

https://dspace.org/

I am Saartjie Baartman: re-imagining parts of a life

Levin, Nobunye N.

2010-03-03T11:33:18Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7605

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

I am Saartjie Baartman:

Re-imagining parts of a life

Nobunye N. Levin

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television.

Johannesburg, 2009.

ABSTRACT

Public articulations of Saartjie Baartman have focused on an over-determinism of her figure, as a signifier of European cultural and scientific imperialism. This generated a range of articulations, which utilise Baartman as a focal point in discussions of race, gender, sexuality and nation. This symbolic utilisation elides a sense of Baartman's private life and does not consider her self-determinism. This report and the accompanying film project, *I am Saartjie Baartman*, offer a re-imagining of Saartjie Baartman and her experiences. This re-imagining privileges a gendered reading of her private life through utilising a "ruin of representation". This ruin of representation is about an "ontology of change" that seeks to "ruin" static structures of life, space and time. It is therefore located in a "logic of difference". The "logic of difference", for the purposes of this research, is about an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity. Furthermore, this re-imagining of Baartman situates itself within the "empirical avant garde". The "empirical avant garde sketches a geography of relations" and considers and produces a sense of experiential rather than historic (linear) time. This is imperative for Baartman's re-imagining as it privileges the personal and experiential. This "ruin of representation" and the re-imaging that it enables can however only exist in the film *I am Saartjie Baartman*. Beyond the film it reproduces itself therefore disavowing the impression of "ruin".

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work, save insofar as indicated in the acknowledgments and references. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Film and Television, in the University of the Witswatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Nobunye N. Levin

22nd day of JULY, 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their time, support and love.

I would like to thank Prof. Jyoti Mistry for her support, encouragement, mentorship and unfailing belief in me. You have been an inspiration.

I would like to thank all the actors, who gave their time and energy towards the realisation of the film project, particularly my friend and intellectual sparing partner Palesa Shongwe, who made a beautiful Saartjie Baartman.

I would like to thank Simon Chambert for always being there.

I would thank all those who gave technical support specifically my friends Kim Munsammy and Michael Matsie.

Finally I would like to thank my family who have always supported, encouraged and loved me. I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... **II**

DECLARATION ..... **III**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **IV**

PREFACE **1**

INTRODUCTION **6**

HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT **9**

REPRESENTING BAARTMAN **17**

Zola Maseko: *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman (2002)* **17**

Penny Siopis -*Dora and the Other Woman* (1988) **29**

RE-IMAGINING BAARTMAN: *I AM SAARTJIE BAARTMAN* **34**

Concept **34**

Director's Vision **36**

Execution **38**

CONCLUSION **47**

APPENDIX **50**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **57**

FILMOGRAPHY **60**

PREFACE

The desire to embark on a project of re-imagining Saartjie Baartman began with a book by Rachel Holmes entitled, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman, born 1789-buried 2002* (2007). Holmes' book offered a re-imagining of Baartman that privileged a feminist historiography. This historiography largely situated itself in Baartman's private life rather than as part of a larger empirical historical project. The book offered details of Baartman's life, which had previously been ignored or gone unrecorded in the public domain. Additionally, Holmes' exploration seemed to consider Baartman as a person first. This was significant in destabilising other public articulations of Baartman.

Public articulations of Baartman include works by artists, writers, scientists, historians and filmmakers. These articulations can be located across Europe, Africa and America. They include Zola Maseko's nation building projects on Baartman; *The life and times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2002) and the pseudo-scientific offerings made by esteemed anatomist and naturalist Georges Cuvier. Cuvier's infamous and racist report on Baartman, written after her death and entitled *"Report on observations made on the body of a woman known in Paris and London as the Hottentot Venus"* (1817) racialised Baartman's genitalia and buttocks and attributed animalistic traits and features to them.

Cuvier's writings became famous across America and Europe. They became foundational texts, "in comparative and evolutionary anatomy and biology, anthropology, as well as racial science and sexology" (Crais and Scully, 2009: 135). Importantly Baartman's appearance in medical texts (namely Cuvier's) was often used "to frame her not only as central but as essential for any discussion regarding medical debates on Khoi-San anatomy in the nineteenth century" (Qureshi, 2004:244). Cuvier's writings were also the precursor to all other writings on Baartman.

Notable among the subsequent writing on Baartman is Sander Gilman's essay; *Black bodies, white bodies/ toward an iconography of female sexuality in Late nineteenth century Art, Medicine and Literature* (1985). Gilman's article explicitly links Baartman's exhibition to her sexuality (Qureshi, 2004:234). He draws links between Baartman's supposedly primitive unbridled sexuality and the perception of prostitutes in the

nineteenth century; "the primitive is the black and the qualities of blackness, or at least of the black female, are those of the prostitute"(Gilman,1985:229). Gilman has been credited with reigniting the debate on Baartman in the eighties and has been frequently cited.

In visual arts there have been contributions made by Penny Siopis in South Africa and by black artists in the Diaspora, such as American Lyle Ashton Harris. Penny Siopis has featured Baartman extensively in her work. Siopis has utilised Baartman to draw parallels between black and white women's oppression; in criticisms of Apartheid censorship and oppression and to comment on the exploitation of European imperialism in general. This has been illustrated in pieces such as *Dora and the Other Woman* (1988), *Foreign affairs* (1994*)* and *Exhibit Ex-Africa* (1990). Harris, on the other hand, has utilised Baartman to comment on the representation of black sexuality and on a culture "that is by and large narcissistically mired in the debasement and objectification of blackness" (Harris as cited in Qureshi, 2004:250). His photograph *Venus Hottentot 2000* evokes Baartman's famous breasts and buttocks through the use of metallic prostheses worn by a model (Qureshi, 2004:249).

Other notable contributions include those made by Richard Atlick and Bernth Lindfors[1], "who discuss Baartman with reference to the entertainment scene of the nineteenth century" (Qureshi, 2004:233). Additionally Anne Fausto-Sterling and Londa Schiebinger[2] discuss nineteenth century writings on the Khoi-San and Khoi-San women in particular. They reveal "how the group achieved such fame and excited the interests of travelers and naturalists" (Qureshi, 2004:234).

The central issue with these public articulations and the dominant position they assume, is that they see Baartman as a symbol of her times and the inhumanity that she suffered

---

[1] See LINDFORS, B.1983. The Hottentot Venus and other African attractions in nineteenth century England. *Australasian Drama studies*. 1:83-104. And ATLICK, R. 1978. *The shows of London*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

[2] See FAUSTO- STERLING, A. 1995. Gender, race and Nation: The comparative anatomy of "Hottentot" women in Europe 1815-1817.IN: Terry, J & Urla, J (Eds.) *Deviant Bodies: Critical perspectives on difference in science and popular culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. And SCHIEBINGER, L. 1993. *Nature's body: Gender in the making of modern science*. Boston: Beacon Press.

(Qureshi, 2004:251) as a woman and a black person. These dominant articulations also largely focus on Baartman's time in Europe and give a cursory glance to her life in South Africa. This reduces her life and experiences to her period of public display in Europe. This disavows a sense of Baartman's private life. Furthermore, "the dominant position currently implies that not only was there one image of the black, but that Baartman was representative of this image" (Qureshi, 2004:234). Baartman is therefore utilised as a tool and object of discourse in political projects concerning race, gender, sexuality and nation. These projects rely on seeing Baartman as a victim and symbol. They consequently engulf "her humanity and individuality" (Holmes, 2007: 187). Furthermore, these articulations elide any sense of personal will that she may have had.

Rachel Holmes' book represents a departure from this dominant position. She recaptures Baartman's humanity by carefully contextualising Baartman and her story in a feminist historiography. By doing this she defies and deconstructs the mythology surrounding Baartman. This mythology constructs her as a symbol and victim. Significantly Holmes' articulations consider Baartman as a person first rather than as a historical figure or icon. So, although she situates Baartman in history, she privileges how Baartman acted upon and within history rather than how history constructed Baartman. Furthermore, when giving historical accounts of Baartman, Holmes attempts to contextualise these accounts in Baartman's voice and experiences. This includes first person accounts of events, which are given by Baartman herself. Such as the detailed story of the death of her father in a European led commando raid that she relayed to a Dutch speaking French Journalist in 1815 (Holmes, 2007:18). Although this passage was probably embellished to a certain extent, the account resonates with the political realities of Baartman's upbringing (Holmes, 2007:18).

There have, however been other attempts to restore Baartman's humanity in writing. These include contributions by Meg Samuelson, Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully. Samuleson's book, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering women? Stories of the South African Transition* (2007), explores the ways in which the imaginative reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa as a "rainbow nation" has been produced from images of iconic women. These reconstructions dismember women's bodies and disregard their historical presence. Saartjie Baartman is one of the women reviewed, alongside women such as Winnie Mandela.

Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully's contribution; *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A ghost Story and a biography* (2009), offers a biography of Baartman that debunks what they argue are common misconceptions about Baartman and her history. This includes facts relating to her place of birth. Crais and Scully claim that Baartman was not born in the Gamtoos valley as is commonly assumed. Rather they assert that she was in fact born 80km to the north of the Gamtoos Valley, in a place called the Camdeboo (the "Green Valley" in the Khoekhoe language Baartman spoke as a child) (2009:7). Furthermore, they argue that Baartman was not born in 1789, but rather a decade earlier in the 1770's (Crais and Scully, 2009:7). This makes her older than originally assumed, both at the time of her death and during her time in London. Furthermore, Crais and Scully attempt to reinstate Baartman's humanity by carefully highlighting the "distinction between Saartjie Baartman the woman and the iconic Hottentot Venus" (Wicomb as cited in Crais and Scully, 2009).

Samuelson and Crais and Scully's books are important in terms of recouping Baartman's humanity and a sense of her private life. Furthermore, both these books disavow the range of causes Baartman has stood for, including those of South Africa's nation building objectives, women's rights and African rights. These books recognise that to construct Baartman solely as a symbol of these causes, simplifies her past and allows her to be mythologized as a victim.

It was however Holmes' book that first ignited my interest in Baartman. Her book invited me into Baartman's private life and allowed me to hear her speak. Holmes' book became the foundational text in which to situate my re-imagining of Baartman and parts of her life. This was long before the discovery of Samuelson and Crais and Scully's texts. Holmes' text seemed to truly privilege Baartman herself, as a person and as a woman. This was imperative for my film project. My film project is about attempting to capture Baartman's subjectivity through an interpretation of her personal experiences. I therefore have decided to distill much of Baartman's personal history and historical context from Holmes' book. The sections in this research report that discuss Baartman's personal history and historical context (namely, but not limited to, the sections: Historical and Scientific context and Re-imagining Baartman: *I am Saartjie Baartman*) will therefore largely be informed by Holmes' book, unless otherwise indicated. I will therefore

paraphrase sections of Holmes' book and reference only when direct quotations from Holmes' book are used.

INTRODUCTION

Saartjie Baartman is an iconic figure who became a signifier of European cultural and scientific imperialism. Scientific racism constructed racialised notions of her body and genitalia, such as notions of the primitive, the savage, the animalistic and the uncontrolled. The racialising of her body and genitalia and the ideas espoused by this racialising process produced images and notions of nation. These were useful to her European exploiters and colonisers under the rubric of science. Later South Africa as a (democratic) nation, cast themselves in the role of saviour and restorer of dignity by returning her to her native soil. Through a process of re-imagining the experiences of Baartman I hope to show how these processes created her as a symbol of both revulsion and adoration. This agenda produced by separate peoples denied her a sense of a private life. In my undertaking I hope to offer a gendered reading that privileges her private life and produces a sense of experiential time rather than historic time.

The assumptions of Saartjie Baartman's life, which rely on seeing her as a victim, have furnished the imaginary reconstructive project of the post-apartheid nation. This nation building agenda has been staged on Baartman's body and relies on her perceived lack of personal will. The myths of Baartman's life have allowed the post-apartheid South African national imaginary and its institutions of nation building to overlook the sense of self determinism that Baartman demonstrated within the social milieu of her lifetime. Baartman's historic context did not contain social and political structures, which allowed someone of her race and gender to make her agency public. She did however continuously demonstrate acts of self determination. This is exemplified by Baartman's showgirl performances in the taverns and shebeens of Cape Town (Holmes, 2007:18). These performances defied her strictly defined traditional roles as both nurturer and servant. It is these acts of self determination that the institutions and proponents of the nation building agenda choose to disregard. They rather utilise Baartman and the inhumanity that she suffered as a symbol of the inhumanity the South African nation suffered under colonialism and apartheid. These processes of consecration which have created Baartman as a symbol of her times and therefore as an icon merely re-establish Saartjie Baartman as a cultural curiosity.

I hope to cast aside Baartman's cloak of both cultural icon and cultural revulsion. These incarnations rendered her as "the archetype of the silenced victim" (Holmes, 2007:187). This shrouded both her individuality and humanity (Holmes, 2007:187). Within this process of disrobing I hope to normalise the figure of Saartjie Baartman and show her as being both resistant to and complicit in whatever experiences she may have been a part of. I hope to interrogate some of the assumptions made about her life and body, which arguably, cast her as an icon of her race, gender and nation. Rachel Holmes has asserted that this kept "history's foot firmly on her neck" (2007:188). History, therefore, disavows the role that she played within the creation of her own path in life. Her perceived lack of personal will and politicisation, within her iconic cloak, merely cast her as a cultural "curiosity re-named as cultural icon" (Qureshi, 2004:251).

There were many Khoi-San women who, like Baartman, were exhibited and dissected and remain stored in our very own national museums (Qureshi, 2004:245). What differentiates Baartman from these women is that she had a name. She was not only Saartjie Baartman; she was the famous "Hottentot Venus", known for her impressive derrière and tablier/ sinus pudoris (supposed apron of skin, extended from the inner Labia or mythically, the abdomen, which covered the genitalia of Khoi- san women, also known as the curtain of shame).

