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# Blackness as permanent exile: black female flesh against the human

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# DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
# MASTERS DISSERTATION




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## Blackness as Permanent Exile:
## Black Female Flesh Against the Human

**Supervisor: Shireen Ally**

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand
2021

***For my father, Mputumi Wiseman Mgqoboka, who passed on too soon. I miss you always, rest in peace Duna, Msuthu, Gubevu, Nokhala, Tiba, Jiyane, Salakumlandela.***
***I am grateful to have an ancestor as powerful as you.***

# *Acknowledgements*

When I began in earnest to think about and lay the foundations for this project, something unexpected happened, well two things—the Covid-19 pandemic and my father unexpectedly fell ill. I had been halfway across the country and unable to travel home to be with my family and by his side, until a few months later when the country re-opened. Feeling incredibly alienated and depressed, it was My supervisor, Shireen Ally who was and whom is still here. Without her, I might not have even been a registered student, let alone have a full dissertation. Her support intellectually was just as important, as she helped guide my very scattered thoughts at the beginning of this research. She helped shape it into what it is today and reminded me why I started. Shireen thank you; you are incredibly brilliant!

To my mother, who lost the love of her life over the last year, to my brothers, who lost their father. I love you and I am so grateful to still have you all with me, thank you for your support during this process and for always believing I was good enough to complete this project, even when I didn't. Ndiyabulela

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Lastly, to black people all over, A Luta Continua!

# *Declaration*

I hereby declare that is dissertation is a result of my original work, except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise and in these cases, a reference of the original author is citied and acknowledged in-text and in the reference list.

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I further declare that this work will not be submitted to any other institutions for any purposes of obtaining a qualification

Signature: 

# *Abstract*

black-Human-woman-exile.

This research is an attempt at interrogating why black women have been left out of the archives of black intellectual histories. What begins as an examination of the structural codes that render black women illegible expands into thinking about the positionality of black people in the world (or rather out-the-world) and how that might have implications for questions of blackness, gender and unfreedom. It utilises a 'Chorus' of black women from Miriam Makeba to Sila van den Kaap, from Hortense Spillers to Saidiya Hartman to critique the project of 'including' of black women into the archives of black intellectual histories, by dislocating blackness from the 'Human' and freedom, and with it, seeking to theorise blackness differently in a way that centres the black female flesh.

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# *Introduction*

In my first year of university I had been bitten by the bug of student politics. There I was, 18 years old and ready to give every inch of my being to improving the lives of black students on campus. The beginning of this journey of activism was only naturally accompanied by the gradual shift of my consciousness, as I was introduced to black thought. Almost immediately a thirst I had had in me for as long as I could remember was quenched. I drank from this oasis like my life depended on it, similar to what Dambudzo Marechera describes in his novel *The House of Hunger*, when he eloquently writes "At this time I was extremely thirsty for self-knowledge and curiously enough believed I could find that in 'political consciousness'. All the black youth was thirsty. There was not an oasis of thought which we did not lick dry; apart from those which had been banned, whose drinking led to arrests and suchlike flea-scratchings" (Marechera, 1978, pp. 30-31).

So here we were, we had chosen our religion and like devoted servants, we read our sacred bibles. In this case we dove into Frantz Fanon (1967), Steve Biko (1987) and the like, and in them we found an accurate articulation of the state of our lives and of the state of black people's lives all over. But of course, the more one reads the more one has questions, well at least in my instance. I had read all these thinkers but there was something missing. What I did not find in those holy texts of black thought were some of the things that had embodied me. I had questions about gender, about a gendered blackness, and on blackness and queerness. These questions also emerged because in the student movement at the time it had been clear that the treatment of black women and of the black queers, was vastly different to that of black men even though we had all equally been invested in the same project. What soon followed then was a moment which I now observe as not new in the history of black struggle, insofar as we began to ask, "where are the black women?" In leadership, in black historiographical accounts, where was the black gendered analysis? More radically so, I and many other black women had all but declared ourselves Black Radical Feminists—we would read black thought by black women, support and engage in struggle against the oppression of black women and even believed we

could somehow convince the political affiliations we belonged to, to take black women seriously.

A couple of years have passed now but these questions continue to eat away at me. They ate away at me in my Honours year when I had decided to do an amateur short film in which I attempted to archive the contributions of black women to black thought and it now centres this Masters dissertation. In pursuit of this project, I am interested in what seems to be the deliberate negation of the contributions of black women to black radical thought, histories and struggle, in all forms. My approach to this problem is a layered one. What I want to do in the broadest sense is to interrogate the histories of black radicalism largely as a means to assist me in exploring my question about the seeming absence of black women, but also as a means to think about a set of current debates in contemporary Black Studies that offer a different way of considering the visible negation of those who embody me within the archives of black thought.

In this dissertation, I attempt to probe some of the existing historiographical accounts of black thought and subsequently the notions of black freedom that emerge from that, and that result in the continued negation of black women from its histories. For the purpose of exploring this problem, my research takes on a set of critiques:

(1) I contend that the historiographies of black thought are inscribed within the discourse of the Human and as such have historically constructed notions of black freedom in problematic ways. This is to say that in many ways the historiographies of black radicalism, arguably, proffer that to be free for the black is to be Human— the Human that is constructed here, by black male historiographers and radicals, consciously or unconsciously figures, expanding from Michelle Stephens in '*Black Empire: the Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United states, 1914-1962*', the sovereign white heterosexual male (2005). I argue that within this configuration lies the structural codes that exclude and exile black women and black queers from its historical accounts. I am interested in the implications that such a notion has, or rather that it has had, for how we think about resistance, blackness and the possibilities of freedom; and how it is in fact this that has left black women and black queers out of the archives of black radicalism. It is interesting to observe that the notion/question of gender has remained in the position of the (un)thought in these histories even when its concerns are immediate.

(2) Undergirding this dissertation is an understanding that a large component of exploring the exclusion of black women from the histories of black radicalism is to examine the scholarship that has already explored this argument. This is to say the black women and the Black Feminist scholarship that has sought to do the work of trying to 'recover' and to 'retrieve' black women who have been 'forgotten' or left out of the archive. I attempt to argue that although these projects of inclusion and representation are important, they are not what this research project aims to do. In fact, in large parts, it is what I aim to critique. This is because I want to suggest that these kinds of projects reproduce, unintentionally, the same structural violence that leads to the exclusion of black women in the first place.

(3) A large component of this dissertation also wants to consider what a project that takes seriously black women might look like. By this I mean, what would it mean to propose that black women may offer us a theory for thinking through the state of blackness out-the-world. Rather than the biographical project of the inclusion of black women into an archive of black freedom, my purpose is to consider how taking black women seriously might 'derange' that archive and disrupt the scholarly and historiographical common sense about black conceptions of freedom, borrowed from Hartman in her attempts to use the term in Venus in Two Acts on the archive (Hartman, 2008). By seriously and by 'derange' I mean, for example, what would it look like if we stopped utilising the assumptive logics of subjectivity and the human to account for the objective status of the suffering of black women? Or, of black people in general? (Douglass, 2018).

