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I AM SAARTJIE BAARTMAN

NOBUNYE LEVIN

Saartjie Baartman has been utilised in a broad range of public articulations, including works by artists, writers, scientists, historians and filmmakers. These articulations can be located across Europe, Africa and the United States of America. Within the European context, specifically, the most significant writing on Baartman begins with the pseudo-scientific offerings made by French comparative anatomist and zoologist¹ Georges Cuvier.²

Baartman is an iconic figure who became a signifier of European cultural and scientific imperialism. Scientific racism constructed racialised notions of her body and genitalia, such as: the primitive, the savage, the animalistic, and the uncontrolled. The racialising and over-sexualising of her body and genitalia, and the ideas espoused by this racialising process, produced images of 'nation'. These were useful to her European exploiters and colonisers under the rubric of science. Later, in the South African context, the assumptions of Saartjie Baartman's life that rely on seeing her as a victim furnished the imaginary reconstructive project of the post-apartheid nation.

In more recent times, within the South African context there have been offerings made by Penny Siopis in visual arts³ and by Zola Maseko in film.

A comparative focus of this chapter will be Zola Maseko's films *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2003). These films function within the rhetoric and image-making associated with the post-apartheid South African nation-building project as they employ representations of Baartman, her narrative and her body as tools in the broader political project of re-imagining and reconstructing the image of the post-apartheid nation.

This nation-building agenda relies on Baartman's perceived lack of personal will. The myths of Baartman's life have allowed the post-apartheid South African national imaginary and its institutions of nation-building to overlook the sense of self-determinism that Baartman demonstrated within the social milieu of her lifetime. While Baartman's historical context did not contain social and political structures that allowed someone of her race and gender to make her agency public, she did, however, continuously demonstrate acts of self-determination. This is exemplified by what we know of her performances, singing on stages, and dancing and playing the guitar⁴ in the taverns of Cape Town (Holmes 2007:34). These performances defied her colonially-ascribed and actual role as a servant.⁵

The institutions and proponents of the nation-building project – which include the nation state, the institutions of the nation state and its actors, consisting of both 'official' state actors as well as the 'citizens' of the nation – choose generally to disregard such acts of self-determination. Rather, they utilise Baartman and the inhumanity that she suffered as a symbol of the inhumanity the South African nation suffered under colonialism and apartheid. These processes of consecration, which have created Baartman as a symbol of her times and therefore as an icon, risk re-establishing her as a curiosity (Qureshi 2004:251). This is similar to her construction in discourses of scientific racism.

My research and film project, *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009), aimed to counter this use of Baartman, particularly with regard to Baartman's symbolic utilisation and representation in Maseko's films, through offering a feminist reading of Baartman, which situates her in a feminist historiography that privileges the private and experiential and in the process foregrounds her acts of self-determination. Broadly speaking, I intend to destabilise certain articulations within political projects that have often employed Baartman as a tool in the service of various

discourses or causes. Furthermore, I specifically seek to posit a critique of Maseko's films concerning Baartman, while also offering an alternative representation of Baartman through a discussion of my film project.

Maseko's film *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* provides a broad overview of the life of Saartjie Baartman and the various roles she played. However, Maseko mainly focuses on the period when she became known as the 'Hottentot Venus' and by doing this he begins to create in Baartman a passive victim with no real personal history. It is the perfect site for the narration of the suffering of a nation and its people.

In the film, Maseko provides the voice-over, along with an unidentified British male voice that provides the commentary for the various historical documents and extracts, which comment on Baartman's time as the 'Hottentot Venus'. In addition Maseko interviews a number of people who offer their commentary and who debate Baartman as an object. These are principally men. Baartman's body therefore largely becomes the scene of rival exchanges among men.

The only woman among these male experts is academic Yvette Abrahams, but Abrahams offers a reading of Baartman which elides her personal experience and self-determinism. She continuously portrays Baartman as a victim. Abrahams comments on Baartman's refusal to be repatriated back to South Africa when her case was brought forward by a group of abolitionists: 'She was a kid. She didn't know what she was doing (Abrahams in Maseko 1998).' Abrahams assumes, as many have, then and now, that Baartman had been coerced into refusing repatriation back to South Africa by her 'handlers', Alexander Dunlop and Hendrick Cesars.

