

# “Alcohol and Art”: Charles Davidson Bell and his cari-catured images of Colonial Khoikhoi in early nineteenth century Century South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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International interest in and encounters between Europeans and the “Hottentots” (Khoikhoi) of South Africa date back and span many centuries. Recurrent colonial encounters influenced the way in which artists, engravers, travel writers and colonial observers represented the Khoikhoi people. The production and reproduction of perceived images of these people in European literature and art not only reinforced distorted images of the Khoikhoi population but, moreover, influenced the perceptions of those who laid eyes on the Khoikhoi for the first time. Against this backdrop, the colonial artist Charles Davidson Bell had produced a few sketches of Khoikhoi men and women, depicting them either as useless drunkards or lazy members of Cape society. My paper attempts to explore how Bell through personal observation captured and caricatured some Khoikhoi men and women and created his own “characterisation” of Khoikhoi colonial identities and “native types”.

**Key words:** Charles Bell, colonial art, Khoikhoi caricatures, liquor, stereotyping, representation.

## “Alkohol en leuns”: Charles Davidson Bell en sy karikaturerastige voorstellings vn koloniale Khoikhoi in die vroeë negentiendê-eeuse Suid-Afrika

Internasionale belangstelling in en ontmoetinge tussen Europeërs en die “Hottentotte” (Khoikhoi) van Suid-Afrika dateer terug baie eeue. Herhaalde koloniale ontmoetinge wat oor die eeue gestrek het, het kunstenaars, grafeerders, reisbeskrywers en koloniale waarnemers, beïnvloed hoe hulle die Khoikhoi voorgestel het. Die skepping en her-skepping van voorgestelde beelde van die Khoikhoimense in Europese literatuur en kuns het nie slegs hierdie verwronge voorstellings van die Khoikhoi bevolking beaam nie, maar dit het ook die persepsies beïnvloed van diegene wat vir die eerste keer in aanraking met die Khoikhoi gekom het. Teen hierdie agtergrond het die koloniale kunstenaar Charles Davidson Bell, verskeie sketse geteken waarin Khoikhoimans en vroue uitgebeeld word as dronkaards en lui lede binne die Kaapse samelewing. In hierdie artikel word gepoog en verken hoedat Bell deur persoonlike waarneming ’n aantal karikature van sommige Khoikhoimans en vroue geskets het, en dus sy eie “karakterbeeld” van koloniale Khoikhoi identiteite en “inboorling tipes” geskep het.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Charles Bell, koloniale kuns, Khoikhoi karikature, drank, stereotipe, uitbeelding.

In her book *Envisioning the Worst: Representations of “Hottentots” in Early Modern England*, Linda Merians<sup>2</sup> describes in detail how, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Khoikhoi of South Africa had been demeaned and dehumanised in travelogues, colonial literature, theatrical plays, art and iconography. Although Britain had only captured the Cape Colony in 1795 and again in 1806, interest in the “Hottentots” had for centuries been entrenched in the consciousness of the English public.<sup>3</sup> While the Khoikhoi people of the Cape had gained the reputation of being called “the world’s most beastly people” or the “world’s most wretched race”, based largely on what Philip Edwards called “voyage literature”,<sup>4</sup> the curiosity of the British public coupled with the fact that they had been exposed to several written and visual genres brought the Hottentots or Khoikhoi into mainstream British society. As Henry Trotter has written in the context of “sailors as scribes”, “travel-writings inscribed and described the person on the other side of the encounter, these works took on a host of functions and a variety of meanings”.<sup>5</sup> The dissemination and distribution of these ideas in literature, art and museum exhibitions stimulated public interest that led to the creation of negative perceptions and representations of the Cape Khoikhoi.<sup>6</sup> This article traces the artistic work of the colonial artist, Charles Davidson Bell, with specific reference to his evocative depiction of Khoikhoi as habitual drunkards, addicts, social misfits and scandalous characters. Bell highlights the growing problem of alcohol addiction among the Khoikhoi population in the immediate decade following Khoikhoi emancipation laws enshrined in Ordinance 50 of 1828.<sup>7</sup>