In this dissertation then and in the pages that follow, In exploring these critiques and the state of blackness in general, I call upon and bring to the centre, a *Chorus* of black women thinkers, intellectuals and artists—Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Miriam Makeba, Sila den Kaap through Yvette Christansë, Christina Sharpe and more—who assist me in dilating and revealing the engendered flesh, pain and melancholia that is so inescapable and is evidenced in what I argue is the permanency of black suffering. It is these black women and their lives that reveal this to us, but whom are at the same time negated from the histories of black thought. For example, I do not utilise Makeba here in the ways that a conventional biographical project might do, rather I point to and extract various parts of her life in order to explore how those moments, might offer us a theory for reading the state of blackness 'in' the world—what does her experience of exile inform us about blackness? How might Hortense Spillers augment our

understanding of gender in relation to blackness? How might Hartman assist us in re-thinking blackness in relation to both the human and the archive?

This idea of the Chorus is one adopted from Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate histories of Social Upheaval (2019)*, in which she names the "chorus" as an attempt at bringing together the voices, actions and lives of a number of black women in the 20th century whose narrations would otherwise be ignored or marked as promiscuous, reckless, wild and wayward by the violence of the archive (Hartman, 2019, p. 7). Of course I do not necessarily utilise the term here in the exact ways in which she does, but I take inspiration from it, in order to name the method and manner in which I draw specifically from the black women whose ideas centre this dissertation and whom I put in conversation with each other, even though they might not have crossed paths. All of them, in concert, assist me in thinking about the problem of blackness and more immediate to this project, the structural codes of the archive that have negated black women from the histories of black radicalism. In other words, this *Chorus* of black women alongside other thinkers, have allowed for a specific way in which I have chosen to explore this project theoretically, that I find aids me in thinking differently about a question that may have been asked multiple times before. This is to say, that this dissertation considers a Black Studies critique in order to deconstruct the ways in which we have come to think about the archive, freedom, the human and gender in relation to blackness. Utilising this theoretical framework has allowed and afforded me an opportunity in this project to think more productively about black women within the histories of black radicalism, and of these histories in general. I might have elected to use Fred Moten's idea of the ensemble (Moten, 2003), instead, but found that it names a political collective and communality that perhaps does not fully capture what I am attempting to do here.

Instinctively then, one might ask what is this Black Studies critique? Black studies, as it has emerged in the United States, provides an important challenge to the historical and traditional ways in which we have come to think through the problem of blackness, and it introduces a new vocabulary for how we may begin to describe the issues that engulf the black world. It takes racial slavery as central to thinking about the condition that black people find themselves within the modern world. The particular area of Black Studies that I am interested in here, interrogates the possibilities of 'freedom' and the 'political subjectivities' claimed and articulated within previous sections of black thought and within larger third world politics. Broadly put, a debate currently rages between several intellectual currents within Black

Studies. A particularly influential strand of Black Studies is pessimistic about the horizon of black freedom in the context of the structural antagonism that racial slavery institutes (Afro-pessimism). At the same time, a countervailing set of currents either: i) defend the possibilities of black freedom, and revolutionary struggle (i.e. 'the Black Radical Tradition'); ii) theorise practices of refusal that are not pessimistic, but do not presume the 'human' subject of 'resistance' or 'revolution' (e.g. fugitivity, waywardness); or (iii) calls instead for the lively activation of the "flesh", either in the extravagant power of abjection, or in black and brown performance that refuse reduction to 'flesh'.

The reception of especially certain strands of this kind of thinking in South Africa has been interesting to observe. In the academy, most often than not it is dismissed, while in a different sense young black people in and outside the academy have gradually embraced it, finding a new language for understanding and describing the wretched state of their lives, of black people in South Africa and the world over. Young black thinkers are compelled by Hortense Spillers' idea of body/flesh and the middle passage (Spillers, 1987); of Frank B Wilderson's idea (taken from Spillers, Hartman and Orlando Patterson) of social death and natal alienation (2010), Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), and modes of refusal and waywardness ; Fred Moten's poetics of black social life and fugitivity (2003, 2013). How we have come to think of racial domination in South Africa has historically been concentrated within settler colonialism and later Apartheid. Although there was slavery in South Africa it is often spoken of and about as a period long ago that does not have as much bearing on how we think of race today or rather that much of its scholarship takes on a sociological account of slavery and not really the kinds of work that thinks through what happens to black 'being' in that moment. So then how may we begin to reconcile the theories of racial slavery located halfway across the world in a particular space and time with the histories and realities of race in South Africa? This is part of my own intellectual struggle, and in fact part of what this project wants to think through is exactly this. I have come to find that this strand of thinking has aided me most in trying to think through the black condition and the main critiques that this project wants to suggest, i.e. the masculinist and humanistic orientation of the histories of black radicalism. It has allowed me to look into the Black Feminist scholarship that is not necessarily interested in the subjectivity of the category 'woman'. And it has provided me with a language, grammar and conceptual framework in which to think through a well-known figure like Miriam Makeba, or a less well-known figure like Sila van den Kaap.

This is not a conventional dissertation, in the sense that it does not follow the traditional markings of what the University might deem a research project—the stringent marking out of the rationale, methodology, literature review etc—none the less, it includes all of this, but in unconventional and perhaps undisciplined ways. This is because in pursuit of the questions posed in this dissertation, I found the traditional methods conceptually limiting and thus I have attempted something different, that has allowed me the epistemic freedom to think through these questions, that whose implications stretch far beyond this dissertation. This project consists of an Introduction, Four Chapters and a Conclusion.

The first chapter titled "***Blackness, unFreedom and the Question of Humanity***" examines the idea of the Human, the notions of freedom that are birthed out from it and its relations to blackness. I attempt to trace the antagonisms that have existed between black struggle and the quest for humanity and question the usefulness of the category for the possibilities of black freedom. Here I also attempt to contend that a large part of the reason why black women have been negated from the histories of black radicalism is as a result of this quest for humanity, precisely because of how the human has been historically framed.

In the second chapter "***Gender, Blackness and the Question of the Archive***", I attempt to think about gender and its relations to blackness. I think through how the histories of black radicalism has treated the idea of gender and black women specifically. This chapter also attempts to engage, interrogate and think through the existing literature on Black Feminism and offers a number of critiques. Lastly, I end this chapter by beginning to pave a different way of thinking about blackness and gender and present a set of conceptual markers for how we may begin to undo the structural codes that have allowed for so long, the exclusion of black women from the histories of black thought.

The third chapter, "***Makeba, Blackness and Exile***" introduces Miriam Makeba and details the ways in which I want to think through her, that are unconventional and do not take on a chronological biographical account. I critically observe how she has been written about in the past and I consider what it would mean if we might begin to observe how parts of her life might offer us a theory for understanding blackness 'in' the world. Secondly this chapter, considers the idea of Exile, derived from Makeba's own experience, and attempts to probe whether it might be possible if we were to begin to understand the condition of being black 'in' the world as one that is Exilic. Lastly, it considers the implications of such a proposition.

The fourth chapter titled "***Partus: Black Female Flesh and the Violence of Intimacy***" attempts to continue the work started at the end of the second chapter, insofar as it attempts to think about how black women, particularly the black woman slave offers us a text and a lexicon for reading blackness. It introduces the ideas of Hartman, Sharpe, Morgan, and others and considers *Partus Sequitur Ventrem* and the violent intimacies that made up racial slavery and that continue to haunt what Saidiya Hartman terms it's "afterlife" (Hartman, 1997). I continue to think about different elements of Makeba's life and read her alongside Sila van den Kaap and consider how these violent intimacies are so present in their text, contrary to national political memory.

