

○ VOLUME 7 NUMBER 2, 2008

'tied in rolled knots and powdered with ochre': Aboriginal hair and eighteenth-century cross-cultural encounters

Shino Konishi

Australian National University

The eighteenth-century is a significant period in the history of cross-cultural contact in Australia, as it is when Europeans first meticulously recorded their encounters with indigenous peoples. Yet, lacking a common tongue and any knowledge of the Aborigines' cultures and cosmologies the Europeans' understanding of Aboriginal society and culture was limited to what they could see with their own eyes. Consequently, descriptions of the Aboriginal body figure largely in their accounts, and it was through their perceptions of the indigenous body that they apprehended and comprehended Aboriginal people and culture. One part of the body that caught the European explorers' attention was the Aborigines' hair. Scrutinizing its colour and texture contributed to emergent racial taxonomies; the manner in which it was dressed suggested indigenous cultural practices; and the Europeans' reception of these styles reflected contemporary western ideas and aesthetic ideals. Further, hair grooming provided opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges, which could be amicable, hostile, or bemusing.

Introduction

Descriptions of hair pepper the eighteenth-century explorers' discussions of Aboriginal people; its texture and colour, the styles in which it was sculpted, the various pomades and adornments used, and how it was groomed. It was not only the locks which garnered interest; the navigators also discussed the Aboriginal men's beards and the amount of body hair they possessed. This level of attention is curious and not one which has been reflected in the historiography. As art historian Angela Rosenthal observes, more 'often than not studies of eighteenth-century culture have overlooked or under-emphasised the importance of hair' (2004:1).

Until the last two decades those historians who have taken an interest in hair in general have focussed their attention on the elaborate wigs worn by the wealthy elites (Corson, 1971; Festa, 2005). While significant, this narrow focus on status has obscured the multiple meanings of hair to the eighteenth-century individual. The condition of one's hair, for instance, could reveal one's inner health. Of greater significance to the eighteenth-century explorers, however, was what hair revealed about race. Through the influential work of the great taxonomer, Carolus Linnaeus, hair became one of the key indicators in tracing the relationships between the different varieties of man. From the revised tenth edition onwards of his *Systema Naturae* (1766-68) Linnaeus cited hair as his second descriptor after skin colour, thereby elevating its significance to that of a racial phenotype. His catalogue reduced the varieties of man to just four, based on the known continents, thereby masking differences within each ostensible 'race' (which previously had been widely recorded), and exaggerating those between the races. Each of these four 'races' had different types of hair: the hair of *Homo americanus* was 'black, straight, thick', *Homo europaeus* 'yellow, brown, flowing', *Homo asiaticus* 'abundant black', and *Homo afer* 'black, frizzled' (cited in Rosenthal, 2004: 2).

The purported empiricism of the taxonomic sciences gave credibility to long-held beliefs that physical characteristics such as hair type and skin colour reflected the inherent qualities of the races. For example in the late seventeenth century philosopher William Petty thought that Europeans and Africans differ 'in their Haire ... as much as a straight line differs from a Circle', and that this correlated to crucial differences in 'their Naturall Manners, & in the internall Qualities of their Minds' (cited in DiPiero, 1999: 164). The observation that these diverse hair types were marked, and therefore indicative of more intrinsic differences, led some theorists to challenge the prevailing monogenist view that all peoples were descended from one common ancestor and instead advocate polygenesis. For example, Jean Henri Samuel Formey, in his contribution to Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, alleged that the 'Negro' possessed 'wool instead of hair', and that this difference, in concert with others concerning skin and facial features, suggested that they 'appear to constitute a new species of man' (in Diderot and d'Alembert, 1765, v. 11: 76).

Recent studies have ascribed other meanings to hair, which although not necessarily recognised in the eighteenth century are still useful for interrogating the explorers' accounts. Hair attracts our attention because it 'surrounds the most expressive part of the body, the face, [so] any changes made to it are inherently visible and noticeable' (Coates, 1999: 8), and it is symbolically significant because it is the only part of the body that grows back, and so can be repeatedly manipulated (Olivelle, 1998: 36). This tendency means that hair will always be "worked upon" by human hands' (White and White, 1998: 42) and, unlike animal hair, never 'exists in a natural state' (Hilebeitel, 1998: 2), for even the seeming neglect of hair is a conscious treatment of it 'by refusing to manipulate it at all' (Olivelle, 1998: 23).

The aim of this essay is to further Gananath Obeyesekere's argument that hair is never just simply *'there'* (1998: xii). Although the explorers' journals contain numerous descriptions of Aboriginal hair and grooming which may appear innocuous and purely descriptive, along with numerous portraits depicting Aboriginal men's hair, styles, and adornments, they are in fact imbued with meaning, reflecting the Europeans' concerns with blackness, race, culture, civilisation, status, and hygiene. Further, the explorers also describe their own interactions with Aboriginal men which revolved around grooming practices, shedding light on the way in which hair enabled both amicable and ambivalent exchanges between natives and navigators.

Strait in some and curld in others

Taken at face value, the explorers' accounts of the physiological nature of Aboriginal men's hair seem to be merely bald description: relatively short and illustrative, and lacking in extensive disquisition. The first record of Aboriginal people's hair was English buccaneer William Dampier's 1697 account of Aborigines from the north-west of Australia. In his account, Dampier invoked familiar images of non-European peoples, stating that 'Their hair is black, short and curled like that of the Negroes, and not long and lank like the common Indians' (1998: 218). His comparison of their hair to that of African 'Negroes' anticipated a debate which was to dominate discussions of Aboriginal men's hair throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: whether or not Aboriginal people had 'woolly' hair.

