


# A postcolonial reading of the early life of Sara Baartman and the Samaritan Woman in John 4

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When Jesus meets the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's well in John 4, it is a meeting between two colonial subjects in the Roman Empire. In this encounter we find the Samaritan Woman as a triply marginalised body, a woman subject to multiple, intersecting forms of oppression within her patriarchal context. Identified as a Samaritan Woman, Jewish rabbis regarded her as unclean, impure, and being menstruous from birth. It can also be deduced that she is an outcast in her own society because she comes to draw from the well at noon, the hottest part of the day when people did not usually fetch water. This Samaritan Woman is nameless, landless and powerless in an imperial, colonial and patriarchal context. The poem of Diana Ferrus, *I've come to take you home*, in memory of Sarah Baartman, highlights how Baartman was dehumanised and treated as a sexual object by European colonisers. Through a postcolonial reading of John 4, I consider the intersections between the Samaritan Woman and the early life of Sara Baartman in their respective colonial contexts and invite the reader, as the poem invites Baartman, to come home to Africa and resist Western European imperial and colonial patterns and tendencies.

**Contribution:** This article has interdisciplinary implications. This is an interdisciplinary study in the sense that it offers a biblical interpretation of John 4 that is informed by the life of Sara Baartman that has been uncovered through anthropology, history and sociology. It is also integrating the field of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics with the theory of intersectionality.

**Keywords:** Samaritan Woman; Sara Baartman; colonialism; African biblical interpretation; postcolonial; intersectionality; gender; race; religion.

## Introduction

In post-1994 South Africa, *I've come to take you home*, a poem in tribute of Sara Baartman by writer, poet, and activist Diana Ferrus, has been influential in recovering and restoring the memory of Baartman. It is believed that the poem inspired the unanimous decision and law that was passed by the French Senate in favour of returning Baartman's remains to South Africa in 2002 (Basson 2022; Henderson 2014:949; Kerseboom 2011:64; Lyons 2018:334).

At this time, it confronted South Africans and the world at large with the life of Sara Baartman and the colonial past of South Africa. In the same vein, the encounter and lengthy dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman in John 4:1–42 demands the attention of biblical readers. Moreover, the Samaritan Woman demands the attention of Jesus and the reader as she transgressively states and asks in verse 9: 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan Woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. [a]) (NIV). Hereby, the Samaritan Woman directs Jesus's attention to what has been considered as the ethnic, religious, gender, and moral barriers in their encounter.

It is my contention that the poem, *I've come to take you home*, invites Baartman together with myself as a biblical scholar and the 21st century reader to return to Africa, resist the tendencies of Western colonial powers, and seek transgressive interpretations of transformation and liberation. Furthermore, this article contends that the biblical text is not exempt from the oppressive colonial and patriarchal tendencies and ideologies that we have experienced in history and therefore requires a critical engagement from the contemporary reader of the biblical text as it also informs our reading of the biblical text. I have not only been drawn to the stories of the Samaritan Woman and Sara Baartman, but have also been challenged to encounter them as persons who have

1.1 am cognizant of my positionality as an African postcolonial biblical scholar and a cis-gendered heterosexual male with an elitist Western education at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, who identifies as culturally mixed race in South Africa.

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suffered broken heartedness in their lives and beyond their lives. The aim of this article is to problematise the oppressive tendencies and power dynamics at play in their respective colonial contexts and showcase the similarities in their experiences. In this way, this article employs a postcolonial imagination to bring the silenced voices of the text, the Samaritan Woman, in conversation with the silenced voices beyond the text, Sara Baartman. Considering this, it is necessary to situate my theoretical framework in postcolonial hermeneutics, which will inform my encounters with a young Sara Baartman and the Samaritan Woman in John 4.

