

REFLECTIONS ON MATERNAL HEALTH CARE

2021 - BY VERENA
KRAUSE, A MIDWIFE
& GENDER STUDIES STUDENT

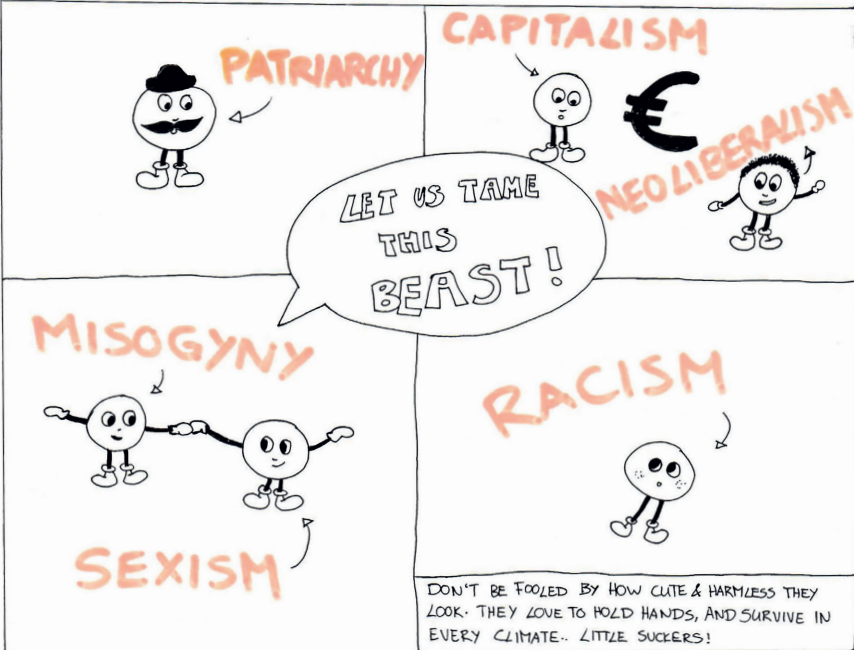
I ALWAYS LONGED
FOR BIRTHS THAT
WOULD FEEL LIKE
WATCHING A
GEORGIA O'KEEFE
PAINTING COMING
TO LIFE.. SOFT &
WARM COLORS UN-
FOLDING LIKE A
FLOWER. SPACES
OF VULNERABILITY.

HER BODY IS LIKE THE OCEAN, UNTAMEABLE, UNCONTROLLABLE.. AS STRONG AS IT IS SOFT!



INSTEAD, AT TIMES IT FEELS LIKE BEING TRAPPED IN A SCIENCE-FICTION MOVIE, WITH REAL-LIFE VILLAINS !!

LET ME PRESENT THE VILLAINS IN THIS STORY ...