This eighteenth-century definition and conceptualisation of African hair as 'woolly' intersected with slavery discourses which dehumanised the African body in order to justify its abject treatment. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that this derogatory term signifying 'the short, tightly-curved hair of Negroid peoples' was first used in a runaway slave advertisement in 1697. This type of hair was also ascribed sexual connotations, for according to Allan Peterkin, 'frizzy' hair was seen as 'demonic, licentious, and pubic' (2001: 101). Eventually, the term 'wool' escaped the shackles of slavery and was used by many esteemed eighteenth-century philosophers and ethnographers. With an ostensibly neutral empiricism Johann Gottfried von Herder sought to explain the cause of 'woolly' hair, proposing that excessive heat induced the 'unnatural' generation of 'fine juices in the skin' which caused the hair to become 'wool' (in Eze, 1997: 76). Like contemporary discussions of other supposed 'racial' markers, such investigations insinuated that this hair type was deviant.

The explorers' accounts of Aboriginal hair differ, with various observers either simply determining, or painstakingly denying, that it is 'wool'. The observers on the *Endeavour* could not agree. While the expedition's artist, Sydney Parkinson, claimed that the hair of the men was 'black and frizzled' (1972: 34), botanist Joseph Banks asserted that 'the hair of their heads was bushy and thick but by no means

wooley like that of a Negro' (1998: 24). Captain James Cook claimed that the Aboriginal people of Botany Bay did not have 'wooly frizled hair, but black and lank much like ours' (1955, v. 1: 312). Yet, seven years later, on his third voyage, he finally agreed that the hair of the Adventure Bay Tasmanians 'was as woolly as any Native of Guinea' (Cook, 1967 v. 3, pt. 1: 52). His original editor, John Douglas, noted that 'Captain Cook was very unwilling to allow that the hair of the natives ... was woolly, fancying that his people, who first observed this, had been deceived, from its being clotted with grease and red ochre'. However when his fellow captain, James King, insisted that the Aboriginal Tasmanians' hair was woolly and successfully urged Cook to inspect the hair of some boys and women who did not apply indigenous pomades, Cook 'owned himself satisfied that it was naturally woolly' (cited by Beaglehole, in Cook, 1967, v. 3, pt. 1: 52, fn 2). William Anderson, Cook's surgeon, at first thought that the 'frizzling disposition' of their hair might be a result of the 'grease mix'd with a red paint or ochre which they smear in great abundance over their heads', but upon examining a boy 'who appear'd never to have us'd any' he found it to be 'perfectly woolly' (in Cook, 1967, v. 3, pt 2: 785).

Cook's disparate accounts of the New Hollanders' and Tasmanians' hair seemed to cause some confusion even though they were from different voyages. First Fleet marine Watkin Tench mistakenly alleged that Cook proclaimed the Port Jackson Aborigines' hair to be woolly, and quickly refuted this imagined assertion. He unwittingly emulated Cook when he pointedly stated that 'It is certainly hair' which the Aborigines had, and moreover, 'when regularly combed [it] becomes soon nearly as flexible and docile as our own' (Tench, 1996: 244-5). This was certainly the case for Bennelong, a Port Jackson man who was kidnapped by the British and eventually formed a close relationship with Governor Arthur Phillip and travelled to England for three years. Upon his return in 1795, David Collins, the colony's judge-advocate, noticed that he 'was found to have very long black hair' because he had benefited from 'having some attention paid to his dress while in London' (1975: 459).

Tench's polemical position that Aborigines did in fact possess hair, especially noticeable when rehabilitated in a European manner, reveals the explorers' awareness of the derogatory implications of the term 'wool'. This is even suggested in some of the explorers' careful avoidance of the term, and their favouring of the words 'crispd' or 'frizzed' instead (Parkinson, 1972: 134; Banks, 1998: 99). Further, some of the Frenchmen from the expeditions led by Marc-Joseph Marion-Dufresne, Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and Nicolas Baudin, used the term frizzy (*crépus*) rather than wool (*laineaux*) when describing the Tasmanians' hair. For example Baudin described it as 'frizzy, but not nearly as thick as the Africans' (1974: 344); commander of the *Marquis de Castries* Ambroise Bernard Marie Le Jar du Clesmeur said the Tasmanians have 'frizzled hair' (in Duyker, 1992: 22), whereas second-in-command of the *Mascarin* Julien Crozet compared their hair to the "wool" of Kaffirs' (25), and botanist Jacques de

Labillardière simply states that the 'natives have woolly hair' (in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, 1993: 290). However, this was not a hard and fast rule: Pierre Bernard Milius of the *Naturaliste* combined both terms describing the Tasmanians' hair as 'wool' which is 'very frizzy at least' (1987: 31).

However, the explorers' interest in the Aborigines' natural hair went beyond their locks, for some also noticed their body hair, such as Marion-Dufresne's men, even though their 1772 stay in Tasmania was very brief. Alexandre d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau thought that 'The men's bodies are generally covered with short, fine reddish hair' (in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, 1993: 282). His perception that it was reddish suggests that it was actually very fine, because he thinks it the same colour of their skin, but different to that on their heads. Perhaps he thought this a sign that they were unmanly? According to Kevin Parker in the eighteenth century coarse body hair was a 'harbinger of manhood', and 'downy, transparent hair' the mark of the '*impubere*' (1992: 540-1). D'Hesmivy d'Auribeau's crewmate Jacques-Malo La Motte du Portail also noticed their fine hair, commenting that 'the rest of the body is hardly hairy at all'. He clearly considered this a peculiarity for he pondered its cause: 'I do not know if the small amount of hair which the other parts are covered is the natural condition or whether it has been removed' (in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, 1993: 300). Perhaps the notion that the men had been depilated suggests that the explorers considered their lack of body hair a sign of savagery?

