

https://dspace.org/

# South Atlantic Hauntings: Geographies of Memory, Ancestralities and Re-Memberings

**Lelliottt, Kitso Lynn**

**2018**

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/26603

Lelliott, Kitso Lynn (2018) South Atlantic hauntings:Geographies of memory, ancestral ties and re-memberings, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/26603>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

# South Atlantic Hauntings: Geographies of Memory, Ancestralities and Re-Memberings

---

KITSO LYNN LELLIOTT

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Johannesburg, 2018

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



STUDENT: KITSO LYNN LELLIOTT

25th day of August 2018

## ABSTRACT

In *South Atlantic Hauntings: Geographies of Memory, Ancestralities and Re-Memberings* I engage with the possibilities for speaking from spaces of elision through a conception of ghosts and haunting. I use the idea of elision with reference to enunciations and knowledges produced as marginal through processes of disavowing the legitimacy, value or presence of ways of knowing and being that are 'othered' as they are different from hegemonic norms that emerged in the 'Global North'. Elision, however, suggests that the subsumed is always, and regardless of its omission, present among and a part of that which is spoken, written and recognised. I am preoccupied with enunciations from spaces and bodies beyond epistemic power and the crisis such epistemically disobedient articulations cause to hegemony. I use the language of the spectral to allude to this sense of a simultaneous absence and presence that describes presence beyond the parameters of the real as it is constituted by the episteme of imperial western knowledge. I interrogate the link between coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of Being in my engagement with the production of the 'real' as it is shaped through the violence of epistemicide. I privilege artistic practice that produces a 'presencing' of the ghostly to articulate the elided towards the possibility of that which is denied making its presence in relation known in a moment of haunting. This language of the spectral is integral to my engagement with the illusive slippages in time, space, 'reality', hegemony and absences in relation to enunciations from spaces of elision that attest to the presence of multiple contesting epistemes and their contingent realties. By locating myself and the focus of this interrogation in the space of the elided, I aim to enunciate from precisely the space hegemony would disavow.



Keywords: Ghosts, Haunting, Epistemology, Ontology, History, Narrative, Elide, Re-membering

To the Ancestors who drove me to do this work.

And to all of us living in the ‘now being’

## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the Ancestors who drove me to do this work.

My family who kept me fed, watered and for their support which sustained me.

And my supervisor Jyoti Mistry who was there to guide me through this work.

*The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... i
ABSTRACT ..... ii
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... iv
LIST OF FIGURES ..... vi
INTRODUCTION In search of the othered worlds out there ..... 1
Speaking back difference ..... 3
VIDEO WORK Narrative/Time/[Hi]Story ..... 5
Chapter Outlines ..... 7
'After Saudades' in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa ..... 8
'Sankofa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past' in the Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast, Ghana ..... 8
'Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ' in Jamestown, Accra, Ghana ..... 9
'Alzire of Bayreuth' in the New Palace in Bayreuth Germany ..... 10
'Rituals of the Living' in Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa ..... 11
Theoretical proposition: Perception in the Ghostly returns ..... 11
INSTALLATION 1 After Saudades - Johannesburg Art Gallery ..... 16
INSTALLATION 2 Sankofa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past – Cape Coast Castle ..... 29
INSTALLATION 3 Alzire of Bayreuth – New Palace, Bayreuth ..... 50
INSTALLATION 4 Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ – Brazil Road Jamestown Accra ..... 67
INSTALLATION 5 Rituals of the living – Constitution Hill, Johannesburg ..... 90
CONCLUSION Meditations on Multiplicity: Towards the other worlds out there ..... 107
Bibliography ..... 118
Appendix 1 ..... 124
Appendix 2 ..... 125

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Johannesburg Art Gallery view from south facing facade ..... 16
Figure 2: Installation view *After Saudades* Johannesburg Art Gallery (2014) ..... 18
Figure 3: Video still "Tsholofelo wa Bakwena" 2014 ..... 26
Figure 4: Video still "Tsholofelo wa Bakwena" 2014 ..... 27
Figure 5: Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast, Ghana ..... 29
Figure 6: Installation view *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past:* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 37
Figure 7: Detail *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 39
Figure 8: Installation view *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 39
Figure 9: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015) ..... 40
Figure 10: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015) ..... 41
Figure 11: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015) ..... 42
Figure 12: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015) ..... 43
Figure 13: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 45
Figure 14: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 45
Figure 15: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 46
Figure 16: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 46
Figure 17: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 47
Figure 18: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015 ..... 48
Figure 19: Exterior of New Palace, Bayreuth ..... 50
Figure 20: Frederick the Great as a child with his sister Wilhelmine by Antoine Pesne ..... 51
Figure 21: Exterior of New Palace with fountain in the foreground, Bayreuth ..... 51
Figure 22: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 56
Figure 23: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 57
Figure 24: Still form video in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 59
Figure 25: Video still in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 61
Figure 26: Still form video in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 63
Figure 27: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015) ..... 65
Figure 28: View of Atlantic ocean from Jamestown compound ..... 68
Figure 29: Video still *My Story no doubt is me*/*Older than me* 5min56sec (2015) ..... 69
Figure 30: Video stills My Story no doubt is me/Older than me 5min56sec (2015) ..... 72
Figure 31: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec ..... 81

Figure 32: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec ..... 83
Figure 33: Video Still *Whitewash* (2013) 5min47sec ..... 84
Figure 34: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec ..... 85
Figure 35: Installation view, Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ (2015) ..... 86
Figure 36: Installation view, Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ (2015) ..... 87
Figure 37: Installation view *Rituals of the Living* (2015) ..... 94
Figure 38: Video Still Fully dressed a woman walked out of the water, thirsty and breathing hard, holding a memory the waters did not drown. 5min 51sec (2015) ..... 97
Figure 39: Video Still *By and by some trace remains* 10min 59sec (2015) ..... 99
Figure 40: Interior jail cells, Constitution Hill ..... 102
Figure 41: Video Still *Transatlantic Saudades* 10min 13sec (2013) ..... 111

Documentation and video links to the visual component of this thesis is available on:
https://southatlantichuntings.squarespace.com/

Site Password: 0302759J

# INTRODUCTION
## In search of the othered worlds out there

> You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice – you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.
>
> (Trinh Minh-Ha, 1989:80).

> The damné or condemned is not a 'being there' but a non-being or rather, as Ralph Ellison so eloquently elaborated, a sort of an invisible entity … What is invisible about the person of color is its very humanity, and this is in fact what the cry tries to call attention to. Invisibility and dehumanization are the primary expressions of the coloniality of Being
>
> (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2007:257).

In *South Atlantic Hauntings: Geographies of Memory, Ancestralities and Re-Memberings* I move through and explore the parameters of a 'reality' constituted by the epistemologies of imperial western knowledge and its historical foundations. In this engagement, the real is understood as being produced through the violent erasure of epistemological difference; the knowledge systems and othered ways of being; from beyond the bounds of what constitutes the real of the dominating epistemology. I work through the idea of elision with reference to knowledges and their enunciations that are produced as marginal through processes of disavowing the legitimacy, value or presence of ways of knowing and being that are 'othered' as they are different from hegemonic norms. I consider how this 'real' is constantly encroached upon and troubled by the presence of what it elides, that is, the othered realities it would deny. Elision, however, suggests that the subsumed is always, and regardless of its omission, present among and a part of that which is spoken, written and recognised. I engage with the possibilities for speaking from spaces of elision through a conception of ghosts and haunting. I am preoccupied with enunciations from spaces beyond epistemic power and the crisis such epistemically disobedient articulations cause to hegemony.

I engage with elided subjugated subjectivities with reference to subjects whose experiential realities, knowledges, enunciations and epistemologies have been marginalised and who, as such,

have had their agency for self-authorship undermined. The hegemony that excludes the realities of those who subsist outside the universalised normative of the 'west' produces what Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) calls the 'sub-ontological difference' through the 'coloniality of Being'. I interrogate the link between coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being in my engagement with realities shaped through contesting epistemologies. I look at the ways in which colonising epistemologies produce narratives and consider the shape these narratives took over the waters of the Atlantic during the formative episode that shaped the modern age.[1] The use of the language of the spectral, which is central to this project, alludes to the simultaneous absence and presence arising from the tussle between differing ontological orders. In using the image of the ghostly to articulate this elided phantom knowledge, I aim to speak to the possibility of that which has been denied and subsumed coming back to the surface and making its presence known in a moment of haunting. This language of the spectral is integral to my engagement with the illusive slippages in time, space, 'reality', hegemony and absences in relation to enunciations from spaces of elision.

The creative and theoretical work I offer is an enactment of such enunciation. It occurs through a dialogue between historically subjugated subjectivities while privileging South-South relations that function in relation to but are imaginatively and epistemologically unmediated by the Global North. The creative work that has driven this enquiry took the form of five discrete installations. Each of these installations comprised video and sound elements as well as found objects. Through the series of installations, I developed a network of relations across historical places and moments in time that were implicated in producing hierarchies of Being and knowing. Each of the sites had historical relevance to the development of coloniality. These were slave castles, colonial forts, European palaces, museums and colonial prisons. They are physical markers of the Histories I am concerned with. It is through these particularly potent nodes in the Histories and geographies of subjugation that I enter into an engagement with and augmentation of the narratives that endow them with significance. I have actively sought out and interfered with places and narratives that were/are involved in producing the erasure of certain kinds of bodies, peoples and histories, their voices and the value of certain kinds of lives from the fold of what constitutes full humanity. Through the interventions at these sites, I address the systematic erasure they have been implicated in. As I am

[1] In his book *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (2005), Ian Baucom gives an exegesis of this idea through a reading of Eduardo Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997). In it, he shows that "what we might just consider as a particularly brutal and exceptional event belonging to a distant and concluded past – the age of slavery that precedes the Enlightenment project of emancipation and the global spread of capitalism – is indeed a fundamental and paradigmatic event in the historical formation of our own present and its dominant cultural logic." (Corio, 2014)

interested in the narratives that attest to the elided humanity of subjugated peoples, I rely on 'othered' modes of recollection, on memories and ancestralities alongside Histories and archives to re-member them. By locating myself and the focus of this interrogation in the space of the elided, the enunciations I offer through the installations, the videos and the characters in them produce a disavowing of western hegemony.

### *Speaking back difference*

> Any presence – even though it is ignored – of a particular culture,
> even a silent one, is an active relay in Relation.
>
> (Glissant, 1997:177)

Speaking from spaces of elision enacts the spirit of de-linking and epistemic disobedience called for in the decolonial turn, an epistemic position that forms the theoretical impetus of this project. It is a rejection of the foundational logic of hierarchisation "between bio-politics in Europe and bio-politics in the colonies [that] lie in the racial distinction between the European population and the populations of the colonies [as]: less human, sub-humans" (Mignolo, 2009:16). By speaking through and valuing what has been rendered discardable, there may be a challenge to this inherited hierarchisation. I developed a language to enunciate from elision in the artistic work that shaped this enquiry. This language has been rooted in the body through which narratives may be articulated. My interventions have been developed through the presence of a body that is denied value, Being or ontological resistance in the 'real' shaped by coloniality. The relationship between the body of this elided Being, the ghost, and the sites of the installations is the language through which new meaning and possibilities of the 'real' emerge. It is a language that can reach histories beyond those that entrench imperial and colonial/modern domination. I explore the possibilities and potential for moving beyond the parameters of a western-centric paradigm of thought and knowledge through this practice-led research process that privileges video art as enunciation, the 'active relay in Relation'[2], within the framework of a theoretical enquiry (Glissant, 1997:177).

I start with the contention that a prerequisite condition for subjectivities to be defined through ideological parameters that fossilise them is the writing out or erasing of their histories, knowledges and agencies. It is this negation that makes it possible for subjectivities to be subordinated and cast

[2] Eduard Glissant describes Relation thus: "Relation is not to be confused with the cultures we are discussing nor with the economy of their internal relationships nor even the intangible results of the intricate involvement of all internal relationships with all possible external relationships. Nor is it to be confused with some marvelous accident that might suddenly occur apart from any relationship, the known unknown, in which chance would be the magnet. Relation is all these things at once."(1997:170-171).

in a socio-cultural shorthand of negation and lack. The agency of the subjugated to know and define themselves according to their own knowledge systems, modes of enunciating, histories and memories, disallows over-determination from a perspective that is other to them. When difference emerges to interrupt hegemony, the said hegemony is disavowed; its ability to define the 'other' and to hold that other down in a subordination of difference is diminished. It is through stories that we come to know and perceive our world. The stories we know are the ones which shape perceptions, understandings and knowledges. It is in the enunciation of narratives of difference through multivalent languages that do not conform to those of western hegemony that a heterogeneous space may come about. I use the idea of the ghostly as a visual and thematic strategy to reclaim elided narratives of history, from the present/past and for the future.

## VIDEO WORK
## Narrative/Time/[Hi]Story

Through producing audio visual narratives, I grapple with the philosophical underpinnings and ontological construction of race and its hierarchisation as it has emerged from colonial/imperial processes of universalising a European episteme. The interventions offered in the video works function on a number of levels to question and displace epistemic hierarchies and interrupt the coloniality of knowledge. One of the primary areas of engagement in the videos is with competing conceptions of time. The narratives that have been privileged within a hegemonic temporal schema are those that reflect and reinstate the power structures of globalisation as it has emerged from a colonial and imperial past. It is a linear progressive time that bolsters a notion of globalisation through which conceptions of 'first' and 'third' worlds emerge. Within this schema, the first world is ahead of its other with long recorded Histories to attest to its progress while its other is left behind, economically and in time. The shaping and treatment of the temporal is an important strategy towards moving past the hierarchical social structures that emerge through this progressive time. The visuals and structure of the video work often produce a de-territorialisation (Martin-Jones, 2006) of linear Histories which move through this linear time because such narrativising functions in the service of coloniality. History becomes the site of intervention, with the video work that articulates narratives from elision enacting this intervention into the historical narratives that shape our contemporary social world. I grapple with locations in time and competing times and narratives where the wavering temporality of the present is susceptible to the encroachments of pasts that persist and haunt them. I am drawn to the possibilities that haunting presents for more dialogical relations between multiple histories and narratives.

I engaged these theoretical propositions in the five major exhibitions I presented which were central to the process of this research. I set up relationships between spaces of Historical importance during slavery and direct colonial domination with the narratives of people whose humanity is and was elided through them. The imagery driving the interventions offered in the work moves between Africa, the Americas and Europe passing through multiple times and places marked by the subjugation of human beings that was produced around the Atlantic middle passage. Water, the Atlantic, the transatlantic crossing, drowning or being subsumed by it becomes a central theme. The sites in which I made work in response to their histories as well as presented the work were the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Cape Coast Castle in Cape Coast and an old slave holding building in Accra, Ghana, as well as a royal palace in

Bavaria, Germany. The project developed through multiple iterations which created a network of relations through the series of the five installations in which a re-membering and re-imagining of the subsumed narratives of marginalised subjectivities occurred.

The process of producing installations in each of the locations began with research into their recorded histories that was available in the form of a documented archive. I read this archive alongside the materiality of the sites as archives in themselves. This included their architecture, their state of deterioration or maintenance and the space they currently occupy in contemporary socio-cultural life of the communities in which they are situated. In this process, I considered the stories I was told about each site with equal significance as those that comprised their official canonised narratives. I produced the videos while considering the differing strands of their narratives as they shaped my experience in each of the sites. From this starting point, I worked through my experiential response to physically being in each of the locations and let my embodied response drive the video work. In this way, the video works and installations offered responses to each site from a perspective shaped by a subjectivity otherwise diminished by the narratives of these spaces. The images presented in the videos and installations are expressions of lived and imagined experience from the perspective of subjects subjugated by colonial histories. The video installations served to return othered narrative strands that took their place amongst those that I encountered when I first entered each site.

At the centre of the videos is a ghostly black woman. Her presence is an embodiment of the kind of subjectivity that would be negated by the coloniality of the histories these sites are saturated in. I use my own body to present this character, performing her in the videos across the multiple iterations of the project. Each enacts a contestation of the constructs that produce the erasure of these subjects' humanity. The slippage between myself and the subjectivities I presence serves as a strategy to express a simultaneity of singular and plural; a synecdoche of History's[3] elided represented by the ghost. I am interested in the idea that marginalised subjects are implicated in one another's stories because they share a denial of self on account of their humanity being invalidated.

[3] I use History with a capitalised 'H' to signal portrayals of the past as they are accounted for in what can be called 'History proper' within a western scholarly tradition. The use of the capital functions to distinguish it from the his/her[stories] from the margins that are elided or occluded by what falls within History that has been deemed significant enough to warrant record, study and writing about in a western canon. The capitalised 'History' signals the privileged status some pasts have been afforded over others as well as distinguishes them from the broader narratives of the past amongst which they are situated. Although there has been a shift in the western canon of historiography to the use of a non-capitalised 'h', I utilise the capitalised form here to the recall its pedigree and, in so doing, foreground intrinsic philosophy of superior value that underpins it and mark the imbalance of influence it has had on shaping the contemporary moment.

Recollections informed by the experiential reality of being defined as hegemony's 'other' re-call, through individual memory and imagining, a re-emergence of communal subsumed perspectives that, in turn, re-member an altered image of History. She is constituted by the processes of silencing and elision that produce her social subjectivity as phantom while, at the same time, haunting the world that constitutes her as such.

The videos are produced by capturing images of the sites as I first encountered them. By introducing a woman into the spaces, she augments their narratives, returning erased pasts which can then be carried to the present. She arrives in the present as the protagonist around whom new narratives take shape; no longer an object whose subjectivity can be erased. In some videos, she appears as a singular presence, in others, she is the multiple presences of one woman and in still other instances, she appears as different women yet physically embodied by one person. At times she witnesses, at other times, she interrupts; whichever way she arrives, her presence produces a rupture, a fragmenting and destabilising of the narratives and knowledge hierarchies ingrained in these sites. She undermines the privileged knowledges coming from western epistemologies. In the videos, I question the constructs of these hierarchies by making images that speak to and challenge them. The work simultaneously interrogates Histories while producing new constellations that destabilise the 'reality' that necessitates them.

### *Chapter Outlines*

The videos and installations emerged in response to each site as well as through a progression, or set of responses, drawn from previous iterations which trace links between the sites. These sites are already situated in their own network of relations to one another. They are linked as places in which the coloniality that I am concerned with was manifest and entrenched, whether this was culturally, bureaucratically or in the space of commerce. It is these links that drove me to work through my interrogation in each of these historical spaces. Each installation offers a different articulation in response to my questions pertaining to erasure. They are linked in the relation across the Atlantic that connects the lives (and deaths) of people who were literally and metaphorically subsumed by the waters they crossed; humanity drowned in the middle passage. My enquiry functions through a process of tracing links through the various locations that act as physical markers of social structures that have functioned to produce, and continue to produce, blackness as lack. As such, the work I offer emerges through these already networked places producing new connections of contestation and interference through a relational dialogue of utterances of difference that would

have been silenced.

The initial videos were primarily shot in Salvador de Bahia in Brazil. From this starting point, the videos developed over the course of the project to incorporate images and interventions on the African shores of the Atlantic as well as in Europe. In the sections that follow, I offer a description of the History of each place in the network, an account of the installation that augmented that space and a consideration of the theoretical implications of each of these 'interruptions'. Below are short outlines of each installation project:

## *'After Saudades' in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa*

In this opening section, I reflect on the exhibition presented at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in which I situate the visual as the primary form of articulation in my process of traversing absences and presences. This section serves to further my introduction regarding epistemological violence as it is produced through coloniality of knowledge, thought and Being. I develop further the contention that the hegemony that defines the parameters of reality is of a colonising imperial epistemology that negates difference, denying 'othered' epistemologies, the knowledge of which does not fall within the parameters of what it deems real or legitimate. There is a focus on the relationship between presence and absence working through an understanding of the 'real' and 'unreal' as contested spaces and, as such, introducing the possibility for the trans-epistemological. I propose the trans-epistemological as a way for the othered modes of knowing and being to destabilise western hegemony. I take up Nelson Maldonado-Torres's stance on the ontological negation of black subjects and link this to the language of the spectral as a way to articulate from beyond the parameters of the real as it is defined by hegemony. Locating this speculative exploration of the ghost in a visual language foregrounds the possibilities for authoring and composing on the world that art offers. The symbolic weight of situating this intervention in the halls of an art institution that was built in the image of empire on the African continent marks the primacy I ascribe to the visual as articulation in this project.

## *'Sankofa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past' in the Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast, Ghana*

The installation presented in the Cape Coast Castle was primarily concerned with the idea of fungibility. In it I considered the conditions under which the value of a human life could come to be

considered as fungible, whether this pertains directly to an interchangeability with a monetary value or, more broadly, a changeability at the desecration of someone other than oneself. It is a condition of subjection that is predicated on a displacement of a person's self-possessed subjectivity producing an object-hood that renders him or her malleable and subject to the will of another. Through a reading of Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (1997), the section considers how the space of the performative was an arena through which to 'compose on life'. It was a space through which to inscribe and re-inscribe the script of social life where the reality of everyday life became predicated on this foundational impasse, the denial of humanity to human beings. In the chapter, I propose that the 'scenes' Hartmann interrogates in the North American context of a plantation society had precursors in the slave castles on the West African coast. As such, these castles are charged with the weight of their histories which produced this 'real' unreality. Those unrealities persist through the scripts that took shape in such places wherein this voiding of humanity came to characterise blackness. In response to this reading of the slave castle, and following the reading Hartmann offers of the auction block and the minstrel show as formative narrativising spaces for the production of blackness as fungible, I inscribed the castle with an alternate script in the form of a video installation.

## *'Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ' in Jamestown, Accra, Ghana*

In Jamestown, Accra, I presented an installation in which I delved into the relation between differing regimes of time. In this section, I return to the difficulty between what is deemed real or unreal as it was addressed in the previous section through the rubric of fungibility. In this instance, however, time is the core concern through which I tease out the tensions between real/unreal as determined by differing conceptions of the temporal. In this iteration of the project, the [H]istoric is approached as having an intimate proximity to the present. Drawing from Ian Baucom's book *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (2005), I consider time, not in terms of linear progression, but, amongst other possible conceptions, as an accumulation. With time conceived as an accumulation of pasts that 'composed' the present expression of reality (the hegemonic), those pasts are alive and current in the bodies, structures and experiences of the contemporary moment. They are a presence in Relation and are treated as such with reference to Eduard Glissant's conception of Relation where time, historic proximity to the contemporary and the almost sedimentary accumulation of what has been formulates our 'now-

being' (Baucom, 2005:34). Time is a route through which to consider the presence of spectres; the ghosts whose place in time is at once the '[H]istoric' and simultaneously our contemporary. With this ability to slip through, between and inhabit multiple temporal spaces at once as they are constructed by a logic beyond epistemologies, the ghost allows for a consideration of the circumstances that produced it while simultaneously opening up a space to see past and through the differing orders of knowing. I explore how the ghost's transgression of the bounds of differing temporal 'realities' (those couched in differing epistemologies) produces openings across difference in the '*totalité-monde*' (Glissant, 1997:XV). These 'routes' through Relation become perceivable in the wake of the ghost's movement across difference.

## *'Alzire of Bayreuth' in the New Palace in Bayreuth Germany*

The fourth section of this exploration shifts the geography of this transatlantic enquiry to Europe. Staged in an 18th century castle in Bavaria, Germany, the iteration of this project titled "Alzire of Bayreuth" turns to the implications of myself as an 'author' and 'artist' making the various works and installations while enacting and embodying the ghostly woman who is at the centre of the works both visually and theoretically. In this section, the preoccupation is with the idea of subjectivity and authoring where the co-authoring between multiple, fluid agencies produces the opacity[4] that characterises the relational yet irreducible quality of being. I work through the emergent possibilities for a shift in epistemic standpoint where subject and author are understood as being porous and in relation not only to each other but also to a heteroglossia of voices and narratives. Here I approach the interplay between characters and authors through Glissant's formulation of 'being in Relation' as well as a consideration of Bakhtin's idea of the dialogical (1981). There is an apprehension of a fluidity between subjectivities where these narratives of difference run into and through one another; where one woman's story is echoed in another's across space and time (Minh-Ha, 1989). From the understanding of the complex subject-author-entanglement explored in this iteration, I consider the implications of reading relation across subjectivities more broadly as it is articulated in the installations across the project. In so doing, I link the intervention in this geographic and temporal locality to interventions that it is connected to elsewhere.

[4] Opacity here is taken from its use by Edouard Glissant who formulated it to capture the irreducibility and thickness that characterises subjects, cultures and the relations between them. It describes an "unresolved ambiguity" (Hantel, 2013:110) that "functions as a corrective to essentializing or reducing the entity" (Prabhu, 2005:79).

## *'Rituals of the Living' in Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa*

In the show, "*Rituals of the Living*" presented at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, the focus of this enquiry turned to Opacity, Relation and Totality with reference to the way these terms were conceptualised by Edouard Glissant (1997). Through his formulation, I interrogate the inflection these ideas bring to the tensions between actuality and absence as I have engaged with this in the installations described above. Here the real and the unreal are explored though meditations and speculative re-membering – through opacity and relation – informed by an experiential understanding of invisibility, the invalidity of one's full claim to humanity and the precariousness of 'Being' as it emerges from living under hegemonic epistemologies that elide marginalised peoples. Following from the previous section, I question the processes of knowledge production that separates known and knower. I situate this speculative imagining through moments of experiential commonality as a route to the elided. This speculation emerges from moments of convergence where the imagining is informed by a connected experiential space, that of having aspects of oneself elided within the colonial matrix of power.[5] The contention is that the privileging of different epistemological modalities beyond the methodologies traditionally privileged in academic enquiry are necessary for addressing the violence produced by their methodologies. The detached theoretical attitude is relinquished for a knower situated in relation which renders his/her knowledge dense with the thickness of opacity. This section considers the effects on the object/subject of knowledge when the process of knowledge production or coming to know is approached through opacity and relation instead of the violence inherent in the totalising impulses of 'transparency' or 'knowability' characteristic of traditional westernised methodologies shaped by imperial epistemologies. I make a case for opacity by exploring, through elision, that which is unknowable through methodologies towards a sensing and imaging of the presence in what is produced as absence given that it is beyond the capacity of detached enquiry to reach.

## *Theoretical proposition: Perception in the Ghostly returns*

Developing from Michel Foucault's "*Subjugated Knowledge*", Lewis R. Gordon considers the presence of 'repressed reality' in relation to its emergence through the "conception of 'America', 'Europe' and 'Africa'" and the 'particularity of that convergence' (2006:2). Gordon illustrates the

[5] The colonial matrix of power is the occidental hierarchisation of the world and its people through "a complex conceptual structure that guided actions in the domain of economy (exploitation of labor and appropriation of land/ natural resources), authority (government, military forces), gender/sexuality and knowledge/subjectivity" (Mignolo, 2009:19).

relation between the suppressed and the dominant through outlining phenomenological positionality with regards to perception in the African-American experience:

> Phenomenology, after all, examines meaningful reality as constituted by consciousness wherein consciousness is understood in its intentional form as always having to be of something. The consciousnesses that manifest themselves in double consciousness are (1) consciousness of how mainstream America sees itself (dominant 'reality') and (2) consciousness of its contradictions (black reality) (2006:10).

While the consciousness of dominant culture and that of marginalised culture exist simultaneously, it is from the perspective of a subjectivity that is not normative that both these 'realities' may be perceived. More directly, what does blackness look like when not defined through Eurocentric epistemology? When working through a Eurocentric perspective, the images I search for are rendered absent. In being made absent and denied by the coloniality of enlightenment project (Mignolo, 2011), ghosts thus become spectral as immaterial. Which perspectives, languages, epistemologies and ontologies then would render this image the 'real'? In producing images that articulate imaginaries formed on the othered side of the colonial line, the work both calls attention to and offers back a vision of difference that would be elided. In so doing, the interventions articulate the partial solution described by Maldonado-Torres:

> The very enunciation of the 'problem of the color-line' was predicated on at least a partial solution, which involved a shift in the theoretical attitude of the knower. The theoretical attitude requires detachment and wonder; the decolonial attitude, which Du Bois advances, demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant (2007:262).

The videos and installations, as intervention, effect such a shift in theoretical attitude. In foregrounding my position as the artist and theorist making the work that interrogates these themes while simultaneously being the subject who enunciates from a place of the elided (elided by the coloniality of Being), my contributions here are characteristic of such a shift. The work is an articulation from a perspective shaped by the sub-ontological that is my reality. It is a process of imagining and producing images informed by my own positioning alongside those living in this opaque space of the sub-ontological reality that is imperceptible through the reality of the dominant groups. Theirs, with mine amongst them, are enunciations that challenge by transgressing the hegemony. The possibilities that arise from the question of where the enunciation comes from are

further accentuated by the privileging of the visual as enunciation within the framework of an academic thesis. This exploration, through creative practice, situates a form of enunciating that would have formerly been relegated to the object or 'raw material' of a given enquiry – the thing that knowledge is produced about – as the actual site of intervention, interrogation and knowledge production. Furthermore, this privileging of phenomenological experience, filtered and articulated through art practice, is paramount for confronting material archives which reproduce the violence of erasure.

> How do we remember ghostly histories and their traces in our lives and in our ideas when our memories are *conspirators, collaborative agents and traitors*; when too many important *books* (in both the literal and metaphoric sense of the term) have been *set aside* … What does it mean to conceive of oneself as a *giver of shape to ghosts* (Gordon, 1999:93).

I have endeavoured to listen to my body when standing in the dungeon of a castle that once held women who looked like me as chattel. I have imagined what it might have been like to come from such an experience and end up in a grand Bavarian palace serving royals to whom you are an exotic oddity. There are strands of those experiences that still linger and shape my experience of the world today and which drive me to do the work undertaken here in the research and in the video project. This is haunted work. The work undertaken in this project exists alongside utterances made in a similar spirit, those that draw on narrativising that expresses the hand of ancestors; a writing of others through a speculative imaging informed by one's own experience of living under subjection.

