

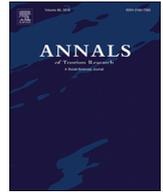
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# Portrayal of the female dead in dark tourism

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## ABSTRACT

In death, men and women are not treated the same – at least in the portrayal of the dead female in dark tourism. Thus, engaging feminist perspectives to theoretically cultivate a scholarly blueprint, our essay critiques the female dead in dark tourism. We expose unrecognised and covert influences that dark tourism has on sensibilities and in legitimising cultural female exploitation. In so doing, we argue dark tourism should foster more empathetic, even empowering curation of the female dead at sites of public exhibition and consumption. Ultimately, we offer an ‘impact pathway’ that disrupts societal norms of subjugation and objectification in female lived experiences, extending to the treatment of the female body in death.

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## Introduction

The Grim Reaper makes no distinction between male and female. Instead, we all eventually return to the elements that bore us and all that is left are memories and legacies. Yet, in death, men and women are not treated the same – at least in the portrayal of the dead female in dark tourism. It is here that dark tourism – travel to places associated with fatality – raises fundamental questions of how the female dead are represented within global visitor economies. These questions are as pertinent to equality issues in life, as there are to how females are presented in death. Indeed, Solomon (1998: 160) states that ‘a woman’s death, through much of the same history, was thought to be a simpler thing, preferably quiet and uncomplaining, or tragically in childbirth. Just as women were denied the right and the capacity to a full life, they were denied the right and the capacity to a full death as well’.

The purpose of our paper, therefore, is to offer a critical review of how the female dead are portrayed in dark tourism. We aim to offer an original conceptual framework in which to uncover and further research the female dead. Notwithstanding broad and multicultural facets of what might constitute dark tourism, our exploratory essay engages feminist perspectives to theoretically cultivate a range of emergent themes, issues, and consequences. In so doing, we employ several contextualising examples to locate the female dead in dark tourism, including the Body Worlds exhibition, the murder victims of Jack the Ripper, and the life and death of Sara Baartman.

Ultimately, we reveal several factors that constitute the portrayal of the female dead within dark tourism, including but not limited to, erased identities, eroticisation and beautification, Othering, misogyny, sexual grotesquery, as well as the sense of empowerment. Our essay exposes unrecognised and covert influences that consuming dark tourism have on sensibilities and in legitimising cultural female exploitation. As such, we exemplify an ‘impact pathway’ that argues dark tourism should foster

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more empathetic, even empowering curation of the female dead at sites of public exhibition and consumption. Consequently, we offer a conceptual blueprint that disrupts the societal norms of subjugation and objectification in female lived experiences, extending to the treatment of the female body in death. Firstly, however, we offer a critique of the female dead and the male gaze as foundation for subsequent discussions of dark tourism and representations of dead women.

### 'Death betrays her': towards a male gaze of the female dead

In her video 'Death and Feminism' mortician, author, and *YouTube* Caitlin Doughty (2016: online) states:

Since feminism is simply the belief that women are equal to men, death itself is actually pretty feminist, because when you die you rot and decompose and turn into a pile of unidentifiable bones, which is a pretty equal system...

Whilst Doughty was examining the paucity of women within the funerary industry, she raises a fundamental point about how female bodies are viewed in both life and death. Similarly, in a feminist critique of Foucault's panopticon, Bartky (1988) describes the intense scrutiny and bodily control women are placed under in everyday life. From a Foucauldian perspective, the human body is rigidly self-controlled because the individual is aware that they may be under observation and, therefore, obligated to behave in a manner deemed acceptable (King, 2004). However, Bartky (1988) argues that Foucault's theory, while a genuine *tour de force* of modernist philosophy, fails to consider the differences between the genders when it comes to self-observation, discipline, and performance. Indeed, women often feel pressured to conform to a particular set of beauty ideals, which fluctuate over time and may contradict each other, and to behave in a certain way to be respected as women (Ingram, 2021; Leibel, 2022). Moreover, women are often encouraged to diet, to repair so-called 'problem areas' on their body, to have limited wrinkles or blemishes, to remove unwanted body hair, to wear facial makeup (but not too much), to stay youthful and slim - and even to undergo surgical enhancement to achieve this (but not to make it obvious, otherwise she becomes an object of ridicule). Women are encouraged to adjust her gait and her stance to be diminutive and feminine.

It is here that Bartky (1988) adapts the argument of the *male gaze* from Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking 1975 critique on gender and cinema (Mulvey, 1975). In short, women in cinema are framed in a way that invites sexual objectification, and that this 'way of seeing' affects women more generally too. However, returning to Caitlin Doughty's statement outlined earlier, could an argument be made for death being the great equalizer of the genders? Of course, the reality of death has no eye for aesthetic or socially accepted ideals of beauty. Regardless of gender identity, decomposition is the same. That said, compared to the scrutiny placed on the female body in life, this is almost radical. Indeed, in death, all control is lost, and the female body is free to decay. However, death - and more particularly, the dead body - is not always without an audience. The enigma of the dead body has long been an object of curiosity in art, literature, and popular culture, with dead female bodies commanding a specific fascination (Bronfen, 1992; Penfond-Mounce, 2018). As Edgar Allan Poe (1846: 163) states, 'the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world'.

Of course, much has already been written on how the female corpse tends to be eroticised in art and literature (for example, Bhatta, 2021; Herschberg, 2019). Consequently, Bronfen (1992) suggests this is because womanhood and death are two of the most 'Othered' concepts in society. Indeed, the female body is so alien even to female-bodied persons that the death of women is made palatable 'because the feminine body is culturally constructed as the superlative site of alterity, culture uses art to dream the deaths of beautiful women' (Bronfen, 1992: xiii). Even within the objective field of medicine, death of the female can be made erotic. For example, *Anatomical Venuses* - educational wax models of the female body that are anatomised - are made beautiful (Watkins, 2018). As an anatomical illustrator argued, 'for men to be instructed they must be seduced by aesthetics, but how can anyone render the image of death agreeable?' (Ebenstein, 2015: 67). These models were stunningly detailed, often made with real hair, given pearl necklaces, and arranged akin to a Renaissance painting (Jones, 2019). Yet, they cannot be said to represent the reality of female death. Furthermore, in other cases where the female dead are portrayed for contemporary consumption, issues of representation and potential exploitation are inherent. It is here that death is often 'packaged' for touristic experiences within global visitor economies. Consequently, 'dark tourism' as travel to sites of death or difficult heritage offers a spectacularization of death in our cosmopolitan age (Stone, 2018). Thus, death of the significant Other, including the female dead, are consumed as commodified spectacles (Jacobsen, 2016; Stone, 2020). It is to dark tourism and its consuming (male) gazes upon the female dead that we now turn.