Baartman was carried in a box back home as a commodity in post-apartheid South Africa's economy of "rainbow" nation building and healing. The South African national discourse often fails to mention who Saartjie Baartman was; what she felt while being exhibited or what she did on "her days off". The discourse overlooks the life she led before her journey across Europe to become the "Hottentot Venus". Furthermore, who she was after the public lost interest in her, is often ignored. She was disregarded after she played out her last season on the Parisian stage and her fame "became the reflected light of a dying star" (Holmes, 2007:151). It is these private moments, which go unrecorded and ignored that need to be unveiled and re-captured. These moments reflect a life of self-determinism and experience. It is within these moments that she spoke. My film project, *I am Saartjie Baartman,* aims to re-capture these moments and in the process reveal Baartman as a person rather than as a cultural artifact.

Baartman's embodiment as a cultural artifact relies on the employment of her body and her story as "focal points in discussions of race and gender" (Qureshi, 2004:251). An approach that adequately interrogates the processes, both upon her body and within material history, is often neglected. This disqualifies any sort of self determination that Saartjie Baartman may have had and places her once again in the role of cultural curiosity. In this way she becomes a representative of her race and nation just as exotic as the "camelopardalis" (giraffe skin) that accompanied her on her voyage to England and which she was bartered with on arrival (Holmes,2007:50).

HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CONTEXT

According to Holmes, Saartjie Baartman was born on the banks of the Gamtoos river valley, in the Eastern frontier of the Cape colony, in 1789. She was the last born among seven siblings; four brothers and two sisters. Baartman's parents were well respected in the community. Her father was the head of the hunters and a cattle drover and her mother was the woman who organised the celebrations. Baartman's father was, however, the dominant influence in her life as her mother died before she reached her first birthday. On the night to celebrate Baartman's forthcoming nuptials to a man named Skolar, her father was killed. He was killed by a European-led commando raid. Skolar, Baartman's first love, died along with him. Baartman was captured and taken into "the custody of a hunter and trader named Pieter Willem Cesars, a free black man[3] from Cape Town" (Holmes, 2007:20). Baartman was taken to Cape Town by Cesars. She became a nursemaid for Pieter's brother Hendrik and his wife Anna Catharina Staal. When she was not serving as a nursemaid in Hendrick Cesars' household Baartman frequented the taverns and shebeens of Cape Town. She became popular there due to her ability to play (on her ramkie), sing and dance.

Baartman met a young British soldier in the shebeens of Cape Town. He was a regimental drummer attached to the Cape garrison. Baartman and the young soldier fell in love. Baartman moved into his barracks and shortly after they had a child. The child unfortunately died before its first or second birthday. Baartman and the soldier parted ways soon thereafter.

Hendrick Cesars was the manservant of a man named Alexander Dunlop. Dunlop was the military staff surgeon at the Army general hospital in Cape Town and "an exporter of museum specimens from the Cape" (Qureshi, 2004:235). Additionally he was given the civil role of chief surgeon at the slave lodge where he treated Khoi-San patients. Dunlop

---

[3] "Since all slaves were *ipso facto* black, free slaves were designated free blacks even if descended from a European parent. Blackness was therefore not so much a matter of skin colour as of non- European descent" (Holmes, 2007: 28-29). Legally, the term free black covered three categories. "All liberated slaves (described as manumitted) entered the free black community, but not all free blacks were descended from slaves. A significant portion came from the population of convicts (mostly Indo-Chinese, Indonesian and Sinhalese) and political exiles (predominantly Indonesian, many royal or high born) Transported to the Cape" (Holmes, 2007:29-30).

became involved in a dispute with the government of Cape Town after they refused to provide funding to treat venereal disease among Khoi- San women at the slave lodge. Dunlop's protestations irritated the administration who regarded themselves as merely temporary custodians "of the Cape on behalf of the exiled prince of Orange" (Holmes, 2007:44). The British government was therefore "unwilling to expend a penny more than necessary on the colony and refused to pay" (Holmes, 2007:44). Furthermore it ruled "any charge whatever with regard to Venereal Female Hottentots as altogether inadmissible" (Johnston as cited in Holmes, 2007:44-45).

Dunlop was enraged by this and continued to cause trouble for the administration. For all his efforts, Dunlop was placed on transfer back to England and a replacement was sought for his two posts in Cape Town.

Due to Dunlop's dismissal Hendrick Cesars and his whole family, including Pieter and Baartman, faced an uncertain future. "Looking for a means to secure a new livelihood, Dunlop persuaded the Cesars brothers that Baartman had lucrative potential as a scientific curiosity in England" (Holmes, 1997:45). Baartman was a pretty young lady with prominent buttocks. Furthermore she was a member of "an almost mythical African tribe" (Holmes, 2007:47). Dunlop was certain that these attributes would make her a great success in London among the thriving entertainment trade in human and scientific curiosities. Dunlop and the Cesars brothers discussed the plan with Baartman and she agreed to leave with them. Baartman was no doubt lured by the promise of riches and adventure. Moreover her material circumstances in Cape Town further prompted her to leave. Baartman was economically dependent on Hendrick Cesars.

Baartman sailed across the sea and finally landed in England. Dunlop hoped to advantageously dispose of Baartman once they arrived in England. He offered her to a collector known as William Bullock. Bullock refused what he considered to be the distasteful offer of the "Hottentot" woman. He argued that "such an exhibition would not meet the countenance of the public"[4] (Holmes, 2007:59). Dunlop therefore decided that he and Hendrick Cesars would manage Baartman. Baartman became a huge success and a cultural phenomenon as the "Hottentot Venus".

People were invited to view Baartman for two shillings. She was advertised as possessing the kind of shape "which is most admired among her country men" (Strother as cited in Qureshi, 2004:236). She wore a "dress resembling her complexion" and so tight that "her shapes above and enormous size of her posterior parts are as visible as if the said female were naked, the dress is evidently intended to give the appearance of being undressed"[5] (Strother as cited in Qureshi, 2004:236).

People in London were captivated by Baartman's posterior and many would prod and poke it to determine its authenticity. Mrs Mathews, wife of Charles Mathews the comedian wrote that her husband upon visiting Baartman:

> found her surrounded by many persons, some *females*! One pinched her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; one *lady* employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it *'nattral'*. This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with sullen indifference, except upon some provocation, when she seemed inclined to resent brutality. On these occasions it took all the authority of the keeper to subdue her resentment (as cited in Qureshi, 2004:236)

After two weeks of exhibition Baartman caught flu. She struggled through her performances, as she grew progressively ill. Cesars continued to push her, even when challenged by an audience member about Baartman's ill-health. Cesars retorted to the angry audience member that Baartman "was always sulky when company was there" (Holmes, 2007:76). Baartman protested and indicated that she was too ill to continue, but Cesars continued to prod her with his Bamboo walking stick, until he forced her into compliance. Baartman's forceful display soon attracted the attention of the abolitionist movement in London.

"On Wednesday, 17 October 1810, Zachary Macaulay, Thomas Gisborne Babington and Peter Van Wageninge filed an affidavit in support of their application for *a writ of habeas corpus* to be issued on Baartman's 'Keepers' " (Holmes, 2007:91). Thus began the court case to "free" Baartman from Dunlop and Cesars. Macaulay and his peers tried to prove

---

[4] "Deposition to the court of the kings bench by William Bullock" (Holmes,2007:204)

[5] Official court records as re-printed in STROTHER, Z.1999. Display of the body Hottentot. IN: Lindfors, B (Ed.) *Africans on Stage: Studies in ethnological show business.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

that Baartman was being held against her own will and that she was exploitatively made to display herself.

Macaulay argued that her exhibitors:

> would invite the spectators to feel her posterior parts …and would desire her to turn around, in order that everybody might see her extraordinary shape…she is exhibited to the public in the same manner that any animal of the brute creation would be exhibited (as cited in Holmes, 2007:92).

Baartman, in response to all of this, stated that she wanted to stay in England. Furthermore contrary to the remarks made by Macaulay, Baartman asserted that she was content in her situation and had come to England "by her own consent…and was promised half of the money for exhibiting her person" (as cited in Holmes, 2007:102). The statements allegedly made by Baartman and a myriad other causes resulted in the abolitionists losing their case. However the court case resulted in Baartman receiving a contract. This contract promised "written security of profit sharing, warmer clothes and passage home" (Holmes, 2007: 107). Whether Cesars and Dunlop kept to this contract is unlikely and uncertain.

The case increased Baartman's popularity and she continued to be displayed in London and the provinces. Dunlop, however died soon after. Hendrick Cesars and Baartman travelled to Paris a short while later. There they mounted a show called *la Venus Hottentote*. It was a very successful show but Cesars had promised his wife that he would return to South Africa after five years. Additionally Cesars and Baartman were struggling to adjust to life in Paris. "They spoke little French and their contacts were poor" (Holmes, 2007:128). Cesars decided to strike a deal with a "predatory showman named Reaux" (Holmes, 2007:129). Baartman was sold to Reaux. Reaux was a "shady figure" (Holmes, 2007:130) who abused Baartman even further by subjecting her to a gruelling 12 hour a day schedule. He was an entertainer and animal trainer who had connections to the city's naturalists and scientists.

Reaux's connections with the Natural History museum prompted him to draw up a scheme. He would sell Baartman to the museum for a performance; in return he would make a small fortune in money. In 1815 Baartman made her way to the "Jardin des Plantes on the Left Bank" (Holmes, 2007:133). Here she was "to pose for three days, as a

life model for a panel of artists and scientists" (Holmes, 2007:133). Georges Cuvier, the famous anatomist and naturalist, was part of this panel.

Cuvier, who was also Napoleon's Surgeon General, had first seen Baartman performing in *la Venus Hottentote*. Cuvier was enamoured with her. So much so that he asked Reaux to set up a meeting with her after the show. Cuvier continued to be fascinated with her, more so after her death.

The legend of Saartjie Baartman was propagated not only within the material circumstances of her exhibition in London and Paris. Her fame is additionally the result of the great mystery of her sexual organs and their link to a sort of animalistic sexuality. These claims circulated for a number of decades prior to Baaartman's exhibition. They were myths brought home by sailors who had visited South Africa[6]. They were however largely legitimised by Cuvier, through his anatomical dissections on Baartman after her death. Cuvier and his colleague Henri De Blainville had tried, unsuccessfully, to get Baartman to reveal her genitalia while she was still alive. They competed to get Baartman naked. The "prize was empirical evidence of the Hottentot's Apron" (Holmes, 2007:142). Baartman's body, therefore, became "the territory battled over, in their escalating struggle for eminence" (Holmes, 2007:142). Cuvier soon scored a minor victory over De Blainville. He managed to convince Baartman to remove her clothes and display herself naked. She however refused to show her genitalia to the panel of artists and scientists. In an act of defiance and self determination she covered herself with a handkerchief.

The results of Baartman's dissection, garnered by Cuvier after her death, are contained in the monograph: *Report on observations made on the body of a woman known in Paris and London as the Hottentot Venus* (1817). This monograph went towards confirming for many the myth of Khoi-San women's animalistic sexuality. Furthermore it set the precedent for how black female sexuality came to be defined. Cuvier's article

---

6 The debate of the "Hottentot Apron" had existed for centuries. The debate centered on, whether the "Hottentot Apron" resulted from culture or nature. (Holmes, 2007:140). "Those favouring the natural explanation dubbed the supposed condition with a pseudo scientific description-hypertrophy of the labia minora- and seized on the apron as the clinching evidence that South Africa's indigenous people were in fact fundamentally a different species to Europeans' (Holmes, 2007:140). Holmes has argued that "Others disagreed arguing for the notional Hottentot *tablier* as a form of cultural genital manipulation best understood as a fashion, designed(depending on the commentator)to stimulate or repel desire" (2007:141).

additionally classified her as the missing link within the great chain of evolution (precursor to the orangutang).

In the monograph, Cuvier tries to prove that the Khoi- San were just one rung above apes and therefore had many simian characteristics; including a small compressed skull and a way of pouting their lips that was in the same manner as was observed in orangutangs (Cuvier,1817). Cuvier's dissection of the "Hottentot Venus" was largely focused on her sexual organs. He sought to prove that Khoi-San women did indeed have the "Hottentot Apron" and that it was a result of nature rather than culture. This would prove that the Khoi-San were a different species from Europeans and were thus "essentially bestial in nature" (Holmes, 2007:141). Furthermore, the discovery of the "Hottentot Apron" would prove that "Khoi-San women were simultaneously uncontrollably libidinous and coyly modest" (Holmes, 2007:142). These notions around Khoi-San women and their sexuality, as defined by the myth of their genitalia, created a fantasy figure. This fantasy figure was of a woman who was modest yet uncontrolled, sexually promiscuous and exciting.

Cuvier's dissection and report focused on the two things that she was exhibited for and which generated so much interest in her, these were her Steatopygia and "curtain of shame" (the supposed elongated labia minora of Khoi-San women).

Cuvier described Baartman's buttocks as being a mass of fat that "has nothing muscular about it and is situated under her skin and which vibrates with all movements that she made" (1817). Furthermore Cuvier writes that Baartman's *Tablier* (apron) was indeed as imagined:

> the labia or inner lips of the ordinary female genitalia are greatly enlarged in Khoi-San women and may hang down three or four inches below the vagina when women stand, thus giving the impression of a separate and enveloping curtain of shame" (1817).

With these two pronouncements, pertaining to Baartman's sexual organs, Cuvier attempted to prove that Baartman's sexuality was animalistic in nature. Furthermore he sought to prove that the traits that defined her sexual organs were particular to the anatomical make up of Khoi- San women.

Cuvier's claims about Baartman's sexual organs were problematic. They assume that the traits that Baartman possessed, pertaining to her sexual organs, especially her genitalia,

which aroused the most fascination, are and were inherent to all Khoi- San women's physical make up. This view is imprecise. Baartman's steatopygia was no different to French man Daniel Lambert's extraordinary weight or the Sicilian Fairy's diminutive proportions[7]. Rather they are analogues, all of them were displayed as human curiosities and not as exemplifiers of their race (Qureshi, 2004:239). It was therefore preposterous for Cuvier to postulate that Baartman's steatopygia was emblematic of all Khoi-San women and furthermore black women. Cuvier racialised Baartman's buttocks in order to further his aim of scientific racism. In this process he linked the sexuality of Khoi-San women to that of animals.

Moreover Cuvier's claim that Saartjie Baartman's elongated labia was "an anatomical trait particular to Khoi- San women" (1817) is incorrect. This is evidenced by the number of cosmetic surgeries that occur in the Western world to "correct" or trim elongated Labia. Such operations are generally performed on women who have among other things, wide inner lips, colloquially termed "bat lips" (Turmen, 1998:1).

