OBJECTIFICATION OF INFANTILE BODIES: UNDERSTANDING THE BIOPOLITICS OF ANTEBELLUM AMERICA THROUGH BABY SHOWS

BEBEK BEDENLERİN NESNELEŞTİRİLMESİ: İÇ SAVAŞ ÖNCESİ AMERİKA BİYOPOLİTİĞİNİ BEBEK GÖSTERİLERİYLE ANLAMAK

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to examine the function of baby shows in the antebellum America in instigating binary logic of gender in family, child rearing, objectification of both infantile and maternal bodies, all of which are closely tied to the biopolitics of the antebellum America. This study will first look at the biopolitical aspects of the first baby shows organized as part of agricultural fairs in 1854 by focusing on the coverage of such events by newspaper articles. Then it will follow Phineas Taylor Barnum's re-introduction of baby shows along with his freak shows in 1855 for commercial success. In Barnum's shows, this study finds, the reproduction of properly bred white American babies is promoted through questionnaires and examinations of doctors in the evaluation of babies as well as the mothers to instill a eugenic normalcy with regard to determining the qualities of the best American baby. Lastly, the juxtaposition of the abnormal "freaks" and "oddities" with "cherubic" babies is realized through Barnum's American museum which, as this study will argue, serves as a heterotopia in the sense that Barnum's museum attempts to establish and thereby instigate a discursive historical truth of the proper middle-class American family in the form of a myth by exercising the power/knowledge over the American family as a heterotopian authority.

Öz
Bu çalışmanın amacı, İç Savaş öncesi Amerikan toplumunda bebek gösterilerinin işlevlerine odaklanılarak bu gösterilerin aile, çocuk yetiştirme, anne ve bebek bedenlerinin nesneleştirilmesi konuları özelinde ikili cinsiyet mantığının toplumda nasıl yerleştirildiğini incelemektir. Bu amaçla bebek gösterileri İç Savaş öncesi Amerikan biyopolitiğiyle ilişkilendirilerek irdelenecektir. Bu çalışma ilk olarak 1854 yılında tarım fuarlarının parçası olarak düzenlenen ilk bebek gösterilerinin biyopolitik yönlerini, bu olayların gazetelerdeki yansımalarına odaklanarak inceleyecektir. Daha sonrasında Phineas Taylor Barnum'un bebek gösterilerini ticari başarı için ucube gösterilerinin içine katarak 1855 yılında yeniden halka sunmasına değinilecektir. Ayrıca, Barnum'un gösterilerinde; beyaz Amerikan bebeklerin üreme artışının şovlarda düzenlenen anketlerde ve doktorların anne ve bebekleri değerlendirmedeki kıstaslarında teşvik edildiği vurgulanacaktır. İncelemelerdeki bu kıstasların en iyi Amerikan bebeğinin niteliklerini belirlemede öjenik bir normallik aşıladığı savunulacaktır. Son olarak, anormal "ucubeler" ve "tuhaflıklar"ın "melek" bebeklerle bir araya getirilmesinin Barnum'un Amerikan müzesi aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmesi, bu çalışmanın savunduğu üzere, Barnum müzesinin orta sınıf Amerikan aile yapısı yaratmak amacıyla bir Amerikan aile miti kurup söylemsel bir tarihsel gerçeklik oluşturmasıyla açıklanacaktır. Bu gerçeklik Barnum'un Amerikan Müzesi'nin Amerikan ailesi üzerinde heterotopik bir otorite olarak güç/bilgi yetkisini kullanarak yapmasıyla açıklanacaktır.

At our house, at home, we've a sweet little baby,
As fat as a 'coon in the fall:
And for mischief, fun, music, or whatever it maybe,
Of brats, he's the general of all!
With Cheeks like two roses,
The prettiest of noses,
Endeared is our Moses,
By every fond tie;
In fair and foul weather,
He serves as a tether
To bind us together-
My Betsey and I.

O. G. Spoons

Introduction

Writing for an article in *San Francisco Sun* in 1854, O.G Spoons started his poem entitled "Our Baby" with an appreciation of an upcoming baby show in California, pointing to the tethering effect of its cherubic innocence for the idealized middle-class American family. Spoons' poem not only reflects the happiness found in marital bond, which is multiplied with the arrival of a baby, but also shows the obsession with regard to the objectified babies. It also reveals how important it was for the idealized American family to showcase their babies. The poem ends with calling the baby "[t]he Fair," which as a pun can be regarded as a call for attracting families to join the agricultural fair. In this vein, it also points to the original function of baby shows: the juxtaposition of showcasing babies in agricultural fairs with home-made products and these were occasions where the baby shows made their first appearances. The first prominent baby show in antebellum America was organized in 1854 in Ohio as part of the agricultural fair (Pearson, 2008, p. 341) where showcasing babies along with agricultural products gave spectators and potential customers a chance to study the best babies. The strength of these babies was measured by how fat and plump they were, not to mention their beauty, which was associated closely with that of their mothers. The commodification of infantile bodies did not only provide an early approbation of maternal duty, but it was also used by organizers for attracting citizens to the fair. The prize especially attracted mothers who saw the contest as a way to earn a monetary prize, as well as an outwardly appreciation of their babies and themselves. Even though the emphasis was on the beauty of the best baby, mothers also took pride and joy in presenting their babies and themselves as they were showcased alongside them. Even though eugenic literature, practice and Francis Galton's ideas had not yet been formed or made public, baby shows in the antebellum era that evaluated babies based on their qualities were precursors to eugenic shows called better baby shows. These

shows attempted to scientifically determine the features and qualities of racially impure white babies. They were used by eugenists to portray and instigate the pure image of the white American family and supremacy over genealogically inferior races.

