

CHAPTER 2

(NOT) REPRESENTING SARAH BARTMANN

Steatopygous sky
Steatopygous sea
Steatopygous waves
Steatopygous me

Oh how I long to place my foot
on the head of anthropology.
(Nichols 1984: 15)

All the world could come to see her during her 18 month period in our capital, and witness the huge protuberance of her buttocks and beastly look on her face. (Cuvier 1817: 263)

As the casket left the embassy, I wondered if Sarah Baartman was looking down from heaven and having a chuckle. The empire had indeed struck back, her people had come to claim her, and the ‘savages’ were running the show. (Smith 2002: 4)¹

Sarah Bartmann was an enslaved Khoi woman, transported to Europe by a Dutchman, Hendrik Cezar, and displayed, to great controversy, in Picadilly Circus in London and later in Paris. The simplicity of the above sentence belies the convoluted manner in which she was exhibited, became known pejoratively as ‘the Hottentot Venus’, died under mysterious circumstances – owned, at that stage, by an animal trainer – and had volumes of scientific and anthropological works written ‘about her’. It leaves out the fact that Cezar was forced to sell

her to an unnamed 'Englishman' because, as the former would write in the *Morning Chronicle* of 23 October 1810, the controversy in England over Bartmann as slave, and the subsequent decision by The African Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior of Africa to sue Cezar on behalf of Bartmann, made it untenable for him to keep her in his ownership (Y. Abrahams 2000; Magubane 2001; Walvin 1982). The deceptive straightforwardness of the outline above also occludes the fact that George Cuvier, fêted anatomist and one of the pre-eminent European scientists of all time, had her genitalia and brain pickled in formaldehyde and kept at a museum in Paris. It speaks nothing of the self-satisfaction which saw him write, 'I had the honour of presenting to the Academy, the genitals of this woman, prepared in such a way, that leaves no doubt on the nature of her "apron" ' (Cuvier 1817: 266).

While any academic labelling of Sarah Bartmann as slave inevitably meets with some resistance and claims that she was a willing agent in her transportation to Europe, her display and ultimately her 'prostitution' and 'alcoholism' (Crais & Scully 2008; Holmes 2007), Bartmann's status as slave is made clear in much scholarship, including Yvette Abrahams's (2000) painstaking research, as well as the specific way in which responses to her in Britain saw her as a slave (Magubane 2001; Walvin 1982). This is the source of the controversy around her display: she was treated like a slave in all respects by Cezar and those who objected to her exhibition.

Much research into Black presence in Britain also suggests that Bartmann slotted into existing representational idioms and debates about the nature and manifestations of slavery within the British Isles (Gerzina 1999; Walvin 1982). Her renaming as 'Hottentot Venus' was in line with a slavocratic 'humorous' tradition, traced by Dabydeen (1987a, 1987b) back to the late seventeenth century, which saw African house 'servants' (slaves) given classical Roman names, and sometimes dressed up ornately for posing in their owners' portraits as decorative figurines or to walk behind their mistresses carrying accessories and smelling salts (Gerzina

1999: 21). Venus was the Roman goddess of love, fertility and romance. Humour here was derived from the juxtaposition of slave (Hottentot) with goddess (Venus). Writing of the eighteenth century, Dabydeen notes that there were developing ways to think and speak about the Black presence in Britain, most notably in its cities, such as London, where Bartmann was placed on display. He notes that '[a] city like London then, if not actually "swamped" ... by flesh-and-blood-alien blacks, was "swamped" by *images* of blacks. London in the eighteenth century was *visually* black in this respect' (Dabydeen 1987a: 18). Within this idiom, a century before Bartmann's display in London, Africans and animals were often the subject of similar characterisation in art, literature and public discourse. By the time she was displayed as a curiosity in London, such idioms were commonplace. This is part of the context of reading Bartmann's passage and her renaming in the condescending idioms of the Cape – as Saartjie, although her baptismal certificate spells her name 'Sarah' – and Britain, as Hottentot Venus in established slavocratic humorous idiom.

Bartmann's remains were kept in Paris, and a cast made from her body and skeleton was on display at the Musée de l'Homme until 1974. Bartmann's body could not be returned for burial until May 2002 because an official from the Musée de l'Homme alleged that her remains had been lost. She was buried in her birthplace, Hankey, in the Eastern Cape on the ninth of August, the day on which she was born in 1789, ironically the inaugural year of the French Revolution.

The South African Broadcasting Corporation quoted the Khoi-San leader Cecil Le Fleur, on the fourth of August, as noting that the return of Bartmann and her funeral on the day of her birth was important. 'It also symbolises the rights of women worldwide,' he is reported to have said.² The traditional Khoi enrobing ceremony performed by elders at the Cape Town civic centre six days before her burial, as part of the preparation of the body, took on an added significance for the woman who had been exhibited naked so that those interested could gawk at her.

Her return, preparation for burial, and interment ceremony were also framed explicitly as participation in a memory project. Thus, while pre-funeral rites are customarily referred to as activities performed in memory of the departed, the use of memory evoked, in this instance, an additional set of associations and was linked to other memory activities in the democratic era. The deputy minister of Arts, Culture and Technology, Bridget Mabandla, suggested these connections in the following way:

[t]here have been many misconceptions about Saartje Bartmann, one being that she was a prostitute. Sarah was a slave and victim of an extreme form of prejudice. It is proper to see her as a symbol for human rights and nation building, because she was one of us. The ceremony is to celebrate her memory through poetry, song and dance by providing a platform for all South Africans to express solidarity in her memory.³

The speech by the president at Bartmann's funeral echoed this position of Sarah Bartmann's reclamation and return as linked to brutal histories of enslavement and oppression, and its role as part of the larger coming to terms with the past. This marks her return, therefore, as participation in the terrain of public memory. Participation in this memory involves a negotiation of anger and celebration. Indeed, as Mbeki pointed out:

there are many in our country who would urge constantly that we should not speak of the past. They pour scorn on those who speak about who we are and where we come from and why we are where we are today. They make bold to say the past is no longer, and all that remains is a future that will be. But, today, the gods would be angry with us if we did not, on the banks of the Gamtoos River, at the grave of Sarah Bartmann, call out for the restoration of the dignity of Sarah Bartmann, of the Khoi-San, of the millions of

Africans who have known centuries of wretchedness.

Sarah Bartmann should never have been transported to Europe.⁴

In the remainder of the speech, President Mbeki proceeded to make connections between Bartmann's individual story and the larger dispossession and racist project which influenced slavery, colonialism and remaining systems of white supremacy in the contemporary world. This project is linked to discourses which frame Africans as those without a past but, more immediately within the context of the South African dispensation, it should link with efforts to 'restore the dignity and identity of the Khoi and San people as a valued part of our diverse nation'. Bartmann's burial place was declared a national heritage site, with additional plans to create a memorial in Cape Town.

The marked celebration that met Bartmann's return also motivated various artistic representations of Bartmann, with varied effects. When Willie Bester's sculpture of Sarah Bartmann was placed near the science and engineering library of the University of Cape Town, it was met with ambivalence. At a panel on 30 April 2001 – including the artist, historian Yvette Abrahams, representatives from the African Gender Institute, the Womyn's Movement at the Centre for African Studies – speakers challenged the lack of context given by the Work of Art Committee's (WOAC) of its decision on where to position the sculpture. While the WOAC's choice of location, as well as the specific choice of Bester's sculpture, was meant to destabilise precisely the history of Bartmann's exhibition in the name of science, Memory Biwa of the Womyn's Movement argued against the absence of any contextualisation at the site of the sculpture's exhibition. Abrahams noted the absence of any other art by indigenous artists in public spaces at the institution which then aggravated the fact that people were forced to look at the sculpture at the entrance of the library. She thus problematised the manner in which this unmediated gaze, coupled with the statue's exceptionality on the campus, inscribed the piece in ways dangerously close to the politics of Bartmann's exhibition.