Eighteenth-century travellers and philosophers were struck by Amerindians' apparent hairlessness and attributed it to a range of different causes. Some considered it a savage custom; The eighteenth-century naturalist and philosopher, the Comte de Buffon, claimed that the 'Savages of Brasil ... pull the hair out of ... every other part of their bodies, which gives them an uncommon and fierce aspect' (1781, v. 3: 184). Others attributed it to natural causes: Louis-Alexandre Devérité claimed it was a 'sign of the feebleness of their constitution' (1786, v.2: 233, cited in Jaenen, 1982: 51). Meanwhile Jacques-Vincent Delacroix considered it a sign of the 'simplicity of their nourishment' and a consequence of their 'defect of appetite and their indifference to sex' (1771, v. 1: 167, cited in Jaenen, 1982: 51). Irrespective of the cause, the Tasmanian men's sparse body hair was considered odd and worthy of comment. Yet, it is difficult to ascertain whether the men were in fact relatively hairless because an account by Baudin suggests otherwise.

On a rare visit ashore the post-captain, accompanied by captain Emmanuel Hamelin, the botanist Jean Baptiste Louis Claude Leschenault and the artist Nicolas Martin Petit, encountered three Tasmanian men (Péron, 1975: 185). After having met them earlier in the morning, the Frenchmen were happy to invite them over after first negotiating with them to abandon their arms. Soon the islanders were 'as familiar as if [they and the Frenchmen] were very much in the habit

of being together', and happily rifled through the strangers' pockets. After examining their possessions the men then 'turned to [their] clothes' and 'in order to humour them in everything' the Frenchmen then displayed their chests 'about which they seemed very curious'. However, it seemed to be Leschenault's chest which 'gave rise to any excitement' for upon seeing it the Tasmanians gave 'great exclamations and even greater shouts of laughter'. Baudin assumed this to be because the doctor was 'hairless' (1974: 320). Though he did not describe the Aboriginal men's body hair their reaction suggests that they found a smooth chest unusual so they must have been relatively hirsute themselves. Indeed it appeared to the Frenchmen that the Tasmanians considered hairlessness to be a sign of femininity for sub-lieutenant Jacques de Saint Cricq noticed that, 'When they saw a beardless one among us, they would immediately feel his breast and often they would even unbutton his waistcoat, to make certain that he was not a woman' (in Plomley, 1983: 141).

There are far too few accounts to ascertain whether or not the New Holland men were hirsute, however. Banks claimed that they were when he observed that 'they seemd to have a redundancy of hair upon those parts of the body where it commonly grows' (1998: 24). He must have found the amount of body hair striking because it was one of the first physical characteristics he described, straight after their skin colour and even before describing the hair on their heads. Collins' account, on the other hand, suggests they were not unusually hairy, for he singled out one extraordinary individual known as 'old We-rahng', who was 'remarkably hairy' and 'in his whole manner seemed to have more of the brute and less of the human species about him than any of his countrymen' (1975: 459). Collins' description of We-rahng is evidently exaggerated (he 'passed for an orang-outang' and had arms 'of an uncommon length'), invoking the *homines sylvestris*, as imagined from the medieval period until the sixteenth century. This folkloric 'wild man' was 'usually pictured with a body covered in hair' (Jahoda, 1999: 5), and was reflected in early European depictions of the Amerindian as 'hairy, naked lustful, uncanny, unpredictable, uncultured ... [and] fulfilling his bestial instincts' (Jaenan, 1982: 51). Thus despite the burgeoning rationalism of the period, pre-modern imaginings permeated European representations of Aboriginal men.

These numerous examples suggest that the explorers' descriptions of Aboriginal hair must be read in the context of contemporary European beliefs about race and gender, prejudices about so-called wool as a human attribute, and representations of mythic creatures. Yet it was not only the western discourses which mitigated the reliability of the explorers' representations of Aboriginal men's hair: they were also confounded by indigenous hairdressing practices.

Tied in rolled knots and powdered with ochre

The wealth of illustrations depicting Aboriginal people accumulated during the late eighteenth century showcase a range of hairdressing and grooming practices. Petit and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur's illustrations are particularly useful for demonstrating the techniques used: shaving, cropping, and the application of ochres and other materials to bind and adorn the hair. Recent anthropological studies have begun to examine the significance and meaning of hairdressing practices for particular societies, especially those in Africa and Asia. Unfortunately, the disparity between the range of styles documented in these early illustrations and the relatively homogenous hairstyles depicted in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs, suggests that assimilationist colonial practices deleteriously and fairly rapidly affected indigenous hairdressing, so it is difficult to ascertain what the different hairstyles meant for Aboriginal people. Their significance is open to historical interpretation. As Robert Houston suggests 'Wearing hair or a wig in a certain way may have had meaning for the wearer, but what historians observe is the reaction of others to a hairstyle' (2003: 52). The explorers recorded a range of reactions, and while the most positive suggested amazement rather than appreciation, and many were negative, we find that their responses were largely born out of incomprehension and ignorance. Indigenous pomades and powders were perceived as mere dirt, and seemingly neglected hairstyles as an artefact of their limited technology.

First Fleet marine Captain John Hunter simply considered that 'they seem to have no method of cleaning or combing, it is therefore filthy and matted' (1968: 41). His presumption that Aboriginal hair was simply filthy was shared by many of the explorers. Hunter's lieutenant William Bradley, in his brief description of the Aboriginal men he encountered, made the curt assessment that their hair was 'clotted with dirt and vermin' (1969: 73). His derogatory tone reflected contemporary attitudes to hygiene, as Europeans of differing classes had long relieved themselves of the pains of keeping their hair clean and louse-free by simply shaving their heads and wearing wigs (Woodforde, 1972: 22 & 37). Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the wearing of wigs was *de rigueur* for various reasons, including fashion and prestige, but also cleanliness. For example, Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist, claimed that he had 'no stomach' for wigs, but only reluctantly wore them as 'the pains of keeping [his] hair clean [were] so great' (Vol. 4, 1970 – 84: 130, cited in Festa, 2005: 53).

