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COLONIALISM, DYSFUNCTION AND DYSJUNCTURE
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SARAH BARTMANN

BY YVETTE ABRAHAMS

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"Suffer the little children to come unto me"

ABSTRACT

Sarah Bartmann was a Khoekhoe woman, who was born in the southern Cape in 1788. She was taken into exile in November, 1809, by an Englishman named Hendrik Cezar, who first tried to sell her as a freak exhibit and later, when he could not find a willing buyer, exhibited her himself. Her exhibition in London during the latter half of 1810 caused a media furore, and Mrs Bartmann can without hesitation be called the most famous Khoekhoe of her time. She was later exhibited in the British provinces and in 1814 was transferred to a new master in Paris. She became a sensation in Paris, as she had in London, and amongst other things, inspired a new fashion and a play. She was also examined by three scientists in December, 1814. Mrs Bartmann died shortly thereafter, in the early hours of 1815, at the age of twenty seven.

The academic resurgence of studies about Sarah Bartmann in the 1980's marked the beginning of a number of studies in a multitude of disciplines dealing with issues around the social construction of knowledge, and the development of positivist scientific ideas of race and gender in particular. She is featured regularly in the media, both locally and internationally, and there have also been two documentaries, one including Sarah Bartmann's life as part of a broader analysis, and one devoted solely to her life. There have also been at least three poetry collections of which her history has formed a part, and two plays. In this sense, Sarah Bartmann can justly be named the most famous Khoekhoe of our time, as well.

This thesis is the first book-length study of the history of Sarah Bartmann. Its aim is to contribute to the writing of an Africanist history of an African.

The thesis grapples with the question of identity. It approaches the study of Sarah Bartmann unconventionally, by investigating the triple identity African/native/slave. This study brings African womanist theory to bear on the historiography of Sarah Bartmann, and understands identity as the mutual constitution of three analytical categories: race, class and gender. It defines and examines the constitution of subjectivity in the context of the historical development of these categories of analysis.

The subjectivities under examination are three-fold. First, the identities of the people who have written the historiography of Sarah Bartmann are examined, and the race, class and gender profile of its practitioners is defined. The role these factors play in determining the ideological contours of the historiography is analysed and explained. Second, the subjectivity of the writer of this thesis is defined in terms of her personal historical context. Here, the author has felt free to use her cultural vernacular, Black Afrikaans, a creole developed in the kitchens and fields of the Cape during its long history of slavery. Third, the subjectivity of Sarah Bartmann is studied. The incorporation of new empirical research enables a dialogue with the existing historiography which allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the circumstances of her life. Although we can never know with absolute certainty what she thought and experienced, reading her actions in the context of the collective

historical experience of her people can offer reasonable certainty in the writing of an historical analysis which places her subjectivity at its centre.

One important function of this thesis is as a potential teaching tool. There is a severe shortage of teaching material on race, class and gender which is theoretically cohesive, located in an African historical context, and which strives to be both accessible and affirming to those who experience oppressed identities. In this study, each step of the analysis is explained and re-analyzed, mistakes as well as successes, so that other students may be able to benefit from the experience of the author. This work aims to contribute to the process of writing a history of Africa which is centred on the subject position of Africans. Its part is to shed light on the steps whereby this writer was empowered to write her own contribution to the historiography of Sarah Bartmann.

Finally, this thesis attempts to achieve a qualitative epistemological change in the historiography of Sarah Bartmann. If at the end of it the reader is enabled to see and understand Sarah Bartmann as a full human being, who perceived herself as the subject of her own history, rather than as an object of the text, its purpose shall have been achieved.

University of Cape Town

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To all my family who kept the home fires burning while I wrote, and through their living, reminded me of what I was fighting for: Auntie Dinah, Patti, Keni, Ritzuko, Rene, Heinrich, Val, Kweku, Eric and auntie Charlotte, my deepest thanks. To my uncle Tokkie, Herman Freise, who did not live to translate this work into Damara: I once was lost, but now I'm found, uncle!

To my parents, Otilie and Kenneth Abrahams, I owe not only the gift of life but a tradition of African resistance which anchors me firmly in this world.

As this thesis became a biography, I thought that they would be the first to understand if I dedicated it to the memory of Sarah Bartmann, may she rest in peace. Without her, this thesis would also have never been, and I would have been the poorer for lack of knowledge. Thank you, auntie!

Now, as this part of my life-circle moves towards its conclusion, I know that auntie Sarah will be the first to understand when I dedicate this thesis to:

Amee, Ashleigh, Ayaka, Brad, Bianca, Carl, Chad, Darne, Erika, Janice, Kelly,
 Kenneth, Lance, Lauren, Laylaa, Micaela, Nicole, Norah, Otto, Reiki, Robyn, Ryan,
 Shayna and Shu-aib
 who waited patiently for auntie to finish studying;
 to Ashlee and Kara
 who didn't,
 and to all the children of auntie Sarah.
 Now is your time!

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PROLOGUE
THE NATURE OF TIME

"The star woman
the star mother
leads
star child
it runs (comes) out
the man star
comes (runs); he
also brings (leads)
the star child, he
climbs, running
the star mother brings (leads)
the star child
he runs away
he runs
into the clouds."¹



¹. !!Kabbo, translated by Lucy Lloyd in Bleek Collection (Jagger Library) BC 151.A2.1.7. notebook II, no.1, 1871, pp. 215.

If Africanism is to mean anything at all, it must mean to think like an African and to see the world from the point of view of Africa. The continent and its people have a complex and sometimes conflictual history, and there are times and places when it makes more sense to speak of histories, rather than history. Yet, we all acknowledge the reality of a unitary Africa every time we speak of 'African history', practice 'African studies', or travel 'in Africa'. Diversity itself is only a meaningful category in the context of this geographical and cultural unit, Africa - otherwise we might as well speak of 'world history', practice 'world studies' and travel 'in the world'. Even then, to reify 'difference' into an analytical category would force us logically to concede that there is, on the face of it, no reason why we should study Earth as a planet with a unitary history, since conflict, diversity and change are precisely what define the history of the modern world. We would be forced to take the history of the universe as our field. That would be a tempting challenge, no doubt.

I am content to accept the unity of Africa, to be free to answer those troubling questions about what Africa is, who Africans are and what it means to be African. In my own cultural vernacular, one would say : 'Mama Afrika has many children. We are all hers. Our name is Afrika' That each child has an individual personality should in no way obscure the truth of our ancestry. 'Difference' should not be an excuse to avoid critical questions about who we are, were, and want to be. It should be an encouragement. Celebrating my individuality obliges me to construct my Africa, to contribute my sense of African values to Africanist practice. The true test of whether my family, community, nation and continent are cohesive units is the extent to which they empower me to reach my full human potential. It is as an empowered adult that I can best serve these commonalities.

Considering the number of things we do not know about Africa, it seems to me a shame to practice deconstruction at the expense of the telling of untold stories.

When we have more historical biographies of African women than we know what to do with, when reviewers and undergraduates alike groan, 'Oh, my Difference! Not another one!', at the sight of yet another flower of intellectual effort and empirical application, in which achievement shall we then take pride? The necessary deconstructionary housecleaning we had to do simply in order to be able to tell our stories, or the rhythm and the rhyme of the story as it flows uniquely African? We do what we have to do, but we do it knowing that it is necessary, not necessarily an end in itself. It is easier to destroy than to create. The old proverb, 'it takes a hundred years to grow a tree and only a day to chop it down' still rings true. The field of African history has long been suffering from severe deforestation of the post, neo, and colonial sort. We need time to grow new trees!

An understanding of time is obviously fundamental to the study of history. The first question the Africanist historian must then answer is: what is an African understanding of time? For example, African women produce over 75 % of the continent's food, constitute 37 % of the formal labour force, and perform a staggering 66% of their working hours without pay.² Yet, when we come late for meetings, we smile at each other apologetically and mumble 'African time!'. Time in Africa today is subject to the multiple distortions of the neo-colonial economy. It was not always so.

At this distance of years, one can only guess how different the Khoekhoe concept of time was from that which now seems normal. The colonization of time was part of the conquest of Africa. This was observed in the last century by oom !Nanseb \Gabemab (Captain Hendrik Witbooi), who included the colonial concept of time in his sweeping indictment of colonialism:

"Already they settle even on the chief's own home ground without asking permission, and rule the people who belong there by their laws: They forbid them to move freely as they wish, or to enjoy water and grazing; they forbid

². Figures calculated for 1990/1991. UNECA/African Centre for Women, African Women report: Participation of Women in the Economic Sector, 1996, pp. 78, 21, and 68.

them to hunt the game of their own home land; they forbid men to carry rifles; they order their lives with dates and hours; they herd them together outside the town. That is how harsh and unbearable, how incomprehensible and useless the German law is, narrow and uncouth, a bane and oppression of all that is human."³

Imagine a world where the comment 'they order their lives with dates and hours' is a criticism; where observing the hours is not a respected quality but something 'harsh and unbearable... incomprehensible and useless', and of a piece with other cruel behaviour. Witbooi's observation was made in the next to last days of colonial conquest, when most of Africa lay groaning under the yoke, and when what many thought were the last battles were raging in the desert sands of the Namib and the southern Sahara. How much odder must this propensity to divide time have seemed two, three or four centuries ago.

The Witbooi Namas had escaped slavery in the south in the late eighteenth century, but maintained close links with those who had stayed behind. They not only had access to oral traditions of slavery, but knew something of the Christian culture which accompanied it, for if they escaped slavery they did not escape the missionaries. Captain Witbooi was educated by missionaries and learnt the principles of Christian timekeeping from them.

A modern theologian, Reverend Benjamin Witbooi, has pointed out that a division of the day was a key element in the christianization of the Khoekhoe. In the religious ethic taught at missions, the process of dividing the day into hours and observing each division faithfully was imbued with extreme moral values. Failure to observe these divisions came to be regarded as sin. Reverend Witbooi cites a work program for the Genadendal mission in the late eighteenth century:

" Monday: School, then religious instruction, 1. for the children, 2. for the men, 3. for the women, each group apart. In the evening for all baptised members a lesson from the *Idea Fidei Fratrum*. ...

Tuesday: School for the children, and in the afternoon after tea for the women. In the evening a sermon, then singing service. For the missionaries: reading of the Periodical.

³. Hendrik Witbooi to Josef Frederiks, Hoornkrans, 27/6/1892, Heywood, A and E Maasdorp, The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pps. 90-91.

Wednesday: Early in the morning instruction of the candidates for baptism. 9 a.m. religious services for all the children, 3 p.m. for the communicants. In the evening Bible reading for all, then evening prayer for the communicants or, alternatively, for the married couples."⁴

Fitting work in the field and home into such a programme would be found onerous even today. It was no doubt much more so for the Khoekhoe of the eighteenth century, "...given the fact that their days were not compartmentalized before, and a special day for worship never existed."⁵ Like water on a stone, the division of time and its keeping played its part in gradually wearing down Khoekhoe resistance to the colonization of the mind.

Destroying Khoekhoe relationships to their own time was part of colonial dispossession. Reverend Witbooi argues that:

"The Protestant work ethic had to be instilled, and the 'lazy, dirty and backward' Khoikhoi (as they were referred to by most European settlers) had to learn to become productive in a capitalist society. The Khoikhoi who had no concept of the private ownership of land, and whose lifestyle focused on the community and not the individual, had to be transformed. That was essentially the goal of the mission stations."⁶

There were few alternatives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the Khoekhoe of the eastern Cape, mission stations represented an opportunity to escape slavery on the farms. This relative freedom was dearly bought. Hours of liturgical reading may not only have been an assault on the customary senses, but also robbers of time. Both physical time and autochthonous ideas of time were lost by this process. To the Khoekhoe, the imposition of colonialism came to mean a shift from an abundance of time to time so short, it had to be measured.

⁴. Witbooi, Benjamin, The Decline of the Khoikhoi in South Africa - from Freedom to Bondage: The Price of Embracing Mission Acculturated Christianity, MA Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1983, pp. 68, citing Kruger, B The Pear Tree Blossoms, Genadendal, 1966, pp. 86-87.

⁵. Ibid..

⁶. Witbooi, The Decline, pp. 52.

We may measure this loss of time with some exactness. Along with the introduction of the Caledon Code in 1809, which formally subjected the time of farm Khoekhoe to the rule of settler farmers, measures were taken to control the time of mission Khoekhoe as well:

"In an attempt to open the market for cheap labour, taxation was imposed on the Khoikhoi living at the mission stations, while farm labourers were exempted. ...It amounted to eight rixdollars per taxpayer. The average annual income of the inhabitants amounted to twelve to fourteen rixdollars; that meant that two-thirds of their income had to go for tax. The Khoikhoi, therefore, were forced at times to find employment on white farms."⁷

Under capitalism, time is money and money, time. The Khoekhoe worked hard for their money. Two-thirds of Khoekhoe working hours were devoted to maintaining the precarious balance between the official sanction of the 'civilizing mission', and seeing to their family's needs. Khoekhoe men made great sacrifices in order to safeguard the right of their women and children to some freedom. For example, in 1823, a Swedish missionary

"criticized the process by which soldiers were enlisted [into the Cape Corps], and pointed out that whereas farm labourers were exempted, one-third of all men were recruited from Genadendal alone. In short, the government used the stations for the accommodation of the women and children and the sick, but wanted the men either to serve as farm labourers or as soldiers."⁸

The contract which the colonial government gradually imposed on the mission Khoekhoe was to claim the men's time, in exchange for allowing women and children a limited freedom to dispose of their own time. This was deeply resented by the Genadendal missionaries who, when the Khoekhoe were not working, preferred them to devote their time to imbibing the tenets of Protestant religion.

The work of Khoekhoe men speaks loudly. Living conditions on the farms must have been harsh indeed, that the Khoekhoe were prepared to make such sacrifices in order to build their homes on mission station lands. Few things so express the difference between free and slave as the power of others to order your life with dates and hours. When the day suddenly begins to have more work in it than you

⁷. Witbooi, The Decline, pp. 80.

⁸. Witbooi, The Decline, pp. 79, citing Kruger The Pear Tree, pp. 159.

can reasonably do, your time has been colonized. One might venture that if we are to believe that colonialism is over, we still have to decolonize time. This was indeed the advice of Captain Witbooi in 1892:

"Therefore I do not understand what you chiefs could have thought when you surrendered to the Protection of such men! and why I am counseling every one of us to grant no concessions to White men on our lands, and to give them no rights amongst or between us."⁹

'To give them no rights amongst or between us'. Then we should not cede our right to time. Historically, if an understanding of time could change once, it can change again. Since this is to be a history of an African, it is appropriate to seek an Africanist understanding of African time.

Where should we seek this understanding? Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie declares:

"Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them, in the sites and forms in which these voices are uttered? We must seek African women's voices in women's spaces and modes such as ceremonies and songs."¹⁰

This makes the task easy indeed. For in seeking a bridge between past and present understandings of time, we may consider Reverend Witbooi's description of a Khoekhoe ceremony which fairly rings with women's voices:

"The Moon was ... associated with the promise of immortality. Every night when it was the full moon or new moon, the Khoikhoi would sing and dance in worship. During the singing and dancing they would repeat this prayer: 'Be welcome, give us plenty of honey, give grass to our cattle, that we may get plenty of milk....' Later, when the Khoikhoi became Christian, it was observed that at Bethelsdorp they sang hymns outside when there was a full moon, and also danced."¹¹

A Khoekhoe sense of time, at least in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was then related to the cycle of the Moon, ebbing and flowing with the seasons of rain and sunshine. This time would be seasonal and related to the events of nature - winter and summer solstices, punctuated by the regular movements of the moon. It was cyclical and yet unique. Imagine a sense of time grounded on enduring cycles

⁹. Heywood and Maasdorp, Papers, pp. 91.

¹⁰. Ogundipe-Leslie, Molaria, cited in Kulawole, Mary E. Modupe, Womanism and African Consciousness, Africa World press Inc. Asmara, Eritrea, 1997, pp. 9.

¹¹. Witbooi, The Decline pp. 89.

- the movement of moon and sun - yet with a sense of the moment as strong (and as fleeting) as a flower blooming! It would make glorious history.

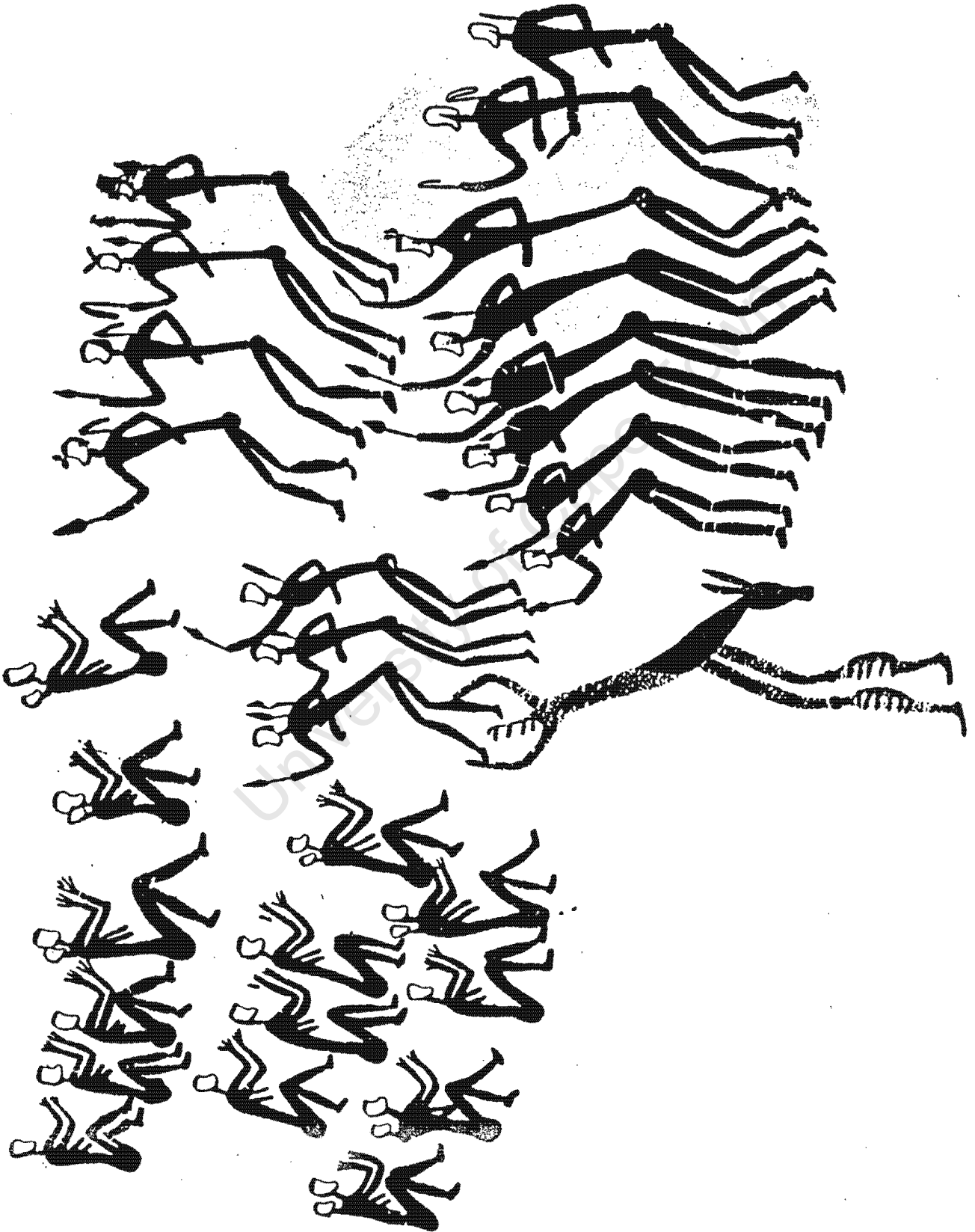
As the Reverend Witbooi explains, a promise of immortality was given by the moon:

"A legend was told that the Moon sent a [mantis] to the Khoikhoi with the message: 'Go to men and tell them, "As I die and dying live, so you shall also die and dying live."'¹²

Khoekhoe time, as expressed in Khoekhoe religious ceremonies, may be summed up as circular and yet uni-directional. The old could not become younger, nor could the young aspire to ancestorhood other than through death. Yet, they certainly had more time. African women of the working classes today, subject to multiple levels of exploitation, would be hard pressed to stay up the whole night every two or four weeks for the purpose of singing praises and dancing. Some do so, though not necessarily for the purpose of praising Spirit. Most are just too tired, or indifferent. In their time, the songs of Khoekhoe women inspired artists to immortalize them.

¹². Witbooi, The Decline pp. 88.

1





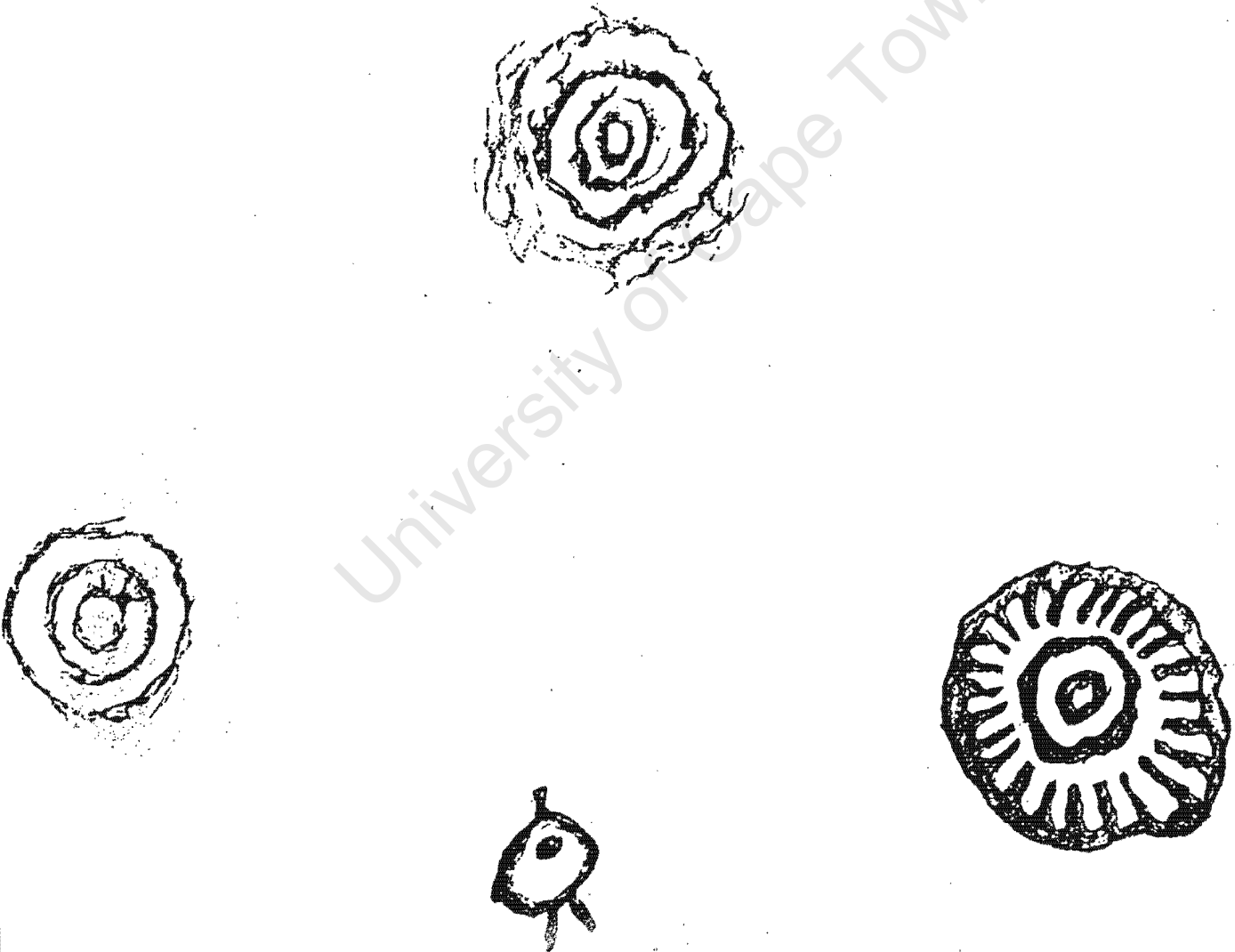
The art of the Khoekhoe gives us some clue to their own ideas of time. Song and dance were above all arts of the moment. The rhythm provided stability, but each step or note had to be performed individually. So we may see a concept of time which is cyclically repetitive, yet which respects the uniqueness of one moment, or one life expressed in their music. It is fitting that the Khoekhoe used the most enduring art of all - rock art - to depict something as fleeting as music.

3



There is no evidence that rock art was ever bought and sold, and indeed, this would have been impractical. As far as is known, the Khoekhoe had time to study, paint, and chip away at rock for the sheer pleasure of it. Certainly, rock art was art for posterity. Mortality must have been of less concern to an African whose art would last for millennia. What message did those artists wish to last? Geometric forms was one of the most loved motifs in rock art. Of these expressions of the circle was paramount.

4



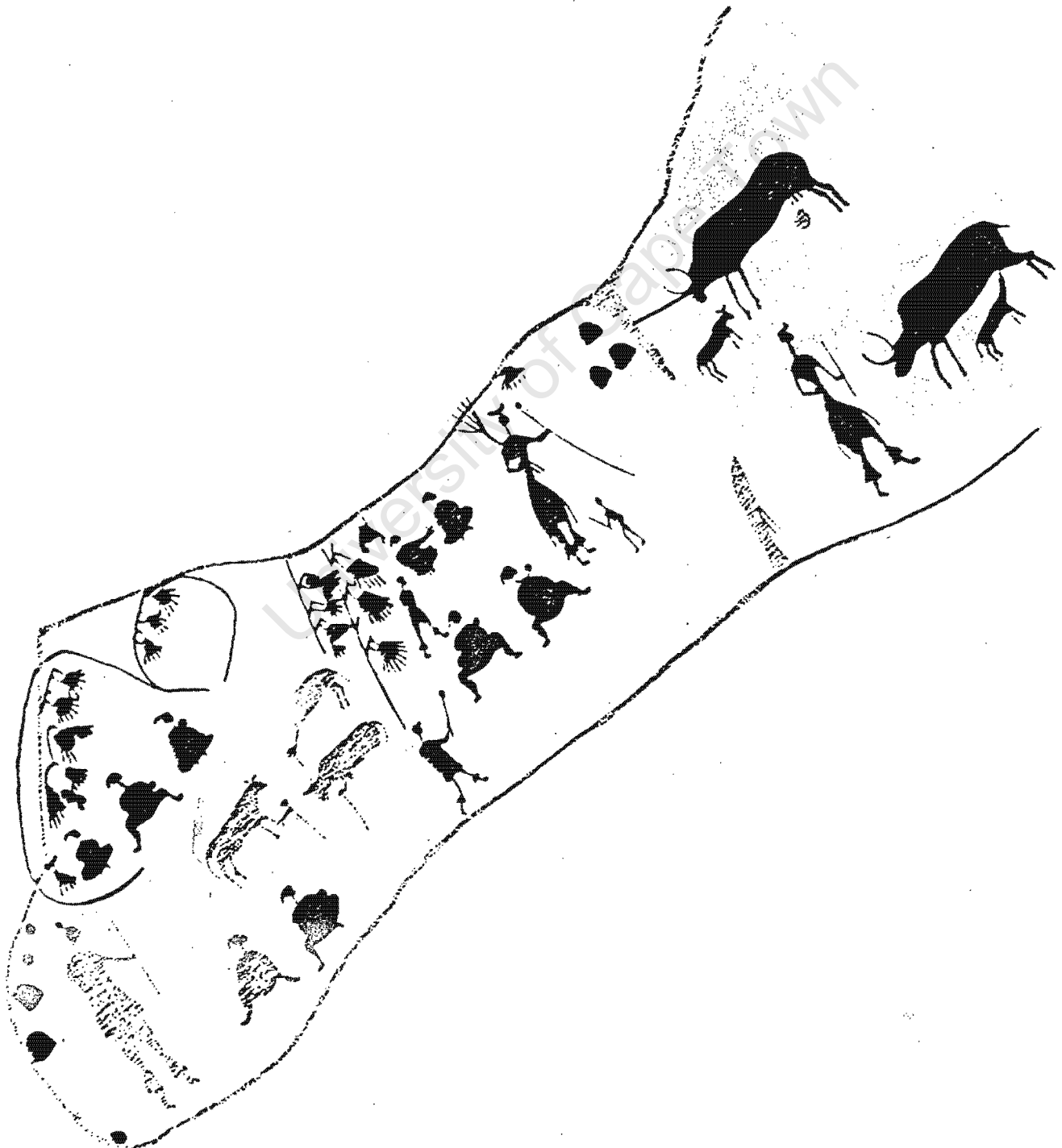
This is not surprising, considering that the Khoekhoe lived in a world without straight lines. There is a sense in which it is a form of colonialism to detach the exquisite compositions from their natural surroundings and present them as black and white tracings on square pieces of paper. Yet even the tracings allow us to appreciate the bare perfection of form and composition with which the Khoekhoe celebrated the uniqueness of the moment.

5



Rock art is landscape painting in a fundamental manner. The Khoekhoe not only situated their art within the landscape, but were fond of depicting landscapes within their art as well. Rock art expressed the circularity in Khoekhoe thinking. The sequence of ideas may be traced from mountain in the world to rock as the basis for art to mountain as painted or engraved.

6



The theme of circularity may be expressed in another way: as 'oneness'. The landscape art of the Khoekhoe included humans as an integral part of the landscape. Humanity had its place in the circle, along with animal, vegetable and mineral people. As may be seen in the elephantine mountain below, the distinction between these categories is deliberately unclear.

7



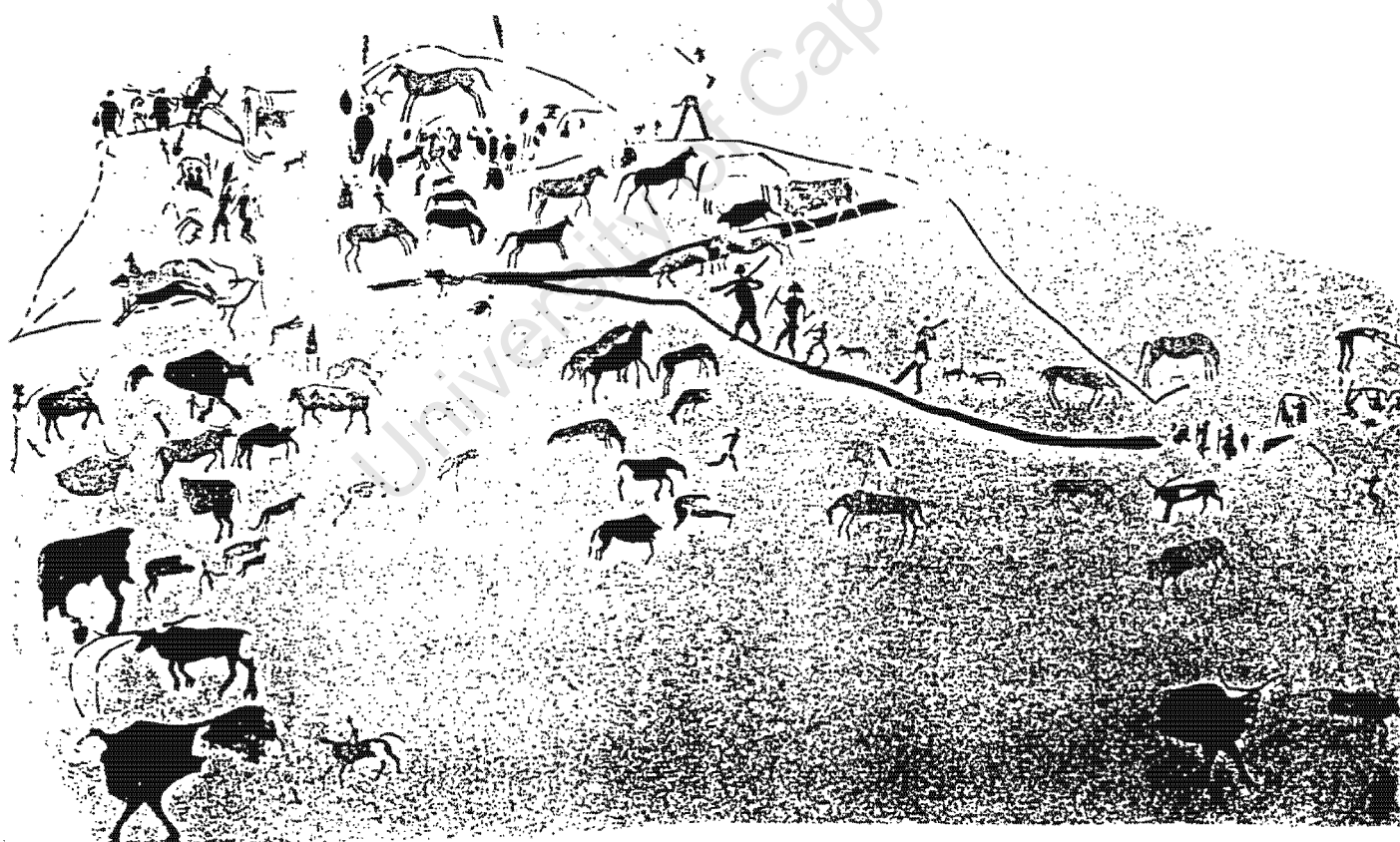
In a landscape filled with rocks of varying shapes and sizes, it would have been possible to choose a rock which accommodated a preconceived design. This suggests that Khoekhoe artists spent a lot of time looking at and thinking of rocks. Their lives must have been a good deal more contemplative than they were to become under colonialism.

8



The Khoekhoe used this leisure to perform what nowadays is considered hard labour: grinding, rubbing and chipping rocks. The fruits of their labour were visions of holism. While the single rock with one engraving was not unusual, it must be borne in mind that the typical composition was large, often filling an entire cave wall. It may not have been the work of one artist, but a collective work, often stretching over generations as new detail was added over old. As much as the meaning of the art may have been altered by its detachment from its natural landscape, it is doing the art a severe disservice to decontextualize it from its artistic context as well.

9



A vision of the past may serve to sharpen our sense of the present. As with rock art, so with one's thinking. In pondering the many, many ways in which it was likely that my mind had been influenced by thinking and working in a white-dominated academic profession built on a Greco-Roman-Judaic-British culture fundamentally alien to that which would have been mine, had I not been colonized, I found the most profound influence upon my mind to be that I had been schooled to approach time as a linear phenomenon. So fundamental was this influence, that it never struck me as odd that I measured time, together with the rest of the world by an arbitrary point in Britain. Cape Town time is measured by its relation to Greenwich Mean Time, not by the rise and fall of the sun in this part of Africa. So colonized was my mind, that I found this natural and normal, rather than as the historical product of colonial political power.

In approaching time as a straight line rather than as a sequence of cycles, each itself forming an arc of a larger circle, I had become alienated from the history I was determined to write. Using a linear concept of time which had been imposed upon my culture from outside, I was writing his-story, rather than my own. The concept of time I had become alienated from has been demonstrated through rock art. It can be explained by analogy with the natural world. As a tree growing completes a cycle of seasons determined by moon and sun, we may call that unit of time a circle, or a year. Those cycles together measure a unique event, a life, composed of a time the tree germinates, a time it grows to fruition and a time to die. Never again will a tree like this tree grow again. Though on the surface the two concepts of time may appear similar, they are fundamentally dissimilar. Sequence is not linearity.

Look at a tree, its circular habit of growth, and see that its relationship to time can be conceived as similar to its relationship to space. It is possible to view time as itself a circle, of which a life cycle is a precisely measurable arc. As a detail of a cave wall itself has meaning, so an African life has meaning. As the meaning of the detail is

changed, and changed again, the more of the wall we see, so the meaning of this life story I tell will change, and change again, as we begin to see the whole history of Africa from an Africanist perspective. The part and the whole become one.

As a small but significant step in decolonizing my work, this work is based on rock art. The art of the Khoekhoe has helped deepen my understanding of time. It will throughout this work be used to define a reference point which we may call 'sanity'. The norms of the Khoekhoe, as expressed in their art, is the rock upon which I stand in deconstructing the stories which have been told about an African woman.

Each detail I have been able to add will add context to our subject, it will enrich, certainly broaden and perhaps change the meaning of the story for us in the end. Each detail I have managed to show to be of no use has prepared the way for more relevant details to be added. As a newer figure was painted above an old on the cave wall, so too does this thesis lay the basis for an African story which may be more appropriate for our lives and times than the ones previously told about some aspects of the African experience.

Sarah Bartmann stands at the centre of Khoekhoe history. She was born free in 1788 and died a slave in 1815. She grew in Africa and died in exile. She endured oppression and fought for freedom. She is the key to understanding the Khoekhoe, for in her life and time she reflects the experiences of a people - and a continent.

The Khoekhoe were great story-tellers. They told each story with a beginning, a middle and an end. As each life formed a part of the Circle of Life, each story formed part of the Great Story of which there is only One.

THIS DAY I CHOOSE TO BEGIN HERE.

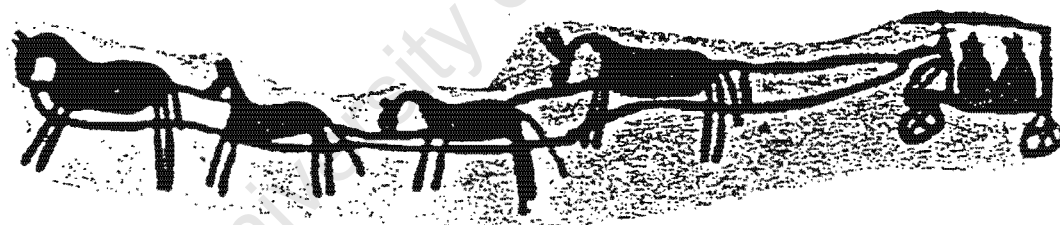
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INTRODUCTION

THE CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF CLEANLINESS

"It began thus. At the time of the first great gathering of chiefs at Gobabis ...I also had gone to Hereroland to look for some oxen which had been left behind. Old father Moses wanted me to go to Gobabis with him, and to look for the oxen from there. But I said *No, I shall go by the great road via Rehoboth*. My old father said *We hear that the Herero are hostile, so don't go alone*. But I said: *Dear Father, it may be so, but I will still take the great road.*"¹¹



¹¹ . Hendrik Witbooi to Reverend Olpp, 3/1/1890, in Heywood, A and E Maasdorp, The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pp. 38.

What do I mean when I say that this thesis is written circularly? I mean that I have placed Sarah Bartmann at the centre of a particular historical experience and written around her everything that I think may be relevant. The radius of this circle is the length of my arm. I have striven with the full reach of my intellect and life experiences to create a work which has Sarah Bartmann at its centre. The purpose of this physical analogy is to explain how it is that the writerly 'I' becomes so evident in an academic thesis. In physical terms, the length of my arm is the very key to the matter.

One of the consequences of a circular methodology is that this volume becomes constructed in such a fashion that you, the reader, may begin with any chapter. Provided that you read sequentially, that is, one chapter after the other, the whole will make sense regardless of where you began reading. If you have chosen to begin here, it is a good place to start. While the reader will get to know me very well in the course of this thesis, this introduction begins the acquaintance by placing my choices in writing this thesis in the context of a personal and collective history. This history took place roughly over the past four generations, mainly in the southwestern Cape, South Africa, and the highlands of central Namibia.

The purpose of this personal history in this chapter is to introduce the concept of cleaning as a metaphor for the work I do here, and explain the multiple cultural ramifications of cleaning in my life and times. As we have seen in the previous chapter, metaphor, analogy and truth are not mutually opposing concepts in Khoekhoe thought. The path to truth may be circuitous, but the final understanding fuller than if I had written this thesis in a linear fashion. With patience all shall be made clear by the end of the circle.

Patricia Hill Collins, in her overarching analysis of the way Black women in the Americas think, argues that domestic work formed the paradigmatic determinant of their thinking:

"Black women's position in the political economy, particularly ghettoization in domestic work, comprised another contradictory location where economic and political subordination created the conditions for Black women's resistance. Domestic work allowed African-American women to see white elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men and from these groups themselves. ... On one level this insider relationship was satisfying to all concerned. Accounts of Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation the women experienced at seeing white power demystified. But on another level these Black women knew that they could never belong to their 'white families', that they were economically exploited workers and thus would remain outsiders. The result was a curious outsider-within stance, a peculiar marginality that stimulated a special Black women's perspective."²

Hill Collins' observation is apt. Many women in Africa have done more than enough domestic work to understand the peculiarities of being an outsider within. African women's experiences, ideas and cultures in urban centres are over-determined by the paradigm of domestic work. The women of my own people, the descendants of the Khoekhoe of southern Africa, have a long history of cleaning up after colonialists, first as effectively slaves and bonded labour, and later as low-wage free labour. Even as they, in the second half of this century, began to work their way out of domestic work into factories, offices, schools and universities, cleaning remained a paradigmatic metaphor for much of our culture and work. Cleaning was the material reality of our lives and history. This is so for working class women, but even amongst the middle-class, many of us are descended from a grandmother or a mother who earned money for school books cleaning white people's houses. Those of us who did not remember this as an exception to the rule. So common was domestic work to Black women of the Cape a generation or two ago that it became noteworthy when a female forebear escaped this occupation.^{1 - 2}

This pattern of work has left its traces on our culture. The insider/outsider stance described by Collins has become part of our oral history. On the one hand, within the legacy of Khoekhoe culture, cleanliness has become a positive value in itself and

². Collins, Patricia Hill, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1990, pp. 11.

a source of fierce pride: "we could be how poor, we washed in cold water, but we were clean!" is a summary comment heard many times from the grandchild of a domestic worker. It reflects both pride in the achievement of humanity in the midst of some very adverse circumstances, and a rejection of a white culture which, in the midst of an affluence and leisure unknown to most of the world, still required the assistance of a Black woman to reach a state of cleanliness.

On the other hand, cleanliness has become a nexus of oppression. It is a dysfunction easily understood in the context of colonialism and slavery: in a world turned upside down, an affected African women could take nothing for granted but the fact that she could neither protect her children nor guarantee their personal safety. The one thing she could attempt to control was the state of her house. It is a dysfunction the more pervasive because (like all dysfunctions) at one level it appealed to material logic: dirty kitchens or dirty children could become infection and disease with frightening rapidity. Certainly, African families could not have survived, much less generated the capacity for resistance, without the constant cleaning, cooking and comforting work of women. Ultimately, of course, the problem causing excessive dirt was poverty and overcrowding, rather than inadequate household hygiene. But, sometimes, there was not much one woman could do about these social factors but keep cleaning. Clean kitchens and clean children became the outward signs of struggle against adverse circumstances, a symbol of sanity and survival in the midst of the madness which was colonialism.

I am heir to this tradition: if there is one thing I do very well, it is to clean. I can remember learning: 'It mustn't just be clean, it must look clean!' This was a morality which was to serve me well in life: it expressed more than the moving of couches to clean corners and the moving of ornaments to dust underneath. There was the careful placing of everything back in its proper place, and the anxious scrutiny to ensure that one's lounge was a place of order, harmony and peace. It is not

surprising that this symbolizes a Black woman's desire amidst the multiple dysjunctures of late capitalism.

Domestic work is not confined to a certain class of Black women. There is, in my community, and not without reason, a very strong hostility to one Black woman using the labour of another outside the family to clean the house. The women I know whose mother or grandmother was a domestic worker are singularly alive to the utter impossibility of establishing human, classless relationships with that person. Also, paid domestic service may cast into doubt the pride just described, and bring with it overtones of adopting white culture and mores. This has resulted in a very strong cultural prejudice: 'I will not have a stranger in my house', is a comment many women make. Nevertheless, women of the steadily working or middle classes who do not have a female relative prepared (or forced, through unemployment) to stay at home and be the 'housewife', will have some form of domestic labourer because it is a workable solution to surviving their multiple oppressions. As producers, African women operate in a working environment which takes for granted the norm that Black women will work twice as hard for half the money. As consumers, they buy in a market where the terms of trade are dictated by monopoly capitalists, who determine the norm that technology is expensive and labour cheap on the African periphery. And as women, they live in a patriarchal culture where African men of any class refuse to do their share. African men uphold a norm which sees household work and personal service coming from a woman as a token of love but, coming from a man, as a token of degradation. In the early days of marriage, working women may manage to combine the two jobs of career and domestic work, but somewhere around the second child, prejudices and resolve alike break down. Domestic work, therefore, offers not only a paradigmatic stance, but also a very direct path into analyzing the oppression of African women within their families and communities.

Colonial dispossession had major implications for the organization of domestic work. Tsitsi Dangarembga describes her heroine's motivation to desire the equivocal pleasures of mission school:

"My books would live in bookcases. It would keep them clean. My clothes would be clean too, without fields and smoke and soot to mess them. Nor would keeping them clean entail a walk to the river, twenty minutes away, washing them on rocks, spreading them on boulders and waiting until they dried before I could go home again. I would be able to keep myself clean too, without too much trouble. According to Nhamo, there were taps right inside the house. ... I could not wait to enjoy these comforts that Nhamo had described to me in patient, important detail. I could not wait to enjoy these consequences of having acquired an education on Babamakuru's part, of being in the process of acquiring one in my case."³

A day on the river washing could, in other times and other places, have been a pleasant occupation for a sunny day. Added to the labour African women were forced to perform simply to eat and be sheltered, it became an onerous burden.

Since the purpose of this excursion into a local history of cleaning is to explain how I arrived at this metaphor, my experience becomes of some importance. In my experience it has become clear that rising into the middle class represents no escape from the nexus. It may offer an escape from cleaning a white man's toilet, but none from picking up your patriarch's socks. Belonging to the middle class may offer an exit from manual labour for African men, but none for African women. The very strong cultural prejudice against hiring a domestic worker remains, in that where they can, the educated women of my community will not allow a live-in arrangement, with its overtones of house slavery. The result is that after hours and weekends, even some women with degrees, cars and properties, will be cooking, bathing children, washing dishes and laundry: in short performing heavy manual labour for free which they would never think of doing for money. As such it should come as no surprise that I, a middle class academic, should find myself thinking of cleaning as a metaphor and as a paradigmatic position for the work I am doing in this thesis. It is a familiar occupation for one of my gender, culture and class.

³. Dangarembga, Tsitsi, Nervous Conditions, Women's Press Ltd., London, 1988, pp. 60-61.

One more function of cleanliness in my culture is as an indication of respect. It is the custom that whenever a mother, or symbolic mother in the sense of a female relative of an older generation, comes to stay for a few days, the house must be subjected to what in the West is called a 'spring cleaning'. This goes far beyond the moving of couches, involving at the very least the washing of windows, walls, curtains and carpets, and on occasion a lick of paint, the replacing of a nail and perhaps even the acquisition of some new furniture. The degree of cleaning may be considered in relationship to the love and respect held for the female relative. It is a wonderful custom, expressing as it does the desire to create peace, order and harmony for the visitor. This custom is perhaps best observed in the breach: where the cleaning has not been done properly it will be said that the elderly female relative 'does not feel welcome'. To let someone feel unwelcome, and that someone a respected elderly female relative, is a terrible thing in my community. It is cause to judge a woman: there may be mutterings of 'whiteyfried', 'got no respect', 'probably thinks she is too good for us' in the remote corners of the parties organized to mark the event of the visit. There is no more severe form of cultural control of adult women in my community, and that is a good thing. No-one will be stripped and pilloried for such an offence.

Pride in the midst of oppression is hard to gain, and cheap at the price of some housework. A woman who lets slip the opportunity may be in need of a gentle nudge. Cleanliness is an expression of emotion, of love and respect. Black women do not get so much love and respect in this world that they can afford to deny it to each other. Colonial dispossession has at times been so efficient that love and respect has been all we had to give one another.

It was not my wish to be Sarah Bartmann's historian. If I had had a choice, I would fulfill my wild desire to be her praise poet, to strew *buchu* leaves before her feet and

anoint the air around her with graceful words and scents.⁴ This was not to be. If I am to be her historian, however, it falls to me to look around at my historiographical house and consider whether it is in a fit and proper state to host her. It is at present a dirty house: sexism all over the floor, racism fouling up the bathroom and a nasty stench of rotting class society emanating from the kitchen sink. The floor is strewn with objectifying pictures of naked African women, and nothing can be served but weak excuses. The front door hangs crazily on its hinges, creaking, with every wind that blows, the question 'is there still such a thing as history'? It is not a house into which any Black woman will feel welcome, least of all an aged female relative of the symbolic sort.

Still, it is my historiographical house. My education has been an expensive one. Between my ears there nestles the symbolic equivalent of a fair-sized house in an expensive suburb of Cape Town. Besides, I love the theory and practice of history. The art of providing us with an understanding of where we came from and how we came to be here, the careful crafting of a story in the context of its time and place, the leisure to think, to understand and to challenge is a great privilege. It is worth some cleaning.

This thesis has become the cleaning process. It reflects both an ambition to write an Africanist history of an African, and an inherited dysfunction of cleanliness unto the point of obsession. Both are extremely strong forces propelling me in the same direction. My wish remains to write a biography of Sarah Bartmann in accordance with my customs and tradition. But I cannot work in a dirty house.

The choice is simple: a dirty lounge and weak excuses for tea, or love, respect, pride and hope? It is not hard to decide that there shall be a house into which Sarah

⁴. Buchu is the Khoekhoe name of a herb (*agathosma crenulata/betulina*) and by extension also the name of an aromatic powder made by dried and crushed herbs. The word may be used also for a variety of cosmetic and medicinal preparations.

Bartmann can safely enter, up unto the *buchu* leaves strewn before the front door and a rose-scented lounge in which she may feel comfortable enough to stay and talk.⁵ The metaphorical teatowels shall be spotless and the bathroom, a triumph of Black woman's working power over very adverse circumstances. I once lived in a garage, and my coffee tables were plastic milk crates covered with cloth. But it was a clean garage. So should this thesis be!

First, I construct my theoretical mop and broom. A bucket and cloth is also necessary, as well as cleansing unguents aplenty. Chapter One sets key definitions. It presents the epistemological position that the experience of a community is the key to the building of theory which can interpret the world for this community and provide workable solutions for the future. It introduces womanist theory. Womanist theory emphasizes personal experience as the logical starting point for analysis, and chapter one provides a methodological discussion for interpreting this form of evidence. Womanism is a body of theory constructed largely by Africans of the diaspora. In Chapter One I bring the theory home and try to demonstrate its relevance to contemporary African problems. It is a good time for African womanism, and cleaning a necessary purpose.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four all consider various aspects of the history of Sarah Bartmann. They cannot constitute a conventional biography, since a biography is a story centered around the life of a subject. A biography should have an autonomous existence determined by the necessities of the story. It should not be determined by the prejudices of the uninformed. A biography of an African written by an African, in particular, should be rooted in a conceptual world resting in spirit upon this continent. This is not the case here. These chapters are instead reactions to the

⁵. The rose-geranium (*pelargonium graveolens*) is an indigenous plant, the essential oil of which is today used world-wide as an ingredient for perfumes and potpourri's.

existing non-African-centred historiography. Their purpose is to try to set the record straight on specific aspects of Sarah Bartmann's life.