After the original introduction of baby shows as part of agricultural fairs in 1854, Phineas Taylor Barnum's institutionalized grand baby shows re-introduced baby shows in New York in 1855 with monetary prizes. In these shows, the infantile body was then exhibited alongside freaks and oddities. This rework by Barnum intended to appeal both to showcasing the decadence of humanity as well as the innocence of cherubic beauty. Such juxtaposition fostered stern criticisms directed towards Barnum. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, a prominent lecturer and a women's rights activist in antebellum America, expressed a strong disapproval of Barnum's mischievous attack on the privacy of that sacred symbiotic bond between the mother and child, decrying: "There is something intrinsically revolting in this attempt to force aside the veil which screens and protects the chaste matron, where she and her 'pretty brood' within the sanctuary of home are exempt from the rude gaze of a prying curiosity" (Adams,1997, p. 103). Barnum's answer revolved around a scientific appropriation of his shows which involved questionnaires that attempted to find the qualities of the best American baby. Such answer also incorporated showcasing of newly invented breast pumps whose functions would mitigate the weight of the hard work of child-rearing to which American mothers were subjected in the domestic sphere as was determined by the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood. As this paper will argue, Barnum's scientific pretensions were deployed to dispel the criticisms but they were reflective of the antebellum biopolitics. Baby shows in Barnum's American Museum acted alongside the biopolitical schema in terms of creating the normalcy in fostering binary structure of the American family. As the maternal and infantile bodies were enthroned for spectators, a discursive truth is instilled in the minds of the visitors and spectators by the heterotopian authority of the museum in terms of fostering what Michel Foucault called the Malthusian couple, the biopolitical formation of the reproductive couple.

The Cult of Domesticity and Commercialized Babies

The idea of the cult of true womanhood, a phrase used in the nineteenth century to associate true womanhood with God was based on the association of religious virtue with maternal roles of the domestic woman. Barbara Welter (1966)

indicates in her influential article that there were four virtues that defined women in the nineteenth century American society: “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity . . . they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (p. 152). As part of the Puritan legacy embedded in collective American unconsciousness, the true womanhood meant a subservient, and homely female that sacrificed her life for the betterment of American nation. This ideology targeting women was dictated by republican motherhood which not only conditioned women to attend to their homely duties but also encouraged them to teach, lecture and write to enforce this ideology. Such prescriptions determined by republican motherhood contributed to the installment of the cult in the psyches of both women and men alike. The cult of true womanhood was justified by the religious appropriation of womanhood since true womanhood had been regarded as “a fervently Protestant notion . . . [warding off] evil and worldly influences” (DuBois & Dumenil, 2016, p. 157). This aspect was closely associated with certain vices such as the alcoholism men were enmeshed in out in the market place. However, as market economy flourished and home as a site of production was replaced by the market which became predominantly male-oriented, the notion of child-rearing changed. Similarly, homely space was attributed to women whose sole role became the conduct of domestic duties. In this vein, the progression of baby shows was not only reflective of such domestic ideology that targeted women but also of the changing economic interests of the middle-class American family. Attending a baby show and contesting in it was a white middle-class pursuit. The baby shows targeting the middle-class American wife therefore consolidated the subordination of women by patriarchy. The shows also instilled the belief that child-rearing as an occupation was a female-only job. This job was considered to be giving maternal pleasure and a maternal peer recognition. By doing so, these shows also contributed to the assignment of the occupation of child-rearing as the primary way by which women should define themselves, serving again as a patriarchal tool that consolidated the confinement of women to home.

The original baby show held in Ohio in 1854 showcased babies along with products made at home. Mothers took their babies to the fair to win prizes but they were also encouraged to display their domestic products alongside their babies. One Georgia baby contest in 1850s required that the female participants should cover their babies with clothing that was produced at home, affirming the conventional

belief of home as a maternal space for producing goods (Pearson, 2008, p. 346). However, baby shows were later quickly morphed into organizations targeting the newly emerging consumerist middle-class American family. Republican motherhood enforced the idea that republican posterity falls to the sacrifice of the domestic women who, displaced from work, are then tasked with the education of children so that the children are instilled with republican values. Such values were regarded crucial to be imprinted in the minds of the children so that they would become virtuous and concerned for the common good as opposed to being ignorant, useless and weak. There grew an increasing and often obsessive focus on the display of babies as child-rearing of fewer but beautiful, cherubic and healthier babies became the measure of pride for antebellum American family and baby shows provided the middle-class American family with a prescribed method of partaking in baby worshipping (Pearson, 2008, p. 347).

Among the reasons that facilitated the objectification of babies in the antebellum era was the introduction of "the bassinet [which] allowed women to place babies in the parlor rather than the nursery, situating them literally and figuratively at the center of the home and showcasing them before guests' eyes" (Pearson, 2008 p. 345). Since the monumental task of child-rearing was regarded maternal, men were often absent in baby shows. Furthermore, the prizes that were given to the fattest and healthiest baby often involved tea sets, silver, cooking equipment and sewing machines (Pearson, 2008 p. 344), confirming that baby shows did not only target babies but also especially the women who took immense pride when they showcased their sons and daughters.

The original Ohio agricultural fair served as the first attraction for baby contests and included in its monetary prize pool certain items: "[t]he first premium finest baby, 2 years, old or under, is a tea set, with silver, valued at $300. The second premium, a tea set valued at $200. The third premium for the finest child under 1 year of age, a silver plate of $200" ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3). Regardless of the gender of the prize-winning baby, tea sets and silver plates were given to the winner mother. This reveals that the organizers of the fairs set the prizes for mothers specifically, which caused a lot of attraction from mothers who wanted to showcase their babies for both maternal approbation and monetary prizes. The sex of the babies that won prizes seems to be irrelevant since the features of the baby- whether babies were fat, plumb or skinny- meant a lot more to the judges, mothers and exhibition. Furthermore, the reports shied away from

giving details on the sex and names of the babies as they feared "serious protests of the parents, who do not desire the world to know whether their babies entered for the prizes and did not get it" ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3). Furthermore, the shows could also be interpreted as an early capitalist imperative of exploiting maternal and feminine attraction, which was used by organizers to attract customers to the fair where several other exhibitions of goods were being put on display. As Pearson (2008) observes with regard to the close link between the transformation of the fair culture with capitalist market economy and growing consumerist culture, previously a space to showcase products that are produced at farm or home, the fairs then became a site for exercising a consumer culture through entertainment and curious displays (p. 346). The middle-class appropriation of true womanhood was not always compatible, especially when one considers the example of female factory workers, the Lowell girls in the antebellum era, who claimed a rather short-lived but exemplary political and economic participation in the exclusively male-dominated work space. However, baby shows in the mid-nineteenth century marked "the substitution of women's traditional goods with babies expressed the economic and cultural changes underlying middle class domesticity" (Pearson, 2008, p. 346). Baby shows would later morph into spectacles juxtaposed with freaks and oddities in dime-museums and freak shows for a strictly capitalist culture that had taken entertainment as the basis of consumerism in exhibiting the abnormal.

