

DISPLAYING SARA BAARTMAN, THE ‘HOTTENTOT VENUS’

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Parties of Twelve and upwards, may be accommodated with a Private Exhibition of the HOTTENTOT, at No. 225 Piccadilly, between Seven and Eight o’Clock in the Evening, by giving notice to the Door-Keeper the Day previous. A woman will attend (if required).¹

In 1995 a campaign began to “Bring back the Hottentot Venus”.² The request to repatriate to South Africa the remains of a Khoisan woman held at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris initiated a charged political row between the French and South African governments. President Nelson Mandela himself made personal requests on behalf of the South African people to François Mitterand, and subsequently to Jacques Chirac, for the return of the woman’s remains to her ancestors for a humane burial. The request has taken eight years to fulfil.³ The woman at the centre of this political bargaining is now called Sara Baartman. Unfortunately, no record of her original name exists and she is better known by her epithet, the ‘Hottentot Venus’, to her contemporaries, present-day historians, and political activists.⁴ Baartman is, even after nearly two centuries, amongst the most famous human ethnological exhibits.⁵ Displayed in England and France in the early nineteenth century as a curiosity, her breasts, buttocks and hypertrophied labia aroused considerable interest, prurient and scientific. After her death the interest continued: Georges Cuvier dissected her corpse in the name of science and immortalized her as a biological specimen. Until as late as the 1970s, a full cast of her body and skeleton was on exhibition at the Musée de l’Homme, where her remains were subsequently held in storage before finally being repatriated in April 2002. The nature of Baartman’s story, and the power of the racial and gender politics invested in its retelling, has led — not surprisingly, and perhaps inevitably — to modern writers and artists appropriating her as a focal point for discourses upon race, gender, empire, and specifically Western representations of black female sexuality. The attempt to reclaim her physically is metaphorically paralleled by the movement to reclaim her image, as black artists are beginning to explore representations of their own sexuality in the modern media through work evoking the infamous breasts and buttocks.

The burgeoning literature spawned by the fascination with Baartman’s story ensures her a continued fame; yet it is, in many senses, deeply unsatisfactory.⁶ The overwhelming analytical emphasis on race and gender has led to relatively little attention being focused upon the material processes involved in Baartman’s objectification, exhibition, and politicization, making much of the literature appear poorly historicized or preoccupied with political ends. Richard Altick and Bernth Lindfors discuss Baartman with reference to the entertainment scene of the nineteenth

century. Their acknowledgement that Baartman's original appearance conforms to long-standing traditions, including displays of the anatomically curious and political caricature, is an essential step in contextualizing Baartman's story. However, Altick is now historiographically dated and often appears insensitive. Anne Fausto-Sterling and Londa Schiebinger discuss nineteenth-century writings on the Khoikhoi and thus reveal how the group achieved such fame and excited the interests of countless travellers and naturalists. Sander Gilman's frequently cited work is amongst the most explicit in linking Baartman's exhibition solely to interest in her sexuality; unfortunately its emphasis upon female genitalia and use of explicit visual material with little supporting discussion can appear voyeuristic. However, the most problematic feature of the current literature is its treatment of race as an historically timeless concept and its role in the construction of deviance in the early nineteenth century. The dominant position currently implies that not only was there one image of the black, but that Baartman was representative of this image.⁷ In contrast, this article attempts to contextualize her tale by examining the mediation of issues such as race, gender and empire through the material practices. It examines the formation of imperial collections, human performance within the public entertainments of nineteenth-century London, the creation of Baartman the natural historical specimen, live and dead, and finally the making of Baartman as a modern cultural icon. This provides an historically sensitive account of her display and reveals why Baartman's story continues to inspire the powerful ideology surrounding her legacy.

IMPERIAL COLLECTIONS

Throughout the history of colonial occupation at the Cape, many representations of indigenous peoples have been used to facilitate their subjugation.⁸ Wildness and savagery characterized depictions of the Khoikhoi during the seventeenth century, quickly establishing them as the 'link' between ape and human in nature's great hierarchy. Images suggestive of cannibalism and depicting the consumption of raw flesh, alongside women with simian proportions and pendulous breasts, were characteristic. The indigenous language further reinforced the supposed wretchedness of the Khoikhoi, since it included a number of click sounds that Europeans found particularly bestial. In conjunction, travelogues categorized Africa in terms that appeared to be objective whilst actually creating and perpetuating the myth of a brutish and 'uncivilized' people believed to be without, or worse still, incapable of religion. Such stereotyping underpinned the view that colonial expansion was not only desirable for the nation but also beneficial to the colonized peoples. The process of appropriation implicit in these forms of categorization was of fundamental importance in constructing Africa as a commodity available for colonial advantage.

Flora, fauna and people were all commodities to be collected. The agricultural relevance of botanical knowledge fuelled nationalist interest in plants, whilst animals caged in menageries provided the public with entertainment and evidence of imperial success.⁹ Missionaries abroad stimulated great interest in indigenous populations; conversion presented an opportunity to effect a reclamation of souls in the interests

of both the Christian faith and empire. Converted peoples were also often displayed in England as evidence of missionary beneficence in spreading civilization.¹⁰ Sara Baartman arrived on England's shores within this traffic of animals, plants and people destined for display as objects representing colonial expansion and as a means of economic gain; she served as both an imperial success and a prized specimen of the 'Hottentot'. Brought over in 1810 by Alexander Dunlop, the surgeon of an African ship and exporter of museum specimens from the Cape, she sailed from the Cape to Liverpool upon the strength of a promise to help her earn her fortune. Dunlop hoped to dispose advantageously of her to a collector and made an offer to William Bullock, later proprietor of the Egyptian Hall, who refused the woman outright. It is possible that Baartman may have been a slave or labourer, or descended from parents with such a status; although the Khoikhoi had not been systematically enslaved since the foundation of the colony they were continually subjugated.¹¹ Often referred to as Saartjie ('little Sara' in Dutch) in contemporary accounts, her very name hints at such a situation; in the nineteenth century diminutives were often used to differentiate slaves or collared people from their white counterparts, effectively assigning them the status of children.¹² It is also likely that the name was given to her by Peter Cezar, for whom she worked as a servant after being brought to the Cape by Dutch farmers, when her father, a drover, was killed.

Alexander Dunlop's status as a collector with trade contacts, and his offer of Baartman to Bullock, a museum entrepreneur, is not incidental. Although Bullock did not purchase Baartman, a decision he regretted following the success of her exhibition, Dunlop's choice to make Bullock the offer, and their positions within the network of suppliers and consumers, indicate that the processes involved in Baartman's commodification are analogous to those involved in animal importation. Dunlop provided a crucial point of contact for individuals like Bullock, who relied upon their exotic investments for commercial success. Dunlop used his position as a naval surgeon to deal in specimens just as other navy employees supplied menagerie proprietors. Similarly, not only were the same trade routes used, but the same practical problems were involved in keeping Baartman alive for the purpose of financial gain. And, just as caged animals represented imperial conquests, Baartman represented the product of British activity in the Cape and the acquisition of fresh territory just four years earlier. It may be tempting to argue that the slave trade provides a better analogy, since it involves recognized human commodities. However, the analogy with transporting live rare animals is preferable precisely because Baartman's value lay in her perceived uniqueness as a rare live specimen of the exotic. Although slaves were more profitable alive, the sheer number of slaves available for trade effectively erased their individuality and encouraged their inhumane treatment during transportation; viewed as being relatively expendable, the effort consumed to maintain their lives would not have approached Dunlop's investment in his ward.

Dunlop eventually found a buyer in Hendrick Cezar.¹³ Baartman's sale to a showman strengthens the case for analysing interest in her in economic terms, and in relation to the trade in live exotic stock. Doing so clarifies the processes involved

in her treatment as a commodity and in her route to becoming a displayed object. Cezar made his investment with the intention of exhibiting his purchase; thus, the next section examines Baartman's place within the London entertainment scene to locate her within a culture of display.

THE ETHNOLOGICAL SHOWS OF LONDON

For a metropolitan resident seeking amusement, London provided a host of possibilities: theatres, museums, pleasure gardens, panoramas, circuses, menageries, freak shows and fairs.¹⁴ Despite the apparent differences between these modes of entertainment, a closer examination actually reveals a common set of practices that underlie the shows of London. For example, the European collecting practices already discussed underlay the acquisition of many materials that were exhibited in the shows, including humans, animals, and objects. These exhibits then formed the basis for theatrical, zoological and museological display and performance. The present section embeds Baartman's display within the context of London's entertainment milieu by drawing analogies between ethnological human display, and exhibitions of human curiosities and animals.