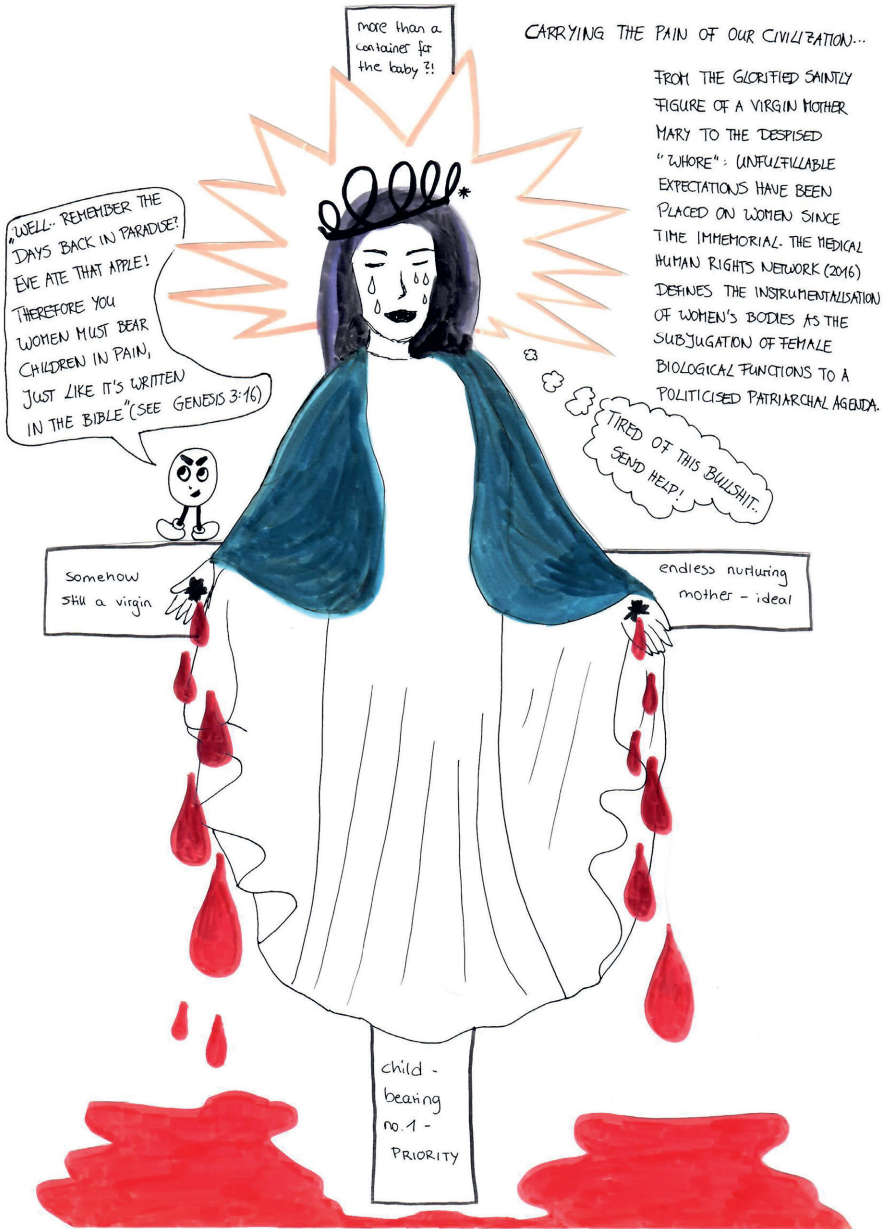
ALTHOUGH THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO 2018) OPPOSES THE ROUTINE USE OF EPISIOTOMY DUE TO ITS HIGHER RATE OF COMPLICATIONS AND POORER WOUND HEALING, THE PROCEDURE IS STILL ROUTINELY PERFORMED IN MANY COUNTRIES - OFTEN WITHOUT MEDICAL INDICATION.

WILL A ROSE IN FRONT OF THE DELIVERY ROOM ONCE A YEAR MAKE UP FOR THIS ABUSE? ROSES REVOLUTION DAY ON 25 NOVEMBER STANDS AS A SYMBOL AGAINST VERBAL AND OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE IN THE DELIVERY ROOM. VICTIMS CAN PLACE A ROSE IN FRONT OF THE DELIVERY ROOM.

THE ARTIST IS RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING: THE MOST VALUABLE PART OF A WOMAN IS HER REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS OF COURSE! LET THE OBJECTIFICATION BEGIN!



FIG. 1: „L'ORIGINE DU MONDE“



DISGUSTING STUFF I HEARD AS A STUDENT MIDWIFE...

EMBEDDED IN UNEQUAL POWER DYNAMICS,
THE INFANTILISATION OF CHILDBEARING WOMEN
IS SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS FAR TOO OFTEN.

SPOILER ALERT: CARE PROVIDERS
SHOULD EMPOWER, NOT HUMILIATE..

"CRYING WON'T
HELP YOU NOW
EITHER...!"

HOW THE FUCK COULD I
FORGET THAT I'M A GROWN
WOMAN...? HM, IT MUST BE
THE PAIN I'M IN



ON THE MENU:
SEXISM AND RAW
MISOGYNY!



