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The unexpected body: From Sara Baartman to Caster Semenya

ABSTRACT

The article draws lines between the historical example of Saartjie Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, and the 'Caster Semenya case' – the 18-year old South African athlete who won the women's 800 metres in the World Championship in 2009, and had to undergo 'gender testing'. It looks into how the South African press covered the case of Semenya in the light of identity and power processes. How did the Semenya case feed into broader political and cultural processes in South Africa? The discussion shows how the concept of identity politics is multifaceted – covering issues such as sex, gender, ethnicity, colour, status and class while reflecting colonial as well as postcolonial realities.

KEYWORDS

feminism
intersectionality
gender testing
identity politics
body
South Africa

She stood there for nearly two hundred years, lips sealed in plaster and paint, her naked body exposed to the multitudes. Thousands of people, scientists and tourists, children, families, writers and artist, stared at her while visiting the Jardin des Plantes, the world's premier museum of natural history [...] And always 'she' was the *Hottentot Venus*, never Sara Baartman, always a symbol and never a human being.

(Crais and Scully 2001: 142)

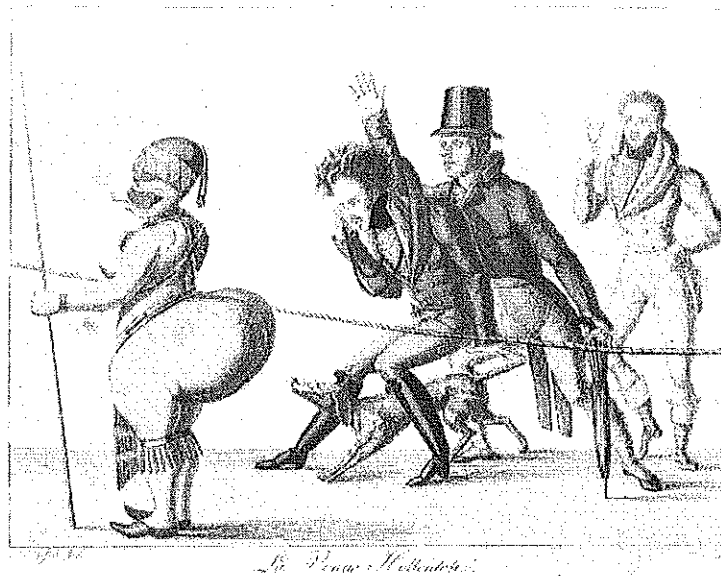


Figure 1: Saartjie, the Hottentot Venus.

Saartjie or Sara Baartman was from the Khoi people in the part of South Africa that is today the Eastern Cape. When she was 16 years old she was sold into slavery to a trader named Pieter Cezar, who took her to Cape Town where she became a domestic servant to his brother. After a few years, she was lured onto a ship for England with the promise that she would make her fortune. There, in London, and later in Paris, in the early days of 1800, Sara Baartman was exposed at numerous freak shows on account of her large buttocks. Baartman's sizeable backside and genitalia made her an object of fascination for the colonial Europeans who presumed that they were racially superior.

When she was not being paraded for the crowds in carnivals of human curiosities, Baartman was displayed at society functions. It was in one of these, where she arrived dressed in nothing but a few feathers, that Napoleon's surgeon general and specialist in comparative anatomy, George Cuvier, spotted her and claimed a scientific interest in her (Holmes 2007). Over the following year doctors and anthropologists repeatedly studied her. She became an example of how colonial power made an African woman a symbol of suppression in terms of both gender and ethnicity – and object of 'double colonization'. When she died in December 1815, Cuvier dissected her body for further investigations and remade her in a plaster cast. A huge illustration of the Hottentot Venus greeted tens of thousands of visitors to the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889 (Crais and Scully 2001).

Some 200 years later, the genitals of another young South African woman once again became the target of scientists' and – through the media – the general public's prodding and poking. This time the object of attention was runner Caster Semenya.