Shortly after Baartman's arrival in London in 1810, at no. 225 Piccadilly, members of the public were invited to view the "Hottentot Venus" for two shillings (Figure 1). Advertised as possessing the "kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen", she wore a "dress resembling her complexion" and so tight that her "shapes above and the 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".¹⁵ She wore beads and feathers hung around her waist, the accoutrements associated with her African ancestry, and, on occasion, would play a small stringed musical instrument. The show took place upon "a stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper, and exhibited like a wild beast; being obliged to walk, stand, or sit as he ordered".¹⁶

Charles Matthews, comedian, who "was all his life a great *sight-seer*", frequented the London neighbourhood in pursuit of the latest curiosities.¹⁷ Upon visiting Baartman:


He 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, '*natural*.' 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.¹⁸

Matthews effectively located Baartman within the arena of human curiosities by relating his meeting alongside visits to several other "living curiosities" starring in London's shows; the Spotted Boy; the elegant dwarf Count Boruwalski; the Living Skeleton; Daniel Lambert, a 36-year-old weighing above 50 stone (700 lb / 317 kg); and Miss Crackham, a young lady measuring just 22½ inches tall whose stage name,

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THE

Hottentot Venus,

JUST ARRIVED FROM THE

INTERIOR OF AFRICA;

THE GREATEST

PHENOMENON

Ever exhibited in this Country;

Whose Stay in the Metropolis will be but short.

FIG. 1. A show poster for Baartman's exhibition in London. This would have been pasted up in the streets to advertise the show. (From Lysons, *Collectanea* (ref. 1), by permission of the British Library, shelfmark C.191.c.16.)

the "Sicilian Fairy", encapsulated both her size and frailty.¹⁹ The association between ethnological exhibits and humans with an anatomical curiosity was not uncommon as they were often exhibited together. Charles Dickens illustrated the variety a single show could encompass in *Sketches by Boz*: "The dwarfs are also objects of great curiosity, and as a dwarf, a giantess, a living skeleton, a wild Indian, and a 'young lady of singular beauty, with perfectly white hair and pink eyes,' and two or three natural curiosities, are usually exhibited together, for the small charge of a penny, they attract very numerous audiences."²⁰ Matthews's reference to a "keeper" echoes numerous primary sources and suggests the exhibition revolved around the dynamics implicit in zoological display. Baartman may not have been physically caged but

her patrons' reactions are strongly reminiscent of contemporary accounts of visits to the local menagerie, where the animals were frequently teased and agitated by enthusiastic visitors.²¹ Menageries formed part of the same spectrum of public entertainment as freak shows. Displays of humans also included numerous ethnological exhibitions, each relying on the curiousness of the alien to draw crowds. Ethnological exhibitions not only represented imperial activity but disturbingly blurred the human/animal boundary. Both occupied a privileged epistemological position in their respective surroundings, be they iron bars or the theatrical stage, since animals were selected to be examples of their specific kinds just as ethnological exhibitions relied upon the claim that the peoples displayed were representative of a nation or race to generate interest.

Shocking as it may be to contemporary sensibilities, Baartman's exhibition and treatment by her show's patrons was not unique. Exhibitions of living foreign peoples were accessible and highly profitable forms of entertainment throughout the nineteenth century. Baartman's display was the first of the new century and the forerunner of numerous displays of foreign peoples including Sámi ("Laplanders", 1822), South Americans (1822), Esquimaux (c. 1820s), Native Americans (1840s), San ("Bushmen", 1847), "Aztecs" (1853), African "Earthmen" (1853), and Zulus (1853).²² Like Baartman, these exhibits were collected within the networks of supply and demand created by the public interest in exotic animals and objects. Often they were imported by merchants as entrepreneurial speculations. Public interest in these shows was stimulated by a range of factors including ethnic "singularity", physical peculiarities such as the diminutiveness of the San, and the subjects' political relevance as Britain's colonized subjects or military opponents. The political relevance of exhibits often proved the most attractive, and in Baartman's case, the most enduring reason for fame.

Baartman's exhibition aroused intense public interest when abolitionists objected to her display on humanitarian grounds.²³ On 12 October 1810, the *Morning Chronicle*, a reforming newspaper, published a letter of indictment from "AN ENGLISHMAN" who believed: "It was contrary to every principle of morality and good order" to allow the show, as it connected "offence to public decency, with that most horrid of all situations, *Slavery*".²⁴ Cezar responded with two letters where he forcefully argued that "has she not as good a right to exhibit herself as an Irish Giant or a Dwarf?". He sought further justification by claiming that since the British acquisition of the Cape, he had been "constantly solicited to bring her to this country, as a subject well worthy of the attention of the Virtuoso, and the curious in general".²⁵ The abolitionist interest prompted a court case: Baartman's self-appointed protectors argued that the exhibit was both indecent and, crucially, that Baartman was being held against her will. In conjunction with the African Association, the abolitionists also arranged for Baartman's repatriation to her native Cape. Ultimately, the court found in favour of the defendant, Cezar, upon the presentation of a contract between Baartman and Dunlop.²⁶ Although it is highly probable the contract was drawn up hastily in the light of the court case, and that Baartman may not even have seen it, the judge felt

it inappropriate to press charges and the show continued.

Court records and newspaper reports of the case provide almost all the available biographical information about Baartman. However, the case's greater significance lies in the critical insight it provides as to why Baartman, of all the curiosities on show, caused such a sensation. Advertisements for the exhibition began appearing in the London newspapers as early as late September 1810, and occasioned little or no response. However, by mid-October abolitionists began to take an interest and there followed a flurry of references, political and satirical, with a number of articles reporting the court proceedings, which began in late November. It is Baartman's *politicization* and not her exhibition that proved unusual. There was little mention of her whilst she remained a curiosity — the turning point in her status came with abolitionist interest in her repatriation. Examining the chronology of the 'Hottentot Venus' phenomenon thus provides a salutary lesson in how to contextualize Baartman's exhibition. Much of the current literature relies on the premise that Baartman caused an immediate sensation in the metropolitan public's imagination because of her perceived anatomical differences (and thus its role in reinforcing a racialist division between black and white). However, contextualizing her in relation to other displays of "living curiosities" demonstrates that this is not accurate. In one sense, all human curiosities are reified; although each possesses an individualizing trait, ultimately he or she confirms the typological basis of alterity. In this respect, Baartman's steatopygia is no different to Daniel Lambert's extraordinary weight or the Sicilian Fairy's diminutive proportions; rather, they are analogues. This aspect of Baartman's tale has been obscured by the political significance ascribed to it, facilitating her appropriation into a spectrum of causes, be they abolitionist or feminist.

Baartman's early politicization is contingent upon the considerable presence of black peoples in Regency London. However, this has been barely addressed in the current literature.²⁷ Such an acknowledgement does not deny that racial prejudice existed, but it does change the dynamics of interaction between Baartman and her show's patrons. It is difficult to estimate the ethnic composition of the population, but an estimate of 20,000²⁸ has been tentatively proposed for as early as 1764, and this is likely to have grown by the time of Baartman's exhibition (the 1801 census records a total population of 958,863).²⁹ This population appears to have been the largest non-white group in residence. In the eighteenth century an ornately dressed young black page was an indispensable accessory for a lady of fashion. Slavery provides a valuable means of assessing the visibility of London's black population. Until the emancipation of English slaves in 1807, most resident black people were in bondage. The popularity of slaves as servants ensured that even in isolated country residences blacks had begun to penetrate the domestic space of the propertied.