## Biography

George Davidson Bell was born on 22 October 1813 in Scotland. Before he turned 17 in 1830, he arrived in Cape Town and was placed in the care of his uncle, Sir John Bell, the Colonial Secretary at the Cape at the time, and his wife Lady Catherine Bell.<sup>8</sup> John Bell was an influential British official and a keen artist and draughtsman. It was under his uncle's tutelage that the young Charles honed his skills and technique as a draughtsman.<sup>9</sup>

His arrival in Cape Town brought the young and impressionable Bell in contact with a new world, society and environment, exhibiting different peoples, cultures, customs, belief systems, languages, and manners. Having laid eyes on all these different peoples of the Cape Colony, Bell captured many of these images on paper as he sketched many individuals and communities in different settings and places throughout his early career. The production of sketches depicting African communities in pristine settings in the interior, rendered his artistic work invaluable, particularly its ethnographic contribution to 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. As the official draughtsman and artist in an expedition into the interior led by Dr Andrew Smith in 1834, Bell was exposed to several indigenous peoples of southern Africa, notably, the Sotho, Tswana, Ndebele, Korana, Rolong, Griqua and a few others. Bearing witness to these communities, their cultures and lifestyles, allowed Bell to produce about 300 "water-colour and pencil illustrations which included landscapes, portraits, animals, incidents and cultural practices and possessions of the Africans".<sup>10</sup> Based on these impressive sketches and illustrations, Frank Bradlow, for instance, described Bell's work as "of immense historic and artistic value and thus of great importance for our South African heritage".<sup>11</sup> As a high-ranking colonial administrator and colonial artist, Charles Bell was therefore not ignored by historians and art historians. As a result, he features prominently in the historiography of colonial art.<sup>12</sup> Michael Lipschitz made a comprehensive study of the *Bell Heritage Trust Collection*<sup>13</sup> while Phillida Brooke Simons penned a complete biography of Bell, entitled *The Life and work of Charles Bell*. Simons provides a riveting biography of an amateur artist who soon established himself as South Africa's foremost colonial artist of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Although most art historians are agreed that Bell was essentially an amateur rather than a professional artist, he displayed enormous talent and he had produced works of art of a very high standard. For example, at the first Exhibition of Fine Arts held in 1851, he won the gold medal for his oil painting, and historical depiction, entitled the "*Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*".<sup>15</sup> Despite his credentials as a respected artist and public figure, Bell was not always prepared to portray the Khoikhoi as respectable human beings which he had done, for example, when he encountered and sketched people of Khoikhoi descent in the interior, notably Adam Kok, the Griqua leader, Old Danser, Old Uithaalter and the Hendriks brothers, Andries and Hendrick of the Bergenaars.<sup>16</sup> Bell was not always an innocent observer or bystander. Neither was he one whose "sketches of Hottentot characters – show him to have had an excellent sense of humour".<sup>17</sup> Each caricatured portrait told a story and represented an image. As John Tagg, has written "the portrait is therefore a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity".<sup>18</sup> For a brief period in the early career of Bell, especially during the late 1830s, he imaged some Cape Town Khoikhoi in a manner that degraded and dishonoured them, especially those guilty of excessive alcohol abuse. Through imaging and in some instances, re-imaging, Bell had hoped to inscribe a new, but negative "social identity" of the Khoikhoi people in the social and political consciousness of his peers and audience. These carefully crafted images seem to suggest that despite the freedoms that accompanied the inception of Ordinance 50 of 1828, the Khoikhoi were still a society in crisis corrupted by drunkenness and alcohol addiction. Khoikhoi emancipation was therefore premature, and as people of colour, the Khoikhoi were incapable of managing their newfound freedom in a socially responsible manner. The following

selected caricatures exhibiting Khoikhoi men and women as drunkards were produced by Bell in order to show how far they had been undermined by colonisation, on the one hand, and on the other, how far the Khoikhoi were from “civilizing” or uplifting themselves at a time when missionaries and those that opposed servitude and slavery propagated the contrary.<sup>19</sup> Bell and his caricatured images seem to suggest that the attractions of alcohol were far too overpowering to resist and that certain Khoikhoi individuals were far too “daft” to comprehend the dangers of alcohol. On the other hand, he showed that alcohol, as a by-product of colonisation, was ruining some Khoikhoi.