Abrahams and the men who offer commentary on Baartman play the role of 'experts'. This collection of patriarchal voices elides any sense of the personal and experiential that Baartman might have had by implicitly claiming the role of seer. Consequently, the film claims all knowledge and power. The 'experts' and academics illustrate this by constantly referring to Baartman as a victim and by situating her within linear history as a cultural artefact upon whom they feel privileged to comment. On the level of the personal, Baartman is silenced and so her public function is amplified.

Baartman's absence in Maseko's film renders her a symbol of her times and of black experience in order to furnish a project that has broad political ends that have little to do with her (other than in her exploitative

appropriation as a tool). Baartman functions as an ideological tool in the construction of a 'new' post-apartheid nation.

In 'Framing National Cinemas', Susan Hayward highlights how the female body is symbolically employed within nationalist discourse. She asserts that this employment is usually one where the female body represents ideas of nation that are linked to invasion, violation, occupation and rape, through the female body being representative of the violated 'motherland'. Hayward reveals how this implicitly frames agency and power as being traits of masculinity. She describes how the female body, which is envisioned as 'motherland', becomes a vehicle for the nation's 'male-driven narratives that have appropriated the female body'. She further argues that 'in these male-driven narratives, the female body by extension becomes the site of the life and death of a nation, the rise and fall of the nation' (Hayward 2000:98).

Baartman is utilised as a tool in recounting the horrors of a formerly subjugated people, and again as a tool in nation-building and unity when her body is finally returned home in Maseko's second film, *The Return of Sara Baartman*.

The Return continues the story told in *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*. It chronicles the return of Baartman's remains to South Africa by the French on 29 April 2002. It documents the official handover of Baartman's remains and her plaster cast to the South African people at the country's embassy in Paris. It then goes on to show her official burial, on Women's Day, in Hankey in the Eastern Cape by her supposed 'descendants'. The film also chronicles the lobbying involved in Baartman's repatriation by people such as poet Diana Ferrus, palaeontologist Professor Phillip Tobias and French senator Nicolas About.

The Return of Sara Baartman seems to cement Baartman's position as a symbol of the nation. This is perhaps most apparent in the climax of the film, which takes place at the site of the funeral in Hankey, where Baartman's body is returned to the earth and buried. Thabo Mbeki reads a speech that reveals how Baartman and her body have 'come to represent the pain and suffering of all exploited black women and the psychic, cultural and emotional impact of racism and its legacy' (Holmes 2007:187).

Mbeki's speech articulates how 'women's bodies are closely aligned with nationalist discourse' (Hayward 2000:97) and consequently how the

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

Through positioning her as a symbol of the nation, a victim and a cultural icon, Maseko's films thus deny Baartman a sense of humanity, subjectivity and self-determinism. Furthermore, Maseko's films generally elide a sense of personal memory and desire, one that asks: What does the body do? (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:56)

In contrast, my film, *I am Saartjie Baartman*, focuses on an interpretation of Baartman's memories and offers an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity. Filmically, this was a way to speak back to and potentially challenge Maseko's project.

Deleuze and Guattari explore the question 'What does the body do?' in their radical re-conceptualising of the body. They wrest a perspective of the body from Spinoza which does not consider the body as either object or subject, but interrogates what the body is capable of. This is also the site at which my film offers an interventionist position. *I am Saartjie Baartman*, following Spinoza, considers how much 'joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies' (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55).

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

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

recognition of multiplicities which are irreducible to one metaphysical unity (Grosz, in Olkowski 1999:56).

All of these articulations concerning the body are imperative for the re-imagining of Saartjie Baartman because they disavow a system of representation which ‘operates by establishing a fixed standard as the norm or model’ (Olkowski 1999:2). Dorothea Olkowski argues that in order to bring about a change to this, a ‘ruin of representation’ is required.⁶ She further asserts that ‘With this ruin underway – with static structures of time and space, of life and thought, disassembled – a philosophy of change becomes viable’ (1999:2).

Olkowski argues that efforts to analyse the representational norm, specifically by feminists, have fallen short as ‘these analyses have operated with categorical generalisations: concepts neither abstract enough nor particular enough, which represent women merely in terms of pre-established, even naturalized, standards’. She argues that these ‘representations do no more than register a complaint against the norms of images, language and social and political structures’. Rather, she proposes:

an abstract but fluid ontology which can make sense of difference by accounting for the reality of temporal and spatial change on a pragmatic level while providing appropriate theoretical constructs in whose terms change can be conceived (Olkowski 1999:2).