On 19 August 2009, Mokgadi Caster Semenya, an 18-year-old South African athlete, won the women's 800 metres in the World Championship in

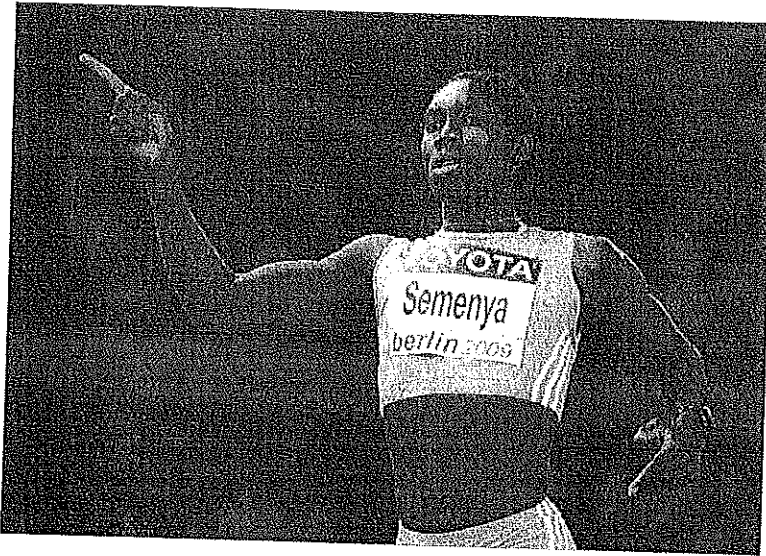


Figure 2: Mokgadi Caster Semenya.

Berlin, Germany, on 1.55.45. This was a national record as well as a championship record and represented an improvement over her former personal record of almost four seconds. Semenya was the first black South African woman to achieve a Gold Medal in the World Championship. At this stage, however, the athletic community and media started speculating about her 'masculine body shape and facial features', prompting the International Association of Athletics Federations' (IAAF) to request gender tests (Hurst 2009). Hence, just after the victory the young athlete 'was forced to undergo 'gender testing' while the world followed closely. The results, stating that Semenya is a woman, but also revealing intimate details about her organs, was not made public by the IAAF until July 2010, almost a year after. In the meantime the young girl was subjected to an examination by the media.

This article will discuss media coverage of the 'Caster Semenya case'. Through an analysis of five newspapers and a total of 125 articles from August 2009 to June 2010,¹ the article looks into elements of how the South African media covered the case of Caster Semenya in light of identity and power processes. The aim is not to give a complete overview of the South African media coverage of Semenya, but rather to find examples of how the body, as simultaneously a material and a cultural site on which the non-alignment of biological sex and gender is played out, is portrayed and problematized in the media. Inspired by theories from the field of feminism and 'intersectionality', an approach to embedding gender processes into specific historical, cultural and economic/political contexts, the article studies how the process of *gendering* takes place in the media. How is gender negotiated through the selected articles? (How) does the Semenya case reflect sex and gender in a country with one of the highest levels of sexual violence in the world? How do the constructions of gender in the media feed into the constructions of race, and how did the Semenya case feed into broader political and cultural processes in South Africa?

The analysed newspapers are: Cape Argus (Cape Town) readership (339,000), Daily News (Durban) readership (246,000), The Star (Johannesburg) readership (811,000), Pretoria News (Pretoria) 189,000, The Mercury (Durban) readership (246,000), newspapers in London (The Independent) and newspaper in U.S.

THEORIZING THE BODY

Simone de Beauvoir was the first scholar to argue that the givens of the body are both the ground of and a real constraint and limitation on our freedom. In her renowned *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949/1986) Beauvoir thoroughly analysed the long history of body-loathing in western culture: the way in which women have been made into reflections of 'Woman' and have had to bear cultural responsibility for being embodied creatures. Because men and women are embodied differently, these differences will express themselves in different lived situations, Beauvoir argued. Hence, these differences gain significance only as part of a larger social, psychological and economic situation and in light of our ontological aims – that is, as Fredrika Scarth has shown, as part of the total existential situation that Beauvoir set out to analyse. Biological differences cannot be experienced on a purely physiological level, since they are always lived out in a situation. In the words of Beauvoir, it is not the body as a biological object that the subject lives in but the body as subject to taboos, and to laws, a body in which 'reflects the desires and fears that express [our] ontological attitude' (2004: 76).