Dr Gary Alter in his article, *A New Technique for Aesthetic Labia Minora Reduction*, claims that due to the appearance of more nude women in cinema and other publications, such as magazines, there is now more of an awareness of an aesthetic requirement for the length and width of the Labia Minora (1998:287). Labia Minora protruding past the Labia Majora are considered unacceptable to these women. Alter quotes Frederich, who suggests that "…a normal Labia Minora is less than 5 cm as measured horizontally from the midline when placed in lateral traction with minimal tension" (1998:287). Alter then goes on to detail a number of case studies involving women who have requested this operation because they feel insecure about their elongated, wide or large labia, which measure more than what is deemed "normal". What this article therefore proves is that elongated labia are not particular to the anatomy of Khoi-San women. Rather this trait of the anatomy occurs in women in the western world as well. This article suggests that Cuvier merely racialised Baartman's genitalia, specifically; he racialised what he saw as

[7] Daniel Lambert and the Sicilian fairy (her real name was Caroline Crachami) were human curiosities that were displayed in the same time period as Baartman (Holmes, 2007:62). Daniel Lambert was a 36 year old man who weighed above 312kg (Qureshi, 2004:236). The Sicilian fairy on the other hand was a diminutive woman, who stood 19,5 inches tall (approximately 50cm) (Holmes,2007:62)

the anatomic “anomaly” of her elongated labia, which he deemed specific to Khoi-San women.

It is these facts; Baartman’s fame, the racialising of her genitalia, the inhumanity that she has suffered, which allow nation building proponents to invest her body with cultural value and imagine her as an embodiment of the South African nation. This merely extends the colonial exercise that began with Alexander Dunlop, Hendrik Cesars and the “esteemed” French anatomist Georges Cuvier. The advocates of the reconstructive “rainbow nation” project, continue to sanctify Baartman and appropriate her degradation as that of the nation. This is so the nation may get closer to the re-birth that it has aspired to for so long. These acts, which create Baartman as an icon and symbol of the nation, deny her voice and sense of personal will.

A gendered reading that privileges memory, the experiential and the private, is imperative in offering a re-imagining of Baartman. Constructions of Saartjie Baartman, which have existed thus far within the public domain, have largely been offered by men. These include the racist constructions of her anatomy supplied by Cuvier in order to further his cause of scientific racism and later the nation building rhetoric seen in Zola Maseko’s documentaries concerning Baartman. This nation building rhetoric is exemplified by Thabo Mbeki’s speech at her burial ceremony and is documented in Maseko’s film, *The Return of Sara Baartman*.

REPRESENTING BAARTMAN

Zola Maseko: *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman (2002)*

Okwui Enwezor discusses how art practices in South Africa are framed by a particular nationalistic post-apartheid project that desires to re-frame the black subject. He describes a nation seeking a new identity, new images and new geographies and boundaries, "with which to ballast its strategic and mythological unity as what has become known as the rainbow nation" (Enwezor, 1999:378). They therefore seek to re-make the nation in the illusionary image of black identity, in order to counter apartheid's rendering of whiteness as a symbol of national identity and citizenship. He argues that in the aftermath of emancipation, it is the narratives of the past that are most fiercely contested and that the "struggle for meaning in post-apartheid South Africa hinges on who controls the representational intentionality of the body politic, especially its archive of images both symbolic and literal" (Enwezor,1999:383-384).

Enwezor's observation about post- apartheid art practice is highly relevant for an analysis of Maseko's films on Baartman. Enwezor points out how art within a contemporary South African setting concerns itself with the task of reclaiming both the image and identity of the black subject. This process of reclaiming reframes the black subject as an emancipated rather than oppressed being. This is through embarking on a broad political project that aims to reclaim the land, the body, the nation and ultimately the identity of the black subject. This is through, as Enwezor has noted, "accessing narratives and images of the past" (1999:383-384). The project of "reclaiming" as described by Enwezor is precisely the political work that Maseko as a filmmaker is involved with. Maseko seeks to reclaim the land, body, nation and consequently the identity of black people. He utilises the iconography, body and historical narrative of Saarjtie Baartman to do this.

An extract, reflected on the sleeve of the video recording of Zola Maseko's film the *"The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* reads: "It was the beginning of the century; she was a young woman coming from far away. She has been both a servant and a great attraction. She's been both a Venus and a freak; she's been both a woman and an ape. How could the same person play so many roles? Her name was Sara Baartman and this is her story."

The Life and Times of Saartjie Baartman gives a broad overview of the life of Saartjie Baartman. It offers a brief description of her beginnings in the Gamtoos valley and then details her voyage to Europe. Maseko however focuses on the period when she became known as the "Hottentot Venus" and by doing this he begins to create a passive victim with no real personal history. He therefore presents the perfect site for the narration of the suffering of a nation and its people.

My film project, which is an alternative to Maseko's, offers an intervention which privileges the personal and a sense of experiential time. The focus is therefore on Baartman's memories of her life. I aim to offer an interpretation of her subjectivity through these memories. In this way I hope to disavow Maseko's project, which is not about capturing a sense of Baartman's subjectivity at all. Rather it is about recouping her body, iconography and experiences for nation building purposes. Maseko's film therefore does not seem to offer a feminist or revisionist approach. He relies on the claim of a revisionist history project but never really attempts to capture a sense of Baartman's interiority or personal experience. He situates her in linear history and re-inscribes dominant positions, which see her as a passive victim of history and its actors.

Maseko provides the voice over for the film (*The Life and Times of Sara Baartman)*. There is another unidentified, omnipotent British voice over that provides a voice for the various historical documents and extracts which comment on her time as the "Hottentot Venus". Maseko interviews a number of people who offer commentary and debate Baartman as a subject. These experts are principally men. Baartman's body therefore largely becomes the scene of rival exchanges between men. The only woman among these male experts is academic Yvette Abrahams. Abrahams offers a reading of Baartman that elides her personal experience and self determinism. She continuously portrays Baartman as the eternal victim.

Abrahams comments on Baartman's refusal to be repatriated back to South Africa when her case was brought forward by a group of abolitionists. Abrahams says: "She was a kid she didn't know what she was doing". Abrahams assumes, as many have then and now, that Baartman had been coerced into refusing repatriation back to South Africa by her "handlers", Alexander Dunlop and Hendrick Cesars. This allegedly occurred during the court case initiated by the abolitionist movement in London on her behalf. But if one

examines her alternatives this assumption of coercion becomes less believable. If Baartman were to return to South Africa, she would most certainly be facing a life of uncertainty and hardship characterised by servitude and extreme economic insecurity. This is not to say that her situation, at the time (in Britain and France), was not horrendous. But at the very least she was fed and clothed and had a role as a performer. This role however, was more often than not, one characterised by oppression and abuse.

Abrahams and the men who offer commentary on Baartman play the role of "experts". They are historians, academics, paleontologists or custodians of the spaces she resided within, in Europe, both in her lifetime and death.

This collection of patriarchal voices elides any sense of the personal and experiential that Baartman might have had, by implicitly claiming the role of seer. Consequently the film claims all knowledge and power. The "experts" and academics illustrate this by constantly referring to her as a victim and by situating her within linear history as a cultural artifact who they feel privileged to comment on. She is therefore silenced on the level of the personal, so that her public function is amplified. My film aims to move away from this public and political function. This is how Baartman has functioned historically and scientifically. Later her public function was once again amplified for nation building/national unity purposes. This approach disavows the positionality of the personal.

Baartman's voice is continuously disavowed throughout the film. This is besides a short passage that she allegedly relayed to a French journalist. Baartman is therefore presented as a silent victim who offered no resistance and was complicit with the experiences that shaped her life. This broad historical description of Baartman as the suffering, tragic silent victim offers no nuances of her life and no attempts at capturing who she may have been in the sense of a private life lived. Maseko therefore seems to represent every incarnation of her that is offered on the sleeve of his video recording, except that of a woman and more importantly, even beyond that, that of a person. Baartman's presence in the film is in actual fact in the form of an absence, not only in her silence, but also because she is continually represented either as an illustrated image or within the form of a moulded plaster cast. She is often seen standing next to "experts" and being commented upon. This absence is a particular trait of the binaries of rationalist western patriarchal

discourse, which constructs woman as "other", as lack, the opposite of the presence of man.

Baartman's absence in Maseko's film renders her a symbol. A symbol of her times and of black experience in order to furnish a project that has broad political ends that had little to do with her (other than in her exploitative appropriation as a tool). Baartman's function is an ideological one, towards building a new post-apartheid nation. Susan Hayward highlights how the female body is symbolically employed within nationalist discourse. She asserts that this employment is usually one where the female body represents ideas of nation that are linked to invasion, violation, occupation and rape, through the female body being representative of the violated "motherland" (Hayward,2000:98). Hayward reveals how this implicitly frames agency and power as being a trait of masculinity. She therefore describes how the female body, which is envisioned as "motherland", becomes a vehicle for the nation's "male driven narratives that have appropriated the female body" (Hayward, 2000: 98). Hayward further argues that "in these male driven narratives, the female body by extension becomes the site of the life and death of a nation, the rise and fall of the nation" (2000: 98).

Baartman is therefore utilised as a tool in recounting the horrors of subjugated people. Furthermore she is used as a tool in nation building and unity when her body is finally returned home in the second film, *The Return of Sara Baartman.*

This film continues the story told in *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman.* It chronicles the return of Baartman's remains to South Africa by the French on April 29 2002. The film documents the official handover of Baartman's remains and her plaster cast to the South African people at the country's embassy in Paris. It then goes on to show her official burial, on women's day, in Hankey in the Eastern Cape by her supposed "descendents". The film also chronicles the lobbying involved in Baartman's repatriation by people such as poet Diana Ferrus, paleontologist Professor Philip Tobias and French senator Nicolas About. Diana Ferrus' poem functions as the other public articulation (other than Yvette Abrahams), offered by a woman in Maseko's films on Baartman. Her poem played an instrumental part in the return of Baartman's body.

Her poem however, largely constructs Baartman as a victim who needs to be saved; this is evidenced by this extract from the poem:

> "I've come to take you home…
> I have come to wretch 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!" (1998).

Ferrus' poem re-instates Baartman's identity as a "passive victim subject entirely to the will of others" (Holmes, 2007:187). By doing this, Ferrus continues to operate within the narratives and identity formations that Baartman has been ascribed by men such as Maseko in South Africa, and Cuvier in Europe. Her poem fails to offer any of Baartman's interiority or a sense of self determinism. She is therefore re-constituted as a tool or symbol. Ferrus' reading of Baartman therefore re-appropriates male driven articulations. She consequently fails to offer a real gendered reading of Baartman which privileges memory, the private and the experiential.

The Return of Sara Baartman therefore, seems to cement Baartman's position as symbol of the nation. This is no more apparent than in the climax of the film, which takes place at the site of the funeral in Hankey. Thabo Mbeki reads a speech that reveals how Baartman "has come to represent the pain and suffering of all exploited black women and the psychic, cultural and emotional impact of racism and its legacy" (Holmes, 2007:187). In his speech, Mbeki says:

> She was ferried to Europe as an example of the sexual depravity and the incapacity to think of the African woman in the first instance and the African in general. The legacy of those centuries remains with us, both in the way in which our society is structured and in the ideas that many in our country continue to carry in their heads, which inform their reaction on important matters (Mbeki as cited in Holmes, 2007:187).

Mbeki's speech articulates how "women's bodies are closely aligned with nationalist discourse" (Hayward, 2000:97) and consequently how the nation is imagined. Saartjie Baartman's body came to represent all the "psychic, cultural and emotional impact of

racism and its legacy" (Holmes, 2007:187). It is therefore imperative that her body be buried. Her burial acts as a reclaiming of the nation's ancestry and also one which buries the legacy of racism and all its consequences. The restoration of her body to the soil of the nation of her birth means that she will come to embody both the death of a racist imperial legacy and importantly, the rebirth of a nation.

This process illustrates Susan Hayward's assertions of how the female body is used in male driven narratives, to become the site "of the life and death of a nation" or "the rise and fall of the nation "(2000: 98). This process is vividly exemplified by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's re-telling of a story by Mahasweta Devi, "Douloti the Bountiful". She describes how Douloti, the daughter of an Indian tribal bonded worker, is sold into prostitution in order to pay his debts. Devastated by venereal disease Douloti dies while walking to the hospital. The piece of earth that she lies on, in death, has the map of India drawn on it by the school headmaster. He has drawn it in order to explain nationalism to his students on the eve of Independence Day (Spivak, 1989-1990:105).

This story is a metaphor for how women's bodies are used in order to constitute the imagined community of the nation and how, in doing so, they suffer a symbolic death, as they are silenced and denied a sense of humanity in their symbolic utilisation. Furthermore this story is analogous to how Baartman's body has been treated in post-apartheid South Africa. My film project aims to address this challenge by disavowing Baartman's role as a victim. This continual representation of Baartman as a victim enables her symbolic usage in projects of nation formation. Baartman's position as a symbol disavows a sense of self determinism and negates her personal experiences.

Mbeki's speech reveals the sentiment expressed in Spivak's re-telling of Devi's story; the legacy of women's burden as cultural and national signifiers. In addition to this it reveals the danger of the sanctified woman. One, whose individuality and humanity is under threat of being constructed as the archetype of "the silenced victim", who becomes a tool for narrativising the nation (Holmes, 2007:187-188). Rachel Holmes has articulated rather incisively the problem with this sort of sanctification, which produced a cultural icon out of Saartjie Baartman. She says, "Sanctification never set a woman free" (2007:188).

The political project (of nation building and unity) which Maseko embarks on is extremely problematic. This project relies on Baartman's continual role as a passive victim and on the over-determinism of her body. This over-determinism, of Baartman, on a corporeal level and as a signifier for notions of racial science and the nation has created and continues to create Baartman as a spectacle and "monster". Furthermore it elides a sense of memory and desire that asks, what does the body do? Deleuze and Guattari (1999) explore this question in their radical re-conceptualising of the body. They wrest a perspective of the body from Spinoza which does not consider the body as either object or subject but interrogates what the body is capable of (1999:55). This is also the site at which my film offers an interventionist position. *I am Saartjie Baartman* considers how much "joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies" (Spinoza as cited in Olkowski, 1999:55).

