The Two Lives of Sara Baartman: Gender, "Race," Politics and the Historiography of Mis/Representation

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Abstract: The story of Sara Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, who was exhibited in both London and Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is part of the long narrative of scientific racism. In the years preceding and succeeding her return to South Africa from the museum in Paris where her brain and genitals were stored, her story has been told and retold countless times by anti-racist white (and predominantly male) scholars, Pan-African anti-apartheid activists, many of them feminists, African-American scholars, and scholars who claim a particular ethnic status within the Rainbow Nation. There has been much controversy concerning the right to tell Baartman's story and the images that may or may not accompany such narration. An attempt is made to explain why this is so.

Keywords: racism, sexuality, South Africa, history of anthropology, anti-racism

Résumé : L'histoire de Sara Baartman, la dénommée Vénus de Hottentot qui a été exposée à Londres et à Paris au début du dix-neuvième siècle, fait partie de la longue histoire du racisme scientifique. Dans les années précédant et suivant son retour en Afrique du sud du Museum à Paris où son cerveau et ses parties génitales étaient gardés, son histoire a été racontée maintes et maintes fois par des chercheurs blancs antiracistes (principalement des hommes), des activistes panafricains et antiapartheid, incluant de nombreux féministes, des chercheurs African-Américains, et des chercheurs qui revendiquent un statut ethnique particulier au sein de la Nation arc-en-ciel. Une grande controverse existe quant au droit de raconter l'histoire de Sara Baartman et de montrer ou non les images qui l'accompagnent. Nous tentons d'expliquer ici pourquoi il en est ainsi.

Mots-clés : racisme, sexualité, Afrique du sud, histoire de l'anthropologie, anti-racisme

Introduction[1]

The remains of Sara Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus") were returned from Paris to South Africa in 2002 after a successful campaign for her repatriation by the parliament and government of post-apartheid South Africa. She had been in Europe for 192 years after spending the last five years of her life as a performer or exhibit in a series of spectacles somewhere between a freak show and a scientific display. Her skeleton was on view till the late 1970s, latterly in the Musée de l'Homme Naturelle in Paris. Her brain and genitals were also stored in the museum. She was not the first "Hottentot" to be the object of the "ethnopornographic" gaze. As Robert Gordon (1998) and others have noted, the genitals and buttocks of both male and female Khoi pastoralists and San (or Bushman) hunters and gatherers, were a matter of speculation for more than a century before Baartman was put on display in London in 1810. The "Hottentot apron" (said to be an enlargement of the labia minora), male monorchidism, and steatopygia (large accumulation of fat in the female posterior) were examined, constructed or imagined as signs of sexualised racial difference by Kolb, Linnaeus, Le Vaillant, Cuvier and others.

We retrace some of these episodes, but our primary concern is the revival of interest in Baartman following Gilman's 1985 essay in *Critical Inquiry*. Her "second life" has been created by historians (Gilman 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Schiebinger 1993; Qureshi 2004; Sòrgoni 2003); prominent biologists (Gould 1982 [1985]; Fausto-Sterling 1995); playwrights (Parks 1998; du Toit 2017); photographers (for example, Renée Cox's ironic self-portrait, *Hot-en-Tot*), visual artists who are also writers (Willis 2010); anthropologists and archaeologists (Gordon 1992, 1998; Schrire 1995); folklorists, art historians and students of performance (Strother 1999; Lindfors 1989, 1996, 2014); sociologists (Magubane 2001); novelists (Chase-Riboud 2003; Wicomb 2001); historical biographers (Holmes 2007; Crais and Scully 2009); feminist

critics from North America and other parts of the diaspora (Collins 1999; Sharpley-Whiting 1999; Hobson 2005; Gordon-Chipembere 2011; Nash 2014), and notably from South Africa itself (Abrahams 1996, 1997, 2000, 2007; Lewis 2011; van der Schyff 2011); a South African poet and performer (Ferrus 1998); a documentary filmmaker (Maseko 1999, 2003); and a well-known director of art house films (Kechiche 2010a and 2010b). Quite recently, performances of Nicki Minaj and Kim Kardashian have resulted in discussions of steatopygia and the Hottentot Venus in *Ms. Magazine* (Hobson 2014 on Minaj) and in *The Daily Mail* (14 November 2014, concerning Kardashian). Early in 2016, Beyoncé denied that she was about to star in a movie based on Baartman's life (Parkinson 2016).

Much about Baartman's identity, early life and adult career can be contested: her name; her precise provenance; her ethnicity; her Africanity; the "facts" about her genitalia and buttocks and whether illustrations of them may appear in a paper about her; the context of her public appearance (as "freak" or icon of disordered sexuality); her agency; and even who has the right to describe her career.

If there is indeed such a thing as ethnopornography, surely it is typified by the treatment of Sara Baartman during her lifetime, immediately after her death and, some would argue, even today. The term "ethnopornography," which may have first been coined by Dr. Walter Roth a century or so ago to describe the photographs he had taken of heterosexual copulation among Australian aborigines (Pringle 2008), has acquired some currency and a new, quite specific meaning recently in anthropology and post-colonial studies. "Ethnopornography" implies the description and construction in the folk and scientific discourses of dominant cultures – by travel writers, colonial officials, anthropologists, human biologists, and ethnohistorians – of dehumanising representations and images concerning the sexuality/sexual practices and discourses of "others."[2]

Cultural and social critique (and affirmation) are a feature of the discourses we call "ethnopornographic," such as the early accounts of Sarah Baartman. In more general terms, they are an important feature of post-Enlightenment discourse in literature, philosophy, history, biology, what we might call "proto-anthropology," and contemporary anthropology (see Marcus and Fischer 1986). In *Irregular Connections* (2004, 18), Harriet Lyons and I used the term "conscription" to describe representational practices that include but extend beyond ethnopornography:

> By conscription we mean the deployment of data about sexual discourses and practices among "others" within discourses of power, morality, pleasure and therapy in the metropolitan cultures where anthropological texts have predominantly been read and produced … Conscription is a live metaphor. It implies force and inequality and, more often than not, the absence of true dialogue. Conscription may be "positive," inasmuch as the sexual practices of "primitives" are viewed as a "natural," uncorrupted form of behavior from which "we" have wrongfully departed and towards which we should now return … It may be "negative" inasmuch as primitive sexual behavior shows us how biologically different "they" are from "us," how lucky or righteous we are that we have evolved morally and they haven't, or indeed how their "degeneracy" is clear evidence of what will happen if we allow our own social misfits to survive or take control of our destinies … We must note that the relationship between conscription and ethnographic "fact" is tangential inasmuch as the same selective data may support both a negative and a positive conscription.

We shall identify several forms of conscription in accounts of Khoi sexuality in general, and Baartman in particular. An undercurrent of desire and/or revulsion was often the subtext in instances of negative conscription involved in the construction of biological, racial hierarchy and Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment moral regimes. This was certainly the case with Baartman.

Recent discourse about Baartman rejects racial stereotypes and associated forms of negative conscription. There is writing against racism by white male biologists, historians of science and anthropologists. There are/were local, feminist, Griqua or Khoi projects of reclamation; national, feminist, Rainbow Nation projects; and claims on Baartman by feminists elsewhere in Africa and in the African-American diaspora. Opposition to racialised pornography and abjection are central themes in much of this feminist writing. Anti-positivism and opposition to patriarchal science constitute another theme. Such projects could be described as secondary or counter-conscriptions, inasmuch as their aim is to retell the story in a way that disrupts and inverts the racist narrative. This is because all recent texts about Baartman are focused on a set of images from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that are present, or else constructively present (even when deliberately absented), in all of them.

This article has three purposes with respect to the politics of representation. The first is to clarify precisely what is going on with these debates. Different forms of

conscription have been used in the service of racist and anti-racist, positivist and anti-positivist, feminist, Khoisan, nationalist and diasporic agendas, and they allude to problems of agency and identity. Secondly, I specifically examine the intended role and unintended effects of writings by a few well-known anti-racist writers who revived interest in Baartman's story. The images they deployed, the words they used and the intent of their narratives were perhaps misrecognised and misunderstood by scholars from whom they might have expected support. Only one of these writers, Robert Gordon, is a social anthropologist, and his work (for example, Gordon 1992, 1998) is designed to critique and even ridicule common European stereotypes of Khoi and San sexuality from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries; he does not deal specifically with Baartman's case.

Like most anthropologists, I am indeed aware that anthropology has plenty of skeletons in its closet (Willis 1972), but I am also aware that the most comprehensive critiques of racism have come from scholars within both physical and cultural anthropology (for example, Franz Boas and Ashley Montagu). Furthermore, the modern fieldwork-based discipline embodies a standpoint that defines itself by the negation of ethnocentric generalisations characteristic of the proto-anthropology of nineteenth-century explorers and raciologists as well as the hypotheses of armchair evolutionists.