As Lilian N. Ndangam (2008: 215) reminds us, feminist-influenced scholarship has extensively applied the concept of gaze to show how women's and men's bodies have been objectified. Laura Mulvey identified the male gaze in sympathy with Jacques Lacan's statement that 'woman is a symptom of man'. Ndangam refers to Whitehead, who describes how the gaze comes with 'a set of moral, social and cultural codes or assumptions that ascribe values on the body and different values to different bodies' (quoted in Ndangam 2008: 215). In our mediated time, this process often happens through the media, and Ndangam stresses how the media is indeed a cultural space where the gaze operates.

Kamilla Peuravaara addresses different perspectives on the body in relation to conceptions of normality. She shows how a body perspective can be taken into account from an individual perspective without losing a structural perspective. This is accomplished using the phenomenological conception of the body as *situated*, discussing the body in relation to conceptions of normality and deviancy (Peuravaara 2013: 415). Analysing the ideas of pollution and taboo, Mary Douglas in her *Purity and Danger* (1966/2002) considered different cultures from a structural point of view. Her purpose was to avoid a limited explanation regarding the phenomenon in relation to the whole social structure in an attempt to clarify the differences between the sacred, the clean and the unclean. Douglas explores how moral values and social roles are upheld by beliefs, and shows how the body provides a basic scheme for all symbolism.

Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed, or it leads to hypocrisy. That which is negated is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention.

(Douglas 1966/2002: 163)

Taboos, social laws and what is considered as 'normal' in a given society is also to a large degree reinforced by, and reflected in, the media. 'Being gendered' in the media never occurs outside a context of time and place and other ways of social categorization, such as ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, religion and location within the global context.

MEDIATING CASTER'S BODY - COVERAGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA

The distribution of articles concerning Caster Semenya came in waves. The news about her victory and gender testing exploded on 20 August 2009. On this date and the following alone there were eighteen articles about the case in the five newspapers analysed. A new top came on the 26th of August with seventeen articles, and with thirteen articles the following day. In September it was quiet; in October and November there were nine and eight articles, respectively, on Semenya in the material. Then the story was not on the agenda until 14 January 2010 when Semenya gave an interview that all the selected newspapers brought excerpts from. In February there were only two articles and then on the 21st of March new attention, and on 31 March there were eight articles referring to an interview with Semenya: 'Caster makes clear she's on her way back to the track' (*Pretoria News*). In April there were ten articles, in May there were 4, and in the first part of June (until 12 June) eight articles.

What the analysed data suggest is that the story of Caster Semenya was told through three main discourses in the South African newspapers. The discourses are here seen in accordance with the definition of Jørgensen and Philips as a *particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)* (2002: 1). These are media discourses circulating in society, and are considered significant as they may both reflect and take part in constituting the social, or aspects of the social, in a given society. Discourse is a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world – including knowledge, identities and social relation – and thereby in maintaining specific social patterns. The discourses identified here partly concur with, and partly involve, a movement from the first to the third: from seeing Caster as 'impure' through a 'negotiating phase' to seeing Caster as 'pure'.

THE DISCOURSE OF IMPURITY

The first discourse discussed here consists of articles referring explicitly or implicitly to Caster as 'impure'. A good example of this is the first page of *Daily Sun* on 21 August 2009, with a large colour picture of Caster and the headline 'Prove you are not a boy'. Through this notorious headline, it is the young athlete who is suspected 'guilty' – it is now up to herself to prove that she is *not* what she is accused of. Most cultures suggest that there are only two sexes, existing in a binary opposition of 'typical male' and 'typical female', with no tolerance for any other categorization. Thomas Laqueur (1994) describes how an essential change in attitudes towards human sexual anatomy occurred in Europe in the eighteenth century. Earlier, it was a dominant belief that women and men represented two different forms of one essential sex: the only difference being that female genitalia were found inside the body, not outside it. Around the eighteenth century, however, the common view became that of two sexes that contradict each other. Currently, in much of everyday discourse, the biological body is depicted as a fixed, invariant object, based on conceptions of the body and gender as biologically divergent. Biological sex differences are understood as something natural, stable and unchanging (Peuravaara 2013: 411). However, according to official numbers some 1 in 1500 to 1 in 2000 children are born with bodies that are not easily coded as 'male' or 'female', but as intersexed every year, and a lot more people are born with subtler forms of sex anatomy variations (see for instance Dreger 1998). Some results show that as many as one in a hundred



Figure 3: The controversial billboard advertisement.