I have used the metaphor of cleaning to explain the work I do in this thesis, and in the context of cleaning Chapters Two, Three and Four can best be described as attempts to find a leg to stand on. Although much cleaning work has to be done on your hands and knees, there comes a time when you have to stand up. A leg or two to stand on are most useful at such times. These chapters represent my efforts to create a discursive space from which to critique the historiography of Sarah Bartman. Each of these attempts are flawed in some way. Although I have created a discursive space in these chapters, it remains defined by the preceding historiography. The space can best be described as an anti-space. It is not a self-defined space and can therefore not provide the necessary starting point for a biography of Sarah Bartman which would be fully liberatory to African women. A discursive space which is defined in antipathy to existing ones is still defined by them, if only in a negative sense. The leg you stand on needs to be strong. It cannot be defined by others, for that weakens you.

Nevertheless I have included these chapters. They allow me to clean in bits and pieces, to get an idea of the size and nature of the job, to set the historiography straight on key issues, to peer into awkward corners and offer some much needed empirical corrections. They may be considered the 'hands and knees' part of scrubbing. They may also prove useful to other scholars faced with the task of cleaning up their historiographical houses, and perhaps aid in shortening their particular labours.

The symbolism of cleaning on hands and knees captures a central contention of this thesis, namely that I as a human being have been handicapped by the effects of colonialism. It follows that I as a historian have been handicapped by those

particular expressions of academic colonialism which together constitute the historiography of Sarah Bartmann. A word on my definition of this concept: 'historiography' in this volume has been interpreted broadly. Few of the authors who have written about Sarah Bartmann have in fact been historians. A study of Sarah Bartmann has of necessity to adopt multidisciplinary as its guiding principle. My working practice can best be described as a unity of subject - the histories of Sarah Bartmann - combined with a multiplicity of approaches based on the historical method. I have found the historical method has yielded well to the demands placed on it. This should not be surprising since history, in itself, is a multi-disciplinary subject. Economic history, political history, the history of identity and social forces, and the history of resistance, are all subjects which have been united by a methodological approach. But the practice should be allowed to speak for itself.

I have not included every single academic reference to Sarah Bartman, indeed, such a task would be a bibliographical feat best attempted by a specialist. The criteria on which the pieces I have chosen to include have been selected are as follows:

- 1: the article or chapter must have either contributed to the rediscovery of, or have significantly kept academic attention focused on, the Sarah Bartman story;
- 2: or have been informed by a specialist knowledge of South African or Khoekhoe history;
- 3: or have added new empirical research to our existing knowledge.

In terms of these criteria, the body of knowledge defined as the historiography of Sarah Bartman presents certain specific racial and gendered characteristics. It is dominated by whites, who are mainly males. No other Black woman has written an article or chapter dealing solely, or in the main, with Sarah Bartman (although this will no doubt soon change). The Black women I have cited have often written no more than the paragraph cited, or at the most perhaps a page or two. This is not surprising. To take on the historiography fully, and to redefine it in terms of a body

of scholarship where race and gender are primary tools of analysis, requires a lengthy study. This is the first extended study written by a Black woman, from a theoretical stance developed by Black women. Small wonder then, that at the outset I felt somewhat disempowered.

Now, these are great disabilities. For a historian to be unable to cite either precedent or tradition is problematic. But one cannot accept that the disadvantages are permanent and incurable. In Chapter Five I begin to consider the chief impediments to empowerment and, inevitably, start with the question of language. The chapter contains a brief linguistic history and explains the linguistic experiments which take place in this thesis. Chapters Two and Six are perhaps the most daring ventures into a different language in this work. Both must stand as experiments which were necessary to undertake. At times, it is the venture itself which matters.

Personal cleanliness is fundamental to the cleansing process. Although my headscarf is faded and my clothes old, they must be clean! The symbolic equivalent is a clean mind in a healthy body. Chapter six attempts many things. It goes back over the previous chapters and places them in my social and economic context at the time. It describes my changing relationship to the historiography of Sarah Bartmann. It is the visible sorting of a disorderly mind, and also a resistance polemic in the style of what Ifi Amadiume has called *Nzagwalu* literature:

"(*Nzagwalu* is a Igbo word meaning answering back - when you have suffered an insult you need to answer back.) There is now a need for consolidating a dialogic literature, as this compels statements, propositions, responses, conversation, and therefore a dialogic library. A dialogue necessitates the existence of more than one view. A dialogue exposes the ground on which we are standing - that is, the partiality of our position/theory on specific issues."⁶

Chapter Six argues that the history of Sarah Bartmann has suffered insult. As this history is also part of my history and the history of my people, we have suffered

⁶. Amadiume, Ifi, Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture, Zed Books, London, 1997, pp. 4.

insult. This chapter answers back. It creates a dialogic response which exposes the partiality of a theory grounded in my identity as a Black woman, and a self-identified Khoekhoe descendant. Womanism, although it seeks answers for the whole world, does not claim to be other than a theory by and about Black women. As Hill Collins writes:

"The insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one protesting the technical accuracy of an image ... to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself. ... When Black women define ourselves, we clearly reject the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so."⁷

Womanism is a theory of, about, and for, a self-named identity of Black women. Womanism seeks to resist the oppression of being defined as Other by others in theory and in practice. This act is by its nature an act of resistance. As such it provides a strong basis for the kind of resistance polemic Amadiume considers necessary to the development of African studies.

A womanist resistance polemic provides the escape from post-modernist excesses in anti-essentialist navel-meditation. The reality of material exploitation and oppression forces us to concede that the world is real. Historically, the lash of the whip, the bite of hunger, the endless expanse of floor awaiting the mop, are fundamental parts of Black women's experience and history which do not allow the denial of the existence of essence. The necessity of resistance forces us to accept that the world we wish to change exists sometimes independent of our cognitive capacity - if the world could be changed by a wish we would be free already. The epistemological trap of identifying self with the world is only open to those who claim a race, class and gender identity which literally owns the world. It is not open to those whose history includes the experience of not even owning themselves.

⁷. Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, pp. 106-107.

Many facets of post-modernism have proved useful to African womanists, especially to literary critics.⁸ Ideas of the social construction of knowledge, and of the process of knowledge creation itself as a terrain of struggle, lie close to the heart of womanism. However, post-modernist excesses do not. For all its emphasis on ideology as a critical constituent of identity; on the necessity of decolonizing the mind as part of the process of decolonizing the continent, African womanism is not a retreat into the subjective. A resistance polemic grounded on womanism should not be confused with a denial of the real. If we were to deny all distinction between the material and the symbolic, we would lose all the challenge of exploring their interconnections.

Chapter Six is a dialogue with the historiography. Chapter Seven distils the lessons of this experience. It reaches towards an autonomously defined standpoint, based less on a critique of the historiography, than on my own historical experience. It details three experiences in the history of my people. The survival wisdom gained from these experiences is then used to analyze both the oppression and the resistance of Sarah Bartman. While falling far short of a biography, Chapter Seven represents an autonomous space to write the history of a Khoekhoe based on the historical experience of the Khoekhoe. It is a leg to stand on which is my own.

Chapter Seven discusses what we can learn from Sarah Bartman's resistance. Womanism requires that the knowledge gathered from the consciousness of a community be returned to that community in the form of a practical guide to everyday living and a path to liberation in the future. It is an activist philosophy which considers revolutionary practice the ultimate truth-test. Chapter Seven therefore proposes a theory which has immediate practical implications. It goes as far as the story can be taken in the context of this thesis.

⁸. Cf. Baderoon, Gabeba, Post-modernism and Womanism, First African Womanist Workshop in Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 1998.

As I go to make hot water and put the oil and lye on to boil, I leave upon this thought: it is impossible to write a thesis on Sarah Bartmann and not demand that she be granted the same respect that the early *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* accorded their dead over a hundred thousand years ago. The idea that modern man should have a need to treat the bodies of the dead with disrespect, all in the name of 'science' and 'progress', is so preposterous as to need no deconstruction. Our post-1994 South African constitution was dearly bought. Now, it guarantees everyone's human right to dignity and sanctity of life. Sarah Bartmann must be returned to her native land, there to be buried with respect according to her religious rites. Anything less is simply not enough.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER ONE
WE'RE HERE BECAUSE WE'RE HERE...
SPEAKING AFRICAN WOMANISM

"Be cheerful and patient, and if you die, die with the Lord, and in the Lord. Bury one another and do not pine for us men. For it is the same with us here; we too have to die and bury one another or be eaten by animals and crows. The great work still has to be done. The return of your men does not stand in my power, or in theirs, but in the hand of the Lord alone. Therefore I say: Pray for yourselves, pray for us, and pray for the work we are doing."¹



¹. Captain Witbooi to Chief of Provisions Klaas Lebe, 1/9/1890, in Heywood, A and E Maasdorp, The Hendrik Witbooi Papers, National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pp. 61-62.

The title of this chapter stems from an old slave song from the Cape, which is immediately meaningful perhaps only to the descendants of slaves and survivors of genocide. We were not even supposed to be alive, or to be born as self-respecting individuals, yet we are still here to be a scourge to our enemies and a support to our friends. To be here is worth celebrating!

Womanism is a theory which emanates from this history, and which self-consciously aims to make history. It is a reaction to the negation and silencing of Black women, a theory and praxis which enables Black women to speak. It is a wonderful thing to speak African womanism.

Womanist theory and practice plays a large part in this thesis, so it is proper to introduce it here. This chapter begins by contextualizing womanist theory in African realities. It goes on to provide a glossary of key terms, explain the theoretical underpinnings of womanism and present its historical background. It argues that womanism is the key to creating a revolutionary theory which will liberate African women as female members of a conquered people. Lastly, it places the historiography of Sarah Bartmann in the context of womanist concerns.

The oppression of women is an issue which Africans have to take very seriously. It lies at the heart of African liberation. All too often, African men measure their degree of empowerment by the degree of power they hold over African women. For some, this may be readily explained by reference to the emasculating effects of colonialism. An explanation, however, is not the same as an excuse. There can be no excuse for the oppression of your mother, aunt, wife, sister, daughter or niece. Yet this oppression is generally endemic to Africa today. Writing in Uganda, Christine Obbo presents a frightening picture of African married life:

"By their utterances and lifestyles the majority of women in this study demonstrated the importance of their own integrity in doing what they thought was good for them individually and not what men dictated. However, even in societies with an urban tradition like the Yoruba, men were still

concerned about women getting out of control. The economic emancipation which broadens a woman's decisionmaking power seems to take a psychological toll on men.

...The central issue is economic autonomy. The men viewed this as a zero-sum game in which women acquired economic autonomy while the men lost control over the women. If a man cannot control the woman's money directly, he can at least devise all sorts of ways to spend the money that women earn, pretending to be short of money all the time or making a wife feel that any money earned is indirectly due to the husband who brought them to town in the first place"²

How, out of social relations such as these, is a liberatory struggle going to arise? Husbands lie to wives, control defines conjugal relationships instead of love, men deprive women of family resources and indeed of their very claim to adulthood as fit and proper stewards of family wealth. If I had to hear of a community organization in which these relations existed, I would not give that organization a chance of making a difference. But the African family is the foundation of our resistance. As much as it is the site of oppression for women, it has also been the nurturing ground for revolutionaries. It is small wonder that our African revolutions have been so contradictory. For as long as African women are disempowered within their families, communities, and continent, the struggle for African freedom is being deprived of over half its human energy. For as long as African men and women spend their time fighting one another, African unity is a practical impossibility.

Inequality of power within the household is now the fundamental force holding back African liberation. Not only does it disempower African women, but it also means that African men, who should be devising means to roll back the shackles of physical, financial and mental colonialism, spend their time maintaining this inequality of power. From her Kenyan study, Machera describes African family life in the 1980s and 1990s as a battlefield more than as a nexus of affective relations:

"My childhood model of an ideal family was shattered one year after our elder sister married a man she loved deeply. It was during my school mid-term break and in the usual 'African' manner of just 'popping-in without warning', I decided to pass through my sisters' place and spend a couple of days with

².Obbo, Christine, African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence, Zed Press, London, 1980 pp. 151.

them. After all I had not visited since the wedding and she had had a baby as well. Little did I know then that I was in for a rude shock and that this was going to become one of the most traumatizing moments of my life. Evidently, my sister was very sick, in bed, with a black eye, swollen face, torn upper lip and a raw backside apparently from kicks, blows and whips from her husband of one year. I could not understand what a human being could have done to deserve such brutality, least of all from a husband. I was soon going to learn more about 'intimate violence' in my own marriage. I have also talked with my friends (both women and men) and it seems that violence permeates most conjugal relationships.³

Raw physical power is a factor in subjugating African women. The oppression of women is maintained by the simple expedient of brute force. However, economic forces have much to do with rendering women powerless to resist this violence. African women constitute the majority of the continent's poor, and control a minute proportion of the continent's property. In questioning why victims of abusive relationships do not simply walk away, it is easily forgotten that often African women simply cannot afford to.

It should also not be forgotten that the colonization of the mind has succeeded. One of the most difficult issues which African women's movements have to confront is the reality of women passing on oppression to other women. Often, this oppression occurs between people who should hold one another dear, like mother and daughter. In her case study of the African highlands, Njiro points out that factors such as gender and age, rather than the closeness of the affective relationship, determines access to the most fundamental goods:

"Analysis of intrahousehold food distribution revealed a situation of contradictions where women who are involved in all processes of food production, processing and cooking, are malnourished. Household food is unequally distributed. This distribution is done in such a way that it proportionately favours men over women, adults over children, boys over girls. The notable irony is that it is women who are experts at production yet allow themselves to go hungry."⁴

These are the facts confronting any would-be liberators of Africa. Malnourished women will bear malnourished children. While male children may have a chance to rectify this early shock to the system by adequate nourishment later in life, the female children of the poor may well experience life-long malnourishment and

³. Machera, Mumbi, The Violent Home: A Study of Violence in the Kenyan Family, Seminar presented to the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town, October 1998, pp. 4.

⁴. Njiro, Esther, "Human Development in the African Mountains", Social Dynamics 24:1, 1998, pp 17.

hunger, with severe consequences for their intellectual and physical development. Malnourishment also symbolizes the deprivation of human affection, love and respect. Learning from the adults around them, girl-children can internalize this lack of love, and pass it on to the next generation of women. The waste of human potential is simply frightening. As for those strong, powerful, African men who allow the flesh of their flesh to starve while they eat, it brings shame on their ancestors.

In this discussion of gender relations in Africa, it is obviously not suggested that this is a picture of all Africans. Indeed, African scholarship has not come so far as to begin to estimate or quantify the scale of the problems, and any wild guesses at this time would miss the point. It is wrong that any African household should be like this. It keeps us all enslaved. A revolution which depends on the male, the rich and the well-fed for its success, is not going to get very far.

Womanism poses a set of solutions to the twin problems of theoretical analysis and activism on these issues. It reaffirms African solidarity, both in Africa and in the African diaspora, while pointing out the hollowness of a solidarity which relies on the oppression of African women for its continuance. Womanism, by positing woman's liberation as an African issue, creates a unique space for African women's voices. For in their concern for family, community, nation and continent, African women are light-years ahead of their male compatriots. They will not be held back by their menfolk for ever.

Womanism is a theory which defines race, class and gender as mutually constitutive categories of analysis. The meaning of 'mutually constitutive' is perhaps best illustrated by example, and a number of examples will be given here. First, key definitions need to be set. A womanist theory rests on womanist language, and a womanist language is constructed through experience and struggle. The glossary

which follows is rooted in the historical experience and the legacy of resistance which is mine.

Black is not a colour, it is a race. Race is a social construct based on physical difference. Here, I do not mean to introduce any false distinctions about reality. The social construct is real, as real as the range of genetic variation in the human species. Race is the social construct which assigns meaning to this variation in such a way that it groups those differences into white and Black; and assigns negative or positive cultural values to the grouped differences. Genetic variation is a normal part of any species' development. Race is a product of our history, and shall be deconstructed by that same history one day.

A derivation of the word 'race' is racism. The mere definition of the word 'race' does not amount to racism. Racism is a set of attitudes and social mores which devalue one race in order to empower another, as well as the material power to deploy those values in the devaluation or destruction of the lives of the devalued race. Therefore those at the receiving end of racism cannot be racists. They may develop counter-values which despise racists, but precisely because of racism, they lack the material power to implement those values.

If white supremacy is the thesis, Black is the antithesis. It is an effort to construct grouped variations in such a way that shared oppression becomes joint resistance. Racial oppression, that is to say, the systematic oppression of human beings on the basis of socially constructed meanings of group differences, is the very foundation of being Black. The SASO-BPC constitutions define Black as follows:

"Black people are those who have been politically oppressed, economically exploited and socially discriminated against as a group, because of the colour of their skin."⁵

⁵. South African Student's Organization, 1969, Black People's Convention, 1972. No written copy of this constitution has been found.

The reference to oppression, exploitation and discrimination underlines the importance of social constructs, while the phrase 'because of the colour of their skin' underlines the fact that white people based the construction of colonialism, slavery and genocide on the existence of heritable physical characteristics. Without that phrase we could equally well be talking about class oppression, a form of oppression certainly rooted in material reality but unrelated to skin colour. Black is the self-definition of those determined to end this oppression. This definition is denoted by the capital 'B' in Black, to distinguish the race from the colour.

If this is the definition of Black, then it follows that 'white' can be written as the opposite: white people are those who politically oppress, economically exploit, and socially discriminate against others as a group, because of the colour of the oppressed group's skin. Whites are not born, they are made. This is the usage which will be followed throughout this thesis.

If Black is the anti-thesis to oppression, where then is the autonomous, self-generated source of Black pride? Black people know that we are more than the sum of our oppression and of our resistance to oppression. I myself find my centre in Africa, for it is to my African heritage that I owe the physical characteristics which group me under the category 'Black', as well as the culture of resistance which enables me to be proud of who I am. So it is with apologies to the Black Dravidians, the First Nation Australians and all the other Black native peoples of the world that in this thesis, the words 'Black' and 'African' are used interchangeably. From my position in the world they mean the same thing.

'African' is not the citizenship of a continent. It is a heritage and a consciousness.

The PAC constitution of 1959 defines African as follows:

"African people are those who are descended from Africans, and who owe allegiance only to Afrika".⁶

⁶. This is the version of the constitution preserved in oral history.

'Descent': the irreducible essence, 'owe allegiance': the social construct, and the centrality of individual choice. One cannot just be born African. We create allegiance to Mama Afrika through our personal choices, our telling of history and our actions in the present, that is, in the history we make for our descendants. It is an old PAC usage to designate the continent, Africa, and her soul, Afrika. This is a fine distinction which is useful in understanding where we came from and who we want to be. Afrika is a state of mind and a political choice. Afrika is a celebration and a source of power.

Africa is a product of history. Its recent history can be summed up in a word: colonialism. Pan-Africanism itself is a product of this history. Colonialism and capitalism created the conditions under which it flourished. The murder, enslavement and dispossession of many Africans, regardless of tribe or clan allegiance, brought home to them the necessity of forming larger allegiances. What became uniquely farsighted about this response to colonialism in Africa was the growth of a movement which saw beyond alliances based on neocolonial state boundaries (as defined by the Berlin Convention of 1885) to inspire a continental ideology, striving towards a common spirit. For Africans, despite all their bewildering variety of custom and belief, are capable of being united by their history.

Divide and rule is the maxim of any oppressive system, and a racist colonialism has sometimes attempted to create variety where there is none, or has attempted to create social meaning out of existing differences. The action of race in the world is two-fold: it unites Black people with one another and divides them from the white ~~master~~-race. It provides a sense of unity with millions of people, and a sense of disunity with people with whom one may be in close contact. We cannot walk away from hundreds of years of history. The meaning which lies in my Black skin does not disappear simply because it has become inconvenient in the construction of a neo-colonial nation. Neither does the meaning of the skin colour of those who for

generations have benefited from white supremacy, disappear. These differences cannot be wished away, nor shall they disappear as long as race defines significant differences in culture, life-chances and material outcome.

Most, if not all, systems of white supremacy seek to undermine this fundamental unity of oppression and disunity with those who oppress by introducing a scale of racial values. Lighter-skinned Black people will be accorded an intermediate place in the racial hierarchy, similar to the position of the middle-class in the capitalist value system. The function of this racial scale is to undermine the unity of Black resistance. In South Africa, there was introduced in the late nineteenth century, and more forcefully under segregation and apartheid, the category 'coloured', a variant of the previous colonial category 'bastard', and meaning exactly the same thing. The sheer contempt embodied in this historical term demonstrates quite clearly the place which coloureds were to hold in the value system of white supremacy. Destined never to rise to the level of their white masters, coloureds were expected to eschew Black solidarity and yet accept that they would never rise to the level of the white man, either ontologically or materially. Unlike other systems of 'colourism', such as that in the Caribbean, the identity 'coloured' in South Africa was not one of choice.⁷ During the forced racial classification drives of the late fifties and early sixties, people with the requisite phenotype were classified regardless of their will. The identity document, which by law all adults were forced to carry, determined this classification based on the opinion of the classifying official. Personal choice was never at issue.

The people who came to be classified coloured were many things, but they were not stupid. To rise slightly above the generality of Black people may have proved tempting, were it not for the fact that coloured classification doomed them to remain far below the most uncultured white. Moreover, the meagre rewards of coloured-

⁷ The term 'colourism' is from Mama, cf Mama, Amina, Beyond the Masks: Race Gender and Subjectivity, Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 143.

dom could never make up for the loss of their historical rights, or even for the equal rights they were being denied. How the constructors of apartheid ever expected people to accept a position of permanent inferiority is an interesting question. They must have believed their own racist myths.

If coloured is the thesis then Brown is its antithesis: a reaction to the racism forced upon a group of people on the basis of an observable phenotype, rooted in a political tradition as old as colourism itself. One heir to this intellectual tradition is the !HCM's definition of Brown:

!HCM's definition of Brown:

"Brown people are those who are descended from the Khoikhoi (or Mens-Mens) and the slaves brought here from St Helena and the Indian Ocean Islands, as well as from elsewhere in Africa; who share a common history, culture and identity and pledge their allegiance solely to their Khoikhoi ancestors; and who, because of their identity and history, have been deprived of their birthright, namely their right to land, culture and freedom."⁸

Again, we see the importance of descent, qualified by a multitude of social constructs : 'a common history, culture and identity', as well as the centrality of individual choice: to 'pledge their allegiance'. Brown is not a colour, it is an identity. We are every shade of brown, from freckled almond to polished ebony, from shining jet to burnished copper; we are gleaming gold to ivory sheen and everything in between. Anything else would be odd in the descendants of slaves.

If Brown is an identity which reacts to a particular history of oppression - the anti-thesis to 'coloured' - then Khoekhoe is the act of self-naming. As with Black and African, I use the terms Brown and Khoekhoe interchangeably. To me they mean the same thing: the possibility of choice, the power of action, and the act of turning a legacy of oppression, in this case colonial land dispossession and slavery (as signified by 'Brown'), to a self-named centre of cultural autonomy: Khoekhoe.

Khoekhoe are defined as the native southern Africans. 'Native' in this context means much more than the simple chronological fact of being here first. What does it mean

⁸. Constitution of the !Hurikamma Cultural Movement, 1995, clause 1.

to be a culture and a people who live on the same land for millennia? What does it mean to refrain from developing a culture and a people which expands, until eventually it takes other people's land and culture? It stands to reason that First Nations people are distinct by virtue of more than the simple fact of long-standing geographical continuity of residence. They are also people who have created, and are creating, a history of choosing not to be colonizers.

The term 'Khoekhoe' is used here to include both those whom a non-African anthropology has defined as hunter-gatherers, and those defined as herders. There is no justification either in the historical records, or in my oral tradition, to make any such systematic distinction between First Nations people in southern Africa. I used to use the term 'Khoisan' to denote this, but always found it a clumsy invented academic portmanteau term, whose meaning was nonsensical in the indigenous language. The word 'Khoekhoe' came about to accommodate the criticisms of my uncle, my mother and my aunt, who all pointed to the importance of the root word: 'Khoe' or 'Ghwe' (sometimes 'Khwe', or 'Khoi' further south), meaning 'person'. When the elders speak unanimously, it is foolhardy to persist in opposition. Therefore Khoekhoe, people of people or in English, human beings.

These definitions have arisen from a history of struggle. The organizations which discussed and debated these definitions did so out of the need to create an identity based politics which defined clearly who was the enemy and who had the potential to be a friend. These movements opposed nineteenth and twentieth century scientific racism with positive definitions of oppressed identities. Scientific racism, on the other hand, stemmed from an epistemology which defined reality as wholly objective and wholly knowable. This epistemology was sublimely oblivious to the complexities introduced by a subjective scientist trying to know reality. Scientific racism defined the various genotypes as constituting genetically distinct races, a concept which has been convincingly debunked by modern writers. In opposing

scientific racism, however, it is important not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. While we cannot draw the lines between various clusters of human genetic configurations in such a way that they will constitute separate races in a biological sense, it remains a fact of life that genetic configurations do cluster. They do this because of a multitude of subjective choices which people have made regarding the meaning they assign to these configurations, as well as with whom to reproduce. This has resulted in a reality in which some people look more like one another than others.

On this biological reality, the white intellectuals of the post-Enlightenment period built a set of social constructions which we refer to as scientific racism. Scientific racism in turn formed the justification for social constructs which deprived a set of people with certain genotypical characteristics of subjective choice. We may refer to this set of constructs as land theft, genocide, and slavery. Slavery and colonialism have no doubt done much to bring certain genetic clusters closer to each other in a biological sense. Yet, they have simultaneously managed to broaden the chasm between two sets of people - the colonizer and the colonized - in such a way that the increasing genetic closeness has been completely outweighed by the social construct. So 'race' today is certainly a concept in which the social construct is more important than the biological essence; that is to say, it has greater force of causation. Nonetheless, this would not justify us in claiming that race is purely social in nature. To do so would be to ignore not only the historical development of the concept but also the consciousness of Black people today. 'Mama Afrika, they took me away from you, Mama, long before I was born', laments the singer Peter Tosh. 'Africa's inside me, taking back her child, giving me my pride and setting me free' exult Arrested Development. 'Word to the Motherland', say POC.⁹ The position of the movements I have cited is that everything is not a text. The idea of race as a purely

⁹. Peter Tosh, "Mama Afrika", *Mama Afrika*, EMI Records, 1993; Arrested Development, "Africa's Inside Me", Chrysalis Records, 1992; Prophets of the City, "Roots", *Our World*, Teal Trutone Music, 1990.

invented construct is nonsensical in the context of the liberation struggle. The freedom fighters who were and still are imprisoned for the causes of Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness are sitting behind iron bars, not texts. Our many heroes, men and women, who confronted the possibility of dying in the struggle, knew well that their lives were more than a social construct. To lay down the breath of your body for an ideal is to be profoundly aware of the material nature of reality.

In this tradition, I consider reality to be constituted of both the essence and the social construct. This is a womanist position. Tuzyline Allen describes womanism as "[r]esolutely idealistic and essentialist...", and the criticism, though contradictory, is also apt.¹⁰ Womanist practice must demonstrate our ability to use the tension between the material and the symbolic to speak to our position in the present and create a liberatory future.

I treasure an old-fashioned belief in the truth - I believe reality exists, that it consists of a complex interplay between the objective and the subjective, and I believe it to be fully knowable, if not always by myself. The Pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness Movements of Azania were organizations dedicated to both material transformation and spiritual revolution. The history of resistance created by these movements demonstrates clearly that the decolonization of the mind and the land were processes only separable conceptually. That this conceptual distinction was often necessary for purposes of strategy did not obscure the fact that, for these movements, the two levels were united in revolutionary practice.

Knowing this, it is ironic that the arguments which were used to debunk scientific racism are now being deployed against its chief victims. Houston Baker warned us of this:

¹⁰. Allan, Tuzyline Jita, Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics: A Comparative Review, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1995, pp. 6.

"When science apologizes and says there is no such thing, all talk of 'race' must cease. Hence 'race' as a recently emergent, unifying, and forceful sign of difference **in the service of** the 'Other' is being held up to scientific ridicule as, ironically, 'unscientific'. A proudly emergent sense of ethnic diversity in the service of new world arrangements is disparaged by whitemale science as the most foolish sort of anachronism."¹¹

One of the cardinal tenets of the Black Consciousness Movement was never to let the enemy determine your agenda. The fact that it is now politically and intellectually unpopular in certain circles to acknowledge the material reality of race should only emphasize the power we have won by being Black and proud of it.

The retreat into subjectivity in modern science is no reason to ignore the reality of racial and ethnic solidarity. How could it be when it was precisely this reality which has empowered so many Black people in the recent past? My very position in white academia is due to the struggle of Black people everywhere, and particularly the social movements of the 1980s in South Africa. To deploy this understanding theoretically is not easy. The multiple subtleties of subjectivity are hard to track down, understand and explain. But the immensity of the task should not intimidate us into the complete intellectual retreat of denying the existence of an objective reality. Without an essence there could be no social constructs - with what would we do the constructing?

If we were to use one concept without the other, we would do violence to the reality we are attempting to describe and change, because the social construct and the essence seldom exist in isolation. The processes of land theft, genocide, and slavery are undoubtedly processes which are deeply ideological in nature, yet each has a set of material causes and consequences. To attempt to describe these processes, either as merely a set of justifying ideologies, or as solely a transfer of material goods and labour power from the possession of one race to another, would be to mis-describe the nature of these processes in history. A poor theory will lead to failure in practice.

¹¹. Baker, H A Jnr., "Caliban's Triple Play", in Gates, H (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference*, Chicago, UP, Chicago, 1986, pp. 385.

The concept of history itself is one where the subjective and objective clearly intermingle. For instance, Brown history was created by a multitude of subjective choices interacting with certain objective realities, be they chains or profit and loss sheets. The one thing I find very comforting about the past is that it is over, in the sense that there is nothing I can do to change it. This is my definition of objective: as something which is unchangeable. To me as an activist, the past constitutes an objective reality. What I can change is the future. It is my subjective choices in the present which will create the world for my children. This is the strength of the political tradition to which I belong.

As an intellectual, the past may appear very much more subjective. The past I read about as an undergraduate was not, in a sense, my past. Apart from obvious misconceptions, it included few Brown people and almost no women. So as an historian I may rewrite it, fill in missing gaps, correct misconceptions, and strive to create a piece of historical writing which may be useful 'in the service of the Other'. Still, my desire to tell a different story cannot change the fact that the events of which I write actually happened in the way they happened. I am not the master of the past. The sequence of events, chain of causation, and constellation of ideologies which I study existed independently of my interpretation: the present cannot determine the past. It can determine the future. I can write a history which liberates instead of one which oppresses. In doing so, it is important that the truth be told. This may apply in a purely empirical sense: either Sarah Bartmann was a slave or she was not. From the fact that she was flow a multitude of economic and social consequences, not least for Sarah Bartmann herself. It is an important fact. I am not justified in altering that fact, not even (and particularly not) in the service of a struggle. The concept of truth is equally important in an emotional and spiritual sense: how did Sarah Bartmann feel? How did she view the world? To whom did she pray? In trying to answer all these questions, it is the concept of history as

composed both of the essence and the social construct which frees me to address questions which to others might appear to be both crass materialism and subjective balderdash. This is the strength of my intellectual tradition.

Before leaving the subject of history, a last word on our understanding of time. It may seem as if what historians study is change over time, and yet this is only partly true. I suppose today the profession overemphasizes change. Nonetheless we do study constancy as well. Constancy, in the form of periodization, is an ongoing preoccupation. I would like this preoccupation to be more explicit, certainly, and more conscious. It is all too easy to get lost in the minutiae of change and forget the important consistencies in history. 'Slave queen, free the shackles of your mind' sings Judy Mowatt, and I listen to that song often as a reminder that slavery is not as over as we would like to think.¹² Constancy is as real as change. One presupposes the other, and good historians need to study both. Without constancy there is no change. If there were we could not perceive it. Against what would we measure change without constancy: against itself?

Class is a relationship to property: some have it and some have not. Like race, it is heritable, that is, poverty and wealth alike tend to run in families. Unlike race, it is not linked to any physical characteristic, although it often expresses itself in classist cultural constructions. The very idea of science as an occupation of the propertied elite, is one such classist construct. I use the Marxist definition of class, as determined by a person's relation to the mode of production. Structure is important in drawing our attention to the necessity to change the system. A structure which pits individuals against each other is going to affect our social interaction in profound ways. The most liberated man will oppress in a sexist society, the most sympathetic white will refuse to acknowledge the privilege bestowed by a white skin in a racist one. Under capitalism, the most philanthropic capitalist must gain the wherewithal

¹². Judy Mowatt, "Slave Queen", *Black Woman*, Island Records, 1990.

for his philanthropy from exploitation of working people. This definition of class directs our attention to the importance of changing the system. For structure can work both ways, and it is equally possible to create a system in which the good of the individual depends upon the good of the whole.

However, a concern with structure can be overdone. This applies, for instance, when a definition of the mode of production based on a European theory and an analysis of Europe is imposed wholesale upon African reality. One needs to avoid the more structuralist mistakes of Marxist analyses of Africa.¹³ I deliberately avoid using the phrase 'dominant mode of production' because I am not convinced that several modes of production can be defined so as to co-exist. If capitalism, through war and conquest, has become the defining mode of production, then people build their economic survival systems around this fact. These systems must by definition be capitalist. They are certainly not 'pre-capitalist' or 'pre-colonial', unless we are suggesting that different historical periods can exist simultaneously. That all over Africa some Black people (mostly male) have managed to hang onto means of production, along with a set of familial relations of production with which to work them, does not make them pre-anything. They live in the present, just like the rest. Rather, their successful resistance to complete dispossession must surely be seen as an indication of the failure of capitalists to completely dominate the world.

Womanism is a theory which arises out of community activism. As such, class as defined by our relationship to the means of production cannot be the only indicator of consciousness. Income matters, as well as what you do with it. This is because the lesson of many decades of activism is that poverty disempowers. A woman who

¹³. Regarding some of the more ill-advised theories about a 'raiding mode of production' amongst the Khoekhoe, cf. eg.: Lau, B, Southern and Central Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time, Windhoek Archives, 1987; Legassick, M, The Griqua, The Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840, Ph. D thesis, University of California, 1969; Moorsom, R, Colonisation and Proletarianization: An Exploratory Investigation of the Formation of the Working Class in Namibia Under German and South African Rule to 1945, MA thesis, University of Sussex, 1973.

has to spend hours fetching wood and water is not going to have much time left over for struggle. A woman who works the fields (nominally hers but with cash crops in practice her husband's) for twelve hours a day, is not likely to attend a meeting in the evening. And a girl-child living on the edge of starvation is not going to be an effective revolutionary.

While defining, it is best to define the term 'revolution', as used in this thesis. It means 'to turn a circle', from the past to the future, from oppression to freedom. Revolution means to accomplish a qualitative change in human relations, in such a way that it becomes impossible to turn back to old, oppressive relations. The qualitative change is what is important, not the measures used to achieve it. It is from this definition that I speak of African revolutions, in the plural. We have accomplished a qualitative change in the political structures which ruled this continent during political colonialism. They shall not return.

A revolution is made of material things as much as by liberatory theories. So the fact that many poor Africans are directing their energies to acquiring money, cannot in and of itself be considered a counter-revolutionary activity. Rather one needs to ask: what do they do with the money once they get it? Do they go to meetings or to cocktail parties? Do they invest in designer clothes or in community projects? The problem of the African middle-class is one which can only be solved in practice. At present, that practice is overwhelmingly determined by racially defined ownership of the means of production. Certainly in contemporary southern Africa the middle-class has not overly impressed one with its ability to convert its new riches into liberatory activity. Yet, for every petty dictator there is a revolutionary. For every Banda there is a Cheikh Anta Diop, for every Mobutu a Ken Saro Wiwa. For every bandit chief in a suit there is a civil servant who curses her corrupt bosses, laments her department's lack of money, and goes out to the rural areas yet again to make all the difference she can make.

For every example of conspicuous consumption, we seem to produce a middle-class professional lambasting the neo-colonial elite. The many great works of African fiction which add such richness to the African tradition of plain speaking were mainly written by middle-class people. In the academic world, the critique of the neo-colonial elite by members of that same elite is a fount of creativity in its invective. The African middle-class seems to produce reckless idealism as often as corrupt tyranny. The forces of retrogression are indeed stronger than anyone could have imagined in the halcyon days of political decolonization. Victories against political colonialism were hijacked with surprising speed. Yet this consideration should return us to a concern with structure. If there is a lesson to be learnt from the neo-colonial elite, it is that it is no use changing the colour of those in power if the economic structure of ownership in both local and world productive relations remains unchanged.

Fortunately, this structure creates its own contradictions. For every neo-colonialist who rises to the top of the heap, there is a middle-class professional who finds him- or herself just as intelligent, qualified and hardworking and yet passed over in the hierarchy. The nature of the heap demands that only a few can rise to the top. It stands to reason that the ones who remain in the middle vastly outnumber, and may well out-think, the ones at the top. In this contradiction there is hope, provided that the middle class can nurture an ideology and organizational practice which turns dissatisfaction into constructive activity for structural change. It seems to me that the challenge of the future lies less in convincing portions of the middle class to commit class suicide - this has often been done on their behalf - than in addressing issues of sexism within African social movements. Sexism within the struggle alienates women and turns them against the struggle as much as the threat of death, prison or dishonour. Yet, in southern Africa, there was not a movement of the

1970s and 1980s which did not depend on women for stability and organizational strength.

Both in the America's and in Africa, white supremacy has meant in practice that race and class are often coterminous. They are not the same thing, but they manifest themselves in similar deprivations. In Africa, colonialism itself exacerbated class distinctions with the one hand, while it proved to be a fundamental leveller of classes on the other. As Captain Witbooi observed over a century ago:

"I do not want you to give any White man a farm on my land. I do not even like you giving a White man a farm on your land. For this part of Africa is the territory of the Red Chiefs. We are one of colour and custom. We obey the same laws, and those laws are agreeable to us and our people.... But with the White people it is not so at all. The White man's laws are quite unbearable and intolerable to us Red people; they oppress us and hem us in on all sides, these merciless laws which have no feeling or tolerance for any man rich or poor."¹⁴

Or for any woman, one might add. Colonialism created its own paradox. While this is true for all of Africa, it was particularly clear in the settler colonies of South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Kenya. Land dispossession historically acted so as to inhibit the growth of Black property-owning classes. In southern Africa, time and again the ability of a Black land-owning peasantry to reproduce itself as a class was reversed by a racist capitalism: by genocide in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by segregation in the 1920s and 1930s, and by apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s. The African capitalist may operate the same way as capitalists the world over, but he has been an endangered species in a harsh environment. The growth of a Black state-dependent bourgeoisie in independent Africa should not obscure the fact that class differences amongst Africans at large could not develop. It was this fact which enabled Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness to thrive by developing strong class alliances. If poverty disempowers, it stands to reason that those less poor have a critical role to play in liberation struggles. The strength of this contribution rests in the ability of the Black middle class to listen to, serve, and empower the African poor. The very success of the struggle against political apartheid, is witness to the

¹⁴. Captain Witbooi to Josef Frederiks, 27/6/1892, pp. 80, in Heywood and Maasdorp, Papers.

fact that class on its own is not sufficient to divide a colonized people. The ultimate truth test of this proposition, of course, will lie in the century to come. Will Black solidarity in African culture be strong enough to overcome capitalist exploitation and the sell-out of much of the neo-colonial elite? This question can only be answered in revolutionary practice.

I am going to define gender in the same way as I do race: as a social construct grounded in a biological reality. Unlike race, however, gender is by definition not heritable. Race unites, gender divides. A family or community can share a racial identity, giving rise to a common culture. It cannot share a gender identity. As long as women marry men and give birth to sons, the African extended family will consist of at least two genders. Thus one can talk of Black cultures, or Black values, but not of a female culture or a set of female values. These only exist within a racial or ethnic subset, as in Black women's cultures or Khoekhoe women's values.

Our culture defines women as productive people: in living memory, there has not been a single woman in the direct maternal line who has not worked productively. The dispossession of land and cattle which took place under colonialism was an attack against the material basis of this gender role. The concept of African women as non-productive beings, confined to a sometimes glorified, sometimes despised, reproductive role, was one introduced to this continent under colonialism. Some Black men on this continent have internalized these colonial values, and the eradication of such sexism is an important part of the decolonization of the mind. In this limited sense, the gender struggle assumes an independent significance. In the main, however, gender is a constituent of identity which has been fundamentally redefined by colonialism. Certainly, in Africa, the concept of 'home', and linked concepts such as 'family', 'hearth' and 'morality' were considered to be part of a woman's domain, but the meaning of those concepts was different when gathering grounds were part of home, when cattle bloodlines were considered family, when

the hearth was the site of soap and medicine manufacture as well as food, and morality a matter of centring the intimate, interlocking web of values which taught a people to value expansionism and conquest as negative achievements. Gender segregation had a different meaning when the domain of men was the hunting grounds and that of women, almost everything else.

The struggle against white sexism which I wage is precisely in order to fulfill this African construct of womanhood. My gender activism, by definition, has to be waged against a male-dominated colonialism and a white male supremacy. My gender theory stems from the specificity of African social constructs of womanhood. As part of a dispossessed collective, African women are not gender traitors in deciding that the struggle over gender cannot be the primary one. On the contrary, even the possibility of thinking along those lines is a luxury reserved for those who are not oppressed by their race. The loss of African women's gender role was the result of colonialism, not the result of choice. I would infinitely prefer to get back what was mine - our land, my cattle, our culture, our history, our language - and then, if I find that I do not like it, I will be that much more empowered to change it. I need the power to choose an African social construction of womanhood, and only then can I decide whether it is necessary to oppose the practice of social construction itself.

This is not a matter of either/or. Clearly I cannot conceive of my Blackness without my womanhood. I would lack any experiential referent for this, since I have never been Black without at the same time being a woman. The point is that this is not by choice. Colonialism, and its child capitalism, are what creates the objective conditions under which our gendered understandings become overdetermined by race. Dolores Williams puts it as follows: "Black women cannot disjoin race and gender as they describe their oppression resulting from their relation to white-controlled American

institutions." ¹⁵ The luxury of disjoining race and gender is reserved for those who are part of the ruling race.

Which guidelines for activism does this theoretical position imply? As Williams sums it up:

"Afro-American females may say that white American families (father, mothers, children) in every social class have the power to oppress the black family (fathers, mothers, children). Black women must struggle for the liberation of women within the context of the broader struggle for the liberation of the black family where equality must exist between females and males." ¹⁶

Revolution begins at home. Certainly, too many Black men have adopted a white definition of manhood which includes oppression of Black women as a constituent part. Certainly, the oppression of Black women within the Black family weakens the struggle against white domination. Still, we cannot lose sight of the fact that these processes occurred under circumstances of extreme oppression of Black people as a whole: in a word, under colonialism. Generations of women survived through the knowledge and practice that our family, our community is all we have. Without it we perish. Sometimes we perished with them, and many times they went under without us. We cannot turn our backs on this history. The liberation of Black women is not going to happen without the liberation of Black people as a whole.

Sexism in Africa weakens the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle. African men need to change not only because they oppress us women, but because they hold our struggle back. Feminists who decry the perceived subservience of African women seem to forget that we have had a good few problems to confront lately. Let us return to the concept of the material realities which interact with the world of ideas for a moment. What gives me the means to sit here and prioritize race? What provides it are the struggles of millions of Black men and women. As Bience

¹⁵. Williams, Delores S, "The Color of Feminism; or Speaking the Black Woman's Tongue", The Journal of Religious Thought, pp. 52.

¹⁶. Ibid., pp. 55.

Gawanas has put it : " We were prepared to sacrifice our lives in the struggle to free ourselves from colonial oppression. We did not have the leisure to sit and worry about who washed the dishes." ¹⁷ If I now have the leisure to worry about the sexist division of labour in our homes and in our struggle, it is due to the victories of those who went before us. The best way to thank them is by keeping the dream alive. Now, as then, these debates must occur with a very clear sense of priorities.

If the racial oppression of Black women is the thesis, and a womanist insistence on the simultaneity of race and gender oppression is the anti-thesis, where, then, is the positive, self-generated impulse which enlightens our struggle? It is the dream of freedom for all. Not just for us as women, but for us as people who celebrate individuality in the context of a collective. For to be African is to understand oneself as fully whole only in the context of a collectivity. To be African is to love our children, male and female, and to dream for them a future in which our vision for their full potential is fulfilled. 'Humanism' is the best word to describe this element of an African womanist vision. Humanism is the recognition of the inhumanity of oppression, the understanding that oppression forecloses our ability to reach our full human potential, and the detailed envisioning of that potential in the midst of some of the most vicious systems of oppression the world has known. This vision is not only theoretical, but practical: it is the sum of observations made by African women throughout the long years of our struggle. We have tilled fields, prepared sour milk, changed nappies, washed dishes, cooked wholesome meals, nursed the sick, laid down the law, kept the peace, told the stories, stood on the barricades, dished out pamphlets, organized conferences, endured solitary confinement and waged an armed struggle; we have expounded on strategies for liberation; we have prayed for the living and the dead. We have survived oppression and dreamt of freedom, if not

¹⁷. Gawanas, Bience, 'The position of the African Woman in the Struggle', Conference on Gender and Colonialism, University of the Western Cape, 1997.

for ourselves, then for our children. The lesson we have learnt is, I suppose, ultimately an idealist one: that we cannot work, fight and struggle to change the material realities of oppression unless we are guided by a vision of freedom. To envision freedom in the midst of oppression is the hardest thing to do - and yet it continues to be done, generation after generation, and shall continue to be done until we are free. For we know where we are heading, and, lest we forget, Vanessa

Ludwig reminds us:

"Jade bit her knuckles to stop herself from screaming. How many more like her were remembering those halcyon days, when the world was well lost in the cause for freedom? Freedom was children who could be children, not forced to live with the brutalities of life. Freedom was young men who were proud of who they were, not intoxicated by the fear they generated. Freedom was women living like queens of Africa, not afraid of the rapist in the alley or the batterer back home. Two years ago they had been told that freedom was around the corner, that things would improve. But things had not improved. If anything they had gotten worse. And freedom seemed even further away."¹⁸

The undermining of African revolutions has not lain in the inability to achieve complete structural change alone, but also in the failure of vision. What was supposed to have happened once we stood victorious? All hunger gone, all pain ended, exploitation, disunity and selfishness were to magically disappear overnight. Most of us saw freedom in a rosy haze as impractical as it was undefined. The humanist vision of African womanism is crucial in learning from the mistakes of the past. It is more than a motivation in the present, for it is a map to the future.

Womanism is a theory which finds the categorization of class, race and gender less interesting than their relationship with one another. As can be seen by these introductory definitions, the minute we begin to talk about real people, or history in real time, it becomes impossible to discuss any one category in isolation. A woman is never simply a woman, she has a racial and class identity which determine the set of gender norms by which she lives and resists. It is this which is meant by 'mutually constitutive. 'Poor Black woman' is a distinct identity. A poor Black woman's

¹⁸. Ludwig, Vanessa, "Keeping the Dream Alive", in Soul to Soul, unpublished.

experience of white supremacy, and of a lack of means of production, is going to be constituted by her womanness. She is at the bottom of three interlocking systems of oppression. She will relate neither to poverty nor to racism in the same way as will a poor Black man. A theoretical stance which defines her as a woman with a colour or a Black person with a womb will not be able to do justice to the human being whose deprivation of her full potential is experienced as total. The interlocking categories of class, race and gender offer an opportunity to understand and analyze the totality of her experience. Womanism understands this experience as the mutual constitution of identities in their relationship to one another. They become tools of analysis rather than reductionist categories. However, an analytical understanding of identity alone is not sufficient. Each individual or collectivity has a specific history, and the mutual constitution of aspects of identity can only be studied in the context of this history. Womanism refrains from providing a theoretical answer as to which aspect of this triple identity will express itself most powerfully in an individual's life. This has to be discovered in practice. And activist practice, to be successful, needs to deal with whole people.

The origins of womanism are diverse. In its conversation with the theoretical frameworks which have shaped much of the history of the twentieth century, namely Marxism, feminism and Pan-Africanism/Black Consciousness, womanism has inherited both their search for theoretical rigor and their activist tradition. What distinguishes womanism from these frameworks is the insistence on placing the reality and experience of Black women at the centre. In this, womanists do not make a sharp distinction between themselves and Black feminists. The exposition which follows makes no systematic distinction between womanists and Black feminists, and, indeed, from a theoretical point of view, there is little to distinguish them. Black feminism first advocated a more holistic view of oppression:

"Only a Black *and* feminist analysis can sufficiently comprehend the materials of Black women's studies; and only a creative Black feminist perspective will enable the field to expand. ... Only a feminist, pro-woman perspective that acknowledges the reality of sexual oppression in the lives of Black women, as

well as the oppression of race and class, will make Black women's studies the transformer of consciousness it needs to be."¹⁹

The analytical tools of womanism are thus based on the ground-breaking work done by Black feminists. Womanists continue to acknowledge this fruitful dialogue. As

Pumla Gqola writes:

"It has become customary for feminist scholars to integrate race and class analyses when examining the lives of their subjects of study. Within the broad umbrella of feminism several strands have mutated to qualified versions of feminism, such as Marxist feminism, Black feminism, Third World feminism, and so on. Womanism has emerged and developed closely with some of these feminisms. The similarities between Black feminism and womanism at times appear so profound that it is oft difficult to tell them apart. Yet, while Black feminism is at last being accorded (begrudgingly) a place in the progressive theorising of oppression and liberation, womanism continues in South Africa to be demonised."²⁰

I have in what follows cited self-described Black feminists and womanists indiscriminately, and it may be seen that the difference between their analysis and theory is in practice a matter of degree. The main difference is in a name - womanists have desired a theoretical space which does not require the qualifier 'Black', while Black feminists have refused to cede the territory of 'feminism' to white women.

In African cultures, a name is of central importance. The experience of colonialism and slavery can be defined as the acquisition of the power of other people to name us, and in so doing, to re-define our symbolic world. Mary Kulawole draws our attention to the power implicit in the act of naming:

"... this alternative, a womanist theory, emerged from the increasing awareness of African women that self-naming is fundamental to these problems. A Yoruba proverb hits the nail on the head:

Owo ara eni l'a fi ntun iwa ara eni se

You have to establish your dignity yourself and not leave it to others.

Self-naming is very central to the African world-view. In many African cultures, naming assumes an almost sacred status.²¹ ... This is at the heart of the search for new terminologies of self-definition."²¹

¹⁹. Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (eds.), All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies, Feminist Press, New York, 1982, pp. xxi.

²⁰. Gqola, Pumla Dineo, "What's in This Womanist Shit? Naming Self as Resistance; Or, My Name Is a Womanist Issue", Paper presented at The First African Womanist Workshop In Cape Town, University of Cape Town, January, 1998, pp. 4.

²¹. Kulawole, Mary E. Modupe, Womanism and African Consciousness, Africa World Press Inc. Asmara, Eritrea, 1997, pp. 26-27.

The very act of naming is an act of resistance, a claim to power, and a motion to revolution. Fundamental to womanism is the realization that to merely invert the terms of reference is not, in itself, a successful mode of struggle. To reject male sexism by an assertion of femininity or to fight white racism by an assertion of Blackness are successful anti-movements, but they may not succeed beyond demolishing the systems they oppose. To move on, to build freedom, a womanist vision of humanity needs to be self-defined. This process begins in the name.

The classic definition is that of Alice Walker:

Womanist: A black feminist or feminist of color ...

From the black *womanish*... Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *wilful* behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one.

A woman who loves other women... Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility ... and women's strength...

Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health.²²

Walker did not approach the matter from a theoretical standpoint (though she could well have done so), but from her position as a writer and activist. The theory came later. Thus, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi laid down the fundamental philosophy of womanism:

"Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks."²³

From a womanist point of view, what is at stake is less separatism than centring. A womanist philosophy places the thought of African women at the centre, and considers African women as the central subject of study. In times of white male supremacy, this is an act with profound consequences.

The name remains crucial, it would seem, to both womanists and non-womanists.

Gqola points out that womanism is still a theory under attack in South Africa:

²². Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, Harcourt Press, San Diego, 1983, pp.xii.

²³. Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English", *Signs*, Vol. 11. No 1, 1984.

"... the hostility and sophisticated response to womanism stem not from a (perceived) deficiency on the part of the theory. The animated response is generated instead by the absence of the word 'feminist' in the name adopted by the womanist movement. It is the coining of a name which shows no loyalty to feminism which makes womanism suspect to its critics."²⁴

In these hostile, threatened, or patronizing reactions, we may confirm the importance of self-naming. An African woman who is loyal to herself is possibly the greatest threat to racism, sexism and economic exploitation in the century to come, for all these modes of oppression are built on her back and based on the repression of her self. Beyond this movement against the powers that be, the act of self-naming provides strength to look forward to a self-defined world. Womanism provides this power here, today, by building a theoretical structure which is self-centred, rather than other-defined.

The importance of names is clear in a debate which has been spurred by womanists' insistence on the centrality of Black multi-gendered institutions to their struggle. Sisi Magaqi has raised this issue in her critique of Ogunyemi. She cites Ogunyemi to the effect that " ... an intelligent black woman writer uses ..." strategies to present positive Black role models in her fiction.²⁵ Magaqi goes on to argue that:

"...the universality (singularity of experience) designated by the singular nouns 'man' and 'woman' should be re-examined. Moreover, does Ogunyemi imply that if a black woman writer does not empower 'the black man' she is not intelligent? In other words, are black feminists or non-womanists not intelligent?"²⁶

The names we Black women call each other matters as much as the names we choose to call ourselves. 'Reconciliation' has been the call for South Africa of the 1990s. Perhaps it is time we considered reconciling with ourselves first.

The issue of whose well-being we are prioritizing is at the centre of the debate between womanism and Black feminism on alliances with white feminism. This debate has become as much organizational as it is theoretical. Black feminists have become as strong advocates of a co-operative policy vis-a-vis white feminists, as

²⁴. Gqola, *What is this Womanist Shit?* , pp 2.

²⁵. Magaqi, Sisi, 'Bessie Head's Empowered Men', Paper presented at the African Womanist Workshop, University of Cape Town, January 1998, page one, citing Ogunyemi "Womanism", pp. 68.

²⁶. Magaqi, "Bessie Head's Empowered Men", pp. 2.

they are sharp critics of white feminism. Their organizational efforts in the 1990s have become directed towards re-defining this feminism in theory and practice, so that it may provide a place for Black women.²⁷ This debate can be illuminated by considering the distinction between ideology and strategy. Separatist politics are the politics of freedom. To be amongst a group of your peers eliminates the necessity to define, explain or defend your identity. It provides a social group which allows you to explore to the fullest your individuality. It decolonizes the mind and so spells f-r-e-e-d-o-m. Multi-gendered and multi-racial politics are the politics of necessity. Our separate spaces, be they coffee and gossip or highly politicized women's organizations, are of necessity isolated spaces in a society where Black women seldom can negotiate from a position of strength. At work, at home, and in their community work, Black women have to function in integrated environments which are defined by structured inequalities of power. These structured inequalities of power force us to operate on the defensive. We find ourselves constantly being obliged to justify who we are, what we are, and where we want to be. Separatism works in these environments primarily by providing Black women with an invisible source of strength. Our separatist experience empowers us to turn a circle from oppression to freedom. Having imagined freedom, we can work to realize it. So I would suggest that we take Walker's definition seriously. The question of which activities are best undertaken separately, and which in multi-racial or multi-gendered coalitions, is for womanism a strategic question, not an ideological one. It should be addressed on that level.

The debates around separatism versus coalition-building are of less strategic importance in the continental African context. In all but the former settler colonies,

²⁷. For both sides of the debate cf. Tuzyline Allan, Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics, pp. 9; citing Hudson Weems, Cleonora, Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves, Bedford Publishers, Troy, Michigan, 1993; Carby, Hazel, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987; McDowell, Deborah, 'New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism' in Showalter, Elaine (ed.), The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985; hooks, bell, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black, South End Press, Boston, 1989.

the number of white feminists is simply too small to be a major cause of difference amongst Black women. In the majority of African countries, the question rears its head only in the limited context of white feminists forming a part of international capitalist institutions. Thus, the question of separatism may be relevant to critical discussions of development aid, the extent to whether it has at all helped, or whether it has rendered us more dependent. The role which white feminists in donor organizations and non-governmental organizations have played in this process is no doubt of fundamental importance. But for most African women the chances of ever meeting a white feminist socially, much less working with one in the same organization, are remote.

In South Africa itself, Black women would do well to consider what it means when a cause of their theoretical and activist disagreement is over co-operation with white women. At this point it may be well worth raising an issue discussed many times in the struggle of the 1980s, but seldom heard today, when it is equally hard to find a white person who ever voted for the National Party, or a black person who did not participate in the liberation struggle. Yet it is a fact, and one of which we were painfully aware at the time, that the vast majority of Black people were far more involved in the struggle to get by than in the liberation struggle. Today, it is worth remembering that as long as conscious, organized, activists are busy arguing with one another, they are not out there in the community helping to organize the many, many grassroots initiatives towards the liberation of Black women which are in fact taking place. I would suggest that the answers to this critical question may well be found while working with those African women who are busy trying to help themselves.

Indeed, any debate takes up mental space, and in so doing may well crowd out other debates of greater material importance. I find it significant that Black feminists, womanists and the many Black women who reject any form of -ism are so

divided on the issue of uniting with white women, while in the meantime we are not addressing the issue of uniting amongst ourselves. Here are some key questions which are not receiving attention: do we treat ourselves and each other with respect? Do we expect respect from those, men and women, who claim to be aiding our cause? And do we carry ourselves so as to earn the respect which is undoubtedly our due as African women? The question of respect for an African woman looms large in this thesis. It is fundamental to any project which purports to liberate Africans, for in speaking of respect, we speak an African language.

In the preceding discussion, I have addressed a complex strategic issue through my experience in activist struggle. This is a womanist praxis. Womanism arises out of a long tradition of activism and has retained a close relationship with activist concerns. It privileges personal experience, and emphasizes organizational practice as a truth-test for knowledge. Phillips and McCaskill argue that the very exclusion of Black women from spheres of power make this a fundamental necessity:

"Perhaps the central organizing principle of womanism (if it can be said that there is one) is the absolute necessity of speaking from and about one's own experiential location and not to or about someone else's. Black women's scholarship has placed Black women and their experiences at the center of analysis just like traditional White men's scholarship has placed White men and their experiences at the center of analysis; the crucial difference is that Black women's scholarship has articulated and owned the centering ... Black women's scholarship does not parade as universal, but rather it emanates from a point of acute authenticity and invites others to participate in a similar, equally authentic process."²⁸

This consideration has led to my decision to use the first person, where necessary, in this thesis, and also where necessary to include personal experiences. A fundamental concern of this thesis is my right to be Black and woman in the academic sphere, with all the historical baggage this identity brings with it. To adopt another theoretical approach would deny some part of my experience and identity. A class struggle which places my gender second, or a gender struggle which requires me to ignore the collective dispossession of my people, would not be a revolution but a

²⁸. Phillips, Layli and Barbara McCaskill, "Who's Schooling Who? Black Women and the Bringing of the Everyday into Academe, or Why We Started *The Womanist*", Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society, 1995, vol 20, no. 4, pps. 1010-1011.

new system of oppression. Womanism not only allows, but also requires me to be the totality of who I am, and in fact enjoins me to assert this in my academic and activist work.

Womanism, following Black feminism, defines racism and sexism as not just the overt expression of denigratory ideas which have no foundation in fact, but also as the theoretical and practical exclusion of Black women's experience. The origins of womanism lay in Black women's dissatisfaction with a white-dominated feminist movement which persisted in treating the category 'woman' as an undifferentiated category. In practice, this meant that Black women's concerns were subjugated by the default race, white women. This left Black women having to fight on two fronts: against sexism in Black movements, and against racism in the feminist movement. The white domination of the feminist movement also placed Black feminist activists at a disadvantage within their own communities. One of the most powerful motives behind womanism has been the deep suspicion of the feminist movement amongst Black women at large. As an organizational obstacle, this suspicion has proved insuperable. Dolores Williams relates how, during a community college course on feminism, she was confronted with the following questions:

"If the work of women's liberation in this country has always accomplished white supremacy and the work of the Ku Klux Klan is for white supremacy, is the label 'feminist' comparable to the label 'klansman'? Do the words 'black feminist' equal the same kind of terrible contradiction as the words 'black klansman'? Since you are a feminist, ma'am, are you advancing the cause of white supremacy? Are you extending white women's privilege rather than fighting for the liberation of black women and all other black people? What are your feminist politics about?"²⁹

Black feminism, and from it womanism, arose out of a need to distinguish Black women concerned with women's issues from the white feminist movement. Womanism continues to be both an anti-movement - a movement against racism and sexism - and a search for positive autonomy as a basis for self-generated struggle.

²⁹. Black woman, quoted in Williams, "The Color of Feminism", pp. 49. For African women's reactions to white feminism, cf Kulawole, Womanism and African Consciousness, pp. 11.

In this political context, the retelling of personal experience is an act of power. It stems both from the recognition that the personal is political, as well as the understanding that the political is always about race. Patricia Hill Collins, in her critique of objectivist positivism, points out the dilemma in which this methodology has placed Black women:

"Such criteria requires African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about Black women, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic and professional power....It therefore seems unlikely that Black women would use a positivist epistemological stance in rearticulating a Black women's standpoint. Black women are more likely to use an alternative epistemology for assessing knowledge claims, one using different standards that are consistent with Black women's criteria for substantiated knowledge and with our criteria for methodological adequacy."³⁰

To choose a theory which requires me to fracture and disjoin my identity from my work would be to do myself an injustice. It would also, and this is a matter of some importance, require me to fracture and disjoin the experience of Sarah Bartmann.

Research, like revolution, costs money. To attempt to take on a body of theory developed mainly by middle-class white males by trying to compete on equal terms would be foolhardy. Personal experience of racism, sexism and material dispossession is something I have which they do not. It should be put to good use.

Personal experience as a historical datum poses a peculiar epistemological challenge. From my point of view, it offers certainty. My personal experience is a datum I can be absolutely sure of. My historical experience is such that I yield to none a better claim to expertise on sexism and racism. If I say an event in Sarah Bartmann's life, or my own, is racist, it is so because I believe that I know it. It does require some effort from the reader to function as a historian. You have to make the decisions a historian normally makes about evidence: Am I qualified to testify about racism and sexism? Am I a witness whose experience is apposite to the story being told? Am I a credible witness? Is my story logically consistent, or filled with holes? Does it confirm

³⁰. Collins, Patricia Hill, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment. Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1990, pp. 207.

or contradict other people's stories, and if so, who is likely to have better knowledge about the event? Personal experience does not function as a substitute for the empirical method. It does transfer some of the evaluative work to the reader.

The only advice I can offer the hapless reader is: beware of historians as specimens. Historians are expert witnesses, highly trained in the selection, evaluation and use of evidence. Though as a Black woman I have been concerned to empower myself in a highly stratified profession, and to find voice in an academic environment, the fact remains that I am highly empowered when compared to many African women who form part of the 'imagined audience' of this work. The retelling of personal experience will make this work more accessible to those who can relate to this experience, but simultaneously will disguise the relative freedom I have had in choosing which experiences are relevant to the matter at hand.

When a graduate student sits down to decide what to research, an important factor in that choice is the search for new knowledge. It is hard to find an area of research about which less is known than the study of African women from the viewpoint of an African woman. The retelling of my personal and collective experience is important from a professional point of view. It opens up hitherto publicly unknown knowledge, broadens the sphere of history and serves as a useful corrective in redefining 'public'.

It is not suggested that the retelling of personal experience should replace other forms of historical knowledge. For Black women it is a culturally comfortable form of knowledge: 'testifying', or beginning a problem analysis by a statement of one's own experience, is an African methodology. It may not be unique to Africa, but it is certainly part of African and diaspora culture.³¹ It is also not completely new to white academe. C.S. Lewis provided a method for reading this kind of evidence:

³¹. Cf. Williams, "The Color of Feminism", pp. 51.

"And because this is the judgement of a native, I claim that, even if the defence of my conviction is weak, the fact of my conviction is a historical datum to which you must give full weight. That way, where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen."³²

Lewis' concept of the historian-as-specimen solved a problem which I had been grappling with for years. The retelling of personal experience offered a way of reducing the highly unequal relationships of power between myself as the researcher and Sarah Bartmann, the research subject.

Finally, using the self-as-evidence is crucial in posing a womanist challenge to objectivist positivism. Subscribing heavily to objectivist methodologies renders a discipline such as history extremely masculinist. Why is a profit-and-loss sheet commonly regarded as an historical 'fact', while hatred and anger are not? Emotional truths are truths too, and any theory which attempts to convert its research into activist practice will come up against the fact that people are emotional. Practical politics tends to be about personal loves and loyalties, as much as about abstract ideas. African womanism translates this organizational experience into theory, by approaching emotional truths through a narrative of the self, broadly conceived here as the writerly self, as well as the community and history which have produced the complex identifications around which the self is constructed. Not surprisingly, I have drawn heavily on disciplines which prioritize the emotional life, such as literary criticism and psychology, in constructing my womanist challenge.

A warning is in order for those scholars who may be inspired by the womanist approach. Objectivist history has many virtues for the historian which womanism battles to provide. Using the third person helps to focus attention on the subject, rather than the historian. This denotes a proper respect for the subject which, though objectivist history has sometimes failed to provide it, is nonetheless a worthy aspiration. Here, it has helped to keep a firm grasp of essentials: Sarah Bartmann is

³². Lewis, C S, They Asked For A Paper: Papers and Addresses, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1962, pps. 24-25.

part of my history, not I of hers. I am part of her historiography. This implies a relationship of power that a narrative of the self may help to lessen, but can never abolish. Unfortunately, the sacrifice is not rewarded by the complete abolition of unequal power relationships.

The sacrifice is very real. The comfortable distance of the third person plural offers the practitioner some protection from the criticism of peers which has been a fundamental part of the discipline's ability to develop. A narrative of the self removes this comfort. This has profound implications for the treatment of the subject. Though it is by now a truism that we invest emotionally in all we write, in womanism this emotional involvement must be made clear and yet remain analytically distinct from our subject matter. Objectivism, though flawed, does offer a distance from the subject which eases analytical work. There are two possible replacements for this analytical distance. The one is critical subjectivity, that is, to achieve some analytical distance from the writing self. It is a method almost impossible to balance. Between excessive self-criticism and excessive subjectivity, there is a narrow path which I have seen, if not always followed, in the writing of this thesis.

The second approach is what I have posited as the 'sane self'. The writing of history is an emotionally exhausting pursuit, particularly when it comes to a history of colonialism. Again, the comfort zone of objectivity offered a modicum of protection from these emotional realities. Critical subjectivity, on the other hand, has to acknowledge the reality of emotional pain in the writing of traumatic events. Sanity is the only hope in this context. There is a difference between wallowing in emotions and seeing them as evidence of a particular historical process. There is a difference between acknowledging the reality of colonial oppression in the emotional life of an individual, and perpetuating it. Here, with as contradictory success as with critical subjectivity, I have used what may be considered counter-emotions as well as autonomously generated emotions. Black pride, feminine empathy and Brown

'asprisgeit' have proved valuable aids to achieving some form of emotional resistance to the traumatic impact of the historiography, as have an intellectual and organizational commitment to love, respect and hope in the effort to turn the historiography around. This approach is the best I have to offer. It shall take many theses to resolve the complexities of emotionally analytical thinking.

The concept of the sane self raises as many questions as it answers. Having considered the emotional life as important evidence, as important as the material realities which drive colonial exploitation, I am immediately forced to conclude that colonialism drives us all crazy. I have used rock art as a symbol of normality which defines this madness, and the values of holism, mutual respect and understanding which I find in this art pinpoints sharply the skewness of the values we today accept as normative. This approach, therefore, is as much a process as it is a method. The critical subject, writing, has to strive ceaselessly towards some measure of sanity and balance which cannot be sustained for long in the midst of a colonial economy of things and knowledge which speaks ill of all that Khoekhoe rock art represents. To expect sanity to last would be to deny the material reality of the forces which keep one in mental subjection. However, in history it is not always the right answers which help us to achieve qualitative change, but the practice of asking the right questions. If I have framed the debate in a manner which shall be found liberatory to its readers, there shall be enough achieved for one thesis.

The good news is that a narrative of the self, no matter how carefully constructed, will reveal aspects of the self to which the narrator may be blind, but which are glaringly obvious to other eyes. The picture I care to present to the world will inevitably contain details I did not include deliberately. As evidence, therefore, of this Black woman's historically embedded and mutually constituted identity, it is unmatched.

The narrative of the self makes for a devastating literary style. The best literary examples of a narrative of the self which I can think of are Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Tambudzai* and Alice Walker's *Celie*, both of which display an innocence which in its unselfconsciousness successfully avoids the danger of narcissism implicit in this genre.³³ This unselfconsciousness is an impossible narrative stance for the historian who is required to track her walking as she goes. The first-person narrative form in academic prose is doomed by its footnotes to be an inherently unsatisfactory genre.

It may sound strange that I speak of *Celie*, a woman who was sexually abused both as a child and an adult, as innocent. I think here primarily of her spiritual innocence: she speaks to her Creator as would a child. *Celie's* approach to life throws into sharp relief the striking anomalies of the historiography of Sarah Bartman. Viewed as literary texts, as emanations of a culture, the historiography of Sarah Bartman presents some odd features. From the viewpoint of African culture, none are more odd than this historiography's relationship to the abuse of the human body on the one hand and religion, on the other. These texts discuss female private parts almost without exception. Yet in this whole literature, the Divine is mentioned only once. The only children to appear in this literature are either dead or sexual objects. It is a literature which concentrates on Sarah Bartmann's weaknesses, on her inability to resist oppression, but very rarely considers her strengths. No text has asked the question: where did she find the strength to survive, to resist and to overcome the circumstances of her life? In this sense, the historiography is not a literature which seeks to turn a circle. It does not ask the questions which are fundamental to African women's struggle today. Yet this is the question which immediately occurs to an African woman such as myself.

³³. Dangarembga, Tsitsi, *Nervous Conditions*, Women's Press Ltd, London, 1988; Walker, Alice *The Colour Purple*, Washington Square Press, New York, 1982.

The separation between church and university is centuries old in the academic world. This separation is being challenged by womanist theory, which is at its strongest in the field of theology. This should not be surprising, since womanism is rooted in Black liberation theology. As Karen Baker-Fletcher points out, Black women have strongly espoused the tenets of liberation theology from its inception as a written body of knowledge. Discussing the Black women preachers, teachers and orators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, she remarks:

"Grounded in a concept of God as an agent of both personal and social change, they held a strong commitment to racial pride and dignity, freedom and equality, and the liberation of positive human potential."³⁴

This faith has provided a firm ground for criticizing white racism, as well as the sexism within Black churches and communities. Womanist theology provides an excellent theoretical and practical starting point for change in these contradictory institutions, which both oppress Black women and yet provide the strength for resisting the hostile society outside them.

Though womanist theologians are overwhelmingly Christian, theirs is a faith which recognizes the worldly origins of this religion in history, which acknowledges authenticity in varying conceptions of the Spirit and seeks to embrace them in a common vision which goes beyond humanity to include all of creation. Baker-Fletcher writes:

"Over time ... we have lost the traditions which underlie the full meaning of Scripture, which spans more than simply humans in its covenant. We ought to practice Christianity in such a way that we reclaim our need for spiritual and physical healing and wholeness of earth and humanity."³⁵

This is the approach which has been marked by its absence in the historiography of Sarah Bartmann. These texts discuss the uses and abuses of her body, but never relate these to the search for emotional and spiritual healing which a reading of the same historiography surely impels. Sarah Bartmann not only survived her

³⁴. Baker-Fletcher, Karen, A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper, Crossroads Publishing, New York, 1994, pp. 38.

³⁵. Baker-Fletcher, Karen, Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Minneapolis, 1998, pp. 19.

oppression, she resisted it. Only a theory which sees faith as the starting point of change is able to acknowledge this aspect of her life and times.

Womanism does not require anyone to prove the existence of the Divine. Indeed, the separation between church and university was probably a wise one in the historical context of a colonizing religion aiming to dominate the world (not that it stopped either institution from attempting the colonizing mission). Still, one cannot be part of the problem and part of the solution. The only answer to the problem of evil is good. In its search for a holistic vision, womanism affirms and embraces the spiritual side of Black women's self. Womanist theology has devoted systematic attention to the analysis of sexual abuse, and to the practicalities of healing from abuse. Sarah Bartmann's place in world history, along with many other Khoekhoe women and men, is based on her struggle as an unwilling subject upon which the foundation of a sexually exploitative scientific racism and a racist sexism were laid. These systems of knowledge functioned separately in the case of Black men and white women, but simultaneously in the case of Black women. These oppressive systems of knowledge cannot be analyzed fruitfully while perpetuating a disciplinary division which buttresses the racism and sexism which is a fundamental part of their construction.

So far, womanism is the only body of theory which offers an analysis of sexuality, race and gender which is neither racist or sexist. Sexuality, whether as in the development of full human potential, or, as is the case here, as in a weapon the distortion of which deprives Black women of their full human potential, needs to deal with whole people. While a biography of Sarah Bartmann, the individual human being, may out of respect have little to say about sexuality, certainly her place in history must be centred upon an analysis of prevailing European ideas of sexuality as tools in constructing scientific racism and sexism. Womanism systematically addresses those questions without either excluding the experiences of 'othered'

groups or perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes of its own. In fact, Black women's studies in America, because of its academic roots in slave studies, have yielded insights which are fruitful in a study of the historiography of a Khoekhoe woman whose sexuality was exploited. It offers a theoretical space where Sarah Bartmann can be seen as whole, and it provides her with a sisterhood.

The theme of sexuality has proved to be so fundamental to histories of Black women that Evelyn Higginbotham includes it in her programmatic statement for the next millennium:

"At the threshold of the twenty-first century, black woman scholars continue to emphasize the inseparable unity of race and gender in their thought. They dismiss efforts to bifurcate the identity of black women (and indeed all women) into discrete categories - as if culture, consciousness, and lived experience could at times constitute 'woman' isolated from the contexts of race, class, and sexuality that give form and content to the particular women that we are."³⁶

Black women's theories of sexuality are epistemologically unique. These theories are grounded in a personal and collective experience of the oppression and exploitation of their sexuality which spans centuries. Their oral history derives from Black women who have survived this oppression and exploitation. As such, this is the body of work which has had the broadest experience and the most sophisticated theory. In this analytical context, womanism provides both an anti-text to a racist and sexist historiography, and a path to self-healing and self-retrieval.³⁷

At the heart of Black women's collective experience of racism and sexism is a degradation of the individual, for as much as the Black female body under colonialism has come to symbolize the epitome of sexual exploitation, from the viewpoint of Black women themselves this body designates a personal space: this is the boundaries of the self. In her definition of slavery, Hortense Spillers discusses the Black body as follows:

³⁶. Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race", in Hine, Darlene Clark; King, Wilma; and Reed Linda (eds), 'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': A Reader In Black Women's History, Carlson Publishing, New York, 1995, pp. 17.

³⁷. The terms are Kulawole's, cf. Womanism and African Consciousness, pp. 19 and 35.

"But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses..."³⁸

The distortion of Black women's power to love themselves and others which we name every time we speak of white male supremacy is an attack on this bodily integrity and spiritual self-image. An attack on Black women's integrity is also an attack on her ability to hold together those collectivities most threatened by a racist capitalism: family, community, and continent. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes writes:

"African American women's existential ambivalence about their bodies may be the most personally painful legacy of slavery and racial oppression. Such a concern may seem trivial in the face of drugs, violence, poverty and social isolation, but many current social problems are often tied to low self-esteem and self-hatred. Self-hatred or damage and brokenness to our inner visions make it impossible for us to make and share effective 'liberating visions' for our community and our world."³⁹

Womanism has brought from Black liberation theology a concern with the spiritual welfare of the individual as the basis of the struggle for social justice. A womanist approach to the study of sexuality is centered on the primacy of personal experience. As much as sexual assault is felt in the first instance by the individual, so too must a liberating vision begin in the healing the 'brokenness' of the self.

In searching for a body of theory which would take Sarah Bartmann seriously, womanism provided a natural home. Racism, sexism and classism are systems of deprivation. They deprived Sarah Bartmann during her lifetime. They have deprived me-as-specimen during my lifetime. This thesis is an extended demonstration of the proposition that they have also deprived analyses of her history of their full theoretical potential. In my struggle to gain the voice to tell this story of the treatment which an African woman has been accorded, I have been much comforted by the womanist sisterhood. In person and in writing, womanism has offered a space for me as well as for Sarah Bartmann to be whole. Although we know few

³⁸. Spillers, Hortense, "'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe': An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics*, 17, 2, 1990, pp. 67.

³⁹. Townsend Gilkes, Cheryl, "The 'Loves' and 'Troubles' of African-American Women's Bodies", in Townes, Emilie (ed.), *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1993, pp. 232.

facts about her life, one thing we do know is that Sarah Bartmann had faith. Her baptism in 1811 testifies to her faith in good, in the midst of much evil.⁴⁰ And a body of theory which welcomes the witness of Black women is the logical place in which to

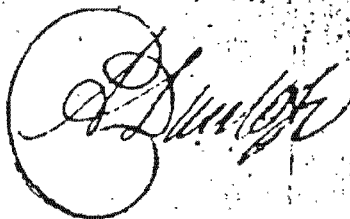
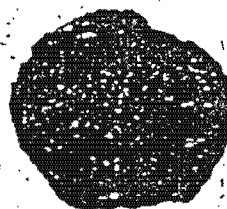
December 1. Sarah Bartmann a Female
Hottentot from the Colony of the Cape
of Good Hope, born on the Borders
of Caffraria, baptized this Day by
Permission of the Lord Bishop
of Chester in a Letter from his
Lordship to Jos. Brooks Chaplain

This is to certify that the above is a true

Copy, extracted from the Register of the Collegiate and
Parish Church of Christ, in Manchester, this seventh
Day of December 1811

Witness Joshua Brooks
Chaplain of the Collegiate and Parish Church
of Christ, in Manchester.

ASTON, PRINTER, MANCHESTER.

⁴⁰ From Kirby, Percival, "The 'Hottentot Venus' of the Musee de l'Homme, Paris", *South African Journal of Science*, Vol. 50, no. 12, 1952, pp. 129.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GREAT LONG NATIONAL INSULT "SCIENCE" AND THE KHOEKHOE IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

"Even though the captive flesh/body has been 'liberated', and no one need pretend that the quotation marks do not *matter*, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time, nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism itself in endless disguise ... I would call it the Great Long National Shame. But people do not talk like that anymore - it is 'embarrassing', just as the retrieval of mutilated female bodies will likely be 'backward' for some people."¹



¹. Spiller, Hortense "'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe': An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* Vol 17, no: 2, 1987, (65-81), pp. 68.

Introduction

This chapter originated as an article I wrote in 1996 upon request for a journal which sought to bridge the gap between popular writing and academic studies.² This was well suited to the project I was engaged in at the time, which was to grapple with a more accessible academic language and style.

The subject of this chapter are the many travel writings which helped to create a discursive world in which the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann became both thinkable and popular, if controversial. The historiographical implications of this project is discussed extensively in a later chapter. This introduction will be devoted to discussing one central issue in the Sarah Bartmann historiography, namely the use of visual material which objectifies Black women.

The original version of this chapter was amply illustrated. The illustrations were a key part of the text and served to demonstrate fundamental points. This was done with a profound sense of the complex ideological and moral issues involved in the re-circulation of these images. I grappled with these issues in two ways. I considered the context in which these illustrations were presented as crucial to the impact they were likely to make, and consciously strove to present an alternative image of Brown people in the text which could serve as a counterbalance to the illustrations. I also argued that these visual texts were not

² Abrahams, Yvette "The Great National Insult: Science, Sexuality and the Khoisan From 1780-1815" Agenda, 31, January, 1997.

so much pictures of Black women, as illustrations of the travelwriter's (or their illustrator's) minds.

Although the responses I have had to the original article have been positive, with the benefit of hindsight I think the decision to include illustrations was incorrect. There is a fundamental difference between the original context of these illustrations and the present. In the eighteenth century, Black women may have been the object of the illustration, but they had no hand in the making or circulation of these images. There were few, if any, Black women holding the pens, running the printing presses, binding the books, or even serving in the bookshops. Today, it is different. Even though we are not as many as we should be, there has been a rapid increase of Black women in academia, literature, film and visual arts. The role which Black women do play in the proliferation of degrading images of Black women must be seriously considered. The question of complicity must arise. To this question, there are probably as many answers as there are Black women producing cultural texts. Here is mine.

I would like to approach this answer via an analogy with the debate on gun-proliferation. A book or journal is like a gun in that, once it is out of your hands, you have no control over what will be done with it. Any one could excise the illustrations from the article where I had obligingly collected them together, and reproduce them in a sexist and racist context. In all the severe violence of apartheid South Africa, an aspect of living in the Cape Flats townships which is

often forgotten is how peaceful much of this life was, at times. By the simple expedient of making it illegal for any Black person to own a gun, and imposing severe penalties on those who were found in possession of one, an unexpected consequence of apartheid state violence was that levels of Black-on-Black violence were comparatively low. Fights took place with fists, knives, or broken bottles, not with loaded weapons because there were none. Even gangsters did not use guns, for the few who stole one could not manage to find enough ammunition to keep going beyond the first few shots. As recently as the late 1980's, drive-by shootings was something the police did to marching school-children.

Today, it is different, and this change has taken place with frightening rapidity. In little more than five years, gun possession in South African townships has increased to levels similar to those in LA South Central, or Washington, DC. In a social situation where the median income is much lower than in those suburbs, the implications are terrifying. The gangsters shoot each other and law-abiding citizens, law-abiding citizens get guns in self-defence, the gangsters rob them of their guns and the spiral worsens. Where gangfights only infrequently resulted in death, death is now commonplace, and if this is the case with gangsters, it should be clear what has happened to non-combatants. The level of violence in our communities has risen to horrifying levels, and as it has risen, community work has come to a standstill. You cannot hold meetings, teach night-classes or stage plays in a suburb where everybody is scared to leave their house after

dark. You cannot build cohesion when people cannot attend a community hall on the wrong side of a gang boundary.

The parallel I wish to draw here is that each gun-owning individual has to take responsibility for the sheer level of violence. While they may not be responsible for the economic deprivation which is the root cause of gang violence, the fact remains that when guns are an every-day feature in shopping malls and streets, the level of violence is simply going to rise. It is the gun-owning township dwellers who are likely to be the first victims. Similarly, the increasing empowerment of Black women in the production of social knowledge does not seem to be resulting in the disappearance of objectifying images of Black women. On the contrary, I see no diminution of pornographic texts and images produced for profit, while side by side with this we now have a growing industry of cultural texts which aim to critique this pornographic industry. The overall level of exposure to these sexually exploitative images is rising and simply going to go on rising. Proliferation increases the possibility of injury, and like the citizen acting in self-defence, Black women are likely to be the first victims. Black girl-children, in particular, are increasingly being deprived of the choice not to view images of Black women which are not sexual. I would not like to contribute to the process of depriving children of choice. Black women have been steadily empowering themselves in the social production of knowledge. With power comes responsibility.

So, I have deleted the illustrations from the text. The references remain, for those who wish to view these images. I understand that this does not solve the root problems of racism, sexism and the economic exploitation of Black women. I am also painfully aware that those of us who need to deal with the issues surrounding the exploitation of Black sexuality cannot possibly do so without reproducing the evidence of that exploitation. There is plenty of this evidence in the text, and it may not be immediately clear why I reproduce these images in words but refuse to do so with illustrations. Well, one picture is worth a thousand words. The sheer emotional impact of these collected images was devastating. I suspect that words alone may suffice to make the case.

Alternative Masculinities

"...no inhabitant...shall take, receive, or give any gratuity for a child to its parents, guardians, or others offering to dispose of such child, except in the case of some well-grounded apprehension of death to the child, either from famine, irritation of the parents or any other cause which may induce such inhabitant to believe it necessary for the safety of the child to receive it... . That any person encouraging, by purchase or by promise, Bosjesmen or other savages to give up their own children, or procuring children by plunder, depredation or fraud, will be considered guilty of man-stealing and punished accordingly"³

I would like to begin by talking about some Khoekhoe men who, during the nineteenth century, took to the mountains and there fought the footsoldiers of British colonialism until they could fight no more. Some men, like David Stuurman, took to the mountains while young. Others, like Jan Gamga Pienaar and Hendrik Hendriks, tried for many years to safeguard the lives and safety of their families through a complex strategy of resistance and negotiation. It was not an easy time in which to live. To save Khoekhoe children from being taken as slaves could in the context of those times be regarded as a major achievement. As the land of their families became steadily encroached upon, as the British efforts to exert control over the Griqua and !Kora societies intensified, more and more Khoekhoe men saw the futility of any kind of negotiations. They forsook the Griqua towns for the mountain fortresses, they became part of the bergenaars, 'mountain people' and "...maintained a warrior's life until they died on commando."⁴

³. "Proclamation of Lord Charles Somerset, August 8:th, 1817" in Theal, G M Records of the Cape Colony William Clowes and Sons, London, 1900, Vol. X, pp. 375.

⁴. Ross, R Adam Kok's Griqua's: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa Cambridge University Press 1976, pp. 21

So, a hundred years ago, the term *bergenaar* connoted both respect and fear amongst the Khoekhoe people. It may well have been whispered with pride amongst the young boys, tired of watching their fathers take the lash. It may also have been whispered with sorrow amongst Khoekhoe mothers, fearing each morning to find their son's beds empty. Even today, when the word has been shortened in Brown Afrikaans to describe another set of 'mountain' people, the 'bergies', feelings are conflicted about it. On the one hand, the bergies are our conscience, a reminder of how far we as a people have failed our own. On the other, as we can see amongst the modern day Rasta movement, the mountain people represent an alternative to our youth too proud to choose selling out, still hopeful enough to believe that in the present times there must be an alternative to bending our backs yet again under the the capitalist sjambok.

I must explain that nowadays the whip may be less physical and more mental - except perhaps for the rural farm workers who still get punished for 'sheep stealing'. Yet even for the most urbanized of Brown youth, the sjambok is real, and it punishes. Some, like the adherents of the Burning Spear movement, have chosen not to give in and have refused to work for the white man. They have chosen instead to live only on the kindness of their families and on what they can hunt and gather. It is a difficult choice. The sight of Brown people sleeping under bus shelters and in shop entrances is a living reminder to all of us of what can happen to any of us still landless people. Yet, where it may be a choice to

dissociate from the capitalist economy, it is a choice that must command respect. However many go under to alcoholism and drugs, some few who survive remind the rest of us that spiritual freedom is an ideal worthy not only of death, but of life.

This chapter is going to be about the mental abuse to which white travel writers and scientists subjected the Khoekhoe for a period of some fifty years, from about 1780 to 1815. I ask you to read it in the knowledge that the mental abuse is far from over, in fact, I will also discuss how it continues to the present day. What I have to write is painful and soul searing. It would not be right to present it without simultaneously presenting some emotional tools to help the reader to deal with it. All I have to offer are the ideas and examples which sustain me in my work. Before describing the lies and abuse, it is important to remember those who overcame, those who fought and perhaps bent, but who fought hard to leave us a memory of struggle, a reminder that no abuse and no material poverty, can deprive one of a final spiritual victory.

Alternative Femininities

"Among the most powerless in the larger society, Black women community workers have moral power and prestige because they are women who represent the total community's interests and who build carefully a culture of resistance through community work in many critical places."⁵

⁵. Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend "Building in Many Places: Multiple Commitments and Ideologies in Black Women's Community Work" in Bookman, Ann and Sandra Morgan (eds.) Women and the Politics of Empwerment Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1988, pp. 75..

I need a moment to talk about my paternal grandmother. She was not a rich woman, in fact some would have thought that she had enough to do just seeing to her own. She was the wife of a Brown locksmith with eight children of her own, and yet she found herself rich enough to share with those whom, she felt, had even less than she. When I came to know her she had an entire family living at the back, whom she fed and clothed to the best of her ability. This was only the most visible instance of a desire to share the little she had with those less fortunate.

I have known many Brown women like her. I cannot state with certainty what is at the root of all this unacknowledged social welfare work. Perhaps it stems from pride: that we who are better off must see to our own. Perhaps it stems from culture: from a history of loving and sharing. Or perhaps it stems from faith: that we must give our all regardless of the cost. Suffice it to state that she was not alone. My maternal grandmother was the same, and to this day I have cousins who are not cousins by blood but the children of children she simply adopted. My grandmother-in-law, still living, is a firm believer in sharing her worldly goods and she expects her family to do the same. None of these women have ever expected any recognition or thanks for their work, and that is perhaps just as well. The time one may discover their work is when it is too late to show one's appreciation. As my cousin says about my paternal grandmother, the only time you noticed her work was at the funeral. It was crowded, and people she had never seen in her life felt impelled to rise up and give thanks for the good my

grandmother had done them in her life. Without her, they would have been less human. I cannot think of a better eulogy for anyone.

So far, a typical Brown story, in fact, you could walk the streets of Bonteheuwel or Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town, and on every street you would find a grandmother like the ones I have known. In this short space it is perhaps impossible to avoid creating a stereotype of my beloved grandmother, but my purpose is to present you with an image of what resistance means. Let it lie in your mind, side by side with that of Khoekhoe men who forsook all to fight for freedom. For though they fought, they had to eat and be healed, and without the spirit of Brown woman, not one man amongst them would be able to stand up and fight.

A Loss-Of-Innocence Story

"[the Boers] surrounded the place during the night, spying the Bushmen's fires. At daybreak the firing commenced and it lasted until the sun was up a little way. The commando party loaded and fired and reloaded a great many times before they had finished. A great many people - women and children - were killed that day. The men were absent [on a raid]. Only a few little children escaped and they were distributed amongst the people composing the commando. " ⁶

One more story, a loss of innocence story, just to remind us of why I am writing this. This one is about one of my paternal grandmother's great-granddaughters, a bright and loving child. I was standing with my cousin, one spring day in 1996, on the verandah and she said "guess where my daughter was yesterday ?" The child, smiling yet embarrassed, told the story of how she had been to the museum with her school. "And she saw the 'Bushmen' there", my cousin prompted, " and I told her that they were her ancestors. Aren't they your ancestors, my baby? " she asked, but the child blushing with anger shook her head "no, no, no". And of course, in a sense they were not. The elders my niece had known, with all their faults, were proud people, and hardworking. "Respect" meant something to them. How was she supposed to relate the elders she had known to the objectified pornography of oppression she had found in the museum ? It was too much to ask of a child, indeed, it is much to ask of an adult.

Thus, before I have even attempted a description, I am offering an analysis. I want to suggest that the mental abuse I am talking of is not accidental, nor of

⁶. "Report of Commissioner Anthing, 1867" cited in Marais, J S The Cape Coloured People: 1652 - 1937 Witwatersrand University press, Johannesburg, 1968, pp. 28.

benign intent gone wrong. It originated during a period when the Khoekhoe were subject to colonization, slavery and genocide. It operated in such a way as to denigrate the women of a nation being subjected to inhuman cruelty. I want to suggest that the inhumanity perpetrated against Khoekhoe women by white men would not have been possible without the denigration. White men first had to be taught to believe that the women and children they were killing and enslaving were less than human. Accordingly, enter the travel writers and, later, the racist 'scientists'. It was their job to create a discursive world in which such beliefs were possible.

And what of my niece? I write this in a belief that as a Brown girl-child she has enough troubles to contend with, deprived of her birthright and living as she does in a world in which African women and children are still the most vulnerable to the burdens imposed by the intersection of oppressions based on gender, race and class. Long before she was born, her people had suffered enough. White society, as represented by the 'heritage institution' to which she was taken has no right to undermine her further by heaping abuse on her ancestors. No one has the right, in word and images, to continue to call her ancestors 'Bushman' and 'Hottentots'.

My niece needs many things to help her to lead a rich and full life. Most of all she needs love and faith. No one has a right to deprive her of innocence. So I write

this to challenge the right of white producers and disseminators of knowledge to deprive my niece of pride in herself and the people who bore her.

Science and the Imperialist Gaze

"As education shall expand the mind of the Rising generation, as Civilization shall go steadily rather than rapidly onwards, and as Liberal Sentiments and Knowledge shall come to bear upon the Colony's Capabilities, an entire change will be wrought on the aspect of the country. Every acre of cultivable land will be brought into use, every tree and herb, and almost every green leaf will be rendered subservient to the use of man, as it was meant by the Creator to be."

Cape Almanac, 1830⁷

The dehumanizing processes of which I have to write began in Europe. Before Europeans came to steal African land and people, they had first to convince themselves that it was their right. One may see eighteenth century European science as a process of creating entitlement through 'othering'. The white men created an image of themselves as entitled, and an image of Africa and Africans as existing only to be possessed.

The chief innovation of enlightenment science was that it was all-embracing. It was considered not only possible, but necessary, to investigate and understand all of nature. Medieval superstition was to be replaced by a complete body of knowledge. The act of naming and ordering was the primary tool in this endeavor. Taxonomy became the epitome of eighteenth century science. The

⁷. Cited in Trapido, Stanley 'The Emergence of Liberalism and the Making of "Hottentot Nationalism", 1815-1834' in Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa vol. 17, no: 42, 1992, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, pp. 37.

aspirations of this branch of knowledge become clear when we consider the taxonomic system which was to become the biological standard, that of Linnaeus. His system "was a descriptive system designed to classify all the plants on the earth, known and unknown, according to the characteristics of their reproductive parts."⁸ The idea that it was possible to devise a system which would cover the unknown as well as the known seems slightly megalomaniac today, but it was not unusual for eighteenth century Europe.

The act of naming partakes of the power of the Divine. To the enlightenment scientists, 'to name' was not a matter of knowing the inner being of a plant, animal or mountain. Instead it meant to define, to classify, to 'know' nature in the biblical sense. As a Swedish Lutheran not given to hypocrisy, Linnaeus himself was perfectly aware of this aspect of his system:

"He referred to himself as a second Adam, the 'eye' of God, who could give true representations, true names...The 'balance of nature' was maintained partly by the role of the new 'man' who would see clearly and name accurately, hardly a trivial identity in the face of eighteenth century European expansion. Indeed, this is the identity of the modern authorial subject, for whom inscribing the body gives assurance of mastery."⁹

The first Adam was given all of earth to rule. The second Adam aspired to equal dominance. But a ruler needs someone to rule. The development of European 'science' required the development of an 'other' which would embrace all the attributes of Satan in their minds. "The unconscious assumption in all these

⁸. Pratt, Mary L Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation Routledge, New York (1992), pp. 24.

⁹. Haraway, Donna Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science Routledge and Kegan, New York, 1989, pp. 7.

ideas was that God had created man 'in His Image' which was necessarily the image of the biologist."¹⁰

How much lower on the scale of good and evil were the peoples who did not conform to the self-image of the scientist, such as the Khoekhoe? We are in a position to gauge this distance with some accuracy. It should be borne in mind that Linneaus' system of classifying according to the reproductive parts was not limited to plants. The classifying eye was also trained on those of the Khoekhoe. From the late seventeenth century onwards, a widespread belief existed amongst European scientists that Khoekhoe men were born with only one testicle. When explorers came to the Cape it would seem as if their lofty interest in the vagaries of this 'scientific' debate obscured their perceptions of the genocide taking place. Thus Kolbe's account of his journey in 1713 abounded with accounts of a primitive way of life - meaning by this not the exterminating savagery of the commandos, but the lives of people reeling under the impact of smallpox and war. Kolbe's contribution to the debate was to argue that the absence of one testicle was a result of manipulation, rather than genetics. In proof of this, he devoted a chapter to a ceremony in which young boys had a testicle removed and replaced with a ball of sheep's fat.¹¹ Kolbe, however, was a lone liberal voice in the wilderness - other scientists in Europe rather surprisingly ascribed his description to pure invention, and continued to hold fast to the genetic theory.

¹⁰. Curtin, Philip The Image Of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850 Longman, London, 1965, pp. 41.

Linneaus classified the Khoekhoe as not quite part of the human species on the basis of his perception of their genitals.¹²

In Linneaus' system, the human species was divided into four subgroups, in descending order the Europeans, Asians, native Americans and Africans. The Khoekhoe belonged to a separate species, *Homo Monstrosus*. Taxonomy both classified and introduced a hierarchy in the act of naming. While European scientists disagreed on the precise merit of the details of Linneaus' system, the colonizing project itself - the principle that it was necessary to 'know' nature, and the method of gaining mastery through naming - became widely accepted.¹³ Science served imperialism by manipulating perceptions of nature. It produced an orderly known hierarchy in which the place of the white man at the top was legitimized as a 'natural' order. In the case of the Khoekhoe, Linneaus' classification relieved them of the guilt of genocide - when white settlers went to murder the Khoekhoe, European science offered them the conviction that the people they were killing were not human.

The testicle debate raged on until Linneaus' pupil Sparrman brought to bear the full weight of scientific method in 1777: 'Sparrman ... *observes* that Hottentot men *have* testicles, and on the basis of his observation denies the existence of

¹¹. Kolbe, Peter Naaukeurige en Uitvoerige Beschrywing van die Kaap de Goede Hoop, Blathazar Lakeman, Amsterdam, 1727, Vol. I, pp.506; cf. also Pratt Imperial Eyes, pp. 52.

¹². Linneaus, Carl Systema Naturae Tenth Edition, British Museum, London, 1956 (1758), pp. 22.

¹³. Cf. Pratt Imperial Eyes, pp. 52.

the procedure Kolbe described.¹⁴ Sparrman's observations brought to light a fact which, it seems, had escaped European observers all along, and paved the way for Khoekhoe admittance into the human species. The damage, however, had been done. In the creation of a colonizing discourse, the important fact about the debate was not so much the wrongs or rights of a fundamentally peculiar argument, but the very fact that such an argument existed in the first place. Scientific effort had created a fundamental dichotomy between Khoekhoe and European, observer and observed. It had introduced a clear hierarchy between the two - the very direction of the scientific gaze implied that the Khoekhoe were less than human. The existence of the debate certainly clarified a key distinction between those who looked at testicles, and those who were looked at.

Engendering the Travelwriters

"By this I have realised with regret how the whole country has been spoilt by the recent freedom of bartering, and the atrocities committed by the vagabonds ... and so from men who sustained themselves quietly by cattlebreeding, living in peace and contentment ... they have nearly all become Bushmen, hunters and brigands, dispersed everywhere between and in the mountains"¹⁵

What the Khoekhoe may have thought about the debate is hard to say. The spectacle of traveller after traveller earnestly observing must have been extremely odd. Then again, it may be readily believed that Khoekhoe men had

¹⁴. Ibid., pp. 53.

¹⁵. "Starrenburg's Journal", cited in Penn, Nigel The Northern Cape Frontier Zone: 1700-1815. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cape Town (1995) pp. 70.

few opportunities to laugh at this time. Yet it seems as if some of the Khoekhoe fully appreciated the humour of the situation - as Le Vaillant complained:

"Those of the Gheysiquas whom I questioned on the subject gave me such an absurd reason that I almost hesitate to repeat it. According to them, it was a mark of distinction which their ancestors ... invented for the purpose of knowing each other.

After a page spent considering the logic of this explanation, Le Vaillant regretfully concluded that 'but that the people of one of them, in order to recognize each other, should adopt a mark difficult to distinguish ... appears to me improbable and not entitled to belief.'¹⁶ Indeed, no amount of improbable stories could divert the insatiable curiosity of European scientists.

As far as the development of "science" was concerned, having admitted the Khoekhoe to the human race it would seem as if this gesture extended the definition of humanity more than it raised the Khoekhoe to a new dignity. It served rather to lower the ontological status of other Africans. Increasingly, the Khoekhoe began to laugh less and fight more. The transition from the testicle debate to the debate over Khoekhoe women needs to be seen in the context of the intensification of Khoekhoe resistance in the east and the north, from the late 1770s' and throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Explorers and travel writers participated in the process of creating discursive hierarchies by providing raw material, in the form of stories, illustrations, and specimens, for the taxonomists of Europe. Their task was crucial in two ways.

¹⁶ Le Vaillant Francois New Travels Into the Interior Parts of Africa By the Way Of the Cape Of Good Hope In the Years 1783, 84, 85. G G and J Robinson, London, 1796, III: 338-9.

Exploration gave vital information on the riches of the land and its people, and simultaneously represented these riches as available.¹⁷ Also, the development of scientific method created a hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. This sleight of hand served to divert attention from the extermination taking place in southern Africa. While scientists debated Khoekhoe genitals, the object of study was fast being decimated. In part this division of labour between scientists and commandos was accomplished through mutual distrust and contempt. The white settlers have left few records concerning the explorers. However, despite the fact that it was the commandos of the Dutch East India Company who ensured their access to the interior, the travel writers invariably denigrated the local white settlers. Yet the technique of distancing themselves from the perpetrators of physical violence should not obscure our perceptions of the intimate connections between the two groups. Travel writing shaped European perceptions of Africa and provided a justification for colonization. It was in a public climate which saw colonization as both good and necessary that money was raised to fund the chartered companies which provided arms and ammunition for soldiers.

This technique of despising the local settlers served a psychological purpose for the travel writers. Pratt has argued that in order to do their job, explorers spent a lot of time convincing themselves that their activities were harmless:

¹⁷ Jordanova, L Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the Eighteenth and the Twentieth Centuries Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1989, pp. 22.

"In the literature of the imperial frontier, the conspicuous innocence of the naturalist, I would suggest, acquires meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest, a guilt the naturalist eternally tries to escape, and eternally invokes, if only to distance himself from it once again. Even though the travellers were witnessing the daily realities of the contact zone, even though the institutions of expansionism made their travels possible, the *discourse* of travel that natural history produces, and is produced by, turns on a great longing: for a way of taking possession without subjugation and violence."¹⁸

In the face of Khoekhoe resistance, this longing had no possibility of being fulfilled. On the contrary, the strength of African men in war was such that it was causing dangerous splits amongst the colonists themselves. Penn argues that it was only the intervention of the British in 1795 which kept the colonial project from coming to a halt in southern Africa:

"Indeed, the British invasion relieved the Company officials from having to cope with a situation which was becoming, if it was not already, quite unmanageable. The British arrival coincided with burgher rebellions in Swellendam and Graaf-Reinet which were, *inter alia*, caused by the colonists dissatisfaction with the Company's inability to engineer conclusive defeats of the San and the Xhosa."¹⁹

It may be seen that the ultimate cause of settler rebellion was African resistance.