However, early social anthropology rarely embraced an egalitarian ethos. Malinowski and others may have condemned attempts to suppress alien sexual customs, but they did so in the interest of a "more enlightened" colonialism (Lyons and Lyons 2004, 174–178; Povinelli 2002, chapter 3). Consent was not sought, nor perhaps could it be meaningfully obtained. More recently, anthropologists have claimed goals such as the co-fashioning of the text and collaborative ethnography. Nonetheless, they may remain unaware of the persistent aura that may be distorting their work, a spectre from the discipline's past that may result in the *aberrant decoding* of their images and texts.

Consequently, in writing about and against racist images of Khoi sexuality and the Hottentot Venus, a Western anthropologist (or historian) may risk accusations of ethnopornographic writing, even if the text merely repeats the story unaccompanied by visual illustrations. Accordingly, the third purpose of this paper is to explore the limits to what can be said, written and visually portrayed in accounts of racialised abjection.

The Negative Conscription of Khoisan Sexuality: Historical Notes

Most scholars who write about stories of Khoi sexuality would agree about the following sequence of events. Male rather than female Khoi were first described as sexually different from Europeans and other humans. In the early eighteenth century, the German astronomer and traveller Peter Kolb reported on his visits to the Khoi. He claimed to have witnessed operations involving the evulsion of the left testicle among eight- and nine-year-old Khoi boys. He cited a number of rationales for the practice, but noted that boys whose left testicle had been removed could outrace riders on horses. He also mentioned a belief that the practice was linked to concerns about excess twin births. Kolb thought that there was a possible link with circumcision, hinting at a Jewish origin for the practice. Whatever the rationale, Kolb was informed that Khoi men could not marry if they had two testicles (Kolb 1968, 112–118). Other writers thought that monorchidism might be "natural." They included Linnaeus, who accordingly classified Hottentots as "monstrosus" in his tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* (Linnaeus 1758, 22). An alternative explanation of mornorchidism was offered by a late seventeenth-century traveller John Ovington, who suggested that the left testicle was removed when boys were eight to ten years old in order to "debilitate that Native Heat, which powerfully prompts them to Propagation" (as quoted in Merians 2001, 101). In this case, culture turns an excess into a deficit. A century later, in 1785, Anders Sparrman wrote that he could find no evidence of frequent monorchidism among the Khoi whom he visited (Merians 2001, 156).

The persistent Kolb had also noted that many Khoi women had enlarged labia (1968, 118, 119). They would reveal them to visitors if a price was paid. Enlarged labia were also supposedly found in other parts of Africa. The practice of female circumcision in northern parts of the continent perhaps reflected a desire to diminish this "natural excess." Kolb was not the first to write on these topics; he is said to be one of the more reliable sources from that period in South African history. The volume of writing on male Hottentot (and also San) genitalia diminished toward the end of the eighteenth century, by which time the pre-contact Khoi culture and identity had been partially submerged under the new colonial regime (see Gordon 1998). However, we should note that around the fin de siècle/early twentieth

century German racial scientists who had worked in Namibia claimed that the San had penises that were semi-erect when not engorged. The supposed trait disappeared when San interbred with neighbouring Bantu peoples (Gordon and Douglas 2000, 62).

In the late eighteenth century, there were increasing numbers of reports of enlarged labia (forming a *tablier*, or apron) among Khoi and San women, or, to be "imprecise," a fold of skin covering the rest of the external genitalia and perhaps extending an inch or two down toward the knee. Eventually, it was determined that the labia minora were sometimes extended. The voyager Le Vaillant produced a vivid drawing after paying a woman to pose nude for him (Schiebinger 1993, 166, 167). It was unclear then whether the enlargement was "natural" or the result of manipulation. It should be noted that either conclusion could be used to enhance depictions of Khoisan peoples as anomalous sexually, culturally and racially. In the last section of this essay, we shall try to place these reports in a comparative, non-racist context, namely accounts of labial manipulation by contemporary African and European social scientists.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, increasing attention was drawn to the "condition" that was to become known as "steatopygia" – the large, raised buttocks possessed by some Hottentot and San women. The late eighteenth century also saw the birth of modern racial classification and the development of the debate between the monogenists and the polygenists, those who believed that all humans belonged to a single species[3] and others who thought that there were several human species. Degrees of perceived somatic difference were critical to those debates. Both sides linked anatomy to behaviour, and there were few on either side (even the monogenists) who believed that human races were equally moral or intelligent. Some monogenists thought that inferior races would be improved morally and intellectually by a favourable environment. In this context, it is critical to note the obvious inference that stereotypes of sexual behaviour and morality were linked to perceptions of genital size and anomaly.

Usually, Africans, Australian aborigines and South Americans were described as sexually voracious, but occasionally, and not always consistently, another stereotype emerged: that of undersexed males, exemplified by Iroquois males who had no beards and did not rape their captives (Abler 1992), and monorchid Khoi, mentioned above. In other words, difference from the "civilised" norm may involve deficit as well as excess: male Khoi were often seen as undersexed or peculiar, Khoi women as excessive and exceptional. Thus, the European racial imaginary distinguished some Khoisan peoples from other Africans who were marked only by excess.[4] The substantial literature on Baartman has ignored this combination of opposed forms of negative conscription.

The Life and Death of Sara Baartman (Sarah Bartmann)

So often, in biographic accounts of Baartman's life, particularly the period before she journeyed to London, we read that she "would" have done this or "might" have done that, and there are sometimes imputations or surmises as to her motives for so doing (see Lewis 2011 for an excellent discussion of such narrative strategies; see also Dubow 2010). Indeed, it is the very *lack* of knowledge about her that makes her such an apt subject for speculation, so that partially imagined Saras can and do inhabit disparate, sometimes irreconcilable discourses concerning her identity and agency. Our own quick recital of the known and unknown events in her life is designed to highlight points of indeterminacy that have fostered contestation.[5]

Sara Baartman *may* have been born in the Gamtoos Valley in the Eastern Cape in 1789 to an Afrikaans- and Khoi-speaking family. However, according to Crais and Scully in their recent volume, she *may* have been born 50 miles further north and a decade earlier in a Gonaqua Khoi community in the Camdeboo Valley (Crais and Scully 2009, 7–12). The surname "Baartman" *may* have been taken from an Afrikaner farmer in the Camdeboo who made servants of some of the local Gonaqua people. After the death of her parents, she was removed from her community to a dwelling near Cape Town where she became an indentured servant to a German called Elzer who died in 1799. She then worked for Pieter Cesars *or* Cezar, Elzer's servant who had accompanied her on her journey to Cape Town. She also worked for Pieter's brother, Hendrik *or* Hendrick, who was in turn employed by a British army doctor called Dunlop (Holmes 2007, 6–24). Baartman *may* have spent a decade in Cape Town and its environs, where she gave birth to three babies, all of whom died. The father of her second child, Hendrik de Jong, was a drummer in the Batavian military who was called back to Holland. Baartman was not more than four feet, four inches tall. Her buttocks were very large, quite unusual even for a population supposedly prone to steatopygia. For this reason, the cash-strapped Hendrik decided that he could make money by displaying her to sailors in the Naval Hospital in Cape Town (Crais and Scully 2009, 50) In 1810 Dunlop and Cesars "persuaded" Baartman to come with them to London (Holmes 2007, 26–28), where she was at first exhibited in travelling freak shows along with a seven-hundred-pound man and anomalous animals. She wore

a revealing body stocking along with face paint and what *may or may not* have been indigenous clothing. Spectators, women as well as men, poked and prodded her in public, and she was subject to Cesars's brusque commands. Her buttocks were portrayed in political cartoons and were the prime focus of ogling attention.

Abolitionists headed by Zachary Macaulay were deeply offended by this public humiliation and decided to test the new anti-slavery legislation in court in October 1810 through a writ of habeas corpus. Baartman was cross-examined in Dutch for three hours, probably in the absence of Cesars and Dunlop. However, she *appeared* to back her employers and insisted that she receive a good share of the proceeds of her exhibition (Holmes 2007, 58–70). Baartman was deemed to have legal agency and to have *consented* to a contractual arrangement with Dunlop, and the court determined that she had not been detained. It would also seem that she did legally own copyrights of two aquatints that had been made of her as an "imagined Hottentot woman" (Crais and Scully 2009, 74–78), although it is possible that Dunlop manipulated the process to make her appear an autonomous agent (2009, 78).