## A postcolonial hermeneutic

Hermeneutics is described by Johnson Kinyua as a science or art of interpretation, and in relation to biblical studies it can be described as the science of interpreting the Old and New Testament (Kinyua 2015:7). Kinyua emphasises the task of the interpreter to responsibly familiarise, draw near, and comprehend that which is unfamiliar, distant and obscure. Musa Dube (1996:44) warns of the danger of biblical interpretation that considers biblical texts only belonging to ancient times and do not consider the power relations biblical texts advocate for that has an enduring influence on current international and power relations. Importantly for postcolonial hermeneutics, Paul Ricoeur considers hermeneutics as ‘work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning’ (Ricoeur 1974:60). In this regard, a postcolonial hermeneutic interrogates the power relations that are explicitly and implicitly present in literature and biblical texts. Moreover, as a theory it understands the active role biblical texts can play in affirming, shaping and transforming the perceptions, understanding and actions of readers and the reading community (Kinyua 2015:8).

According to R.S. Sugirtharajah, the purpose of postcolonial biblical interpretation is to foreground the colonial context and text in approaching, reading, and interpreting the biblical texts (Sugirtharajah 2006:17). For Fernando Segovia, it also goes beyond simply foregrounding the imperialist or colonialist context and text and ought to be concerned with the ‘intricacies and complexities at work in imperial-colonial interchanges’ (Segovia 2009:209). It should therefore be alert to the variety of struggles of oppressed bodies in and outside the colonial context, listening to and incorporating the voices of those who have been oppressed on grounds of ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, differently abled bodies, race, class, and age. This reflects the concerted effort and commitment of postcolonial scholars in recent years, with the help of feminism, to consult intersectionality<sup>2</sup> in uncovering the myriad of power relations and systems at work in oppressive environments.

Kimberlé Crenshaw considers intersectionality to be rooted in black feminism and critical race theory and believes that it serves as ‘a method and disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool’ (Crenshaw 1991:303). Intersectionality is defined by Musa

2.The term intersectionality was introduced in the 1980s by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the book, *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics* (1989).

Dube as ‘a multidimensional approach that seeks liberation by recognising and analysing how various social categories work in synergy to promote the oppression of the other’ (Dube 2020:3). She often also refers to it as the double colonisation of marginalised women (Dube 1999:223). Furthermore, Jennifer Nash explains that intersectionality accounts for subjectivity through ‘multiplicative’ vectors at the nexus of inequality such as class, status, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and religion (Nash 2008:1–15). These vectors are considered multiplicative as they mutually reinforce one another and intensify the effects of the others rather than understanding them to be accumulative in adding to the marginalisation. Importantly, in relation to Sara Baartman and the Samaritan Woman, Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasises that ‘Intersectionality was a lived reality before it became a term’ (Crenshaw 2015).

This article will consider a postcolonial hermeneutic as an ‘intersectional approach’ and advocate for postcolonial hermeneutics as an approach to life, to commit oneself to scrutinise the colonial tendencies and entanglements implicit in texts and contexts (Kwok 2006:46). It also becomes a personal academic endeavour to reread oneself together with texts and contexts. John Berquist notes that postcolonial studies consider textual strategies of deconstruction to seek the ‘heart of the text’ and its ‘inherent brokenness, a broken heartedness’. The struggle to overcome the oppressive tendencies can then emerge from this broken heartedness. The records of the lives of the Samaritan Woman and Sara Baartman are centuries and worlds apart, yet their lives reflect a similar inherent brokenness and broken heartedness that not only demand our attention but necessitates it.

## A postcolonial encounter with a young Sara Baartman

*‘I have come to soothe your heavy heart,*

*I offer my bosom to your weary soul’*

I’ve come to take you home by Diana Ferrus (1998)

Sara Baartman, also referred to as the Hottentot Venus,<sup>3</sup> has problematically been the subject and object of a variety of studies concerning science, history, anthropology, biology, race, gender, and sexuality<sup>4</sup> (Lyons 2018:327; Magubane 2001:816). In the long history of her life dating back to the 18th-century, it

3.Scully and Crais (2008:307) provides a description of the meaning of Hottentot: ‘Hottentot is a pejorative word invented by the Dutch to describe pastoralist communities who spoke very difficult click languages. The word comes from Huttentut, “to stammer.” European use of the term Hottentot thus implied that the Khoekhoe were without language and thus possibly not part of human society’. In contemporary South Africa it has become a derogatory word to refer to culturally ‘coloured’ people.