# *Blackness, unfreedom and the question of humanity*

*However, suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one's suffering but rather of intensifying it? Or what if this acknowledgement was little more than a pretext for punishment, dissimulation and the instantiation of racial hierarchy? What if the presumed endowments of man—conscience, sentiment and reason—rather than assuring liberty or negating slavery, acted to yoke slavery and freedom?*

*-Saidiya Hartman, in Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and self-making in 19th century America(1997, p.5)*

In 2005, Michelle Stephens attempted to argue in her foundational text , '*Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962',* that black male intellectuals in trying to craft a path for the black race, conceptualised notions of black freedom and black transnationalism at the end of World War I that were often gendered, masculinist and entrapped within the context of empire (2005). Using Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay and C.L.R. James, Stephens suggests to us that in a context in which "nationalism and the model of the nation-state rapidly became the international political norms of the early 20th century; the Caribbean intellectuals living in the United States during these years experienced the politics of self-determination through a very particular set of concerns" (Stephens, 2005, p. 2)—i.e. that the Caribbean's experience was one in which they were displaced into the middle passage from Africa and later displaced from the colony to the United States. This is to say that this constant state of limbo presented a challenge for the male Caribbean intellectual, that is: how to represent some form of black nationalism and black self-determination (Stephens, 2005, p.3). Of course, their attempts at such a project were grounded in trying to imagine black nationality outside of the colonial and Western global imperialist political order; more so, this oppositional project was one which attempted to craft a black internationalism in a world that did not recognise "black colonial subjects as national peoples" (Stephens, 2005, p. 3).

There is a double bind here however, because while attempting to imagine and construct notions of black freedom outside of empire precisely because empire provided the material conditions for black solidarities to emerge across nation, language, gender and class, Stephens

argues that they also constructed a specifically masculine global imaginary that cannot be divorced from the consciousness and innerworkings of empire (Stephens, 2005, p.6). Stephens's work rests on two key arguments: **1)** "that we have missed identifying a black global political consciousness that develops in tandem with discourses of imperialism, empire and the modern nation-state and that results in a 'hybrid' discourse"; **2)** that this "inspectable hybridity reveals black global histories that embody black political desires in specifically gendered and sexualised constructions of race" (Stephens, 2005, p.8). For Stephens, the black male Caribbean intellectual's desire and longing for the black state, for black sovereignty, were "captured in and embodied by powerfully gendered and sexualised metaphors"—resulting by implication, in the imagined sovereign state and as a such black freedom that figured the black sovereign male at the expense of black women (Stephens, 2005, p. 13). For Stephens, it is important to note that in essence empire must be understood as not simply a discourse that constructs notions of white racial and sexual formations, but that it also informs notions of blackness.

Now one might ask why do I begin this dissertation on the negation of black women from the histories of black radicalism with Stephens? Well, I do so because I want to contend that Stephens in her text, tugs at something that had driven me to begin this project in the first place. This is to say that at a fundamental level, her project is not one in which she readily attempts to insert black women into the histories of black thought as a quick remedy for their negation. Instead, she attempts the task of trying to provide a structural analysis for why it is that we might find ourselves in a situation in which black women have been excluded—or what she might regrettably term 'woman of colour'. For me, this first step is integral, because it allows us to think beyond a biographical project of representation. Secondly, in her attempts at a structural analysis, Stephens suggests something important, insofar as she points to how the inner workings of empire ultimately result in the black male intellectuals framing and constructing of black freedom in very masculine ways—so that the desire for the black state or rather black sovereignty articulates and translates to black male sovereignty. But I want to argue that Stephens does not far enough in her analysis and misses an opportunity that might leave her text also ultimately entrapped within the same structural codes.

I want to suggest that by understanding the problematic construction of black freedom by black male intellectuals of the time, Stephens misses the opportunity of interrogating this thing we call the *Human*. This is to say that she doesn't attempt to disrupt black freedom understood as,

and undergirded by, a humanist project. Because if she did so, she might not have stopped at framing black freedom constructed under conditions of empire as simply figuring the black male sovereign; but rather that under these conditions, black freedom, consciously or unconsciously, figures the white sovereign heterosexual male. Stephens assumes subjectivity in the place of the black intellectual and overdetermines them. Although Stephen's text for me lays an important starting point, it also threw me into conceptual crisis precisely because it does not disrupt the scholarly commitment to the Human, and by implication black freedom and the historiographical work that later follows. What happens if we are to dis-integrate the category Human that has been so integral to the black freedom project within the histories of black radicalism? Would this disrupt the codes of the archives of black radicalism that have resulted in the negation of black women to begin with? What happens if we do not assume a *subject* position and subjectivity, in place of the *object* status of the black? In other words what happens if we begin with the premise that the black has in fact been placed outside the Human – as not just a less than human subject, but an object and a thing? Stephens' work falls in line with a multitude of texts that want to think about black intellectual histories and either their masculine orientation or their exclusion of black women from its histories. Stephen's herself argues that she takes a feminist posture in this text and in fact utilises the work of Carole Boyce Davis, Hazel Carby and other black women who have attempted to think through this question. So, it is with the *Human* then that I want to begin this project—precisely because it provides the structure for how I want to think through this question of the absence of black women from the histories of black radicalism, a question that has resurfaced on so many occasions within black thought.

## *The Human:*

Over the last couple of years, I've come to be preoccupied with the question of humanity and freedom in relation to blackness precisely because it presents to me a crisis of sorts, in the sense that these three words (humanity, freedom, and blackness) sit uncomfortably alongside each other—antagonistic yet complicatedly interwoven. Of course, this question, for me, arises out of larger question of the negation of black women and queers in the histories of black thought and radicalism. In my meditation over the latter, perhaps foundational question with regards to this project, I find that the former, that is this question of the Human and freedom and the black kept resurfacing and in fact has become quite central in my thinking. I think that this question persists because I am interested in the implications of the continued investment in the rescuing

and saving of the Human, particularly within black thought. It is interesting to me that much of the work that wants to account for black history, this is to say writers and intellectuals like Robin DG Kelley *in Freedom Dreams (2002),* Anthony Bogues in *Black Heretics Black Prophets (2003),* Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic (1993)* all seemingly cling onto humanity in the positivist sense, so that they position humanity as the thing to which to strive towards , to have recognised, and ultimately the mechanism through which freedom can be achieved. In the same breath it is in these texts that one finds consciously or unconsciously the erasure of black women and queers from its archives of black thought. It is significant that Cedric Robinson's (1983) ground-breaking work on the histories of Black Marxism does not mention a single black woman. Robyn DG Kelley in his influential foreword to *Black Marxism* suggests that Robinson's attention to the unconscious and to spirituality introduces a recognition of surrealism, to which Suzanne Césaire contributed so importantly, yet this late inclusion is a clumsy effort. This is unsurprising. One way of reading Kelley's striving in *Freedom Dreams* (2002) to adopt a feminist posture is that it is driven by a political correctness to 'include' black women, in which these contributions are for the most part compartmentalised in and as 'black feminism'. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) suffers the same problem. While he performs a feminist sensibility by offering a gendered analysis, it speaks volumes that the starring cast of The *Black Atlantic* is a familiar line-up of big men: Frederick Douglass, Richard Wright, and W.E.B. Du Bois. It is also important to note that when the historiography of black thought/radicalism does specifically 'include' black women, it is often a patronising gesture of representation.

