledge of faith.²⁶



Figure 2.1 'Hottentots'.

Note the intestines in the hand of the man on the left.

Lodewyckz, W. (1598), *Historie van Indien*, Amsterdam. Reproduced from Van Wyk Smith (1992).

Grevenbroek provides several examples of Khoi reasoned behaviour, structured along contemporary ethnographic parameters, to show that they are not isolated instances. In

²⁶ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 272). Ignorant of an intricate custom at first, Grevenbroek shows that he learned through observation and inquiry. I return to empiricism as a means of questioning the European consensus about the Khoi in the next section.

another example, Grevenbroek rationalises the Khoi's frequent use of animal entrails European ethnographies and encyclopaedia often sported compelling visualisations of Khoi dress, hairdo and feeding habits, which served to illustrate their uncultured way of life (figure 2.1, previous page, and figure 2.2).²⁷ Grevenbroek, however, provides an explanation for this seemingly unfamiliar custom:

Si conjectare permittitur, non alia de causa ipsos aegri collo omentum circumdare, eumque axungia oblinire dicerem, quam ut iis spirituum vitalium nimias exhalationes sistant, porosque corporis obturando, frigus externum arceant, caloremque nativum foveant.

If I may be allowed a conjecture, I should say that the reason of their hanging the entrails round the neck of the patient and anointing him with fat is to check the excessive exhalation of the vital spirits, and, by closing the pores of the body, to keep out external cold and foster the native heat.²⁸



Figure 2.2 'Diabolical Hottentots'. Note the dripping intestine in the woman's hand. Also note the breast of the woman flung over her shoulder to feed her child, which answers to the stereotyped image of Khoi women having long, hanging breasts. Herbert, T. (1634), *A Relation of Some Years Travaille* [sic], London. Reproduced from Van Wyk Smith (1992).

²⁷ Van Wyk Smith (1992) has shown that it was a common strategy in Khoi iconography to render the unfamiliar familiar. See, for example, Khoi body posture in figures 2.1, previous page, and 2.2. The vast majority of illustrations were made by artists that never left Europe and the Khoi are oftentimes posed in the manner of ancient statues.

²⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 242).

Khoi medical habits may seem unfamiliar to the European eye, but Grevenbroek shows that they, like European treatments, are built around an orderly system of norms, values, actions and physiological considerations. According to Coetzee, a rationale for Khoi behaviour – other than a savage one – is typically absent from the European echo chamber of discourse. Grevenbroek, however, presents a break with the broadly accepted view that the Khoi, like animals, acted to instinct, which classified them as beasts or barbarians. In a discourse in which reason was considered not only the highest, but also the most archetypically human faculty, Grevenbroek's conjecture suggests that the Khoi use of entrails may in fact be a reasoned reaction ('quam ut ... foveant').²⁹

Interestingly, Grevenbroek mentions the sheep's entrails worn around the neck earlier in his treatise as well. There, he notes that the Khoi look at European jewellery in disdain, as it serves no obvious practical purpose. The Europeans, on the other hand, fail to acknowledge the rationale that underpins the use of entrails:

Et pretiosissima eorundem monilia, ex tenuissimo filo, acu texta, plurisque empta, quam maximi pecudum greges veneunt, nullum alium usum, commodum, utilitatemque habentia, praeterquam eum quem luxus fingit, venenato joco circumcisè explodunt, dum ipsi praecordiorum intestinorumque ex collo pendentium virtute et pinguedine mactati pecudis, nostratibus tantopere exhibitis medicamentis, nonnunquam morbos depellunt, et averruncant.

They [the Khoi] also condemn with curt and biting ridicule the precious necklaces of the Europeans, strung with a needle on a slender thread, bought for a greater price than the largest flocks of sheep, and having no other use, convenience, or value than that fictitious one that luxury provides. Yet they themselves sometimes banish or avert diseases by the power of entrails and intestines which they hang round their necks, and by the fat of slaughtered beasts, remedies greatly scoffed at by our countrymen.³⁰

The comparison of entrails with jewellery emphasises a contrast: aesthetic vanity has led the settlers to 'scoff' at jewellery that serves a more pragmatic purpose. Notably, the passage explains the European custom from a Khoi point of view. Grevenbroek was hereby able to oppose the Khoi's simple living with a European settler lifestyle of '[fictitious] use, convenience and value that luxury provides' ('usum, commodum, utilitatemque ... quem luxus fingit'). To not read the passage as an answer to the question of how to interpret the observed differences between Europeans and non-Christians is to miss the point. Put briefly,

²⁹ Pagden (1982, Chapter 3).

³⁰ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 206).

Grevenbroek's answer is that the Khoi have remained closer to the values of early Christianity than the European settlers.

An intriguing aspect of Grevenbroek's letter is that he was nominally one of the people he scrutinises: he was a (former) VOC clerk from (Christian) Europe. It is therefore worthwhile to delve into what he found was the root of the settlers' moral corruption. This brings out the more immediate theological concerns of the time reflected in the letter. Grevenbroek claims that the Cape's problems can be traced back to Amsterdam, which attracts criminals and rascals from far and wide. Once at the Cape, Grevenbroek goes on, the enlisted 'change their climate and their merchandise, but not their hearts. [...] Their virtue is to triumph over the restraints all other men obey' ('[...] et caelum mercesque non animum mutasse videri. [...] virtutis esse domare quod cuncti pavent').³¹ The restraints are those of Calvinism, the main religion in the Dutch Republic at the time.³² Many 'Reformed' men were turned into tyrannic 'Deformers', and no means was left untried in pursuit of personal gain:

nimumque Reformatores hi (Deformatores parum abest quin dicam) in Calvini verba jurantes nil bonis operibus, omnia gratiae tribuunt, nil virtuti, minusque merito dant, contractuum innominatorum Do ut Des, Facioque ut Facias etc. defensores studiosissimi, caeterum patrii juris rudissimi, hinc eorum imperium Abderitico per omnia simillimum, stolideque despoticum diceres, dum veniam corvis datam, imbellesque columbas censuram vexare, protegi sontes, immeritos premi, scelerique murum dari videres.

Enthusiastic Reformers (I am tempted to call them Deformers), who having sworn allegiance to Calvin allow nothing now to good works and everything to grace; they ascribe nothing to virtue and still less to merit; they are zealous champions of innominate contracts: Do ut Des, Facioque ut Facias etc., but for the rest know nothing of their country's law. Hence their rule may be likened to the warning

³¹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 236). 'Virtutis ... pavent': literally, 'It is of virtue to conquer that which everybody is frightened of'.

³² Political grievances against Philip II, King of Spain, Lord of the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands and a Catholic, sparked hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, with Calvinism gaining adherents especially among the middle class. After the Eighty Years' War (1568 to 1648), in a complex interplay of political and religious tension, Calvinism became the de facto state religion in the Dutch Republic. Harris Harbrison (1955, Chapter 1) explains that many public offices could be occupied only by Calvinists, although totalitarian control was not affected for the sake of commerce. Joost van den Vondel also reflects on this widely felt religious tension in his poem on Amsterdam ('Op Amstelredam', 1631): 'Wat volken ziet ze niet beschijnen door de maan, / Zij die zelf wetten stelt de ganze oceaen? [...] Welvaren blijv' haar erf, zolang de priesterschap / De raad niet overheerst en blindhokt met de kap'. The last two lines were added in 1647. For Vondel, the reformed vicars' lust for political power is the only threat to Amsterdam's prosperity (cf. Sterck (1929, 354)).

examples of antiquity in its stupid despotism; they pardon the ravens and punish the doves, protect the guilty and oppress the innocent, and give the place of honour to crime.³³

In what follows, Grevenbroek argues that the construction of additional churches would in itself be no solution to the betrayal of Calvinist virtues: 'it is a mistake to begin by erecting crosses and gibbets for the suppression of crime' ('nec praeposteri cruces et patibula coërcendis sceleribus initio erigere').³⁴ He points a finger to the Company, and more particularly to the void in Christian ethics among its officials at the Cape. As long as Grevenbroek's fellow members at the Council of Policy did not set a virtuous example for the settlers by altering their mentality, standards of virtue at the Cape would remain even lower than they are in Europe:

salutemque Reip: ex lege in qua jurati sunt, supremam debere esse, sed praecipites ruentes [...], corradunt per omne fas et nefas everriculo pecuniam, virtutem post nummos habent. [...] quam ob rem ne mireris si dixero me plura indicia non adumbratae sed expressae pietatis, probitatis, fortitudinis, ingenuitatis, aliarumque virtutum signa in Europa una die vidisse, quam tot tantisque stipendiorum curriculum, quibus sub signis Societatis nostrae merui, inter commilitones nostros observaverim.

the safety of the state into the service of which they are sworn, comes before all. Instead they rush heedless on, [...] ruthlessly sweeping all the money they can into their drag-net, despising virtue in comparison with cash. You must not then be surprised if I say that in one day in Europe I have seen more evidences of piety, honesty, courage, innocence, and other virtues, and not the mere promise of these virtues but their fulfilment, than I have seen among my colleagues here in all my long years of service with the Company.³⁵

Grevenbroek's continued references to virtue as a behavioural compass and as the foundation for the safety of the state drew on a religious-political debate at the time in Europe. In his *Ethica*, the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) argues for an understanding of God that is radically different from that of traditional eschatology: for Spinoza, the universe is a part of God. God is not an abstract creator of the universe, whose presence is shown through miracles; instead, God is present in every aspect of the universe's natural state (or, order). There thus exists only one substance; everything, man

³³ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 284). A man of the world, Grevenbroek understands the temptations faced by Company staff. There are more riches to be gained in India, he explains, than in the Americas or at home: 'All [men] are turned towards India, and very few in the other direction' ('[o]mnia licet Indiam advorsum, perpauca retrovsum videant') (Farrington-Schapera (1933, 234)).

³⁴ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 284).

³⁵ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 284).

included, is a property of God. Spinoza intends all this not as philosophy in itself but to serve a very practical purpose: the idea of free will is a result of man's ignorance, Spinoza argues, because he fails to recognise the Godly roots of his actions. Virtue, understood in its wide generality, allows man to live a temperate life that is naturally in balance with the Godly universe. To act in accordance with virtue is thus to be focused on the 'being' ('esse') in the Godly universe:

In proportion as a man aims at and is successful in pursuing his *utile*, that is his *esse*, so much the more is he endowed with *virtue*; on the other hand, in proportion as he neglects to cultivate his *utile* or his *esse*, so much the greater is his impotence.³⁶

In the *Ethica*, political society is preceded by a so-called state of nature, in which there is no law or religion or moral right or wrong, but solely the individual ('ego'), who must do all he can to preserve himself. Spinoza argues that men, as rational creatures, have come to realise that a law of reason is in greater self-interest than the law of nature. Yet, unbounded self-interest is to be restrained, and this is 'most naturally' done by a democratically elected sovereign.