4.Andrew Lyons notes in his article *The Two Lives of Sara Baartman: Gender, ‘Race’, Politics and the Historiography of Mis/Representation* (2018) that Baartman’s ‘second life’ was created by historians (Gilman 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Qureshi 2004; Schiebinger 1993; Sörgoni 2003); prominent biologists (Fausto-Sterling 1995; Gould 1982 [1985]); playwrights (Du Toit 2017; Parks 1998); photographers (e.g., Renée Cox’s ironic self-portrait, *Hot-en-Tot*), visual artists who are also writers (Willis 2010); anthropologists and archaeologists (Gordon 1992, 1998; Schrire 1995); folklorists, art historians and students of performance (Lindfors 1989, 1996, 2014; Strother 1999); sociologists (Magubane 2001); novelists (Chase-Riboud 2003; Wicomb 2001); historical biographers (Crais & Scully 2009; Holmes 2007); feminist critics from North America and other parts of the diaspora (Collins 1999; Gordon-Chipembere 2011; Hobson 2005; Nash 2014; Sharpley-Whiting 1999), and notably from South Africa itself (Abrahams 1996, 1997, 2000, 2007; Lewis 2011; Van Der Schyff 2011); a South African poet and performer (Ferrus 1998); a documentary film-maker (Maseko 1999, 2003); and a well-known director of art house films (Kechiche 2010a, 2010b).

is the soothing and comforting poetry of Diana Ferrus, which seems to restore the human face of Sara Baartman. Ferrus mentions in an interview that she was inspired to write the poem when she herself was in Holland for studies and dearly missed her own mother. This longing and learning about Baartman at the time made her think of just how much Saartjie must have missed her mother in her life. Ferrus recalls, excitingly, that she then heard a voice saying, 'I want to go home, I want to go home', and proceeded to write the first words, 'I've come to take you home'.

This article suggests a postcolonial encounter with the early life of Sara Baartman before she set foot in England in 1810, being cognizant of the variety of studies that have concerned her life and afterlife. Moreover, scholars such as Yvette Abrahams, Zine Magubane, Simone Kerseboom, Itumeleng Mothoagae and Zine Magubane have critically argued that any account of her life, voice and positionality ought to be understood in light of the colonial context of her time. They have asserted that the historical account of her life has been compromised by a patriarchal European perspective (Abrahams 1996:96; Kerseboom 2011:65; Magubane 2001:816; Mothoagae 2016:71).

It is important to observe that the early life of Sara Baartman is marked by speculations and contestations. Most studies have generally accepted that she was born in 1789, but scholars such as Scully and Crais (2008:306) and Henderson (2014:949) who propose that she may have been born in the 1770s. It is believed that she was born either in the Gamtoos- or Camdeboo Valley (approximately 50 miles apart) in the Eastern Cape and was of Gonaqua descent, believed to be descendants of the Khoikhoi (khoekhoe) and the Xhosa.

Further speculations and contestations exist regarding her name as her original Khoi name is unknown. Lyons (2018:5) suggests that the surname 'Baartman' may well have been the surname of an Afrikaner farmer who made some of the local Gonaqua people his servants. Some have regarded the name 'Saartjie' as a diminutive version of Sara and have also viewed the name 'Sarah' with suspicion. The latter, 'Sarah', appears on her baptismal certificate from the Anglican Church in Manchester, England in 1811, but is subject to suspicion given the history of violence and erasure that accompanied the baptism of Africans by Europeans in colonial contexts.<sup>5</sup> The former, 'Saartjie', resembles a derogatory nickname such as 'shorty' or in Dutch 'little Sara', which diminishes the name, value and dignity of a person (Gordon-Chipembere 2006:56; Kerseboom 2011:63). Kerseboom however acknowledges that in contemporary South Africa 'Saartjie' has become a name of endearment to Khoisan descendants of Baartman.<sup>6</sup>

5.The baptism would have symbolised the conversion of the 'barbaric' African to become a civilised Christian and would be sealed by receiving a new name in a foreign language to them, but acceptable to the colonial masters. It is however not the purpose of this study to investigate this complicated history.

