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ENGH 318  
Response Paper #2

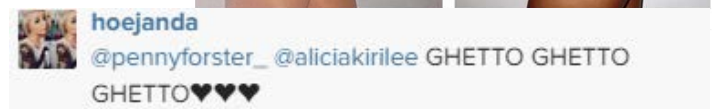
### Butt of the Joke

On Wednesday, when we were discussing Janell Hobson's essay along with the film *The Hottentot Venus*, it bothered me how Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman was stripped of her dignity because the European population was fascinated by her large buttocks. They ridicule and oppressed her. Hobson explains, "Baartman becomes a "freak" in Europe precisely because she is a "type" of Khoisan woman of South Africa. In this construction of her sexualized and "disabled" body, Westerners can prescribe racial and cultural differences" (Hobson 90). Baartman was a South African woman sold into a life in Europe that embarrassed her. They labeled and sexualized her body as "disabled" and suffering from "steatopygia," which was proposed as condition when the buttock protrudes outward. In class we spent an incredible amount of time reflecting on her death. The scientist who dissected her after she died didn't report *how* she died, and that left the class suspicious of her death. I don't want to hypothesize her death, since we know she could have fallen victim to alcoholism or suffered syphilis; rather, I want to discuss the fetish behavior around her body and how it's still continuous in modern Western culture.

Hobson explains that contemporary culture has a way of dismissing the role of racism in reaction to female, black bodies. This variation of racism is important to address because currently society idealizes the white woman's body over a black woman's body. Hobson emphasizes saying the black woman's body is thought to be, "grotesquerie while whiteness serves as an emblem of beauty" (88). This is a damaging, racist, but common idea in the media. There seems to be "negative attitude" toward the black woman's buttocks, as if it's her fault that

her buttock is larger (Hobson 87). This is why Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman was interpreted as a “freak,” why she was seen as an object rather than human. The notion that her body was the reason she was labeled as the “other,” is something Hobson touches on, but also how the fetishism of the black woman’s buttocks removes them from the classified standard of beauty. How it’s okay to adore a woman’s rear end, but if she’s a black woman, she isn’t viewed as beautiful. There is a vast interest on the woman’s body, but the fetishism and racism behind it is something I have never been able to learn about in classroom setting.

In the media, all the time women are exploited and their bodies are up from scrutiny. Just like how Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman was up for display, it’s as if certain black females are under the same criticism. Today, it seems as if the black woman’s body it not perceived as beautiful, but her assets are. If a white woman has the buttocks, hair style influenced by “ghetto glamor”, she is perceived as sexually desirable. But when a black woman, who has a distinguishing buttock and is wearing her hair the same way as the white woman, somehow she is classified as the lesser—the other, or ugly.



Braids have been a common way black women style their hair, but it has become a style western culture has accepted and replicated, but before it was seen as childish, sometimes even tacky. Pictured is up and coming rapper Niykee Heaton who is known to show off her figure, especially her buttocks. It becomes the notion that Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman’s body and other black

women that were classified as having “disabled bodies” or a different style, are now the most sought after.

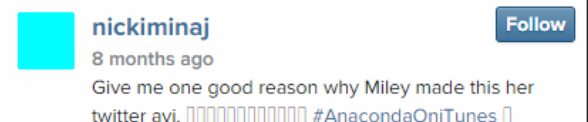


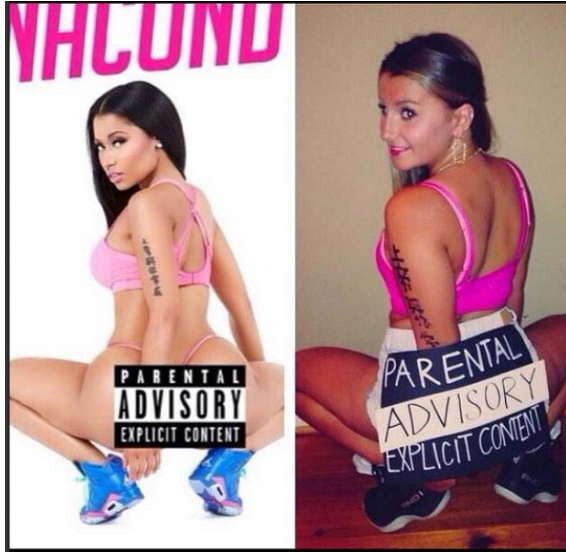
For example, Nicki Minaj is a black female rapper from Sri Lanka and is known for her hour glass shape and buttocks. She embodies the figure close to Sarah “Saartjie” Baartman, but her body is admired today. I went on her Twitter and Instagram and it was nearly impossible to find a mean comment, but I did manage to. Minaj was on the cover of Rolling Stone, arguably the most desired magazine to be featured in. Minaj proudly posted the cover on her Instagram for her fans to see. A majority of her fans were ecstatic

and complimented Minaj, but there were definitely comments that were questionable and rude.

Take for example, user marie12.angle who insinuates how Minaj should wear a shirt that covers her. This comment wasn't the worst, but it shows female hate and how a black woman is scolded for wearing a revealing tank top.

Also, Minaj's famous album cover art has been replicated by many white women. Miley Cyrus, who is has been harshly criticized for her presence in the media and degrading the black female woman's body and culture, is seen in the





squat position. Cyrus photo shops Minaj’s face and place her own face on the bare body, and she manages to lighten the skin tone. Minaj even calls Miley out on posting this picture on Instagram. Again, we see a white woman replicating the cover of Minaj’s album for Halloween. It’s humorous, pokes fun, and draws attention to the buttocks area. It’s treating Minaj’s body as a something to point

and laugh at and replicate.

The prevalence of how the media exposes a black woman’s body for laughs and imitation is appalling. Hobson hits the hammer on the nail when she says, “This appropriation of a “big behind”—a sign of grotesquerie, later connoting a sign of luxurious beauty in the bustle—illustrates the complexities of white responses to racial and sexual difference, which elicit both repulsion and desire” (Hobson 96). The buttock has become a physical feature women are desperate to achieve. But somehow where it derived (within black women) it is not accepted as beauty. I am glad I was able to read Hobson’s essay, it really forced me to do my research.