Like for Spinoza, Grevenbroek's religious conceptions have clear socio-political ramifications.³⁷ In Grevenbroek's argument, the 'ego' of the settlers (particularly that of their leaders) is the central issue in founding a society that is balanced in God. The settlers yield to self-interest and are not focused on the 'esse'. The Khoi, however, are virtuous, in that their actions are more Christian than those of the early Christians. Grevenbroek also explains that the Cape is filled with God's presence, and that all it needs is a radical expulsion of 'the disturbers of the State [and] their leader' by someone of unsullied – religious – character:

[...] spectaveris, Deoque complacitum esse, me in hunc compingere locum, cujus felicitati nihil deest, quam ut hoc exulcerato formidulosoque tempore, per aliquem religiosum Numam, caput non rediviam gemursam(que) curantem, ab scelerum vestigiis expietur, et Reip: turbines audaciâ furentes, flagitiaque anhelantes cum eorundem Autolico Duce, qui pecori imperitat, quem tota armenta sequuntur, exophthalmoque scordalo, perque alterum Titum Judaei hi funditus extirpentur, et colonia his everriculis et erubescenda sentinâ vacuefacta, ad pileum vocata floreat vigeatque:

³⁶ *Ethica*, liber IV, propositio XX. 'Quo magis unusquisque suum utile quaerere, hoc est, suum esse conservare conatur, et potest, eo magis virtute praeditus est; et contra quatenus unusquisque suum utile, hoc est, suum esse conservare negligit, eatenus est impotens.' Translations from Rickaby (1909, *sub voce* 'Fortitude').

³⁷ There is no volume of Spinoza among the 91 books that remain of Grevenbroek's private library, which comprised at least 370 titles (see Van Stekelenburg (2003, 94)).

magnique refert rudis hic populus, dulci fortuna ebrius Numinis metu mitigetur, melioreque consuetudine permulceatur.

Reflect too that it has been God's will to fix me in a spot that lacks nothing for happiness except that in this corrupt and parlous age some religious Numa should arise, to attend to the head, not to the sore nail or the corn on the toe, and to clear the place of the traces of its crimes. But as for the disturbers of the State, raging in their fury and panting with villainy, together with their leader, a pop-eyed thieving blackguard, who lords it over the flock and whom the whole troop follows, another Titus must arise to extirpate them like the Jews of old, and when the colony has been purged of these plunderers and of this shameful scum, and rescued from slavery, it will flourish and prosper. It is of great moment to this rough people, made drunk with good fortune, that it should be tamed by the fear of God, and mellowed by better ways of life.³⁸

Grevenbroek makes the omnipresence of Godly substance central to solving the Cape's problem with its leader, who, at the time, was governor Simon van der Stel: the lament about 'the disturbers of the State' is framed by an explicit dedication to (the supreme) God ('Deo') and to the divine presence ('Numinis').³⁹ Grevenbroek writes that he is (literally) bent, rolled, or involved in God ('Deo[que] complicatum'), and that 'this people should be tamed through a (fearing) respect for the divine presence' ('hic populus ... Numinis metu mitigetur'), where Numen is understood as a Godly spirit that permeates the universe.

The passage above also builds on two famous cases from Roman antiquity. Whereas Ten Rhyne advanced ancient history in an illustration of the Khoi's savage nature, Grevenbroek – in an inversion – directs the authority of the ancients to the morally bankrupt Cape settlers. Firstly, Numa was the second king of Rome, elected after extensive strife between two rivalling parties. After a violent period under the first king, Romulus, relative peace was restored under Numa. He is credited with installing various religious and political institutions, is said to have been in direct contact with the Roman Gods, and was praised extensively for his piety.⁴⁰ The Cape, too, Grevenbroek writes, needs a 'religious Numa' – for a fresh start. The other ancient motif is the reference to Titus, who in 79 became the tenth Roman Emperor. Roman relations with the Jews in the east of the Empire had been complicated ever since Rome had made Judaea a province of the Empire in 6. For

³⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 297). The 'pileus' was a felt cap ceremoniously presented to a slave when he was freed. It was a symbol of Libertas, the goddess of liberty.

³⁹ Grevenbroek was known to disagree with his governor's policies. See Sleight (1993) and Chapter 4.

⁴⁰ According to Livy (*History of Rome* 1.18), Romulus had 300 'Celeres' ('swift men') as personal bodyguards. Having refused the throne when it was first offered to him, Numa eventually accepted, but disbanded the guard. This has variously been explained as a sign of moderation, as self-protection against corruption and the guard's questionable loyalty, and as a token of religious faith. Numa constructed the Temple of Janus (as an indicator of war and peace) and established the cult of Terminus, God of boundary markers.

example, the Jews refused to have statues of Roman Emperors placed in their synagogues, and would in fact not honour any statue since their religion forbade this. Protests against over-taxation by Roman officials joined the list of grievances, sparking a rebellion in which Roman ‘traitors’ were killed in Jerusalem.⁴¹ In the ensuing Jewish-Roman war (66-73), Titus captured Jerusalem and crushed the Jewish rebellion, looting and destroying the Temple, the icon and centre of Jewish identity.⁴²

Grevenbroek compares ‘those Jews’ with the ‘disturbers of the State’ at the Cape (‘turbines audacia furentes’, literally: ‘furious (men), agitated by audacity’). The officials at the Cape need to be purged, like the Jews were overthrown by the Roman order. Their ‘leader’, then-governor Simon van der Stel, is compared to Autolycis (‘Autolico Duce’), a mythical Greek thief who could not be caught by anyone and who had the power to metamorphosise himself and stolen goods at will.⁴³ Grevenbroek is convinced that once the ‘colonia’ is saved from the ‘slavery’ imposed by the corrupt governor and his henchmen, it will be guided to ‘better ways of life’ (‘meliore consuetudine’).⁴⁴ The Cape populace will meet good fortune (‘dulci fortuna ebrius’) and can then be mellowed by ‘fear for the divine presence’ (‘metu Numinis’).⁴⁵

It is interesting that Grevenbroek writes from a (pagan) Roman perspective – the Jews are perceived as the disturbers of a Roman order – and that Spinoza rejects the particularism that many argued was essential to Judaism. For Spinoza, the Godly election of the Hebrews, their ‘vocation’-as-gift, had been temporal and conditional. With their social organisation and political situation long gone – and without them being superior in wisdom or proximity to God to any other nation –, Spinoza argues that ‘at the present time there is nothing whatsoever that the Jews can arrogate to themselves above other nations’.⁴⁶ In

⁴¹ Philo, *Flaccus* VI.43. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.8.11.

⁴² The justifiability of Titus’ actions has been a topic of debate ever since. See, for example, Gambash (2013).

⁴³ The story of Autolycis is told, for example, by the Roman author Hyginus (circa 0) in his *Myths* (201), of which Grevenbroek had a copy in his possession. (See my remarks on Grevenbroek’s library in Chapter 3.)

⁴⁴ ‘Erubescenda sentina vacuefacta’ is a phrase from Valerius Maximus, 1st century writer of historical anecdotes: ‘hac turpi atque erubescenda sentina vacuefactus exercitus noster’, ‘our army was then emptied of this shocking and shameful bilge water’ (II.7.1). The bilge are the pedlars and sutlers as well as the countless prostitutes that poisoned the soldier’s spirit with too much pleasure, Valerius Maximus writes.

⁴⁵ Originally, Roman religion did not know anthropomorphic Gods but only divine powers that were present everywhere in the world. ‘Numina’ became anthropomorphic as a result of contact with the Greek world, in which myths played an important role. See Rose (1926, 44).

⁴⁶ Translation Shirley (2001, Chapter 3, sub G III.56/S 45).

Spinoza's philosophy, piety and blessedness are Godly universals, accessible to anyone, whatever their religious denomination.

Spinoza maintains that 'the highest virtue of the intellect is the knowledge of God'.⁴⁷ A virtuous life, as he calls it, opens up 'better ways of life' for all and will safeguard the state. Arguably, Grevenbroek's 'happiness' ('felicitati') in the first line of the above passage is a Cape filled with a Godly presence, a 'Numen', in which un-virtuous leaders no longer stand in the way of people living in accordance with this presence. In the conclusion to his letter, Grevenbroek states:

Quo uno omnia verbo complectar, terram scias hanc suis contentam bonis, nec mercis aut opis alicujus (si luxuria absit) indigam, tam longè latèque se pandit Divina bonitas, abundè incolis exhibens alimenta.

To put all in a word, you must know that this land is sufficient unto itself, and needs neither commerce nor any other aid, if luxury be absent, so bountifully does the goodness of God here display itself, affording nurture without stint to the inhabitants.⁴⁸

Although Grevenbroek does not say so explicitly, it could be argued that his ideal 'colonia' is one in which Europeans and Khoi live as Christian brethren. The particularism that Spinoza discerned in the Jews, then, is what Grevenbroek finds in the settlers. At the same time, he interprets Khoi customs as more than a positive primitivism: he finds that the Khoi are more authentic than the early Christians. The land ('terra') is enough to support the Khoi, for the goodness of God ('Divina bonitas') spreads itself ('se') open far and wide ('longe lateque'). This is opposed with commerce ('mercis'), 'luxuria', and any other aid ('opis alicujus'), which, it is implied, have come to characterise European life at the Cape, chaired by a corrupt administration.⁴⁹ Such properties focus on what Spinoza called the 'ego', and lead away from the communal 'esse'. Couched in ancient references, contemporary ethnographical discourse and allusions to Christian eschatology, Grevenbroek's argument seems to be that, unlike the Khoi, the Dutch settlers have abandoned their Christian roots under a corrupt leadership, which is what stands in the way of a happy, virtuous and sustainable society. Grevenbroek thus again advances the opposition between Khoi and European in favour of

⁴⁷ *Ethica*, liber V, propositio XLII.

⁴⁸ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 290).

⁴⁹ The translation is quite free. The Latin has 'indigam', suggesting that the divine land is certainly not 'unworthy' of commerce or luxury, but does not need such aids as long as it is filled with God's goodness.

the former, and couches his argument in early modern political-religious concerns, supported with relevant examples from ancient history.

The Letter's sources and structure

Grevenbroek's argument for Khoi humanity in conjunction with his sustained critique of settler ethics sets his letter apart from contemporary ethnographic writing on the Khoi. In this section, I show how, as a part of this, Grevenbroek re-dresses familiar ethnographical criteria using knowledge obtained during his time at the Cape. In this way, he renegotiates not only the image of the Khoi, but also the way this image was constructed. A look at his sourcework and the letter's structure permit a closer exploration of his position among his peers.

The vast majority of accounts of the Khoi provides a discussion through customary ethnographical criteria. To an extent that is difficult to underestimate, these texts tend to be informed by works of others – be they written by travellers, writers-from-home or publishers.⁵⁰ This is not to say that travellers did not disembark onto Cape shores to observe the land with their own eyes, but that the novel or unfamiliar was interpreted within or as an extension to the familiar as predominantly laid out in ancient literature, exegetical texts and contemporary writings.

We know that Grevenbroek had a considerable influence on at least two authors. One is Peter Kolb, whose *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum (The Cape of Good Hope Today)* (Nürnberg, 1719) has been dubbed 'the most detailed and serviceable treatise we have on the early Cape Hottentots'.⁵¹ He acknowledges Grevenbroek once, in very general terms:

At last Mr. Johann Wilhelm de Grevenbroek, a man of remarkable industry, understanding and knowledge, who after serving several renowned ambassadors had finally come here as Political Secretary to the Illustrious Company, taught me from the notes, which he had likewise made concerning the Hottentots during his residence here.⁵²

The Abbé de la Caille, who stayed at the Cape from 1751 to 1753, asserts in his *Journal historique du Voyage fait au Cap de Bonne-Espérance* (1763) that Kolb copied everything from Grevenbroek:

⁵⁰ Baggerman (1993) discusses this for the 17th century Dutch bookseller Simon de Vries.

⁵¹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 162).