A SENIOR DOCTOR AFTER
SUPERVISING A BIRTH THAT JUST
TOOK PLACE: "AHH YOU KNOW..
SLIM WOMEN ARE SIMPLY BETTER
AT GIVING BIRTH... WHEN I LOOK AT
YOU, I BET YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT
FLEXIBILITY IS BOTH FOR BIRTHING AND
IN THE BEDROOM.. NO WONDER OBESE
WOMEN HAVE THE HARDEST BIRTHS."

"THAT'S NO WAY TO GIVE
BIRTH! PULL YOURSELF
TOGETHER, YOU ARE NO
LONGER A LITTLE GIRL,
ARE YOU..?!"

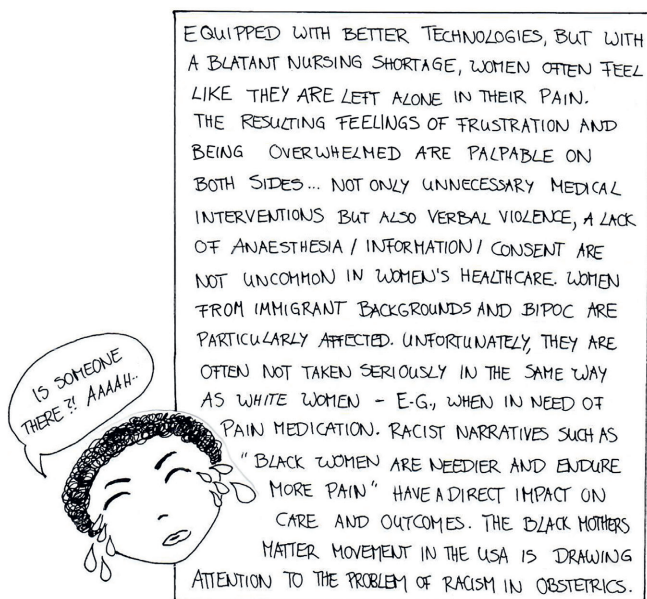
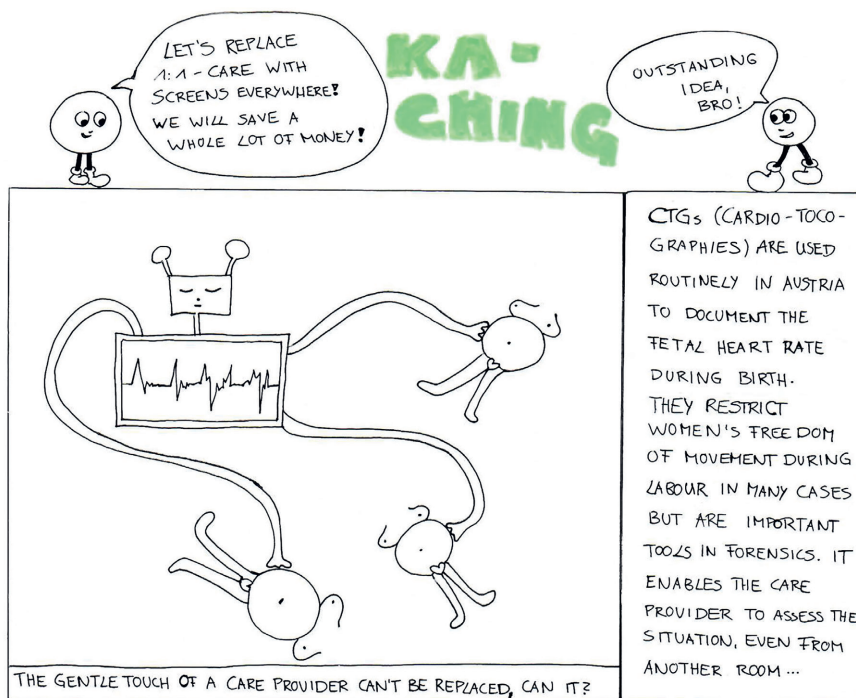
"SHAVE YOURSELF
BETTER NEXT
TIME.."