Out of this then a number of supplementary questions emerge: how does holding on to this thing we call the Human maintain the structural codes of the archives of black thought? Put differently, what might happen if we dislocate the Human? Perhaps it would mean that we no longer consciously or unconsciously frame freedom in terms that reiterate the sovereignty of the white heterosexual male? What happens if we stop using the lexicon of the Human to account for the object/ive status of the suffering of black people? How do we begin to think through notions of freedom in relation to blackness? What are the ontological and existential stakes here? This question of the Human expands beyond this dissertation and comes to occupy even contemporary debates within the black intellectual world— the stakes of this question are high because it is indeed a matter of black life or black death. That indeed if the question of ontology is fundamental here, then this question of the Human has implications for how we write and mediate on blackness in the humanities in general. What do we do with the question

of freedom? My attempt here is not to settle a particular debate, or to perhaps find the answers to the questions I've posed, but rather to think with and against a set of ideas with regards to humanity, freedom and blackness.

The 1400s marked a shift in how we would come to think about and relate to the African in the world, this is to say that from this moment onwards their position in the world becomes a precarious one and in many ways it becomes oppositional to the Human – insofar as the African, converted into the black, becomes the essence of unfreedom while the Human, marked white, becomes the essence of freedom. It is precisely this moment that also marks the beginnings of black strivings for freedom—be it on the shores of the Gold Coast (now present day Ghana), on the slave ships across the Atlantic, to later in resistance wars against colonial settlement in the Cape of Good Hope and the Eastern Cape, to the Anti-Colonial, Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Even intellectually we have seen the urgency to write about the condition of black people and perhaps mediate on the possibilities of their freedom in ways in which figured a critique of the west and the Human—It is W.E.B Dubois who declares that the problem of the 20th century is the colour line; Aimé Césaire in "*Discourse on Colonialism*" (1950), pens what might be considered one of the most dramatic critiques of the paradox of Western humanism and its civilisational discourse; it is what makes Tiyo Soga in confrontation with anti-blackness in 19th century Eastern Cape declare that the native people were the children of Ham, that "God had given Africa to the sons of ham and he would retain them" (Williams, 1978); it is what allows Ida B Wells to pen *Southern Horrors (1892)* in order to demonstrate the severing of the black body in relation to the white, and ultimately it is this sustained critique of Man that compels Sylvia Wynter to re-think the categories of humanity.

One can say then that black people either through radical political struggle or indeed through black intellectual thought and histories have on some level engaged in the critique of Western discourse and its Humanism. But what one finds, interestingly, is that a large number of those who have engaged in those critiques in the 19th, 20th and even 21st century do so while attempting to hold onto the promise of one Human race—varied versions of Nelson Mandela's rainbow nation dream if you were—consciously or unconsciously; even when the 'evidence', this is to say the continued and persistent violence against the black, demonstrates to them otherwise. So, what happens if we step back for a moment and observe the structural relations of the world? I argue that doing this allows us firstly to see the real stakes at play here, to resign ourselves to the reality of the black position. Furthermore, it allows us to shift how we

write and meditate on blackness and ultimately brings us a lot closer to some form of freedom than previously before. For the purpose of my project, I wonder if it allows us to engage the archive differently, to think of this question of gender differently. Of course, the histories of the critique of the Human, are not only located within black scholarship—this is to say that much of post-structuralist and even post-colonial theory has been integral to this tradition: consider Jacques Derrida's critique of the Western logocentrism, Michel Foucault's critique of modern 'Man', Edward Said's '*Orientalism*'(1978) and Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern (1985). Although these texts are important, they are not foundational in this dissertation because my focus here is on blackness and the Human.

Central to my thinking about Blackness, freedom and the question of humanism are Hortense Spillers' *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar book (1987);* Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America (1997),* and Frank Wilderson's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms (2010)*. I have selected these three thinkers because for me, they mark a shift in the way that we have come to think about freedom/humanism in relation to blackness. They present a different approach to this thinking that doesn't seek in the end, incorporation into the technologies of Western modernity. They think through blackness not with the desire to find some redemptive arch or a level of coherence, but rather they point us to the structures that underwrite 'being' black in the world, or rather out-the-world. Now it has not gone over my head that all three of these theorists find themselves in the United States, analysing at one level American society. For some, this might pose a problem in that they might argue that the 'context' and 'experiences' are different. I disagree with this because, firstly, I believe that one should theoretically and intellectually 'travel' to where they deem necessary. It is interesting that this argument is levelled only when it comes to these black thinkers, but one might happily reference some German fellow named Karl Marx, or some French fellow named Michel Foucault. Secondly, that these thinkers provide and present for me, at least, an argument at a level of global structure that reaches far beyond the event of slavery in Mississippi, that allows us to think through the question of blackness on a global scale. Which is why these three thinkers, and their texts are fundamental. Of course, there are other thinkers who have also done this—Frantz Fanon who lays some of the foundations, Christina Sharpe, Jared Sexton, Joy James, Fred Moten, and even Achille Mbembe.

One might contend that perhaps it would be inappropriate to have a conversation about the Human in relation to the black, without having Sylvia Wynter as foregrounding or in the least bit mentioning her work. But there is a reason as to why Spillers, Hartman and Wilderson populate this discussion on the Human, and not Wynter. Her life's work has attended to our conceptions of the Human and Man and has centred around rethinking alternative modes of being and to the formation of new humanism and sciences of Human discourse that are removed from the shadow of Darwinism and scientific racism (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 2). Although Wynter's work argues in many ways that it is "the ex-slave archipelago that holds the possibility of undoing and unsettling and not replacing or occupying - Western conceptions of what it means to be human" (McKittrick and Wynter, 2015, p. 2), I am unconvinced by the destination of this project. This is to say, she like many black radical intellectuals, is correct in beginning with the premise of the critique of Western political thought/discourse and their conceptions of the Human, in fact her critique might be the most substantial one, but I am unsure how productive the destination of her project may be. Wynter's work is relevant here because it is at its core about how the history of racial violence continues to inform our lives, more so that her work thinks about and interrogates how the figure of the 'Man' has become the yard stick through which all other beings are measured. But I take issue with Wynter, in so far as she attempts (in conversation with Césaire, CLR James, Foucault and the like) a project that wants to attend to the creating of a new science of being human—Wynter, in my engagement with her, doesn't abandon the Human, she conceives a new way of being human, that I think presumes that the black is operating 'in' the world and has the capacity for *being* under these conditions to begin with. A large part of my project is attempting to undo this, to dislocate the Human that has resulted in the illegibility of black women within the archives of black thought. So I go to Spillers, Wilderson and Hartman in an attempt to not only to demonstrate the position of black people out-of-the-world but to abandon the Human as the vehicle through which the black constructs notions of freedom, that I want to suggest has contributed to the structural codes that leave black women illegible in the archive.

## *The Body and the Flesh:*

*"The New World (15th century until today) represents for African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment and exile. That firstly marked the theft of the body, this process a wilful and violent severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire… and the female body and the male body become territory of cultural and political manoeuvre". (Spillers, 1986, p. 67)*

It is Hortense Spillers in her work in 1987, who alludes to us, that there is a fundamental shift that first takes place to the African at the advent of modernity. Although '*Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*' is really about black women and the question of gender as a response to the Moynihan Report that proclaimed that black women were responsible for the problems of the "Negro" community, it is integral, in this case, precisely because it provides us with the vocabulary and language for how we may describe African/black being 'in' the world and how it comes to change upon the encounters with the Europeans. For the purpose of this chapter then, I want to focus on some key conceptual markers she provides that help lay the theoretical foundations of this dissertation. The quote above suggests to us something essential, that I think has often been missed in our narrations and accounts of slavery and colonial conquest. This is to say that Spillers contends that there is an ontological and metaphysical shift that takes place to the African, who is turned black, that allows their body to become a "territory of cultural and political manoeuvre" (Spillers, 1987, p. 67).