#### *Gazing upon the female dead in dark tourism*

Death has become mercantile within international visitor economies over recent years, with representations of the dead in dark tourism blurring the line between commemoration and commercialism (Stone[A], 2021). Put very simply, dark tourism is when a place is visited *because* of its connections to tragic events, most often related to death, disaster, or the macabre. Sites of spectacular death tend to prove more 'attractive' in touristic terms (Stone, 2018), though Seaton (2018) makes a distinction between *mortality* (death from natural causes) and *fatality* (death that is traumatic and 'unnatural'). Hence, dark tourism incorporates places of fatality that, as Seaton (2018) argues, are more 'gaze worthy'. For instance, a graveyard has a certain pull factor, but it is not as strong as the one offered by a memorial to tragic victims of a disaster or atrocity. This raises issues of consumerism and tourist experiences, as well as the touristic 'gaze.' In mainstream tourism there is an exchange between three groups of people: firstly, the tourist; secondly, orchestrators of tourism (tour guides, companies, heritage groups - that is, those who create

narratives for tourist consumers); and finally, the represented people (for example, locals or historical figures that become the subject of the gaze). In 1990, John Urry published his well-cited book *The Tourist Gaze* and posited a theory based on Michel Foucault's concept of the medical gaze – that is, the dehumanizing separation of a patient's body from their personhood by those treating them. According to the original theory which Urry drew upon, the disparity in knowledge between patient and medic creates a power imbalance (Foucault, 1976). Though the tourist gaze does not necessarily involve a disparity in knowledge, it continues the act of dehumanization from expectations that tourists have from individuals, cultures and groups represented in tourism.

In a revision of his original tourist gaze theory, Urry acknowledged the fact that the tourist gaze is objectifying the subject of the gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Much like Foucault's 'mad ones' in the medical gaze, within the tourist gaze, residents, hosts, and other notable figures are part of the scenery, especially if they conform to the visual hegemony. In other words, they are 'behind bars,' photographed like all other objects that tourists consume visually (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 204). This is especially true when there is already a power imbalance between the tourist and the subject – for example, a wealthy Western voluntourist perusing the impoverished slums of Jakarta in Indonesia. However, the tourist gaze can be mutual, and in many instances it is. Locals can equally see tourists as the *madmen* (after Foucault) and make them a 'figure of fun' (Urry & Larsen, 2011: 205). This has the potential to be empowering for those subjected to the unequal gaze.

In dark tourism, however, there is a crucial amendment to this triad of exchange. Importantly, the subjects of the tourist gaze are dead. The dead cannot gaze back or control how they are 'seen' or remembered in any way. Yet, within dark tourism the dead have both a 'presence' and 'absence' and, consequently, the dead can 're-enchanted' the past through the spatial and temporal (re)organization of material history (Goulding, Saren, & Pressey, 2018). Therefore, notwithstanding complexities of politics of remembrance and the agency of absence, we must depend upon 'memory managers' to (re)present the dead within dark tourism. Seaton (2018) refers to this process as 'Engineered and Orchestrated Remembrance (EOR),' or in other words, the object of what we might call the 'dark tourist gaze.' Moreover, as Roberts (2018) argues, site interpretation within dark tourism is especially important in encouraging understanding and awareness of the 'Other' and, thus, helping them become less 'other'. An exchange between subject and gazer can, therefore, provide the empathy necessary for navigating sensitive topics.

Yet, the danger of limited or inaccurate interpretation has been noted in older instances of dark tourism. An early example is from the Paris Morgue tours, which exhibited unidentified corpses found in the River Seine and around Parisian streets during the 19th century. The ostensible purpose of these public morgue tours was to facilitate the identification of the anonymous dead, but the institute effectively functioned as a tourist attraction and was a spectacle of death within the Victorian imagination (Martens, 2008). Charles Dickens, Emile Zola, and Anthony Trollope all visited the morgue and reflected upon middle class anxieties over the (working class) growth of 1860s 'vulgar culture' (Edmondson, 2018). Dickens seemed particularly moved by the display of the indigent dead, as he observed:

And there was a much more general, purposeless vacant staring at it – like looking at a waxwork, without a catalogue, and not knowing what to make of it. But all these expressions concurred in possessing the one underlying expression of *looking at something that could not return a look*.

[(Dickens cited in Edmondson, 2018: 81, emphasis by Dickens)]

However, tourists of the day were not experiencing *memento mori* – that is, a contemplation of mortality – but confronting an alien Other, an object of curiosity no different from a manufactured waxwork (Edmondson, 2018). This type of objectification of the dead is magnified when considered alongside other disadvantages the subject (that is, the deceased) may have had in life. It is here we wish to examine Mulvey's theory of the *male gaze* and Bartky's amendment to Foucault's panopticon, as noted earlier. While there have been explorations of tourism and the tourist gaze from feminist perspectives (for example, see Pritchard & Morgan, 2000), and on the objectification of the female dead body (Roberts, Calogero, & Gervais, 2018), there has been limited commentary on the intersection of the two (Mooney, 2018).

Indeed, within the female context, a dead woman – in art, in real life, or as framed within a dark tourism context – cannot return the gaze and, of course, is not empowered to choose how her body is represented. Hence, without sensitive interpretation, potential exploitation of the dead female body is inherent. Dark tourism allows for interaction with the dead – that is, photographs of the dead or displays of human remains – though touristic encounters with actual corpses are never made (Stone, 2020). Therefore, the question remains whether death and its (re)presentation within dark tourism liberates women from pressures described in life. It is here that we introduce our conceptual blueprint (Fig. 1) which outlines an impact pathway to the study of the female dead within dark tourism. As illustrated in Fig. 1 and revealed shortly by our contextual insights, the female dead portrayed by dark tourism share numerous traits. These include but are not limited to issues of Othering and erased identities, voyeurism and sexual grotesquery, beautification, misogyny, and sexualization. Whilst exploitation of the female dead appears inherent, issues of female empowerment are also realised. However, the *problématique* of the praxis posed by our essay focusses upon interrogation of interpretations of dead females. Thus, we argue that the female dead portrayed in dark tourism is by no means neutral or factual but is perpetuated by a *male gaze* that is collectively sexist, exploitative and, in some cases as we will reveal, incontrovertibly racist. By looking through a lens of feminist epistemology and the optics of intersectionality, our conceptual model (Fig. 1) offers an undisguised call to action to employ more inclusive, ethical, and empowering portrayals of the female dead.

