

Replenishing and Recycling an Exhausted History in Lydia R. Diamond's *Voyeurs de Venus*

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Summary

In this article, I offer an analysis of Lydia R. Diamond's *Voyeurs de Venus* and argue that the replenishment of Saartjie Baartman's hijstory by Diamond can provide alternative perspectives to that exhausted piece of hijstory. In my analysis, I explore the ways that Diamond uses to flashlight the dark and unknown areas in the life of this historical figure. I demonstrate how the repetition and revision of that hijstory links the present to the past and helps the playwright to make a comparison between the status of black women at different eras and areas. Since the play draws upon a strong feminist potential to interrogate the intersectional concerns of race, sex, class and gender, I also approach the play from the standpoints of intersectionality. I argue that the intersections of race, sex, class and gender have five outcomes or "Penta Ps," namely the *promotion* of white male scientists and white race, the *privilege* of whiteness, the *perversion* of the black female body, culture and race, the *profit* of white masters, and the *pleasure* of white male spectators and owners.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel bied ek 'n ontleding van *Voyeurs de Venus* deur Lydia R. Diamond. Ek voer aan dat Diamond se aanvulling van Saartjie Baartman se geskiedenis alternatiewe perspektiewe op daardie holrug geryde stuk geskiedenis kan bied. In my ontleding ondersoek ek die maniere wat Diamond gebruik om die donker en onbekende areas in die lewe van hierdie historiese figuur te belig. Ek toon hoe die herhaling en hersiening van daardie geskiedenis 'n verband tussen die hede en die verlede lê, en hoe dit die dramaturg help om die status van swart vroue in verskillende eras en areas te vergelyk. Die drama gebruik 'n sterk feministiese potensiaal om die kruisende belange van ras, geslag, stand en gender te ondersoek, dus benader ek dit ook vanuit die standpunte van oorkruising (*intersectionality*). Ek voer aan dat die oorkruising van ras, geslag, stand en gender vyf uitkomstes (*Penta Ps*) het, naamlik die bevordering (*promotion*) van wit manlike wetenskaplikes en die wit ras, die bevoorregting (*privilege*) van witheid, die perversie (*perversion*) van die swart vrou se liggaam, kultuur en ras, die profyt (*profit*) van wit base, en die *genot* (*pleasure*) van wit manlike toeskouers en eienaars.

Introduction

Lydia R. Diamond's *Voyeurs de Venus*, which appeared on stage in America in 2006, replenishes an exhausted hi|story. The play, which rehistoricises some parts of the hi|story of Saartjie Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, shows that "the life and times of the 'Hottentot Venus' continues to captivate scholars, poets and artists" and her "specter continues to haunt us" (Miranda & Spencer 2009: 910-911). Accordingly, a number of writers, captivated by Baartman, have rehistoricised her hi|story, including the South African poet Stephen Gray, who published a collection of poems, entitled *Hottentot Venus and Other Poems* (1979), and the British writer Angela Carter, who wrote a short story, entitled "Black Venus" (1985). In addition, the American poet Elizabeth Alexander has a poem, entitled "The Venus Hottentot" (1990), and the American poet and novelist Barbara Chase-Riboud has published a novel, entitled *Hottentot Venus* (2003). Suzan-Lori Parks, the African American contemporary playwright, has also revisited Baartman's hi|story in her play *Venus* in 1995. These authors' efforts to rewrite Baartman's hi|story might have exhausted that piece of hi|story; however, due to their different perspectives, each effort has indeed replenished some of the holes, which still exist in that piece of hi|story.

In what follows, I offer an analysis of Diamond's play and argue that the replenishment of Baartman's hi|story by Diamond can provide alternative perspectives to that exhausted hi|story. In my analysis, I explore the ways that Diamond uses to flashlight the dark and unknown areas in the life of this historical figure. I demonstrate how the repetition and revision of that hi|story links the present to the past and helps the playwright to make a comparison between the status of black women at different eras and areas. Since the play draws upon a strong feminist potential to interrogate the intersectional concerns of race, sex, class and gender, I also approach the play from the standpoints of intersectionality. I argue that the intersections of race, sex, class and gender have five outcomes or "Penta Ps," namely the *promotion* of white male scientists and white race, the *privilege* of whiteness, the *perversion* of the black female body, culture and race, the *profit* of white masters, and the *pleasure* of white male spectators and owners.