This suggestion put forward by Spillers I think is different from accounts of slavery or colonialism that speak to empirical markers and labour practices. That more than that, the captive body is disrupted by externally imposed meanings and uses that: "*1. The captive body becomes a source of an irresistible destructive sensuality 2. The captive reduces to a thing 3. In this absence from a subject position the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness'.4. as a category of otherness, the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general powerlessness, resonating through various centres of human and social meaning"* (Spillers,1987, p. 67). This is a mouthful, but if we are to really think about it, this is exactly what the African continent is to Europe—a projection of myths and fantasies, a creation of their own self-fashioning through the othering of Africa.

Spillers wants to make a distinction between body and flesh; she posits that this distinction is the central one between captive(object) and liberated subject-position: "*In that sense, before the "body" there is "flesh," that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography"* (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). I contend that what Spillers is arguing here is that something happens at the moment of the capture of the black body at the dawn of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is to say that there is a process of mutilation and dismemberment that takes place in the middle passage, in the ship (the hold). And as such there are two kinds of positionalities or ways of 'being' that await us on the other side—the first is the body which is a subject that has forms of subjectivity and that is free; the second is the flesh which is fungible; this is to say that it is an object, marked by violence and is "the 'human' form divested of gender and moral subjecthood, more so the flesh is the 'human' form ideology cannot acknowledge" (Rivera, 2015).

For Spillers, in the middle passage and subsequently in the Americas the black 'being' turns from body to flesh, from subject to object—that the captive body becomes "*the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality and at the same time, in stunning contradiction, the captive body reduces to a thing*" (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). I want to contend that this doesn't only happen to those who are violently forced onto the slave ships and hauled across the Atlantic, that rather this process extends to the African in general—to those who are left behind who at any point have the potential to be the slave insofar as the slave is also synonymous with the black; to those of whom on the continent faced a similar magnitude of violence at the advent of colonial conquest. One would only have to read Sol Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (Picador Africa, 2007) to realise this fact.

By establishing this distinction between the body and flesh, Spillers allows us to rethink our assumptions about the 'subjectivity' of black people in the world. In other words, I argue, that she affords us the language to be able to make the distinction between the Human and the black—this move is controversial and may throw a lot of what we think into crisis. This is because in our mediating about the oppression and subjection of black people within the humanities, the archives of black thought and elsewhere, we have come to assume without question that the category Human includes the black and therefore we have come to think about notions of freedom, gender etc from this position. Spillers allows us to disrupt this assumption, insofar as she allows us to probe whether categories like gender formulate in the same ways for black people as they do for others, that notions of will and consent and even family are

thrown into crisis as Hartman will later demonstrate. It allows us to disrupt black freedom as a project of the Human and by consequence a project of the white sovereign heterosexual male. This is a step that Stephens missed in *Black Empire* and a step that I contend is essential if we are to disrupt the existing structural codes of the archives of black thought. For Spillers and her project in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, this argument of the flesh is essential because she contends "*that this materialised scene of unprotected female flesh…offers a praxis and a theory text for the living and for the dying and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations*"(Spillers, 1987, p. 68)—this is a key conceptual point that I wish to take up in the second chapter of this thesis, this is to say that perhaps thinking through black women seriously may offer us a theory for blackness, but only if we are honest in our assessment of the subject/object position of the black 'in' the world.

Spillers in many ways in this text attempts to trace the symbolic order of things, in order to reveal the grammar of American society that compelled the Moynihan report to wrongly blame black women for the problems that face the black community or what Frank Wilderson might term the libidinal economy, borrowing from Hartman (2008), or simply a grammar of suffering. She contends that in order to trace this symbolic order that turned body into flesh, subjects into objects one would have to start at the beginning. This is to say, to return to the moment of rupture, that the massive demographic shift, that violent formation of a modern African consciousness that takes place on the sub-Saharan continent at the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). I, too, want to go back here, because I think that in order to trace the paradigmatic relation between this thing, we call the Human and its relation to blackness it is important to start at where the shift takes place. To assist me in tracing this fundamentally ontological question, I want to park Spillers for a moment and travel to Frank Wilderson's now controversial thesis turned book: *Red, White & Black- Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms (2010),* which if one actually engages with it, should not find all too controversial, particularly on this question of ontology and symbolic (libidinal) order, even though the book itself to a large degree is a critique of film theory and cultural studies.

Wilderson in its introduction, *Unspeakable Ethics*, narrates the story of a black woman who would stand outside the gates of Columbia University and yell at Whites, Latinos, East and South Asians as they entered the university (Wilderson, 2010, p. 1)—she accused them of having stolen her sofa and of selling her into slavery. A few sentences later he describes that when he was at the University of California, he saw a Native American man on the streets, in

front of him was a sign informing those who pass by that they could settle their "Land Lease Accounts" they had neglected to settle since the 'discovery' of the Americas. I note these two encounters here, as Wilderson does in *Red, White &Black*, because of the grammar that they articulate. This is to say that for Wilderson, the Black Woman and the Native American man are articulating the only ethical grammar "available to modernity because it points us to the violence that underwrites the modern world's capacity to think, act and exist spatially and temporally" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 1)—In other words, their response is the only ethical response to the unethical grammar of suffering that characterises the modern world or what Spillers plainly puts as America's grammar. The Black Woman is deemed insane for refusing to participate in this unethical network of distribution, as Wilderson rightfully puts it "rather she is articulating the loss of her body (by Spiller's account: turned into flesh)….that she gave birth to the commodity and to the Human and yet she has neither subjectivity nor a sofa to show for it" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 2).

What concerns Wilderson is that questions of political ontology, particularly in relation to the black are always so unspeakable, to which I tend to agree. As I had alluded at the beginning of this chapter, black intellectual history and black political struggle history through striving for freedom have sought to speak to and point to the condition of black people and to their 'grammar of suffering', I asked why was it that even when revealed to the 'evidence' of the positionality of black people 'in' the world, they still held onto the promise of humanity and more so, it became the main vehicle through which freedom was attainable, even today? Wilderson provides his own thoughts on this, he argues that from the 1980s until today (which for him is at the time of the construction of the book in 2010) the articulation of the grammar that unwrites modernity, that is the grammar of black suffering, shifted from black politics and intellectuals speaking this unspeakable grammar (through radical politics) to blackness only manifesting itself in intellectual, cinematic, and political discourse as unspoken grammar. If we are following Wilderson correctly here, then what he is trying to say is that there became a concealment of the true state and 'being' of the black within political and intellectual discourse from the 1980s onward. For Wilderson, the protocols that govern the contemporary political and intellectual scene "hide rather than reveal the grammar of suffering that underwrites structural antagonisms (Wilderson, 2010, p. 6)". I too, have gone to Wilderson, Spillers and Hartman precisely because I am concerned about the ways in which we have meditated about the positionality of black people, that has implications for the ways in which we think about gender and freedom for example.