6.This is captured in the manner Ferrus refers to 'Saartjie' in her interview, with no impression of being condescending or malice. It would however seem impossible to expect the same feeling of endearment from the colonialists who were responsible for taking, dissecting, weighing, naming, and displaying her. I will proceed to refer Sara Baartman at times as Saartjie, not in a derogatory manner or to diminish her value, but as a name of endearment and referring to her vulnerability in a patriarchal colonial context.

Sara Baartman found herself in a vulnerable position at a young age after both her parents passed away shortly after one another, and she was consequently removed and displaced from her local community. Orphaned, presumably as a young child, while processing the loss of her parents, she was sold to a German man, Jan Michel Elzer in Cape Town. She worked for Elzer until he passed away in 1799, and thereafter started working for Elzer's servant Pieter Cesar (Abrahams 1996:94; Crais & Scully 2008:308; Henderson 2014:949; Lyons 2018:330). Here her paths crossed with Hendrik Cesar, Pieter's brother, who was acquainted with Alexander Dunlop, a doctor in the British army and exporter of museum specimens from the Cape.

The hurtful history of her body being sexually objectified started with these two men who saw an opportunity to profit from her body. They initially exposed her to the fetishisation and violence of the colonialist gaze by parading her in front of military personnel from all parts of the world who came to Cape Town for 'port city fun' (Henderson 2014:949). Lyons provides a description of her body, as countless scholars have also done for centuries through graphic words and illustrations. The danger is, however, that through a description of her body, the reader becomes part of the audience and participates in the violence in the viewing, gazing, tantalisation and the fetishisation of her body. Ultimately, objectifying her to the point of 'a non-being' (Mothoagae 2016:72).

The extent of the manner in which Pieter Cesar and Alexander Dunlop exploited the vulnerability of Sara Baartman and the way in which this was possible in the oppressive patriarchal colonial context is captured in the following section by Lyons (2018):

For this reason, the cash-strapped Hendrik decided that he could make money by displaying her to sailors in the Naval Hospital in Cape Town. In 1810 Dunlop and Cesars 'persuaded' Baartman to come with them to London, where she was at first exhibited in travelling freak shows along with a seven hundred-pound man and anomalous animals. She wore a revealing body stocking along with face paint and what may or may not have been indigenous clothing. Spectators, women as well as men, poked and prodded her in public, and she was subject to Cesars's brusque commands. Her buttocks were portrayed in political cartoons and were the prime focus of ogling attention. (p. 330)

A variety of accounts of her life swiftly mentions that Sara Baartman had given birth to three babies at the time she was moved to London, all of whom sadly passed away in their infancy (Henderson 2014:949; Lyons 2018:330; Scully & Crais 2008:308).<sup>7</sup> She would have been near 21 years old at the time of being moved to London in 1810, if she was born in 1789 and passed away in 1816 at the age of 26. Moreover, she would have lost her three babies in her teenage years and have had her first child in 1796 at only 7 years old (Scully & Crais 2008:306). It therefore seems unlikely that she was born in 1789, but even if she was born in the 1770s and was older

7.According to Scully & Crais: 'The children's fathers were a Khoekhoe servant (perhaps a man she met on the frontier), a drummer from Batavia, called Hendrik de Jongh, and a slave of Hendrik Cesars'.



when living in Cape Town, it certainly showcases that she was in an environment of immense duress.