The Past is not Past

Voyeurs de Venus replays Baartman's hi|story to link the present to the past and compare the past and present conditions of women of African descent in the 19th and 21st centuries. In addition, replaying Baartman's hi|story enables Diamond to replenish some of the rifts, which after all exist in Baartman's hi|story based on her own mindset. As Brian McHale notes, some historical fictions "treat the interior life of historical figures as dark areas – logically

enough, since the ‘official’ historical record cannot report on what went on *inside* a historical figure without fictionalizing to some extent” (McHale 1987: 87 original emphasis). Through fictionalising hi|story, Diamond attempts to recreate some of the private moments and illuminate dark areas that still exist in Baartman’s life. Seen in this light, “the re-writing of history is therefore an endless task” (Trinh 1989: 84). This way, Diamond engages herself in the endless task of replenishing and recycling Baartman’s history to restore Baartman’s voice and words in the context of history, which can question the official historical record, written on Baartman’s behalf.

To restore Baartman’s voice and words, Diamond employs Sara Washington, a black cultural anthropologist, a tenured university professor and a prolific writer in the 21st century. In some parts of the play, Sara, who is haunted by Saartjie, finds the opportunity to speak to Saartjie. In Act 1, Scene 13, for example, the stage direction reads: “*The present. Sara and Bradsford in the living room. Saartjie sits on couch as Sara works*” (Diamond 313 italics in original), and in the next Scene, it reads, “*Lights rise on Sara, working in her office. Saartjie joins her*” (Diamond 314 italics in original). This simultaneity provides the ground for Sara to have Saartjie read and comment on some of the pages that she has just finished writing. Diamond highlights Saartjie’s comments through using a vernacular language. As Saartjie comments, “Eet was a beeeeg sheep. The beeeeggest I haf ever seen weeeth my own eyes. She bobbed up and down een the water like the great mother sun deescending from the heavens at the end of another day” (314). In addition, this simultaneity enables Sara to ask her questions from Saartjie about the points that are still vague in her history:

Sara: I’ve been studying you for months and every account gives a different version. You were twenty, you were twenty-three, you died of syphilis, you died of smallpox, you drank yourself to death.

Saartjie: Either way.

(306)

I argue that Saartjie’s comments and answers help Sara to collect further information about this historical event. However, in some cases, like the example above, Sara fails to receive clear answers from Saartjie.

The combination of fictional and historiographic elements in *Voyeurs de Venus* makes the play another pseudo-historical representation of Baartman’s hi|story. As Sara says, “We know that history is largely fabrication” (295). Likewise, after reading Sara’s manuscript, Carl Richards, a publisher interested in Baartman’s hi|story, notes, “That’s *well-written* historical documentation” to which Sara retorts, “That’s *historical fiction*,” signifying that there are some layers of fictionality in every history recorded (303 emphases added). Additionally, as Sara informs Bradsford, her husband, James Booker “wants [the book to be] more graphic, and Carl says it’s not romantic enough. Graphic I guess do, but romantic,” and Bradsford suggests

Sara to add “a little courtship before [Saartjie’s] raping” (316). To make the story more appealing to readers and earn more profits, Booker and Carl urge Sara to manipulate Saartjie’s hi|story. Such self-referentiality shows that history and its writing can be affected by different forces and factors for the pleasure and profit of different persons and parties.

The use of self-reflexivity in *Voyeurs de Venus* also unfolds the artificiality of Diamond’s own work. For example, Sara admits, “I write books and papers on the fluff that lives around the edges and sometimes threatens the meat of our existence. And I legitimize my observations by assigning a historical context” (299). Sara’s statement shows that she resorts to historical contexts to validate her own personal views. The quote not only unmasks the fictionality of Sara’s version of Baartman’s hi|story but also increases incredulity toward the authenticity of historical texts, which are human-constructed discourses and are affected by man’s limitations, biases, interests, etc. Although Sara voices her own limitations to rewrite Baartman’s hi|story, Booker retorts that this is “a *story* the world needs to know” (304 italics added). Here, in a self-reflexive mode, Booker acknowledges that what Sara writes is a story or rather history, and Sara, who was still reluctant to rewrite that piece of hi|story, replies that what she is forced to write is “the same *story*” that has been written “over and over again” (341 italics added). Here, Diamond clearly certifies that her play is not original but is a recycled version of an exhausted piece of hi|story.