In these events we may seek reasons why the testicle debate raged with such intensity during the eighteenth century. Travel writers distanced themselves from local settlers as a way to distance themselves from the brutal acts committed: they mentioned settler brutality only to distance themselves from it. Yet, travel writing also provided a discourse which intervened in the material crises affecting the colonized as a group. Travel writers did not, as a rule, kill the Khoekhoe. But they called the Khoekhoe names, and the harder Khoekhoe men fought, the more offensive the names were to become. These names provided a "scientific" justification for the settlers who killed and enslaved. Travel writers created a

¹⁸. Pratt *Imperial Eyes* pp. 58

psychological armoury which may have served the settlers as much as the arms and ammunition provided by the colonial administration.

The Imperial Gaze Discovers the Female of the Species

"Alas ! all these splendid chimeras vanished before me. [They] ... were all romances existing in the brain of the author, and in the taverns where they had been told him by those who made him their sport."²⁰

The question of the truth value of travel writings is one which historians generally seem not to have addressed. Rather, there is an unspoken assumption that travel writers can be cited as if they spoke the literal truth.²¹ Undoubtedly these sources are evidence of something, but evidence of what, exactly?

When reading Kolbe's travel description, Khoekhoe society emerged as almost exclusively male. In the text, as in the illustrations, women were never in the foreground, and their sexual characteristics hardly noticeable. The one exception to this were the chapters dealing with childbirth and infant nutrition. As late as 1779, Paterson's travelogue still depicted the Khoekhoe as a male society.²² Yet, the waning of the testicle debate was paradoxically accompanied by an increased

¹⁹. Penn The Northern Cape Frontier, pp. 387.

²⁰. Le Vaillant New Travels, Vol. II, pp. 353.

²¹. Cf. for instance Beinart, William "Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Cape" Journal Of Southern African Studies Vol. 24, No.4, 1998.

²². Kolbe Naaukeurige Beschrywings, Vol. II, pp. 506; Paterson, William A Narrative of Four Journeys Into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffraria in the Years 1777, 1778, 1779

J Johnson, London, 1830 pp. 115.

sexual interest in the Khoekhoe. From the last decades of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, this interest shifted to the women.

Although earlier descriptions of Khoekhoe women's bodies exist, we may date the intensification of interest to the travels of Thunberg and Sparrman in the late 1770s. The latter spent not much more than two paragraphs on the testicle debate, but devoted ten pages to a description of the

"... *clitoris* and *nymphae* [which] are in general pretty much elongated; a peculiarity which undoubtedly has got footing in the nation, in consequence of the relaxation necessarily produced by the method they have of besmearing their bodies, their slothfulness and the warmth of the climate.²³

Sparrman ascribed this phenomenon to culture rather than genetics. In tones reminiscent of the testicle debate, this phenomenon, dignified by the Latin name of *tablier*, was to preoccupy travellers for the next one and a half century, and again, the chief focus of the debate was not to ascertain the existence of the phenomenon, but to determine as to whether its existence was due to the work of nature or of culture. It can now, of course, be finally resolved since it should be evident from this historical survey that the **tablier** owed its existence to the growth and spread of what can only be termed a culture of colonization. An indication of the rising intensity of the debate is perhaps given by the way these perceived characteristics grew ever larger as time went on. Sparrman's perceptions were not much more than an inch, while Gordon's some ten years

²³. Sparrman, Anders A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, Towards the Arctic Circle and Round the World But Chiefly Into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffres From the Year 1772 to 1776 G G and J Robinson, London, 1785, pp. 182.

later ranged from one to three inches.²⁴ Le Vaillant estimated them at four inches while Barrow states that "[t]he longest that was measured somewhat exceeded five inches..."²⁵ The counting of testicles had given way to measurements of the labia.

This fascination with Khoekhoe women's most intimate parts was accompanied by an interest in a more accessible sexual characteristic. As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, descriptions of Khoekhoe women's buttocks become common practice for a white traveller in Southern Africa. Sparrman was apparently unaware of this feature, which became known as *steatopygia*, but Le Vaillant identified it in a remote Khoekhoe clan.²⁶ Where Le Vaillant got the idea from we do not know, although it is noteworthy that Gordon, who does not write about it, nevertheless illustrates it.²⁷ A preoccupation with *steatopygia* is echoed in all subsequent traveller's accounts, with Barrow, striving for credibility through exactitude, giving us a measurement '... five and a half inches from the line touching the spine'.²⁸ What is striking about these observations is their similarity. Lichtenstein's description:

"[t]he extraordinary protuberances of the hinder parts of some of these women excited our astonishment... Perhaps the custom of carrying their

²⁴. Cf. Raper, P E and Boucher, M (eds.) Robert Jacob Gordon, Cape Travels, 1777-1786 Brentwood Press, Houghton, 1988, pp. 56, pp.82; Barrow, John Travels Into the Interior of South Africa In Which are Described the Character and the Condition of the Dutch Colonists of the Cape of Good Hope and of the Several Tribes Beyond its Limits Cadell and Davies, London, 1806, pp. 235.

²⁵. F. Le Vaillant Voyage de Monsieur Le Vaillant Dans l'Interieur de l'Afrique Chez Benoit le Francq, Brussels, 1791, pp. 271 ; Barrow Travels pp. 235.

²⁶. Le Vaillant New Travels, Vol. II, pp. 180.

²⁷. Raper and Boucher Robert Jacob Gordon, pp. 337.

²⁸. Barrow Travels, 238.

children on their backs may have some share in this singular conformation, but it is certain that the principal cause must be sought in the original organization."²⁹

could in fact be describing the illustration in Gordon's book. The concept of

steatopygia became inextricably linked with the theme of the woman and child.

What did the Khoekhoe think about these obsessions? Again, it is hard to say. Certainly amongst their descendants it is considered extremely rude to mention someone's private parts. This is the more so when the private parts are those of an ancestor, and if the ancestor is female the very mention of them is considered a direct invitation to fight. So pervasive is this perception that if this chapter were written for an audience in Mitchell's Plain, say, or the Richtersveld, a suitable title would have been "Jou Ma Se M---; or what white people have been saying about us for three hundred years". But of course people do not talk like that any more, at least not in academic circles.

Would the eighteenth century Khoekhoe have felt equally offended? We cannot say. It is precisely due to the physical obsession that it becomes hard to say. For one thing, every page spent describing the *tablier* and *steatopygia* is one page less that the traveller can record the ideas and perceptions of the Khoekhoe for posterity. If written pages may be translated into attention span, it is clear that travellers were much less interested in the minds of the Khoekhoe than in their own psychological phantoms. For the genital encounter was fundamental in setting the tone for the subsequent relationship between Khoekhoe and traveller.

²⁹. Lichtenstein, Henry Travels Into Southern Africa In the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 Henry

Yet of this relationship we are told little, far less, in fact, than we are told about Khoekhoe genitals. An encounter like the following occurs completely without context:

"On the 12:th I again examined a Hottentot woman. I found the genitals to be the same as those of the others... The skin was very elastic. When they hung loosely each was an inch wide and a quarter of an inch thick, but I could stretch each out to a width of an inch and a half without the length being affected significantly. Then they resembled two wings."³⁰

We do not know who the woman was, where she came from or how she reacted to the examination. I cannot even say from the text whether the woman was alive or dead, in fact, we have no certainty that this incident did happen, and was not just the product of Gordon's fevered imagination. If it did happen, it is possible to deduce from Gordon's location at the time that she was likely to be a farm **inboekseling**, and we know that the period under study was the high point of Khoekhoe slavery. But of her conditions of labour, of the loss of land and the appearance of the sjambok, there is nothing for Gordon to say. Her appearance in the source, and therefore in written history, was limited to Gordon's perception of her genital parts. Gordon set what was going to become an enduring image of the African woman before the world: reduced to a bodily part, she existed only to be known, named, categorized and taken.

The genital encounter is crucial in that it set the terms of future interaction, of what was said and what was done thereafter. In that sense, it lies at the heart of the history of Khoekhoe interaction with whites. What, if anything, could Gordon 'see' of Khoekhoe society after his examination? The question is impossible to

Colburn, London 1812 Vol. I, pp. 321.

answer, both because of the genital encounter itself, and because it is presented as a decontextualized event.

Only occasionally does the reader find an awareness of the relations of power which structured the encounter: "I had already fallen asleep, and the Hottentots crowded around me so closely that I considered it prudent to take my musket unobtrusively in my hand in the course of conversation."³¹ It may be seen that the invention of the *tablier* coincided with a period of determined, and largely successful, Khoekhoe resistance. By the end of the eighteenth century on the northern frontier, as well as in the east, colonists were being forced to abandon their 'loan-farms' and retreat.³² In any war, name-calling is a common feature. The phenomena of the *tablier* and *steatopygia* were a suitable way for European travel writers to name and control the Khoekhoe, who not so long before were despised as animals, and who were now showing themselves capable of a violence almost equalling that of the colonizers.

From the vantage point of the present, we must understand that the genital encounter did not only enable the settlers to dispossess the Khoekhoe of the land and their children. Their obsession with the genital encounter enabled travel writers to dispossess the descendants of the Khoekhoe of much of their history. The history I have to write from these sources would be dishonest if I avoided

³⁰. Raper and Boucher Robert Jacob Gordon, pp. 82.

³¹. *Ibid.*, pp. 335.

³². Cf. Penn The Northern Frontier, pp. 392-3.

the namecalling, the gazing and the measuring. This is the truth of which these writings speak.

The Imperial Knife and A Dead Body

Q: Was your daughter pickled when you left her, or what was done to her?

A: She was beat with a thong that she could not stand up, and I heard from the Hottentots that the master had been rubbing her back with salt.

Testimony of Uithaolder Hendrik before Landdrost

Cuyler, 1810³³

In 1810, "scientific" racism received an enormous boost with the arrival of a real live specimen in London. As one of the spoils of British imperialism a Khoekhoe woman, Sarah Bartmann, could be viewed in Piccadilly for the ruinous sum of two shillings.³⁴ The genital encounter now moved to Europe.

It was perhaps a sign of the increasing popularization of science that the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann was an instant success. The chief object of interest was her perceived *steatopygia*:

"One pinched her, another walked around her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; and one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, 'natral'. This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with indifference, except upon some great provocation; when she seemed inclined to resent brutality which even a Hottentot could understand."³⁵

The exhibition created a major scandal in London with some prominent abolitionists objecting both to Sarah Bartmann's state of undress and to her

³³. Theal Records, Vol. VII, pp. 408.

³⁴. Edwards, P and Walvin, J Black Personalities in the Era Of the Slave Trade Macmillan, London, 1983, pp. 146.

³⁵. "Memoirs of Charles Mathews" cited in Altick, Richard The Shows of London Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (1978) pp. 270.

servitude. She was moved to the provinces and disappeared altogether from the records until she resurfaced in Paris in 1814. In March, 1815, Sarah Bartmann was examined by a team of French scientists. For Sarah, the ordeal lasted three days. No effort was spared "to establish by every contrivance of art and science the characteristics of this race of the human species."³⁶ That the scientists placed the Khoekhoe lowest on the rung of human beings is revealed by the detailed comparisons made between her and various species of monkeys. She was certainly treated as an experimental animal - she was placed on a podium, poked, prodded and measured 'by every contrivance'. At length, the scientists managed to convince themselves that Sarah Bartmann's rear end, like that of other humans, consisted largely of fat.³⁷ They then attempted to examine her further, but could not succeed in divesting her of her clothing.³⁸

The disappointed scientists had not long to wait. Sarah Bartmann died in late 1815, and her body was given to two scientists to dissect. "Dissection of her apron ... was the first order of business. Cuvier relished the opportunity to resolve the mysteries of her apron."³⁹ The dissection took sixteen hours. After satisfying their curiosity with regard to the *tablier*, the scientists cut up Sarah Bartmann's back to verify that the perceived *steatopygia* was not the result of a deformation of the spine. Finally, the body was sewn up and "prepared in such a

³⁶. "Description of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire" in Kirby, Percival R "The Hottentot Venus of the Musee de l'Homme, Paris" South African Journal of Science Vol. 50, No. 12, 319-25, pp.320.

³⁷. Gould "Hottentot Venus", pp. 22.

³⁸. "Description of Henri de Blainville", cited in Schiebinger, Londa Nature's Body: Gender In the Making of Modern Science Beacon Press, Boston (1993) pp. 170.

way as to allow one to see the nature of her labia."⁴⁰ The result was preserved and became a permanent exhibit at the Jardin du Roi, later to become the Musée de l'Homme.⁴¹

Dismembered, isolated, decontextualized - the body in the glass case epitomizes the way in which some white men were trying to see Khoekhoe women at this time, as unresisting objects open to exploitation. The result of their obsession with Sarah Bartmann's body is that there are large parts of her history I simply cannot write. What we do know is that the genital encounter at this point became not just obsessive, but obscene. Scientists had moved from creating phantoms on paper to sculpting their narratives with knives on a dead body.

The multitude of illustrations of her reveal only subtle manipulations to create the desired image. Cuvier's drawing of Sarah Bartmann is the illustration with the strongest claims to visual literalism, and yet it is not true to life.⁴² It is likely that this drawing is a copy of one of the poses drawn by four artists during Sarah Bartmann's ordeal at the Jardin du Roi.⁴³ Yet both drawings leave out what is relevant - Sarah Bartmann's clothes, the attempt to remove them, the sheer intimidation of being a woman alone with several men, all of whom had

³⁹. Ibid..

⁴⁰. Cuvier's autopsy notes, cited in Gilman, Sanders "Black Bodies, White Bodies : Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 12,1, Autumn 1985, (204-89), pp. 212.

⁴¹. Gilman, Sanders *Sexuality In Art: An Illustrated History* John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1989, pp. 289.

⁴². Kirby, Percival R "The Hottentot Venus" *Africana Notes and News* Vol. VII, No:3, 1949, (55-62), pp. 58.

the most dishonourable of intentions. There is one revealing difference between the two drawings. The one from the Jardin du Roi depicts features quite unlike the ape-like face of Cuvier's drawing. What Cuvier's hand was creating was his own perception of the Khoekhoe as "degraded, disgusting... swarthy, filthy and greasy..." and not Sarah Bartmann at all.⁴³ The same applies to the preserved body. During Sarah Bartmann's lifetime her private parts had been, in Cuvier's words, "...carefully hidden either between her thighs or more deeply."⁴⁵

What Cuvier's knife had done in order to achieve the full frontal exhibit in a glass case does underscore the point that the phantoms of white scientists required innumerable sleights of hand to be sustainable. The history of the people I wish to write about, if it is at all possible to write, must be found through the interstices of these manipulations.

With the life of Sarah Bartmann, the genital encounter itself had begun to create the history of which we have to write. Of course, many African women in this period were taken from Africa to labour in the West. But Sarah Bartmann and her many successors were taken only to satisfy the curiosity of scientists about a phantom they themselves had invented. The preserved body and the autopsy notes became widely publicized, and were used as scientific proof of the objective existence of these inventions. Cuvier and St Hilaire went on to enjoy

⁴³. Kirby, Percival R "A Further Note on the Hottentot Venus" *Africana Notes and News* Vol. XI, No. 4, 1954, (165-168), pp. 161, pp. 166.

⁴⁴. Cited in Comaroff, John and Jean. Comaroff *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, pp. 104.

distinguished careers, during which they became important propagators of ideas about the natural inferiority of Africans. Upon Sarah Bartmann's body, a superstructure of scientific racism was built which supported the continued enslavement of Africans in the Americas and the 'civilizing mission' in Africa.

Conclusion

*"A woman who writes has power. A woman with power is feared. In the eyes of the world that makes us dangerous beasts."*⁴⁶

In this chapter I have documented the genital preoccupation of white male scientists during a critical period of the colonization of southern Africa. I have argued that this preoccupation was a discursive weapon in the colonial struggle. In those days, I have little doubt that Khoekhoe women may have thought 'sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me'. But in the late eighteenth century, Khoekhoe women still had some power. Those on the fringes of the white settler occupation, and those outside the colonial borders, still had access to land. They could feed their families, and therefore retained more power to pass on their culture and traditions.

Today, it is different. The descendants of the Khoekhoe are a landless people, forced to make a living in the interstices of a white owned and white controlled economy. Brown women and children, being the poorest part of the community,

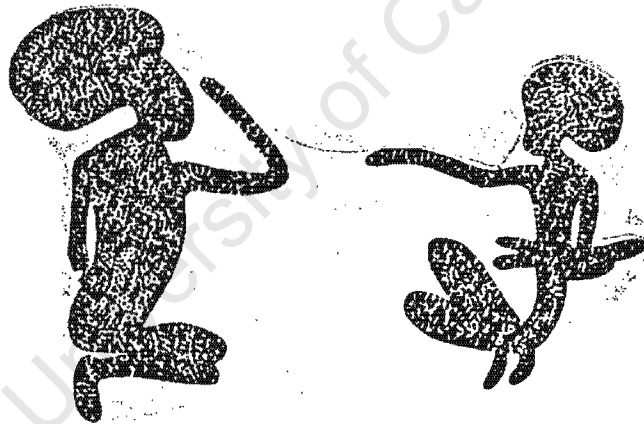
⁴⁵. Cited in Schiebinger *Nature's Body*, pp. 171.

are the most exposed to the triple oppression of race, class and gender on which the present economy is based. Yet, the genital preoccupation has not ceased, but on the contrary has experienced a renaissance since the mid-eighties. It may be seen in the postcards showing naked Khoekhoe women, on sale at many tourist outlets. And it may be seen within the precincts of white heritage institutions, such as the one which so shocked my niece. What is its purpose today? I can only conclude that this renaissance is not unrelated to the many Brown women who have fought the triple oppression and survived, to hold their community together and instil pride in their children.

⁴⁶. Alzaldia, Gloria "Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer" in Anzaldia, Gloria and Cherrie Moraga (eds.) This Bridge Called my Back: Writings By Radical Women Of Color Kitchen Table: Woman Of Color Press, New York, 1983, pp. 164.

CHAPTER THREE
IMAGES OF SARAH BARTMANN
RACE AND GENDER IN EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

"The question which we might legitimately raise at this point is that, given the ideological structures of domination outlined above, how can any reading of women's responses ... hope to reconstruct the Indian woman as the subject of the controversy? In other words, do ideological constructs that condition women's participation predetermine the nature of women's responses and make any interrogation of the consciousness and agency of women themselves irrelevant? I contend that a focus on the voice or the agency of the women themselves does not have to be opposed to an examination of the ideological structures from which they emerged."¹



¹. Sinha, Mrinalini "Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism: Locating the Indian Woman" in Shapiro, Ann-Louise (ed.) Feminists Revision History Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1994 pp. 253.

Introduction

The paper on which this chapter is based was originally written for a feminist audience, and therefore aimed at intervening in the debate about the relationship between race and gender which is still preoccupying the feminist movement within and outside the academic world.²

This was a simple exercise: to demonstrate that it was not possible to analyze the stories about Sarah Bartmann without considering how ideas of race and gender influenced each other. This approach in itself was not startlingly new, even in feminist history. Like many Black feminists and womanists before me, I took one set of literature on race, and another on gender, and considered the implications for the life of one Black woman. However, there is still space open to implement this idea in many, many Black women's stories. Although the subject matter of my story was emotionally exhausting, it was an intellectual pleasure to be able to do the job in minute and careful detail.

This chapter examines the way in which racist and sexist discourses were constructed around each other in the case of the Khoekhoe. What was important about the myths built around Sarah Bartmann was precisely how this became an increasingly conscious, and public, process. I argue that before the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann, sexual analyses of Black women were a relatively minor theme in public discourses. Afterwards, ideas about the essentially deviant sexual nature of the Khoekhoe spread to include

². Abrahams, Yvette "Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, Race and Gender in Early Nineteenth Century Britain", Pierson, R Roach (ed.) Empire, Colony, Nation: Critical Categories Of Gender Analysis, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1997.

virtually all Africans. Sarah Bartmann's exhibition thus became a central moment in British constructions of race and gender.

This chapter centres on Sarah Bartmann's exhibition in London in 1810, and the publicity surrounding the court case it produced. It rests on the conviction that the various uses of Sarah Bartmann, the metaphor, underpinned and reinforced the relations of power in which the living woman was embedded. The chapter investigates two aspects of this process. It considers the rationale behind exhibitions such as that of Sarah Bartmann. Here, there is much to be gained from a description of the culture in which these motivations were shaped. Further, I examine how Sarah Bartmann's exhibition marked a key change in the way Black people were represented in British middle and working class culture. It considers how this process emanated from struggles over changing definitions of gender, particularly amongst the middle class. Since the people who became scientists in the nineteenth century increasingly emanated from the middle classes, rather than the aristocracy, these struggles were not irrelevant to issues surrounding the 'scientific' treatment of Sarah Bartmann's body, or the creation of scientific metaphors of race based on the body.

As with the previous chapter, the original version of this chapter was heavily illustrated. Particularly with regard to working class interpretations of Sarah Bartmann's story, the posters and cartoons of her must have been influential in shaping people's understanding of her. Again, I have removed the

illustrations, but have left the references for those who need to gain a visual understanding of Sarah Bartmann, the metaphor.

Imperialism and the Freak Show

The very concept of 'show' implies something which is staged, performed and therefore constructed to create a specific impression on the viewer. Although the extent to which Sarah Bartmann herself had any influence on the nature of her performance is open to question, there is little doubt that her 'handler' went to considerable lengths to create a specific cultural construct. Lindfors has been perfectly frank about this characteristic of the freak show in a later period:

"Thus, as black stage performances in England and elsewhere in the western world in the latter half of the nineteenth century increased, they also grew less representative of the African peoples they purportedly were meant to portray. Stereotyping and dishonest fabrication became the norm, truth the exception"³

Lindfors' observation rings equally true of Sarah Bartmann's time. This is the more easily understood if we consider the structural nature of freak shows, and their purpose in the broader imperialist process.

The freak show occupied a niche all of its own in imperial British culture. Its appeal lay in its accessibility. Unlike the written word, or the visual conventions of painting and sculpture, the exhibition of oddities required little knowledge and no effort on the part of the viewer. The effect was both immediate and lasting:

³. Lindfors, Bernth "'The Hottentot Venus' and other African Attractions in nineteenth century England" Australasian Drama Studies 1:2, 1983, pp. 100.

"They were, in fact, an alternative medium to print, reifying the word; through them the vicarious became the immediate, the theoretical and general became the concrete and specific."⁴

It was the reification of the word which underscored the powerful symbolism of freak shows. The credulous came to gape, and having gaped, could return home in wonder at the oddities of the 'other', thus reaffirming the enduring normality of their own world. Not surprisingly, the nineteenth century was the heyday of the freak show. The industrial revolution had irrevocably changed the world of the British lower orders. The freak show, and its accompanying penny prints and advertising leaflets, was one of the many ways in which the disruption of the social fabric was made to seem a normal, almost an enviable, state of life.

There was an important racial dimension to this effect. As Edwards and Walvin have argued, white freaks were always exhibited as oddities, whose value lay in the way they were distinguished from the rest of their species. Black people, on the other hand, were exhibited as typical of their race.⁵ The savage freak show functioned to create the requisite distance between the colonizing self and the colonized 'other'. It must be borne in mind that it was precisely from the landless classes of British society that the armies of colonialism were recruited. Institutions such as the savage freak show may have contributed to the psychological make-up which enabled these functionaries to unleash violence for the greater glory of the British empire. In this sense, Sarah Bartmann was doubly a victim of British imperialism. Had it

⁴. Altick, Richard The Shows of London Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 1.

⁵. Edwards, P and J Walvin Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade Macmillan Press, London, 1983, pp. 183.

not been for the British colonization of the Cape, she would never have been brought to London. Once there, her perceived physical characteristics were pressed into the service of imperialism through the medium of the freak show.

A crucial part of the 'othering' process was the way in which African freak exhibits were invariably presented as bestial, serving to reinforce the common perception that there was little or no distinction between Black people and animals:

"The Black freak could be used to blur this distinction, as... in the case of the Hottentot Venus, by placing members of an already degraded race in a position of further degradation and by reinforcing the conception of Africa as a place of monsters" ⁶

The savage freak show served to reinforce common stereotypes. Less than five years after the second British occupation of the Cape, Sarah Bartmann could be viewed as one of the spoils of war. She also provided an early object lesson, showing the state of the indigenes in Britain's newest colony. The contrived savagery in which she was shown created a generalized picture of the savage people that British troops were at that moment trying to 'civilize'. That imperialism itself may have played some part in making Sarah Bartmann less human than her ancestors; that a childhood in a war zone and effective slavery in London may have made her sullenness and ferocity quite a normal reaction, was of course not obvious to the casual observer. On the contrary, the phenomenon of race as spectacle had to contrive that savagery as something so obvious it went unquestioned - in that certainty lay its strength and its meaning within the broader world of British imperialism.

⁶. Edwards and Walvin, Black Personalities , pp. 151.

The exhibition of Sarah Bartmann also marked an important change in the format of the savage freak show. The connection between bestiality and unbridled sexuality was made explicit. I have been unable to find that earlier popular representations of the savage included either women, or representations of sexuality. Certainly the 'Young Oranatu Savage' exhibited at Bartholomew Fair in 1752 was advertized as savage, but without any sexual overtones.⁷ The penny prints circulated prior to Sarah's exhibition were almost overwhelmingly male and while they represented Blacks as poor and degraded, they did not stress their sexual nature.⁸

Of course, bestiality and sexuality may have been linked in popular consciousness, but earlier representations of Black stereotypes did not make that element explicit. Representations of Sarah Bartmann, however, pushed the boundaries of public decency. While she was never exhibited fully naked, her dress was contrived to look nonexistent:

"...she is dressed in colour as nearly resembling her skin as possible. The dress is contrived to exhibit the entire frame of her body, and the spectators are even invited to examine the peculiarities of her form."⁹

The dress was obviously intended to emphasize her figure, and for all we know, may have created them through the use of a cinched waist, wadding or buckram. In an age where a glimpse of more than female ankles was regarded as indecent by middle class observers, the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann's legs clearly set her apart from white females. The invitation to

⁷. Walvin, J and J Walton (eds) : Leisure in Britain, 1780-1939, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1983, pp. 19.

⁸. Cf. eg. 'Billy Waters - the Dancing Fiddler' and 'Joseph Johnson, Black Sailor', in Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp. 116-117.

⁹. cited in Altick The Shows, pp.270.

explore what lay beneath her thin dress also acquired sexual overtones. All the illustrations of Sarah Bartmann during this period show that the response to this sexual invitation was overwhelming. It was not just that she became an object of sexual fantasies, but that sexual objectification became inseparable from the public representations of her. A typical example is the political caricature which shows her wearing the figure-hugging dress mentioned above. Other illustrations took the sexual fantasy one step further, distorting the convention of dress and portraying her as nearly naked. In an illustration comparing Mrs. Bartmann's anatomy to Lord Grenville's, while the white man and the Black woman are portrayed as equally abnormal in a physical sense, the man is fully dressed. Sarah Bartmann's status as freak, is underlined by her nakedness and the careful depiction of body parts such as nipples and ankles.¹⁰

Representations of Sarah Bartmann mark the turning point towards exhibiting the 'savage' as raw sexuality. The obscure illustrations of travel writings became increasingly socially acceptable. While in 1790 an English translator of a French traveller omitted both the verbal description and the picture purporting to be of a naked Khoekhoe woman, by 1810 Sarah Bartmann's body was being widely publicised in London.¹¹ In effect, conventional norms of decency were to become inapplicable to women of colour. The moral

¹⁰. Cf. eg: 'Prospects of Prosperity, or Good Bottoms Going Into Business' by C Williams; 'A pair of Broad Bottoms' by W Heath, both taken from Altick *The Shows*, pp. 271-272.

¹¹. Cf. Schiebinger's discussion of Le Vaillant in Schiebinger, Linda *Nature's Body: Gender In the Making of Modern Science* Beacon Press, Boston, 1993 pp. 168.

lesson was clear - as a journalist observed of one of Sarah Bartmann's unfortunate successors, Tono Maria, the 'Venus of South America':

"He whose gallantry thought little of our fair Countrywoman before, will probably leave the show 'clean an altered man' and for life after pay homage due to the loveliest works of creation, enhanced in value by so wonderful a contrast."¹²

If the freak show itself came to play an important role in underpinning an imperialist mind set, the exhibition of the sexualized savage was equally important in imparting gender specificity to the dichotomy between colonizer and colonized. By far the majority of those who went to the colonies to aid the imperial effort were men. The image of the civilization they were called upon to spread became increasingly symbolized by their 'fair countrywomen'. This image was created and disseminated in a dialogue with the image of the sexualized savage.

White Women, Black Women, and Men

The entry of the sexualized savage into images of popular culture may be seen as one of the effects of imperialism, but its popular acceptance is more likely to be due to developments inside Britain. By the 1770s, the Black population in Britain was larger than ever before, and overwhelmingly male.¹³ The most visible image of the Black was not a savage in darkest Africa, but a working man or a street entertainer. Most of these Black men married or had casual liaisons with white women " ... a fact which produced some of the most splanetic (and anti-plebian) outbursts from pamphleteers."¹⁴ The

¹². 1822, cited in Altick The Shows, pp. 273.

¹³. Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp. 17.

¹⁴. Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp 20.

increasingly visible presence of Blacks in Britain gave rise increasingly to a moral panic.

This moral panic dovetailed neatly with the more hysterical arguments of the anti-abolitionists. As the abolitionist debate gained in strength, so too did the debate on the sexual nature of Black men, and their seemingly irresistible attraction for white women. Much of this debate was marked by class snobbery. For instance, Edward Long complained in 1790 "(t)he lower class of women in England are remarkably fond of Blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention."¹⁵

It was in large part due to the debate on slavery that this moral panic showed no signs of diminishing in the early nineteenth century, despite the fact that tide had turned, and the Black population of Britain was by this time dwindling fast, due in no small degree to the ending of the slave trade in 1806. The increasing representations of the sexualized savage may be seen as an intervention in this discourse. To people like anti-abolitionist Edward Long, the reason why Black men had over a generation been largely assimilated into white working- or lower middle class families could not be due to simple demographics. Instead, anti-abolitionists created arguments about the sexual potency of Black men and their irresistible attraction to white women. These arguments defined a conceptual split between white female identity and Black.

¹⁵. Ibid.

Black men became the embodiment of the sexualized beast, which white, and particularly white working-class, women could not resist. Black women, however, were more savage than the men, so bestial that even their own men would choose a white woman in preference to them. This was the genesis of a process which culminated in the Victorian ideal of white womanhood. White women were to be increasingly denied sexual expression while for Black women, sexuality came to be seen as a defining characteristic. Sarah Bartmann's exhibition marked a change which was crucial to the success of this process, namely the fact that public displays of sexuality became legitimate. In the late eighteenth century these emotions had been 'too brutal to mention'. In the nineteenth, their representation became increasingly allowable, provided the woman represented was Black. There was a crucial class dimension to this process. The caricatures, for instance, were published in newspapers read mainly by the burgeoning middle class and the aristocracy. Had pictures of a near naked white woman been published in such a context, there would have undoubtedly been a public outcry. The caricatures of Sarah Bartmann, however, seem to have passed without a ripple. The exhibition, as well, was not aimed at the lower classes. It took place in the gentrified precincts of Piccadilly, and the entry fee - two shillings - would have been beyond the reach of most workers. As striking as the protests of the Evangelicals were, what is surely more striking is the broad acceptance of the exhibition amongst the middle class in general. Ironically, we have the spectacle of white middle class women, themselves subjected to

increasing expectations of chastity, indulging in the display of another woman's sexuality.¹⁶

There were reasons why the savage freak show became legitimate for the middle class, such as the spread of education, and the move of science away from the hands of the aristocratic amateur. The prurient interest in Sarah Bartmann's anatomy could be understood as motivated by an interest in 'science'. It should be borne in mind that at the time, it was popularly believed that Blacks could not feel pain. This belief was encouraged by respectable scientists such as the Frenchman Louis Figuer, who after extensive experiments "found that blacks were endowed with thick skins and insensitive nervous systems, making them impervious to pain."¹⁷ These 'scientific' findings were disseminated through the press and public lectures, and in effect created a climate which validated racism. The people who went to see the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann could view themselves as indulging a perfectly 'respectable' scientific curiosity. Their voyeurism implied an acceptance of the conceptual split between Black and white gender roles. In accepting the validity of a racist science, they had to accept its sexist implications as well. As options narrowed for women in the domestic gender struggles which were to come, the split left white women, not just on their own, but in a racial sense on the side of the white man. Increasingly, the only alternative to the desexualized, domesticated gender role dictated for

¹⁶. For more pictures, cf. "The Hottentot Venus" by Cuvier, taken from Kirby, Percival R "More about The Hottentot Venus" Africana Notes and News, Vol. X, No. 4, 1953, pp. 133; and by comparison "In Sunday Best" ,taken from Cunningham, C W Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1935, pp. 212.

¹⁷. Cohen, William The French Encounter with Africans, Indiana UP, Indiana, 1980, pp. 241.

white women was to become the sexual savage made physical in the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann and the many 'Venuses' of colour who succeeded her.

The Saints and Their Demons

The relationship between redefinitions of Black and white gender roles becomes evident when we look at what must surely have been one of the more liberal sections of British society, namely the abolitionist movement. This movement was undoubtedly more conservative, in every way, by 1810 than it had been during the 1770s and 1780s. In the earlier period abolitionists, together with radical political reformers, pioneered a political populism which used tracts, pamphlets, lectures and mass meetings to advance their cause. The connection with political radicalism, however, severely damaged the movement during the post-Revolution backlash, and the ongoing Napoleonic Wars exacerbated the conflict between political radicalism and patriotism. In consequence, the abolitionists moved away from radical populism and into parliamentary politics. This marked a separation from working class politics which was to endure into the 1820s. The increasing social respectability of the Abolitionist cause was accompanied by an increasing political conservatism.¹⁸

Representations of Sarah Bartmann bear witness to the growing schism between populist politics and Evangelicalism. Although the working class would not have had much access to Sarah Bartmann in the flesh, the original aquatint was used as a poster to advertise her exhibition in both London and

Paris, where it would have been seen by any passer by. In 1810, Sarah Bartmann's keeper was taken to court by some Abolitionists. This case will be discussed extensively in the following chapter. It is sufficient for our purpose here to note that the court case gave rise to numerous broadside ballads, which would have been sung by street artists and sold in penny sheets. Of little literary value, they were deeply conservative on both race and gender issues. For instance, one ballad draws a comparison between the abolitionists and the chivalrous knights of old, finding exquisite humour in the implicit contrast between Sarah the 'savage' and the gracious ladies of medieval times. It concludes:

"When speaking free from all alarm
The whole she does deride
And says she thinks there is no great harm
in showing her b--kside
Thus ended this sad tale of woe
Which raised well I wot
The fame and the revenues too
of SARTJEE HOTTENTOT." ¹⁹

It would seem as if the fact that the Evangelicals came to Sarah Bartmann's aid did much to discredit her amongst the working class. The Ballad of John Higginbottom of Bath is explicit in its lambasting of the Saints:

"A strange Metamorphosis ! - Who that had seen us
'Tother night, would take this for the Hottentot Venus
and me for poor Jack ? - Now I'm Priest of the Sun
and She, a queer kind of Peruvian Nun;
Though in our Novitiate we preach but so so
You'll grant that at least we appear comme il faut
In pure Virgin robes, full of fears and alarms
How demurely she veils her protuberant charms !
Thus oft', to atone for absurdities past
Tom Fool turn a Methodist preacher as last
Yet the critics, not we are to blame - for 'od rot em
There was nothing but innocent fun at the bottom !" ²⁰

¹⁸ . Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp. 35.

¹⁹ . The Story of the Hottentot Ladie and her Lawful Knight Who Essaied to Release Her Out of Captivitie, and What my Lordes the Judges Did Therein , cited in Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp. 178.

This excerpt was typical of most low brow ballads in that it seems less concerned with Sarah Bartmann herself than with the golden opportunity her trial offered to lambast Evangelical hypocrisy. These ballads were not necessarily written by the working class. Nevertheless, their target market was quite clearly the British dispossessed, and they would have been written with some idea in mind of what the new working class would consider acceptable, and amusing.

The growing class conservatism in Abolitionist circles was reflected in their ideas of race, as well. Their initial insistence on abolition as part of a broader claim to the inalienable rights of man to liberty was replaced by an Evangelical sentimentalism. Crucial factors in this process were the moral panic caused by the increased visibility of Black men in Britain, the successful slave uprisings in St Domingo and Haiti in 1790 and 1792, as well as the drawn out Khoekhoe wars in Britain's newest colony from 1799-1802. All of these clearly contributed to a racial backlash in Britain itself. Class radicalism and racial radicalism became linked in the public mind - as William Wilberforce remarked " (p)eople connect democratical principles with the abolition of the Slave Trade and will not hear mention of it."²¹ As a result, the Abolitionists quickly moderated their demands for an end to the slave trade. Paradoxically, this moderation did not cease as the domestic Black population disappeared, and as the colonies quietened down. Rather, the Abolitionists wove their

²⁰. cited in Kirby, P R "The Hottentot Venus" Africana Notes and News Vol XII., No. 1, 1948, pp. 57.

²¹. cited in Walvin, James England, Slaves and Freedom; 1776-1838, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, pp. 117.

arguments around the emotional sentimentalism encapsulated in the slogan 'is he not a man and a brother?' Their arguments emphasized the helpless, childlike nature of Blacks rather than their right to liberty. This is evident in their defence of Sarah's Bartmann's liberty in 1810 - consider the tone of the following:

"...that wretched object advertised and publicly shown for money - the 'Hottentot Venus'. This, Sir, is a wretched object ... The poor female is made to walk, to dance, to shew herself ... for the profit of her master, who, when she appeared tired, held up a stick to her, like the wild beast keepers, to intimidate her into obedience." ²²

The language appeals to sentiment without in the least allowing Sarah Bartmann to appear as a subject in her own right. The 'wretched object', the 'poor female', is objectified by sentiment as much as she would have been by hatred in the language of the most racist planter.

The Abolitionist movement had become decidedly more conservative on gender issues as well. The new religious revivalism which took the place of political radicalism had powerfully conservative ideas of proper feminine roles in genteel and middle class households :

" In addition to their roles as a vanguard of religious conservatism, these revivalists also played a key part in the formation of Victorian attitudes. The intense sentimentalization of the home which reached its peak in the mid-century had its beginnings in their promotion of a domestic religion centred around the 'moral influence' of the wife and mother." ²³

The women free thinkers of a previous generation had no home in the evangelical movement of the nineteenth century. Rather, any potential gender radicalism amongst white women was displaced in the struggle to free the slaves. Their methods of struggle differed as well - it was as wives and

²². Letter to Morning Chronicle 28/10/1810, cited in Edwards and Walvin Black Personalities, pp 172.

mothers that white women fought against slavery in the 1820s and 1830s, in parlour meetings and church halls. There was a peculiar class dynamic to this process, as the earlier radicalism was replaced by an emphasis on the gentrified concept of charity. Abolitionism became an expression of middle class philanthropy. All these factors served not just to emasculate the struggle for racial radicalism, but to subvert potential feminist tendencies as well.

Conclusion

Victorian gender roles assumed that 'proper' women had no sexual feelings. Yet from its origins in the early part of the century this gender role was racially defined. Representations of Sarah Bartmann show that as Black women begin to be depicted in British culture, sexuality became not only an acceptable, but a crucial part of their social identity. To do them justice, it is clear from trial records in 1810 that the Evangelicals themselves disapproved of any public expression of sexuality. They tried to "impress the court with an idea of the offensive and indecorous nature of the exhibition... But the details would not be fit for the court."²⁴ Despite these protests, it should be clear that the increasing conservatism within crucial sections of the middle class could not be combined with its puritanism. Instead, the racist and sexist images of Sarah Bartmann became weapons in white gender and class struggles. The construction of scientific sexism meant that the sphere of influence of white women was to become increasingly limited in the

²³. Taylor, Barbara Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993, pp 14.

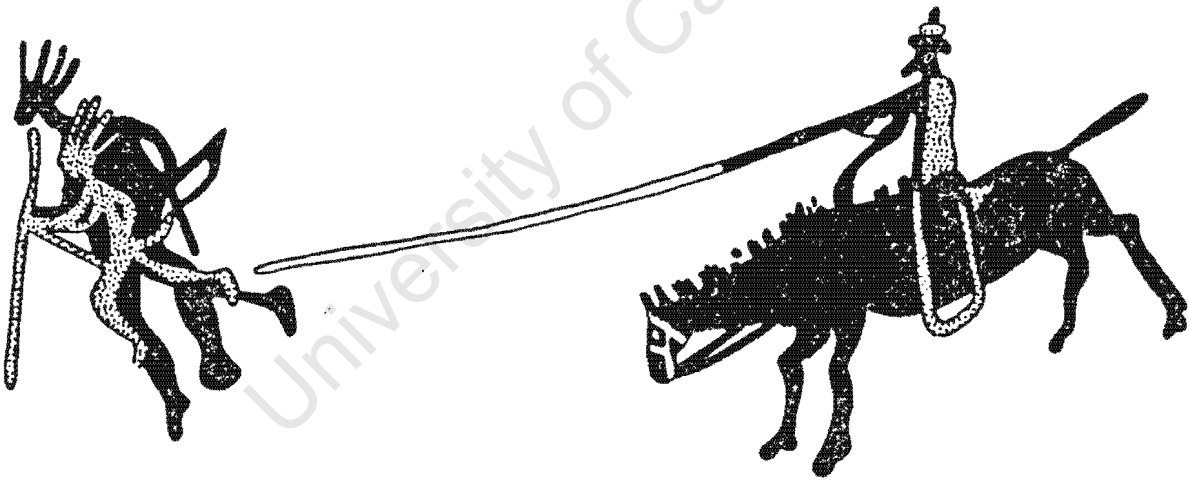
²⁴. Times of London "Report of Court Proceedings" 26/11/1810.

nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the Black woman was left to face the fate awaiting her at the Musee de l'Homme.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER FOUR
DIEMPOWERED TO CONSENT
SARAH BARTMANN AND KHOEKHOE SLAVERY IN THE NINETEENTH CAPE
COLONY AND BRITAIN

"Let all my people who are still imprisoned ... go and come to me. There are still some women and children left in Windhoek and Rehoboth."¹



¹. Captian Witbooi to Theodor Leutwein, 23/9/1894; in Heywood, A and E Maasdorp The Hendrik Witbooi Papers National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pp. 183.

Introduction

This chapter is about a court case, and the approach has been very much like a court proceeding: the presentation and weighing of evidence, the judging of various witnesses' credibility.² So the chapter has become heavily empirical, seeking to make a point by a careful consideration of evidence. 'Evidence', however, needs to be interpreted in a broader sense than official written sources. The question of slavery in Khoekhoe history is one which echoes in our oral history, and is one to which almost every Khoekhoe resistance leader has left evidence. This oral history is in marked contrast to the written history in which the question of Khoekhoe slavery has been, until very recently, regarded as controversial.

My starting point was the folksong, much sung in the anti-colonial struggle of the 1980s, but with even older roots:

"Ons bruin mense, seuns van slawe,
wil ons eie land terug hê
wat gesteel is van ons vaders
toe hul nog in vrede leef.
Gee dit t'rug nou, gee dit t'rug nou
Weg met al die slawerny
Botha sal ons nie vashou nie
Afrika sal vryheit kry"³

Such unequivocal memories of slavery call for more serious historiographical treatment. This chapter uses an analysis of Khoekhoe slavery to explain some puzzling events in the life of Sarah Bartmann. In 1810, she was the focus of a court case which generated massive publicity, and indeed this case remains the single

² . Originally published as "Disempowered To Consent: Sara Bartman and Khoisan Slavery in the Nineteenth century Cape Colony and Britain" South African Historical Journal, 35, 1996.

³ ."We, Brown people, sons of slaves, want our country back, which was stolen from our fathers, as they lived in peace. Give it back now, give it back now, remove all slavery. Botha shall not keep us down now, Africa shall soon be free." A version was sung in District Six in the 1950s, while the one

most abundant source of testimony about her. The nature of her exhibition raised the ire of Evangelical abolitionists, who took Sarah Bartmann's keepers to court, both because of the indecent nature of the exhibition, and because they suspected she was being kept as a slave. They lost their application to have Sarah Bartmann set free but, despite the huge publicity it generated, it seems as if the court case did hurt business. Sarah Bartmann was removed from London and exhibited in the provinces until 1814, when she was taken to Paris.

This chapter examines the court case in more detail. It argues that the court was incorrect in finding for the defendant, and that there is considerable evidence to show that Sarah Bartmann was in fact a slave. It further argues that the judgement handed down itself was the outcome of both British and colonial political struggles. It concludes that the struggle over Khoekhoe slavery in the Cape Colony led to the denial of Khoekhoe slavery in Britain. One consequence has been that the historiography of Sarah Bartmann has been incapable of grasping both the limitations to, and the nature of, her agency.

The Historiography of Sarah Bartmann

"...othered groups...remain objects of the white heterosexual gaze throughout the text, denied the authority of cultural voice, marginalizaed and objectified even in those discussions in which they are the putative subjectsIt is from such a skewed perspective that the tone of the discourse is established, and we see the consequences of a methodology which **adds** the othered as an object of discourse without **authorizing** it as a subject."⁴

While a more complete survey of the historiography will be provided in chapter six, its approach to Sarah Bartmann's conditions of labour is of relevance here. Academic accounts of Sarah Bartmann generally do not mention the issue of slavery at all. The ones which do show a marked lack of curiosity about the court case and implicitly, about her conditions of labour. Altick, in his history of freak shows and museum exhibitions, described Sarah Bartmann's historical context as follows:

"The "brutal Hottentot" was the epitome of all that the civilized Englishman, happily, was not. At the same time, however, early English missionaries at the Cape of Good Hope felt an obligation to protect these primitive people against the Dutch settlers, whom they accused of innumerable murders and acts of cruelty toward the Hottentots"⁵

It would seem as if the history of the Khoekhoe became relevant only as part of a general history of the struggle of civilization against savagery. Altick did mention the court case, but only to dismiss it: "[t]he attorney -general was forced to concede that the humane and benevolent gentlemen of the African Association had no case.... The case was thereupon dismissed."⁶ Altick thereupon seemed to dismiss any sense of understanding of the living woman as well. His account of her life was limited to her uses as an object for exhibition and read like a recitation of stereotypes:

⁴. Ducille, Anne "'Othered' Matters: Reconceptualizing Dominance and Difference in the History of Sexuality in America" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1990, 1:1, pp. 105-106.

⁵. Altick, R D *The Shows of London* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 269.

⁶. Altick, *The Shows* pp. 270.

"She possessed, in addition to a fondness for trinkets customarily attributed to savages, an even greater one for the bottle. Thus debilitated, she was in no condition to fight the smallpox which ... killed her at the end of the year."⁷

The recitation of stereotypes as a replacement for analysis was to set a trend for later work on Sarah Bartmann.

While the stereotypes were less in evidence, later studies were also not distinguished by their conceptual depth. The tendency was to accept the archival material at face value, without subjecting it to a critical analysis. Here is a version from a natural scientist: "The Hottentot Venus was a servant of Dutch farmers near Cape Town....Hendrick Cezar, brother of Saartjies 'employer", suggested a trip to England for exhibition and promised to make Saartjie a wealthy woman thereby"⁸ Gould's interpretation was based on a somewhat sloppy reading of the court record. But while there is nothing in the records to suggest that the people from whose farm Sarah Bartmann was taken were Dutch, nor any record of what Cezar said to her on the farm, these instances were presented as facts in Gould's article rather than the conclusions of a superficial reading. Still, those quotation marks around the word 'employer' show that Gould was aware of the possibility of a different interpretation. Unfortunately these doubts were of little interest to Gould who, like Altick, went on to discuss Sarah Bartmann as a body rather than as a living person. The fact that Gould's conclusions have remained uncontested ever since should indicate the degree of seriousness, or lack of it, with which Sarah Bartmann's personal history has been treated in the literature.

⁷. Altick *The Shows*, pp. 269.

⁸. Gould, Stephen Jay *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History* Viking Penguin Inc. New York, 1985, pp. 293.

This feature could be said to define academic writing about Sarah Bartmann. In the context of a discussion on nineteenth century sexual icons, an art historian mentioned in passing "her status as an indentured black" which could bring us closer to the truth.⁹ It may be argued that the fact that Gilman did not see any relation between this status and the use of Sarah Bartmann as the ultimate sex symbol was precisely because he could not see her as an historical person in a social context. Instead, images of Sarah Bartmann appeared amidst a jumble of French paintings, Italian prostitutes and Austrian lesbians. Her perceived anatomical abnormalities were the focus of attention both in the illustrations and in the text. While Gilman's comment hinted at the importance of our understanding of indentures in the Cape Colony in determining whether Sarah Bartmann was a slave or a free agent, the paper as a whole did not bring us any closer to an understanding of these issues.

Edwards and Walvin wrote of Sarah Bartmann in the context of a general history of Blacks in Britain. They had nothing to say on her conditions of labour. This is a pity since they provided some general comments which could prove illuminating. They argued with regard to the eighteenth century that "the law itself had spent much of the century trying to decide whether black people should be counted as humans or goods."¹⁰ This legal confusion was reflected in society at large. Despite increasing popular sentiment against slavery by the turn of the century, this institution remained the defining parameter of the Black experience in Britain :

"Throughout the history of black society in England in this period there persisted the threat of slavery. Not only had most blacks experienced slavery,

⁹. Gilman, S "Black Bodies, White Bodies; Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature" in Gates, H (ed.) "Race", Writing and Difference Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1986, pp. 232.

¹⁰. Edwards, P and Walvin, J Black Personalities In the Era of the Slave Trade Macmillan Press, London, 1983, pp. 146.

but many continued to be enslaved in England. Moreover, even those who had been freed, or who had escaped from slavery, lived under the threat of renewed enslavement and transportation, and it would be misleading to suggest that England's black society had, by emerging thousands of miles away from the slave colonies, been freed from the shadow of bondage. " ¹¹

Rather than examining the implications of this argument for Sarah Bartmann's life, Edwards' and Walvin's contribution to the literature consisted of publishing a variety of primary sources on her, a useful contribution but a limited one. The task of analyzing her life in an historical context remains undone.

As a consequence we lack academic studies which view Sarah Bartmann as anything other than a symbol. Her story becomes marginalized, since it is always used to illuminate some other topic, rather than the social and economic context being used to illuminate her life. In this sense, the academic marginalization of Sarah Bartmann provides a parallel to the increasing social and economic marginalization of the nineteenth century Khoekhoe. Historical anthropologists have analysed Sarah Bartmann as a sexual metaphor and a scientific specimen. However, neither of these works have related these uses to her conditions of labour, or the wars which engulfed the frontier in which she was born, a strange omission amongst authors whose knowledge of southern African history was then unparalleled in the field of Bartmann studies. The opportunity to examine the interconnections between Sarah Bartmann and the history of her people was lost.¹² Her life story remains disconnected from broader trends in South African historiography. The loss becomes

¹¹. Edwards and Walvin *Black Personalities* pp. 34.

¹². Cf. Comaroff, J and J. Comaroff *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 104; and Gordon, R "The Venal Hottentot Venus and the Great Chain of Being" *African Studies* 51:2, 1992, pp. 187.

that of Khoekhoe studies, since there are few Khoekhoe women of the early nineteenth century whose lives it is possible to document in such detail.