In the nineteenth century many continued in domestic service after having achieved their freedom. Black people managed to settle in London, working and intermarrying with the local population: at the level of the lower classes considerable assimilation occurred. Black faces appear with surprising regularity in depictions of London's underworld, where they are found intermingling freely.³⁰ Indeed one anti-abolitionist

felt it necessary to vehemently attack “the lower classes of women in *England*, [who] are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention”.³¹ Some, such as Robert Wedderburn and Olaudah Equiano, having achieved their own freedom, began to campaign for the emancipation of others and achieved prominence as political activists.³² Those less fortunate might turn to begging and some achieved fame for this alone, such as Charles M’Gee and Joseph Johnson, whose hat was unmistakably modelled after a ship. Furthermore, Londoners’ experience of blacks was inextricably tied up with performance over a broad range of social situations; black performers ranged from the casual busker in the street to professional musicians and the theatrically inclined. A substantial proportion earned their living as musicians and actors, with some achieving celebrity status: for instance, Billy Waters, a one-legged talented fiddler, and Ira Aldridge, an acclaimed actor. This excludes the significant number of white actors and musicians who painted themselves black to perform, thus strengthening the association between blacks and performance. Minstrels, for example, could regularly be found in the streets where they serenaded passers by. Of particular relevance are those employed within freak shows, such as the Spotted Boy, a young boy famous for the striking white patches mottling his skin, or Amelia Harlequin, a “white Negress”, who appeared at Bartholomew Fair in 1788.³³ The one exception to the visibility of black people is that of black women. They were a much rarer sight than black men but were still not unknown.

Given the significant number of resident black persons, it is fallacious to assume, as has often been done, that Baartman’s status as an imperial spectacle was ensured by her colour alone, as an overwhelming number of visitors flocking to see her would already have had firsthand acquaintance with a black person, however limited or negative. Her colour may have placed her in a minority but it did not immediately relegate her to the status of wholly alien. Attempts to frame Baartman’s display as anomalous also ignore both its continuity with exhibiting human curiosities and its resonance with the longstanding association between blacks and entertainment. However, Baartman’s attraction did lie partly with her ethnic origin.

Despite metropolitan racial heterogeneity it is important to remember that not all of Britain’s subjects were equally represented. For example, London’s black population was the largest resident population of coloured peoples; however, most of these individuals were originally slaves and thus of African American, Caribbean or West Indian extraction. Able to speak English, dressed in European attire and often converts to Christianity, they were relatively integrated into British culture, whether as servants or more equally as amongst the lower classes. Yet, when Sara Baartman arrived upon these shores even Londoners with considerable experience of London’s black population would have been extremely unlikely to have had any acquaintance with a resident Khoikhoi woman. It is easy to forget that these differences existed, since accounts of ethnological display often imply that a different colour alone is sufficient to relegate ethnological exhibits to the status of exotic. This not only ignores the racial heterogeneity of London but also ethnic differences between peoples of the same colour, differences of which the public was not only

aware but which showmen capitalized upon. Sara Baartman could be *made* to correspond with the large resident population of blacks, it is true, but this was not a given. Thus, the court case regarding her exhibition attracted such attention precisely because it neglected her distinctive ethnicity in order to argue for incorporating her into the wider debates on slavery and the status of the black. Although slavery was abolished in Britain in 1807, it was not abolished in the British Empire until 1833.³⁴ Thus, Baartman's exhibition occurred at precisely the moment when the abolitionist issue was gathering strength and pro-slavery campaigners were actively creating an image of *the Black* that erased ethnic differences between culturally diverse black peoples so as to lend force to their political agenda. Given the centrality of Baartman's ethnic origin in ensuring her status as both a rare sight and a political pawn, it is entirely plausible that patrons of her exhibition *were* paying to view difference but not difference resulting from race alone; rather, they were paying to view an exhibit with immediate political relevance.

Little is known of Baartman's career in England following the court case and before her appearance in France. Manchester parish records indicate that in December 1811, "Sarah Bartmann a female Hottentot from the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, born on the Borders of Caffaria, [was] baptized this Day by permission of the Lord Bishop of Chester in a letter from his Lordship to Jos. Brookes Chaplain".³⁵ Baartman was also exhibited in Manchester, possibly Bath, and Limerick in Ireland.³⁶ Curiosities were often exhibited in the provinces, and it is tempting to speculate that these recorded appearances formed part of a provincial tour in order to exhaust the economic possibilities of Cezar's investment. If this was the case it is feasible that she may have become unprofitable in Britain and thus forced across the Channel. The next section examines the move and the final days of her life, which were spent in Paris.

INVESTIGATING THE KHOISAN BODY

In 1814, Baartman began to be exhibited in Paris by the animal trainer S. Réaux; the show caused a sensation and ran for eighteen months. In the spring of 1815 Baartman spent three days at the Jardin des Plantes under the observation of the professors of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle. Here she posed nude for the images that appeared in the first volume of Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's and Frédéric Cuvier's *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*.³⁷ Now iconic, they are the first images to greet the reader and the only portraits of a human in this lavishly illustrated work; the others depict an array of mammals, including numerous species of apes and monkeys.

Baartman's poses in these images are striking; she appears rigid with the air of a stuffed specimen rather than a live model. Instead of portraying a classical pose, the artist presents views framed similarly to the other mammalian specimens in the volume and which are analogous to the anterior and lateral profiles used in zoological illustration. The delicate colouring is clearly intended to be realistic; details such as the hair, veining of the areola tissue, and nails contribute clinical precision. Minimal scenery hints at a geographical location without interfering with the human/animal

subject. A scale emphasizes the intention of anatomical accuracy. These cues indicate an aspiration towards visual objectivity and embody period conventions. Artistic representations of blacks could employ obvious artifice; however, in ethnographic illustration an artist's role was supposedly that of a passive recorder, the only legitimate input being the choice of subject or physical perspective.³⁸ Baartman's expression is the sole feature that adds a sense of humanity; poignantly addressing the viewer directly, it draws away from her physical form.

In December 1815, Baartman died from an illness Georges Cuvier diagnosed as "une maladie inflammatoire et eruptive".³⁹ Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire applied to the authorities on behalf of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle to retain the corpse on the grounds that it was a singular (*singulière*) specimen of humanity and therefore of special scientific interest.⁴⁰ The application was approved and the body removed to the Muséum where Cuvier conducted the autopsy and triumphantly published a detailed account of Baartman's anatomy.⁴¹

The report reveals a tension between acknowledging Baartman's humanity (she is not even named), and the expectation of bestial habits borne from the belief that she represents an inferior human form. Cuvier begins by relating observations he made while she was still alive, before discussing her cadaver's anatomical form. He notes that her personality was sprightly, memory good, and that she could speak tolerably good Dutch, a little English and had even learnt some French during her stay in Paris. His account of her dancing in the fashion of her country, and ability to play the 'guimbarde', a stringed instrument, ascribes a sense of vivacity to Baartman that is unusual. He adds that her shoulders and back are graceful, her arms slender, her hands charming and her feet pretty. However, his physiognomical description barely hides his disgust. Features such as the jutting of the jaws, fatness of lips and short chin recall the Negro, while the large cheeks, narrow eyes, and flattened base of the nose echo Mongolian characteristics. Physiognomy was commonly used in the nineteenth century to establish an individual's character and to demonstrate racial and class superiority; thus Cuvier's extended discussion of Baartman's face serves to confirm her already lowly status.⁴² Cuvier also cannot help categorizing her with numerous species of monkey since her ears are small and weakly formed, as with the orangutan, and she frequently juts her lip outwards in a like manner; likewise, her skull resembles a monkey's more than any other he has examined. Even her vivacity is translated into rapid and unexpected movements like those of a monkey.

This tension rests partly in Cuvier's theory of anatomy.⁴³ Cuvier emphatically classifies Baartman as a "femme de race Boschimanne", as opposed to a different species or a Hottentot. His anatomical investigation established that her steatopygia was simply the excessive accumulation of fatty tissue, and that her so-called *tablier* was an extension of the inner labia, and thus also an over-development of a feature common to all women rather than a mark of a different species. The San were commonly believed to be the most degraded of humans and were often likened to orangutans. Vituperation characterizes contemporary accounts: one story of Dutch settlers on a hunting excursion relates how they shot a San man and ate his flesh,

believing they were eating large game rather than a human.⁴⁴ Cuvier's anatomical observations testified to Baartman's humanity but his decision to categorize her as a *Boschimanne*, rather than *Hottentote*, suggests that for Cuvier Baartman was as close as possible to an ape. This is crucial since Cuvier opposed Lamarck's transmutational theory, preferring a relatively stable view of species.⁴⁵ He categorized humans as a single species but believed there were three physically distinguishable races, Caucasians, Ethiopians and Mongolian. Thus, Cuvier attempted to reconcile perceived animality with humanity by classifying Baartman as a *Boschimanne*, the lowest rung in his human hierarchy, and through preserving her as a racial type, rather than as an anomaly or separate species, erased her individuality whilst implicitly legitimating his politics of anatomy.