Her baptismal certificate spells her name ‘Sarah Bartmann’, but much writing also uses Sara, Saartje and Saartjie; and her surname Bartman, Baartman, Baartmann and Bartmann is linked to the lack of clarity on how she spelled her own name. Nor is there conclusive evidence of what her birth name was. She is referred to most commonly as Saartjie, sometimes spelled the Dutch way, ‘Saartje’, little Sara(h). I have chosen to use ‘Sarah’ here because that is the name and spelling used in her baptismal certificate, and in recognition of the history of a slavocratic, colonial and apartheid trajectory which infantilised adult Black men and women in the service of white supremacist patriarchy. ‘Little’ or ‘-tjie’ is also often added to show close personal proximity to an individual.⁵ The diminutive put Black people into the much theorised position of always being assumed to be intimately available to white South Africans. To the extent that I do not have intimate access to Sarah Bartmann as a contemporary or close associate, there is no justification for using ‘Saartjie’ without being complicit in this history of naming and objectifying African subjects.

The quotation at the beginning of this chapter is from a poem by the celebrated Guyanese/Black British poet, Grace Nichols, from that part of her poetic *oeuvre*⁶ which challenges the stereotypes of African women in the world throughout history. It is an endeavour to imagine a world with a sky, a sea and waves which reflect African woman’s body as norm rather than pathology. If everything in the world Nichols’s persona imagines reflects her form, then the world cannot at the same time cast her as a freak; it is a world within which she is comfortable and normal. The stress in Nichols’s poem is on the ‘fat black woman’ thinking, imagining and feeling anger; in other words, expressing her will and interiority. Her anger is directed at various epistemic projects responsible for constructing Black women as excessively corporeal, housed in the disciplines of anthropology, history, theology as well as contemporary patriarchal capitalist industries which capitalise on this racist violence. Such sites are part of the logic that placed Sarah Bartmann in slavery, on display and in specimen jars as

evidence of 'steatopygia'. Nichols's use and recognisability of the medico-scientific term 'steatopygia' echoes Bartmann's display and dissection.

To the extent that most traditions, either racist or patriarchal or a combination, do not represent *thinking* African women subjects, Nichols's 'fat black woman' fantasising about a better world while lying in the bath is powerful and necessary. Its importance is not so much because it charts a counter-narrative, but rather because it significantly alters the terms of the debate altogether where Bartmann is concerned.

The second extract is from the respected nineteenth-century French scientist Georges Cuvier, about whom Gail Smith – feminist essayist who wrote the scripts for both Zola Maseko's documentaries on Sarah Bartmann, *Hottentot Venus: The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) and *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2003) – has mused 'one thing that has always puzzled me, if Cuvier was such a brilliant scientist, why was Sarah Baartman's official cause of death never known?'⁷ The quotation refers to how Cuvier saw and spoke of Sarah Bartmann. It speaks volumes for what he considers as 'All the world', and the implausibility that one day Blackwomen subjects would assume positions as makers of academic knowledge. Cuvier's immediate audience is the scientific community in nineteenth-century Europe. They are the possible viewers and intended readers of his text, not those who for him fell into the bracket of 'Negro women, Bushmen women and female monkeys' (Cuvier 1817: 269).⁸ It is the tradition against which Nichols writes. It is Bartmann's body of which he speaks as a 'huge protuberance', and whose face is 'beastly' in his eyes. He assumes that this is a discovery which advances science, as do his peers. It is testimony to the extent that his peers, and those who came after him, valued this as important scientific knowledge that Sarah Bartmann's remains could not be returned for burial until May 2002. It is confirmation of the resilience of resistance that the 'savages' are able to run the show and claim her back, even if it is several centuries later in Gail Smith's citation which follows Cuvier's at the beginning of this chapter.

The story of Sarah Bartmann has been one of the fascinations of academic writing on 'race', feminism and post-structuralism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. An enslaved Khoi woman, she was transported to Europe where she was displayed for the amusement, and later scientific inquisitiveness, of various public and private collectives in London and Paris. Yvette Abrahams (1997, 2000, 2004; Abrahams & Clayton 2004), Jean Young (1997) and Zine Magubane (2001, 2004) have written on the contradictions that characterise her story. Bartmann's paradoxical hypervisibility has meant that although volumes have been written about her, very little is recoverable from these records about her subjectivity. This is because for the bulk of her writers over the centuries, she has been the body of evidence. Magubane has noted that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the black body offered for much colonial thought 'the meeting of two contrary impulses – of a suffering that could not be denied but that nonetheless had an incredibly fungible character' (2004: 103).

This chapter begins with these quotations because it seeks to explore the possibility of writing about Sarah Bartmann in ways unlike those traditions of knowledge-making that dubbed her 'the Hottentot Venus', and were therefore complicit in her slavery. It reads a variety of texts which position themselves in relation to her, as a means of arriving at a Black feminist/womanist⁹ engagement with the histories which fix representations of Blackwomen in colonialist epistemes. The entry of Sarah Bartmann, and Khoi people generally, into historiography was through their corporeality (Abrahams 1997). This has also become acceptable supposition in much academic and creative literature concerned with the enslavement of African people, and their forced transportations to the Americas and Europe. Corporeality, then, becomes one of the dominant ways in which, within colonialist epistemes, African people enter public discourse. More specific to Khoi people, it is through 'observations' about the variety of ways in which their genitalia are 'deformed', whether naturally or through some

extensive manipulation, that the reader is led to ‘one testicle’ for Khoi men or the ‘Hottentot apron’ for women (Abrahams 1997).

Representing Black women, or colonised women of colour more generally, offers challenges for feminist writers. In Chapter 1, Carli Coetzee (1998) suggested one of the murky areas in this regard. She has written on the tendency of white feminists to use colonised women as symbols, and references the work of several women of colour globally who critique this tradition. The difficulties of representation are aggravated when the colonised woman is a famous one, Sarah Bartmann, who has so extensively been mythologised. bell hooks (1996) has noted the manner in which this hardship is exacerbated when Blackwomen’s subjectivities feature in certain versions of anti-racist thought. hooks observes that in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), ‘not only is the female body, black or white, always a sexualized body, not the body that “thinks,” but it also appears to be a body that never longs for freedom’ (1996: 84).

How have African feminist literary projects approached Bartmann’s absent presence as mnemonic activity? If the general hegemonic status of Black bodies has been as spectacle, ‘made to function less as flesh and blood entities than as fertile discursive sites to be mined for images and metaphors’ (Magubane 2004: 106), what happens when the most famously embodied Black subject is imagined creatively in ways that do not foreground her corporeality? This is one of the most striking similarities in how feminists of the African world¹⁰ have chosen to engage with Sarah Bartmann’s legacy as the ‘Hottentot Venus’. This legacy, and the power of its accompanying scientific knowledge, is such that several centuries later, in the twentieth century, feminists would continue to write against the *felt* effects of the gaze which fixes them/us as oversexed, deviant object.

Faced with the slew of creative writing on Sarah Bartmann by feminists in the African diaspora and beyond (Gordon-Chipembere 2006), I remain uninterested in charting, reviewing and analysing the varied ways in which

she has been characterised in literature. My concern here is with the emergence of a very specific idiom which arises in literature of the African feminist world, and which, as I will show, offers radical departures from conventional representations of her as only embodied (object), pathologised (deviant), evidence (knowable) and/or singular ('freak', myth).

I draw from the insights gleaned from African feminist work in non-literary genres, and recognise this scholarship as invaluable. Still, the three central creative texts which will be used in addition to Nichols's are Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000); Ferrus's poem 'I Have Come to Take You Home' (2002), previously listed and performed as 'A Tribute to Sarah Bartmann'; and Gail Smith's 'Fetching Saartje' (*Mail & Guardian* 12 May 2002). These texts offer refreshing narrative possibilities which are more imaginative than 'the science, literature and art [which have] collectively worked to produce Baartmann as an example of sexual and racial difference [which also] offered exemplary proof that racial and sexual alterity are social construction rather than biological essences' (Magubane 2001: 817). As Zine Magubane demonstrates, these traditions are informed by a variety of ideologies on race, gender and class positions, but have nonetheless been strengthened in their ahistorical usage to explain how Sarah Bartmann became the icon for sexual alterity in theory.

'Molara Ogundipe's invitation to African feminists is that '[w]e should think from our epicentres of agency, looking for what is meaningful, progressive and useful to us as Africans, as we enrich ourselves with ideas from all over the world' (quoted in Lewis & Ogundipe 2002). The texts analysed here embark on and approach the topic at hand from various angles, but will be read, nonetheless, as participating in the same larger African feminist project. While the specific structures of the narratives differ, these texts exist along the same continuum. All grapple with the (im)possibility of representing Sarah Bartmann, and in turn probe how history's silences are more interesting than the overwritten volumes about Bartmann during her lifetime, or since.