One such story is that of Margaret Garner as it is re-membered by Toni Morrison in the book *Beloved* (2005). In the archived historical records that are accessible in the form of newspaper reports, the person, Margaret Garner, is elided. She herself, the personhood of her family and children, the girl child who died in particular, are marginal to the story of the white abolitionist who tried to help her and her family in her trial (Gordon, 2008). Through Morrison, however, the story of what would necessitate the killing of one's own child to protect it shares the centre of the stage alongside the return of the dead child. Morrison has written, "I started out wanting to write a story … the clipping about Margaret Garner stuck in my head. I had to deal with this nurturing instinct that expressed itself in murder" (Morrison in Clemons 1987:75) (A. Gordon, 2008:142). In the retelling of Margaret Garner's story by Toni Morrison, "haunting rather than 'history' (or historicism) best captures the constellation of connections that charges any 'time of the now' … with the debts of the past and the expense of the present, why one woman killed her child and another was haunted by the event" (A. Gordon, 2008:142).

Morrison, who is haunted by the story of Margaret Garner, writes a story that History could not articulate as she writes through imaginative recall informed by the experience of being a black woman in a United States shaped by slavery. In such a way, haunting is "memory that is … playing havoc with the normal security historical context provides" (A. Gordon, 2008:66). The act of haunting is very much a causal agent in the activities of the present. To imagine a toolset more diverse than the one inherited from the 'master's' (Lorde, 1984) set, necessitates this move from a fidelity to an idea of History as 'real presence' in the sense that it can be marked off against corresponding evidence of events it accounts for to this privileging of ghosts, haunting and ancestors. Taking haunting seriously is to participate in a socio-cultural world where ancestors play an active role in the lives of the living. This is the de-colonial theorists' texture of thought wrought from epistemologies weaning itself from the master's tools.

I rely from the onset on negated histories that frame an understanding of the 'ghostly' through multiple inflections. My starting premise is from the position that haunting is a generative and productive occurrence when understood as an encounter and engagement with ancestral will. If hegemony is the blinkered single consciousness from which access to compound multiple perspectives is limited, such as the double consciousness of being black in a white hegemonic world, then I endeavour to take up Audre Lorde's challenge of "learning how to take our differences and make them strengths" (Lorde, 1984:112).

The ghost that may be an insubstantial presence from the perspective of hegemony is thick, saturated embodiment of the lives, experiences and realities that the hegemonic perspective cannot perceive. I consider the implications of my performance and embodiment of the ghostly presence and how this gesture is tied to ideas of possession and lending one's body to be inhabited by spirits. However, this possession is a performance of the self as the spectres are conceived as ancestors to the performer. As such, they are always already part of the subjectivity which embodies those that came before me and whose experiences are formative to my experience of the world. While this idea of embodiment is descriptive of the process through which I produce the video work, the language of possession and ancestors privileges an epistemic position and route towards embodied knowing that has been denied value by a Eurocentric hegemony.

In summary,

> the belief in one sustainable system of knowledge, cast first in theological terms and later on in secular philosophy and sciences … is pernicious to the well-being of the human species and to

> the life of the planet. Such a system of knowledge, referred to here as the 'Western code,' serves not all humanity, but only a small portion of it that benefits from the belief that in terms of epistemology there is only one game in town (Mignolo, 2011:xii).

To perceive of the ghost as more than 'mere aspic' necessitates such a shift in epistemic positioning that renders the ghost, not an insubstantial presence, but as ancestor – one that carries the stories of the marginalised and is an active agent in the lives of the living. She is present in her own language despite European hegemonies' inability to articulate her. The ghost marks the presence of realities beyond the parameters of knowledge shaped by the 'Western Code', its framing ontology. In doing so, it provincialises a system of knowledge that would take its totality for granted.

To reclaim 'othered' modes of perceiving time, memory, recollection and future is not to erase all value in Historic accounts but rather necessitates an understanding of the historic in its specificity rather than universalism. It is to disavow the totalising authoritative functioning of linear Eurocentric History as it has been entrenched as the carrier of what's 'real' through the coloniality of imperial knowledge. To fragment the hegemonic is to allow the visibility of different kinds of knowledge that are in conversation with one another and contribute to human knowledge without one claiming precedence over its 'others'. It is a move away from rigid dichotomising of difference towards an open opacity and fluidity of Relation (Glissant, 1997).

In thinking of subjugated elided stories and histories as the ghostly missing content of 'History', it is through those multiple forms of recollection – memories, traces, ancestors, story – that they may be re-called. The ghostly is useful in speaking beyond coloniality of knowledge and reclaiming what has been disavowed because ghosts (that which has been written out) do not function according to a colonial/imperial logic. Ghosts are precisely disobedient of, or rather, are unrestricted by and do not need or seek the permission of hegemony but appear how and when they must. When they do appear they engender a disruption to the 'reality' that would deny them.

## INSTALLATION 1
## After Saudades - Johannesburg Art Gallery

The Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) sits forlorn in the midst of Johannesburg as a shadow of its former grandeur. The vocabulary of its architecture, the bulk of its sandstone frame with entablature and great pillars, carries nostalgia for the empire on whose back and in whose image it was built. A deteriorating train rustles past in the trench just beyond the front boundary of the gallery grounds, not four metres away from the base of the sandstone steps leading up to its pillars. The rickety train resembles the gallery in age and lack of maintenance. The shaky old vehicle made of tin and wheels is full to the brim, ushering in throngs of commuters from homes in the outlying areas of the city. The train remains an everyday necessity for people who bring the city space to life while the gallery sits quiet and almost forgotten, an island of sad neglect in the centre of a city overflowing with life around it.



**Figure 1: Johannesburg Art Gallery view from south facing facade**

JAG is one amongst the multiple historical spaces that I engaged with over the course of my research. What is particular about JAG in terms of this study is that, as an institution, it can be understood as marking a moment of confluence where there is an intersection between my enquiry into epistemological violence and the discourse and canons of Art History, practice and theory. The museum presents a space where questions of epistemology can be interrogated directly through an engagement with the canonisation of arts practices as defined through Eurocentric histories. It is an

opportunity to engender questions concerning epistemologies in a moment when they are manifest through art practice; a space where imaginative abstraction and creativity take precedence in composing the prevailing conditions and projected possibilities for the realities we inhabit.

As a place associated with art – the creative authoring that is a reckoning with the world we experience – the art museum is of particular importance as a signifier of the ideological. As a signifier, from its inception, the gallery was conceived and was built on the ideological foundations of empire. The curator of the galleries' foundational collection described the JAG collection as "an ambitious project to form a representative collection of Modern Art for South Africa."[6] Nowhere in this 'representative' collection, however, were there art works representing the creative traditions of cultures amongst which the gallery came to be situated. The art practices of the broader South Africa societies were not of consideration in such a 'representative' collection. The creative output of the black South African population was erased along with its presence as a public and an audience that might engage with such a collection.

The celebration of empire was at the core of the JAG's inception and is perceivable in the vocabulary of its architecture. The columns and entablatures of the building reference the mythologised dawn of western culture in ancient Roman and Greek civilisations. The markers are drawn from and reproduce a narrative of the grandeur of these empires and, in turn, those of colonial Europe. The art gallery speaks through this coloniality of symbols that valorises western sensibilities, tastes and canon of History. As it stands at the centre of an otherwise bustling city centre, the institution's current state of neglect becomes its own attestation of a schism between the museum and those it finds itself situated amongst, an alienation that comes of its ideological precedents. As an institution designed to function at the ideological heart of cultural life, its colonial foundation makes it a fraught space for defining and valuing contesting forms of cultural production.

In the intervention at JAG, I presented an installation in the physically deteriorating structure of the institution's basement. It brought into question the gallery's relation to the colonial structures, both physical and ideological, on which it was built. I engaged the physical deterioration of the space as a marker of the precarious reality of coloniality premised on misanthropic skepticism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) and the resultant structural instability of this 'reality'. The installation consisted of the

[6]Excerpt from a letter outlining Sir Hugh Lane's intentions for the Johannesburg Art Gallery accessed at http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/hugh-lanes-vision-johannesburg-art-gallery on 03/04/2016.

connections I drew between different bodies of water, both physically present as well as the images of water from elsewhere. I set up a dialogue between a shallow pool of water I constructed beneath a large leak from the crumbling ceiling of the basement and a video of water of the Atlantic. The video, which was physically reflected in this pool, consisted of long sequences of images of this water that were shot across The Bay of All Saints in Bahia, Brazil. The reflective pool of water linked the two spaces – the gallery's crumbling infrastructure and The Bay of All Saints – through the materiality of substance and reflection. Together they became an allusion to their interconnected history of coloniality – that of a city built on slavery in South America and the structure of the museum in Southern Africa.



**Figure 2: Installation view *After Saudades* Johannesburg Art Gallery (2014)**

Highlighting the presence of these bodies of water and reflections between them in relation to the crumbling structure of JAG was a symbolic gesture marking the interconnected matrix of power as well as the instability of the tenets of coloniality. It marked the pernicious undercurrents that are a constant aspect of the social, epistemological and ontological reality it forms. The institutionalisation of racial hierarchy described above and the ascribing of value to work that fits a particular canon while erasing the value of others, is symptomatic of the broader coloniality that governs the epistemological and ontological landscape in which the gallery operates. To elucidate this, I refer to Nelson Maldonado-Torres in his contention that the 'fundamental ontology' that underpins western epistemology is one that is premised on violence and the eradication of difference (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). He makes a case for this racial hierarchisation being intrinsic to western understanding of the world as it is inscribed in what constitutes Being in that ontology.

Maldonado-Torres names three ontological formulations that he deploys to elucidate the ways in which this hierarchisation functions through what he terms 'the coloniality of being'. These formulations are: the trans-ontological difference and the sub-ontological difference alongside ontological difference. They are described as follows:

> Trans-ontological difference (difference between Being and what is beyond Being; or Being and exteriority) Ontological difference (difference between Being and beings) Sub-ontological or ontological colonial difference (difference between Being and what lies below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder) (2007:254).

Maldonado-Torres takes on Heidegger's formulation regarding Being as that which is distinguishable from other beings and elucidated, past this distinction of ontological difference, the trans (beyond/outside of) and sub (beyond/outside of and below) ontological difference. In this elaboration, Maldonado-Torres accounts for a distinction between Dasein, understood as the colonising subjectivity, and damné, those colonised othered subjects who are denied 'ontological resistance' (2007:254). He argues that the foundational identity of the coloniser is the *ego conquiro*, an identity premised on the suspicion of the sub-humanity of the 'other' which legitimised, even compelled, this ego to conquer its other. This *ego conquiro* is understood as the predecessor to the articulation of the *ego cogito*. The two kinds of identity, as the former provides precedent for the latter, share a certainty in their own constitution of Being while they harbour suspicions on the nature of being of those considered others. He writes that

> the 'certainty' of the project of colonization and the foundation of the ego conquiro stand, just like Descartes's certainty about the cogito, on doubt or skepticism. Skepticism becomes the means to reach certainty and provide a solid foundation to the self. The role of skepticism is central for European modernity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:245).

The ego of European subjectivity is defined by this skepticism towards the humanity and subjectivity of its other, the difference of the objectified other underpinning the certainties of its subject self. This skepticism separates out those "who belong to the realm of Man vis-à-vis those outside the human oecumene" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:247). It is an attitude that Maldonado-Torres characterises as a "racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism" which is a "questioning of the very humanity of colonized people" (2007:245). This skepticism, he argues, precedes and perhaps even informs the Cartesian division between *res cogitans* (consciousness) and *res extensa* (matter). In this way, the divisions between mind/body, human/nature can be understood as being rooted in this coloniser/colonised dichotomy that, in modern iterations, translates to a

division between european/non-european, lighter/darker skinned people and, as such, as a reconfiguration and reiteration of the "anthropological colonial difference" articulated in the *ego conquistador* and the *ego conquistado* (2007:245).

Maldonado-Torres then extends this argument to contend that, for the Eurocentric mind, these inferior beings can only produce inferior knowledge as they fall on the 'nature', 'body' side of the consciousness/matter colonial line. In the kind of universalisms that western knowledge functions through, there is a disavowal of peoples and knowers whose knowledge comes from understandings and experiences beyond its presumed universal, beyond which nothing can exist. From this standpoint, any understanding of the cultures or knowledge or art of the other comes to be known and named according to an understanding produced through Eurocentric epistemology. The way such materials and conceptual articulations of cultural life may be perceived through the other's epistemology is not a factor. Toni Morrison describes this in her discussion of art encountered across epistemologies:

> From the seventeenth century to the twentieth, the arguments resisting that incursion [of the other into a 'Eurocentric stronghold'] have marched in predictable sequence: 1) there is no Afro-American (or third world) art; 2) it exists but is inferior; 3) it exists and is superior when it measures up to the 'universal' criteria of Western art; 4) it is not so much 'art' as ore – rich ore – that requires a Western or Eurocentric smith to refine it from its 'natural' state into an aesthetically complex form (1996:20).

This epistemological and ontological exclusion of the other has become a foundational characteristic of western philosophical traditions wherein the other is taken for granted as non-thinking and non-being. Maldonado-Torres elucidates this through his critique of Heidegger's formulation of Ontological difference where there is a projection towards death that is the catalyst for an authenticity of individualisation that distinguishes between a Being and other beings that constitutes Dasein. Maldonado-Torres draws on Fanon's description of the other side of this formulation perceived from the position of the sub-ontological difference to describe a state of living in the constant company of and evading death which produces the very different reality that determines the damné's existence. Such a mode of existence cannot, according to Heidegger's formulation, be considered as Being as it pertains to the ontological presence of the Dasein. In this way, there is an exclusion of their very 'being' producing the "condemned of the earth … the being who is 'not there'" (2007:253). As such, in the domain of the 'real', as it is constituted through epistemologies of western modernity, "[m]isanthropic skepticism and racism work together with

ontological exclusion" to elide its other (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:253).

As certain bodies were produced as less than human, the knowledges that came from those bodies also became understood as inferior; their epistemes and their very capacity for ontological autonomy or difference diminished by the totality of a conquering ontology. The absence of value of the other becomes the natural state of these others and nothing is amiss when this episteme dismisses the value of the majority of humanities' epistemologies along with the different knowledges they produce because they are always already invalid. Walter Mignolo describes this process of silencing as an integral and fundamental part of western systems of knowledge making. It is a system that does not enter into dialogue with knowledges produced through different epistemologies. This system functions through "the hubris of the zero point [which] was, and still is, an imperial epistemology. It is not dialogic, at least in the specific sense of being that which doesn't allow any other type of knowledge to enter into dialogue" (Mignolo, 2011:202). This violence of erasure, however, produces haunting which is an important marker of the systematic violence engendered by eliding people, their knowledges, their histories, their epistemologies and their equal place in the human world.

The question of power and knowledge is explored through this idiom of haunting in Avery Gordon's writing. In her work, she illustrates how it is important that the eliding of knowledges is understood as fundamental epistemological social violence on which other manifestations of violence are based. As such, ghosts appear when "the trouble they represent and symptomise is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view ... [when the ghost] demands its due, your attention" (Gordon, 2008:xvi). What Gordon describes as ghostly matter may be understood in terms of coloniality; it operates through elision at different levels and the things it elides are constantly fighting to make their way back into view.

In her text, Gordon works through the rubric of sociological enquiry, tracing the limits of post-modern critique in its ability to bring into view ways of being, knowing and speaking that do not function through the logic of the hegemony of western episteme. In her questioning of the limitation she identifies here, the inability to learn from the others' epistemologies, she extends and implicates the broader western academic tradition and its institutionalised systems of knowledge production. Through her discussion of the ghostly presence, she points to the inability to grasp or reach the thing being elided by hegemony through the perspective (the ontology and epistemology) of hegemony. From within social studies (an academic discipline situated within the fundamental

ontology of Western Europe), she describes the inability of those knowledges, rarefied within the academy, to learn *from* their other. As an illustration, she describes Seth and the schoolteacher's interaction in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where "she was just a piece of data waiting for his words to write her up" (Gordon, 2008:185). Here Gordon poignantly illustrates the violence in the methods of western disciplinary knowledge, here signified by schoolteacher, to whom the other is reduced to an object of scrutiny.

In her observation of this inability to perceive the others' capacity to think or produce knowledge that is 'legitimate', Gordon's work points to the coloniality of knowledge as it is interrogated in the work of Walter Mignolo. Her use of the language of ghosts and haunting brings her analysis closer to ideas pertaining to the coloniality of Being as it is described by Maldonado-Torres. She argues that the inability to comprehend knowledges beyond the limits of a western tradition of knowledge production does not preclude the presence of what is beyond its ability to grasp. As such, the idea of haunting points to the presence in what is perceived as absence. Regardless of whether this presence is beyond the field of vision of what the hegemony is able to perceive, they are always already present.

What is significant about Gordon's work is that it recognises this inability of the hegemonic to perceive difference and, in so doing, is able to describe the limitations of what her episteme can account for from within. What is elucidated, however, is precisely the inability to describe the other from within hegemony. She recognises that the ability to actually articulate that other remains elusive. She demonstrates an important break with the tenets of totality and universality by seeing and naming its limitation. Working within this ontology alone can only achieve what Gordon outlines – a description around something that is missing. It cannot account for, describe or make tangible, audible or visible, the thing it produced as lacking ontological resistance.

Gordon describes a precarious balance between absence and presence in the chapter of her book *Ghostly Matters* (2008) titled "Her Shape and His Hand". The idea of her shape and his hand, or her shape (an empty presence) *in* his hand (an actual materiality) evokes a sense of power 'he' holds in being a real presence aside 'her' absence. It describes a negotiation in the interaction between what is 'real' and what is absent or 'immaterial' where one has to find 'the shape described by her absence' (Gordon, 2008:6). It is the place where her shape pushes back on the materiality of his hand, and though 'absent', the contours of her body become visible where his hand falls on those contours. While his world is the 'reality', she takes shape and starts to become discernible at the

margins of their encounter. This image, where her shape is alluded to, is an image of the limits of his vocabulary of knowledge production.

Gordon goes on to describe how "vocabulary [is] a social practice of producing knowledge. A vocabulary and a practice were[/are] missing while demanding their due" (2008:8). As the "social world is textually or discursively constructed," his vocabulary or discursive tradition is inadequate in describing her in order to bring her form into being (Gordon, 2008:11).

To bring her into being, she would have to be described through an ontology in which her Being, humanity and knowledges are not excess, discardable waste to the human world but are actual, real, valid and constitutive of the world. Then, only through trans-ontological dialogue, can what is elided be perceived by what is at present hegemonic. This, however, can only be brought about when the hegemony is no longer hegemonic but is one way of conceiving and knowing the world amongst numerous ways of knowing.

However, as shown above, while under the prevailing hegemony, the bodies and knowledges that came from those bodies produced as less than human, remain subordinated. Their epistemes and their very capacity for ontological autonomy or difference is diminished by the totalising modality of the conquering ontology. The physical and ideological structures, the institutions and the bodies of governance that are produced within this ontology necessarily reproduce the foundational tenets of this ontology.

I contend that these processes are evident in the collection, given the canonising and the curatorial history of JAG. As an institution that furnishes weight and value on cultural productions, it offers a ground through which to interrogate coloniality at the level of creatively inscribing the world. To enunciate means to give life and form to ideas, to the imaginaries which constitute knowledge in and of the human world. This enunciation is intimately tied up with the enunciating subject and where this subject is positioned in relation to hegemonic power structures. The position of the subject within these hierarchies of knowledge becomes a determining factor in the visibility and audibility of the subject's enunciations. For a significant part of its history, the collection housed at JAG was an extension of the discourses of empire made concrete within its walls. There was a historic denial of the cultural value of what may have been considered important creative production by those whose humanity itself was questionable. Their 'art' could not be considered as equal to the work of great European masters. Here, where enunciations take the form of creative production, those of the other were elided from the reified heights of human culture alongside the

populations who produced them and for whom they carried weight and value. The articulations that carried artistic and cultural value for the damnés subsisted outside as the ghostly beyond the parameters of what was recognised and valued within the margins of what constituted legitimate art. The collection of paintings, sculptures and other objects that counted as art within the bounds of the museum's framework of art displayed their ideological home in a western episteme. Their reification alongside the negation of the other's expression of material culture demonstrates "the pervasive power that comes in occupying space, filling it with your symbols and shoring it up against loss"[7] or, in this case, encroachment (Mbao, 2016).

While the institution has been subject to internal tensions and has undergone shifts pertaining to what and whose creative enunciations constitute art, these shifts have arisen from within a continuing lineage of the aforementioned episteme. The actors conferred with the capacity to engender these shifts have been situated within the same epistemological traditions that once denied the value of local art practices. As such, the shifts that take place reproduce the inward hubris of the western canon. The changes pertain to what might be brought into the folds of a canon, a language, an epistemology that is, at its foundation, colonial. The broadening scope of what constitutes art has not emerged through entering into dialogue with difference but rather from bringing the multiplicity of the world into its canon. In this way, the gesture to incorporate difference into the collections of the gallery does less to undo the coloniality of its foundation than it does to re-enact the process of corralling the world's knowledges into the store of hegemony's raw materials from where it may be legitimised. I worked to foreground this in the intervention offered at JAG in order to articulate the importance of recognising different and contesting epistemologies and their contingent ontological paradigms because "without awareness of coloniality", Maldonado-Torres argues, "reflection on Dasein and Being [continue to] involve the erasure of the damné and the coloniality of Being" (2007:253). Maldonado-Torres suggests that, in order to conceive of the Being of black subjects, people of colour and colonised subjects, they must "become the radical point of departure for any reflection on the coloniality of being" (2007:253). Being taken under the wing and having legitimacy conferred on them according to the standards of an episteme that denies their autonomy of knowledge cannot offer such a radical departure.

A second set of videos I presented at JAG functioned to elucidate this by displaying an encounter between embodied subjectivities and their respective relation to JAG's institutional History

[7] From "Rearranging the furniture at Stellenbosch" Wamiwi Mbao, in "Africa is a Country" blog http://africasacountry.com/2016/02/rearranging-the-furniture-at-stellenbosch/ accessed on 25/02/2016.

because, as put forward above, the body from which an enunciation emanates has a determinative role in the perceived validity of what is enunciated. The first of these subjectivities was a black woman, an embodiment of the othered who was elided in the institution's early conception of subjectivities that produce valuable material culture. She appeared as a ghostly apparition wandering the halls of JAG. She wore a black ankle length cotton skirt secured with a thick leather belt around her waist. Her white blouse had ruffled details around its high neck and puffed sleeves. Her clothing referenced the sartorial sensibilities of the early 1900s western woman's clothing and yet she wore them with confidence and ease. The second of these subjectivities were those of Western Europe. They filled the images hanging on the walls and took up space on plinths in the halls of the museum. This presentation was part of a show of Sir Hugh Lane's foundation collection[8] that was on display in the upper halls of the gallery concurrently with the presentation of the video response I offered. As the historic exhibition was not presented with any retrospective critique of the violence of elision that was constitutive of the collection, the show produced a contemporary complicity in the historical elision.

In this video, which is titled *Tsholofelo wa Bakwena*, the ghostly figure who was beyond the parameters of relevance to the museum now makes her way through the archives and the history of the institution that once would have erased her. The video comprises a dialogue between the return of the images that were part of JAG in its earlier days, before any art produced by black Africans was included, and the ghostly black African woman. She observes the contemporary show while moving through the halls of the exhibition contemplating works that constituted a canon that denied her but would now adopt her creative productions as a ward under its care. However, she refuses to be subsumed by a canon of art that once rejected her as she was always already present but kept out of sight and out of hearing range. Instead, she enters in the form of this ghost that produces a 'wavering present' to disarticulate the History that denied her.[9] In this way, she may enter on her own terms. She moves through the halls as well as through the artworks themselves, both observing the works and becoming an interloper in them. She shows particular interest in portraits of men and women in the paintings, entering them and changing their content. Her gesture interferes with the

[8] In his text describing his vision for the gallery, Sir Hugh Lane, the curator of its foundation collection, stated, "Johannesburg's Gallery in the beginning is an ambitious project to form a representative collection of Modern Art for South Africa" which he hoped would "awake in the young South African the inherited artistic traditions of the Dutch and French nations from which it has partly sprung" (2015). The public that makes up the nation of South Africa that his collection aimed for and amongst whom he hoped it would develop "intellectual activity, which together make up the culture of a nation" was of distinctly European ancestry.

[9] In the chapter "not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there" in *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon describes history as "wavering" and how it "articulates and disarticulates itself and the subjects who inhabit it", pointing to its susceptibility to the shifts haunting can bring (2008:106, 184).

things within the bounds and literal frames of what was venerated in a time when she was erased, a time before she was issued an invitation to enter. She has an indigent air about her as she scrutinises the objects and images on display. Her actions question the authority of the institution to legitimise or delegitimise her as it sees fit. The presentation of the foundational collection without critique re-stages and re-inscribes its historic violence and articulates an indifference to these continued histories of erasure. Her haunting presence in the context of the exhibit enacts a contestation to this blindness, as Gordon describes it:

> [H]aunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied ... What is distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely (Gordon, 2008:xvi).



**Figure 3: Video still "Tsholofelo wa Bakwena" 2014**

While the exhibition operates from within the hegemonic that is blind to the value of its other and takes for granted the naturalisation of violence against that other, the ghost, who is a representation of the effect of that violence, comes into the space to foreground this blindness.

In a second part of the work, the ghostly woman returns, this time in a white corseted cotton dress. She stands confronting a portrait of a Victorian man that is part of the gallery's collection. The oil

painting of this man fills half of a dark screen and she appears in the other half staring at him straight in the eye. The subject of the painting seems to stare out at her as she stares back at him until his image disappears and only she is left. She then returns in multiple forms walking across and filling the entirety of the screen. Through the videos, there is an engagement with the History and the historic collection of JAG. The ghost's emergence in the future of a space she had been written out of produces a twisting of time which, in turn, allows a contemporary viewer to return to a time and space implicated in the cultural history of elision that the gallery was part of. The videos and installation connect this local manifestation of colonial erasure with the broader history of coloniality over the Atlantic world speaking to the ways in which these histories grew out of one another to produce linked social realities across disparate places.



**Figure 4: Video still "Tsholofelo wa Bakwena" 2014**

It is in the haunting moment when the subsumed come into view despite the hegemonic fortification to keep them concealed. She disrupts *her* 'other's' attempts of describing her from elsewhere than where she is situated in Relation. In her presence, a "marginal discourse, the story of how the *real* story has emerged, consistently shadows and threatens to subvert the very authority that establishes ... order" (emphasis added) (Gordon, 2008:26). The woman's presence in the space alongside the works and History that denied her work as well as her being highlights that history of rejecting the

value of art produced by black people. As Gordon describes, haunting is an instance where things that have been subsumed make their presence felt, where they make themselves heard. It is only the vocabularies and enunciations of those subsumed subjectivities that can adequately account for their presence. It is only through her own enunciation that she can be 'brought' into being and her absence can take on its own materiality. 'His' hand cannot describe her but only point to her absence, constituting her as lack. 'His' knowledge cannot describe her while simultaneously being the very thing denying her the right to speak for herself and define herself in her own terms. As meaning is not set or finite but always in the process of being produced, her presence in the gallery's archive at a time when it deliberately and proudly stood for the empire is significant. She is person in a place, spatially and temporally, that is actively producing a world where the meaning of value, relevance and worth is being produced precisely to exclude her. This retroactive 'presencing' contests the generation of these meanings as they are being actively produced. She also, in turn, engenders a critique of uncritical returns to such histories of epistemological violence. The ghostly return simultaneously calls into judgement the violence and injustice that produced it while it makes 'visible' the enunciation of the difference that is subsumed yet returned to destabilise hegemony.

## INSTALLATION 2
## Sankofa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past – Cape Coast Castle

> Of course, he missed everything. Everything that might have made him notice that she was alive and would stop making the ink and run away, even kill her children, probably kill him too.
>
> (Gordon, 2008:146)

The imposing white building of the Cape Coast Castle stands on the edge of town almost leaning out to sea. At the bottom of the mammoth structure is a wooden doorway known as 'the door of no return' – the door through which enslaved people were led out to waiting ships – leading to a landing that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean. Inside the castle, on either side of the passage leading to this wooden door, there are two more doorways in the stone walls. Each of these lead into dark cavernous dungeons with high arched ceilings. The floors are matted with grime that is hundreds of years of human excrement, blood and other accumulated dirt. There are small slits close to where the ceiling starts to curve into its dome. Thin shafts of light eke through the slits without managing to illuminate the space at all



**Figure 5: Cape Coast Castle, Cape Coast, Ghana**

In this space, where women were held captive (after being bought by European slavers), I presented

an exhibition titled *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past*. It consisted of videos projected onto cotton sheets that hung in the dungeon. These sheets recalled the sails of the ships that trafficked kidnapped people to the Americas. From the castle on the African coast, the ships sailing them across the Atlantic and the coasts on the other side of the ocean, the process of producing 'slaves' amounted to turning "human life into an abstract financial and monetary equivalent" (Corio, 2014). It is this process that captures the most odious dimension of misanthropic skepticism and the experience of the damnés that I addressed in the installation exhibited in the castle.