### **Alcohol and art**

#### *“Hottentot with Bottle”*

The portrait, *Hottentot with Bottle*, was sketched by Bell in 1839. It represents an unidentified Khoikhoi male character, holding onto an empty wine bottle, swaggering about aimlessly. Dressed in tattered trousers and shirt, sporting a feathered hat, a hallmark of colonial Khoikhoi dress, the person is depicted as a drunkard roaming the streets of Cape Town. The caricature suggests that the person was continuously inebriated and had surrendered his entire life to liquor. The position of the bottle, pointing downwards, suggests that its contents had been consumed and that the individual imaged is already in an intoxicated state. The open shirt exposing his half-naked chest is indicative of the fact that he had consumed far too much. The angle of one of his feet indicates that he is “staggering” or “tottering” along. His winged arms balance his fragile frame and prevent him from falling and eventually passing out completely. The fact that he clutches the bottle even though all his wine had been consumed is indicative of the fact that he “owned” the bottle, or that the bottle “owned” him. Although the Khoikhoi were not enslaved, Bell masterfully portrays, by virtue of their addiction to strong liquor, that they were psychologically serving another master, namely alcohol.



**Figure 1**  
*Hottentot with Bottle*  
(Museum Africa, Johannesburg, B762).



**Figure 2**  
*Hottentot Woman with Bottle*  
(Museum Africa, Johannesburg, B764).

### *Hottentot Woman with Bottle*

Sketched in 1839, *Hottentot Woman with Bottle* is the female equivalent of “*Hottentot with Bottle*“. This caricature represents female addiction to liquor, which suggests that substance abuse transcended gender barriers. Her demeanour appears unsophisticated, which illustrates that Bell questioned her femininity. Her stance is demeaning and the artist denies the female character any beauty, style and elegance. In fact, Bell portrayed her as a scandalous woman, holding a bottle and arguing. Aggression was clearly a visible sign of having had one too many. Her clothes are not shown to be tattered, which suggests that she possessed the potential to be respectable, had she not surrendered her life to alcohol. The bottle is shown in the upright position, which suggests that its contents are still to be consumed. Her stance, open mouth together with a pointed fist suggests that she is either in conversation with another person, or she is conducting an argument. The female with bottle in hand lacks refinement and gentility, and represents vulgarity of the worst kind.

### *Hottentot Street Scene*

From this caricatured portrait entitled, *Hottentot Street Scene*, it is evident that Bell introduced more characters to his repertoire in order to underscore the Khoikhoi as drunkards. Bell introduces four characters – three women and one male carousing in front of what appear to be colonial buildings. It is evident that each character represented a different mood and thus conveyed a different message. In this particular caricature, Bell concentrated on the facial expressions and physical appearances of each figure. The male appears happy, dancing with a bottle in hand. The one woman is content, smoking her pipe, one female is arguing, while the third female character is sleeping, presumably drunk. Moreover, two characters are extremely active – one is dancing while the other is gesticulating. The two other characters are far less active, almost passive. Bell once again depicts Khoikhoi women in a negative light. For example, one woman is pictured lying face down on the ground. She is so completely inebriated that she had passed out.



**Figure 3**  
*Hottentot Street Scene* (Simons, 1998).



The other woman is happily smoking a pipe whilst leaning against an old cannon. The third woman, who is trying to get her hands on the bottle held by the only male character, is seemingly very angry at something. This further suggests that women were heavy rather than moderate drinkers.

In this particular depiction, the bottle is shown in an upright position, suggesting that its contents had not been consumed as yet. The fact that the bottle is held in the male's left hand is open to two interpretations. He is left-handed or, alternatively, he is keeping the bottle away from the woman, which explains why she is so angry to the point where she is about to become violent. The facial expression of the angry, woman is clearly shown by Bell as she is seen shouting at the man, demanding a sip of wine.