In an attempt to start at the beginning then, how did an entire continent become racialised into blackness and then characterised into the quintessential slave? The main rationalisation for the conquest and enslavement of Africans is commerce and as a result the Marxists might argue that true liberation can only be achieved through a proletariat led revolution and the destruction of capitalism. Wilderson wants to dispel this, he attempts to demonstrate to us using David Eltis, that in fact Europeans might have had greater economic success had they simply enslaved their own at a larger scale, that at that time they certainly had a large enough population for it—there is no need to stop in Africa. What is an important take away here is that the argument for commerce is not enough, that perhaps the problem of the world is anti-blackness? And that rather what Wilderson suggests to us might be food for thought. He argues that Europe chooses the less economically viable option because fundamentally "what whites might have gained in economic value, they would have lost in symbolic value and that it is this symbolic value that structures the libidinal economy of civil society" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 15). That "White chattel slavery would have meant that the aura of the social contract had been completely stripped from the body of white the convict, vagrant, beggar, indentured servant or child" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 15). For me, this point is vital to our understanding of the relationship between the world of blacks and world of Humans, and that white-on-white violence is put into check before it becomes gratuitous.

It is this point then, when the symbolic and ontological value of the white is saved at the expense of the degradation of the ontology of African people, that is integral. We know that many other societies have been enslaved in the past, Wilderson himself states that in the Middle Ages different groups experienced slavery and following Patterson, were socially dead (generalised dishonour, gratuitous violence, natal alienation) (Wilderson, 2010, p. 18). But that it had never been to this magnitude and at this global scale—that for Wilderson, the African, or more precisely blackness refers to an individual who is, by definition, always already void of relationality. In essence modernity here marks a new ontology because it is an entire race of people whom even prior to the contingency of a transgressive act stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world (Wilderson, 2010, p. 18). This is to say that in 2021 an entire race of people whether in Johannesburg South Africa, North London England or the streets of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil are open to a constant anti-black violence. For Wilderson, slavery *"**advances from a word which describes a condition that anyone can be subjected to, to a word which reconfigures the African body into Black Flesh**" (*Wilderson, 2010, *18),* and in essence signifies the banishment of the African from ontology. More so "That slavery did not

just change the ontology of the African, that it also created the Human out of culturally disparate entities from Europe to the East" (Wilderson, 2010, 18), so that the black's grammar of suffering allows everyone else, in the very least, ontological potential and that as Fanon suggests "simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger" (Fanon, 1967, p. 87).

The question that follows next then is what is the positionality of the black in the world? What is their ontological position if they have any? Again here, Wilderson through his interchangeable use of theorists like Marriot, Hartman, Patterson and Spillers, provides us with the potential answer or in the least bit something to seriously mediate upon. Wilderson contends that the position of the black is a paradigmatic impossibility in the West and indeed the world (Wilderson, 2010, p. 9). That if we are to posit that the black is the very antithesis of the Human subject, his or her paradigmatic exile is not simply a function of the repressive practices on the part of the institutions –which is ordinarily what sociology or political sciences would argue (Wilderson, 2010, p. 9). Here Wilderson, similar in some sense to Spillers earlier, throws humanity by the wayside, positioning it outside of the black and in fact in opposition to it. For me this is a bold and important move because as I have alluded before, the anxiety to hold onto humanity at every turn is peculiar to me. Why has no one taken the risk and parked it outside, even for a moment? —Fanon probably is the only one who does this in *Black Skin, White Masks* when he contends that "*ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man*", even though ultimately, he is committed to humanism. I contend that the three theorists I have chosen to meditate upon in this first chapter do take that risk. It is Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection (1997)* who best articulates that even in what we think are the most progressive, emancipatory, or even radical moments, the black still operates in antagonistic relations with humanity and indeed freedom—that this violence is often times not discernible. Wilderson extends from Hartman and argues that this banishment from the Human fold is to be found most profoundly in the emancipatory meditations of black people's staunchest allies and in some of the most 'radical' films (Wilderson, 2010, p. 9)—that in the "afterlife of slavery", under the guise of multiculturalism and globalisation theory, blackness is even more illegible. I will return to Hartman, when I think through this question of freedom.

Now that humanity for the moment has been relegated to the realm of suspicion and dubiousness, plainly put, what is the position of the black in the world? Well, Wilderson argues that every black person in the United States and in fact the world today should be thought of

as a Slave and whites and non-whites as Masters. He is not interested, as I am not too, in the empirical reasons for this (i.e. the continued police brutality, the prison system, Apartheid spatial planning etc.). But rather he takes a structural approach—and focuses on this question of ontology. Using Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death (1982),* Wilderson argues that he dispels the notion that work and forced labour are constituent elements of slavery but that instead the constituent elements that make slave are that one is, a) perpetually open to ***gratuitous violence***—that the body of the slave is open to the violence of all others and exists in a state of structural and open vulnerability. More so that this violence is not contingent upon any transgression (thus one can be killed for walking while black), b) ***generally dishonoured***—that one is dishonoured in their very being and existence, c) ***natally alienated***— which is so say that the world does not recognise or incorporate your filial relations into its understanding of what constitutes the family. In essence then what is really essential to the slave is that they are socially dead, that as an ontological position and a grammar of suffering the slave, that we can now substitute for the black following Wilderson's thinking, is not "a labourer but an anti-Human, a position against which humanity establishes and maintains and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 11), that which becomes the "***territory of cultural and political manoeuvre"*** as Spillers suggests**.** It is important to think about slavery not as the event or the experience of slavery on the plantation, but rather it must be understood as a condition of ontology. That for Wilderson, the black person is ontologically socially dead. That what characterises the black is what Hartman points out as fungibility and accumulation, not exploitation and alienation as the worker would.

Now whether I believe black people are slaves or not is beside the point. I utilise Wilderson and he is important to me because he establishes a structural antagonism that if taken on some level seriously makes it impossible for us to so easily reconcile with humanity and seek freedom and incorporation into it. It gives us a split chance to have a BLACK conversation and that for me alone, already presents us with a potentiality for some level of freedom. As he cynically suggests, "the onus to prove otherwise is on the one who argues that there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness, how and when did such a split occur? the woman at the gates of Columbia university awaits an answer" (Wilderson, 2010, p.11).

## *The Question of Freedom:*

As I near the end of this chapter, I want to come to this question of freedom in relation to the black. Here I want to call upon Saidiya Hartman for assistance. What makes Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America (1997)* such a landmark and important text within black thought, is precisely because she wants to observe the parts of blackness that we peculiarly do not often consider. That in our accounting of black suffering we are often quick to point to the scenes of explicit violence, by this I mean the literal display of black death. What Hartman does here is to attempt to look at the implicit forms of violence in the constituting of black being and non-being that are just as gratuitous but not so easily apparent or discernible, this is to say, that persistent violence that continues even after the moment of emancipation. More so that she offers us a different interpretation of how we might have previously observed and thought through the experiences of blackness — insofar as she firstly interrogates this thing, we call humanity/freedom and equality, which is terminology that has been so engraved within the history of black thought and radicalism and in many ways has been fundamental to its project. Secondly, particularly, in the Chapter *Seduction and the Ruses of Power*, she attempts to think differently about gender, sexuality, the positionality, and experiences of the black woman slave, to which I want to explore in the second chapter. Here I call upon her for this question of freedom in relation to the black and humanity.

