

The Hottentot Venus:

The objectification and commodification of a Khoisan woman at the crossroads of imperialism, popular culture and science

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“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”

Thabo Mbeki, 2002.

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Preface

The present study came about through my participation in the Liberal Arts and Sciences Program at the University of Tilburg. My passion for the domain of the humanities soon led me to choose a historical topic that still has an important political and cultural impact on our contemporary society.

A visit to the exhibition held at the musée du quai Branly in Paris entitled “Autour des Zoos humains” in early February 2012 resulted in my interest in the intricate phenomenon of human exhibitions. I remember to this day the striking effect the portrait of Saartjie Baartman had on me. Never before had I heard about this extraordinary woman to whom an entire section of the exhibition was devoted. Driven by this keen interest I then dedicated many hours in order to research and read as much as possible about this fascinating human being. The more I read, the more my thirst for knowledge about her and the context of her tragic life increased. No doubt was left, I wanted to evolve through the complex writing of a Bachelor thesis with Saartjie Baartman by my side. It seemed revolting to me that so little was known about such an interesting and violent story which does not only tell us about the woman concerned but also about the entire European population of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Moreover, the ethical debate on the treatment of historical remains provides this issue with a much more contemporary dimension.

Finally, it is through Saartjie Baartman’s life-story that we can see how Europeans through the ages were and still are dealing with the image of the Other.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me through this writing process with a special mention of my thesis supervisor Raymond Corbey as well as Peter Richardus for the language editing.

Introduction

One of Europe's darkest secret is slowly being unraveled by means of a growing number of studies on the controversial phenomenon of human exhibitions held in the imperial West. What was first thought to be an isolated event soon turned out to be a large industry with diverse visual remnants that offer an abrupt outline of the impact such events could have on both the viewer and the model. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, processes such as modernity, the Enlightenment and the discovery of new territories soon brought new sources of wonder and fear to the West. This resulted in the demand for identity reformation . Identity formation is known to be highly influenced by distinctive visual differences. The urge for belonging to a certain group automatically results in the separation of the self from other beings.¹ At this period, the so-called "savage" or "exotic" represented, for the Europeans, the perfect opposite image to reflect upon. What started as chaotic representations known as freak shows, evolved in organized institutions addressed as human zoos. Here non-western people were staged in an unrealistic way, resulting in the formation of vivid stereotypes.

However, the goal of this thesis is not to focus on this important phenomenon but to analyze the beginning of this process by means of the unique story of Saartjie Baartman which perfectly denounces the core elements (imperialism, science, popular culture) at play in the phenomenon of human exhibitions.

I seek to answer to the following question: What does the story of Saartjie Baartman tells us about the way in which Europeans were dealing with the threat of the Other? In order to do so I will investigate the following matters:

- How did the relation between colonizers and indigenous people influence Europe?
- How did the phenomenon of the freak show appear and to which needs did it answer?
- What role did science play in the process of the invention of the Other?

A priori, I would like to clarify that by choosing to look into the life and times of Saartjie Baartman I do not intend to enter into the gender or ethnic discussions.

¹ Jean-Francois Staszak, *Other/Otherness*, 2008.

Chapter 1 will focus on the contact history between Khoisan and Europeans. Chapter 2 deals with the study of the early forms of exhibitions of human beings, from Antiquity to the 19th century, in order to finally analyze the influence of science on the construction of the savage's narrative.

Who was Saartjie Baartman? Answering this question did not become easier as I dug into the past of this fascinating woman. Even her true name lacks as a leading element in her narrative. Known as Sarah, Sawtche, Saartjie Baartman or even the Hottentot Venus, this protagonist lived the full and obnoxious life of a commodified human who was traded and exhibited in Europe during 3 decades.

Born in the 1770s close to the Gamtoos River in South Africa, Saartjie Baartman belonged to the Khoikhoi people. By Europeans she was seen as a perfect specimen of the Hottentot ethnic group. Little is known about her childhood and puberty, which was mostly spent near the Reed River in the Zwartland². Apparently she married a Khoikhoi man and had given birth to three children who all died in unknown circumstances.³ She worked as a servant for various Dutch Boers, including the Cesar family, even breastfeeding Hendrik Cesar's children. In 1806 Saartjie had her first encounters with the British when they officially took over the colony of Cape Town. The testimony of Anna Catharina Staal in a later court case held against her husband Hendrik informs us that Saartjie was already displaying her body to British soldiers settling in the city. This is how master and servant came to meet an army surgeon and exporter of museum pieces called Alexander Dunlop⁴. This encounter would change their lives forever.

In the hope of making a fortune Saartjie went on board of the HMS Diadem in April 1810 with H. Cesar, the Dutch Boer for who she was working, and A. Dunlop, the army surgeon encountered in the Cape, sailing for Liverpool.⁵ Upon arrival in London she must have been surprised to find that her new workplace did not really comply with her expectations. The atmosphere of London in the beginning of the 19th century was full of wonder and excitement

² Loan farm deed granted to David Fourie, 4 March 1763, CA RLR 17/1. (As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais, "Race and Erasure: Sara Baartman and Hendrik Cesars in Cape Town and London", *Journal of British Studies*, 2008).

³ Cape Papers, 1810–11, ZI/25 2431/12/1, CA. (as cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais 2008).

⁴ Memorial of Dunlop, 16 June 1809, Colonial Office [CO] 3871, CA). (As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais 2008)

⁵ Material concerning HMS Diadem and her sister ship HMS Raissonable, is located at TNA: PRO ADM (As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais 2008).

but also, according to certain present-day moral standards, ethically decadent . So-called freak shows, providing the audience with all kinds of real or manufactured physical abnormalities, were taking place regularly within the English capital. Surrounded by “giant men” and “bearded women” Saartjie gave her first performance at 225 Piccadilly, London⁶. This first exhibition met with great success, motivating Dunlop and Cesar to repeat it. This raised some major concerns among the English abolitionists which resulted in a controversial court case⁷; Saartjie and the two entrepreneurs toured successfully through England for several years. In 1814 Cesar and Dunlop decided to sell Saartjie to an animal trainer called Réaux who went on to put her on show in France.

Her exact trajectory in France remains unknown but it seems that Saartjie performed before more private audiences such as in the famous Parisian salon of the Duchess of Berry⁸. In the spring of 1815 scholarly interest concerning Saartjie Baartman came to life. She was cordially invited to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in order to allow the prestigious professors of the Muséum d’histoire Naturelle to observe her at close range. She was then asked to pose in the nude for a picture to be published in Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s and Frédéric Cuvier’s book entitled *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*.⁹ What happened to her later remains a mystery, but some rumors reported that, on account of the growing lack of popularity of her performances, Saartjie ended up as a prostitute in Paris.¹⁰ She died in December 1815 due a disease the scientist George Cuvier described as “inflammatoire et eruptive”¹¹ and that showed all the symptoms of the fatal

⁶ According to the poster of the show. Source: Lysons, *Collectanea*

⁷ This account is based on the court records, as reprinted in Strother, op. cit. (ref. 5), and the following newspaper articles: “An Englishman”, letter to the editor, *Morning Chronicle*, 12 October 1810,3; Hendrick Cezar, “The Hottentot Venus”, letter to the editor, *Morning Chronicle*, 13 October 1810, 3; Humanitas, “Female Hottentot”, letter to the editor, *Morning Chronicle*, 17 October 1810, 3; A Man and a Christian, letter, *Morning Post*, 18 October 1810; Hendrick Cezar, letter to the editor, *Morning Chronicle*, 23 October 1810, 4; Humanitas, “Female Hottentot”, *Morning Chronicle*, 24 October 1810, 3; White Man, letter, *Morning Post*, 29 October 1810, 3; “Law report; Court of King’s Bench”, *The Times (London)*, 26 November 1810, 3; “Law intelligence; Court of King’s Bench, Sat., Nov. 24; the Hottentot Venus”, *Morning Chronicle*, 26 November 1810, 3; “Law intelligence; Court of King’s Bench, Nov. 28; the Hottentot Venus”, *Morning Chronicle*, 29 November 1810, 3; and “Law report; Court of King’s Bench”, *The Times (London)*, 29 November 1810, 3 (As cited in: Sadiya Qureshi, “DISPLAYING SARA BAARTMAN, THE ‘HOTTENTOT VENUS’”, Christ’s College, Cambridge, 2004)

⁸ S. Coeure, «La Venus Hottentote dans les salons de la Duchesse de Berri», Paris, aquarelle sur papier, 1830.