Some felt the need to encounter this perceived threat that Caster Semenya represented, through reproducing stereotypes on what a 'real woman' should be. Strip Club owner Lolly Jackson received a lot of attention in the media (30 September 2009) as well as in the cityscapes of South Africa for his controversial billboard advertisements, arguing that among his strip club dancers, here represented by a blonde woman, wearing nothing but a lot of make-up and stiletto shoes, barely covering her large breasts with one arm, there was 'no need for Gender Testing'.

In addition to dictating what a 'real woman' should look like, the boards also expressed a certain view on what a woman's role in a male-dominated society should be. This effort to try to fit bodies into accepted categories, in popular culture as well as in the media in general, may be seen as an example of Michel Foucault's disciplining of bodies. In his words:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements.

(Foucault 1977/1995: 304)

The media, including advertisements, inhabit an ideological force of the 'normal', which enables specific bodies to enjoy a kind of unmarked status. 'The unmarked, normal body thus perpetuates counterfactual universal ideals which then disavow the actualities of embodiment' (Jaarsma 2009: 86).

On 11 September 2009, the Australian *Daily Telegraph* published a story claiming that Semenya had 'male sex organs and no womb or ovaries'. The story was based on an anonymous source closely involved with the Semenya examinations during the IAAF testing, who claimed that Semenya had 'three times the amount of testosterone that a "normal" female would have' and

that the athlete had 'internal testes – the male sexual organs which produce testosterone'. The source further stated that 'there certainly is evidence Semenya is a hermaphrodite'³ (quoted in Hurst 2009). After the article was published by the *Daily Telegraph*, most of the South African newspapers quoted the Australian newspaper. Simultaneously, several of the newspapers also quoted Robert Hamblin, chairman of Gender Dynamix,⁴ who argued that it was wrong to call Semenya a hermaphrodite, and that the condition should rather be referred to as intersex.

THE DISCOURSES OF NEGOTIATION

Many agendas – medical, scientific, personal, national, international, professional, sportive, moral, aesthetical and political – meet in the discussions about Caster's body. This is perhaps inevitable, for as Alice Domurat Dreger puts it 'in any human culture, a body is never a body unto itself, and bodies that openly challenges significant boundaries are particularly prone to being caught in struggles over these boundaries' (1998: 42). Or as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, 'By its very presence, the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation, and incite regulation. The unexpected body fire rich, if anxious, narratives and practices that probe the contours and boundaries of what we take to be human' (2002: 16).

Transgressing male/female boundaries may be perceived as highly destabilizing, and a lot of discourses negotiating Semenya's sex took place in the analysed newspapers.

Around 20th August, several South African newspapers quoted Caster's family, her father Jacob and grandmother Maphuthi Sekgale, both of whom stated that she was raised as a girl and that they had no doubt that she was a girl. Also, Semenya's mother, Lorcus, was quoted as saying, 'If you go to my home village and ask any of my neighbours they will tell you that she is a girl'. However, some of the newspapers also referred to the former head teacher of Semenya's school, Eric Modiba, who was quoted as saying, 'She liked soccer and she wore pants to school. She never wore a dress. It was only in grade 11 that I realized she is a girl'. Three of the selected newspapers reported the story by Lebogang Seale and Louise Flanagan, who described Semenya's 'lifetime of humiliation' and how Semenya was 'taken to the school toilet to verify her gender' (*The Mercury*, *The Star* and *Pretoria News*, 21 August 2009).