My motivation is informed, firstly, by my conviction that creative texts offer an ability to theorise and imagine spaces of freedom in ways unavailable to genres more preoccupied with linearity and exactness. I have become increasingly intrigued (Gqola 2001a, 2005) by the creative theorisation in the arena of African feminist imagination. By 'creative theorisation' I intend the series and forms of conjecture opened up in literary and other creative genres. Theoretical/philosophical epistemological projects do not only happen in those sites officially designated as such, but also emerge from creatively textured sites outside of these.

Secondly, read against the texts I will discuss, I find Nthabiseng Motsemme's thinking on silences and African women's subjectivities compelling. Motsemme asserts that 'the mute always speaks'. Like her:

My aim is not to romanticise silence and thus undermine the power of giving voice and exposing oppression. It is rather to remind us that under conditions of scarcity and imposed limits, those who are oppressed often generate new meanings for themselves around silences. Instead of being absent and voiceless, silences in circumstances of violence assume presence and speak volumes. (Motsemme 2004: 5)

CRAFTING EPICENTRES OF AGENCY

Zoë Wicomb's novel *David's Story* (2000) directly confronts the dilemma of historicising. Her novel is the fictional biography of David, an activist who decides to narrate his life story during the transition from late apartheid to democracy. David's sense of how lives are told and rooted in past lives' trajectories differs substantially from his fictional amanuensis' preferred working style. The novel is both David's story and not. He takes no joy in the private ownership of it that the biographer imagines should determine his relationship to the story. He chooses not to claim it in a tidy sense, although the presence of an amanuensis suggests that he has

taken some initiative in recording his story, thereby deeming it worthy of capture. In her communication with his scribe, he insists that his story is one that starts with the Khoi women Sarah Bartmann and Krotoä, the latter of whom is also known as Eva. Both these women are positioned as ‘firsts’ or symbolic beginnings in some ways: Krotoä, as the first indigenous translator between the Khoi and the Dutch, and Bartmann as the beginning of many narratives of belonging.

However, Wicomb writes David so that he does not simply position them as his foreparents. He repeatedly refuses the psychic safety that would flow from simply claiming and embracing them. They are part of a difficult and necessary identitiary project aligned to both memory and the imagination, a venture he cannot completely preside over. For David, then, these women do not point at clear meaning, but they are significant nonetheless. This marks his claim over them as quite different from the one critiqued by Carli Coetzee in Chapter 1.

Symbolically, then, David’s story as an activist who dedicated his life to the end of apartheid begins with those who sought to mediate between cultures of the colonised and colonisers. Secondly, coloured and Khoi subjectivities attach to a *continuum* of personal identification in the novel. The above positions of colouredness and Khoiness, represented as internally uncohesive, are engaged in a fluid exchange which at different times takes on competitive, supplementary and elusive edges. He will not participate in a project of ‘denying history and fabricating a totalizing colouredness’ (Wicomb 1998: 105) because he realises the impossibility of closure. Instead, he appears to embrace the possibility of ‘multiple belongings’ which offer:

an alternative way of viewing a culture where participation in a number of coloured micro-communities whose interests conflict and overlap could become a rehearsal of cultural life in the larger South African community where we learn to perform the same kind of

negotiations in terms of identity within a lived culture characterized by difference. (Wicomb 1998: 105)

The foremost anxiety with which he grapples even as he recognises his powerlessness over it, is the meeting point of history, memory and the imagination. It is these interconnections that Wicomb's novel negotiates.

Interestingly, his amanuensis, acting more like a biographer than mere scribe, is at pains to steer him in the direction of stability. For David, who does not imagine himself participating in an individual project, the disquiet centres around what is missing from his narrative and what is elusive. David's story as an Umkhonto we Sizwe combatant is told through recourse to stories of other activists as well as these jarring beginnings represented by Bartmann, enslaved woman, and Eva, the first mediator between the cultures of the colonisers and colonised. His resistance to narrative precision leads his fictional biographer to muse that 'promiscuous memory, spiralling into the past, mates with new disclosures to produce further moments of terrible surprise' (Wicomb 2000: 194–195). This is because she has long noticed how:

[h]is fragments betray the desire to distance himself from his own story; the many beginnings, invariably flights into history, although he is no historian, show uncertainty about whether to begin at all. He has made some basic errors with dates, miscalculating more than a hundred years, which no doubt is due to the confusing system of naming centuries; but then, as I delighted in the anachronism, he was happy to keep it. (Wicomb 2000: 1)

This anachronism is deliberate on Wicomb's part and points to the relationship between different modes of telling stories, ways more nuanced than timelines. It also attaches to the challenges of historicising experiences

when there is no dependable narrative, only the colonisers' in written form, plotted along a date line which is not in itself logical, even as it is paraded as neutral. David's interest in history suggests that he has reshuffled the events to highlight the desired associations with other herstories, to display more clearly, in Deirdre Prins's (2000: l. 18–25) words:

Because even though I do not know when my ancestors lived
I know that each one of their lives
Left a mark on my life
...
Even though I do not know

Such a desire is highlighted in his insistence, for example, on the anchoring of his story through Krotoä and Sarah Bartmann even though he makes little attempt to mythologise them. He is at pains to avoid their erasure, as well as making them icons. His response, '[o]ne cannot write nowadays ... without a little monograph on Bartmann; it would be like excluding history itself', can mean this (Wicomb 2000: 1). As his amanuensis suggests, 'the many beginnings, invariably flights into history, although he is no historian, show uncertainty about whether to begin at all' (Wicomb 2000: 1). Wicomb's David is convinced of their importance to his narrative, but need not dwell on the precise manner in which their narratives intersect with his, a detail which proves increasingly frustrating to his amanuensis. Rather than wanting to control the narrative, David is content to testify to a collective history which self-consciously points to its constructedness. Succeeding in this venture makes it clear that his narrative does not contain everything. For Wicomb's purposes, the project of writing history requires that the imagination perform differently, chaotically, in a manner that messes up centuries. Irritated by his logic, his amanuensis asks him, 'what on earth has Baartman to do with your history?' To this, he replies:

But it's not a personal history as such that I am after, not biography or autobiography. I know we're supposed to write that kind of thing, but I have no desire to cast myself as hero, he sneers. Nothing wrong with including a historical figure. (Wicomb 2000: 135)

When in further response to her, 'She may not even have been a Griqua,' David says 'Baartman belongs to all of us' (Wicomb 2000: 135), this is particularly telling. His claim to her is not because they both may have Griqua ancestry. Rather, David's recognition of Sarah Bartmann as important is neither about the 'recovery' of indigeneity nor the celebration of 'colouredness'. It is akin to Diana Ferrus's acknowledgment in her poem 'A Tribute to Sarah Bartmann' (1998). David and his biographer both note the extent of his outrage at the mere mention of Cuvier's name. This indignation finds accompaniment in Ferrus's persona's emotions, expressed in the second stanza:

I have come to wrench you away –
away from the poking eyes of the man-made monster
who lives in the dark with his racist clutches of imperialism,
who dissects your body bit by bit,
who likens your soul to that of satan
and declares himself the ultimate God! (ll. 10–15)

Ferrus's poem, written in Holland in June 1998, would eventually be reported as responsible for the release of Sarah Bartmann's remains by the French government, facilitating her return for burial in South Africa. The real story of the return is more complex, and less romantic, involving as it does protracted legal wrangling between the French and the first democratically elected South African government. While historian Yvette Abrahams wrote the first full-length study on Sarah Bartmann after noting the absence of academic material which sought to make sense of

the historic figure as individual rather than symbol, Wicomb and Ferrus provide two imaginative texts that humanise her.

Through varied mediums, the acts of self-definition for both narrating subjects in Wicomb's and Ferrus's projects are thoroughly historicised, and acutely mindful of the interaction between the present and various possible pasts. For David, then, historicising his experience is necessary but difficult. His recognition of such complications facilitates his surrender of the narrative once it is written down.

A similar impulse hides in the narrative uncertainties that are left unresolved by Ferrus in her poem. These find expression in the speaker's desire to use peace as the emotional currency that clears space for her conversation with Bartmann. The persona claims Bartmann as one of her own, bringing her peace through Bartmann's return home. Yet, it is unclear how Bartmann has managed already to bring the speaker peace. Lines 21–22 and 29–30, respectively, read:

and I will sing for you
for I have come to bring you peace.

and

where I will sing for you,
for you have brought me peace.