I argue that Diamond’s effort to recycle Baartman’s hi|story signifies “double-coding” wherein some links are established between the present and the past through combining new styles with old ones in a construction. When applying this definition to Diamond’s *Voyeurs de Venus*, at first we feel that it would be an exhausted work; however, after going through it, we learn that Diamond has renewed her play with her own creativity and imagination. According to Carlos A. Miranda and Suzette A. Spencer, “the process of reclaiming involves invention, supplementarity, and (re)investing ... the subjugated body not as a site of re-presentation but as a site to question” (Miranda & Spencer 2009: 913). Diamond’s invention and supplementarity result in the creation of an alternative narrative, which would have some differences with other narratives, written on Baartman. The multiplicity of narratives on Baartman draws our attention to the emplotment of historical narratives, which rests on human choices. Because of invention and supplementarity, the vector of “exhaustion and oldness” and the vector of “difference and newness” simultaneously operate in the play to offer a different and new version of Baartman’s old and exhausted hi|story.

To recycle this exhausted hi|story, Diamond refers to and borrows from different sources, and thus, it can be said that the playwright is not the sole proprietor of this play. For instance, in Act 1, Scene 18, Millicent reads some selected passages from different sources on Hottentot women, written between 1704 and 1763, to Cuvier. Through using a variety of intertexts,

Voyeurs de Venus manifests “a repetition with revision and reference” (Ghasemi 2016: 86) which helps Diamond to replenish and recycle Baartman’s hi|story. Therefore, rewriting Baartman’s hi|story is in line with John Barth’s idea of “literature of replenishment” (Barth 1984: 193-206).

Additionally, the use of intertexts halts the linearity of the play. It is worth noting that this play consists of two acts. Act 1 consists of 21 scenes and Act 2 includes 17 scenes, numbered in ascending order. However, the story refuses to move in chronological order and shifts its settings repeatedly. As Diamond notes in an interview, “Very seldom do I write in chronological order” (Myers 2016). Out of 38 scenes, 21 scenes occur in the US, mostly Chicago at present time, 4 scenes happen in London in 1810, and 8 scenes take place in France, mostly Paris and between 1805 and 1814. Moreover, the presence of 5 very short scenes, which include music and dance throughout the play, functions to impede the play’s linear chronological order. Thus, *Voyeurs de Venus* is suspended between the past and the present, between South Africa, England, France and the US, between what was and what is to imply that different eras and areas make no difference if people refuse to change their perceptions and attitudes (Ghasemi 2016: 92). Diamond’s use of ever-shifting or multi-perspectival settings also implies that black experiences and identities are not confined in one single era and area (93).

The temporal distortion is maximised with the application of some “anachronisms.” For instance, Carl Googles images of Saartjie Baartman, while Sara informs him that “[t]he camera had not been invented” in the 1810s (Diamond 2015: 301), showing that, like her hi|story, Baartman’s existing photos, as Sara notes, are “interpretive images” and have been fictionalised and illustrated by people (304). These anachronisms, which recur throughout the play, enable the playwright to oscillate between now and then, here and there to make a comparison between the conditions of women of African descent at different times and places. Drawing a connection between different locations and times also helps Diamond to cast light on various intersectional factors that have resulted in the discrimination against black women and paved the way for the continuation of their discrimination for centuries. To this end, *Voyeurs de Venus* delves into different intersectional orientations, so-called “Penta Ps,” devised to:

- *promote* the white male scientists and white race,
- *privilege* whiteness,
- *pervert* the black female body, culture and race,
- *profit* the masters, and
- *pleasure* the white male spectators and owners.

(Ghasemi 2016: 110)

To *promote* his own knowledge of human anatomy, Cuvier dissects Saartjie’s body. The dissection helps Cuvier to gain further information about racial and biological differences and sustain the domination of whites over blacks. This

can be interpreted from Foucault's knowledge / power inscriptions that "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1977: 27). In her *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins refers to this event as the "infotainment" (Hill Collins 2005: 143). Saartjie is "enjoyed while alive and, upon her death, studied under the microscope for the burgeoning field of comparative anatomy" (28). This infotainment helps Cuvier to make up some theories based on the racial differences between whites and blacks and justify his position on the racial superiority of the whites. As the play reveals, he publishes his "findings" in a book, entitled *Natural History of Mammals* (1814):

Millicent: Your book, sir?

