

Darwin's Hunch: Science, Race and the Search for Human Origins

By Christa Kuljian

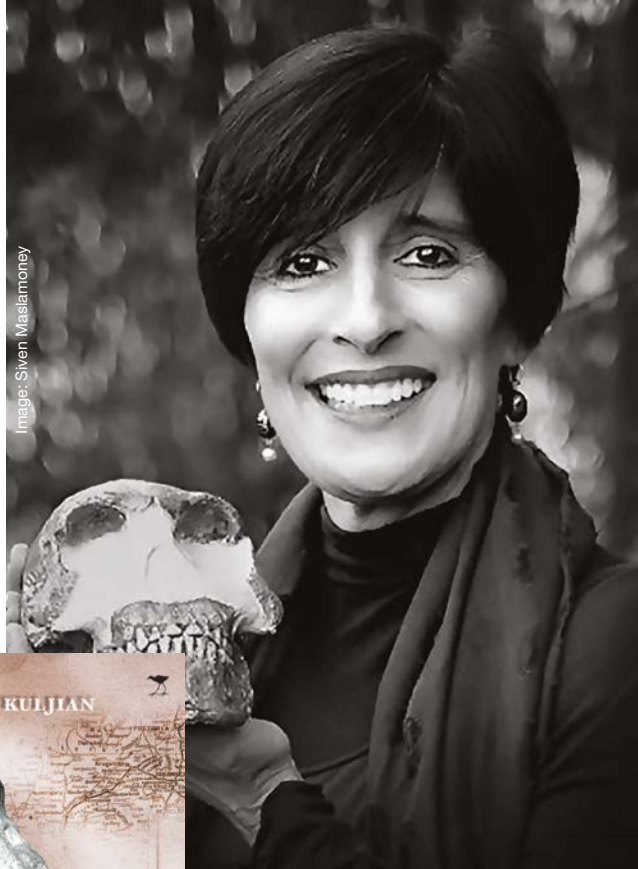
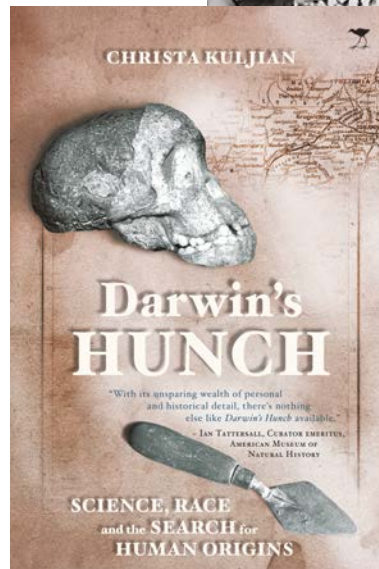
(Jacana, 2016)

As time passes, daylight and shadows move across a wall hung with face masks. Some almost cease to look human; others emerge as recognisably so. Such is the effect that may come to mind when reading this book by Christa Kuljian (MA 2007), a research associate at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research.

"Science is moulded by its social and political context," she writes in the introduction to her highly readable take on a subject so closely linked with Wits University over the years. Charles Darwin's hunch was that humans shared common origins in Africa, and Wits scientists have been pre-eminent in exploring that idea, all the way from fossil-hunting to the anatomy of living people and to breakthroughs in genetics.


The book, Kuljian explains, is guided by questions like: "How have the changing scientific views about race, and racism, affected the efforts to understand human evolution?" and "How have the beliefs of individual scientists, and the times in which they lived, shaped the narrative of human origins?"

Wits scientists like Robert Broom, Raymond Dart, Phillip Tobias, Himla Soodyall and Lee Berger come to life as characters in the book, which is illustrated, indexed and supported by pages of notes and sources. Equally, the author strives to restore the human dignity of individuals whose



bodies and lives were sometimes treated, in the name of science (not to mention politics), in ways that appall us now.

Part 1, "Searching for Difference", covers the period when scientists were preoccupied with looking for differences between anatomical forms and with grouping them into types. Part 2, "Searching for Humanity", shows how this approach began to shift, along with our ideas about human nature itself, and Part 3, "Searching for Unity", covers the period in which scientists have come to accept that "biologically, race has little meaning".

The book helps the average reader to understand the evolution of knowledge as well as our knowledge of evolution. It was shortlisted for the Alan Paton Award for Non-Fiction. 

Apartheid Guns and Money

By Hennie van Vuuren
(Jacana Media, 2017)

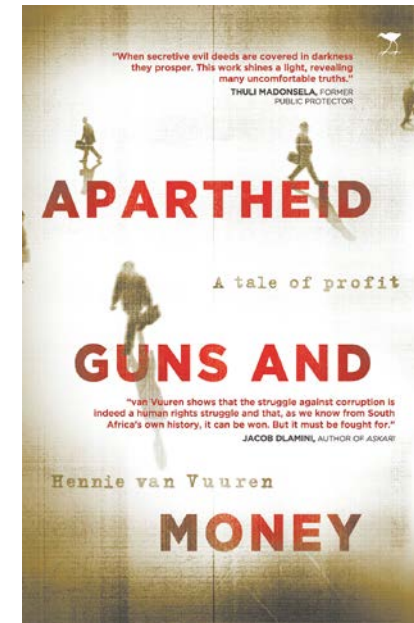
Apartheid Guns and Money is "probably the single most important book that has been written about South Africa for the last 20 years," said Achille Mbembe, Research Professor at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research, at the book's launch in May. It gives us "a deeper look at the long history of state capture in South Africa".

The author, Hennie van Vuuren (BA 1998, BA Hons 1998), and a team of researchers have exposed some of the economic crimes that propped up apartheid. Heads of state, arms dealers, bankers and many more were enriched by flouting arms sanctions and laundering the money that paid for weapons.

The book debunks the myth that the apartheid regime was self-sufficient and isolated, says Van Vuuren. It sets out the way the regime beat sanctions: through state secrecy and security; a secret war economy in which corporations were accomplices; laundering of money by banks; and powerful allies and their proxies.

From 1977 to 1994, about half a trillion rand in today's value was moved offshore to procure weapons for the apartheid state, Van Vuuren says. At least 47 countries collaborated to break arms, oil and trade sanctions against South Africa.

Van Vuuren says it is "fundamental to understand both the nature of power in South Africa and the nature of elite criminality – the way in which corruption has become ingrained in the practice of our politics and business."



From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, "a mix of factors gave rise to a perfect storm that left an indelible impact on our history and society. It was a time of unparalleled abuse of power. ... [when] economic crime not only festered, but became state policy." The apartheid-era pattern and many of the actors "rapidly ingratiated themselves into the new order".

In the introduction to the book, Van Vuuren adds a personal note:

"Under apartheid, my classification as white brought me spoken and unspoken privilege and, most importantly, the benefit of a solid public education. I am a product of state subsidies that saw me attend universities beyond the reach of my parents, neither of whom completed their schooling or lived a life of plenty."

Van Vuuren was Wits SRC President in 1996/97.

He is now the Director of Open Secrets, a non-profit organisation which aims to promote private sector accountability. It is supported by the Open Society Foundation, the Claude Leon Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Open Secrets also works with the SA History Archives and Lawyers for Human Rights, and supports calls to release the entire apartheid archive.

The book is based on years of research and is accompanied by graphics which set out important facts and connections visually. Van Vuuren also co-wrote a book about South Africa's arms deal, *The Devil in the Detail: How the Arms Deal Changed Everything* (Jonathan Ball, 2011). 