Olkowski’s articulations concerning ‘the ruin of representation’ and the ‘philosophy of change’ this enables are imperative for my research and film project because they are important for the disassembly of the representational categories that have historically and scientifically constructed Baartman’s body. These categories construct the body as inferior lack within the mind-body dualism. The body is therefore reduced to static materiality rather than fluid interaction, relation and creation. In addition, within this dichotomy, woman is seen as being inherently linked with the body, as a being that is inferior to the hierarchy of man and reason/mind. In addition to this, these binaries create blackness as a monstrous ‘Other’. It is these conceptions of the body, woman and the racialised ‘Other’ that allow the extreme over-determinism that Baartman suffers.

My research and film project consider and begin with ‘difference’ (Derrida in Boyne 1990:92), which is enabled by Olkowski’s notion of ‘the ruin of representation’ and its disassembly of static structures of time, space, life and thought so that ‘a philosophy of change’ becomes viable.⁷ This difference is located in an interpretation of Baartman’s subjectivity, which is central to *I am Saartjie Baartman*. My interpretative stance proposes a continual becoming, which is contingent on experiential time. Furthermore, this interpretative stance is fluid and concerned with the relations between objects, spaces and people.

The film is a short experimental film shot on digital video. It brings together archive footage with live action footage. Its privileging of a sense of experiential time and memory places it within ‘the empirical avant-garde’ (Mellencamp 1995:174). Mellencamp argues that ‘the empirical avant-garde destabilises history through the experimental, granting women the authority of the experiential which includes both knowledge and memory’ (1995:175). Such a practice therefore privileges memory and experience rather than the generalisations of linear history. Deleuze says these works of memory ‘sketch a geography of relations’ (in Mellencamp 1995:175). The works of memory in *I am Saartjie Baartman* are predicated on relations located in Baartman’s desire.

The ‘connections and relations’ of Baartman’s desire are represented through two love affairs. Rachel Holmes’ book *The Hottentot Venus: The life and death of Saartjie Baartman, born 1789 – buried 2002* was imperative in providing the information about these two love affairs. Furthermore, it was critical in my project because it enabled me to locate an interpretation of Baartman’s subjectivity, as it recaptures Baartman’s humanity by carefully contextualising her and her story in a feminist historiography. It was also instrumental in creating a skeleton for the content of my film, its locations and its chronology. I was able to garner enough information to create a sketch of Baartman’s life and the events that shaped it. This sketch was teased out and infused with my own interpretations and projected imaginary. Additionally, I was able to retrieve a number of phrases, allegedly uttered by Baartman, from Holmes’ book. This was important for the creation of an interpretation of her subjectivity.

I chose to use the name Saartjie rather than Sara or Sarah (the name Baartman was given when she was baptised in England [Holmes 2007:112]) because of something that Holmes pointed out in her

book. The *-tjie* in Afrikaans has two different functions: it indicates the diminutive (and inferior) but 'is also a powerful way of expressing sentiment' (Holmes 2007:xiii-xiv). 'The key emotion expressed by the *-tjie* diminutive is endearment. It is a verbal demonstration of affection and care' (Holmes 2007:xiii). My film is about relations and revealing the personal. The name *Saartjie* enables this project because it is the name family and friends might have called her (Holmes 2007: xiii).

Baartman's first love affair took place when she was about 17 or 18, and was with a young Khoisan man named Skolar. Skolar and Baartman were to marry. On the night of the feast that was thrown for Baartman to celebrate her forthcoming marriage, Skolar was killed. He was murdered by a commando raid led by Europeans (Holmes 2007:18–19).

The second love affair was with a young soldier, whom she met in her first year in Cape Town, possibly at church or in a tavern (Holmes 2007:34). In *I am Saartjie Baartman* I chose to imagine that they met at a tavern. The soldier's name is lost, yet what is known of him is that he was 'a regimental drummer attached to the Cape Town Garrison' (Holmes 2007:34). It is not known whether he was Irish, Nguni, West Indian, Khoisan or 'a slave made free through military service' (Holmes 2007:36–37). In my film he is imagined as Irish. I decided to do this because an interracial relationship, within the social and historical milieu in which Baartman existed, would further demonstrate her sense of self-determinism.



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Still from *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009).