Alternatively, Hunter's tone may reveal his growing frustration with having his ethnographic endeavours circumvented. The apparent dirtiness of the Aborigines' hair prevented him from making a more conclusive physiological description of it other than saying it was 'bushy' and 'longer about their heads' (Bradley, 1969: 73). Buffon had noticed that indigenous hair treatments had made it difficult to

ascertain the physical nature of their hair and consequently determine their racial classification. He complained about the difficulty of determining whether the 'Hottentots' of southern Africa were 'Negroes' because of their hair, 'for they never either comb or wash it, but daily rub on their heads vast quantities of grease, soot, and dust, which makes their hair resemble a fleece of wool stuffed with dirt' (Buffon, Vol. 3, 1781: 153). Buffon was concerned that such unguents masked the texture of the hair and made it appear like wool which consequently undermined his thesis that they were 'not true Negroes, but blacks beginning to approach to whiteness' (155-6).

The explorers' descriptions of the Aborigines' apparently dirty hair also reveal the power dynamics at play in first encounters. Eleven months after the First Fleet's arrival Governor Phillip decided that he was 'Tired of this petty state of warfare and endless uncertainty' which existed between the British and Aborigines, and was determined to throw down the gauntlet. He resolved to 'captur[e] some of them' in order either to 'inflame' them and escalate the conflict so he could decisively put an end to it, or to 'induce an intercourse' (Tench, 1996: 94). So on New Year's Eve his marines were despatched to 'seize and carry off some of the natives', though they only successfully wrangled one man named Arabanoo, who saw out the rest of his short life in the settlement. After being given a tour of Port Jackson and a meal at the Governor's house, he was then coerced into having his hair cut and being shaved (95-7).

Unsurprisingly Arabanoo was alarmed when his captors approached him armed with scissors and a razor, for he refused to 'submit to these operations until he had seen them performed on another person'. Realising that they meant to cut his hair he 'readily acquiesced', and had it 'closely cut, his head combed and his beard shaved'. To what extent his acquiescence was volitional is questionable. He was at the mercy of his captors, and having already been disciplined for wiping his hands on one of the Governor's chairs he would have had an inkling of how he was expected to behave. Further, Arabanoo had little opportunity to resist the British barber as his want of English meant he could not articulate his refusal. He was not only coerced into submitting to being groomed, but also into modifying his own behaviour in accordance with British decorum.

Just as Tench expected, the prisoner's hair 'was filled with vermin' and he was repulsed to see that Arabanoo ate the lice, believing this was out of 'either revenge or pleasure', and not considering that this may have been an indigenous practice. The British promptly 'express[d] disgust and abhorrence' which made him leave 'it off' (97). Tench's expectation was no doubt shaped by the European misperception that the Aborigines were dirty and also by the aforementioned lengths eighteenth-century Europeans went to in order to prevent lice: shaving their hair and wearing wigs. Yet, lice was not necessarily an endemic problem for Aboriginal people, as Banks was very surprised to observe that 'Dirty as these people are

they seem to be intirely free from Lice'. European travellers had noticed the prevalence of lice even 'among the most cleanly Indians' so Banks found it 'remarkable' that the Aborigines did not suffer because he thought 'their hair was generaly Matted and filthy enough' (1998: 100).

The prevailing perception of the Aboriginal men's hair as dirty meant that the explorers did not recognise that New Holland men deliberately manipulated their hair, so written descriptions of hairstyles are almost entirely absent. Even those which describe the look of the hair explicitly state that the Aborigines completely ignored their hair. For instance, Banks claims that 'In all of them indeed it ... seemd as if seldom disturbd with the Combing even of their fingers, much less to have any oil or grease put into it' (100). It is naïve to assume that the Aboriginal men simply left their hair 'natural'. Obeyesekere asserts that hair is not a 'natural symbol' and 'must be dealt with; thus everywhere there is culture control of hair', even amongst those who 'keep it in a culturally defined "natural" state' (1998: xii).

So it is short-sighted to assume, as Banks does, that the Aboriginal men deliberately refrained from dressing their hair. Though the descriptions of New Holland hairstyles are relatively rare, there are a few valuable accounts. Baudin's naturalist François Péron describes the hairstyles of some men from King Sound, and while not explicitly stated, these descriptions that the styles may have reflected the individuals' age. 'The three eldest, who could have been forty to fifty years old', had 'naturally curly' hair which was 'trimmed all around', whilst the two younger men, 'judged to be from sixteen to eighteen years old', had 'their long hair ... gathered back into a knot' and 'powdered with ochre' (Péron and Freycinet, 2003: 122-3). In New South Wales Collins noticed that 'natives who inhabit the south shore of Botany Bay' would 'divide the hair into small parcels, each of which they mat together with gum, and form them into lengths like the thrums of mop' (1975: 457). While Governor Phillip did not describe or perhaps even notice the men's hairstyles, he did at least observe that they adorned their hair with 'the teeth of dogs, and other animals, the claws of lobsters, and several small bones, which they fasten there by means of gum'. He even noticed that only men were thus adorned, suggesting that it may have had some gender specific significance (Phillip, 1970: 76). However, it is the illustrations by the artists of the various expeditions which provide a valuable catalogue of the myriad ways in which Aboriginal men wore their hair, highlighting the great significance that it must have had in their cultures.

The most common hairstyle depicted is short, even length, unadorned curly hair. Key examples of this style are depicted in portraits by Baudin's artists, Lesueur and Petit, the First Fleet artist, known simply as the Port Jackson Painter, d'Entrecasteaux's artist Antoine Piron, and Cook's artists Parkinson and John Webber. Again, it is difficult to assess how commonplace this hairstyle was because of the new influence of race theory on ethnographic portraiture. Bernard Smith

claims that new conventions were established during this period, better 'suited to the new needs of the science of comparative anatomy. The older empirical distinctions that included an interest in dress and ornament [were] to be ignored' (1992: 187). An example of this was the esteemed eighteenth-century naturalist and comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier's edict to artists that they should depict all of their indigenous subjects with the same simple hairstyle in their drawings so that it would leave the shape of the skull visible, as he was more desirous of documenting their anatomical features than their cultural practices (1978: 175).