⁹ Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (4 vols, Paris, 1824–47)

¹⁰ R. Verneau (1916) « Le centième anniversaire de la mort de Sarah Baartman », *l’Anthropologie*, 27, p.177-9. (As cited in : P. Blanchard 2004)

¹¹ 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*, ii (1817), pp.259–74.

disease known as syphilis. But even her death did not stop the Western curiosity : her body was immediately dissected by Cuvier. Moreover, her genitals and brain were conserved and studied in the context of the growing scientific debate on evolution and the missing link between apes and humans. The remains and the mold of her body were then displayed in a number of museums to end up at the Musée du Quai d'Orsay in a storage room in 1994¹². Saartjie Baartman's remains were returned to her country to be buried only in April 2002 after an official request by the South-African president Thabo Mbeki.

Chapter 1: A Khoekhoe youth

1.1 An ethnographic note

In order to fully understand the scientific and popular interest Saartjie Baartman experienced in the West, it is of paramount importance to highlight the singularity of her ethnic origin.

Saartjie Baartman was of Khoekhoe descent. The Khoisan are divided into two groups: (1) the Khoekhoe who were once known as the Hottentots and (2) the San also known as Bushmen¹³. However, it is important to keep in mind that the classification of the Khoisan was and still is quite a delicate matter. Therefore, many other names such as San or Kwe-Kovab are also found in literature dealing with this ethnic group. With regard to clarification I will only use these two terms: Khoekhoe and San.

¹² N. About (2001), Proposition de la loi autorisant la restitution par la France de la dépouille mortelle de Saartjie Baartman dite «Venus Hottentote» à l'Afrique du Sud, texte no. 114 (2001-2002) déposé au sénat le 4 décembre 2001.

¹³ A. Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: a comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan people*, Cambridge University Press, 1992

The language of these people is mostly known through the click sound that both ethnic groups share. However, it is important to notice that the differences in the vocabulary of the two groups are quite wide.¹⁴ The language families of the Khoisan are: Khoe, !Kung, Ta'a, !Wi, /Xam¹⁵.

As to their economy, the Khoisan could all be regarded as either hunters or gatherers. The Khoekhoe group was known to mostly consist of herders whose economy revolved around cattle. On the other hand, the San were much more centered on collecting and hunting.

Both groups do not share any religious and spiritual beliefs. The Khoekhoe provide the moon with an important status. Its cycle is of great importance for the organizing of ceremonies such as dancing or rainmaking rites.¹⁶ The San are mainly centered on one central god and less powerful deities.

The San and the Khoekhoe do share more or less the same political system. Leadership seems to be mainly based on the life expectancy of the individual as well as the personal qualities. Both groups live in egalitarian societies in which exchange is given an important place. Kinship is really important for the settlement of an adequate political hierarchy.

Their geographical location spreads from Botswana to Namibia although some groups can also be found in Angola and Zimbabwe. Their actual number is estimated to be around 60.000 people¹⁷.

The origin of this ethnic group can be traced back to ancient times as Isaac Schapera reports: "The Khoisan were long regarded as the earliest human inhabitants of South Africa, and as having occupied the country from times of remote antiquity"¹⁸. However, it seems empirically extremely difficult to determine during which exact period the Khoisan settled in South Africa. This supposed ancient root was one of the main reasons why the Western scientists were so interested in studying these people which were considered to be at the lower end of the evolutionary chain.

¹⁴ A. Barnard, *DIVERSE PEOPLE UNITE: TWO LECTURES ON KHOISAN IMAGERY AND THE STATE*, 2003, p. 13

¹⁵ A Barnard, p. 23

¹⁶ <http://www.khoisan.org/religion.htm>

¹⁷ As cited in: R. Vossen, *Studying the linguistic and ethno-history of the Khoe-speaking (central Khoisan) peoples of Botswana*, research in progress; R. Vossen - *Botswana Notes and Records*, 1984 – JSTOR, p. 1. (Citing A.C. Campbell, pers. Comm.)

¹⁸ I. Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots*, Taylor & Francis, 1930, p. 26.

However, it is important to know that this remote origin was not the only element to attract both scholarly and popular attention to the Khoisan.

Saartjie Baartman was believed to be part of the Hottentot branch of the Khoisan ethnic group. The Hottentots have the characteristic of possessing some rare physical attributes (mostly shared with the female Bushmen). Firstly, the buttocks of most Hottentot females present an important accumulation of fatty tissue, *steatopygia*¹⁹. During the scientific debate on the hierarchy of races, this physical attribute was mostly held against the Hottentots as it was commonly believed to correspond with the buttocks of female apes on which they carried their young.

Secondly, the genitals of the Hottentot female were of extreme interest due to their total singularity when compared to those of European women. The genitals of Hottentot females were covered by what seemed to be a lip of skin, called *labia minora*, which could measure up to 8 cm. This attribute was called the Hottentot apron and was a great source of controversy during the 18th and 19th centuries as George Cuvier himself states: “There is nothing more celebrated in natural history than the Hottentot apron, and at the same time there is nothing which has been the object of such great argumentation.”²⁰ Fig. 1 (see below) depicts the *steatopygia* and elongated *labia* that the female Hottentots and female Bushmen share:

¹⁹ L. H. Krut, R. Singer, “*Steatopygia*: The fatty acid composition of subcutaneous adipose tissue in the Hottentot”, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* Volume 21, Issue 2, pp. 181–7, June 1963

²⁰ G. 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*, ii (1817), pp. 259–74

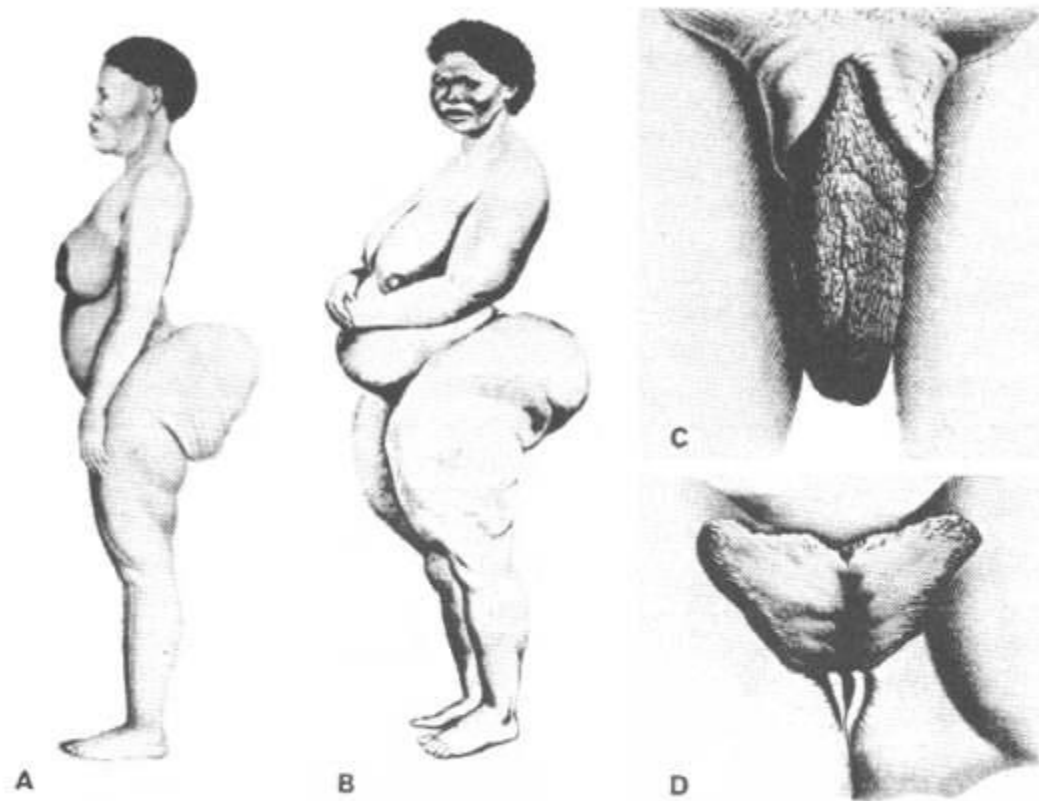


Fig. 1. A, a Bushwoman (the famous 'Hottentot Venus'); B, a Korana woman; C, the external genitalia of a Bushwoman, standing upright; D, the same, of a Bushwoman lying down with the labia minora separated and turned aside. Source: A, from Cuvier; B, from Friedenthal; C and D, copies of coloured engravings by Lesueur, reproduced by Blanchard.²¹

1.2 The impact of the Europeans.

The daily life of the Khoisan was soon to evolve due to the arrival of new settlers. Before discussing the Dutch colonizers it is important to notice that since the beginning of the Iron age sometime after 2000 BCE²², the Khoisan were already in constant contact with foreigners and more than willing to trade and exchange goods. However, the arrival of the Dutch would change Khoisan culture forever.