Cuvier's report also addresses contemporary accounts of Khoikhoi genitalia. The interest began with accounts in travel narratives that Khoikhoi men had a single testicle, and that the women possessed protruding buttocks and a *tablier*. The *tablier* became subject to numerous contradictions, with no one able to decide if it was natural or the result of artifice. Curiosity abounded as to the cause and function of the enlarged buttocks, some proposing that it was an adaptation allowing the women to carry their children on their backs. Both sexes were the subjects of speculation, but the attention devoted to the women is extraordinary. Many writers bemoaned the difficulty of persuading the Khoikhoi to appear naked. François Le Vaillant, known for his images of Khoikhoi women, relates the lengths to which he pleaded with a Khoikhoi woman to reveal herself. Finally achieving success, he writes: "Confused, abashed and trembling, she covered her face with both her hands, suffered her apron [*tablier*] to be untied, and permitted me to contemplate at leisure what my readers will see themselves in the exact representation which I drew of it."⁴⁶ These images frequently present Khoikhoi women reclining, naked except for long robes that unfold along their length to reveal breasts and parted legs exposing the elongated labia. In some the women are more accommodating and hold their labia apart as an invitation to intimate examination. Both the text and images attempt to represent the women as coy but compliant in their invasion; however, for a modern reader, it is difficult not to view them as anything other than deeply disturbing, pornographic and, frankly, distastefully voyeuristic. Such accounts conferred prestige upon Cuvier's verification of the existence and nature of the *tablier*. During the examination at the Jardin des Plantes both Henri de Blainville and Cuvier pleaded with Baartman to allow an examination of her *tablier*, with de Blainville even offering her money; but she refused and took great care to preserve her modesty. Cuvier only succeeded when her cadaver lay before him. His meticulous description of the *tablier*, including its length, thickness, and appearance folded and unfolded, takes up a long passage that is as graphic and violating as Le Vaillant's images, and makes it clear that Cuvier's attempted scientific resolution of the *tablier* mystery was a personal triumph.

Cuvier's autopsy report is well known and has long been established as the basis for his vilification as a racist scientist in the literature on Baartman; however, during the nineteenth century a number of articles appeared in Britain, France and Germany

concerned with the comparative anatomy of the European and Khoisan.⁴⁷ Within this body of research, Cuvier's and de Blainville's early articles were the only works to focus primarily on Baartman. In later discussions of Khoisan anatomy Baartman was often used as an example, but this was within a much broader discussion on human physical difference. By the 1830s, for example, interest had shifted away from individual specimens and by the early twentieth century a single organ, the brain, was often the preferred means of comparison. In these later studies, Frederick Tiedemann and Edward Spitzka used Baartman's brain to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between intelligence and ethnic origin. The belief that she represented peoples on the lowest level of human capability is again evident; for example, one writer describing the brain of a San woman demonstrated the simplicity of her anatomy by arguing that "In this point the Bushwoman's brain is more ape-like than *even* that of the Hottentot Venus".⁴⁸ The starkest reiteration of Baartman's status as an intermediary between ape and human is perhaps the illustration used by Edward Spitzka. Here, a simple line drawing of her brain identified her as a medical specimen, whilst the use of just her brain, hovering between that of a physicist and orang-outang, established her as the definitive decontextualized object used to affirm a racialized human hierarchy.⁴⁹ However, Baartman's brain was one of many obtained from museum collections and was not the primary subject of either paper. Similarly, James C. Prichard incorporated a brief discussion of Baartman's skeleton into his encyclopaedic natural history of humans.⁵⁰ Most of these papers have been cited, if not fully analysed, within the literature on Baartman, but their importance has been overstated.⁵¹ Baartman's appearance within medical texts has often been used to frame her as not only central but essential for any discussion regarding medical debates on Khoisan anatomy in the nineteenth century. For example, Fausto-Sterling has argued: "The encounters between women from Southern Africa and the great men of European science *began* in the second decade of the nineteenth century when Henri de Blainville ... and Georges Cuvier met Baartman and described her for scientific circles, both when she was alive and after she was dead."⁵² This approach is fairly typical of the literature on Baartman in tracing the 'scientific' debates, as opposed to 'traveller's tales', regarding the *tablier* to Baartman and the French encounter. However, evidence exists that intellectual debate outside the travel literature existed before Baartman ever graced an exhibition venue.

Between 1799 and 1802 William Somerville, later the husband of the mathematician and science writer Mary Somerville, was stationed at the Cape. Holding office as both a public servant and garrison-surgeon he took advantage of the opportunity to observe the indigenous population, including the local women.⁵³ This was not an easy task as Somerville noted: "It is but justice to the modesty of the Hottentots to say that I have constantly found as many difficulties in the part of the women to submit to the exposure parts which a closer inspection required, as in all probability would have occurred in persuading an equal number of females of any other description to undergo examination."⁵⁴ However, he managed to persuade his patients to submit to closer inspection since his "profession" was of "singular utility in removing those

scruples which arose from a sense of decency".⁵⁵ Somerville described these observations in a paper which he deposited at the Royal Society in 1806 and later published in 1816.⁵⁶ Although available only in manuscript form, the paper demonstrates that detailed medical literature regarding Khoisan anatomy was available prior to both Baartman's exhibition and Cuvier's autopsy. That this research was also known is demonstrated by an article in *The lancet* in 1832 which specifically cited Somerville's paper.⁵⁷ Furthermore, this research is not only British but also independent of Baartman's exhibition; thus, through ignoring publications in English, Baartman's formative role in the debates on female Khoisan anatomy has been overstated.

Baartman's preserved remains became the artefacts the Musée de l'Homme displayed. Astonishingly, given the centrality of the Musée in perpetuating Baartman's role as an ethnological icon, and in the political row over her remains, no attempt has been made to understand her significance from a museological perspective. The next section discusses the role of Baartman's remains in securing her career post-mortem.

BAARTMAN'S AFTERLIFE

Cuvier produced several body casts and a wax mould of the *tablier* whilst preserving her decanted brain, stiff skeleton, and dissected genitalia. Her skeleton and cast were displayed within the halls of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle alongside two other human skeletons and the numerous other objects of comparative anatomical interest that were part of the collections.⁵⁸ Here she entertained visitors until her skull was stolen in 1827. Anonymously returned within a few months, the restored skull and skeleton continued to arouse the interest of visitors until the remains were moved to the Musée de l'Homme when it was founded in 1937. The new museum was devoted to displaying the considerable anthropological collections the French had accumulated. High above the entrance gilded letters announced the founders' intention to display rare and beautiful things gathered from the far reaches of the world in a learned manner, in order to educate the eye of the beholder.⁵⁹ Here, among the items on display from the anthropology laboratory, Sara Baartman awaited visitors' curious gazes.

The extraordinary exhibit of Sara Baartman's skeleton and plaster cast greeted any visitor passing case 33 at the Musée de l'Homme up until the late 1970s.⁶⁰ Both her skeleton and body cast stood side by side and faced away from the viewer. Above her head rested images of black people. The display exemplified her perceived value as a scientific specimen. The painted tones of the body cast simulated skin whilst the knowledge it was moulded directly from her corpse and the presence of her skeleton contributed to the illusion of objectivity. The positioning of the skeleton and cast, in profile and facing away from the viewer, emphasized her steatopygia whilst reinforcing its status as the primary reason for interest in her body. The juxtaposition of the apparently 'normal' skeleton with the cast, and its 'anomalous' form, also drew attention to the steatopygia. The cast presented her bare body as if naked, save a diminutive piece of fabric between her legs, placing her sexuality at the core of the

interest in her body. The presence of the photographs above her head, presumably of a Khoikhoi man and woman, provided the only visual reference to her people: an attempt to contextualize a display that otherwise explicitly failed to acknowledge her dispossession. The photographs of the man indicated an attempt to legitimate the exhibit's worth; he stood undressed and in the classic lateral and profile poses of anthropological investigation, thus providing further visual cues to attempted objectivity.⁶¹

Baartman's exhibition proved popular until it elicited complaints from a number of feminists who complained of its degrading representation of women.⁶² The modern campaign of criticism witnessed the removal from public exhibition of Baartman's skeleton in 1974 and body cast in 1976 and their relegation to the museum storerooms. Following her removal, the Musée de l'Homme installed an exhibition on the history of Man devoted to celebrating human diversity. Here Baartman's tale appeared in a section devoted to the history of scientific racism and was embedded in a much larger historical context. Ironically, Baartman's replacement with an exhibition celebrating diversity indicates an awareness of the complexity of display but, by failing to problematize the very use of museological space, still privileges the role museums might play in retelling her tale. Especially revealing are the comments of Philippe Menecier, an assistant curator at the Musée de l'Homme, who continued to argue against her repatriation because "we never know what science will be able to tell us in the future. If she is buried, this chance will be lost ... for us she remains a very important treasure", thus continuing to legitimate her putative value as an artefact, albeit one hidden from the public gaze.⁶³