The mood of the male character appears jovial, but suggests simultaneously that it could erupt into violence at any given moment. One woman's gesticulating with her arm raised in a fist implies that she is very angry and is about to attack both the man with the bottle and the other woman who is looking on. The potential of violence or a brawl is not ruled out. The inclusion of the one woman that had passed out conveys an even stronger message – namely, that excessive drinking invariably ends in a state of unconsciousness. Neither female is allowed grace, class, civility, beauty or even dignity by the artist. The smoking of the pipe illustrates a lack of femininity.<sup>20</sup>

Our attention is also drawn to the commercialisation of liquor through advertising. The brand *Collison's Ale* and *Brandy* are specifically advertised. The artist also takes a swipe at the Temperance movement and its activities in the Cape Colony. As the name suggests, Temperance organisations were founded in Britain and America to vehemently oppose liquor abuse and prevent middle-class communities from becoming habitual drunkards.<sup>21</sup> In this illustration, Bell highlights the movement's inability to "rescue" the Khoikhoi in a spiritual sense and mocks its attempts to convert the Khoikhoi by preaching abstinence.<sup>22</sup> The fact that Bell inserted the notice *Meeting of the Temperance Society* directly above an already intoxicated woman suggests how ineffectual their messages of sobriety and abstinence were among the Khoikhoi.

The way in which Bell represented certain Khoikhoi individuals in contemporary colonial art and the religious activities of the Temperance movement in art were perhaps indicative of early 19<sup>th</sup> century perceptions of Temperance movements in the Cape Colony. Two satirical published plays, *De Nieuwe Ridderorde of De Temperantisten* written by the French-born playwright and journalist, Charles Boniface in 1832, and another by Andrew Geddes Bain entitled *Kaatje Kekkelbek* (1838) provided Bell with ample intellectual stimulation, material and insight to construct his own caricatures of drunken Khoikhoi.<sup>23</sup> These satirical plays, in particular, *De Temperantisten* which in the words of Siegfried Huigen represented Khoikhoi characters "as drunk, criminal revellers" and "drunken good-for-nothings with criminal career paths"<sup>24</sup>, had no doubt inspired the young Bell to sketch alcohol-addicted Khoikhoi in a similar degrading way. In Bell's characterisation of the Khoikhoi as those unable to resist the temptation of drink and the failed attempts of Temperance movements, his artistic works had added significantly to an existing corpus of literature, including what Christopher Heywood called "satirical representations"<sup>25</sup> that wittingly sought to degrade and humiliate certain Khoikhoi individuals, especially those that had become addicted to liquor.

### *Hottentots Carousing*

By naming the title of this portrait *Hottentots carousing*, Bell reinforced the nature of excessive liquor abuse among Khoikhoi men and women. The pencil inscription: "een slukje tog myn

*Willem Schei uit dan...my te Kwellen*” was written on the back of the sketch.<sup>26</sup> Unlike any of his other caricatures, Bell has identified the Khoikhoi man as one Willem Schei, but unfortunately, the female remains anonymous. The identification of Schei as the main character suggests that he was in fact a real person and not an imaged individual. Schei is portrayed as one that loved liquor. The lower parts of the man’s body and woman are intertwined, which suggests that these characters could have been a couple. Willem Schei was clearly the one who controlled the bottle and “carousing”. He determined when and what volume was to be consumed by his female partner. Holding the bottle aloft, suggests that he appeared unwilling to share it with his female companion. The man appears happy holding the bottle aloft, while the woman who is on her knees is slightly upset as she tries to grab the outstretched arm of the man in an effort to reach the bottle. There is definitely not an equal relationship visible here. The fact that the woman is on her knees suggests the subservience and inequality in Khoikhoi society. The woman appears desperate as she battles to grab hold of the bottle in order to take a “*slukje*” (sip). Bell also portrayed the female in a sexual manner. The woman appears to be flirting with the male and it appears that she was quite prepared to offer him sexual favours in exchange for liquor. The female is pictured sporting a very seductive pose – standing between the legs of the man, facing away from him. Both characters are dressed in colourful colonial garb – the man wearing a hat with feathers, a jacket, trousers and *veld-shoes*. The female character is sketched wearing a headscarf, a blouse and a striped colonial dress. If these characters were indeed real, then they were certainly not poverty-stricken. The background is bland, which suggests that the focus was entirely on the couple and their drinking escapades.