Within the context of the poem, where the reader is positioned as listening in on a private conversation between two 'people' joined by a relationship s/he is excluded from, there is no room for explanation of what may already be understandable to the two conversing women. This seems a deliberate absence from a poem which, in its written form, is always accompanied by a glossary. Ferrus's choice suggests privacy and the listener's exclusion from how knowledge is exchanged between the

two insiders. It is therefore not a failure, any more than David's bungling narrative is a fault. Although both Wicomb and Ferrus use distancing techniques in their representations of a slippery Bartmann, the two writers craft varied effects. Ferrus forces her reader into the position of onlooker, excluded from the intimate space between Bartmann and her speaker. Consequently, Bartmann is made more elusive, not because she is mythic, but because human beings are entitled to some choice over whom to include and whom not. This is an important distinction because Bartmann is historically denied a private intimate space through readers' access to her naked body (parts).

Wicomb's text is rife with distancing strategies. Writing on representations of Krotoä and Sarah Bartmann, Kai Easton (2002) has commented that the two are 'very allusive and elusive characters who figure in [*David's Story*], only to slip out of the story'. Further, Easton continues, '[d]espite their fleeting presence in Wicomb's novel, both of these women, I would argue, are integral to a book that refuses to engage them wholeheartedly in its plot' (2002: 237). While I agree with Easton about these characters being integral to Wicomb's novel, my reading of the novel suggests an oblique engagement of the characters rather than a limitation. This 'refusal' is part of the plot's construction and Wicomb's hint at the failure of representation, rather than an unresolved anxiety. Although Bartmann must be written, she is evoked without the unwavering certainty in older colonial scripting – or even more recent celebration and biographies – of her.

In the same issue of *Kunapipi* as Easton, Margaret Daymond (2002) argues that *David's Story* confronts the politics of coloured identity within the larger texts of a nation in formation. For Daymond, the novel participates in a larger creative project which asks questions through coloured protagonists about belonging and self-identification. It is therefore an exploratory exercise into the terrain of belonging and location, especially for coloured subjectivities in an era where certainties have vanished. It is

also a questioning of whether this secure self-location is at all possible if the narratives of history, and race, and shame are ever-shifting.

That Sarah Bartmann and Krotoä are not portrayed in any detail save for their importance in understanding David's story testifies to the validity of Easton's argument. However, to the extent that Wicomb's reader is not allowed to forget their presence, through the various narrative techniques discussed below, it is inaccurate to characterise the novel as 'a book that refuses to engage them wholeheartedly in its plot'. Rather than a character, Bartmann assumes a ghostlike status in Wicomb's novel, in a move that has the novel folding in on itself as Wicomb's reader negotiates the intangible presence of Bartmann in the narrative. This is also part of the larger exercise of disaffection and subversion devices throughout the novel, such as the intrusive amanuensis, the messy periodisation, the irregular naming and the deferral of closure.

Although the novel is located in 1991, its relationship to key moments and subjects of earlier colonialism is explicit. It makes connections between past and current uncertainties in the terrain of identity. The 'as told to' structure of the novel echoes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave narratives from the Americas, and the references to Krotoä and Sarah Bartmann reinforce this connection. Yet, David is on the verge of the freedom he has dedicated his life to. Some of David's beginnings, he thus seems to insist, lie in slavery and colonialism. These origins also linger in multiple discursive and linguistic registers, and require meticulous and constant translation. It is not coincidental that Krotoä was a translator who spoke English and Dutch in addition to her mother tongue; or that Bartmann spoke English and Dutch, and had learnt some French by the time she died at the age of 28. The reader is invited to constantly translate first between the biographer and the protagonist and then also between tangible presences and implied ones. Nor is it accidental that both women are rendered homeless: one transported to another continent, and the other banished to an island off the coast of her homeland. They are both exiled,

and therefore separated from any sense of 'authentic' rooting through various tropes. A tale that begins with them, therefore, cannot be one with narrative certainty since this requires the very stability undermined by their inauthenticity and homelessness. What is required of the reader is constant mediation between the various worlds of meaning uncovered and re-covered in the pages of Wicomb's novel. Here, then, Wicomb's reader is invited to participate in the contact zone as theorised by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1999). This contact zone is 'a place where cultures met on unequal terms, the contact zone is now a space that is redefining itself, a space of multiplicity, exchange, renegotiation and discontinuities' (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 14). This space foregrounds the reality that 'languages articulate reality in different ways' (*The Guardian Education Pages* 12 March 2002: 13).¹¹

Inattentive to this, David's amanuensis is plagued by a divergent set of practical concerns. Given that there are numerous written texts on Bartmann, would it not make more sense to use a short cut and simply quote these here, she asks. What she cannot understand, an aspect Wicomb's reader may not miss, is that rooting his narrative with Bartmann has little to do with a linear historical chronology which she criticises him for 'bungling up'. Wicomb both suggests and subverts the importance of using Bartmann as historical referent to 'root' David's story as fictional narrative. Given how little certainty there is about Bartmann's life, she cannot provide firm anchorage in the past.

Having established Sarah Bartmann as starting point, although Wicomb proposes that Bartmann cannot anchor, there are a few more references to her in the text. All of these entail writings by David, or sketches, or a combination. Each time the amanuensis is stunned by their significance. They illustrate nothing for her, except the impossibility of excavating their relevance. *D/ David's Story* does not mention Sarah Bartmann again, apart from brief references to her on pages 33, and then again 134–135, or in any explicit manner. *D/ David's Story* is both the fictional narrative that

the character relates, and the larger novel that Wicomb writes. There is no new material except the constant assertion that she will not be inserted into this narrative in the usual way. Wicomb does not allow us to forget Bartmann, thereby choosing to engage in mnemonic script. At the same time she will not write (about) her in ways that mythologise or fix her. The challenges for a reader of this novel, perhaps in search of Sarah Bartmann but who doubtlessly has also read about this woman at great length, are to make sense of the ways in which Wicomb opts to engage with Bartmann's legacy and to represent her physical absence from the text. Clearly, to speak her name is to invoke more than associations with the concrete historical subject that Sarah Bartmann was; it is also to awaken a litany of images and narratives seen to be easily associated with her. As David reminds his biographer, '[t]here've always been other worlds; there always will be many, all struggling for survival' (Wicomb 2000: 197). The reader is to participate in the contact zone, 'for to interpret is no less than to act' (Wicomb 2000: 89).

When Wicomb writes a novel that begins with Sarah Bartmann but does not participate in the project through which she has been the subject and object of myth, the writer is in conversation with the literary and theoretical lives of Sarah Bartmann. Bartmann's treatment is not isolated, however, so Wicomb scripts a fictional world peopled with elusive Blackwomen characters who 'appear' subservient only to turn out as revolutionaries. Because Sarah Bartmann's specific resistance cannot be pigeonholed, it can be rendered imaginatively as the participation of various young women, Griqua and coloured, who are the backbone of the armed struggle in Wicomb's text. These coloured characters, who are linked to earlier Griqua women, are placed along a continuum with names that begin with Saartje, proceed to Sarah and end with Sally. At other times, they return to Saartje. They appear docile as they sit in the sun with their *swirlkouse*¹² but through Wicomb's pen they are invested with revolutionary subjectivity. Thus, what is often rebutted as signalling

aspirations towards whiteness is charged with the ability to function as mask, or disguise, for many of the coloured women characters in Wicomb's text. Thus, we are confronted with descriptions such as '[t]heir tilted, stockinged heads were those of guerrillas deliberating over an operation' (Wicomb 2000: 17). The preponderance of names like Saartje, Sarah and Sally as a continuum where the same character moves back and forth, again locate the most famous Saartje or Sarah within a context that normalises her, like Nichols's poem where the world reflects and centres 'the fat black woman'. The insertion, but not definitive description of these Saartje/Sally/Sarah figures' interiority, signals that their histories begin with and link indefinitely with Sarah Bartmann's and Krotoä's in as much as David's does. It prevents the location of the two Khoi women in a position where they simply illuminate another male narrative of insecurity.

Similarly, the activist Dulcie, whose name peppers the narrative because of her association with David's own activism, proves as elusive as Sarah Bartmann or Krotoä. Although her name finds its way into the various explanations and self-narrations offered by David, little is known about her at the end of the story. The amanuensis goes to great pains to extract specific details about her, but in the end she fails. Dulcie often appears shortly after the mention of Sarah Bartmann, or rather, after David's attempt to speak his anxiety more coherently about these women. This becomes quite important in light of the connections between Bartmann and Dulcie (September), both elusive women, one from the nineteenth century and the other from the twentieth.