To reveal the traits outlined in our conceptual model (Fig. 1), we now offer contextual background by outlining several empirical insights. Particularly, we now turn to three specific case examples of the female dead within past and present touristic

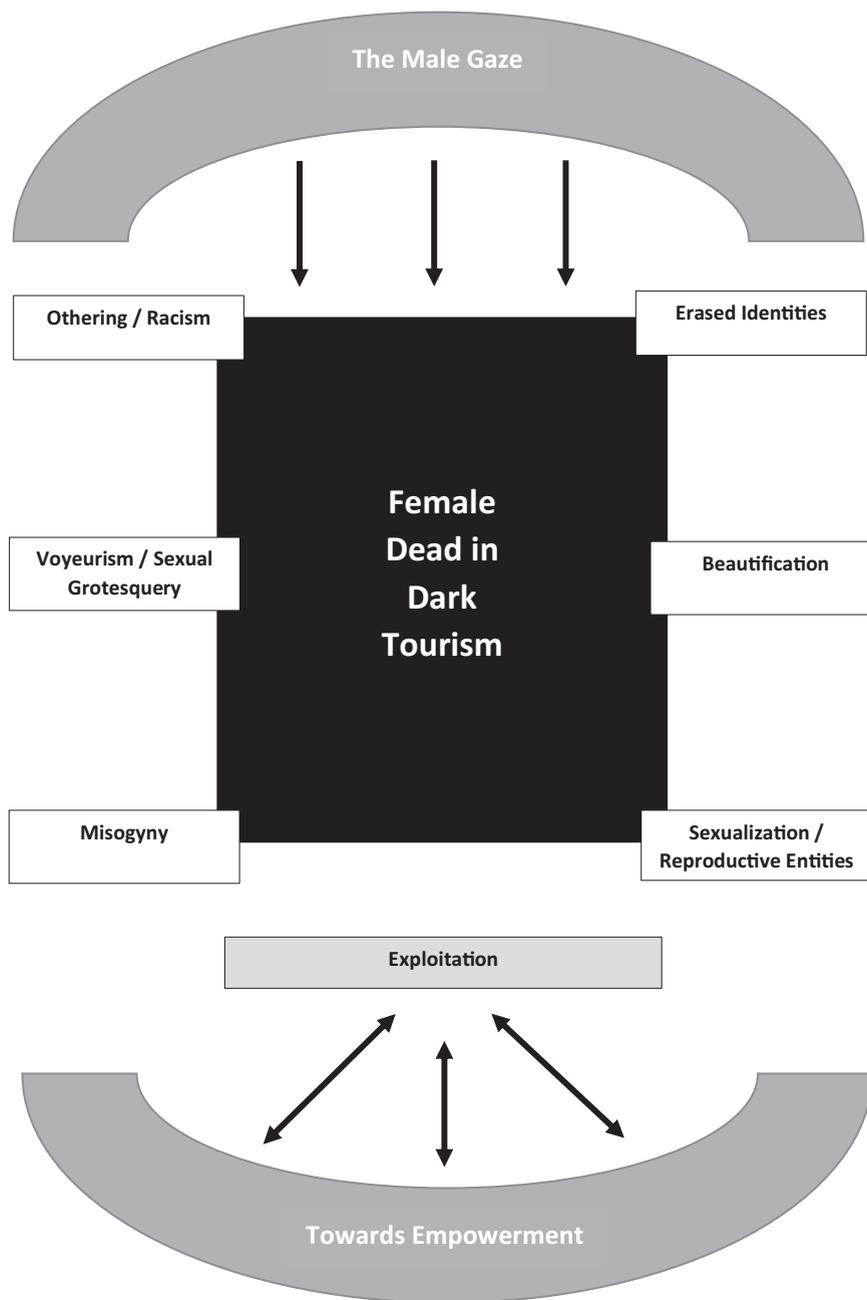


Fig. 1. The female dead in dark tourism.

settings. We outline, firstly, the portrayal of the female dead within the Body Worlds exhibition; secondly, contemporary (re)presentations of the female victims murdered by Jack the Ripper in the 1880's; and finally, Sara Baartman – a South African women born in 1789 who was a source of public curiosity both in life and death. We chose these case examples as exemplars to conduct feminist enquiry as they all display the female dead in both past and present contexts and, consequently, illustrate the persistence of their representations. We critically ascertain if cross-sections of the *male gaze*, *tourist gaze*, and what we term the *living gaze* (though there is not really any other kind), merits further exploration. In doing so, we draw upon discourses of the specific tourist attractions and/or exhibitions and uniquely examine the female dead within dark tourism.

**‘Sexualised corpses’: the women of body worlds**

In a process called plastination, the German anatomist Gunther von Hagens invented a technique for preserving biological tissue in human corpses with reactive resins (Stone, 2011a). Von Hagens went on to create a world-renowned travelling exhibition

called Body Worlds, which displays his cured human specimens, either in separate body parts or as whole anatomised cadavers (van Djick, 2001). Dead humans (and some animals) are displayed to reveal the structure and processes of the body as well as its capabilities. The Body Worlds exhibition has attracted controversy since its inception and blurs the line between art, anatomy, and exploitation. With the dead arranged to evoke everything from Renaissance anatomical drawings to surrealism and dada, the bodies are donated, often by those who visit the exhibition, through a dedicated scheme where immortality can be purchased (Stone, 2011a). Moreover, Tettenborn (2005) suggests Body Worlds is an imitation of a post-modern freak show, where exhibited cadavers challenge conventional boundaries between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, and fact and myth. Stone (2011a, 4) goes on to argue that “Body Worlds as a cadaveric carnival constitutes an ambiguous form of post-modern existence, whereby human corpses are arranged in ‘real-life’ situations.” Meanwhile, Goulding, Saren, and Lindridge (2013) offer various ‘readings’ of the body at Body Worlds, including the body as spectacle, as mortality salience, as commodity, as a machine, as well as a dehumanized body.

Whilst criticism of Body Worlds often focusses upon voyeurism of the aestheticized dead and a moralistic anatomical awe (Moore & Brown, 2007; Walter, 2004), we would like to critically examine female cadavers within the exhibition. Indeed, visiting Body Worlds one might notice that male corpses outnumber female ones (Burns, 2007; Stone, 2011a). There are various explanations for this disparity, with the official Body Worlds website stating that von Hagens attempted to replicate Renaissance art, which tended to feature male subjects much more than female (Wright & Fitzgerald, 2017: 62; also see Body Worlds, 2022: on-line). Another explanation may simply be that more men than women choose to donate their bodies to the exhibition for post-mortem perpetuity (Stone, 2011a). Meanwhile, Britta (2014) suggests that von Hagens adopts more male cadavers because of the definition of masculine muscles and body parts. Regardless, this relative dearth of female bodies at Body Worlds can have some unfortunate implications, including limited narratives within the exhibit on the effects of disease across the genders (Dubek, 2013).