Perhaps the most intriguing hairstyle depicted in the portraits is Petit's illustration of Mororé's, whose long hair was pulled back off his face and bound with white cloth into an elaborate arrangement resembling a ship's prow (No. 20038.2 in Bonnemains et al., 1988: 173). Mororé also wore a double binding headband, with the wider section sitting over his hairline on his forehead, and another narrower band sitting back towards his crown. This portrait was drawn in 1802, 14 years after the establishment of the settlement, and the use of cloth suggests that it was a trade item or gift from the new colonists; in Port Jackson Petit's compatriot, Milius, noticed that the men who had most contact with the British wore a cloth bandeau around their forehead (1987: 48). Yet, it does not seem as though this contact had any great influence on the indigenous hair styles. Just as some male African slaves adopted and adapted Western hairstyles shortly after arriving in the New World, suggesting they were '*bricoleurs*, drawing from both their African past and their American present to create a style that was new' (White and White 1998: 50-2), so Mororé's hairstyle may have been a cultural adaptation, a *mélange* of British material culture and indigenous style and meaning. Unfortunately, it is impossible to recover what this style said about his identity, as there are no other illustrations or accounts of similar hairstyles.

One local style in particular captured the attention of the crews led by Marion-Dufresne, Cook, d'Entrecasteaux and Baudin. Marion-Dufresne's men, like Cook himself, were very concise, only noting that the Tasmanian men's hair was 'anointed with red ointment' (Cook, 1967, v. 3, pt. 1: 52; Duyker, 1992: 33, 42 & 47). William Ellis enlarged on this description slightly, noticing the texture as well as the colour: 'their hair (which was short and wooly) and beard were formed into small distinct lumps, with a mixture of reddish brown earth, and some kind of liquid, which appeared to be of an oily nature'. He thought that 'this mode of dressing their hair gave them an uncommon appearance' (Ellis, 1782: 17): the reader can only wonder whether it was uncommon to the English or uncommon compared to the rest of the Aboriginal men. William Bayly, the astronomer, was clearly intrigued by the Tasmanians' appearance because he gave a more exacting description of their hairstyle, noticing that the 'reddish clay' they used was formed 'into little round lumps about the bigness of a middle sized Pea', so that the 'head & beard of the men are hung with little balls on to the ends of the Hairs' (in Cook, 1967, v.3, pt.1: 52, fn 3). Bayly's evocative account is an important counterpoint to other

concise descriptions because it addresses the Tasmanian men's sartorial expression, and reveals that some demarcated themselves through their hairstyles. Yet, Bayly's journal was not published, so his description has only penetrated the public domain as a mere footnote in Beaglehole's edition of Cook's journal. It is mainly through the renowned though taciturn Cook that we know anything of the Tasmanian's sartorial nature.

Another explorer who echoed Bayly's supposition that this hairstyle was considered special is Baudin, whose journal, like Bayly's, is relatively unknown. Although he captained the expedition his premature death meant that it was his naturalists Peron and Freycinet who were recognised in print. Baudin's sea-log was not published until 1974 in an English translation, and his historical journal was not published in French until 2000. If these journals had not been rediscovered by twentieth-century historians we would have even less idea of the cultural significance of this Tasmanian hairstyle. Baudin's meticulous account notes that of the group he met, only one wore this red-daubed style, making him 'remarkable for the elegance' of his appearance. At first sight Baudin thought the man wore a 'sort of wig-shaped cap' possibly 'made of seaweed', so was determined to have a closer inspection. After further scrutiny the Frenchmen 'realised that it was his own hair', which had been 'Divided into small strips about 1" long, and smoothed down with grease and reddish-brown dirt' forming 'a skull-cap over his head'. The Europeans were transfixed by this style, noticing that 'every movement he made caused it to shake in a different way' (Baudin, 1974: 303). This exquisite account gives a particularly detailed description of the man's hairstyle, which corresponds to Petit's illustration of Ouriaga (No. 20015.2, in Bonnemains et al, 1988: 148).

Baudin's account was also unusual because he did not rely on many analogies to describe their hair. For other observers, analogies were often drawn on. For example, Julien Crozet described the Tasmanians' hair as 'tied in rolled knots and powdered with ochre' (in Duyker, 1992: 25). This nonchalant account resists exoticising the men's hair, suggesting that his eye assimilated their styling practices with the contemporary European fashions of wearing boucles, rolls, and queues, and dusting hair with powders and pomades. Other analogies to western styles could be more controversial. Baudin's midshipman Joseph Ransonnet implicitly compared the Tasmanian men's style to that of European women, for he claimed that they have very beautiful hair formed into a chignon and powdered with red earth (n.d). The chignon, a roll or coil of hair worn at the nape of the neck, was an exclusively female hairstyle which came into fashion in the 1780s, so Ransonnet's description seemed to feminise the men. Unfortunately, there are no corresponding portraits of men with this hairstyle in the accompanying *Atlas* so it is difficult to assess the appositeness of his description. The proliferation of descriptions of this particular red-daubed hairstyle led the explorers to waive the new ethnographic dogma of ignoring cultural manifestations in favour of the physical attributes.