Museums necessarily divorce objects from their original context; in doing so they ascribe meanings such objects would otherwise never easily obtain. The object implicitly occupies an epistemologically privileged position in the putatively neutral space of museological display, since it gains the capacity to augment a visitor's knowledge; at one extreme, display invests the object with a power to speak of its own accord. Thus, framed within an ethnographic museum, Baartman spoke to viewers, objectively, neutrally, on behalf of the perceived peculiarities of the Khoikhoi form: after all, the suspicion remains that one need only *look* to know what the fuss was *really* all about. The exhibit crystallized Baartman's function as an ethnographic metonym, a role exploited in all forms of her display in a chain linking her to all Khoisan women and Africa. Her role as an exemplar of Khoisan anatomy reinforced by the synechdochal nature of the museum itself: objects are decontextualized and re-presented as substitutions for the whole, thus embedding the associations institutionally. At the Musée de l'Homme this is with the explicit intention of exhibiting humanity itself. Baartman remained in storage until March 1994 when the body cast formed part of an exhibition of nineteenth-century ethnographic sculpture at the Musée d'Orsay.⁶⁴ The Musée also included the nude lithographs of Baartman that had originally appeared in the *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* and a watercolour painting of her skull. Her display was embedded within the artefactual context of nude images of black women that were contrived to emphasize the proportions of

their buttocks, and numerous sculpted busts, figurines and photographs depicting foreign peoples in both romanticized and degrading images that exemplified a range of conventions used in ethnographic material in the nineteenth century. Once again Baartman's display aroused both curiosity and considerable criticism, and this resulted in her removal in June of the same year. She was then placed in storage again until her final repatriation in 2002.

Baartman's display is a testament to the historical obsession with Khoisan bodies that continued long after her death. In the nineteenth century, for example, many Khoikhoi women were treated as taxidermic material, their skins stripped and stuffed to preserve them as specimens of the anomalous. Sir John Herschel, during his visit to the Cape in the mid-1830s, noted that he had seen a "Hottentot woman's skin — stuffed ... with all the extraordinary peculiarities attributed to these nymphs by travellers".⁶⁵ Francis Galton provides one of the most memorable indications of the lasting obsession with the Khoikhoi body in an account of his visit to the Cape in 1851. Observing a Khoikhoi woman in the distance, he writes:

I profess to be a scientific man, and was exceedingly anxious to obtain accurate measurements of her shape; but there was a difficulty ... I did not know a word of Hottentot ... I therefore felt in a dilemma as I gazed at her form, that gift of bounteous nature to this favoured race which no mantua-maker, with all her crinoline and stuffing, can do otherwise than humbly imitate. The object of my admiration stood under a tree, and was turning herself about to all of the compass, as ladies who wish to be admired usually do. Of a sudden my eye fell upon my sextant; the bright thought struck me, and I took a series of observations ... and registered them carefully upon an outline drawing for fear of my mistake; this being done, I boldly pulled out my measuring tape, and measured the distance from where I was to the place where she stood, and having thus obtained both base and angles, I worked out the results by trigonometry and logarithms.⁶⁶

As late as 1911 a frustrated Dorothy Bleek complained of the Khoisan that: "It is exceedingly difficult to get photos of the natives without their clothes on."⁶⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century the "natives" had been made the unwilling subject of numerous investigations and photographic documentaries.⁶⁸ European interest in and ethnographic preservation of the Khoisan body has led to the accumulation of thousands of artefacts: today, more than 2,000 skeletons remain in South African museums alone. Lying in publicly inaccessible storerooms, they bear witness to the fate of many others who, like Baartman, were collected and preserved by museums the world over as objects. These bones formed exhibits that are only just being removed as museums reassess the politics of their display. The South African Museum still has a diorama of the Khoisan hunting, cooking, and enjoying the African grasslands.⁶⁹ These displays subtly encode racialized ideologies by claiming to provide privileged and objective views into a people's lifestyle, rather than anthropological interpretations born of a particular methodology.⁷⁰

The historically privileged position of museological space is demonstrated by the

exhibit “Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit” which toured America, Australia and London in 1992. A male and female Amerindian lived inside a golden cage and were claimed to originate from an island that had been overlooked for over five centuries.⁷¹ A fake *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry, map of the island, and chronology of live Western ethnological exhibitions contextualized the display. The only means of obtaining further information was from the protective zoo guards. The pair performed ‘traditional tasks’ ranging from making voodoo dolls, undergoing weight training, watching television, and working at a laptop computer. For a small fee, the lady performed a ‘traditional’ dance to rap music and the man momentarily revealed his ‘primitive’ genitalia. The installation was previously unadvertised and, crucially, presented as a museum exhibit rather than performance art, thus forcing visitors to reflect upon their relationship with the caged people aided only by the didactic information given. Coco Fusco, who performed as the ‘Amerindian’ woman, writes: “As we assumed the stereotypical role of the domesticated savage, many audience members felt *entitled* to assume the role of the colonizer.”⁷² Many paid the requisite fee to view ‘primitive’ genitalia or watch the ritual dance, some walking away when their expectations of ‘authenticity’ were unfulfilled. Others questioned the guards in an attempt to verify the exhibits’ provenance and, once convinced, easily assumed positions of control and superiority, some even hurling abuse or sexually harassing the pair. Many participants, after realizing that the performance was not an ‘authentic’ display, became angry and upset. Unable to cope with the implications of their behaviour, visitors castigated the exhibitors for their ‘immoral’ deception of the public.⁷³

The performance raises many interesting issues, but especially relevant here are the power that an observer possesses to construct the significance of a subject and how location shapes meaning. The lack of self-reflexivity on the part of the audience is partly the consequence of staging the performance in a museum. It bears witness to the underlying assumption that museums ought, in some sense, to communicate the ‘truth’ and is suggestive of the power this invests in them as cultural institutions. When reading of Baartman’s treatment, one can easily assume that as modern citizens of multicultural societies we are free from, or at least less tainted by, the racial prejudices that fed her inhumane treatment. The curiosity for the exotic we now show is supposedly cloaked in a culturally sensitive appreciation of ethnic diversity. However, without the benefit of hindsight to justify our moral superiority, the situation becomes more complicated. Museums the world over have preserved skin and bone as objects for ethnographic exhibition, and the interest in Baartman demonstrates the need to reassess the use of such collections and the need to consult with indigenous peoples in the process. And here lies the key to the historical importance of human ethnographic exhibition. The display of Sara, and countless others like her, has shaped our identity, and although now hidden away, it continues to do so.

CONCLUSION

In many ways, Sara Baartman is not an unusual woman, despite all the attention she has inspired. Throughout her life, processes can be identified that contributed to her objectification, allowed her trade as a human commodity, underlay her exhibition as a curiosity, aroused scientific interest, and reified her as a museum artefact. None of these events is in itself exceptional in the sense that they occur only in her tale. Rather, an historicization of her collection and display embeds her within a range of related contexts. The collection of animals and their display in menageries is analogous to human ethnological display, for both depend upon an appetite for consuming exotic displays. Baartman's exhibition in Piccadilly relates her to the human curiosities upon display in the vicinity, from obese giants to emaciated dwarves. That the exhibition took place in London is of further significance because of the political presence of abolitionists and London's demography. The museological context is crucial in Baartman's political significance, as it highlights that every display needs to be situated because of the role of artefactual context in creating meaning and thus shaping reception. Baartman's display within an ethnographic museum is also echoed in numerous other displays in which ethnographic objects serve as tangible metonymic fragments of foreign cultures.

The question therefore remains, why has Baartman become such an icon?