As a Khoisan woman in a colonial historical moment Baartman would have been perceived as a servant, so it is almost certain that white people largely did not see her as a legitimate person who might embark on a love affair with a white person. The concept of an interracial relationship is therefore extremely radical. It illustrates a sense of self-determinism that destabilised pre-existing norms and social behaviour. In this way Baartman's act becomes political and transgressive through her wilful act of miscegenation.

Baartman's love affair with her soldier progressed to the point that she moved in with him (Holmes 2007:35–36) and soon she discovered she was pregnant. She gave birth to a child whom they raised together, until the child died of unknown causes shortly before its second birthday. After this loss, the drummer and Baartman broke up. It is not known if this was due to their baby's death (Holmes 2007:39–40).

The two love affairs explored in *I am Saartjie Baartman* are in the form of a series of impressions. These impressions focus on images, sounds and the relationship between bodies on a physical and psychic level. This requires a re-conceptualisation of Baartman's body. Baartman's representation has historically and scientifically relied on over-determinism of her figure, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This over-determinism finds its signifier in the iconography that exists of Baartman. It is illustrated in the images drawn and painted by artists in the 19th century.

Notable among these images are those commissioned by Georges Cuvier, who 'employed a small cadre of artists to depict her likeness for a collection of illustrations showing the diversity of "flora and fauna" housed in the library of the French Natural Museum' (Collins 2010:72).

These images depicted Baartman naked, in contrast to how she was exhibited in the popular shows that she was shown in at the time. Nicolas Huet le Jeune's image of Baartman depicts her in profile in order to highlight her buttocks.

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

An important feature of colonial discourse is 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial

difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise, the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known and something that must be anxiously repeated (in Enwezor 1999:388).

On one level *I am Saartjie Baartman* seeks to re-imagine this official image, which 'is a text, an argument, an idea, inscribed in line and colour, by means of representation' (Bal in Moxey 1994:29). In the film Baartman's image is re-imagined through a series of projections that seek to disrupt and in many ways implode the fixity of her representation. Le Jeune's image of Baartman is used in these projections.

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

We first see the image of Baartman's official representation in a sort of Eisensteinian intellectual montage⁸ which seeks to challenge the scopophilic gaze that Baartman has been subjected to in the past and present. The montage utilises archive footage from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The montage disavows the provenance of the archive in this instance. Images from Eisenstein's film are distilled in order to construct a montage that comments on and challenges Baartman's objectification.

The montage begins with an image of an eye looking through a lens taken from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). The eye dissolves into a pool of optical blue light and the first image of Baartman's body appears. Its head is cut off and it slowly tracks in. The montage continues with a juxtaposition of a group of sailors handling a piece of meat infested with maggots. This is continually intercut with the image of Baartman's buttocks and the image of an eye looking through an eye-piece. Now and again the eye-piece touches the maggot-infested meat. We see a woman, who is meant to be Baartman, standing in a darkened blue-lit interior. She is outside of the world of the projection.

She stands looking back at the sailors, the image of herself and the audience. She looks on with a fixed, challenging gaze on her face. Her image continually moves forward in tandem with the projection of her official representation.

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



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Close up on Saartjie to counter the historical drawings in which she is dominantly depicted. Film stills from *I am Saartjie Baartman* (2009).

This treatment of Baartman's official image (its blowing up and eventual destruction as it becomes unrecognisable) is similar to the way that the director David Cronenberg conceptualises the cinematic body. He foregrounds the monstrosity of the flesh 'to refuse the pacifying lures of specular idealisation' (Shaviro 1993: 132–133). 'This new regime of the image abolishes the distance required either for disinterested aesthetic contemplation or for stupefied ascription in spectacle' (Shaviro 1993: 140–41).

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

The second sequence in *I am Saartjie Baartman* involving Baartman's official representation begins with the close up of the eye looking through the camera lens. This is followed by a sequence from Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* depicting an auditorium being prepared for a screening and a projectionist preparing the film for projection. People begin to walk in and take their seats, awaiting the show. We are, once again, shown the eye. Then the optical blue light appears to reveal Baartman's official image. It is a naked body revealed in its entirety. Contrary to the previous representation of Baartman's official image, in *I am Saartjie Baartman* here it is static and at the mercy of the gaze. Here the film re-creates the distance required 'for stupefied ascription in spectacle' (Shaviro 1993: 140–141). This is to illustrate the imperial/colonial gaze to which Baartman was subjected.