More an encumbrance than a mark of dignity

The ad hoc melding of cultural and racial imperatives in the Europeans' ethnography was also reflected in their descriptions of Aboriginal beards. The explorers observed that most of the Aboriginal men wore beards which some thought was simply left to grow naturally. In his general overview of New South Wales, Banks stated that 'the beards of several were bushy and thick' (1998: 99), and Bradley observed that the Port Jackson men's were 'very long and bushy' (1969: 73). In Tasmania Anderson observed that the men wore 'their beards long' (in Cook, 1967, v. 3, pt 2: 785). However, as stated earlier, scholars have found that hair is never simply left natural, so this was a naïve belief contested by other accounts. Phillip asserted that 'the men keep their beards short' and even speculated on their methods: 'it is thought by scorching off the hair' (in Hunter, 1968: 76). Further, in Tasmania the explorers' accounts differ so markedly that it could not simply be variations in beard lengths which explain the inconsistencies. For example, Marion Dufresne's crewman Le Dez stated that 'they have very little beard' (in Duyker, 1992: 33) while d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau claimed 'they wear a fairly long beard' which he thought 'complement[ed] the face to perfection' (in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, 1993: 282). D'Entrecasteaux's botanist, Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière, thought that the Tasmanians 'suffer[ed] their beards to grow' (1800: 290), thereby not only describing beard length but also giving expression to a general European dislike at this time of facial hair.

The eighteenth century was an unusual period according to Richard Corson because it was 'one of the few times that almost total beardlessness was ever practiced' in Europe (1971: 302). Penelope Byrd claims that while wigs were in fashion 'beards and moustaches were virtually never seen' (1979: 159). Houston noted that growing a beard was so unusual that it represented 'male eccentricity or madness and an affront to social convention' (2003: 52). Yet even though most European men shaved off their facial hair, the ability to grow a luxuriant beard was considered essential in some quarters because it was a marker of both masculinity and race. Carolus Linnaeus exclaimed that 'God gave men beards for ornaments and to distinguish them from women' (1971: 157 cited in Schiebinger, 1990: 391). Londa Schiebinger claims that eighteenth-century philosophers believed that 'excess bodily fluids' such as 'resorbed semen' caused the beard to grow, proving one's manliness (1993: 125). Further, this sign of masculinity was considered unique to European men, reflecting the eighteenth-century belief that the beard was also a racial sign; 'Where', Charles White mused 'shall we find, unless in the European ... that majestic beard?' (1799: 134 cited in Rosenthal, 2004: 2). So the beard represented a contradictory, yet widely understood, complex of meanings in eighteenth-century Europe: the physical ability to grow a beard was essential due to its racial and gender significance, yet facial hair was abhorred by the fashionable in favour of shaving which represented civility and rationality.

Before Linnaeus came up with his revolutionary taxonomy Europeans had devised less differentiated categories of human populations. For instance, Richard Bradley detailed the comparatively minor differences between Europeans and Amerindians in *A Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature* (1721), which were solely based on their facial hair. He believed that of the purported 'five sorts of men' the most superior two were 'the white men, which are Europeans that have beards; and a sort of white man in America (as I am told) that only differ from us in having no beards' (Horowitz, 1997: 1182). Yet according to others the indigenous Americans' subjugation at the hands of the seemingly superior and bearded Conquistadores was linked to their supposedly natural smooth chins. Schiebinger contends that to the eighteenth-century natural historians this 'proved that they belonged to a lower class of humans', and to some even 'a separate species' (1990: 391).

That a beard could easily be manipulated through shaving meant that it was not a reliable racial indicator in the eighteenth century. Buffon and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach recognised that Amerindians deliberately plucked the hairs from their chins, and Schiebinger reveals that some contemporaries believed that 'if an Indian shaved from the time of his youth, he would develop the same lush beard of the European' (392). So if not considered an immutable racial sign, facial hair was at least seen to represent cultural deviancy, though this was only determined in accordance with western whims and fashions. Elliott Horowitz argues that depending on the particular non-European Other, Europeans demarcated themselves by instituting a facial hair fashion that was the direct opposite. In fifteenth-century Spain, for example, the beard was closely associated with 'the Muslim and the Jew', so beardlessness became popular amongst Christians. This distinction was affirmed by the passing of laws which decreed 'Henceforward, Jews and Moors are not to shave their beards... but are to wear them long' (Horowitz, 1997: 1188). Yet beards came back into fashion when Europeans encountered the largely beardless Amerindians, as they were 'perceived, on some level, as a sign of strength, conquest and empire' (1194).

In their eighteenth-century encounters with Aborigines, Europeans did not have to refashion their facial hair as they found that they were already easily differentiated from the bearded indigenes. In some cases the beard appeared to exaggerate the ostensibly savage qualities of the Aboriginal men, especially their fierceness. This was apparent in Baudin's sailors' disturbing accounts of the Shark Bay men (see Konishi, 2008). Two parties of sailors had rowed ashore so that they could fish with nets, but had a terrifying encounter with the local men. One group claimed that as they were trying to land, a group of 'extraordinarily big, strong men' suddenly ran down the beach and 'prevented their going ashore'. The 'hundred or more' men were described as 'giants', and apart from their prodigious size, the only physical characteristic that the terrified Frenchmen noticed was their 'long, black beards [which] grew down to the middle of their chests' (Péron and Freycinet, 2003: 134; Baudin, 1974: 506). The

second party of fishermen returned with a similar story, and were equally terrified, so Baudin's naturalists decided to go ashore and investigate the matter, but upon meeting a group of Aboriginal men found that they were 'of ordinary height – even small' (Péron and Freycinet, 2003: 146). The fact that these apparently cool, calm, and collected men of science, unlike the terrified sailors, did not even find their beards worth mentioning reveals that European reactions to facial hair were an elastic indicator of the indigenes' fierceness, and the Europeans' own fearfulness.