However, the most pertinent criticism of the portrayal of women (or lack of them) at Body Worlds is summarised well by Wade (2008) in her article ‘Your Body: Men are People, Women are Women’. Particularly, Wade (2008) notes that the only section of the exhibition that contained the female dead were exhibits on reproduction. The implication of course, is that the male body is the default and, moreover, the female body only exists to fulfil biological imperatives of sex and childbirth. This argument is also the focus of Wright and Fitzgerald’s (2017: 60–61) critique, who suggest the ‘authenticity and ‘reality’ of Body World’s promotional material distracts from the fact that all cadavers are engineered to some degree and, therefore, promotes narratives that centre the White, male experience as the default. The few female cadavers on display at Body Worlds are heavily subjected to the male gaze, something that is extensively commented on by Dubek (2013). The limited female dead tends to be beautified (some appear to be wearing false eyelashes) and are posed like pin-up girls, an affected way of holding the body that is designed to convey sex appeal (as Bartky, 1988 argued). Likewise, Stern (2003) argues that the female plastinates are portrayed in terms of beauty, passivity, or reproduction with cadavers posed in pornographic clichés (Plate 1).

Of course, sexuality is a part of the human condition – and no other taboo subjects such as sex and death attract so much attention. Indeed, death and sex sells! In 2009, Body Worlds combined sexual encounters with death in its most controversial exhibit to date (Rhodes, 2009). Cadavers were posed as heterosexual couples engaging in sexual intercourse with the act of



**Plate 1.** Female cadaver posed in a pornographic cliché.  
(Source: Bodyworlds.com)

conception graphically illustrated by the dead (Plate 2). Whilst the exhibit attracted some obvious criticism and moral outrages, there is anatomical merit in seeing the mechanics of this act as much as any other in the exhibition. Importantly, however, the exhibit does not exist in a vacuum, particularly when other female plastinates emphasise sexuality and are posed to titillate or provoke the (male) onlooker. Indeed, consequences of the sexualised female dead are in plain sight in Body Worlds. As a result, the question remains as to what are the lessons being taught when the female dead are Othered and sexualised?

Interestingly, Troyer (2020) critiques the Body World exhibition and recounts that in a 2006 questionnaire given by von Hagens to potential donors, on being asked if they would like their bodies to be placed in sexual displays, most male respondents liked the idea while female respondents did not. Therefore, the aesthetic choices made by von Hagens, and his team may be playing an active role in isolating women visitors from their sexuality. The sex plastinates should be able to simply show a natural human act. However, while sexualisation of the female body is the general norm in society, this dark tourism exhibition which is promoted as educational and objective, has some way to go to address inherent portrayals of the female dead as merely sexualised reproductive entities.

### 'Down on whores': portraying female victims of Jack the Ripper

Despite criticisms of Body Worlds, the exhibition does have some genuine scientific and educational merits, and, notwithstanding some issues of provenance, cadavers have been voluntarily made. However, that is not the case of murdered female victims of Jack the Ripper - a 1888 serial killer in London's Whitechapel - whereby shocking scandal and tabloid titillation became industrialised, including present-day Ripper-related tours, exhibitions, and visitor attractions (Stone, 2009). Crimes of Jack the Ripper are well-recorded and have become part of a pop-cultural osmosis and, therefore, are not repeated in-depth here. Rather, Jack the Ripper, as the mystical and un-convicted serial killer murdered and mutilated numerous women, including those victims known as the Canonical Five. These victims were Mary Ann Nichols (aged 43), Annie Chapman (aged 47), Elisabeth Stride (aged 44), Catherine Eddowes (aged 46), and Mary Jane Kelly (aged 25). The common denominator of all these slain women is that they were alcoholics and lived in dire poverty at the time of their murder, most without permanent accommodation. All of them performed sex work to varying degrees to earn a living. That said, however, there is nuance to this latter point as Rubenhold (2020) argues the term 'prostitute' does not necessarily apply to the Ripper victims. Nonetheless, the Ripper serial killings exposed sexism and misogyny that vilified the five victims as 'whores' who somehow were responsible for what happened to them (Rubenhold, 2020). Indeed, Sara Stone in her feminist account which explores parallels of biblical blame-shifting with contemporary victim-blaming, questions 'those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same' (Stone[B], 2021: 204). She goes on to note 'whether society has become desensitized to victim-blaming due to its prevalence, both historically and currently' (Stone[B], 2021: 206).

Yet, violence against 'ladies of the night' in Victorian Britain was tolerated and even an accepted part of society. It against this socio-cultural background that Jack the Ripper captured popular imaginations and, subsequently, the mystery of the villain rather than the memory of the victims has endured. However, as Stone[A] (2021: 184) states in his tourist guidebook of 'England's dark places' is to 'forget the villain, [but] remember the victims' of Jack the Ripper. The victims were women living in circumstances that rendered them extremely vulnerable. In short, 'the victims were women who fell through the net of Victorian society, and the villain was a cruel sociopath' (Stone[A], 2021:184). Of course, the Ripper murders have subsequently been transformed into 'a media sensation, a pop culture phenomenon and a money-making juggernaut in the tourist industry' (Gray, 2018: 8). A



**Plate 2.** Female cadaver posed in sexual intercourse.  
(Source: Bodyworlds.com).

range of factors for the enduring appeal of the crimes remain. The most important fact, it remains a compelling mystery akin to an old Penny Dreadful – cheap and sensational Victorian-era storybooks of violent adventures or felonies.

That said, however, we would like to focus on the role victims play in mediatised and touristic narratives of the Ripper. Indeed, *Jack the Ripper* (a name originating from a signed letter in 1888 purporting to be the killer) as the male murderer (assuming he was male) is usually the centrepiece of popular cultural narratives. The female victims appear in *his* orbit, as kind of props for *his* story. Many media and fictional accounts of the killings have been made over the years (Smith, 2016), including Alan Moore's and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* (and subsequent 2001 movie starring Johnny Depp), and the 1988 television mini-series *Jack the Ripper* (starring Michael Caine), all created to support male actors in depicting authoritarian (if not flawed) police characters. Though the 2016 movie *Jack the Ripper: The London Slasher* does focus on a female protagonist as a main storyline, Bloom (2008: 261) suggests victims of Jack the Ripper 'exist to scream and die'.