Cuvier: Yes. It is almost done. Hundreds of species of animals classified, genus and species classified. Groundbreaking really.

Millicent: And so you are almost finished?

Cuvier: I am making an addition. I have determined that Saartjie represents an evolutionary link between man and animal. I have told that we are all mammals, but Saartjie is living proof that we evolve. Her brain vacillates between primarily instinct and a modicum of intellect.

(Diamond 2015: 336)

The infotainment, which adds a chapter to Cuvier's book and helps him achieve a worldwide fame in his own field, works to place Saartjie closer to instinct rather than intellect and introduce her as a "humanimal." However, Sara seriously condemns Cuvier's findings. As she says, "Cuvier. The mother-fuckin' Father of Modern Anatomy. You know the Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species stuff? That was him. He, not God, named the animals. And you know what he did? He killed her" (340). Sara's remarks manifest that some people like Cuvier are responsible for the manipulation of such hierarchies, which are human construct and not God-given.

While Cuvier is dissecting Saartjie's body, Millicent enters. Cuvier asks her to bring a candle and listen to him. However, Millicent surprisingly asks:

Millicent: She had a brain? Thoughts?

Cuvier: Instinct. Please don't interrupt. . . . Yes, we think in these lower forms it is all instinct. A brain, to mimic and act, but never to think. It is this and this alone that separates us from the beasts.

(309)

This dialogue shows that Cuvier, who tends to limit Saartjie to her flesh, has to ignore the real functionality of her brain; otherwise, his hypotheses would be invalidated. This also signifies that some scholars and researchers, just like

Cuvier, might take some facts for granted in their research works in order to attain the ends that they desire.

In yet another case, Cuvier admits that Saartjie was able to speak four languages, including English, Dutch and French. Despite the fact that speaking is a human faculty and Saartjie had the talent to learn four languages, Cuvier still classifies her as a beast. Sara protests Cuvier's findings when she says, "She is, according to him, this woman who spoke at least four languages, the link between man and animal" (340). In fact, Cuvier needed to deny these human faculties in Saartjie in order to justify his own hypotheses. According to Sanya Osha, "Surely these attributes elevate her above the merely bestial" (Osha 2008: 90). As Osha concludes, "SARAH BAARTMAN was not an *animal* in the most basic meaning of the word. She was capable of speech and also the intimacies of affect"; however, "in spite of copious evidence testifying to her humanity, she is made to live and die like a beast" (90 bold letters and italics in original). Saartjie's attributes reveal an incongruity between what Cuvier expected and what he received, or between what he has stated and what has been real. Additionally, speaking four languages signifies the British, Dutch and French dominance over her and her dependence upon those dominant powers for her survival.

Cuvier's infotainment was then used to *privilege* the whites and their culture and to *pervert* black female body and race. With his hypotheses, Cuvier as a Western scientist provided a "scientific" support and validation for the whites' racist attitudes toward the blacks and justified black peoples' inferiority and enslavement. According to Hill Collins, "Western scientists perceived African people as being more natural and less civilized, primarily because African people were deemed to be closer to animals and nature, especially the apes and monkeys whose appearance most closely resembled humans" (Hill Collins 2005: 99). By the same token, Cuvier, who deems Saartjie to be closer to animals, calls her "monkey" and "orangoutang" (Diamond 2015: 337). Yet in another example, while Dunlop attempts to motivate Bullock, the director of a natural history museum in the 19th century Liverpool, to purchase Saartjie for his museum, Bullock responds, "I am a museum director, not a zookeeper" and refuses to buy her (299). However, after Dunlop's insistence, Bullock asks, "What is *it*?" to which Dunlop retorts, "What is *she*?" (299 emphases added). As the conversation continues, Bullock says, "I hope you have not brought me a monkey" (302). After observing Saartjie, Bullock claims that he has never seen such a wild creature, while Dunlop advises him to approach her as "you would a dog" (302). In such a climate, Saartjie "wavers between the polarities of humanity and animality" (Osha 2008: 82), a prerequisite for her display and dissection. In her play, Diamond ironically repeats some of the bestial images ascribed to Baartman in a self-reflexive mode to show the origin of a number of negative stereotypes about black women. Diamond rejects the bestial portrayal of black womanhood, pointing out that pseudo-scientific hypotheses as well as race,

sex, class and gender inequalities have been the main factors for the pervert of black women. I argue that Western scientists' pseudo-scientific theories played a major role in introducing the whites as rational and civilized and perverting the blacks, particularly black women. On this account, pseudo-scientific findings helped the whites to locate themselves on top and place the blacks on the bottom.