**Figure 4**  
*Hottentots Carousing* (Museum Africa, Johannesburg, B741).

#### *Hottentots After Kraal meeting*

In this portrait, Bell emphasized the extent to which liquor had penetrated “traditional” Khoikhoi society. The inclusion of a rural landscape, a mountain range, shrubs and trees and a family loading their possessions on an ox conveys how alcohol usage had infiltrated the inner circle of “traditional” Khoikhoi life, namely the sanctity of the kraal. Once again Bell illustrates the power men commanded over women in Khoikhoi society. Women were subjected to men all the time, even when they socialized. The bottle is held aloft by the man, as two well-dressed women frantically scuffle to reach it. They are once again depicted as sitting down – suggesting subservience. Men presumably used liquor to control women and to occasionally demand sex. Begging for a sip of wine suggests that women were incapable of obtaining their own liquor

and were thus dependent on the male figure. Once again, female characters are depicted in a provocative – almost sexual – manner, as if to suggest that the women are flirting with the male. The two women are seen clutching the male's inner thigh, while the other is caressing his chest so as to offer him sexual favours in exchange for liquor.



**Figure 5**  
*Hottentots After Kraal Meeting* (Museum Africa, Johannesburg, B742).

### *Hottentots*

In this particular portrait, simply entitled *Hottentots*, Bell depicts a Khoikhoi man and woman in a calm and tranquil setting. Even though the couple appears respectable in every aspect – clothing and appearance – Bell still introduces the bottle and pipe into the portrait in a very subtle manner, shifting its focus away from the seemingly happy couple to smoking and drinking. The inclusion of the woman with baton in hand, hovering above them, suggests that the tranquil setting and atmosphere was about to be disturbed, meaning that the effect of smoking and alcohol consumption was about to lead to violence.

The manner in which Bell portrayed certain indigenous Khoikhoi as drunkards and people besotted with alcohol was by no means unique, as similar images of indigenous communities already denigrated by the colonial encounter surfaced around the British-controlled world. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century seems to have represented a period in which colonial artists showed through representation how racist, insensitive, and intolerable the western world had become towards conquered indigenous societies. The founding of new colonial settlements in Australia and New Zealand during the eighteenth century and the expansion of British colonial domination during the nineteenth century is a case in point. In colonial Australia, for example, the manner in which colonial artists depicted Aboriginal Australians during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was no different to how European artists depicted the Cape Khoikhoi in their land of birth.<sup>27</sup> In order to



illustrate this point, reference can be made to at least two colonial artists, Charles Rodius and John Carmichael, and their depictions of Australian Aborigines in colonial settings during the 1840s.



**Figure 6**  
*Hottentots* (Simons, 1998).



**Figure 7**  
*Scene in the streets of Sydney* (Reynolds, 1989).



This famous depiction of colonised Australian Aborigines entitled *Scene in the streets of Sydney* was drawn by Charles Rodius (1802-1860), a German-born portraitist and landscape artist who served a prison sentence in the colony of New South Wales for theft.<sup>28</sup> It is a typical visual representation and colonial image of Aborigine men brawling and drinking in the streets of Sydney. Rodius and other artists of his generation, notably Augustus Earle and WH Fernyhough, often portrayed how Aboriginal men and women under the influence of strong liquor resorted to violence. In this sketch, two men are hitting each other with clubs while another two men dressed in tattered European clothes are having a conversation while drinking from separate bottles. On the left side of the sketch we observe what appears to be a family (father, mother and child) looking on. Between the mother (seated on the ground) and naked child we observe a wine bottle in an upright position. This could suggest that the mother was in the process of consuming liquor while she and her husband observed the brawl. By associating the Aborigines with the consumption of cheap liquor, referred to as “bull” and “grog”,<sup>29</sup> European artists redefined the image of Australian Aborigines to represent “savagery”<sup>30</sup> of the worst kind and people of despair, as we shall see in the next example.

This particular sketch by John Carmichael appeared in a book authored and published by James Macle hose, entitled, *The Picture of Sydney and Strangers Guide in New South Wales for 1839*.<sup>31</sup> Readers of the book were introduced to these caricatured images of Australian Aborigines who appeared to be in a state of complete degeneration. In this sketch, the Aborigine couple are totally engrossed in consuming alcohol while they neglect their young children. Surrounded by mangy dogs, Carmichael imaged the Aborigine couple as one of many that succumbed to European-introduced vices. The woman, for instance, is half-naked as one of her breasts is exposed, which could suggest that she simultaneously suckled her baby and consumed liquor. The woman appears more interested in gulping “grog” than tending to her crying infant. The facial expression of the male appears aggressive and he is pictured grabbing his spouse by her neck. This insinuates that harsh words were possibly exchanged and that a physical fight between the two appeared imminent.<sup>32</sup> In his assessment of how the Aborigine was depicted in Australian colonial art, Stuart Macintyre, the Australian historian, summarised the views of colonial artists and portraitists very well. He writes, “white artists caricatured them as semi-naked figures who sprawled over public spaces with tobacco, alcohol, mangy dogs and neglected children, shameless vices and incapable of responding to the virtues of civilisation”.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 8**  
*Male and female natives, Sydney, 1839 (Macintyre, 2004).*