Moreover, there is a tendency to sexualise Ripper victims in both fictional and factual accounts (Bloom, 2008). However, these female dead are also subject to a different kind of objectification, where their corpses (or pictures thereof) are treated as ghoulish spectacles, a ghastly backdrop to a gruesome gaze. Indeed, what is the first instance of 'Ripper tourism,' the corpse of the second victim, Annie Chapman, became a temporary visitor attraction (Ryder, 2022). As Annie lay dead in the backyard at 29 Hanbury Street on the morning of 8th September 1888, enterprising tenants in adjacent apartments with windows overlooking the yard opened their doors and charged visitors for a 'bird's eye view of the corpse' (Ryder, 2022). Of course, while the physical corpse did not form part of the (dark) tourist experience for long, Annie Chapman and other female Ripper victims are now portrayed within contemporary tourism with their identities erased. In other words, the female victims are not portrayed in touristic narratives as characters with lives lived, but as graphic representations of being deceased and mutilated (Khan, 2020).

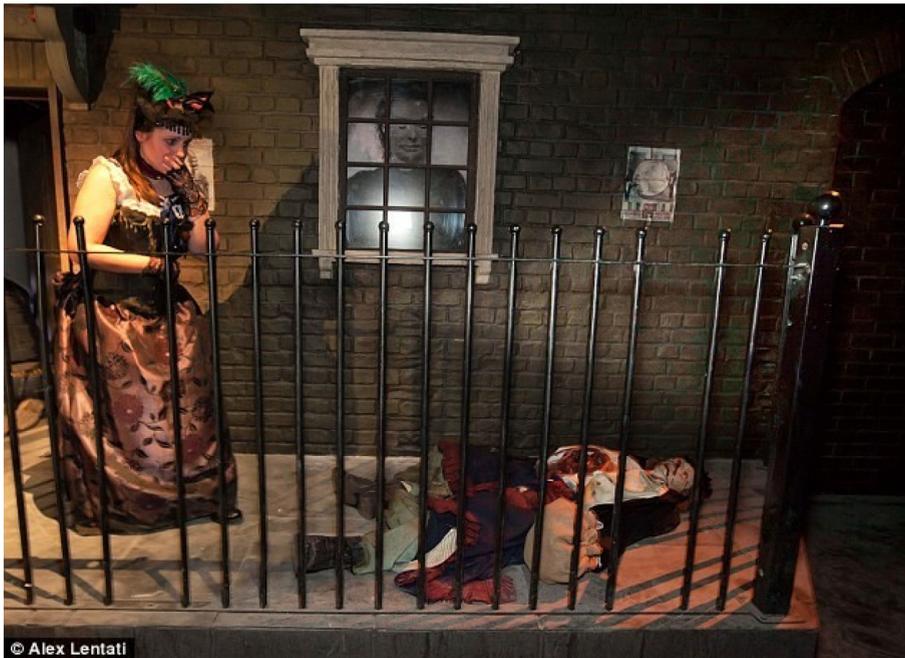
Consequently, in what has become a 'Ripperology' industry, tales of the Ripper are now consumed as dark tourism and the female victims remain silent. Instead, Jack (the Ripper) is perpetuated by his evil deeds and his female dead are used as macabre backdrops in the persistence of myth (Stone, 2009). For example, in this picture (see Plate 3) from the London Dungeon (a popular visitor attraction operated by Merlin Entertainments plc and visited by adults and children alike), visitors gaze upon a reconstructed 1888 London East End Street. It is here that Ripper killings are played out for contemporary consumption, with an actor playing Mary Jane Kelly, a mannequin representing the mutilated Catherine Eddowes, and in the fake window behind them, the post-mortem photograph of Elizabeth Stride.

Post-mortem photographs of Mary Ann Nichols and Annie Chapman are also displayed within the reconstructed sets at London Dungeon as 'edutainment' (Wyatt, Leask, & Barron, 2020). Despite being dead, these photos do not illustrate female victims in the Romantic Victorian imagination of death as if to dignifiedly drift off into an eternal slumber (Stone, 2011b). Rather, other post-mortem photos exist of the victims (and have been widely circulated): most notably a naked photo of Catherine Eddowes post-autopsy with unmistakable evidence of body and facial mutilation, as well as a crime-scene photo of Mary Jane Kelly and her extensively mutilated corpse. Although the London Dungeon visitor attraction do not include these latter photos in their exhibits (Stone, 2009), as a 2018 advertising campaign demonstrates (Plate 4), the male villain is yet again put in the spotlight against female victims. Of course, other Ripper tourism providers make full use of all available post-mortem and crime-scene photography. For instance, some Jack the Ripper tours in London led by apparent 'expert Ripperologists' use so-called 'Ripper-Vision' to project graphic pictures of Eddowes and Kelly's corpses onto unassuming street walls to inject a sense of macabre storytelling (Ripper Vision, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the female dead in this case of dark tourism are quite literally a form of window dressing. However, whilst we are not encountering the actual corpse, Bronfen (1992) in her study of death and femininity argued that pictorial representations should not be considered as real bodies are. Yet, as Sontag (2003) argues, there is a veracity to photography and, consequently, images of violence are powerful. Sontag's (2003) treatise on violent imagery in *Regarding the Pain of Others* finds that photographs of violent acts should not necessarily be shown with the justification that they may 'teach', that such violence is unimaginable to those who have not experienced it, but nonetheless these photographs are important. Indeed, they bear witness to a truth, and they have an almost sacred property to them as representations of the person depicted (Sontag, 2003).

Of course, overuse of images of spectacular death can make it seem normal, especially if they are the only images of the dead that are regularly being shown (Jacobsen, 2016; Stone, 2018). Notwithstanding issues of sensitization, in this way, fear of death may be perpetuated as the dead become monstrous 'Others' - created from violence and used to provoke fear and anxiety (Jones, 2011; Mubarki, 2014). Moreover, in the case of the Ripper victims, their sex worker associations make that 'Otherness' especially problematic. Victorian perceptions of female sex workers were of 'fallen' women or 'whores' - even from those who were sympathetic to their plight (Attwood, 2011). Subsequently, Victorian womanhood was restrictive and prescriptive, with the popular dichotomy being that of 'the angel in the house versus the whore in the streets' (Kingsley Kent, 1987: 60).