Although Baartman's biographical details are scarce and uncertain, historians are able to make significant inferences and thus piece together a relatively coherent story. Crucially, enough is known about Baartman to individualize her — she is far from being an anonymous skeleton whose plight we might pity. Instead, she is a named person, and this facilitates a sense of identification with her as an ancestor, or empathy with her treatment as a human. A significant factor is the lack of agency Baartman inevitably possesses in any retelling of her story, since all the surviving records are accounts of her, rather than diaries or letters from her.⁷⁴ Consequently, it is precisely the difficulty in recovering her agency that makes her amenable to employment as a cipher, even her minimal presence being enough; unfortunately this only contributes further to her dispossession.⁷⁵ The ease with which she can be politicized can be seen in her lifetime as well as today. The campaigns for Baartman's repatriation, as waged by the abolitionists and modern Africans, depend upon the ascription to her of political significance.

Her political significance for discussions of representation of black sexuality has been central in establishing her cultural status.⁷⁶ In Lyle Ashton Harris's photograph *Venus Hottentot 2000* the famous breasts and buttocks are evoked through the use of metallic prostheses worn by the model, Renée Valerie Cox, who stares directly at the viewer against a background that borrows the colours of Marcus Garvey's UNIA flag (Figure 2).⁷⁷ Discussing the image, Harris states:

This reclaiming of the image of the Hottentot Venus is a way of exploring my own psychic identification with the image at the level of spectacle. I am playing with what it means to be an African diasporic artist producing and selling work



FIG. 2. "Venus Hottentot 2000" by Lyle Ashton Harris, reproduced by permission of the artist.

in a culture that is by and large narcissistically mired in the debasement and objectification of blackness. And yet, I see my work less as a didactic critique and more as an interrogation of the ambivalence around the body.⁷⁸

The emphasis upon identifying with Baartman as an ancestral self and her treatment as representative of the negativity of modern depictions of black sexuality is typical of her modern politicization.

Sara Baartman is now explicitly proposed as a symbol of the colonial treatment of Africans, a role exemplified by her repatriation. Her skeleton, preserved organs and body were finally returned to South African custody in April 2002, in a white wooden box draped with an African cloth accompanied by the air of gospel songs.⁷⁹ The following August the funeral took place in the town of Hankey, nearly 500 miles east of Cape Town, where she is believed to have been born, and coincided with national Women's Day. Thousands attended the funeral. Before the burial, herbs were set on fire to purify Baartman's remains as part of a traditional ceremony. Her coffin, decorated with aloe wreaths, was then lowered into the ground as a choir sang gently.

The attempts to restore Baartman's dignity through a symbolic purification that erases the processes of objectification and her burial, not as celebrity but as a local

woman returned to her home, are both desirable and valuable. However, Baartman's employment as a symbol of subjugated peoples mirrors the problems with the existing literature since her use as a focal point for discussions of race and gender, her lack of agency, and politicization contribute to the risk of re-establishing her as a curiosity merely renamed as cultural icon. Baartman's iconic status depends upon her perceived value as emblematic of both nineteenth-century black experiences and of European debates on physical differences as markers of racial difference. However, this cultural status has been supported by a failure to recognize the heterogeneity of black experience on the part of Europeans and blacks, both of whom differentiated a wide range of ethnicities within people of the same colour. The growing literature also lacks perspective by exaggerating the formative role of European debates on Khoisan anatomy within wider racialized debates on human difference. As Zine Magubane has recently argued, "if we compare the amount of ink spilled, the volume of studies, and the number of corpses examined, it becomes apparent that Irish male skulls were of far more interest, and caused far more speculation about the nature of racial differences than steatopygious African backsides ever did".⁸⁰ Examining the material processes involved in Baartman's commodification, objectification, display and preservation not only offers new perspectives upon her story but crucially avoids ahistorically reifying her to support political agendas. Indeed, a thorough contextualization and recapturing of her agency may provide a more effective and legitimate basis for her cultural status through demonstrating the elements of her treatment that are *representative* of colonized peoples' experiences. Such a history would strengthen the sentiment of Baartman's funeral address in which African president Thabo Mbeki maintained that "The story of Sarah Baartman is the story of the African people.... It is the story of the loss of our ancient freedom ... [and] of our reduction to the state of objects who could be owned, used and discarded by others".⁸¹ The power of Sara Baartman's tale depends upon the level of inhumanity she has suffered; if this is to be directed honestly in her politicization we need to historicize it, and recognize that it is, in many senses, unexceptional.

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2. Chris McGreal, "Coming home", *Guardian*, 21 June 2002, 6–7.
3. Eddie Koch, "Bring back the Hottentot Venus", *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 15–22 June 1995, 13.
4. A note concerning terminology: throughout the paper African peoples are referred to by terms drawn from indigenous languages; thus, 'Hottentot' and 'Bushmen' are replaced by Khoikhoi and San respectively (or "Khoisan" to denote their modern descendents). Older names are restricted to quotations from original sources or passages in which it is clear the historical sense is intended. Contemporary accounts usually refer to Baartman as the "Hottentot Venus" or "Saartjie" ("little Sara" in Dutch). However, because of the link with slavery, as discussed later in the article, the adult form "Sara" is used in preference throughout whilst "Saartjie" and her baptized name "Sarah" are restricted to quotations.
5. Extensive discussion of, and allusion to, the famous "Hottentot Venus" has given Baartman's story a certain familiarity but hides the fact that no one knows much for certain, least of all exactly who she was. The account presented here is largely inference from a few official documents, newspaper reports, songs, and cartoons. Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information regarding Baartman is taken from newspaper reports, cited as relevant; Lysons, *op. cit.* (ref. 1); the official court records as reprinted in Zoë S. Strother, "Display of the body Hottentot", in Bernth Lindfors (ed.), *Africans on stage: Studies in ethnological show business* (Bloomington, IL, 1999), 1–61; Richard Altick, *The shows of London* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); and Percival Kirby, "The Hottentot Venus", *Africana notes and news*, v (1949), 55–62, "More about the Hottentot Venus", *Africana notes and news*, x (1953), 124–34, and "The 'Hottentot Venus' of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris", *South African journal of science*, x (1954), 319–22.
6. See Altick, *op. cit.* (ref. 5); Sander Gilman, "Black bodies, white bodies: Toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine, and literature", in Henry Louis Gates Jr (ed.), *"Race", writing, and difference* (Chicago, 1985), 223–61, and *Difference and pathology: Stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness* (Ithaca, NY, 1985); Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, race, and nation: The comparative anatomy of 'Hottentot' women in Europe, 1815–1817", in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla (eds), *Deviant bodies: Critical perspectives on difference in science and popular culture* (Bloomington, IL, 1995), 19–48; Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's body: Gender in the making of modern science* (Boston, MA, 1993); Bernth Lindfors, "The Hottentot Venus and other African attractions in nineteenth-century England", *Australasian drama studies*, i (1983), 83–104, "The bottom line: African caricature in Georgian England", *World literature written in English*, xxiv (1984), 43–51, and "Ethnological show business: Footlighting the dark continent", in Rosemarie G. Thomson (ed.), *Freakery: Cultural spectacles of the extraordinary body* (New York, 1996), 207–18; Yvette Abrahams, "Disempowered to consent: Sara Bartman and Khoisan slavery in the nineteenth-century Cape colony and Britain", *South African historical journal*, xxxv (1996), 89–114, and "Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, race, and gender in early-nineteenth-century Britain", in Ruth R. Pierson and Nupur Chaudry (eds), *Nation, empire, colony: Historicizing gender and race* (Bloomington, IL, 1998), 220–36; Zine Magubane, "Which bodies matter? Feminism, poststructuralism, race, and the curious theoretical odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus'", *Gender and society*, xv (2001), 816–34; and Gérard Badou, *L'énigme de la Vénus Hottentote* ([Paris], 2000). See also Stephen Jay Gould, "The Hottentot Venus", in *The flamingo's smile* (New York, 1985), 291–305.
7. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a full historiographical account of the Baartman literature. Readers are referred to the excellent paper by Magubane (ref. 6) for the most detailed and historically sensitive analysis that I have found.
8. For changing representations of the Khoikhoi see Strother, *op. cit.* (ref. 5); Schiebinger, *op. cit.* (ref.