In her book, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Saidiya Hartman considers the constitution of a slave in terms of the condition of fungibility. She formulates the idea of fungibility as it emerges when a human being is subjected entirely to the will, desires and agency of others. This situation, of being determined by someone else, reduces a person to an objecthood as they are produced as entirely externally malleable. This condition of fungibility is a state wherein the capacity to determine the ways in which a person can 'be' is stripped from the individual him/herself. This usurping of agency, which is then placed entirely in the control of the other, is understood as a constitutive condition of slavery. In her text, Hartman teases out multiple tiers or modes through which this changeability-at-the-discretion-of-someone-other-than-themselves is constructed and articulated as she locates it as a primary condition of slavery.

Hartman deals with the idea of fungibility as a constitutive dimension of slavery in the chapter "Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance" (1997). Her primary concern in this chapter has to do with the '*scene* of subjection', where the idea of the scene foregrounds the performativity required to inscribe and reproduce subjection through various 'stages'. Different performative renditions of blackness produced by the white imagination become the stage on which to compose and define the contours of blackness. Hartman's interrogation of these processes is focused on scenes as they occurred in the Americas, once people were already in bondage having survived the middle passage or having been born into servitude. Here I consider how these mechanisms of control (produced through the enactment of scenes of domination), which produce subjection, began in the picturesque castles and mansions of the West African coast.

In the dungeon, the videos of the installation were accompanied by sound recordings that filled the darkness. These recordings consisted of voices narrating scenes relating to atrocities that took place in the castle. The recordings also suggested the futures produced by those atrocities. These were both immediate, in terms of the captives' futures, as well as further-reaching futures pertaining to a

capitalist world-order built on the foundations set in place here. The screens and audio elements were accompanied by commercial goods that enslaved people were forced to produce in the Americas. These materials were displayed in glass boxes reminiscent of those used by contemporary Ghanaians who sell goods on the streets and in traffic. The materials, signifying goods produced by slave labour in the Americas, were displayed together with the boxes to imitate the commercial dimensions of racial oppression as it took shape in the castle. Their pairing suggests the ramifications of this past in the contemporary commercial global order. They also allude to a social mechanism that was the foundation of slavery – the fungibility of the black body as commodity.

Hartman uses the language of performance to describe how fungibility is produced and maintained. She understands this capacity to discipline black bodies and the vocabularies of those disciplinary mechanisms – the script – as being sketched out on the stage and extended to processes of control operating in the broader slaveholding society. As such, the roles sketched out on the fiction stage could be found echoing through the auction block, the coffle and the tightly regulated forms of 'amusement' that slaves were obliged to participate in, in plantation life. The two key performative modes that Hartman deals with in her text are melodrama and the minstrel show on the fictive stage. The strict regiments of control that black bodies were subjected to in the Americas found a precursor in the methods of control meted out on those in the slave castle.

Hartman reads the minstrel show as an example of a 'laboratory' space where white imagination composed blackness. As the space of fictive performance, where unrestricted imaginings can take form, the representational production of blackness as fungible occurred in the minstrel show; a 'laboratory' from which it could be explored and then disseminated. The castle too was a kind of laboratory where people entered and commodities for the market were produced and shipped out (no more than objects for trade on an open market). This transformation from personhood to goods void of agency, will or desires was achieved through violent discipline of any display of autonomous will shown by the captives, even to the point of death.

The 'joke' in the minstrel moment, where blacks flounder in an attempt to improve themselves by determining their own image, is the immediate and forceful discipline with violence on such acts of self-actualisation. Though blackness was permitted to venture outside its social confines on this stage, albeit in evidently ill-equipped ways, "these performances of blackness regulated the deviance they conjured up with the threat of punishment and humiliating discovery" (Hartman,

1997:31).

Through the use of popular theatre, Hartman engages with the ways in which black people were controlled and defined from outside themselves. She notes how "minstrelsy elaborated and fixed blackness in a theatrical presentation" and that, although black bodies sometimes "trespassed the racist logic of suitable placement", in the end "these vain aspirations were punished and blacks returned to their proper stations" (Hartman, 1997:31). Hartman describes how the suitable placement of the black person is determined by white subjectivity policing that body and defining the limited possibilities of being for black subjects, or rather, the non-being of the black who becomes an object of value and ownership.

> Within this economy, the bound black body, predominantly affixed in its place, engenders pleasure not only ensuant to the buffoonery and grotesqueries ... but above all deriving from the very *mechanisms of this coercive placement*; it is a pleasure obtained from the security of place and order and predicated upon chattel slavery. In this regard, the donning of blackface restaged the *seizure and possession of the black body for the other's use and enjoyment* (my emphasis) (Hartman, 1997:31-32).

In the slave castle, this seizure for enjoyment and discipline often resulted in the death of black men and the rape of black women who had not yet learned their place or understood their 'role' in relation to their white masters. Any black body that displayed the capacity to act in any way that was not defined for them by those masters was punished. Enslaved women were raped in these castles and were servilely punished if they were to resist. Enslaved men were left to die from starvation in solitary confinement (Ashun, 2013)[10]. These punishments were meted out to any who would claim agency over their own bodies. This is because, in doing so, the enslaved person would be breaking the artifice of the doctrine that they were the property of white men whose will was the only one that carried any weight. Any deviance from this script and allocation of roles was not tolerated. This 'killability and rapeability' of black bodies was part of an ongoing formation of a racial world defined by European epistemologies of misanthropic skepticism and erasure.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes how this violence of overwriting someone from elsewhere other than where they are (legitimated through the violence of erasure) is foundational to the ontology of western philosophical thought. Maldonado-Torres shows that Heidegger's fundamental ontology of Being did not present a break from its predecessors in the canon of western

[10] *Elmina Castle and the Slave Trade* [sa].

philosophies but rather followed on from a Cartesian thinking being which, in turn, found a precursor in a conquering being. As it functions within the ontology shaped by western episteme, this lineage remains bound within a province of thought beyond which there are others that are the conquered. These others do not have thought in order to be and, therefore most fundamentally, are not *beings*. Maldonado-Torres describes the divide as follows: "I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)" (2007:252). As such, the knowledge or the ability to know/think, the epistemology and ontology of the slave is voided. In the coloniality of knowledge, the other does not think and in the coloniality of being, that other *is* not and is therefore expendable (2007:252). In epistemology (ways of knowing), the cogito is tied to being in a most fundamental way. In this scenario, western ways of knowing entirely elide the Being of their other as that other does not think, or think properly therefore cannot be. The denial of Being and humanity of the other is produced by this inherent denial of their capacity to think, a denial of their knowledges and ways of knowing. What was an absence in rationality in Descartes's sixteenth century age of enlightenment has remained, articulated in twentieth century modernity as a lack of Being as "[m]isanthropic skepticism and racism work together with ontological exclusion" (2007:253). The other becomes a being without/rendered void of ontological resistance, a playable being, malleable in the hand of the only Being with any legitimate claim to his own destiny which is fundamentally and unalterably his own; the thinking Being that can know and describe the world, the Dasein.

In slave society, different forms of fictive and non-fictive performance becomes a staging for the ways fungibility could be figured and deployed both for the production and for the management of control. Within this 'theatricality', the various players' roles were entirely scripted from the position of white supremacist consciousness which was understood as the only one capable of authoring the world. Whether pro-slavery or abolitionist, the social script was rendered in a paternalistic tone where there was a necessity and responsibility to manage unruly, wild and volatile black bodies.

For those who were pro-slavery "performances cast the slave as contented bondsman and elide[d] the difference between volition and violation" (Hartman, 1997:43). In the case of the abolitionists a call for 'freedom' can be understood as "exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts and feeling of others [where] the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery" (Hartman, 1997:19). In both formulations, the sovereignty of the enslaved is still not recognised. Even in advocating for the 'freedom' of slaves, the terms were entirely scripted according to the needs and

desires of white subjects. The captive body, its bondage or freedom, remains at the discretion and agency of others where even the ability to act on the "good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery [depends on] ... the fungibility of the captive body" and the very condition that sustains the state of captivity, the lack of sovereignty (Hartman, 1997:19). As such, the discursive strategies and ideological position of abolitionists, clouded in the denial of black subjects' sovereignty, instead relying on a paternalistic understanding of black people which reinforced "the 'thingly' quality of the captive" (Hartman, 1997:19).

Hartman illustrates how joy and sorrow, coercion and will were rendered close to the point of conflation in the controlling of slaves so that a forced performance of contentment became entangled with the mechanisms of sale. On the auction block, slaves were expected to present themselves happily in front of prospective buyers to boost their selling price. In such instances, "jollity ... is not an index of the expressive capacities of the enslaved but rather a means toward the enhancement of value, the emblem of coercion, and an incident of fungibility" (Hartman, 1997:37). The control of the slave was to the extent that they could not even express the distress and pain of their situation but were obliged to feign satisfaction and contentment in order to reproduce the idea that the condition they had been forced into was their natural condition. Hartman continues, "[i]ndeed, the slave would be made to appear as if born to dance in chains" (1997:47). In this fiction, the ability or right to control the other is in part justified by the limited capacity for thought attributed to the objectified black person whose natural state is absolute object-hood and subservience.

Hartman's choice of the term fungibility is an extension of the definition referring to the changeability of a thing. There is a discord to the word when used in reference to people. This incorrectness in the use of the term poignantly captures the particularly gross perversity and overreach of power wherein such changeability is ascribed to a self-possessed human being who is denied their sovereignty to the point of this absolute object-hood. The incorrectness of the term itself produces a sense of the grotesque absurdity in this denial of the sovereignty of a person's self-possession.

For a person to enter into this state of object-hood and become interchangeable with things, wherein their sole value determined by those things they produce, there must be a violent clash of ontologies where the captives are thrust into an ontology where their humanity could cease to exist. The particularity of this slave economy was this denial of the humanity of the enslaved based on the

racialisation of Being which became coded into a difference between those who could be considered human, and others who fell beyond the parameters of what constitutes 'man'.

This is sustained on the 'racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism' described by Maldonado-Torres as defining imperial western man's attitude towards his other, a skepticism that underpins the coloniality of western epistemology and ontology (2007:245). He argues that a conception of a division between Man and his other sets the foundation for new ethics in the 'new' world. This new ethic was reliant on a divided world where society was made up of different degrees of human beings out of which an ethics of war and genocide became naturalised. It is this skepticism of "the *imperial attitude* [that] promotes a fundamentally genocidal attitude in respect to colonized and racialized people. [It is] through it [that] colonial and racial subjects are marked as dispensable" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:246).

The exhibition was staged in the space where fungibility was beginning to be inscribed, where the captives entered the castle and, through it, entered a new ontological order. By presenting in this space, the show functioned to disrupt the historic coding that took place there, where humans entered to exit as commodities. The presentation illustrated how this 'reality' of rendering people inert property was untenable through highlighting the resistance and survival of those people historically as well as into the present. As Avery Gordon describes, theirs were "lives embodied and embedded within a system that never succeeded in making itself the world or turning people into the inert property of its will, and that cannot then fully account for the lives made within its negating and treacherous bounds" (2008:164). Those rendered void of ontological resistance, knowledge and Being under the prevailing hegemony of western ontology survive beyond its ontology. From within it, however, their existence appears spectral. The staging of their spectral return was a staging of a very different kind of scene, one that contested the erasure of the people who were held here, presenting their fears, despairs and desires (those things that affirm and articulate their ontological resistance).

In the dungeon on the left, a white sheet hung in the centre of the cavernous room. On it, the video *By and by, some trace remains* was projected. The video was shot at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. In the video, there is an empty, quiet and dirty room with walls covered in dirt. It is framed on either side by a passage leading away from the room and a heavy set metal doorframe. A ghostly woman appears for a moment floating in the room wearing a plain cotton blouse under an equally plain cotton dress, corseted at the top and voluminous from the waist down. Her colouring

is muted, desaturated in comparison to her surroundings. She disappears. She is followed by another woman, the same woman, this time a physical actual presence in the space dressed in the uniform of a domestic worker. She starts cleaning the space. She appears and disappears over the course of the 10 minute video, constantly cleaning, scrubbing, seemingly stuck in this perpetual gesture. She is, at times, a single body in the space while, at other times, she is accompanied by multiples of herself, overlapping and dissolving into one another, with the sound of the scrubbing getting louder and louder.

There are moments when the body(s) in the space are not present while the sound of the scrubbing and sweeping remains. In one moment, neither the woman nor the sound of scrubbing is present, but only her laboured attempt to catch her breath and her coughing is heard. After the momentary stillness, she returns to sweeping, scrubbing and climbs a ladder to scrub the wall. She gets on her knees to scrub the wall near the floor, she is bent over sweeping, bent over washing her rag in a bucket, bent over moving the lamp that she works by. She continues until she is joined by the ghost woman in the corset gown. This time, she is no longer an apparition but a physical presence alongside the first cleaning woman. They both clean together, until after a while, it is only the ghost woman left cleaning, scrubbing, sweeping. The video begins again and plays this loop over and over; the women stuck sanitising the space. The labour and the labouring body, that would otherwise be unacknowledged, insists on being made visible.

On a pile of rubble in a corner of the dungeon sits a TV monitor with the words of a poem playing on its screen:

> Suspended in a stasis...
> there is a solitude here, a quiet, disquieting
> In the moment before the break.
>
> To know it is coming,
> the first crack has already ripped through the air,
>
> leaving that momentary stillness,
> quiet
> before the shattering
> that is already here
> So I remain
> stubbornly, resolutely in stasis

suspended in that non-time between before
and the way we have come to be.[11]



**Figure 6: Installation view *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past:* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015**

In the poem there is a break from one state of things – from a way of being before a rupture to a shifted reality after such a rupture. Read in relation to the events that occurred in this dungeon, this rupture is the event that ushered in a new state of being for black subjects, that of non-being. The words hang in the darkness in the corner of the dungeon then disappear from the screen.

At the other end of the dungeon there is another monitor. In it, there is an image from a book with an illustration of a black woman being hung by her ankle from the mast of a ship. A huddle of other enslaved people watch on as two white men seemingly enjoy torturing the woman. The ghost woman in the white dress from the previous video walks across the picture and sets it alight. The screen is then replaced with the words "By and by all trace is gone" and "By and by some trace remains". The two phrases interchange and overlap multiple times until the video begins again.

[11] Kitso Lelliott (2015)

The dungeon is filled with sounds. Words taken from numerous literary sources are spoken by women, sometimes whispered and sometimes spoken forcefully; they echo out of dark corners and unseen sources in the rubble. Her words are mixed in with those of man.

"This is not a story to pass on".[12]

"Everything was as it had been, nothing was as it had been".[13]

"Cowry shells feasted on the blood of the captives"[14]

"No end, no middle, no beginning; no start no stop, no progression;
neither backwards nor forward, only a stream that flowed into another stream, an open sea".[15]

"They have always known, that you are not a mule

They have always known, that you are not a mule They have always known,

that you are not a mule They have always known, that you are not a mule They have always

known, that you are not a mule They have always known, that you are not a mule They have always known"[16]

"I dwell in them, they dwell in me, and we dwell in each other, more guest than owner."[17]

"So you protected yourself and loved small"[18]

"it was not a story to pass on…anything bigger wouldn't do… a big love like that would split you wide open"[19]

"They have always known, that you are not a mule"[20]

"My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me."[21]

[12] Toni Morrison (2005, 223-224)
[13] Saidiya Hartman (2007:187)
[14] Saidiya Hartman (2007:209)
[15] Trinh Minh-Ha (1989:123)
[16] James Baldwin (1965)
[17] Trinh Minh-Ha (1989:123)
[18] Toni Morrison (2005:191)
[19] Toni Morrison (2005:191)
[20] James Baldwin (1965)

These sounds fill the dungeon from the arch of the roof to the rubble filled corners. They fill the space that was once crammed with black women. Now the words of people who have lived through forms of discrimination that were given form through the 'laboratory test' in dehumanisation that took place here echo through the space and spill out into it. They are the words of men and women born in the diaspora as descendants of the people moved though dungeons like this one, the effects of the experiments conducted on their ancestors still marking the ways they can be in the world. Here, in one of the most poignant spaces where fungibility began taking shape, their words compel a "rethinking of ontology in light of coloniality and the search for decolonization" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:242). Through opening up space where the ontological resistance of those deemed fungible can be articulated, the show demonstrates the limits of colonial ontology by presenting these enunciations from beyond its parameters. Together with the images projected onto the screens, the sounds cut across and fragment the space and its narratives with the enunciations of the damné.



**Figure 7: Detail *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015**



**Figure 8: Installation view *Sankɔfa Hauntings, Ghosts of a Futures Past* Inside women dungeons, Cape Coast Castle 2015**

The light in the dungeon is provided by the projected videos, the television monitors and a number of glass boxes with wooden frames. The boxes contain commercial goods emblematic of the driving forces for the transatlantic slave trade: cotton, tobacco, rice and sugar cane. The production of these goods demanded the labour that consumed the human lives held in the dungeon.

[21] Trinh Minh-Ha (1989:123)

In the dungeon on the right were two screens suspended across the arches of the stone celling. A projector shone light onto them and past them onto the walls beyond. The videos on the screen would interchange. There is a close up image of dead coral lit in orange light followed by an image of a mermaid lit in an arch floating in a dark space. The mermaid, who is a powerful water deity of West African Yoruba tradition, became reimagined over the Atlantic Ocean in the form of Brazilian Candomble's Yamenja, the mother whose children are like fish. Of the Orishas, Yamenja is the patron spirit to people whose lives have been touched by the ocean. The allusion to the deity is followed by an image of the ghostly woman who first appeared in *By and by, some trace remains*. In this moment, she embodies the enslaved whose lives were stolen to produce the goods in the glass boxes. She sits in a black space with her legs crossed holding a DSLR camera. She points the camera at alternating objects in front of her: cotton, tobacco, rice and sugar cane. The video is viewed from the perspective of this woman, the viewer both seeing and looking at what she sees through her lens. The gaze thus becomes embodied from the position of this enslaved woman.




**Figure 9: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015)**

The skepticism towards the cognitive capacity of black people was central to legitimising their enslavement. The questioning of this capacity to think thus becomes a constitutive factor in the production of the slave as fungible matter. It was used within and as the scaffolding around a society catering to white supremacist consciousness. It is this question of sentence and the positionality of the consciousness controlling the production of a 'scene' that is engaged in

*Untitled: Fungible Things*. In the video, the woman is dressed in a white cotton dress typical of a period when Africans were enslaved in the Americas. She sits in a black void, an unmarked non-space, holding the camera, a tool for image creation and representation. In front of her is a mirror. In this mirror she sees the reflection of herself sitting holding the camera. Between the place she physically sits and her reflection, appear the different items representing the labour of those enslaved, the materials people's humanity was erased for: cotton, tobacco, rice and sugar cane.

The woman in the video appears and disappears; each time the object between her and the mirror changes. Over the screen, words appear with each object. They are a repetition of some of the words being spoken in the audio recordings of voices filling the space:

> I dwell in them, they dwell in me, and we dwell in each other, more guest than owner. My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me.
> No end, no middle, no beginning; no start no stop, no progression; neither backwards nor forward, only a stream that flowed into another stream, an open sea.[22]

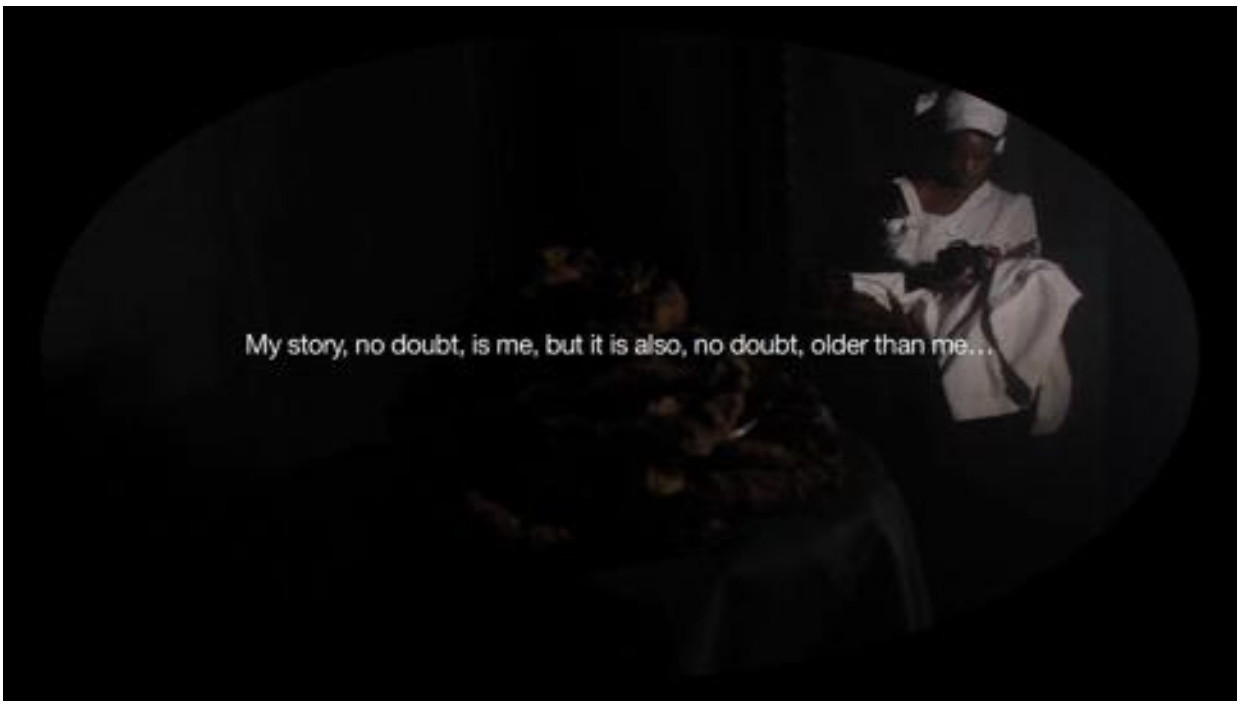



**Figure 10: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015)**

[22] Trinh Minh-Ha (1989:123)

In this vignette, the perspective of the looking cognisant subject is that of the subjectivity denied the capacity to author reality. She confronts and unmasks a system of denial wherein she would be no more or less than the value of those objects her body, labour and her life were made interchangeable with. Though there is still a preoccupation with the social, cultural and ontological conditions where a person could be deemed fungible, a challenge to this construct is offered in the vignette through this shift to the perspective of the damné. This is offered through the positioning of the consciousness engaging in and interrogating the parameters and contours of (human) fungibility. The perspective of the video is from the consciousness of a body that would be denied the sentience of a fully sovereign human self. The vignette unravels the foundational tenets of an ontology that would deny her these attributes and, as a result, her humanity. Through their critique of this production of coloniality, there is a performance of ontological resistance, the very thing she would be denied in order to legitimately define her as fungible.




**Figure 11: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015)**

The consciousness in control of the production of narrative is shifted to a person whose capacity for autonomous will and thought would be denied in the economy of control that rendered her as fungible. Despite the focus of her lens being on the things that were entangled with the denial of her subjectivity, in her control of the lens, she overturns the ontology that defines her as lacking cognitive complexity. By claiming back her usurped self-possession, she denies the entire fictive or

'illusory' construct wherein her humanity, sentience and sovereignty were denied.

This critique is then echoed in the presentation of the commodities her Being was made interchangeable with. The commodities, cotton, tobacco and others central to the Atlantic slave trade are displayed in the glass boxes around the two dungeons. The commodities are activated by the space and their intertextual relation to the critique being offered in the video. From the slave castle to the auction block and onto the popular stage, blackness was constituted by the spectacle of its complete and utter subjugation to the will of an other – a will that could render that black body as anything the white subject desired it to be. Here, it is the will of that white subject, the Dasein who takes for granted the non-being of its other that is illustrated. The video puts the will of the Dasein on display by presenting what their will would render the damné equivalent to, the value of the objects she films. Between the video and the objects in glass boxes, coloniality and its effects are made visible; the dehumanisation for the sake of commercial power with exploitation being legitimised through the naturalisation of racial hierarchy. The production of commercial value, capital over humanity, that drove, sustained and continues to sustain dehumanisation sits quietly illuminated in the boxes on the dungeon floor.




**Figure 12: Video still *Untitled: Fungible Things* 2min11sec (2015)**

In the video, I have tried to illustrate the crisis at the epicentre of the slave society when a slave,

despite its bondage, demonstrates his/her will beyond the parameters sanctioned by the will of white supremacist society. It is only in the fundamental ontology constructed through the consciousness of white supremacist society that human beings can be imagined as fungible non-sentient beings. While the state of fungibility is understood as a condition constitutive of slavery, this constitution can only be claimed as true when a consciousness eliding the humanity of another defines the hegemony.

In Hartman's text, the 'illusory' nature of this fungibility is displayed and brought into crisis when confronted with a black subject with ontological resistance. The videos are a performance of such an encounter wherein they first assume the omnipotence of the dominant gaze but then undermine it. While the title, '*Untitled: Fungible Things*', sets up this omnipotence of the prevailing hegemonic perspective that the woman is situated in, her actions in the video control the viewing experience which undercuts the seemingly totalising truth. The video operates through producing this tension between conflicting consciousnesses, ultimately cracking the facade of hegemony by offering the enunciations from the body of a person denied Being in the controlling logic of her context. Displaying reality from her perspective enacts the radical departure Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes as necessary for driving decoloniality: "The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:262).

Inside the dungeon, there was a preoccupation with making visible the coloniality that makes others dispensable fungible objects while simultaneously hiding its presence so that it appears as the 'natural' order of things. Though there were moments of disruption and interruption to this process, the works predominately functioned to make visible the mechanisms that produce erasure. On the landing outside the door of no return, the focus of the works shift towards articulations coming from those 'invisible' people, the damné.



**Figure 13: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**



**Figure 14: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**

Outside the 'door of no return' is a landing with stairs leading down to the beach below. The beach is crowded with fishermen's boats, most with a tall mast topped with a flag. The fishing community has built homes right up to the walls of the castle and the landing has become a community workspace. Men sit and mend their fishing nets on the landing while girls walk around selling water sachets out of metal tubs balanced on their heads. Children run around and women prepare the catches for sale. On this landing, I strung rope from the castle walls to lampposts from which I hung more white sheets that echoed the ones inside. These blew in the breeze from the Atlantic along with the fishermen's flags. On these sheets, I projected three more videos. They occupied the space between the castle and the community, leading to the commentary happening inside the castle dungeons out through the community and further out towards the ocean.

On the landing closest to the sea, the projected videos fell partially on the erected screen as it moved in the wind while the rest of the image spilled onto the castle wall behind. In the video, black and white archival footage showed black men beating on drums and women wearing the white voluminous dresses of a Candomble ceremony while dancing in circles. Over these images the voice of a woman speaks in Brazilian Portuguese. She says: "My dream is that one day our grandchildren and great grandchildren can confront the looks, the way people see them". The words are translated into English in writing that covers the whole screen, obscuring and overtaking the ethnographic images of Candomble below. The image is then replaced by the sounds of drumming and singing as the feet and legs of a woman are seen dancing in a brightly coloured airy studio. She turns and steps to the beat of drums and claps with her yellow dress flying around her ankles. The voice of the woman speaks again in Portuguese, this time describing how woman and femininity are vital to the survival and practice of Candomble. The words appear as subtitles letting the image

continue uninterrupted. Once again, it is the voice of those dehumanised articulating their desires that fills the frame of the video work.

A second exterior video, *Transatlantic Saudades*, shows a pier jutting out to the Bay of All Saints in Bahia. It is nearing sunset and, over the 10 minutes of the video, it gets darker and darker. Life happens around the pier at dusk; a man walks past on an evening stroll on the beach and a motorboat jets across the water. Amongst all this, the ghost woman appears. She looks away over the bay, longingly. Her voiceover recites a poem across the waters she was forced to cross once and that she cannot cross again to return home.



**Figure 15: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**



**Figure 16: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**

She says:

> At dusk
> Before the rain
> In a deserted corner of the beach
> Facing the insurmountable amount of water, between my island and yours
> Never again conquered distance
> Between continents that split long ago
> like the round people in Plato
> I am as lost as the other half
> and as lonely
> As the string of Birimbao[23]

She appears and disappears as the night comes, seemingly struggling to remain present. The sound around her of the coming dusk is slowly replaced by the sound of water lapping on the sides of a

[23] Maja Klaric (2013)

wooden boat. The creaking of the boat takes over entirely and we hear the water as though we are inside the body of a wooden ship. Darkness takes over and she appears again, this time fragmenting, multiplying until these multiple selves float away into the darkness. She appears in her clothing from the seventeenth and eighteenth century in a place where speedboats cross the bay in front of her, marking her as out of time and space. Seemingly, she has been here on the beach for a long time, her longing as old as the first break from an ontological order where life was more livable.



**Figure 17: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**

Maldonado-Torres and Mignolo, amongst other de-colonial thinkers, understand de-coloniality to be as old as coloniality. Its resistance against coloniality starting from its earliest developments and continuing alongside the multiple iterations of violence and erasure that coloniality produced. This woman, enunciating a desire denied to the damné, illustrates an instance of this constant and ongoing decolonial presence.

Here, on the wall of the castle, the laboratory where blackness began its transformation onto fungible substance equal to the worth of its commercial value, the woman quietly reflects. From the

other side of the ocean she looks across the water speaking her desire to return to this more '(livable) place' (Morrison, 1987:198). There is a gap between the sheet acting as a screen and the wall of the castle. This gap divides the video just to the side of the position of the woman, almost offering an entryway into the town and community beyond. But this is a town and community that has been wrecked by the same histories that produced her as phantom. The scene behind the screen, the world that the image of the pier on the screen seems to be pointing to, is in the contemporary which is a future ahead of the ghost woman's time, "and we are reminded that she [has] returned to a place and time she never was" (Gordon, 2008:184).