The monetary value surely attracted families who poured from different states to showcase their babies. Even though babies were the core focus, maternal approbation was also an important factor which propelled mothers to join the shows but contesting mothers were also a site of attraction for men. For example, one article in *Independent Press* reporting on the fair in Ohio in 1854 pointed out how young America was aroused by the display and how young men who were prevented from seeing the baby tent filled with nurses and mothers "climbed the adjoining trees, and enjoyed free gratis for nothing, a stolen peep at the Baby Convention, which from their expressions we judged was highly gratifying" ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3). A similar report confirms that the tent was forbidden to enter as referees carefully examined babies who were taken care of by nurses. Mothers wore their best dresses and rosettes to show their pride in participation of the contests, whose attraction was reportedly "due to the magnetic forces of the mothers; most of them were young and many of them very beautiful" ("The Baby Convention", 1854, p. 6). As babies were inspected and assessed for

beauty and health, a sancto sanctorum, a holy tent assigned for angelic babies and their mothers, accompanied by music for babies and mothers were erected on the fair grounds and attracted the fair-goers.

Despite being spaces that promoted a strictly white and middle-class heteronormative gender matrix, baby shows were occasionally used as public spaces for activists to challenge the normalcies and conformities of the antebellum period. The baby show in Ohio in 1854 was such a spectacle that organizers invited activists such as Lucretia Mott, Fanny Fern and Horace Greeley but they were unable to attend. However, they sent letters which were read aloud to the audience and such spectacles organized figures by Barnum used the public space in their absence for political propaganda against slavery to cause further attraction to the shows. Drawing attention to "the human constitution in this country, where able-bodied men are sold at from $500 to $1500" ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3), Greeley emphasized anti-slavery sentiments with regard to the biopolitical misdeeds of the South. While critics in the North occasionally associated baby shows with slavery, the Southern critics of baby shows conducted in the North focused on the highly commercialized culture that objectified babies. In this vein, northern critiques showed how the display of triplets and quadruplets was immoral in the sense that the shows reminded one of "slaveholders anxious to change woman from an uniparous to a multiparous animal" (Pearson, 2008, p. 351). Such criticism accused baby shows of promoting a form of slavery for women who are praised for having multiple babies. On the other hand, the critique of baby shows by southern newspapers focused on how southern society were much more "affective, more domestic and less troublingly commercial than the free North" (Pearson, 2008, p. 352).

Lucretia Mott who was one of the foremothers of Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 showed discontent with the exclusion of black babies from the baby show and called for the inclusion of black babies ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3). The criticism by Mott was centered on the objectification of babies that were being displayed for profit. Babies were objectified for their newly discovered middle-class cherubic innocence, which provided a sort of entertainment for the consumerist culture. Agricultural fairs that showcased babies brought such consumerist culture with them to the rural areas. This obsession with babies elevated them to unique beings who should be closely monitored, schooled, cared for but also showcased. Although these shows are heavily criticized for exposing the sacred bound between

mother and her child that should be confined to the home, the displayed children that belonged to the American middle class was being transformed into iconic figures of piety, virtue and innocence.

A reporter in a newspaper article in Georgia in 1854 hoped after observing a baby show that "the audience would not judge the specimen exhibited by present appearances, for, although young, it was but the development of the future and a *burst* of human nature" ("Baby Show in Georgia", 1854, p. 3). The fact that the word "specimen" is used for the word "baby" foretells an upcoming juxtaposition of baby shows who became integral parts of middle-class entertainment in dime-museums and freak shows. Baby shows had a biopolitical aim of being used as a public space for spectators "to contemplate the virtues that babies symbolized: the health of the nation, domesticity, innocence, even divinity" (Pearson, 2008, p. 347). Mothers who raised future republicans were celebrated for their maternal role even when they could not receive a prize. An article in 1854 observes an old woman who attends a baby show in Ohio with her seventeenth child to claim a premium award ("National Baby Show", 1854, p. 3), which can be interpreted as a celebration of her contribution to republican ideals by giving birth to sons and daughters for the republican cause amidst an increasing clash between Northern and Southern values. Even though the posterity of republican values was being challenged by Southerners in claiming that baby shows were a northern phenomenon and the northern critical literature around baby shows pointed to the association of these shows with slavery, they both agreed that babies were being forced impiously to take part in contests that objectified babies.