²¹ Retrieved in may 12th 2012 from: John R. Baker, The 'Hottentot Venus', www.heretical.com

²² Joseph S. Spoerl (Saint Anselm College), *A Brief History of Iron and Steel Production*, 2004

In 1601 Dutch settlers first arrived in both the Cape and the Bay of Saldaha as part of the Dutch First East India Company.²³ The first Dutch comments about their encounter with the Khoisan highlights the patronizing and biased mind with which the Khoisan had to deal with on a daily basis. Jan Riebeeck, first commander of the First East India Company, described the Hottentots as a: “dull, stupid, lazy, stinking nation” as well as: “bold, thievish, and not to be trusted”²⁴. In spite of these ideological frictions, the first 50 years of cohabitation between Khoisan and Dutch were spent in peaceful cooperation. Therefore the official policy of the Dutch first East India Company was to never enslave the Khoisan and to consider them as trading parties and independent beings.²⁵

However, the constant flow of new settlers and increasing Dutch demand for meat and territory soon created resentment on the part of the Khoisan. Therefore, the Khoekhoe herders not only agreed on trading a limited number of cattle which soon became too limited for the need of the Dutch. Moreover, the Khoisan felt as if the Dutch were: “Taking every day ... land which had belonged to them from all ages and on which they were accustomed to pasture their cattle. They also asked: would they be permitted to act in the same manner if they visited Holland?”²⁶

The Khoisan were defeated by the Dutch in three wars (1659 - 1677). It is important to notice that the Khoisan did not, as what often occurred in relationship with the Dutch, willingly hand their territory over to the settlers. However they fell victim to several weaknesses that did not allow them to form a strong coalition against the imperial foreigners.

Therefore, the demise of the Khoisan was mostly due to the lack of central social organizations. The internal fights were soon as violent as the struggle against the colonizers. Moreover, the degree of acculturation of the Khoisan also played an important role in their defeat. Hence, many Khoisan often joined the Dutch army when other European invaders, such as the French, threatened the Dutch positions. The mixing of the populations through marriages between

²³ South Africa History online, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1600s>

²⁴ D. Mccrone, *Race attitudes in South Africa*. (Johannesburg, 1957). As cited in: Shula Marks, *Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*

²⁵ D. Johnson, “Representing the Cape “Hottentots,” from the French Enlightenment to Post-apartheid South Africa’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume 40, Number 4, Summer 2007

²⁶ The record, 205, Van Riebeeck’s journal 4.april 1660. As cited in: S. Marks, *Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*

Khoisan women and Dutch settlers also helped to blur the ethnic alliances.²⁷ These important defeats caused a high level of impoverishment and forced the Khoisan to turn to activities such as serving the Dutch. Saartjie Baartman was born into this convoluted setting.

1.3. Saartjie's life and times in South Africa.

Having understood the context in which Saartjie Baartman grew up, it is important to look into her life in Southern Africa with more depth. Literature on Saartjie focuses mainly on her life spent in Great Britain and in France but does hardly pay attention to her earlier experience in South Africa. I believe this incorrect as the imperial and racist setting of her early years considerably influenced what happened to her in Europe.

Saartjie grew up on a colonist's farm owned by her first "master", David Fourie.²⁸ Here the first record of her name appears. The name Saartjie includes the particle 'tjie', applied in the Dutch language to describe something small and harmless. In this context it is fair to say that choosing this name fits the dominant white discourse into which Saartjie was born. When her master Fourie died, Saartjie and her family were sold to another Boer called Cornelius Muller with whom she moved to Cape Town. Muller then sold her to Pieter Cesar, the brother of Hendrik Cesar.²⁹ Saartjie started working for Hendrik Cesar and his wife Anna Catherina Staal in 1803. Saartjie Baartman's exact occupation during her time spent at the house of the Cesar family is unknown. It seems she was mostly employed as a servant and a nurse for the children born to Cesar and Staal.

What is I think really interesting is the paradoxical situation in which Saartjie Baartman found herself. She was neither a slave, as the official policy of the First India East Company prohibited, but neither was she totally free. It seems fair to say that before coming to Europe Saartjie never really knew what freedom truly was.

²⁷ S. Marks, *Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 78-80.

²⁸ Clifton C. Crais, P Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography*, Introduction.

²⁹ 33 Cape Papers, 1810–11, ZI/25 2431/12/1, CA, (as cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais 2008).

Her presence in Cape Town during the transfers of the Dutch colony to the British, places her in a delicate position. The arrival of new British settlers in search of exoticism and the thrill of the unknown widened the already existing prostitution market in the Cape. As Anna Catherina Staal described in the court case against her husband, it seems that Saartjie frequented such places. It is known that Hendrik Cesar took a huge interest in money so the idea of sexually commodifying Saartjie in Africa most probably came from him. It is by seeing the success that Saartjie had with the British soldiers that Cesar started his partnership with Dunlop from which the idea to bring her to London came about.

The question of agency on Saartjie's part is of great significance and will return later during the court case opposing Hendrik and the British abolitionists. However, it is also important to question the honesty of the people Saartjie met up with in South Africa. The Boers were mostly described as quite rude people constantly looking for easy and dishonest money. During the court case in England, Saartjie described the terms of her working for Hendrik Cesar and Alexander Dunlop as quite dubious mostly through her description of the so-called contract. Dunlop seemed to have proposed to Saartjie to come to London to collaborate with him in the exhibition business but never as an exhibition herself. The existence of a real contract remains unknown.

With these arguments in mind, it becomes easier to understand Saartjie's background and the people surrounding her judging with the benefit of hindsight. It is also important to notice that Saartjie was not only a victim of the imperial and racist societies in Europe but also in Southern Africa ever since her birth.

Chapter 2. On show in Europe

2.1 The origin of human exhibitions.

In order to fathom the life story of Saartjie Baartman in more depth, it is important to take a step back and understand how the phenomenon of human exhibitions came about. They did not suddenly appear during the 18th or 19th centuries but emerged from a long pre-existing tradition.

When articulating one's identity, a sense of belonging to a certain community is essential. Humans as social entities need to fit in a certain group in order to live and evolve efficiently within society. One can identify him/herself in two ways: by physically resembling someone or by sharing certain ideas or ideologies. The first case interests us the most with regard to the present study. In order to work, a society needs to be divided into distinct groups and follow a certain hierarchy. Here the process of Othering happens. Othering can be defined as: "transforming a difference into Otherness so as to create an in group and an out group"³⁰. This practice causes different social groups come to about in past and contemporary societies.

Cultural others have always been a subject of fascination. Physical attributes are the most recognizable features when meeting someone for the first time whereby certain group members can distinguish insiders or outsiders the quickest. This has never changed in the course of history. The explanation given as to understanding why such differences exist has changed however.

Already in Antiquity, the Other was an important subject of interest and research. Aristotle and Cicero gave to the explanation of the so-called monster a leading position in their taxonomical scheme. The presence of the Other always gave rise to interpretation. In Antiquity, the Other was mostly seen as the expression of the divine to be either feared or admired. But in any cases or times, the Other always served the profit of the dominant group, instrumentalized in a specific way dictated not by themselves but by someone else.³¹

It is known that the Egyptians exhibited "black dwarfs" from Sudan. The Romans showcased the defeated "savages" in order to demonstrate their power. Artists from the Middle Ages were also fascinated by these beings whom they depicted in numerous paintings such as in the work of Jerome Bosch. Kings and Queens also surrounded themselves with dwarfs and weird creatures in order to amuse the court. When a new Age of Discoveries dawned and new territories were

³⁰ J.-F. Staszak, 'Other/otherness, International Encyclopedia of Human Geography', 2008, Elsevier.

