

Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora  
 Short Paper Topic Due **Thursday, March 17, 2005 at 11 am.**

In her review of the theoretical uses of the “Hottentot Venus” among scholars of gender, science, race, and colonialism, Zina Magubane (2001)<sup>1</sup> has criticized Sander Gilman’s analysis of representations of Blackness and the female body as being ahistorical and psychologically determinist. Against this view she affirms: “the idea one people has of another, even when the difference between them is embodied in the most striking physical characteristics, is always mediated by the social context within which the two come into contact” (Magubane 2001: 821, citing Barbara Fields (1982: 148)).<sup>2</sup>

What Magubane highlights in these statements is the extent to which knowledge produced about the Other, and the practices directed toward them, is always contextual and political. In this respect, she recalls Foucault’s discussion of biopower and biopolitics (nosopolitics). Magubane also reminds us of an argument presented in Lock and Scheper-Hughes, namely, that there is more than one “body” that must be considered: there is the individual phenomenological body of lived experience; the social body, which has been used as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society and culture; and the body politic, the realm of regulation, surveillance and control of individual and collective bodies (1996: 45).

On another level, however, we are reminded of the way in which the project of knowledge production itself is also a contested one. For example, in his early work *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Johannes Fabian has asserted: “It is by diagnosing anthropology’s temporal discourse that one rediscovers the obvious, namely, that there is no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act” (2001: 1).

In your double-spaced, 5-7 page, 12-point font paper, please address the following issues: to what extent can symbolic, psychological, or stereotypical representations of the Other (whether European/white or African/black) be separated from the political, economic, and security interests of either group? To what extent does the knowledge or ideology about both groups influence the medical and scientific practices that evolved from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries (or vice-versa)? Finally, discuss whether there can be a practice of knowledge construction about the Other that is free from power and politics. What would such a project require? As you build your argument, please discuss at least three historical or geographical case studies/theoretical approaches from the readings (you may choose from readings through those of March 15th); however, one case must be the problem of the fetish.

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<sup>1</sup> Zina Magubane, “Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the ‘Hottentot Venus,’” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (Dec. 2001): 816-834.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Fields, “Slavery, race, and ideology in American history.” In *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, edited by J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).