

Decolonizing Literature
A History of Medicine Perspective

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The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask “race” to do.

(Appiah, “Uncompleted Argument”)

Introduction

Tasked with representing a history of medicine perspective for a discussion of the decolonizing turns that have emerged within academia in recent years, I am prompted to reflect on a wide spectrum of personal and scholarly identities we may hold close. Our editors suggest that such a preoccupation with *decolonizing this* and *decolonizing that* has arrived quite late to the party. The postcolony has long been here, whether or not its presence is felt acutely everywhere or by everyone. And as is often the case, the inspiration to act against colonial constructions and residues in the curricula was spearheaded not by the Academy’s bright stars, but by activist students in the Global South. This was followed by legions more in the Global North’s elite institutions, which paradoxically (and stubbornly) held fast in the protection of the very same imperial icon in the form of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes. The Rhodes statue in Oxford and other colonial tributes continue to be overlooked by many as simply part of Oxford University’s architectural landscape with an acknowledged, but not necessarily critiqued, colonial past. To many others, however, walking past such laudatory symbols has not merely been intellectually taxing but serves as a reminder of an unapologetic institutionalization of the lived experience of racism felt within both the city and the university.

This essay aims to engage with decolonizing turns within the history of medicine as a set of sources and as a discipline and will consider how such readings and pedagogical choices might help us reflect upon a decolonizing turn within the English literary curriculum. Literary sources intersect

seamlessly with histories of medicine, science, disability, and emotion. However, it is still possible that history and literature as complementary but starkly different methodologies rarely reflect adequately on one's disciplinary borrowings from the other. This essay is an attempt to facilitate such a conversation and knowledge exchange. For my purposes, I define "literature" for the historian in a way that incorporates a broader range of "creative" writing, including ethnography, memoir, psychological or psychoanalytic note-taking, and polemics. There is some value in the extension of the literary beyond, say, the novel, but we might also reflect upon the emotional content of fiction properly historicized so that it might serve multiple purposes.

This reflection will focus on three brief case studies where insights might be gleaned from a greater dialogue between two fields; teaching "race" within the history of science and medicine; colonialism and medicine (psychiatry); and the historical and intellectual legacy of Sarah Baartman, a seminal life history that has been reproduced on countless syllabi. These case studies reflect some of my own (imperfect) experiences in teaching postgraduate-level students.

In the introduction to her groundbreaking book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith speaks to the embeddedness of images, speech, and symbols not only as stories from a racist past, but also as deeply entrenched modes of research and knowledge production. While we recognize and object to easily identifiable racist and dehumanizing language, there are many other ways one might speak of other, often-marginalized, groups that do not give us a moment's pause (Tuhiwai Smith 9). It is still common to find references to a "native" or a "tribe," of course, but we inscribe our witnessing of such anachronisms with the inverted comma. When we engage with the history of medicine specifically, our sources may also attempt to represent a *type* of person with deeply racialized images of sickness – the "leper," the "epileptic," the "schizophrenic." Not all of this language has disappeared, and to Tuhiwai Smith's point, we perpetuate such dehumanizing erasures in our own research methodologies and in our teaching. This is not a simple dynamic explained by White privilege only. Tuhiwai Smith relates her own experiences as an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous communities and the ways in which local or nonlocal, or Western-educated or not, may present additional categories of insider and outsider (Tuhiwai Smith 14).

Today's Class Is about Race . . .

In 2020, Mark Hinton and Meleisa Ono-George coauthored an article that I had long been looking for. Their reflections on coteaching a course on “race” and racism (aimed at the legacies felt within British communities) marries a difficult challenge (teaching “race”) with an even bigger challenge, employing an informed, actively antiracist pedagogy within the classroom (Hinton and Ono-George). Perhaps most importantly, the authors, alongside their students, attempt to “move [themselves] and others from a place of trying to be ‘non-racist’ to a place of active anti-racism” (716).