³¹ P. Blanchard, 2004, *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales: 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre*, Paris, La découverte.

opened up by Europeans as well as by Chinese, more and more exotic creatures were brought back to be exhibited. After discovering America, Christopher Columbus did not hesitate to return with Amerindians individuals.

It then became a trend for rich men and/or nobility to meet one another in their personal residences in a “cabinet de curiosité ” in order to share and compare each collections. This phenomenon appeared during the Renaissance in Europe and can be seen as the fore-runner of the museum. The aim of such cabinets was to offer a classification of the world different from the one offered through religion, to offer a modern classification of things going from God’s work to the one of nature to finish with all human creations³². In these cabinets one found various items ranging from often really exotic to thrilling such as pottery from Antiquity or rare stones. One especially exciting collection contained various types of bodies, offering a strange repertoire of abnormal creatures.

It is important to notice that at each of these periods, the physical Other served to fulfill the goals of the ones judging the Other. The Others in fact were malleable entities, answering to the preoccupation and values of one specific culture at a specific time.

During the period of great colonization, examples of indigenous peoples were generally speaking brought back to Europe in order to show the superiority of the Westerners by highlighting the savagery and brutality of non-westerners. This often served to justify imperial missions and to glorify the power and prestige of an empire.

What had initially been considered a sign of the divine soon came to be seen under a more scientific heading. What had been fearfully respected in the past soon came to be seen as a monstrous mistake. Therefore, the advancements in science, such as the authorization to dissect human beings, enabled most intellectuals to see the world in a different manner.

The secularization of various areas of society changed the mindset of numerous people who started to see the Other as not more than another caprice of nature. This soon led many scientists to develop a keen interest for such beings. Scholars were not the only curious about such “abnormal beings”, who started to appear in a more popular setting such as the freak show.

³² P. Blanchard, Exhibitions: L’invention du sauvage, 2011, Actes Sud musée du quai Branly Paris, p. 79.

These manifestations can be seen as the desire of popular masses to grow acquainted with these weird beings. This is how a entire market of “freak transactions” started to evolve all over Europe. A race towards finding the most extraordinary body debuted for numerous producers searching for money and fame. The outmost goal was to find in one single person physical irregularities as well as an exotic ethnicity. Consequently, it was common for travelers or merchants to become producers and bring natives from remote territories to be exhibited. Scientists saw this as an opportunity to study living samples in support of their emerging theories.

This is how the collaboration between science and entertainment began. Producers allowed the performer to be examined in exchange for some kind of attestation of authenticity or abnormality that could serve to attract more people. Therefore, it was quite common in the freak show world, to find a great amount of fraud/fakes. As a result, the audience started to be more and more suspicious and increasingly asked for tangible proof before paying the entrance fee. Saartjie Baartman found herself in this context when arriving in Europe. However, she stood on the threshold of this phenomenon at a time when everything was still chaotic and disordered.

Later, during the 18th century, Phineas Taylor Barnum began exhibiting the Other on a brand new scale. What had been reserved for small audiences in random venues was now on display in serious institutions with given rules and a strict organization. Saartjie Baartman can be considered as the forerunner of the so-called human zoo.

We have now seen the main lines of the evolution of human exhibitions through time. It is important to remember that, although such exhibitions always took place, its explanation and purpose shifted considerably as to the period during which it occurred.

2.2 Saartjie’s life and time in Europe.

Saartjie Baartman’s first destination after leaving the Cape was London. Saartjie, Dunlop and Cesar arrived here in April 1810 after a several months long journey. Dunlop’s initial

intention was to sell her to William Bullock, the owner of the Egyptian Museum³³. However, Bullock did not take any interest in her and decided not to take the offer. This event can be considered the first European commodification of Sarah Baartman. The process of commodification can be defined as the following: “to turn into or treat as a commodity”³⁴. Next Dunlop and Cesar decided to introduce Saartjie to the world of the biological rarities, to so-called freak shows. Her first performance took place at 225 Piccadilly for which the audience was asked to pay 2 shillings. She was now introduced as the Hottentot Venus. The poster shown in Fig. 2 must have been most popular in the streets of London.

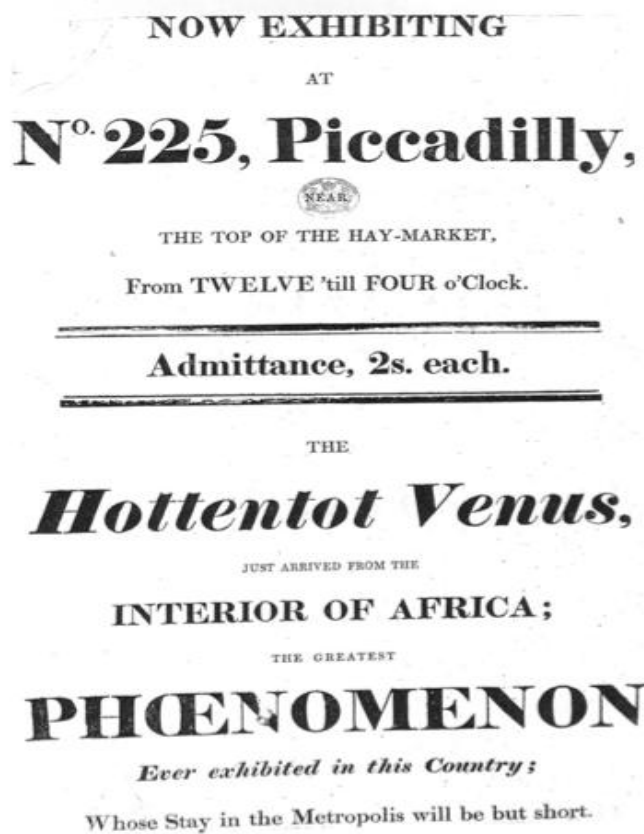


Fig. 2 Poster of Saartjie's performance at 225 Picadilly London. Source: National Portrait Gallery³⁵

³³ Testimony of William Bullock, 21 November 1810; Testimony of George Mooyen, 28 November 1810, TNA: PRO KB 1/36/4. As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C Crais

³⁴ Oxford dictionaries on-line,

http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/commodify?q=commodification#commodify__2

³⁵ Retrieved July 9th 2012: <http://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2007/between-worlds/exhibition-tour/baartman.php>

The way in which Saartjie was presented during shows was quite remarkable. Her ethnic origin, namely Khoisan, was never referred to. The kind of clothing and narrative surrounding her performance did not come close to reality at all.

According to the court records that transcribe the trial between the British abolitionists and Hendrik Cesar, Saartjie was dressed in a quite provocative manner when performing. She was wearing “a *dress resembling her complexion*” and this costume was 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*”³⁶

Moreover, the only “ethnic attributes” visible during the show were only a few tree leaves and some indigenous looking jewelry. The status given to her during the exhibition was that of an animal held on a leash by the glorious European (Hendrik) who was bravely protecting the audience from Saartjie’s savagery and spontaneous violence.³⁷ The report of a British comedian who witnessed the performance gives us great insight on what might have actually happened: “*I 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.*”³⁸

However, it is important to notice that Saartjie’s representation did not only meet with general approbation but also with harsh criticism. The following extract of *The Morning Post* of October 29 1810 gives us a good perspective on the opposite reactions:

“*Considerable interest has been excited by the situation of an unfortunate being who has for some weeks publicly shown in Piccadilly, like a prize ox or a rattle snake, and from some letters . . . it seems to be more than insinuated that she has been brought by artifice or force from her*

³⁶ Court Records, as reprinted in Strother, (As cited in Sadiya Qureshi 2004: DISPLAYING SARA BAARTMAN, THE ‘HOTTENTOT’ VENUS)

³⁷ Robert Chambers (Ed.), *The book of days: A miscellany of popular antiquities, in connection with the calendar* (2 vols, London and Edinburgh, 1863), ii, p. 621. (as cited in: S. Qureshi 2004)

³⁸ Mrs Matthews, *Memoirs of Charles Matthews, comedian* (4 vols, London, 1839), iv, 133. For more on the late 19th 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). (As cited in: Sadiya Quershi 2004)

*own country for this abominable purpose and is at this moment in a state of slavery in England. Two of the letters are signed by a foreigner, purporting to be her keeper, which are of a kind so equivocating, the writer of them so evidently avoids satisfying the doubts to the Public as to the real situation of this poor creature, that they must conclude their suspicions to be well founded*³⁹

British intellectuals started to question whether Saartjie had ever really agreed to be exhibited in this way. The abolitionist association called the African Association was raising several ethical objections regarding her treatment. Moreover, the old rivalry between English and Dutch for the dominion of the Cape led most people to consider Hendrik Cesar a despicable Boer who had enslaved a poor creature for his personal profit. Saartjie's freewill in this whole process became a matter of justice at the Court of King's Bench between October and November 1810. The principal accusation concerned Hendrik Cesar but Alexander Dunlop was present during the majority of the court hearings.