After performing for some months in London, she toured the provinces. She was baptised in Manchester in 1811. Gradually, interest in her appearances diminished. After a tour to Ireland, she lost Dunlop to death, and, apparently, Hendrik Cesars was no longer in contact (he was to die in the United States). In 1814, she moved to France with a manager companion called Henry Taylor. Early in 1815 an animal trainer called Réaux bought the right to exhibit her from Taylor. In France, there were no protests against her humiliation, even though Réaux made her wear a slave collar. Georges Cuvier, the foremost anatomist in France, and his young assistant, de Blainville, took a scientific interest in Baartman and unsuccessfully tried to get her to pose nude (she briefly stripped off her covering for de Blainville, but not for long enough to answer his questions about her *tablier*). Cuvier remarked that her face was ugly, exhibiting a mixture of Mongol and Negro features, and her buttocks were repellent, but he conceded that she was a gentle soul who possessed a very good memory, could speak three languages and could play a musical instrument. After Baartman died from a three-day illness in 1815, Cuvier finally could obtain access to her cadaver. He examined her *tablier* and dissected it and her brain. He decided that the labia minora were naturally long rather than artificially extended. He thought that the elongation was an effect of the warm climate. The discomfort caused by this condition was opined to be the cause of female circumcision in Abyssinia (Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier 1824). Baartman's organs were preserved for nearly two centuries, first in the Jardin des Plantes, in which her genitals eventually found a place near the anthropologist Paul Broca's brain, and after 1937 in the Musée de l'Homme Naturelle in Paris, where Cuvier's brain was also stored (Holmes 2007, 100). The above is just about all we *know* as fact about the "relationship" between Cuvier and Baartman. Anything else is speculation.

In 2002 after a sustained outcry by feminists, nationalists, anthropologists and politicians in the new South Africa, culminating in a motion passed by the legislature, and after extensive negotiations between the governments of France and South Africa, Baartman's remains were returned to her home country and on 9 August, National Women's Day in South Africa, were reburied in Hankey in the Eastern Cape, which was *then presumed to be* within a few miles of Baartman's place of birth. Thabo Mbeki, then South Africa's President, delivered a funeral oration (Crais and Scully 2009, 149–169).

Racism and Khoisan Sexuality after Baartman: Brief Remarks

San and Hottentot sexual characteristics continued to have a place in racialist literature throughout the nineteenth century, although their significance can be exaggerated. Sometimes the Khoi and San were equated with other Africans; sometimes they were seen as racially distinct because of their lighter colour and small stature. Their related languages, marked by click consonants, were often depicted as animalian. Sometimes Khoi and San were confused with each other (Cuvier referred to Sara as a Bushman). Along with the Australian aborigines, the Fuegians and the Andamanese, the Khoisan peoples occupied the most marginally human locus in the racist imaginary. The San, forced to defend themselves against both African and European intruders, were viewed as violent, repulsive savages. It was only in the mid-twentieth century, after their defeat and exile to more remote and ever-diminishing territories, that they were romanticised as "the harmless people" (see Guenther 1980). At the fin de siècle the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and his disciples compared Khoi women to atavistic prostitutes in European cities. Lombroso was obsessed with the discovery of physical stigmata of degeneration supposedly detectable in the faces of criminals and deviants who were said to be evolutionary throwbacks. By his time, however, it could be easily claimed that Khoi sexuality no longer occupied centre stage in racialist imaginaries. Racists in the twentieth century occasionally exploited Khoi

sexuality for political purposes. According to Sòrgoni (2003), the newly racist Italy of 1938 resurrected the Hottentot Venus and similar women as undesirable products of miscegenation between Africans and indigenous peoples (steatopygia being now viewed as a hybrid trait).

By the 1970s, mainstream anthropology had no place and no patience for narratives that sought the roots of culture in people's genitals. However, in his book *Race*, John Baker, a retired Oxford cytologist, revived several of the explorers' depictions of Hottentot "genital anomalies" as well as curious fables of racial smells as part of his attempt to reconstruct race science (see Baker 1974, 313–319). The book was rejected and forgotten by the academic world, but it enjoys a second life on racist websites such as Stormfront.org. Sir Laurens van der Post, a popular "expert" on the San, friend of Margaret Thatcher and informal mentor to Prince Charles, still felt compelled to express his "knowledge" of Khoisan genitalia as late as 1993. His friend, the archaeologist Abbé de Bréville (presumably Henri Breuil), had informed him that Egyptian "hieroglyphs" clearly showed an identifiable San, causing van der Post to opine that the semi-erect penis, steatopygia and the "anatomical apron" were lasting, visible evidence of the uniqueness of "the Bushman," who supposedly saw them as a badge of honour (Nathan 1993, 4). Baker and van der Post were outliers. In the late 1970s and 1980s, writers of a very different kind began to retell Sara Baartman's story.

The Discursive Revival of the Hottentot Venus

In 1978 Richard Altick described Baartman in a book on the history of public exhibitions in England, but more extensive attention began in the mid-eighties. There was an excellent essay by Stephen Jay Gould in *Natural History*, which was republished in *The Flamingo's Smile* (1985). It explored the relationship between Baartman's story and the history of scientific racism. Gilman's well-known essay on the Hottentot and the prostitute appeared in a collection in *Critical Inquiry* in 1985 (Gilman 1985a), which reappeared in the 1986 volume edited by Henry Louis Gates entitled *"Race," Writing and Difference*, a book that was widely read by intellectuals in Africa and the diaspora (Gilman 1986). A similar essay appeared in Gilman's 1985 volume *Difference and Pathology* (Gilman 1985b). Gilman, who is *inter alia* a historian of psychiatry and anti-Semitism, equated images of Khoi women such as the Hottentot Venus (of whom there was a brief description) with blacks in paintings such as Manet's *Olympia*, and also with the fat Parisian prostitutes described by Parent-Duchatelet in 1836, Pauline Tarnowsky's late nineteenth-century descriptions and photographs of Russian prostitutes with wild eyes and misshapen noses, and Lombroso's prostitutes, who combine some of Tarnowsky's stigmata with enlarged labia. The plates, most of which are to be found in both versions of the article, included the following: reproductions of *Olympia* and *Nina* by Manet and of *The Servant* by von Bayros; a photograph of "sexual anomalies" in Khoi and European women from a book by Lombroso and Ferraro; a nineteenth-century cartoon of someone staring at the Hottentot Venus's buttocks through a telescope; a reproduction of Frédéric Cuvier's (the brother of Georges) and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's engraving of a full-length Hottentot Venus; and an Italian drawing from 1905 purporting to show steatopygia in an African prostitute. Gilman's argument is built on the contrast between the Victorian ideal of pure maidenhood and motherhood and the loss of sexual control represented by African females, prostitutes and other atavisms. The argument takes us right through the nineteenth century, from the era of the early classifications of modern biology (Linnaeus and Cuvier) through mid-century evolutionism to the post-Darwinist pessimism of the criminal anthropologists and anthroposociologists who feared that degeneration would lead to the prevalence of atavistic types.

Gilman's is the most ambitious and widely discussed of any of the recent restudies of Western representations of Khoi and San sexuality. There are later discussions by anthropologists that are more cautious and scholarly (for example, Gordon 1992, 1998; Schrire 1995, 176–178, and 1996).

There are indeed a few related and often overlapping genres of discourse concerning the Baartman case, issues of power/knowledge and Khoisan sexuality. Gould, and anthropologists such as Gordon and Schrire, are very explicitly concerned with scientific racism. Gilman is interested in forms racism takes in both science and the arts as well as the complex articulation between modes of knowledge and manifestations of power. He shows that pictorial and photographic representations, allegations of relationships between physiognomy and behaviour, anxieties concerning sexuality and the social, scientific typologies, and theories of biological change are intersecting currents revolving around the armature of dominance.

Critical accounts of the displays of Baartman (and other indigenous peoples) in shows in the metropolis (see Altick 1978; Lindfors 1996, 2014; Strother 1999; see also Gordon 1999 for a twentieth-century case) constitute a second theme of discourse. Here the focus is on

the public display of indigenous peoples in cages and/or on stages and (in the case of Lindfors, who is also very concerned with racism) in the posters and handbills that depicted them. Such exhibitions had something in common with freak shows and circuses, and indeed Réaux exhibited Baartman in the same show as a rhinoceros. Crais and Scully (2009, 73) remark that "the Hottentot Venus created juxtapositions of difference around gender, race, the body, and culture in a way that created something new – the ethnographic freak show – and prefigured the later rise of the ethnographic show as spectacle." The Baartman performances were harbingers of a new kind of display that some scholars describe as the "enfreakment" of cultures (Crais and Scully 2009, 73).