Such a conception of the body foregrounds the passions and actions of the body, which replace the system of genus, species, and its differences and the hierarchy of the mind-body dualism (Spinoza as cited in Olkowski, 1999:55). This understanding of the body and the questions that arise from it lead to questions of desire (Olkowski, 1999:55).

Elizabeth Grosz points out that Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza and Nietzsche, conceive of desire not as longing for something but as that which creates connections and relations (1999:55). This is an overturning of a Platonic conception of desire which envisions desire as lack (Grosz as cited in Olkowski, 1999:55). Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza and Nietzsche, therefore re-conceptualise the body and desire and see them as productive and affirmative as opposed to old conceptions predicated on negation and lack. Importantly their recognition of the body is predicated on the recognition of multiplicities which are irreducible to one metaphysical unity (Grosz as cited in Olkowski, 1999:56).

All of these articulations concerning the body are imperative for the re-imagining of Saartjie Baartman because they disavow a system of "organic representation" (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:15). Dorothea Olkowski, a feminist philosopher, uses the French philosopher, Deleuze, to critique both the structure and nature of representation and how it pertains to people of colour in general and women in particular. Olkowski argues that in

order to bring about change there needs to be a "ruin of representation". A ruin of hierarchically ordered time and space based on traditional western concepts of reason postulated principally by Plato and Aristotle (1999:2-18). Olkowski further asserts that "With this ruin underway- with static structures of time and space, of life and thought, disassembled- a philosophy of change becomes viable" (1999:2).

Olkowski argues that efforts to challenge the representational norm, specifically by feminists have fallen short because rather than attempting to overthrow the system of representation itself, in other words going beyond representation, they have instead posited general statements, which do no more than register a complaint against the norms of images, language and social and political structures. She proposes an ontology of fluidity which "can make sense of difference by accounting for the reality of temporal and spatial change on a pragmatic level while providing appropriate theoretical constructs in whose terms change can be conceived" (Olkowski,1999:2).

In order to fulfill this desire she uses Deleuze's indictment of "organic representation". Deleuze states that, "organic representation" is distributed hierarchically around one sole and elusive perspective, one origin (as cited in Olkowski, 1999:18). Representation, therefore, mediates everything but mobilizes and moves nothing, thus there can be no real concept of difference within these structures (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:20). Olkowski following these arguments by Deleuze rejects a "logic of identity" in favour of a "logic of difference" (1999:13).

This "logic of difference" is based on a Deconstructionist approach propogated by Jaques Derrida. It is, in the case of *I am Saartjie Baartman,* about the ability to argue for and justify differences in interpretation as a result of privileging different aspects of narrative history at various and disparate historical moments. This "logic of difference" is analogous to Derrida's derision (and consequent deconstruction) of the notion of "presence" (Boyne, 1990:90).

Derrida derided the arrogance of western thought; in particular he focused on the principle of "presence" or "origin" (as Deleuze does). He argues that presence assumes that there is a universal language, which represents a perfectly attuned world (Derrida as cited in Boyne, 1990:90). Derrida further argues that this dream of "pure presence"

held by Aristotle, Plato, Hegel and Rousseau "is a deeply complex but ultimately unacceptable fantasy" (Derrida as cited in Boyne, 1990:90). Derrida's strategy would rather "be to celebrate those marginal texts, which express some recognition of the falseness of this philosophical desire for the unmediated truth of the world" (Boyne, 1990:90).

Derrida's conceptualisation around the notion of "presence" further enables the "logic of difference" in *I am Saartjie Baartman*. "The logic of difference" in the film is about an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity as it relates to history (personal and official) and her private life. Her personal history and private life and the interpretations of them in *I am Saartjie Baartman* represent marginal texts. They are marginal because they have been ignored and gone unrecorded. Furthermore they represent an alternative to dominant positions which do not consider Baartman's subjectivity. Rather these dominant positions espouse a "truth" of Baartman which is contingent on constructing her as an object, a cultural artifact in linear history.

Olkowski further argues that the "logic of difference" begins with the fact of heterogeneity and the interrelation of groups (1999:13). She argues that this logic of difference is both abstract and particular and rather than considering general identities or even communities, it instead focuses "on specific practices, engaging the particular in the sense of 'this' woman here and now, this situation of impoverishment, this sexuality, this particular site of creation and/or oppression and this so called 'I', the self that each of these situations produces" (Olkowski, 1999:2).

Olkowski's articulations are important for Baartman's story as they disavow representational categories, not in an oppositionist fashion but with a real intention for change, beginning with the recognition of difference. This "logic of difference" is both fluid and particular thus it proposes a completely new space, more about interpretation. It proposes a continual becoming, an interpretation of new realities that is particular to location and race and other intricacies of the self but also general enough to be political beyond it. This discourse is crucial to my film project, which aims to re-imagine Baartman, as it allows a space in which an interpretation of her subjectivity becomes possible.

It is important to note that I do not advocate a complete disavowal of Baartman's position as a cultural icon. This would merely duplicate the structure which I seek to critique, relying as it does on the concept of "origin" or "presence", which is utterly unavailable to us (Derrida as cited in Boyne, 1990:97). Furthermore the disavowal of Baartman as a cultural icon would deny a nation of national icons at a time when it needs to constitute a nation building project.

Rather what I propose is a project that will bring about an ontology of change, which seeks to ruin representation and its static structures of life, time and space. This project will consider and begin with the incongruencies, the marks on the pristine white paper of representation, in other words it will begin with difference (Derrida as cited in Boyne, 1990:92). This difference is located in the interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity. This is what my film project and research aims to do.

The notion of the "ruin of representation" is important for the deconstruction of representational categories, which have historically and scientifically constructed Baartman's body. These categories construct the body as inferior lack within the mind-body dualism. The body is therefore reduced to static materiality rather than fluid interaction, relation and creation. Furthermore, within this dichotomy, woman is seen as being inherently linked with the body, as a being that is inferior to the hierarchy of man and reason/mind. Additionally these binaries create blackness as a monstrous other. It is these conceptions of the body, woman and the racialised "other" that allow the extreme over-determinism that Baartman suffers. This over-determinism focuses on the material display and fixity of Saartjie Baartman's body and does not consider how her body acts in multiple ways or how it creates desires and memories. Furthermore, it does not consider how desire and memory may be projected onto her body outside of a colonial or patriarchal project.

These conceptions create a dead body and thus the absence of a life lived. It is this perceived lack of self determination and her gendered identity as a woman which allows South Africans and Maseko, in his films, to produce Baartman as a symbolic tool of the nation. Through this construction they are able to invest her body with masculine narratives of invasion, violation and finally re-birth. This process of re-birth continually engages with the archive of her body and its memory.

Therefore, through the disavowal of the structure of representation and the generalisations that it postulates, Baartman will gradually be re-imagined through an interpretation which privileges a gendered reading of the private and experiential. This reading will challenge representation, which constantly places her and her body within linear history as a cultural artifact or fixed body that becomes utilised as "a focal point for the discussions of race and gender" (Qureshi, 2004:251).

I am Saartjie Baartman seeks to critique Maseko's films by offering an alternative. This alternative de-emphasises linear history and the knowledge that it imparts on Baartman as she is constructed as a passive victim, cultural artifact and symbol. This experimental film works within a model of what, Patricia Mellencamp calls the "empirical avant garde" (1995:175). Mellencamp argues that "the empirical avant-garde destabilises history through the experimental, granting women the authority of the experiential which includes both knowledge and memory" (1995:175). Such a practice therefore privileges memory and experience rather than the generalisations of linear history. Deleuze says these works of memory "sketch a geography of relations" (as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:175). My film locates these relations in a discourse of desire, Baartman's desire. As opposed to the desires projected onto her

This "geography of relations" can recall what has been ignored or gone unrecorded, fashioning what Deleuze calls "a logic of the non-pre-existent" (as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:175). Mellencamp's articulations, based on a framework that utilises Deleuze highlight the radical shift that is needed both within the conceptualisation of feminist filmmaking and within the discourse of feminism itself, especially for women of colour. There is a need for a separate space in which the memories, desires and experiences of women can be articulated outside of "linear time (historical and political)", which inevitably situates itself within patriarchal and racist institutions of the nation state (Kristeva, 1986:187). Mellencamp's articulations offer a radical space in which to re-imagine articulations of Saartjie Baartman. This feminist reading of time subverts Baartman's singular construction as cultural text contingent on specific historical moments, "linear time" and nation. Rather it privileges a sense of "experiential time" which creates a third space; an "imaginary space" (Bhabha as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:176. Within this space, a sense of interiority is revealed.

Furthermore this third space allows a re-imagining of Baartman, which articulates itself outside of predetermined binaries.

Moreover this theorisation around time is significant towards describing a constant becoming. This constant becoming, which comes with the resistance of linearity and rationalist thought, opens up "hybrid sites and destroys those familiar polarities between knowledge and its objects" (Bhabha as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:176). Within this space of becoming, Baartman's personal narrative exists to rupture history.

Penny Siopis -*Dora and the Other Woman* (1988)

Penny Siopis' work has often been concerned "with the lived and historical relations between black and white women in South Africa" (Coombes, 1997:110). Her work explores these relations through an engagement, which illustrates and interrogates how black women's time, lives, labour and bodies have been appropriated. Furthermore, through this engagement, she interrogates how this appropriation has shaped her own history (Coombes, 1997:110). Saartjie Baartman is one of these black women. She has featured extensively in Siopis' work. For Siopis, Baartman's story and her representations raise huge issues in South Africa "around the conjunction of gender and race and sexuality and race" (Siopis as cited in Coombes, 1997:121). The use of Baartman's historical representation in Siopis' work, therefore, seems to function as a vehicle, which identifies and maintains the relationship between black and white women's oppression on a sexual, political and structural level.

Dora and the Other Woman (Figure 1 in Appendix) is a work that seeks to articulate the shared sexual objectification that black and white women experience. In *Dora and the Other Woman,* Siopis looks at Saartjie Baartman in relation to Freud's "Dora". Siopis makes a direct connection between "the way white women's sexuality is pathologized in psychoanalysis, primarily through Freud and the image of Saartjie Baartman" (as cited in Coombes, 1997:122). Siopis therefore connects these two women's stories through ideas of objectification and scopophilia, which they were both subjected to (Siopis as cited Coombes, 1997:122).

The drawing depicts a woman, draped in a voluminous white dress or cloth. The white garment falls to one side, leaving her left breast exposed. The woman stands on a red stage. She is framed on her left side by opulent drapes. The drapes are swept back and held back by a scarlet sash. Her face rests on her right arm, turned away from what would seem like the gaze of an audience watching. This woman seems to represent Ida Bauer or "Dora", as she is commonly known (Schmahmann, 2004:8). Brenda Schmahmann has pointed out that the drawing of "Dora" seems to vaguely resemble Siopis herself (2004:9).

“Dora” was a “hysteric” as analysed by Freud. Her father first brought her in for treatment when she was eighteen after she had experienced sexual trauma (Schmahmann, 2004:8-11). Siopis was particularly interested in “Dora’s” case because it offered a site for re-interpretation from a feminist perspective: ‘I am particularly interested in those re-readings which see “Dora” in (particular) and hysteria in (general) in terms of women’s resistance to patriarchal domination or her protest against the colonisation of her body (as cited in Schmahmann, 2004:8).

For much of the nineteenth century, psychiatric or psychological issues that afflicted women were attributed to their sexual difference and were consequently defined as Hysteria. Hysteria was defined as the affliction of women. In fact the word hysteria “is derived from the Greek word, *hysteros*, which means womb (Ragland-Sullivan as cited in Schmahmann, 2004:9). Freud conducted a number of important and prominent studies involving Hysteria, including his famous studies of “Dora”. The studies conducted by Charcot were however significant in illustrating how hysteria became a condition of spectacle and display. “Charcot organized photographs of women patients at the hospital for nervous diseases at Salpêtrière that endeavoured to document the affliction” (Schmahmann, 2004:9). Siopis has pointed out how “his ‘presentations’ of hysterical patients became famous ‘scientific’ spectacles in which he displayed the afflicted patients before a select (male) audience” (as cited in Schmahmann, 2004:9).

On one level the “Other Woman” in the title of Siopis’ drawing refers to the presentation of hysteria as a symptom of the “otherness” of women in studies of the disorder (Schmahmann, 2004:9).While, on another level the “Other Woman” refers to Saartjie Baartman and the construction of her “otherness” due to the racialising of her genitalia and buttocks.

In *Dora and the Other Woman* Baartman is depicted through the use of various caricatures. These caricatures are presented as pamphlets which are scattered on the floor and on “Dora’s” dress. The caricatures are nineteenth century representations of Baartman from the French and British press. Siopis has asserted that even though the idea of looking and objectification were the connecting theme in both those women's stories, the power relations are played out differently (as cited in Coombes, 1997:13). Siopis argues that this is why she saw it necessary to utilise caricatures (as cited in Coombes,

1997:13). “They were obviously representations, I was simply re-representing them” (Siopis as cited in Coombes, 1997:13).

Siopis’ acknowledgement of the difference in power relations between “Dora” and Baartman shows an attempt to illustrate how race played a part in Baartman’s oppression. Siopis’ usage of caricatures further illustrates how Baartman was denied a sense of humanity. Furthermore, in re-representing Baartman in this fashion Siopis’ seeks to reveal the artifice of Baartman’s racially constructed sexuality. This is further evidenced by the use of framing devices, such as the two gold picture frames positioned on the stage.

One of the picture frames lies adjacent to the figure of “Dora” and is enclosed by a mirror (Schmahmann, 2004:11). The other is situated in the middle distance. It is surrounded by a specimen jar and one of the fragments of the caricatures of Baartman (Schmahmann, 2004:11). These two frames illustrate the constructed nature of “Dora” and Baartman’s sexual identity as women. Baartman was constructed as “other” on the grounds of her physiognomy, while “Dora” was marked as “other” on the grounds of her “hysterical” response to sexual trauma (Schmahmann, 2004:11).