Dunlop quickly came with the ultimate proof in favour of both Cesar and him, namely a contract. This contract was dated March 20, 1810 and was valid for 5 years.⁴⁰ Little importance was ever given to Saartjie during the whole juridical process. Therefore, she was only interviewed by two Dutch-speaking merchants in the presence of Dunlop who could have easily pressured her to answer the way she did. On this occasion she revealed "*she came by her own consent to England and was promised half of the money for exhibiting her person—She agreed to come to England for a period of six years; she went personally to the Government in company with Henrick Caesars to ask permission to go to England. Mr. Dunlop promised to send her back after that period at his own expence [sic] and to send the money belonging to her with her*".⁴¹

In the light of such a statement and with the contract for proof, the court of King's Bench quickly dismissed all accusations. Saartjie returned to perform on November 28.

³⁹ As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais

⁴⁰ P. Kirby, "More about the Hottentot Venus," 125. See "Statement regarding testimony of The Hottentot Venus 27 November 1810, signed affidavit of Messrs. Solly and Mooijen," 28 November 1810, TNA: PRO, KB 1/36/4. (As cited in: P. Scully and Clifton C. Crais)

⁴¹ "Statement regarding testimony of The Hottentot Venus 27 November 1810, signed affidavit of Messrs. Solly and Mooijen," 28 November 1808 [sic], TNA: PRO, KB 1/36/4.

Little is known about Saartjie's further experience in England. It is quite possible that Saartjie did not provide as much profit as she had once done. This was perhaps the reason for Cesar and Dunlop deciding to sell her to the animal trainer S. Réaux who took her to Paris. There are no official reports or witnesses to help us understand how Réaux decided to represent Saartjie in Paris. The only official source in which she appears is Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's and Frédéric Cuvier's "Histoire naturelle des mammifères", vol. 1. In it she is depicted in the middle of a panel of various other mammals and classified as a mere animal.

2.3 How it all came to an end

As mentioned above, little is known about the journey of Saartjie Baartman in Paris who after being bought by an animal trainer named Réaux continued to be exhibited for fifteen months. According to Sebastien Coeure's painting⁴², Saartjie started to perform in much more intimate places and for a much more privileged audience. Therefore, it seemed that her arrival in Paris interested people from all social classes and that her presence in some "salons bourgeois" was quite common during the year 1815 as the *Journal des dames et des modes* describes⁴³.

In Abdellatif Kechiche's 2010 film titled "Black Venus", Saartjie's experience in France is depicted in a very sinister manner. Réaux seemed to have been a far inferior producer than Cesar. Saartjie seemed to have performed almost completely naked in France (as in Coeure's painting, see note 8) and it seemed that Réaux often allowed the audience to touch Saartjie in the most revolting ways.

As soon as the French scholars heard of the presence of a real Hottentot in Paris they could not resist to jump at the opportunity to examine her. Saartjie's first encounter with the world of science came about thanks to Réaux's greed, to whom they offered a generous amount of money.

Her first appearance in a work of science is in the renowned publication by Frédéric Cuvier and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire entitled "*Histoire naturelle des mammifères*". It consists of four volumes and was created in order to represent the diversity of the mammal species on earth with great precision. It includes detailed coloured drawings, two of which (see Fig. 3) depict Saartjie's anterior and lateral profiles, as it was the case with the other mammals. Saartjie is the

⁴² S. Coeure, «La Venus Hottentote dans les salons de la Duchesse de Berri», Paris, aquarelle sur papier, 1830.

⁴³ P. Blanchard, *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales: 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre*, La découverte, p. 97

only human being to be drawn and included in these volumes. At present it is quite striking to see a female lowered to the level of animals and compared to them in one and the same book as if no real differences exist between them.



Fig. 3.: Espèce humaines: Femme de race Bochismann. Source, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (4 vols, Paris, 1824–47).

Her total nudity reduces Saartjie, as a person, to a solely physical level. It appears fair to say that scientists were not interested in knowing who she truly was.

What then happened to Saartjie remains a total mystery. According to rumours, Saartjie ended her life as a prostitute in Paris.⁴⁵ The success of Saartjie's exhibition had seemingly steadily decreased and Réaux had chosen to place her in one of the many brothels of the French capital.

She passed away in December 1815 due to a condition George Cuvier diagnosed as a “une maladie inflammatoire et eruptive”⁴⁶, perhaps syphilis. Her journey in the spiral of science did

⁴⁴ Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Frédéric Cuvier, *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (4 vols, Paris, 1824–47). Images : Espèce humaines: Femme de race Bochismann. Retrieved in may the 22th 2012 from :

http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?parent_id=108807&word=

⁴⁵ R. Verneau ‘Le centième anniversaire de la mort de Sarah Baartman’, *l'Anthropologie*, 27, 1916 pp. 177-9. (As cited by P. Blanchard 2004)

not stop here. After her demise, Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire immediately requested the right to preserve the body in order to continue studies of extreme importance. The Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle supported this request.

Chapter 3. The influence of science

3.1 George Cuvier.

We now have to look into the role science played in Saartjie Baartman's fate. As sketched, Saartjie's encounter with the world of science only began after her arrival in France. Therefore, the scientists of the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle were the first ones to directly have the possibility to examine the Khoisan woman.

Before discussing George Cuvier, I would like to briefly summarize the report that Saint-Hilaire wrote about his meeting with Saartjie which was published on April 1, 1815 a few months before her death.

Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was a French naturalist who was born near Paris in 1772. His first academic expertise was in the field of theology. However, the outbreak of the French revolution influenced him to embark upon the study of law and then medicine. In 1793 he was appointed a Professor of Quadrupeds, Birds, Reptiles and Fish at the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Having dedicated his career to the zoological study of mammals and marsupials Saint-Hilaire became one of the founders of comparative anatomy together with scientists such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and George Cuvier.⁴⁶

The full report as delivered by Saint-Hilaire was not available to me. However, I was able to find several important extracts from trustworthy secondary literature, namely the report of the National Assembly of France of 2002. It had been officially requested to report the life story of

⁴⁶ G. 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*, ii (1817), pp. 259–74

⁴⁷ A. Moyal, "The great French naturalist and the platypus", *The National Library Magazine* 1 (2): 2–7, (June 2009), <http://www.nla.gov.au/pub/nlanews/2009/jun09/the-great-french-naturalist-and-the-platypus.pdf>; retrieved on June 12, 2012

Saartjie and focus on the return of her body to Africa⁴⁸ I will analyze this report due to its importance here in 3.1.

Saint-Hilaire always seemed to use Saartjie in comparison of another animal or to be more precise in comparison to various species of apes. When talking about her face, he described what he thought were the features that Saartjie shared with these mammals: “*the beginning of her muzzle is even bigger than the one of the red orangutan who lives on the large islands of the Indian Ocean*”⁴⁹ and the “*prodigious size of her buttocks*” was, according to him, highly similar to the bottom of female mandrills during menstruation.

Just by the look of these two sentences, it seems clear that Saint-Hilaire did not consider Saartjie as a real and respectable human being.

As mentioned above, Saartjie’s corpse was immediately brought to the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle in order to be dissected and studied after her death in December 1815. George Cuvier decided to conduct the entire process.