Hinton and Ono-George, who identify themselves as a White middle-class British man and a Black working-class woman, were inspired in their course design in part by the Rhodes Must Fall movement and efforts within the United Kingdom to “decolonize the curriculum.” Their approach was experimental in asking the question “is it possible for the history of race and racism to be taught in such a way that is academically rigorous and transformative for the students and teachers?” (Hinton and Ono-George 717). For my own part, I felt a first step in this process was to begin to imagine what this might look like and ask how such an environment might differ from teaching practices I have employed or encountered in the past. An additional and essential part of this would be to own up to what might be lacking in reflections about how the teaching has gone. For me, a minor innovation was to include Hinton and Ono-George’s article on a short reading list for a single class on “Race and Racisms” that sits within an eight-week module on overarching themes in the History of Science and Medicine.

Prompting students to consider their own positionality when engaging with both literary and historical texts highlights an often-overlooked tension in classrooms and on the syllabus. I have long been bothered by the problem of “we,” that is, the suggestion that “we” must incorporate more diverse and marginalized voices, which, although unintended, creates in the mind a normative syllabus where “we” signals predominantly White Western voices as the natural point of departure. What might it mean, for instance, to begin with a “White” syllabus and then add the requisite number of non-White perspectives to decolonize an already-skewed construction? In history writing, we engage with primary sources, and the role of these sources within the curricula is to represent a problem. Within the history of colonial medicine and science, for instance, this might be a problem of scientific racism and knowledge production, or ideology

embedded into medical treatises. Our goal is to read the politics and the oppression through the lenses of medicine, psychology, and science and divert the gaze back to colonial or other dominant frameworks born of corruption.

The publication of *The Bell Curve* (1994) is a case in point. The book itself exists within scholarship today as an artifact, a piece of material culture, that serves to illustrate the intractability of racially deterministic arguments well beyond the era of eugenics. However, the book's success in penetrating mainstream discourse as "scientific" was alarming enough when it was first published that it instigated a counterscholarship that mobilized expressly to respond to its spurious claims. Steven Fraser's edited volume, *The Bell Curve Wars* (1995) followed quickly on from the book, but in the post-Trump era, newer volumes have appeared to respond to more recent reverberations of the pernicious debate about race and intelligence (Staub; Fischer et al.). Students find some fascination in the history of eugenic thought, but they are not always prepared to recognize the cyclical nature of popularized racist science recast in languages that attempt to mask resurgent racist ideologies.

Engaging with travel and exploration narratives is a useful exercise here. These historical and literary sources frequently present ideas about the tropics, and by extension, the "tropical races" that inhabited them. Explorers' prose is unsurprisingly littered with the language of disease and death. Stephen Donovan asserts that despite the hardship and danger, the Congo was an important site developed for adventure travelers. "Congo tourism," he writes, "has its origins in a dense matrix of travel, imperialism, and textual representations" (Donovan 39). He notes, however, that the greatest inspiration for amateur travelers was not the thick tomes of Henry Morton Stanley or Richard Burton, but Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The Congo as a site of darkness and disease, of moral corruption, and a fecund backwardness is reflected in Conradian references that continue to appear in myriad forms today. Anthropology has made use of the "diseased heart of Africa" metaphor in deconstructing racist depictions of the continent (Comaroff 305–29), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* remains a film masterpiece transplanting the tropes of "darkest Africa" to the horror of the Vietnam War, and one disastrous exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, *Into the Heart of Africa* (Cannizzo), sparked years of protest after the exhibit, curated to be "ironic," was found by the city's Black community to be an overwhelmingly uncritical display of racist imagery (Burrett). The failed exhibit has

become such a well-known cautionary tale in museum practice that it has an associated scholarship documenting the show and its aftermath.

Returning to Hinton and Ono-George's pedagogical lessons, they caution that "one of the dangers of teaching histories of race, and in particular of racial violence, without considering contemporary racism is that you can easily end up detaching these historic acts from their legacies in contemporary society and in the lived experiences of those in the classroom" (Hinton and Ono-George 717). Students are not unaware of the need for some reflection about positionality, but it is easy enough to lose sight of what this might look like in practice. Reading nineteenth-century depictions of Africa or other colonized spaces through the genre of travel writing can feel like a safe distance from modern experiences of racism. When we periodize these texts too rigidly, however, we might ask if we are in danger of overlooking some of the same racist tropes that appear in other forms of writing and in more modern periods. The skill to impart to students is to question disciplinary authority (history, anthropology, literature) by utilizing the skill set from one to critique the other. For example, one might look for well-established literary tropes – dripping with references to tropical rotteness – within modern political science.