Europeans imagined that in shaving off Aboriginal men's beards, they could perhaps inspire some kind of accord. While the visiting explorers were unable to test this idea, the men of the First Fleet, with their great number and closer contact with Aboriginal people, attempted to do so within their first month of arriving. Tench records that when 'some young gentlemen belonging to the *Sirius*' one day met an old man and noticed that he 'had a beard of considerable length' (Tench, 1996: 59), they, attempting to follow Phillip's plan to 'win their affections', offered to 'rid him of [it], if he pleased' by 'Stroking their chins and showing him the smoothness of them'. After a while the old man finally understood their 'signal' and acquiesced. Using a penknife and 'making use of the best substitute for lather he could find' the marines shaved the man. Perhaps out of novelty or a genuine preference the old man appeared to appreciate his new smooth chin, since a few days later he was seen 'paddling alongside the *Sirius* in his canoe and pointing to his beard' which was interpreted as him wanting to be shaved again. The sailors invited the man aboard, but he refused, so 'a barber was sent down into the boat alongside the canoe' and 'leaning over the gunnel' shaved the man. The man's apparent delight suggested to Tench that the beard held no special significance in Aboriginal society and was more 'an encumbrance than a mark of dignity'; it was seen as a burdensome artefact of their limited barbering technology. More significantly, Tench hoped that the intimate act of shaving and being shaved, in which the recipient's vulnerability attests his trust, was also a culturally transcendent means of bonding, heralding the 'dawning of cordiality' between the two groups (60).

This was not an isolated case during the formative years of the Port Jackson settlement, as Phillip noted that 'several of them ... seemed to take great delight in being shaved' (1970: 76). Even when the men 'had no beard', as was the case with the young man Immeerawanyee, they still eagerly participated in this western grooming ritual by 'being combed and having his hair clipped' (Tench, 1996: 145). However, it seems unlikely that the Britons were happy to play barber to the Aboriginal men simply to maintain friendly relations, and there must have been other benefits. For instance, as a strategic initiative, the First Fleeters would have immediately been able to identify who chose to consort with them, and who were still potentially hostile, just by the appearance of their facial hair. In addition, as with their attempts to clothe the Aborigines, grooming would have contributed to their attempts to assimilate and civilise Aboriginal men.

Just like Arabanoo, Bennelong had been shaved and groomed when he was kidnapped by the British. He stayed in the settlement for five months during which he became, at least to British eyes, integrated into western life by wearing clothes and learning English. Yet, when the opportunity arose he absconded from the colony and returned to his people where, much to the distress of the Europeans, he reverted to his own customs, by abandoning his western garb and allowing his beard to grow. Indeed when they saw him again he was 'so far disfigured by a long beard' that it was 'not without difficulty' that the officers 'recognised their old acquaintance' (135). Upon realising that he would meet with the Governor again, Bennelong asked for a razor so that he could shave his beard. The British assumed that 'the length of his beard seemed to annoy him much', so he was given a pair of scissors and he diligently demonstrated that 'he had not forgotten how to use such an instrument' as he clipped away at his hair. But perhaps his beard was not an encumbrance? Rather, Bennelong may have learnt that this was what his former captors expected of him following his long incarceration. Historians have noted that in many different cultures and times removing hair and shaving was a form of control and punishment (Byrd and Tharp, 2001: 10-11; Woodforde, 1972: 3; White and White, 1998: 40). However, the Britons must have expressed their admiration for his newly smooth chin, which possibly led Bennelong to infer that acquiescing to shaving his beard was a means of manipulating the settlers who evidently wanted their potential envoy back.

One week later Bennelong again met some of the officers and behaved in a far more arrogant fashion. In front of his family and friends, some of whom were 'timorous and unwilling to approach' the Britons, Bennelong received a fine present of a 'hatchet and a fish' and then 'called loudly for' some 'bread and beef' which he offered to his nervous associates, of whom only two 'tasted the beef'. Once finished he then 'made a motion to be shaved' and to the 'great admiration of his countrymen' he was promptly shaved by the barber who was present. Bennelong appears to be having fun at the Englishmen's expense, tantalising their desires to assimilate him and have him return to the colony. He may also have been showing off in front of his countrymen, for they 'laughed and exclaimed' when he was shaved, but would not 'consent to undergo it' only 'suffer[ing] their beards to be clipped with a pair of scissors' (Tench, 1996:142). Such spectacles illustrate that the Western investment of meaning in facial hair and shaving came to be recognised by the indigenes, and how even such a seemingly mundane practice could be imbued with the ambivalences of the colonial encounter.

Conclusion

While hair may essentially be 'a mere lifeless extension' of the body, it has been imbued with meaning in various cultures and civilisations. In eighteenth-century Europe it was ascribed political, cultural, hygienic, and, most significantly, racial importance. And clearly it was

highly regarded within Aboriginal societies as demonstrated by the wide range of hairstyles and adornments used. Yet, there is more to hair than just its materiality and fashion. The explorers' accounts reveal that the intimacies connected to the maintenance of hair, through various cleaning, grooming, and styling practices, formed a basis for the Europeans' interactions with the Aboriginal men. These close connections could be coercive and border on punitive, as in the cases of the Aboriginal men captured and forcefully bathed, clipped and shaved, or they could invoke amity, as the novelty of being temporarily transformed (for hair has the luxury of always growing back) could elicit amusement and awe. How hair is fashioned can also be a crucial sign of masculinity, especially in the case of beards and other facial hair. The explorers' accounts of beards are particularly interesting because they provide a window onto a different era, in which beards were paradoxically understood as both a sign of racial superiority and cultural inferiority. This highlights the curiosity and complexity of the period, and inspires even greater wonder about how the seemingly polar-opposite European and Aboriginal men were able to find some brief moments of amiable camaraderie over some soap and a razor.

Shino Konishi is a research fellow at the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Australian National University. Her doctoral research explored eighteenth-century cross-cultural encounters, and European representations of the Aboriginal male body.

Bibliography

Banks, J 1998, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks: The Australian Journey*, P Brunton (ed.), Harper Collins Publishers in association with the State Library of New South Wales, Pymble.

Baudin, N 1974, *The Journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin Commander-in-Chief of the Corvettes Géographe and Naturaliste*, C Cornell (trans.), Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide.