As a footnote, Henderson (2014:949) mentions: 'Uncovering Baartman's tragic entry into motherhood casts a different light on her public personae that needs further critical investigation'. It would not require a medical expert to consider the trauma and pain of childbirth in the 18th century and the greater possibility of mortality for babies and mothers compared to the 21st century. Furthermore, questions, needing further investigation, can be asked regarding the availability of wet nurses, midwives and efficient medical care to enslaved people and servants in the 18th century. Certainly, Sara Baartman would have had physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual scars and trauma after losing her parents at a young age, being sold and displaced from her local community, being displayed to foreign men, and losing three babies in their infancy. A postcolonial hermeneutic and imagination identifies these experiences as having an impact on her wellness and personhood and foregrounds the colonial context that caused this brokenness. Furthermore, an inability to do so would lead to our complicity in the barbaric colonialist gaze that objectified her to a non-being. For it might well be that an already broken-hearted Sara Baartman travelled to London with Cesar and Dunlop.

In England, she had to bear the name and humiliation of being known as 'the Hottentot Venus' as her 'grotesque body' was further exhibited by her colonial masters on stages in England and France (Kerseboom 2011:63; Ras 2017:1). Notably, the only recorded detail of Baartman speaking on her own behalf is during the well-documented court trial of 27 November 1810. Kerseboom does well in describing the environment of duress in which she spoke (Kerseboom 2011):

Questions had arisen on whether Baartman was being kept as a slave in London by her 'keeper', Hendrik Cesars, and a case was brought before the court by Zachary Macaulay, a leading abolitionist. The interview lasted for three hours and this is the first time that Baartman's voice enters the historical record. She denied that she was a slave; she stated that she was happy in her present situation and wished to remain in London. However, when Baartman spoke her voice cannot be removed from the context of power relations. Baartman, a black woman, spoke to four European men in Dutch, her second language and might even have been coached in her answers by Dunlop. (p. 65)

Scully and Crais mentions the short answer she gave when asked during the trial by an attorney if she wanted to go home to the Cape of Good Hope or remain in England. Her answer was simply: 'Stay Here'. Gail Smith, South African co-producer of the film *The Return of Sara Baartman*, raises an important question:

How can we even engage with the prospects of a KhoiSan woman from 1800, a woman from a people decimated by Colonial hunting raids, regarded and treated like half human/half beast, being treated with respect and given a contract and her share of the profits? (Gordon-Chipembere 2006:56)

What chance did Saartjie have on her own against the imperial agenda's mutually enforcing and oppressive vectors of race, gender, age, class, ethnicity, sexuality and culture? What difference could it have made to a broken hearted Saartjie, who suffered trauma, loss and displacement, if someone would have responded to her in her native Khoi language: 'I've come to take you home?'

## A postcolonial reading of the Samaritan Woman in John 4

This article considers the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the well as an encounter between two colonial subjects in the colonial context of the Roman Empire. Moreover, a postcolonial encounter with the early life of Sara Baartman leads us to consider the positionality of the Samaritan Woman in this colonial encounter with closer inspection.

It is often mentioned that Jesus crosses significant boundaries in his encounter with the Samaritan Woman. Theresa Okure highlights:

At the end of the encounter, Jesus, the disciples, the woman, and the Samaritans enter into a communion fellowship, transcending a complex variety of sociocultural, gender, and religious barriers that would otherwise keep them apart. (2009:403; Keener 2012:585; Kwon 2021:41)

These interpretations allude to the multiplicative vectors of ethnicity, gender, religion, and culture that are overcome in the encounter between a Jewish man and a Samaritan Woman. It would signal a victory for Jesus and the disciples to expand their mission beyond the boundaries of the Jews and also include Samaritans as believers:

*'Now he had to go through Samaria ...'*

Kwon (2021) notices in his exegetical consideration of John 4:4 that the first Greek word *'Edei* (edei) in John 4:4 can be translated as 'must, ought to have to, or should'. He contends that a rhetorical strategy is employed by the Johannine author to highlight the inevitability and necessity of Jesus to extend his mission towards Samaria and establish himself as Messiah for the Samaritans. Kwon, much like Fotiou (2013), Keener (2012) and Okure (2009), proceeds to consider the mission of Jesus as 'breaking boundaries'.