In *Peoples on Parade* (2011), Sadiah Qureshi has given us an extensive account of ethnographic displays throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, stressing that they became a frequent phenomenon in many European countries and North America. They were mostly real and sometimes spurious (the latter category included two Lilliputian "Aztecs," Maximo and Bertola, exhibited in England in the mid-nineteenth century). They included the Bushmen exhibited by Robert Knox in England in 1847, Inuit, Sami, various Amerindian peoples, and Ota Benga (the pygmy who was exhibited in the United States). A huge "Savage South Africa" show took place in London in 1899–1900, involving two hundred South Africans – Zulu, Xhosa, Shona, Ndebele and Afrikaners – and including a reenactment of the Matabele wars. Qureshi stresses that there is in fact a continuum stretching from freak shows to interactive popular anthropology, and that serious and occasionally non-racist encounters (even dialogues) could form part of these ethnographic displays. Robert Knox's shows involving five San were doubtless used to sustain his polygenist racial theories. In contrast, the unity of mankind was a guiding principle of the work of Robert Gordon Latham, an ethnologist and curator who in the 1850s put up lifelike, three-dimensional displays, or dioramas, of various non-Western peoples in the recently built Crystal Palace in Sydenham. Qureshi does not downplay the racism in most of the shows she describes, such as those involving Baartman, but her contribution is to show that in some cases, later in the nineteenth century, they could sometimes satisfy innocent curiosity and promote a kind of anthropological knowledge. As such, they played a little-acknowledged role in anthropology before professionalisation and before fieldwork.

A third focus is the feminist one apparent in work by Schiebinger, Fausto-Sterling and Qureshi. Schiebinger's brief discussion of Baartman (1993, 160 – 170) is particularly strong because the rest of her book, *Nature's Body*, develops a comparative context concerning eighteenth- and nineteenth-century understandings of the human, particularly the female, body. Much South African writing also intertwines feminism with a fourth focus, the nationalism of the post-apartheid decade, most notably that of two women with Khoi ancestry, the accomplished feminist historian Yvette Abrahams (for example, Abrahams 1997) and the writer Diana Ferrus, whose remarkable poem "I've Come to Take You Home" became a verse anthem for the successful repatriation movement. Two African-American writers, Suzan Lori Parks and Barbara Chase-Riboud – in the play *Venus* and the novel *Hottentot Venus*, respectively – used historical sources to recreate Baartman as a semi-fictional protagonist with agency. Parks played more than a little loose with the facts, as was her right, and the appearance of an African-American actor playing a character similar to Cuvier was cause for comment. Her play, first performed in 1996, depicts Sara as someone very willing to contemplate marriage with a lecherous scientist in exchange for needed money, cuddling and material comfort. Chase-Riboud's Sara is the protagonist of the novel, and the book to some degree adheres to Baartman's life history as it was known at the time. but the novelist's imagination has to fill in some of the many gaps in our knowledge. There appear to be some total inventions, as well as speculations about known facts. We do not know whether or not Sara had a sexual relationship with Pieter Cesars, as imagined by Chase-Riboud, though we do know that she was not literally pursued by a lascivious Cuvier.

Within South Africa, the post-apartheid campaign for the repatriation of Baartman's remains was advanced by a remarkable short film by the Swazi director Zola Maseko, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*, and the campaign's success was celebrated by him in a sequel, *The Return of Sara Baartman*. It should be noted that not all the campaigners for Baartman's return to South Africa were black and actively feminist. One of the leaders of the movement was Philip Tobias, who was the foremost physical anthropologist in the country and a long-time opponent of apartheid. Strangely enough, some of Tobias's early work (for example, Tobias 1957) described Khoi and San "racial" characteristics in a surprisingly old-fashioned way, but by the 1960s he had rejected such typological approaches (Morris 2012).

It should be noted that the Baartman repatriation campaign parallels some events in other countries, such as the passing in 1990 in the United States of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,

and the successful campaign that led to the reburial in California of the ashes of Ishi, the "last" Yahi, along with his brain, which had been repatriated from the Smithsonian (Starn 2005).

Issues of voice/agency and identity often occur in struggles to repatriate both human remains and artifacts. In the case of Sara Baartman, there are problems that are not unique in such cases but still unusual. The only reliable record we have of her own opinions about her fate is the summary of her three-hour interview by officials of the Court of King's Bench during her *habeas corpus* case in London, from which it would appear that she did not understand the contract she had allegedly signed with Dunlop, given that she could neither read nor write. She did, however, insist that she had agreed to be exhibited and had no complaints against her employer apart from the cold she sometimes suffered while performing in scant clothing (Crais and Scully 2009, 98–101; Strother 1999, 41). It is unclear how constrained she felt during her testimony, given the servile status she had endured in Africa, the circumstances of her presence in Britain, her dependence on Dunlop and her unfamiliarity with the court and its officials. Crais and Scully observe that individuals in such situations "rarely can speak truth to power" (2009, 101). However, Carmel Schrire (1996, 348, 349) suggests that Baartman told the truth to the court and that she was a businesswoman who put on an act as a "savage" while retaining half of the profits from her shows in England. Schrire suggests that her situation was arguably better than if she had stayed in South Africa, and that she was not a slave but someone trying to do the best she could with the hand the fates had dealt her. Schrire's is probably a minority opinion. For example, Desirée Lewis (2011) thinks that Crais and Scully exaggerate the degree of agency Baartman displayed in the courtroom and in the choice of the "fetishized dress" in which she was portrayed in a broadsheet. She notes the obsession many writers have with clichéd ideas of the bourgeois autonomous self. Similarly, Hirshimi Bhana Young (2011) notes that the status Baartman possessed as a worker in South Africa cannot be accommodated by a simple, binary distinction between slavery and autonomy, because, historically speaking, these two statuses were part of a continuum. The conditions under which she had to sell her labour afforded her few choices (see also Abrahams 1996). In her case, resistance could consist only of a delay or occasional refusal of compliance, such as failing to appear on stage. The numerous Khoi and San individuals whose bodies were inspected, measured and sketched or photographed cannot talk to us about how they felt and thought, and it is evident that their thoughts and feelings were of minimal concern to those who recorded their physical characteristics for posterity. It is all the more frustrating if one cannot be entirely sure of their provenance and identity. That is why writers such as the playwright Parks and the novelist Chase-Riboud endeavour to endow Baartman with a lifelike presence. In their work fiction is the mode of escape from the weight of colonialist structures and the silence in the archive, a way to recover a sense of Baartman as a person rather than as literally dismembered and reassembled biological fragments and objectivised scientific and ethnopornographic images of dehumanised body parts. The search for a sense of Baartman's personhood is the besetting goal of the African, Caribbean and African-American writers and academics who contributed to Gordon-Chipembere's collection, *Representations of Black Womanhood* (2011). Siphiwe Ndlovu (2011, 25–26) has eloquently stated the problems, the potential aporias encountered by such searchers:

> Not only do we read Baartman as always already different, we also think that she is "speaking" her difference, exhibiting her "otherness" so that even as we seek to right/write the wrongs we feel were done to her body, we are anchored in its alterity. This is why most earlier and some recent scholarship seems to be telling the same story, only from different angles; the story of how Saartjie Baartman's body came to be an example of sexual and racial difference. However, this concern with alterity had virtually nothing to do with Saartjie Baartman the person, and everything to do with those who saw her body as different. The fact that even the best and most well-intentioned scholarship cannot seem to see past this difference speaks to how "the master's concerns" have become our concerns.

Baartman's identity and names are also matters of contestation. Was she Khoi, San, Griqua, Gonaqua, Xhosa or (more likely) some combination of these? Diana Ferrus, the poet who campaigned for her return, assumed that Sara epitomised all formerly abused coloured and black women in the new Rainbow Nation.

The dispute over naming is manifold and in all ways political. What was her original name? Was she later given an Afrikaans name? What did she call herself? What should we call her now? What precise spelling should we use? Must we refer to her by a slave name or diminutive? Despite the surmises of Crais and Scully and others before them, it is not clear whether her birth name was Sara Baartman. The diminutive form of "Sara" in Afrikaans is "Saartje" or "Saartjie," and some

writers use it. Such diminutives can denote affection, but they may also be quite patronising. Once again, "Sara Baartman" may be objectionable because the double "a" is Afrikaans, as is the absence of the terminal "h" in the forename, so it has been suggested that we use the more English variant of her name recorded on her baptismal certificate in Manchester in 2011 when she became "Sara*h* Bartmann." The double "n" in the surname is Germanic rather than Dutch. Did she choose that variant, or did the clerk do so, inasmuch as one may presume a lack of familiarity with Dutch orthography (Crais and Scully 2009, 107)?

In 2002, the year of Baartman's return to South Africa, the government decided that the baptismal name would be officially adopted because other names were insulting, and indeed it was "Sarah Bartmann" that President Thabo Mbeki invoked in the short and learned oration he delivered on the occasion of her reburial (Mbeki, 2002).

In that address Thabo Mbeki explicitly drew links between major figures in the science and philosophy of the Enlightenment and the ideology of apartheid, demonstrating the fit between the racialist writings of Winckelmann, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Cuvier and the mistreatment of Sara Baartman, and tracing the threads linking the thoughts and practices of that era with the ideology of apartheid in recent times. Mbeki's speech echoes arguments that have resonated in social thought ever since the days of the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason, and are present also in the "amodern" critique of science by Haraway and Latour (beginning with Haraway 1990 and Latour 1988).