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9. For the imperial importance of botany see Richard Drayton, *Nature's government: Science, imperial Britain and the improvement of the world* (New Haven, 2000); David P. Miller and Peter H. Reill (eds), *Visions of empire: Voyages, botany, and representations of nature* (Cambridge, 1996); and Richard H. Grove, *Green imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical edens, and the origins of environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995). For zoos and menageries see Robert J. Hoage and William A. Deiss (eds), *New worlds, new animals* (London, 1996); Harriet Ritvo, *The animal estate: The English and other creatures in the Victorian age* (London, 1987); and Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardoium-Fugier, *Zoo: A history of zoological gardens in the West* (London, 2002). For more on natural history see Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and Emma C. Spary, *The cultures of natural history* (Cambridge, 1995).
 10. Sujit Sivasundaram, “Natural history spiritualized: Civilising islanders, cultivating breadfruit, and collecting souls”, *History of science*, xxxix (2001), 417–43. The article discusses the display of three Khoikhoi converts, including a man.
 11. For an alternative perspective on Khoikhoi enslavement see Yvette Abrahams, “Disempowered to consent” (ref. 6). Baartman’s legal status is the subject of much debate in the literature. Since there is little in the primary sources other than circumstantial evidence and a discussion of the legal issues is beyond the limits of this paper, readers are referred to Abrahams.
 12. Strother, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), 48, note 2.
 13. Nothing more is known about Cezar. Percival Kirby, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), suggests he may have been Peter Cezar’s brother, and possibly the keeper to whom contemporary accounts of Baartman’s show refer (since the name is Dutch and the keeper spoke to Sara in Dutch).
 14. The classic work on London’s entertainment scene during the period is Altick, *op. cit.* (ref. 5). However, readers may also find Lysons, *op. cit.* (ref. 1); Lindfors, *Africans on stage* (ref. 5); and Thomas Frost, *The old showmen and the old London fairs* (London, 1874) and *Circus life and circus celebrities* (London, 1875) helpful. The largest collection of primary material is available at the John Johnson Collection of Ephemera, the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
 15. Court Records, as reprinted in Strother, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), 43.
 16. Robert Chambers (ed.), *The book of days: A miscellany of popular antiquities, in connection with the calendar* (2 vols, London and Edinburgh, 1863), ii, 621.
 17. Mrs Matthews, *Memoirs of Charles Matthews, comedian* (4 vols, London, 1839), iv, 133. For more on the late nineteenth century see Robert W. Rydell, *All the world’s a fair: Visions of empire at American international expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984), and Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral vistas: The expositions universelles, great exhibitions and world’s fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988).
 18. Matthews, *op. cit.* (ref. 17), iv, 137.
 19. For more on Crackham see Gaby Wood, *The smallest of all persons mentioned in the records of littleness* (London, 1998).
 20. Cited in Arthur L. Hayward, *The days of Dickens: A glance at some aspects of early Victorian London* (London, 1926), 57.
 21. See Ritvo, *op. cit.* (ref. 9), and Hoage and Deiss (eds), *op. cit.* (ref. 9).
 22. Displaying foreign peoples was not new but such shows did proliferate in the nineteenth century and reached their peak under the aegis of the large-scale world fairs that followed in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The current literature on ethnological human display in the early nineteenth century is limited. However, for more see Altick, *op. cit.* (ref. 5); Lindfors, *Africans on stage* (ref. 5); and Lysons, *op. cit.* (ref. 1). See also “Human Freaks 4”. available at the John Johnson Collection of Ephemera, the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
 23. This account is based upon the court records, as reprinted in Strother, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), and the following

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24. *Morning Chronicle*, 12 Oct. 1810 (ref. 23).
 25. *Morning Chronicle*, 23 Oct. 1810 (ref. 23).
 26. Historians are still debating the nature of this agreement, some arguing that Baartman was a slave sold to Cezar whilst others argue that she may have been lured to England upon false promises of earning her fortune through publicly exhibiting herself. It is generally agreed that the contract Dunlop presented at the court case was a ploy to win the case and continue exhibiting Baartman.
 27. Unless otherwise stated, this history of black presence is based upon Paul Edwards and James Walvin, *Black personalities in the era of the slave trade* (Baton Rouge, 1983); Iain McCalman, *Radical underworld: Prophets, revolutionaries, and pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge, 1988); Gretchen H. Gerzina, *Black England: Life before emancipation* (London, 1995); and Peter Fryer, *Staying power: The history of black people in Britain* (London, 1984). For more on abolition, see David Eltis and James Walvin (eds), *The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade: Origins and effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas* (Wisconsin, 1981).
 28. Edwards and Walvin, *op. cit.* (ref. 27).
 29. Altick, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), 221.
 30. David Dabydeen, *Hogarth’s blacks: Images of blacks in eighteenth century English art* (Manchester, 1987).
 31. Cited in Edwards and Walvin, *op. cit.* (ref. 27), 42.
 32. For Wedderburn see Robert Wedderburn, *The horrors of slavery, and other writings*, ed. by Iain McCalman (Edinburgh, 1991), and Iain McCalman, *Radical underworld* (ref. 27), 50–72. For Equiano see James Walvin, *An African’s life: The life and times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745–1797* (London, 1998), and Edwards and Walvin, *op. cit.* (ref. 27), especially 119–41.
 33. Lysons, *op. cit.* (ref. 1).
 34. For more on slavery see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic slave trade: A census* (Madison, 1969), and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The many headed hydra: Sailors, slaves, commoners, and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000).
 35. This quotation is from the original certificate of baptism as reproduced in Kirby, “The Hottentot Venus” (ref. 5). The original is held at the Musée de l’Homme.
 36. Baartman’s exhibition is lampooned in “The ballad of John Higginbottom of Bath” which is frequently cited in the literature, see Kirby, “The Hottentot Venus” (ref. 5), 57, and Abrahams, “Images of Sara Bartman” (ref. 6), 232–3. Newspaper clippings in Lysons, *op. cit.* (ref. 1), record references in the Manchester papers, while further reports appear as “The Hottentot female”, *Wheeler’s Manchester Chronicle*, 7 December 1811, 4, and “That beautiful, amiable object...”, *Cowdroy’s Manchester Gazette*, 14 December 1811, 3. Baartman’s appearance in Ireland is recorded in Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick, its histories and antiquities, ecclesiastical, civil and military* (Dublin, 1866), 416. I am indebted to Bill Rolston for the reference to Baartman’s exhibition in Ireland.
 37. Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (4 vols, Paris,

- 1824–47), i. The actual examination at the Jardin des Plantes was conducted by Georges Cuvier, amongst others, but was reprinted by his brother in the *Histoire naturelle*.
38. Hugh Honour, *The image of the black in western art* (4 vols, Houston, 1989), iv, 47. Honour demonstrates that although an artist's role in ethnographic illustration was theoretically limited to simple recording, many techniques were used to create images which in fact drew on, and perpetuated, racialized mythologies such as the 'noble savage'.
 39. Georges Cuvier, "Extrait d'observations faites sur le cadavre d'une femme connue à Paris et à Londres sous le nom de Vénus Hottentotte", *Mémoires du Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle*, iii (1817), 259–74.
 40. For a full account of the correspondence, including a reprint of the original letter, see Badou, *op. cit.* (ref. 6), 149–56.
 41. Georges Cuvier, *op. cit.* (ref. 39). A shorter version of the paper accompanies the drawings of Baartman as "Femme de race Boschimanne" in Saint-Hilaire and Cuvier, *op. cit.* (ref. 37), i, 1–4. For the most detailed discussion of Cuvier's paper and its political significance, see Fausto-Sterling, *op. cit.* (ref. 6).
 42. See Mary Cowling, *The artist as anthropologist: The representation of type and character in Victorian art* (Cambridge, 1989), and Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the meaning of expression in nineteenth-century culture* (Cambridge, 2001).
 43. For more on Cuvier see Darinda Outram, *Georges Cuvier: Vocation, science and authority in post-revolutionary France* (Manchester, 1984). For more on the Jardin des Plantes see Emma C. Spary, *Utopia's garden: French natural history from old regime to revolution* (London, 2000).
 44. Mathias Georg Guenther, "From 'brutal savages' to 'harmless people': Notes on the changing Western image of the Bushmen", *Paideuma*, xxvi (1980), 123–40.
 45. Cuvier's views on transmutation were subject to change, but by 1812 he was arguing against great leaps in nature. See Outram, *op. cit.* (ref. 43), 118–28.
 46. Quotation in Strother, *op. cit.* (ref. 5), 20.
 47. Fausto-Sterling, *op. cit.* (ref. 6), is one of the few historians who directly cites this literature, but even her discussion of it is limited as she focuses upon the work of Cuvier and de Blainville. In addition to Cuvier's work, *op. cit.* (ref. 39), see (in chronological order): Henri de Blainville, "Sur une femme de la race Hottentote", *Bulletin du Société Philomatique de Paris*, 1816, 183–90; Johannes Müller, "Ueber die äusseren Geslechtsteile der Buschmänninnen", *Archiv für Anatomie, Physiologie und wissenschaftliche Medicin*, 1834, 319–45 (note: Müller used the body of a Khoisan woman who had died in Germany, and not Baartman, as the focus of his article); Frederick Tiedemann, "On the brain of a Negro, compared with that of the European and the Orang-Outang", *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London*, cxxvi (1836), 497–558; John Marshall, "On the brain of a Bushwoman; and on the brains of two idiots of European descent", *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London*, cliv (1864), 501–58; W. H. Flower and James Murie, "Account of the dissection of a Bushwoman", *Journal of anatomy and physiology*, i (1867), 189–208; and Edward A. Spitzka, "A study of the brains of six eminent scientists and scholars belonging to the American Anthropometric Society, together with a description of the skull of Professor E. D. Cope", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, xxi (1908), 175–308. For a detailed and helpful overview of this research in relation to the debates on Khoisan genitalia originally found in travel literature, see John R. Baker, *Race* (London, 1974), 313–24.
 48. Marshall, "On the brain of a Bushwoman" (ref. 47), 514, added emphasis.
 49. This is one of many illustrations where the same hierarchy of specimens is presented.
 50. James Cowles Prichard, *The natural history of Man; comprising inquiries into the modifying influence of physical and moral agencies on the different tribes of the human family*, 2nd edn (London,