## Discussion

In his book, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony 1750-1870*, Robert Ross observes that the “antithesis to respectability was drunkenness”.<sup>34</sup> Liquor abuse was clearly a major problem among all social ranks of Cape society. As a result, an individual’s identity and social status as far as respectability was concerned were very much linked to sobriety. By the 1830s and 1840s, as Lipschitz has shown, residents of Cape Town spent a considerable amount of their earnings on liquor. Lipschitz furthermore argues that the availability of liquor across the wide spectrum of social classes made all inhabitants of Cape Town susceptible to liquor.<sup>35</sup> Edna Bradlow has shown how, during the 1870s, the Cape Government did everything in its power to curtail “public drunkenness”, as it spun out of control.<sup>36</sup> Since “public drunkenness” was a common occurrence in urban Cape Town, Bell stated the obvious. And despite being accurate and correct in his portrayal of intoxicated Khoikhoi and their contact, he was also highly selective. He, for instance, selected, whom and whom not to depict as drunken individuals. This even applied to Khoikhoi individuals. In 1840, a year after he sketched *Hottentot Woman with Bottle* and *Hottentot with Bottle* in 1839, he sketched a *Hottentot Man* and *Hottentot Woman* and depicted them as respectable individuals.<sup>37</sup>

Liquor had always been readily available to virtually all classes of Cape society from settler to servant. As Gerald Groenewald has shown, the roots of liquor production, the liquor trade, and the emergence of the *pachter* community in colonial Cape Town are to be found in the formative years of Dutch colonial settlement.<sup>38</sup> The number of liquor houses, canteens or cellars established in Cape Town alone reveals the extent to which a culture of drinking had been entrenched in the mother city. In the 1820s, for instance, one particularly large cellar or bottle store operated quite successfully in Burg Street and was often frequented by all sorts of Cape characters. Situated in the centre of town, this particular canteen gained a reputation among its customers and was called “Big Butt”. According to William Wilberforce Bird, a British Civil servant who visited Cape Town in 1822 and recorded his observations in a book, “around it, from sun-rise to sun-set, was assembled every description of vagabond in the town, male or female, with the addition of half-naked Hottentots men and women, fighting and rolling about the street in eternal drunkness”.<sup>39</sup>

Derogatory artistic visual images of Khoikhoi individuals in a drunken state were matched by equally vile written descriptions alluding to alcohol abuse. David Gordon has demonstrated how Peter Kolbe, a German astronomer to the Cape during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, described the Khoikhoi as “the drunkest people on earth, had they had enough liquor to do so”.<sup>40</sup> Apart from Kolbe’s description, many other visitors to the Cape Colony penned similar thoughts of how addicted certain Khoikhoi were to alcohol. Dr Ferdinand Krauss, a German natural scientist and apothecary who visited the Cape between the years 1838-1840, for instance, provided written descriptions of the Khoikhoi as drunken people corroborating the racist portrayals of colonial artists. In his memoirs, of which excerpts were published in the *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* in 1966, he writes, for example, how the Cape Town Khoikhoi employed as wagon-drivers enjoyed “highly favoured brandy” and often frequented “numerous taverns”.<sup>41</sup> Khoikhoi men were distinctly described by Krauss as “being drunkards, which gives rise to shameless and deplorable scenes. They are very useful to the colonist and a great boon, provided they have nothing to drink or it is given to them in moderation, but sooner are they in town than both sexes indulge in this passion until all their goods and chattels hardly their clothes remain”.<sup>42</sup> Even Khoikhoi women were described in a prejudiced way by Krauss. He, for instance, diarised how a “half-drunk Hottentot woman with shrill voice and clicking languages [was] vehemently arguing and quarrelling” in public places notably, Market Square.<sup>43</sup>