**Figure 18: Installation view, exterior Cape Coast Castle 2015**

Next to this video is the third piece in the installation on the landing. The video shows images of a stone circle at the centre of a family compound in Jamestown, Accra. The ghost woman shows up in the stone circle in several guises marked by changes in her attire. As she moves about the circle,

there is a celestial interplay of markers of time, maritime navigation, languages overlaid with documents connected to profiting from an exploitation of people.

The videos projected onto the fabrics and the walls of the castle narrate the multifaceted dimensions of what the space was implicated in erasing. They speak to the desires, fears, longings and despair that human beings experienced despite having their Being denied or their history ignored. The images that were shot in the diaspora in Bahia are particularly significant as they display not only the physical but also spiritual survival of the people who came through the castle and their descendants. The practicing of Candomble is a testament to an epistemological survival of the knowledges and beliefs they took with them across the Atlantic. These are now displayed, as a marker of that survival, back onto the wall of the castle.

The elements in the exhibition in the Cape Coast Castle were selected and choreographed into a 'performance' that disrupted the previous enactments of power. The presentation of the exhibition in the Cape Coast Castle made present and brought 'back' to the space the things which peoples lives were made exchangeable with. While the commodities are 'returned' geographically through their physical presence in the dungeon, the historical fungibility they refer to echoes into the present; the prescripts for racial oppression that took form here, alongside other locations for staging subjection. This temporal proximity illustrates how these 'pasts' are tangible in the contemporary moment and affects the lives of people as they are shaped by this history. As they persist in the present, they are malleable from the present. It is from this present that a different scene might be staged, flooding the walls of the castle where the enactment and performative ritual of subjection took place with the images of those who survive through their descendants.

## INSTALLATION 3
## Alzire of Bayreuth – New Palace, Bayreuth



**Figure 19: Exterior of New Palace, Bayreuth**

The Neues Schloss in Bayreuth stands regally just off the cobbled stone road near the centre of the Bavarian town. Stretching the length of an entire block from north to south, the palace has a beautiful street facing facade with detailed ornate arched windows the height of two storeys. The palace was completed in 1758 to the tastes and standards of Margravine Wilhelmina of Bayreuth. In front of the entrance to the castle is a large fountain with steps leading up to the main basin. At the centre of the fountain is an elevation with five figures rising from it. On the lower level, these figures are representations of people from different parts of the 'known world' – the world as it had been 'discovered' and was thus known to Europe in the 18th century when the castle was completed. There is a black African man holding a bow and arrow riding a lion, a native American man riding a griffin, an Asian man wearing a turban with a spear in his hand riding a horse side saddle and an Asian woman riding a bull. Standing on a pedestal above them all is a white European man with his sword at his side. He is seated on a rearing horse surveying all that lies beneath him.



**Figure 20: Frederick the Great as a child with his sister Wilhelmine by Antoine Pesne**



**Figure 21: Exterior of New Palace with fountain in the foreground, Bayreuth**

Visitors entering the palace are presented with a narrative prefigured by the symbolism of the fountain statue. The display of power and global reach of the European courts was narrated through these objects and the architecture that has survived since it was built. In the time of the Margaravines and Margraves, this power was also displayed through the staff that the royals were able to have in their service. The narrative displayed through the fountain outside the palace echoes the people who were in the service of the powerful in the 18th century when it was popular to have 'exotic' staff as a show of wealth, influence and reach. The Margravine was socialised into a class in which displaying black servants was not out of place (Childs & Libby, 2014; Cook, 2016). This is illustrated by a painting which portrays Wilhelmina and her brother as children accompanied by a black servant. One such servant in the palace of the adult Margravine was a young woman called Alzire. It was her presence in Bayreuth and in the palace of the Margravine which was the subject of my exhibition *Alzire of Bayreuth*.

The new Palace of Bayreuth is a monument to the Margravine Wilhelmina of Bayreuth who was the wife of the Margrave from 1730 to 1758. She is more prominent than her husband in the space of the palace and the town. Her image is reproduced on a plethora of tourist memorabilia on sale around the town. References to her love and patronage of the arts and architecture of the town are repeatedly evoked in the narrativising of the Bayreuth's History. While it is unusual that the Margravine's legacy out-shadows that of her husband, what is usual is the recording of the History

of the powerful with the image of white European History eliding the presence of black people at the time. In response to this eliding, I used the physical remnants of the world Alzire lived in and was part of, the architecture of the castle and the context of Bayreuth, to imagine and picture her presence in the space and, through this gesture, perform a 'presencing' of the long, yet forgotten history of black people in Europe.

To access the show in the palace, one had to enter through a grand doorway behind the regal fountain. Inside the front entrance is a passageway leading to a hall; on the opposite wall there is a second door that opens onto manicured palace gardens on the other side of the building. Inside, on either side of the large hall, is a sweeping staircase. They lead up to the grand and ornate ballrooms, tapestry rooms, tearooms and private chambers of the nobles who once lived in the palace. The plain ground level hall has cobblestone floors and high walls in which there is a second wooden door leading to the garden. The walls are large at about four metres high and six metres across. It was on these two walls that I presented a series of projections featuring the presence of Alzire. In that presentation, the almost forgotten woman who once worked in the castle becomes a larger than life presence dominating and filling the space.

In my search for a trace of Alzire, I found that she appears briefly in the Wilhelmine's memoirs. The Margravine offers a glimpse of this elided person while inadvertently alluding to the life of hardship led by Alzire. The Margravine wrote: "I might have said like Alzire, 'Have my sorrows softened hearts that were born to hate'" (Sophia Friederica Wilhelmina, 1828:242). In the memoir, it is unclear whether the person being referred to as Alzire is a fictional character from a play by Voltaire after whom the Margravine named her servant, or if it was in reference to the servant who waited on the Margravine, named after the fictional heroine of the tragedy. This conflation of the subject being referenced produces a moment of opacity, or thickness, that opens the possibility for a speculative reading of the text left behind by the Margravine. Whether the person being referred to in the memoir is the fictional one or the young woman serving in the palace, the name has come to denote suffering. The name Alzire (as I encountered it) had already gathered a depth of meanings as described by Bakhtin: "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in a dialogic interaction with an alien world that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way" (1981:279). The way in which a word comes to mark its subject of signification is an active, open and ongoing relation where the word is shifted and augmented by the many permutations of its object of reference. Words become through this relation with their object of reference as well as in relation to differing articulations of that object. There is a

privileging of such heteroglossia in Alzire's appearance in the installation. It is produced through the imaginative speculation generated from the space between interrelated subjects – between the woman named Alzire who worked in the palace and the Alzire of Voltaire's text. The relation between the two renders this marker of their shared name suffused by sorrow. Whichever woman was being referred to in the Margravine's text, the fictional or the real, this name chosen by the Margravine for a servant in the castle was one that she herself understood as circulating in this currency of despair and sorrow.

With the intended referent rendered inaccessible to the reader, the signifier in the text continually slips between the two signified women – Alzire the woman working in the palace and Alzire the fictional heroine – without fully belonging to either. The name refers to these two women while denoting what has become common between them, the sorrow the Margravine ascribes to the name. Alzire's appearance in the Margravine's text then is in the form of a subjectivity that is porous. It is a presence that operates in a way that Eduardo Glissant advocates in his rejection of a totalising 'I' that functions through a logic that denies slippages, porosity and contradiction. He is critical of an 'I' that privileges totality in a way that stills subjectivity to a containable, knowable form. In my search for the woman who worked in the palace, Alzire appeared through a slippage between the fictional woman and the real woman, the Margravine's writing of her and my speculative reading of the text left by the Margravine. It is an appearance characterised by opacity in the sense of an irreducibility where the woman I've searched for is not graspable but is suggestible as a collectively constituted self. She remains elusive and cannot be captured by an 'I' who is the artist because "[o]pacity … refuses in that relation to permit the fate of being signified by the Occidental other" or any other elsewhere from where she is (Griffiths, 2014:32). The "'I' of an artist or intellectual who thinks he alone can give coherent and full representation to those who are voiceless" is not tenable as the subject can only be understood once its own agency and capacity to act back on the author's perceptions is recognised (Dash, 1995:5).

> If anything, Glissant … attempts to dramatise a range of voices from the past and present, even to have his narrator marginalised by this polyphony of voices. This, then, raises the second issue in Glissant's sceptical treatment of the totalising powers of the individual self, the need to assert a community, to write the 'we' into existence (Dash, 1995:5).

According to Glissant's formulation, becoming happens between entities in an encounter, my own included. The way in which Alzire appears denies the singularity of an autonomous self which is problematic as it assumes a knowable totality. As one writing in relation and amongst the

heteroglossia in which my text is formed "these [other] voices create the background necessary for his[/her] own voice, outside of which his[/her] artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'" (Bakhtin, 1981:279). It is only when enunciation happens against other utterances, their contexts and histories, that both situate it as well as reveal its partialness, that an enunciation and the enunciation from a subjectivity might come to hold its place in Relation, without which it loses any relevance.

This opaque starting point for reading and imagining Alzire, that denies the possibility of any claim to a coherent reading or rendering of her as a subject of my work, are the very conditions that allow this imagining to resonate. She remains in her opacity while being the privileged subject of this reimagining where she emerges in the relation between the white noblewoman who authored the text in which she is referred to, her actual self, who was the black servant the Margravine (possibly) wrote about, as well as myself, as artist and theorist, encountering Alzire via the Margravine. I, in turn, imagine Alzire through the lens of a black woman living in a world where the meaning of being a black subject has gathered and developed through the flows of history that brought Alzire to Bayreuth. Between all of these relations, I offered my projection of Alzire in the palace in Bayreuth. This kind of entanglement articulates the move away from a western epistemic proposition that privileges the individual 'authenticity' of the self as 'I', intimated in Heidegger's Dasein, that Glissant works through in his 'poetics of relating'. In this way, I follow Glissant in his need to "assert a community, to write the 'we' into existence" (Dash, 1995:5).

In Glissant's work there is a commitment to "cultural and linguistic plurality" which, in its very conception, is a radical debunking of "old notions of cultural wholeness" (Dash, 1995:18-19). For him, the poetics of relating came from "[t]he interpretation of cultures, the interference of languages with each other, [and] the continuous movement of peoples" (Dash, 1995:18). His move away from a western epistemic mode of conceiving and enunciating subjectivity while simultaneously refusing to operate through an oppositional stance against hegemony, is important. Through focusing on the elided plurality, the haunting presence of what is subsumed, there can be a re-emergence of what was subsumed instead of a preoccupation with what causes the eliding. As such, between Alzire the fiction, the woman, the Margravine and myself, the work becomes, like for Glissant, an attempt to "dramatise a range of voices from the past and present, even to have his narrator marginalized by his polyphony of voices" (1995:5) where relation takes precedence over opposition.

In articulating this ambiguous character in these ambiguous terms, this approach to Alzire

undermines the kind of authority privileged through the "perspective of the literary patriarch," so that "the *maître* is consistently undercut by a looser, more imaginative approach which is well suited to [an] elusive subject" (Dash, 1995:22). Alzire, acting as this elusive, loosely defined subject, is an illustration of the importance placed on the *process* of becoming in writing, in imagining and enunciating as it has been elucidated in Glissant's work. To him, it is not the concrete outcome of an enquiry into the ideas of 'the creole' that is significant but the experiential and ongoing process of creolisation. The processes through which Alzire comes to 'be' in the work privileges the entanglements that the 'we' emerges from. This, according to Dash (1995:23), marks the 'epistemological break with essentialist thinking' that Glissant was striving to conceptualise.

In *Alzire of Bayreuth*, I offered an imagined history in which, during the time of the show, Alzire became the protagonist through which to enter an engagement with the History of the town. It was a moment of shifting around a pivot, from the narrative of the Margravine – a woman who left the written accounts of her life – to that of someone whose experience can only be imagined. Alzire is played by the same actor who has been embodying the other 'elided' characters evoked in previous and forthcoming iterations in this work of presencing the elided. However, unlike the other entirely imagined iterations of this character, in this incarnation, she is named and is an actual person who lived within the physical walls of the site of the show. Yet, despite being identifiable in historical texts with a name and a record of journeying from Surinam to Amsterdam before finally arriving in Bayreuth, she is, in many ways, still erased and elided. Who she was is overwritten in the archive as her name, Alzire, is not hers but the one ascribed to her by someone who named her for suffering. Yet, in this moment and under the title 'Alzire of Bayreuth', the perspective of the town is prefaced by Alzire's 'experiential' perspective offered imaginatively through the experiential articulation of a young black women inhabiting the space 300 years later. The vast difference in time, context and experience, bridged only by the experience of blackness in a space and History that work to elide it. This relational quality, where meanings interfere with one another and make murky the distinction between a person and a character in a tragic opera, is likewise extended to complicate the relations and distinctions between the various characters in the work I produce. I perform her in this show pertaining to Alzire as well as the many others she is a part of who appear in the subsequent spaces of the contiguous iterations of the work. Their representation through one body marks their relation across each other and to myself amongst them.



**Figure 22: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

Apart from a name, what particularly marks Alzire, the young woman, as more 'reachable' than the other characters evoked throughout the network of installations, is the record of her moments across the world. She is described as a servant but is noted to have been given to the Margravine as a present. This indicates that, for those she worked for, she was more property than person. In eighteenth century Europe, the distinction between slave and servant was not clearly defined. She had come from Surinam at a time when it was a Dutch colony in South America. The colony had a large population of Africans and African descendants. As such, it was possible that Alzire came from or was a descendant from people brought from Africa. The videos in the installation give prominence to the possibility of this trajectory from Africa to the opulent space of residence of the nobles she served in the town where she died and was buried. The projections that fill the walls of the ground floor hall move through images ranging from clusters of baobabs in the Sahel to a view of a sun setting to the west over the Atlantic Ocean. They move from dark damp interiors of slave dungeons, to the manicured garden of the Bavarian castle and ornate halls of the palace interior. All of these images are superimposed with Alzire walking over the landscapes. She is a ghostly figure moving through these spaces. At times, she is singular, at other times, she is multiple; a trail of ghosts following in one another's footsteps across these multiple spaces and geographies. These

multiple geographies have for me, a resonance with a conception of deep time, a time of multiple histories that overlap, contest but are ultimately intertwined as co-producers of what comes to shape spaces as place or site. As Alzire herself is haunted and is haunting her future, she carries with her the time of the post-colonial, the time of the colonial, an enactment of de-coloniality as old as the colonial itself, a much deeper and longer time since the pre-colonial that runs through them, and, enveloping them all, a geological time of the earth – the hills, savannahs and oceans that have been witness to all the comings and goings, shifts and upheavals – that have shaped the spaces, over time, into places. They are layered upon each other to become palimpsests on sites that have been the constant present.



**Figure 23: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

To imagine a history of place and people is to necessarily imagine these numerous times intersecting across shifting axes. Bayreuth is one such place that (like the shifts between the subjects creating a space through which to imagine Alzire) might become in its encounter with its other. With Bayreuth's narrative framed through Alzire, its history may be shifted. History is rendered unattainable as truth as Bakhtin proposes:

> Truth ... belongs to no one; it is realised, rather, in the realm of dialogue, where the linked utterance of the self and the other interpenetrate, yielding a truth which is fluid, ephemeral, and evanescent. Not only does it not reside with any *one*, but it is in itself contextual, depending

> upon its temporal and spatial configuration, on the interplay of the dialogic world of the self and other (emphasis in the original) (Danow, 1991:65).

It is in the shiftiness of the crossroads where space intersects with its many temporalities – both the pasts and projected futures – that I locate a productive arena to engage with ideas of mobility and fluidity in imagining the identity of a place. It comes into being through the peoples and cultures that mark it as it shifts in and out of settled form or truth. It is an unstable ground on which to locate and define identities, both at the level of the personal and amongst a collective people and their place in the world. The broader network of interventions that *Alzire of Bayreuth* is situated in is a gesture that makes a case for this instability of the shifting silt of deep time and history that make us. We are produced though displacements, migrations as they have taken place and continue their ebbs and flows despite the impulse to lock down local identities as discrete, contained or finite. By operating through such opaque gestures, the work renders the entanglements that produce us more palpable to the point that here, amidst the geographies of cultures that are home to proclaimed universal totalities, the transparency of those knowledges is displaced.

> Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the word in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing (Glissant, 1997:111).

As shown in Glissant's assertion, whether it is denied or embraced, the experience of being in the world gives evidence to 'formative' and ongoing entanglements and their moving, shifting, unstable relations. Reaching back temporally, imagining Alzire and privileging her narrative in relation to Bayreuth, narrativising the place of the palace through her perspective produces a reconfigured site, its history and her place in that history as well as in its present. Where I have treated people as being marked by the traces they accumulate through their movements across spaces, sites may be understood as marked by those traces the people who move across them carry. Alzire carries the traces of her migration across various geographies. Her transient migratory character has an effect on and is then echoed in the character of the site as it too develops its own transience through her. This irreducibility has been and continues to be produced through the movement of people, their cultures and the knowledges they carry with them.

While the traces of the places she has moved through are marked through the landscapes described

above, the different cultures she has been marked by are articulated through the changes in her varying garments that show the many social contexts she has lived through. At times, she is wearing her corseted dress, marking a space where European customs dominate, at others, she wears a white wrap around her waist with a cascade of white necklaces, armbands and bracelets, the traditional coming of age dress for young women in many traditions in Ghana. These versions of herself move into and through each other, sometimes following one another, sometimes crossing over one another, sometimes in a single direction and other times in opposite directions. This visualisation of her crossing over various versions of herself, across multiple places in this narrative, articulates their relatedness to one another in an entanglement of migratory identities.



**Figure 24: Still form video in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

Similar to the relations developed between the character(s) within the videos and across the videos within this particular installation, each installation is itself situated in the discursive framework of the broader project with its many iterations in the various locations in which the project has been staged. In her text, "*One place after Another*" (1997), Miwon Kwon interrogates the relationships between sites, artists and their work in contemporary art practices. She proposes that "site-orientated projects, operating with multiple definitions of the site, in the end find their 'locational' anchor in the discursive realm" (1997:93). The discursive relations that 'locate' this project, then, are produced both in the relation between the various iterations of the project as well as each ensuing iteration's relation to its particular site of staging, sites which are in themselves produced through their own entanglements. A place that is a marker of the histories that produced it, such as Bayreuth, in this instance, is like a word that is a marker of its object of signification. They do not exist in an "artificial preconditioned status ... [but have an] internal dialogism ... that penetrates the entire structure" of its meaning (Bakhtin translation 1981:279). Through each installation, the 'internal dialogism' of the site in which I present an installation becomes a part of the dialogue across the sites of the project. Across these sites, the interventions generate situated utterances

which are simultaneously open-ended in terms of both their 'beginning' (what engendered their production) and their 'end'. In each utterance, word, installation or video, the symbol of signification is alive with the complexities of entanglement of its own production in relation to its referent while the present context of enunciation produces new situational relations subject to the context of enunciation.

Their relational character is articulated through the visual and formal strategies employed in the production of each exhibition as well as being embodied in these ideological underpinnings of the project. In a similar gesture to Alzire's presence bringing her past experiences into the encounter with this site, the videos themselves articulate the different iterations of this project that have taken place elsewhere. Thus, in the present moment of the show, the many different times and spaces the work has moved through are now situated next to each other and become concurrent with one another. Despite the various exhibitions having happened temporally one after the other, elements from each previous space are brought through the trace of their utterance in the form of a video or image into the present to produce a side-by-side-ness rather than a one-after-the-other-ness. A simultaneity across different times is produced where different times sit adjacent to one another through the traces left on the haunted ghost and on the places encountered and brought into the present space. As each articulation is produced through previous articulations as well as those anticipated, the series of interventions participate in what Bakhtin describes as 'the dialogical opening up to heteroglossia' (1981). In heteroglossia, the time of the present is dense, heavy with the weight of its futures and pasts hanging alongside it. In his reading of Bakhtin, David Danow writes,

> the message is conceived and articulated in consequence of what has already been uttered by the speaker, and with regard to the possible future utterances, and in reaction to the previous utterances of an interlocutor, as well as in anticipation of that speaker's potential future responses not yet said ... in sum, in terms of its joint temporal and spatial features, time past and time future of both sender and receiver are in constant interaction within the articulated message of the present (1991:62-63).



**Figure 25: Video still in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

In amongst the videos on show in the hall of the palace, there is a sequence in which Alzire's footsteps are heard on the wooden floorboards of the upstairs rooms. They echo through the halls as the video cuts from room to room. Her reflection is seen in mirrors as she walks past them while her body is absent from the room itself. She has a loud and visceral presence as sound that is thrown off by her visual absence which is only caught in her last steps moving out of a room, a glimpse at the edge of a space. She walks through the rooms that she spent the last years of her life in and was put on semi display as a servant and presence displaying the fashionability of her masters who could have such exotic people in their service. Yet, despite this earlier will to put them on display, the presence of black people in 18th century Europe has become elided in popular memory. Her presence/absence in the video speaks to this forgotten presence that was once deliberately foregrounded. In relation to these politics of display, there is a tension in the video as she refuses the visibility of display while simultaneously making her presence known through sound and glimpses, a willing denial of visibility while her presence fills the space. The sound of her movement, prior to her visibility and despite her invisibility, produces a sense of expectation of her arrival which is not fully realised. It is a partial appearance, incomplete and fragmentary, marking as opaque the seeming transparency of the place. Her sonic arrival before her reflected arrival,

despite her physical 'un-arrival', alludes to Kwon's contestation of the notion that "a particular site/place exists with its identity-giving or identifying properties always and already prior to what new cultural forms might be introduced to it or emerge from it" (1997:108). As described above, Alzire has carried with her the places that she has moved from and through into her encounter with this place. As such, although she is now thinking and speaking from the physical location of Bavaria, in the encounter with her, there is an encounter with all her histories. Through her, Bavaria can now speak of Surinam and the Gold Coast and Salaga via Amsterdam. Temporally, the histories she brings with her are as old as or older than the palace itself although they are from elsewhere in space.

Glissant make a case for the necessity of understanding the situation of any utterance, what he calls – by way for Patrick Charaudeau – 'situational competence'. In his formulation, any understanding of language in itself needs to be appreciated in the 'situation within Relation' of a language (Glissant, 1997:116). If Alzire's presence becomes an utterance of difference through which the viewer is orientated when encountering the space, she shifts our situation in relation to it. In a similar manner to the encounter with the palace being offered through a new perspective, the framing of Bayreuth's narrative is also shifted when the perception of the town is mediated through her. In telling Bayreuth through Alzire as the primary consciousness framing the encounter, the cultural coordinates, through which a relation to Bayreuth is developed, are situated primarily in relation to her histories. The place is now primarily marked as foreign and alien while the place that is far away from where she is now, the place that she came from, is the familiar, the normative vis-a-vis the peculiarity she encounters here. This prior experience, however, is not a prior in time as much as it is an elsewhere in space because what happened before is carried with her to this encounter and becomes concurrent with it. It thus becomes a marker of difference across geographies rather than a sequential movement that leaves what was prior behind. Although there is a difference between this place and her normative – that other place she claims as her 'formative(s)' – they are simultaneously out there at the same time as she inhabits this place that was once foreign but is now shifted (through an encounter with her), revealing the relational quality of the place and herself with it. The developing opacity that results from these complexities of entanglement ultimately renders this 'foreign' place her own. Now that she is here, now that she has been brought here and has lived here, the encounter has made it hers and she is now a part of it. It is changed as it has changed her, not from an original state but from a particular constellation of identity markers in the constant shifting of meaning in Relation.

Her presence shifts the space and deepens its opacity as a result of her state of being anachronistic in space, or an anatopism. As in Bakhtin's dialogue, her prior was produced in the convergence of its own priors or, in the terminology of dialogue, the word's meaning emerges through a relation to its object as co-producers of meaning rather than conferring of meaning. Her pasts accumulate in her and those experiences (the movement across geographies) find their position in relation to the future and place which had awaited her. Bayreuth, then, was a place in anticipation of her arrival, open to the possibility given the flows and entanglements mentioned above. In relation to the elided narrative of the long history of black people in England, Stuart Hall stated "They are here because you were there. There is an umbilical connection. There is no understanding Englishness without understanding its imperial and colonial dimensions" (2008). As with this English articulation, Alzire's encounter with Europe is thus situated in the depths of the narratives she carries and their deep historical entanglement with the histories of the space that now anticipates her arrival in Europe. The encounter, though not inevitable, was heralded through the flows that have both the place she came from and the place she ended up in entangled long before her arrival and, with her arrival, entrenching the relation further. Kwon proposes:

> It seems inevitable that we should leave behind the nostalgic notions of a site as being essentially bound to the physical and empirical realities of a place. Such a conception, if not ideologically suspect, often seems out of synch with the prevailing description of contemporary life as a network of unanchored flows (1997:108).



**Figure 26: Still form video in Installation "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

Although Kwon retains a level of wariness towards the use of concepts, definitions, narratives and various theoretical tools that espouse complete untetheredness (as she is apprehensive that such theoretical openness could be a veil for a lack of precision and rigour), her observation captures the produced-ness in any instance of naming, describing and identifying. Glissant points to this rigour

necessitated when working through the messiness of untethered flows of relation and entanglements, stating that "[t]he opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced" (1997:191). To think through the opaque is to keep sight of the many confluences and contradictions inflecting any subject at hand, denying the possibility of reduction to singular totalities that lose sight of the partiality of any one way of knowing. This is because "Relation is an open totality evolving upon itself … [to] say this again, opaquely: the idea of totality alone is an obstacle to totality" (Glissant, 1997:192). The intervention in the palace, then, may be understood less as an incursion of difference into the History and narrative of a site that was already defined and is now being added onto. Rather, it is an inflection to the narrativising of the space offered from a perspective of difference that is as formative to the constitution of the site as the story of the Margravine. It is less an added on afterthought but rather an integral marker of the matrix of power relations and the flows of power, capital and influence through the migrations of people, forced or otherwise, that forged the site from its onset.

In one video Alzire is pictured throughout the video, always at the centre of the frame inhabiting the hallways and rooms in ways she would not have been allowed to in her life there. She takes her time moving leisurely through the halls of the palace observing the opulence around her. She sits in the centre of a reception room, she stands gazing out of the window of the ballroom, lost in her own thoughts without any particular rush or errand or task to perform. She is present now. She is not on display for anyone but the subject observing her world.

In a third video the grand ballroom is pictured with her standing looking out of the window. The bells, drumming, clapping and singing from a Candomble ceremony fill the room and she begins to dance. She swirls round and round across the length and breadth of the ballroom. The image is overlaid with duplicates of her dancing so that she starts taking up the whole space of the ballroom. The image of her dancing is repeated in opaque layers in larger and larger size frames until the space is a blur with her movements. Through all her movements she breaks up the space, blurring its edges. She does to the image of the ballroom what the remembering of her presence in Bayreuth does to the Bavarian town's narrative – rendering it opaque, messy and entangled. Her dance fades away and is replaced by the dance of a Candomble priestess in trance. The priestess continues the movements of Alzire, swirling round and round until the screen is filled with the blur of the movements of her dress.



**Figure 27: Installation view "Alzire of Bayreuth" (2015)**

Amongst the videos shown in the palace of Alzire is one of her amongst other women in a courtyard in Jamestown, Accra. The narrative unfolds in a stone circle in the centre of the compound where slaves were once sold. Alzire, or the ghostly woman who is part of Alzire, is pictured in multiples in the circle. She appears as different people simultaneously while, in this multiple state, there is a linking between her story and the passage of people like her through spaces like this one, where they were put on display for sale before leaving the continent. The multiplicity of the woman in the circle points to Alzire's connection to this place through her own ancestry. She is a ghost who is haunted carrying with her experiences of the ancestors who came before her. Like her, I carry the experiences of the ancestors who came before me and work through the fragments of embodied memories that I have access to through my experience of the world and those imaginings that are informed by this experience. I will return to this work in more detail in the forthcoming section focusing on the intervention presented in the courtyard where the work was shot in Jamestown.

The videos flood the two great walls on either side of the door leading to the gardens. The garden and everyday comings and goings of life in Bayreuth are visible through the door. The images evoke depths of time in Alzire's history which reach into the present Bayreuth and bring her

haunted story with them. A story that is not singularly hers alone but one related to and haunted by multiple stories of migrations across the Atlantic. Her images interact with the palace making her story a significant part of its history, and, through the opening of the door, with the surrounding contemporary context.

## INSTALLATION 4
## Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ – Brazil Road Jamestown Accra

> I, too, live in the time of slavery, by which I mean I am living in the future created by it.
>
> (Hartman, 2007:133).

> To begin might be difficult; to end, impossible. For no matter how strenuously we might forget what was begun, or wish to call an end to it, what-has-been is, cannot be undone, cannot cease to alter all the future-presents that flow out of it. Time does not pass or progress, it accumulates, even in the work of forgetting or ending, even in the immense labor it takes to surrender what-has-been, or to make reparation on it, or to address its ill effects.
>
> (Baucom, 2005:331)

In Jamestown, Accra, there is an old family compound distinguishable from its surroundings through the crumbling red clay bricks of its deteriorating walls. They have a weathered look about them as though, despite exhaustion, there is a determination to precariously hold themselves together in the form of this wary time worn structure. The building's haggard appearance betrays not only its age but also carries traces alluding to the histories that saturate it. The events it has witnessed over the years are manifest in the marks it carries. They seem to be those of a rough narrative. It was on the sea facing terrace of this compound that I presented an installation titled *Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ*.[24] One of the primary videos for the show was shot in the central courtyard of the compound. To see the show, visitors had to pass though this courtyard in order to reach the sea facing exhibition area pictured above. The compound is demarcated by a line of single story buildings that separate the courtyard from the street, a dilapidated formerly double story building on the opposite side facing the ocean and a large circular structure at the centre that is slightly elevated from ground level. They are all constructed out of red earthy coloured stones. The space is alive with the daily goings on of the extended family that lives and works here.