Their separate and joint elusiveness, as well as their immersion in various narratives of masking and unmasking, and of narratives by Blackwomen, are significant pointers to multiple perspectives. Bartmann's resistance, like Dulcie's and that of the numerous coloured women who are guerrillas, points to the activity of alternate storying, and suggests the ever-presence of sublimated histories of struggle which reside in spaces

that do not easily give up meaning. Wicomb's project makes the imagining of these sites possible. Dulcie is central to David's life, yet few details about her are provided.

In Gail Smith's essay 'Fetching Sarah' (*Mail & Guardian* 12 May 2002), the author notes a rare moment of relaxation for those South African officials responsible for the particulars of Bartmann's repatriation. After Bartmann's coffin has been loaded onto a plane headed for South Africa, the deputy minister of Arts and Culture, Bridget Mabandla, reminisced about 'exile travel stories, and a rare moment of poignant remembering of Dulcie September, another great South African woman who had died a horrible death in Paris'. Dulcie September was assassinated by agents of the South African apartheid state on 29 March 1988, as she was opening the ANC office in Paris after collecting mail from the post office. A highly visible, if convoluted, gathering of information on possible assassins notwithstanding, nobody has ever been charged with her murder. Her death remains an object of speculation even with so much information at the French's disposal.

To the extent that Dulcie September's name is well known, it is she who is hinted at when the trajectory of varieties of Blackwomen, specifically coloured or Khoi, are unearthed in Wicomb's novel. Dulcie, the character, then suggests September, or others whose names are less known, to chart along with the numerous Sallys, Saartjies and Sarahs in Wicomb's narrative, varieties of participation in anti-colonial struggle. Wicomb's text charts a pattern of Blackwomen's participation, not the exceptional one that is registered in nationalist struggles.

It pays 'broad attention to voice, communication and agency [in ways that] enlarge conventional understandings of women's agency and transcend the "resistance" models that have often constrained understandings of women's roles as political and historical actors' (Lewis 2002: 1). It also charts continuities of agency, recognition, languaging, and blurring from slavery to now. In response to the challenge of how to develop a

representational idiom that homes varied Blackwomen, Wicomb and Smith respond differently, even if their preferred historical figures are similar.

D/*David's Story* invites us to question to what and whose ends stories work and, more specifically, to ask these questions in relation to the various discursive constructions of Sarah Bartmann. More importantly, Wicomb's novel bravely defies and resists closure. Unlike much of the writing on Bartmann, it at once acknowledges that she is more than object and/or icon, and refuses to make her a clear subject of the imagination. It is important that we remember her, but it is not necessary for us to have specific details projected or historically verified in order for this memory to work. Writing on her which does not recast her as a 'freak', reading her in ways that parade her as the ultimate icon of alterity, can only draw attention to the reality that we know nothing about her. Yet her presence continues to haunt us in Wicomb's text, as Zola Maseko says of Bartmann generally. He remarks that after finishing making his first film about her, the award-winning *The Life and Times of Sarah Baartman* (1998),¹³ 'I knew even then that this was not the end of the story ... Sarah's spirit and her soul continued to haunt us, to follow us, inspire us – she shouted for justice, and would not be ignored' (quoted in Setshwaelo 2002: n.p.).

REMEMBERING HOME

I have lived in so many places, I think I have forced myself to find home in smaller things.¹⁴

Making a home has become a critical instinct in all living creatures, and for humans who claim that they are above all other creatures in terms of intelligence and the ability to survive, home is the true marker of having arrived, of being there and having lived. (McFadden 1999: n.p.)

The above quotations seem to speak to two antagonistic impulses in the naming and definition of home spaces. In the longer citation, Patricia McFadden points to the sociability of home. It is that space which, although usually physical, bears the mark of relationship to human selfhood. This relationship to self is always marked in relation to other creatures, and is a stamp of humans' superiority over other living beings by the level of sophistication human abodes represent. Human homes are evidence of people's existence, and as such are of enormous importance. For Jessica Horn, home is mobile and more conducive to carrying within. It is not so much proof of having been here, or there, but a condition which responds to obligation or necessity. Like McFadden's, it is a relationship to the human self.

Both highlight the negotiated element of home, its choices, its locations and its necessity. Horn makes it smaller, but still needs to 'find home'; McFadden defines it as a 'critical instinct' at the same time as she underscores its social value. In both cases home is necessary.

Sitting in Holland in June 1998, Diana Ferrus wrote one of the most famous pieces on Sarah Bartmann. It might be more appropriate to describe it as a poem *to* her. In its very title, 'A Tribute to Sarah Bartmann', the poem unsettles expectation and marks itself as participating in an undertaking markedly different from many of those who have scripted Bartmann. A tribute is an acknowledgement, a mark of respect. It is the opposite of the degradation Sarah Bartmann endured in the last years of her life. However, the relationship Ferrus's persona details with Bartmann need not be mediated through colonialist and other related mythologisations of Bartmann. The poem is not a celebration of Sarah Bartmann. Instead, the persona is concerned with the comfort of Bartmann's inner workings, her emotional and psychic health. Bartmann is being taken home.

In an interview, Ferrus has noted how she came to write the poem, from a place of empathy:

I was doing a course that included a segment on sexuality in the colonies, so my mind went to Sarah Bartmann and how she was exploited ... But more than that, the really big thing was how acutely homesick I was. ... My heart went out to Sarah, and I thought, 'Oh, God, she died of heartbreak. She longed for her country. What did she feel?' That's why the first line of the poem was I've come to take you home. (in Setshwaelo 2002)

Further, Ferrus's refrain 'I have come to take you home' (l. 1, rpt. as 24 and 29), and the title under which she was to later publish the poem, addresses Bartmann directly as one who has a home. Taking her home is a gesture of intense emotional saliency. The meanings which attach to home challenge the status of Sarah Bartmann as object, positioning her instead as a loved one. Home is a place of particular importance for the exiled and enslaved. It is a space which provides the possibilities of belonging, of acceptance and special significance. The love suggested in the act is further intensified given the specific meanings which attach to the act of taking her home. Taking somebody home is always an intimate act of rescue given that only specific people can participate. Ferrus's interview underscores this when she speaks of the possibility of dying from heartbreak when the possibility of going home is taken away.

The late Edward W. Said (2000), who has written movingly about exile and the condition of homelessness in great detail, called it the feeling of being 'out of place', the title of his memoir. When Ferrus's persona offers to take Sarah Bartmann home, it is a declaration of immense affection and connection.

I have come to take you home –
Home! Remember the veld?
The lush green grass beneath the big oak trees?
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,

WHAT IS SLAVERY TO ME?

your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,
the proteas stand in yellow and white
and the water in the stream chuckles sing-songs
as it hobbles over little stones. (ll. 1–9)

The tone of the poem, which stresses relationship, intensifies the link between the speaker and the addressee. The memory of home is one that is shared, gesturing to a common past. Ferrus's character is a historic projection who has ensured that upon her return home, Sarah Bartmann will be comfortable. Home is more than the physical dwelling inside which people live here. It represents the familiar which brings peace. The evocation of proteas, mint and buchu, along with the use of 'veld', clarifies where this home is located geographically. However, it also captures the presence of smells, tastes and other feelings which do not correspond to how Bartmann feels in exile. These familiar things are also put in the position of being desired because they represent, and are from, home. The memory that is evoked and stressed is one of familiarity through which Bartmann knows how to shelter herself from the elements. It is one that entails Bartmann's freedom to roam about in the veld, unlike her enslaved position in Europe. Home offers pleasures by way of beautiful proteas to behold, and musical water flowing over little stones. Home is a site of pleasure and ease.

Further, the speaker is also committed to the project of restoring Bartmann to herself, which is to say, bringing her home. Because home is a place that one voluntarily goes to, the fetching marks the event as somewhat urgent, bearing as it does strong overtones of rescue. The emotional prominence of home is further complicated as the persona imbues it with additional layers of meaning.