Hartman in the opening chapters of ***Scenes***, poses an important set of conceptual questions— she states "***however, suppose that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one's suffering but rather of intensifying it? Or what if this acknowledgement was little more than a pretext for punishment, dissimulation, and the instantiation of racial hierarchy? What if the presumed endowments of man— conscience, sentiment, and reason — rather than assuring liberty or negating slavery, acted to yoke slavery and freedom***?" (Hartman, 1997, p. 5). These set of questions are important fundamentally because they assume and diagnose the problem of black suffering after "independence/ freedom" differently than had previously done before. By this I mean, ordinarily texts within black radicalism have tended to position humanity as the thing in which to strive towards and have recognised and ultimately the mechanism through which freedom can be achieved. The diagnosis of the state of black people's lives in the afterlife of slavery/colonialism is always interestingly conceived within the vein of implementation. This

is to say that the problem of the continued subjection of black people is presumed to be the failure of the implementation of economic freedom in post 1994 South Africa, or of reconstruction in the US or the failure of the post-independence period across the African continent. When critique is levelled, it remains within the conceptual bounds of humanity. Even in Kwame Nkrumah's now landmark text *Class Struggles in Africa (1970)* which contends that the African continent is/was subjected to neo-colonialism after independence, although true, I think misdiagnosed the problem and perhaps the solution. For I think neo-colonialism tends to be focused mainly on this question of class and thus presumes that the remedy is socialism—but I am inclined to think that this is not enough. Insofar as Spillers, Hartman and Wilderson have demonstrated that what characterises black 'being' is not alienation and exploitation but fungibility and accumulation.

Hartman thinks through the problem of racial subjection differently, she finds that in fact forms of recognition of slave humanity under slave law only intensified the brutal exercise of power upon the captive. By recognising this, Hartman calls out humanism's bluff in relation to blackness—in fact simultaneously, she calls out black people's loyalty towards it. So that then what she is concerned with is "the savage encroachments of power that take place through notions of reform, consent and protection" (Hartman, 1997, p. 6); that only simply allow not for the grand event of liberation but rather transitions between modes of servitude and racial subjection (Hartman, 1997, p. 6). Interestingly Wilderson suggests, I'm sure in consultation with Hartman and her work, that black slaves by virtue of existing, created the white revolutionary. As a result of this "the political imagination of civil society was enabled by the fungibility of the slave metaphor" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 22), insofar as the slave metaphor becomes the motivation for the French and even the American revolution. "the circulation of blackness as metaphor and image at the most politically volatile and progressive moments in history (e.g., the French, English, and American revolutions) produces dreams of liberation which are more inessential to and more parasitic on the black, and more emphatic in their guarantee of Black suffering, than any dream of human liberation in any era heretofore" (Wilderson, 2010, p. 22). That these moments of appeal for freedom, even the abolition movement makes even less legible the condition of the slave. What I am trying to allude to here, by using Hartman and Wilderson, is that freedom under these conditions of modernity cannot exist without slavery or rather blackness.

This begs that we pose a set of key questions then: what does it mean when black radical thought continues to use this language of humanity? What are its implications? What type of violence and domination are enabled by the recognition of humanity, justified by the grounds of liberation and freedom? Is the word Human for everyone? "Can it be equally borne by all"? Hartman contends "that the recognition of the humanity of the slave did not redress the abuses of the institution nor the wanton use the captive warranted by his or her status as chattel….Put differently I argue that the barbarism of slavery did not express itself singularly in the constitution of the slave as object but also in the forms of subjectivity and circumscribed humanity imputed to the enslaved" (Hartman, 1997, p. 6). This is reason alone to question the kind of freedom we seek to be incorporated into. What she is interested in, is examining the shifting and transformed relations of power that brought about the re-subordination of the emancipated, the control and domination of the free black population, and the persistent production of blackness as abject, threatening, servile, dangerous, dependent, irrational and infectious. "in short the advent of freedom marked the transition from the pained minimally sensate existence of the slave to the burdened individuality of the responsible and encumbered freed person" (Hartman, 1997, p. 117). For Hartman freedom and humanity is a double bind, and ultimately perhaps a demand for the democratisation of white rights more than anything else and that freedom under these terms and conditions is not attainable.

Wilderson suggests to us that the problem with how we have imagined freedom before within political discourse, is that political discourse recognises freedom as a structuring ontologic and then undoes that work by not imagining freedom through political ontology –where it rightfully began—but through political experience and as a result losing its ontological foundations (Wilderson, 2010, p. 22). In other words, it traps blackness and black people into concealing not only their true ontological position of being structured against the human, but the also the ways that we attempt to seek freedom. For me, Hartman demonstrates what happens when we use notions of subjectivity as a means of understanding and subsequently remedying the objective status of the black. But why do we continue to do this within political and intellectual discourse? Why does the black readily appear as though they are a part of civil society? Or rather a part of the world? Well, it is precisely because we make the concession or rather the "structural adjustment"—some of our most radical theorists do it—we analyse blackness through subjectivity and what Wilderson terms 'borrowed institutionally' (Wilderson, 2010, p. 38) and as a result we believe that we can seek freedom through incorporation into humanity.

Although all three of these scholars are integral for my thinking against the Human, I argue that there is something that is foundational to this dissertation that Hartman and Spillers do (joined later by other black women), that a Wilderson does not—this is to say that Hartman and Spillers attempt to think through the state of blackness, through the figure of the ***black woman slave***. Hartman arrives at the conclusion that humanity and freedom are a double bind for the black and only work toward a continuation of their subjugation by realising that the 'experience' of the black women slave may offer us a theory for the state of blackness 'in' the world today; Spillers does something similar in her engagement with the female flesh, writing against the Moynihan report. To a large extent this is what I aim to do in this dissertation. I began with this question of humanity because I want to set a theoretical precedent for the rest of the dissertation. By this I mean, that this dissertation attempts to throw the Human by the wayside and the assumptive logics that come with it. It wants to contend that the first step in attempting to think about why black women have been negated from the histories of black radicalism, one needs to disrupt black freedom as a humanist project. If we do this, for example, we might be able to suggest that the exclusion of black women from the archives of black thought is in fact anti-blackness. More so it builds the foundation for the second chapter and how I want to think about the question of blackness and gender in chapters that follow.

# *Gender, Blackness and The Question Of The Archive*

*"Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar", "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother", "Aunty", "Granny", God's "Holy Fool", a "Miss Ebony First" or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented".*
*-Hortense Spillers, Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe (1987, p.65)*

One of the greatest deceptions and misleading articulations to circulate the black intellectual world is that Hortense Spillers' *Mama's baby, Papa's Maybe (1987)* proves that blackness today has no gender. It is fascinating that a text that is in fact an attempt to think about the position of black women in America and indeed the world, gets mobilised to certify what Spillers in many ways attempts to undo. It seems then that this question of gender is indeed a 'problem' for blackness and thus deserves critical engagement. The fundamental praxis of this dissertation is my concern with the negation of black women from the accounts of black thought and history and that in all the black intellectual courses I have done at a university level, there seems to be little to no regard for black women, unless the course is titled feminist theory—even then black women are relegated to a week lecture. It both fascinates and agitates me that black women seem to be discarded from the histories of black thought, let alone intellectual thought in general. And as such a large foundation of this research is an attempt to think through this problem and to interrogate this thing we call the archive and how it renders certain 'beings' illegible. It was important for me to begin with the question of humanity in relation to blackness because it is precisely what lays the under-structure for how I want to think about gender and later the archive. That I want to begin from the premise that we cannot use the logics of subjectivity and the Human to account for the objective status of the suffering of black women and of black people in general, Spillers and Hartman demonstrate this to us in their work. As I have mentioned earlier, it is peculiar to me that much of the historiographical work that wants to document the histories of black thought—Anthony Bogues, Robin DG Kelley, Cedric Robinson —firstly are invested in the Human and thus their pursuit of freedom is framed by this structural logic. Secondly that these works also either exclude black women

from their accounts of black history writ large or they include them as a patronising gesture of representation. I want to take for a moment Anthony Bogues' *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals (2003),* a key text within black radical thought as a case in point in this respect. I am interested in how Bogues mobilises Ida B Wells in such a way that in the end she is relegated to a biographical figure of representation.