[24]Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ translates from Akan to English as "Rituals of the living". This was a continuation of an exhibition shown in Johannesburg with the same name in English.



**Figure 28: View of Atlantic ocean from Jamestown compound**

The central video of the installation, *My story no doubt is me*/*Older than me*, begins with a woman's voice speaking out of the darkness: "My story, no doubt, is me. But it is also, no doubt, older than me" taken from Trinh-T Minh-Ha's *Woman, Native, Other* (1989:123). The visuals then open with a wide shot of the compound in the late afternoon. In the stone circle at the centre of the family compound, a woman in a white summer dress appears looking straight at the camera. She disappears. The screen cuts to black for a moment and then the image of the compound returns. The woman follows, standing in the centre of the stone circle looking at the camera. This time she wears a white cloth around her waist. She has a cascade of heavy white jewellery hanging from her neck and bracelets on her upper arms, just above her elbows and on her wrists. Her upper body is covered in patterns made with white body paint. She is joined in the circle by the version of herself in the summer dress. They, in turn, are joined by more versions of her multiple selves, one in a white cotton corseted dress and another in a white dress in the style of early 18th century Western Europe. They are dotted around the stone circles and intermittently appear and disappear. The different versions of this woman also move around the circle, walking, standing in new positions, or moving into the position of one of her other selves as they meld into one another.



**Figure 29: Video still *My Story no doubt is me/Older than me* 5min56sec (2015)**

As she moves positions, each new point she occupies is linked to the last by a thin white line which builds to form a geometric pattern. The pattern traces where she has been while also forming links between her various selves. As each new link is made, a second line leading up to a central point above the courtyard is made. Together, the formation takes the shape of a triangle. The lines introduce a different visual sensibility to what has hitherto been a 'realist' environment albeit inhabited by ghosts. The universe in which the courtyard had been situated – a magical realism in which time was displaying its processes of accumulation with the ghosts of a long history presenting themselves in the present moment – is now overlaid by the geometric abstraction that graphically describes the trace of ghosts. It is through these lines, as markers, that the soft opacity of the ghosts is translated into this new descriptive form, that of a hard geometric language. The layering of these visual shorthands for two different modes of marking traces – the ethereal language of lingering spectres and the more mathematical geometric mark making of the hard line – introduces, through this visual allusion, a conceptual concern with difference in language. It signals the preoccupation with diverse languages as they are linked to a multitude of world views and epistemologies. These visual articulations of the trace display and articulate the project's broader

concerns. Her ghostliness, that persists in the present moment of the compound and that marks the deep time accumulated here, is described both though her opaque presence and the geometric lines that mark, trace and link the past locations of her appearances.

As the dance between the multiple variations of this woman takes place in the compound, the evening sky turns dark and is filled with stars. The stars are overlaid with words, numbers, images, written notes and animations. They constitute an abstracted celestial constellation laden with symbols. Images of different navigational tools are part of this intricate composite of signifiers. There are swirling compasses historically utilised by European travelers which are overlaid with the celestial map of ancient Mesopotamia. There are Dogon representations of the sky alongside Adinkra.[25] The Adinkra shown include the (Nkyinkyim), which refers to twisting paths and an ability to overcome difficulty and disruption, a sign denoting perseverance and ingenuity. There is the  (Sankofa), a symbol which refers to returning to and learning from a past in order to move forward. These images mark multiple concepts as they have been produced through multiple epistemologies and the diverse times and places they were and are situated in. Here they appear swirling, colliding and intersecting above this moment in a courtyard in Jamestown, Accra where the ghosts appear.

These references to ways of seeing, understanding and representing time and space are further overlaid with images of sheets of paper marked with numbers. They consist of different receipts: some are deeds of sale for buying a human being, others the contemporary cost to enter places where enslaved people were held, such as slave castles and rivers where people were washed before being sold. The receipts question the continued monetisation and dehumanisation from the erasure of peoples' humanity through slavery, to the ways in which the people's dehumanisation remains exploited.

In the context of the astrological, celestial, historic and contemporary imagery, an animation appears of a couple slow dancing. The line drawing of an intimate moment of affection between two people takes its place in its own fleeting moment, in the midst of the meta-representations of time, history and space. Their moment illustrates the closeness and non-hierarchical treatment and translation between interactions on a celestial universal scale and those on an intimate domestic scale. It demonstrates the way in which the 'meta' produces the contours in which the intimate details of people's lives takes place. These relations between the meta and the intimate, between the

[25]Adinkra is a writing system dating from pre-colonial times from the Ashanti region of present day Ghana.

various cosmologies of thought and imagining, the multiple times they are produced and through which they emerged all crash together into the time of the courtyard of a family in Jamestown.

Caught in her appearance between the present moment of the courtyard and the celestial dance that this appearance is framed by, she herself becomes at once an iteration of the ancient Adinkra concert of Sankofa and a time traveler slipping through and across multiple temporalities. Her presence here resonates with a conception of deep time, a time of multiple histories that overlap and contest but are ultimately intertwined as co-producers that have formed this place in this moment. The site that has been the constant present is now laden with the accumulations and transformations of knowledges learned in far-way places and in far-off times.

At the end of this second part of the three stage video, the scene leaves the courtyard. The multiple versions of the ghostly woman become one 'meta' self in a sky of abstracted markers of time as it is described through different cultural and epistemic frameworks. She stands nude in the midst of markers of the temporal and geographic 'nodes' or points in the ongoing flows of human knowing that compose the celestial night. Here she is unclothed and unmarked by clothing that marks cultural location as she moves beyond place in time and space. The video lingers here for a few moments before the scene disappears and the screen cuts to black. We then return to the courtyard in the late afternoon. A small child sits on the ledge of the stone circle then runs off to join others playing nearby. The compound continues with the daily happenings of life.

In this return to the quotidian normalcy of the courtyard, after having delved through multiple imaginings of deep times through various cosmologies, the work articulates this closeness of the traumas that were produced and linger here to the contemporary everyday. It displays a closeness and lingering presence of a past that saw the legitimisation of the sale of people as it once occurred in the circle. This intimacy is the central proposition of the video. It grapples with the way deep time/history has an intimate proximity to and everyday intimacy with the present that has come out of it.

The depth of this history is marked by the layering of multiple epochs in human history as detailed above. The video attempts to reckon with the 'daily getting on with life' in the wake of and within a social world produced by mass trafficking of human beings, a violence which is foundational and that permeates the structures of lives today. By situating the work at one of the epicentres of this foundational violence and affront to humanity, I consider the exceptionally unexceptional normalcy of racial violence and the exceptionally unexceptional ways in which the coping of those violated

bodies and persons goes unrecognised and is rendered unexceptional.



**Figure 30: Video stills My Story no doubt is me/Older than me 5min56sec (2015)**

The paradigm of thought – the colonial matrix of power that is particular to the Occident – that produced the non-being of the othered, is ordered around a number of foundational organisational principles, including that of time. The linearity of time towards progress, as it is mentioned above, is one such principle. The forward march of time is disregarded in the video as it represents the space of the courtyard. Following Ian Baucom's formulation in his book *Spectres of the Atlantic* (2005), time does not progress but accumulates. This closeness of the past, as it is shown, is a palpable presence in the video and becomes a way in which to mark an ontology that was produced to deny and, importantly, continues to deny the humanity of certain human beings as well as the fundamental idea of 'being' to racially mark people. Achille Mbembe articulates it thus:

> [It] is not simply *not to be like* (in the sense of being non-identical or being-other); it is also *not to be at all* (non-being). More, it is *being nothing* (nothingness). Flying in the face of likelihood or plausibility, these systems of reading the world attempt to exercise an authority of a particular type, assigning Africa to a special unreality such that the continent becomes the very figure of what is null, abolished, and, in its essence, in opposition to what is: the very expression of that nothing whose special feature is to be nothing at all (2001:4).

The humanity and being of black subjects is persistently rendered 'non' despite the actuality of their being. Regardless of their untruth (as is evident and perceivable in ontology beyond that of the Occident), the prevailing hegemonic perception remains one wherein "Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of 'human nature'" (Mbembe, 2001:1). This perceived

"elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa ... incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for humankind" illustrates the contemporary outcome of a long process of impoverishments (Mbembe, 2001:1). These perceptions of Africa have developed through processes of producing knowledge about a place and peoples in a non-dialogical manner. There is a loss of the irreducibility of opacity allowing for an accumulation of "off-the-cuff representations … [that] have persisted as notions that everyone uses but of origin quite unknown" (Mbembe, 2001:8). The perception of the 'elementary primitive' accumulates, as in Kant's well-known formulation on "groundless assertions, against which others equally specious can always be set" developing as a given a priori (Mbembe, 2001:8). The processes of filling meaning into and through this idea of lack produces, in the western ontology that generated it, an ongoing reproduction of void, non-human simulacra in the image of black bodies. Within the framing of this ontology, the claim that such non-beings are 'lacking' rings true even in the face of its untruth. Mbembe expresses frustration at this,

> It is not that, in absolute terms, it is impossible to imagine rigorously conceiving the negative or founding a specific body of knowledge that would be the knowledge of non-being, of nothingness (*the ecceity of non-being*) – but because it is not true, as either starting point or conclusion, that Africa is an incomparable monster, a silent shadow and mute place of darkness, amounting to no more than a lacuna (2001:9).

The fact of this 'unreality' exerting such influence over the perceptions of a continent, its people and those of its diaspora, is a contemptuous fallacy which Mbembe seems to find onerous to indulge. Mbembe continues: "More than any other region, Africa thus stands out as the supreme receptacle of the west's obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of 'absence,' 'lack,' and 'non- being,' of identity and difference, of negativeness – in short, of nothingness" (2001:4). Despite the a priori formulations not being true, they hold true in the discursive (yet non-dialogical) mechanisms of occidental knowledge that produce them as truth, from which point they acquire material reality. As such, despite their non-truth, these idea-forms that shape conceptions of Africa remain, shaping African-ness as this spectacle of lack when engaged with from an occidental perspective. As such, reality does not "come down to a simple opposition between truth and error" (Mbembe, 2001:4). The 'truth' therefore, reverts back to the idea that forms of an a priori conception that proliferates and dominates thought pertaining to the continent despite a lack of correspondence to the beings it references, obscures and distorts. The video alludes to the foundational violence of erasure/denial that progressive linear time enacts in the gesture of 'leaving

behind' its other. The twisting back and compounding of time simultaneously functions to deteriorate the 'structural integrity' of that ontological frame while making it visible in its particularity.

The video is a visual representation of the historical trauma as it is manifest in this particular space. It simultaneously works to deteriorate the veneer of an anterograde amnesia wherein the present moment obscures how we 'got here' – to a place where lack is the common sense a priori of what African-ness entails. What has accumulated here are both truth and untruths signalling competing schemata of thought. The idea of 'lack' remains a truth in so far as reality is produced by the ontology which is constituted by this denial and thus its a priori's of logical deduction will inevitably return to the understanding of Africa in term of negation. The epistemological determines the ontological in as much as any grasp of what is, however omnipresent, can only come to be conceived of through the ways we construct our knowing.

Relation across schemata of thought could provide a route to the trans-ontological that Nelson Maldonado-Torres outlined. However, these trans-ontological relations are necessarily inflected by the relations of power in a world shaped by coloniality. This coloniality reproduces the pattern of the powerful eliding the opacity of its other, rendering beings and their epistemologies, who have their own sense of self beyond the hegemonic, as non-being within it. The phenomenological experience of these othered non-beings is then determined by the conditions they live under in the prevailing hegemony. As such, the experience of living as the damné is a phenomenological reality despite this 'reality' only being 'truth' from the perspective of the Manichean misanthropic skepticism of western imperial gaze. Any grasp of the ontological is epistemologically grounded and specific yet, despite the reality of their being when perceived through their own epistemological paradigm, the damné live under the hegemony that denies them. The trans-ontological encounter presents an opportunity to relate across ontological differences yet is still fraught with these tensions of power. The video articulates the possibility of this trans-ontological dialogue through the palimpsest visualisation of the various articulations of the night sky from multiple epistemological standpoints. Moving out of 'reality', as it is rendered so, through any one ontology necessitates the suspension of that familiar reality so as to navigate this unreality in which the ghosts might offer guidance.

It is this shift that Lewis. R. Gordon is concerned with when he draws from W.E.B. Du Bois' ideas pertaining to double consciousness (2006). He makes a case for the plural realities inhabited by the

consciousness of the subjugated. It is an awareness of and being able to live through multiple orders of being simultaneously, having access to the hegemonic as well as ways of being beyond the hegemonic ontology. Following on from this double consciousness, one can consider a triple consciousness that not only takes into account the hegemonic white perspective that is augmented by a second dimension of reality grounded in the experiential reality of being black in a world made for the comfortable accommodation of whiteness but also accounts for eliding of gendered difference as well. This necessarily leads to the complexities of multiple consciousnesses. It is this compounding of subjection that intersectional feminist scholars of colour have been engaged in articulating and practicing. For the moment, I will remain focused on the precarious existence of black subjects at the margins of the hegemony that denies it before returning to this broader nexus of produced subjugations amongst which blackness is only one dimension. What the expanded reality evidenced by multiple consciousness illustrates is that, while it is undoubtedly detrimental to those whom it subjugates, the erasure and denial simultaneously means

> that the white world lives, for the most part, according to the laws of a shrunken reality. Although this asymmetry has power on the side of whites, it is also a rupture of the relationship of knowledge and power ... at least social knowledge and what could be called 'facts' of the social world are not constrained by the mechanisms of power but are always in a struggle with it. The liberation of colonized groups, then, also includes the liberation of knowledge (Gordon, 2014:102).

Again, the problem persistently remains that the occidental, which takes whiteness as universal norm, remains hegemonic and resists its own particularity. It is a situation wherein "a certain rationality, claiming to be universal but in reality mired in the contingent and the particular, has never understood … all human societies participate in a *complex* order" (Mbembe, 2001:8). It is here, between denial and actual presence that the potential enacted by our ghost comes to bear on the bounds of knowing. In his critique of the ways in which black subjectivity has been denied through, amongst other processes, the methodologies of western sciences, Tendayi Sithole (2014) notes how these methodologies assume, a priori, the object-hood of this subject. He calls for 'Decolonial meditations' in "researching the African subject ... from within, and of course, as a subject and not an object to be ethnographically extracted and hypothetically tested" (2014:39). It is from this shift in the place of thought that the ill-fated disregarded truth of the being of black people, that the formulation of the ghostly – the haunting presence – the ancestor, might manifest against and through that very negation of which it is a consequence. It is the existence in the spaces that are unknowable to the hegemonic that produces the awareness and capacity to go beyond the

methodological shortcomings that come from this 'shrunken reality' (L.Gordon, 2014:102). It is an opening up of critical and imaginative thought that "the added dimension of double consciousness, especially as articulated by potentiated double consciousness, [through] the significance of representations of the self as governed by competing worlds of consciousness" can offer (L.Gordon, 2014:101). The ghost's productive energy, to upend the very cosmology that insists on the non-being of its other, might be found in its access to knowledges in the othered worlds that are imperceivable through western hegemony.

Sithole echoes Maldonado-Torres's damné in his insistence on speaking from the space of Non-being that is the black experience. From the vantage point of occidental perception, the actuality of this being is an ungraspable spectre beyond the bounds of perceivable reality. But, because the actuality of its being is, in fact, actual, this negation is no longer when the othered is viewed, experienced and encountered from elsewhere than an occidental perspective. It is precisely the particularity of the occidental that is relevant. There are a multitude ways of knowing, ontologies and epistemologies that do not negate blackness from the onset. It is the resources of these othered ways of knowing that have to be made apparent and that the ghost points to. It is again the 'disobedience' of the ghost, ghostly from the outset because of its very dispossession, that the damné's potential to upend hegemony's universality by making visible its limitations.

In the video *My story no doubt is me*/*Older than me* (2015), the provinciality of the ontology shaping occidental thought is displayed in the act of highlighting its particularity. The video displays time through a schema of perception from beyond the bounds of the self-appointed universal; its given logic of linearity, an a priori that is matter of course when within its parameters. The ghosts are a visual illustration and reminder of the pasts this present state has emerged from and that it carries with it still. The ghosts mark the times when hierarchical idea-forms pertaining to race were being formulated in the ontology of the west. Their lingering persistence shows an accumulation wherein all occurrences, "[e]very gesture, every word involves our past present and future. The body never stops accumulating" (Minh-Ha, 1989:122-123). By her very presence, she is a denial of that erasure that renders impoverishment the 'natural state' of black subjects, and thus simultaneously undoes the primacy of the violent ontology she comes into as a disruption.

Her presence, as transgression, marks a contention to speak oneself "for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks, and you will be said" (Minh-Ha, 1989:80). The emergence of the ghost is a challenge to what has been spoken. As she collapses linear time around herself in this moment of

showing herself to be present, the ghostly woman/women produce a broader showing of the social, historical and ontological construction of this place and, in so doing, makes uncanny the everyday.

> What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention (Gordon, 2008:xvi).

In relation to these images, the ghosts' presence also calls into question commerce, the generation of wealth and capital as integral dimensions to the foundational violence that the video addresses. In the register of the economic, Jamestown, being a space of limited means, recalls the financial dimension of the present pasts of the video's interrogations. The accumulations that have produced the present in terms of the ontologically temporal, where the socio-cultural present is brimming with the histories that shape it, has ideological contours shaped in the financial realm as well.

As most other places, Accra has people living in a multitude of economic situations, but material wealth is something that has been depleted from this place that was once sought out for its gold and was named 'The Gold Coast' by the western travelers who arrived here. With an appreciation of the many nuances and complexities through which processes of depletion have taken place, it can be acknowledged that Ghana, like the rest of the African continent has been materially impoverished in the global flows of capital and wealth that have enriched the west. Ian Baucom traces the lineage quite directly in his understanding of the slave trade as formative to what he terms 'now being' in that "the slave trade refuses to detach itself from slavery itself, nor the slave ship from the plantation, nor the plantation from the ghetto and the shantytown" (2005:313). Our contemporary emerges out of not only the ethical ruptures illustrated in Maldonado-Torres's formulations but also the contingent capital concerns that engendered the ethics of war that permitted the dispossession and disposability of people, their sovereignty, lands, wealth and their very being.

Baucom offers a lucid reading of the philosophical contours shaping the ideological underpinnings of our current financial order, from its formulation over the Atlantic to the form it exists in the now

through an interrogation of the massacre on the slave ship Zong. He reads the episode from the ship, in which 136 people were murdered in order for the ship's captain to claim compensation from insurers, as "a sign in which modernity finds itself anticipated, demonstrated and recollected" (2005:159). It was a moment in which "a fundamental and paradigmatic event in the historical formation of our own present and its dominant cultural logic" was formed, wherein this impoverishment, both material and in as many ways a person can be stripped bare of worth, could take hold. This courtyard is located in that net of relations of accumulated time and financial flows at a confluence such that the people who live here struggle to get by. The events that formed the paradigmatic precedents to our present, in the time when the very being of people was deemed void so as to facilitate the conception of them as "'empty bearers' of an abstract, theoretical, but entirely real quantum of value, [so as to] treat them as little more than promissory notes, bills-of-exchange", is not only marked in the present of the video in the ghostly apparitions and the bills of sale in the sky but also in the materiality of the everyday environment where the ghost is presenced (Baucom, 2005:139).

The contemporary space displays its place in this intricate and complex web of socio-economic structures that have grown out of long and ongoing interactions that have produced and are manifest in the inequity that has become the constant present. These are the material impoverishments that have functioned alongside the deterioration of cultures and the devaluing of the knowledges that come from and were shaped by the socio-cultural realities of the continent interrupted by coloniality. They have collectively come to produce our current state, wherein lack – lack of History, lack of knowledge, lack of being – is the preceding conception of Africa in western ontology. If, taking from Kant's propositions, the rational mind has no access to the object of consideration in and of itself beyond the confines of those things that shape that mind's capacity to perceive, whatever the object might be beyond this capacity to perceive it and those frameworks of thought that shape processes of perception cannot be known. The various subjugations, impoverishments and erasures of value associated with the African continent that come to be taken as a natural state of [non]being, accrue to a degree that they become the 'a priori' knowledge of the continent.

> [A]s to how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely a priori, with which concepts the things must necessarily agree, and as to how my understanding may formulate real principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles experience must be in exact agreement and which nevertheless are independent of experience –

> this question, of how the faculty of understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves, is still left in a state of obscurity (Kant, 1967:72).

Even with the recognition of this fundamental problem of a priori concepts that spurred on his principal works, Kant was still able to proclaim that, though Africans were "not capable of any further civilization [*Civilisirung*]", they still "seem perhaps to rank above the Americans inasmuch as 'they have instinct and discipline, which the Americans lack'" (as cited in Mikkelsen, 2013:8). Furthermore, he states "Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus [they] are only good as slaves" with a seeming assurance of his knowings of these far off foreign peoples despite never having traveled beyond his own region of the world (as cited in Mikkelsen, 2013:8). The idea-form had crystallised and, as it is a shaping principle unto itself within the logic of European perception, the corresponding object of that idea-form must correlate. With his celebrated position of significance to the occidental canon and the enlightenment project and, perhaps, despite "the liberal internationalism of [his] cosmopolitanism" he was still able to proclaim "Americans are incapable of all cultivation [*Cultur*]" and stand even "far below the Negro … who after all occupies the lowest of the remaining grades we have called racial difference" (as cited in Mikkelsen, 2013:8). Kant, who cautioned against a priori's mired 'in a state of obscurity' and a foundational thinker who laid out the groundwork for modern philosophical though of the west, managed to contradict his thesis and his egalitarian ideals when confronted with blackness (Kant, 1967:72). His concerns that 'groundless assertions' open up space for more 'equally specious' do not merit the same rigour when it comes to blackness because this particular inferiority is, to him in fact, a given a priori (Mbembe, 2001:8).

Within the parameters of Kantian studies, the debate continues on as to whether this seeming aporia is indeed just that or whether such a 'personal' position on race should be held to bear on the sanctity of the thesis of his major works. Nevertheless, that these debates are underway is a step towards taking contradictions and internal tensions inherent to occidental thought seriously when the shadowy parts of its enlightenment are disturbed by the ghosts produced by its violences.

> Black existence brings to the fore a central tension in modern thought. While a celebration of the value of freedom, much (albeit granted not all) of modern thought has also been a rationalization of enslavement and the ignoring of ideas about enslavement and freedom from black people, which raises the question of the extent to which philosophical thought is committed to truth and reality (Gordon, 2014:96).

Blackness precipitates a crisis in this ontology that does not recognise the humanity of black subjects. Because it is an ontology that has built itself up around the grotesque misnomer of assigning human beings to a space of non-being, "when you try to stand up and look the world in the face like you had a right to be here … you have attacked the entire power structure of the Western world" (Baldwin, 1965). The being and knowledge of these 'non-beings' announces the presence of "a practice of interest fundamentally at odds with the disinterested practices central to the emergence of occidental modernity, its universal philosophy of history, its theory of justice, its practices of empire, and its dreams of a universal and homogeneous state of history" (Baucom, 2005:300). The 'truths' and 'realities' of the occidental being find themselves in crisis, thrown out of their operational logic by their object when it does not correlate to what is projected onto it a priori. When what must *necessarily* be true turns out to not be, the naturalisation this knowledge has achieved, by obliterating difference and spreading itself as universal and thereby erasing the processes through which its universality was produced, is undone.

It is through this undoing that the ghost's presence produces that we might find ways to expand the more liveable realities that have subsisted alongside the hegemonic. As a result of the ghost's presence, which produces a compounding of multiple times, site (both in terms of a place and the body) can no longer be described, hinged on or taken for granted as functioning through an a priori conception. It returns the irreducibility of opacity to bodies that had been denied their complexities. In this space, beyond the deflected universality, more worlds start coming into view. Histories are no longer contained in the past and linear time warps around her as she appears in the flows and relations between many times. It is here, in these intersections, that realities take up and lose form, shape shifting as the woman in the circle morphs into and through her various selves.

The relation of the ghostly woman across each of her different selves in this video is analogous to the trace that has developed across the spaces where the project has been presented. These presentations accumulated traces as the project has travelled. There is a repetition of images, videos and the audio elements from earlier iterations in subsequent presentations, repetitions which become their own ghostly hauntings.



**Figure 31: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec**

A second video titled *Whitewash* (2013), which was shot in Bahia Brazil, was presented in the installation alongside *My Story no doubt is me*/*Older than me* (2015). It consists of images from different interiors of a museum in what was the first European fort built in Brazil. The video opens inside an old stone watchtower from which the expanse of the ocean is visible through a slit in the stone wall. This is followed by an image of the watchtower from the outside. On both sides of the watchtower are the whitewashed walls of the fortress. They gleam white against the blue of the ocean and the sky. The camera moves along the pristine white wall. The images are accompanied by a voiceover in Portuguese reflecting on the word 'Saudades'. In a woman's voice, the audience is told that the word does not have an English translation but it approximates something like nostalgia while being temporally ambiguous. She describes how the saudades longing can be for something in the future as well as the past. She narrates:

> "Saudades
>
> That Portuguese word with no English translation
>
> Something similar to nostalgia
>
> A longing, but not quite
>
> It's a lot sweeter than nostalgia, less melancholic
>
> Also, it lives somewhere between the past and the future
>
> a remembrance, and a looking forward to"[26]

[26] Kitso Lelliott (2013)

There is a move to the interior of the old fortress and the camera moves across rooms which have groupings of objects on display – old tools for navigating the oceans, models of lighthouse lights, maquettes of ships, all of which are presented in glass display boxes. As the camera glides across the room exploring the space, it slows to linger on a glass display box containing neatly numbered tools. There is a hook, shackles, a metal brace for enclosing the neck; all objects used to subdue and control the bodies of black captives shipped over the Atlantic to the shores of the Americas. These sit next to jugs and clay pots, all objects of everyday routine use. Inadvertently, the normalcy this grotesque violence was granted is put on display and, through that normalising of this violent dehumanisation, the disquieting dimensions of banal violence are also put on display. The voiceover continues:

> "A word that came about when men from Europe went about exploring and conquering
>
> things
>
> Finding new spaces and places
>
> Saudades was what the wives and families were left with
>
> a present constant longing
>
> For something that is loved, but has gone away
>
> But yet,
>
> It could return in some possible future.
>
> One does not know if they are dead or alive
>
> If they are living in some distant, unknown place in the world
>
> across the waters
>
> And while it carries that fatalistic tone, that they might never return
>
> There is still that slight chance
>
> That small but present possibility
>
> that they may"[27]

[27] From *Whitewash* (2013)



**Figure 32: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec**

The voiceover narrating the etymology of saudades returns as the camera looks over the objects used to shackle the human beings forcibly taken from their homes and shipped across the Atlantic. Heard alongside these images, the words now highlight the way in which the poetry and longing called forth through the word saudades was reserved for the men in this narrative setting, those sailors traveling by consent who were afforded subjectivity. As captured in the word, those above deck were recognised as bearers of pasts, futures and the complexities of their emotional worlds while the longings, fears, desires and hopes of the rest of those on board were not afforded the luxury of such recognition. However, the voiceover pulls this discord to the centre of this narrative by ascribing the poetry of the word to the people denied humanity, to those who were shackled and, via the images of the tools used in restraining their bodies, to the experience of loss of the captives. The image cuts to a maquette of a cross-section of a ship. Above deck, these white men are working the sails, clothed and distinctive in their appearance while below deck there are naked black bodies, hundreds huddled together in chains, nondescript bodies that are indistinguishable from one to another. In this maquette, there is a reiteration of this denial of subjectivity to the black people below deck that the white men above are afforded. There is a poster on the wall with a few brief anecdotes about slavery along with images of a slave woman wearing a white cotton corseted dress. The dress is voluminous from the waist down, echoing the dress worn by the ghostly interlocutor in her future, our contemporary.



**Figure 33: Video Still *Whitewash* (2013) 5min47sec**

The video takes on a slightly mottled quality where the clarity and sharpness is somewhat lost. In this deteriorated image of the museum, a woman walks into the frame. The space is now a projection on her solid corporeal present body with the light producing the images being distorted around her as she moves across the space. Her presence undermines the 'reality' or realism of the space and the narratives it imparts. The objects, the maquettes, the narrative of conquest and discovery embedded in the thick stone walls warp and bend around the movements of this ghostly woman. In this moment, she is more physical than her environment, she is the reality against the bending, warping image of a museum and the narratives it espouses. She moves out of the room inside the museum to the watchtower where we began. There she looks through the slit in the watchtower wall out over the Atlantic, longing for a home she lost, her saudades taking centre stage. Her presence and subjective longing displaces the space, distorting this reality and its narratives that would elide her.

On another screen, blowing in the wind of the sea-facing courtyard in Jamestown is a third video featuring the ghostly slave woman. The video appeared previously in the installation in the Cape Coast Castle. She sits documenting examples of the goods that she and millions like her were dehumanised and had their lives stolen in order to produce. She takes stock of each of the items: cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, rice. As she does so, a sentence describing her connection to other damnés appears in text over the scene on the screen. The words describe how stories flow in and out of each other, how we produce each other and how everyone's story is a continuation of another person's story that came before them. "In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is

me, neither me nor mine", Minh-Ha wrote of the stories and experiences passed down, where "my story carries with it their stories, their history and their history repeats itself endlessly" (1989:122). The culmination and convergence of the circumstances (those materially technological, ideological and economic) that produce a 'reality' where a woman becomes this fungible vessel, valuable only in terms of the abstract 'quantum of value' exchangeable with the objects in front of her that cannot be undone (Baucom, 2005:139). It is a formative scene that has come to pass and left its mark. It is a past that can not be undone and lingers in the places these violences occurred, so that "if you go there – you who was never there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there, waiting for you … even though it's all over – over and done with – it's going to always be there waiting for you" (Morrison, 1987:69).