In sum, writings about Sarah Bartmann have eschewed a historical analysis of her as a human being. Instead, she has been treated as an object whose putative anatomy and stereotypical characteristics have been regarded as of more importance than her feelings and perceptions. The constant regurgitation of her story without any form of analysis which places her subjectivity at its centre amounts to a display of difference rather than an explanation. This tendency in the historiography has been aided and abetted by trends in Khoekhoe studies in general, and the roots of the field in nineteenth century colonial anthropology in particular. While these trends were not specific to Khoekhoe studies, the post-colonial emergence of African historians has meant that elsewhere on the continent, the issue of placing African people at the centre of analysis has long been systematically addressed. For instance, Afigbo has argued that colonial historiography in effect denied Africans a history:

"The last element in the so-called colonial historiography, that is insufficient concern with the methods and techniques of the historian, especially with chronology, the processes of causation and change, is also easily explained... the royal science of the colonial period was not history but anthropology, and for that matter anthropology of the most speculative and theoretical type. To begin with, like other scholars of human society, the anthropologists of the period, no matter to what school of thought they belonged, accepted the racial explanations of the origins and achievements of civilizations."¹³

In Khoekhoe studies in particular, anthropology and to some extent archeology have been the dominant disciplines, and the display of Sarah Bartmann as a metaphor of racial difference or sexual abnormality must be seen in this context. As this survey of the historiography has shown, we are presently in danger of using and abusing the history of Sarah Bartmann, much as her body was abused last century. Again, this

¹³. Afigbo A E "Colonial Historiography" in Falola, T (ed.) African Historiography: Essays in Honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi Longman, Ikeja, Nigeria, 1993, pp. 49.

danger reflects the trend of Khoekhoe studies where the Khoekhoe in general remain ahistorical specimens devoid of a context other than that of the academic observer and his or her audience. The effect is one of voyeurism rather than conceptual analysis. It is hard to find a study of Sarah Bartmann which does not display offensive illustrations. It is equally hard to find a study which relates such illustrations to the history of the Khoekhoe. Such an approach deprives the Khoekhoe of the respect due to any human being. The historiographical focus on Sarah Bartmann's anatomy rather than on her conditions of labour underlines this point. As in colonial anthropology, the effect of this myopia has been to provide Europeans with a metaphor of savagery (noble or otherwise) which underpins the European self-image of civilization. The effort to move Khoekhoe studies beyond its colonial antecedents and into step with modern African studies must involve restoring the Khoekhoe to chronicity and placing Khoekhoe experiences at the centre of the analysis. How did Sarah Bartmann think? What was her understanding of her situation? Although these questions can maybe never be answered with certainty, a consideration of her history and social circumstances can provide a better understanding of the living woman.

British and Colonial Politics in 1810

"The necessity there was, in consequence of pressure from England, for minute investigation into the conduct of the Colonists and the comparative unimportance of charges against the Hottentots was greatly misunderstood by the Boers; and taking place, as it did, before English and Dutch had had sufficient time to understand one another rightly, the seeds were sown of all the unhappy racial discord, with its attendant disasters and sufferings which forms such a feature in the history of the Eastern Province."¹⁴

¹⁴. Cory, G E Rise of South Africa Struik, Cape Town, 1965, Vol. I, pp. 219.

We may begin our effort to restore Sarah Bartmann to history by briefly considering the historical context in which the court case occurred. This was important in determining the nature and interpretation of the facts presented in court. The delicate political situation, in particular, requires a detailed examination. The appointment of Lord Caledon as governor of the Cape in 1806 was an extremely controversial one. As a contemporary wrote to Caledon's patron, Lord Grenville: "I told you, I believe, of the croakings and groanings about Lord Caledon's appointment to the Cape. I suppose it must be at least an extraordinary appointment, for friends and foes seem equally dissatisfied with it."¹⁵ It would seem as if Lord Caledon's competence was less of a factor than his influence. Giliomee argues that "the choice had fallen on Lord Caledon because the Grenville government wished to make use of his interest in a forthcoming election."¹⁶ Perhaps this is what caused the controversy, since Caledon's friends may well have felt that his influence deserved a better reward than the governorship of the Cape. Be that as it may, it seems clear the question of Caledon's competence was from a outset a sensitive one.

The problems he confronted were such as would have taxed the most competent administrator of colonialism. A hostile settler population, an even more hostile indigenous population and a turbulent frontier which had remained uninhabitable for whites since the wars of 1799, all had to be brought under the control of an orderly British colonial administration. In addition to all these factors, the London Missionary Society had constituted themselves protectors of the 'natives', and they made the

¹⁵. Lady Bessborough to Lord Granville, 1806, cited in Giliomee, H Die Administrasie Tydperk deur Lord Caledon, 1807-1811 South African Archives Yearbook, Pretoria, 1966, pp. 235.

issue of maltreatment of the Khoekhoe a priority. The Khoekhoe were, in a sense, the terrain on which white political battles were fought. A temporary truce was reached with the proclamation of the Caledon Code in 1809, which legalized existing 'indenture' arrangements and provided for their registration with the state. The Code also made the Governor of the Cape the legal guardian of all Khoekhoe, and the Khoekhoe were to take any complaints of maltreatment to him.

In the state of administrative confusion which reigned at the time, the provisions of the Code, such as they were, were unenforceable. This might have remained a matter of little concern to anyone but the Khoekhoe, had it not been for the publication of Read's famous letter in the London Missionary Society newsletter in 1809. The publication cast the issue of the **inboek** system and the administration of the settlers into the spotlight of British politics:

"The Statement in this letter casting so severe a reflexion on the conduct of those in the Interior Districts, it will be obvious to you that it is essential to come at the Truth thereof by every possible means".¹⁷

The threat to his reputation, and indeed to that of his patron, Grenville, forced Caledon to take these allegations with the utmost seriousness. It became the opening salvo in the battle between the LMS and the colonial administration which culminated in the Black Circuit of 1812:

"His Excellency is extremely anxious that this Subject should be brought before the Court of Justice, that the World may be convinced that the enactment's of this Settlement are not nominal for the protection of the defenceless merely, but that they are enforced."¹⁸

¹⁶. Ibid..

¹⁷. Deputy Secretary Bird to Landdrost Cuyler, 21/9/1810, in Theal, G M (ed.) Records of the Cape Colony, William Clowes and Sons, London, 1900, vol. VII, pp.375.

¹⁸. Deputy Secretary Bird to Landdrost Cuyler, 28/2/ 1811 in Theal Records, Vol. VII, pp. 499.

Sarah Bartmann arrived in London at precisely the time when the issue of Khoekhoe slavery was becoming a highly politicized one, both in the metropole and the periphery.

We may conveniently follow in the wake of Harry Alexander to London. In consequence of a ongoing argument with Lieutenant General Grey, the military authority in the colony, Caledon had sent Alexander to London to seek support from the Colonial Office.¹⁹ Alexander arrived a day or two before Sarah Bartmann's case came to court in November, 1810.²⁰ Coincidences in history should never be ignored. One may well wonder what would have been the consequences, had his ship taken another week to arrive in England.

Alexander walked into an extremely sensitive political situation in the metropole. The political stability achieved by William Pitt the Younger had given way to a period of loose and constantly shifting alliances, while the challenge imposed by the last phase of the Napoleonic wars tested the government's ability to the limit. Langford characterizes this period as follows:

"There was no outstanding heir to Pitt's prestige and power.... Not surprisingly in the bewildering politics of this period there were bad moments. The opposition grew steadily more defeatist and pacific and no element of strategy could be regarded as uncontentious. The worst point occurred perhaps in 1809-10. Then the disastrous Walcheren expedition, the scandal of the Duke of York's allegedly corrupt activities, the bullion emergency all conspired to produce a desperate political crisis. In one division on the Walcheren affair the government was actually defeated ... and Perceval only emerged from this series of crises with his administration intact by a judicious mixture of manoeuvre and concession"²¹

¹⁹. Lieutenant General Gray to Lieutenant Colonel Torrens, 10/9/1810, in Theal Records Vol. VII, pp. 440.

²⁰. The Times of London 26/11/1810 reports Alexander as having delivered dispatches to the Colonial Office.

²¹. Langford, P The Eighteenth Century: 1688-1815 Adam and Charles Black, London, 1976, pp. 221.

The court case about Sarah Bartmann took place in the interstices of these political manoeuvres and concessions. In fact, it took place immediately after the government had lost the Walcheren vote, and it was at that time thought likely that Caledon's patron, Lord Grenville, would be asked to form a coalition ministry similar to the one he had headed in 1806. The prospect of another 'broad bottomed' administration proved too tempting for newspapers to resist. Coverage of the trial was accompanied by a multitude of caricatures drawing supposed anatomical parallels between Grenville and Sarah Bartmann.²²

There were more realistic connections between the two events. Had the outcome of the court case been to prove that Sarah Bartmann was a slave, the capacity of Caledon to enforce his brand new Caledon Code as well as the ban on the slave trade passed during Grenville's previous administration would have been cast into question, and such a judgement would have proved politically very embarrassing to Grenville. The doubts surrounding Caledon's appointment would have resurfaced, and the scandal would undoubtedly have spread to his immediate superior in the Colonial Office, Lord Liverpool. A judgement by a British court proving maladministration in Britain's newest colony would certainly have multiplied the difficulties Grenville faced in forming a ministry. It is in this context that we need to reconsider the enormous publicity surrounding the court case. This was not an obscure case about a nameless woman from a far flung place. The Sarah Bartmann case was located in the heart of British and colonial politics.

²². Cf. P. R. Kirby "More about the 'Hottentot Venus'" Africana Notes and News Vol. 10, No. 4, 1953, pp. 126.

THE SAINTS

"The interest of the Evangelicals in the African Association is not hard to understand; they were leading the fight against the slave trade, they were the founders of the colony of Sierra Leone, they were concerned to promote both the 'civilization' of Africa and a juster appreciation of African abilities. Many of the leaders of the movement were, if only for a time, members of the association... It has sometimes been suggested that the Evangelicals dominated and inspired the movement to explore Africa. This is not true..."²³

The connections between southern African and British politics were embodied in the individuals who brought the case before the court. It has been mentioned above that the LMS in South Africa was not averse to using their religious contacts in Britain to strengthen their position in the battles with the colonial administration. A consideration of the Evangelical movement in Britain is therefore in order. As noted in the previous chapter, the leaders of this movement were undoubtedly more conservative, with regard to class and race, in 1810 than they had been during the 1770s and 1780s. This move succeeded insofar as Evangelical abolitionism began to attract adherents considerably higher up on the social scale. This network of contacts is evident in the court case. The suit itself was brought by a Mr Mc'Cartney, at the time secretary of the African Association, and Mr Macaulay, a prominent man in abolitionist circles and a former governor of Sierra Leone.²⁴ The African Association, a pre-cursor to the Royal Geographical Society, included amongst its members such prominent abolitionists as Sir Joseph Banks. That Banks was familiar with Sarah Bartmann's exhibition we know. Although he did not appear in the court case himself, there is an invitation to her exhibition in Piccadilly directed to Banks by

²³. Hallett, R Records of the African Association, 1788-1831 Royal Geographic Society, London, 1964, pp. 23.

²⁴. *Ibid.*, pp. 171, Altick The Shows pp. 270.

Hendrik Cezar, dated the 23rd of September, 1810.²⁵ The early date indicates that Banks was likely to have been one of the first to know of Sarah Bartmann's arrival in London, and the preservation of this invitation amongst his papers may indicate a lingering interest in her fate. Banks was also closely acquainted with the then chairman of the Association, the Earl of Hardwicke, Caledon's fellow Irish peer and also his father-in-law.²⁶ Both these peers would undoubtedly have seen much of Harry Alexander during the latter's stay in London. The Secretary, Mc"Cartney, claimed a personal acquaintance with Lord Caledon. He testified in court that:

"That person who had custody of her said, that he had got her from the Cape of Good Hope, having procured her from some of the Dutch Boors who came from the interior, and that he had an agreement from the Governor of the Cape for bringing her away. When he said this, Mr M'Cartney, knowing Lord Caledon, asked if he had his consent? Of which he answered in the affirmative. Mr M'Cartney asked, if the consent was in writing? To which the keeper also answered in the affirmative. Mr M'Cartney then expressed a wish to see the consent, he being in the habit of corresponding with Lord Caledon."²⁷

The line from Evangelicals to British politics, and from thence to South African colonial politics, runs reasonably straight through the African Association.

With regard to race, the movement had lost its early radicalism. It had initially insisted on an abolition of slavery as part of broader claims to the rights of every human to liberty. The abolitionists began to base their campaign on a sentimental Evangelism, epitomized in the slogan "Is he not a man and a brother?" Edwards and Walvin argue that it was precisely the absence of a large visible community of

²⁵. British Museum, 512:0 "Hottentots-Types-Women-Hottentot Venus", exhibit no:33.

²⁶. Hallett Records pp. 299.

²⁷. "Loaw Intelligence" Morning Post 28/11/1810.

Blacks which enabled the movement to appeal to sentiments which emphasized the helpless, childlike nature of Blacks, rather than their rights to liberty:

"Would the humane British response to blacks have been so striking - would it have even been possible - had the black community survived on the scale of the 1770s and 1780s?... Perhaps it is no coincidence that the unique support of black humanity was expressed by the abolitionists at a time when the blacks themselves were no longer a domestic problem."²⁸

For Sarah Bartmann, this meant she had little choice of allies. Had she arrived in the 1780s, she might have met the likes of Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho, Black people with not just an active fellow feeling but also an understanding of slave cultures. However, in 1810 the Black community in Britain was itself falling in numbers, its leaders on the defensive, and certainly not in a position to protect her. The people who constituted themselves her allies were sharply circumscribed in how far they were prepared to go in ensuring her rights. They may have liked to ensure her liberty, to be sure, but were constitutionally unable of treating her as an equal. The Evangelical fight for Sarah Bartmann's freedom was marked by a stultifying respectability. Ultimately, there was no place for the equality, or the human rights, of a Khoekhoe woman within the boundaries of this respectability.

²⁸. Ibid., pp. 52.

The Court Case

"With respect to the doubts which prevail respecting the Abolition Act being so extensive in its signification as to prevent the Transfer of Slaves Within the Colony of Good Hope... if they should be grounded I shall feel it my Duty to take such Steps as may be necessary to submit to Parliament the necessity of relieving the Colony from the difficulties consequent to this.

At the same time it should be observed that it may be desirable to avoid as much as possible the interfering with a Subject on which so much public feeling and anxiety prevails"²⁹

A close analysis of the court records reveals how Sarah Bartmann gradually was constructed as a creature beyond the boundaries of respectability. The court case itself was held on two occasions, and on the first day Evangelical sentiment abounded. The affidavits handed in by the prosecution argued that Mrs. Bartmann's keeper, one Hendrik Cezar, had illegally imported her as a slave, and demanded the court rule that she should be set free. As evidence of her bound condition it was stated that

"... one time, the keeper let down the curtain, went behind and was seen to hold up his hand to her in a menacing posture; she then came forward to his call and was perfectly obedient."³⁰

Further, an affidavit was presented from a Mr. Bullock, of the Egyptian Museum, stating that Mrs. Bartmann had been offered to him for sale along with the skin of a giraffe.³¹ At this point, Mrs. Bartmann's character was not in question. Instead, the issue was whether Cezar had followed the provisions of the Caledon Code, that is whether she had been legally indentured and had left the country legally. Cezar was asked whether

"he had Lord Caledon's permission in writing to bring her away; he said he had, and the Deponent asked him to produce it; he refused, saying he should answer us no more on the subject."³²

²⁹. "Earl of Liverpool to Earl of Caledon, 3/3/1810" in Theal Records, Vol. VII, pp. 262.

³⁰. Times of London "Report of Court Proceedings" 26/11/1810.

³¹. Ibid..

³². Morning Post "Law Intelligence" 28/11/1810

At this point, the court did not press Cezar's undoubtedly weak argument. While Mc'Cartney and Macaulay argued that Mrs Bartmann was being held under duress and challenged the court to release her, the magistrate, however, changed the terrain slightly: "The object of the Court is ... to ascertain how far the exhibition gives her pain as a sentient being."³³ This enabled the court to remove Mrs. Bartmann from the care of Cezar, and to appoint an interpreter to ascertain this point. We will discuss this interview again below. At this point, we need only show that both the atmosphere of the court, and the attitude of the magistrate, had changed markedly during the two days intervening before the second session. Then, the results of the interview were read out as follows:

"She agreed with Hendrik to come to England for six years. - She appeared before the Governor of the Cape and got his permission. Mr Dunlop promised to send her back rich. She was under no duress. She had no wish to go back nor to see her two brothers and three sisters for she admired this country. She went out in a coach for two or three hours together ... She had two black boys to attend her and would like warmer clothes."³⁴

The text of the interview constructed Sarah Bartmann as greedy for money. It may be seen that the text adds corroborative detail such as the fact that she had little family affection, and admired a country where, according to an eye witness, she had been treated in the following fashion: "[o]ne pinched her, another walked around her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; and one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, 'nattral'.³⁵ The text falls down under its internal contradictions. It is improbable, for instance, that Cezar would have spent money on two servants for Sarah Bartmann, yet at the same time would have refused to buy her adequate clothing.

³³. Times of London "Report of Court Proceedings" 26/11/1810.

³⁴. Times of London "Report of Court Proceedings" 29/11/1810

³⁵. "Diary of Mrs Charles Mathews" cited in Altick The Shows pp. 270.

Hence, Mr Gasely's tangled explanation, 'when Lord Caledon discovered for what purpose, he was much displeased, and would have stopped the parties had they been in his power.' This both got Caledon off the hook and suggested that Sarah Bartmann had, while she was still at home and under the protection of her family, gone into exile fully aware of the role she was about to play.

Further indication of a cover-up is the fact that, on the same day as the interview, a notarized agreement was drawn up promising Mrs. Bartmann a share of the profits. To this, the affidavit of the translator was added "who had read the agreement to her in Dutch and thought she seemed perfectly to understand it and be pleased with the prospect of half the profits."³⁷ In the context of the evidence presented in the case, this made no sense. If, as Cezar had argued, and indeed as Mr Gasely was to argue the following day, an agreement of indentures was already in place, a notarized agreement would have been superfluous and possibly, considering the provisions of the Caledon Code, illegal. If the agreement was deemed necessary it is clear evidence that none existed, in which case Cezar had obviously shown himself to be both a perjurer and a criminal. It is incomprehensible why he should then be deemed capable of being a fit 'employer' of Sarah Bartmann, or indeed why Bullock's evidence as to the attempted sale of Mrs. Bartmann was not credited. Instead, as we have noted, Cezar is presented as the man without whom 'the only effect would be to let her loose to go back again'. It is likely that the agreement was drawn up as a sop to the abolitionists. The agreement would have regularized Sarah Bartmann's position and enabled her case to be dropped without further publicity,

while at the same time soothing abolitionist sensibilities. In this context, it is significant that the agreement specified that Mrs. Bartmann was a domestic servant and made no mention of her services as an exhibit.³⁸ Neither Macaulay or Mc'Cartney made any protests the following day when the Attorney General refrained from ruling on the issue of slavery, nor were there any attempts at an appeal. The only ruling in fact delivered was Mr Gasely's stern warning that any further affront to the laws of decency would be likely to land Cezar back in court. Respectability, if not Sarah Bartmann's rights, was thus preserved intact.

A Question Of Language

"Afrikaans, then, is a language created out of the interaction of slaves (and Khoekhoe) with Europeans. In that sense, too, it is a paradigm for the construction of slave culture."³⁹

As we have seen, the argument that Sarah Bartmann said she was free was seen, both in the court case and in the historiography, as convincing evidence of her freedom. However, it must be borne in mind that if Sarah Bartmann had been a slave, it would have been extremely unlikely that she would have said so if she had felt her environment was hostile to such a conclusion. There is no record of who was present at the interview, but we do know that she was a woman alone, far from her people, and quite probably felt intimidated. We also need to take into account the fact that she was, if not born, certainly grown to adulthood in a culture of slavery.

³⁷. Times of London "Report of Court Proceedings" 29/11/1810. It should be noted that neither amongst Mrs Bartmann's papers, nor anywhere in the literature have I been able to find any indication that she was ever paid.

³⁸. Kirby "More about", pp. 127.

³⁹. R. Ross Cape of Torments Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983, pp. 15.

The most obvious consequence of this fact was that communication was not enabled by the decision to ask her questions in Dutch. By 1810, even many of the European settlers did not speak Dutch. Nor is there any reason why they should, since a large proportion of their number were of German descent.⁴⁰ While the urban middle class and rich Boland farmers might consciously strive to speak and write in Dutch, the poorer rural settlers were much more likely to speak Afrikaans. Afrikaans developed as a patois which enabled the native South Africans and slaves from Mozambique and east Asia to communicate with each other. The slave masters eventually also spoke it as a means of communicating with slaves. During the eighteenth century, Dutch began to decline as a spoken language, since the European settlers of the rural hinterland began to speak Afrikaans even to each other. This became a matter of concern only when the settler nationalist movement in the nineteenth century sought to unite the increasingly English speaking urbanized middle class with rural settlers on the platform of ethnic nationalism. The early nationalists recognized the indigenous roots of Afrikaans in a way which the historiography of the later apartheid era tended to ignore:

"I would ask the ministers of religion, the promoters of education, and the responsible rulers of the Colony, if they are satisfied with things as they are? - if they realize the fact of the children of Dutch-speaking, European parentage growing up with less care bestowed upon them than upon the beasts of the field - without the ability to read or write even their mother tongue, without any instruction in the knowledge of a God that made them, having at their command no language but a limited vocabulary of semi-Dutch, semi-Hottentot words, and those only concerning the wants or doings of themselves and the animals they tend."⁴¹

⁴⁰. Cf. Newton King, *S The Enemy Within: The Struggle for Ascendancy on the Cape Eastern Frontier, 1760-1799* Ph. Thesis, University of London, 1992, pp. 11.

⁴¹. Anonymous article in the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, 1873, cited in H. Giliomee "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850-1915" in L.Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* Longman, London, 1989, pp. 33.

It is because of this later silence that the historiography of Sarah Bartmann has also been able to ignore the distinction between Afrikaans and Dutch and the implications of this for the court proceedings.

These are readily apparent. It is reasonable to assume that, like any language, Afrikaans was shaped by the environment in which it was spoken. It was simple in structure, so that it could be learnt easily by new slaves. From the master to the slave communication could take place only at the level of command: 'do this', 'do that', 'I am going to do that to you if you don't do this !' Between slaves, Afrikaans functioned on a completely different level. Its simplicity of structure was coupled with a richness of symbolic meaning, a slippage of concepts so that each word could mean at least two things. Like the African slave languages in America, this level was constructed to be inaccessible to the slave master. It was, after all, the human expression of people forced to be objects. Its existence as resistance under the master's nose was dependent as much on what was not said as what was. Secrecy and silence became as much part of the Afrikaans language as spoken words. The very structure of the slave language mirrored the absolute divide between the captive body and the captor, the slave and the master, the 'us' and the 'them'.

The spectacle of Mrs. Bartmann answering in one language to questions in another is mind-boggling, and yet, the problem was not merely about different languages. Communication between the interpreter and Sarah Bartmann was shaped by the structure of a language which she learnt, if not from birth, certainly from very early on in her childhood. Newly taken from her cage and her keeper, how did she view

the people who came to question her? The power relations of the interview were determined by the fact that the white man asked the questions and the Khoekhoe woman answered and by the fact that in the Khoekhoe woman's consciousness, in every word she spoke, there echoed a language which divided the world into those who could speak freely, and those who could not.

What would Sarah Bartmann have done in this situation ? Reasonably, she would have done her utmost to discover what her interlocutors wished to hear, which responses would get her into least trouble, and which might conceivably ameliorate her situation. She would have had to make a choice between the captor she knew and the white men she did not know. She would have thought like that because she spoke a slave language shaped by a culture forced to develop under slavery:

"In the out-of-joint world that slavery was, in the midst of patriarchal power gone so monstrously amuck, even 'submission' could be an act of resistance, as well as survival. Like the secret messages encoded in many spirituals, donning what poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar called 'the mask that grins and lies' was a fundamental element of the culture of resistance which enabled slaves to survive and the race to endure."⁴²

If Sarah Bartmann had been a slave and she thought such an acknowledgment would have brought her into trouble, she would most certainly have lied. The issue of the relationship between her and the abolitionists then becomes of utmost importance. Would she have accepted their *bona fides* ? Would she have accepted those of any white man, given that she came from a culture in which the distinction between slave master and slave ran along racial lines?

Communication, to the extent that it took place, must have been tortuous beyond belief. A close reading of the interview certainly indicates that, apart from the first few questions, Sarah Bartmann did little other than smile and nod: 'she seemed ...

pleased with the prospect of half the profits'. Strangely enough, one question which was never asked, and therefore never answered, was whether the exhibition gave her pain as a sentient being. Whether she would have answered such a question honestly is again a matter for conjecture. But it might have done something to persuade her of the concern of those who sought to free her.

Theory and Practice

"One is treated endlessly to such bacchanalian eulogies. Culturally, the 'Hottentot' characters emerge as amoral types, incapable of functioning as rational human beings."

"There can be no doubt that the severe and brutal punishments, which ... masters were allowed to inflict on their slaves... had a pronounced effect on the dealings of the colonists with their 'free' servants. Even the law tended in certain particulars to extend to the Hottentots the distinctions applicable only to the servile class"⁴³

Although we have no direct evidence of Sarah Bartmann's attitudes towards the white judicial system, a consideration of judicial practice at the time is instructive in considering what was likely to be her perceptions during the court case. In justice to the abolitionists, they would have had to be very persuasive to inspire Sarah Bartmann with confidence in the judicial process. In the country she came from, the testimony of slaves was not credited in court cases which involved white people. The sanctions against Khoekhoe people who brought evidence before the court were heavy. The procedure of early nineteenth century courts was to imprison Khoekhoe witnesses until the court case came up. This practice was legalized under British administration in 1813:

⁴². Ducille "'Othere'd' Matters", pp. 121.

⁴³. V. February Mind Your Colour: The ~Coloured' Stereotype in South African Literature Kegan Paul International Ltd, London and Boston, 1981, pp. 28; J.S. Marais The Cape Coloured People: 1652-1937, Witwatersrand UP, Johannesburg, 1968, pp. 120

"And be it further enacted and proclaimed, that when poor Hottentots, slaves, or others, incompetent to give security, are confined to give evidence, and secure the punishment of crimes, and to guard them against being tampered with by the parties they accuse or their friends; that in all and every such case, where the party confined to give his testimony appears to the Court to have given a just and fair testimony, and to have acted honestly and faithfully, that then ...the party so confined shall receive 2 skillings a day over and above his provisions and necessaries, as a compensation for his loss of time..."⁴⁴

It should be noted that, while this legislation provided for compensation for Khoekhoe witnesses, it still condemned them to jail. While we have little evidence of conditions prevailing in the rural judiciary prior to 1810, the report of the British officials sent out with the first Circuit Court in 1812 is revealing, and it may reasonably be assumed that the situation, if anything, was worse prior to that. The conditions in prison at the time could be harsh, while the lack of separate accommodation meant that Khoekhoe witnesses found little distinction made between themselves and other Khoekhoe prisoners doing forced labour in irons.⁴⁵ Bearing witness could also prove a hazardous occupation :

"The transporting of prisoners either from the places of inhabitants or through the medium of the Field Cornets... is not effected with that regularity which on the one hand is requisite to prevent the prisoners escaping, and on the other hand to protect their lives; it is to be attributed to this that the prisoners either frequently get away on the road, or in making endeavours to do so are shot by those who have the charge of delivering them into the hands of justice..."⁴⁶

If any Khoekhoe were still determined to take these risks in order to appear in court, there was still the danger of being adjudged a false witness. How often were the Khoekhoe considered to have acted 'honestly and faithfully'? The judicial credibility of Khoekhoe witnesses was to be tested in 1812 with the proceedings of the Black Circuit, and even though their evidence was admitted in court, the actual outcome cannot bear out any general conclusion that Khoekhoe witnesses were regarded as

⁴⁴."Proclamation by Sir John Cradock", 12/3/1813, in *Theal Records* , Vol. IX, pp. 142.

⁴⁵. "Report of Commission of Circuit for the districts of Graaf-Reinet, Uitenhage, and George." *Theal Records*, Vol. IX, pp. 61.

credible. Where they were not, they were in turn put in the dock for perjury, and sentenced to severe penalties. The case of Fredrik Fix, who was found guilty of false testimony and sentenced "to be flogged by the constables and to hard labour at the Drostdy for two months" is fairly typical of the sentences meted out to many Khoekhoe witnesses.⁴⁷ The official prison term could in practice be inflated to years, since if the witness was not provided with a job and a white master on release, he or she was liable to be rearrested for vagrancy under the Caledon Code. By contrast, those white settlers who were found guilty in the first Circuit Court were in all but three cases sentenced to fines rather than imprisonment.⁴⁸

There is no evidence that Sarah Bartmann was informed of the practices obtaining in British courts before her interview. We do know that she was 'removed from her keeper', but there is also no evidence on where she was kept during the two days immediately preceding the interview or whom, if anybody, she spoke to. In considering whether Sarah Bartmann would have thought of telling the truth about her position in 1810, we need to take into account judicial practice in her home country. Her habits of thought and preconceptions with regard to white justice was formed in a culture which must have viewed judicial practice with regard to the Khoekhoe as hazardous, at best. In these circumstances, to expect her to tell the truth would be to ignore the likely effects of the culture born of slavery in which she was bred. The historical experience of her people had given her reasonable grounds to expect that her testimony against a white man was not likely to be credited, and

⁴⁶. Ibid., pp. 63

⁴⁷. Ibid., pp. 105, also CA CJ3387, pp.649.

⁴⁸. CA CJ1/2 3387, pps. 246-249.

that the consequences for herself were likely to be terrible; in short, that the justice administered would discriminate on a racial basis. In view of Mr Gasely's expressed ideas about Khoekhoe people, there is a strong possibility that she was right.

In the end, the fancy foot work at the trial proved useless. The Grenvillites did not enter government, the Colonial Office decided against Lord Caledon in the administrative dispute, and he was recalled the following year. Considering that it is likely that Sarah Bartmann's welfare had been sacrificed for his, it is ironic that Caledon became the one to claim that both the Attorney General and Cezar were liars. After Alexander's return to the Cape, Caledon wrote to his superior in the Colonial Office that

"It having been stated in a recent trial before my Lord Ellenborough that a female Hottentot had been carried out of this colony with my knowledge and consent, it is due to the high situation that I have the honour to hold, for me to acquaint your Lordship that I was wholly ignorant of the transaction until long after her departure, and that she never did apply for or receive a permission to leave the Colony."⁴⁹

If Sarah Bartmann had consented to Cezar's scheme, of course, there is no reason why she should not have left the country legally. We may be reasonably sure that she was in fact abducted and forced to labour in Britain. Further, we may be certain that she wore the 'mask that grins and lies' in court not because she had no desire to be free, but because she considered it necessary for the sake of survival. It would have been highly unreasonable to expect her to accept the goodwill and sincerity of strangers who looked like the slave masters back home. Between the legalization of Khoekhoe slavery under the Caledon Code in the Cape and the excesses of her audience in London, Sarah Bartmann's experience of the British could not have been a happy one.

⁴⁹. Letter from the Earl of Caledon to the Earl of Liverpool, *Theal Records* Vol. VII, pp. 503.

Conclusion: More Questions Than Answers

"But cruelty is only the background for the real story. Even here, where life was most difficult and choices most limited, black women had victories. They reared children who loved and respected them. They passed on from generation to generation values that made life possible and worth living. They turned survival into an art and a form of resistance to oppression. This is where we really begin to learn about the women of Black America."⁵⁰

Slavery, when you experience it as part of a collective, is widely different from the life of the single exile. Within a collectivity there is a chance to create a slave culture, and to experience some of the joys of life as part of a family and a culture. While resistance is never impossible, resistance within a collective is more likely, and more successful than the individual act. All these factors were doubly true when you were enslaved in your home country, like the Khoekhoe. While I am far from suggesting that Sarah Bartmann was above making mistakes, the central contention of the court case, namely that she willingly left her home and family for the uncertainties of Cezar's character and a foreign country, does not ring true for anyone with a knowledge of Khoekhoe slavery. People whose lives are insecure in the extreme are those least likely to take chances.

We have Caledon's word for it that Sarah Bartmann did not leave the country under existing indenture laws. In the court itself, this was stipulated to be evidence to the fact that she would then have been a slave. While the indenture laws were not far removed from slavery, and actual practice even less compliant with those minimum stipulations, it seems certain that at the time to have been removed from Cape

⁵⁰. Hine, Darlene Clark and Kathleen Thompson A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black women in America Broadway Books, New York, 1998, pp. 66-67.

Town to London outside those laws would have been evidence of slave status. We may accept this condition at face value.

It is ironic then, that it should be Sarah Bartmann's keeper, Hendrik Cezar, who left traces of their exit from the colony. Because Cape Town was at the time a military base, both entry and exit was strictly controlled, and permission had to be sought and given. While shipping records from the period are missing, a permission remains for a Hendrik Cezar to leave the colony on the 12th of November, 1808.⁵¹ It seems as if he did not in fact leave, for he was given a second permission to leave on the 20th of March, 1809, on the HMS Reasonable, captained by a S. Hatley. Further research in Liverpool records may well uncover when Cezar arrived and who his companions were. The 'sundry permissions' records that he was registered as a 'Free Black', and was accompanied by the 'Free Black' Zaar Cezar.

Now this evidence raises more questions than it answers. What was Hendrik Cezar's role in this? 'Free Black' in 1810, a time when both Jews and Arabs, for instance, were regarded as Black, is not helpful in determining who this man was. All we can say with certainty is that he was not Khoekhoe. The legal category 'hottentot' could by definition not apply to Free Blacks because, legally, the Khoekhoe could not be enslaved. Therefore what was needed was indenture laws to create a satisfactory legal category for unfree Khoekhoe labour. Certainly there were a small number of Free Blacks in the Cape in 1810, some of whom were slave owners. But if Cezar was Black in our sense of the word, the issue of gender relations amongst Black people becomes of paramount importance. At present, all we do know is that whatever

racial signifier Cezar possessed, it was one which was socially significant in the Cape, but not in Britain. None of the British records mention him as Black, which they surely would have done, if nothing else than to discredit him. The only other reference I can find is from a South African. Kirby, writing in the 1950s, says that "his surname seems to be either fictitious, or else to be an epithet such as might have been bestowed on a coloured inhabitant of the Cape."⁵²

Was 'Zaar Cezar' Sarah Bartmann under a different name? This seems likely, but only leads to further questions. Where was she kept between November, 1808 and March 1809, when she finally left for England? Did she return to Peter Cezar's farm, or did she spend those months in Cape Town? All we know for certain is that the harbour master could not have laid eyes on her. We have the word of the most famous scientists of the day that Sarah Bartmann was Khoekhoe. If the harbour master had seen her, she would have been registered as 'hottentot', as was done with another woman, Catherine, given permission to leave as a domestic servant in the same register.⁵³ Whether the ship's captain took a bribe on the side, or simply never saw Sarah Bartmann on his ship, is a question we may never answer. Be that as it may, it seems clear that Sarah Bartmann left the Cape outside the law. Would she have done so out of her own free will? It seems unlikely. If she had wanted to leave with Cezar, there would have been nothing stopping the two of them from registering a contract.

⁵¹. Cape Archives CO 6067 Index to Permissions to Leave the Colony, 1806-1827 'Sundry Permissions', pp. 14.

⁵². Kirby, Percival R "The Hottentot Venus" Africana Notes and News 6:3 (55-62), 1949, pp. 59.

⁵³. CA CO 6067 Index to Permissions pp. 14.

This chapter has sought to investigate Sarah Bartmann as an historical person, rather than as a metaphor or a footnote to a history of ideas. From this viewpoint it has been argued that, in common with the majority of colonial Khoekhoe in this period, Sarah Bartmann was a slave in fact, if not in law. Her position in Cape Town would certainly have been an unfree one, and it has been argued that her position in early nineteenth century Britain offered little hope of change. The one great opportunity for change, the court case, became enmeshed in the intricacies of British and colonial politics. The evidence presented in the court case purporting to prove her freedom has been examined and found wanting, and it has been shown that this outcome was not unrelated to the political context of the times.

The issue of her slave status has importance beyond the immediate aim of restoring Sarah Bartmann to historical writing. Slavery as a system was directly related to the process of creating images of African women as sexualized savages, a process which involved taking women like Sarah Bartmann from their native lands and exhibiting them in the metropolises. There is a more direct connection: slaves had no power to determine the manner of their use. As we have seen, Sarah Bartmann's supposed complicity in her own fate has been used as an excuse to treat her as an object in the text. If she was a slave, however, we need to reconsider the uses and abuses which were made both of her story and of her body.

The question of labour coercion becomes crucial. It is clear that Sarah Bartmann's position as slave was not incidental to a broader explanation of the origin and development of Black people as sexual metaphors, but on the contrary, a central part of the story. She was exhibited because she was a slave within a wider system

of slavery which was justified by, amongst other things, a system of perceptions about Black people as savage beings whose nature became defined by a brute sexuality. Sarah Bartmann's treatment in Britain was not qualitatively different from that of other Khoekhoe women in the colonized parts of southern Africa. The increasingly gendered, and sexually charged, stereotypes of the Khoekhoe in southern African travel writing were coterminous with the growth and eventual legalization of Khoekhoe slavery.

To view her as a slave means that the distinction between Sarah Bartmann, the metaphor, and the living person becomes a false one. We become able to write a history which both centres on her subject position and provides causal links to a broader history of racist ideas. In the early nineteenth century, racist stereotypes were well established. We have seen that their emergence in the court enabled the victimization of Sarah Bartmann to continue, while her position of powerlessness in turn made it possible to use her body as the physical basis for the development of scientific racism. By reestablishing the connections between the living woman and the world she lived in, it becomes feasible to link the abuse of Sarah Bartmann as a captive body with her uses as a metaphor. To conceptualize this interrelationship requires of necessity that we turn to the task of writing the history of Sarah Bartmann and her people from their subject position.

**CHAPTER FIVE
VISION, TRUTH AND BEAUTY
A SHORT HISTORY OF LANGUAGE**

"Finally, for a Black woman\feminist intellectual who is trying to live out the various aspects of her identity and be a whole person amidst the contradictions and negations of this society, *nothing* is ever simple".⁵⁴



⁵⁴. Hull, G. T. and Smith, B "Introduction: The Politics of Black Woman's Studies" in Hull, G.T., Bell Scott, P, and Smith, B (eds.) All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, The Feminist Press, City University of New York, New York, 1982, pp. xxx, emphasis in original.

Introduction

The writing of history is creative writing. It is a sad fact that many of the historians I admire have won a place in my esteem not on the basis of their empirical work, but on the sheer beauty of their prose. Literary criticism interests me because my profession obliges me to pay a sometimes painful attention to the craft and art of writing. I have an intimate interest in influences which prevent Black women from writing.

Some time ago, I began to consider the problem from another angle: how, in different historical periods, had Black women succeeded in writing? In her historical analysis of Black women's fiction in North America, Marjorie Pryse pursued an extended discussion of the textual tactics which enabled Black women to write. She argued that literary authority was a necessary pre-condition for the exercise of literary power, and that late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Black women authors found the lack of an autonomous literary tradition in itself disempowering. In order to create a literary authority, these early authors called upon Divine inspiration and the cause of racial uplift. They wrote in order to convince a largely white audience of the capacity of Blacks to be 'civilized'.

The turning point, for Pryse, was the publication of Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men in 1935:

"The key to Hurston's genius was the return to her birthplace... in order to collect and transcribe the folktales or 'lies' she remembered hearing growing up in the state's only incorporated black town....Mules and Men had the effect on Hurston's own fiction and thereby, through Hurston to Alice Walker, the effect on the Black woman novelists's literary tradition, that the Bible had on the earliest white male colonials. It gave her the authority to tell stories

because in the act of writing down the old 'lies', Hurston created a bridge between the 'primitive' authority of folk life and the literary power of written texts."⁵⁵

Pryse's conclusion is sensible. The only way in which the creative expression and survival wisdom of the descendants of slaves could have survived would have been within the protective sphere of the Black family. As such, 'lies' represented a means of empowerment. Hurston found this power enough to enable her to make the transition from the spoken word to the written, and from thence to a new basis of power for Black women in the diaspora.

I found Pryse's argument persuasive not least because I had confronted the same necessity in writing the immediately preceding chapters. My struggle to empower the Black woman as subject, both myself as the writing subject and Sarah Bartmann as an historical subject, set two tasks for my historical writing. My task would be not just to write about the Khoekhoe, but to write about them with some inkling of the way in which they would have viewed their own history. The literary tools I was in search of were to function both as a means to empower myself as a writer and as a means to authorize the Khoekhoe as subjects. Pryse's remarks led me to think of oral history as a means to achieve these ends. At this point I ceased to worry about being able to write, and began to worry about how I was writing - and about whom I was writing into history.

This interdependency between empowering the subject of research and the researcher appeared to be common amongst Black women. The authority conferred by the use of oral history ultimately rests on the power of the oral historians. In

⁵⁵. Pryse, Marjorie "Introduction: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and the 'Ancient power' of Black Women" in Pryse, Marjorie and Spillers, Hortense(eds.) Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985, pp. 11.

other disciplines, a battle has been fought to recognize what may be broadly referred to as the consciousness of Black communities as a claim to knowledge.

Dolores Williams, a theologian writes:

"Transformations of consciousness... and epistemological processes happen in a socio-historical context. Hence the socio-historical context of actions and ideas is important in black liberation theology.... James Cone claims that consciousness is created by the social context, and so epistemological realities are different for white and black people....Apparently Cone is suggesting an epistemological screening process created by a people's history, cultural patterns, political realities, socioreligious values and patterns of action."⁵⁶

It should be noted that Williams's last sentence was yet another description of what Pryse had called 'lies': the accumulated wisdom of a community.

Now, 'oral history' may sound odd in the context of the historiography of a woman who died a hundred and eighty five years ago. If there are direct traces of Sarah Bartmann in our oral history, this is not the place to discuss them. Rather, the oral history I had in mind was the consciousness of my people in the broadest sense. Nowhere was this consciousness - evidence, if you like, to a collective identity - more evident than in our language. The language we spoke, and in which I increasingly began to write, was in itself a source of history. Proverbs, turns of phrase, the multiple meanings of words and the very custom that everything has to mean at least two things, what are these but traces of our history? One example may underline this point. The word 'Baas' (master) is one which recalls the worst excesses of apartheid days, and remains a word which seems to demean the user of it. Yet the Black Afrikaans saying 'ja, baas jou m--- baas' (yes master, your womb, master) turns this concept on its head, and renders every utterance of the word

⁵⁶. Williams, D S Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk , Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1993, pp. 156; citing Cone, James A A Black Theology of Liberation Orbis Books, 1990. It should be noted that Williams is setting Cone up here for the womanist dialogue with Black

pregnant with resistance. Is this saying, which will win a smiling response from the workers on every farm and factory in the Cape, not evidence to a past of slavery, oppression and resistance? 'Lies' which have enabled us to survive and resist must surely be of use to the historian whose need at this time is precisely to survive and resist in the field of academic writing.

So, at the time I began writing the chapter which follows I was experimenting with language. Some portions of the chapter were written originally in Cape English vernacular, and subsequently translated into academic English. Other sections have stubbornly resisted translation. This raises the question of whether academic English, as presently constituted, is at all amenable to a womanist analysis. If a pure academic style did not allow me to express what I needed to express, what are the ideological implications of this? This chapter grapples with language as a literary, empirical and political issue.

Both Sides of the Story

As a historian, language is my working tool. As a human being, it is a fundamental constituent of my identity. Yet my efforts to reconstruct the story of Sarah Bartmann were flawed by the experience that the particular working tool and means of self-expression called academic English did not allow me to express my empirical reality. What is the history behind this particular dilemma?

theology which follows. However she gives a very nice summary of the philosophy behind the movement.

During colonialism, language itself became a battlefield. It was a weapon in the struggle to divide Africans along class lines. Language dispossession was an integral element in the education system through which it was necessary to pass in order to join the African elite. Elite members were to be so divided from the rest of their people that cross-class communication was going to become impossible. Otilie Abrahams considers neo-colonial efforts to reverse this process:

"The use of the vernacular languages is encouraged in African states today. This in itself is an admirable thing, but what we must never fail to see is that this is an artificial process in the sense that Africans (especially the elite) who are more at home in English are called upon to make a concerted effort to learn a traditional language in which they are not very proficient."⁵⁷

In celebrating the rich vein of oral history and literature which is preserved in African languages, there remains no doubt that command of these languages is of fundamental importance in forming cross-class alliances. But we need to recognize that the 'home language' of much of the African elite is English or French.

Kwesi Prah puts the other side in the African language debate as follows:

"Africans indeed constitute some of the most multi-lingual people on earth. ... But thought itself is partly a function of linguistic insights and the ability to organize new ideas on the basis of commonly shared language symbols. This requires familiarity and command. It is therefore inconceivable to create and press the human genius into useful service in a language we can hardly use. In short, we create best in our home or first languages."⁵⁸

The argument that our very attempts to make sense of this world are shaped by the language in which we think has lain at the root of much of the antagonism against the use of colonial languages. Though undoubtedly justified, these critiques seem to miss the point that the language-community of the African elite has overwhelmingly been that of the colonialists: missionaries, educators and civil servants. Do we not need to recognize this in our linguistic practice? In order to decolonize our minds,

⁵⁷. Abrahams, Otilie Comments on African Literary Criticism, 1978, unpublished, pp. 13.

we need to decolonize our language usage. This is, by definition, a communal project. My concern is that, in our battle to reconstruct African language usage, we tend to overlook the importance of academic English, French, and Portuguese as terrains of struggle.

The African elite is, after all, Black. What has been done to the consciousness of a group whose 'home' language is one which Toni Morrison has described as racist to the core?:

"I am a black writer struggling with and through a language which can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language who are by no mean marginal or already and completely known and knowing"⁵⁹

This language should not be allowed to continue to exist uncontested in its present racist form. We should turn contradictions into opportunities for struggle. If the move to separate the African elite from their indigenous languages was accompanied by the very construction of their new language in such a way that it undermined their dignity and self-respect, at least we gained from it a very competent English-speaking group of Africans. It is time to demonstrate this competency by decolonizing the language.

And My Side

Perhaps this point will become clearer by focusing on a particular linguistic history. In examining the historical experience of my language-community, it immediately becomes clear that language was a key factor during the enslavement of the Khoekhoe. Oral history tells of the preference, on the part of slave raiders, to

⁵⁸. Prah, Kwesi Kwaa Beyond the Colour Line: Pan-Africanist Disputations, Selected Sketches, Letters, Papers and Reviews Africa World Press Inc, Asmara, Eritrea 1998, pp. 88.

capture only children of a pre-lingual age and put the older ones to death. It is certain that, by the nineteenth century, Khoekhoe was not publicly spoken in the heartland of slavery - the western and south western Cape. Still today, the residual survival of spoken Khoekhoe dialects can be mapped to coincide with the areas where slavery came the latest and hurt the least. Khoekhoe is spoken most where the linguistic communities managed to resist the enslavement of their members, either through the development of a strong military society like the Nama and the Griqua; or through the protection of the mountain and desert, like the Ju//Tvasi. To the south and east of these communities, we may gauge the extent of colonial dispossession by the fact that the descendants of slave Khoekhoe are a linguistic community without an autochthonous language. On my southern side I am without a native home language.

A slave creole did develop. Afrikaans was a language based on Khoekhoe but including the masters' language as well as the speech of slaves imported from afar: Java, Indonesia, Mozambique. It was called 'kombuistaal' (kitchen language), and we find traces of the Khoekhoe women in the language of hearth and home. Words for food fade imperceptively into animal and plant names: biltong, kudu, kukumakranka, buchu. Other words are literal translations of the Khoekhoe: suurvy (sour fig), bobbejaan[ui]njies (baboon's bulbs, bulbs eaten by baboons), doringboom (thorn tree). In this category, we find words for patterns of behaviour from Khoekhoe roots and constructions: aspris (acting in direct opposition to all good advice/accepted norms, simply to demonstrate that it can be done), astrand

⁵⁹. Morrison, Toni Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Harvard University

(going against the grain), *hardekwass* (literally 'hard broom', but meaning strong-willed), *hartrand* (holding a grudge for long). Each word is not only a concept but a lesson: a guide to behaviour and moral norms. To be *eieweis* (self-willed) used to be a bad thing for both sexes but especially for women. I have seen it become applied to little girls without rancour, and indeed with some smiling approval.

In the hands of the slaves, Dutch, French and German were used to forge a concise, yet agile language, African in its turn for metaphor but serviceable under colonialism in its ability to change in the face of new needs for new expressions. As the descendants of slave Khoekhoe will tell you, you can swear properly in no other language. There is a history to be written from linguistic changes alone.

This is not the place to write the full history of this language. The subject of Afrikaans is raised only to document a great theft, namely that, as the non-British European settlers sought a language through which to create a nationalism antagonistic to British imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Afrikaans was found to be a potent unifier of white descendants of German, Dutch and French settlers. The children of slave-owners found that they had in common the language of slaves. Concomitant with the codification and writing down of the Afrikaans language by settler intellectuals in the 1890's began a process of denying its African roots. The new 'Afrikaners' denied the influence of Khoekhoe in a way that their predecessors did not. The very word 'Afrikaner' originated from the Khoekhoe usage. The settlers took the name, the language, and denied the theft. This great lie has profoundly influenced the course of South African history. Not only

did the written version of the language become increasingly Europeanized, creating a divergence between the Black spoken and white written language which exists to this day, but the move to impose this language on all Blacks in the country, including non-Afrikaans speakers, set off the riots of 1976. While the students of the southwestern Cape may have been protesting against a multitude of oppressions: crowded classrooms, broken windows, too few teachers and racist textbooks; certainly the riots in the rest of the country were perceived as a protest against the imposition of the oppressor's language. Thus even Africans became enmeshed in this web of theft, denial and lies. One of the lasting effects has been to render Afrikaans-speaking an ideologically suspect activity in large sections of the liberation movement: the native cannot go home, even to her creole.

On my northern side, the linguistic situation was different. Central Namibia is the site of ancient trading routes, and has been a hotbed of languages for well over a century. This was the true home of Prah's multilingual African. In my generation, the tie was to be broken. I went into exile at a barely word-cognitive age. I was forced to speak two foreign languages for the sake of survival. This was almost a decade before the Swedish government began home-language teaching for immigrant children. By the time the authorities understood that children who are confident in their mother-tongue are more empowered to learn second languages, it was too late for me. Bereft of referents: kudu, kukumakranka, buchu (we received biltong through the kind offices of visiting friends) and deprived of my linguistic community, my first language could not survive. I forgot. Although I have relearnt it as an adult, and sometimes think in it, I still speak it with difficulty.

It is in any case an oral language. The great wave of proud Black Afrikaans speakers, the writers, poets and academics of the Black Consciousness movement in the south-western Cape, began in the late 1970s to grapple with an orthography. Denied support, approval or funds, even within the ranks of the liberation movement, they are still grappling. Black Afrikaans flourishes in the oral poetry of the Cape - hiphop and rap - but languishes in the written arts. So even if I spoke it fluently, it would still be a struggle to write it. I do not think that one who speaks her native language with difficulty should be the one to create an orthography. The consequence of my historical experience has been that my native creole is denied me. I have no language to use but that of the oppressor.