⁵² Kolb (1719, 416), English translation by Farrington-Schapera (1933, 162).

M. Grevenbroek, ... an extraordinary man, had made some researches into the manners and customs of the Hottentots. After his death his papers were sent to Kolb, who pieced them together without any skill or judgment.⁵³

All that Kolb says in the rest of his book is taken from the memoirs of a certain Grevenbroek, secretary of the Council at the Cape, who had put into writing what the Hottentots whom he had seen had replied to his questions.⁵⁴

François Valentyn addresses particular qualities of Grevenbroek's treatise. He writes in his *Beschryvinge van de Kaap der Goede Hoop* (Amsterdam, 1724-1726):

[I have seen] a Latin treatise by Mr. Secretary Grevenbroek, who had taken the trouble to write an elaborate and able account not only of their manners and customs, but also of their language; this treatise he allowed me to read in Stellenbosch in 1705.⁵⁵

Valentyn is probably referring to (a draft of) Grevenbroek's letter: the Latin-Hottentot-Dutch vocabulary that Valentyn includes in his own description of the Cape is copied verbatim from it.

It is important to note that Valentyn and Kolb not only incorporated parts of Grevenbroek's letter into their work, but also acknowledged Grevenbroek.⁵⁶ At the end of the 17th century, referencing one's sources in the modern sense of the word was not yet expected practice and an explicit evaluation of the writer's rationale was seldomly triggered – as is also implied by Coetzee's term 'echo chamber of discourse about the Cape'.⁵⁷ Grevenbroek stands out in listing his sources as well as in elaborating his understanding of what constitutes truthful evidence and how this understanding differs from his predecessors'.

⁵³ Caille (1763, 156-157), quoted from Farrington-Schapera (1933, 163). There is no evidence that papers by Grevenbroek were in fact sent to Kolb.

⁵⁴ Caille (1763, 322; see also 156-157), quoted from Farrington-Schapera (1933, 163). It is not known if Grevenbroek mastered any indigenous languages, yet it seems likely that he did, judging by his comments on Khoi language and his extensive, multilingual book collection. See Chapter 3 and Van Stekelenburg (2001; 2003).

⁵⁵ Valentyn (1726, 106), cited and translated by Farrington-Schapera (1933, 163).

⁵⁶ Copyright ethics would only be tentatively established in the 18th century. For a case study of François Valentyn (1666-1727) and ethics regarding plagiarism (or the lack thereof), see Huigen (2009¹). Interesting also is the case of François Leguat (1637/39-1735). His travel account, first read as a work of non-fiction, was denounced as fiction in the 19th century.

⁵⁷ At the same time, controversies raged over many 'truthful' statements about foreign peoples: Grafton (1997, Chapter 7). Breisach (1998, 1553) asserts that still in the 18th century, when referencing was becoming a topic of scholarly debate, the uncluttered page without footnotes 'found its advocates in the Classical period when in-text recourse to past authorities sufficed for gaining credibility'.

Grevenbroek prioritised first-hand evidence over any other source type. In the conclusion to his letter, he lists five of his sources:

Vale vir Rev^{de} et stabili salute potiaris, acroamaque hoc adstrictae ex schedis meis rejectaneis adversariisque compilatum, crassiorisque Minervae tam rerum auditione acceptarum, quam quas certis auctoribus omni exceptione majoribus, et ex annalibus, instrumentisque authenticis comperi, oculisque usurpavi [...]

[...] this little composition has been thrown together from my note-books and odd pages of writing. It is a rough sketch, embodying matters of hearsay as well as information gathered from reliable witnesses, written records, authentic documents, and my personal observation.⁵⁸

Indeed, his modest ‘thrown-together composition’ (‘compilatum’) was based on a variety of sources unavailable to any of his peers: first-hand access to official yearbooks from the Castle (‘annalibus’), authentic records (‘instrumentis authenticis’) and a decade of personal observation (‘oculisque usurpavi’). More than that, Grevenbroek could weigh the two source types that were more widely available – hearsay and reliable witnesses – against his own experiences. After all, he was the Council of Policy’s secretary from roughly 1685 to 1695, attending the vast majority of its meetings, writing and signing off on its minutes, and surveying its various correspondence with the East and the Lords XVII in Amsterdam.⁵⁹ Statements such as ‘a certain Dutchman whose word I can assure’ (‘Accepi ex quodam non temnendae fidei Batavo adseverante [...]’) suggest careful assessment of the information available.⁶⁰ What is more, on two occasions Grevenbroek includes suggestions for further reading. First: ‘supplement this [observation] with the observation of the English write[r] Hellyn [sic], the Aquitanian Tavernier, and the Swiss Stoupa, whose works I saw long ago’ (‘Adde quaecunque de his Hellyn Anglus, Aquitanus Tavernier, cum Helveto Stoupa scripsere, olim mihi aliaque visa, [...]’).⁶¹ And second:

⁵⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 298).

⁵⁹ Many of the Cape council’s minutes and letters written or signed off by Grevenbroek have been preserved at the Cape Town Archives and Records Services: C1887-1904 (minutes) and C1378 (letters).

⁶⁰ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 194). With the notable exception of the two suggestions for further reading mentioned below, Grevenbroek does not specify or name his sources. Possibly, he was striving for consistency with his own anonymous opening and his promise that he did not want to ‘reveal state secrets’. (As noted, the front page, which contains the sole explicit mention of Grevenbroek’s name in the document, was added at a later date. See Maas (2017)).

⁶¹ Farrington-Schapera (1933; 236). The works are Heylyn, P. (1657), *Cosmographie. Containing the Horographie and Historie of the whole world*. London, and Tavernier, J.B. (1676), *Les Six Voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier [...] en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes*, Paris. Like Farrington-Schapera (1933, 237n58), I have been unable to identify Stoupa.

Haec ab exordio detexui, longiusque prolapsus, quam epistolae cancelli patiuntur: plura si de hujus juvenis navisque sorte scire gestis, evolve si placet Mercurii Europaei tomi sexti partem secundam, complectentem sex posteriores menses anni 1695, editam Amstelodami typis Timothei van Hoorn in 4o pag. M. 237 ubi omnia fusius, non meo, sed ni fallor cujusdam praestantissimi auctoris clancularii stylo exarata patent.

I have told this story from the beginning, and it has been too long a digression for the limits of a letter. If you wish to learn at more length the story of this man and his ship, turn up, if you will, vol. vi, part 2 of the European Mercury, comprising the last six months of 1695. It is published at Amsterdam by Timothy van Hoorn. There on p. 237 you will find the whole story told at greater length, not by me, but by the pen of an anonymous author of great powers, if I may trust my judgment.⁶²

Finally, the historical instances mentioned in the letter, such as the framed narratives that I will discuss shortly, took place during Grevenbroek's time in office at the Cape, suggesting that he built his image of the Khoi around events that he could personally verify. This explicit care for sourcework makes Grevenbroek's letter stand out from other literature of his time.

Elsewhere in the letter, Grevenbroek continues his rationale. He explains that much is unknown about the Cape and, in a description of the animals of the land, identifies the gap he sees in the extant literature:

Multitudo [animalium], quorum genera ut plurimum in quatuor et plures species se spargentia, easdemque maximam partem nostratibus ignotas, omnibusque scriptoribus incognitas, attonitus animadverti.

[I am] astonished to perceive, [species that] are for the most part unknown to the Europeans and unrecognized in the writings of all naturalists.⁶³

Some African mammals had been described by the ancients in mythical terms and by explorers, but Grevenbroek observes a void in all European written sources about the Cape ('omnibus scriptoribus'). The passage about Cape wildlife has no direct bearing on the Khoi Grevenbroek sets out to rehabilitate, but it is indicative of his way of collecting evidence:

et ne à fide abhorrentia narrare videar, scias eadem mihi assiduos testes retulisse, et inter caetera visas ipsis pascentes belluas, capite equo similes, oblongo collo, brevi caudâ, reliquis vero corporis partibus elephantem referentes adaequantisque, incredibilis penè pernecitatis, adeoque cicures ut mansuefactas crederes; porrò ex ore nonnullorum haud spernendae fidei accipi, visos sibi monocerotes equo statura omnibusque membris simillimos in fronte cornu brachii longitudine et

⁶² Farrington-Schapera (1933, 232).

⁶³ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 265).

crassitie gestantes ferocissimos: alii quorum fides non vacillat narrant dari illic bicornes equos paris ferocitatis et formâ egregios: [...] Onagrum non minoris pernecitatis et spectatae pulchritudinis fasciis albis nigrisque duorum digitorum latitudine alternatim per totum corpus, ab auribus usque ad caudam et imos talos affabrè striatura dispersum miratus.

I do not want you to suppose that I am straying from the truth; you must know therefore that the most careful observers have reported the above facts to me, and have told me among other things that they have seen creatures grazing with horses' heads, long necks, short tails, like elephants in the rest of their parts and as big, of an almost incredible swiftness, and at the same time so little shy that they seemed domesticated. I have also heard credible witnesses state that they have seen ferocious unicorns as big as horses and like them in every limb, with a horn on the forehead as long and as thick as your arm. Others, of unimpeachable veracity, say that there are horses here with two horns, equally ferocious and of exquisite beauty. [...] I have seen with wonder a zebra of no less speed and rare beauty, artistically striped over his whole body from his ears to his tail and down his legs to the pastern with alternate bands of black and white two fingers thick.⁶⁴

Entertaining as Grevenbroek's descriptions are to us of a giraffe, rhinoceros and zebra for an audience that had never seen an image of them, relevant to my argument are his assertions that he is covering uncharted territory. He confirms to his reader that he does not want to stray from the truth ('ne à fide abhorrentia narrare videar'), even though he is including second-hand knowledge: he relies on careful observers who report facts ('assiduos testes'), credible witnesses ('porrò ex ore nonnullorum haud spernendae fidei'), and people of 'unimpeachable veracity' ('alii quorum fides non vacillat'). In short, Grevenbroek sketches an image of the Cape that is empirically driven. He supplements the European body of written knowledge about Africa with a new class of sources. The body of European naturalists can be weighed against Grevenbroek's own observations. The implication must have been radical enough for Grevenbroek to feel the need to dwell on his trustworthiness.

Grevenbroek's answer to his own implied question about the remaining value of the 'European naturalists' to whom so much is apparently unknown is ambivalent. In the case of the Cape mammals, he does not call extant knowledge into question. Instead, he adds to the familiar image of the Cape, relying exclusively on information that he obtained in situ. The case of the unicorn is an obvious misnomer but this seems to be an isolated instance in his attempt at telling fact from fiction whilst operating on the edge of knowledge.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 265). Interestingly, South African National Parks does not introduce giraffes in its game reserves on the Cape side of the Karoo, as they are not native to the area. Expedition logs and maps testify that settlers had penetrated across the Karoo by the time Grevenbroek wrote his letter (personal correspondence with Joseph Mbosi, PR officer at Addo Elephant National Park, 20 November 2015).

⁶⁵ On the unicorn as a locus of knowledge in early modern Europe, see Huigen (2007, Chapter 4).

For his treatment of the Khoi, Grevenbroek builds on the conventional set of ethnographic criteria, but develops it only with information that he could obtain himself.⁶⁶ Oftentimes, this information takes the form of an anecdote or memory not found in any other works. For example, when Grevenbroek discusses how a Khoi mother shows affection for her child, he remembers having seen the same at a Khoi wedding where the bridegroom wished to show his love for his wife.