**Figure 34: Video Still *Whitewash* 2013 5min47sec**

Through the video, her story is remembered through mine as my body – that looks like hers in a world that voided her being – is also marked by the erasures that denied her being. My body, my skin carries those histories that are not mine, our stories that started long before me. I, the hunted, become the vessel for their memories that linger on my skin, and thus I perform her in her many incarnations, telling the story through my truths; she becomes witness to her own denial in the moment of fungible exchangeability.

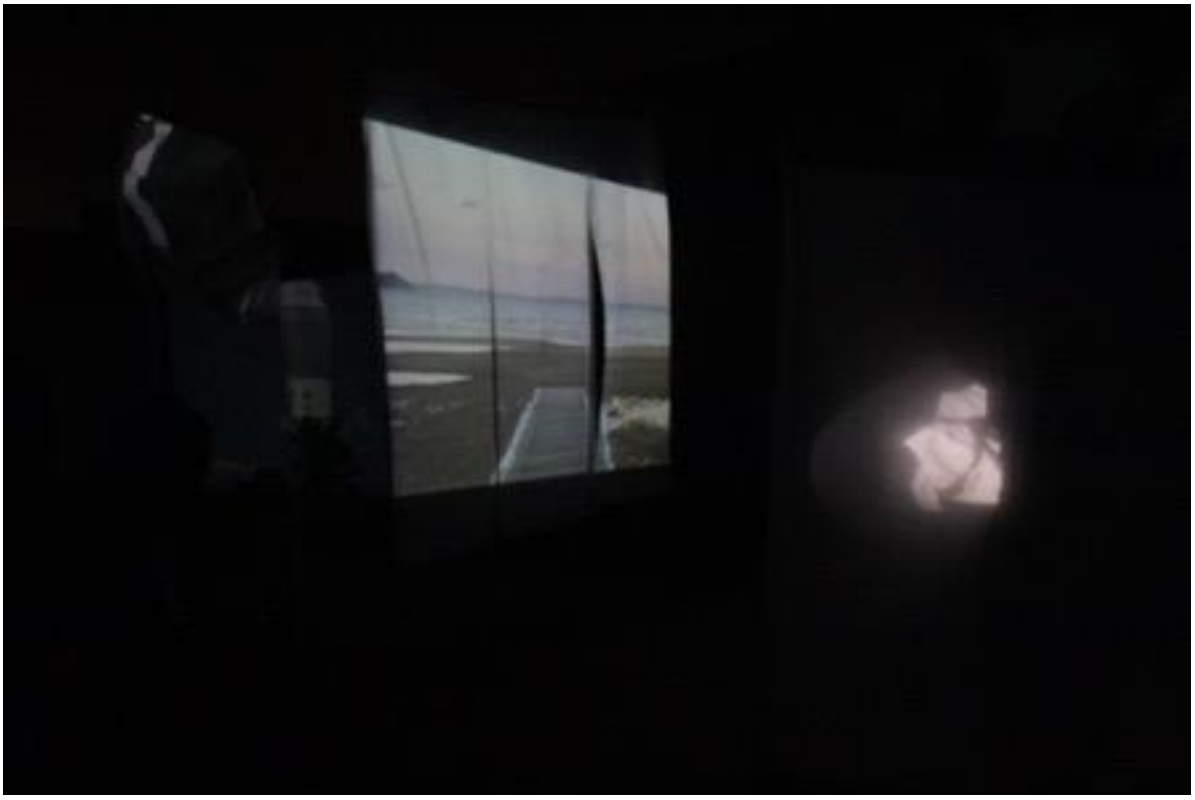


**Figure 35: Installation view, Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ (2015)**

The stories that produced her as void are passed down in our bodies, on our skin and in the world so that the shape we take is in the contoured by occidental idea-forms. However, this telling and retelling, although marked by the violence, is not defined by it. It is in these ongoing re-tellings that our form might exceed and eclipse those idea-forms. "The story is older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift and circulate. So that it may become larger than its proper measure, always larger than its own in-significance" (Minh-a, 1989:136). In the retelling, the story changes, shifts, is added to. The viewer, as a being encountering the image as she is making it in the video piece (her/my re-telling), is now in the position she would be when producing the image so that the ghost becomes the viewer's reflection. The viewer then, is as erasable as she is, which is to say, not at all. In telling the story again, the moment in which she was treated as fungible cannot be undone, but the story can be re-told 'truthfully'. By articulating from the other side of the Manichaean division, between being and non-being, her account of this moment opens up the bounds of hegemonic reality, "illuminating [its] systemic contradictions" (L.Gordon, 2014:101). In such articulations, where the subjugated claim their othered, ignored, elided realities as resource, they produce fissures in the structural integrity of

the hegemony as "[e]ach contradiction unveils a false universal, which is an expansion into a more universalizing understanding of the world around one. In effect, the particular becomes expansive as the particularization of the previously avowed universal takes place" (L.Gordon, 2014:101).

In her text on storytelling, narratives and truth, Minh-Ha asks "What is true and what is not, and who decides so if we wish not to have this decision made for us?" (1989:134). Our ghost makes a case for the tensions between truth and falsity by bearing witness to experience through facts of History (she was exchangeable) and (her) stories when accounting for those experiences. What is disqualified as mere story or conjecture outside the realm of fact, History as accountable in the archive, is often where the truths of those silenced and marginalised might be found. The telling and re-telling of stories opens up more worlds perceived through the multiple consciousness of othered realities which are accessible to those who live them, offering othered truths.

> Following ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, towards a counter memory, for the future (Gordon, 1997:22).



**Figure 36: Installation view, Transatlantic Saudades: Ateasefoɔ Amamrɛ (2015)**

On the fourth and final screen was another video taken from previous installations, *Transatlantic Saudades* (2015). It showed the woman looking out over The Bay of All Saints. She appears and

disappears on the pier as night falls as she recites a poem about a longing for a place across the water. The videos in the installation were accompanied by the sounds of the ocean crashing onto the beach a few metres below as well as a woman's voice speaking from small mp3 players around the courtyards. She repeats short stanzas:

Money multiplied if fed human blood[28]

Weather. Just weather.[29]

My story, no doubt, is me, but also, no doubt, older than me[30]

By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there.[31]

Looking at the Atlantic I thought of the girl.[32]

The rest is weather.[33]

It is said that, if you look at the water long enough, scenes from the past come back to life.[34]

Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for,

but wind in the eaves ...[35]

It is said that "the sea is history" and that "the sea has nothing to give

but a well excavated grave".[36]

[28] Hartman (2007)
[29] Morrison (2005)
[30] Minh-Ha (1989)
[31] Morrison (2005)
[32] Hartman (2007)
[33] Morrison (2005)
[34] Hartman (2007)
[35] Morrison (2005)

The words are gathered from multiple sources, brought together here to form a constellation of ideas which refract off one another. From Hartman to Morrison, to Min-Ha, and myself amongst them, lending my voice to their words. “The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being” (Minh-Ha, 1989:119).

[36] Hartman (2007)

**INSTALLATION 5**

## Rituals of the living – Constitution Hill, Johannesburg

> I look for her shape and his hand; this is a massive project, very fragile.
>
> (Gordon, 2008:6)

> The politics of witnessing and melancholy ... a way of pointing to and giving birth to new transversal and multifarious and hybrid forms of identity and solidarity, no more based on exception or exclusion, but on sharing and exchange and thus capable of transforming, through a 'prophetic vision of the past', the tragic loss of the middle-passage in the gain and promise of a present-future of global 'creolization'.
>
> (Corio, 2014)

> This is not a return to identity politics ... [but] a performance of the marginalized body's own presence, until that presence takes root ... this can be sensed – between the cracks of its grand curatorial gestures.
>
> (Yawitz, 2017)

Not so much method but meditation: In his text, *Researching the African Subjects in African Politics* (2016), Tendayi Sithole offers an argument for the privileging of meditation over method. His critique of method is in line with other post and de-colonial thinkers,[37] who find methodologies coming from the canonical western disciplines to be too saturated with the interests of imperial subjection to really produce the de-linking from coloniality which is sought in decolonial gestures. This is succinctly captured in Lewis Gordon's reading of Fanon wherein he states "if colonial practices occur also at epistemological levels, then even methodological assumptions could be contaminated. Epistemological colonization is also methodological" (2016:100). Sithole contends that "[t]he canon of methodology as we know hides its locus of enunciation by claiming to be objective, totalising and universal" (2016:220). The methodologies that are characteristic of western models of knowledge production operated as a part of the violencing epistemology. In the undertaking of articulating that which is diminished under imperialist epistemology, it is important

[37] L. Smith, A. Gordon, W. Mignolo, B. Santos and L. Gordon

not to work through the paradigm of knowing that produces erasure through an unwillingness to listen to or learn from their other.

To meditate on, towards sensing past the presented archive, to listen, intently, through the silences – this is the endeavour we have been undertaking. Thinking through the omissions, what might be learned from both the fact of the absences as well as the effects of such absences on 'real materiality' – that which is acknowledged or understood as being present – is a way of being in the opaque. What opacity points to in terms of the missing, the unspeakable, makes a case for an apprehension of limits of knowing and allowing space for all those things, those omissions in perception and articulation. It is to conceive through the thick mist where the subject of the gaze might be encountered. What is perceived is partial, fragmentary, obscured and always augmented by the thick environmental haze between us; the heteroglossia of voices that an encounter is situated within.

Opacity addresses the problem of totality because it refuses transparency and the ability to know and define. Through opacity, the limits of perception and what can be known are accounted for. In the opaque, there is an opening up to broader possibilities in the world when the subject of engagement is understood as being un-graspable in its entirety. An assumed authoritative comprehension of a given subject negates those dimensions of that subject that are not perceivable or cannot be elucidated through the understanding of a particular epistemology when that schema of thought and knowledge is believed to be a totality in its transparency. Glissant argues:

> Against this reductive transparency, a force of opacity is at work. No longer the transparency that enveloped and reactivated the mystery of filiation but another, considerate of all the threatened and delicious things joining one another (without conjoining, that is, without merging) in the expanse of Relation. Thus, that which protects diversity we call opacity (1997:62).

What cannot be grasped from where one is epistemologically located does not negate the presence or participation of what is unknown. Thinking through opacity leaves room for that which one might not perceive or have access to. I return to Avery Gordon's description of the problem of lacking vocabularies that can capture what is beyond one's epistemological grasp. She describes the difficulty of finding her shape through his hand,[38] "finding the shape described by her absence

[38] In the work of "finding her shape described by her absence", Avery Gordon (2008:6) refers to the challenge faced by Patricia Williams (1991:19) who sought her great-great-grandmother who was a slave through the writings of her great-

captures perfectly the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" (Gordon, 2008:6). The inability of his hand to describe her reduces her to absence, yet she is sensed in the haunting moment and, as a spectre, she becomes a marker of the potential thresholds leading to the other worlds that exist beyond his. Despite being rendered 'absent', the absences are teeming sites of urgency, a polemic against that which renders them invisible. Gordon describes how, in her sociological work, she kept returning to the ghost, or rather, kept being interrupted by ghosts and their haunting as they "highlighted the limitations of many of our prevalent modes of inquiry". She had been continuously encountering a failing in terms of being able to capture and find ways to "communicate the depth, density, and intricacies of the dialectic of subjection and subjectivity" (2008:8). Her observation is echoed earlier in the work of Glissant (1997).

In his work pertaining to Relation, Glissant recognises "the irreducible difference of the other" (Britton, 1999:11). However, the possibilities that this concept captures have been tainted with the pervasive contours of power shaped by coloniality which are now a part of Relation. This is evident as we live in a 'now time' whose brutal histories were not "terminal but originary … [they were] a middle-passage into an experience of global modernity" (Corio, 2014). Over the past centuries, entanglements have occurred and taken shape or expression in the context of, and are unavoidably inscribed with, the power imbalances of the colonial matrix. Yet, despite this, as per its very operational logic, there still remains room for what would be discounted. Those spaces that would not "'count' for conquering science" remain present as they are still a part of *chaos-monde*, the chaos of the word wherein the overlooked, though marginalised, are not reduced to a "passive participation [as] Passivity plays no part in Relation" (Glissant, 1997:137). Glissant articulates relations spatially in his discussions of landscapes, orientating the epistemological around the geographic and highlighting the implications of place in knowing the thinking from where one is. In my explorations towards ontological presencing of the elided, this place of thought and articulation – the where one is – is located within the 'absence' and is articulated as the ghostly haunting in Relation. The contributions of such 'absence' still have an effect on the world because, even in the far flung places, among those whose articulations are seldom heard, "[e]very time an individual or a community attempts to define its place in … [Relation], even if this place is disputed, it helps blow the usual ways of thinking off course" (Glissant, 1997:137). There is no inert object of knowledge and, despite the projected, pre-existing conceptions of the othered obscuring the Being of the

great-grandfather who was her owner. It was her great-great-grandfather's hand that wrote the archive where Williams found an oblique route to access to her great-great-grandmother.

subjugated, they remain in Relation and offer enunciations constituted by their own epistemologies. Glissant (1997:186) continues:

To himself the subject is a thick cloud of Knowledge

That is why Relation also dismantles the thought of non-Being.

That is why it is not: (of) Being, but: – (of) beings.

As Glissant (1997:126) suggests, and his scholarly strategies demonstrate, forms may be suggested by what we learn, opaquely, from elsewhere or nearby them. Where Maldonado-Torres has done the detailed work that elucidates the ideological processes through which beings have been produced as a non-being, Glissant calls up, through poetics of Relation, routes from and to the thoughts of subjects whose knowledges have been undermined. I understand his poetics as being attuned to and recognising the importance of the far off murmurs beyond his or another's comprehension but which are clear to ears orientated to their own knowledge systems. This gesture is not about giving agency but recognising the agency of all those who participate in and reverberate with the echo in the '*écho-monde*' (the world of things resonating with one another) (Loock, 2012). Glissant points to ways of navigating across the colonial and decolonial through the relations in the T*out-Monde* and *chaos-monde* in which we navigate our place or locality.

The Constitution Hill iteration of the installation series, entitled *Rituals of the Living* (2015), participates in amongst the chaos of Relation it finds itself caught in. The installation was part of a group show in which a number of young South African artists presented work in response to the layers of history of the space and the contemporary reach of those histories. My contribution comprised pieces that articulated a number of questions pertaining to the space by offering critiques to the processes of curating sanitised History; something that is operationalised in the museum of the historic space. It is a form of muting out of the nuanced relations echoing through one another in the dense network of narratives in the interest and process of canonising a few amongst them. This density remains more overt in the un-sanitised ramparts where, in their eerie forgotten state, they evoke a "haunting [that] describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon, 1997:8). The physical structure of the ramparts belies this sanitization through its architecture, its trapdoors leading to cells deep underground and the long since walled up passageways leading to other locations in the city's underground network. The space recalls the stories and, through its allusions, their fragments may be glimpsed. The show was presented in and articulated a refusal of this

sanitisation through the telling architecture of the ramparts of the former fort. My contribution was in the form of two video installations that stood at opposite ends of the ramparts, bookending the collective exhibition.



**Figure 37: Installation view *Rituals of the Living* (2015)**

The first of these installations was on the ground floor of the ramparts shown in the image above. The floor of the room was covered in small puddles of water while the walls bore the marks of water damage seeping in from the manmade hill it is situated in. Around these puddles, I constructed a scattering of small islands made of mounds of bricks. The bricks were sourced from a demolished prison building that was operational in the days when the fort was an apartheid prison. On these I placed different sized TV monitors. There were small monitors resembling those used for security surveillance and larger monitors that would be associated with domestic leisure and entertainment. Two of the surveillance sized monitors displayed recordings of the space the installation was presented in, the environment behind the monitor being replicated in their screens. The duplicate images shown in the monitors, however, differed from the surrounding context they referred to with slight interruptions to the reality they were in and that they represented.

One of these monitors sat in front of a barred window that let in a small amount of daylight. This monitor had an image of the window behind it repeated inside its frame. In the video of the window there are flashes of a woman in a white corseted dress. She is glimpsed trying to materialise herself, trying to enter the frame but is unable to. Another monitor sits in front of a hole between rooms in this rampart. It also has bars across it. Again, the reproduction in the monitor repeats the image behind it, however, this time there are shadows from an unseen body moving across the scene within the frame of the monitor. There is a tension produced between the weight of the real – the physical space and its history – and the struggle that these elided presences (those trying to become) are caught in. The suffocating weight of History in the context of Constitution Hill, coupled with the erasure that comes from falling outside its canonised contemporary narrative, frustrate their efforts to become actual presences. The videos articulate a tension between the actual and the absent through the subjects who struggle to come into being. In their struggles, the absent figures subsist just at the edges of what is real.

This struggle is presented within the frame of the television monitors which denote mechanisms of disseminating popular imaginaries. In her work that troubles the edges of the real in her own discipline, A. Gordon writes,

> Questions of narrative structuring, constructedness, analytic standpoint, and historical provisionality of claims to knowledge direct sociology to the ways in which our stories can be understood as fictions of the real … [wherein the] real itself and its ethnographic or sociological representations are also fictions, albeit powerful ones that we do not experience as fictional, but as true (1997:11).

The reproduction of the surrounding room within the frame of the television and surveillance monitors acts as a reminder of the fictions of the real precisely in their presence as representations. Their immateriality within the monitors becomes a marker of a broader dissemination of denial of the presence and being of elided subjectivities like these. Within these frames, there is an attempt to re-compose those frictions. The partial appearance of the figure in the monitor, who struggles to become an actual presence, marks aspects of the real that are missing. In their subsistence outside the space of what is actual materiality, the videos become dense with their absence which resonates through the emptiness producing an uncanniness within the representation in the monitors as well as the space they reference.

Another video in this space depicts the woman in the white dress stepping into a metal tub filled

with water. Unlike the previous two video works, there is no visual reference to the space of Constitution Hill. She is in a black non-space with nothing around her apart from the zinc tub sitting in the emptiness. The image is accompanied by the sound of gentle waves washing onto a beach with sea gulls in the distance. After a few moments, the woman in the white dress walks into the scene and stands behind the tub looking down into it. She walks away, seemingly unsure. She returns to look down into the tub with the sound of waves almost calling her into the water. She steps in, slowly, and, for the first time, the water is seen through a reflective shimmer on her legs and dress. There is a flash forwards in time to an image of her lying in the tub, a reference to herself a few moments in the future of the video. The image then returns to the previous moment. She stands with her feet in the water but she is still dry. Almost in obedience to the premonition, she sinks into the water. Lingering in this non-space without context or grounding in any specific time or place, the woman's actions take on meanings driven by the relation between her body and water as it is linked to the ocean through sound.

When she lies in the water, she is fully dressed and the volumes of white cotton from her dress billow out around her. The image of a black woman fully dressed and subsumed beneath water recalls an image from literary fiction when a woman, a ghost, walked out of the water fully dressed in Toni Morrison's haunting book *Beloved* (2005). The woman in Morrison's book is a ghost who is herself haunted. The ghost is the return of a dead infant who would be the age of the woman who walked out of the water, had the child lived. Despite having been born in the United States, this ghost, Beloved, carries with her memories from the waters, the middle passage to the Americas. Avery Gordon describes how "Beloved the ghost's double voice speaks not only of Sethe's dead child but also of an unnamed African girl lost at sea, not yet become an African American … the ghost that is haunting them is haunted herself" (Gordon, 2008:140). She is the image of a ghost who is herself haunted, who carries with her the memory of those who did not make it, of the deaths that happened alongside her. Her story is not hers alone but she shares it with those damnés who must take up space in Relation. A ghost that returns and brings with her memories of personal and collective trauma, memories that are hers and not hers but that haunt her all the same, of things drowned that return with her to force a reckoning. In their return,

> [s]omething is making an appearance to you that had been kept from view ... The ghost has an agency on the people it is haunting … the wavering present, forces a something that must be done that structures the domain of the present and the prerogatives of the future (A. Gordon, 2008:178-179).

She is haunted and carries the memories of multiple subjectivities as she "herself is haunted by the ghost of slavery and racial capitalism" (Saltmarsh, 2009:542). She holds the memory of another woman who was shipped across the Atlantic and remembers the deaths that happened alongside her. In this moment in the video, a dark skinned woman in a cotton corseted dress submerged in water recalls the woman from popular literary history who walked out of the water fully clothed who herself slips in and out of the memories of the "sixty million and more" who died and survived in wooden ships over the Atlantic (Morrison, 2005). The image of the woman fully clothed in the water with the sound of the ocean and a creaking wooden ship starts to take on some of those associations that Beloved carries with her. The relation between these women is thick and, through this dialogue between them that emerges through the visual language, a new 'node' in Relation of the *tout-monde* is formed. Reading the woman in the water alongside a ghost that returns and brings with her memories of personal and collective trauma, these traumas are then recalled in the close-ups of the woman's skin submerged under water. Her body carries memories that are hers and not hers but that haunt her all the same, of things drowned that return to force a reckoning. She evokes Morrison's woman, as described by Avery Gordon (2008:170), who had

> traveled a long distance, holding a memory the waters did not drown. How bad is the scar? ... A woman walked out of the water thirsty and breathing hard having traveled a long distance looking for a face. Nobody counted on her walking out of the water, but when she did, she reminded them of things they had forgotten or hadn't even got around to remembering yet. How bad is the scar? A woman walked out of the water thirsty and breathing hard having traveled a long distance looking for a face. Nobody counted on her walking out of the water. Nobody counted her until she forced an accounting.

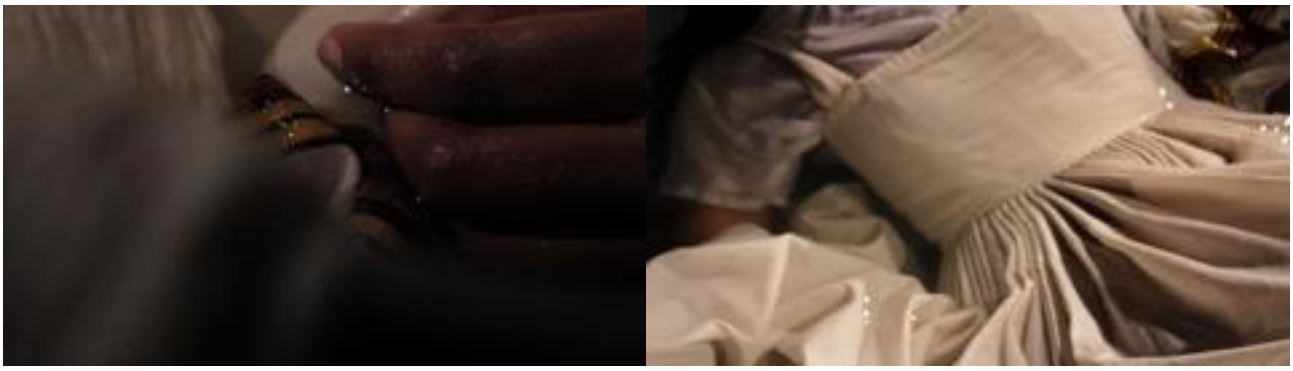


**Figure 38: Video Still Fully dressed a woman walked out of the water, thirsty and breathing hard, holding a memory the waters did not drown. 5min 51sec (2015)**

The evocation of this woman in water is reminiscent of black bodies that were drowned, subsumed beneath the surface of a body of water as well as the things that were formed in the body of the Atlantic; the production of a racialised world where blackness took on its particular modern meaning. It is a body of separation and linking between Africa, the Americas and Western Europe, the relation across which has guided the series of interventions across their geographies. While the image of the fully clothed woman in water refers to the image of black people submerged in the Atlantic through which blackness emerged as something different than that which entered the water, it also speaks to a return or presence of other erased experiences of being. She is present in her body, manifest throughout the video in a way she was not able to be in the previous two videos. She returns herself – alongside those others indexed by her body – as well as their memories. In a roundabout way, in the call and response between this text and another, she is part of and marks a 'they'.

The representations in the room within the ramparts of Constitution Hill work into the architectural archive to find the stories described by their absence. The knowledges that do exist about a subject like her are not dependable, wherein the recorded, what is known, would miss her entirely. They miss her in the same way that the existing archive in the "historical geography of enslavement offers few sure routes to dependable knowledge. Searching archival records and the historiography of slavery for insights into enslaved experience often makes us feel as if we are facing the void: absence, silence, negation, death, perhaps even cultural genocide" (Brown, 2015:134). The moment in the book *Beloved* (Morrison, 2005) when the ghost's mother Sethe ran away was the point when the schoolteacher, a man armed with the methodological tools of western knowledge, was going to write her down in a way that missed her and erased her. Sethe recognised the violence of his writing at the point when she realized that he meant to measure her up, to measure in her animal characteristics against the human. She would not let him write her and her children in a way that negated their humanity through the way in which he inscribed them into the world. She refused to be an object of detached enquiry stating: "No notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither" (Morrison, 2005:233). The importance of narratives and the authoring that lets ideas loose into the world is described by Minh-Ha (1989:133):

> What I have is a story ... laugh if you want to / but as I tell the story / it will begin to happen ... 'Call the story back,' said the audience by the end of the story, but the witch answered: 'It's already turned loose / It's already coming. / It can't be called back.' A story is *not* just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can't simply be stopped at

someone's request.



**Figure 39: Video Still *By and by some trace remains* 10min 59sec (2015)**

Sethe ran to prevent the words that the schoolteacher would write, to prevent them from being set loose, but many more of those stories have been written and sent out into the world and their ideas have taken hold. They cannot be unwritten, but they may be overwritten. The story must be told, truthfully and to do so I look past the recorded archive and the 'truths' they contain. "Again, truth does not make sense. It exceeds measure" (Minh-Ha, 1989:150). In the dense opacity of Relation, "[t]ruth is when it is itself no longer" when it exceeds the bounds of illuminate transparency, particularly when the illuminating methods pay allegiance to the interests of coloniality (Minh-Ha, 1989:121). It was schoolteacher's measuring string that made Sethe run so that she would not be captured in a story that dis(re)membered her. In the face of archives wherein "there is no sustained sign of an interiority for the slave, who is also a human person, who is also black" (Jansen, 2017), the person who is black disappears and only the projected idea of the black remains. The relation between these women across the Atlantic is tangled in the net of stories that negate the humanity of black people. The flows that are not unidirectional with the ideas that took shape in the Americas returning to shape, or negate, the being of people marked as black on the African continent and beyond it. The relation that connects them as the damnés also connects their subsistence and the significance of each one of their stories returning to the surface. As such, any time a story that captures the complex personhood of a subjectivity that is part of the damné is articulated, that enunciation is significant for those who subsist alongside them within Relation. "'It will take a long time,' she said, 'but the story must be told. There must not be any lies.'" (Minh-Ha, 1989:144).

The second installation was shown at the opposite end of the ramparts. This room, found at the end of a long corridor, was accessed through a trap door on the ground floor of the ramparts. Despite the

languorous heat of the midsummer afternoon sun, the room at the end of the winding corridor was cool. The otherwise oppressive heat does not reach deep under the ramparts of Constitution Hill. In order to get to it, viewers walk through the door on the side of the man-made hill, past the rooms on the ground floor and down into a trapdoor at the beginning of a corridor. Once under the trap door, there is another corridor, this one has a floor that is at a slight slope. As one walks further along the corridor, there is a descent taking you deeper into the ground. At the end, the room sits still, dark and cool, insulated from the afternoon heat by the earth to the sides, below and above it.

Here, there is no daylight. The room has a kind of stillness that feels like it has not been interrupted for a long time. These rooms, so far underground and out of sight, seem undisturbed since a time when they were used for things that needed to be kept far from the sight of people in the world above. The walls are dull and the floor has a thick layer of dust mixed with the carcasses of tiny animals and insects. There is a doorframe in the entrance to the room that looks like it once held a heavy metal door. An image of the room is projected in a video on the opposite wall from the doorway. In the stillness, a woman appears. She moves about cleaning the room. She is the same woman as all the ghosts who have been interrupting spaces across the Atlantic world. This time, however, she is dressed in more contemporary clothing. Her attire echoes the uniforms worn by domestic servants in South Africa.

The rooms under the ramparts are said to have been office spaces. If so, they were the variety of office that had heavy set bars in each doorway. It was the kind of office space that required rooms deep in the ground beneath trap doors. It was the kind of office with underground passages leading directly to the police station and the mortuary. The kind of office space necessary perhaps under apartheid and colonial rule. The things that are not spoken or acknowledged about these ramparts are consistent with processes of constructing a narrative of any history. Here, like in the other places I have engaged with, the omissions feel present. These omissions are particularly discernible here as the space indignantly retorts to the claim of this having been an administrative space with a decisive "No. This was not an office." Again, it is precisely the omissions that need attention, as the data, the archive that is available as resource points in the wrong direction because

> our data are debased, compiled from the records of the slavers, the racists, the exploiters, and their bureaucrats. Yet there may be a virtue to this limitation. We can never confuse our sources for the things they describe, and this encourages us to emphasize their qualitative nature (Brown, 2015:138).

It is the very misleading quality of this data that, in a roundabout way, begins to lead an enquiry through the opaque and gives evidence to just the thing it sought to erase.

> If a notion of colonial ethnography starts from the premise that archival production is itself both a process and a powerful technology of rule, then we need not only to brush *against* the archive's received categories. We need to read for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake − *along* the archival grain. ... Reading only against the grain of the colonial archive bypasses the power in the production of the archive itself (Stoler, 2001 as cited in Kuster, 2012).