The Reinscription of Insults

Some of the scholars, most particularly Gilman, who have retold the story of Sara Baartman have been accused of perpetuating the form of pornographic representation they are criticising. Criticisms have been made of accounts of Baartman's appearance in texts without as well as with illustrations, and in spoken lectures illustrated by PowerPoint slides. Attention has been paid to the type of language used, to jokes accompanying presentations, and to absences as well as presences in texts (for example, the lack of any voice for the oppressed). The social contexts of these texts and presentations (for example, their academic nature and their intended readership and audience) is key to such critical discourse. This is perhaps why some critics use the same images they damn others for employing.

One is reminded of Foucault's remarks on the plurality of discourses on sexuality in the last few centuries (Foucault 1980, 33). In the case of the Hottentot Venus and other disputes concerning the ethnographic gaze, it may matter if, to employ Harold Lasswell's (1948) famous rubric, we pay close attention to "who says what, in which channel, to whom with what effect."

Pictorial depiction (the visual channel) constitutes a major problem. In a footnote in *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt describes Gilman's account as prurient – he has "rightly been criticized for reproducing the very pornographic dimension he is seeking to condemn" (Pratt 1992, 232). Qureshi (2004, 234) says that it can "appear voyeuristic." Natasha Gordon-Chipembere (2011b, 5) is unwilling to reproduce degrading images of "the monster that was African womanhood in the eyes of the colonial empire."

Fausto-Sterling (1995, 19) omits any photographs, drawings and cartoons of Baartman, claiming that "including such visual material would continue to state the question as science and to focus us visually on Bartmann as a deviant. Who could avoid looking to see if she really was different?"

It should be noted that virtually everybody else uses one or two vivid illustrations, but we have noted that Gilman used a good number, including pictures of peculiarly disembodied genitalia by Lombroso and Ferraro. Would even "disembodied" genitals be appropriate in another context? If so, in precisely what context, in what kind of semiological field?

In an excellent article on labiaplasty and racist imagery, Nurka and Jones (2013) argue that racist ethnopornographers reproduce images of the exposed genitalia of marginalised women, but images of genitalia of "normal," young white women are not reproduced, even though the bodies are "nude" (often displayed against attractive landscapes). Their own text is accompanied by a range of illustrations precisely appropriate to this argument. They explain that they have to show the offensive images to demonstrate their "extraordinary rhetorical power": "In doing so we hope to defamiliarize these images to expose and question white constructions of sexual black female identity, rather than to give them license" (Nurka and Jones 2013, 419).

Alternatively, are all the images of genitalia of all human groups inherently inoffensive? Yet another possibility offers itself: Is it more appropriate for some people (for example, Schiedinger and Abrahams, respectively a white American and a Khoisan South African feminist) to reproduce such imagery than it is for Gilman, who is deemed to be both male and privileged? Again, are pictures so much more powerful than words? Qureshi addresses the latter issue directly. She could have omitted words like "savage" and "heathen" from her own text (quotations are another matter), but visual

images, such as reproductions of posters advertising appearances by Baartman or the Savage South Africa show, presented a particular problem: "It is simply not possible to create new visual vocabularies in order to exert the same kind of control we might over text" (Qureshi 2011, location 142). Qureshi gave some consideration to issues of voyeurism and the reinscription of insults. She had "refrained from reproducing" images "that have been produced using coercion and unwilling subjects," such as "the nude images of Baartman produced when she was at the Jardin de Plantes in 1814" and was pressured into removing her clothing (2011, location 3661). However, she felt that some images of displayed peoples that she had reproduced show how such people became "knowable and consumable commodities" (2011, location 146).

It has been argued that pictorial depictions in lectures present a particular problem for audience members who are members of minorities, who may experience a profound sense of abjection and insult when they see PowerPoints of figures like Baartman and diagrams and photographs of African or specifically Hottentot female genitalia. Patricia Hill Collins, a prominent African-American feminist sociologist, states that she initially thought that the reluctance of a white feminist to show slides in a lecture on Baartman was not justified, but that the reaction of black women to such slides when presented by male scholars showed her that her feminist colleague had a point. A white scholar who was a prominent opponent of racism made matters worse for some of his audience when he made a joke about such a slide. One presumes that the joke was made to ridicule racism and defuse tension, but Collins and others did not find it appropriate. When Collins took the lecturer to task, he defended his freedom to use images that were in the public domain. A black lecturer who also used slides of Baartman defended his decision to do so by saying his lecture was about race, not gender. Collins (1999, 142–143) felt that both lecturers, whatever their stated intention, indulged in voyeurism, in acts that amounted to the reinscription of racist pornography and compelled unwilling members of their audience to participate: "Apparently, among some thinkers, some habits of thinking are extremely hard to break."

The slides of Baartman could indeed be said to be exemplars of the visual practices that Collins calls "controlling images." According to Jennifer Christine Nash (2014, locations 789–799), Collins persuasively argues that the function of such images of black female sexual excess is to naturalise and normalise "a dominant racial order, offering instruction on the hierarchy that marks daily life."

It could be argued that Collins and the audience members had *aberrantly decoded* the images and some of the accompanying narrative, which had an intent opposite to the effect that was perceived. There have been a few parallel and relevant incidents in the recent history of anthropology.

Aberrant decoding was arguably present in a Canadian dispute that occurred a quarter century ago involving a museum exhibit of works of African art that the Royal Ontario Museum had acquired from various collectors. Many of them had been obtained during the colonial period. The curator, Dr. Jeanne Cannizzo, decided to make racism and colonialism, the political and social context of collection and appropriation, into frames in which the displayed art could be viewed. Cannizzo gave the exhibit an ironic, Conradian title: *Into the Heart of Africa*. Racist utterances were repeated on wall displays as exemplars of past evils. The display that attracted the most controversy depicted a missionary, Mrs. Thomas Titcombe, teaching African women how to wash clothes. The exhibit and the accompanying guides were shown to some distinguished African and African-American scholars who gave it their seal of approval. However, some leaders and members of the African-Caribbean community in Toronto were outraged, and as the Coalition for Truth about Africa they mounted demonstrations calling for the closing of the exhibit at the "Racist Ontario Museum" (Butler 2013, location 164). Cannizzo's career was temporarily threatened, but she did continue her career in Scotland. In a paper written just after these incidents, Harriet Lyons and I (1991) noted that certain forms of irony are peculiar to elite discourse and that the irony of Cannizzo's presentation was lost on many visitors to the exhibit. However, Shelley Butler, in her book *Contested Representations*, repeats the telling remark of on observer that, despite his ability to "decipher the exhibit's irony, he still felt 'the emotion of the rape of I and I'" (Butler 2013, location 1276).[6]

In 1996, just a few years after the row at the ROM, a very similar dispute broke out in South Africa, which had just emerged from apartheid. Pippa Skotnes's exhibit in the South African National Gallery, *Miscast: Khoisan History and Material Culture*, was an attack on colonial misrepresentations of Khoi and San as peoples lost in time. The exhibit used not only photographs, antique cameras, old pictures of Khoisan people, and ancient rock art, but also fibreglass models of trophy heads, hair and some full body casts. However, by design, there were no depictions of female genitalia. There was also an expensive volume (Skotnes 1996) based on the exhibit to which Mathias Guenther, Rob Gordon, Carmel Schrire and Alan Morris contributed

chapters. In a discussion in the *Southern African Review of Books*, Carmel Schrire noted that the exhibit's aim was "to heal not to hurt" and that it succeeded in correcting misrepresentations of Khoi and San culture. However, for both Rustum Kozain and Yvette Abrahams, who were the other discussants, the exhibit failed, because it did not really try to reverse the objectification, the "othering" of Khoi and San peoples (Schrire, Kozain, and Abrahams 1996). Abrahams felt that the display of old body casts placed on doors at the front of the exhibition was particularly insensitive, given that they had been obtained without consent. A descendant of one of the individuals who were taken to Cape Town so that the casts could be made was particularly outraged at an "offence to decency," at the renewal of dishonour. Nothing was done in the exhibit to convey any sense of agency on the part of the subject peoples. Abrahams's (1996, 16) conclusions echo aspects of our discussion of the ROM exhibit:

> What the elite does to entertain the elite is their business. Fashions change and if the elite today enjoy a spice of guilt, a dash of naked bodies and some charity with their art it really could not matter less to us. But Skotnes' insistence that she is doing something "for" the Khoisan remains an irritant.