Writing about a "slum" called Chicago in Abidjan, prominent author Robert Kaplan employs a language that recreates the imaginary of the rotting, dangerous, disease-ridden tropics:

Chicago, like more and more of Abidjan, is a slum in the bush: a checkerwork of corrugated zinc roofs and walls made of cardboard and black plastic wrap. It is located in a gully teeming with coconut palms and oil palms and is ravaged by flooding. Few residents have easy access to electricity, a sewage system, or a clean water supply. The crumbly red laterite earth crawls with foot-long lizards both inside and outside the shacks. Children defecate in a stream filled with garbage and pigs, droning with mosquitoes. In this stream women do the washing. Young unemployed men spend their time drinking beer, palm wine, and gin while gambling on pinball games constructed out of rotting wood and rusty nails. These are the same youths who rob houses and more prosperous Ivorian neighborhoods at night. One man I met, Damba Tesele, came to Chicago from Burkina Faso in 1963. A cook by profession, he has four wives and thirty-two children, not one of whom has made it to high school. (10–11)

To my mind, this is a medical, or rather a pathological text. With a few alterations, we might be reading a nineteenth-century explorer's log, a Conradian passage of misery, or a neo-Malthusian plea for resurgent eugenics. We are transported to a "slum," and yet we are in the "bush." The

environment *teems, crawls*, or is *ravaged*. Mosquitoes drone. There is no irony here, but a warning – the “coming anarchy” of African garbage, and pigs, and mosquitoes, and children. The disciplines of History and Literature work in concert to expose twenty-first-century ways of imagining Africa.

Feminist Literatures and Masculine Anxieties

Literary scholar Marilyn Booth tells the story of nineteenth-century feminist writer and activist Zaynab Fawwaz’s efforts to collect and disseminate women’s perspectives and literary works both locally and globally. Booth shows how Fawwaz challenged Western representations of Arab women as either sexual objects or silent by sending her 500-page Arabic-language volume of historical biographies of great women for inclusion in the “much publicized” women’s library at the 1893 Chicago World Exhibition. According to Booth, the inclusion of Fawwaz’s *Scattered Pearls among the Generations of Mistresses of Seclusion*, whether comprehended by visitors to the space or not, upends the Western imaginings of Egyptian women as the exotic belly dancers they were presented to be in Chicago (Booth 275). With tireless drive and commitment, Fawwaz paid equal attention to local gender politics through essays published in the nationalist press as well as two historical novels, one of which Booth contends is a “gendered rewriting of local history” (275). The “coy” renaming of the novel’s protagonists suggest that there is little to differentiate the “historical novel” from the “historical chronicle” (279). Arab women wrote fiction as a means of rewriting the histories that excluded or misrepresented them. Arab feminists began to write themselves into the dynamic spaces of nationalist newspapers, which saw women as sources of disruption, with pieces on women’s troubling presence in urban spaces, girls’ education, and most pointedly a preoccupation with prostitution (276). The novels that Zaynab Fawwaz either wrote or helped to promote can be seen as acts of exposure of Arab men’s anxieties about wayward women losing their morals and traversing into respectable spaces. Booth notes that Fawwaz “rewrites the trope of ‘women’s wiles,’” depicting instead the more truthful knowledge of women who “know how to resist and thwart the violent acts of men” (291).

Fawwaz’s extraordinary activism in responding to antifeminist agendas in the press allowed for a unique visibility that provided a platform for her first historical novel, *Good Consequences, or The Lovely Maid of al-Zahira* (1899). The novel included a preface that, Booth writes, included a “plea

for the moral utility of fiction that was, she insisted, proximate to historical ‘truth’” (278). Zaynab Fawwaz’s intellectual life and work might appear well outside of the disciplinary interests of the history of medicine and science, and her work, despite her most expansive ambitions, also sits outside of the English-speaking world. However, once found, it is hard to ignore Fawwaz within this important period for feminist creativity and participation. If we turn our perspective slightly, Fawwaz’s intervention in the Chicago World Exhibition, if considered not by her actions but by what such exhibitions would have expected from her, is a direct assault on the fetishizing and pathologizing gaze that scientific disciplines either sought to establish or already asserted to be true. Such exhibitions and World Fairs popularized anthropological and medicoscientific representations of (gendered) ethnic and (gendered) racial types. The objects normally associated with the exhibitions were carefully curated to conform to how Western audiences understood non-Western people, whether Congolese or Navajo. The insertion of an object of literary import and scholarship from an Arab feminist runs counter to our usual interpretations of such exhibits and engages scholars with new questions about how subalterns subverted the intended purposes of such displays.