Barnum's Grand National Baby Shows

Agricultural baby shows that started in 1854 were not strictly offering monetary prize as they were rather organized as part of fairs for further attraction for mothers, families and men. Phineas Taylor Barnum turned the sentimental baby shows into capitalistic profit. His institutionalized shows took full advantage of the earlier commercial success of baby shows. Barnum saw the potential profit that could be made in re-launching the baby shows which were previously attached to fairs. Barnum claimed that the original idea of baby shows came from him and he took full advantage of the earlier success of showcasing babies alongside with their mothers. Barnum's baby shows used scientific lectures and appropriation to ward off any criticism. Barnum's American Museum which was founded in 1841 introduced baby shows with monetary prize in 1855 for the first time in New York

"that for better or worse, filled the establishment with children, their mothers eager to win cash prizes for finest or fattest baby or best twins" (Wilson, 2020, p. 271). Barnum (2017) points out in his autobiography that the chief function of these baby shows was to show the middle-class and the press that he had "curiosities worth showing and worth seeing, and exhibited dog cheap at twenty-five cents admission, children half price- [studying] ways to arrest public attention; to startle, to make people talk and wonder; in short, to let the world know that I had a Museum" (p. 153). The first show held in New York offered a $100 prize, equivalent in purchasing power to about $2,000 today, to the finest baby and received much attraction as 100 contestants registered for the prize. However, it quickly caused a protest since "the verdict did not suit anybody but the mother of one baby. The other ninety-nine indignant mothers jumped on to Mr. Barnum and the committee, and denounced the whole proceeding as partial and unjust" (Benton, 1891, p. 113). Barnum quickly adjusted his baby shows by providing a lecture room for mothers and babies. He also created a jury to announce the prizes as well as allowing new inventions of breast pumps, baby notions and nipple shields to be displayed during the shows.

Scientific Appropriation of Baby Shows

Barnum attended the lectures given by famous female abolitionists such as Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. He formed close relationship with the New York physician Dr. Russell Thacher Trall who was a prominent writer at the time on hygiene, and hydrotherapy, as well as a temperance advocate. Barnum (1983) frequently asked his wife to attend his baby shows as a judge (p. 69). When the shows at first encountered harsh criticisms, Barnum sought professional legitimacy and blessing for his baby contests. In 1855, Dr. Lydia Folger, the second woman to be given a medical degree in the U.S. gave a lecture in the museum. In this lecture which had a pre-eugenic focus, prize-winning babies were held up one by one to show "the audience on the merits of the infantiles, especially on the crowning merit of their being genuine original American stock" ("Baby-Show", 1855). Furthermore, Barnum sought after scientific appropriation of his shows by inviting doctors and scientists. He frequently legitimized his shows by relying on scientists and doctors who lectured on subjects such as child-rearing, maternal duties and children's health. This is interpreted as establishing a tradition of pre-eugenic scientific baby shows that relied on research and cataloguing, which were picked up by eugenists who organized better baby

shows towards the end of the nineteenth century (Blanchard, 2008, p. 115). Barnum juxtaposed the future of Yankee posterity symbolized through his baby shows against the exhibitions of abnormal freaks. Blanchard points out that "the rich and the famous of New York, as well as commoners, flocked to his establishment to feast their eyes on the likes of The Last of the Aztecs (a brother and sister with pointed heads, who had mental disabilities), The Swiss Bearded Lady, The Original Siamese Twins, an African-American mother with her two albino children, and domestic and foreign savages" (Blanchard, 2008, p. 129). He exhibited the fattest and finest babies in his Grand National Baby Shows alongside freaks for two days, and echoing the previous baby shows which rewarded the reproduction quality of the domestic American woman, he offered "a premium of $250 . . . for the finest quatern, or set of quadruplets" (Barnum, 1983, p. 89).

Antebellum Concerns of Barnum's Baby Shows

Barnum's popular baby shows which were held at the American museum in New York and in several other cities in 1855 were reflective of antebellum attitudes about race, gender, and class. Barnum's baby shows excluded black babies and Barnum never organized a colored baby show. A correspondent in New York Tribune openly asked Barnum to include black babies in an article, writing:

> I wish to inquire whether, on the coming contest between the infantile members of the community, those to whom nature has given a dark exterior will be admitted to the arena, as combatants for the proffered rewards of merit. Resting in the disinterestedness of my esteemed friend, I trust that as my inquiry is advanced sincerely, it will merit a passing notice and elicit an expression that shall cause solid satisfaction to take the place of doubt. I pause for a reply ("Letters", 1855).

Barnum's response was a re-affirmation of the racial conformity and dynamics of the antebellum era as he showed reluctance to challenge them: "As society is as present constituted, however, and as it seems likely to remain during our day and generation, . . . I shall manage the Baby Show, as I manage all other enterprises in which I engage, with a respectful deference for the social usages of the community I seek to please" ("Letters", 1855). Even though Barnum promised a colored baby show later, he refrained from organizing one himself but he later came into an agreement with a colonel to create a show for babies in Boston. However, as an article in *Vanity Fair* in 1862 on an upcoming baby show in the museum observes,

Barnum was close to exhibiting a black baby called Abolition in a separate apartment in the museum but the baby was too sickly to be put on spectacle because of being over-fed by nurses. It was also reported that there was an overwhelming attention given to the little baby, so the exhibition had to be cancelled ("Letter from McArone," 1862). This attempt points to the pre-eugenic belief in the inferiority of the black baby which was to be showcased as a curiosity as part of the freak shows. Such display would also serve a purpose to underscore the purity of white babies as opposed to the display of the abnormal black baby. The same article makes reference to how new cargo of goods brought by SS *Great Eastern* in 1862 would enhance and ease the burden of child-rearing for mothers exemplified through "Baby's Notions consisting of corals in reefs; rattles; ribbons; lace caps; . . . other things of which we do know the names but do not know how to spell them" [alongside with a newly patented baby-jumper which is] "calculated for the reception of twins, triplets, quaterns, quintuplets" ("Letter from McArone," 1862). The article then juxtaposes the foreign nature of the unknown goods with the black baby in a cartoon, presenting two "others," namely the mistrust towards the "foreign" goods embodied and caricaturized stereotypically as an effeminate Chinese immigrant and the stereotypical display of the exotic black baby, in a congruous manner (see fig.1).

Figure 1

The Approaching Baby Show[1]

[1] From Vanity Fair, Making of America Journal Articles, 1862, p. 267. Copyright 2021 by University of Michigan: Humanities Text Initiative.