Siopis therefore attempts to offer a critique of Baartman’s constructed identity as it relates to race and gender. Her critique however is problematic as it offers “an aesthetic that reveals a curious ambivalence towards its subject as a social being” (Enwezor, 1999). This is precisely due to her decision to use the pamphlets of Baartman’s caricature. These caricatures depict Baartman as an object caught in an historical moment. They fail to capture a sense of her humanity or a sense of experiential time. Furthermore, they position her as an emblem or a story rather than as a person. In this way she is made into a fetish.

The caricatures of Baartman constantly replay the colonial stereotype and thus elide Baartman’s position as a social being. Additionally they reproduce Baartman as the abject. Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that “which disturbs identity, system, order… does not respect borders positions, rules” (as cited in Enwezor, 1999:382). The caricatures depict Baartman as an object of fetishistic fascination. They illustrate Baartman’s objectification due to her physiognomy, by showing various white men and

women looking, probing and ridiculing Baartman's buttocks. Baartman therefore functions as an object of "fetishistic fascination and disturbance to both the spatial and temporal order" (Enwezor, 1999:382). Siopis does not allow Baartman to challenge this position. Her image is rendered as the abject and is not allowed to assert its presence even within the confines of its liminality. "Dora," on the other hand, is drawn with her hand up, covering her face with her head turned away. She is given agency to reject the gaze that constructs her as other. Furthermore by staging "Dora" in her own image:

> Siopis enacts the type of histrionic gestures that Charcot set out to visualize. Through this self-conscious role-playing, Siopis allies herself with feminists who re-read "Dora's" case, finding in her hysteria the visualisation of resistance and rebellion against patriarchy, and the expression of what she called "dis-ease" rather than "disease" (Schmahmann, 2004:9).

Baartman, however, remains static, an over embodied abject figure.

Siopis' drawing, therefore, positions Baartman as a "hollow presence" (Enwezor, 1999: 397) that is seen yet unseen. Okwui Enwezor argues that Edward Said has described;

> an ontological and epistemological distinction between the settler population and the indigenous population. These distinctions, which lie at the root of the colonial project, worked on two inventions. One the ontological description of the native as devoid of history and two, the epistemological description of the native as devoid of knowledge and subjectivity (Said as cited in Enwezor, 1999).

Siopis' drawing positions Baartman in this manner. Baartman is seen in a series of caricatures, these images lie on "Dora's" dress and on the floor. "Dora's" subjectivity is therefore privileged. She is depicted as a whole person while Baartman's identity is fragmented and ultimately disavowed through the use of the pamphlets. Furthermore by placing the caricatures of Baartman on "Dora's" dress, Siopis forces the viewer to read Baartman through "Dora." This reinforces white women's privilege. This privilege is further reinforced by the fact that "Dora" is named in the title of the work yet Baartman is not. Baartman's identity, in *Dora and the Other Woman,* is premised on an image of her, which reveals her as an object and thus does not consider her subjectivity. Moreover the caricatures depict Baartman as devoid of history or a sense of experience. They position her as an emblem, a story that forms part of a meta- narrative within historical time. She is therefore seen but remains unseen as she is never located as a person within Siopis' drawing.

In order to locate Baartman as a person it is necessary to claim a "location" (Shohat, 1997: 184). Ella Shohat argues that "post third- worldist" feminisms should articulate "a contextualised history for women in specific geographies of identity, such feminist projects…are often posited in relation to ethnic, racial, regional and national locations" (1997:184). Shohat's assertions are important in terms of constructing feminisms as they disavow universal concepts of feminism. These universal concepts do not consider "specific forms of resistance in relation to diverse forms of oppression" (Shohat, 1997:184). Furthermore, they do not consider the relative privilege that white women have, even within post- apartheid South Africa.

Sioips' gender project is premised on universal concepts of feminism. She attempts to connect the way that white women's sexuality was pathologized, through psychoanalysis, with black women's oppression, namely Saartjie Baartmans'. Siopis does not consider that these oppressive pathological constructions of Hysteria were in fact premised on a position of white middle class privilege. She therefore does not consider the vast historical, structural, social and economic chasms and contradictions that exist between white and black women. Siopis' fails to contextualise Baartman's experiences as a black woman and more importantly as a person.

The theoretical and practical project that I propose, seeks to correct this historical and cultural imbalance. I aim to locate the experiences of Baartman on the level of the personal rather than the public. This rejects notions which may disseminate "a curious ambivalence" (Enwezor, 1999) to Baartman's position as a social being. This necessitates a project that considers Baartman within a feminist historiography that privileges the private but does not disavow the importance of the nation or concepts of race, as Siopis does. My project therefore aims to locate Baartman somewhere between gender and nation. In order to find the personal as it articulates itself between and within these concepts (gender and nation) but is not limited to them. Furthermore, this reading hopes to disavow projects that utilise Baartman as a vehicle for broad political projects that do not consider her first as a real person. Siopis' *Dora and the Other Woman* is one of these projects .The project I propose seeks to present a hybrid being who exists within a site of difference rather than in dichotomous polarities. She exists within a space of liminality where she is both subordinate and resistant, but always willful.

RE-IMAGINING BAARTMAN: *I AM SAARTJIE BAARTMAN*

Concept

Zola Maseko's films on Baartman appropriated the political agenda of hegemonic public articulations, such as those communicated by Sander Gilman and Georges Cuvier. These public articulations utilise Baartman as a tool in discourses concerning science, gender, race, sexuality and nation. The intervention staged by Maseko's films situates Baartman in colonial linear history, as a symbol of her times and of black experience particularly scientific racism. She is exploitatively appropriated as a tool in recounting the horrors of subjugated people. In Maseko's second film, *The Return* of *Sara Baartman,* her political exploitation continues. Baartman's remains and her burial are utilised to stage a project of nation building that silences Baartman as a person.

My film *I am Saartjie Baartman* seeks to (among other responses) critique and create an alternative to Maseko's films. This re-imagining continues Holmes' project. It offers a feminist historiography that privileges the private and therefore reveals Baartman as a person. This is achieved through a disavowal of an articulation of Baartman that situates her within linear history.

This destabilisation of linear history disavows a system of "organic representation" (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:15) and thus effects a "ruin of representation" (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:18). Dorethea Olkowski argues (as I explore in part two) that "with this ruin underway-with static structures of time and space of life and thought; disassembled- a philosophy of change becomes viable" (1999:2).This "ruin of representation" (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:18) is the meta-discourse under which my re-imagining of Baartman takes place.

This "ruin of representation" (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski, 1999:18) begins with difference. This "logic of difference" (Olkowski, 1999:13) is both fluid and particular thus it proposes a completely new space less about subjectivity and it emphasises and privileges interpretation.

The tension between subjectivity and interpretation is important for the conception of my film project. Maseko's film treated Baartman as an object. His film relied on an over-determinism of Baartman's body in relation to gender and nation. This over-

determinism created a static body, which disavowed conceptions of experience and interiority. Maseko's film relied on Baartman's objectification because it sought to utilise her body as a vehicle for the construction of the nation.

Susan Hayward's essay *Framing National Cinemas* (2000), frames nationalist discourse and cinema; wherein she describes the process of gendering the nation. She criticises initial ideas of the nation being gender neutral and points out that the "woman's body is closely aligned with nationalist discourse" (Hayward, 2000:97) and how the nation is imagined (as mentioned earlier). She highlights how the female body is symbolically employed within nationalist discourse. By discussing how this employment is usually one where the female body represents ideas of nation that are linked to invasion, violation, occupation and rape, as the female body is representative of the violated "motherland" (as described earlier), Hayward reveals how this implicitly frames agency and power as being a trait of masculinity. She describes how the female body, envisioned as "motherland", becomes a vehicle for the nation's "male driven narratives that have appropriated the female body" (Hayward, 2000: 98). Hayward further argues that "in these male driven narratives, the female body by extension becomes the site of the "life and death of a nation, the rise and fall of the nation" (as described earlier) (2000: 98). *I am Saartjie Baartman* seeks to challenge these notions of nation, which are constituted and staged on the site of women's bodies, namely Baartman's body. In the process my film seeks to critique Maseko's films which utilise Baartman's body to show a restitutional revisionist history.

Moreover, Hayward's articulations are imperative to understanding how Baartman has become constructed as a cultural icon and representative of the nation. Baartman's humiliation at the hands of her European colonisers form part of South Africa's own narrative of oppression. Baartman's body was occupied, violated, and raped. In this way she becomes the perfect tool in which to invest the narratives of the nation's own violations, rape, occupation and invasion by European imperialism. Her body becomes the site in which to chronicle "the life and death of the nation" (2000:98) and more importantly in the case of South Africa, its rebirth.

This re-birth was staged with the return of Baartman's remains in 2002 by the French government. This project of nation building, on Baartman's remains, is a main feature of

Maseko's second film, *The Return of Sara Baartman*. This re-birth, played out on the remains of a woman's body is analogous to the re-telling of Mahasweta Devi's story "Douloti the Bountiful", by Spivak (as described earlier). This story is a metaphor for how women's bodies are used in order to constitute the imagined community of the nation and how, in doing so they suffer a symbolic death, as they are silenced and denied a sense of humanity in their symbolic utilisation.

I am Saartjie Baartman, is a short experimental film shot on digital video. It brings together archive footage with live action footage. It is a film that seeks to offer an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity. This interpretative stance proposes a continual becoming, which is contingent on experiential time. Furthermore, this interpretative stance is fluid and concerned with the relations between objects, spaces and people. The difference that I speak of is located within the tension between subjectivity and interpretation, as I have already mentioned.

Director's Vision

I am Saartjie Baartman privileges a sense of experiential time and memory. Patricia Mellencamp calls this type of filmmaking "the empirical avant garde" (as described above) (1995:174).The works of memory in *I am Saartjie Baartman,* are predicated on relations located in Baartman's desire (as mentioned above).

The "connections and relations" (Grosz as cited in Olkowski, 1999:56) of Baartman's desire, are represented (in *I am Saartjie Baartman*) through two love affairs. Her first love affair took place when she was about seventeen with a young Khoi-San man named Skolar. Skolar and Baartman fell deeply in love and they were to marry. On the night of the feast that was thrown for Baartman, in order to celebrate her forthcoming marriage, Skolar was killed. He was murdered by a commando raid, led by Europeans.

The second love affair was with a young soldier, whom she met while dancing and playing music in the taverns of Cape Town. His name is lost, yet what is known of him is that he was a regimental drummer attached to the Cape Town Garrison. Furthermore it is not known whether he was Irish, Nguni or Khoisan. In *I am Saartjie Baartman* he is imagined as Irish. I decided to do this because an interracial relationship, within the social and historical milieu that Baartman existed in would further demonstrate Baartman's

sense of self determinism. Baartman was a black woman in an imperial historical moment. Her relationship with white people was framed by this. To most white people she was seen as a servant or an indentured labourer. It is almost certain that she was largely not seen as a legitimate person with whom to conduct a love affair except perhaps in forced violent encounters. The concept of an interracial relationship is therefore extremely radical. It illustrates a sense of self-determinism that destabilised pre-existing norms and social behaviour. In this way Baartman's act becomes political and transgressive through her willful act of miscegenation.

Baartman and the soldier carried out a love affair, which saw her moving into his dormitory barracks. Before long Baartman discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth to a child whom they raised together, until shortly before its second birthday. Just before its second birthday the child died, the causes of its death are unknown. Not long after this loss the drummer and Baartman broke up.

Rachel Holmes' book was imperative in providing the information of these two love affairs. In fact it was an indispensable tool in the creation of my film. It was instrumental in creating a skeleton for the content of my film: its locations and its chronology. I was able to garner enough information to create a sketch of Baartman's life and the events that shaped it. This sketch was teased out and infused with my own interpretations and projected imaginary. Additionally I was able to retrieve a number of phrases, allegedly uttered by Baartman, from Holmes' book. This was important for the creation of an interpretation of her subjectivity.

Moreover I chose to use the name Saartjie rather than Sara or Sarah because of something that Holmes pointed out. The *-tje* in Afrikaaans has two different functions. It indicates the diminutive (and inferior) but is also a powerful way of expressing sentiment. "The key emotion expressed by the *-tjie* diminutive is endearment it is a verbal demonstration of affection and care" (Holmes, 2007: xiii). Holmes articulations are imperative to my film and motivate the decision to use the name Saartjie as opposed to Sara or Sarah (Sarah was the name she was given, when she was baptised in England). My film is about relations and revealing the personal. The name Saartjie enables this project because it is the name family and friends would have called her.

The two love affairs explored in *I am Saartjie Baartman* are in the form of a series of impressions. These impressions focus on images, sounds and the relationship between bodies on a physical and psychic level. This requires a re-conceptualisation of Baartman's body. Baartman's representation has historically and scientifically relied on over-determinism of her figure. This is evident in Maseko's film. This over-determinism finds it's signifier in the iconography that exists of Baartman. This is illustrated in the images drawn and painted by artists in the nineteenth century. These images typically depict Baartman naked (Figure 2 in Appendix). She is often depicted in profile, in order to highlight her buttocks.

These representations of Baartman were and are deeply problematic. They represent a fixed and static body, which does not act and therefore has no agency. Furthermore, this fixity continually re-inscribes the colonial stereotype. Homi Bhabha writes:

> An important feature of colonial discourse is "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity as the sign of cultural/ historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise, the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in 'place', already known and something that must be anxiously repeated (as cited in Enwezor, 1999:388).

On one level *I am Saartjie Baartman* seeks to re-imagine this official image, which "is a text an argument, an idea, inscribed in line and colour, by means of representation" (Bal as cited in Moxey, 1994:29). In *I am Saartjie Baartman,* Baartman's image is re-imagined through a series of projections that seek to disrupt and in many ways implode the fixity of her representation. The image used in these projections is an image which has been commonly associated with Baartman's official public representation. (Figure 3 in Appendix). It was painted by Nicolas Huet le Jeune in1815.

Execution

The projection of Baartman's official image in the film begins as a referential site with which to identify the character of Baartman. This referential site also functions as a place in which to introduce Baartman's pre-determined official articulations and then to work towards their deconstruction.