Another writer, a feminist sister and journalist from the English literary canon, was similarly staking an intellectual claim against the conventional thinking of her time. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1890) is heralded both as feminist tract and a fictionalized autobiographical account of mental ill health, brought on in part by the oppressive environment imposed on creative (all) women, by the expectations of society, by doctors, and by husbands. However, reading Gilman’s short story *only* as a metaphor for hysteria or as an illness narrative is far less interesting than reading it alongside the one-page explanation she published in her own magazine years later. In *Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper* (1913), published in *The Forerunner*, Gilman responds to a physician critic who claimed the text should never have been written and that it “was enough to drive anyone mad to read it” (Perkins Gilman 19–20). Gilman continues to explain that her nervous breakdown and melancholia from years earlier had prompted the advice of the “rest cure” with a strict admonishment to “never touch a pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.” However, Gilman did write again, casting such advice “to the winds,” she said, to produce a fictionalized account of the mental distress and hallucinations of a woman intellectually constrained by the men around her. In the first pages of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, it is modern medicine, dominated by men, that is implicated in her sickness, and this

includes the oversight of her physician husband. Perhaps, she muses (secretly, telling only the “dead paper” in front of her) that *this* is the reason she does not get well faster.

Fawwaz and Gilman together, writing as contemporaries, subverted the dominant narratives produced by the times and spaces they lived in. When we read Fawwaz, or about her, we discover a counterimage to the colonial and Western constructed Arab woman’s body and capacity. While the ethnographically distorted depictions of Congolese “pygmies,” “Eskimos,” and “Indians” have been critiqued already in a well-developed historiography, we might now look beyond the obvious racism of these displays to look also for the subversion of these depictions as an alternative way of reading the historical moment presented by this period of scientific categorizations of imperial subjects.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote in direct opposition to one of the most prominent physicians of her time, neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell. She wrote with authority about the illness experience, however dramatized, and about the degradation caused by the sexism of modern medicine. Gilman was well aware that the treatment prescribed to her was an assault on her autonomy as a woman. Fawwaz does not write about illness or medicine in the same way, but she does make an appearance that challenges the narrative at a World Exhibition that would have been rife with depictions of the stability or capacity of non-Western people. Like Gilman, Fawwaz also comes up against the constant erasure of womanhood, which is the instigation behind her writing and the need to compile a 500-page tome attesting to the greatness of women. Both women wrote pointed critiques of sensational newspaper practices, with Gilman taking on the Hearst newspapers for their attacks on her personally and for the stance that all women’s writing was presumptuous, if not monstrous (Edelstein 73).

These two writers (could they possibly have known about each other?) complement each other in dismantling the oppressive authority of male-dominated scientific knowledge and its false narratives around womanhood. They could do this most effectively through literature in its various forms. For the English Literary Curriculum, there is something to be gained by engaging familiar literary motifs as they were enacted within other disciplines in the medical or social sciences. This moves beyond the mere documentation of racist symbols to actively seek out how to read the existence of feminist writing as a subversion of racist science.

Writing, History, and Colonialism

The history of colonial psychiatry, a robust subfield in the history of medicine, has produced an extensive range of work on institutional, political, social, and intellectual histories that seek to unpack the largely political landscape that is laid bare when an analysis of the uses of psychological language takes place. Psychological profiles of whole populations (the African, the Indian, the native) provided an additional layer of rationale for occupation, and signaled how such regimes could be characterized as logical by the languages of science and medicine. In short, all racist regimes and institutions stack the deck. Superior guns are one way to do this. But the presumed superiority of the ruler built into a medicalized rationale for occupation might be more palatable to government in the metropole.