Barnum's baby shows addressed to those of native-born middle-class mothers but discontent was frequently observed. In another article from *New York Herald*, a reportedly middle-class lady who attended one of Barnum's baby shows criticized Mrs. Barnum for deeming her baby unfit for prize. As the exhibiting mother reveals how "the babies and their mothers were all placed in a hot room, where a number of questions were put" ("Baby Show Again", 1855) to the contestants, she was then asked by Mrs. Barnum from what country she was from. Having been asked such an undesirable question that questioned the nativity of the baby, the middle-class white mother, then decried about the question that inquired on the baby's birthplace. She felt that her immigrant background and the fact that she came from Ireland was the chief factor in the elimination. Exhibitor then accused Mrs. Barnum of deeming her display poor and unfit and of choosing the winner baby based on doctors' and her own elitist and subjective view which prompted her to call the whole show at the end of the interview a scam by a humbug like Barnum ("Baby Show Again", 1855).

Barnum did not take the risk of juxtaposing black babies with black "oddities" such as the "Afro-American known as Vitiligo, who was an albino and was also microcephalic [. . . and] presented . . . as the 'missing link' between men and apes" (Blanchard, 2008, p. 68). Barnum had used racial indifference as a tool for profit before the introduction of baby shows. Joice Heth who had been exhibited by Barnum across the United States for her great age of 161 years as well as her alleged previous employment as George Washington's nurse, was subjected a post-mortem autopsy in 1836 in a spectacle organized by Barnum. Joice Heth as a former slave was under contract with Barnum when she died and her public autopsy had exposed Barnum as a fraud. Even though Barnum later admitted that it was a hoax, he already had a reputation for using "scientific ideas on the biological nature of racial difference [which] provided a conceptual framework for popular images of degraded, deformed, and otherwise humiliated blacks on stage" (Blanchard, 2008, p. 116).

As binary logic of gender was constituted through baby shows and conformity and sacredness of family that relied on the domestic role of women dominated the antebellum era, the abnormal only found appearance in the form of objectification in dime-museums and freak shows such as Barnum's American museum. Objectification of the abnormal was the capitalistic form of entertainment through which consumers formed their true republican American identities by

watching the abject put on display. Blanchard (2008) believes that "the disappearance of the 'abnormal' from the heart of social structures made it all the more imperative that a new form of Otherness should be displayed. Otherness was not simply a state, it was the alien element which resisted assimilation and made it possible to construct social, cultural and physical identities" (p. 27). The abject is pitted against cherubic innocence in the museum, out of which Americans learned how to form their own identities which clearly instigated a white middle-class familial structure to which babies brought joy and meaning. Baby shows provided a different form of entertainment alongside freaks in showing the ideal babies each American family should ideally have. In this respect, these shows promoted reproduction and confirmed that mothers should not seek fulfillment in the working space which rightfully belonged to the male but seek fulfillment in child-rearing, as was enforced by the "domestic ideology that sanctified the home as the seat of morality and goodness" (Pearson, 2008, p. 345).

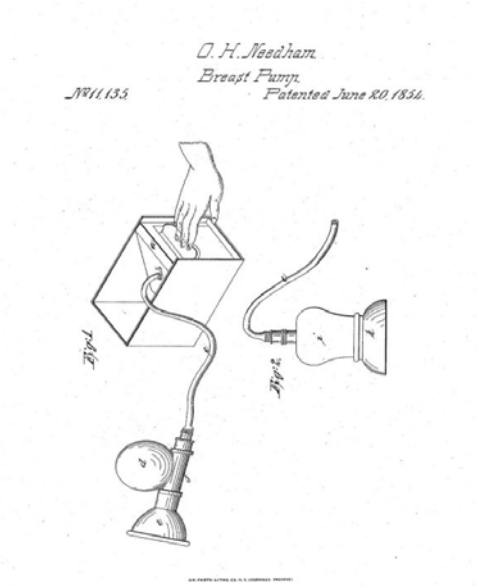
Maternal Display and Criticism

Barnum exploited maternal desire by making a spectacle of not just babies but mothers as well. Referring to the earlier sexual connotation of baby shows where mothers were source of the sexual attraction by men, Barnum's American Museum provided beauty products and allowed gadgets designed for mothers and babies to be displayed during spectacles. As Pearson (2008) notes, "*Vanity Fair* likewise joked that in preparation for an 1862 baby show at Barnum's museum, mothers were buying up baby-improving potions by the gallon, inventors were hard at work on contraptions to sell at the show, and merchants were compiling rattles, ribbons, and other Baby's Notions" (p. 359). This presents a clear distinction between the earlier baby shows that first and foremost focused on the display of domestic products and used baby shows for attracting fair-goers and Barnum's baby shows which made that shift of appealing to the emerging consumer culture that now targeted mothers and maternal approbation. Furthermore, Barnum made sure that the prize-winning babies alongside their mothers are enthroned for further display for a few days. This spectacle has not only provided a maternal mimicry to be internalized by other mothers and future mothers, but also allowed a sexual display of maternal sexuality. Indeed, these baby shows in Barnum's American Museum allowed the participants a glimpse into maternal beauty, secrets of sexuality and the child-rearing by focusing extensively on the relationship between babies and sex. As Pearson (2008) believes, this sexuality was shown through associating the

baby shows with breastfeeding and prompting the mothers into displaying their own sexuality by movable fronts attached to their dresses that designed specifically to be used for frequent breastfeeding (p. 354). The earlier sancto sanctorum in previous fairs is replaced by a nursery set up inside the museum by Barnum, which attracted many consumers. Among the reported displays of maternal inventions inside were Dr. C.H. Needham's display of breast pumps and nipple shields, which reportedly attracted a lot of attention (see fig. 2). The fact that men were barred from going anywhere near the nursery points to a growing interest by young men who were sexually attracted to the displays to have a glimpse at maternal bodies. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century cultural ideas about motherhood and nursing had begun to change. Even though wet nursing was widespread among high upper-class families in antebellum era, middle-class motherhood was targeted mostly by the cult of true womanhood. The cult "stressed that the fate of children rested not just in God's hands, but in those of women. And the home, increasingly viewed as a private sphere separated from commercial enterprises, became a mother's workshop. Opening the nursery door to a stranger, an unknown wet nurse - possibly a woman of deficient character - was, therefore, a risk" (Golden, 1996, p. 39). Reflecting the reproductive and biopolitical capitalist economy, the breast pumps were designed to make these mothers' domestic lives easier and served as an ideological tool which contributed to the idealized image of the mother feeding her own baby.

