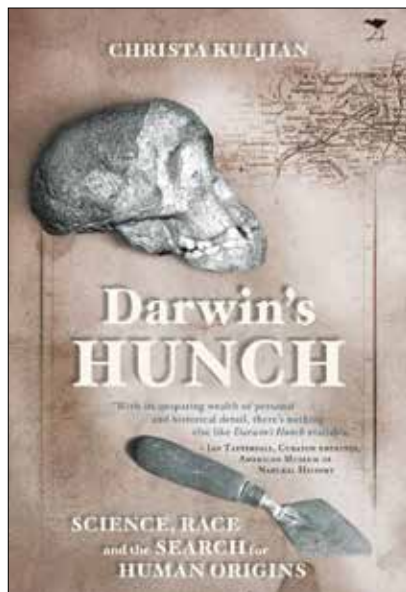


## BOOK REVIEW

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

By Christa Kuljian. Johannesburg:  
Jacana Media, 2016. ISBN:  
978-1-4314-2425-2



Christa Kuljian of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research has made an in-depth historical analysis of the personalities behind the study of human origins in southern Africa, spanning approximately a century. The hunt for fossils and fossil-finds

on the African continent, the 'Cradle of Humankind' made headline news all over the world, with the Out of Africa hypothesis the favoured one – it was Darwin's hunch that this was so. In South Africa (SA) the names of Robert Broom, Raymond Dart and Phillip Tobias are synonymous with the story of our origins. Kuljian focuses on the personalities behind the science, weaving into the story their attitudes on issues of race, and the methodologies they employed to throw light on the evolution of the human race. As discomfiting as her story is, it is an honest piece of work that is relevant for the dominating discourse of the day in SA on race, racism, transformation and decolonisation.

The history of modern-day *Homo sapiens* is marred by racism, and a century-long view was that the races were created separately. The reference point was the 'Boskop race', a foundation of a race typology based on the finding of a skull in 1913. It was this idea that drove the research of Broom, Dart, and very disappointingly Tobias! Dart's discovery of the Taung skull in 1924, a momentous event in this history, seemed to have had no effect on his racist views, and generally he did not credit the African for any achievement. He would go to any lengths to secure a skeleton for his collection, which seemed more important than his study subjects. The demeaning scientific methodology employed reflected the view that the African was inferior, coinciding

with the political ideas of British colonial rule and later apartheid. As recently as 2007 the Nobel laureate James Watson is known to have remarked that Africans were of a lesser intelligence! With the advent of modern genetics in the mid-20th century, a paradigm shift away from typology occurred when Hertha de Villiers showed that there were no distinguishing features between different SA tribes, but a 'range of variation in a cluster of closely related populations'. A new direction in biological thinking was born.

Apartheid was dismantled in 1994, and in 2002 Phillip Tobias, who gradually abandoned the ideas of his predecessors, introduced himself on television with '*Hello, my name is Phillip Tobias and I am an African. We're all African ... because this was our cradle*' (my italics). Darwin's hunch becomes fact and Tobias's evolution with respect to his thinking is complete.

This highly recommended study should be part of discussions on science, race, decolonisation and transformation in all our classrooms in high schools and tertiary institutions as we envision a new SA society.

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