Saartjie Baartman was most meticulously studied in George Cuvier’s work.

George Cuvier was born in Montbéliard on August 23, 1769 and died in Paris on May 13, 1832. This French anatomist was one of the founders of comparative anatomy and paleontology. He entered the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle in 1795 to study living but also extinct species. He was highly interested in the human species which he considered part of the animal kind. He granted a great deal of time to the study of the sub-Saharan Africans whom he thought of as “the most degraded of human races, whose form approaches that of the beast and whose intelligence is nowhere great enough to arrive at regular government.”⁵⁰ ⁵¹ Cuvier was not an explorer or adventurer and made the majority of his discoveries in his laboratory. He succeeded in creating great partnerships around him and constantly received specimens to study from all around the

⁴⁸ <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/rapports/r3563.asp>

⁴⁹ My translation (M.C.) the original French extract can be found at: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/rapports/r3563.asp>

⁵⁰ G. Cuvier, *Recherches sur les ossements fossiles de quadrupèdes où l’on rétablit les caractères de plusieurs espèces d’animaux que les révolutions du globe paroissent avoir détruites*, 4 vols, Paris, Deterville, 1812.

Translation from <http://www.strangescience.net/cuvier.htm>

⁵¹ P. Blanchard, Exhibitions: L’invention du sauvage, 2011, Actes sud Musée du quai Branly, p. 64

world. Cuvier believed in the bible but claimed that its narrative should not be taken literally, as he firmly believed that life started in the sea to then evolve on earth⁵².

When Saartjie's body first arrived at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Cuvier immediately followed the already conceived plan he had meticulously organized in several steps. He firstly produced several body casts of Saartjie as well as a wax mould of her genitals to finish by preserving her brain, skeleton and genitals. In 1817 Cuvier published a report featuring the precise anatomical components of what he called "la femme de race Boschimanne"⁵³.

It is important to learn about the so-called "obsession" Cuvier fostered regarding the existence of the Hottentot apron. This apron was described in numerous travelers' reports as something extremely spectacular and rare to most Europeans. However, it seemed that the Hottentot women were more than reluctant to reveal themselves to the European gaze as François Le Vaillant describes: "*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.*"⁵⁴ The lack of scientific examination of this extraordinary anatomical feature provided Cuvier with a supplementary motivation when learning of the presence of a Hottentot in Paris.

Consequently, it is with pride and satisfaction that Cuvier finally confirmed the existence of such an organ to his readers and audience in 1817. He did not only write a report but also gave a triumphant lecture in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle that same year. The content of both accounts is really interesting as to the mindset of most nineteenth-century scientists.

In order to start his report in the catchiest way, Cuvier starts to confirm the existence of the Hottentot apron. He then immediately starts to contrast Saartjie's anatomy to the body of various kinds of great apes by means of the method always applied in comparative anatomy. However, he immediately specifies that the apron of most Bushman females does not show any resemblance with the genitals of the great Apes.

⁵² M. Scott, G. Cuvier, <http://www.strangescience.net/cuvier.htm> Updated September 30, 2011

⁵³ G. Cuvier, op cit. 46.

⁵⁴ Zoë S. Strother, "Display of the Body Hottentot". (As cited in: Sadiah Quershí 2004)

Cuvier then continues with the study of Saartjie's buttocks which, contrary to the apron, were believed to show some similarities with the bottoms of female mandrills and baboons.⁵⁵ The head is next in his complete anatomical study. He highlights the importance of this body part which is mostly used in order to compare and measure the difference between each species and races. Cuvier now shows great enthusiasm when revealing to his audience the unusual discovery found while studying Saartjie's face and skull. Sara is believed to show a striking combination of Negro and Kalmuk traits. The Kalmuk were thought to be the race closest to the ape with the Negro just in front. After some technical measurements, Cuvier finally states, "I have never seen a head which more resembles the ape"⁵⁶

Cuvier then chooses to explain why, contrary to recent scholarly research, the superior race inhabiting ancient Egypt could not have been born from any Negro race. He continues his argumentation by comparing the head of a mummy to the one of a Negro and of a European to then highlight the difference between the second and the two others, reminding his audience that the Europeans could have only inherited laws and moral values by descending from the Egyptians.

Apart from the apparent racism in Cuvier's study, much can be said with regard to the way he addresses Saartjie's existence. He seems to be hesitant when trying to conceive whether Saartjie ever possessed any real sign of human nature. He does recognize that she was far from being mentally disabled, as she was able to speak a little French, English and quite a bit of Dutch (Afrikaans). He even notices that her feet, shoulders and hands were pretty. However, his constant comparison between Saartjie and various apes illustrates perfectly the mindset of many eighteenth-century scholars. His belief in racial hierarchies shows his total lack of respect for any other ethnicity than the European one. Moreover, when talking or writing about Saartjie he never uses her name or shares any kind of information about her apart from the fact that she comes from the Hottentot ethnic group. This shows his total detachment and lack of interest in Saartjie as an individual.

⁵⁵ G. Cuvier, *op. cit.* 46.

⁵⁶ Translation from the English subtitle of the DVD of the film by Abdellatif Kechiche titled 'Venus noire' (2010)

3.2 Contemporary ideas on species, race, humanness.

In order to understand the keen interest expressed by many scientists when encountering Saartjie Baartman, it is important to become familiar with the basic scientific ideas of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In mind a book by Raymond Corbey entitled: *The metaphysics of apes: Negotiating the animal-human boundary* which is helpful in dealing with the most important issues.

According to the Judeo-Christian religious idea, the human is considered an *Imago Dei*, namely that humans are created as the images of god.⁵⁷ According to the Book of Genesis, man was created as unique being and regent of the natural world including the animals. As Pope Jean Paul II stated: “*Revelation teaches us that man was created in the image and likeness of God*”⁵⁸. Consequently, it is fair to say that since the beginning of Christianity in Europe, this idea of human exceptionalism was vividly present and defended by most intellectuals. Therefore, no one could have doubted the fact that the human species was part of a unique and privileged group of beings both physically and spiritually.

With the Enlightenment, these ideas started to be challenged. The Enlightenment can be defined as: “*a movement and climate of opinion which encouraged the critical and even sceptical exploration of traditional beliefs, including religious dogma, with the help of rational argument and empirical observation instead of the authority of texts or the Church*”⁵⁹.

The controversial discovery of the existence of the Orang-Utans started to shake the certitude as to the Christian *Scala naturae*. Nicolaes Tulp and later Edward Tyson decided to compare the anatomy of this mysterious creature with the anatomy of human beings.

Tyson succeeded in discovering 48 features which resembled those of humans and 34 which could be more linked to monkeys. The most striking resemblances could be found in the shape of

⁵⁷ R. Corbey, Video lecture 1 : >>>>CONCEPTS OF BEING HUMAN: HUMANS AND OTHER ANIMALS on the Blackboard of the university of Tilburg, retrieved in June 2012(2011)

⁵⁸ Pope Jean Paul II : MESSAGE TO THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES: ON EVOLUTION, *Message delivered to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences 22 October 1996*, retrieved from Video lecture 1

⁵⁹ R. Corbey, *The Metaphysics of Apes: Negotiating the Animal-Human Boundary*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005,. Chapter 2, p. 36.

the brain, the structure of the larynx and the erect gait.⁶⁰ With these similarities in mind, Tyson concluded that the Orang-Utans could have been an intermediary form between monkeys and human beings starting the controversy about the missing link in the Great Chain of Being.

In spite of this exceptional discovery, Tyson did not by any means recognize the overall resemblance between Orang-Utans and human beings stopping only at the physical realm. Therefore, the ideas of the French philosopher René Descartes, in particular his theory on human dualism, hugely influenced most scientists of that period who could not allow themselves to question the uniqueness of the human soul.

The work of two natural historians, i.c. Carolus Linnaeus and George-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon caused human exceptionalism to become seriously endangered.