Home is signalled here by everything that the addressee's current location is not. Home has buchu to soothe the effects of the humiliation from being displayed, to counteract her objectification as slave, freak,

specimen and her dissection for further examination after her death. Home in Ferrus's poem has open spaces ('veld') and protection ('shade'), which are a contrast to the confinement of Bartmann in Europe. She is not peered and poked at there. The proteas, too, which are missing from the Europe she remained enslaved in, represent something particular to home. The speaker appeals to an emotional memory as well as a memory of the senses. Home is cool, and she can lie in the shade unexposed. She can see the breadth of the veld, and the colours of the proteas. It is her eyes, and the eyes of the persona from her home, that are privileged here. The smell of buchu and mint, as well as their healing possibilities, are also foregrounded. To complete the image of home, Ferrus offers the playful sounds of water flowing freely and singing.

In the writings of late eighteenth-century Europe, in various public debates and court cases, it became clear that colonialism was being explained in a variety of intertwined ways. First, the colonised space 'tempted' the coloniser to subordinate it, and the very difference offered and embodied by the territory and peoples invaded 'propelled' the colonising mission into a justification of an increasing spiral of violence in an effort to make it knowable, and thereby controllable (Kitson 1998). Within this violent regime of knowing, or making knowable, was the body of the slave or colonised. Clearly, then, this was a quest which had no illusions about the coupling of material and epistemic violence. To be known, the colonised and enslaved had to be brutalised, and their home fundamentally altered. Further, this violation of the subjected was an integral part of the coloniser's own self-definition and constitution as ultimate power, and exclusively authoritative (Kitson 1998). This pattern inevitably affects the ways in which (previously) colonised subjects then interact with each other, which is not to argue that the colonised/enslaved is defined wholly by the experience of having being brutalised.

It is important that Ferrus offers descriptions of the landscape as part of her reminder to Bartmann's imagined self, since part of the

alienation of colonialism is the separation of the 'native' from her land. In Bartmann's case, as well as that of many other slaves, it is displacement from this home. It was important, as the Dutch became Afrikaners, that the same land(scape) be emptied of its indigenous occupants. One of the consequences of this pertains, more recently, to the paucity of landscape in Black South African literature written in English, as opposed to its centrality in the Afrikaner novel, especially the *plaasroman* (farm novel) (see Coetzee 1988). For the speaker who intends to take Bartmann home, to position herself as having access to this land in order to be able to prepare it for Bartmann's return charts a different location to land in the literary imagination. Part of her return, part of the mutual exchange of peace, has to do with being at home and having part of one's humanity restored.

Wicomb leaves her reader with an elusive Sarah Bartmann, who will not be represented fully by either the amanuensis of David's story or the author of *David's Story*. For Wicomb, Bartmann is an important memory but she may not be a character. Ferrus allows her persona anger and gentleness depending on who is being addressed. Bartmann is the rescued beloved, verbally soothed and physically transported. Because of how she is addressed, we assume commonplace feelings and experiences for the addressed Bartmann. The simplicity of this move serves to highlight the utter brutality of the systems that put Bartmann on display.

When Wicomb resists showing Bartmann as knowable, and Ferrus speaks to a Sarah Bartmann whose interiority is privileged, this stems from a refusal by both writers to describe Bartmann, to offer her as a known and knowable subject. It is enough that she is human, and to explore the obvious things that accompany that recognition.

For Ferrus, this means that she must have experienced emotions, felt sensations, and recognised the humiliation she was subjected to. It also is obvious that she must have resisted it. Wicomb casts her as impossible to know, a condition of full humanity. Both texts participate in a new politics

of representation, crafting new languages through which to speak to the creative imagination at hand. This is based on the recognition that:

[o]ne difficulty with the assumption that language can be overturned in favour of an entirely new lexicon and world outlook is the problematic assumption that words and their meanings can be neatly separated from a globalised cultural repertoire pervasively underwritten by centuries of western discursive dominance. (Lewis 2002: 3)

Ferrus's third stanza further challenges conventional representations of Sarah Bartmann by showing her as one who is loveable, desirable and aesthetically pleasing. Line 20's 'I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you' highlights a different way of looking at Bartmann than fills the volumes penned about her in the last 200 years. Here again Ferrus's project intersects with Wicomb's who, without specific reference to Bartmann each time, nonetheless installs the image of *steatopygia* as normal for all the women in her novel, and later points to its valuation in another context as beautiful. It is also a location which welcomes her, like the world of Nichols's poem. It is a worldview which is not hostile to Bartmann; a home. All four feminist writers examined here choose not to reinscribe Sarah Bartmann's discursive hyper-corporeality; at the same time, they do not pretend that she is without a body. She is not invisible physically or metaphorically; but in the imagination of feminists of the African world, her body is like many others: recognisable, and therefore not the focus of their attention.

The saliency of 'fetching' her finds further emphasis in Gail Smith's account of participating in the ceremonies in France and South Africa leading up to Sarah Bartmann's burial. A member of the team responsible for repatriating Sarah Bartmann's remains for burial, and the scriptwriter on a second Sarah Bartmann collaboration with Zola Maseko, Smith's speaker also echoes Ferrus's more figurative home-bringing. The act of

‘fetching’ signifies more than mere collection. One fetches things and people one claims ownership of. Additionally, to fetch somebody suggests that you will ultimately return home with that person. This is why for Smith’s narrating voice the act of fetching is linked so closely to the ability to claim Bartmann back.

Like Ferrus’s speaker’s tone in the second stanza, ‘I have come to wrench you away’ (l.10), there is indignation in Smith’s piece at the degradation Bartmann had to suffer. Smith acidly lashes at the celebrated anatomists who took pleasure in such depravity. However, she is unsurprised by the rise of right-wing sentiment in present-day France because events in history are linked. Thus, her troubled stance as she recognises the pattern is exacerbated by the surprise she finds expressed in the French media. There are no shocks for her in the politics of contemporary France, with the threat of Le Pen taking leadership as she writes.¹⁵ Historical narrative is portrayed as a series of links rather than sporadic moments. All pasts are linked, whether the commentary is on South Africa then and now, or the various events in France.

In respect to Smith’s continuum and her critique of forgetfulness that is at the heart of both Bartmann’s twentieth-century treatment as well as the ‘surprise’ of Le Pen’s rise, it is as Barnor Hesse (2002: 165) argues:

In postcolonial memory it is the memory of present predicaments that recalls the dislocation of the past. In the ethics of postcolonial memory, remembering slavery can no more be experienced than generations of racism can be experienced. It is less a structure of feeling than a passionate intervention. The *oughtness* of Atlantic slavery’s memory and the justness of its excavation reside in refusing to efface through forgetfulness and historical complicity and contemporary failures of Western liberal democracies. It is this which foregrounds the passage from ethics to politics, rather than the reverse.

Such links are not just important at a temporal level, since there are clear connections between Smith's speaker, Sarah Bartmann's spirit, Dulcie September and Bridget Mabandla. Consequently, *Le Pen*, the exhibition of Bartmann and the lies which aimed to keep her remains in the Musée de l'Homme are not unconnected. They occupy moments apart in time, but are all part of the same logic.

Thus, while Ferrus and Smith are in different turns angered and softened by the same historic characters, their approaches are poles apart. Smith crafts a dual persona: pacey, intellectual and assertive on the one hand, and emotionally wrought, spiritual and gentle on the other. Where Ferrus's speaker offers passing insult to Cuvier *et al.*, Smith's persona offers intelligent critique that argues, like Patricia Williams, that history is a hovering presence that shapes current experiences of selfhood. Smith focuses on Bartmann by dedicating the bulk of her narrative on reflections on just how Bartmann retains significance.

Clearly comfortable in intellectual terrain, her 'earth self' persona turns the tables on Cuvier, the French and other Europeans, according shame to them as they become the subjects of her scorn and mockery. It is inconceivable to her split personality that a celebrated scientific pioneer left such gaps in his investigations, so Cuvier is seen as sloppy in addition to whatever else he was.

Gail Smith's essay, unlike Wicomb's and Ferrus's texts, was written after Bartmann's return, reflecting on the process of fetching her from Paris. Wicomb's novel was finished long before and published prior to Bartmann's return. Although Ferrus's poem would eventually 'bring about' the return of Bartmann, to do this it had to be written long before the actual event. Ferrus's tribute, then, is in some respects prophetic.

Smith eschews the distance prized by conventional malestream academia between the knowledge-maker and the subject, or 'object', of her text. As feminist academic turned journalist, Smith's speaker is unapologetic about her evaluation of historic projects that seem obviously connected to

her. She is equally confident in not only combining the ostensibly separate realms of the intellectual and spiritual, but also fuses journalistic and fictional aspects in the presentation of her narrating voice.