Considering the depth of these rooms hidden from sight and sound, begets the question of what they were used for as it had to be hidden deep underground. The need for erasure marks a crack in the ideologies that legitimised oppression through its misanthropic skepticism. The omission is telling, not only of the absent presence sought in the gesture of listening to ghosts. But, by highlighting the necessity of such erasure, the omissions declare the untenability of an ideological order that denied the humanity of human beings in order to render them as fungible matter. The necessity to hide what has been done belies the legitimacy conferred on the atrocities committed and their social, moral and legal permissibility. In Gayl Jones's book, *Corregidora* (1986), a family of women pass down the stories of what happened to them from the time of slavery through to emancipation in order to prevent the disappearance of their truth. After the things they had lived through, which had been legal and permissible at the time, "the officials burned all the papers cause they wanted to play like what happened before never did happen" (Jones, 1986:79).

> Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done – so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them (Jones, 1986:14).

To read for the omissions is to lean into the silence and see the forms described by it as well as gain a perspective on the underside of the structures that produce erasure, a perspective that displays the 'negative space' of the dominant ontology. In the constant cleaning, the woman in the video calls attention to and becomes an articulation of the 'negative space' that locks her in place. In her action, she shows how society is structured by inequities shaped by misanthropic skepticism. As the woman cleans, her gesture echoes the actions of women jailed in the women's jail of the Constitution Hill above. The woman prisoners spent their days cleaning the spaces of the prison

they were held in. In this act of cleaning, her body references the bodies of generations of black women in South Africa whose restricted opportunities for generating income and survival was confined to the strictly regimented social space of domestic servitude. What took form as a racialised economy in the Americas became the genesis of colonial modernity founded on racialised, legalised slavery, the legacy of which subsists here in South Africa as it does in the Americas. In a societal system designed to afford privileges of class and race, people of her colour and gender were restricted from opportunity and the possibility of work beyond this prescribed allotment. In the world of the video, she perpetually cleans this room that is out of sight of the world, hidden away alongside the memories of this room that are un-recorded and un-remembered. It is a room that has been witness to things of such a nature that they were obliged to be carried out deep underground, relegated to be buried here beneath the earth, away from the living before they transpired. She cleans the space that was implicated in the systems of oppression that subjugated her. It is her allotment to provide the labour for cleaning this place of accumulated deposits of history.

The other spaces in the Constitution Hill precinct are less decisive about laying bare the emotive weight of its histories. The museum spaces above ground have been renovated. The fragments of the past that are included in the narrative are arranged in a series of uniform plaques. These plaques present manageable chunks of historical information pertaining to the place in which each one is displayed. They are neat and clean and sanitised for a viewing public to take in on tours that last an hour or two. All tours on offer end with a rounding off at the Constitutional Court where the rubble from old buildings of the jail have been used in the construction of the court building which is symbolic of a national future. The woman's continual cleaning in the video calls attention to which bodies labour and bear the burden and consequence of this sanitisation.



**Figure 40: Interior jail cells, Constitution Hill**

Within the context of continued coloniality, the narrative strategies employed by the museum adhere to an institutional lineage of processing and presenting knowledges where cleanliness and orderliness belies the long, tangled messy histories that the early quiet, dirty and un-presented space of the dungeon reveals. In the dungeon, there is a sense of the historic debris, "'deposit' of past events and actions that [are] not verbally recalled" but are felt in the sense of time suggested by the space (Shaw, 2002:4). Time here is marked by the accumulation and layers of dirt. When she appears and begins to clean, she calls attention to the sanitisation above ground where things are presented. The contrast between the spaces above and below come to highlight each other's processes of accumulation and erasure. Here she is 'caught in the act' of sanitising the haunting eerie filth of the dungeon. This visualisation of her labour displays a cruel irony – that it is her labour that makes it palatable for other people's engagement with the histories of suppression that would restrict her to this cast – the cleaner in society who is hardly visible to those whose comfort her labour maintains. Her presence, however, collapses the space between neat, sanitised space and its narrative and the violence, erasures and suppressions in the sanitisation that let us partake in neatly packaged and easily manageable accounts of History. Here, visualisation calls to attention the 'cost-to-someone-else' in the silencing of the subjugated that keeps her in servitude while burdening her with keeping things neat, tidy and manageable. In the video, the curated museum, as a marker of archival processes of producing omission, is foregrounded by the erased body and labour which is now centre stage.

There is something monstrous about the place and what could have happened here. That she is the one who cleans points to a kind of perversion where the one most dispossessed by power is the one set the task of keeping things pleasant for the powerful. As she evokes what would be erased from sanitised versions of History, those privileged, as they support particular agendas of power, there develops an accumulation of the narrative rubble of excluded, messy history. All that she cleans is collected and is presented physically in the dungeon in a museum display box. It is the stuff accumulated over time and a marker of that time. It is the ugly stuff that would normally be thrown away in a sanitisation process. Here, it is the dirt which points to the idea of cleaning away the lived, visceral reality of unpleasant things, the look and smell and feel of it that is being presented. Like the women in *Corregidora* (Jones, 1986), there is a protest against erasure in remembering even the ugliest parts of these histories. In their refusal of erasure, they told stories.

> My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told

> me what they all lived through and we were supposed to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. *Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen* (my emphasis) (Jones, 1986:9).

The protest against erasure in the dungeon is presented in the display of these 'off-cuts' of History. Their evocation insist on an engagement with the messiness of histories disrupting the cordoned off space of narrative they are excluded from. She is a woman who cleans the residue of history. She does work that has historically been associated with black women, a reality that still persists together with the racialised economy that produced this reality. The time that is shown to have accumulated here is an assertion of

> an 'asynchronous' and anti-linear ... historical time ... [a] history whose aim is not to free the present of the violence of the past (to forget slavery, to abandon its memories into the past and move on to something new and 'modern'), but 'to discover in the very brutality of what-has-been the responsibility and promise of a transverse, relational now-being. ... a reapprehension of time which insists that the moment of now-being in which we take up the work of historical responsibility (and historical interest) is not ontologically subsequent to, or 'after', the violent moments of the what-has-been to which we task or attach ourselves, but exists in a nonsynchronous and long-durational correspondence with these distant moments (Corio, 2014).

She continues on and on, cleaning in an endless, continuous cycle of labour. This labour that refuses any signs of reprieve pulls into focus questions about reconstituting discourses on the present futures that emerge from pasts whose ongoing coloniality has made this her lot. The pasts cannot be escaped but the discursive reconstitution of its narratives and exploring the presence of what has been made absence may produce a broader set of possibilities in which her body might exist beyond this labouring for others. In paying attention to her present non-presence and the compounded politics of erasure, erasing, exception and her errancy from exception (expressed in her visual presence), the video participates in what Gordon describe as "haunting [that] travels between personal narrative and social memory, between the speakable and what has been rendered unspeakable, between historical representation and the disappearance and loss of its absent others" (Saltmarsh, 2009:542). Amongst the women pictured throughout the installation and those they reference beyond it, there is a passing on of stories. Sometimes it is told, and other times it is not told but is carried in the body, carried in the way the world treats a person given the body they move through the world in. Though the particularities of her story and of these histories may be out of reach and thus cannot be named specifically she may be sketched out somewhere amongst the

contours of these narrative appearances which are linked and implicated in those it is in relation to and echoes through.

The installation engages the physical space of Constitution Hill in the sense of it being a marker of suppressive structures, both in terms of its history as well as the contemporary silencing of the echoes running through it. It is because of this that it can become a medium through which to evoke the memory of things that have been forgotten. The ghostly woman's visual presence is a reaction to the experiential realities of being in and inhabiting the historically loaded spaces that are in Relation and are part of the *tout-monde*. The intervention here resonates beyond the walls of the ramparts in which the exhibition takes place. In the opacity of the place, which acts as a marker of history's dense layered palimpsest of the *tout-monde* and *chaos-monde*, her presence and the knowledges elude

> what histories could hide, in order to escape history; it is stored in a layer, imperceptible in memory ... which operates below the level of perception and suspends the opposition between a subject (that knows) and an object (that is known). There, in co-naissance (literally together-birth), knowledge is generated ... which precedes its generation and is engendered by it at the same time (Kuster, 2012).

The elided presence of (his)tories, of narratives and of the humanity of those denied it in this ontology shaped by misanthropic skepticism subsist beyond the bounds of its real. They subsist outside of the real along with the evidence of how that real was produced and sustains itself. Her actions here, like the women telling stories in *Corregidora* (Jones, 1986), are a visual testament, a moment of giving evidence to the violent processes that produced their stories, humanity and being as elided. The evidence remains alongside the fullness and nuanced complexities that is the elided actuality of these subjectivities. The place beyond the ontology constituted by violent erasures is alive with an open and ongoing dialogue with between histories and subjectivities of the damné as well as the rhizomatic relations that connect them to each other. I have worked on and produced this installation as well as the others in this series while being situated in and laying resource to this open dialogue in the relation of subjectivities taking up space against negation.

In marking the presence of erasure, the imaging of this woman is both engendered by what has been silenced and, therefore, it becomes an opportunity to situate the ontology that elides within this broader deeper dialogue across ontologies that differ. Like the multiple locations engaged with in this ongoing series of experiments/invocations/disruptions in and of space, the presentation in this

physical space becomes a staging for a broader discussion on the ghostly missing parts of the histories of our real. They shift the appearance of 'reality' when it is situated in relation and open dialogue with the presence it would otherwise elide. The ghostly returns articulated in my work and beyond it, produces a "haunting [that] operates analytically and affectively" in these dialogues through history and across subjectivities (Saltmarsh, 2009:542). I work to articulate the form suggested in the space between what is included and valued in this 'reality'. The work settles into form and takes shape between what is spoken, in the occluded lingering non-narratives and imaginings beyond what is immediately decreeable. I look for the traces of experience that History is unable to articulate, excavating the archive to try and discern 'her shape' beyond his hand by reading and listening into the silences teeming with the enunciations of those omitted.

# CONCLUSION
## Meditations on Multiplicity: Towards the other worlds out there

> "In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine."
>
> (Minh-Ha, 1989:122)

> "It will take a long time …" the grandmother ends; "its began long ago …" the granddaughter starts.
>
> (Minh-Ha, 1989:149)

> My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part that she lived through and that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through
>
> (Jones, 1986:9)

The things that happened in the past that I am concerned with are not the pasts that are accessible in History books. According to such History books, the histories and narratives of the marginalised people I am preoccupied with do not exist. From where I stand, however, I have an appreciation of History as it has emerged through epistemes of western knowledge as well as its contradictions; an understanding of how History has been employed in the erasure and disavowal of my subjectivity. This disavowal, as I have worked to illustrate, is premised on a negation at an epistemological and ontological level. While under the hegemony of the 'Western code', my knowledges, my stories, my pasts, narratives and ways of enunciating them are dismembered/dis-remembered (Mignolo, 2011:xii). My stories and my subjectivity become elided because "imperial epistemology racializes [and genders] bodies and places: [and mine is of the] bodies out of rationality and places out of history" (Mignolo, 2011:191). The naturalisation of a particular kind of subjectivity as a universal subject attests to the ways in which "[r]acism, as we sense it today, was the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge: that certain bodies were inferior to others, and that inferior bodies carried inferior knowledge" (Mignolo, 2011:19). The inability or refusal of western knowledge systems to learn from or engage equally with knowledges of its constructed other, is

based on an epistemological racism contingent on the kinds of bodies legitimised to produce knowledge. It is based on a self-serving hierarchisation that functions to disavow difference, its value, and legitimise the violence inherent in subjugation. This racism, that functions on the epistemic level, can be understood to permeate every part of the system of knowledge produced through its ideological foundations.

Knowledges that can account for the histories of black subjectivities are denied in a process of universalising western epistemology at the cost of eliding other epistemologies. Boaventura de Sousa Santos names this "extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing" as epistemicide (Grosfoguel, 2013:74; see De Sousa Santos, 2014). Like Santos, Walter Mignolo has shown how knowledge and enunciations that came from epistemological difference from the west were and are made illegitimate, initially through the doctrines of Christian theology and belief, which has since been succeeded by the logic and reason of the Enlightenment (Mignolo, 2011:xii). Mignolo describes how, in a western paradigmatic framework, hegemony maintains power by silencing difference as "coloniality of knowledge means not that modern knowledge is colonised, but that modern knowledge is epistemologically imperial" (Mignolo, 2011:205). It devalues and dismisses epistemic difference. From within this paradigm, the other does not have knowledge but is the object of study for the knowing western subject who operates from

> a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez describes as the hubris of the zero point), the knowing subject [who] maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them (Mignolo, 2011:2).

In this frame, the west is where knowledge is produced and where the knowing subject has the toolset to produce knowledge. In his work on de-coloniality, Mignolo discusses the set of interlinked regulatory systems that frame the limits of valid knowledge in a western framework through the colonial matrix of power. He proposes strategies for moving beyond them through the decolonial turn. The coloniality of thought and knowledge positions western knowledge as universal so as to render its 'eurocentric epistemology carefully hidden' and its 'geo-historical and bio-graphical' locatedness ostensibly neutral (Mignolo, 2009:2). In so doing, it simultaneously dismisses the legitimacy of my knowledge while masking the processes of this subordination. This makes the universal applicability and standardisation of its 'modern' and the fallibility of 'othered' knowledge seemingly natural. Mignolo's critique of "European hegemonic knowledge and modern and postmodern ideas that moulded the universal concept of humanity" is based on the recognition of a bio-historically marked subjectivity overreaching its specificity and giving itself licence to

define a framework of being for all of humanity (2011:17). In so doing, it disavows the relevance of the vast majority of human experience. Moreover, when the privileged position of western modernity's enunciating subject is understood in its contingency on and continuation of colonial hierarchies that underpin it, the violence of its universalism, as it emerged through genocides and epistemicides, is made visible. In this way, one system of perceiving and understanding the human world, a system that shrunk the parameters of what fully constitutes human, is positioned as *the* universally applicable way of knowing the world.

Mignolo identifies knowledge, the production and enunciation of which is from bio-geo-historically marked bodies, as a key concern in addressing inequity and the violence of coloniality. This necessitates a shift in focus to the "apparatus of enunciation" (Mignolo, 2011:4). Such a shift entails a critique focusing "on the knower rather than the known" (Mignolo, 2011:4). This emphasises that there is always "a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get[s] the call to speak, to articulate" (Mignolo, 2009:2). A focus on the apparatus of enunciation requires one to be cognisant not only of what knowledge is spoken but also the processes and ideologies at work to bring what is known into being.

> Geo-politics of knowledge goes hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing. Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated … these questions enables the shift of attention from the enunciated to the enunciation (Mignolo, 2011:2).

Such a shift foregrounds the mechanisms and vested interests of knowing subjects and ways in which the language of articulated knowledge is implicated in epistemic hierarchisation. The privileging of particular languages, as they are tied to particular bodies and epistemologies, shape the world which those enunciations reference, describe and ultimately produce. "[I]n the articulation of language, what is referred to, phenomenally and philosophically, is no more important than what is at work, linguistically, in the referencing activity" (Minh-Ha, 1989:42) because it is in the act of referencing through language in which meaning is produced and ascribed. I focus the conversation pertaining to power and knowledge on the positioning of the body that enunciates. This functions to foreground the situated embodied privilege of particular subjectivities and "the very assumptions that sustain [their] locus enunciations" (Mignolo, 2011:4) as universal, thus privileging their knowledge over their others. The appearance and centering of a body that has historically been denied such privilege undermines this universalist pretension. In working through a de-colonial turn wherein I have privileged image-making in the enunciation of difference, this exploration has been an undertaking to re-member narrativising though multiple languages, modes of enunciating and

epistemologies. Through this process, I work to capture the full breadth of my humanity alongside others who have been denied it under coloniality.

In this light, my privileging of haunted work expressed through my embodiment of various historical and geographical subjectivities has been my articulation from the elided. This recuperative project focusing on the "knower rather than the know" is central to the research (Mignolo, 2011:4). In the series of interconnected videos and installations, I have produced a body of work that locates my place as researcher in relation to and amongst the subjectivities through whom I have explored Being/being in shifting realities. Visually representing a return of the ghost, effects a decolonial displacement of the real and the bodies whose languages are privileged in the production of the hegemonic real. The language and creative mode of enquiry, which has led this exploration of enunciating through the experiential reality of living in the state of elision, has taken form around the embodying of Alzire in Bayreuth, Tsholofelo in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and the unnamed women in Constitution Hill, Cape Coast and Accra. While some of these women are named and others not, they all occupy and testify to the importance of occupying space in Relation despite a knower's capacity to name them. There is a connection across these subjectivities and malleability that is perceivable through the ghosts' reappearance in the body of a single woman while each appearance attests to a distinct place in time, space and lifetime(s) being re-membered. They show up in each other's locations bringing traces from those different lifetimes to weigh on each site they introduce their narrative difference to. Taking up art practice to compose images that centre the experience of those whose subjectivity has been elided not only locates their narrative in Relation of the *Tout-Monde*. It also does this using a toolset more suited to articulating their difference beyond what the language of the hegemonic can capture.

The installations presented in Johannesburg, Cape Coast, Accra and Bayreuth all had their genesis in Bahia, Brazil. It was there that I first became concerned with the elided articulating itself through haunting. The first videos that feature Dandara, a woman in a white dress with a corset and voluminous skirt, were shot in Brazil. These images returned across the Atlantic to be presented in places like the Cape Coast Castle. The image of her looking across the water, longing for an impossible return to Africa, is completed by this presentation in the dungeons and passages of a place where the institutionalisation of her dehumanisation began. She is writ large in projected light and her image dominates the space that once reduced her to chattel. The video which constituted a fragment from the earliest articulation from this subjectivity was presented alongside new works produced for the site. Together these video works, projected onto white sheets, cut up the space they

were situated in while their contents cut through the Histories that elided them.

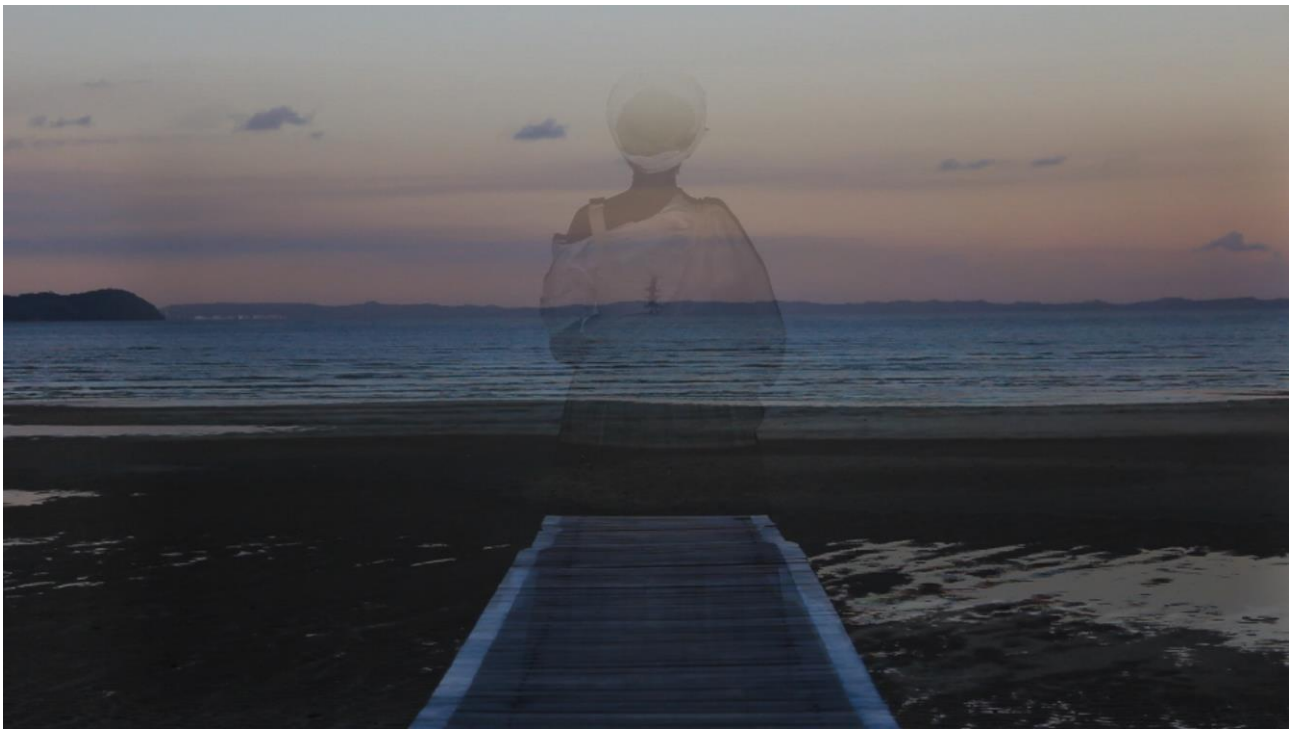


**Figure 41: Video Still *Transatlantic Saudades* 10min 13sec (2013)**

All five installations in the series that have constituted my research have functioned in this way: fragmenting the hegemonic with the narrative it would elide while tracing the links across those elided narratives. In the traces that develop between images and spaces across the Atlantic, the ghostly woman's appearances open up a dialogue between her presence, the sites of intervention and their histories. 'Beginnings' and 'endings' are open and flow through each other like the open porous subjectivity I embody and whose presence returns elided narratives. It was in Brazil that I began to be haunted and driven to make this work. It is because I am the one who is haunted that I embody the ancestors who insist on this work being done.

Enunciating through these women from a place beyond hegemony attests to the presence of othered realities. This, in turn, attests to the colonising apparatus of western epistemology that erases their realities. As such, as Sabine Broeck proposes: "Instead of unwarranted returns to (Post-) Enlightenment's projections of the innocent subject, I thus argue for a hermeneutics of *epistemological suspicion* from the point of view of the un-subjectification, or abjection, of human beings" (2013:115). This is echoed in Mignolo's proposition of thinking from a position where the processes that construct the idea of modernity are always apparent. In this way, the modern is not

taken for granted as the pinnacle of a trajectory of human development (the way it constructs its own image). He goes on to propose thinking "from the perspective of coloniality and the colonial difference" as a strategy towards foregrounding the violence of erasure inherent to western knowledge, violence which it relies on to master and dominate other knowledges (2008:249). Thinking from the perspective of the underside of coloniality necessitates a shift beyond modern knowledge's paradigmatic boundaries while privileging knowledges from difference.

While, within a western paradigm, my humanity is denied and is thus a spectral entity that haunts a colonial enterprise, marking the violence of epistemological erasure characteristic of the occidental enlightenment canon of knowledge. However, as I have worked to illustrate through my creative articulations of histories beyond that canon, there are other realities of being and knowing where I am not denied. Yet, still, my lived encounter with the world is under the tenets of an epistemological order that renders me, my humanity and my histories spectral under the dominance of a 'reality' shaped by misanthropic skepticism. It is at this impasse, as I have explored in this paper, that the spectral could lead us to the edge of ourselves and the edge of knowledges that are constricted by the limits of hegemonic knowing and towards a broader world of knowledges. Nelson Maldonado-Torres contends that "[t]he transition from modernity to transmodernity lies first and foremost in the political and epistemic interventions and creations of the damnés" who have been rendered invisible and whose voices have been rendered silent by the coloniality of modernity (2007:262).

My work of offering a set of creative interventions to the given Histories I have encountered has been an enactment of this decolonial logic. Through these interventions and the woman I embody in the video work, this project has been a process of producing a set of alternate enunciations alongside hegemony's 'modern' academic knowledge. Operating in accordance with Maldonado-Torres' assertion, these enunciations have been made with the contention that, in their articulation, the 'modern' can no longer be considered as distinct, outside, above or ahead of what is 'left behind' but is rather understood as simultaneous with, contingent on, in dialogue with and amongst difference. It is an apprehension of such a broadened reality that could lead the hegemony of modernity's coloniality towards a transmodernity characterised by trans-epistemological dialogue. I engage this set of preoccupations from a position of being characterised by gender and race in a way that marks me as different from the locus of the universalised white male normative subject.

In foregrounding myself as an embodied writing subject articulating from my bio-geo-historic

locality, the creative text I offer through these installations recalls Minh-Ha's questions: "Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color?" (1989:6). In so doing, it calls attention to the significance such a writing has to the hegemony of 'disembodied', 'objective' producer of knowledge. In this question, Minh-Ha starts to articulate a set of conscriptions on writers whose gender and ethnicity is not that of the hegemony's 'normative'. The semantic play between the different variations of this interlinked questioning highlight a snare of dismemberment when engaging with language and writing when it comes to women of colour who enunciate. By posing her question in this way, she calls attention to what has been constituted as an incongruous relationship between being of colour, being woman and being a writer or producer of knowledge. In so doing, she directly names assumptions relating to where and through what kind of subject/bodies knowledge is produced or where 'legitimate' enunciations emanate from. By breaking up and fracturing her question, she points to the hegemonic values that produce this assumption while performatively enacting a reflexive critique on the colonial/hegemonic logic that would fracture or dismember a woman of colour who simultaneously 'writes' (or produces knowledge) from her writing-self.

The interventions offered in the site specific installations that comprised the explorative and speculative methodology that this work took shape through were brought together in an auxiliary show presented in Johannesburg. The installation was presented at ROOM Gallery & Projects (see Appendix 2). Unlike the spaces I have engaged with over the course of this enquiry, the gallery did not function as a site of intervention. It served as a space to consider and articulate trace as it ran through the creative research and, in so doing, foregrounded the network of relation that has developed across the installations. In this presentation, the selection of videos and objects on display – both newly produced and others reoccurring from previous installations – marked a moment that crystallised the idea of connectivity, or the trace between multiple subjectivities and experiences, as it has developed across the work's previous iterations. It is not the ghost who is crystallised in this moment but rather the import of her changeability where the 'trace' is that which signals the connection across her multiple selves and myself amongst them. It functions to bring to the fore the significance of the multiple as it has been articulated in this malleable presence, a plural, open, interconnected subject manifested in the ghost.

The cumulative development of trace that has developed over the previous installations is drawn together here. The woman (who marks the cumulative trace) is both singular and multiple – caught in a dance as she shifts between her many selves. As she moves, she visually recalls this

connectivity between herself and those selves who came before her. In her dance of recalling those previous selves, she performs what Palesa Shongwe describes: “Dance is remembering the severed memory of past lives. It is transportation to time before the record. The time that history interrupted” (Shongwe, 2010). The trace, marked by the reoccurring embodiment of the ghost through one woman’s body, traverses the rupture that severed her from her histories. The body becomes a visual expression of trace connecting, linking, marking and drawing out a line of commonality across the reoccurring women.

The open-endedness, that characterises the women and imaginaries in the video works, echoes the porosity in the referencing developed across shows. The connections displayed in the relation across video pieces within any one of the installations are themselves pulled through from older constellations and into new networks in subsequent installations. This auxiliary piece functioned to emphasise the importance of porosity between the multiple expressions of these subjectivities while foregrounding the implications of her appearance in the multiple sites. This act of marking the trace between her many selves becomes an expression of the experiential communality between the damnés. This post-script marks a culmination of the process of exploration I have been working through while simultaneously pointing to possible future trajectories for creative engagements with present-pasts. As the project travels, it augments, picking up fragments and traces of each place it comes into contact with, changing form in response to each place and its histories. With each installation, in every instance the work has taken form in a site of intervention, the woman/women travel across space and time. Her/my presence in the installation transforms the site she comes into as it transforms her until she moves on, taking the trace with her to where she goes next.

The work speaks to ideas pertaining to movement and migration across time, across space and of overlapping imaginaries and expressions of epistemological ‘locatedness’ using imagery that locates it in relation to this idea of ‘deep time’ while the method relies on the most contemporary of mediums (video). It opens up a channel of communication between ostensibly disparate times, spaces, histories and ‘technologies’ of enunciation that are seemingly incongruous. It is a gesture towards displaying how we, individually and collectively, personally and culturally, shape shift as our world shifts, an expression of Eduard Glissant’s *Tout-Monde* in Relation. As we are constantly coming into being, in communication and in translation, with those we inevitably come across in those cross-currents of time and space, the work produces and functions at that intersection of temporal and spacial [the Place] of becoming imaginatively and in Relation. It is here that there may be an agency to orchestrate the things that make us, those things that are always in flux, so they

might produce a shape we see fit for ourselves. The ghostly woman in the videos is always emerging in the shifting slippages of a geo-bio-historically situated body in conversation with herself and her world, an identity that is never fixed, crystallised, static or singular. "Shedding the weight of ones being" allows her to be, at once, singular and collective and denies the over-determination of essentialising discourse of difference as discrete and oppositional (Glissant as cited in Dash, 1995:42).

I have played with the aesthetics of opacity and layering to evoke ghostly hauntings in order to 'make visible' or enunciate the elided stories the installation functions to re-member. The environments in the videos are overlaid with images from disparate places and time periods. I make them translucent in order to produce a collage-like palimpsest. They slip out of the realist representations of the sites they reference into the surreal. Opacity allows space for what is unknowable from within any given paradigm of thought and the video work makes this visible through the fragmentary partiality of its constituent parts. That which is elided under a hegemonic regime of thought may be approached through an understanding of opacity. Through opacity, what is unknowable cannot be dismissed as it is always part of the *Tout-Monde*. It becomes a marker of the presence of something despite the knowers' inability to capture it in their imaginary. In opacity, "[t]ruth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure. It exceeds all regimes of truth" (Minh-Ha, 1989:123). In the realm of the opaque, one cannot know one's other but only have a sense of that other in relation to oneself, "I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him" (Glissant, 1997:192). In this open Relation, the other cannot be over-determined by hegemonic discourse. This aesthetic approach attests to the necessity of being cognisant of the limits of any one way of knowing and an awareness of there being more beyond what one can account for. Opacity marks an irreducibility wherein the known cannot be contained by the perceptions or understanding of a knower, "[i]n Relation the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally diversity. Let us say this again, opaquely: the idea of totality alone is an obstacle to totality" (Glissant, 1997:192). There is value in things that may not be known, where the gaps and silences are always part of the picture.