In *I am Saartjie Baartman,* we first see the image of Baartman's official representation (Figure 3 in Appendix) in a sort of Eisensteinian intellectual montage[8]. This montage seeks to challenge the scopophilic gaze that Baartman has been victim to, in the past and present. The montage utilises archive footage from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The montage disavows the provenance of the archive, in this instance. Images from Eisenstein's film are distilled in order to construct a montage that comments on and challenges Baartman's objectification. The montage begins with an image of an eye looking through a lens (Figure 4 in Appendix); taken from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). The eye dissolves into a pool of optical blue light and the first image of Baartman's body appears. Its head is cut off and it slowly tracks in. The montage continues with a juxtaposition of a group of sailors (Figure 5 in Appendix) handling a piece of meat infested with maggots. This is continually inter-cut with the image of Baartman's buttocks and the image of an eye looking through an eye piece. Now and again the eye piece touches the maggot infested meat. Additionally we see a woman who is meant to be Baartman, standing in a darkened blue lit interior (Figure 6 in Appendix). She is outside of the world of the projection. She stands looking back at the sailors, the image of herself and the audience. She looks on with a fixed challenging gaze on her face. Her image continually moves forward in tandem with the projection of her official representation.

The projection of Baartman's image continues to move forward, the pace quickens. The sailors continue to violently prod and smell the maggot infested meat. Additionally, a man continually casts leering glances. Eventually Baartman's image has been blown up to the point that we no longer recognise it. The montage ends with Baartman's character staring back in a close up, victorious.

This treatment of Baartman's official image (its blowing up and eventual destruction as it becomes unrecognisable) is similar to the way that the director David Cronenberg conceptualises the cinematic body. He foregrounds the monstrosity of the flesh "to refuse

[8] The technical innovation, which Eisenstein dubbed "intellectual montage" "resulted from his studies of Kuleshov's famous experiments (which demonstrated that the meaning of any shot is contextual) and of Japanese ideograms (where two separate symbols can be juxtaposed to create a third meaning, e.g. child + mouth = scream, white bird + mouth = sing)" (Cook as cited in Shaw, 2004).

the pacifying lores of specular idealisation. This new regime of the image abolishes the distance required either for disinterested aesthetic contemplation or for stupefied ascription in spectacle" (Shaviro, 1993: 133-134).

The physiological affects of the body are therefore privileged undermining the idea of representation and ideological content. The function of vision is no longer to show but to excite the nerves directly. This excess of the body, leads the body to ultimately destroy itself as in Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1982). The official representation of Baartman's body erodes and gradually begins to feed on itself. It rots due to its continuous handling and the excess of its size. It wilts as Baartman's gaze penetrates it and reveals its falsity and its function as a tool of objectification.

The second projection of Baartman's official representation (in *I am Saartjie Baartman*) is found in a sequence which utilises archival footage from Dziga Vertov's, *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). In this instance the provenance of the archive is maintained. Vertov's film is about the cinematic gaze. It is about a man who walks around the city of Moscow with a camera. The film continually comes back to an image of an eye looking through a camera lens. This is to highlight the idea of looking and how the cinematic gaze plays a part in this. Vertov documents various scenes and people, often the people are unaware of the eye of the camera on them. These anonymous people and scenes become the spectacle that the camera eye gazes on.

The second sequence in *I am Saartjie Baartman* involving Baartman's official representation begins with the close up of the eye looking through the camera lens. This is followed by a sequence that depicts an auditorium being prepared for a screening and a projectionist preparing the film for projection. People begin to walk in and take their seats, awaiting the show. We are, once again shown the eye. Then the optical blue light appears to reveal Baartman's official image. It is a naked body revealed in its entirety. Contrary to the previous representation of Baartman's official image in *I am Saartjie Baartman,* it is static and at the mercy of the gaze. Here the film re-creates the distance required "for stupefied ascription in spectacle" (Shaviro, 1993: 133-134). This is to illustrate the imperial/colonial gaze that Baartman was subjected to. This sequence is meant to represent Baartman's period of display in London and in Paris at the Jardin des Plantes. The inscription of the imperial gaze and its European context is reinforced by a

voice over which runs concurrently with the images. This voice over is in French and is meant to represent Georges Cuvier. It authoritatively says:

> We could verify that the protuberance of her buttocks had nothing muscular about it but arose from a fatty mass of a trembling and elastic consistency, situated immediately under skin. It vibrated with all the movements that the woman made (1817)

This sequence re-iterates Baartman's scopophlic objectification by Europeans. This is to illustrate her experiences in the white worlds of Europe and Cape Town. Furthermore the re-iteration of this gaze after its initial moment of resistance by Baartman's character, is to illustrate how "submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another; it is these two elements that together constitute the subaltern mentality" (Bhadra, 1997:63). Baartman was a willful woman. The social and historic milleu that she existed in, however, determined and ensured that she was socially inferior. As a Khoi-San woman she was most likely part of the lowest social group of her time. Although she may have been a willful woman, her society did not permit Baartman the political agency that allowed defiance in all instances.

This initial use of projections in the film is interspersed with projections that become less concerned with scopophilia and Baartman's official images. Rather these projections begin to represent Baartman's memories. Some of these additional projections consist of archival still images from the Lloyd and Bleek archive of the San people, compiled by Pippa Skotnes[9] (Figure 7 in Appendix).

The use of public photographs in *I am Saartjie Baartman* ignores the provenance of the archive. This is important as a consideration of the provenance of the archive would immediately create the "memory of an unknowable and total stranger" (Berger as cited in Wolfe, 1995:197). In many ways Baartman is an "unknowable and total stranger" (Berger as cited in Wolfe, 1995:197), as public articulations of Baartman have elided her representation as a person. Furthermore this "memory of an unknowable and total stranger" (Berger as cited in Wolfe, 1995:197) in turn creates a moment of "contemplative dissection" (Eisenstein as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:174).

This "contemplative dissection" ignores the relation between things and disavows Eisenstein's valuation of affective rather than effective logic (Mellencamp, 1995:174-179). Rather than focusing on the historicity of the public photographs and their original function as anthropological evidence, the photographs of the San people function as memories of Baartman's family, suitors and compatriots. They become a part of her memories and thus sit firmly within the narrative world of the film as opposed to the claim of an ethnographic or historical provenance in the material world. Additionally, by treating the photographs in this manner, we begin to learn more of Baartman as a person. This diminishes her previous conceptions as an "unknowable and total stranger" (Berger as cited in Wolfe, 1995:197).

This is similar to the manner in which the archive of still images of anonymous men is treated. As Baartman dances in the taverns and on the stages of Europe and Cape Town, the narrator in the film comments on men she may have come into contact with in these places. The archive of these men no longer functions in its original context. Rather the men become representative of the types of men that she may have met and seen while she performed in the taverns and dancehalls. Additionally, they become indicative of Baartman's interiority as the narrator describes the relations that she may have had with these men who watched her dance.

I am Saartjie Baartman goes further with the deconstruction and disavowal of Baartman's over-determinism. The film interrogates what the body can do and what it is capable of (Deleuze and Guattari as cited in Olkowski, 1999:55*). I am Saartjie Baartman* stages an intervention which diminishes the over-determinism of Baartman's figure and instead foregrounds how it acts in relation with other bodies and consequently how this articulates Baartman's desire. This "is a matter of how much joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies" (as described above) (Spinoza as cited in Olkowski, 1999:55).

In *I am Saartjie Baartman* these relations and the emotions that they conjure are explored through themes of loving and loss. This loving and loss not only resides in

---

[9] See SKOTNES, P. 2007. *Claim to the country: The archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek / [created, compiled and introduced by] Pippa Skotnes*. Johannesburg: Jacan; Athens: Ohio University Press.

Baartman's memories and experiences of her two love affairs; but also in the memories of her lost childhood home and her dead parents. Furthermore the film seeks to show the relation of bodies and their desire in a manner that includes the tactility and corporeality of the body. Baartman's body is therefore seen in relation to other bodies, as it smells, speaks, touches and tastes. This is necessary in order to communicate a sense of a life lived not only in a psychic sense but additionally in terms of its physical corporeal experience.

The film, perhaps for one of the first times, clothes Baartman's body. This is done, once again, to disavow previous articulations that have focused on her naked figure. Clothing Baartman diminishes her objectification. It allows us to see her as a person, who acts in multiple ways. This contradicts and challenges Maseko's articulation of her, as a cultural artifact, who symbolises political projects of race and nation.

The film largely clothes Baartman in a billowy white nightdress. This is the case except for one scene where is she is seen in a brown peasant dress with a frilly white trim at the cuff. The costuming in the film is designed to suggest a historical period rather than attempt a period (historical) in costume design. This is due to the fact that the film is concerned with a sense of experiential time rather than historic linear time. The white night dress that Baartman's character is seen in however has a definite purpose. The garment suggests a sense of the private and intimate. This is due to the fact that she is adorned in a garment which is primarily worn within the confines of the home.

Fundamental to the design is a white cloth, which functions as an object of narration and marker of time. This cloth comments on Baartman's interiority and narrative journey. Furthermore it illustrates the processes of the body. It becomes different things at different points in the narrative; its shape, colour and size changes, as it assumes different uses and marks different periods in her life. The cloth functions as a prop within her dance routines and as a shroud as she gives birth or comforts herself after Skolar's death. It marks time as it moves from the dance routines in Cape Town **before** the death of her baby, to a cloth marked by blood and time **after** the death of her baby. The cloth becomes a tool of resistance. It morphs into the handkerchief that Baartman used to hide her genitalia as she was probed and observed by the French anatomist, Cuvier and his colleagues.

Her bodily functions and emissions stain the cloth and thus comment on her lived experience and interiority. The cloth which hides her genitalia becomes the cloth upon which she first makes love and loses her virginity with Skolar. It is stained red in order to suggest blood and the consummating of their love. The cloth morphs once again and the red hue, which suggests the consummation of their love, later suggests Skolar's blood in death. Further on in the narrative the cloth becomes the sheet on which she gives birth. The bloodied sheets then suggest the death of her child.

This concern with bodily fluids and emissions follows on from Julia Kristeva's essay, "Powers of horror: An essay on Abjection" (1982). In this essay Kristeva explores the significance of the taboos surrounding bodily emissions, arguing that these articulate more than simply revulsion against the lack of cleanliness. Since the body can function as a metaphor for social structures, a dread of its emissions is bound up with the recognition of their capacity to threaten the social fabric. Kristeva's argument is that a focus on such marginal matter- on what she calls "abjection or the abject" (1982) can be potentially subversive. She argues that it can disturb identity, order and suggest a lack of respect, for societal borders, positions, rules (Kristeva, 1982:4). This focus on bodily emissions therefore functions as a form of resistance for Baartman, as a threat to the societal fabric which has created her as representational tool. Furthermore, the white colour of the night dress and its large size continues the narrative function of the cloth. When she washes the cloth after her child's death, the nightdress is splattered with the bloodied water. It too, becomes stained by her lived experiences and thus becomes a reflection of her narrative journey and her personal experiences as opposed to her public display.

A key feature of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the function of the voice over. The voice over acts in two ways. Firstly it functions as the voice of the filmmaker (my voice). The conversation, between the narrator and Baartman, inserts the "I" of the filmmaker in the film, without asserting a visual presence. In this way my own subjective interpretation is written into the film and made present. This does not disturb the focus of the film, which is primarily concerned with Saartjie Baartman. On a secondary level (but by no means in terms of importance), a conversation with a historical figure, in the form of a dialogue consisting of call and response is imperative in ascribing a subjectivity to Baartman that has thus far been historically absent. Furthermore the images that we see of Baartman are of a young woman, this is to reflect Baartman's actual age, while she was still alive. The

voice over that acts as Baartman's voice is however communicated by an old woman. This is to infer and suggest a sense of reflection; to inscribe the sense of a woman looking back at her life.

The desire to create a film that privileges the experiential and the private is reflected in the style, shot size, composition and lighting. The film is shot in a combination of red, indigo, ochre, jade and yellow. This is to evoke the colours of the landscape in which Baartman grew up. The lighting aesthetic is influenced by a sense of the private. Images are lit in order to create a sense of intimacy. This often means that there is a play with shadows and concepts of light and dark. Baartman's character is often shot as if she were emerging from and framed by darkness. This is to suggest a narrative world that foregrounds and privileges the experiential and the private.

Additionally, the film consists of a textured look that sought to enhance emotional resonance and intimacy. This was done through the use of out of focus shots and extreme close up's. The images were often tightly framed and positioned in low angles. This is once again to evoke a sense of intimacy that suggests Baartman's private world, rather than an empirical, historical project. The need to evoke the sense of experiential time was articulated through the use of "long takes which capture the rhythm of life" (Gabriel as cited in Mellencamp, 1995:176). Furthermore, although the film concerns itself with chronology, it is however non linear in structure. This is once again to suggest a stream of consciousness or the notion of experiential time.

An important facet of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the issue of how to deal with her remains. As I have already mentioned, the return of Baartman's remains played a crucial role in Maseko's film, *The Return of Sara Baartman.* This was in terms of the remains (Baartman's) use as a symbol of the re-birth of the nation. One of my principal concerns was to disrupt this symbolic usage. I managed to do that at the end of my film. The end explores a return of Baartman that does not focus on her remains and their metaphorical significance in terms of constructing narratives of the nation. These articulations focus on her material remains and their material burial in the soil of the nation. These articulations therefore objectify Baartman's body by emphasising the use of her body as a tool in narratives of the nation. In order to disrupt this objectifying usage of Baartman's body, my film seeks to concentrate on a concept of return that is spiritual in nature. Baartman

returns home as a spiritual entity. As an ancestor, who does not live above or below us but among us. In this way her iconicism is infused with a sense of political agency that unveils her as a person, who in one way or another is constantly speaking and acting both within the past and present.

This is exemplified by the voice over at the end of the film. Baartman's character says in Xhosa (a language that according to Rachel Holmes she spoke and which functions as an African counterbalance to the English and French otherwise spoken in the film): "I lost my way; I didn't know where I was. I was out of my mind." The home in this passage does not refer to a material home within the earth; rather it refers to a spiritual home. The voice over continues and says: "Oh, what is this I see? It seemed like someone in red blankets was sitting there. Oh how beautiful this woman was. Her face was so beautiful". The woman that Baartman's character sees is an ancestor inviting Baartman to join the realm of the ancestors. The red of her blankets refers to the colours that *Sangomas* or traditional healers wear. This is to reinforce that Baartman's character is having a conversation with the spiritual world and that she is about to become part of it.