In some of the negotiating processes taking place in the newspapers, Semenya was portrayed as a victim: 'Caster Semenya is a victim' (headline of *Cape Argus*, 25 August). Her vulnerability was also referred to:

Two hours after Semenya and the rest of the South African athletics team had returned from the world championships in Berlin, the world 800m champion stared down at the table in front of here, looking up occasionally from behind hooded eyes, unsure of what to make of it all. (The Star, 26 August 2009)

Most of the newspaper articles talk *about* Semenya, and it is rather seldom that her own voice is heard. Some articles even make a point out of her silence:

In that silence, my sister, there lies a deeper message of self-knowledge and pushing oneself hard to realise one's dreams. It is a discipline and

approach that many of us continue to aspire to. It is a discipline that remains elusive to many of us.

(*Cape Times*, 28 August 2009)

... shrugging off the media frenzy, she let her feet do the talking.

(*Pretoria News*, 21 August 2009)

One rare occasion when Caster's own voice is heard is when, the following year, she tells a journalist from the newspaper *The Star* about her humiliations:

I have been subjected to unwarranted and invasive scrutiny of the most intimate and private details of my being. Some of the occurrences leading up to and immediately following the Berlin World Championships have infringed on, not only my rights as an athlete, but also my ... rights to dignity and privacy.

(*The Star*, 31 March 2009)

Douglas explained how 'some pollutions are too grave for the offender to be allowed to survive. But most pollutions have a very simple remedy for undoing their effects' (1966/2002: 135). In the newspaper articles different strategies of negotiation are presented. One was to pretend that the whole debacle was about race and not gender. A number of racial issues were also raised in the analysed newspapers – referring to individuals from ASA who attributed the fuss around Semenya to racism. ANC Youth League president Julius Malema branded the IAAF's decision to subject Semenya to gender tests 'racist'. 'That is equally undermining the woman who gave birth to this child. And equally, we will never agree with any racism', he said (*Cape Argus*, 26 August 2009). President Zuma was reported to have asked why there were so few whites at the airport welcoming Semenya home. But several newspaper reports stated that South Africans of all colours seemed proud of Semenya. Or, as Nomboniso Gasa put it:

The tendency to conflate racism and sexism in your case also plays itself out in the dialogue that often refuses to see black women as having specific struggles which sometimes may be common and at times different from those of black men. To reduce your experience to a racist incident only, is to silence and erase the historical experience of international competitive sports as generally sexist.

(*Cape Times*, 28 August 2009)

This quote feeds into the discussion that black women often have felt left behind, both by black men and by white women whose 'feminist movement did not articulate the needs of poor and non-white women, thus reinforcing sexism, racism, and classism' (see for instance hooks 1982; Oyewumi 2005). None of the media analysed here questioned the fact that only women, and not men, were subjected to gender verification testing in sports, or mentioned the sheer 'normality of abnormality' in top-flight sports.

NEGOTIATING CLASS

Another interesting aspect of the Semenya coverage in South African newspapers is that it shed light on a level of society that is often ignored in the elite newspapers (see for instance Chuma 2009; Wasserman 2010). A *Cape Argus*

article made the home place of Semenya the focus of an article. It started *in medieum res*:

It's a blistering hot afternoon at Masehlong in Limpopo and as you enter the village a group of young boys play alongside the gravel road. Some barefoot and with ragged clothes, the boys take turns dashing into the thorn bushes, emerging with a herd of goats that they direct towards a dirt soccer playground nearby. The silence is broken only by the bleating of the goats. This is where 800m gold medallist Caster Semenya grew up, fetching water in searing heat from communal taps.

(28 August 2009)

These are scenes from the daily life of sections of South African society that are frequently ignored in the media. The newspaper coverage of Semenya's case allowed for more perspectives into the often unnoticed, and a certain negotiation of class took place. The underprivileged areas' need for better training facilities was highlighted several times in the analysed articles and an important theme was that South Africa has the potential to nurture athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds and make them into champions.