A WOMAN'S WORTH AND THE CYTOTEC SCANDALS

IN RECENT MONTHS, THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF A DRUG FOR INDUCING LABOUR WITH THE TRADE NAME CYTOTEC (THE ACTIVE MEDICAL INGREDIENT IS MISOPROSTOL) HAS CAUSED A HEATED DEBATE. THE DRUG WAS USED WITHOUT THE WOMEN BEING INFORMED OR GIVING THEIR CONSENT, AND IS SAID TO HAVE CAUSED A NUMBER OF COMPLICATIONS AND DAMAGES TO THE MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN (BARTENS ET AL. 2020). THE FACT THAT CYTOTEC IS NOT APPROVED FOR THE INDUCTION OF LABOUR IN GERMANY AND IS ADMINISTERED AS A SO CALLED OFF-LABEL DRUG - I.E., IT MAY BE USED FOR OTHER PURPOSES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THERAPEUTIC FREEDOM - HAS CAUSED OUTRAGE. CYTOTEC ORIGINALLY CAME ON THE MARKET AS A STOMACHIC, AND IS COMMONLY USED IN OBSTETRICS BECAUSE IT IS CHEAPER THAN OTHER APPROVED DRUGS.



CASH
RULES
EVERYTHING
AROUND ME ...





AS I'M ALREADY IN THE PICTURE...
LET ME TELL YOU WHAT RACISM ACTUALLY DID FOR GYNAECOLOGY..

LET ME PRESENT OUR
"HERO" OF THE DAY :
DR J. MARION SIMS, BETTER
KNOWN AS ...

**"THE FATHER OF
GYNAECOLOGY"**

WELL.. I'D BETTER
BE THANKFUL FOR HIS
WORK! AT LEAST YOU
CAN ENJOY THE BENEFITS
OF HIS SPECULUM NOW..
A TRUE GENIUS!!

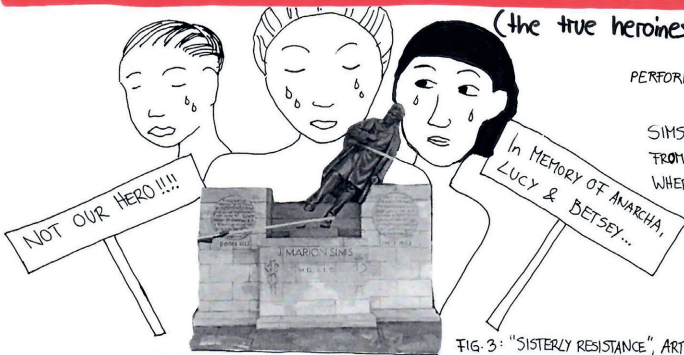


FIG. 2: "GYNAECOLOGICAL SURGEON," THOM 1952

PAINTING BY ROBERT THOM, AS PART OF THE "GREAT MOMENTS IN MEDICINE SERIES". IT'S THE ONLY KNOWN REPRESENTATION OF LUCY, ANARCHA AND BETSEY, THE THREE ENSLAVED WOMEN SIMS OPERATED UPON, REPEATEDLY... SIMS (1813-83), A GYNÆCOLOGIST IN ALABAMA, BECAME FAMOUS FOR INVENTING THE SPECULUM AND SUCCESSFULLY PERFORMING OPERATIONS ON VAGINAL FISTULAS. FISTULAS WERE COMMON IN THE 19TH CENTURY, ESPECIALLY IN BLACK, ENSLAVED WOMEN (DUE TO RARE, MULTIPLE PREGNANCIES, POOR NUTRITION, AND UNTREATED INFECTIONS). LIVING IN AN ERA WHEN IT WAS ASSUMED THAT BLACK PEOPLE WERE CAPABLE OF ENDURING MORE PAIN THAN WHITE PEOPLE, SIMS DID HIS EXPERIMENTS ON LUCY, ANARCHA & BETSEY WITHOUT ANAESTHESIA (!!!)

OUR MOTHERS OF GYNAECOLOGY:

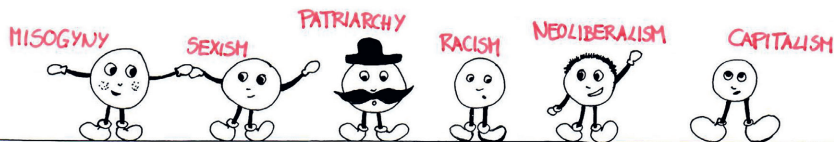
(the true heroines of this story..)