The home language movement is and will remain one of the most liberating forces in African arts and sciences. This should not blind us to the necessity of waging a struggle over foreign languages in African use. The very fact that academic English could not say what I needed it to say demonstrates that this is not a terrain we should leave uncontested. Some of us have nowhere else to fight. When academic English operates so as to silence a Black woman, it becomes a terrain of struggle. In fact, Morrison lays this upon us as a duty:

"Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek - it must be rejected, altered and exposed."⁶⁰

Like myself, and for much the same reasons, namely slavery and exile, Morrison has no other language but English in which to reject, alter and expose oppressive uses

of language. Her struggle is of necessity waged within this linguistic terrain. If African home languages are linguistic liberated zones, we should still not forget that there is a need for a guerrilla struggle in the cities. I speak here of the need to allow self-expression in the midst of the proud but calcified city called academic English.

The question which preoccupied me during the writing of the chapter which follows was (in Prah's terms): how to press my human capacity into useful service in a language not my own? Fortunately, I was not aware at the time that this was inconceivable. I did conceive of it, not as an abstract intellectual question, but as a very concrete daily fight with my keyboard. I would give many of the languages I now speak for just one language - my own. But this choice is denied me by my history. Like my ancestors, I must press a foreign language (in this case academic English) into service in the creation of a new creole.

The first recorded Khoekhoe use of English occurred in 1613. The young Coree, taken as slave on the ship *Saldanha* to Liverpool: ".would daily lie upon the ground and cry very often this in broken English : ' Courie home goe, Souldania home goe, home goe'."⁶¹ Indeed the language served to express his feelings perfectly - and my own. I desire nothing more than to go home. But where is that? Again, during the 1630s English was spoken by the look-out on Robben Island. The great linguistic genius, Autojoema, used the language in his strategy for resistance. So can I.

⁶⁰. Morrison, Toni "Nobel Lecture 1993" in Nancy J Petersen (ed.) Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997, pp. 269.

⁶¹. Terry, cited in Edwards, P and J Walvin Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1983 , pp. 12.

Since language is by definition a communal activity, the project of turning academic English into a language which expresses our African experience is not something I can do alone. Perhaps fortunately (for the purpose of this project) I am not alone.

The experiences which have created my problem are not unique. As Prah writes:

"... to give mathematical or biological examples drawn from European realities to African students is to force the cultivation of mimicry and not creativity in the minds of such students. The function of education is not to put in place the conditions for cultural schizophrenia, rather, it is to provide tools for people to relate and mold their cultures to suit human needs in the first instance in their own societies and their own realities."⁶²

The conditions which cultivate cultural schizophrenia affect thousands of students. It is a product of our history, and one in which we need to work collectively for change.

When I sat down to finally revise this thesis, I took strength from my inheritance. On the one side that of an urban polyglot, quick to turn a phrase and so laden with double meanings that I ceased to try translating it into an academic language which is unaccountably determined to say only one thing at a time. On the other, a rural morality, filled with meaningful silences and ironic asides, which can be summed up as 'make the best of what you have'. So I have completed the following chapter in the grand African tradition of the moral, or cautionary, tale. It wavers between the exigencies of its conception and its final purpose. It is in the hope that some scholars will benefit from my experiences, perhaps succeed where I have faltered, and possibly begin to think of creating a new language in which we can be fully human - even as academics - that it has been written. If the next Black woman who

⁶². Prah Beyond the Colour Line, pp. 90.

has to write of historiography finds her task a little easier, my tale shall have been well told.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER SIX
'AMBIGUITY' IS MY MIDDLE NAME
A RESEARCH DIARY

"All this that I am now telling you, you yourself know it to be true: you are in no position to force me back: it is I who can drive you off. You are free to put it to the test. Even little children know it for the truth, for they saw me circling around your settlement, and turning away; and they also saw you seek shelter at your place. I don't say this to boast before you, but it is the truth. And to speak and act the truth is righteous and good and brings blessings."¹



¹. Captain Witbooi to Manasse !Noreseb, Lidfontein 10/12/1888, in Heywood, Anne and Eben Maasdorp (eds.), The Hendrik Witbooi Papers National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pp. 26.

Introduction

In 1996 I was requested to write up the historiography of Sarah Bartmann, a task I had up to then always managed to avoid. In fact, even in the face of a pointed request, I found the task impossible. I began writing this diary in order to understand why this was so. This chapter deals with my relationship to the academic world of knowledge surrounding the Sarah Bartmann story. It is a quest for self-understanding and self-retrieval from the obscurities of a language not created for my benefit, a turn-around polemic against racist and sexist cultural texts which silenced me through their animosity, and a contribution towards the communal project of creating a more hospitable mental environment for African creativity. It expresses my human need to understand, come to terms with, and move on from, the historiography. Finally, this chapter is an exercise in womanist methodology. Because womanism considers race and gender identity important, I have consistently specified the race and gender identity of the scholar I am discussing. In this way, racism and sexism by exclusion, that is, to work on an assumption of racial and sexual homogeneity which in practice turns out to be a mainly white, mainly male, reality, can be rendered visible. This should aid the process of examining the interconnections between identity, history and historiography which is the focus of this investigation.

This chapter is included here because I hope to lay bare my prejudices as well as my insights, and also because my experiences being Black and a woman writing about

Sarah Bartmann, have proved to be germane to a study of her historiography. It might even reveal something about Sarah Bartmann herself!

From the Beginning, Then...

This diary is about my inability to be a disembodied academic dispassionately analyzing some objectified specimen. My race and my gender follow me, even into my academic work. And I mean this in a bad way. There is not, in the Sarah Bartmann historiography which has been written by white males, any symbolic role model where Black = good, woman = righteousness, or Brown = beauty. On the contrary, the quintessential experience of living my race and gender in the shadowy world which is the historiography of Sarah Bartmann has been well described by Lorraine Hansberry:

"I can be coming home from eight hours on an assembly line or fourteen hours in Mrs. Halsey's kitchen. I can be all filled up that day with three hundred years of rage so that my eyes are flashing and my flesh is trembling - and the white boys in the streets, they look at me and think of sex. They look at me and that's all they think... Baby, you could be Jesus in drag - but if you're brown they're sure you're selling."²

This pretty much sums it up. Make no mistake, my desire has been to leave my race and gender at home and be in some sort of equal world with other intellects. Didn't work. I could be Jesus in drag, but being Brown, I had to be selling. If not my body, then my credibility, or both, but something was going to have to be sold down the river.

I am a descendant of the Khoekhoe writing about Sarah Bartmann. My relationship to her is special. I remember reading the white man Sander Gilman's article:

² Hansberry, Lorraine, To Be Young, Gifted and Black Signet Press, New York, 1969, pp. 98; cited in Collins, Patricia Hill, Black Feminist Thought, Unwin Hyman, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, pp. 173.

"Eighteenth century travelers to southern Africa, such as Francois Le Vaillant and John Barrow, had described the so-called Hottentot Apron, a hypertrophy of the labia and nymphae caused by the manipulation of the genitalia and serving as a sign of beauty among certain tribes, including the Hottentots and Bushmen..."³

What was this? Certainly not my idea of refined intellectual intercourse, certainly not the search for truth I had been brought up to believe in. For white male academics, this may be an intellectual matter, indeed, at this point Gilman is making an argument about nineteenth century intellectual history. For me, this is personal. I am of these people. The 'Hottentot and Bushman' tribes which Gilman talks about are my family and friends.

The rest of the article was in a similar vein. I cannot say that Gilman went out of his way to demonstrate the existence of this 'apron'. He took its existence for granted, since at no point did he explicitly point out that this 'apron' was merely a figment of the imagination, either. It was racism and sexism by exclusion, since the basic assumption that such a thing existed was allowed to remain unexamined and unquestioned.

My position does allow me certain privileged information. Until that time, the mysteries of the 'Hottentot apron' had been completely hidden from me. I had no idea. For one brief moment, as I re-read those lines, I did toy with the idea of phoning my mother and aunt and asking them if they had ever seen or heard of this 'sign of beauty', but my heart quailed at the thought of that little bit of empirical research. My mother would certainly be offended, and begin to wonder audibly why

³. Gilman, Sanders, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality In late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature" in Gates, Henry (ed.), "Race", Writing and Difference Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1986, pp. 213.

she had wasted her time and money sending me to university, if this was the s--t I was learning. My aunt would certainly think I had lost my mind, and score points over my mother on the comparative mental stability of my cousins, less advanced academically but endlessly saner. So I scotched the idea and got on with my work. Perhaps I should have called my mother instead, perhaps that way I would have discovered much sooner the truth that history is about identity. Historians have identities which seem to interact in strange ways with their studies. The story of Sarah Bartmann teaches nothing if it does not teach you who you are. Researching her life and talking to people about her was a process of learning for me. I found out that I would remain a Brown woman, no matter how many strings of degrees I trailed around behind my name.

Reactions to Gilman's article provided my first clue to identity. Another white man liked it because it was about science:

" I would have enjoyed reading analyses not only of literary texts but also of political, scientific, and philosophical writings on the question of "race" during the same period, since the subject we are interested in is ideology, the dividing line between fiction and non-fiction grows rather fuzzy, and it is clear that these texts had considerable influence on one another, no matter to what genre they belonged.(In this respect, Sander L. Gilman's essay... is the only exception)."⁴

Enjoyment was not exactly my predominant emotion on reading Gilman's 'scientific' treatment, in fact I have never been able to re-read it since without getting angry. If the racism does not upset me the ignorance certainly does.⁵

⁴. Todorov, "Race, Writing and Culture" in Gates (ed.) *"Race", Writing and Difference*, pp. 377.

⁵. Sanders Gilman has since publicly distanced himself from his 1985 paper, at a seminar held at the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town, May 1996; a seminar at which the first twelve pages of this manuscript were presented in its original form.

Certainly Gilman was confronted with critiques. Nobody, however, confronted him on this central lie. Here is a white female scholar who did an extended textual analysis of the article:

"What, then, is the function of the images in this story? Within Gilman's shifting discourse the images can easily work as unbecoming confirmations of the critic's dubious position. They illustrate, and reconfirm, a positivistic belief in what one 'sees with one's very eyes'. Looking hovers between erotic reveling in, and scientific positing of, a particular version of 'reality', and the latter is easily put forward as an excuse for the former. Corbey thematizes that belief explicitly, thus attempting to distance himself from the fatal complicity a la Gilman. But when he reproduces and exhibits these postcards, he does so in order to use them as evidence. Evidence of what exactly? Not of the savage femininity of 'Africa' and 'Africans', but of the objectionable colonizing meaning production by the colonial"⁶

Well, it was nice to hear that whites were distancing themselves from Gilman, but somehow this to me begged the question of complicity, that is, how Gilman's culture and history produced such a man, and such a paper. 'Fatal complicity' could not be limited to one man alone. Gilman wrote in a time and place when the Khoekhoe were an unknown, savage people from an obscure corner of the earth. The thought that one day one of them would read it and say 'hey, where do you come on this nonsense?' probably never occurred to him or to anyone else.

Bal's distancing of herself from Gilman and Corbey was not, it seemed, in defence of Sarah Bartmann, nor an attack on unquestioned assumptions. It was in defence of the notion that there is somehow a 'proper' way in which the colonized can be used as text to aid colonial psychotherapy:

"Postcolonial criticism can make a difference, but which difference it makes is not always clear.... insight alone is not enough; we have to live our past traumas again, not looking at them, from a false distance but immersing ourselves in them."⁷

⁶. Bal, Mieke, "The Politics of Citation", *Diacritics*, 21:1, 1991, (25-45), pp. 33.

⁷. *Ibid.*, pp. 44.

So colonialism was tough for white people too. It was certainly not my problem since my traumas were not in the past. I wish that Bal had spent less time reliving her past traumas and a little more time thinking of whether her actions were traumatizing somebody else. Firstly, she wasn't confronting that genital lie. By not confronting it, she was practicing passive acceptance. Secondly, she was recirculating that material. Her article contained no naked white men, together with false and probably libelous statements about their bodily parts. It contained, surprise, only more naked women of colour!!! Looking at the naked women of colour displayed in Bal's article, I felt the same anger aroused by Gilman's illustrations. The text of Bal's article may have been a post-colonial critique of the postcolonial, but the subtext told me the same ol'same ol' story.

Compare Bal's critique to that of a Black man written "...in a voice characterized by an anger dangerously self-restrained.":

"...one sometimes has the feeling that an imitation of science - conceived of as a neutral rationalist presentation of 'facts' or a rigorous cataloguing of 'instances' - is the only end. This end, lacking as it is in what might be called 'real side' referentiality and present-day political sensitivity, leads to frighteningly embarrassing moments such as Sander L. Gilman's ...[article]. The only thing that can be said about this 'scientific' presentation with its simplistically contextualized illustrations and weak connectives is that it offers a fine illustration of Pratt's 'manners-and-customs' category, presenting yet again, and so dreadfully embarrassingly, a whitemale confessional. 'Look what we have done', it naughtily delights, rubbing its hands and looking pruriently sidewise."⁸

I liked that anger. Why the difference between the texts? I have for long been aware that a non-racialized feminism, no, let us be explicit here, a white feminism would end up sowing divisions in the Black community. Black men are sexist and the violent emanations of that sexism could well succeed in destroying the Black community. But the one thing we don't need is our white 'sisters' constantly carping

at our side. If they can't help the evil, namely a racist and sexist capitalism, the least they can do is leave us alone. Black solidarity is a product of history. While Bal's history could be written with words, Black men's history was written in blood and sweat:

" A North Carolina [ex-slave] woman said runty males were not allowed to father children as `dey operate on dem like dey does de male hog so's dat dey can't have little runty chillun's"⁹

I asked a brother what did he think of this ? He said 'It's simple. It's about sexual power. White man didn't want to think that his thing was smaller than ours, so he cut ours off.' This bit of oral history I found tremendously illuminating. It made me think of the sexual politics of lynching, not to mention the sexual politics of Sarah Bartmann historiography, at least that part written by white males. Certainly Black men have an historical experience which should enable them to understand what Black women are going through. They have been subject to violent deformations of the body like we have, if not in the same manner or extent. It's about time that they begin to sort it out. Sorting it out in defence of Black women seems like a good way to start. Meanwhile, I was glad to get a key right then to the Sarah Bartmann story and all the many texts surrounding it. It is about sexual power.

Having said that, I must go on to say that Baker did not go nearly far enough for me. Most of the time, it seemed to me as if this debate was missing the point. I mean, what was all this 'genital manipulation' anyway? Here was Gilman, saying without hesitation in public that Khoekhoe women play with themselves, and nobody

⁸. The first quote is from Carby, Hazel V, "Lynching, Empire and Sexuality", pp. 310; and the second from Baker, H A, Jr., "Caliban's Triple Play", pp. 387-388; both in Gates (ed.), "Race", Writing, and Difference.

⁹. Jennings, Thelma " `US COLOURED WOMEN HAD TO GO THROUGH A PLENTY': Sexual Exploitation of African American Slave Women", Journal of Women's History, 1:3, 1993, pp. 51.

was contradicting the man.¹⁰ My response was a very vernacular 'ooh pleeease!' Like during three hundred and fifty years of colonialism, war, measles, slavery and apartheid we had still found time, between raising families and liberating this country, to play with ourselves. Why did I find this a silly theory? Because it was not just Black history, but Brown history. It was my history and Sarah Bartmann's history. Before I could even begin to write that history, I found myself having to define my relationship to this, the silliest of theories.

Before going on, I need to explain that what you have just read is all there is in terms of a 'Sarah Bartmann historiography'. There is a resounding silence in the texts which you will read from now on about what previous writers have said. You might find it in the footnotes, but the one thing which we require of any graduate student - a survey of the literature which has gone before - is missing. The reason for this may be that the text is **never** about Sarah Bartmann. It is always about something else in which she is being used as an example, or as evidence. The effect of this is that the object under discussion can never be a subject. Instead she is presented in a timeless unstable present in which all connections to her history and selfhood are lost. This makes it that much easier to objectify her and exploit her for whatever textual purpose is at stake. Gilman, writing at a time when at least three other authors had written about Sarah Bartmann in modern times, did not appraise any of them.

Both the unstable present and its function is revealed in this argument from Jay Gould:

¹⁰. Bal does raise the question, cf. "The Politics of Citation", pp. 29. She just doesn't answer it.

" Khoekhoe women do exaggerate two features of their sexual anatomy ... Linnaeus was only saying that African women have a genital flap ... He was also wrong because only the Khoekhoe and a few related peoples develop this feature...the *labia minora* or 'inner lips' of ordinary female genitalia are greatly enlarged in Khoekhoe women and may hang down three or four inches below the vagina when women stand." ¹¹

This is ostensibly an intellectual argument, this time about taxonomy. I could deal with it on that basis, by observing for instance that these intellectuals should make up their minds who has it and who has it not. I could even take it seriously enough to demand empirical evidence but, oh yes! I forgot. Sarah Bartmann's body is their empirical evidence. What Jay Gould is saying is not only that Khoekhoe women play with themselves, but that this is what matters about us. This is our point of entry into academic discourses. Honestly. The Khoekhoe are the native South Africans. Our history here stretches back some twenty five millennia, and yet how are we brought into white male history ? The answer, in my native idiom, is unprintable and yet white academic language was not only saying it, but saying it in such a way that it legitimizes the speaking of the unspeakable. By now I could see that I was not taking on Gilman alone. This was about his history, his people; my history, my people and the fight, not just to take our land and make us slaves, but to determine our very identity through racial and gendered power. The 'genital flap' was an expression of undiluted racism and sexism. And I had become its object.

Finding an aunt

I could never be right. Reading the white historiography of Sarah Bartmann, there was no place, and no identity, which would let me feel right about myself. I was not

¹¹. Gould, Stephen Jay, "The Hottentot Venus" Natural History, 91:10, 1982, pp. 22-23.

alone. As Katherine Crenshaw said, welcome to the twilight zone of being a Black woman. The most incredible things happen there:

"The particular experience of black women in the dominant cultural ideology of American society can be conceptualized as intersectional. Intersectionality captures the way in which the particular location of black women in dominant American social relations is unique, and in some senses unassimilable into the discursive paradigms of gender and race domination. One commonly noted aspect of this location is that black women are in a sense doubly burdened, subject in some ways to the dominating practices of both a sexual hierarchy and a racial one. In addition to this added dimension, intersectionality also refers to ways that black women's marginalization within the dominant discourses of resistance limits the means available to relate and conceptualize our experiences as black women."¹²

'Unassimilable'; that was me. Couldn't be intellect, couldn't be race, couldn't be gender, couldn't find a place in the discursive paradigms to go home. My symbolic selves in these texts, Khoekhoe women, were limited and conceptualized to one bodily part, used and abused in the othering discourses on art history, taxonomy or post-colonial criticism. It is no wonder I started asking myself 'where am I in all this?'. I found myself in the twilight zone. Marginalized in the dominant discourses pretty much sums it up. You have to understand, I was the only one in my university admitting consciousness, hurt, confusion and anger about this putative bodily part debate. It is the weirdest feeling when something in the historiography drives you to tears and most people don't seem to notice anything wrong. I thought I was the crazy one!

By this time I was feeling most paranoid. My emotional truth was that whenever a white male academic looked at me I was starting to wonder what he was actually looking at, or is it 'for' ? I began to realize that to identify myself as an intellectual

¹². Crenshaw, Kimberlè, " Whose Story is it Anyway ? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill" in Morrison, T (ed.) Race-ing Justice, Engendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality, Pantheon, New York, 1992.

was to make myself a fish out of water. Academic discourse held no place for our brains, only our bodies. Gould only confirmed my suspicions:

" [In the museum of Man] I saw a little exhibit that provided an immediate and chilling insight ... in three smaller jars I saw the dissected genitalia of Third World women. I found no brains of women ... [and no] male genitalia graced the collection."¹³

This liberal genuflection - the lifting of the hands and raising of eyes and moaning 'oh how terrible this all is!' could not release Gould's text from its terrible assumptions. What really needed to be dissected here was the fact that Gould was still the one to observe, women of colour still the ones to be observed. To be a Brown woman observing is, in the white male narratives surrounding Sarah Bartmann, a contradiction in terms. There was no place for me in this discourse. It seemed as if I was going to have to choose between identities. In the dominant white narrative, wanting to observe, to study and understand was going to also make of me a non-white.¹⁴ Here, I could find no path to follow which would allow me to be simultaneously an historian and a woman of colour.

Researching the story of Sarah Bartmann within the context of the white male meta-narrative meant reversing the positions which were regarded as proper within our native narrative. You have to understand, in my culture, that there is simply no way for me to relate to a lady almost two centuries older than myself other than by treating her with extreme respect. If we had only a passing acquaintance, I would have addressed her as 'Mrs. Bartmann', but by this time we were meeting on a daily basis. So, although we are not blood relatives I should call her 'auntie' and address her at all times in the third person. This was not a problem for me, since I am old-

¹³. Ibid., pp. 20.

fashioned about manners. So in the home I began to talk about 'auntie Sarah'. This was all to the good since it defined my relationship to auntie Sarah in a culturally acceptable way. Acquiring an aunt also served to strengthen my resolve, since we have a proverb at home 'if you have no respect for others you have no respect for yourself'. It was long time personal - I mean this bodily part discourse could not but offend - but acquiring an aunt made it personal in a positive sense also.

The aunt/niece relationship is more about respect than about hierarchy, but if there was a hierarchy at all it would certainly have to go one way only. The power relation implied by auntie Sarah being observed by myself the observer was all wrong by my native standards. So it was precisely at the point where I chose to reject the position of intellectual that the white male historiography placed me in an unsolvable dilemma. I simply cannot talk in my native idiom of 'have you seen that picture purporting to represent auntie Sarah's ----?'. It is not thinkable. At least, to even think it is to be so rude that I make myself an outcast in my own culture. So powerful is this convention that it has taken me years even to phrase my dilemma. At the time I tried to cope by using two languages. I wrote about 'Sarah Bartmann' and thought about 'auntie Sarah'.

Paranoid schizophrenia was an old coping mechanism, and one which had proved a passable defence against racism and sexism. The problem was that this time it was a coping mechanism which estranged me from the native culture which gave me strength. In the past I had coped with difficult discourses by thinking in vernacular and then carefully translating in my written work. This worked well as long as the

¹⁴. 'Non-white' means the same as 'uncle Tom' in African American idiom. Its origin lies in the joke:

field I was studying was one where my history had been suppressed or subverted, violent, but not sexually so. With Sarah Bartmann's story, the leering preoccupation's of white male historiography operated so as to turn my own vernacular against me. A problem I could not even begin to phrase in my language was a problem I could not solve.

I did try. It was hard to do without a linguistic habit which had served me for years. I do remember occasionally trying to translate the white male historiography. Every time I tried, there was only one native narrative tradition I could possibly begin to cast it in, that of swearwords and insults. There is of course another tradition, that of women talking amongst themselves, which can be very open and to the point. Yet whitemale concerns did not in any way translate into that. The thought of the women of my nation sitting around discussing somebody's hypothetical bodily deformations is just absurd. We are never so bored. So that left me with only one native narrative. In my vernacular the historiography translates as 'whitey is taking you for a c--t'. This is not a language which can possibly relate to aunts, it is in fact only one which can take place between age equals, and age equals bent on picking a fight at that. So it was hopeless from the start. Sure, my family was not old-fashioned, and my mother always wished us to have considerable licence in thought and speech. But I found it highly embarrassing to talk like that in the public domain. Certainly I could not even begin to think of auntie Sarah in those terms. I found myself forced to write about her solely in academic English, a position, you remember, which I had already rejected.

'Take away the 'white' part and what are you left with ? Nothing!'

Paranoid schizophrenia is not a good state for analytic thinking. I did reach some conclusions, though, but only through the medium of story and analogy. Past and present came together for me as I began to understand that, although some Brown women were invited in from the kitchen and allowed to sit in the lounge, served tea even, we were being offered a d----d uncomfortable seat. I felt like Jadine in Toni Morrison's Tar Baby.¹⁵ You recall the surreal scene where Jadine is sitting at table with the master and mistress, making polite conversation while her uncle Sydney is serving ? That is how I understood the situation. I was being made welcome at the academic table with auntie Sarah being served up for dinner. I felt the expectation on the part of the master of the house to leave my kitchen manners behind. My problem was that there were some nasty racist and sexist habits in the lounge to which I found it impossible to conform, a level which I had certainly never plumbed in the kitchen. The seemingly benign, abstract intellectual conversation had become, in my vernacular, a discussion of an aunt's own ... business. For me to participate would have been the academic equivalent of passing for white.

I was being intersected, alright. The experience made me sick. The tidbits served for dessert did not help. So Gordon cited a study from 1937 to support his contention that " ... the *tablier* enjoys a wide distribution in Africa"¹⁶ For the brief moment that I had been able to approach this from a purely intellectual point of view it had been an interesting study. Gordon is that anomaly in the Sarah Bartmann discourse, a man knowledgeable in Khoekhoe history and therefore actually able to put those

¹⁵ Morrison, Toni, Tar Baby New American Library, New York, 1981, pp. 175.

¹⁶ Gordon, Robert, " The Venal Hottentot Venus and the Great Chain of Being" African Studies 51:2, 1992, pp. 187.

white male fantasies in as much of an historical context as anthropology will allow him. But from the point of view of my identity, he was being difficult. He could not concede that this central white male preoccupation was a fantasy. The thought that all those 'respected' scientists suffered racist and sexist delusions may have been beyond him. Pamela Hill Collins writes:

"The fact that Sarah Bartmann was both African and a woman underscores the importance of gender in mentioning notions of racial purity. In this case Bartmann symbolized Blacks as a 'race'. Thus the creation of the icon applied to Black women demonstrates the notions of gender, race and sexuality were linked in overarching structures of political domination and economic exploitation."¹⁷

'Sexuality' is, I feel a bit of a misnomer from the point of view of Black women, at least if the word is also meant to include a loving sharing of the self. After being put in a cage, threatened with a stick and made to dance, to walk and to show herself, where was auntie Sarah's love then?¹⁸ Of course it is control of a sort. With regard to white male sexuality, Hill Collins' description was precise.

Well, white men must have expected enough pleasure out of this display to be prepared to pay for it. Over time, these expectations were built into the symbolic system. Gordon's place in those overarching structures of political domination did not seem to allow him to undermine the wet dream it was built on. This despite his overt purpose, which was to argue that the equality Black woman=sexual icon was not a natural one, but one created precisely to enable economic exploitation.

Fortunately, at this point my native cunning did not desert me. I could see very well where this was heading. Pretty soon I was going to pick up a reading which said to

¹⁷. Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 169.

¹⁸. Cf. Altick, R.D., *The Shows of London* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 272.

African women 'you are all c--ts'. It was, I think, my sticking point. I politely excused myself from the academic table and went to sit in the kitchen and think. It was not that I wanted to identify. All this *tablier* discourse was, of course, there for a purpose. My feeling was that it was there to say 'you, Yvette, are the respectable darkie, you have learnt how to wash, you have learnt how to use a knife and fork and converse about those other uncouth darkies in civilized language'. And if I did not want to, what was the option? In the discourse of the lounge, only to join the labia'd ones. I like dining out. But I could not eat hatred.

Hill Collins has put my dilemma in much more respectable language:

"When an outsider group - in this case African-American woman - recognizes that an insider group - in this case white males - requires special privileges from larger society, a special problem arises of keeping the outsiders out and at the same time having them acknowledge the legitimacy of this procedure. Accepting a few 'safe' outsiders addresses this legitimation problem. One way of excluding the majority of Black women from the knowledge validation process is to permit a few Black women to acquire positions of authority in institutions that legitimate knowledge, and to encourage us to work within the taken-for-granted assumptions of Black female inferiority shared by the scholarly community and by the culture at large."¹⁹

It was of course possible that there were certain taken-for-granted assumptions about my inferiority which would not perturb me. I can remember as an undergraduate devoting the first tutorial or two of each course to convincing my tutor (white male or female alike) that I had a brain. Each course, without fail, I would devour the reading material and prepare questions which would not only probe the material but also demonstrate my intelligence. It would sometimes be tricky to find a hook to hang my questions on in the actual tutorial, but I learnt to improvise, and work them in I did. Only once this was done would I relax and breathe, secure in the knowledge that I would be treated as of average human

intelligence. I hated nothing more than people taking one look at my skin colour and gender and talking down to me. Still, I can't remember this antagonism ever discouraging me from desiring to teach, research and write in the future. This public discourse about private parts was another kettle of fish altogether. If this was what being an academic was all about, then I didn't want to be one. It was not a good way to recruit potential insiders. The price exacted from a Black woman was too high.

A Mother's Resistance

Like Brown girls are wont to do in times of trouble, I headed for my mother's house. She gave me, I think, her blessing. I got spoilt with love: oxtail stew and rice, fried chicken and pumpkin, and date cake for dessert. We cooked, ate and told stories. As I thought, there between the stove and the sink, of all the young ones who dreamt of an education, I realized I had work to do. It looked like the lounge was going to get quite crowded in a generation or two's time. I wanted to make sure it was a decent place for young girls. Nourished anew by the root of my life I put myself back together again and headed for my alma mater. I told myself 'OK, child, don't get angry, get even'. White male wanted to insult Brown women he was going to find he had a fight on his hands.

The first thing I did was to take it seriously. I did this by tracking down white male sexual fantasies about Khoekhoe women from auntie Sarah's parent's time to after her death (the 1770's to the 1820's). It was a truly nasty job, but one I felt had to

¹⁹. Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, pp. 204.

be done. I did not want to do the disproving by referring to the physical evidence. Just now some raving loony was going to suggest examining auntie Sarah's mortal remains to detect any signs of manipulation. I did not feel that that was the respectful thing to do. Rather, I thought, if I could discuss the history of ideas about the Khoekhoe I could show that this history had an existence unrelated to anatomical realities. I mean, Khoekhoe women did not suddenly develop physical conformations in the late eighteenth century. I was culturally unable to treat auntie Sarah as an object, so my solution was going to be to turn whitemale travel writers into the objects of my research. I wanted to turn the lens, to connect to a long tradition of Brown women observing white men and coming to some unflattering and mostly unprintable conclusions. My language problems remained unsolved. I was still forced to translate from my native idiom into academic English. What was the use, I reasoned, of calling them names if they could not understand what I said?

At one point I found myself translating back. I learnt that you cannot wish to gain strength from your native tradition without at some point falling back into vernacular. So I wrote:

"What did the Khoekhoe think about these obsessions? Again, it is hard to say. Certainly amongst their descendants it is considered extremely rude to mention someone's genitals. This is the more so when the genitals are those of an ancestor, and if the ancestor is female the very mention of them is considered an invitation to fight. So pervasive is this perception that if this paper were written for an audience in Mitchell's Plain, say, or the Richtersveld, a suitable title would have been 'Jou Ma se M---'; or what white people have been saying about us for three hundred years"²⁰

It is clear to me, now, that what I really wanted was to be writing for an audience consisting of my own community. It would have made my task so much simpler and

²⁰. Cf. Pp. 126.

my paper so much shorter. Instead that fight was calling me. I then went on to relate the 'apron' idea to its specific historical context.

It should be clear that by this time I was lying to myself. Despite all my admonitions to myself I was just getting angrier and angrier. Off paper I began to argue. I kept saying 'look we do not play with ourselves until our bodily parts hang down to our knees'. One scene would have been funny if it were not so silly; I was having lunch with a white man, and, although I cannot remember the conversation verbatim there was a sort of subtext where he conceded easily that I did not. After all, I was one of the citified Khoekhoe who had given over our ancient ways. Already I was uneasy, since this was not my idea of lunchtime conversation with a comparative stranger. I was still adjusting my mind, you see, to the idea that in the lounge with those comfortable seats some rude namecalling was going on which would have been totally unacceptable in the kitchen. Even though I had begun to do some of it myself, it was hard to readjust my standards. Then my luncheon companion said to me

'well, you know, in the desert where I work it is hot and dry, and I have often seen my daughters scratch themselves down there, because the dry desert air makes them itch. Perhaps that is what the Khoekhoe women did'.

I recovered, I think, enough to make a snappy comeback, after all, something had been won in this encounter, he had conceded that it was something in the past, unlike Gilman whose phrase '**serv**ing as a sign of beauty', to me, meant that he was arguing that we were still doing it. I said

'well **you** know, Sarah Bartmann grew up in the eastern Cape, an area of South Africa which has year-round rainfall. I don't see why she should have

scratched herself. We had oils, you know, and medicines - is cortisone not won from a South African plant?²¹

It seemed enough to get him to change the subject. Unfortunately by this stage I had lost my appetite, a sad thing for a student getting a free lunch. My victory, if anything, was extremely limited. A fact little known about me is the fact that I spent my first years in a dry desert area of southern Africa. Although I cannot honestly remember any itching, it was still in a sense my body lying there on the table, open to all to discuss. It may be argued that his daughter's bodies were also part of the story, yet their racial identity protected them. They were not in the position of having people looking at them and thinking about hanging labiae. It was different for me because I was Black. Because I was Black it was racist. That was when I began to feel what it must have been like to be auntie Sarah. This lunch was not an intellectual experience. What lay on the table was my Khoekhoeness and my womanness.

This is still what it means to be auntie Sarah. After a hundred and eighty five years, her body is still lying on the table of countless undergraduate tables swotting for their courses in race and representation, literature, art history, history, anthropology, archeology or the history of medicine. That fighting year I protested as best I could from the position of powerlessness which casual temporary teaching staff inhabit. One course in particular I remember well. By the time I was hired the course reader had already been printed. I found myself in the position of having to teach that Gilman text (which seemed destined to haunt me over two continents). I did feel as if I had landed in outer space.

²¹. About *Dioscorea Elephantipes* and the extraction of cortisone, cf. Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk, The Medicinal and Poisonous Plants of Southern and Eastern Africa, Livingstone Press, London, 1972, pp 82. Also re: *Bulbine* spp. of the eastern Cape, cf. pp. 12.

There was little I could do, but that little I did. When teaching about auntie Sarah to first-year students I pasted pictures of indigenous flowers over that infamous page of Gilman's (but I will now carefully tell you where you to find it, whether for voyeurism or for pasting depends on your identity).²² I recommended my students to do the same, and frowned heavily on any boy who dared to leave an unpasted page open in my class.

This course I remember as an unending struggle. The white boys I taught were certainly not of Gilman's, Gould's or Gordon's ilk. This generation had lost everything their fathers had had: the racially restricted vote, segregated universities and neighbourhoods, and the taken-for-granted expectation of a comfortable job after graduation. The comfortable cushion which their race and gender had bought in the past was beginning to erode, and having to compete on however inadequately equal terms was for them a frightening experience. They still had the lifestyle: the Black maid, the Black gardener, the swimming pool and the two-car family. But a new world was beginning to open up and, I suspect, the very fact that a Black woman had the power to judge their work came to have a deeply symbolic meaning to them.

What I remember most was the sheer sense of entitlement they possessed, such that, although the white boys constituted only 25% of the tutorial population, they insisted on occupying 90% of the tutorial talking time, not to mention my attention. The assumptions of their race and their gender were never more clear than when

they 'forgot' to give the Black student next to them space to speak, listen and be heard.

So, in that tutorial about Sarah Bartmann lines were drawn. When the white boys tried to be rude I quelled them with a glance. With the Black girls I did my best. I deconstructed the text in as simple language as I could find, and allowed them to speak of their emotions of reading it. I encouraged them to validate those emotions as important facts in exploring and understanding the text. I set an essay on aspects of the history of sexism and racism and prescribed my own and other Black women's work (which up to that point had seemingly escaped the course co-ordinator's attention). I don't know how well I did with the Black girls. All I know is that one of them is handing in her honours thesis as I write - and she still remembers me.

It was a contradictory experience. I remember it as singularly humiliating: the very fact that the economic exploitation of my labour could put me in a situation where I was actually teaching racist and sexist texts is something to which I have never completely reconciled myself. I felt complicit in my own and other's oppression. I used to look at the young faces of the students, listen to their hopes and dreams, and think of the system which awaited their working lives.

There I was in the process of reproducing capitalist labour power, and this very same colonial capitalism demanded of me either complete assimilation or exposure to sexual ridicule. The white male tutors were not confronted with these choices. My economic exploitation was racialized and gendered in a particularly vicious way. At this point my mind started playing tricks on me. Assimilation left me no choice but to

²². Gilman "Black Bodies" pp. 217.

be content with reproducing the racism and sexism which oppressed me. This would have rendered me complicit in my own oppression with self-hatred and self-loathing the inevitable end result. Well, being economically exploited in a sexual manner is not an unusual position for a Black woman to be in. Like so many before me, I turned to struggle as a means to regain sanity.

There, as I taught, I formed a determination to write anti-texts, texts which did not other Black women, texts which conceived the Black woman as Self. Then was born the decision to write a biography of Sarah Bartmann, a book which Black girls could safely take home to mother and study in the kitchen.

I also learnt that no oppression can stop you from learning. Those classes taught me that the identity which the white males wished me to leave in the kitchen was in fact a subject of intense debate in the lounge, but distorted, reduced to a bodily part. Again, this was not an accident since it began to happen at precisely the moment they realized they could not keep us forever confined to the kitchen. Giddings writes:

" It is no coincidence that Sarah Bartmann became a spectacle in a period when the British were debating the prohibition of slavery....Euro-Americans had to resolve the contradictions between their own struggle for political freedom and the black men and women they still enslaved. This contradiction was resolved (by both pro- and anti-slavery whites) by racialism: inscribing certain inherited characteristics to blacks, characteristics that made them unworthy of first class citizenship. At the core of these characteristics was the projection of the dark side of sexuality, now literally embodied by black females....By the turn of nineteenth century, then, race had become an ideology, and a basis of that ideology had become sexual difference."²³

I began to see that these scenes where my body kept on coming onto the table were happening to me because auntie Sarah and I shared a history. My history and this history which I was writing was shaped by racism, sexism and economic

exploitation. The fight I was fighting was about me. This realization helped me solve an intellectual problem which had been working on me for a long time. I am a historian, you understand, I study change over time. Yet the more I began to challenge white male rights to call us --- names, the more I was beginning to think that nothing had changed. Now I saw that change was in fact the issue. 'Okay', white males were saying to me subtly and sometimes more directly, 'you want to insist on being Khoekhoe, you are going to have to accept our identity Brown=sex object'. They were saying this precisely because the fight of people of colour around the world against racism had forced them to change, precisely because we had challenged their nice resolutions of their own little contradictions. What I was experiencing was (I hope) the last ditch battle. The historical process begun in auntie Sarah's time was ending in mine, provided (I thought) I could keep up the fight.

I also began to understand that the reproduction of Gilman's text in the context of a university course in Cape Town, 1995, was not ideologically innocent. Its content and location was designed to reinforce at an ideological level the bastions of race and gender which were beginning, however slowly, to crumble. I might have taken longer to realize this had it not been for an incident in which I was killed before my own eyes. It was towards the end of a slightly tense tutor's meeting at which we had discussed the teaching of a module on Khoekhoe history. One tutor asked the course co-ordinator idly, as the meeting was winding down, 'so do you think there are any Khoekhoe still around, you know, people who still practice their culture, I mean?'. The co-ordinator replied 'no, physically there may be some genetic mixtures

²³. Giddings, Paula, "The Last Taboo", in Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*, pp. 445-446.

still around [with a sidelong glance at me] but their culture is extinct. You might find some remote tribes, but even there their culture is dying out in the face of westernization'.

What really brought this incident into the realm of the surreal was the fact that I was at that very moment sitting and chewing on a piece of biltong. They always liked to have tutors' meetings during the lunch hour. This was a piece of home-made biltong, lovingly made by my aunt and sent to me by my mother. I was very happy as I chewed on my piece, because it had been made by my youngest aunt. She had been going through a very difficult time lately and if she was making biltong she must surely be restored to good health.

Such was my state of mind, as near as I can describe it, when this white man came to extinguish my community and my culture in a sentence. And me with them, for who am I without my community and culture? For the life of me I could not prevent what happened next. I looked at the biltong, looked at him, looked at the biltong again and burst out laughing. The meeting broke up somewhat hurriedly, me still wavering between hysterical giggles and perfectly distracted stares.

Now, with hindsight, I regret that I could not take this symbolic genocide more seriously. I am sure that a more dignified response should have been both possible and necessary. Had I bent my mind to it I could possibly have started a small revolution on that sentence. But to see him denying my material culture while it was being consumed in front of their own eyes was too much. I don't know who they thought had taught my aunt to make biltong - the white colonizers perhaps?

There is a moral lesson in this. If I have learnt anything from my great-grandmother it is that they cannot stop us from laughing. They dispossessed us of our land, took our cattle, made us slaves and stole our language. We don't have much left besides our sense of humour. Make no mistake, colonialism is a very serious matter indeed - except when it is completely ludicrous. Vine Deloria says:

"When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that people can survive."²⁴

Well, survive I did.

A Daughter Digresses ...

I learnt from this experience to respect auntie Sarah's strength. This continual exposure in public was a trial to me. How much worse must it not have been for her? Although I knew that a comparison between oppressions is not really meaningful, I infinitely preferred the symbolic exploitation to the real. I would rather dance in front of seminars with all my clothes on, than perform in a cage in a thin costume. My conditions of labour felt still easier than hers.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt that it was high time the exposers got exposed. Giddings had made me think about the construction of racism: 'this contradiction was resolved... by racialism.' Seeing the functioning of racism in my own times let me see more clearly how it functioned in auntie Sarah's time. One of the things I did during the fighting period was to think seriously about this identity

²⁴. Deloria, Vine, "Indian Humour", in Anderson, Margaret and Patricia Hill Collins (eds), Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, California, 1992, pp. 346. Another gem from this collection: "It is said that when Columbus landed, one Indian turned to another and said: 'Well, there goes the neighbourhood'." Ibid., pp. 342.

white males had created for us, and how it had shaped both our lives and theirs. So I did write a paper on British imperial history. I wanted to explain how the exhibition of auntie Sarah served a purpose in the fabrication of an imperial culture, one which both built ideologies of racism, and divided constructions of gender by race. I wrote that

"Ideas of race from Sarah Bartmann's time on were to be inextricably entwined with the struggle over gender definitions. In that sense it is bizarrely fitting that, as European scientific ideas about the Khoekhoe were extended to include all Blacks, and eventually all people of colour, the grand edifice of scientific racism came to be built on Sarah Bartmann's body....This paper.... rests on the conviction that that the various uses of Sarah Bartmann, the metaphor, underpinned and reinforced the relations of power in which the living woman was embedded." ²⁵

Then, this seemed like progress, since the very fact that I was able to write about auntie Sarah at all seemed to show that I was finding a way out of my language problem.

What I was trying to do was to restore Sarah Bartmann to history, and her history to auntie Sarah. I felt the paper was a good reaction to the kind of British imperial history which was all about causes emanating from the metropole and effects in the periphery. It could work the other way round too, I argued, and I felt this was an important point to make. I was never quite easy in my mind, though, that I had made a solid case. For one, the relations of power were so hopelessly unequal. Auntie Sarah may have intervened in the discursive construction of gender in Britain, but she had very little influence over the process. For another, writing about 'Sarah Bartmann, the metaphor' felt like reducing her to object status again.

²⁵. Cf. Pp. 138..

After all, what was the real difference between what I was writing and the Comaroffs contribution to the historiography?

"One item among the potpourri of curiosities in the Animal Kingdom was a description of the "Hottentot Venus", an "essential black" from the Cape Colony. This unfortunate "wild woman" of Khoi ancestry had been taken to Europe and ... ended up on Cuvier's dissecting table. His famous account of her autopsy was to be reprinted twice within a decade of its publication; it centered on the anomalies of her "organ of generation", which, in its excessive development of the *labia minora*, was held to set her kind apart from human beings."²⁶

It took me a while to see the similarity because this kind of sophisticated text requires some decoding. It takes a stance which distances itself from the people under discussion through coy quotation marks and passive terminology: 'had been taken ...centered ...ended up ...was held'. Another way of putting it: 'Ooops, these things just happened'. The Comaroffs do not approve of Cuvier, it is clear, but it didn't seem to me as if they were particularly concerned about the fate of this nameless 'wild woman', either. Perhaps it was not their business. The text, this time, was about Cuvier, or was it about the process whereby "...the bourgeois subject of the new Age of Capitalism, already secure in the Protestant ethic and rational Philosophy, was given uncontestable grounding in biological nature."²⁷ What the text was not about was mine and auntie Sarah's history, except insofar as she functioned as an object in aiding the Euroamerican understanding of itself. There is a sense in which the Comaroffs were doing precisely that, you may note, which Cuvier was doing.

I have found that, like Bal's text, this kind of quasi-liberal text tends to be an exercise in modern white people using Black people as objects in trying to excuse/understand the sins of their fathers, and therefore themselves. This method

²⁶. Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, Vol.1, pp 104.

decontextualizes what to us is the crucial subject: Black history. And the more it decontextualizes, the more conservative and downright racist meanings begin to creep in. I am not talking about simple things like the fact that white people have names and the Black people do not. No. Just see how that `excessive development of the *labia minora*' creeps in at the end. The distancing technique and the fact that this phrase is **not** in quotation marks (our attention being diverted elsewhere, you see) lends this remark authenticity. The shape, cause or history of this idea is not an issue, except as a minor footnote in the history of white ideas. This kind of analysis makes reality by omission.

To me, it was the issue for the longest time. Not by choice but of necessity - the necessity to be a self-defined biltong-chewing subject with a sense of humour - I had devoted a considerable amount of effort to investigating the manipulation that went into creating the 'Sarah Bartmann anomaly'. This exposure quite logically revealed some most distasteful details about colonizing science and culture. The study of physical manipulations - the 'low angle', so to speak - succeeded in shedding light on the culture which, almost two centuries later, produced the papers I have been discussing. My imperial paper was an attempt to relate this manipulation to the process of creating a colonial culture. I did this via 'Sarah Bartmann, metaphor'. But another word for metaphor is 'thing'. There is a sense in which I was doing precisely that, you may note, which the Comaroffs were doing.

I suppose that this would have made more sense if I was not who I was. Restoring, recontextualizing, rebutting can be very good and probably necessary

²⁷. Ibid., pp. 101.

work. Still, all this time, what I actually wanted to do was to write about auntie Sarah, the woman. I wanted to tell the story of who she was, what she ate, how she lived - a biography. I mean, a question which had been troubling me from the start was why the Khoekhoe? I kept on seeing that the Khoekhoe have functioned as an archetype for centuries. Some of the most racist ideas thought up by Europeans were first elucidated about the Khoekhoe and then extended to apply to other oppressed peoples. I wanted to approach this question by exploring the triple intersection of the identity African/native/slave. Yet I could not. Even had I been able to find the words, I simply did not have the time. All this re-stuff was getting in the way.

The process of rebutting white male identities was making it impossible for me to simply affirm auntie Sarah's. And because she was part of my history, I was making myself an orphan in the process. The more I could not write her history, the less I was opposing the colonial process which had deprived me of my history.

We have a proverb: 'slim vang sy baas'.²⁸ White male insistence on the essentially sexual nature of our identity was forcing me to think seriously about sexuality, or the lack of it, and the way I finally thought myself out of this bind was through a debate on sexuality. Washington argues that the identity 'Black woman=sex' has, in fact, shaped over a century of African women's writing in America:

"Women's sexuality is another subject treated very differently by men and women writers. In the male slave narrative, for example, sexuality is nearly always avoided, and when it does surface it is to report the sexual abuse of female slaves. The male slave narrator was under no compulsion to discuss his own sexuality nor that of other men. As far as we know, the only slave narrator forced to admit a sexual life was Linda Brent.... sexuality literally

²⁸. 'clever catches his boss', meaning, people that try to be too clever eventually get themselves into trouble.

made women an unfit subject for literature. In Harlem Renaissance literature, as Barbara Christian reminds us, only male writers felt free to celebrate eroticised sexuality: 'The garb of uninhibited passion wears better on a male, who after all, does not have to carry the burden of the race's morality or lack of it.'²⁹

We do, probably, have a sexuality and a set of morals which shape these emotions. Perhaps I should say 'we had', because Heaven only knows what is left of Black women's emotions after colonialism, slavery and neo-colonialism has finished with us. Did white males leave us alone to restore what we could of our shattered emotions? Instead they persisted and persist in that accusation : 'you are all c--ts'. So we found ourselves in the position of having to respond. We tried to prove ourselves respectable. We proved them wrong daily, in our dress, our culture and the way our narrative traditions were shaped. We took on the 'burden of the race's morality'. It was a role which fitted in well with our traditional role as guardians of the set of physical relationships and cultural construct we called family.

I need to digress for a moment to make this point absolutely lucid: the necessity which confronted me in writing about the misuses of auntie Sarah's story was the same which confronted other Black women writing about slavery, namely the gendered obligation to defend the nation's morality. For an African woman this is a particularly hazardous road. As Amadiume says:

"The greatest insult to an African is to curse his or her mother or to refer to his or her mother's vagina (which explains the angry reactions of many Africans to the insults heaped on Africans by bourgeois women on the issue of women's circumcision)."³⁰

²⁹. Washington, M H, "'The Darkened Eye Restored': Notes Towards a Literary History of Black Women" in Gates, H (ed), *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology* Meridian, New York, 1990, pp. 36-37. The quote is from Christian, B, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of Tradition 1892-1976* Greenwood Press, 1980, pp. 40.

³⁰. Amadiume, Ifi, *Re-inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*, Zed Books, London, 1997, pp. 165.

This cultural attribute originates from respect for motherhood, and the meaning of motherhood expands to include all girls as potential mothers as well as real and symbolic other-mothers, in other words all African women. This cultural attribute is a token of the historically great respect paid to motherhood. The very nature of blasphemy, after all, rests on insulting that we hold most holy. Yet it has become the old colonial story. That which originally was good and wholesome - respect for motherhood - has become yet another tool for oppression. Obbo notes that:

"Women's roles and contributions in the rural areas as farmers, wives, mothers and homemakers often prove a hindrance to female emancipation. In order to keep women in the villages, the majority of men have developed arguments justifying women's role as part of African tradition. However, even rural women insisted: 'Traditions that break women's backs, that take women's work for granted without any reward, that keep women at home, that insist on morality for women only, must be forgotten.'³¹

The burden of the race's morality has become an oppressive one. In carrying it, it seems that African women have enabled a gendered morality which operates in such a way that the men are exempted from the necessity of acting morally. To insist that this is 'tradition' is to ignore the very history which created the burden of the race's morality in the first place. Look, I feel it is time we laid it down. For every Black man who objects every time we try to lay it down, that the morality of the nation will go under, I have one question: why is this a burden we cannot carry together as equals? For though colonialism has oppressed all of us, it oppresses women in specific ways from which men largely are exempted. So I cannot understand why she who is doubly oppressed should have extra burdens to carry.

The prohibition on mentioning female private parts is the reason why there is so little open debate about women's sexuality in Africa, of which I suppose the sexual

³¹. Obbo, Christine, African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence Zed Press, London, 1980 pp. 28.

abuse of women is also a part. There is no language into which it can fit. Ideally, a respectful debate can happen only in gender-segregated environments. It is a 'woman's issue'; since here too, the burden of the nation's morality is borne by women. With this I have no problem, since it is right and proper that history should be written without insults. Occasional gender separation is a custom I am comfortable with.

The problem is that African women sometimes need to oppose the mutilation of female bodies in the public, multi-racial and multi-gendered, sphere where it can make a difference, for the power and the violence which makes it possible for this mutilation to take place is not solely a 'woman's issue'. And it is precisely our role as guardians of the family which impels us to speak of this monstrous threat to the lives and happiness of young women. We then find ourselves in the position of first having to invent a language. But African women place themselves outside their culture when they do, for the 'bearers of morality' should respect themselves first. So our culture, which is otherwise a source of strength, operates against us in this matter. In order to demand an end to the violation of female bodies, it is necessary to mention the unmentionable in public. To do so puts you outside the boundaries of accepted morality.