Colonial administrators pathologized not only African dissenting behaviors, but also oral or written expressions of discontent. They also noted what, and more importantly *how*, Africans read. Missionary-translated Bibles and prayer books were scrutinized by colonial police in Kenya to see which parts of Scripture were underlined, annotated, or reinterpreted by local prophets (Mahone, "Psychology of Rebellion" 254). Africans coopting the sacrosanct written word of the colonizer and daring to rewrite it suggested a kind of madness. At the very least, such inscriptions spelled trouble. Derek Peterson's monograph on the "creative writing" of African writers, translators, and bookkeepers details how Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o himself was a Bible translator, providing new phraseology and meaning for the political context of Gikuyu freedom fighters going to the forests during the Mau Mau war (Peterson 228).

While there remains a great deal of historical scholarship that contextualizes how colonial regimes played the long game by hijacking scientific understandings of colonized peoples, there is something to be gained from the careful handling of the actual primary source as textual artifacts. I have seen a remarkable and quite visceral response from students when handling the material culture of colonialism even when they are already familiar with its content and language. As I have in my possession the influential tract *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Colonial Office, 1954), I have passed around the document in its original pamphlet form. This report, largely self-plagiarized from psychiatrist J. C. Carothers's equally troubling World Health Organization monograph *The African Mind in Health and Disease* (1953), helped to lay the groundwork of the medical rationale for the mass internment of Kenyan men and women. The unexpected materiality of

colonialism within a history of medicine discussion provoked surprise at the “realness” of this moment in history, but also a more reflective response than the scholarship alone could provoke. The document itself is unremarkable-looking. It is pamphlet-size, laid out in book format, and printed on thin off-white pages. It consists of thirty-five pages of small typeface with no illustrations or photographs. The front cover is adorned only with the title, author, and colonial crest from the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. Reading about J. C. Carothers is a first port of call for the niche market of historians of colonial psychiatry. The doctor’s notorious comparison of African “normal” brains with the brains of lobotomized Europeans appears time and again in the literature as an exemplar of racist pseudoscience from this period.

Reading Carothers in tandem with Frantz Fanon, who explicitly took on the psychiatrist and his influence, exposes what exactly is at stake when only the most powerful institutions control scientific knowledge, or as Fanon might put it, when corrupt institutions develop scientific knowledge. The Carothers case brings forward much more than a gratuitous racist diatribe. The dynamics of a public health study, a government-commissioned report, a series of both positive and negative book reviews, all portray the ease with which extremist ideas may be produced and circulated. Fanon’s polemical writings pass a bit too quickly over the specifics of Carothers’s dehumanizing rhetoric; nonetheless, Carothers does appear within *The Wretched of the Earth* with Fanon’s explicit attack on the rising influence of the “East African School” (of psychiatry) and its coopting of medical education and politics, both of which asserted the lesser humanity of colonized people (Mahone, “Three Psychologies”). While historians of medicine have engaged with the scientific racism of colonial governments by illustrating how such language was used to rationalize imperial interests, the absurdity of colonial representations are perhaps best expressed by literary sources. Flora Veit-Wild has highlighted how African writers have exposed the “violence of colonial and postcolonial oppression and the absurdity of power” with the opposing “power of the written word” (Veit-Wild 5). Fanon’s polemical writings allow us to engage with a decolonizing literary canon, while also observing an explicit dialogue between a revolutionary and a colonial psychiatrist.

While the history of psychiatry is now well represented by studies from myriad former colonial territories, there is less attention paid to Black intellectual life apart from resistances or protest movements. One such author, who ought to be read more widely, is Noel Chabani Manganyi, South Africa’s first Black psychologist and a prolific essayist on the

experience of apartheid (among many other things). I came to know this writer only because a student opted to write an undergraduate thesis about him (Dalzell). Manganyi's first groundbreaking work, *Being Black in the World* (1973), resonates like *The Souls of Black Folk* for our global modern times. A memoirist as well as a social commentator, Manganyi, like Fanon, is a clinician, whose witness and testimony were a crucial part of the antiapartheid movement's intellectual and material resistance. His later memoir, *Apartheid and the Making of a Black Psychologist* (2016), is a testament and an important historical document in its own right. However, Manganyi's forays into literary criticism, biography (of Es'kia Mphahlele and Gerard Sekoto), and social commentary, *as a clinical psychologist*, places him into historical conversation with, and also an ability to critique, the psychiatrists we know from both ends of the political spectrum during the period of decolonization. There are interesting parallels to be found between Fanon and other writers' accounts of the psychic trauma of living under colonialism and Manganyi's accounts of the psychology of living not only under apartheid, but also in exile. In a 2002 interview, Manganyi describes the synergy between writing biography (a "written narrative") and the therapist's intervention. "Psychotherapy is a verbal narrative reconstruction. Both are enriched by and brought to life by the interpretations of the biographer and psychotherapist" (Manganyi in Ngwenya and Maganyi). Perhaps within the decolonizing turns in both history writing and the English literary curriculum, it is time to privilege the textual contributions of these writers in order to highlight not only what they subverted, but also what they accomplished despite the colonizing structures that surrounded them.