To gain *profit*, the whites needed to privilege themselves and pervert the black female body. Thus, Dunlop, Cuvier and Bullock all help to further Saartjie's devolution from humanity to animality. The play starts with these lines:

(Beautiful black women of different hues and body types, clad in exquisite white European finery of the early 1800s, wearing equally extravagant wigs. They stand on pillar-like platforms of varying heights. Out of the darkness a piercing spot flashes on one or another of them, alternately).

(Diamond 2015: 294 italics in original)

These lines show that black women, exhibited in public, were profitable commodities for their white masters. As Hill Collins writes, "certainly animals could be slaughtered, and domesticated as pets, because within capitalist political economies, animals were commodities that were owned as private property ... and could be profitable for their owners" (Hill Collins 2005: 100). In a similar manner, Saartjie's masters see her as a domesticated animal, which can be engaged, displayed, sold and dissected. As Saartjie informs Sara, "Dunlop sold me to Monsieur Reaux, a carnival, you say circus, owner. I lived in cages with animals Monsieur Reaux wasn't interested in women. Only in money" (Diamond 2015: 315). Like a domesticated animal, Saartjie was also required to follow blindly what her masters ordered. In Act 1, Scene 2, Dunlop wants her to repeat some lines which she had to utter in her shows:

Dunlop: What did I tell you?

Saartjie: I'm sorry?

Dunlop: Yes, you most certainly are. Only repeat what I have said.

Saartjie: I don't understand.

Dunlop: Not important that you understand Now, again.

(295-296)

Later, when Saartjie finds that Dunlop has sold her to Monsieur Reaux without an equal share of the profits, earned from her public displays, she objects:

Saartjie: So you're leaving me here without the funds?

Dunlop: Funds –

Saartjie: You promised that there would be –

Dunlop: Funds?

Saartjie: In the contract. Our agreement. You said–

Dunlop: Then you did not read the –

Saartjie: You read it to me, you said ... you told the inquisitors of the contract. I told them. You promised them more comfortable clothes and that I would collect my portion when our contract ends. You said more meat, warmer clothes, and a share of the profits

Dunlop: ... you exhaust me. You talk back, you think you are more clever. You're a bloody Hottentot. No more, no less.

(312)

These words show that Dunlop, who has deceived Saartjie with some false promises, wants Saartjie to blindly obey him and advance his financial status without even asking for any share of profits.

Exploitation and sexploitation with the false promises of monetary reward are also used by Monsieur Reaux. Right after being sold to Cuvier, Saartjie finds that Monsieur Reaux has deceived her, too. When Cuvier asks her to remove her dresses to examine her body, she replies, "Monsieur Reaux said for three francs or two pounds and not beneath my gown" (328); however, Cuvier retorts that "He has left you in my care" (329), meaning that Cuvier now owns her exclusive rights. However, in the conversation between Saartjie and Millicent in Act 2, Scene 7, it is cleared that Cuvier pays to Millicent as a white woman for her domestic services:

Millicent: I assist Monsieur Cuvier in domestic matters.

Saartjie: Are you a slave?

Millicent: Of course not.

Saartjie: Still, you cook for him. And ... do other things.

Millicent: Yes. Monsieur Cuvier pays me for my domestic services.

Saartjie: Oh, so you are a prostitute?

Millicent: I am a domestic and a companion.

(331)

In her conversation with Millicent, it is also revealed that Saartjie receives Millicent's old dresses. The contrastive positions of Millicent as a white woman and Saartjie as a black woman emphasize the determining roles of race and class. Diamond further clarifies this through comparing Millicent as a white woman and Cuvier as a white man. Millicent stands somewhere between white men and black women with a privileged position over Saartjie due to her race and class. However, due to her gender and class, she stands below Cuvier. I argue that in *Voyeurs de Venus*, Diamond touches upon some of the white women's concerns, including patriarchy, and this provides the ground for readers to compare the concerns of white and black women.