Procus ardentem castumque suum amasiae testaturus amorem, illius sinistram malam duobus suis dextrae digitis, pollice et indice, leni tactu comprimit, eosque osculatur. Pariter quidam trimulus Afer stipem à me petens, impetratam continuo matri, gaudio exiliens porrigit, quae sinistrâ eam avidè arripiens, primoribus duobus dextrae digitis laevam pusionis bucculam attingit, eosque labiis suis admotos, laeta me coram suaviata.

The bridegroom, wishing to prove his burning and chaste passion for his beloved, gently pinches her left cheek with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and then kisses these two fingers. I observed a similar action, when a native child of three years of age begged a copper of me, and forthwith, jumping with joy, gave it to his mother; for she eagerly snatched the coin with her left hand, but with the first two fingers of her right hand she touched the left cheek of the little lad, then put the fingers to her lips and fondly kissed them in my presence.⁶⁷

This passage constitutes a clear break from the encyclopaedic vignettes and enumeration of facts in much other writing about the Khoi. It makes Grevenbroek's account more personal. Yet, again, it can be difficult to tell fact from fiction when exploring new territory, also (particularly) when relying on first-hand knowledge or witnesses. Grevenbroek is well-aware that – as stories travel – exaggeration and mythification can obscure the line between fact and fiction to the point that 'we get false notions of the real facts' ('nos de veritate rerum adumbratâ intelligentia hallucinari'):

aequi bonique consule, fidesque penes auctores sit, quippe multa elutriata in hebetes quarti imo quinti interpretis aures, et effutita audaci, temeraria et barbara linguâ, credentium se narrate apprimè intelligere, cum nihil intelligant, verbum de verbo malè exprimentes, impudentiaque sua fidem capitulatores sibi perstruentes, et secum ipsi discordes, necessum est, omnes de genuino sensu balbutire, et nos de veritate rerum adumbratâ intelligentia hallucinari. Hoc Ryparographi levidense hujus provinciae commentariolum, conditionemque regionis, brevi aliam manu Lysippea ex vero et liquido per singula liniamenta simulatam, communi bono, valentioribus lateribus excepturam, spero imo confido.

⁶⁶ In contrast to contemporaries like Dapper and Ten Rhyne, Grevenbroek does not treat the criteria under separate headings or in encyclopaedic fashion but weaves them into a coherent argument. With his denominators for the Khoi, Grevenbroek also breaks with tradition: see Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 200).

My informants must bear the responsibility for what they say. Many statements have been filtered through the dull ears of four or five interpreters, and then poured forth in a bold, rash, and barbarous style by men who believed they understood what was told them, though they really understood nothing. They interpret badly, but endeavour by their boldness to make themselves believed, and they often contradict themselves. Inevitably they all miss the true sense, and our understanding is darkened and we get false notions of the real facts. I hope, nay, I am confident, that this slight sketch of the province, and description of the country will soon be superseded, for the common good, by another of more powerful eloquence fashioned in every line, truly and brilliantly, by the hand of a Lysippus.⁶⁸

Together with Praxiteles and Scopas, Lysippus (4th century BCE) is commonly considered one of the greatest sculptors from ancient Greece. Besides showcasing Grevenbroek's eloquence and knowledgeability, the reference is also an instance of false modesty.⁶⁹ Whilst Grevenbroek ultimately abdicates responsibility for third-party knowledge ('aequi bonique consule, fidesque penes auctores sit'), he was invested in ensuring readers of the trustworthiness of his account. His observations represent a decade of careful selection and weighing up of information gathered at the Cape. Contrary to his assertion, there is little indication to assume that he wrote his letter for it to be surpassed soon.

Three lengthy narratives at the letter's centre illustrate how Grevenbroek relied on events from during his time in office to (re)construct the image of the Khoi. The narratives recount the adventures of William Chenut, a young Frenchman taken captive by natives, and of the wreckings of the ship *Stavenisse* in 1686 and of the ship *Gouden Buys* in 1693.⁷⁰ Such narratives as well as their framing are atypical for contemporary travelogues and ethnography. Scholars have noted the letter's unusual structure; Bert van Stekelenburg, in his first paper on Grevenbroek from 2001, commented: 'Grevenbroek often digresses or interrupts his account, so that his method seems rather loose and sometimes illogical'.⁷¹ Indeed, at the end of the three inserted narratives, Grevenbroek apologises that he has been 'side-tracked all too long' ('longiusque prolapsus') or writes that 'I ask that the reader forgive the rather long digression' ('parce quaeso longius evagato').⁷² He concedes that 'we

⁶⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 298).

⁶⁹ See my remarks on Grevenbroek's imitation of ancient literature as false modesty in Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Schoeman (2008, Chapter 3) asserts that these three events featured in early histories of the Cape settlement. The story of the *Gouden Buys*, as related by Lourens Thijsz and Daniel Silleman, appeared in pamphlet form in 1706 (*Ongelukkig of Droevig verhaal Van 't Schip de Gouden-Buys*) and was republished by Blommaert and Gie (1922, 129-169). A new edition was published by Kieskamp and Gessel (1995).

⁷¹ Van Stekelenburg (2001, §3): 'Hij [Grevenbroek] dwaalt dikwijls af of onderbreekt zijn verhaal, zodat zijn methode een tamelijk losse en soms onlogische indruk schept'. Translation by me, TM.

⁷² Farrington-Schapera (1933, 232; 236). Translations by me, TM.

must now return from our side-track to our story' ('redeamus a diverticulo in viam') or that 'my pen must return from where it went astray' ('redeat illuc unde deflexit calamus').⁷³ Yet the letter's structure, with the three framed narratives, is a direct consequence of Grevenbroek's sourcework – which forms the basis of his argument about the culturedness of the Khoi.⁷⁴

The three narratives present well-known cases that reverberated in the settlement's cultural memory. In Amsterdam, they contributed to rumours of murder and cannibalism by the Khoi. A pamphlet recounting the unlucky wrecking of the *Gouden Buys*, published in Amsterdam in 1695, describes the 'Hottentots' that the crew encountered on shore as 'savage cannibals' ('wilde mensch eeters').⁷⁵ Grevenbroek does not explicitly rebut these accusations but rather, his point in presenting three histories of miraculous survival is that each hinged on the good-naturedness and support of the natives. Together, the narratives exemplify the virtuous nature of the natives and present a contrast with the image that existed of them at the Cape and in Europe.

The first narrative focuses on William (Guillaume) Chenut, a young Frenchman who left for the Cape on an English merchant ship in 1684.⁷⁶ He and some of his countrymen were taken captive by natives on an expedition to the shore near modern-day St. Helena Bay, some 150 kilometres north of Cape Town. They later escaped and managed to reach the Cape Castle overland thanks to the repeated aid of various native tribes. In his account,

⁷³ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 238; 286). Translations by me, TM.

⁷⁴ The apologies for the digressions are also examples of false modesty: see Chapter 3. Grevenbroek carefully selected the three narratives to cover both east and west Africa so as to illustrate the goodnaturedness of all African natives. Interestingly, the reiterations of the aims of the letter on pages 224 (Chenut) and 230 (*Gouden Buys*) are roughly halfway between the opening statement (172) and the conclusion (290). The architecture, or structure, of Classical literature, and in particular that of 'the great national epic of ancient Rome', Vergil's *Aeneid*, has been a popular topic with Classicists. Duckworth (1960) argued that mathematical points of symmetry in the *Aeneid* highlight aspects of the epic's argument. On Grevenbroek's effort to write in a Classical vein, see Chapter 3.

⁷⁵ See Kieskamp and Van Gessel (1995, Introduction). The cannibal was an archetype in early modern depictions of the savage. Montaigne (1580) considers Native Americans as cannibals. Depictions of the Khoi as cannibals seem to be scarce, but examples include Laval (1610) and Dapper (1668, cited from Farrington-Schapera (1933, 29)): 'They [the Kobonas, a Cape people] are real cannibals, for if they can get hold of a Hottentot or any other person they roast him alive and eat him'. ('Deze zijn rechte mensch-eters: want zoo zy eenen *Hottentot* of ander mensch kunnen bekomen, dien braden zy levendigh en eten hem op.')

⁷⁶ Chenut's uncle refused to conform to the worship of the French king, Louis XIV. In 1685, the Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the 1598 Edict of Nantes, which had granted the Huguenots the right to practice their religion with no persecution from the state. Its revocation led to a mass exodus of Protestants from France; quite a few were taken in at the Cape, where they founded the village Franschoek ('French corner').

Grevenbroek describes all natives – both those that initially took the sailors captive and those they encountered along the way – as men of mercy, reason and principle:

[S]ed inexsuperabilia juga montium, praealtis asperibusque silvis inaccessa, latronibusque obsessa vetant, qui coorti armis, numero viribusque longe superiores, obsistentes trucidant, ast arma, commeatum, tegumentaue abjicientibus moderati, nudis vitam concedunt, iterque relegere patiuntur: qui domum revertentes, clade hac nihil deterriti, multa de rebus hospitem suorum asportantes, omnibusque rebus rursus instructi, iter per valles et ambages iteratò tentant [...].

The mountains were [also] beset by robbers, who being far superior in arms, numbers, and strength, barred the way against them and were for slaughtering them; but when they [Chenut and his countrymen] cast away their arms, food and clothing, the brigands spared their lives and suffered them to retrace their steps. Returning home [i.e. the *kraal*] again undismayed by this disaster, they collected much property of their hosts, and being again equipped with everything attempted a second journey, this time through winding valleys.⁷⁷

Grevenbroek does not deny that the journey was perilous and that the hinterland could be full of danger: some of the natives ‘obsistentes trucidant’ (‘were for slaughtering them’). Yet at the same time, there were also natives who showed piety by taking in the sailors and preparing them for a second overland attempt home. Importantly, the native robbers (‘latrones’), too, practiced mercy in response to the sailors’ surrender. Put differently, they recognised and acknowledged the settlers’ cultural code of surrender, thereby displaying a restraint and civility that formed a stark contrast with the dominant European image of the ‘noble savage’ or ‘Hottentot’.

Reflecting on the examples of unselfish aid and compassion on the part of the natives he provided, Grevenbroek remarks:

Hinc inferre libet, quod nulla gens sit adeò effera, quae illaesa in innoxium saeviat hominem, eumque ignotum, nudum et inermem necare velit: testorque me vidisse *άνδροποφάγον* (sic) malis meis illachrymantem, commilitonibus quibusdam meis, mihi in calamitate innocenti, inauditâ crudelitate insultantibus. Manus de tabula.

Hence it may be inferred that no race is so savage as, unprovoked, to offer violence to an innocent man, or wish to slaughter a stranger, naked and unarmed. And I bear witness that I have seen a cannibal shedding tears at my misfortunes, while companions of mine, with unheard of cruelty, jeered at me in a disaster I had done nothing to deserve. But why paint the lily!⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 222).

⁷⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 224).