The “bottle” as opposed to “glass” is an interesting observation and worth commenting on. The word “bottle” as well as the shape of a bottle – symbolic of liquor consumption – featured prominently in all caricatures. Even the captions *Hottentot with Bottle* and *Hottentot Woman with Bottle* are suggestive. Ironically, none of the caricatured characters have been depicted holding a glass. The depiction of the “bottle” could have been associated with heavy drinking, whereas the “glass” was associated with moderation, class and some measure of sophistication. Drinking from a bottle has many suggestive connotations in this context. In the first instance, it implies consumption of large quantities. Khoikhoi individuals invariably over-indulged the moment they put mouth to bottle and, according to Bell, drinking in moderation was non-existent in Khoikhoi society. Bell also paid attention to the angle of the bottle. The fact that the bottle was tilted downwards suggests that its contents had already been consumed. The bottle’s being captured in an upright position suggests that its contents are still to be consumed. In essence then, drinking from a bottle suggests a total lack of etiquette and class.

## Conclusion

The Cape Colony provided Charles Bell with the place and space to develop and grow as an artist. Being a native of Scotland, a small country compared to the vastness of the Cape Colony, allowed Bell to meet, interact with and sketch a variety of images from so-called “noble savages” to indigenous “native types”. The vast open spaces and all its attractions (people, environment, and landscape) gave Bell a new perspective on the indigenous and settler population in the Cape.

The art historian, Michael Godby, suggests that the work of Charles Bell fell into two major categories, namely landscape and social commentary.<sup>44</sup> If Bell is to be regarded as a social commentator, then he used art to create an awareness of a particular social evil that threatened Cape society. His message to eradicate or, at least, address public drinking did however, not fall on deaf ears. In order to curtail public drinking, the Cape authorities struck back in a major way. By 1851, through legislation and Ordinance 9 of 1851, the Legislative Council of the Cape Government had instituted a law that outlawed lying drunk on the streets.<sup>45</sup> Transgressors of this law either faced a harsh penalty or jail term.

As a “respectable” colonial official and British citizen, Bell had judged the Khoikhoi in terms of European standards and values. He thus viewed the Khoikhoi and their behaviour through different eyes. But respectability like, beauty, was entirely in the eyes of the beholder. “The respectable”, to quote Ross again, in this case, Charles Bell, either “saw the drunken as helpless victims of their race or as targets for redemption”.<sup>46</sup> The former is more applicable, rather than the latter, however. Bell’s view and observations as reflected in his caricatured images of Khoikhoi individuals suggest that some were beyond redemption. He, for example, mocked Temperance societies – a movement geared at redeeming rather than condemning the Khoikhoi. As a result of their addiction to liquor some Khoikhoi were depicted as incapable of transforming themselves into respectable citizens and were therefore to remain at the bottom rung of the social structure in Cape colonial society. Simply put, according to Bell’s characterization of Khoikhoi identity, they were the “dregs” of society and were to remain “outsiders” and outcasts. While travel writers used the pen and sailors’ stories to vilify the Cape Khoikhoi, Bell employed artistic caricatures to highlight their crisis. Through art, Bell had mirrored in no uncertain terms the rapid degeneration of Khoikhoi society in colonial South Africa. Geoff Dutton speaks of a similar period among the Australian Aborigines and termed their decline in colonial Australia as “instant degeneration”.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the duplication and re-duplication of these stereotyped images distributed as “pictorial souvenirs”<sup>48</sup> in the form of



postcards invariably left an imprint of negativity in the psyche of the colonial beholder. Such observers saw the Khoikhoi people as nothing but drunken individuals in a state of complete dejection, depression and despair.

In capturing, caricaturing and ultimately, categorising these few Khoikhoi characters as the “lowest of the low”, Bell the artist, had in fact created and constructed his own “facet” of Khoikhoi identity, within the context colonial Cape Town, namely that of a “lost” and “fallen” generation.<sup>49</sup>

## Notes and references

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2. (Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2001).
3. Merians, *Envisioning the Worst*: 119.
4. See Merians, *Envisioning the Worst*: 118.
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