Voyeurs de Venus portrays a typical patriarchal society in which power is in the hands of men, and they make the major decisions. In more concrete terms, the play represents an equation, consisting of some intersectional variables such as race, sex, class and gender, wherein femaleness and blackness are

disadvantageous, whereas maleness and whiteness are advantageous. As the play shows, due to his race, gender, money and power, Cuvier reduces Saartjie and Millicent to suppliants. As the stage directions clarify, “(*Cuvier reaches for the papers. As Millicent hands them to him, he grabs her wrist and pulls her into an embrace. They kiss. Cuvier stands, continuing the embrace. As lights fade, he bends her over the desk and begins to raise her skirts*)” (337 italics in original). The sexual relationship between Millicent and Cuvier which is built on the unequal foundation of money and authority, places the former in the powerless position with no control over her body, while Cuvier has the power to do whatever he wishes.

Similarly, due to his race, gender, money and power, Booker reduces both Sara and Saartjie to suppliants. To show this, in some cases, especially when Booker has sex with Sara, Saartjie suddenly appears, and Sara and Saartjie overlap and speak in unison:

(They begin to make love. Sara speaks to the audience while Booker begins to undress her.)

Saartjie and Sara: If you will make love to us.

Saartjie walks into the embrace that Sara has just left. Saartjie and Booker begin to make love.

(322 italics in original)

In addition, Booker urges Sara to sign a book deal with him and write Baartman’s hi|story, and when he perceives Sara’s indeterminacy, he lays a great pressure on her:

Booker: We need a decision.

Sara: I need time.

Booker: Sure. But remember, Ms. Baartman is public domain and we do have a stable of respected writers poised to . . .

Sara: You’re threatening me?

Booker: Of course. I, we, want you.

(305)

This conversation, which has some similarities to the way Dunlop used to force Baartman to move to London, shows that even in the 21st century women of African descent in any position might be abused for the profit and interests of some parties or people. Despite Booker’s pressure, Sara still has an internal conflict to rewrite Baartman’s hi|story. As she says:

Her story is important ... and she’s finally gotten her funeral. Who am I to dredge it all up, and for what purpose? When I think of the black literati reading my book and calling me an exploitive sell-out, I can’t breathe. When I picture white housewives reading it on the beach, and middle-American buffoons discussing it at steakhouses, it – really, it makes me ill.

(307)

As a result of Sara's insistence, Booker eventually admits that they "are complicit" in Saartjie's oppression, too (325); however, he, who only thinks of his own profit, cannot turn a blind eye to this profitable book project. As he says, "It's a sellable topic" (326), and "I don't care what you mean. I only care that you deliver four hundred pages that keep turning" (310). Writing and publishing books as cultural activities should promote the society culture; however, as it is clear here, it mainly aims to bring about fame and profit to some people. Later, Booker, who sees Sara's resistance, tries to justify his position as such:

Booker: You empower her [by writing her hi|story]. You give her story to the people.

Sara: You know that's bullshit. (*deadly calm*) I don't empower her. I let it happen again in front of witnesses. I celebrate it. And you know as well as I that they'll line up to read it, and call it empathy, and enjoy it for the freak fuckin' show that it is That's the same story over and over again They don't really care. Just as long as we stay victims, it's a great story to consume She only just got a proper burial three months ago. The museum just gave her back to South Africa.

(340-341 italics in original)

Sara's counterargument shows that, due to the interests and profit of some people and parties, Saartjie does not experience peace even after her death, and even though she has been returned to and buried in her birthplace in 2002, she is still exhumed and exhausted. Thus, unlike those who tried to lay Saartjie's body to rest, Booker is still interested in Saartjie's disinterment for his own profit. As Booker angrily addresses Sara, "You stupid theatrical bitch. I have the PDF. You signed a contract I'll have Fran send you the galleys" (341). In such a climate, Sara is obliged to finish the book. Thus, Sara desperately asks Saartjie, "Why don't you tell me what to write so I can put you to rest, huh?" (335), showing that Sara has been also involved in Saartjie's disinterment, too. Here it can be confirmed that the wealth, power and influence of the whites can oblige the blacks to change their directions and destinations (Ghasemi 2016: 108).