In their connectivity across historical elision across multiple geographies, the women in the videos trace the link between, and amongst others, the elided humanity of an enslaved woman in Brazil, the body of a worker caught in servitude and the silenced part of the writing subject when her enunciation in hegemonic language elides or erases her specificity of being a woman of colour who

writes. As she is both absent and present, singular and plural, both a fragment amongst a communal story and a whole subjectivity within her own, she functions in this space beyond the logic and conscriptive reach of hegemonic discursive control while a different logic may reclaim her through imaginative recall. Here, finality and certainty are not the objectives. Understanding is "'situated':partial, embodied, historically-located, culturally specific, discursively grounded, contradictory … identity and history as process, language as heteroglossia, knowledge as partial" (Burton, 2001:240). The tension between access and denial of knowing animates the work in multiple ways. It draws on and displays imagery from multiple epistemes without explication. The sound elements in the installations contain voices that speak in multiple languages while subtitles are offered incongruously and often in locations that are detached from the voices. As such, different people who experience work can access certain aspects of it dependent on the knowledges they access it through. The videos in the installations are both site specific and migratory. They never claim or represent wholeness but are fragments of a narrative that began elsewhere and will lead into new narratives yet to be articulated. The works refuse total grasp from any one epistemological standpoint. Rather, viewers can only access the work through multiple epistemes. The silence and gaps attest to the knower's place in Relation and how that place renders certain knowledges accessible or inaccessible.

> Only by understanding that it is impossible to reduce anyone, no matter who, to a truth he would not have generated on his own. That is, within the opacity of his time and place. Plato's city is for Plato, Hegel's vision is for Hegel, the griot's town is for the griot. Nothing prohibits our seeing them in confluence, without confusing them in some magma or reducing them to each other (Glissant, 1997:194).

Ghosts are a reminder that all ways of knowing, seeing and understanding are situated in their specificity in Relation. There are always ghosts that linger beyond the realm of our grasp. "In the Akan language, knowledge was constituted anew with each retelling; elasticity of silence as important as authority of sound" (Oforiatta-Ayim, [sa]). I have worked through things that are unspeakable, unrepresentable or just beyond the grasp of language and those things that cannot be captured or accounted for through the sanctioned methods of western academic disciplinary knowledge and that are beyond Euro-American epistemologies. I have endeavoured to approach these narratives, subjectivities and forms of knowledge that I have been preoccupied with through a sensibility of Haiku, the "epistemologically open structure" of which is described as "grasping of things in their fragile essence of appearance" (Minh-Ha, 1992:235). The work is never complete but

open to new iterations. Videos that are produced for one show become a part of subsequent shows where they take up space alongside new videos produced specifically for that site. The ghost who is central to and appears across the videos is malleable across epistemologies as well. She carries different sets of meanings across different hermeneutical points of entry into the work. There is a lightness and never-fully-quite-present quality to this ghost which refuses definition. She remains open to the shifting narratives and possibilities that run through her, from Tsholofelo, the Tswana woman who appeared in the Johannesburg Art Gallery to Alzire looking out over Bayreuth from the grand halls of her palace. I find possibilities for re-orientating the real in the undefinable ghostly subjectivities' refusal to take an externally defined form constituted through discursive traditions which negate them and silence (her)story.

In the endeavour to privilege (her)story, I have followed the ghost through the gaps, silences, fractures and continuities where a "communication between a self and an Other" could occur towards the "trans-ontological as well as the sharing of a common world" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:258). The relation, as it has been expressed across difference within the videos themselves, across videos in exhibitions as well as across exhibitions, extends beyond the parameters of the creative explorations I have offered through my own work. They function in relation to other othered enunciations that are part of the *Tout-Monde*.

As I write, precisely because of the haunting that has produced a 'something to be done', those denied pasts come into existence, becoming as I write (Gordon, 2008:202). I am in the process of writing those histories and narratives that were elided in collaboration with the ancestors who haunt me and, in doing so, I might become in a form that is not determined for me by Histories that relegate me to a space of lack. If, as Minh-Ha describes, "[t]he to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman is an endless one" then the haunted writing woman's text might open a space for those who haunt her to enact their agency (1989:30). As the writing process is an endless movement of reference, referring to the writing and writer making each other, "I am there only to provide it [speech] with a passageway ... creating an opening where the 'me' disappears while 'I' endlessly come and go" (Minh-Ha, 1989:35). We, together, enunciate what was elided from History, opening up to a broader deeper process of co-becoming.

## Bibliography


Ashun, A. (2013). *Elmina, the Castle & the Slave Trade*. Elmina, Ghana: Nyakod Printing Works.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Baldwin, J. (1965). *James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley*. [video]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w [Accessed 12 May 2017].

Baucom, I. (2005). *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance capital, slavery, and the philosophy of history*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Britton, C. (1999). *Edouard Glissant and postcolonial theory: Strategies of language and resistance*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Broeck, S. (2013). The legacy of slavery: White humanities and its subject. In J-M. Barreto (Ed.), *Human rights from a third world perspective: Critique, history and international law*. Newcaste-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Brown, V. (2015). Mapping a Slave Revolt: Visualizing Spatial History through the Archives of Slavery. *Social Text*, 33(4):134-141.

Burton, S. (2001). Difference and Convention: Bakhtin and the Practice of Travel Literature. In P. Barta, P. Miller, C. Platter & D. Shepherd (Eds.), *Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other*. New York: Routledge Harwood Academic Publishers:225-246.

Childs, A & Libby, S. (2014). Introduction: Figuring blackness in Europe. In A. Childs & S. Libby (Eds.), *Blacks and Blackness in European Art of the Long Nineteenth Century.* New York: Taylor and Francis.

Cook, G. (2016). *Were Those Black 'Servants' in Dutch Old Master Paintings Actually Slaves?* [Website] Available at: http://www.wbur.org/artery/2016/01/15/black-servants-old-master-art-slavery [Accessed Nov 14 2016].

Corio, A. (2014). *Ian Baucom's 'Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History'*. [Blog]. The Open Boat. Available at https://caribiolit.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/baucom-specters-of-the-atlantic/ [Accessed 27 April 2016].

Danow, DK. (1991). *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin from Word to Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dash, J. (1995). *Edouard Glissant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. New York: Routledge.

Earle, T & Lowe, K. (2005). *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Elmina Castle and the Slave Trade*. [Sa]. [DVD video] Elmina, Ghana: Ato Ashun.

Glissant, E. (1997). *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Gordon, A. (1999). Making Pictures of Ghosts: The Art of Gary Simmons. *Social Identities*, 5(1):89-104.

Gordon, A. (2008). *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Gordon, L. (2006). African-American Philosophy, Race, and the Geography of Reason. Available at http://lewisrgordon.com/selected-articles/africana-philosophy/lewis2.pdf [Accessed 20 Sept 2017].

Gordon, L. (2014). Black Existence in Philosophy of Culture. *DIOGENES*, 59(3-4):96-105.

Griffiths, MR. (2014). Toward Relation: Negritude, Poststructuralism, and the Specter of Intention in the Work of Édouard Glissant. *Discourse*, 36(1):31-53.

Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, XI(1)Fall:73-90.

Hall, S. (2008). Cited on theguardian.com. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/sep/15/black-chronicles-ii-victorians-photography-exhibition-rivington-place [Accessed 27 Jan 2017]

Hantel, M. (2013). Rhizomes and the Space of Translation: On Edouard Glissant's Spiral Retelling. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 17(3(42)):100-112.

Hartman, S. (1997). *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hartman, S. (2007). *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Jansen, C. (2017). Featured in [Audio] *Listen to the recording of the launch of Critique of Black Reason*. Available at http://witspress.bookslive.co.za/blog/2017/06/14/listen-to-the-recording-of-the-launch-of-critique-of-black-reason/ [Accessed October 2017].

Jones, G. (1986). *Corregidora*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Kant, I. (1967). *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-1799*, Translated by A. Zweig. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Klaric, M. (2013). *Quinta Pitanga*, Zagreb, Croatia: V.B.Z.

Kuster, B. (2012). *The Imperceptibility of Memory*. [Blog] The European Institute for Progressive Cultural policies. Available at http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/kuster/en [Accessed 29 Oct 2016].

Kwon, M. (1997). One place after another: Notes on site specificity. *October 80,* Spring 1997:85-110.

Lane, H. (2015). *Hugh Lane's Vision for the Johannesburg Art Gallery*. [Online] Available at http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/hugh-lanes-vision-johannesburg-art-gallery [Accessed 17 May 2016].

Lelliott, K. (2015). *Stillness*. Unpublished manuscript.

Loock, U. (2012). *Opacity*. [Online] Available at https://frieze.com/article/opacity [Accessed 22 Mar, 2016].

Lorde, A. (1984). The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. In A. Lorde (Ed.), *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press:110-114.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2):240-270.

Martin-Jones, D. (2006). *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mbao, W. (2016). Rearranging the furniture at Stellenbosch. Africa is a Country. [Blog] Available at http://africasacountry.com/2016/02/rearranging-the-furniture-at-stellenbosch/ [Accessed 25 Feb 2016].

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Mignolo, W. (2008). The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference. In M. Moraña, E. Dussel & C. Jáuregui (Eds.), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mignolo, W. (2009). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(7-8):159-181.

Mignolo, W. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mikkelsen, J. (2013). Recent Work on Kant's Race Theory/The Texts/The Translations. In J. Mikkelsen (Ed.), *Kant and the Concept of Race: Late Eighteenth-Century Writings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press:1-40.

Minh-Ha, T. (1989). *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Minh-Ha, T. (1992). *Framer framed*. London: Routledge.

Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. New York: Knopf.

Morrison, T. (1996). Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature. In H. Wonham (Ed.), *Criticism and the Color Line: Desegrating American Literary Studies*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Morrison, T. (2000). Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American

Literature. In J. James & T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Eds.), *The Black Feminist Reader*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell:24-56.

Morrison, T. (2005). *Beloved*. London: Vintage Books.

Oforiatta-Ayim, N. [Sa]. *Cultural Encyclopaedia*. [Online] Available at http://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/futures-cohabitation/cultural-encyclopaedia [Accessed 29 Oct 2016].

Prabhu, A. (2005). Interrogating Hybridity: Subaltern Agency and Totality in Postcolonial Theory. *Diacritics*, 35(2):76-92.

Ramón, G. (2013). The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/ Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 11(1):72-90. Available at https://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol11/iss1/8 [Accessed May 28 2017].

Saltmarsh, S. (2009). Haunting concepts in social research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(4):539-546.

Shaw, R. (2002). *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the historical imagination in Sierra Leone*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Shongwe, P. (2010). Atrophy. [Online Video]. Available at http://impakt.nl/channel-2/videos/palesa-shongwe-atropy-south-africa-2010-745-mins/ [Accessed 8 June 2017].

Sithole, T. (2014). Achille Mbembe: Subject, Subjection and Subjectivity. PhD thesis in African Politics. UNISA, Pretoria.

Sithole, T. (2016). Researching the African Subjects in African Politics. In S.J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni & S. Zondi (Eds.), *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa*, Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Stoler, A. (2002). Colonial archives and the arts of governance. *Archival Science*, 2(1-2):87-109.

Wilhelmina, F. (1828). *Memoirs of Friederica Sophia Wilhelmina, Princess Royal of Prussia, Margravine of Bareith*. London: Hunt and Clarke.

Williams, P. (1991). *The alchemy of race and rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Yawitz, A. (2017). *An Inclusive Documenta Succeeds Despite Curatorial Failures*. Available at https://hyperallergic.com/386581/an-inclusive-documenta-succeeds-despite-curatorial-failures/ [Accessed Aug 10 2017].

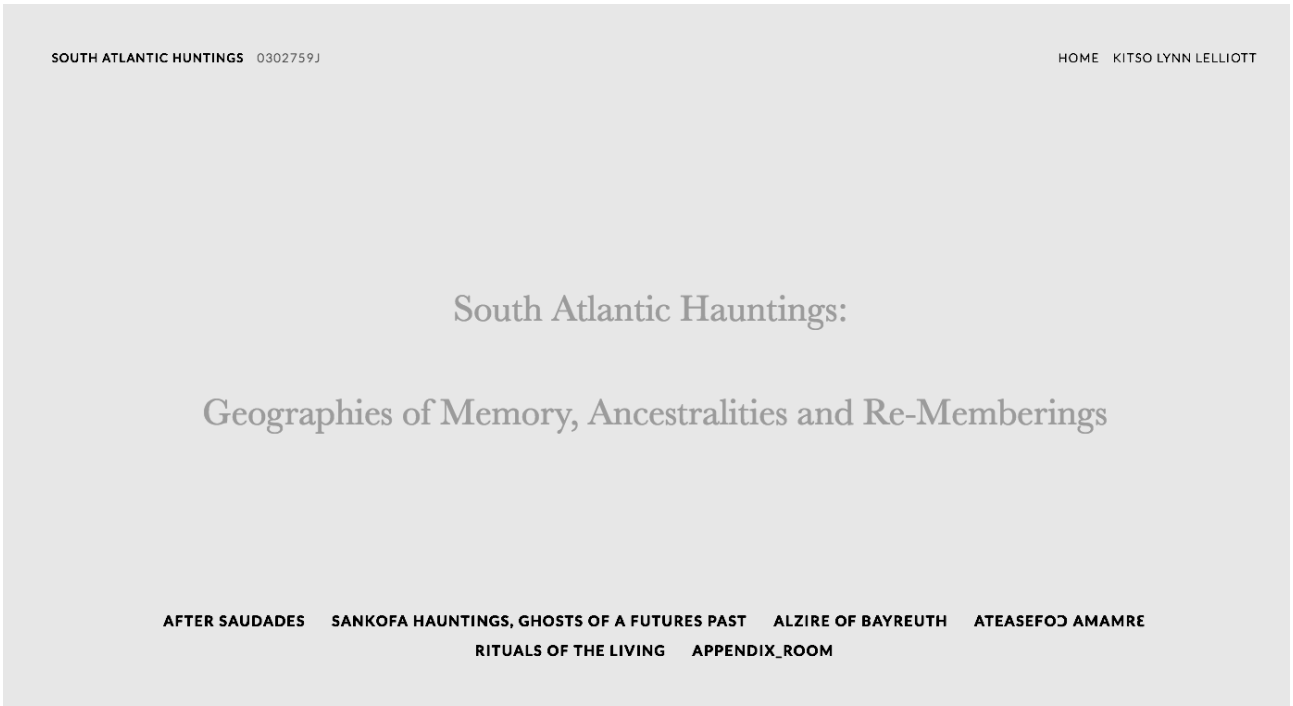
**Appendix 1**

*South Atlantic Hauntings: Geographies of Memory, Ancestralities and Re-Memberings*

Documentation of creative practice as research:
https://southatlantichuntings.squarespace.com/
Site password: 0302759J




**Landing page with link to site underlined**




**Home page with links to documentation of each installation at the bottom of the page. Please hover mouse over the name of the installation you want to view and click to enter.**

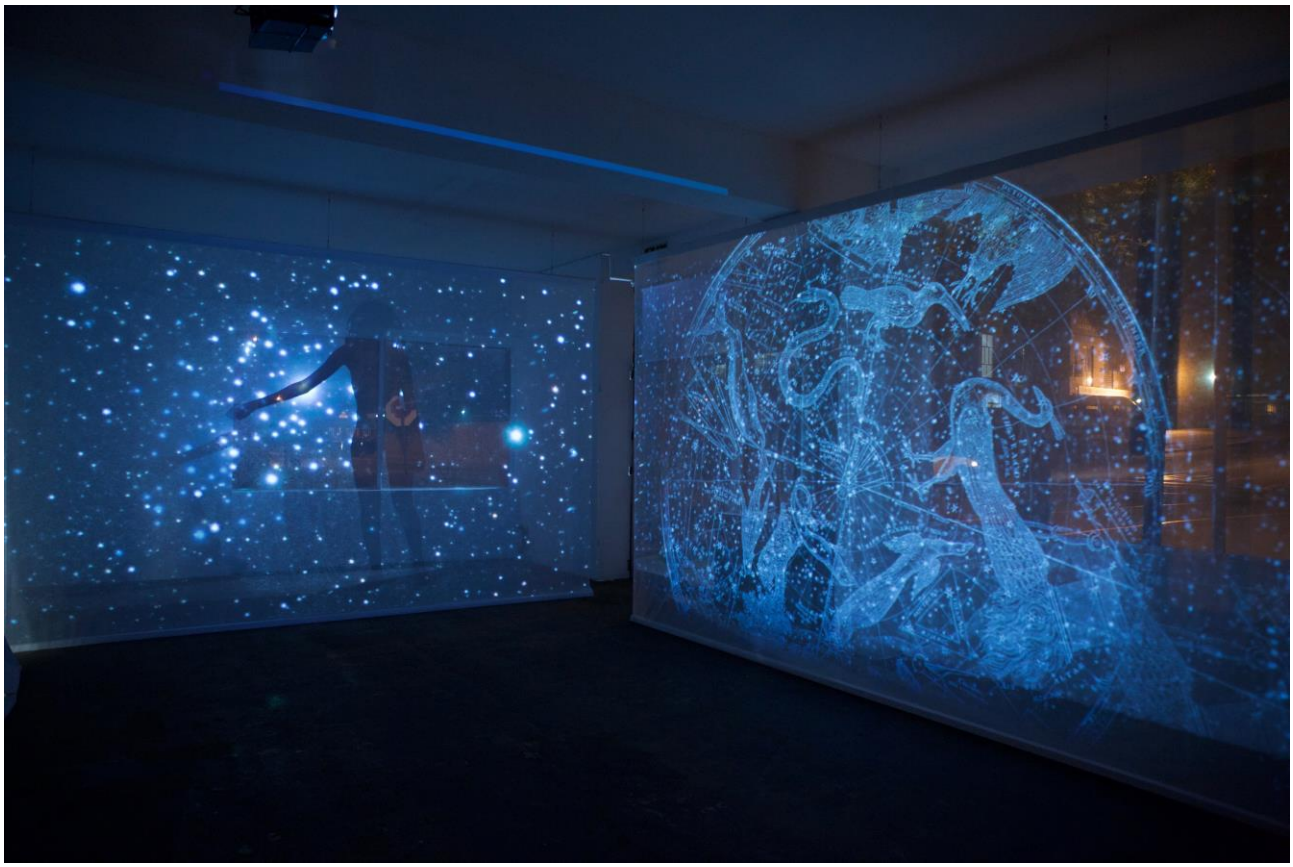
**Appendix 2**

ROOM gallery and projects, Johannesburg.

*I was her and she was me and those we might become*.

The post-script installation presented at ROOM Gallery and Projects differed from previous iterations of the audio visual exploration that have driven my research. The five installations that have been part of my process of articulating suppressed narratives were presented at sites steeped in colonial narrative histories. These installations worked into the History of the specific sites which were then subject to a re-membering of their narrative in the wake of the ghosts' appearance. This show, however, was presented in a gallery space without the same degree of imbedded connection to the network of histories permeating the castle dungeons, palaces and forts across Africa and Europe. Moving outside this network of direct reference to sites allowed for the focus of this show to linger on the development of trace as it had accumulated over the multiple installations.

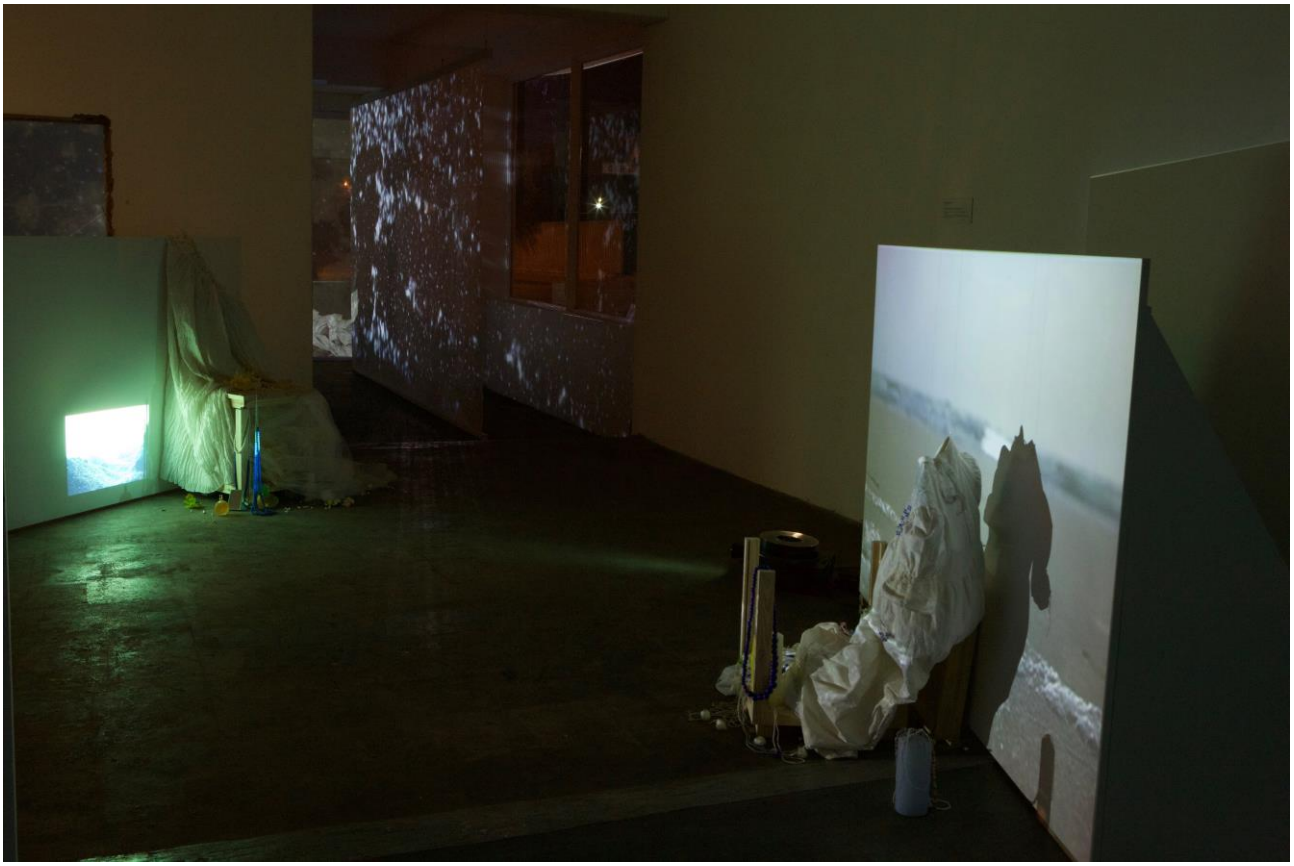
The following images are installation shots of the exhibition presented at ROOM Gallery and Projects (2017)






They were the same those








Freeze


ART
WEEK
OBURG
2017

The installation comprised three primary videos. Two were produced for this show while the third was from previous iterations of the work. These three videos were displayed at opposite ends of the exhibition space, bookending the presentation. In the largest room, Hall 1, I presented "*I was her and she was me and those we might become*" and "*Untitled_Sankofa1*" which were diptych partners displayed perpendicular to one another. The third video "*My story no doubt is me*/*Older than me*" was displayed at the opposite end of the space in Hall 3.

The video "*I was her and she was me and those we might become*" focuses on the body of the ghostly woman who has acted as the embodiment and return of the elided throughout the project. In this piece, she sits in a dark empty unmarked space, the only other thing present being a pile of white fabric a little way away from her. She is unclothed and has her back to the viewer. Slowly she shifts and turns to the mound of white cloth. She reaches out to it and the fabric almost crawls onto her body. She struggles to stand up, contorting with the seemingly sentient fabric as it slides its way onto her body. As she moves, a second version of this woman appears, standing behind the first, dressed in the white voluminous gown reminiscent of sartorial sensibilities in 18th century Europe or its colonies. She is in silhouette. Within her silhouette, there is a third version of the woman, also moving and contorting with the white fabric that clothes her. Hers is a voluminous skirt coupled with a buttoned down blouse. The first of the women who is visible in the video disappears. As she does so, the woman wearing the 18th century dress moves out of silhouette to become fully visible as she works to take off her dress. They all fall into silhouette against the backdrop of a moon like disc. The disc is a reproduction of an almost three thousand-year-old map of the Mesopotamian sky. As they move, and once they are both unclothed, they merge into one form for a moment before separating out into two forms again. They continue changing attire and moving in and out of silhouette as the video progresses. The women are absence in the process of taking form, slipping out of it and re-appearing in new forms. Her shifting between bodies and her movement into and out of singular form articulates the very communal connected experience of living as the damné under the coloniality of being. She is an expression of the phenomenological experience of the damné, the invisible entity. Yet, as her presence with the narrative it carries fills the room, her 'being' undoes the coloniality that denies her. It is in this way that "[t]he damnés or condemned of the earth become primary agents of … transformations [and in which] the damnés have the potential of transforming the modern/colonial into a transmodern world" because their very presence attests to the fallibility of colonial erasure (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:263).

The circular map that has been a background to the woman's/women's movements is replaced, at

times with a moon, at others with stars and, at others still, the triangular map that marked connections between the women in the stone circle from the video "*My story no doubt is me*/*Older than me*" that first appeared in the show presented in Jamestown, Accra. She continually shifts (marked by changes in clothing as cultural markers) through different versions of herself. At times, her attire marks a space in an imperial European context or its colonies, at others, it speaks to an African context, at times, to a modern timeframe and, at others, to more distant pasts. On the intimacy of her body, we see the markers of a world in relation much broader than her individual self and she carries with her the traces of the complex intersections that formed and continue to form her.

The sense of a depth of time is amplified by the accompanying video "*Untitled_Sankofa1*". It is an articulation of the concept of (Sankofa; the Adinkra concept loosely meaning one has to look back from where they came to see where they are going) through the use of tools and resources of the internet age. As a visual articulation of this translation between the ancient and the contemporary, I source imagery and symbols online that speak to deep time and space as they are understood through different mythologies and epistemologies and constitute an image of palimpsest through these images. The visuals used to articulate the concept are drawn from, without contradiction, imagery of star charts from as far afield as the Ottoman Empire (temporally) and Polynesia (spatially) to describe the concept, all while privileging Sankofa as a concept located in an African Adinkra episteme. The multiple visual illustrations of star systems are placed over one another in opaque layers. This layering brings into close proximity disparate moments where humans imagined, gave meaning to and described their place in the universe while the celestial itself connotes a sense of time so deep that it shrinks human time to a diminutive span in which our dramas unfold. The gesture of shrinking the grand epochs of human knowledges in this way illustrates the provincialism of human knowledges more broadly and, in turn, the absurdity of one of these which Mignolo has called the "Western code" taking itself as universal (Mignolo, 2011:xii).

The hall in which "*I was her and she was me and those we might become*" and "*Untitled_Sankofa1*" were displayed was the largest as well as the brightest of the three halls in which the work was exhibited. The two street facing walls of this hall primarily comprised windows with the screens for the videos erected four feet from these windows. The screens were large enough to fill almost the entire space at five metres across and 2.9 metres high. They were made of translucent sharks' tooth scrim fabric which captured a lucid image from the projectors' light, producing an almost ghost-like

apparition that hung in mid-air. This fabric also let light spill through past it onto the windows which, in turn, spilt the images onto the street outside. As a result of the light in the room, the projections were only ever visible from the evening and on into the night after gallery hours. The space stood seemingly empty during the day. In this way, it continued operating hauntingly outside the bounds of sanctioned temporal arrangements that structure the norms of how viewers may encounter work in a gallery. The ghost continued to appear when and how it must, which has been intrinsic to the project. The ghost's transgressive character, as strategy for reclaiming elided narratives, has functioned through these enactments of a return of those things dis-re-membered and denied, only immaterial as long as there is a continued dismissal of epistemological difference.

The process of foregrounding knowledge couched in epistemes beyond western canons was continued in the videos on display between those at either end of the exhibition space. These pieces were presented on three screens rising from the ground in the centre hall. Each of these was a shrine as well as a backdrop for projected images. The images displayed on the screens were of bodies of water in disparate geographies. One was an icy shorefront with snow covering the hills on a shore denoting a place in the far reaches of northern Europe. The second was of a small lake in misty mountains in a seemingly temperate environment. These two images were small in scale against the backdrop of their screens. The third video filled the entire screen with images of the warm ocean from the Bay of All Saints in Salvador da Bahia. The image was overlaid with text that appeared momentarily in short stanzas over varying areas of the image. The text functioned as translation for the voices of women speaking in multiple languages that filled the space.

Images of the open sea with ships on the horizon and others of the bay with land in the close distance interchanged with a close up of a wreath floating out with the tide. The wreath consisted of objects made in offering to the Candomble Orixá Yamenja. She comes from the West African tradition where she is a river goddess and yet emerged on the American side of the Atlantic as the goddess of the ocean. These objects: perfume, combs, roses, beads, shells and mirrors were echoed as material objects on display in the halls of the exhibitions as part of the shrines. The shrines also comprised the dresses seen in the videos at either end of the exhibition space. They were the dresses that had been worn by the ghostly woman in all of the video works throughout the project. These were accompanied by other elements that have been present in previous exhibitions or referenced in previous video works. The display boxes that featured in the exhibition at Cape Coat Castle in Ghana were also present. They became the centrepiece of each shrine surrounded by but failing to contain the objects of offering to Yamenja alongside burnt candles and the garments worn by the

ghostly women. The garments emerged from the shrines, suspended in mid-air as well as in time. They hung as though a body that occupied them a moment before had just dissipated and they were left suspended, in space and in that moment, an instant before they had time to crash to the floor.