Figure 2

Dr. C. H. Needham's Breast Pump[2]



[2] From GooglePatents, 1854, https://patents.google.com/patent/US11135. In the public domain.

Barnum expelled criticisms towards his baby shows by presenting himself also as a father figure who loved babies. His scientific lectures also sought to better the conditions of mothers who are tasked with the crucial task of child-rearing. The juxtaposition of babies along with oddities sparked stark criticism which often accused Barnum of invading private sphere of American family. A newspaper in 1862 in Ohio criticized baby shows for offering the winners monetary prizes whereby the more grotesque and odder the baby was, the more money was offered for displaying them (Pearson, 2008, p. 353). Appalled by Barnum's attempts of presenting baby shows appealing to the middle-class American family, *Godey's Lady's Book* severely criticized the shows on the grounds that they dared exposing the sacred bound between the child and the mother:

> It is to us an inexplicable social enigma that so many mothers holding respectable positions, and some of them positions of influence, should be found ready, under any circumstances, to submit themselves to the degradation to which exhibitors and exhibited are exposed.
>
> Let those who have never attended one try to realize the scene; the mothers, the nurses holding labels stating the class and number, the infants feverish and excited in consequence of the foul and heated atmosphere they are compelled to breathe, and the treatment to which they are subjected. Some of them doze uneasily upon the knee of mother or nurse, seeking their natural nourishment before the gaze of the crowd; and there hundreds of indifferent or curious spectators move along, jostling, laughing, joking, commenting with unsparing freedom! (Hale & Godey, 1856, p. 571).

The horrified experience of infantile display is then scorned for ungodly behavior since the way *Godey's Lady's Book* promoted motherhood and maternal sacrilege as part of the cult of true womanhood has been under a seemingly capitalist attack. This attack was considered to be rendering the holy sacrilege of motherhood a soulless approbation: "What a picture for pure infancy, for solicitous maternity! What a betrayal of the Divine trust: Take these little ones; bring them up for me, It seems impious to add: Of such is the kingdom of Heaven" (Hale & Godey, 1856, p. 571). Nevertheless, Barnum always associated himself with the figure of a republican *paterfamilias* doting on its babies. In one of selected letters addressed to the poet Bayard Taylor, Barnum (1983) ponders over his future in the manner of a true republican father:

> Barnum has been made rich by catering for the children. The youth of America regard the loss of Barnum's Museum as a loss irreparable. Fathers & mothers mourn its destruction on account of their children. Why should not Barnum (who in fact was always more of a philanthropist than a humbug) establish a free museum for the instruction and edification of the Youth of America! (p. 140).

Barnum's baby shows affirmed the ideals of domestic womanhood such as affirming child-rearing as a crucial part of women's lives. However, women who attended the baby shows found a chance to earn monetary prize through these shows as the total amount of prize was occasionally increased and distributed to a wide array of babies varying from the finest and fattest to the twins and triplets. This method was a way to please mothers in encouraging them further to engage in perfecting their maternal duties as well as dispelling criticism by allowing more mothers to be rewarded. Monetary value aside, Barnum's baby contests were a way for mothers to extend their roles outside of familial interiority by attending lectures of activists. The ideology of the cult of true womanhood was embedded in the firm belief of the maternal role of women, which had political as well as spiritual connotations as to "preserving the memory of the American revolution and to securing its legacy within a stable, peaceful, and permanent American nation" (DuBois & Dumenil, 2016, p. 202). Such duty fell to the republican mother who played the crucial role in educating children who were to play vital roles in preserving republican ideals. Such education started first in family and mothers had to make sure that the children were raised to obey God's orders and to embrace republican ideals such as solidarity, preservation of larger good, being industrious and self-disciplined. What baby shows affirmed through maternal approbation was to consolidate women's confinement to home and child-rearing where the crucial education of children was taking place. However, as women sought claiming public spaces wherever they found them, whether in lectures in baby shows or through working at mills and claiming rights as part of their economic participation, they were already pushing to acquire new ways of that would challenge the ideals of the true womanhood.

The Antebellum Puzzle

The antebellum period in the United States saw a growing marketing economy, economic prosperity, rapid urbanization but also a decline in population. The antebellum puzzle, which "describes the situation of declining stature and rising mortality in the three decades prior to the American Civil War (1861-65)" (Haines et

al., 2000, p. 1) points out that even though the rapidly growing market should have brought with it better living conditions and thereby a decrease in mortality rates, the opposite was experienced in the antebellum families. The reason for the puzzle is attributed to the decline in nutritious diet of antebellum Americans which lacked enough proteins and calories: "the nation was also suffering from serious negative externalities which affected the health and longevity of the population" (Haines et al., 2000, p. 1). The deterioration of American diet along with increased mobilization, faster rates at which diseases were spread owing to growing transportation links contributed to the mortality rates as well as shrinking of the population. This might have had added an extra concern over the crucial role of child-rearing for mothers as fewer children were preferred because of the changes in the American familial structure. American diet at the time was a growing concern. In this vein, the way mothers fed their babies was a frequent question asked of them in baby shows among many others varying from the type of bath baby gets to the shape of land where the baby is raised. In one baby show in antebellum era, a reporter observes several questions in the form of questionnaires being addressed to mothers. This questionnaire is comprised of inquiries on the age of the father, mother, child's birthdate, its name, mother's maternal history on child-rearing, whether the child was prematurely or regularly delivered, as well as the diet and exercise of the mother during pregnancy, the geography of the home the child was raised in and the care given to the child (bathing, diet, special care etc.) ("Grand Infantile Display", 1855). Out of ten questions of this questionnaire, two were directly about the diet and judges gave suggestions and advise depending on the type of answers mothers gave. Since these questionnaires were either conducted in nurseries or tents, all mothers were giving their ears to what the judges remarked. The way the contested child was raised and giving the proper answers revealing the proficiency of the mothers in child-rearing to convince the jury members were also important factors in determining the winner.