Miscast did not merely upset intellectuals like Abrahams. The exhibit upset some of the ordinary San and Naro people who came to visit it. Mathias Guenther (2016, personal communication) notes:

> I talked to a number of the Naro and San at D'Kar, Botswana, a delegation of whom had seen the exhibition. They were very upset, about the display of nudity and, especially, about the laminated photographs that, as part of the exhibition, had been set in the floor of the exhibition space, as a symbolic representation of the "downtrodden" San. The reaction was outrage: people walking over, with their shoes and boots, the faces of Bushman people!

To what degree is it right and proper to censor public lectures and public exhibits in museums because the visual and verbal content might offend some of the audience, viewers or readers who belong to a presently or formerly abjected gender class or ethnicity? To what extent is it right and justifiable to give such lectures, to mount such exhibits in the first place? Are slides of illustrations or photographs of Khoi women's buttocks shown in an anthropologist's lecture or displayed in a textbook about racism no different from the illustrations of bodily organs in standard anatomy textbooks? Can "ethnopornographic" depictions be deemed neutral and non-threatening when they can be said to have "redeeming scientific or moral value"? The answer depends on whether or not we view science as a disinterested pursuit serving the interest of all humanity rather than an elite, and also on our view of human progress since and as a consequence of the Enlightenment. Very often, scepticism about Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment values goes hand in hand with disbelief both in the inevitability of progress and in the existence of a science that does not serve the interests of a particular class or gender. Additionally, in film and theatre, where pornographic images are hardly unknown, it is possible to deploy ethnopornography as a shock tactic to raise disturbing moral questions about the dehumanising strategies of colonialism and racist science.

The film *Vénus noire* (Kechiche 2010a), by the Tunisian-French director Abdellatif Kechiche, is explicitly and exhaustively ethnopornographic and makes a clear claim to redeeming, anti-racist social value. In an interview, Kechiche (2010b), who has encountered racism in his own life and is distressed by its current manifestations in France, directly claimed that his aim was to make the audience uncomfortable by forcing them to confront their own racist and voyeuristic gaze. Given that this is a feature film rather than a documentary, the director takes advantage of his creative licence. The film contains prolonged scenes that are based on real, contemporary accounts of Baartman's subjection to prodding, gawking and pinching by audiences at her performances/displays. However, the latter half of the movie contains imaginary scenes of her subjection to sexual assaults in a brothel where she is taken by Réaux. In one sequence, she is ridden like a horse and swallows a grape placed on the end of a dildo. The film implies that she died of syphilis. This takes Gilman one step further – Kechiche's Hottentot really *is* a prostitute. It is *possible* that Réaux could have pimped Sara to some of his associates in the last six months of her life, but there are no eyewitness accounts; she seems to have died of pneumonia, although nobody really knows the cause of death (see Holmes 2007, 98; Crais and Scully 2009, 138). Reactions to the film were mixed. A South African reviewer who had worked with Maseko on the Baartman documentaries defended "this Rottweiler of a film" when it was first shown in her country, but noted that most of the audience, including Maseko, walked out before the closing credits (Smith 2011). One reviewer remarked that in his attempt to enlist the audience by exciting their revulsion against the demeaning and abjection of colonial subjects, Kechiche risked reproducing the phenomenon he was endeavouring to extirpate, "falling into the trap that he denounces": "*on se demande*

si Kechiche ne finit pas lui-même par tomber dans le travers qu'il dénonce" (Heyrendt 2010). Significantly, the film, which tells the viewer virtually nothing about Baartman's life in South Africa (Qureshi 2012), begins with a lecture by Cuvier on Sara and Hottentot anatomy. The language is properly scientific. The actor playing Cuvier shocks the modern audience by an examination of ways in which Hottentots partially mediate the gap between humans and apes. The so-called *tablier*, however, is said to be a racial peculiarity. Cuvier points to a vivid illustration of it and also displays the preserved remains of Sara's genitalia.

"The Poking Eyes of the Man-Made Monster": Cuvier and Post-Enlightenment Science

In Kechiche's film (above) and in numerous other works, Cuvier has become the body and soul of Enlightenment science. He has become a symbol in the discourse(s) about Baartman. He is seen as the perpetrator of objectifying and dehumanising strategies that must be repudiated. It may be deemed insufficient merely to reject his conclusions.

In Fausto-Sterling's (1995) account of the Baartman case, Cuvier appears as one of the creators of a scientific rationality whose claims of disinterested scholarship have always been suspect. In her belief, Cuvier had become a hardcore racist by the time he dissected Baartman, barely clinging to his monogenism[2] in deference to his Protestant religious background. An ambivalent mixture of repulsion and desire is present in his account of Sara. Fausto-Sterling does give some credit to Cuvier's considerable ability as an anatomist, which is more than some sources do. Her purpose is to place Cuvier's achievements in a context, the *social* history of Euro-American biology in the early nineteenth century, that will enable the reader to understand what he did to Sara and why he did it (Fausto-Sterling 1995, 40). In her 1997 paper, "The Great Long National Insult", Abrahams is less generous to Enlightenment science than Fausto-Sterling. Referring primarily to Linnaeus and Cuvier, she avers that one can see 18th century European science as a process of othering. The white men created an image of themselves as entitled, and an image of Africans as existing only to be possessed (Abrahams 1997, 37).

One might note that Abrahams includes four visual depictions of steatopygia and also Le Vaillant's famous drawing of a Khoi woman with a *tablier*. This surely illustrates a point we made earlier, that much depends on who is showing what or whom to whom and for what purpose.

In her haunting poem "I've Come to Take You Home," which, as previously noted, furthered the successful campaign to repatriate Sara's remains, Diana Ferrus (1998) wrote of Cuvier and Baartman:

> I have come to wrench you away –
> away from the poking eyes
> of the man-made monster
> who lives in the dark
> with his clutches of imperialism
> who dissects your body bit by bit
> who likens your soul to that of Satan
> and declares himself the ultimate god!

In *Hottentot Venus: A Novel*, Barbara Chase-Riboud prefaces each chapter with an extract from Cuvier's writings (a similar strategy is used in Parks's *Venus)*. In her plot the oscillation of repulsion and desire in European accounts of Khoi and, more generically, African sexuality finds clear expression in an overt equation between the gaze of the male scientist and the penetration of the rapist. Diseased, oppressed, given to drink and inhabiting a borderland between reality and nightmare, Baartman makes a brave gesture of resistance, screaming that she is human, not an animal, before a crowd of gaping, uncomprehending Europeans at a post-Restoration ball given by the Duc de Berry. Falling from a chandelier that she has climbed, she is "rescued" by the "black-clad police-inspector-doctor Cuvier … stalking me like a hunter, intent on his prey and without mercy, when all I craved was mercy" (Chase-Riboud 2003, 257). Baartman successfully resists Cuvier's attempt to rape her and returns home in Réaux's carriage. In Parks's play *Venus*, a "romance" between the lecherous Cuvier and the materialistic Sara almost culminates in marriage, but Cuvier's "Grade-School Chum" persuades the anatomist to return to the straight and narrow path of racism and academic responsibility.

In a perceptive article, written four years before Chase-Riboud completed her novel, Ulrike Kistner (1999) had noticed the significant disjunction between Foucault's image of Cuvier as a scientific genius who played a prominent part in a break in knowledge, an epistemic change, and the common or garden-variety racist who appeared in some of the recent accounts of the Hottentot Venus in literature and cultural studies. Indeed, Cuvier was not a "pseudo-scientist," a word too liberally employed by those who criticise his racism, a usage that sometimes implies that one secretly venerates the scientific rationality one may claim to disparage. While it would indeed be

unfortunate if Cuvier's accomplishments in anatomy and paleontology were to be undervalued, surely it is not uncommon for geniuses to be morally flawed? Later in the nineteenth century, in *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin (1886, 83) claimed that a dog might have more self-awareness than "the hard-worked wife of a degraded Australian savage." In other words, Cuvier was a true scientist, but his work on members of his own species was certainly damaged by his moral flaws.

In writing the history of biological anthropology, how do we judge the individuals who placed Ishi's brain and Baartman's genitals along with their own brains or crania on museum shelves in boxes or in pickling solutions? Does historicism with respect to these scientists enjoin the same sort of relativism with which we would treat (or not treat) Dayak endocannibalism, which may or may not have comparable motives? There is, unavoidably, an issue of consent, something that was deemed less important in the nineteenth century. Cuvier and Broca desired to exhibit their brains to posterity. Baartman did not (so far as we know) consent to the posthumous examination, dissection and exhibition of her genitalia.

"Dehumanised Colonial Imaginings"?

Aside from their placement in the history of racial science and popular stereotypes, does anything about some Khoi and San genitalia and buttocks merit the attention of physical anthropologists?

Yvette Abrahams (1997, 46, 2007) blames Gould (1982, 22, 23), Gilman (1985a, 12) and Gordon (1992, 187) for reviving the racist tradition, citing remarks made in their accounts of the racist past, in which they discuss the existence/persistence of the *tablier* among living Khoi and San as either a biological singularity or as the product of cultural practices such as labial manipulation.