I do not know if this African custom was so strong, before colonialism. I do have a problem if custom becomes a means of silencing African women. This seems to me to go against the very grain of tradition, in the African sense of a series of negotiated settlements aimed at preserving community and a sense of collective

history. Yet so strong is this custom that debates which are of life-sustaining importance to us as women are being silenced.

Like the rural women who sought freedom and independence in the cities, African women who wish to protest sexual violence are having to do so without the comfort of respectability. As long as they are prepared to be symbols of morality, it is all right, but as soon as they want to become empowered beings through language, they can no longer be respectable. It must be a sad and brittle respectability which is so easily lost. Yet African women may hang on to it because, in the midst of multiple dispossessions, it is all they have. Many feel that it is better to be the oppressed wife, respected in theory although despised in practice, than to be branded a prostitute. So the hatred which was exerted against us becomes internalized. Sexual violence, refracted through our own gendered morality, has rendered women mute. It is no wonder that Awa Thiam begins her book with a discussion of voice:

"Black women have been silent for far too long. Are they now beginning to find their voices? Are they claiming the right to speak for themselves? Is it not high time that they discovered voices, that - even if they are unused to speaking for themselves - they now take the floor, if only to say they exist, that they are human beings - something that is not always immediately obvious - and that, as such, they have a right to liberty, respect and dignity?"³²

Sexual violence against African women has aimed to deprive us of our humanity. As such it is not a 'women's issue'. That we have at all needed to assert the existence of our humanity is testimony to how far generations of sexual violence waged against us have succeeded. To be human is to speak. We need a language, and a custom, which will enable us to speak of our experience and needs.

³². Thiam, Awa, Speak Out Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa Pluto Press, London, 1978, pp. 11.

I have digressed enough. What I began to think about at this stage of writing about auntie Sarah's story was generations of rebuttal. Our post-emancipation, neo-colonial history was all about proving that we were so much more than sex. In the process, just like I never got round to writing auntie Sarah's history, we never got to be all we could be. Why do we care so much? We are not the ones going around calling other people names. We are not the ones with minds bent to rule. Why are we spending all this time telling them that they are wrong about us? The more I thought about it, the more I began to ask myself 'so who cares what they think, anyway?'. The history of British, European and American imperialism shaped my and auntie Sarah's life. Doesn't mean I should spend the rest of mine getting stuck there.

Carby reached a point like this and found power:

"But instead of concentrating upon the domination of a white feminist theoretical discourse which marginalizes non-white women, I focus on the production of a discourse of sexuality by black women. By focusing on the sexual and cultural politics of black women who constructed themselves as sexual subjects through song, in particular the blues, I want to assert an empowered presence."³³

'Empowered presence' sounded like just the thing for me. Constructing ourselves as self-loving subjects sounded just like what I needed. I wanted to be finished with rehashing old white insults. The very next thing I wanted to do was going to be that biography.

...Rebels

³³. Carby, Hazel V., Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America, Verso, London, 1999, pp. 8.

But I was not there yet. The path to that biography is still long and rocky. Here, since I could find no help in the historiography, I sought it in the popular culture around me. Though no doubt highly politically incorrect, I found particular solace in a text by Bob Marley. The refrain goes: "...We've been trodding on the winepress much too long. Rebel! Rebel! 'Cos we've been taken for granted much too long. Rebel! Gotta rebel y'all. Rebel!"³⁴ 'Trodding on the winepress' has particular implications for the children of slaves, since the wine of the Cape was made by slaves for over three centuries.

I wish I could say I stopped digressing. When I wrote the imperial paper I was at the height of my re-fighting period. I couldn't stop because the more I fought, the angrier I got. Nor is this surprising since the pettiest things about the research process itself were enough to drive anyone to violence. I don't know what offensive name the whites called your people, but they used to call us 'Hottentots and Bushmen'. Let alone that it is rude to call people out of their proper name, the meaning of these names came to imply all that was rude and disgusting. Yet I could not find a library computer on two continents which listed literature on auntie Sarah under anything than 'Hottentot Venus'. Try 'Bartmann, Sarah' and you would come up blank. I am happy to say that the UCT library is now an exception to this rule. But most people did' nt seem to catch on to the fact that the lady had a name. Book indexes were a nightmare.

³⁴. Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Babylon System", Survival!, Island Records Inc., United Kingdom, 1990.

So the only way I could even begin to do research about auntie Sarah was by using a rude and offensive term. Imagine what it would be like to have to look up facts about Sojourner Truth under a term like "nigger" ! That was my position. Small wonder it made me fighting mad.

All that fighting was making me tired. I started to wonder if I could make it through enough years, and more and more, I began to wonder if I was using the right weapons. To make matters worse, auntie Sarah was starting to hit the news in South Africa. The text this time was different, it was about the movement to bring her home again for burial. Still, the same images were recycled as offensively as before. At my breakfast table I opened up the paper and stared a caricature, purporting to be her naked body, in the face. I attended one conference where a white man showed me a whole file full of these clippings. It was, to him, the token of his political conscience. He was `for' the movement. Jeez. That was just what we needed, images of auntie Sarah's body as the ultimate symbol of white liberalism. It began to seem that in political as in academic discourses - not that academic discourses are not political in nature - Khoekhoe women had but one thing to offer.

I knew that the re-emergence of these decontextualizing texts in modern times are intimately linked to the success we have had (albeit contradictory) in decolonizing our minds and our lands. Wilmsen writes:

"Clearly, the discourse of Stone Age savagery has changed little during the ... years it has been part of the existential Euroamerican consciousness. And it continues to play the role initially reserved for it, that of metaphoric underpinning for the self-recognition of that consciousness. In the nineteenth century, living persons were taken from their homelands to be displayed in colonial capitals as representatives of their savage state... Ethnography now fulfils this need; it can do so for modern tastes grown somewhat squeamish

about using actual bodies because ... displaying difference and writing about it serve the same ideological function."³⁵

I am not in a position to comment on the criticisms which have been made on Wilmsen's use of evidence.³⁶ I am not entirely happy with the structuralist nature of his history, though, where the Khoekhoe easily become little more than hapless victims of insuperable economic forces. But in his critique of the intellectual antecedents of the two great master sciences in Khoekhoe studies, namely archeology and anthropology, he is spot on. He puts his finger on the method with which these sciences operate: by cutting off their victims from the social and economic reality around them. Cheikh Anta Diop writes:

"It is recognized that a biased anthropologist can whiten a Black or blacken a White by a tendentious interpretation of measurements and carefully selected partial analyses."³⁷

In writing of Sarah Bartmann without writing about her, anthropologists succeeded in lining her up for symbolic display without making any sense of her life and times. A carefully selected partial analysis succeeded in confirming 'facts' about her which were not in fact, facts. The symbolic function was to buttress white male supremacy. The male 'existential Euroamerican consciousness' cannot continue to exist without such constant buttressing. It is in this context that we must understand the tremendous proliferation of Sarah Bartmann texts in the late twentieth century, which mention her without granting her life.

Her literary function was to be abused, by any one of the textual mechanisms in use: decontextualization, depersonalization, objectification and insult. And was this

³⁵. Wilmsen, E, Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari, University of Chicago Press, London, 1989, pp. 35.

³⁶. Cf. Lee, R B and M Guenther, "Problems in Kalahari Historical Ethnography and Tolerance of Error" History in Africa: A Journal of Method, vol. 20, pps. 185-235.

³⁷. Diop, Cheikh Anta, Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology Lawrence Hill Books, New York, 1991, pp. 2.

any less than slavery, since the question of auntie Sarah's consent to this procedure was not even considered?

Two examples, in quick succession. Altick could do no better for Sarah Bartmann than to list her as a 'heavy arsed heathen'.³⁸ Lindfors not only cites this but continues to refer to her as a "fat-arsed female".³⁹ Now really. Sarah Bartmann did not need this. Neither do we. But the perpetuation of ridicule serves a purpose. Auntie Sarah is exhumed only to be insulted.

It is not just that this display is not benign. As I have already said, the white male historiography was inhospitable to me simply because there were no good symbolic role-models for me. These texts went one step further by positing Black womanhood as nothing more than the subject of ridicule and insult. We have a proverb: 'as jy niks goed kan se nie, se dan liever niks'⁴⁰ It is the prevalence of texts which rather say something nasty than nothing at all which disturb me.

Altick's study is revealing about the function of symbolic display in freak shows and circuses. He at times deals with his freakish material by distancing himself through a dry irony:

"No longer did much aura of sentimental primitivism surround such people. Instead, besides the perennial interest any strange-looking and -acting human being had for the show-going public and the proof such creatures presented of mankind's variety, they owed their appeal to a new climate of interest in nineteenth century England. In the preceding century, what small knowledge of human behaviour and primitive culture had been obtained from imported savages remained for the most part unorganized and unscientific... Now

³⁸. Altick, R.D., The Shows of London Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 269.

³⁹. Lindfors, B, "'The Hottentot Venus' and other African Attractions in nineteenth century England" Australasian Drama Studies 1:2, 1983, pp. 100.

⁴⁰. 'If you can't say anything good, rather say nothing'

appeared the first stirrings of what would become, by the late 1840's the infant science of ethnology, for which, of course, living specimens of barbaric or savage races constituted prime raw material. Simultaneously, the imperialism which accompanied the early *pax Victoriana* was weaving ethnology, geography and the nation's economic and geopolitical aspirations into a single seamless pattern."⁴¹

Heavy going, and had it been about a white male instead of auntie Sarah I could have forgiven the temptation to leaven it with a little irony. But humour is culture contingent - and what can one possibly say about a scholarly culture that would find this acceptable? In Altick's work, the freakishness of the business he is studying is all too often reproduced in his text. This causes problems of representation. I mean now! 'Primitivism', 'strange-looking', 'savages', 'barbaric' on the one side; 'a single seamless pattern' on the other. It was just not funny.

In Lindfors' hands, this mindless racism is taken one step further. The 'blame the victim' mentality runs amok as writers hasten to escape the obvious implications of a systematic analysis of her oppression. Just hear how the hatred drips from the text:

"She was willing to collaborate in her own degradation in order to earn more money....She had agreed to allow herself to be exhibited indecently to the European public, and she persisted in this tawdry occupation for more than five years, stopping only when her health finally broke down. She may have been the victim of the cruelest kind of predatory ruthlessness, but her collusion in her own victimization was unmistakable."⁴²

It is sad and depressing that a level of analysis such as this should exist in academic writing on Sarah Bartmann. I tell myself that one must perhaps not expect too much from those who, by virtue of their race, class and gender, are beneficiaries of the very system which ground Sarah Bartmann down and pickled the remains. But this is not history. It is an exercise in racial and sexual hatred. Lindfors, citing a French anthropologist's speech from 1915, who repeated rumours he had heard in 1875, concluded:

⁴¹. Altick, *The Shows*, pp. 268.

⁴². Lindfors, B., "Courting the Hottentot Venus" *Africa*, Rome, 40, 1985 (133-148), pp. 148.

"To put it plainly, she may have engaged in prostitution as well as exhibitionism. Her degradation may have been complete."⁴³
 It looked like the thrill was going. As the Sarah Bartmann story grew stale by repetition, it seemed as if white males had to think up ever more emotionally charged stories to get the same excitement quotient out of it. There was more, even more offensive, which I shall spare you. By this time I was sick of analyzing racist texts.

Hatred and insult have just one effect on those who are the receiving end. It makes 'one' tired. Researching Sarah Bartmann's life is just about the hardest thing I have ever done. It is the most exhausting job I have ever had. It is trodding a heavy winepress.

This is not to say that the politicization of auntie Sarah's story was not in itself a good thing. For one thing, her life was obviously very much about politics from the beginning, and for another, some victories just cannot be won in the academic sphere, but on the streets outside. It gave me a curious feeling of satisfaction when the Griquas, a section of the Khoekhoe people who can trace their tradition of resistance way back to 1656, took up auntie Sarah's cause. Still, the publicity accompanying it brought some unexpected consequences. Journalists did not scruple to argue against the Griqua position in the guise of 'objective' reportage:

"The fact that Saartje pleaded in a court case that she did not perform under duress and received half the profits did not change the Griqua perspective on her 'undignified' exploitation."⁴⁴

Can you see how media took Lindfors' hatred and ran with it? This time to undermine the movement to treat auntie Sarah's mortal remains with some respect.

⁴³. Ibid..

⁴⁴. Toronto Globe and Mail, 1/1/1996.

I had no idea what she had done to cause all this hatred other than being born Black and female. But certainly, while I was getting emotionally exhausted, nobody was looking at the conditions of her labour. So long as these writers could make out that she was complicit in her own oppression, nobody cared about its economics. All that de-stuff I've been talking about concentrated on Sarah Bartmann, the thing-as-metaphor. While white male authors were getting all excited writing about her body, it seems that they were forgetting that she was a human being who laboured in a capitalist system.

In this respect, complicity has been one of the fundamental myths in the Sarah Bartmann story. Most accounts do not mention her status as worker at all, since most accounts are only interested in one thing. The ones that do implicitly deny any link between slavery and the creation of Sarah Bartmann as the ultimate sexual signifier by the simple expedient of not making any. Slavery is, of course, a matter which is of crucial importance to the descendants of slaves because it defines our identity. Being a descendant of slaves writing about slaves has taught me of this double bind - I am a person whose name was lost studying people whose names were taken. Far be it from me to suggest that the name my mother gave me is not a 'proper' name. What I am saying here is that it is not the name she would have chosen, had we not been colonized.

So there I was: tired, exhausted and still angry. I had defined a relationship to auntie Sarah, **but I did not know her birth name**. In principle we were both fine with that, as after a century or so you learn to have relationships without an African name on either side, but it was an important clue. Since she was born in the 1780s

on the eastern Cape frontier, she must have had a Khoekhoe name. It is far too early, and too far out in the country, for her parents to have been so colonized that they would not have given her a native name. So she must have had one. How and at what point did she then lose this name and come into the records as 'Sarah Bartmann'? In Africa there are only two ways - through religious colonization or through slavery. But auntie Sarah was baptized much later, in Manchester in 1811, so it was unlikely that she could have been baptized in the Cape. Brooding about names led me to the conclusion that she must have been a slave.

The other point, of course, is geography. Somewhere between 1790 and 1809 auntie Sarah would have had to pass through the heartland of Khoekhoe slavery - the wine districts of the southern and south-western Cape - in order to get from her birthplace to the ship which took her to England. She may have spent years in this passage. To be Black and to live in these areas without being a slave was so unusual at the time that it was explained and specified. Black people who were not slaves were such an anomaly that they had to carry papers to that effect: these named them 'Free Blacks'. Khoekhoe were not 'Free Blacks' because they were not legally enslaved. But the customary enslavement of the Khoekhoe was such an established social fact that those who were free enough to travel from one place to another had to have official pieces of paper to that effect. These pieces of paper were called passes, and Sarah Bartmann did not possess one. So she must have been a slave.

Up to this point in my personal history the slave story had been for me an intellectual issue, a matter of evidence and methodology. Watching the myth which

was being built up around her being used against the struggle of her own people, I saw the politics of it. Maybe all that fighting was misdirected. Maybe the issue was not which weapons I used. Knowledge is power, and I knew auntie Sarah was a slave. I knew it, but to whom was I saying this?

So I wrote a paper on Khoekhoe slavery. I took the evidence and methodology and turned it around. I took auntie Sarah seriously and connected her personal history to the history of Khoekhoe. I argued that the reason why historians could get away with pretending that she wasn't a slave was because of their historical refusal to acknowledge Khoekhoe slavery. Auntie Sarah was to be recontextualized alright.

To me this paper was fundamentally important. Oddly enough, it was precisely at the moment when I defined auntie Sarah as in a position of complete objectification, as a slave, that I began to see agency in her story. I wrote:

"To expect her in these circumstances to tell the truth would be to ignore the likely effects of the culture born of slavery in which she was brought up. The historical experience of her people had given her reasonable grounds to expect that her testimony against a white man was not likely to be credited, and the consequences for herself were likely to be terrible; in short, that justice would be administered on a racial basis. In view of Mr Gaseley's expressed ideas about Khoekhoe people, there is a strong possibility that she was right."⁴⁵

It is sad that the thing I thought auntie Sarah did with this agency was to lie. But I suggested she lied because she had to. I argued that when she saw herself as having only two choices: that of telling the truth and possibly spending the rest of her life in jail, or of lying and returning to a state of slavery outside jail, she lied. So it was sad that she used her agency to sin, but also fully understandable in the historical context.

⁴⁵. Cf. pps. 183-184.

The good part was that here I was doing all those things I had previously found so hard: writing history, writing in that language. Best of all I was finding such lovely turns of phrase: 'she ... was brought up', 'she expected', 'she was right'. What lovely sentences can be created with the Black woman as a restored subject!

This paper allowed me to bring auntie Sarah home, not just to Khoekhoe history but to the history of Black women all over the world. It allowed me to make connections between her personal experience of being colonized and our collective colonial history. This could be summed up in a sentence: when we weren't being exploited in the process of reproducing capitalist labour power, we were being sexually harassed. At the one pole cleaning, at the other, violence. And the roots of this historical situation lay in slavery and colonialism. As Joan Martin says:

"The nature of moral goodness and its relation to enslaved women's work is the underlying theme for the third characterization of Black women's work. Here, Black women's control of their own bodies and sexuality, and their reproductive capacities make a work ethic a complex matter fraught with ambiguity. Enslaved women were exploited for their labor power. This included exploitation as sexual objects and as breeder's of the slave owner's human capital. According to Joanne Braxton, enslaved women knew that they were 'sexual laborers' and producers of children for the slave market, and that these factors made women a commodity different and unique from men."⁴⁶

As I reproduced human capital and endured sexual harassment, I realized that there was no time-limit to the after-effects of slavery. As long as Black women's material exploitation oscillates between those two poles, the ambiguities are going to remain. The least I could do as an historian, I thought, was to attempt to put things into

⁴⁶. Martin, Joan M, "A Womanist Investigation of the Work Ethic of Antebellum Enslaved Women, 1830-1865" in Grant, Jacquelyn (ed.), Perspectives on Womanist Theology ITC Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1995; citing Braxton, Joanne, Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989, pp. 20.

perspective so that those who wondered about these things would understand. It comes out of slavery. So I got that paper published.

So have you noticed how popular that paper became? Have you noticed how often it gets prescribed in courses on race and representation, literature, art history, history, anthropology, archeology or the history of medicine? No really? Nor have I.

I understood that Brown people today are less free than we would like to think. The physical chains are gone, but we are still in bondage. So I rebelled. I rebelled like mad.

...And moves on.

Whenever I think about my evolving relation to auntie Sarah's story, I suspect I am not as bright as my mother always said. Up to this point I had retained a naive belief that 'the truth' mattered. I still thought that if I played by their rules and presented all my evidence, I could manage to convince white scholars that Sarah Bartmann did not choose her fate. See. It still seemed to matter what others thought.

I used to listen to local music, searching in my own culture for answers. If this was our historical experience, I reasoned, the mere fact that we survived meant that there were answers. Vicky Sampson sang 'time to move on, time to break free'.⁴⁷ And she was right. I had spent long enough resisting mental liberation.

⁴⁷. Vicky Sampson, Shine, Tusk Records, 1992.

Until then, I had never thought of this 'ambiguity' manuscript as serious academic work. I thought of the truth as 'out there', and of evidence and methodology as something I was doing in the context of auntie Sarah's story, not my own. The idea that my emotions were data which could lead me to the truth, or that my inner truth mattered, in an intellectual sense, was not something I understood, then. The thought that these emotions could provide an academic methodology was not one which occurred to me in all of this time. Still I wrote, hurriedly before I got to my 'real' work, not knowing what I was writing this for or how it fitted in.

The strange thing was that in my work and life outside this intellectual world, I would be the first to claim that Black women were expert witnesses to racism and sexism. If a Black person said something was racist I would take her word before a white person's. If a woman said it was sexist I would take her word before a man's. And what was auntie Sarah's story about, then, if not about racism and sexism creating the conditions under which she had to make her choices for good or evil? Yet I was denying my expertise in these matters by refusing to make it part of my academic work.

The change, for me, came when I moved beyond the re-work. There is a difference between re-butting, re-searching, re-contextualizing and re-calling names, on the one hand, and an autonomous self-named story on the other. In the first, I am still allowing white males to set the terms of debate. I am fighting on their territory. This is a cardinal mistake oom !Nanseb /Gabemab (captain Hendrik Witbooi) has warned you against. So I spent much time reading writers and practitioners of resistance,

searching for tactics. I learnt that guerrilla warfare is about forcing your enemies to come look for you on a territory of your choosing.

I learnt from Captain Witbooi about the rightness of time. To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. A great strategist is one who does things in the right and proper season. So oom !Nanseb wrote in his youth: "Toro-/garu tama ta ha. Amase ni //nati habatsi sa oms \kat ge gowa !Kuub ei-!a khemi."⁴⁸ In the wisdom of his later years, he wrote: "everything I can say has already been written, all I could do has been done."⁴⁹ And it was with an eye towards that latter time, when I would be able to say the same, that I read on about the art of war. I needed the power to say what I needed to say. So I went right back to the beginning of my work, and practised becoming my own terrain of struggle. In the context of this symbolic struggle, I had to learn to become a self-definer. Here, in this manuscript, I set the stage. Here, I have power. This is my world.

Having learnt to speak, I started to think about why it had taken me so long. Why had I fallen back on schizophrenia as a mode of defense? In fact, as I began considering my thought and actions I started to realize that there were some things that were not entirely right about me. And small wonder, because I had taken some powerful abuse. The more I thought about the years I spent researching the life of auntie Sarah, the more I began to think about sexual abuse as a part of that experience.

⁴⁸. 'I did not come intending war. But truly, now I shall come over you, because you have invited this war into your home, [so I shall come] in the power of the Almighty.' Captain Hendrik Witbooi to Chief Maharero, senior, !Ga-os, 30/10/1885, cited in Heywood and Maasdorp (eds.), Papers, pp. 9.

Oddly enough, or perhaps not so, it was through reading white feminists on auntie Sarah that I came to this conclusion. Schiebinger, for instance, was a hard-working historian. Unlike many of those mentioned up to now, she had had gone out of her way to find new sources of evidence about auntie Sarah, and very importantly, had had these translated into English. She also evinced a proper concern with auntie Sarah's agency. The problem was that Schiebinger did not relate to her as 'auntie Sarah' at all. For one, Schiebinger's consistent use of the words 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman' without a shadow of a quotation mark was lacking in respect, not to mention sensitivity. For two, at the same time as she was searching for agency, she seemed to be writing auntie Sarah out of the script:

"...neither the dominant theory of race nor of sex in this period applied to women of non-European descent, particularly black women. Like other females, they did not fit comfortably into the great chain of being. Like other Africans, they did not fit European gender ideals."⁵⁰

That the white male scientists who were creating 'dominant theories of race or of sex' might have been thinking that these were separate theories was perhaps uncontroversial. That Schiebinger, after over a decade of Black feminist polemics, still thought so, was inexcusable. The dominant theory of race was eminently gendered, and the dominant theory of gender was racialized from the time auntie Sarah came on the scene. By arguing that dominant discourses on gender and race developed separately, Scheibinger ignored much of the evidence she herself presented on the way the Khoekhoe in particular had been characterized as sexually deviant from the inception of European colonialism in southern Africa.⁵¹ To then end

⁴⁹. Captain Witbooi to Captain Leutwein, Tsaam, 10/9/1894, in *ibid.*, pp. 180.

⁵⁰. Schiebinger, Londa, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, pp. 160.

⁵¹. Cf. *ibid.*, pps. 91, 115, 135-6.

her discussion of Sarah Bartmann with the question "Why, then, did anatomists and anthropologists privilege *male* bodies when investigating race and *European* bodies when examining sex?" missed the point.⁵² Why are we not displaying naked anthropologists and anatomists, if they are the subjects of our text?

Fausto Sterling was yet another demonstration of the tendency to lose sight of Sarah Bartmann altogether and instead to consider the ideas and feelings of the white participants in her life story. This is not unexpected, considering the post-modern emphasis on human subjectivity and academic construction. In fact, the modern resurgence of texts on Sarah Bartmann must be seen in the light of these changing emphases. Fausto-Sterling pointed out the historical parallels between the early nineteenth century and our time, but still with such a familiar segregated mindset:

"These new accounts are significant. Just as during the nineteenth century she became a vehicle for the redefinitions of our concepts of race, gender and sexuality, her present recasting occurs in an era in which the bonds of empire have broken apart, and the fabric of the cultural systems of the nations of the north Atlantic has come under critical scrutiny"⁵³

Just whose is 'our'? The personal history of auntie Sarah just became irrelevant.

Just consider the questions which Fausto-Sterling asked:

"What was the importance of these dissections to the scientists who did them and the society that supported them? What social, cultural and personal work did these scientific forays accomplish, and how did they accomplish it? Why did the anatomical descriptions of women of color seem to be of such importance to biologists of the nineteenth century?"⁵⁴

While the honesty may be refreshing, it may be seen that auntie Sarah's role in this story was still limited to that of a dead body. What is more, this body was relevant only in so far as it allows us to shed light on Western culture and science. The concern with subjectivity and social construction is, it seems, limited to that of

⁵². Ibid., pp. 172.

⁵³. A. Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe, 1815-1817" in J. Terry and J. Urla (eds.), Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996, pp. 20.

Western observation. This article has no intentions of relating to the Khoekhoe, or indeed to Africans at all. In this sense, these writings about auntie Sarah are not histories at all, at least with regard to her and her people. Rather they represent a renewed use of her body.

It remains for me to shed light on what was not said. I need to speak about the symbolic sexual abuse which I was experiencing in my life. It has taken me a long time to understand that there are places where symbolic is real as it can be, and that the violation of the space between my ears is not in my imagination.

Now, I wonder that I could be so slow. For of course auntie Sarah was violated, and of course there is a need to write about it. Some key definitions: rape is an act of sexual violence, an expression of male power and female vulnerability. So let me go back to that first Gilman paper, and my experiences upon reading it. Was it not rape of a symbolic sort to parade the degradation and humiliation of auntie Sarah before me? Was it not a sexually violent act which expressed male power and my vulnerability to pain? Has not each male author I have brought before you been unable to resist the temptation of demonstrating their psychosexual power and auntie Sarah's inability to resist? Michele Jacques writes of Black bodies as evidence of a singular sort:

"Black bodies testify to our strength, endurance, love of spirituality and oneness with earth and sky. From ... slavery forward, devilish untruths about our embodiment have hindered the power of this testimony. Too often 'the rocks have spoken' in our place and a false witness has been given."⁵⁵

⁵⁴. Ibid.

⁵⁵. Jacques, Michele, "Testimony as Embodiment: Telling the Truth and Shaming the Devil" in Grant, Jacquelyn (ed.), *Perspectives on Womanist Theology op. cit.* pp. 129.

In place of false witness it is time to speak the truth. I name the post-humous abuse and degradation of auntie Sarah's body, rape. The rape of her body is a rape of my mind. That this takes place on a symbolic level does not make it any less real than Cuvier's dissection and re-engineering of auntie Sarah's mortal remains. Altick lived to tell the tale, Lindfors to make fun of it. I find this to be surrogate violence against women. That auntie Sarah was dead and could not feel the abuse in her body makes this difference: I am alive and can feel it. I feel it is done to me. The difference it makes to practise sexual abuse at a symbolic level is that the perpetrators are undetected: the act is not named as such and occasionally even passes for 'history'.

In order to clarify the meaning of this symbolic sexual violence, our definition of rape can be both refined and broadened. Toinette Eugene provides a womanist definition:

"... the elements of sexual abuse are the violation of a person's integrity by force and/or threat of physical violence, dishonouring the ethic of mutuality and care in relationships of domination, and an infraction of one's psycho-spiritual-sexual integrity. Sexual abuse is a sacrilege of God's Spirit in each of us."⁵⁶

If it is auntie Sarah's credibility as a witness which shall determine the case, I shall lay the evidence before you. If it is my credibility as a witness which is at stake, the evidence lies before you here. I claim for us both the status as expert witnesses to the violence of which I speak.

I have documented the violence and shall do so again. That there has been a dishonouring of the ethic of mutuality and care which should exist between the researcher and researched I have shown. That there exists instead a relationship of domination between the white males who have written and the Black woman who

⁵⁶. Eugene, Toinett, M, "If you get there before I do!": A Womanist Ethical Response To Sexual Violence and Abuse" in Grant (ed.) *Perspectives* , pp. 105.

has been 'written' is clear. I have made the case that auntie Sarah's integrity has been diminished thereby - and my own. My full humanity has been denied me.

You see, there was this biography I wanted to write. I can see it as I write: moon, wind, water, rocks speak truth. Mid growing trees air rises buchu scent: rose, jasmine, chamomile, mint and khoigoed. Rose for heart's ease, jasmine for rest, chamomile for tranquillity, mint - which both warms and cools - for oneness, khoigoed for home and buchu for spirit; all speak peace to the girl by the waterside being braided.

This vision remains in the realm of the symbolic. Only I can see it. My material resources, thought and time have been consumed for this text instead.

As one Khoekhoe woman to another, I wanted to write a biography of a human life. This would have fulfilled me as a human being. I would have felt I lived a life worth living. This choice has been foreclosed by sexual abuse. My choice was only one of two: to pretend that none of this abuse was going on; or to confront it, admit it, and admit that it is happening to me. To choose the first is too dangerous. The chance would always exist that another white male would re-play these abusive texts at a time of threat. In fact, wherever I look I see Black women working, striving to get by and struggling for a better world. It is very likely that white, property-owning males will feel very threatened in time to come. Would not some young woman, then, be violated anew by these texts as I was? My word, this text needs to be there to stop this from happening, or to help, when it has happened.

Racism, sexism and their sexually abusive confluence have created the conditions in which I was not free to choose to be a biographer. Hill Collins explains how the system works:

"These violent acts are the visible dimensions of a more generalized, routinized system of oppression. Violence against Black women tends to be legitimated and therefore condoned while the same acts visited on other groups may remain nonlegitimated and nonexcusable. Certain forms of violence may garner the backing and control of the state ... Specific acts of sexual violence visited on African ... women reflect a broader process by which violence is socially constructed in a race- and gender-specific manner."⁵⁷

The social construction of racism and sexism has rendered the abuse which was performed against auntie Sarah Bartmann's body and her image socially invisible to the perpetrators and, sometimes, to the victims. Instead, it has been represented as an ideologically innocuous activity. This academic violence has been state-subsidized and state-supported, represented as innocent by the mass media. In the process, it has rendered the violence done to other Black women, such as myself, invisible.

The most painful part of it is that I was exposed to this abuse in the course of my work. I have a right not be exposed to sexual violence at work. This right has been violated, and this violation has been constructed as so fundamental a part of my race and gender identity that it has become socially invisible. Yet, we should not make easy distinctions between symbolic and physical sexual abuse. An act has to be thinkable before you can commit it. In this sense, symbolic violence against women can be analyzed by analogy with theories of physical violence. For example, Crenshaw argues that:

"Rape and other sexual abuses in the work context, now termed sexual harassment, have been a condition of black women's work life for centuries. Forced sexual access to black women was of course institutionalized in slavery and was central to its reproduction. ... The stereotypes and myths that

⁵⁷. Collins, Pamela Hill, *Black Feminist Thought*, pp. 177.

justified the sexual abuse of black women in slavery continue to be played out in current society."⁵⁸

I have discussed these stereotypes and myths at length. It remains only to mention that they have victimized me, and to demand that it comes to an end. If this chapter has done nothing more than render this abuse visible, it shall have served its purpose well.

Forced sexual abuse of Black women was institutionalized in slavery. Slavery was a point at which Black people were completely objectified: they were defined, by those who claimed the power to define, as being devoid of motive will. Choice in this context is meaningless. White law, white justice and white custom defines rape as sexual violence without consent. Under slavery Black women could legally not be raped because they could legally neither consent nor dissent. They were not people. Does this mean they were not raped? Black women know the answer.

Black women know about the impossibility of choice through their historical experience. Today, rape is still defined in the courts as a matter of individual consent. It is also defined as an act against an individual woman. This is a definition which does not take into account the historical reality of Black women's lives. We know that the ruling culture retains the norm that Black women have no right not to consent. Lorraine Hansberry's heroine cited at the beginning of this chapter put her finger on it when she said 'if you're Brown, they're sure you're selling'. She was not free to choose the ruling culture which set the conditions under which she was sexually harassed, neither am I nor any other Black woman or girl.

⁵⁸. Crenshaw, Kimberle, " Whose Story is it Anyway ? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill" in Morrison, T (ed.) Race-ing Justice *op.cit.*, pp. 411.

The ruling narrative structures, create the conditions under which our consent is irrelevant. The question auntie Sarah and all other slaves had to answer was: what can choice really mean under conditions of absolute unfreedom? In our symbolic world, ruled by white supremacist, woman-hating narrative structures, this question still remains. Our only choice must be to choose to cease to practise violence against those of our own race and gender forthwith. In our relationships with one another we create our world. Here, we have power.

Conclusion

I have always believed that, in trying to understand the world, the answers are only as important as the way you phrase the questions. Let me again, endeavour: is there a 'right' history to be written about the crimes which were committed against us? This may be a strange question for a historian, but I am starting to see my elders' reasoning. My elders chose, often, not to tell me of my history because the pain, anger and hatred were considered not suitable for children. Only with the attainment of a certain age and seniority have I, cautiously, been allowed to hear the stories. I myself wonder still, and often, if all this were not better forgotten. An old lady from Paarl used to try to teach me to forgive my enemies. For years I shrugged it off as turn-the-other-cheek stuff which had no place in our struggle. Then I began to think about this clever woman who is never too old to learn. This old lady had certainly survived a life I would be too scared to live. Now, I have come to understand that it was the other tradition of my people, that side by side with our struggle to be free, there lived a struggle to remain human. Forgiving thine enemies is not about them, they can see to themselves, it is about us.

The issue is not whether anger and hatred can motivate us in our fight. The issue is what is all that pain and anger doing to us? I don't have all the answers. Still, I do know that we can ultimately win the fight over material goods and still have lost it all if we forget who we were. To write the history of pain, hatred and anger, without replicating and passing on the heavy burden of those unresolved emotions: now that would be a truly humane history of Africa!

I realized this when one Sunday afternoon at the South African National Gallery in 1996, at a meeting where Brown people from all over the country were coming together to protest against the continued exhibition of our ancestors' bodies, I finally managed to find myself underneath years of academic socialization. This meeting had on the surface very little to do with auntie Sarah. She was mentioned, of course, as it would be impossible to have a meeting like that without thinking of her, but this time she had company. A slim Brown girl from the Kalahari said to the exhibitors 'if you knew our culture, you would not have done this thing.' Of course it would not have been done. But to 'you', we are objects. The process of taking away our land, making us slaves and denying us our history; colonialism, in short, has made us to 'you' objects. Things do not have culture, decency, or respect. 'Khoekhoe', the word we use to describe ourselves means 'people of people', in English 'human beings'. Our humanity was what colonialism robbed us of. The fact that we are still being objectified can only mean that colonialism is not over. How must it be over?

On that sunny afternoon on the slopes of Taub Homi - the last place Sarah Bartmann saw as she was removed from the shores of Africa - I came to connect with my humanness.⁵⁹ I spoke very little. There was no need when my people were all gathered together to speak. What I did say came from the heart. I said 'it hurts us'. And now I understand that it was my humanness speaking, that it is precisely my native African self, the descendant of slaves, who has all these problems and issues of morality.

Our meeting, predictably perhaps, ended with a discussion of identity. A stout Brown man from Cape Town, in trying to find words to explain our sense of who we were now, said 'to be Khoekhoe means suffering'. It means that exactly. What is this 'I' which feels pain? It is the hurt I feel when any of my people are objectified which forms the meeting between auntie Sarah Bartmann and myself. I do not seek to claim her suffering. There is more than enough of that going around to need to take another's share. I do identify with it. Pain, though unendurable at the time, is easily forgotten when it is over. Ultimately, all that is going to matter is that we can be Khoekhoe again.

As a Brown woman, I know it must come to an end. As an academic, my particular part in this process has been to write the history of dehumanized colonial imaginings, but also the history of humanness against all odds. The former matters only because it measures the obstacles which we have overcome.

Doesn't matter what room of the house we're in, wherever the children are is a good place. I will work out a way to explain to our children how it came about that things

⁵⁹. The Khoekhoe name of Table Mountain means 'place of the Supreme Being'.

which we teach them are private and not a subject for public discussion in fact were a subject for white public discussion for three centuries, a process which necessitates my mentioning the unmentionable. Then I will teach them that it is not important, as long as we are good, as long as we retain faith in our power to be good. I have not yet managed to resolve all the ambiguities. I suspect the only way I will ever resolve them is when it is, in the colloquial sense, history. Yesterday's news. Until then, I can at least realize that I do not bring these contradictions on myself. Until then, I can realize my power to choose humanity.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER SEVEN
COLONIALISM, DYSJUNCTURE AND DYSFUNCTION
SARAH BARTMANN'S RESISTANCE

"the general processes through which subjectivities are constituted need to be theorised, if the work is to have relevance to anyone other than the actual participants. ... to theorise is to generalize. I set out to make some generalizations about the processes through which individuals and social groups become subjects, and about the resources that black people utilise in overcoming racist discourses, individually and collectively. I set out to generate theory because of my conviction that describing and sharing experience, however enriching and important this may be, will not be enough to transform our oppressive social relations."¹



¹. Mama, Amina, Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity , Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 14.

Introduction

Well, the work is done. The house looks decent, the larder is stocked. We are almost ready to welcome a dignified aunt into this symbolic home. I should be rushing off to wash myself and put on clean clothes. Oh yes, and I must still pick some flowers for the bedside table. But first, I think, I shall relax on the couch with a cup of tea and some confidences.

Confiding is good for the soul. The historian must take care of her soul. The historian who wishes to write of strange and painful events must ensure a fit mind in a healthy body. The stresses and strains of this colonized history, of this history of the colonized, are such that it becomes of the utmost importance to ensure that no unhappiness is passed on. The pain is enough. It would be wrong if from the pain of the past I were to transmit the burden of my own pain to the future.

Testifying is a necessity for the womanist historian. Womanism removes the comfort and protection of being able to pretend that the historian is somehow apart from her history. Whereas objectivity requires distance, womanism expects involvement and requires activism. While there is much comfort in testifying, there is no protection in it from the unresolved contradictions of the colonized self. The womanist injunction upon its practitioners may be summed up as follows: theorist, know thyself! In this society, this is in itself a painful process. Denial, distance and objectivity are so much more safe and comfortable! As Fawzia Afgal-Khan writes:

"No self-knowledge, progress or identity seems possible without suffering. Neither does any future seem possible without coming to terms with the past

- but not in the traditional masculinist sense of 'overpowering' or "possessing' it, which eventually only leads to a loss of self..., but rather through some other dialectic that allows for a space between self and history, even as one acknowledges one's deep embeddedness in history and its injustice to oneself."²

This chapter seeks to create a dialectic which may or may not culminate in a comfortable discursive space, but certainly can acknowledge my deep embeddedness in history and its injustice to me. When there is no choice, no knowledge seems possible without pain and suffering, it is always an excellent time to take a smoke break and review your strategic situation with care.

Self-knowledge must be the foundation stone of womanism. If you do not know yourself you truly cannot know your world, how it came to be, or your place in it. I have just concluded an extended critique of people who insist on seeing the world through the opaque distortions of their own racist and sexist glasses, all the while pretending that they are clear. I should not criticize this mistake while perpetuating it. The danger inherent in an anti-struggle of this nature is that danger itself, risk, pain, anger, sorrow and loss become reified as ends in themselves, when they should be understood as means towards an end, necessary but not good. The desire to glorify suffering should worry me.³ In seeking to understand myself, then, I am immediately forced to confront the fundamental knowledge that I am crazy.

My insanity stems from a long (five hundred and five years in the south-western Cape) history of madness. My mother once said to me: " a traumatic event is an act of violence done to you over which you have no control." I said: "It sounds to me as

2. Afzal-Khan, Fawzia "Bridging the Gap Between So-Called Postcolonial and Minority Women of Colour: A Comparative Methodology for Third World Feminist Literary Criticism" Womanist Theory and Research Vol. 2, No. 1, 1996-97 (35-47), pp. 39.

if you have pretty much defined colonialism." When violence is inflicted upon us, we hurt. In seeking a diagnosis for my madness, it is as well to begin at once by suggesting that I suffer from post (or is it neo?)-colonial stress disorder.⁴ Its symptoms are many: I doubt the legitimacy of my own emotions. I do not trust myself. I cannot love myself. I hold on to anger and pain in preference to working through it. Never believe an historian who says she is merely studying the past! We seek to make the future. In the project of making a better world, colonial stress disorders of any variety is dysfunctional.

Dys-function may be defined as the lack of function, the inability to form part of an organic whole, to be unable to relate lovingly to the other parts and people of your world. Dysfunction is sometimes counter-functional: a pattern of behaviour which exacerbates rather than addresses the problem which caused it. Substance addiction is a good example of dysfunctional behaviour: being addicted to a substance means the substance becomes your problem. You can wake up in the morning and go to bed at night worrying about your substance abuse. This saves you from having to worry about the problem which caused your substance abuse in the first place. It also prevents you from ever having to grapple with that problem, in fact, your problem may never go away but you are affectively isolated from it by your preoccupation with your substance abuse. The pain of the problem is displaced by the self-hatred of the substance abuser. The fact that at the end of the process you

³. With thanks to Lynne Rhode, who made me see this!

⁴. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Joy Croft Leary of the Department of Psychology, UCLA at Berkeley, whose talk on post-traumatic slavery disorder set my mind thinking along the lines which follow; in a speech read at the Black History Week Conference, Queens University at Kingston, February, 1994.

now have two problems instead of one is what makes it dysfunctional, but your mind needs to be sober enough to see this.

Dysfunction is caused by dysjunctures. I use the plural advisedly: under colonialism, dysjunctures never come singly. In fact, colonialism may be defined alternatively as a series of dysjunctures, one after the other. Imagine a loss so complete that it can never be undone! Imagine waking up in the morning and confronting the fact that the day just passed was not a dream, that in the time between your previous awakening and the present one you sustained a loss so complete that your life will never be the same again. No word or action of yours can bring back what you have lost. This is dysjuncture.

Dysjunctures displace us from the known to the unknown, leaving all our emotional habits, cultures and morals unable to cope with this new and dangerous world. For survival we mimic the emotional habits of the colonizer: embracing danger, risk, pain, anger, and the glorification of sorrow and loss. Dysjunctures are violent in the extreme. Post-colonial stress disorder then has three causes; 1: the original violence of the dysjuncture; 2: the memory-triggered trauma of that violence; 3: Without healing tools, we develop dysfunctional responses to dysjunctures. Although they add to our problems, dysfunctional responses work. We did, we do, survive. It is not enough for a revolution. Colonialism happened. Dysjunctures remain. What was severed can never be healed the way it would have grown. Still, through dysfunctional responses, we only make the pain worse for ourselves.

Individuals and peoples do more than copy dysfunction. They do, at some point begin to seek in their pre-dysjunctural culture and philosophy, tools for healing and moral regeneration: Africanism. Nobody knows how long it takes for this regeneration to be complete. Also, for this process to work we need some measure of the depth of dysjunctures we have experienced. I can testify: I have lost my land, my cattle, my culture and my language. I have lost my family, for the people whom we are today are not the people we would have been, had we been born of freedom.

To continue my catalogue of dysjunctures: I have lost the history which should have been mine. I have lost not only my past, but my future. For the Africa which we were can never be brought back again. For all that the new Afrika which we build shall be a wild and wondrous place, filled with pleasures of which I could write forever, we shall know that it can never be the Africa we were making.

I mourn the dead heroes of our struggle with sorrow and bitterness, for I have seen those who survived. To have watched the mighty ones return from battle, to have looked into their eyes grappling with the multiple contusions of the anti-violence just inflicted in our cause for freedom; all this is to have watched the daily struggle between good and evil, humanity and the glorification of violence, loss and the glorification of suffering; is to understand when I say that we need emotional healing more than we need anything else. Freedom is not going to come without it. We have barely begun to count the cost of our glorious resistance, for innocence, once lost, can never be regained.

Womanism as activism needs to make the connections between the political and the personal clear, lucid, and available as a programme for action. Mama observes of her experiences organizing Black women's movements in London:

"Many of the difficulties that this fledgeling movement encountered were about the relationship between identity and politics, the contradictions between one's subjectivity and one's professed position. The influential feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was generally taken as meaning that the one was the same as the other and therefore, that if one had the correct political analysis, all else would fall into place. History has demonstrated that nothing could be further from the truth. Adopting political rhetoric and symbolism, however earnestly, does not unproblematically lead to personal change."⁵

This rings true in the context of my own experience of resistance. Revolution begins in the heart. The heart is a contradictory site, it is the hardest thing in the world to change and yet when it happens, when a child opens her eyes to the power of dreaming and dares to dream of freedom, it is the most unstoppable force in the world.

My organizational experience has not taught me how to accomplish this change reliably, nor to understand why the one heart changes and the other remains obdurate. So, although obviously the only way to accomplish change is by continuing to work, I cannot theorize about this. What I do know is that much can and must be done to change the discourses within which children's hearts, perforce, must grow. It is easier to decolonize the literature which forms the mind than to decolonize the minds of children. It is easier to re-circulate images of beautiful Blacks than to heal the damage caused by racism. Much can be done, and that much remains to do. About this I consider that I am qualified to theorize, and this theory, like all broad

generalizations, is simple. It is possible to divest our historiography of racism and sexism, to provide the emotional tools needed for those, like historians, who must perforce continue to grapple with a racist legacy. It is possible to reconstruct a historiography which asks the questions to which African women need answers. And where the heart goes the body must follow. In the midst of my concerns about economic exploitation, the very existence of this thesis demonstrates that the material conditions have been sufficient for the task set before me.

So it can be done and it must be done. In order to do it, the theorist must be aware of the dangers of complicity. In attempting to remove the root causes of the illness, it is critical not to catch the disease. Self-healing and self-retrieval are needed to acquire the ability to know the difference, to understand that hatred, pain and anger cannot form part of the liberated self. One cannot be part of the problem and part of the solution. The theorist who desires freedom must perform a revolution in the heart, must turn from pain and anger to love. Loving self, love my people, loving Spirit, regardless.⁶

How is this change to be achieved? How does the crazy writer heal herself? There are few options. We cannot expect those who caused the problem in the first place to now come up with solutions. My experience is that we need to accept and no longer be ashamed of our madness. Those of us who have survived our losses are all crazy. We must be so because we live in a society which is defined by violence.

5. Mama, *Beyond the Masks*, pp. 5-6.

6. With grateful thanks to Alice Walker, cf. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, Harcourt Press, San Diego, 1983, pp.xii.

Suffering is an endemic state of being. There is so much pain in this world that it will be pictured in our cultural expressions and people will watch it for 'pleasure'. The process of watching the infliction of trauma is called "entertainment" in our society, whereas in others it would be called "sick". I can understand that any society needs to understand itself through art, yet the choice of terminology is revealing. It is an indication that we have become so desensitized to pain that we no longer know the difference between dealing with our trauma and enjoying it. We are a society of masochists.⁷

If masochism, denial and separation anxiety were all our sufferings, this would probably be a short chapter. They are only some of a multitude of dysfunctions which seem to me to be endemic to our society. The problem is that we are not just dealing with a trauma, singular, but a multitude of violences inflicted over time. It is not as if our most recent ancestors had much time to sit around and practise group therapy. We have lost their poetry, their art, and their music. They had little time to practise culture and left us, instead, a legacy of struggle. It is a glorious legacy. That it is not our rightful heritage does not diminish the love with which it was built. Love asks no return, yet it would not be misplaced to ask: where to from here?

The time and place in which I write is a good one for the asking of all of these questions. The struggle years of the 1980's were years of much good: we practiced an undying love for our people. In the midst of danger we knew life, laughter, silly jokes and fellowship through hard work. Still today, as I watch the children of

entitlement grow, I catch my breath at the wonder of it. That a Black child should feel entitled to anything is a thing of beauty!

Resistance is what this chapter is going to speak about. It is good to situate this conversation amongst the rewards we enjoy, now, from our resistance then. We are not free, yet. My generation has seen the toppling of a mighty regime. Now, as we gaze bemusedly at what we have become amidst the ruins of the oppression we knew, it is not hard to see that that we are not yet free. Cheikh Anta Diop has observed of Sweden:

"But just inject immigrant workers up to the fateful threshold of 4-8 percent and you will have a racial situation comparable to that of New York City: the nature of social relationships changes, engendering ethnic tensions, global reflexes painful to describe. The more the percentage increases, the more the class struggle transforms itself into racial confrontation"⁸

From where I sit, it looks as if the racial struggle is transforming itself into the class struggle. While the racial structure of ownership of the means of production has remained fundamentally unchanged, the period during which I have researched and written this thesis has been one where sections of our growing Black petty bourgeoisie seem to have lost all grip of who they were and where they have come from. From here, the struggle cannot but continue. Frantz Fanon has written:

"And this future is not the future of the cosmos but rather the future of my century, my country, my existence. In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the world that will come later. I belong irreducibly to my time. And it is for my own time that I should live."⁹

7. With many thanks to Jo-Anne Prins, who with such beautiful economy defined masochism for me.

8. Diop, Cheikh Anta Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago, 1991, pp. 122.

9. Fanon, Frantz Black Skin, White Masks pp. 15.

So it is with me. I cannot change the past, and the future is not here yet. For all I write so that the world may be a better place to live, I may never live to know it. For all I have striven to see clearly, I cannot rise above the shackles of my time.

What I can do is try to put this awareness into practice. My experience of colonial stress disorder teaches me that it is no use being dysfunctional about struggle. Dysfunction requires not only the glorification of suffering but a peculiar sort of blindness known as denial, a refusal to see what is because the pain of seeing is too much to bear. The shambles which is left of our struggle of the 1980s, of my strivings to build a better world, is a mess which requires great strength of mind to see. But that is no matter. To refuse to see it is to accept that we shall live in oppression forever. Colonialism was forced upon us. Dysjunctures were done unto us which forever will separate us from who we once were. But dysfunction is something over which each one of us still has control. We have the power to solve one problem out of two.

Let me borrow a little story from another author, to show you what is meant by a dysfunctional struggle. Tsitsi Dangarembga allows mad Nyasha to speak this truth about colonialism:

"Then she was whispering again. 'Why do they do it, Tambu,' she hissed bitterly, her face contorting with rage, 'to me and to you and to him?' Do you see what they have done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. They've deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're groveling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him.' She began to rock, her body quivering tensely.' I won't grovel. Oh no, I won't. I'm not a good girl, I'm evil. I'm not a good girl.' I touched her to comfort her and that was the trigger. 'I won't grovel, I won't die,' she raged and crouched like a cat ready to spring. ... 'They've trapped us. They've trapped us. But I won't be trapped. I am not a good girl. I won't be trapped.' Then, as suddenly as it came, the rage passed. 'I don't hate you, Daddy', she said softly. 'They want me to, but I won't.' She lay down on her bed. 'I'm

very tired', she said in a voice which was recognizably hers. 'But I can't sleep. Mummy will you hold me?'"¹⁰

Nyasha rejects colonialism in the only way she can, by retreating into the absolute lack of self-love symbolized by her anorexia. She rejects the colonial classification of a good African as one who grovels, and uses colonial ideas of the African who stands up as evil for a stone to throw at them. Her madness enables her to speak a truth which everybody around her is trying to deny: that colonial oppression loses us to each other as we grapple with a world where survival simultaneously in spirit and in body is sometimes impossible. The choices people are forced to make can be unacceptable to themselves and others, and in losing love for ourselves and respect for one another we have lost our foundation for family and community. Dangarembga places them all before us with pitying clarity: the father who does not want to listen, the mother who dares not understand, the sister/cousin who strives to remain oblivious to the warning voices around her, the brother lost to jungle fever, and a community struggling to come to terms with the violence, the dysjunctions and the traumas following on the First Chimurenga.

