

Introduction¹

Sarah or Saartjie as she was known was a young woman of 20 when she was taken away under false pretences by William Dunlop, a British ship's surgeon. When they arrived in London she was paraded as a sexual freak. In 1814 her owner took her to France where she was sold to an animal trainer. Barely a year after her arrival in Paris she died of disease and homesickness. Her humiliation did not end there, after her death a plaster cast was made of her body (sick body) and then she was dissected. Her brain and genitalia were taken out and put in formalin. Then Napoleon's scientist George Cuvier and Geoffrey St Hilaire wrote books on how her body showed that she was not fully human but as Darwin put it, "the missing link between human and ape". Her remains were displayed in the Musee de' Le Homme from 1816 till 1986.

The French did not want to return the remains in spite of requests by the Griqua people since the 1950's. Nelson Mandela approached the then president Francois Mitterand but to no avail. Senator Nicholas About submitted his bill which included my poem "I've come to take you home" and they voted unanimously that her remains must come home. Although they did this to many young Khoi women Sarah was the only one on whom reports were written, she was interviewed as well where she said she only wanted to go home to the valley where she came from, the Gamtoos valley. Her story is the only story recorded. Her return to her country of birth is a huge correction of history, of what was said about indigenous people, of Africans as a whole, she suffered on our behalf. The French apologized to the South African people, the French Minister of research that day said, "we must ask ourselves who the real monster in this story was". She came home after 192 years in exile and was laid to rest in the valley where she came from.

Sarah's story is a victory over colonialism, is a reminder that she suffered as a Black woman, a poor woman and because she was a woman, gender, race, class. The story of Sarah Bartmann needs to be told over and over again because there are so many lessons in it. Having a building named after her, especially a university building can enhance our truth and reconciliation.

Significance of Sarah Bartmann at UCT²

Sarah Bartmann was a slave when Hendrik Cesars and Alexander Dunlop took her abroad for exhibition. Slave history in Cape Town is characterized by a multiplicity of silences, erasures and contradictions in how certain narratives are made invisible or hypervisible. The various monuments and statues at the campus and in UCT generally reflect these contradictions. UCT was built on the graves of slaves and this history must be acknowledged in a much more meaningful way. Although there is a memorial for the Rustenburg graves on campus – it does not adequately pay homage to the lives that were lost through slavery and its consequences in present day Cape Town. That many students and staff who encounter the university are unaware of this history and the gravesites is a testament to its silencing and erasure.

As a victim of colonial science and exploits, Sarah Bartmann's is a good counterposition to the mercenary and perpetrator of colonial crimes, Jameson. As an institution that prides itself for

¹ Diana Ferrus, September 2017

² Motivation to the Task Team on Naming of Buildings by the Black Academic Caucus, 2016

leading research, the University of Cape Town must pave the way for the kind of research that confronts the consequences of colonial science. To do this, it must resuscitate Bartmann's name from the muffling and suffocating narratives of disgrace in order to recognize the human strength and dignity that she represents.

Older names of buildings on UCT campuses are those of men who were involved in colonial exploits. New names have also often been those of men. It has become part of the South African landscape to come across buildings, streets and townships named after Mandela, Biko and Joe Slovo. While this has been important, it has tended to shadow the crucial role that women played and has created a gendered landscape in which women, and black women are invisibilised. Sarah Bartmann's legacy is evidence in the textured academic texts about race and gender, which her life and her experiences have stimulated.

Born in what is now known as the Eastern Cape, Sarah Bartmann died in 1815. The institution is positioned and compelled to engage with the entangled histories of the present-day Eastern and Western Cape. The few modest memorials of Sarah Bartmann that are mostly in the Eastern Cape do not reflect the incredible strength it must have taken to endure what Bartmann encountered and do not speak to the significance of her narrative for our contemporary times.