Grevenbroek wilfully plays with the reader's expectations here: the Greek word for man-eater is opposed to the designation of his fellow European soldiers as companions ('commilitonibus'), but the former turns out to be more civil than the latter.⁷⁹ At the same time, Grevenbroek calls the natives a beastly nation ('gens effera') and claims to have seen a man-eater himself, thus also reinforcing the discourse about the Khoi as non-human creatures (see the chain of being, discussed in Chapter 1). It is important to stress that Grevenbroek does not directly oppose or deny the dominant discourse about the Khoi. Instead, he extrapolates from Chenut's experience to argue that no race will kill unarmed strangers.⁸⁰ He redresses familiar motifs from the echo chamber with new classes of evidence – archival sources, first- and second-hand testimonies –, thereby adding what he finds is missing from the 'writings from all naturalists'.⁸¹

After Grevenbroek's take on Chenut's adventures follows an account of the *Stavenisse*, which was wrecked some 110 kilometres west of Port Natal, in 1686. 60 of the 71 people aboard reached the shore, being the first Dutchmen to set foot on these lands.⁸² 13 men first constructed a new vessel from the combined wreckage of the *Stavenisse* and two earlier ships, the *Good Hope* and the *Bonaventura*, and then sailed to the Cape. The others tried to make it home on foot but found themselves less fortunate.⁸³ In the next four years, some were picked up by rescue expeditions dispatched from the Castle but others

⁷⁹ Grevenbroek signed his will and his ex libris with the addition 'causarius miles', 'private who left service early but with good cause'. A military career as a private has been supposed by Boëseken (1961, *sub voce* Grevenbroek), yet it also seems possible that Grevenbroek used 'commilitonibus' to refer to his years with the VOC – from which he retired at age 50 or 51: Van Stekelenburg (2001, §1).

⁸⁰ Interestingly, the three Englishmen that accompanied Chenut to the shore were immediately killed by natives. Only when they realised that Chenut was still alive did they begin to pity him, according to Grevenbroek. The merchant vessel *Centaurus* picked Chenut up from the native shore on 9 February 1688 and took him to the Cape. Grevenbroek offers much more detail than the *Centaurus*'s log book; Godée Molsbergen (vol. III, 87ff.) gives the available literature: Grevenbroek's account (Farrington-Schapera (1933)) and Van der Stel's letter of 20 June 1689 to the Lords XVII (reprinted by Moodie (1960, 425)).

⁸¹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 216n46) suggests that Grevenbroek heard Chenut recount his adventures in person at the Council of Policy: 'the much fuller details given by G. were no doubt obtained at first hand from the boy himself'. I have not managed to identify such evidence (Cape Archives and Records Services).

⁸² The captain's account of the overland expedition was later published, together with some notes of his crew, by Godée Molsbergen (1932, III.92-4), Moodie (1938, 426-7), and Theal (1896, II.302-3). Grevenbroek's account is in line with that of the survivors but, significantly, does not mention the overland attempt to reach the Cape. These details he must have been obtained first-hand as the Castle's chief secretary who signed off on all minutes of the official hearings in which survivors from lost vessels were heard.

⁸³ Some died from illnesses, others drowned when crossing rivers, and some were overrun by elephants or other wild beasts.

were never heard of again. The news of the shipwreck generated a shockwave through the colony, again sparking stories of native cannibalism.⁸⁴

Grevenbroek does the scale of the *Stavenisse* event justice by including a three-page narrative. Excluding rumours of cannibalism, he stresses the helpfulness of the natives in constructing the new vessel. Also, he notes that an expedition that came to look for survivors the next year found that the possessions left behind by the marooned sailors had not been plundered but were still intact:

Imo gregem viginti et amplius decumanorum boum, aperto campo pascere sinunt: quae omnia Argonautae nostri, anno converso, ex mandato Patrum Conscriptorum Societatis nostrae, eò liburnicâ delati, ponderi, numero, et mensura integra, et illaesa, tanquam S. Sancta, et numini alicui dicata, spectatori quam Attica fide, intacta invenerunt. Digna quae marmore caedantur!

They [the survivors] even left a herd of twenty or more fine oxen grazing on the open plain. A year later our Argonauts were conveyed in a galley to the same place by the order of the Council of our Company, and they found all that they had left behind uninjured and perfect in weight, number and size, as if sacrosanct or dedicated to some deity. Their possessions could not have been more scrupulously respected by the proverbial Attic good faith. The story ought to be cut in marble!⁸⁵

Minutes from the Council of Policy and letters to the Lords XVII in Grevenbroek's handwriting verify that an expedition was sent out that retrieved goods from the shore near the wrecking site.⁸⁶ The Khoi are portrayed as equally inviolable in their faith as those from Attica, or the city of Athens, symbolising Greek cultural refinement. The Dutch sailors are compared to the Argonauts, a band of Greek sailors from mythology that embarked on a quest that would take them to the far corners of the then-known world. Grevenbroek's narrative praises the restrained nature of the natives in the equally remote realms of the Cape, particularly when they could have easily taken the crew's belongings after they had left. He thus elaborates on virtues normally not associated with the Khoi.

At the narrative's conclusion, Grevenbroek emphasises how the Europeans can learn from the natives:

⁸⁴ For the impact of the *Stavenisse*'s wreckage, see Paesie (2002). The survivors reported riches in the hinterland and in 1719, by decree of the Lords XVII, a trading-post was set up in Rio de la Goa (Maputo, Mozambique). No gold was found, but raids by the natives were common, and half the garrison died of malaria. See Huigen (2007, Chapter 3).

⁸⁵ Farrington-Schaper (1933, 228).

⁸⁶ Cape Town Archives and Records Services, C1891, reprinted by Moodie (1960).

In confesso est ipsos nil habere antiquius sanctiusve, quam arctum hospitii solver animum et peregrinos convivasque tecto, hunc in finem singulis pagis erecto, omnique comitate et comiteo publicitus excipere, et cum asymbolis hilariter helluari, et ad crepusculum usque anancaeis poculis certare: quod testantur liquidò Batavi nave Stavenisse novissimè vecti [...]. Hac virtute sane, intra paucas memorandâ, multos Europaeos hic nobiscum degentes, longis parasangis praevertunt, utinamque cives nostril hospitalitatis sacra aemulentur, et à barbaris discant hospitii jura nunquam fallere, [...].

It is admitted by all that the Hottentots hold no obligation more sacred than that of comforting a distressed soul by hospitality. Strangers and visitors are entertained at the public expense, in a hall erected in each district for this purpose, with every courtesy and attention; they partake of joyous banquets scot free, vying with their hosts till the fall of night in swallowing brimming goblets at a draught. Clear proof of this is afforded by the recent case of the crew of the Dutch ship Stavenisse. [...] In this very important virtue they are miles ahead of many Europeans who live here with us. I only wish that our citizens would rival them in their respect for strangers and learn from the natives never to break the laws of hospitality and to rid themselves of their inhuman and savage temper.⁸⁷

Although some exaggeration may be underpinning Grevenbroek's description of Khoi hospitality, the important point is the contrast drawn with the 'inhuman' Europeans. Here, too, Grevenbroek turns the popular horizon of expectations around. In the opposition between the Europeans ('Europaeos') and the 'barbari', the latter are shown to be more hospitable than the former. Ultimately, Grevenbroek relates this to the natives' virtuous nature.

Before turning to the last of the three framed narratives, Grevenbroek states that, in selecting them, it is his aim to prove that any tribe in Africa possesses a virtuous nature:

Haec in exortiva Africae plaga acta sunt, et ne occiduos hujus orae incolas sua laude fraudem, paucula etiam de illis levi penicillo, à capite accersita, summaque tantum secutus fastigia rerum attingam, quo tradam qualiscunque inter Barbaros maximè inconditos, et agreste hoc hominum genus, possit esse virtus.

These events were unfolded on the east side of Africa. That the inhabitants of the West may not be robbed of their meed of praise, I shall now lightly sketch a few incidents of their history from memory, touching only on the main points, in order to show that virtue can exist among savages of any sort, even the most rude, and in the midst of this wild race of men.⁸⁸

This passage draws on a legacy from antiquity that pervaded the early modern geography of Africa: the distinction between the two Ethiopias – a more savage nation in eastern Africa

⁸⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 238). Instead of 'Hottentot', Grevenbroek uses 'barbarus', in the sense of 'foreign [to European culture]'. On Grevenbroek's adaptation of Classical semantics to a Cape context and the word choice in the English translation, see Chapter 3.

⁸⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 230).

and a more civil one in the western part.⁸⁹ On the one hand, Grevenbroek admits to a contemporary worldview that goes back to antiquity, allowing a division of people into distinct races ('genera'). On the other hand, he is able to advance the idea that no matter how 'rude' on first appearance African peoples may appear, all possess virtue ('virtus'). Again, Grevenbroek does not reject the dominant ancient framework for viewing the African but adds to the dominant discourse that exists about the Africans on the basis of his own experiences.

True to his word, in the final framed narrative Grevenbroek moves away from eastern shores. He summarises the story of the *Gouden Buys*, a Dutch ship wrecked near modern-day Saldanha Bay, some 120 kilometres north of Cape Town, in 1693. Its crew also received help from the natives, thanks to whom some sailors made it back to the Cape alive. On its way to the Cape from Europe, *Gouden Buys* had already lost the majority of its 190 sailors to disease when Captain Baanman commanded two men to be put ashore near Saldanha Bay to find help: Laurens [sic] Thijsz, carpenter, and Daniel Silleman.⁹⁰ Grevenbroek recounts how Laurens, having spent three weeks in the bush where he survived on tortoises and his own urine, was found by Africans who saved him:

Solus Laurentius Matthei F. vulgò Laurens Thijs, faber lignarius moribundus ab Afris, natione magis quam ratione Barbaris, reperitur, qui noctem antecapturi cum semi-mortuo, humeris ipsorum alternatim suscepto, ad mapalia citato cursu properant. Hic inedia propè necatum, primo recenti lacte, mox jusculo ovillo, tandem carne elixa aliisque efficacibus fomentis refocillant: alio Pegasio nuncio nostratium in Saldagniensi portu stationem, de Laurentii casu certiozem faciunt, ubi V. Kal. Janiis benigne à popularibus, post varios casus excipitur:

Only Laurens, son of Matthew, commonly known as Laurens Thijs, a carpenter, survived to be discovered in a dying state by the Africans, savages in name but not in nature, who in order to anticipate the fall of night carried the dying man in relays on their shoulders and ran with him to their huts. He had almost perished with hunger. But they were able to revive his strength, feeding him first with fresh milk, then with a little mutton broth, and finally with boiled meat, and using other efficacious remedies. Then by a messenger like another winged Pegasus they informed our men stationed at Saldanha Bay about Laurens' plight. Here on the 28th of December, his troubles at an end, he was made welcome by his fellow-countrymen.⁹¹

⁸⁹ See Van Wyk Smith (2009) and Chapter 3.

⁹⁰ It will be noticed that Grevenbroek says nothing of Silleman, except that there was another survivor of the wreck. This is peculiar, as Grevenbroek must have been present at their hearing before the Council upon their return, or at least have signed off on the minutes.

⁹¹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 232). Grevenbroek gives the Roman date for 28 December. About Grevenbroek's manifold ancient mannerisms, see Chapter 3.

Again, the European's survival is not hampered by the natives but facilitated by them. Also, Grevenbroek uses another ancient reference in their praise: he calls the 'African' messenger 'another Pegasus', the winged stallion from ancient mythology that fought against evil powers.

Together, the three framed narratives exemplify the virtuous nature of the natives through an emphasis on the unselfish aid they provided to strangers in major events in the recent history of the Cape. Grevenbroek's empirical evidence confirms that 'virtus' exists in any people – also in those classified as savages. He couches his argument in a key political-religious debate of the 1680s and 1690s discussed by, for example, Spinoza. He thus redresses the image of the beastly, uncivil African vis-à-vis the civil, Christian European settlers in popular discourse. All in all, he challenges the echo chamber but at the same time strategically re-empowers ancient frameworks and biblical frameworks. This puts Grevenbroek in an ambivalent position, making him a child of his time.