- 1845), 123–8.
51. To my knowledge the only work discussed here that has not previously been cited in the Baartman literature is that of James Prichard, William Somerville, and a paper that appeared in *The lancet* in 1832 (see ref. 57).
 52. Fausto-Sterling, *op. cit.* (ref. 6), 23, added emphasis.
 53. William Somerville, “On the structure of Hottentot women”, in Edna and Frank Brownlow (eds), *William Somerville’s narrative of his journeys to the Eastern Cape frontier and to Lake Lattakoe, 1799–1802* (Cape Town, 1979), 236–41. I am indebted to Jim Secord for this reference.
 54. *Ibid.*, 238.
 55. *Ibid.*, 239.
 56. Somerville prepared a manuscript which he deposited at the Royal Society in 1806 with three explicit illustrations that remain unpublished. This paper was later published as “Observationes quaedam de Hottentotis”, *Medico-chirurgica transactions*, vii (1816), 154–60. An English translation of this paper appeared as “On the structure of Hottentot women” (ref. 53), in 1979. I am indebted to Jim Secord for bringing these references to my attention.
 57. Anon., “Anatomical description of the organs of generation in a Hottentot female”, *The lancet*, xix (1832), 147–9.
 58. Badou, *op. cit.* (ref. 6), 157–8.
 59. “Choses rare ou choses belles ici savamment assemblées instruisent l’oeil à regarder comme jamais encore vues toutes choses qui sont au monde.”
 60. The museological discussion presented here is based upon Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of ethnography”, in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and the politics of museum display* (London, 1991), 386–443; Michael J. Ettema, “History museums and the culture of materialism”, in Jo Blatti (ed.), *Past meets present: Essays about historic interpretation and public audiences* (London, 1987), 62–93; and Peter Vergo (ed.), *The new museology* (London, 1989). Perhaps the most useful of these for understanding Baartman’s function as an artefact is Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. She argues that the “artfulness of the ethnographic object is an art of excision, of detachment, an art of the excerpt”. Furthermore, she suggests that the term “ethnographic fragment” may be more helpful in conceptualizing the role of ethnographic display since it can refer both to the “physical act of producing the fragments” and the “detached attitude that makes that fragmentation and appreciation possible”. Thus objects displayed in museums can act essentially as metonyms for the cultures and peoples they represent; that is, the object becomes “a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be recreated” (p. 388). Thus, with respect to Baartman, she symbolizes Africa through a chain of associations that link her to the Khoikhoi, African women, Africa and Black peoples. Unfortunately, I have been unable to reproduce a photograph of the museum vitrine here. However, readers will find a photograph in *Kunapipi*, ii/1 (1980), 29.
 61. For a discussion of anthropological photography see Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw histories: Photographs, anthropology, and museums* (Oxford, 2001).
 62. See Badou, *op. cit.* (ref. 6), 185–92.
 63. Paul Webster, “France keeps a hold on black Venus”, *Guardian*, 1 April 2000.
 64. Antoinette Le Normand-Romain and others, *La sculpture ethnographique au XIX^e siècle: De la Vénus hottentote à la Tehura de Gauguin*, Musée d’Orsay, 16 mars – 12 juin 1994 (Paris, 1994). The catalogue includes a photograph of the body cast with no means of hiding the full length of the tablier from public inspection, suggesting she was exhibited ‘naked’ in the Musée d’Orsay. This only serves to make the cast appear even more explicit than the accompanying material on exhibition.
 65. David Evans *et al.* (eds), *Herschel at the Cape: Diaries and correspondence of Sir John Herschel*,

- 1834–1838 (Austin, TX, 1969), 42.
66. Francis Galton, *Narrative of an explorer in tropical South Africa: Being an account of a visit to Damaraland in 1851*, 4th edn (London, 1891), 54.
 67. Patricia Davison, “Human subjects as museum objects: A project to make life-casts of ‘Bushmen’ and ‘Hottentots’, 1907–1924”, *Annals of the South African Museum*, cii/5 (1993), 165–83, p. 169.
 68. Pippa Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, 1996). The book was published to accompany an exhibition on historical representations of Khoisan bodies.
 69. Rachel L. Swarns, “Bones in museum cases may get decent burials”, *New York Times*, 4 November 2000, 4. The article notes that the museum is planning to remove the exhibition but a date is not specified. The display is made up of body casts taken from live subjects; for a discussion of their manufacture, see Davison, *op. cit.* (ref. 67).
 70. Donna Haraway, “Teddy bear patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–36”, in her *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nature in the world of modern science* (London, 1989), 26–58. Haraway’s discussion of the Natural History Museum in New York has subtly established the use of taxidermic display to encode imperialist fantasies and reinforce the mythology associated with exploration and conquest.
 71. Coco Fusco, “The other history of intercultural performance”, in her *English is broken here* (New York, 1995), 37–63, p. 39.
 72. *Ibid.*, 47, added emphasis.
 73. Fusco’s analysis of visitor responses is most interesting when she begins to differentiate them upon the basis of gender, social background, and ethnic origin. Despite the sometimes significant differences, the concern with authenticity and literalism emerges as an almost universal response.
 74. Even in the court records for which Baartman was interviewed, her responses are in terms of reported speech rather than direct quotation.
 75. Little work has been done to recover Baartman’s perspective explicitly; in this respect Abrahams’s work is valuable and rare. Indeed, writers like Abrahams oppose their attempts to recover agency to the “fairly typical ... approach of white male academics to the study of Sara Bartman” which is characterized as “analysis [replaced] with name calling”. Quotation in Abrahams, “Images of Sara Bartman” (ref. 6), 222. See also Elizabeth Alexander, “The Venus Hottentot”, in her *The Venus Hottentot* (Charlottesville, 1990), 3–7, and Stephen Gray, “Hottentot Venus”, in his *Hottentot Venus and other poems* (London, 1979), 1–2.
 76. In a relatively new and highly political focus within the literature, Baartman’s story is argued to be emblematic of the Western representation of black female sexuality as deviant. For a general discussion, particularly of the modern media, see bell hooks [*sic*], “Selling hot pussy: Representations of black female sexuality in the cultural marketplace”, in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (eds), *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (New York, 1997), 113–28.
 77. Universal Negro Improvement Association. For the exhibition catalogue see Ragnar Farr (ed.), *Mirage: Enigmas of race, difference and desire* (London, 1995).
 78. Alan Read (ed.), *The fact of blackness: Frantz Fanon and visual representation* (Seattle, 1996), 150, added emphasis.
 79. For Baartman’s return, see Suzanne Daley, “Exploited in life and death, South African to go home”, *New York Times*, 30 January 2002, 4; David Hearst, “African woman going home after 200 years”, *Guardian*, 30 April 2002; and Obed Zilwa, “Sold as a slave, exhibited as a freak, Sarah finds dignity after 200 years”, *Independent*, 10 August 2002, 12.
 80. Magubane, *op. cit.* (ref. 6).
 81. Zilwa, *op. cit.* (ref. 79).