Named as split personality, but at home in various realms, and confident enough in the knowledge sphere to deliver judgement on both spiritual/moral (Cuvier's and lying director's shame) grounds and on an intellectual basis, Smith's narrator points to Cuvier's sloppy investigation and the French's failure to see obvious connections.

Fetching is an emotional act of bringing back, clear enough when Smith's narrator comments, 'My spirit self was reclaiming an ancestor', making Bartmann part of her past, and herself (like David in Wicomb's novel) part of Bartmann's future. The narrator positions herself in relation to Sarah Bartmann as more than object, as someone whose relationship to her is circumscribed by a subjective history. No pretence at objectivity is made by either speaking personality. Such feminist self-positioning is poles apart from the allegedly objective, unemotional treatment which saw Bartmann treated so violently and degradingly. Smith's speaker does not shy away from the contradictions that this poses but rather acknowledges the split between the self who is claiming an ancestor and the other one, the 'earth self', making a film about the return of Sarah Bartmann. There is no need to mask such a conflict, and Smith's narrating voice makes no attempt at this. This is not a tale that this African feminist chooses to tell from a distance, coldly. Bartmann's life and hers are influenced by similar discourses, even if not to the same extent.

Reading Smith against Helen Thomas's (2000) theorisation of African metaphysics often evoked in slave literature adds another layer to Smith's choice of splitting voice, as well as its links to an ancestral spirit in the guise of Bartmann. Thomas (2000: 12) notes:

[w]hereas Western subjectivism posits the subject as a self-sufficient, relatively 'free' egocentric agent, African metaphysics and philosophy

offer a communicentric view of the subject, whose status is affirmed via the cultivation of contacts and exchanges with others. Within such an existential framework, therefore, 'death' does not destroy the tissue of human possibilities and aspirations but rather confers personal immortality and continued existence via generations of descendants and ancestors, the guardians of the community. Differences such as these can perhaps serve to register the counter-discourses to Western subjectivism, colonial expansionism and imperial historical frameworks.

Against this backdrop, Smith's stylistic choices at the same time invoke a different meaning-making system from that which objectified and killed Bartmann. Further emphasising the networks of meaning, Sylvia Tamale has underlined that 'no African woman can shield herself from the broad negative and gendered legacies left behind by forces such as colonialism, imperialism and globalisation' (2002: 7). Given this recognition, it is possible to see contemporary lives as being shaped by the histories which so demonised Bartmann, to the same extent that the French cannot be free of histories of men like Cuvier. This is how Smith's concept of shame works: it is the brutalisers, in the legacy of Cuvier and the other curators at the Musée de l'Homme, who lied about having lost Bartmann's skeleton, genitalia and brains, who should be ashamed. More importantly, Smith can place such shame on the doorstep on which it belongs.

The angry self who can allocate the shame to those who displayed Bartmann, rather than to Bartmann herself, has a different kind of engagement with the ancestor she fetches from Paris. The observer is introduced as one who is split from the onset, one who is divided, torn by the project she has in front of her. Her ambivalence underlines the intimacy and connection between her two selves. The split-spirit persona that Smith constructs disavows the objective distance that is valued by science and, later in her piece, she points to some of the reasons why this

is both important and possible. Her stance is different from that of Cuvier, who felt greatly honoured to present Sarah Bartmann's corpse after he had dissected her. Expressing his pleasure, Cuvier could write 'I had the honor of presenting to the Academy, the genital organs of this woman, prepared in such a way, that leaves no doubt on the nature of her apron' (1817: 266).

Encountered with Bartmann's separate body parts, her skeleton and her bottled remains, Smith (2002: 1) comments:

[s]even years of research, discussion and fascination with Sarah Baartman did not prepare me for the face-to-face meeting with her. Or rather the disembodied bits and pieces deemed crucial for scientific research by the scientists who were 'auspiciously' entrusted with her remains just hours after her death, and who wasted no time getting to the heart of the matter: making a cast of her body, dissecting it, and preserving her brain and genitals.

While she has been fascinated with Bartmann, this means something quite different from Cuvier's absorption. Smith later recounts how 'unremarkable' the bottles containing Bartmann's body parts are to her, and wonders about 'what treasures of scientific discovery they could possibly have yielded': her eyes are unlike Cuvier's because perspective and location are everything. Unlike Cuvier *et al.*, she reflects on the implications on trying to ascertain something spectacular in the parts of Bartmann's body that lie pickled in the jars. Repulsed by responding in a manner that may be seen to mirror Cuvier's, she remarks that she stopped trying to ascertain what was so remarkable about Bartmann's brain and genitals.

It is not only Smith's self-positioning in relation to Sarah Bartmann that is remarkable, however. The essayist is equally struck by the contexts within which she was kept at the Musée de l'Homme. Walking through the Musée de l'Homme, Smith is struck by the many bodies meticulously

catalogued in the name of science. The neatness of the cataloguing system leaves her 'horrified', 'appalled' and 'disgusted' by the rows of cupboards, each with a page that 'listed the contents ... skeletons, skulls and other bits of indigenous people from every corner of the earth, but mostly Africa, North & South America' (Smith 2002: 2).

The catalogued bodies are 'France's colonial shame' (Smith 2002: 2) and Smith speculates about the 'shame-faced' officials who were caught in a lie about the whereabouts of Sarah Bartmann's remains. In addition, she muses, 'the French are both proud and ashamed to be in possession of what is the biggest collection of human remains in the world' (Smith 2002: 2). The shame is larger than that, however, as she now turns her ire on Cuvier as indictment of the kind of society and epistemic violence that he was part of:

Georges Cuvier was not just any old scientist. He was the best of the best, a respected surgeon who counted Napoleon amongst his patients, and a man obsessed with human anatomy and the secrets it held about different races. He apparently did not believe in evolution, and was more of a liberal racist who believed in the abolition of slaves. He also wasn't too interested in actually going to far-flung lands inhabited by fascinating fauna, flora and savages. He preferred to stay at the Jardin de Plante and have the specimens come to him. (Smith 2002: 3)

The science of Cuvier that legitimates a feeling of honour at the display and dissection of human beings and animals contrasts with the spirit Smith speaks about: both her own that comes to claim an ancestor and make a film about the return, as well as Sarah Bartmann's own which must have 'cried out again and again to be taken home, and her cries have reverberated through the centuries, and her name has lived on' (2002: 3). In Ferrus's poem, 'the ancient mountains shout [Bartmann's] name'.

Although the cries are in anguish in both texts, they point in different directions. Ferrus's poem has a landscape calling out to one of its own. Smith's Bartmann has an unbroken spirit that would not be silenced until she was put back in her place.

Cuvier is honoured with an avenue named after him next to the Jardin des Plantes. What is more, the contrast in which the two people's lives were cast when alive was only to come to an end when Sarah Bartmann was taken home. Until then, as Smith (2002: 4) says:

Cuvier is buried in the famous Parisian cemetery, Père Lechaise, as is Jim Morrison, Sarah Bernhardt, Colette and other historic figures. Sarah Baartman's remains lived in case #33 in the Musée, and later in the parts of the museum still dedicated to anthropology and research and which the millions who cross its doors never see.

This process also illuminates the lies which the director of the museum, Andre Langenay, had manufactured, and which are recorded in the earlier film by the same Smith and Maseko team, about how Sarah Bartmann's remains had been destroyed in a fire long before he was employed by the institution. About this incident, Smith (2002: 2) remarks mockingly in retrospect:

Sarah Baartman was not simply a powerful symbol of scientific racism, but she clearly has magical powers. She could bring her own genitals and force the modern day representatives of the men who dissected her into a shame-faced apology at being caught out in a very public lie.

Linked to those who ensured Bartmann's ongoing degradation, Langenay is now the shamed one, exposed on camera by one of Bartmann's own, in a reversal of fortunes. The spirit Smith invokes as part of her essay

is diametrically opposed to the hierarchies in European science of the nineteenth century. It also offers a reading of the contradictions of Europe at the time. One of the centres of contention which made slavery impossible to justify for the abolitionists related to the spiritual ability of Africans (Thomas 2000). While enslavers classified Africans in their capture as property, thereby objectifying them, Smith stresses how powerful Bartmann's spirit must have been to survive resolute for two centuries.