Violence and discrimination against female sex workers and, sexual harassment against women in general, remains a problem (Lawton, 2017). Indeed, the recent rise of #MeToo, a social media driven feminist-activist movement, has elevated the voices from female victims of sexual harassment and/or abuse (Stone[B], 2021). Yet, as Whelehan, (2001: 21) argues, using the term 'whore' means the Othering of sex workers is entrenched and, subsequently, ensures a sharpening of boundaries between them and society, enforcing the 'whore stigma' (*ibid*: 30). Interestingly, the 'whore stigma' of the female dead in the Jack the Ripper example was supposed to be addressed by a new dedicated museum. In 2015, the Jack the Ripper Museum opened in Cable Street, London – close to where the original crimes took place (Ripper Museum, 2022). The enterprising museum was heralded as the first visitor attraction to narrate well-rehearsed tales of the serial killings from the female victims' perspective. Instead, the museum opened and altered original plans and, consequently, received criticism for being directionless at best and exploitative at worst (Gray, 2018; Hayward, 2017). Hayward (2017) went on to suggest that the museum promotes so-called 'poverty porn' – that is,



**Plate 3.** Jack the Ripper victims portrayed in London Dungeon visitor attraction.  
(Source: Lentati via [dailymail.co.uk](https://www.dailymail.co.uk) CC BY-SA).

voyeurism of the urban poor that invites the tourist gaze without any real education about the causes or impact of poverty. Yet, despite the kitsch and often vulgar interpretation of the killings at the museum, the post-mortem and crime-scene photography of the Jack the Ripper case, as noted earlier, is in the museum's basement. Themed as a Victorian morgue, the visitor is invited into the basement to show caution and respect and, in so doing, brief narratives of the female victim's life are provided (Hayward, 2017).



**Plate 4.** London Dungeon billboard advert, Waterloo Tube station, London, 2018.  
(Source: Author).

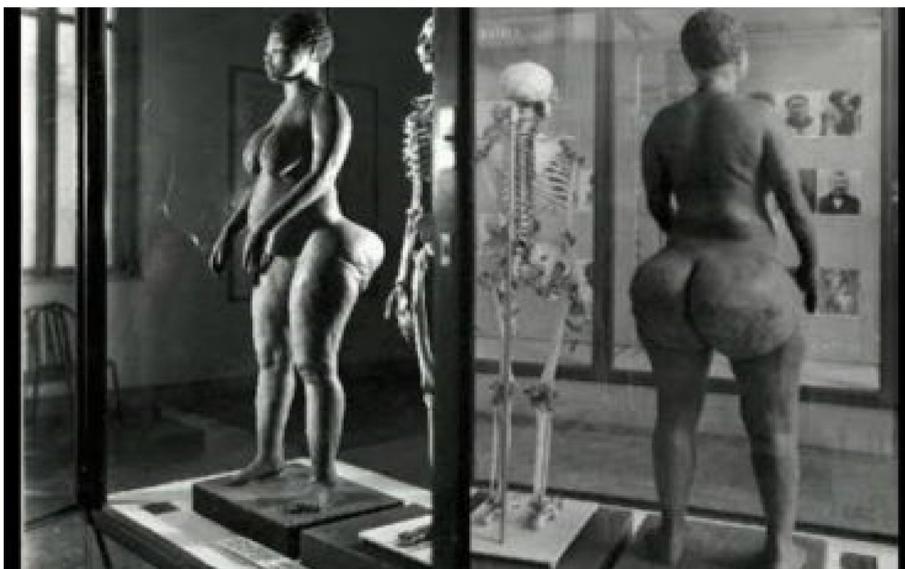
However, despite this limited attempt to rebalance meretricious interpretations of the crimes, it would be foolhardy to claim that women and female sex workers are murdered or harassed simply because of nefarious touristic narratives of Jack the Ripper's victims. Notwithstanding, we do argue that proliferation of images of the violent death of female sex workers, as in Jack the Ripper case, feeds into cultures where violence against women may be seen as normal and inevitable (Akhmedshina, 2020). Hitherto, we need to address cultural entrepreneurship within dark tourism and subsequent mobilisation of morally tainted cultural resources (Dalpiaz & Cavotta, 2019). In short, we need to give 'wordless women' their voices back (Hayward, 2017). Consequently, we can help effectuate partial (hi)stories of our difficult heritage portrayed in dark tourism, especially when our marginalised female dead are featured.

### The life, death, and afterlife of Sara Baartman

We turn finally to one of the most morose examples of the female dead in dark tourism. In so doing, we enter the world of the 19th century 'freakshow'. The institute of the freakshow – or the monetised display of distinctive people and their unconventional bodies – was objectifying to most who appeared in it, even those who were able to retain some agency over their lives and performances (Ruiz, 2013). Death, as we have already argued, adds a further layer of objectification and powerlessness. It is here, however, that race and racism further contribute to the objectification of the female dead.

Sara(h) 'Saartjie' Baartman was born in 1789 to a Khoekhoe family in the Camdeboo vicinity of what is now the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The Khoekhoe are the indigenous nomadic populace of south-western Africa, which was a Dutch Cape Colony when Baartman was an infant, and a British colony by the time she was an adult. In the 1790's, she moved (willingly or otherwise) to Cape Town. Baartman had a steatopygic body type uncommon in Western Europe – that is, the state of having substantial levels of tissue on the buttocks and thighs. Steatopygia was considered a curiosity at the time, as well as a subject of scientific interest, albeit of racist inquiry, as well as being of erotic projection. Leaving Cape Town in 1810, Baartman travelled to England and, under the 'guardianship' of Hendrik Cezars and Alexander Dunlop, was exhibited in public 'freak shows' because of her perceived pejoratively large buttocks. Nicknamed 'The Hottentot Venus', both a racial slur and designation of the female body in arts and cultural anthropology, Baartman was displayed to White audiences across Europe as an anthropological and sexual aberration.

While Baartman was never exhibited nude, she was marketed and parodied as the 'missing link between man and beast' (Kelsey-Sugg & Fennell, 2021; broadcast). Crais and Scully (2009: 129) go on to suggest that 'people came to see her because they saw her not as a person but as a pure example of this one part of the natural world'. During a move to France in 1814, Baartman became further enslaved, and her exhibition became more clearly entangled with scientific racism. At the end of her life on 29 December 1815, at the age of 26, Baartman died destitute (Crais & Scully, 2009). After her death, anatomist Georges Cuvier, who had been interested in examining Baartman invasively while she was alive (which she always refused) took a plaster cast of her body. He had her dissected, preserving her brain and genitals, and articulated her skeleton. Baartman's remains went on display at the Musée de l'Homme – an anthropological museum in Paris – and proved a popular tourist attraction until the late 1970's (Plate 5). Sporadic calls for Baartman's remains to be returned to South Africa were made from the 1940's onwards, including an influential poem entitled *I've Come to Take You Home* in 1978 by South African poet Diana Ferrus. After the victory of the African National Congress (ANC) and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first Black president in 1994, Sara Baartman's remains were finally repatriated to her homeland in 2002, over 200 years since her birth.