THE BODY AS A SPACE FOR POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS

When Semenya returned from Berlin to Johannesburg's OR Tambo Airport on the 25th of August, she was met by large crowds of people, singing, dancing and waving posters of support: 'Caster our golden girl!'. Caster was also welcomed by the Minister for Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya, saying that the government was outraged that Semenya was subjected to humiliating questions about her sex (*Cape Argus*). Also, ASA president Leonard Chuene addressed the media, and several high-profile politicians, ANC Youth League Julius Malema and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, joined the celebrations at the airport.

Malema and Madikizela-Mandela were criticized for '(deciding for) their own opportunistic political agendas to trample on this fairly rare example of national unity and blame white South Africans for the athlete's trauma' (du Preez, *The Star*, 27 August 2009). Max du Preez continues:

I found it distasteful that Malema and others in the ANC are now masquerading as the champion of women's rights. Weren't they the same crowd who harassed and insulted the young woman who accused their leader of raping her? Wasn't Malema the man who made the sexist remark about women who ask for taxi money after having sex? Wasn't Malema the one who called a woman 28 years his senior, DA leader Helen Zille, a 'little girl'? [...] And where, may I ask, were the Youth League's protests when Eudy Simelane, former national soccer player, was raped and killed because she was a lesbian?

(*The Star*, 27 August 2009)

Several other reporters agreed: 'Semenya's big day hijacked' (*Cape Argus*, 26 August 2009), 'Politicians steal mentor's limelight' (*The Star*, 31 August 2009). Quite a few stressed the irony that South African politicians suddenly rallied to the defence of Semenya, but never raised their voice to the defence of women who face violent retribution because they refuse to conform to

traditional femininity, nor to fight the 'pandemic of sexual violence' or the 'rape crisis'. Also the fact that President Jacob Zuma, notorious for 'macho politics', told Semenya 'Walk tall. We're proud of you. We love you' was commented upon critically in the analysed newspapers.

Several newspaper commentators stressed the fact that as Semenya was celebrated, another sportswoman who transgressed gender expectations met a very different fate just one year earlier. In 2008, Eudy Simelane, captain of the South Africa's women football team, was gang-raped and killed. The football star was a 29-year-old politically active lesbian. Such 'corrective rapes' against lesbians or others who do not fit stereotypic ideas of what a woman 'is supposed to be' are common in South Africa, and the guilty are seldom caught. In general, there is very little focus on the high level of violence against women in the media in South Africa.

South Africa can be very happy that Caster is still alive because there is quite a risk for women like (her) to run into one of those orthodox citizens who feels she should be a certain way.

(*Daily News*, 28 October 2009)

The Semenya case opened up new dimensions of discussions in the South African public sphere, through some of the negotiations that took place in the media around topics such as class, politics, sexuality and violence. The coverage also proved the continuous dominance of race over gender in the public discourse.

THE PURIFICATION RITE

It is interesting to observe how the Semenya debacle quickly translated to popular media and advertising. On 10 September 2009, the first page of the glossy magazine *You* carried the picture of a totally 're-made' Semenya and

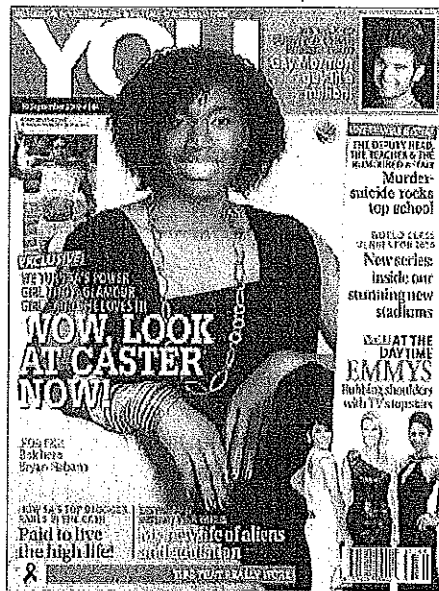


Figure 4: Semenya on the front page of a glossy magazine.

the headline 'Wow, look at Caster now'. As pictures always are, the first page image is polysemic and may be read in different ways. The picture of Caster all made up, sitting in a 'feminine pose', holding her hands in a passive/posing way, showing off the sparkling nail polish, wearing a dress and a lot of jewellery may be read as a sad statement on the limited space women are given. A small picture of the 'old' Caster in running gear is presented in the corner, much like the 'before and after' pictures in the total makeover genre of women's magazines is presented to show how much she has changed. This illustrates how the body is situated, which implies becoming and being made visible in a certain way, largely depending on the context. The front page may also be an example of how cultural standards of attractiveness obscure the complex ways in which gender is constructed, and the fact that differences among women – age, race, culture, sexual orientation and class – translate into numerous variations in responses to ideals of femininity and their attendant practices.