PERFORMING

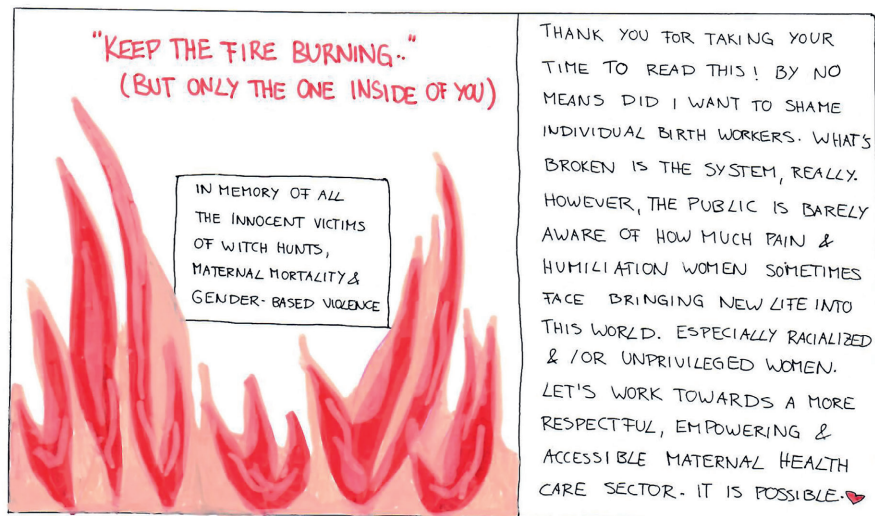
SIMS' STATUE WAS REMOVED
FROM CENTRAL PARK IN NYC,
WHERE IT HAD STOOD FOR
124 YEARS, IN 2018.

FIG. 3: "SISTERLY RESISTANCE", ARTHUR 2019.



THIS SHORT COMIC WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE FOOD FOR THOUGHT ABOUT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VILLAINS OF THE STORYLINE HAVE SHAPED OUR MEDICAL SYSTEM AND THE WAY BIRTHING PEOPLE ARE TREATED. SOME OF THE VILLAINS ARE EASIER TO FIGHT, SOME MORE CHALLENGING. ONE THING IS CLEAR: YOU HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE. WOMEN ARE INCREASINGLY FINDING THEMSELVES LEFT ALONE DURING A PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TIME, AND THE INCIDENCE OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION IS RISING. YET, THE SOLUTIONS ARE SO CLOSE AT HAND. FOR EXAMPLE, COMPREHENSIVE POSTPARTUM CARE, COVERED BY THE HEALTH INSURANCE FUND (WHICH ALSO REACHES LESS WEALTHY FAMILIES) WOULD BE DESIRABLE IN ORDER TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND WORK PREVENTIVELY. BUT AS LONG AS SAVINGS ARE BEING MADE IN THE AREA OF WOMEN'S HEALTH AND CARE WORK IN GENERAL, NOTHING WILL CHANGE.

WOMEN DESERVE BETTER ❤️



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- Fig. 1:** Courbet, Gustave. *L'Origine du monde*. 1866, oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay. <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/lorigine-du-monde-69330> (accessed May 27, 2023).
- Fig. 2:** Thom, Robert. J. *Marion Sims: Gynecologic Surgeon, from The History of Medicine*. Circa 1952, oil on canvas. University of Michigan. <https://exchange.umma.umich.edu/resources/41241> (accessed May 27, 2023).
- Fig. 3:** Arthur, Jules. *Sisterly Resilience*. 2019, oil on canvas. The Resilient Sisterhood Project, Boston. O'Donnell, Christine. “Jules Arthur: Historical Narratives in Art.” *Very Private Gallery*, <https://veryprivategallery.com/jules-arthur-resilient-sisterhood-project> (accessed May 27, 2023).