> The present tense of these pronouncements serves to show that what Pratt (1992, 232) has called "Europe's dehumanised colonial imaginings" are alive and well in dominant symbolic activity on the Khoisan. Although it now takes place at the level of academic work rather than as a direct physical act, it would seem as if the genital encounter between white men and Khoisan women is doomed to be repeated endlessly in the twenty-first century, as it was in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth. The quotes just cited are the tip of the iceberg. I have chosen them because they possess an intellectual honesty – there is no need to deconstruct these texts (Abrahams 1997, 46).

On the contrary, there may be a need to deconstruct the texts. One has to ask who the authors are and what positions they are taking, what is inside their texts and what is excluded from them, given that there is "nothing ever without text/context"– "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (see Derrida 1976, 158, 159). Are Gould, Gilman and Gordon merely perpetuating the worst aspects of Enlightenment science? Surely they are part of another discourse. What neither Gould nor Gilman had was an understanding of Khoi and San traditional cultures and the ways in which they resembled and differed from other cultures both in South Africa and elsewhere. On the other hand, Rob Gordon and Stuart Sholto Douglas have written a well-received, historical and anthropological monograph on the mistreatment and misrepresentation of the San of Namibia (Gordon and Douglas 2000), a fact that Abrahams does acknowledge.

On one key argument Gilman agrees with many of his critics, namely that the Khoisan *female* (rather than the Khoisan male or the female of another African group) was always a symbol for everything in African and black sexuality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse. I was aware that stereotypes of *male* sexuality among Khoi did not always conform to typical racist stereotypes of oversexed male Africans, which have existed for at least three or four centuries. There were other problems with the terms of debate between Gilman and his critics of which I was partially unaware until new scholarly work appeared.

In a singularly brilliant article, Zine Magubane brings to task Gilman and both those who follow him and those who oppose him. Most of these scholars, remarks Magubane, claim to be constructionists of some sort, but they take for granted Gilman's assertion that blacks, both male and female, were the central icons of sexual difference in the nineteenth century. "They have not, however, asked what social relations determined which peoples counted as black, and for which people did Blacks become icons of sexual difference and why." She says that they are therefore all guilty of the very essentialism they "purport to deconstruct!" (Magubane 2001, 817).

The discourses of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century raciology are anything but consistent, and it is certainly true, as Magubane claims, that both Khoi and San were sometimes seen as prototypically African, sometimes seen as African but unusually so, and quite often viewed as a distinct race because of their stature, lighter colour and other (supposedly) distinctive features. Strother (1999, 39) makes a similar point, stressing that in Cuvier's time Khoisan peoples were usually viewed as racially separate from other Africans. Saul Dubow has shown how late Victorian historians like George McCall Theal developed an evolutionary narrative in which the primitive autochthonous hunter-gatherers, the San,

were supplanted first by the pastoralist Khoi (who were racially mixed with "Hamites") and latterly by agro-pastoralist Bantu (Dubow 1995, 68–73). These assertions were precisely concordant with colonialist and racist claims to land. However, in post-apartheid South Africa, the members of the Rainbow Nation may now wish to stress the common Africanity of most or all of its peoples.

Magubane also notes historical elisions and mistakes in the accounts of Gilman and others of the place of the Baartman episode in the history of science. For example, Cuvier did not support the hypothesis of the Great Chain of Being. He believed that there was a discontinuity between humans and other animals. When Gilman equates representations of African women by a monogenist (Cuvier) with those by a polygenist (Virey) who wrote at the beginning of the nineteenth century, writers on prostitution in mid-century, and degenerationists who wrote 75 to 85 years after Cuvier, he is playing loose with the facts. The degenerationist Auguste Morel thought that there was a bigger gap between atavistic degenerates in contemporary Europe and the upper middle class than there was between the Bushman and the bourgeois European (Magubane 2001, 819). The discourse of degeneration concerns racialised class difference within Europe; it is less concerned with racial division between the colonial periphery and the metropolis.

Magubane notes that whites/white males were never a unified group. It is indeed true that the outcry that resulted in the legal challenge to Dunlop and Cesars over the exhibition of Baartman was loud and widespread. Even though the challenge was not successful, it indicates that there were popular anti-racist as well as racist currents. If we turn to more recent years, it is not insignificant that the three recent writers whom Abrahams criticised are/were all liberals who strongly opposed apartheid, and at least a couple of them were Jewish or part Jewish by birth (so too is Schrire and so too was Tobias). Gilman's account thus implicitly assimilates fin de siècle images of Jewish degeneracy (often linked to circumcision), which he has often discussed, to the negative stereotypes of Africanity that were sustained throughout the century. His subject, whether as text or barely buried subtext, is racism directed at more than one group. Gordon (1998) has noted that Southwest Africa in the wake of the Herero genocide provided a training ground for biological scientists like Eugen Fischer, who were to be prominent in the Third Reich.

Let us give Gilman the benefit of the doubt and assume that he had no prurient intent, and let us concede that he paints nineteenth-century history with far too broad a brush. There is for all that a profound irony in the fact that Gilman seems to be the butt of more contemporary criticism than the racists he deplores. His essay demonstrates continuities in the chains of thought and in the histories of the practices that led to apartheid. He was indeed a messenger who brought some old, bad and still relevant news and then got blamed for it. This was quite possibly because of his essay's publication in a very important and widely read volume edited by one of the best-known contemporary African-American scholars, a book that made Baartman a key symbol of racist and patriarchal oppression and her return so important a goal of the post-apartheid generation in the new Rainbow Nation.

Concluding Remarks

At the end of this saga, we are still left with all the problems with which the paper began. Are we narrating these aporias to no purpose? Are we rather implying that, since Sara Baartman has been laid to rest for 15 years, there should be a moratorium on further discussion by physical and social anthropologists and historians concerning the controversies about her and her peers because we might inadvertently revive the offensive stereotypes we are attacking? Perhaps our contribution could be to remove contested "facts" and "fictions" from disputed narratives and place them in a context where they may belong.

Social anthropologists have had plenty to say about Khoi and San cultures, both traditional and "modern." Ethnographers of Khoi and San peoples such as Schapera, Marshall, Carstens, Lee, Barnard and Guenther have given us detailed descriptions of the changing lives of hunter-gatherers that few, if any, would label ethnopornographic. They write about such things as social organisation, subsistence patterns, folk tales, trance dances and both traditional and commercial art, not about supposed genital peculiarities. Indeed, anthropologists and historians who do write today about sexuality in their own and other societies usually recognise the sensitivity of the matters at issue by candidly acknowledging positionality and taking careful account of the ways in which people can read both against as well as with the text. Privacy is a major concern, and sometimes it implies barriers that outsiders should not or cannot cross. Because most people in most cultures are shy about sex, and because sexuality is a legitimate part of anthropological research, the best way to do ethnographic research in this field even more than others is in collaboration with scholars and ordinary people from the societies we are studying. This means that there are

subjects the anthropologist's interlocutor may be loath to discuss.

Shostak's book about the life of a !Kung woman, *Nisa*, is a remarkable account of sexuality and marriage from a feminine perspective. It devotes but a few lines to matters eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers deemed so important.

While recounting her recollections of the years when she was newly married in the late 1930s, Nisa told Shostak of some of her early fears about sex: "Because, when my genitals first started to develop, I was afraid. I'd look at them and cry and think something was wrong with them. But people told me, 'Nothing's wrong. That's what you yourself are like'" (Shostak 1981, 159).

In an endnote Shostak (1981, 378) offered an explanation of Nisa's comment: "The !Kung have little body hair and women have very long genital labia; elongation of the labia rather than appearance of pubic hair signals puberty in girls. (Hence the numerous references to long labia in sexual insults.)"

Note that this is Shostak's gloss, that Nisa may have never discussed or may have been reluctant to discuss the "development of her genitals" and whether it was "natural" or "cultural." But what is significant is the matter-of-factness of Shostak's statement. Possibly the *tablier* is more than a "genital phantom" haunting the pages of some contemporary writers, as Abrahams (2007, 46) asserts.

All of this should be kept in mind when one considers the one historical puzzle that the literature on Baartman cannot and does not seek to solve. Cuvier was a racist like many of his contemporaries, but he had a reputation for impeccable observation and analysis. He did claim to see something, the so-called *tablier*, when he conducted his outrageous, post-mortem examination. If we reject the idea that it was a sign, one of a few stigmata of racial difference, then it was either a manifestation of extreme natural variability, an individual anomaly, or else a product of cultural modelling, rather like a skull after cradle-boarding, a Maori tattoo, a Caduveo face design, a pierced nose, a pierced ear, circumcised labia or a circumcised penis. Labiaplasty is a directly analogous practice in contemporary Western societies, but this process of refashioning of the external genitals may represent a continuation of the racist stereotypes we have been examining (Nurka and Jones 2013).