In questioning whether this increasing mortality rates which stemmed from the deterioration of the American diet in antebellum period was a Malthusian squeeze since Thomas Robert Malthus predicted that nutritious shortfall would result in higher mortality rates. It is suggested that "the commercialization of agriculture probably played some role in mortality and nutritional access . . . which is typically associated with some deficiency in the production of food, it did reflect a negative feedback from the economy to the demographic environment" (Haines et al., 2000, p. 13). Even though the report lists several reasons ranging from

immigration to rapid industrialization as factors that contributed to unusual mortality rates in antebellum era, it is concluded that "it seems that the growing prosperity of the United States in the antebellum period was partly purchased at a price of some deterioration of the biological standard of living" (Haines et al., 2000, p. 14). The growing concern for the education and schooling of fewer children by the middle-class American families might have been the result of this biopolitical concern pertaining to the antebellum period.

Barnum's American Museum as a Heterotopia

Michel Foucault lists the deployment of sexuality as essential to the biopolitics of the modern state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries since sex as a phenomenon became highly regulated, and confined to home as the incest taboo became strictly forbidden. Deployment of sexuality made it possible so that the power could be exercised over the subjects' body, which was ensured by the reproduction of proper bodies. According to Michel Foucault, the power and knowledge share a close association in the sense that they co-exist. Knowledge, for Foucault, can be regarded as an exercise of power relations, which in turn causes power to function as an off-shoot of knowledge. Such power-knowledge Foucault speaks of was a marking characteristic of the functioning schema of the biopolitics of the modern state, which relied on the formation of what Foucault called the Malthusian (reproductive) couple. Such ideology enforced and is first fed on Victorian motherhood that confined sexuality to home and associated the angelic space of home as the rightful place of the female, which has close connotations to the cult of True Womanhood which stemmed from similar ideals. This new re-evaluation of sex, as Foucault (1978) calls it, is deployed at the behest of biopolitics which, "[s]pread out from one pole to the other … [pointing to] a whole series of different tactics that combined in varying proportions the objective of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations" (p. 146). Just as Victorian sexuality was confined to home, sex in antebellum America became a middle-class phenomenon that is confined to the homely space as non-normative sexualities were deemed abnormal. The abnormal was manifested in dime-museums through the display of abject monsters and freaks of human nature such as Joice Heth. The abject that was put into display in dime museums stood between human and inhuman, while spectacles in dime-museums and freak shows for middle-class entertainment provided a screen against which binary roles of the established gender matrix are formed.

While sex was regulated by biopolitics in the nineteenth century, the familial interiority was targeted as well. In this vein, the biopolitics of Victorian moral codes is crucial as an analysis for Foucault owing to the fact that the Victorian era and its (im)morality contained emerging feature of biopolitics: the confinement of sex to home, and the assignation of man and woman to their gendered space to ensure reproduction. A similar capitalistic tendency in exploiting non-normative abject screens are found in the institutionalized structure of profit-making machinery of dime-museums such as Barnum's. Barnum's American Museum as an entertainment targeting the consumerist middle-class fits in what Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) call a heterotopia, which is defined as "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society- . . . counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (p. 3). For Foucault and Miskowiec (1986), museums and libraries are heterotopias where knowledge and history are recorded and exemplified through objects and art pieces. However, museums are strictly western, capitalistic and modern in the sense that they reflect collective memory as opposed to their earlier function of displaying individual tastes in the seventeenth century (p. 7).

For Foucault, heterotopia meant a counter-space, a liminal site embodied through what he called mirror that stood between utopia and heterotopia whereby subjectification occurred. By subjectification, Foucault meant a series of processes that created the subject and such processes were centered on disciplining the subject. Museums in this regard can be seen as sites where the disciplining of the mob through mimicry is ensured through display of objects. This creation of normalcy through display in museums, as Hetherington (2011) points out, shows that "the museum is a discursive space of the outside as Foucault presents it, a space in which a certain imagining about culture, nature, history and the forces of power associated with their exhibition, emerge through a non-relation to the subject who visits" (p. 471). Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) believed that this subjectification is a process whereby a subject is formed through the mirror through which," I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, . . . a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy" (p. 4). Such counteraction can be regarded as the freaks and monsters, the abject display that is showcased in dime-museums. The American

middle-class that visited Barnum's museum for entertainment and spectacle have witnessed freaks of nature and was then subjectified into a disciplined mob.

Foucault and Miskowiec (1986) point out that "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible . . . [juxtapositions that] are foreign to one another; . . . a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space" (p. 6). Barnum's museum deviated from earlier individualistic enterprise attributed to eighteenth century museums as his is a strictly capitalistic endeavor targeting the American middle-class. As a heterotopia, it nevertheless aimed to foster the creation of a collective American memory, deploying a biopolitical agenda. Even though Foucault and Miskowiec talk of museums in general as sites of accumulation of memory and history, the juxtaposition between babies and freaks can be linked to the mirroring effects of the institutionalized museum like Barnum's American Museum that embody and enforce subjectivations provided through abject screens and maternal mimicry achieved in baby shows.

Conclusion

From their introduction as part of agricultural fairs to their capitalistic enterprise, baby shows created a culture where infantile display is juxtaposed with maternal desire. Juxtaposing the showcase of maternity and child-reading with an emphasis on its close association with domestic life contributed to the dismantling of the clear-cut lines between public and private sphere. Such juxtaposition also instigated the belief that a normalized consumer culture relied on displaying humans as well as that exhibiting babies were of a normalized way of providing entertainment. These shows served as precursors to eugenic movement starting from the late nineteenth century that excluded black babies but focused obsessively on the white babies. This served as a biopolitical tool with regard to the reproductive economy capitalism and cult of true womanhood. Barnum's baby shows institutionalized their display in juxtaposed curated display with freaks and oddities, which helped form middle-class identities through abject screens. They also showed that ideal middle-class American family should look like by instigating maternal and heteronormative mimicry which were elevated and promoted with pride and monetary prize.