I have defined oppression as the place where there is no good choice to make, only a choice between greater and lesser evils. Nyasha chooses madness as the price of truth, and in doing so she has lost her loving self. The loss is not hers alone. Her family lost a daughter, a sister and a niece. Her community lost a potential mother, wife and aunt. Her nation lost a revolutionary-in-the-making. Madness is the last weapon of the weak. Like the slave women who threw themselves into the seas of the Cape, rather than bear a child into slavery, a retreat into madness is the ultimate

¹⁰. Dangarembga, Tsitsi Nervous Conditions Women's Press Ltd, London, 1988, pp. 200-201.

protest. It throws the stone effectively, it inflicts a counter-pain if only by ensuring that this slave can no longer be economically exploited. It is also dysfunctional: it carries colonial dysjunctions into the furthest recesses of the human mind, the place which we have striven with our lives to defend against evil beyond our comprehension. Amina Mama has defined this space:

"This is where we need a theory of the unconscious. Subjectivity can then be conceptualised as being multi-layered, with deeper levels that are less accessible to the conscious mind containing material that has been repressed, either with the passage of time and the constant laying down of new material, or because the material is anxiety-provoking, a sense of unease having been the initial cause of its being split off and repressed."¹¹

I would suggest that in all that we repress, there is not just the anxieties of life, but also the parts of ourselves which are life-generating. This is because colonialism is a social situation in which it is simply impossible to live a loving, giving, self-affirming mental life. So, African women repress life in order to protect it, to keep some part of themselves sacrosanct from the exigencies of surviving colonialism. I live sparingly. I love only just enough to get by. I wonder often: where does the love go? It may sound odd to hypothesize the possibility of choice in connection with the unconscious, but it is necessary. Revolution means creating choice in the face of necessity.

I would argue that it is when this protection gives way that African women are exposed to the full blast of the exploitative psychodynamics of colonialism. In Nyasha's madness we can measure the width and the breadth, the height and the depth of her oppression. If we are to measure the oppression of our own times, it must be by our ability to avoid losing more women to madness. If the last two generations of African revolutionaries are to have made a meaningful difference, we

¹¹. Mama *Beyond the Masks* pp. 134.

should be able to avoid using the ultimate weapon. Truth is cheap at any price, but surely it can come cheaper, now.

In choosing sanity as a strategic option, I do not underestimate the magnitude of the task. Of course, so long as the root cause of our dysfunction remains - colonialism - we may never be completely sane. But the only way to remove the source of our disorder is to strive for sanity. The lesson which I draw from the eighties, could I distil it in a sentence, is that we lose out by being dysfunctional about the struggle. In our resistance, if nowhere else, we must strive to be pure of heart. We must see clearly. We must act thoughtfully. The howling reverberations of pain and the blurry eyes of denial are of no use when it comes to planning a strategy and executing it with caution, calm, and resolution. I do not mean to blame the victim here. The colonial habits and mode of struggle we adopted, merely to survive, served to confuse us so that even when we tried to resist (as any human alive must resist) the denial of freedom, our resistance would be feeble and weak. We would not see opportunities where there were opportunities, we would take chances where there was no hope, we would seek death - whether swiftly at the hands of the apartheid police and army or the slow suicide of substance abuse - because we hoped against hope it would lead to a better life. bell hooks has pointed out that the very intensity of our desire for freedom can work to our detriment:

"Witnessing the genocidal ravages of drug addiction in black families and communities, I begin to 'hear' that longing for a substance as, in part, a displacement for the longed-for liberation - the freedom to control one's destiny."¹²

¹². hooks, bell Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black South End Press, Boston, pp. 12.

I can date this moment in the South African struggle with some precision. It was in the mid-1980's that the *laaities* began to *kap a pyp* before going to throw stones at the casspirs.¹³ This was a time when the word 'cannonfodder' entered my vocabulary, when it ceased to matter who you were or what you believed in, so long as you could provide a warm body for the demonstrations, or a cold one for the statistics. And here we are. A better life for some. Crack for the others. But when I begin to hear from people I know suffered unbelievable trauma that 'it was better during apartheid', I know it is time to move on. The future is not here yet. When it comes, I would like it to be enriched by the lessons of the past. Though I may never overcome the dysfunctions of my times, the least I can do is to refrain from passing it on. The only way to do this is by striving to overcome.

In choosing sanity as a strategic option, I do so without a clue as to how hard it is going to be. Still, if my ancestors, back in 1906, had asked themselves whether what they were trying to do was at all possible, they would never have done it. So it is with me. The revolution I seek for the nineties is a revolution of the heart. In order to turn the circle of the heart, we need a social psychology which is historical in its approach. We need to grapple with communal traumas, with social dysfunctions that arise out of collective experiences of dysjunctures which are still on-going. We need answers for everyone, one heart at a time. The task is naturally too big for one person, or one thesis. The remainder of this chapter attempts to contribute to a psychology of history. This chapter details three dysjunctures in my own life. It compares these events to three dysjunctures in Sarah Bartmann's life. It

13. 'Laaities' : kids. 'Kap a pyp': the lighting of a bottleneck containing a mixture of dagga and

posits these experiences as paradigmatic psychological experiences for Black women in southern Africa. It finally examines how Sarah Bartmann turned her experiences into positive, life-affirming gestures. We learn from her a theory and a praxis of African revolution: a way to turn the circle of the heart.

Dysjunctures (I)

I shall place my discussion in Namibian history, for it is there that the events are most recent and the dysjunctures most stark. Let me tell of the event which has caused the severest dysjuncture in my life. Let me reach into my personal history and confide: in 1905 the German colonial army, finding itself unable to beat down the African guerrillas no matter how much the number of troops increased, withdrew from the battlefields in the mountains. They stationed troops around every waterhole from the Karas to the Kalahari, and as the people came to drink they were shot, men, women and children. Step by step, people were forced into the thirstlands of the Omaheke. Eighty percent of the Herero and fifty percent of the Nama died in that war.¹⁴ It seems that nobody ever bothered to count the Damara.

When I think of the loss in my life I wonder that I still live. For the young men who should have been my great-grandfathers died in that year. And the young men whom my grandfathers could have been were lost with them, their full human potential denied to us by genocide. If I feel that loss, how so the sons who had to

mandrax (a prescription tranquilizer) Casspir: police tank.

¹⁴ Bley, H South West Africa Under German Rule: 1894-1914, Heinemann, London, 1968, pp. 151.

invent good Black male role-models as they went along? Our men with courage and compassion died in that year, and with them went self-respect. Which Black man, surviving, when all men around him were dead, stood much chance of surviving survivor's guilt? The Omaheke and the German soldiers between them provided the material conditions in which any man who thought of being a man at all wanted to die. No human being should have had to make such a choice.

Mama's critique of colonial psychology is powerful and hard-hitting. She argues that one of its chief discursive weapons was to define black people as inherently pathological.¹⁵ My analysis of colonial dysjunctions is not meant to feed into this discourse. However, I must ask how it would be possible for us not be traumatized? Post-colonial stress disorder is historically contingent and context-specific, and it also varies with the individual, but it has been a part of our Blackness for a great length of time. Now, of course the Germans were mad, too. According to Bley's calculations, the army spent six hundred million German marks - the most expensive war of its time in Africa - on the conquest of a largely semi-desert country of little value to anybody but its inhabitants.¹⁶ Over the years, the profits of the mining industry would exceed this sum, but in 1905 nobody knew whether the colony would ever be economically self-sufficient, much less make money. The motive for genocide was not even economically rational. It was the sheer and undiluted desire to rule at any cost, the inability to concede that the German army could be bested by Africans, which caused the war. As the commander of the army, Von Trotha proclaimed:

15. Mama Beyond the Mask , pps. 20-39.

"You shall come with your entire clans, carrying a white cloth on a stick, and no ill shall befall you; you will find work and be given food until the great Emperor has announced new arrangements for the peace after the war. Whosoever believes after this that the pardon cannot extend to him would do best to leave the country; for wherever he is seen on German soil, he will be shot at, until the last one has been exterminated."¹⁷

The question is not whether this was pathological. The questions we need to ask are: how do we distinguish between the pathology of the colonizer and the traumas of the colonized? How do we ensure that our dysfunctions do not allow us to adopt the colonizing pathology? How do we turn that circle before we become what we most despised?

A loss of such immensity made the act of grieving a practical impossibility. To have even begun to grieve would have been such a great sorrow-work we would still be crying, three generations later. Instead, we became angry. When I look around me and see the violence which has engulfed African families, I see not only the living men who look for manhood in all the wrong places, but also the missing great-grandfathers who did not live to be parents. Genocide means that not only your father, but your brothers, sons, uncles, sometimes also wives and daughters, are gone. The entire collectivity which makes you, you, is gone. What is left but the pain? When I look around me and see a collective, compulsive addiction to violence and lies, I see a post-traumatic stress disorder echoing down the generations. I do not mean to remove from each individual our moral obligation to distinguish between right and wrong, or our personal responsibility for our actions. The questions which interest me are these: how long does it take to find our minds after

16. Bley, South West Africa Under German Rule, pp. 152.

17. Von Trotha's proclamation of the 22/4/1905, cited in Heywood, A and E Maasdorp The Hendrik Witbooi Papers National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek, 1995, pp. 220.

such an event? How do we theorize, and practise, the path to sanity? Maybe it is up to us, the great-grandchildren of genocide, to provide the answers.

There are times when survival itself becomes resistance. In the face of loss so complete, and so total, life itself becomes an act of resistance. The survival wisdom which I draw from this is that you survive to fight another day. Indeed, the very fact that I now have leisure to sit and think of this dysjuncture, and the wisdom which came of it, is testimony to the fact that we did survive and resist. If I can do nothing else to honour this struggle I can at least think, know and remember freedom. And if my mind has been so colonized that I cannot envision freedom, I can at least retain just enough sanity to know that it is not this madness. It is not this intellectual thirst which afflicts me in the symbolic Omaheke which is the historiography of Sarah Bartmann. My grip on sanity is the sure knowledge that I hunger and thirst for freedom.

If the sands of the Omaheke was the one root of our dysfunction, the kitchens of the German soldiers provided the site of another. For if I see the genocide of 1905 as a defining traumatic event, there followed a second series of events, contingent upon the first to be sure, but equally traumatizing in its effects. Winifred Hoernle observed it, and named the second site of dysjunctures as follows:

"The Wachmeister, Slottke, on the German side is quite a respectable sort of man and was exceedingly kind to me. It made me quite miserable, however, to hear of goings on at a German police camp and I really got quite 'Aufgeregt' over it. Each man has what he calls his 'Bambus', a young native girl whose duty it is to wash his clothes and to fulfill what the call the 'Kleines affaire',.... To me the manner of this seems too much for words. ... I can find no excuse for they are by their action lowering the white race in the eyes of the native and above all insulting the women of their own race. I told this to Slottke and he acknowledged that all I said was true but that he did not think anything would alter it, one could not do anything against one's nature, he

says. He described to me how he felt if he doesn't have any relief and said there was nothing to do against it."¹⁸

A bamboes was a wooden pot used by the Khoekhoe in which they stored herbs and medicine. This inversion of the word, from a place for *buchu* to the self-image of a German soldier seeking healing for his colonialist pathology, expresses the dysjuncture of our collective rape. The chronology of dysjunctures is clear: first the violence, then the sexual abuse. The question of individual consent is not even at issue. It was rendered irrelevant in the Omaheke.

In the kitchens of the Germans was severed the mind from the body, the soul from joy of life. Institutionalized rape on this scale was a dysjuncture so severe, and so systematic, that it comes to have enduring meaning only at the level of the individual. I must write about each and every woman's experience or write about none. 'Stilte is die beste antwoord' is a proverb of my people, and, I suspect, one which may have arisen from this kind of collective experience.¹⁹ The dysjunctures of the post-1905 period have left only the silence of the individual. And if I have in the previous chapter spoken out for the right of African women publicly to denounce this abuse, I wish here to emphasize respect for the right of those who have chosen to remain silent. It is their right to choose. Out of the silences I grow *buchu* for the body and the soul.

The survival wisdom of generations seems pitifully little when measured against the trauma, and can best be expressed as Judy Mowatt sings: "love is a miracle" and

18. Diary entry 30/10/1912 in Carstens, P; G Klinghardt and M West (eds) Trails in the Thirstland: The Anthropological Field Diaries of Winifred Hoernle, Centre For African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1987, pp. 41.

19. Silence is the best answer

indeed it is.²⁰ For those African women brought up children, raised families and taught morality. The undying love for my people I practised in the 1980s did not come from nowhere. This text, if you will, is evidence to this. Under colonialism, Black girl-children do not survive to adulthood, much less write theses, without a lot of love.

Survival is pointless without freedom. If we cannot be free, we can live and die trying. By the sand dunes of the Omaheke and in the forced labour camps which followed was born the collective wisdom that this struggle is all that gives meaning to a colonized life where a human could choose only exile, slavery or death. And in the kitchens of the Germans, African women clung to the knowledge that love is all that matters. I would not say that this love was born out of hatred, for indeed love is not dependent on evil for its existence. Love is autonomous, self-generated, and bitterly endangered under colonial conquest. Yet it has survived amongst us. As my people built the roads, the railroads and the public buildings which became the symbols of imperial Germany in Africa, they also began building the family, community and culture which produced us.

But I am not yet born. In my story of the dysjunctures which have been the deepest causes of my colonial pathology, I have not yet arrived. Well, I was born, and while still playing with the differences between my fingers and my toes, experienced yet another dysjuncture. In 1963, my parents were discovered to be plotting treasonable activities against the apartheid state, to wit: armed struggle, and I was taken into exile very young. After various vicissitudes, my family ended up in

20. Jusy Mowatt "Look at Love" *Sistren: the Heart of Reggae* Jayrem Music, 1995.

Sweden. My father battled for some years to have his qualifications recognized by the Swedish authorities, and was forced to repeat his internship wherever he could find a vacancy. As a consequence, I grew up in the remote towns of rural Sweden, and it was here that I learnt the hard way that race is real. It exists. I learnt of the pain of this reality by going to school in places where people had never seen a living Black person in their life. From the seemingly innocuous elderly women who rubbed my hair "to see if it really is as curly as it looks" to the school mates who called me 'nigger', I learnt that as far as white people were concerned race was a straightforward reality.

The scars on my body bear mute testimony to the reality of race, and racism. I would have had many more, were it not for the fortunate circumstance that my brother and I were in the same class, and so could watch each other's back at all times. I learnt young (long before I could spell the words) of the strength, the power and the sheer necessity of Black solidarity. I felt that I owed my physical survival to the vigilance of Black manhood. In the face of children's racism, where was my space to fight for the dignity, freedom and equality of Black womanhood?

I cannot overestimate the impact it must have had on my personality formation to be one of the only five Black people in these towns, and the other four my family. We moved eventually to the capital, but it must be remembered that in the 1970s Stockholm was still a small town. This was before the big wave of Black immigration, which hit Sweden in the late 1980s, and I can remember that even in the capital, Black people would be so few and far between that we would greet each other in the street, even if we were total strangers. The gesture of recognition was an

instinctive tribute to the reality of race. To me, this was a crucial moment in my perceptions of race. I discovered race not just as an element which separated me from the white people around me, but as a quality which united me with untold millions in the world. The struggle out there to force whites to respect my colour was certainly instrumental in reinforcing my perceptions of race as a critical constituent of reality. Equally, I can remember relating to Blackness as joy and pride. Most of all I used to treasure the thrill and excitement of my mother's stories about 'home'. Africa - a place where the streets would be filled with Black people. A place where everybody around me would look like me, talk like me, and walk like me. A place where my skin, my hair, my culture would be the norm, not the exception. I learnt to love the name of Africa. Had it not been for the promise of return, I think, I never would have survived those teenage years.

Still, I cannot overestimate the effect exile must have had on my personality formation. It is very frightening for a child to be unable to go 'home'. The political exile is out of control of her own life. My ability to go home was dependent upon the struggle of millions of Black men and women in Africa. There was pitifully little we could do, and that little we of course did. We learnt to roll off pamphlets and collate newsletters as part of our 'normal' childhood activities.

My mother took what I still believe was the only rational decision under the circumstances. She did not want us to remain in a state of permanent limbo, so she brought us up to live as if we would remain in Sweden forever. I remember 1976 as a formative moment in my life. Reading the newspapers, discussing over the kitchen table, we were all keen to boycott too. The idea of not going to school as a method

of struggle had a wondrous attraction for us, and certainly seemed much easier than collating newsletters or picketing the South African embassy. We pestered my parents mercilessly, until they said, 'listen, you children. What difference are you going to make, the two of you boycotting on your own? You have an opportunity which many African children don't have. The children in South Africa are going without schooling for your freedom. Do you go to school for theirs! Get your education, learn as much as you can, and use it in the cause for freedom!'

The survival wisdom I draw from this is that exile limits your possibilities of resistance. Indeed, this wisdom can be generalized: the dividing line between resistance and collaboration must depend on your circumstances. It is only by measuring the width, the depth, and the height of your dysjunctures that you can decide what is resistance and what is not.

These three dysjunctures have been the formative events which have shaped my experiences of subjectivity. They are the roots of my colonial stress disorder. Thanks to the collective survival wisdom of my people, I have survived, I have come back, and it is now time to turn the circle and perform a revolution. The revolution I desire to perform in my heart, is to turn from those multiple traumas to love.

It is indeed true that the subtext of the historiography I have been discussing is the insult; 'you are all c---s'. It is exactly as I feared it was in the dim dark days when I was struggling with paranoid schizophrenia. Looking back, I do not even think I was that insane. Dysfunctional, yes, but not so blind that I could not see the truth. It was fear of my dysfunction, more than the madness itself, which caused me to

doubt the reality of my emotions. And by way of fighting for freedom, let me love my subject, as indeed it would be impossible not to, after spending years in a study of her life. It is a worthy pursuit to see the good in auntie Sarah Bartmann, and bring it to light so that others may see it too.

Dysjunctures (2)

The history I have just told about myself is a specific history - it took place in a specific time and place and happened to specific people. Yet colonialism is also a system. It retains structural similarities no matter where and when it exists. Indeed, when comparing the dysjunctures in my own personal history to those in auntie Sarah's, the similarities are striking.

The frontier of the eastern Cape was one place where genocide was being committed from the 1770's to the end of the century. It differed from that which took place further north a century and a half later, in that it was committed in bits and pieces. Material constraints readily explain this. The non-British European settlers in the eastern Cape of the late eighteenth century did not possess the material resources of the German army in the early twentieth, Yet the settlers continued to pursue this war, for if material constraints forced them to move slowly, the capturing of slaves formed a powerful material inducement to continue to raid Khoekhoe villages. Sarah Bartmann's birth and childhood was located in a time and place characterized by violence both on the colonial frontier, and behind the frontier

where bonded Khoekhoe labour was the foundation of the settler economy.²¹ It is a genocide which is horrifyingly easy to track. During this period, reports from local military leaders in the eastern Cape abound, detailing the number of Khoekhoe killed and taken slaves.²² The people, culture and economy which would have given rise to a free Sarah Bartman was devastated by the onslaught of the settlers against indigenous people. As Susan Newton-King cautiously observes:

"Whether or not this slide ... into a position of dependence was 'traumatic' is difficult to ascertain in the absence of adequate testimony, but given the intimate connection between land, people and animals in the world-view of the Khoisan, it seems likely that changes which adversely affected any one of these elements and threw them into imbalance would be experienced as stressful."²³

Between 1770 and 1800, everything that auntie Sarah's family knew and understood in the world would probably have changed forever. I cannot speak to the specificity of auntie Sarah's experience - I have spoken of my own - but I can observe with certainty that she was heir to this trauma. No doubt there were many differences between my specific historical experience and that of auntie Sarah, the chief being that she was two generations closer to it than I am. But the dysjuncture felt as the same.

Nonetheless, she survived long enough to give testimony about her experiences. Auntie Sarah's account of her early life, as translated by a court interpreter, is as follows:

21. Cf. Eg. Penn, Nigel "Labour, Land and Livestock in the Western cape During the Eighteenth Century" in James, Wilmot and Mary Simons (eds.) Class, caste and colour: A Social and Economic History of the South African Western Cape Transaction Publishers, new haven, 1992, pp. 13.

22. Cf. Eg. Moodie, Donald The Record: Or a Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa A.A. Balkema, Cape Town, 1960 (1839-1841) vol 3.

23. Newton-King, Susan The Enemy Within: The Struggle for Ascendancy on the Cape Eastern Frontier, 1760-1799 Ph. D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1992, pp. 113.

"Her father was in the habit of going with cattle from the interior to the Cape, and was killed in one of those journeys by [hunters], her mother died twenty years ago. She has a child by a Drummer in the Cape with whom she lived for about two years, being all the time in the employ of Henrick Caesar ... the child is since dead."²⁴

Three deaths in one paragraph - that is the effect of genocide on the individual life. ?

The death of a loved one by violence is a traumatic event from which may take years, even decades, to fully recover. The death of auntie Sarah's father by cattle raiders must have been very difficult for her. We do not know how old she would have been at the time, but the sequence of the narrative seems to suggest a causal connection. In other words, that her father's death was followed by her mother's death, by which time auntie Sarah, who was twenty two at the time she told this story, must have been two years old.²⁵ The loss of a mother at such an early age must have been deeply traumatic. We do not know who then functioned as a surrogate mother, although the same account tells of brothers and sisters, who must presumably have been older than she. It is reasonable to assume that auntie Sarah would have been the youngest of her family. In an age when not only the settler's guns, but the settler's diseases, were wiping out genocide against the Khoekhoe, it must have taken special care to bring a girl-child to adulthood.

²⁴. Interview with notary, 1810, cited in Lindfors, Bernt "Courting the Hottentot Venus" *Africa*, Rome, 40, 1985 (133-148) pp. 142. Lindfors' translation gives 'Bosmen' as the people who killed Sarah Bartman's father, while the same word is translated in the *Morning Post* "Law Intelligence", 29/11/1810 as 'Jagay', i.e. 'jager' (hunter). It was a well-known habit of the settlers to blame everything, from murder to stocktheft, on the Khoekhoe guerillas who referred to themselves as Soanqua. I have accordingly translated the word as 'hunter', since this is the literal truth. Whoever shot the father was a hunter of cattle, and obviously of men.

²⁵. Please note Fausto-Sterling's caution that the inscription on the museum case which holds her body states that she was thirty-eight at the time of death. Contemporary sources, however, state that she was twentyeight; cf. Fausto-Sterling, Anne "Gender, Race and Nation" in Terry, J and J. Urla *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996, pp. 28.

The death of a child is arguably the single most traumatic incident which can happen to anybody. How the child died is not told, but this death cannot have been more than two or three years before auntie Sarah's embarkation to Britain. How long does it take to overcome the death of child? The answer must depend on the individual. What we do know is that in 1810, the wife of an actor observed her grieve her lost child in the midst of a performance. This was not evident to the eyewitness, who wrote:

"I had observed that at the time Mr Mathews entered and found her surrounded by some of our own barbarians, the countenance of the 'Venus' exhibited the most sullen and occasionally ferocious expression; but the moment she looked into Mr Kemble's face, her own became placid and mild, - nay, she was obviously pleased; and putting her hands together, and holding them up in evident admiration, she uttered the unintelligible words 'Oh ma babba, oh ma babba'."²⁶

In 1810 then, auntie Sarah was still grieving for her lost child. She expressed this grief in the only way she could, in the nexus of human relations available to her, during a performance for people who may have seemed sympathetic, compared to her other viewers. The geographical separation from the child's grave, and from the family with whom she shared this deeply-felt grief, must have made it much more difficult to heal.

With regard to the second collective dysjuncture of Sarah Bartman's people, it is clear that institutionalized sexual violence against Black women was so much part of the culture of the colonial Cape, that it could be considered normative. As Mentzel remarked of Cape Town in 1785:

"Boys, who through force of circumstances have to remain at home during those impressionable years between 16 and 21 more often than not commit some folly, and get entangled with a handsome slave girl belonging to the household. These affairs are not regarded as very serious ... It does not hurt

²⁶. 'Baba' is Afrikaans for baby. "Diary of Mrs Charles Mathews, cited in Altick, Richard The Shows of London Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978, pp. 269.

the boy's prospects, his escapade is regarded as a source of amusement, and he is dubbed a young fellow who has shown the stuff he is made of."²⁷

The idea of sexual violence as almost a rite of passage for young settler men says something about the extent to which institutionalized rape was embedded in settler culture. By the nineteenth century, so pervasive was this perception, that a court reversed a death sentence for rape passed on a white man, upon evidence being brought that the victim was in fact Khoekhoe.²⁸ I cannot speak to the experience of auntie Sarah and her family in this regard, but I can say with certainty that if this was the norm in white culture, there must have been a culture of resistance within Khoekhoe culture. And auntie Sarah would have had need of it, to confront the abuse she would experience in exile.

In her study of female slave resistance, Barbara Bush argues that, though resistance was a constant, its form varied depending on the circumstances of the slave. She demolishes the myth that domestic servants, so often assumed to be more amenable to slavery, did not resist their conditions of labour:

"Whip or no whip, a significant proportion of women slaves continued to risk the wrath of their white masters, most commonly by refusing to work, or by engaging in verbal abuse and insolence. ... This rebellious behaviour testifies to a refusal on the part of the ordinary field hands to accept the harsh conditions of their servitude, but domestic servants, who, in theory at least, led an easier and more privileged life, seldom proved contented and obedient slaves either. They too, refused to acquiesce gracefully to white authority, though the methods they used to frustrate their masters and mistresses may have been more subtle and devious."²⁹

27. Mentzel, Otto A Complete and Authentic Geographical and Topographical Description of the Famous and (All Things Considered) Remarkable African Cape of Good Hope Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1925, II, pp 109-110.

28. Cf. Scully, Pamela, Liberating the Family? Gender, Labour and Sexuality in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853, Ph. D Thesis, University of Michigan, 1993, pp. 388.

29. Bush, Barbara "Defiance or Submission? The Role of Slave Women in Slave Resistance in the British Caribbean" in Hine, Darlene Clark; King, Wilma; and Reed Linda (eds.) 'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': A Reader In Black Women's History Carlson Publishing, New York, 1995, pp. 151.

The subtlety and deviousness of domestic slave resistance is readily understood in the context of their circumstances. They were more likely to be women, and therefore more vulnerable to all forms of abuse. Their proximity to the slave master and family meant that they were under more constant surveillance, and generally had less freedom of movement than field workers. They were also more likely to be isolated from other slaves by the nature of their work. Their weapons were the weapons of the weak, a resistance often so devious that even the nature of their actions as resistance could remain hidden. Their very survival depended on their acceptance by the slave master as passive, and survival was the prerequisite to living to resist another day. Domestic slave resistance was determined by the objective conditions under which these women lived. It had to be subversive, challenging domination but, in the event of failure to achieve change, easily disguised as 'laziness', 'stupidity' or an excess of docility. Domestic slave resistance, therefore, can be seen as a very female form of resistance.

In order to understand auntie Sarah's resistance, we need to understand the choices open to her in exile. She could have chosen to be sweetly submissive, or passionately sensual. She could have chosen to play off her beautiful Blackness, for the material advantage she could gain. She chose none of these things. Instead, all accounts indicate that she was a stubborn and recalcitrant slave.

Auntie Sarah was a dancer. She was almost two centuries closer than we are to the Khoekhoe tradition of dance as vision, as ritual, and as art of the most enduring kind. Unfortunately, the writings and illustrations of her we have available were overdetermined by perceptions of her race and gender. Nowhere have I found a

reference to her art from an aesthetic point of view. Yet, as an artist she must have been a story-teller. Her art was to communicate. What stories did she tell?

The story she told was one of resistance. Like domestic slaves were wont to do, she slacked when she could, and protested when she could. As one spectator wrote of a performance:

"She was extremely ill, and the man insisted on her dancing, this being one of the tricks she is forced to display. The poor creature pointed to her throat and knees as if she felt pain in both, pleading with tears that he would not force her compliance. He declared that she was sulky, produced a long piece of bamboo, and shook it at her; she saw it, knew its power, and, though ill, delayed no longer."³⁰

As with her grief over her lost child, auntie Sarah chose a public performance for her testimony. The drama she enacted was one of slavery: the woman resisting, forcing the violence which underpinned her labour to become explicit. The effort made her tired, however. She showed her anger openly. The spectator continued:

"While she was playing on a rude kind of guitar, a gentleman in the room chanced to laugh: the unhappy woman, ignorant of the cause, imagined herself the object of it, and as though the slightest addition to the woes of sickness, servitude, and involuntary banishment from her native land was more than she could bear, her broken spirit was aroused for a moment, and she endeavoured to strike him with the musical instrument which she held: but the sight of the long bamboo, the knowledge of its pain, and the fear of incurring it again, calmed her. The master declared that she was wild as a beast"³¹

Auntie Sarah had made her point. If there were people walking around London fully convinced that she was a slave, it was because she told them so. She spoke as eloquently as she could, using every art known to her. The tactic of constantly provoking Cezar in public, of forcing him to show his violence and making her coercion explicit, was extremely effective.

30. 'A Constant Reader' cited in Lindfors 'Courting', pp. 136.

31. Ibid..

At times, she made even her silence speak for her. In a deposition before the court, Thomas Babington and Peter van Wageninge said that the latter put many questions to her, he being Dutch speaking, but she would not answer. Instead:

"they had heard her utter several deep sighs such as would be given by someone whose mind was distressed, and they related the incident in which the curtain was drawn for a moment and the woman threatened with a beating by Cezar for not responding to his commands."³²

Auntie Sarah was anything but a willing worker. It is, of course, possible that there were performances of hers where she worked willingly, of which evidence has not been preserved. Certainly the descriptions we do have make it very clear that she was pursuing an effective strategy of showing what kind of man her master was. We can see that she was a woman with self-love and considerable mental resources. Without the support of fellow slaves, in the absence of any possibility of collective resistance, she nevertheless made sure that she got her recalcitrant message across.

The very props used to stage her appearances spoke eloquently of slavery. Mr McCartney spoke of an early performance where he had found her enclosed in a cage, on a platform raised about three feet above the floor. He

"was confident, from every appearance, that she was under total restraint; but from his not being able to speak with her, could only judge from appearance. These appearances, however, were convincing. She frequently heaved deep sighs; seemed anxious and uneasy; grew sullen when ordered to play on some rude instrument of music"³³

Cezar, no doubt, was trying to play on British sentiments about the African as beast, as uncontrollable, through the contrivance of the cage. But auntie Sarah challenged his control, because she took the props and subverted them into a narrative about being forced against her will to perform.

32. T.G. Babington, P van Wageninge, Affidavit filed on the 26/11/1810, cited in Lindforc "Courting", pp. 140.

33. Deposition of the Secretary of the African Association, 24/11/1810, cited in Altick The Shows, pp. 270.

Here, I must make the point that I would not like my story to be confused with 'performance' theory. In my vernacular, 'to perform', means to front, to play a part not in accordance with the feelings of the heart. In speaking of auntie Sarah the artist, and the story she has told for us, I am by no means suggesting that the feelings - the sighs, the tears, the anger - were not real. Auntie Sarah acted as she felt, and felt her story as she told it. Her life and art were one. This was the culture in which she was born, and to which she held, in the midst of multiple dysjunctures. What she disguised was the spirit of this culture as resistance.

And when we consider the colonial settler culture in which she had lived and worked, we can appreciate fully the magnitude of her strategy. For if violence against Black women was institutionalized in colonial culture, it was also rendered socially invisible. Apart from the odd comment such as Mentzel's, colonial sources have little to say on everyday violence against Black women. It was a taken-for-granted part of colonial life. So if the drama that auntie Sarah played out with Cezar forced him to lift a stick, to utter threats, or to close her cage door, it made a very strong statement about violence against Black women which British observers could not ignore. It formed an answer to the silence back home in the colonial Cape.

This was a point not missed by contemporary observers. As one 'Humanitas' wrote:

To prove that the slave was not brought here by force, he [Cezar] merely thinks it necessary that she should not appear in chains, or have been dragged to her present abode, uttering frantic yells of despair and horror. Was she or was she not a slave in her own country? Has she not been purchased by some mercenary and avaricious speculator to make a profit on her person? And therefore, has not a long servitude moulded and terrified her mind into an unlimited obedience to her proprietor's commands? In a late trial, where the decision rested on the fear and restraint supposed to influence a testator

in making a will, the learned judge very judiciously, and with a sound knowledge of our nature, said it was not necessary to prove fear or restraint at the precise moment of signing, but that if the testator had been generally awed and subdued by the conduct of those around him, that would sufficiently establish the fact of a biased and controlled judgement."³⁴

Auntie Sarah was making at least one Englishman think, not only about her state of slavery in the metropolis, but about the state of Khoekhoe slavery in the colony. In truth, the longer she was allowed to perform, the more severe the danger she posed to the orderly conduct of British administration in the Cape. Her message was powerful.

If her exile weakened auntie Sarah, by separating her from the collective of blood and culture which formed the source of her strength, she nevertheless chose the strategy of resistance open to her. In London, she found a stage and an audience. She used this, to the best of her ability, to speak about the social relations she knew. Her art, and her resistance, was to make the violence embedded in these social relations visible. It was a strange dance she danced with Cezar and the stick. It was one which sought to change the circumstances of her life and times.

If we understand her life as art, and her art as a strategy of resistance, the question of her intelligence leaps to the fore. From where did she obtain the knowledge on which to base her strategy? Did they gossip about the abolition of the slave trade in the servant's quarters of number 225, Piccadilly? Would she have understood them, if they did? Was she aware of the court case? Did her heart leap when the notaries came to speak to her, and did it fall when the question whether:

"she was an object capable of making an election; that she feels pain under the constraint from which she is at present held"³⁵

34. "Humanitas" in *The Examiner*, 28/10/1810.

35. Justice Lord Ellenborough, cited in *Morning Post* "Law Intelligence", 28/11/1810.

came not? There are so many things we do not know about auntie Sarah's social relations in London. It is possible that her only source of information was Cezar, and if so, her methods of intelligence-gathering must have been devious indeed.

What we do know for certain is that her search for freedom did not cease after the disappointment of the court case. It is in the context of her resistance that we must see her baptism in Manchester on the seventh of December, 1811.³⁶ It may have been auntie Sarah's way of demonstrating that she was capable of election. As Elizabeth Elbourne remarks:

"Khoi people were rarely admitted to baptism in southern Africa, since Christianity was widely identified with a white skin, and baptism posed legal problems, theoretically compelling judges to give equal weight to Khoi and white testimony in court, and removing an informal bar to Khoi land ownership."³⁷

Baptism in a Christian church, then, was an act with profound political significance.

It was a claim to racial equality on the part of the Khoekhoe. As Reverend Witbooi explains, baptism also could provide a spiritual answer for dispossessed Khoekhoe, seeking a firm basis of faith in a changed world. The idea of a rite of passage through water was by no means foreign to Khoekhoe culture, but on the contrary a familiar way of coping with changes in their state of being:

"Separated as they were and uprooted from their places of abode ... the whole fabric of their lives had to undergo change. ... Thus the first steps of the rites of passage occurred - separation from the known, the traditional. In the traditional understanding they had become !nau. In order to be aggregated into the new society, an officiating person was needed to help in the process of transition. None of the former officiating persons was able to

36. It is interesting to note that the signature on the baptismal certificate: "A. Dunlop" is the same as the name of the ship's surgeon who accompanied Sarah and Cezar from the Cape, Alexander Dunlop. This may be a complete coincidence, if not, it suggests that these two men were the only people to have ongoing contact with auntie Sarah through the years she spent in Britain.

37 Elbourne, Elizabeth "Terrible Ambiguities: Khoisan Visits to London in the Early Nineteenth Century" University of Dalhousie History Department Seminar, March, 1996, pp. 16.

help in the process of transition, because all those separated were Inau."³⁸ Baptism by a Christian was then understood by some Khoekhoe, conceiving of their new society in traditional terms, as a way of moving into the future with rites appropriate to the past. The passage through water offered healing for the soul, and spirit to deal with the challenges of an unknown world. Auntie Sarah's baptism, seen through the lens of her culture of birth, can be read as seeking peace with the past, and independence in the present.

Indeed, this would not have been the first time a Khoekhoe woman in London had used the church as a platform for resistance. Mary van Rooy, who visited London in 1803 together with two Khoekhoe men, preached as follows:

"she trust there be many here, who have pity for themselves, and for others, compassion for own soul, and soul of others; but wish it was all, but perhaps it was not all; perhaps some here have not compassion on own soul. O that they would take counsel of this poor Hottentot ... Tell to them that no people go to Christ! but Christ save them, when they like to be saved. That Christ never say "I won't save them!"³⁹

That Mary van Rooy did not use the opportunity to thank the listeners for their missionary efforts in Africa, but instead besought them to take care of their own souls, was certainly subversive. What I understand to be her text, that only by grace through faith are we saved, must have been calculated to disturb the tranquillity of a missionary society dedicated to doing good works in heathen lands. As Elbourne remarks:

"This certainly constituted unconventional preaching, even if Mary van Rooy was not in a position of authority. For a Khoi person to suggest to a white audience that they might not be saved was a considerable inversion of southern African racial and religious politics. In a period in which female

38. Witbooi, Benjamin The Decline of the Khoikhoi in South Africa- from Freedom to Bondage: The Price of Embracing Mission Acculturated Christianity MA Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1983 , pp. 107.

39. Cited in Elbourne "Terrible Ambiguities", pp. 10.

preaching was controversial, if not unheard of among the more radical dissenting sects, it was also unusual for a woman to testify."⁴⁰

The missionary churches in South Africa set out to enslave the minds of the Khoekhoe. And like all slaves, the Khoekhoe set out to subvert the dominant narrative. I wonder if auntie Sarah knew, or had heard of Mary van Rooy who, like herself, came from the eastern Cape?

It is sad to record that the baptism did not succeed as intended for auntie Sarah. I must hope that she found peace of the soul, because it certainly did nothing to remove her from Cezar's power. Indeed, the next few years must have been hard for auntie Sarah, as she went from provincial parlour to provincial parlour, the spectators never ending. At last the seemingly insatiable British curiosity about her ceased to make Cezar money, and she was able to get away from him. In September, 1814, she was taken to France. In France, however, her chances of resistance were smaller. She now had to learn a new language and a new culture. In all his miserableness, Cezar was her last surviving link with home, now severed. Auntie Sarah experienced a new dysjuncture added over one old, and scarcely healed. The land to which she was going was engulfed in the Napoleonic post-Revolution backlash which included, amongst other things, a complete reversal of ideas on the universal rights of humans to freedom and equality. The political climate she was to find around slavery was far more conservative than in Britain. Auntie Sarah was sold to her new master Reaux for an undisclosed sum, and the French did not scruple to call him her 'keeper'. The fact that he was a showman of wild animals merely added to the irony.⁴¹

40. Ibid..

41. Kirby, Percival "The Hottentot Venus" *Africana Notes and News*, 6:3, June, 1949.

It was in Paris that auntie Sarah was to meet, and overcome, her greatest challenge, for it was there that three French scientists made an arrangement with Reaux to examine her body in the spring of 1815. They had also arranged for an illustrator to be there. Did auntie Sarah know that this was to be more than a casual performance? How soon did she feel threatened, as their demands became clear to her? What we do know is that her actions demonstrated the strongest possible objections to being undressed and examined. Londa Schiebinger gives a description from one of the men who was present:

"According to de Blainville, the men ... had great difficulty convincing Sarah (de Blainville adopted this familiar address) to let herself be seen nude. It was only with 'great sorrow' that she let drop for a moment the handkerchief with which she had been covering her genitals. She took a particular dislike to de Blainville because, he supposed, he came too near her, 'tormenting' her to get material for his description. At one point, he offered her money, knowing how much she liked it, hoping in this way to render her more docile, but she refused to take it. In the end, despite their efforts, no man of science managed to get a good look at Bartmann's genitalia."⁴²

What should we read from auntie Sarah's actions? An expectation of respect. Auntie Sarah stated, with the greatest possible clarity, that she did not wish her bodily parts to be the subject of public scrutiny, not for money, neither for enjoyment, nor for the 'logic' of science. If she had ceased to try for freedom, she had not ceased the struggle to set limits to her conditions of servitude. We can appreciate the immensity of her demand, both then and now, for not one of the men who have observed her seems to have heard her message. Her struggle was one hundred and eighty-five years before its time.

Auntie Sarah said what she had to say. It is for us to listen. Each artist requires an audience, and each work of art is a conversation. Auntie Sarah was successful in

getting her message out, even through the pen of one of her antagonists. Yet I shall not call her resistance successful until she has been listened to.

It must have required enormous spiritual resources to keep up the fight during the three days for which the examination lasted. How did she eat, or sleep, during the days she fought off these men, each larger and more well-fed than she? It was well that auntie Sarah had taken the time to walk the passage under water, to finally make peace with herself and accept that the life she had had at home was gone forever. It was well that she had taken the time, alone under the water with her Spirit, to dedicate herself fully to the new life she had to lead. De Blainville surely underplays the violence which took place. What brought on her 'great sorrow'? I suspect that there is more to be told than meets the eye, for if de Blainville chose to underplay the incident, Cuvier chose to obscure it entirely: "In the spring of 1815, having been driven to the Jardin du Roi, she agreed to undress and be painted naked."⁴³ Yet de Blainville's description does not sound like agreement. It sounds more like Khoekhoe resistance.

If auntie Sarah could resist, there are none of us so alone, so isolated, or so traumatized that we cannot resist. Her story teaches us to keep trying, even when we fail at first, at second and even at third try. That she succeeded in getting her message across, through time and space and by the hands of strangers, was surely a great achievement. The artist who is silenced cannot live. By living, auntie Sarah

42. Schiebinger, Londa Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 170.

created the story of which I have to write, and given the constraints under which she had to practise her art, the negation and silencing of her self-hood which she overcame, her speech deserves due honour, love and respect.

The survival wisdom I draw from her story is that for resistance to be successful - for resistance to become revolution - it has to be collective. Auntie Sarah was determined to assert her sense of self. She could not be stopped. Probably she spoke much more than is recorded here, and as research continues into her life and times we shall no doubt be able to piece together much more of her message. But her speaking was only half of her art. It is for us who have ears with which to hear to fulfil her story, to find our voices and speak of her out loud. Only when auntie Sarah's message has been heard over mountain, land and sea, only when no one can ignore what I understand to be her cry: "RESPECT ME, BLACK WOMAN!", will her story be complete.

Conclusion

So I have told my story - for now. The tea is long since drunk, the ashtray overflowing. I must make haste to empty it, for we do not know if auntie Sarah likes the smell of smoke. I see that, in the manner of my people, I have whiled away the time of waiting by talking about the dear approaching, her likes and dislikes, her achievements and her sorrows, and all that she has meant to me. But the time for waiting draws to its close. I see in my mind's eye that she approaches down the mountain path. It is good, for the house is clean, and we are ready.

43. Cuvier, Georges "Extrait D'Observations faites sur le cadavre d'une femme connue a' Paris et Londres sous le Nom de Venus Hottentotte: Memoires Du Museum d'Histoire Naturelle, 3, 1817 (259-274), pp. 264.

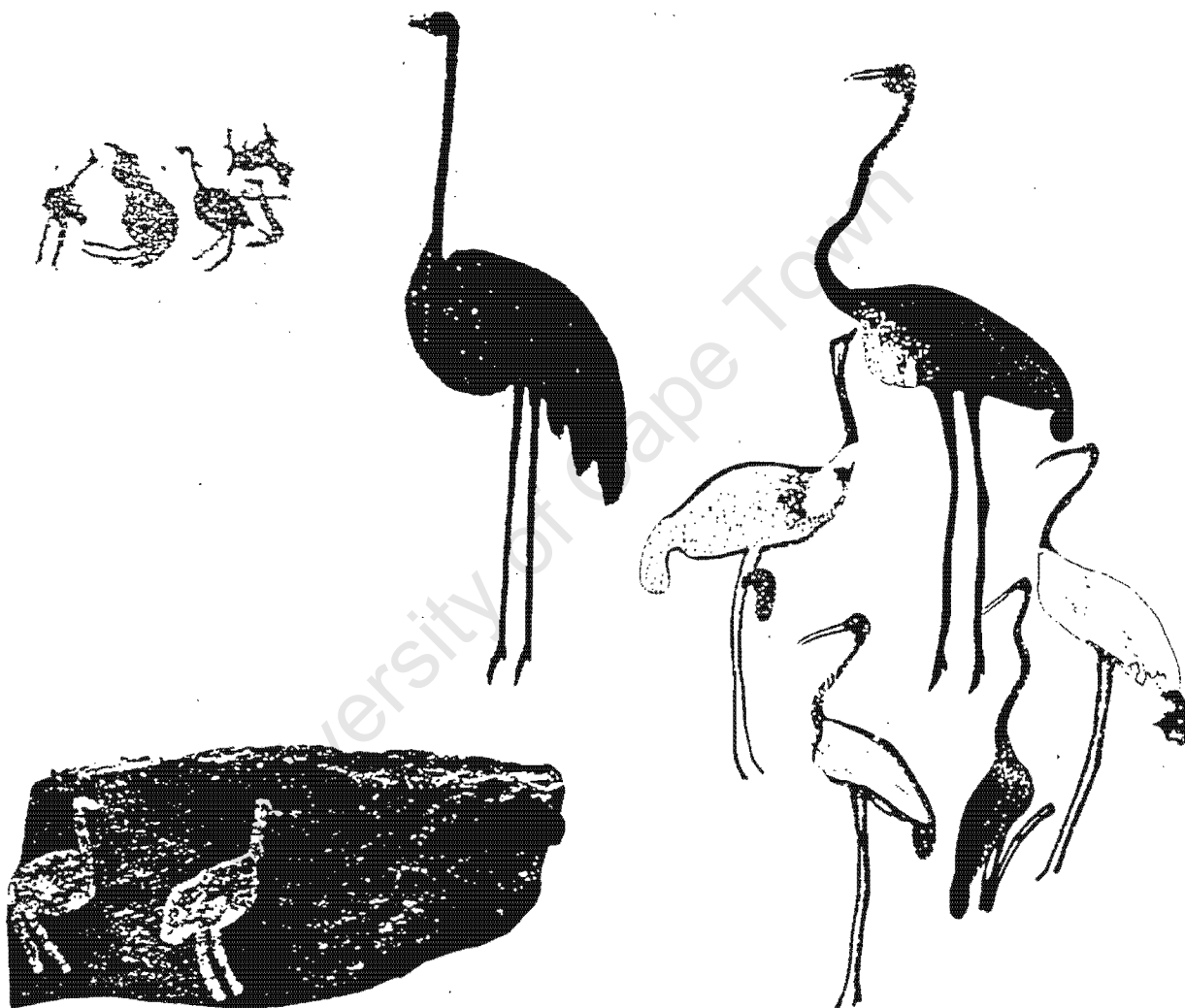
For what it is worth, my theory about what those observers saw in auntie Sarah's gait was her pride. Like the ostrich it came behind her as she walked, her pride, indomitable. And the white men looked and they looked, but their eyes could not recognize pride in a Black woman, so all they decided to see was a body. Still, for three days in the garden of kings the white men tasted of her spirit: indomitable.

Though I am young and she is old, I have taken the liberty of naming auntie Sarah. Until we find the name her mother gave her, I shall call her 'coming home' - Aroas!

University of Cape Town

CONCLUSION WHERE TO FROM HERE?

"It is now time to bring this book to a close. But how does one end the beginning of something?"¹



1. Mama, Amina Beyond the Masks: Race Gender and Subjectivity Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 159.

Black women everywhere are creating new paradigms, separating from their old oppressions and seeking open spaces. Each one of us who does this eventually has to come up against the fact that our life's work is but a beginning, not a fulfilment of some long-cherished project.

I have done an honest job at what I find I do best: cleaning up. This thesis has tried to clear the space to tell a story. The full story has yet to be told, perhaps not by myself. The task has been to prepare for the story to come. So there can be no closure, no convenient summing up, for a woman's work, when done, is often invisible. I said I would clean and I have done what I can. All I have to show you is a clean house. It would be boastful, now, to walk from room to room, telling you where I washed and where I scrubbed.

A last word, perhaps, about the social conditions determining the character of my work. Phoenix Laurel writes:

"Slave narrators had to show that they had been hurt ... by slavery. Because of this hurt, readers were forced to conclude that slavery must be abolished. Yet, at the same time, slaves had to maintain the posture of credible witness to events and causal sequences that readers might well have dismissed as unbelievable. Because of this credibility, readers were forced to conclude that the slave was a fully rational human being deserving of freedom. Taken together, these competing imperatives forced the slave narrator into a paradoxical presentation of self as both harmed and able to transcend that harm, as both debased and untouched by that debasement, The competing imperatives in slave narratives are repeated in narratives of madness."²

The 'readers' Laurel speaks about were overwhelmingly white, yet her moving descriptions of the chains which bound slave narratives are an apt description of my present predicament, even (as the case may be) with an audience which

understands oppression through experience. I am bound by a womanist commitment to speak of my place in this world and therefore of myself. This injunction has led not just to a sometimes painfully embarrassing prose style, but also to an epistemologically difficult position. It may seem as if we face here the ultimate jettisoning of empiricism since my experience of myself-in-the-world is precisely the one datum which science cannot replicate reliably. In a nutshell, you are obliged to take my word that what I think about my experiences is true. This requires a lot of trust, particularly since my theory, as I stated in the previous chapter, is that my observations are those of a mad person.

All I can say to help is that since I am a product of history, I constitute evidence to the history of which I speak. Thus, I may lay claim to a particular and distinct epistemological status for the writings of the oppressed about the oppressed: it is writing which is simultaneously theory and practice, research and experiment, of the subject and by the object. So the very strong tradition of liberatory writing by the oppressed by its nature defies definition, because it strives to become other in the very moment of its being. It is always a work-in-progress. There can be no finality until there is no more oppression.

I close this volume with an observation on methodology which may be of value: please do not think you know me, for I do not know myself. I do not know the human I could have become, were it not for my social conditioning under colonialism. But if my opportunities were foreclosed, it does not mean that there is

2. Phoenix Laurel, Jeanne "Slave Narratives: Retentions in African-American Writings about Women." *Womanist Theory and Research*, 2:1, 1996-1997 (57-63) pp. 57.

no chance for the next generation. The purpose of this thesis is to ensure that there never again will be another datum like me. Read it as you will.

Since this is an opening and not a closure, I can indicate my plans for the future. I would like to write a conference paper entitled "Seek and ye shall find" detailing avenues for further research which I consider fruitful. I would like to organize a drawing competition. I would have given much to have been able to see the face of auntie Sarah in this thesis, as she really was. I know it cannot be done, so a competition to encourage artists to seek her face amongst the Khoekhoe women of today would be of good use as illustrations for future theses. Still, all that is for the future. For now, I shall live, a little bit, outside these pages.

THE END