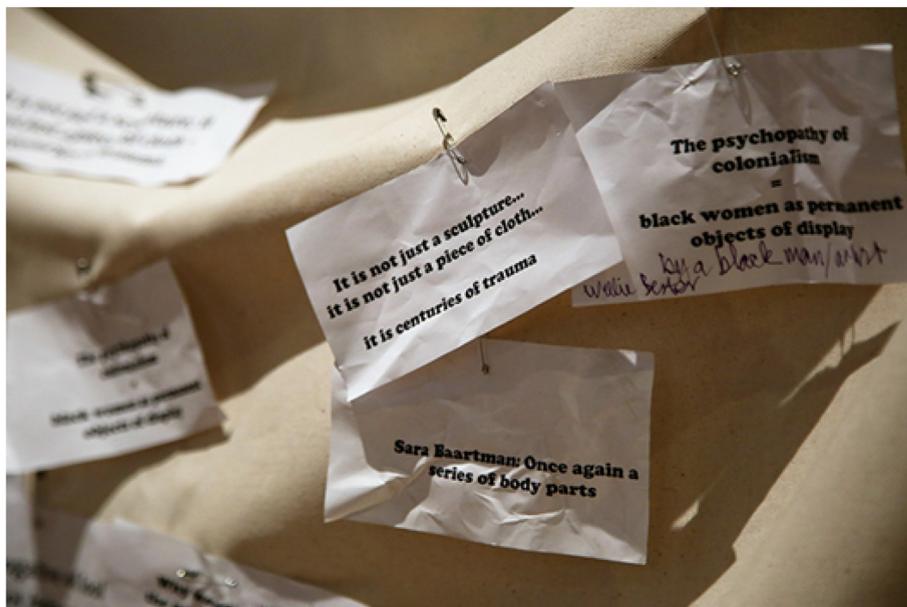
**Plate 5.** Sara Baartman at the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.  
(Source: Hadithi.Africa)

The story of Sara Baartman is regarded not only as one of racist colonial exploitation, but also a warning from history of the commodification and dehumanization of Black people, particularly women (Chase-Riboud, 2003). Ironically, in recent years, those who protest the ideals of White mainstream female beauty, curvaceous bodies are increasingly lauded in (Western) popular culture and the mass media (Iqbal, 2018). Nevertheless, during her life as an exhibit/performer, Baartman was treated as an object and touristic curio. In death she became even more so. Moreover, her objectification was plicated as a Black woman, her race and gender both markers of deviance and exoticism. In both her life and her death, Baartman's buttocks and genitals were of a particular fascination. However, whilst she may have held on to some dignity in refusing the invasive examination purported by Cuvier when she was alive, Cuvier and his fellow scientists finally accessed all of her in death. In short, Cuvier under the guise of scientific racism used institutionalized 'science as rape' (Crais & Scully, 2009: 140).

Subsequently, Baartman's body was read as inherently sexual, but not in the same way we have argued the anonymous women in the Body Worlds exhibition are represented. In Body Worlds, the female dead are allowed to be 'beautiful' in a way, albeit that limits them to a parochial idea of female capability. Baartman, however, is made animalistic, called a 'Venus' but intended to demonstrate the dark deviance of Black female sexuality. Moreover, while the Ripper victims have been portrayed as the monstrous Other and 'ripped' because of their moral failings as women: Baartman was born that way. Thus, in this system all women are objects, but some appear to be worth more than others. Unlike the other examples we have drawn upon to contextualise our conceptual discussions, the display of Sara Baartman as the female dead no longer exists. Instead, in death, Baartman became symbolic of South African nationalism and of global feminism. While other Khoikhoi people were taken to Europe during the 19th century for fairs and shows, including by circus creator P.T. Barnum, Baartman represents the dual evils of what colonizers do to the colonized, and what men can do to women's bodies. In death, however, the touristification of her remains and her protracted reinternment to her homeland demonstrates contemporary post-colonial objectives (Carrigan, 2014).

Moreover, Baartman illustrates how the female dead in bygone dark tourism can still resonate with contemporary society today. Whilst Baartman's grave has recently been vandalised (BBC, 2015), her legacy continues to provoke emotional responses. Indeed, female diasporic artists have been critical of the traditional iconography of Baartman as pandering to the European perception of the Black females as exotic, bizarre or monstrous (Gilman, 1985). In 2000, South African artist Willie Bester created a sculpture of Baartman which was exhibited at the University of Cape Town (Cloete, 2018). However, recent emotional antiphon to the statue have been (re)ignited with Black female students protesting that Baartman continues to be shaped by male influence (the sculptor being a man), and still represented only by her nudity (Smith McKoy, 2011). Subsequently, covering the sculpture in a traditional robe and headwrap, activists pinned commemorative messages of protest to the robe (Plate 6).

Sara Baartman and her 'afterlife' provoke racist trans-historical narratives of pornographic eroticism and sexual grotesquery (Dunton, 2015). Baartman also provokes themes of empowerment, particularly for Black women, though boundaries with inherent malfesance is very much contested (Qureshi, 2004). Though her dead body (or at least parts of it) which was once exhibited in a way that objectified her and, thus promoted pernicious ideologies against Black women is now gone, her (re)presentation within the visitor economy continues with dichotomous legacies of exploitation or empowerment (Ashley, 2021). As such, Baartman as a dead female in dark tourism symbolises far more of the fundamental interrelationships with the cultural condition



**Plate 6.** Messages of protest pinned to the robe covering Sara Baartman's statue by Willie Bester. University of Cape Town, South Africa. (Source: [news.uct.ac.za](https://news.uct.ac.za) CC-BY-SA).

of contemporary society, including racism, postcolonialism, stereotypes, and misogyny. Undoubtedly, the discrimination she faced in life and the indignities in death will forever be a part of her memorialised afterlife.