Grevenbroek as a child of his time

As explained in the previous section, a Christian perspective based on the biblical creationist account contained in Genesis, which depicts God as living outside the universe and preceding it, could no longer be taken for granted in the second half of the 17th century. With explorations bringing home undeniable evidence of unfathomed diversities of man, how was one to maintain a coherent Christian worldview? Grevenbroek maintains that a universe in which God is present in every element is congruent with the traditional Christian belief in the common origin of humankind. In this section I explore Grevenbroek's discussion of the key ethnographic categories of language, law and religion. He interprets a new class of evidence to re-invigorate a Christian worldview. This puts him at an early stage in the Revolution of Knowledge as a child of his time.

Grevenbroek's argument for a rehabilitation of the Khoi flows from a Christian dogma in Genesis 10. After the great deluge, the world was repopulated from its Jewish centre, Jerusalem: the African natives were descendants of Cham, son of Noah, while his brothers Japheth and Sem repopulated Europe and Asia respectively. Throughout the letter, Grevenbroek relies on early modern ethnographic parameters to trace Khoi habits back to Jewish customs. Here, for example, he discusses religious rites:

Utrosque autem omnes ritus tam sacerdotales quam sacrificales, meram antiquitatem redolentes, ab Israëlitis, tot licet saeculorum intervallo obumbratos, traxisse, quis adeo lusciosus ut non videat?

Indeed who is so blind as not to see that it is from the Israelites that both divisions of Hottentots have derived all their sacerdotal and sacrificial rites, which are redolent of the purest antiquity, though admittedly the lapse of so many centuries has obscured the connection.⁹²

Grevenbroek's view is not unique, as already discussed in Chapter 1. One popular branch of early modern anthropology explained corporeal and cultural differences between peoples on a temporal-progressive scale: as Noah's progeny inhabited different climatic 'spheres' in relative isolation from each other, their skin colour varied with the sun's intensity. This is what caused the Asian's 'yellow', the European's 'white', and the African's 'black' skin.⁹³ Of all African people, those of southern Africa had lived at the greatest distance from the Christian centre: hence, their Christianity was said to be most diluted, weathered, or overgrown with a rustic veneer. Underneath their beastly appearance, it was supposed that Christianity was preserved in a primordial, authentic – albeit primitive – form.

The Noahiden view could be maintained as long as the Scripture and the ancient library continued to be the most trusted sources for knowledge, and as long as information about 'the African' could be interpreted as an expansion of the conventional worldview. As I pointed out in the Introduction, Anthony Grafton in his book *New Worlds, Ancient Texts. The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (1992), coins the term 'Revolution of Knowledge' to refer to the crisis that empirical observation – as a trusted base for knowledge about the world – brought to the information contained in centuries old written (biblical and ancient) sources.⁹⁴

Grevenbroek lived and worked during this transition. His use of his own, personal observations and critical judgment allows him to refute the emblematic figure of the Khoi as a savage. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, he explicitly states that the reiteration of familiar, centuries-old ethnographic motifs has reduced the Khoi to a fixed set of stereotyped, false impressions. Also, as discussed in the previous section he remarked that much about them is unknown to the 'European naturalists'. At the same time, his observations do not force cracks in the Christian origin myth, and ancient elements still

⁹² Farrington-Schaperla (1933, 208).

⁹³ See, for example, Hodgen (1964).

⁹⁴ Grafton (1992, 6).

present a meaningful framework to him for describing Africa and its peoples. In other words, Grevenbroek's empiricism allows him to challenge the prevailing discourse about the Khoi, but his empiricism – or rather, his interpretation of the empirical evidence – still empowers the traditional Christian worldview. The epistemological frameworks that give meaning to the fundamental beliefs about the history of the world, the origin of mankind, and cultural diversity of Europeans were not revised until much later. Indeed, as Grafton explains, the dawn of empiricism and the ensuing 'revolution in the forms of knowledge and expression [that] took place in early modern Europe' was a slow and gradual transition.⁹⁵ Within it, I argue, Grevenbroek's account of the Khoi holds a significant place.

Nowhere does Grevenbroek explicitly elaborate on his worldview. However, examples of his adherence to a Jewish parentage for the Khoi are plenty. Jewish lineage is suggested, for example, in his observation that the Khoi share terms to describe kin relationships with the Jews (Israelites)⁹⁶:

Hic mihi silentio praetereundum non videtur, quod Afris nostris communi fratris sororisve nomine, more Israëliitarum indigetetur patruelis et consobrina, aliisque quarto consanguinitatis gradu se invicem contingentes.

Here I think I should mention that among our natives (i.e. the Hottentots) the names of brother and sister are, in the Israelitish fashion, bestowed on cousins on the father's or the mother's side; while among others (i.e. the Magosi) the names of brother and sister are given to those related to one another in the fourth degree.⁹⁷

Circumcision and semi-castration were also interpreted as readily appreciable manifestations of the Khoi's linkage with the Israelites. However, in this respect Grevenbroek observes certain differences as well, between Africans and Jews, and between different African tribes ('the inhabitants of the remoter parts' versus 'the natives near us'):

A Judaeis circumcisionem, non praeputii, sed graviorem cuticulae ad imum ventrem usque resectae, mutuos diceres eos, qui abdita regionis inhabitant: et ab his eos qui nobis propinqui, didicisse sinistri colei (honore dicto) excisionem [diceres].

⁹⁵ Grafton (1992, 6) argues that the dawn of empiricism as a trusted basis for knowledge acquisition would shape modern anthropology, ethnography, and the sciences in general. See also Grafton (2007; 2009).

⁹⁶ Family and social structures were a common item in early modern descriptions of foreign peoples.

⁹⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 286 and 286n96): Grevenbroek here provides the earliest proof that what anthropologists term the classificatory system of kinship nomenclature was used by the Khoisan and Xhosa people.

It must be supposed that it is from the Jews that the inhabitants of the remoter parts have learned the practice of circumcision, [although it is a more serious operation with the Africans, involving the cutting away not only of the prepuce but of the skin right up to the base of the abdomen. From the Jews also the natives near us must have acquired the practice of removing the left testicle, if you will excuse the mention of it.⁹⁸

Given that circumcision was one of the most iconic ethnographic parameters in early modern writing about the Khoi, Grevenbroek's tentativeness is noteworthy.⁹⁹ The Latin 'diceret', a subjunctive form of the verb, indicates that the writer does not guarantee the factuality of the statement provided; it adds an element of uncertainty, often rendered in English as a wish, desire or doubt.¹⁰⁰ Notably also, Grevenbroek does not take the purportedly primordial, Christian custom as a starting point to discuss the extent to which the Khoi have fallen or degraded. Instead, he again distinguishes between those natives living closer to the Cape and those living further inland ('aliis' and 'qui abdita regionis inhabitant'). This distinction between different African tribes is not a common motif among contemporaries and signals how Grevenbroek engages his own empirical knowledge to re-empower a Christian worldview.

A comparison with two contemporaries, Dapper and Ten Rhyne, highlights how Grevenbroek interprets the primary ethnographic tricolon of the time – language, law and religion – to rehabilitate the Khoi.¹⁰¹ Language, law and religion are key tropes in arguably the most influential theory of Grevenbroek's time to distinguish between peoples, that of the Spanish Jesuit missionary José de Acosta (see Chapter 1). The latter's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590) facilitated a classification and relative ranking of foreign peoples.

⁹⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 208). In the English translation, the square bracket marks the beginning of a 300-word passage that was censored by Van Oordt (1886; 1932) in his Dutch translation.

⁹⁹ At the time, there was little consensus about the alleged Khoi practice of removing one of the testicles. Among those who thought it was true, it was considered the reason why the Khoi could run fast. The discord among ethnographers regarding the practice of semi-castration was put to bed by Fritsch (1872, 14), who maintains that earlier observers must have been deceived by the fact that, in both Hottentots and Bushmen, 'the scrotum is often drawn up close to and just under the root of the penis, and appears to contain only one testicle, the other not having descended into the scrotal sack' (quoted from Farrington-Schapera (1933, 143)).

¹⁰⁰ The translations 'it must be supposed' and 'the natives must have acquired' by Farrington-Schapera (1933) accurately render the subjunctive.

¹⁰¹ Dapper probably never visited the Cape but relied on informants and books for his account, whilst Ten Rhyne's findings are the product of a (brief) personal acquaintance with the Khoi (Farrington-Schapera (1933, 2)): 'He [Dapper] does not appear to have ever left Holland to see with his own eyes any of the countries he describes. For his material he relied solely on printed sources and on memoranda specially prepared for him. That this circumstance does not guarantee the accuracy of his work is obvious. His great merit, however, lies in the fact that he ranged very widely in search of information, and that he had a shrewd eye for relevant detail. His work was comprehensive and painstaking, and as the first great compendium of modern knowledge about Africa it became deservedly famous'.

It was translated into all the major European languages and remained the most-commonly used handbook on the New World and ethnography more generally until well into the eighteenth century. In it, Acosta interprets the religious practices of Native Americans as the work of the devil and attempts to reconcile all of the empirical observations of the New World with Christian and ancient scholarship. But his work can also be read in a more secular key: in his temporal-progressive model, there were different stages of development: those people who lived in the utterly 'degenerated' nomadic state, those who had established some degree of 'barbarous' political order, and those who had established great empires. According to Acosta's theory, the Khoi peoples, with their tribal society and nomadic lifestyle, and living on the southernmost tip of Africa, would have ranked below those that established great empires.

Grevenbroek does not explicitly engage with Acosta's stages of development. He does, however, do for the Khoi what Acosta did for the peoples of the New World: develop first-hand knowledge of the Khoi into a grand theory of 'natural and moral history of the Africans'. Like Acosta, Grevenbroek mixes his empirical insights with elements from (Greek and Roman) antiquity, traditional Christian eschatology, and current theological debates. Acosta's temporal-progressive interpretation of the Noahiden dispersal led to a hierarchical ranking of peoples. Grevenbroek, similarly, endorses the idea of a more developed Ethiopian and a less developed non-Ethiopian side of Africa, and acknowledges that there are different African peoples with diverging customs. Virtue, however, for him exists in all peoples, irrespective of these distinctions.

As explained in Chapter 1, an observed lack in a people of (Christian) language, law or religion was readily interpreted as an absence of civility, warranting them a rank between Christian man and beasts. In 1668, Olfert Dapper opened his treatise *Kaffrarie of Lant der Kaffers, anders Hottentots genaemt* with a statement about the perceived bestiality of their language and the absence of law and religion:

"s lants inboorlingen, die by d'onzen, om hunne belemmerheit en wanhebbelijkheid van tale, met den naem van Hottentoots of Hottentots gemeenlijk bekend zijn, en zonder eenige wetten van Godtsdienst leven.