(Mis)(re)interpretations of the Sarah Baartman Story

The tragic story of Sarah Baartman has been told and retold. It has been made visual and has been dramatized. I have long used Baartman's story in my own teaching as a way to expose how the historical racisms associated with Baartman's treatment are not frozen in time in the nineteenth century but still resonate deeply today. The continued relevance of Sarah Baartman is expressed in multiple historiographical and literary forms. More recent writing supplants the retelling of her biography with analysis of how the "theoretical industry" that has developed around her has created problems and misinterpretations anew.

For my own early engagement with Baartman, I was struck by a series of pertinent dates; 1810, 1974, 1985, 2002. In 1810, Sarah Baartman was

brought to London to be exhibited as the “Hottentot Venus.” More than a century-and-a-half later in 1974, her skeleton, long displayed with a body cast and her genitalia, was finally removed from public display at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris. In 1985, an influential essay by historian Sander Gilman gave a heavily psychological interpretation of the fascination with her sexualized body in the form of a lengthy article in *Critical Inquiry*. And in 2002, Sarah Baartman’s remains were repatriated for burial and a memorial in her homeland, the result of years of activism and a formal request by Nelson Mandela.

Andrew P. Lyons refers to “much controversy” over the right to finally tell Baartman’s story in his 2018 article in *Anthropologica*. His review is an attempt to disentangle why this contested narrative has unfolded in the way that it has. Lyons helpfully traces the multi-disciplinary “second life” of Baartman literature with (post Sander Gilman) studies from history, anthropology, sociology, creative writing, feminist studies, and filmmaking (Lyons 327–28). Lyons notes, as have others, that factual details about Baartman’s early life (including her original name) and the nature of her physical appearance are either unknown or contested. He notes also that her personal agency and “who has the right to describe her career” also require contextualization, particularly in light of what has been termed an “ethnopornography” – the familiar body of literature that seeks to encapsulate whole ethnicities or cultures or peoples within a series of dehumanizing tropes, representations, and discourses (Lyons 328). The wealth of academic literature on Baartman’s (and Khoisan) sexuality is perhaps matched only by the historiographical treatment of the creation of the “Hottentot Venus” caricature and the subsequent zeal to market her as a traveling exhibition. While Sarah Baartman, and Ota Benga, who was famously exhibited in a chimpanzee enclosure in the Bronx Zoo, exemplify the exploitation of notable individuals in sideshows and pseudoscientific colonial exhibitions, human displays remain a popular research topic in the history of science and medicine, particularly as a material culture engagement with the enormous volume of racist ephemera they produced in the form of exhibition posters, advertisements, and political cartoons.

The subject of Baartman’s agency within the circumstances of her exploitation is harder to glean. Zine Magubane, a sociologist, takes on what she sees as the overreliance on historical sources that focus on Baartman’s racialized body and sexuality. This turn, beginning with Gilman’s broader interests in representations and difference, has become the dominant scholarly trope for Baartman studies over the years. Ironically, this discourse scholarship has become its own discursive trap

and has in some ways perpetuated the dominance of the racist imagery attached to her, overshadowing more nuanced interpretations of Baartman's short life. Sander Gilman's interpretation of the symbolic import of Baartman's story has been, according to Magubane, the "genesis for a veritable theoretical industry" (Magubane 817). Magubane calls for a deeper reflection from scholars who, while uncovering the racism behind nineteenth-century depictions of Baartman's "difference," have themselves focused almost entirely on the very same bodily fascinations of pseudo-scientists and sideshow gawkers (Magubane 817). Magubane's most compelling insight is that the misplaced focus that conflates the life of Baartman with the reception of her imagery has failed to ask pertinent questions about politics, social relations, and geographic context, thus placing Baartman "outside history" and with a status as "theoretically fetishized" (Magubane 818).