CONCLUSION

Guatam Bhadra argues, that "submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another; it is these two elements that together constitute the subaltern mentality" (1997:63). This statement is of particular significance to the life of Saartjie Baartman. Baartman's resistance was contextualised by this mentality. She was both submissive and defiant at different moments, this illustrates how "idioms of domination, subordination and revolt are inextricably linked" (Bhadra, 1997:63).

Furthermore, Bhadra's statement illustrates how the severely disenfranchised, as Baartman was, as a Khoi-San woman in the nineteenth century, can act and demonstrate a sense of self determinism. This sense of self determinism can play itself out even within a patriarchal, classist, imperialist and racist milieu, as the one that Baartman found herself in.

Ranajit Guha, in his essay entitled *Chandra's death* (1997), speaks of how a sense of personal will exists within patriarchy for the subaltern woman. In this essay he describes the death of a woman named Chandra, who was a member of a very low caste in colonial India, known as the Bagdis. The Bagdis were so poverty stricken and "polluted" that they were often considered outside of history itself (Guha, 1997:40). This is similar to how the Khoi-San were viewed within Baartman's lifetime. Chandra dies after she ingests herbal medicines administered by her sister in an attempt to abort a child that she has conceived with a distant relative. Her sister and mother attempt to abort the child in order to save her from the threat of banishment through *bhek*, which her one time lover threatens to place on her. "The semiotic ensemble called *bhek* consists of wearing a *boishnob's* habit, which is to adopt the dress, ornaments and markings, which move one out of caste and therefore society" (Guha, 1997:52).

Guha argues that Chandra's mother and sister displayed solidarity amongst women by choosing to administer the medicine in order to abort the baby, rather than allowing Chandra to be a victim of *bhek* (1997:59). He asserts that this solidarity of women, displayed a revolt, which although not public, was still visible, as it was exercised within a society where initiative and voice are given to men alone (1997:59). Guha therefore asserts that by choosing "abortion as an alternative to *bhek*, they defied the sentence of living death that had already been pronounced on Chandra" (1997:59).

They therefore displayed and exercised a sense of personal will even within the confines of a deeply oppressive society, contingent on class, caste and patriarchy.

The narrative of Chandra's death and its ramifications in terms of a sense of self determinism and feminism itself, are significant and in many ways analogous to the ways in which Baartman exercised a sense of personal will within her lifetime. Often this sense of personal will was not recognised as such and rather was viewed as further evidence of her extreme victimisation and disenfranchisement. This is similar to the way that Chandra's choice to have an abortion could be viewed; as something borne out of victimisation, rather than personal choice.

Baartman's refusal to admit to the abuse of her situation and be repatriated back to South Africa, after a trial was instigated on her behalf by abolitionists in Britain, is one such incident, that I have already discussed earlier.

Chandra's death, following the ingesting of the herbal remedy and Baartman's return to humiliating exhibition and abuse after the trial reveals important things. Although moments of self determinism are possible by subaltern people there are however limitations. Limitations which often demand submissiveness, in the same instant as resistance and which may even have deadly repercussions.

The above analysis disrupts the articulation of Baartman as a victim. This is done through a feminist historiography that articulates a sense of self determinism even within the confines of colonial imperialism and patriarchy. This illustration of a personal will (described in both my film project and this research report), allows Baartman a voice outside of a discourse of nation and nation building. This voice allows an articulation of Baartman as a person, rather than as a symbol of the inhumanity that she had suffered. This voice and her subsequent unveiling as a person, who was both complicit and resistant, reject her incarnations as a symbol or tool. This rejection consequently disavows her sanctification, as her role as a symbol, is deconstructed and ultimately diminished to some degree. Her official identity is therefore disrupted and called into question.

The ruin of Baartman's representation that my research report and film propose is premised on a "logic of difference". This "logic of difference" is about the ability to

argue for and justify differences of interpretation by privileging different aspects of narrative history at varied historical moments. This notion of interpretation, specifically the interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity as it relates to history (personal and official) and her private life, is grounded in Patricia Mellencamp's description of the "empirical avant garde". *I am Saartjie Baartman* privileges experiential time above notions of the historical (linear or historic time). This concept of experiential time is crucial to the ruin of Baartman's representation and therefore her re-imagining. The ruin of representation can however only exist in the moment of the film, *I am Saartjie Baartman.* Beyond the film it reproduces itself, therefore disavowing the impression of "ruin".

APPENDIX

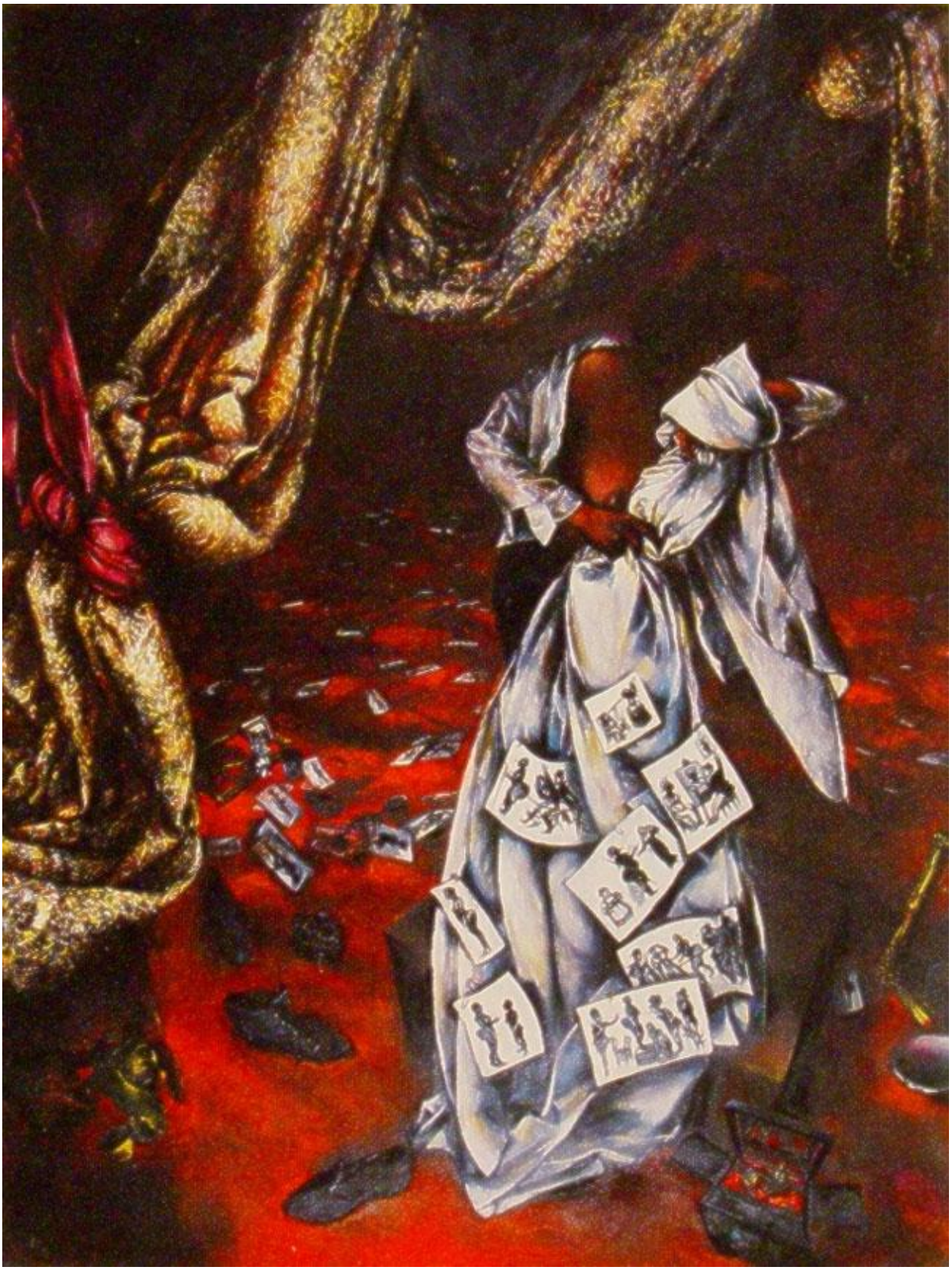


Figure 1: Penny Siopis, *Dora and the Other Woman* (1988), pastel on paper, 153 x 120 cm, Private collection.

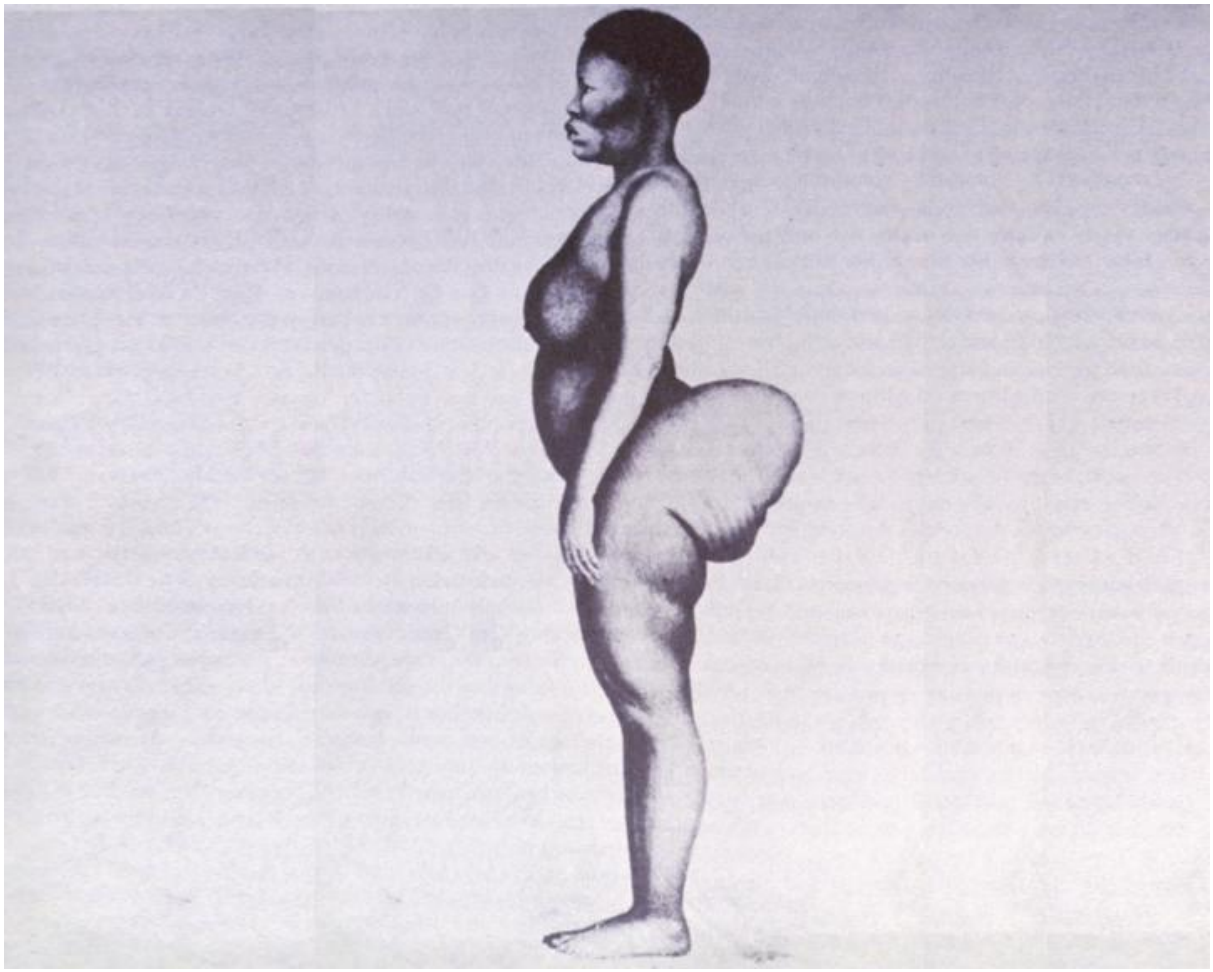


Figure 2: Nicolas Huet le Jeune, *Saartjie Baartman* (1815), watercolour on vellum.