In *Systemea naturae*, Linnaeus undertook the heavy task to classify all living beings. It is important to understand that he was a firm Christian and that his work was mostly aimed at honouring and glorifying the divine. However, an unexpected discovery quickly turned his cherished plan into a more bitter finding: “It is remarkable that the stupidest ape differs so little from the wisest man, that the surveyor of nature still has to found who can draw the line between them”⁶¹. As Tyson had done before him, Linnaeus succeeded in avoiding the human-animal boundary controversy by stressing the importance of human dignity. Nevertheless, this element did not save him from raising huge disagreements amongst many intellectuals who were outraged to find human beings and apes in the same category. He developed some even more interesting categories regarding the topic of the present thesis. Faced with the diversity of human forms Linnaeus developed some “extra categories” of beings: the homo monstruosus (such as dwarfs or giants), homo ferus (naked and walking on four legs) as well as the homo africanus, homo americanus and homo asiaticus. It would be interesting to wonder about the category to which Saartjie Baartman could have belonged.

“Dignity” is an important concept and often applied when addressing the uniqueness of the human species. Dignity can be defined as: the quality of being worthy or honourable; nobility or

⁶⁰ R. Corbey, op. cit. 59, p.41

⁶¹ Linnaeus, *Systema naturae* 12th edition, 1766. Retrieved from Corbey ,2002

befitting elevation of aspect, manner, or style.⁶² In other words, human beings are considered to be highly valuable beings.

As to the modern ideas of philosophers such as Descartes and Kant, the concept of human dignity took in an even more important place. Kant is known for his ample use of reason as an argument to defend the uniqueness of human beings. Therefore, Kant held the view that the human species differs from the animal species because of the fact that humans are reasonable moral agents. In the view of such arguments, it is fair to say that scientists were walking on thin ice when tackling the taxonomical order of earthly beings.

One of Linnaeus's most bitter rivals was the French natural historian Georges-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon who highly criticized the former for his excessive focus on the morphological resemblances of apes and human beings. According to the Comte de Buffon, the most important tool of comparison was a more functional one which served to analyze whether the exercise of actions such as speech or thought were present in both entities. Here once again one can feel the high uneasiness which scientists were dealing with when faced with the human-animal boundary.

After Buffon many other scholars including Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and Petrus Camper tried to find any possible theory and argument to definitely separate human beings from apes. Camper developed the first most precise measuring method to be widely applied in craniofacial morphology. This measuring of the facial angle allowed him to draw a clear limitation between human beings and apes. However, this method not only served the sole purpose of differentiating animals and human beings but also the differentiation of human beings between themselves. It was thought that the "smaller the facial angle, the lower the creature stood in the hierarch of creation".⁶³ This is when the idea of races clearly appeared in science and when the human-animal boundary shifted from the European-lower races boundary.

For an overview of the racist gradation flourishing at the time, see Fig. 4. For the source, see note 60.

⁶² Oxford Dictionary cited in R. Corbey Video lecture 1, 2011

⁶³ R. Corbey, op. cit. 46, p. 54

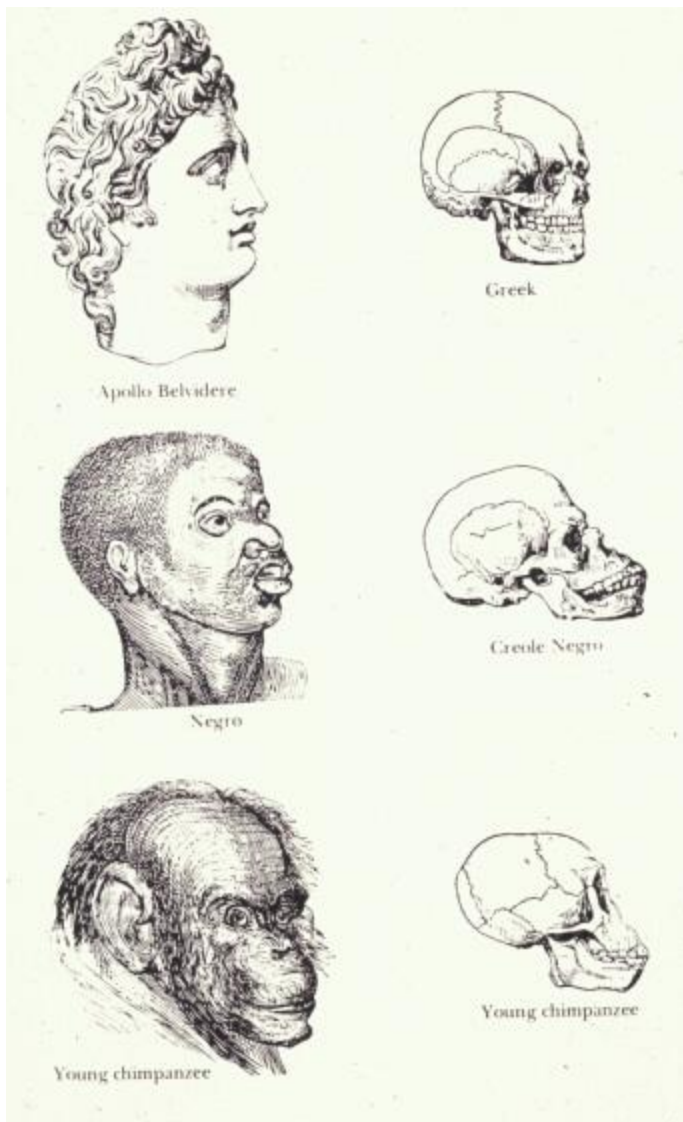


Fig. 4

This was the boarder canvas in which Cuvier dissected and studied Saartjie's body. She was soon thought to be the missing link between humans and apes. Looking through this racist lens he declared Saartjie Baartman to be the lowest human being in the complex gradation of the natural order.

⁶⁴ Retrieved From: L. Maury, Ferencz A. Pulszky, J. Aitken Meigs, *Indigenous Races of the Earth: Or, New Chapters of Ethnological Inquiry*, J. B. Lippincott & co., 1857

Conclusion

This case study on Saartjie Baartman analyzed the various influences and events explaining the tragic fate of this Khoisan woman.

Three influences have been pointed out. Firstly, it seems fair to recognize that Saartjie ended up in Europe due to Dutch and British imperialism. The presence of Dutch Boers in the Khoisan territory as well as the subsequent British settlement in Cape Town, highly influenced Saartjie's encountering and activities. It seems difficult to imagine that, without the intervention of Dunlop and Cesar, Saartjie would have met the same destiny. The life story of Saartjie Baartman is not an isolated case, colonialism enabled many settlers in search of money to return to Europe with rare and much sought after ethnic specimens. This not only implied that the world fairs and ethnic showcases of the late 19th century spread through Europe and America but also that other victims suffered this harsh treatment in Europe.

Secondly, the entertainment scene into which Saartjie entered upon arrival in Europe also highly influenced her life. The fact that William Bullock, the owner of the Egyptian Hall, refused to buy Saartjie resulted in her introduction into the world of freak shows. This cruel business forced her to adopt the behaviour expected of her and the work conditions of such an industry. Saartjie's performances never reflected her true ethnic origin or her true self. Instead it only constructed everything Europeans imagined a Hottentot ought to be. This was generally speaking the case whenever non-western people were exhibited. The producers aimed at making the most spectacular and lucrative performances possible. The public expected the confirmation, as was written in most travelers reports, that the indigenous peoples were savages and brutes. Consequently, the opinion or input of the foreign people exhibited which, according to present-day moral standards, should have been the most important and relevant was nearly always ignored.

Finally, the intervention of science has also considerably influenced Saartjie Baartman's life. The crucial element in Saartjie's life-story in fact was the association between entertainment, industry and science. Due to the alliance between Réaux and the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle Saartjie was examined while alive and then dissected after her death. Moreover, it is due to the spread of

scientific theories glorifying racist hypotheses that Saartjie's exhibition was formulated in such a way.

Through the combination of imperialism, entertainment industry and science Saartjie Baartman's life ended the way it did. This case study does not tell us that much about Saartjie herself but indeed more about Europeans. Her experience resulted in her commodification by Europeans, who used her only to answer to certain needs of their own. Through her physical and ethnic uniqueness, Saartjie represented the perfect Other who in a period of modernization and Enlightenment reassured the Europeans of their as yet favoured position. Thus, Saartjie Baartman's life-story is not so much about her tragic destiny but more about the concerns and prejudices of European peoples in times of doubt and fear.