Magubane asks "why this woman?" Why should Sarah Baartman become the scholarly icon for "racial and sexual alterity" when many thousands of men and women (and children) were exhibited in fashionable displays of European modernity in contrast to the primitive? The wealth of tantalizingly awful visual sources, from cartoons to plaster casts, have helped to obscure the nuances of Baartman's daily existence, her subjugations, resistances, and performances. It is far more surprising that Baartman appeared not in exhibitions, but in the courtroom. Baartman's biographies are rarely microhistories in themselves. Some creative attempts at depicting her agency in the form of theatrical productions have had to speculate on the finer details of her life and thought, but these depictions, while attempting to right a wrong, also have their own agendas and points of view.

When and how we might teach about Baartman's life and legacy has become the subject of reflection and debate. The emotional impact of the frequent reproduction of Baartman's imagery has brought to the fore new writing in history and literary criticism about positionality, perspective and privilege. Natasha Gordon-Chipembere and others have refused to display or republish the colonially produced images of Baartman that are so easily available and familiar (Lyons 335; Gordon-Chipembere, *Representation* 5). Baartman's image (or rather her exploitative and distorted image) appears in teaching slides and research presentations, the purpose of which is to highlight the scientific racism behind the creation of such illustrations. The end result is that these images remain in circulation and subvert efforts to point out how racist images circulated *in the past*. Gordon-Chipembere's analysis extends to literary attempts to retell Baartman's story through the

novel, such as Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* (2003). However, this fictionalized reimagining depicts Baartman herself referring to her own "huge hips and buttocks," recreating the colonial narrative about Baartman's body and further diminishing her voice (Gordon-Chipembere, *Representation* 6).

My own use of a well-known cartoon illustration of Baartman in a teaching lecture on "race" within the history of medicine was intended to challenge the notion that nineteenth-century abuses may be neatly contained within an identifiable racist past. Assigned readings include critiques of earlier historiographical accounts of Baartman, but perhaps most important is the ensuing discussion about what it might mean that viciously racist displays of genitalia and body image should remain intact as late as the 1970s or that the request for a repatriation of Sarah Baartman's body for burial was the subject of any debate whatsoever. Zine Magubane asserts that Baartman's curious "theoretical odyssey" exemplifies the dangers of applying theory without historical specificity. In Gilman's case, this is an exercise in privileging an overriding human propensity to see the world in terms of iconography and stereotypes including those of sexualized Black women (Sander Gilman 204–42). In his *Critical Inquiry* piece, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," Gilman reproduces six images of either a nearly nude Sarah Baartman or associated scientific drawings of "Hottentot" genitalia.

The sheer expanse of Baartman scholarship and creative output has prompted reflection and critiques from myriad perspectives and disciplines. Ayo Coly, writing in 2019, asks: "What is at stake in continuing to extend hospitality to the specter of Baartman, especially when she has been laid to rest and mourned properly?" (Coly 183). Coly's project engages with the many claims and debates about what is "at stake" in finally letting go when perhaps, as Natasha Gordon-Chipembere asserts, Baartman's story with all of its (even well-meaning) misreadings, speaks for itself, not as a symbol but as a tale of a Khoisan woman whose life was deeply marred by colonial intent (Gordon-Chipembere, "Intentions"). Within the History of Medicine, Baartman's story is still largely one of symbolism and display. The problems with some historical narratives of Baartman's life have been answered by fictional accounts, but these too have found it hard to know Baartman without a recreation of her bodily image. Two decades have now passed since Baartman has returned home for a proper burial. We may yet hope to reveal an end to the long story of a short life.

The melding of historical and literary voices in methodological partnership allows for a greater understanding of how to read through the symbols, silences, and absences that appear within the imperfect texts we work with. The symbols and stereotypes of race science, collective psychology, and ethnological and commercial exhibitions can be interrogated well beyond the images they conjure up. The literary curriculum might have something to gain by engaging with the historical specificities of the medical and psychological frames that would have governed historical actors' lives.

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