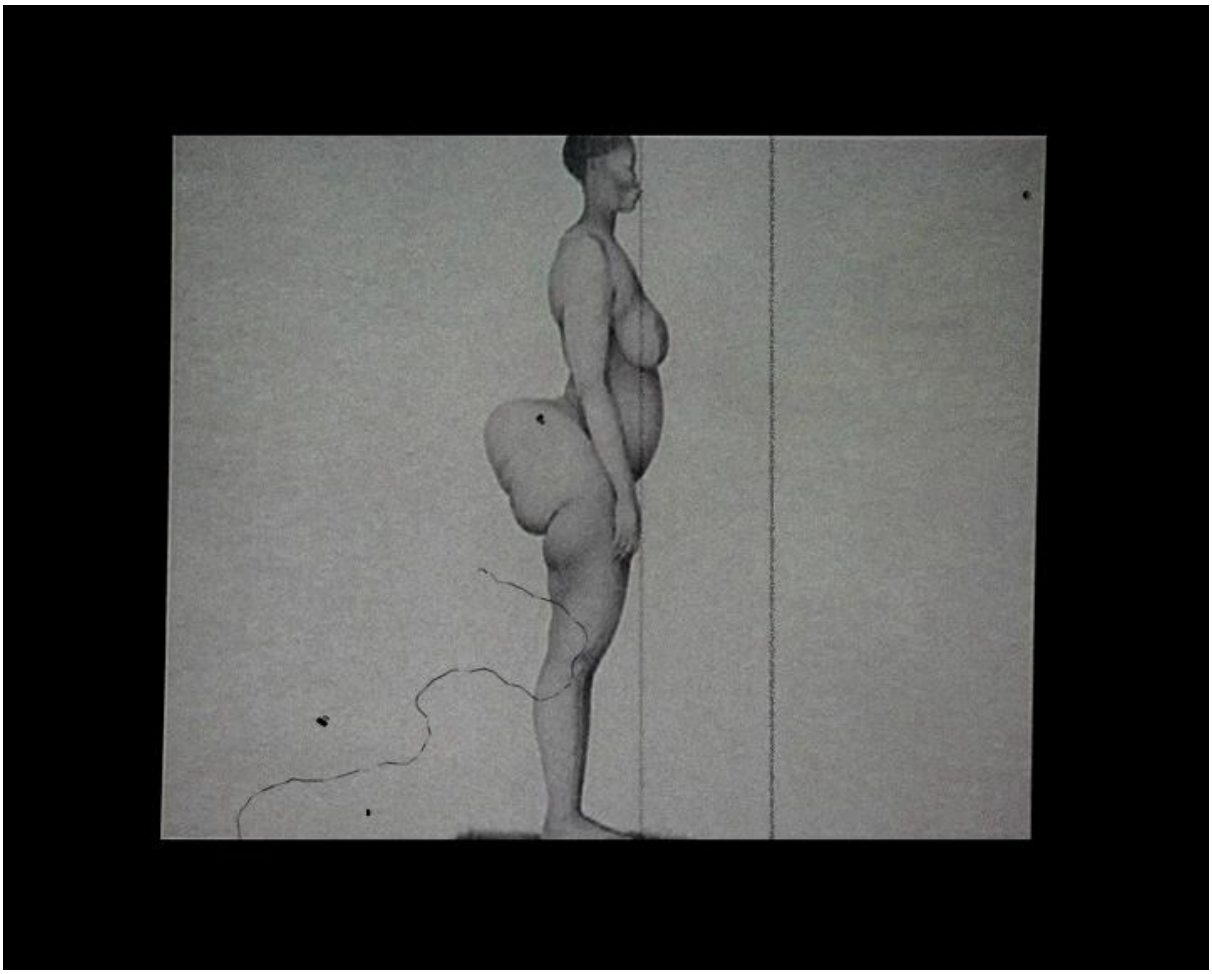


Figure 3: Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman*, projection originally painted by Nicolas Huet le Jeune, *Saartjie Baartman* (1815), watercolour on Vellum.

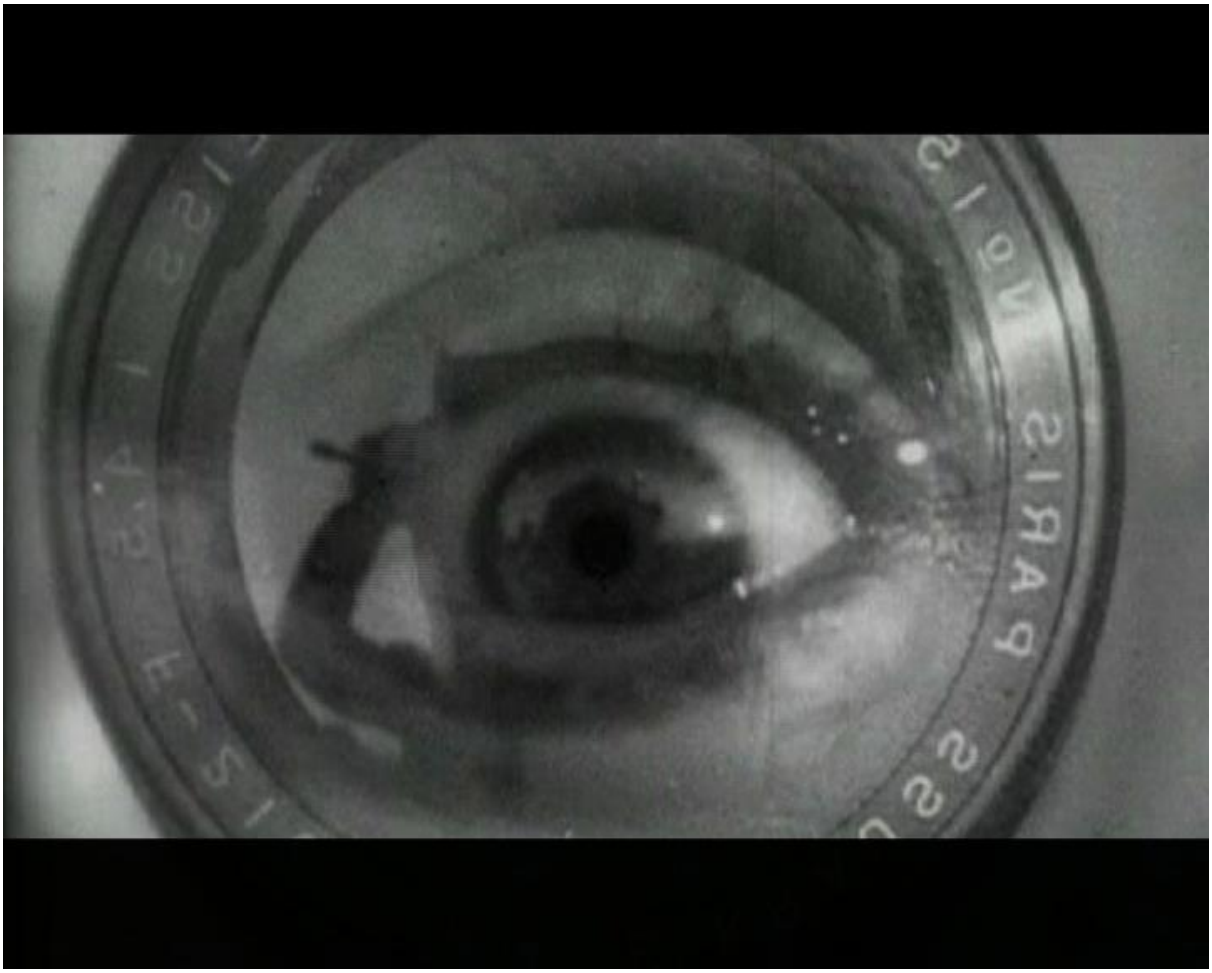


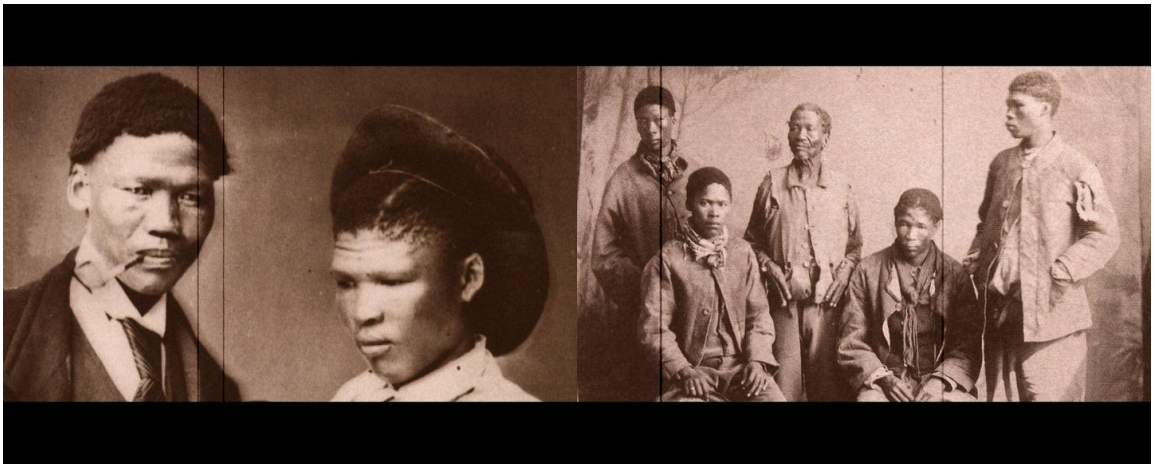
Figure 4: Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman*, projection from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the movie camera* (1929)



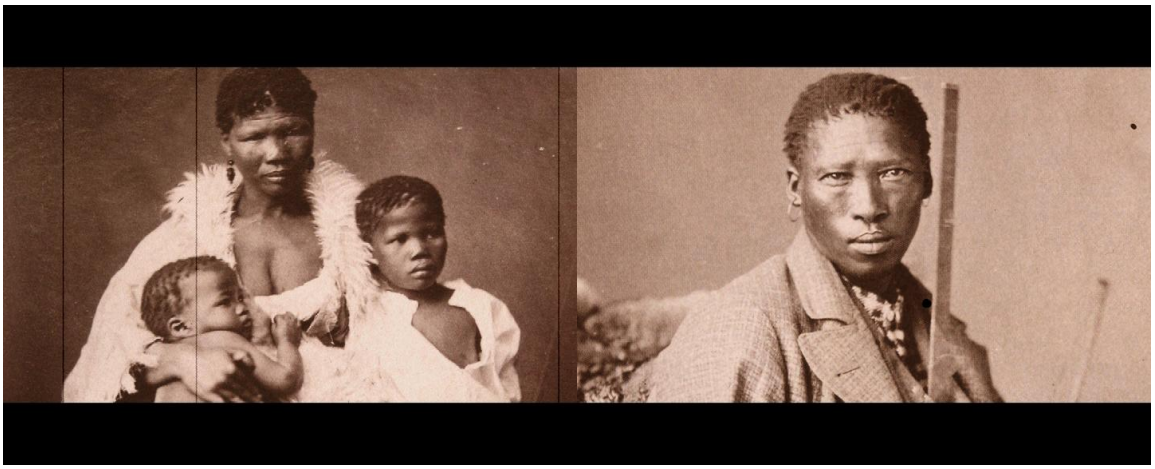
Figure 5: Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman*, projection from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)



Figure 6: Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman*



1 2



3 4

Figure 7: Still images from *I am Saartjie Baartman*, projections of archival photographs of San people from the Bleek/Lloyd archive compiled by Pippa Skotnes (2007)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. ALTER, G. 1998. A New Technique for Aesthetic Labia Minora Reduction. *The Annals of Plastic Surgery*. 40(1):287-290.

2. ATLICK, R.1978. *The Shows of London*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

3. BHADRA, G. 1997. The Mentality of Subalternity: "Kantanama" or "Rajdharma". IN: Guha, R. (Ed.) *A Subaltern Studies Reader*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

4. BOYNE, R.1990. *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*. London: Unwin Hyman.

5. CRAIS, S and SCULLY, P. 2009. *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography*. New Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press.

6. COOMBES, A.1997. Gender, Race, Ethnicity in Art Practice in Post Apartheid South Africa: Annie.E. Coombes and Penny Siopis in Conversation. *Feminist Review*. 55:110-129.

7. CUVIER, G. 1817. Report on the observations made on the body of a woman known in Paris and in London as the Hottentot Venus. *Memoires du Museum d'Histoire Naturelle*. 3:259-274.

8. ENWENZOR, O.1999. Re-framing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation. IN: Enwenzor, O & Oguibe, O. (Eds.) *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from theory to the Market place*. London: Institute of Visual Arts.

9. FAUSTO- STERLING, A. 1995. Gender, race and Nation: The comparative anatomy of "Hottentot" women in Europe 1815-1817. IN: Terry, J & Urla, J (Eds.) *Deviant Bodies: Critical perspectives on difference in science and popular culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

10. FERRUS, D. 1998. *A Poem for Sarah Baartman*. Available from: The south African Government, Web site: http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/saartjie.htm [Accessed: August 12, 2008].

11. GILMAN, S. 1985. Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of female sexuality in late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature. *Critical Enquiry*. 12(1):204-242.

12. GOULD, S. 1985. *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History*. New York: W.w. Norton.

13. GUHA, R. (Ed.) 1997. Chandra's Death. IN: *A Subaltern Studies Reader*. Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press.

14. HAYWARD, S. 2000. Framing National cinemas. IN: Hjort, M & Mackenzie, S. (Eds.) *Cinema and Nation*. London and New York: Routledge.

15. HOLMES, R. 2007. *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman, born 1789-buried 2002*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishers.

16. KRISTEVA, J. 1986. Women's Time. IN: Moi, T. (Ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell LTD.

17. KRISTEVA, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

18. LINDFORS, B.1983. The Hottentot Venus and other African attractions in nineteenth century England. *Australasian Drama studies*. 1:83-104.

19. MELLENCAMP, P. 1995. An Empirical Avant Garde : Laleen Jayamanne and Tracey Moffat. IN: Petro, P. (Ed.) *Fugitive Images: from photography to video*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

20. MOXEY, K. 1994. *The Practice of Theory: Post-Structuralism, Cultural Politics and Art History*. New York: Cornell University Press.

21. OLKOWSKI, D. 1999. *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*. Berkley, California: University of California press

22. QURESHI, S. 2004. Displaying Sara Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus". *History of Science*.42: 233-257.

23. SAMUELSON, M. 2007. *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South Africa Transition*. University of Kwazulu Natal Press.

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

25. SCHMAHMANN, B. 2004. *Bodies of Resistance: Works by Penny Siopis*. Inaugural Lecture, Rhodes University.

26. SHAVIRO, S. 1993. *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

27. SHAW, D. 2004. Sergei Eisenstein. *Senses of Cinema*.30.

28. SHOHAT, E. 1997. Post -Third Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation and Cinema. IN: Alexander, J & Mohanty, C (Eds.) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic futures*. New York: Routledge.

29. SKOTNES, P. 2007. *Claim to the country: The archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek / [created, compiled and introduced by] Pippa Skotnes*. Johannesburg: Jacan; Athens: Ohio University Press.

30. SPIVAK, G.1989-1990. Women in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful". *Cultural Critique*. 14:105-128.

31. STROTHER, Z. 1999. Display of the body Hottentot. IN: Lindfors, B (Ed.) *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

32. TURMEN, T. 1998. *Female Genital Mutilation*. Geneva: World Health Organisation

FILMOGRAPHY

1. CRONENBERG, D. dir. 1982. *Videodrome*. 88mins. Canada
2. EISENSTEIN, S.dir.1925. *Battleship Potemkin*. 65mins.Russia
3. MASEKO, Z. dir.1998. *The life and times of Sara Baartman*. 52mins. South Africa
4. MASEKO, Z. dir. 2002. *The Return of Sara Baartman*. 52mins. South Africa.
5. VERTOV, D. dir.1929. *Man with the Movie Camera*. 68mins. Russia