I would like to add that my thesis did not aim at criticizing or bearing moralistic judgments on the Europeans of the 18th and 19th centuries who, for various historical reasons, could not show as much detachment and sympathy regarding the Other as is now possible. I hope to have shown how the extraordinary story of Saartjie Baartman reveals much about the articulation of identity among Europeans who lived during the above-mentioned period.

A final observation is that human zoos or freak shows have more or less completely disappeared in Europe and America but other manifestations, such as "reality programs" and talk shows nowadays show similarities with the happenings in earlier centuries. Hence, the stigmatization of the Other seems to always be present.

Regarding developments in science, it is fair to say that racism is one of the most fought against concepts in our contemporary world. The human species is now widely recognizable and respected through the installment of rules such as universal human rights. However, the status of animals such as the great apes is still widely debated. Hence, people should be careful when addressing the position of animals in the natural world and not succumb to speciesism which has manifold similarities to the racism studied in the above analysis.

Epilogue

In this section we will learn what exactly happened to Saartjie Baartman's remains and contextualize this process into the contemporary debate on the ethical treatment of historical remains. The remains of Saartjie made an interesting and complex journey before being finally returned to Africa in 2002.

After Cuvier's dissection, her cast and skeleton were exhibited in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle until 1937. Her remains were part of an entire section on comparative anatomy which also included two other skeletons as well as many other related objects.⁶⁵ With the establishing of the Musée de l'Homme in 1937 Saartjie's skeleton and cast were moved to showcase 33 until 1970. In an attempt to contextualize these remains, two pictures of a Khoisan man and woman were placed above the cast. In spite of the successful integration of the remains in the Musée de l'Homme critical remarks expressed by feminists resulted in the body being removed from the public section to the museum's storage room⁶⁶. Her remains then reappeared in 1994 at the Musée du quai d'Orsay as part of an exhibition of nineteenth-century ethnographic sculpture.⁶⁷ However, this exhibition raised even more criticism. This led to the removal of the cast and the skeleton in June 1994. They remained in the storage room until her repatriation to Africa in 2002.

The repatriation of Saartjie Baartman's remains raised a huge controversy between France and South Africa. Such a claim first appeared in 1994 through the African association representing the descendants of the Khoisan. In 1999, during a congress on archeology held in the Cape, the President of the association declared that: "the exhibition of her buttocks and genitals which only goal was to amuse heartless people was disrespecting the dignity of her people."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ G. Badou, *L'énigme de la Vénus Hottentote* ([Paris], 2000), pp. 157–8

⁶⁶ See G. Badou

⁶⁷ A. Le Normand-Romain and others, *La sculpture ethnographique au XIXe siècle: De la Vénus hottentote à la Tehura de Gauguin*, Musée d'Orsay, 16 mars – 12 juin 1994 (Paris, 1994). (As cited in : Sadiyah Qureshi 2004)

⁶⁸ My translation (M.C.), M. Jean, LE GARREC, Rapport fait AU NOM DE LA COMMISSION DES AFFAIRES CULTURELLES, FAMILIALES ET SOCIALES (1) SUR LA PROPOSITION DE LOI, ADOPTÉE PAR LE SÉNAT, relative à la

Nevertheless, French intellectuals were showing some resentment when approaching the issue. The reason being that Saartjie's remains were considered to be of great historical and scientific value as the following statement from Philippe Menecier, curator at the Musée de l'Homme, proves: *"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 artifact, albeit one hidden from the public gaze.⁶⁹

On a more governmental level, the return of Saartjie's remains had already been discussed during numerous political meetings between France and South Africa. The French president François Mitterrand had even promised to return the remains to Nelson Mandela and his government in 1994. However, this never came to fruition.

On October 6, 2000 the South African embassy to France decided to send an official letter to the French department of Foreign Affairs demanding the definite return of Saartjie Baartman's remains to be buried in South Africa. Only after many controversies and the settlement of an exceptional French law did France accept this request of repatriation.

Saartjie Baartman's official funeral ceremony took place on August 9, 2002. Her remains were entered at her place of birth, on the banks of the Gamtoo River. The South African president Thabo Mbeki attended the burial and declared the grave a national monument.⁷⁰ This ceremony was part of the famous Women's Day festivities. On this occasion Mbeki declared::

"The story of Sarah Baartman is the story of the African people, it is the story of the loss of our ancient freedom... It is the story of our reduction to the state of objects who could be owned, used and discarded by others. Sarah Baartman should never have been transported to Europe. Sarah Baartman should never have been stripped of her native, her Khoisan, her African identity and paraded in Europe as a savage monstrosity. Today we celebrate our national Women's Day to ensure that we move with greater speed towards the accomplishment of the goal of the creation of a non-sexist society."

restitution par la France de la dépouille mortelle de Saartjie Baartman à l'Afrique du Sud, Enregistré à la Présidence de l'Assemblée nationale le 30 janvier 2002

⁶⁹ P. Webster, "France keeps a hold on black Venus", Guardian, 1 April 2000. (As cited in: Sadiah Qureshi 2004)

⁷⁰ BBC News Edition, 'Hottentot Venus' laid to rest, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2183271.stm>

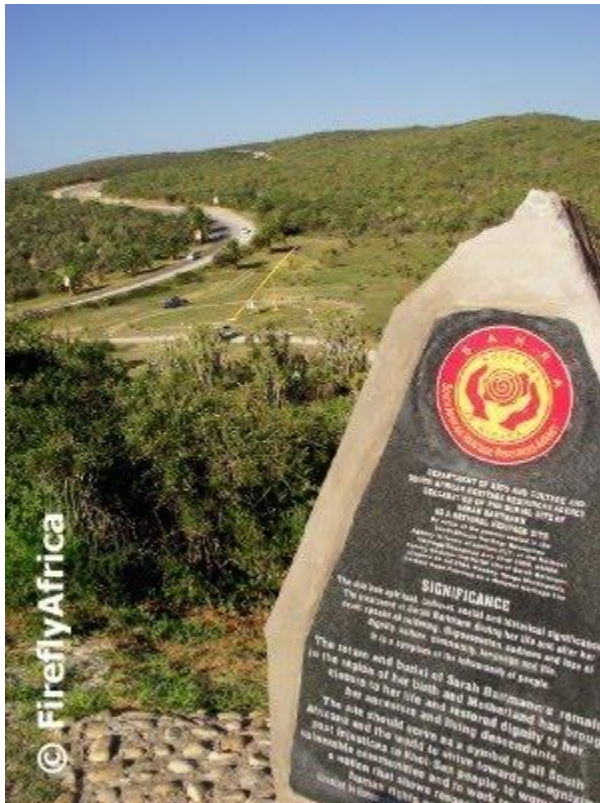


Fig. 5. Saartjie Baartman's grave on a hill top overlooking the Gamtoos River.⁷¹

The long process through which the South African community went in order to recover the remains of Sarah Baartman should not be seen as a singular case.

The contemporary debate on the issue regarding the ethical treatment of historical remains has been in constant progress and growth for a number of decades. Many museums curators are confronted by associations or individuals claiming rights on one or more parts of historical collections.

It is important to remember that the collection of most of the pieces exhibited in the museums today come from dubious sources. Hence, artifacts taken from other countries during the period of colonization were mostly seized without the permission of the original owners and were poorly classified leaving the objects or remains anonymous. Moreover, it seems unfair to condemn the countries in which the objects are presently exhibited since they cannot hold themselves accountable for what happened decades ago.

⁷¹ Retrieved on July 1st, 2012 from: <http://fireflyafrica.blogspot.nl/2010/07/sarah-bartmanns-grave.html>

It is difficult to determine whether the community requesting the return or claiming any heritage on these pieces have good intentions. The scientific value of each of these collections should be taken in consideration before the restitution of a piece. Therefore, the constant progress of science enables innovative research on these artifacts which are of great international significance. The extensive process through which Saartjie Baartman's remains went through in order to return to South Africa is completely normal according to present-day standards. This debate enabled curators, researchers and anthropologists to create a new set of rules to be followed in every circumstance. It is important when collecting objects to always refer first to the concerned community for permission as well as to use these objects for righteous goals while respecting the dignity, privacy and safety of the given people.⁷²

⁷² P. Blanchard, *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales: 150 ans d'inventions de l'Autre*, chapitre 41: collections humains et sciences inhumaines: échantillons et reliques. 2004 par André Langaney