Foregrounding the imperial- and colonial-context and agenda of the Roman Empire in this passage however sheds a different light on this divinely inspired and boundary breaking mission. As mentioned earlier, Musa Dube emphasises that imperial domination is central to the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman and the Gospel of John as a whole. She does not merely accept the extension of the mission of Jesus as a theological necessity, but proceeds to highlight the imperial and colonial tendencies involved in the text.

Importantly, in this encounter at the well, the Samaritan Woman does not identify Jesus as Lord, Christ or the Messiah, but identifies him as a Jewish man, establishing the boundaries between them as people, Okure proceeds to

highlight that it is essential to consider Jesus here as a poor and marginalised Jewish man from Nazareth, as suggested by the renowned question of Nathanael in John 1: 46: 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' The Gospel of John further emphasises the marginalised position of Jesus as he is rejected and ridiculed by his own people in Galilee (Okure 2009:405). When we then encounter Jesus at the well in John 4, Dube Shomanah (1996) asserts:

... we witness the consequences of imperial disruption and intergroup competition at two levels: First, the disciples of Jesus are extending their influence to Samaria because they are losing the national competition to the Pharisees. Second, we enter into centuries of imperial subtexts of disruption, alienation, and resistance that strained the relationships of the Samaritans and Jews (4:9, 20–23). This tension goes back to the Assyrian Empire. Through intermarriage and the adoption of some of the religions of their Assyrian colonial masters, Samaritans became what some have termed 'despised heretics' and 'despised half-breeds'. As a result, the Samaritan Jewish descendants distanced themselves from Samaritans on the grounds of religious impurity. Their strained relationship illustrates the extent to which imperial domination has affected and influenced the relationship of different people at different centuries in the world. (p. 46)

In this encounter between a Jewish man and a Samaritan Woman at the well, it is the power dynamics of the colonial context of the Roman Empire at play as well as the lasting effects of a history of imperialism and colonialism. The nameless Samaritan Woman is designated and penned to represent all of Samaria and has to bear the weight of this history and imperial disruption in the biblical text, and plays a key role in the expansion of the mission of Jesus and the disciples. Dube recounts that throughout this lengthy encounter in John 4 the main focus of Jesus and the disciples remain Galilee. The evangelisation of the Samaritans does not occur through the initiative of Jesus or the disciples, but rather because of the testimony of the Samaritan Woman and her community's own initiative and begging Jesus to stay.

Evidently, the disciples and Jesus are distanced from self-interest and the Samaritans are characterised as people who are in need of saving. Jesus and the disciples transform from desperate travellers to honoured guests. Dube asserts that this reflects: 'an imperial theology that portrays the colonized as people who "require and beseech domination" and the colonisers as people with a moral "duty to natives"' (Dube 1996:49). The disciples who are seemingly background characters in the story share in the superior authority of Jesus to be able to travel to foreign lands and impose themselves on the inferior colonised peoples.

In contrast to the hidden authority of the disciples, the Samaritan Woman takes on a public role in her engagement with the authoritative Jesus. It may also be true that the Samaritan Woman is the first apostle in the Gospel of John who evangelises and successfully brings her people to Jesus, and the first recipient in the Gospel of the self-revelation of Jesus as Messiah, as he states 'I am he' (John 4:26). (Schneiders 1998:534). It is however important to highlight that the

biblical text is subject to the pen of the implied author of the Johannine text. Sandra Schneiders regards the implied Johannine author as a second generation member of the Johannine community who penned the Samaritan Woman as *textual alter ego*, a literary self-portrait, of the implied author (Schneiders 1998:533). The Samaritan Woman is constructed by the implied author to affirm the superiority of Jesus as Messiah, and consequently affirm more so the inferiority and 'need-of-saving' of the Samaritans.

Kim emphasises that the rhetoric of the author characterises the Samaritan Woman as an unimportant other who's only purpose is to play her role in the unfolding narrative of the revelation of the identity of Jesus (Kim 2004:99). The implied author constructs this encounter between the Samaritan Woman and Jesus at the well in a manner that maintains the oppressive imperial and colonial tendencies of placing men superior to women. Jews to Samaritans, Israel to foreign nations, Christianity to other religions, etc.