Dime-museums and baby shows served as a biopolitical tool, providing an institutionalized machinery of displaying the normal and the abnormal in subjectivating binary and conforming identities. These museums served as

heterotopias where babies were regarded as an integral part of the idealized American family and where the abnormal were dumped into the creation of a collective American psyche. Barnum's museum served as a heterotopia which collected abnormal histories, many of which were a hoax, for profit. The fact that Barnum juxtaposed the abnormal freaks and oddities with cherubic babies and maternal mimicry is realized through the institution of museum. As the collective memory is created and displayed and knowledge are accumulated over time, Barnum's museum established and enforced a discursive historical truth of the proper American family in the form of a myth through lectures and scientific appropriation of baby shows by exercising the power/knowledge over the American family as a heterotopian authority.

Baby shows continued throughout the twentieth century, but they turned a lot more scientific in the beginning of the century as those who re-evaluated the function and significance of the shows with a eugenic and scientific touch began to strip them off their sentimental value, creating the better baby shows (Pearson, 2008, p. 362). These revised shows termed as "better baby shows" which were heavily influenced by eugenics movement sought after normalcy in the superiority of white babies and in furthering the eugenic purpose of racial improvement against the impurities. Better baby shows introduced a different connotation to the infantile display: babies were then juxtaposed with not abnormalities but animals and crops in a eugenic attempt whereby the eugenic authorities attempted to instill a normalcy of infantile body and infantile upbringing according to measurements and examinations used in farm animals. This revolved around realizing a genetically pure livestock of white babies who were subjected to scientific methods, experiments, and measurements.

Displaying infant incubators for premature babies were also widespread in the beginning of the century. There was even an Infantorium created by Martin Couney in Coney Island which featured premature babies who were reportedly not cared for by hospitals and as they were cared by nurses, people paid to see something they could never see elsewhere (Liebermann, 2006, p. 84). Similar to Barnum, Couney responded to criticisms centered on the objectification of babies and making money out of displaying them by attempting to legitimize his pursuit in saying that the Infantorium had a crucial scientific and educating mission (Liebermann, 2006, p. 84). New forms of baby display mirrored eugenics movement as babies were assessed for their mental as well as physical health, diet and appearance. The

purpose of these eugenic shows was to decrease mortality rates of infants by providing a standard of measurement and cataloguing of infantile health. Again, this new eugenic connotation of baby shows harkened back to antebellum fears of high mortality rates, but babies were given even greater attention in order to preserve white American ideals which were deemed crucial to be preserved for progress.

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Summary

The aim of this study is to delve into the biopolitical aspects of baby shows in the antebellum era in the United States. These baby shows were first organized as part of agricultural fairs whereby they were alluded to be part of a capitalistic enterprise of turning agricultural shows into entertainment in increasing potential profit. In this regard, baby shows should be regarded as instances that reflected the antebellum attitude on class, gender, race and commodification of humans in the form of entertainment. The earlier connotation of baby shows in the antebellum era shows, as this study argues, that it was a source of maternal and familial pride for the attending American middle-class to showcase their babies in fairs. The shows did not only provide a maternal appreciation and approbation, but they also provided instances whereby discourses on sex, domesticity, womanhood, separation of spheres were created. It is not surprising in this respect to note that many male attendants and observers of baby shows were quite enthusiastic and interested not simply in the babies and child-rearing but in the displayed maternal beauty. As this study further argues, the baby show contests were not only providing appreciation and confirmation of maternal duty for mothers, but they were also used by organizers in order to attract potential fairgoers by introducing the monetary prizes that especially attracted mothers who regarded the occasion as a way to earn money as well.

Phineas Taylor Barnum's re-introduction of baby shows that were first organized in New York in 1855 as part of Barnum's American Museum with various prizes was a shifting point in the way baby shows were performed. Babies were not necessarily showcased for their pure and innocent look, but a significant emphasis in displaying monstrosities and oddities for middle-class entertainment by Barnum affected the nature of babies who were being promised rewards for display in grandeur. In Barnum's museum, the infantile body was showcased along with freaks, oddities and monstrosities, causing stern criticisms by prominent activists and journals. As the criticism revolved around defiling that sacred symbiotic bond between mother and child in exposing them in an impious display, Barnum attempted to thwart them off by giving the debated shows a scientific touch through lectures, introduction of inventions such as breast-pumps or the promotion of lotions.

Barnum's institutionalized baby shows in Barnum's American Museum should be considered as part of the biopolitical schema of the antebellum politics in terms of instigating a normalcy in the establishment of the binary structure of the middle- class American family. As this study argues, the fact that the showcased maternal and infantile bodies were enthroned for spectators in Barnum's museum and that the shows were also an ideological tool in instigating a prescribed, normalized and glorified motherhood whose chief function was child-rearing, there was created a Foucauldian discursive truth established in the psyche of the fair goers and participants through a heterotopian authority of the museum. This study associates the biopolitical aspect of these shows with the heterotopian unity of the museum in instigating a binary truth on motherhood and femininity. This study further ties the juxtaposition of displaying babies with monstrosities with establishing a binary gender matrix by providing abject screens in display within the heterotopian authority, namely the monstrosities, against which prescribed and normalized roles for the American middle-class were formed. The prescription by the heterotopian authority of museum also provided a maternal and heteronormative mimicry.

Baby shows in the antebellum era, as this study argues, worked as precursors to the eugenic movement since these shows disallowed black babies to be displayed, focused on obsessively on the showcase of white babies. Such newly introduced baby shows heightened by the eugenics movement assessed babies according to their mental health, diet and shape. Baby shows were stripped off their earlier maternal connotation by eugenic introduction of better baby shows that categorized, measured and observed babies in great detail. These eugenic shows attempted to cure racial impurities through experiments to safeguard racially pure posterity.