In a more positive way, where what is unsettling also is seen as liberating, the *You* coverage of Caster may be read as an attempt to broaden the frame of glossy magazines' first pages. Caster's looks, even after having been 'turned into a glamour girl', definitely break with the ordinary norm of beauty, such as this norm was represented by the three 'tv star women' also on the first page. Mary Douglas' discussion of the role of purification rites in overcoming fears is interesting here. What is considered 'dirt' in a given society is about what is considered 'out of place'. The purification rites may be 'rites of reversing, untying, burying, washing, erasing, fumigating, and so on' (1966/2002: 135). *You*'s transformation of Semenya may be seen as such a purification rite: an effort to put her into the 'right place' of woman.

PURE, SACRED GOLD

In quite a few articles about Semenya, she has no need to endure any purification rite, or she has already been through it, as she is described as 'pure, sacred gold'. Some examples from the selected newspapers may be 'Our golden athlete' (*The Star*), 'a tenacious and dignified warrior' (*Cape Times*), 'Gutsy Caster Semenya deserves accolades' (*Daily News*) and 'Golden girl' (*The Star*). Here we see clearly how anomalous persons who do not fit neatly into preconceived, socially determined categories are seen as especially powerful or dangerous. And how the same person may switch between being considered 'dirty' to being considered 'sacred', as 'dirt is essentially disorder' (Douglas 1966/2002: 12).

The Semenya case provides an important site for investigating cultural anxieties about otherness – and raises interesting discussions of normalcy. It is especially interesting in the way it opened up a space in the South African public sphere for discussions around race and gender in the public discourse. The power of words and concepts used in journalism and the media is imperative, and the experiences from this particular case may serve as an example when advocating for gender sensitivity in journalism training as well as in newsrooms and in the field. Several of the articles described how the IAAF had infringed on Semenya's rights to dignity and privacy, which are enshrined in the Bill of Rights and the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (e.g. *The Mercury*, 26 August 2009), but none of the analysed articles focused on the media's own treatment of her. The Semenya coverage further raises interesting questions related to the notion that sex is clear-cut; we see how it is largely culture – not nature – that insists that human beings fit into one of two distinct categories of male or female.

Towards the very end of this article, let us return to Sara Baartman: What happened to the remains of her body? In 1994 when apartheid ended, South

Africans began demanding the return of Baartman's remains for proper burial in the place of her birth. The French refused and claimed that the body was theirs (Crais and Scully 2001). Baartman and her life as the Hottentot Venus emerged as a reminder of the injustices black South Africans, and in particular black women, had endured over three and a half centuries. Then, on 2 May 2002, after years of political negotiations, the remains of Sara Baartman were finally returned to South Africa. She was reburied on National Women's day in August 2002 in the Gamtoos River valley, not far from where she was born. Her grave has been declared a national heritage site and is acknowledged by a poster with a poem written to her by poet Diana Ferrus, herself of mixed Khoisan and slave ancestry, as a tribute:

I've come to take you home – home!
Remember the veld,
the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees?
The air is cool there and the sun does not burn.
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,
the proteas stand in yellow and white
and the water in the stream chuckle sing-songs
as it hobbles along over little stones.

I have come to wrench you away,
away from the poking eyes of the man-made monster
who lives in the dark with his clutches of imperialism
who dissects your body bit by bit,
who likens your soul to that of Satan
and declares himself the ultimate God!

I have come to soothe your heavy heart,
I offer my bosom to your weary soul.
I will cover your face with the palms of my hands,
I will run my lips over the lines in your neck,
I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you
and I will sing for you,
for I have come to bring you peace.

(Ferrus 1998/2011)

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