This second sequence is meant to represent Baartman's period of display in London and in Paris at the *Jardin des Plantes*. The inscription of the imperial gaze and its European context is reinforced by a voice-over which runs concurrently with the images. This voice-over is in French and is meant to represent Georges Cuvier. It authoritatively says:

We could verify that the protuberance of her buttocks had nothing muscular about it but arose from a [fatty] mass of a trembling and elastic consistency, situated immediately under her skin. It vibrated with all the movements that the woman made (Cuvier in Gould 1985:297).

This sequence reiterates Baartman's scopophilic objectification by Europeans. This is to illustrate her experiences in the white worlds of Europe and Cape Town. The reiteration of this gaze, after its initial moment of resistance by Baartman's character, is to illustrate how 'submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another; it is these two elements that together constitute the subaltern mentality' (Bhadra 1997:63).

Baartman was a wilful woman. However, the social and historic milieu in which she existed determined and ensured that she was socially inferior. As a Khoisan woman she was most likely a member of one of the lowest social groups of her time. Although she may have been a wilful woman, her society did not permit Baartman the political agency that allowed defiance in all instances.

This initial use of projections in the film is interspersed with projections that become less concerned with scopophilia and Baartman's official images. Rather, these projections begin to represent Baartman's memories. Some of these additional projections consist of archival photographs from Pippa Skotnes's book *Claim to the Country: The archive of Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek* (2007).

In *I am Saartjie Baartman* the use of these archival images disregards (not with the intention to disavow) the provenance and identity of the individuals represented as well as their personal narratives. Rather the images of the San people function as memories of Baartman's family, suitors and compatriots. Thus they are re-purposed in order to inscribe Baartman's personal history and reveal her as a person, while also situating her in the ancestral realm as she becomes located within the archive of her people.⁹ Situating Baartman within this realm affords her a sense of political agency, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The use of archival material to depict Baartman's memories is utilised further in the film. As Baartman dances in the taverns and on the stages of Cape Town and Europe (Holmes 2007:60), the narrator in the film

comments on men with whom she may have come into contact in these places. These men are represented through archival photographs, which are intercut with Baartman dancing. The archival photographs of these men no longer function in their original context; the provenance is unacknowledged and the men in the photographs are never named. Rather the men become representative of the types of men she may have met and seen while she performed in the taverns and on stages. Additionally, they become indicative of Baartman's interiority as the narrator describes the relations that she may have had with these men who watched her dance.

Thus the film interrogates what the body can do (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:56) and, like Deleuze and Guattari, following from Spinoza, it also asks what the body is capable of (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55). *I am Saartjie Baartman* stages an intervention which diminishes the overdeterminism of Baartman's figure and instead foregrounds how it acts in relation with other bodies (Deleuze as cited in Olkowski 1999:215), and consequently how this might articulate Baartman's desire. This, as Spinoza argues, 'is a matter of how much joy, affirmation, sadness and decomposition a body can endure within its various relations with other bodies' (as described above) (Grosz in Olkowski 1999:55).

In the film these relations and the emotions they conjure are explored through themes of loving and loss. This loving and loss not only resides in Baartman's memories and experiences of her two love affairs, but also in the memories of her lost childhood home and her dead parents (Holmes 2007:19 and 23). The film seeks to show the relation of bodies and their desire in a manner that includes the tactility and corporeality of the body. And so Baartman's body is seen in relation to other bodies, as it smells, speaks, touches and tastes, and in so doing it communicates a sense of a life lived not only in a psychic sense but also in terms of its corporeal experience.

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

Throughout the film Baartman is mostly clothed in a billowy white nightdress, except for one scene, where she is seen in a brown peasant dress with a frilly white trim at the cuff. The costuming in the film is designed to suggest a historical period rather than attempt a period (historical) in costume design. This is because the film is concerned with a sense of experiential time rather than historic linear time. Having said this, however, the white nightdress that Baartman's character is seen in has a definite purpose: the garment suggests a sense of the private and intimate. She wears a garment that is primarily worn within the confines of the home.