The country or land of Kaffraria (or, according to Marmol, Quefrerie) is so named after the Kafirs, its native inhabitants. They are commonly known to our countrymen as Hottentoots or Hottentots, because their language is so clumsy and difficult; and they live without any laws of religion.¹⁰²

To Dapper's reader, this would have signalled that what follows is a treatise on 'native inhabitants', lower than Christian man. Dapper substantiates this, for example, for religion:

By al de *Kaffers* of Hottentots of strantlopers, heeft noit iemand, hoe nau ook onderzocht, een teken van eenigen godtsdienst kunnen bespeuren: nochte dat zy Godt of den duivel eenige eere bewijzen; niet tegenstaende zy wel weten, dat 'er een is, die zy 's *Humma* noemen, die de regen op d'aerde doet neerkomen, de winden waien, en hitte en koude geeft, zonder evenwel hem aen te bidden: want waerom, zeggen zy, zouden zy dezen 's *Humma* aenbidden, die den eenen tijt dubbele drooghte, en den anderen tijt dubbel water geeft, naerdien zy het liever matigh en van pas zagen. [...] Dan hebbende gene kerken, nochte houden de minste Vergaderingen.

No one, however thoroughly he has inquired, has ever been able to find among all the Kafirs or Hottentots or Beachrangers any trace of religion, or any show of honour to God or the Devil. They know nevertheless that there is a being, named by them 's *Humma*, who sends rain on earth, makes the winds blow, and produces heat and cold. But they do not pray to him; for why, say they, should they pray to this 's *Humma*, who at one time gives excessive drought, and at another excessive rain, when they would rather see it fall moderately and conveniently. [...] They have no churches, nor any sort of congregation.¹⁰³

In Dapper's view, the major characteristics of civilised (Christian) religious worship were notably absent among the Khoi. Although they recognise a superior being, they fall short of European standards in the ignorant motives for their worship, and because they lack centralised religious institutions. Instead, Dapper discerns signs of superstition ('waengeloof'):

Het schijnt evenwel dat zy eenigh waengeloof aen d'opkomende nieuwe mane zouden hebben: want wanneer die begint gezien te worden, zullen zy gemeenlijk met hele troepen t'haerwaerts keren, en den gehelen nacht met groot gejuich, zoo met dansen, springen, zingen en kloppen in de handen, als prevelen binnen 's monts, overbrengen.

They [also] appear to have some superstition about the new moon; for when this is first seen, they all turn towards it in groups, and make merry the whole night, dancing, jumping, singing and clapping their hands, and also murmuring in their mouths.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Farrington-Schapera (1933, 6).

¹⁰³ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 74; 76).

¹⁰⁴ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 76).

Superstitions, such as the worship of natural phenomena, were taken to indicate that a people was not on a par with Christianity.¹⁰⁵ Dapper considered the Khoi's homage to the moon to be a sign of idolatry. A contemporary reader would have immediately understood that Dapper ranks the Khoi among the lowest class of lawless creatures.

Ten Rhyne is not as decisive in his judgment as Dapper. He observes that although the Khoi do not have law, they do appreciate some supreme being ('*de supremo quodam Capitaneo memorans*'), which means that they could not be quite lawless.¹⁰⁶ In his chapter on religion, one sees him struggle with the question of where to rank the Khoi:

CAP. XX. // **De Relligione.** [sic] // Barbara licet & plane brutalis haec natio, ut inter easq) gentes, quae legem etiamsi non habent, naturae quae legis sunt, faciunt, recenseri non possit exlex. Attamen summi cujusdam Entis vel leviculam - cognitionem habere videntur, saepe de supremo quodam Capitaneo memorans.

Chapter 20. // Religion // Though this nation is barbarous and brutish, yet, since it is numbered among those peoples who though they have not the law yet do the things that are of the law of nature, it can not be regarded as being utterly lawless. They seem even to have some slight knowledge of a supreme being, since they often speak of a Great Chief.¹⁰⁷

Adherence to some form of law bestowed upon the Khoi a higher rank in Acosta's framework than Dapper's observations could justify. For Ten Rhyne, then, the Khoi do not live in the original, 'degenerated' state. All the same, Khoi religion for him is still closer to paganism than to Christianity:

Ast ordinarius eorum cultus cum omnibus fere antiquis gentilibus, quarum primi in ea sententia fuere Aegyptii, in hoc convenire videntur, ut Solem & Lunam pro Diis suis habeant. [...] Lunam vero, ut dictum saltando venerantur.

Their ordinary worship seems to agree with almost all the pagans of antiquity, among whom the Egyptians were the first to adopt the opinion that the Sun and Moon are gods. [...] The moon, as has been said, they worship by dancing.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ About superstition in early modern times, see Pagden (1982, 169ff.): 'Superstition confused the creature with the [Godly] creator'. Acosta admitted that all religious consciousness begins as superstition.

¹⁰⁶ As noted above, such reason was considered to be not only the highest but also the most archetypically human faculty.

¹⁰⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 138).

¹⁰⁸ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 140).

The differences between Dapper, Ten Rhyne and Grevenbroek underline that the Revolution of Knowledge was a slow transition involving many frameworks that offered diverging and sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations of the same phenomenon.

On the other side of the ethnographical spectrum from Dapper, Grevenbroek, drawing on a decade of personal experience at the Cape, leaves little doubt as to the Christian origin of Khoi faith. A conversation with a Khoi man ostensibly provided him with the required details:

[respondet Barbarus:] qui porrò scissitanti (sic) scrutantique mihi, quo nomine apud ipsos Supremum numen veniat: continuò mirabili genealogia ultimae originis adjicit *Khourrou* vel *Thikkwa*: inferum autem *Damoh* appellari: ab hoc Summo Deo, *Noh* primum hominem, ejusque conjugem *Hingnogh* creatos: hosque sanguinis sui ultimos auctores humanum genus, majoresque suos uxores ducere, liberos tollere, poligamiae, paci et concordiae studere, alium non laedere, suum cuique tribuere docuisse, hisque similia praecepta, infra succincte narranda tradidisse, non irrediculè inquit.

In response to my further enquiries as to the name by which the Supreme Being was known among them, he immediately traced a wonderful genealogy back to the beginning and gave the name *Khourrou* or *Thikkwa*. The devil, he said, was called *Damoh*. By this Supreme God were created *Noh* the first man and *Hingnogh* his wife. This pair, the ultimate authors of his race, had taught mankind and his ancestors to marry wives and rear children, to practice polygamy, peace and concord, to hurt no one, to give to each his own, together with other similar precepts, which will be succinctly set forth below. This information he gave me, sensibly enough.¹⁰⁹

In Grevenbroek's rendering, the Khoi origin narrative is the Christian origin narrative after a long period of separation. Khoi religion is built around a supreme being ('supremum numen') and a devil ('inferum'), whom Grevenbroek asserts created the first man and his wife, to whom the Khoi trace back their genealogy. The first pair, like Adam and Eve, taught men about virtues and vices.

In Grevenbroek's interpretation, Khoi virtues and vices exhibit notable correspondences to the principles of Christian living. For example, the Khoi administer the ultimate penalty – death – for deeds that are comparable with violating the Ten Commandments:

¹⁰⁹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 192). Grevenbroek appears to have drawn on the experiences of the *Stavenisse* crew: 'They [the Khoi] deduce their origin from a certain man and woman, who grew up together out of the earth and who taught them to cultivate the ground, to sow corn, milk cows and brew beer' (in: Godée Molsbergen (1932, III.62); Moodie (1838, 431). Farrington-Schapera (1933, 192n21) observes that the myth of mankind's origin recounted by Grevenbroek is not found among the modern Nama.

Divinitatem aliquam *Messimo* dictam, in lucis summo cultu venerantur, cum spe minime dubiâ, ipsos Christianorum sacris propediem initiandos; deprehensum in adulterio adulteramque vivos jugulant, eodemque supplicio homicidia, furta, et latrocinia plectunt, eorundem bona fisco addicentes.

They worship a divinity called *Messimo*, in groves, with such reverence that there is little room to doubt that they will ere long be initiated into the Christian religion. A man or woman taken in adultery they put to death. Homicide, robbery, and brigandage merit the same penalty, the goods of the condemned being forfeit to the public treasury.¹¹⁰

Grevenbroek aims to prove that the Khoi have a systematic faith that derives from the early modern benchmark of civility: Christianity. As for Dapper's observation that the Khoi knew no centralised worship, Grevenbroek cites a trustworthy farmer who regularly witnesses natives practicing sacred rites near his farm. According to this farmer, the Khoi adhere to sacred spots:

Accepi ex quodam non temnendae fidei Batavo adseverante, se nunquam praetervectum caudem, uno alt(e)rove milliari à praedio suo distantem, quin viderit quoscunque comites Barbaros, decerptum ex proximo frutice aut arbore ramum, ei tanquam verbenam instravisse, rogatosque causam, jejune satis, sui majorumque suorum antiquitus id moris, et vetustissime in usu ipsis esse, respondisse, et aegerrime tulisse, quod nostrates, loco hoc capitali, exonorantes alvum, illorum cultui tam foedè illuderent.

A certain Dutchman whose word I can trust assures me that he has never passed a certain rock a mile or two distant from his farm, without observing the natives who accompany him pluck a branch from some shrub or tree hard by and strew it upon the ground as a sacred offering. Being asked the reason for this act they replied, without further explanation, that it was the custom of their ancestors from of old and long in use among them, and that they took it very ill that our countrymen should foully insult their worship by disburdening their bowels in this sacred spot.¹¹¹

The Latin can be read in two keys. On the one hand, the phrase 'majorum suorum moris' (custom of their ancestors) positions Grevenbroek's letter amidst a more secular concern of early modern writers about the Khoi. The Latin word for custom, 'mos', was used in lieu of terms like ethnography and ethnology, which were not coined until the late eighteenth century. As the anthropologist John Rowe explains in 'Ethnography and Ethnology in the Sixteenth Century' (1964):

The closest sixteenth century equivalent to "ethnology" was the phrase "moral history", used by José de Acosta in 1590 as a parallel to "natural history". The word "history" in these contexts has its

¹¹⁰ Farrington-Schaperera (1933, 288). Idem (289n99): '*Messimo* = *medzimu*, the name applied by the Mashona to their ancestral spirits'.

¹¹¹ Farrington-Schaperera (1933, 194).

original meaning of “research”, or “a report on research”, while “moral” is derived from the Latin *mos, moris*, “custom”.¹¹²

Indeed, Grevenbroek’s letter, like Acosta’s treatise, was an attempt at providing a moral and natural history of the Khoi – but one with Christian roots.

On the other hand, the phrase ‘majorum suorum moris’ has an ancient Roman origin. ‘Mos maiorum’ (ancestral custom) was the unwritten code woven into society from which pagan Rome derived its norms: it permeated every aspect of political, social and military life.¹¹³ Conveniently for the early modern writer about foreign peoples, the Romans were also the one great people that converted to the Christian faith and brought it to Europe.¹¹⁴ In the light of Grevenbroek’s eloquence, the choice of words seems hardly a coincidence. The Khoi are seen to practice a system of sacred rites that, like in ancient Rome, has Christian norms and values engrained in it. When the time is right, Grevenbroek seems to suggest, the Europeans or the Khoi will acknowledge these shared roots.

Grevenbroek also held a radically different opinion from his contemporaries about the second important factor in the tricolon used to assess a people’s civility: language. As previously mentioned, Dapper’s description of the Khoi language as ‘turkey-cock speech’ is no innocent comparison but part of the Khoi’s more general animalisation:

Tale. // Al deze Hottentots, inzonderheit d’aen strant-gelegen, spreken een en dezelve tale of sprake, die t’eenemaal belemmert, en by d’onzen om de moeielijkheit der uitsprake niet te leren is, tot merkelyk nadeel van het verder opspeuren der gelegenheit des lants, en handeling met deze volken. Hun sprake gaet geduurigh met klokken, als de kalkoensche hanen, klappende, of klatzende over het ander woort op hun mont, gelijk of men op zijne duim knipte.