The superiority of Jesus is further illustrated and strengthened in the argument concerning the living water which he provides opposed to the water of Jacob's well. A variety of meanings of ὕδωρ ζῶν as the 'living water' have been considered (Brown 1966:170).<sup>8</sup> Possibly referring to life-giving water or heavenly water with the potential to grant eternal life or alluding to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus himself. Another meaning may be that the stale or stagnant or 'flat' water of the well is contrasted with the much preferred fresh, running water of a spring (Elowsky 2006:146, 149; Marais 2017:76; Moore 1993:208). Ultimately, the 'living water' that Jesus provides is regarded as superior in quality and function to the water in Jacob's well. To the Samaritans, Jacob's well was a significant cultural, ethnic and religious symbol as they still considered themselves to be a branch of Israel and regarded Jacob as their ancestor (Chalmers 2021:30; Mukansengimana-Nyirimana & Draper 2012:301). Not only does the argument regarding the living water therefore establish the superiority of Jesus but it also disregards and diminishes the tradition of the Samaritans in disregarding the symbolic function and significance of Jacob's well:

*'You have had five husbands ...'*

Verses 16–18 has been considered as a 'moral question' concerning the 'shameful past' or 'disorderly life' of the Samaritan Woman with contestations and speculations about why she's been with six men (Baron 2019:6; Keener 2012:605). Whatever the reasons may have been, which will still be referred to, in the patriarchal context of the time the legal onus was exclusively limited to husbands to initiate the divorce. The Samaritan Woman would therefore not have had the power in the patriarchal context of the time to enter in and out of marriages or relationships at her own will. Yet, the number of divorces would still have been a bad reflection of the woman rather than the husbands. She would have been viewed as the one with whom there was 'fault' or

8. Possibly meaning: 'fresh, running water' (such as spring water) or 'life-giving water', 'living water' 'is water that moves, is fresh, and flows from springs, as against stagnant water from cisterns or jugs', 'spiritual water'.

something wrong (Keener 2012:607). Furthermore, as an older woman who's been with five husbands, she would have been regarded as a less valuable commodity than a younger virgin. This could have led to her not finding anyone who would be willing to enter into marriage with her, thereby legally protecting her. Keener observes that her staying with a man without being married to him would have been regarded by conservative Jews and Samaritans as the life of a concubine or prostitute (Keener 2012:608). Additionally, Kim highlights that in the socio-historical context of the time, women were also sexually exploited or marginalised and would resort to the strategy of 'voluntary rape', to avoid brutal attacks and violence from soldiers (Kim 2004:105).

Encountering the early life of Sara Baartman illuminates the complex power relations and stronghold of oppressive multiplicative vectors involved in the colonial context. These multiplicative vectors intersect on the body of the Samaritan Woman and illustrate her disempowered position in the colonial context of the Roman Empire. Okure highlights that she is marginalised firstly as a woman in an overtly patriarchal context. Secondly, she is identified as a Samaritan Woman, who were regarded as unclean, impure and being menstruous from birth by Jewish rabbis. Thirdly, she is regarded as an outcast in her own society, because she comes to draw from the well at noon, the hottest part of the day when people did not usually fetch water (Okure 2009:408).

Importantly, Parker emphasises that trauma – broken heartedness – is inherent to the story of the Samaritan Woman. Whether she was married multiple times; or if her husbands passed away; or if she could not bear children; or if she lost her three babies to infancy; or if she was representative of the history of Samaria; she experienced loss and trauma. Parker asserts that 'whether the woman's life is representative of the imperial and political scene in Samaria with various empires (as husbands) coming in and overtaking the Samaritan land. If so, then one can argue that interpreters may be witnessing communal trauma as a result of imperial invasion' (Parker 2020:268). Evidently, the imperial and/or colonial agenda and ideology of domination and expansion leads to broken heartedness and trauma for vulnerable and marginalised people like Sara Baartman and the Samaritan Woman. A postcolonial reading refuses to simply focus on the expansion of Jesus's ministry in the Gospel of John, at the expense of overlooking the broken heartedness of the Samaritan Woman. In the same way, a postcolonial encounter with the early life of Sara Baartman takes seriously her broken heartedness and humanity and resists any endeavour to further objectify her as an intersectional symbol or figure for our own purposes.