Despite this, in the acknowledgements of her book, Sara writes, "And finally, I must thank James Booker for having had the courage and wisdom to give voice to such a tragic and compelling story" (Diamond 2015: 342). Her words remind us of Saartjie's answers to Dunlop's questions:

Dunlop: Have I ever hit you?

(*Beat, raises his hand as if to hit her.*)

Answer me!

Saartjie: No.

Dunlop: Have I ever caused you undue pain or stress

(*Dunlop raises his arm as if to backhand her if the answer is incorrect.*)

Saartjie: No I told them you were good to me. I told them we have a contract.

(312 italics in original)

Both Sara's acknowledgements and Saartjie's answers show that they both have been forced to conceal the reality from readers and authorities under pressure. This also shows that, even in modern times, black women are abused, and through the passage of time, Saartjie has been transformed into Sara.

In addition to gaining profit, the male figures gain *pleasure* from female characters. A part of the pleasure arises from gratifying gaze (male gaze) and hegemonic gaze (medical gaze), showing that men, either as spectators or medical practitioners, exercise their predominance over women through their gaze for pleasure and examination. Male gaze emerges from men viewing and watching the female bodies as sex objects or pleasing objects of desire (Mulvey 1975). The male spectators and characters stand as dominant, while the female figures and characters come into view as passive under the active gaze of men. As a spectacle, Saartjie is voyeuristically enjoyed by Dunlop, Monsieur Reaux and Cuvier as well as the spectators, who attend her shows, signifying male interest in objectifying her body for pleasure.

Medical gaze denotes that medical practitioners have full power and authority to observe the bodies of their patients in order to diagnose their diseases or evaluate their healing processes, and thus, in the relationship between a doctor and a patient, the latter is cast as a helpless object, while the former appears as sound and sane (Foucault 1973). As noted earlier, some scenes of the play deal with Saartjie's autopsy. In those scenes, Cuvier, who has a hegemonic position, examines Saartjie's body, while Saartjie appears as a powerless character with no authority over her own body and even her mind. "Both male and medical gazes create unequal power relations between the gazers and the gazed upon" (Ghasemi 2016: 122). This unequal gendered power relation between the viewer and the viewed is also powerfully present when Sara, Saartjie and Becky get naked and Cuvier, Booker and Bradford, stand behind them, look at them and masturbate. As the stage directions notify, "(All three women turn their backs to the audience Cuvier and Bradford enter, backs to audience. Each takes a place beneath a woman, Booker in the center, in front of Becky, Cuvier in front of Sara, Bradford in front of Saartjie. They begin to masturbate.)" (Diamond 2015: 321 italics in original). The women, who have no right to look back, become the butt of the phallogentric gaze and retain the object and abject position, while Cuvier, Booker and Bradford hold the subject position.

The sense of pleasure is not limited to the hegemonic and gratifying gazes in this play. Saartjie – like almost all female characters in the play – is also consumed and enjoyed physically and sexually throughout the play by different male characters, who mostly appear as her owners. Sara also informs Booker how as a student she had been sexually abused by her professors to

pass her courses. As she notes, “The next professor I slept with was a Nigerian anthropologist who studied Native American cultures. His house was also gorgeous, because his wife had great taste” (333). The Nigerian professor, who was married, used to exploit Sara for his pleasure and transitory unilateral satisfaction. Like the Nigerian professor, Booker enjoys having sexual relationship with Sara. However, as he warns Sara, “Careful, don’t mistake me for a relationship. Remember, we fuck, we don’t love” (335). His warning signifies instantaneity. Thus, objectification of female bodies for transitory pleasures with no affection or commitment toward them affects the lives of women.

To sum up, in *Voyeurs de Venus*, Diamond, who refuses to see history as a fixed and absolute narrative, rehistoricises Baartman’s hi|story to replenish some of its missing parts based on her own vision. In addition, rehistoricising Baartman’s hi|story provides the ground for Diamond to question the legitimacy of historical and pseudo-scientific hypotheses and highlight their contribution to the construction of race, sex, class and gender hierarchies. Consequently, the rehistoricisation of Saartjie’s hi|story opens up the readers’ eyes to the ways in which some men have *perverted* some women of African descent at different eras and areas to *privilege, promote, profit and pleasure* themselves.

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