Empirical insights offered by our three case examples reveal several shared conceptual traits as we illustrated in Fig. 1. Of course, we do not claim these traits are inherent in all representations of the female dead, or whether some traits are exclusive or otherwise. Indeed, other examples of the dead female may be more sympathetically portrayed or represented within dark tourism, even in natural or tragic circumstances. For instance, some female saint-like idols or celebrity figures may be treated more affirmatively in death than others. Consequently, future studies may examine other portrayals of the female dead within dark tourism and public memorialisation. These may include cherished or tragic figures such as Anne Frank, one of the most-discussed Jewish victims of the Holocaust, who gained famed posthumously in 1947 with the publication of her 'Diary of a Young Girl'. Yet even early portrayals of Anne Frank were subject to social constructions of femininity with initial diary renditions edited to exclude her thoughts on sexuality, menstruation, and exploration of her genitalia (O'Toole, 2013; Waaldijk, 1993). Likewise, other revered figures such as Joan of Arc, an early 15th century feminist and symbol of freedom and independence, have been subject to gendered inquiry. Indeed, Joan became a French patron saint who is honoured as a defender of the French nation. Yet her ascension to military leadership and her ultimate execution was under the guise of her cross-dressing (as a male) as a stabilizing point for her identification. It is here that evolving gendered portrayals of Joan has focussed not only on her inspiration as a (dead) female saviour, but also her transvestism and how she challenged traditions of masculinity and femininity within a patriarchal culture (Schibanoff, 1996; Sproles, 1996). Meanwhile, present-day dead female icons, such as 'Queen of Soul' singer-songwriter Aretha Franklin (1942–2018), lay in repose during four days of mourning. On each of the days, Franklin's funerary dress was changed to show her from her sorority days to her as stage diva. The different regalia turned her funeral into a fashion show, from a bright crimson dress to chiffon and lace wear and Christian Louboutin heels, whereby Franklin directed her visiting mourners to receive her a woman of power. Indeed, the magnitude of that power – artistic, political, communal, familial – from a matriarch of the nation is undoubted (St. Felix, 2018). Yet, despite empowerment of her funerary spectacle, her passing played into parochial parameters of how women 'should look' and, consequently, beautification of even the affirmative female dead appears inherent.

## Conclusion

We set out in our conceptual essay to explore key themes, issues, and consequences of portraying the female dead in dark tourism. By augmenting theoretical underpinning and contextualised application, we aimed to develop dark tourism theory. Of course, we recognise the subject of the female dead in dark tourism is broad, complex, and culturally nuanced. However, by providing a social-scientific account and drawing upon feminist perspectives, we have outlined some major features in conceptualising the female dead within dark tourism representations and their memorialised afterlives. Building an integrated theoretical framework that draws upon Foucauldian notions of the panopticon, linked with Urry's tourist gaze, and Stone's categorisation of the spectacular death in dark tourism, we provided a critique that is firmly positioned within the current stream of interpretive dark tourism scholarship. Moreover, by scrutinizing dark tourism through the lens of feminist epistemology and the optics of intersectionality, we rendered a scholarly pathway for future research of the dead female within dark tourism.

We approached this topic initially thinking only of the romantic and erotic female corpse in art, expecting to be confronted with a similar reality in dark tourism. Yet, whilst this is true for some female corpses, our scrutiny of the female cadavers in Body Worlds meant that the sexualisation and beautification of the female dead remains. As in life, idealised notions of beauty occur also in death for female portrayals in dark tourism, whereby women are represented as reproductive entities for the default male gaze. Similarly, as with the eroticisation of the female corpse in art, the consequence of this is that the female visitor experience is limited to appealing to a heterosexual male. That said, however, the male gaze is not the same when applied to all female corpses. The Jack the Ripper victims – commonly referred to as prostitutes and whores – are often eroticized in cinema and art, but in tourism they are presented with their identities erased where the villain is celebrated, and victims' lives forgotten. Consequently, the myth of the male evildoer is orchestrated by dark tourism narratives, and the female dead Othered as monstrous and alien. In turn, blasé socio-cultural attitudes of violence towards sex workers specifically, and women in general are maintained – as several prominent commentators including Judith Walkowitz (1992) and Carol Ann Lee (2019) have addressed. Meanwhile, the story of Sara Baartman saw her turned into a sex object, but not the delicate brand of beatific death that the Body Worlds female dead are given. With inherent themes of racism, colonialism, misogyny, as well as empowerment, Baartman was paradoxically presented as both sexually attractive but also repulsive; a sexual grotesquery that was supposed to represent the basest aspects of femininity and humanity. Crucially, therefore, just as in life, intersectionality impacts the way the female body is presented in death.

In her evaluation of the portrayal of the female corpse in art, Bergo (2014) concludes that male depictions of female death and pain tend towards the erotic. However, treatments on similar subjects, such as those represented by dark tourism, have far more potential to provide a platform for voices that had previously been silenced and turn the female body from object to subject. We have discussed in this essay our concerns over several prominent examples of the female dead displayed in dark tourism. In summary, and as presented earlier in Fig. 1, these include the sexualisation of the female dead, as well as beautification and representing the female dead as reproductive entities for a dominant male gaze. Specific issues also focus upon erased identities of the female dead and themes of voyeurism. The Othering of the female dead as monstrous or alien raises broader issues of racism, colonialism, misogyny, or sexual grotesquery. At an affirmative level, however, empowerment and critical engagement with the hegemony of how the female dead are (re)presented and memorialised in dark tourism has also been revealed. Further research,

importantly by *both* female and male scholars (as is the case for this essay), can reconnoitre these scholarly avenues and expose further how and why the female dead are portrayed by dark tourism.

We need to challenge the memory managers and orchestrators of engineered remembrance if the female dead in dark tourism are to go from object to subject. We need to challenge the dominant male gaze that perpetuates the kind of objectification we have revealed in our discussions. In so doing, we need to incorporate narratives of empathy into interpretations of the female dead for more sympathetic and realistic dark tourism experiences. Where women might be victims in life, they do not need to be also in death. Otherwise, contemporary dark tourism will be no different from Dickensian morgue tours and its morbid gaze at the spectacle of death. To that end, conscious feminist engagement has helped before. In an alliance with anti/post-colonial sentiment, feminist interventions helped repatriate Sara Baartman to her homeland. Moreover, we call for conscious feminist engagement with the Jack the Ripper murders and their touristic narratives that will allow for more dignified and thoughtful presentations of dead female victims. We also call for greater critical engagement with feminist theory in the field of dark tourism more generally. It is here that a specific focus on intersectionality, sensitivity, and care of the female dead in dark tourism will allow for the male gaze to be impugned.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

Philip R. Stone is a joint co-author and re-wrote/revise the initial draft to a full manuscript, with formal analysis, conceptualisation, data curation, and visualization. He also made all editing and post-review revisions as well as project administration.

Castriona Morton is a joint co-author for this paper and outlined the initial draft. She outlined the formal analysis, methodology, and data curation.

### Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

### Declaration of competing interest

None.

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### Dedication

Our essay is dedicated to the memory of three-year-old Alexander Bowes (son of Dr. Emily Cooper) who tragically passed away from Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) on 26 December 2021.

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