## Conclusion - more than intersectional figures

This article has unequivocally focussed on the broken heartedness found in the stories of Sara Baartman and the Samaritan Woman through a postcolonial hermeneutic.

Both the Samaritan Woman and Sara Baartman have been considered as intersectional figures who represents their respective ethnicity groups and even though they are worlds apart, their stories reflect a similar brokenness caused by patriarchal colonial contexts.

Musa Dube situates the Samaritan Woman in the expansion of the mission of Jesus beyond Israel, as part of what she coins 'the imperialist ideology of subjugation' found in the Bible and in John 4 (Dube Shomanah 1996:53). She states that the Samaritan Woman is characterised to represent all of Samaria and becomes the point of entrance, who is domesticated and finally dismissed (verses 37–38) (Dube Shomanah 1996:53). Additionally, Angela Parker considers the Samaritan Woman as 'an intersectional figure who has her voice and agency erased both in the Johannine text and in large segments of the history of the text's interpretation' (Parker 2020:260).

Similarly, in her book, *Hottentot Venus* (2003), Barbara Chase-Ribound captures the barbaric objectification of the body of Sara Baartman by European colonialists: 'her cadaver became the unexplored Africa, the Dark Continent, dissected, violated, probed, raped by dead white men since Roman times' (2003:281). Furthermore, it is clear, as Isaabella Ras states that Baartman had to bear the physicality of the colonialist gaze as her body was taken, dissected, weighed, named, and displayed during her lifetime and thereafter. Ras records: 'Issues of gender, sexuality, class, culture, race, science and colonialism all intersected on the body of Saartjie Baartman so that all that was left were pieces of her in jars and a plaster likeness of her body' (Ras 2017:2). The return of Baartman's remains in post-1994 South Africa symbolised a victory over colonialism, racism, and sexism, and restored Baartman's dignity. Her exploitation and dehumanisation at the hands of European colonialists and scientists was publicly condemned by the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, in his speech at her funeral with the return of her remains. He asserted that these Western colonialists and scientists who defined themselves as 'man par excellence' were in fact the real barbarians as opposed to their subjects (Kerseboom 2011:73).

Both these women are employed in their respective patriarchal colonial contexts in a game of power to transform the fate of desperate men. When Hendrik Cesar met Sara Baartman, he was in a desperate cash strapped position. He wasn't exactly a high official in the British army, but given the patriarchal colonial context of the time he could collude with Alexander Dunlop to exploit her and transform their fate for the better at her expense for the worse. In contrast to Sara Baartman, we have an extended account of the voice of the Samaritan Woman, yet subject to the pen of the implied author of the Johannine text and its history of interpretation. Angela Parker therefore considers it an imperative to highlight the negligence of interpretive communities who have read the story of the Samaritan Woman without recognising her as a marginalised body in an imperial, colonial and patriarchal context (Parker 2020:260).



Zine Magubane critically states that amid the myriad of studies of Sara Baartman, which she has rendered as a 'fetishisation of Baartman', it becomes essential to remember and value the humanity of Baartman (Magubane 2001:816). To this degree and in line with Parker's imperative, reading the story of the Samaritan Woman together with the story of Baartman, goes beyond seeing them as intersectional figures, but values their humanity by recognising their inherent brokenness. In this sense, a postcolonial hermeneutic was employed in an effort to offer a transgressive biblical interpretation of John 4, which invites the reader to involve the African context and history in their reading of the biblical text and come home to Africa.

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## Author's contributions

D.E.J. declares that they are the sole author of this article.

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