Smith's speaker makes connections between the logic of lies at the French scientists', curators' and directors' words. She deconstructs their privileged claims to knowledge, setting these up against the more complex creative and spiritual histories. She and Bartmann have spirits that find expression in ways that need no forced or linear narrative of lies. Interestingly, in her choice of language, Smith rejects the Eurandrocentric violent heritage of lies, taking risks instead with complexity that cannot be flattened out as her own voice splits and Sarah Bartmann works her magic from beyond the grave.

TURNING THE CIRCLE

Representations of Sarah Bartmann have incensed feminists of colour the world over due to the manner in which she has been instrumentalised as part of inscribing Blackwomen's bodies in white supremacist colonial culture as oversexualised, deviant and spectacular. In her 'Thoughts Drifting through the Fat Black Woman's Head while Having a Full Bubble Bath', an extract from which opened this chapter, Grace Nichols reclaims and subverts dominant representations of African women's bodies. Her speaking subject lies in her bath, thinking about a world that reflects her interestingly rather than oppressively. It is with anger that the bathing 'fat black woman' responds both to the multiple sites of this inscription, and to the combined authority they continue to exert. Lying in the bath, she allows for the possibility of enjoying her own body, her own mind, of being more than she is to the white supremacist capitalist epistemic systems that

she must continue to endure. These epistemic systems continue to exert power over her. Importantly, she links her positioning as a contemporary Blackwoman to the historical constructions of that subject category, whether these take the form of anthropological discourse, historiography, theology or the diet industry.

Nichols's narrator locates her reality in tandem with the violence with which Sarah Bartmann was inscribed. Like Smith, Nichols refuses to pretend that the volumes penned to make sense of Blackwomen's bodies are removed from her own persona's lived experience. The vision her speaker immerses herself in, like the full bubble bath, is a fantasy that she needs to create for herself, where steatopygia is the norm and where the world reflects her. It is not a distant reality, but one which intersects in a variety of ways with her lived experience.

Wicomb's text asserts the necessity of historicising Bartmann and Krotoä, which is to say, the need to make them human, and at the same time demonstrates that this project of representation and historicisation is not one which offers wholeness or closure. Indeed, Wicomb's text both structurally and metaphorically resists offering definitive answers, or seeking refuge in explanatory narrative. Yvette Abrahams (1997: 45) points out that:

Dismembered, isolated, decontextualised – the body in the glass case epitomises the way white men were trying to see Khoisan women at the time, as unresisting objects open to exploitation. ... After reams of measurements and autopsy notes, we do not know the simplest thing about Sarah Bartman. We do not know how she laughed, her favourite flowers or even whom she prayed to. We cannot even know with certainty how she looked.

Later, Gail Smith (2002: 3) would write:

Very little is known of Baartman's experience in Paris. No one can say for sure where she lived, if she had friends, what she took for menstrual cramps, what she thought of French food, or the cold.

Given the many years both writers spent researching the history of Sarah Bartmann, combing the archives for any information about her, the manner in which their declarations rhyme in this respect is staggering. This shared frustration points to how Sarah Bartmann remains an icon put to the use of various systems of logic. Given the near total absence of information about her person, (how then) is she representable? And what available tropes are there for this representation in ways unlike those systems that mythologise her? Wicomb chooses to weave traces of Bartmann's ghost into her novel, never allowing her to be a (knowable) character. In this way she ensures that Bartmann is seen as relevant to the larger picture in a myriad of ways. Similarly, that Bartmann is found in echoes throughout Wicomb's text highlights the difficulty of representing her in refreshing ways. Wicomb's novel, like Smith's essay and Nichols's and Ferrus's remarkable poems, partakes in the larger ideological project of *remembering, connecting, contextualising* Bartmann and Krotoä. Aesthetically, this is achieved very differently by the four writers. For Smith, Sarah Bartmann's history is linked to her own, and it is not one from which the writer feigns emotional distance. It is linked to Dulcie September's. Equally, it intersects with the struggles over identity and self-positioning which accompany the readings of Blackwomen's bodies in ways that trap them/us in discourses of hypersexualisation. Smith's connection and contextualisation brazenly deconstructs the circulation of 'white supremacist, Eurocentric beliefs about knowledge and its production' which perpetuates 'practices that invisibilise black women' (Matlanyane Sexwale 1994: 65).

The writers here examined suggest that there is necessarily a variety of lenses brought to bear on representing Blackwoman subjectivities,

and also that these are linked to Bartmann as one of the women most conspicuously subjected to the violence of this gaze. Smith (2002: 4) points to the same when she notes, towards the end of her piece:

I wept for Sarah Bartmann, I wept for every black woman degraded and humiliated by men obsessed by the hidden secrets they carry between their legs. And I wept for every brown South African reduced, degraded and humiliated by being called 'Hotnot' and 'Amaboesman'. I also wept tears of joy, and gratitude, that I had been chosen to witness a brief and victorious moment in history.

This relationality is important for Smith's text. Without it, the humanising project cannot be complete. Part of the objectification of people has historically involved denying them spatial and temporal context. To treat Bartmann as ahistorical, or as an interesting floating symbol, is to use her in the same manner as the theoretical impulse Magubane critiques. For the projects above, it bears noting that 'all representation and knowledge production are mediated, and that feminist research and practice, if it is not to betray its progressive thrust, is always relational and partial' (Lewis 2002: 7).

The historicisation of Bartmann that Magubane urges is an urgent matter; one which, after her, must go beyond the usual disclaimers about the constructedness of all identity, and which requires that Bartmann be located within a context in which her enslavement was possible, and her display, dissection and caging were celebrated in the name of science. It requires that she not be placed outside history, but embedded in the histories of colonialism, slavery, apartheid and other ongoing systems which stem from this history of racist terror. After all, what made her humiliation possible is not exceptional, as Smith reminds us. It was part of the widespread belief and academic knowledge-making to justify the inferiority of Africans, and the ultimate superiority of Europeans.¹⁶ Its

consequences continue to plague the contemporary moment, a factor that Smith's essay will not let us lose sight of.

Homi Bhabha (1994: 31) writes:

The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment. ... The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. However impeccably the content of an 'other' culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is ... the demand that ... it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination.

In these texts, Sarah Bartmann does not remain the 'docile body of difference'. She is not the icon of alterity that Magubane so skilfully critiques, but appears as self-loving in Nichols, rescued by Ferrus, mischievously stubborn in Smith's essay and indefinable in Wicomb's novel. The main question all of these texts address is the difficulty in speaking about how Blackwomen's subjectivity is constituted.

The literary texts here discussed unsettle the Eurandrocentric perspective as norm by imaginatively illustrating the inescapable marrying of perspective and discursive construction. Thus, the logic and aesthetics of colonial valuation, biased in the interest of white supremacist patriarchy, are unravelled in the refusal of linear narrative strategies (timelines). Collectively, these historic feminist texts offer a revision of prevalent literary representations of the past. Bartmann is not used as illustration for some alternative ideology. Rather, her narrative is engaged with in ways that are irredeemably contaminated by her past of violation. For David, then, whose story starts with Bartmann, it is an elusive beginning; his story is incomplete, non-linear and bungling. It is not a history that resides somewhere, which can be accessed with relative certainty and

reliability. Similarly, Smith's essay and Ferrus's poem point to some of the difficulties of engaging in and with this history, but offer very different solutions.

All writers analysed here gesture to what is not knowable, invite us readers to 'wrestle with ways of unifying concepts which [we] had come to believe were polarised opposites, or could be placed into neat hierarchies, such as is the case with speech/silence' (Motsemme 2004: 4). What has emerged is the manner in which representing Sarah Bartmann within the African feminist imagination moves far beyond drawing attention to history's silences about her. All literary texts analysed in this chapter suggest that rather than speaking about her obliquely, it is possible to gesture to Sarah Bartmann's absent presence, and to contextualise and humanise her imaginatively:

creating spaces which facilitate the telling of ... stories as connected as possible to [our own African feminist] centres of meaning, then we will have to take the risk of leaping into places which have become unfamiliar to many of us fed on the restricted diet of the power of articulation and the text. (Motsemme 2004: 5)

In other words, they move beyond writing back to older traditions. Instead, they uncover and discover the textures of crafting 'epicentres of our agency', suggesting that relying on the same recycled motifs is intellectual and creative laziness. Widely varied in style, tone and register choices, these writers illustrate the vast possibilities available to imagining historic subjects as human without focusing on their bodies as their sole point of reference.