Labial elongation is a process undergone by many young women in different countries in Southern and South Central Africa, including Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ruanda, Uganda and Kenya. It is less common in South Africa and Lesotho. It may not be found among contemporary Khoi populations and populations that are partly Khoi in descent, but it could conceivably have been practised among Khoi and San populations who were in contact with Bantu-speaking groups among whom it was customary. If one assumes that this could not have happened, one may be guilty of the very essentialism against which Magubane rightly cautions. The World Health Organization classified the custom as type 4 female genital mutilation, but withdrew the designation in 2008 on the grounds that the procedure was often harmless.

It is curious that until the last couple of decades very little research was done on the topic, although there was a large corpus of literature on male circumcision and female infibulation and clitoridectomy. The new scholarship has been developed by medical anthropologists, medical sociologists and health workers trained in social science research as well as lawyers committed to human rights. The scholars are both African and European, and they are usually women.

Two feminist anthropologists, Brigitte Bagnol and Esmeralda Mariano, who worked with women in Tete Province in Northern Mozambique, learned a lot from them about labial manipulation, the tightening of the vagina and the use of unguents and potions that, they say, formed part of an *ars sexualis* in the Foucauldian sense (Bagnol and Mariano 2008, 43). While it is true that occasional infections were caused by the application of powders and plant substances to the vagina, Bagnol and Mariano stressed that these practices did not constitute genital mutilation. In all such cases, they caution, one must listen carefully to the disclosures of one's interlocutors (on this point see also H. Lyons 1981 and 2007 with respect to genital cutting).

Such a close listener is Mathabo Khau, whose work (2012) on inner labial elongation among Basotho women, which considers whether or not the practice, which reflects socially constructed notions of gendered duty, is a form of symbolic violence in Bourdieu's sense. Khau is not an anthropologist, but is rather a researcher, primarily concerned with AIDS and sex education, who has been doing postdoctoral work at the Centre for Gender Excellence in Sweden. She is conversant with the relevant anthropological literature and fieldwork methodology. Her paper was based on her own experiences and those of a dozen science teachers who were the subjects of her research on AIDS and sex education. Labial elongation is common among the Basotho, but it is not a topic for public discourse. Khau had to work hard to break down the barriers to get her group to discuss their experiences. In brief, Basotho consider

that women should have elongated labia because they are pleasing to men and proper. A woman who does not have elongated inner labia at the time of marriage is considered to be "cold," and such women may be stigmatised. From the age of eight onwards, young girls assist one another in labial stretching. Older women such as grandmothers and aunts check on the process. Khau notes that labial elongation makes the clitoris less accessible and may therefore diminish sexual pleasure. Defenders of the practice say that it enhances femininity and is clearly consensual. Khau questions whether eight-year-old girls can possibly give real consent to this process. Khau describes the humiliation of those who do not undergo labial stretching as a form of symbolic violence. No doubt some Basotho would object to Khau's conclusions, and there are certainly issues of differential power within Basotho society that could be raised.

Unfortunately, not everybody is aware of this sort of work, and this is as true of some progressives as of colonial reactionaries. In the early days of the revolutionary government, the Mozambique Liberation Front condemned all traditional practices associated with initiation as primitive, just as the missionaries did before them. It is hardly surprising that an articulate, progressive Khoi feminist like Yvette Abrahams would recoil at the suggestion that Sara Baartman and her peers practised labial manipulation. She considers such suggestions to be obscene, insulting and absurd: "Off paper I began to argue. I kept saying, 'Look, we do not play with ourselves until our bodily parts hang down to our knees' " (Abrahams 2007, 430).

Such an argument is in a sense overdetermined. The author is aware that labial manipulation does not exist in her own community, and was at that time possibly unaware that it is practised elsewhere in Africa and that it is comparable to practices of bodily alteration all over the world. She is very aware of the racist tradition that sees modifications of the sexual organs as an index of primitivity (on this see H. Lyons 1981), and it is very conceivable that she has internalised attitudes toward the body that form part of religious education. Anyone who grew up as the victim of systemic racism, a social malaise that is present even in countries that officially ban racial discrimination, must be painfully aware of the persistent powerful stereotypes of mental and moral inequality and hierarchy that preserve systems of injustice, of *baaskap*. They are abstract controlling representations and wounding, insulting controlling images (in the sense used by Hill Collins).

The discourse about Baartman is characterised, as we have seen, by a powerful set of vivid, pictorial controlling images. Their meaning is anything but arbitrary. They cannot be manipulated like purely abstract signs because they are haunted by their past. Anthropologists who are familiar with the work of Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s are fully cognizant of the power of key symbols with strong, pictorial, corporeal components that can be tied to a varying set of ideas, drives and affects. A colour symbol such as the red *muyombu* log in Ndembu circumcision ritual may be viewed as symbolising the blood of the successful hunt, but it can't shed other connotations that are deemed less favourable, such as the blood of homicide (Turner 1962). In similar fashion, Lévi-Strauss (1966, 35) noted that the symbols used in bricolage are not purely abstract signs – they always carry the baggage of their past history; they are "pre-constrained." If any depiction of Baartman is always already constrained by previous depictions and representations, we can better understand why Gilman's text and illustrations are *haunted* by the very representations he tries to deconstruct and why they are virtually imprinted on the pages of writers who consciously abstain from the use of drawings and photographs. In our terminology, the counter-conscription is impeded by the prior conscription.

Arguably, one reason for the power of such controlling images is that they concur with racist stereotypes that are still anchored in the popular imagination in Western countries. One has only to read some of the racist tweets about the Obamas that are endlessly shared on social media to know that such images are still around. It is therefore impossible to totally rule out the assertion that they could conceivably infect most well-meaning scholarly and critical discourse as well. This caveat applies even to the comparative discourse on body modifications whose contours we have outlined, although it does matter that it is to a very great extent a product of a decolonised imagination.

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Notes

1 This article is an expanded, updated and wholly revised version of a presentation I gave at the American Anthropological Association in 2007. I have used the spelling "Sara Baartman" rather than "Sarah Bartmann" simply because it is more commonly used. The word "Khoisan" correctly describes a language group, and it also may refer correctly to both the Khoi and Bushman peoples. The term "Hottentot" for Khoi is still commonly used, although it refers to the racist comparison made by early Dutch settlers between the Khoi languages and the clucking of fowls. However, most people who speak of Hottentots are unaware of the term's origin. The Bushmen, or San, do speak related languages and share distinctive cultural traits. They possess no collective term that would encompass all of their peoples (such as the Juhoansi or the !Kung). "Bosjeman" or "Bushman" was once obviously an insult term, but so too is "San," a term of insult the Khoi employ with respect to the San. Accordingly, some scholars who once preferred the term "San" are now returning to "Bushman," a usage some Bushmen have encouraged. I use both terms.

2 Our own understanding of the concept of "ethnopornography" came from the oral as well as the written tradition: the sessions on ethnopornography at the annual meetings of American Society of Ethnohistory in 2005 and a subsequent special conference at Duke University, both organised by Pete Sigal and the late Neil Whitehead. We should note that Nash (2014) advocates a sex-positive form of ethnopornography that is designed to express joy in the sexuality of black women. Some of the visual stereotypes formerly employed by white racists may then be invoked in an aggressive counter-reading of the symbols of abjection, which are then transformed into symbols of affirmation and jouissance.

3 Monogenism was the belief that all humans are a single species descended from a common ancestor. The so-called "races" were therefore not separate species but varieties of a single species, a fact that was evidenced by their capacity to interbreed. As a theory, monogenesis was much more consistent with the Bible than polygenesis, but some monogenists relied on science much more than the Bible.

4 Inasmuch as Khoi and San were correctly distinguished in older sources, we should note that images of San sexuality pointed mainly to excess. Early accounts of the genuinely erotic elements in San dances by Victorian writers such a George Stow reinforced these stereotypes. Stow, who genuinely appreciated many aspects of San culture, referred to some of their dances as "lascivious" (Stow 1905, 119).

5 Narrative strategies can play down indeterminacy as well as foreground it. In her excellent biography, Rachel Holmes (2007, 8) sometimes converts speculations into facts – for example, claiming that Baartman's father was the dominant influence on her.

6 Harriet Lyons and I saw the exhibit with our children on the penultimate day of the exhibit and had a reasonably friendly discussion outside the museum with the daughter of one of the protest leaders, who had not actually seen anything more than the museum's brochures. We tried to persuade her that the curator meant to counter racism, not to perpetuate it. In fairness, we must mention that our then 12-year-old son, a member of a class of observers often taken to museums by parents and teachers, read the signage as supportive of the missionary endeavour.

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