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

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

This concern with bodily fluids and emissions follows on from Julia Kristeva's essay, *Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection* (1982). In this essay Kristeva explores the significance of the taboos surrounding bodily emissions and fluids, arguing that these articulate more than simply a revulsion against a lack of cleanliness. Since the body can function as

a metaphor for social structures, a dread of its emissions is bound up with recognition of their capacity to threaten the social fabric. Kristeva's argument is that a focus on such marginal matter – on what she calls 'abjection' or 'the abject' – can be potentially subversive. She argues that it can disturb 'identity, system, order' and suggest a lack of respect for societal 'borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva in Schmahmann 2004:3).

This focus on bodily emissions therefore functions as a form of resistance for Baartman, as a threat to the societal fabric that has created her as a representational tool. The white colour of the nightdress and its large size continues the narrative function of the cloth. When Baartman washes the cloth after her child's death, the nightdress is splattered with the bloodied water. It, too, becomes stained by her lived experiences and thus becomes a reflection of her narrative journey and her personal experiences as opposed to her public display.

A key feature of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the function of the voice-over. The voice-over acts in two ways. Firstly, it functions as the voice of the filmmaker (my voice). The conversation between the narrator and Baartman inserts the 'I' of the filmmaker in the film, without asserting a visual presence. In this way my own subjective interpretation is written into the film and made present, but without disturbing the focus of the film, which is primarily concerned with Saartjie Baartman. Secondly (but by no means less important), a conversation with a historical figure in the form of a dialogue consisting of call and response is imperative in ascribing a subjectivity to Baartman that has thus far historically been absent. Furthermore, the images that we see of Baartman are of a young woman. This is to reflect Baartman's actual age while she was still alive. The voice-over that acts as Baartman's voice, however, is communicated by an old woman. This is to infer and suggest a sense of reflection; to inscribe the sense of a woman looking back at her life.

The desire to create a film that privileges the experiential and the private is reflected in the visual style, shot size, composition and lighting. The film is shot in a combination of red, indigo, ochre, jade and yellow. The four last mentioned colours are meant to evoke the landscape of Baartman's childhood (Holmes 2007:8). The lighting aesthetic is influenced by a sense of the private. Images are lit in order to create a sense of intimacy. This often means that there is a play with shadows and concepts of light and dark. Baartman's character is often shot as if she

were emerging from and framed by darkness. This is to suggest a narrative world that foregrounds and privileges the experiential and the private.

Additionally, the film consists of a textured look that sought to enhance emotional resonance and intimacy. This was done through the use of out-of-focus shots and extreme close ups. The images were often tightly framed and positioned in low angles. Once again this is intended to evoke a sense of intimacy suggesting Baartman's private world rather than an empirical, historical project. The need to evoke the sense of experiential time was articulated through the use of 'long takes which capture the rhythm of life' (Gabriel in Mellencamp 1995:176). And although the film concerns itself with chronology, it is deliberately non-linear in structure.

An important facet of *I am Saartjie Baartman* is the issue of how to deal with her remains. As I have already mentioned, the return of Baartman's remains played a crucial role in Maseko's film *The Return of Sara Baartman*, symbolising the re-birth of the nation. One of my principal concerns was to disrupt this symbolic usage. I believe I managed to do this at the end of my film.

The end explores a return of Baartman that does not focus on her remains and their metaphorical significance in terms of constructing narratives of the nation. These articulations focus on her material remains and their material burial in the soil of the nation. In order to disrupt this objectifying usage of Baartman's body, my film seeks to concentrate on a concept of return that is spiritual in nature. Baartman returns home as a spiritual entity, as an ancestor, who does not live above us or below us, but among us. In this way, her iconicism is infused with a sense of political agency that unveils her as a person who, in one way or another, is constantly speaking and acting both within the past and present.

This is exemplified by the voice-over at the end of *I am Saartjie Baartman*. Baartman's character says in Xhosa (Holmes [2007:13] claims that she may have spoken some Xhosa, and it functions as an African counterbalance to the English and French otherwise spoken in the film): 'I lost my way; I didn't know where I was. I was out of my mind.' The home in this passage does not refer to a material home within the earth; rather, it refers to a spiritual home. The voice-over continues and says: 'Oh, what is this I see? It seemed like someone in red blankets was sitting there. Oh, how beautiful this woman was. Her face was so beautiful.' The woman that Baartman's character sees is an ancestor inviting Baartman

to join the realm of the ancestors. The red of her blankets refers to the colours that *sangomas* (traditional healers) wear and reinforces the idea that Baartman's character is having a conversation with the spiritual world and that she is about to become part of it.