Language // All these Hottentots, especially those along the shore, speak one and the same language. This is at once a hindrance, for owing to the difficulty of pronunciation it cannot be learned by our countrymen, to the great detriment of further exploration of the country and of dealing with these

¹¹² Rowe (1964, 1-2). The meaning of ‘research’ also went back to antiquity: the Greek historian Herodotus is immortalised by his work *Ἱστορίας ἀπόδειξις* (‘Historiès apodexis’, ‘A report of my inquiry’), which remained a fount of knowledge on foreign people until well into the Renaissance, owing to its many cultural and ethnographic digressions.

¹¹³ Hölkeskamp (2010, 17): ‘[Mos maiorum’s] range of reference and meanings was almost unlimited [...] This notional stock of time-honoured principles, traditional models, and rules of appropriate conduct, of time-tested policies, regulations, and well-established practices not only prescribed social behavior in “private” life, but also regulated all criminal and “public” law, the state religion as well as the military system, the ways and means of running politics at home and abroad’.

¹¹⁴ The Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity on his deathbed in 337, and with the Edict of Milan (313) had put an end to the persecution of Christians.

people. Their speech is full of clucks like those of the turkey-cocks; they clap or clack each word in the mouth, as if a man were snapping his thumb [...].¹¹⁵

In 1686, in his treatise about the Khoi, Ten Rhyne in a similar vein describes Khoi speech as ‘noise’ rather than language. His comparison with birds from antiquity again implies a ranking of the Khoi with beasts:¹¹⁶

CAP. XXVII. // **De Lingua eorundem.** // Si quis eos loquentes auscultet, reviviscere Pythagorae aevum dixerit, in quo aves mutuo sermonis consortio polluisse fingebantur. Quippe revera stridor non vox est, si Hottentottorum expressionem expendas: nam quodvis vocabulum stridulo linguae (sonoro applicita[e] palato) clangore finitur

Chapter 27. // Their language. // If one listens to them talking, one supposes the age of Pythagoras to have returned, in which birds were fabled to have enjoyed mutual converse in speech. In sober truth it is noise, not speech, if one attends to the mode of expression of the Hottentots; for every single word is finished by a noisy click of the tongue against the echoing palate.¹¹⁷

Rather than repeating these stock motifs about Khoi speech, Grevenbroek relies on his own observations and groups the Khoi with mankind. He finds that the native language (‘linguam patriam’) is not the same throughout the Cape (‘nec passim eandem [linguam opinor]’) and that it possibly consists of various dialects (‘eam [linguam] variis constare dialectis [opinor]’). A unique feature of his letter is the table of 12 Khoi numerals (one through ten plus 20 and 30). The table is consistent with the hypothesis made in the case of circumcision and castration: that not all peoples in southern Africa are one. Accordingly, the table distinguishes between two peoples: those ‘in Promontorio Bonae Spei’ (at the Cape Peninsula) and those further afield, called the Magosi. Each is seen to have their own language although they share linguistic properties.¹¹⁸ Grevenbroek goes on to argue that the idiom is well-developed and rich (‘idioma hoc maturum divesque’), and that etymologies and derivations are systematic:

¹¹⁵ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 70). Despite Dapper’s disdain for the Khoi language, his account is one of the first, albeit rudimentary, attempts at its systematic description: it is claimed to be one language, and the distinctive clicks of the Bantu language family are noted.

¹¹⁶ The belief that the lack of a proper language among the Khoi ranks them among the beasts was not deemed incompatible with their supposed Christian roots; it was surmised that their lengthy separation from fellow Christians had degraded their speech.

¹¹⁷ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 152).

¹¹⁸ Significantly, only in the 19th century would Bleek and Lloyd, in their famous research into (nowadays mostly extinct) Khoi languages, provide proof for Grevenbroek’s early claims. Their collection is accessible at the University of Cape Town (Special Collections), but also online: <http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/>. Accessed 20 January 2019.

Caye Mansine, navem interpretatum denotat, voce compositâ ex *Caye*- domus, et *Mansine* mediâ productâ, aqua i.e. domus aquatica, non absono inclinamento pro nave.

Caye mansine means a *ship*. It is a compound word from *Caye*, house, and *mansine*, with the middle syllable long, which means *water*, i.e. *water-house*, not an unintelligent turn of speech for *ship*.¹¹⁹

For Grevenbroek, then, Khoi speech is certainly no animalist noise but a coherent language with rules and grammar.

By contemporary linguistic standards, Grevenbroek's observations about Khoi language are an extraordinary testimony to the value of independent research. Being a child of his time, however, Grevenbroek interprets his data to conclude that the two Khoi languages share one ancestor, Hebrew:

Patriam ipsorum linguam aliqua cum Hebraeorum idiomate communia habere opinor, nam videtur ex gutturalibus, dentalibus, lingualibus aliisque vocalibus labris illuctantibus, nobisque pronunciatu asperis conflate.

I am of opinion that the language of the natives has something in common with Hebrew, for it seems to consist of gutturals, labials, dentals, linguals and other sounds that fall with difficulty from the lips and are hard for us to pronounce.¹²⁰

As with the other customs, Grevenbroek perceives a common ground in idiom ('aliqua ... idiomate communia') between the languages spoken on the southernmost tip of the continent and Hebrew. Whatever the ethnographic criterion, a Jewish lineage is a recurring cornerstone of Grevenbroek's interpretation of Khoi customs.

Grevenbroek does not explicitly discuss the third aspect of the major tricolon in assessing a people's civility: law. This is remarkable in the light of his exhaustiveness and careful reasoning throughout the letter, and because he studied law in Leiden before he moved to the Cape. It seems unlikely that he was unaware of the two dominant theories regarding law and foreign nations. Firstly, in the 16th century, Spanish jurists and theologians concluded that the American Indians were subject to the crown of Spain not by virtue of any positive law, but because their 'poor and barbarous education' had made them, temporarily

¹¹⁹ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 280). In modern isiXhosa, 'Khaya' means home, and 'amanzi' is water. 'Mansine' may be the locative form of 'emanzini': Farrington-Schapera (1933, 281n93). Grevenbroek's data were revolutionary additions to the established corpus of knowledge about the Khoi.

¹²⁰ Farrington-Schapera (1933, 280).

at least, unable to create civil societies for themselves.¹²¹ It would not have been a far cry to extend such claims to the Cape and its people: any claims the VOC or the settlers might have had arose as a consequence not of rights but of a Christian duty to care for peoples who were considered to be in an utterly ‘degenerated’ condition. Similarly, given his humanist upbringing at home and private library at the Cape, it seems unlikely that Grevenbroek was unacquainted with Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery, which was an accepted way in early modern thought of explaining why some people ruled over others. In his treatise *Politeia* (*The state*), the ancient Greek philosopher writes:

those who are as different [from other men] as the soul from the body or man from beast—and they are in this state if their work is the use of the body, and if this is the best that can come from them—are slaves by nature. For them it is better to be ruled in accordance with this sort of rule, if such is the case for the other things mentioned.¹²²

In the light of the implicit nature of Grevenbroek’s criticism of the dominant theories and authors of his day, it is perhaps not surprising that he does not explicitly engage with any debates from the legislative domain. All the same, it is remarkable that Khoi law or the legalities of settler life at the Cape remain untreated altogether. After all, Grevenbroek is known to have sided with the free-burghers in the revolt against the governor’s son (Willem-Adriaan van der Stel) in 1705. Grevenbroek aided with the legal correspondence with the Lords XVII which followed, and which eventually led to the governor’s dismissal from the Cape.

A possible reason for avoiding the law in his discussion of Khoi culture is provided by Grevenbroek’s own position at the Cape Council. He probably wrote his letter a year after retiring. I will explain in Chapter 4 that, at the time, his position at the Cape was precarious: he possessed confidential information from his decade at the Council and his relationship with governor Simon van der Stel was marred by disagreement over policies that – in Grevenbroek’s eyes – disadvantaged the Khoi. In Chapter 3, I will show how Grevenbroek spent considerable effort to safeguard his anonymity in his letter – even though the informed reader must have known that the letter’s Latin, insider knowledge and considerable detail could hardly point to anyone else than Grevenbroek. Similarly, in the letter, Grevenbroek does not name the people in the Dutch administration he accuses of

¹²¹ Pagden (1982, 3).

¹²² Translation Lord (2013, sub 1254b16–21).

unethical behaviour – even though the sustained critique leaves the informed reader little doubt that it is directed at governor Simon van der Stel. Given this situation, Grevenbroek may not have wished to discuss the legal position of the VOC and Khoi law, especially since he did not absolutely need it to make his argument about Khoi virtue.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the urgency and relevance of Grevenbroek's letter in the context of European writing about (southern) African peoples. I have made clear that Grevenbroek's argument for Khoi humanity positions the Cape natives at the heart of the political-religious debate in early modern Europe about the Godly nature of the universe and man's place in it. In addition, the letter embodies an early step in a radical epistemological transition that would redefine the way European man looked at the world and himself. In this so-called Revolution of Knowledge, the bounds of the venerated ancient and Christian library gave way to empirical observation as a source of superior knowledge about the world.

The title of Grevenbroek's letter mirrors that of other early modern treatises about the Khoi, but moves away from them in argument, structure and sourcework. For Grevenbroek, the Khoi are more Christian – 'whiter of soul' – than the Europeans, especially Simon van der Stel and the Castle administration, who shame their Christian roots through unethical behaviour. Grevenbroek challenges the emblematic figure of the Khoi as a beastly, uncivil race and the 'echo chamber of discourse about the Cape', that is, the stereotyped image of the Khoi. Underpinning Grevenbroek's argument is that Khoi norms and behaviour are grafted onto a stratum of Christian virtue ('virtus'), as described by Spinoza in his *Ethica*: Godly substance permeates the entire universe, which implies that all men are innately Christian and have equal access to virtue.

Grevenbroek developed his argument for a rehabilitation of the Khoi as Christian brethren by relying on empirical evidence collected during his time in office at the Cape, while much other writing is informed by stock motifs about the Khoi and the tradition of writing about them. He is thus able to interpret familiar ethnographical categories and well-known cases from local history anew. Dapper and Ten Rhyne, also writing about the Khoi, concluded that they are a degraded class of man. Grevenbroek, drawing on a decade of first-hand experience with the Khoi, reaches a different conclusion, while remaining within a

Christian framework. He returns to the biblical dogma of the Noahiden dispersal of people across the globe, which allows him to reaffirm a Jewish lineage for the Khoi.

Nowhere does Grevenbroek explicitly engage theological, political or ethnographical discourse of his time. Yet, recurring statements about the trustworthiness of his empirical sources and a continuous concern with providing truthful evidence suggest that Grevenbroek was well-aware that his effort to supplement 'the writings of all European naturalists', ancient and modern, was an unconventional and revolutionary move. His empiricism allowed him to counter popular opinion yet it did not challenge the more fundamental worldviews of the time. Instead, the epistemological value of the frameworks that underpin contemporary views of the Khoi are re-empowered. This, indeed, makes him a child of his time. In the next chapter, I illustrate how Grevenbroek likewise strategically draws on ancient literature to renegotiate the prevailing early modern image of the Khoi, whilst re-invigorating this second dominant European framework for viewing the world.