Bonnemains, J, Forsyth, E and Smith, B (eds.) 1988, *Baudin in Australian Waters: The Artwork of the French Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands 1800-1804*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Bradley, W 1969, *A Voyage to New South Wales: The Journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786-1792*, Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

Buffon, G Comte de 1781, *Natural history, general and particular, by the Count de Buffon. Translated into English. Illustrated with three hundred and one copper-plates, and occasional notes and*

observations by the translator, W Smellie (trans.), 8 Vols, W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London.

Byrd, A D, and Tharp, L L 2001, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*, St Martin's Press, New York.

Byrd, P 1979, *The Male Image: Fashion in Britain 1300-1970*, B.t. Batsford Ltd, London.

Coates, S 1999, 'Scissors or Sword? The Symbolism of a Medieval Haircut', *History Today*, vol. 49, iss. 5, pp. 7-13.

Collins, D 1975, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, B Fletcher (ed.), A.H & A.W. Reed in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney.

Cook, J 1955-67, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyage of Discovery*, J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), 4 vols, Hakluyt Society, London.

Corson, R 1971, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years*, Peter Owen, London.

Cuvier, G 1978, 'Note Instructive sur les Recherches a Faire Relativement aux Différences Anatomiques des Diverses Races d'Hommes' in *Aux Origins de L'Anthropologie Française: Les Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII*, J Copand and J Jamin (eds.), Le Sycomore, Paris, pp. 171-176.

Dampier, 1998, *A New Voyage Round the World: The Journal of a Buccaneer*, M Becken (ed.), Hummingbird Press, London.

Diderot, D and d'Alembert J L R (eds.) 1751-1772, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers par une Société de Gens de lettres*, 17 vols, Chez Briasson et al, Paris.

DiPiero, T 1999, 'Missing Links: Whiteness and the Color of Reason in the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 40, iss.2, pp. 155-176.

Duyker, E (ed.) 1992, *The Discovery of Tasmania: Journal Extracts from the Expeditions of Abel Janszoon Tasman and Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne 1642 & 1772*, St. David's Park Publishing, Hobart.

Ellis, W 1782, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke, in His Majesty's Ships Resolution and Discovery, During the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780*, G. Robinson, Pater-noster Row; J. Sewell, Cornhill; and J. Debrett, London.

Eze, E C (ed.) 1997, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge (Mass.).

Festa, L 2005, 'Personal Effects: Wigs and Possessive Individualism in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 47-90.

Hilebeitel, A 1998, 'Introduction: Hair Tropes', in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, A Hilebeitel and B D Miller (eds.), State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 1-9.

Horowitz, E 1997, 'The New World and the Changing Face of Europe', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol 28, no. 4, pp. 1181-1201.

Houston, R 2003, 'The Face of Madness in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 49-66.

Hunter, J 1968, *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson ...*, Australiana Facsimile Editions No. 148, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide.

Jaenen, C J 1982, "Les Sauvages Américains": Persistence into the 18th Century of Traditional French Concepts and Constructs for Comprehending Amerindians', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 43-56.

Jahoda, G 1999, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, Routledge, London and New York.

Konishi, S 2008, "Inhabited by a race of formidable giants": French Explorers, Aborigines, and the Endurance of the Fantastic in the Great South Land, 1803', *Australian Humanities Review*, iss. 44, pp. 7-22.

Labillardière, J 1800, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, Performed by Order of the Constituent Assembly, During the Years 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794, John Stockdale, Piccadilly, London.

Milius, P B 1987, *Recit du Voyage aux Terres Australes par Pierre Bernard Milius, Second sur le Naturaliste dans l'expédition Baudin (1800-1804)*, J Bonnemains and P Hauguel, (eds.), *Société havraise d'études diverses*, Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre, Le Havre.

Obeyesekere, G 1998, 'Foreword', in *Hair: its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, A Hilebeitel and B D Miller (eds), State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. xi - xiv.

Olivelle, P 1998, 'Hair and Society: Social Significance of Hair in South Asian Traditions', in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian*

Cultures, A Hilebeitel and B D Miller (eds.), State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 11-49.

Parker, K 1992, 'Winckelmann, Historical Difference, and the Problem of a Boy', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 532-44.

Parkinson, S 1972, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in his Majesty's Ship The Endeavour*, Australiana Facsimiles Editions A34, Libraries Board of South Australia, Adelaide.

Péron, F 1975, *A Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Hemisphere*, performed by order of the Emperor Napoleon, during the years 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1804, Mark Walsh Publishing, North Melbourne.

Péron, F, and Freycinet, L 2003, *Voyage of the Discovery to the Southern Lands: Book IV*, Comprising Chapters XXII to XXXIV, 2nd Ed., 1824, C Cornell (trans.), The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide.

Peterkin, A 2001, *One Thousand Beards: A Cultural History of Facial Hair*, Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver.

Phillip, A 1970, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay: with contributions by other Officers of the First Fleet and observations on affairs of the time by Lord Auckland*, J J Auchmuty (ed.), Published in Association with the Royal Australian Historical Society and Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Plomley, B, and Piard-Bernier, J (trans. and eds.) 1993, *The General: the Visits of the Expedition Led by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux to Tasmanian Waters in 1792 and 1793*, Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston.

Plomley, N J B 1983, *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines*, 1802, Blubberhead Press, Hobart.

Ransonnet, J n.d., 'lettre adressée à Monsieur Péron date de "Paris le 1er mars"', Cat no. 09029, Collection Lesueur du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Harve, Le Havre.

Rosenthal, A 2004, 'Raising Hair', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 1-16.

Schiebinger, L 1990, 'The Anatomy of Difference: Race and Sex in Eighteenth-Century Science', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 387-405.

Schiebinger, L 1993, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Beacon Press, Boston.

Smith, B 1992, *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, Carlton.

Tench, W 1996, *1788: Comprising 'A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay' and 'A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson'*, T Flannery (ed.), The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne.

White, S, and White, G 1998, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

Woodforde, J 1972, *The Strange Story of False Hair*, Drake Publishers Inc, New York.

© borderlands ejournal 2008