In my film and also in this chapter I have sought to challenge Baartman's symbolic employment as a tool in nationalist discourses (Hayward 2000:99). 'This symbolism disguises real questions of gendered agency and power', as agency and power are invested in the male body rather than the female body (Hayward 2000:99). Contesting masculine inscriptions of Baartman's body, which construct her as a symbolic tool through continually concealing her self-determinism, I chose to situate Baartman in a feminist historiography which articulates a sense of self-determinism even within the confines of colonial imperialism and patriarchy.

This re-imagining of Baartman allows her a voice outside of discourses concerning the nation and nation-building, which is how Maseko's films have positioned her. It is premised on an interpretation of Baartman's subjectivity that is enabled by 'the ruin of representation', 'where a philosophy of change becomes viable' (Olkowski 1999:2).

I am Saartjie Baartman privileges experiential time above notions of the historical (linear or historic time). This concept of experiential time is crucial to the ruin of Baartman's representation and therefore her re-imagining. 'The ruin of representation' can, however, only exist in the moment of the film *I am Saartjie Baartman*.

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NOTES

- 1 Rachel Holmes states that Cuvier specialised in comparative anatomy and zoology (2007:136).

- 2 Cuvier's infamous and racist report on Baartman, written after her death and entitled *Report on the observations made on the body of a woman known in Paris and in London as the Hottentot Venus* (1817) racialised Baartman's genitalia and buttocks and attributed animalistic traits and features to them. Cuvier's writings became famous across America and Europe. They became 'foundational texts in comparative and evolutionary anatomy and biology, anthropology, as well as racial science and sexology' (Crais and Scully 2009:135).
- 3 Penny Siopis has featured Baartman extensively in her work. For example in her painting *Dora and the Other Woman* (1988), Siopis looks at Baartman 'in relation to Freud's Dora' (Siopis in Coombes 1997:121). Siopis (in Coombes 1997:121) says that the painting makes a 'direct connection between the way white women's sexuality was pathologised in psychoanalysis, most of all through Freud, and the image of Saartjie Baartman'. Therefore Siopis connects the two women's stories through ideas of 'objectification and looking', which was a connecting theme in both their stories.
- 4 I have assumed that she played the guitar in the taverns of Cape Town, although it is not stipulated in the page that I have cited from Holmes' book. However, earlier on in her book, while discussing how Baartman became an almost overnight sensation in London, she states that Baartman played the guitar (2007:6). So I have assumed that Baartman's 'ability to play' that Holmes refers to in terms of her popularity in 'tavern nightlife' in Cape Town (2007:34) refers to the playing of the guitar.
- 5 This assertion is based on Holmes' argument that 'over time, colonisers forced an association between "Hottentots" and servility' (2007:11). Additionally, at the time of Baartman's performances in Cape Town, she was registered by the Cape census as a servant in the home of Hendrick and Anna Cesars (Holmes 2007:27).
- 6 'The ruin of representation' is a term coined by Michele Montrelay and has been 'adopted and reconfigured' by Dorothea Olkowski for her book *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*(1999).
- 7 However, it is important to note that I do not advocate a complete disavowal of Baartman's position as a cultural icon. This would merely duplicate the structure which I seek to critique, relying as it does on the concept of 'origin' or 'presence', which is utterly unavailable to us (Derrida in Boyne 1990:97). Furthermore, the disavowal of Baartman as a cultural icon would deny a nation of national icons at a time when it needs to constitute a nation-building project.
- 8 The technical innovation, which Eisenstein dubbed 'intellectual montage', 'resulted from his studies of Kuleshov's famous experiments (which demonstrated that the meaning of any shot is contextual) and of Japanese ideograms (where two separate

symbols can be juxtaposed to create a third meaning, eg child + mouth = scream; white bird + mouth = sing)' (Cook in Shaw 2004).

- 9 She is situated within the archive of her people as 'the Khoekhoen and the San emerged from one people and were not separate races' (Holmes 2007:192). I am also imagining her through 'the collective term *Khoisan* (*khoi* or *kho*, and San)', which 'is now used when speaking of the long shared history of South Africa's first peoples' (Holmes 2007:192). Furthermore, Holmes states that 'Saartjie was descended from the Eastern Cape Khoisan, the long intermingled society of herding, pastoralist Khoekhoen (Khoi) and the hunter-gathering, nomadic San, native to South Africa since pre-historic times' (2007:9).