Bogues in this particular work attempts to do roughly three things. The first is to try and think through how we may begin to define what he terms the black radical political intellectual, and he does this by utilising popular definitions of what it means to be an intellectual. The second thing Bogues does here is to effectively split black radical intellectual production into two streams, the first being the heretics and the second being the prophets (not sure of the usefulness of this exercise). Lastly, he embarks on a task of picking out a number of black radicals to think through. What is of interest for me in this regard is that Bogues includes in his book a Chapter on Ida B Wells, the only black woman included in the text, and it is interesting to observe the register in which he speaks of Ida as a black radical intellectual, and more so how he thinks through Ida in relation to other black intellectuals present in his work. So that when one reads Ida's chapter in relation to his chapter on Du Bois and C.R.L James, Bogues falls into the not so visible traps of 'inclusion'.

In the chapter on Ida B Wells, titled 'The Radical Praxis of Ida B Wells Barnett: Telling the Truth Freely', Bogues begins by stating that the 19th century in America was a site of trauma and the regular killings of ex-slaves, that although Reconstruction had granted all blacks freedom from slavery and black men the right to vote (we'll explore this particular point in a moment), these victories were short lived and the defeat of Reconstruction meant the reinforcing of white supremacy in the United States (Bogues, 2003, p. 47). It is here then, that for Bogues, Ida B Wells becomes an important figure, for she undertook the challenge "to assert black male and female equality, to end the mass ritual of flesh burning and to establish a new set of practices for black women that redefined womanhood"—I would expand and say for blackness writ large (Bogues, 2003, p. 48). Bogues argues, correctly, that Ida was the single most important campaigner against the lynching of blacks in the late 19th and early 20th century. More so that she was a black woman radical who grappled with a central idea in American thought at that period: the nature of the black body and the sub-humanness of the African American (Bogues, 2003, p 48). Taking from Hazel Carby, Bogues asserts that Wells practiced a form of black feminism, and that in fact her activities are representative of a stream of the

black radical intellectual tradition in which activity and theoretical reflection merge into praxis (Bogues, 2003, p. 48). For Bogues, Wells' writings mark a different stage in the African American tradition, specifically that her essays (particularly those on lynching) are interventionist texts. In fact, he coins her writings "polemical (critical) sociological excursions" (Bogues, 2003, p. 48).

But how can we use Ida's ideas to think through the black radical tradition and to take her interventions seriously? This is where I think Bogues fails. Bogues, having demonstrated that the world in which Wells was living in was one which was extremely dangerous for black people, that public spaces of freedom for ex-slaves were sharply constricted, and that Well's work was that much more important because of this, he does not critically engage her and take her interventions seriously at least on an intellectual level—it is here then that I want to step back for a moment and return to the point on the black male vote. Reconstruction in the US had meant the "freeing" of black slaves and secondly the awarding of black men the vote. Of course, reconstruction failed, but I want to continue with this thinking for a bit. Bogues argues, quite interestingly, that the black male population's political demands for equality during this period was focused on a politics of inclusion under the rubric of American male citizenship (Bogues, 2003, p. 49). Bogues even goes on to quote from a meeting discussing the black male vote, in which a black man states "we simply ask to be recognised as men, the same laws that govern white men shall govern black men and that in short we are dealt with as others are- in equity and justice" (Bogues, 2003, p. 50). For me this statement is revealing, as it is an opportunity for Bogues to interrogate the notions of black freedom that were conceptualised by black men at the time; to think seriously about how the politics that Ida presents to us may provide an opportunity to 'derange' the archive, because while black men demanded the right to vote and to be recognised as "men" during reconstruction, Ida was thinking through a politics that wanted freedom for all blacks. She was preoccupied with the prevention of the ceremonial killings of blacks by whites. No doubt, there were black women also struggling for inclusion into political society. No doubt there were black men involved in a more radical struggle. My point is that Bogues misses this opportunity for genuine intellectual engagement completely, a moment to recognise Ida's thinking as not just an example of 'interventionist' work, but also as a radical intellectual offering of a very different theory of blackness and freedom than the project of humanism. Bogues instead hides behind other black women radical thinkers, probing them to question the political programme of the time and refuses to engage it himself, and as a

result fails to interrogate why black freedom at the time meant black women would have to remain in the domestic sphere and in the shadows.

Lastly, then, if one were to look briefly at the Chapter on C.L.R James and W.E.B. Dubois, not necessarily to zone in too much on his argument here but rather to observe the tone and register of his writing compared to the chapter on Wells; one may soon realise the problem with how Ida has been used in this context. Bogues interestingly notes at the beginning of this chapter that his first two chapters on Ottobah Cugoano and Ida B Wells focused on individuals who are not normally acknowledged as a part of a black radical intellectual tradition, and now that he has spoken about them, he wants to turn to two figures whose writings and practices can be recognised as central to the 20th century black radical tradition, as if to say 'I've done the work of inclusion, now I want to engage serious politics or intellectual production', whatever that may mean. This is not an interrogation of Du Bois and James; whose contributions are indeed vital but rather an interrogation of Bogues' sincerity. This is because there are many others who have fallen into the same modes that Bogues has, including D.G. Kelley, Gilroy and others, or from a cinematic perspective one might look at the recently released documentary "By All Means Necessary" (2020) by Ramadan Suleman and Bheki Peterson and its problematic use of Miriam Makeba. That I want to contend that these gestures of 'inclusion' that seem progressive only repeat the violence of the archive that silences black women's radical thinking in the first place.

Now the antithesis or rather the innate response to the problem of the exclusion of black women from the histories of black thought is that we have come to see a large body of work that has been generated and curated by black women who seek to re-insert black women within these histories. Thinking through this question, one would need to acknowledge the work done by them and their efforts to undo the exclusion of black women from the histories of black radicalism, it would be an epistemic injustice not to do so—that some of this work laid the foundations of my own black feminism in the past. However, I have come to find that much of the scholarship that seeks to 'recover' black women to black history falls into the same structural logics and modes that has already placed them into the position of the unthought in the first place. It is peculiar to me that although there has been a large body of work (at least recently) that seeks to re-insert black women, the modus operandi of the archive remains the same. I want to think through this, to make the argument that projects of 'representation' are not enough. It seems to me that if we do not attempt to think through the problem from this

level, black women will simply appear in the archive for that one moment and then disappear again. They will remain figures of biography, they will service particular narratives, and they will not disrupt the narratives of black struggle that have not seen them included in the first place.

There is, as I have mentioned, a lot of scholarship that seeks to reinsert black women within the histories of black thought— *Hazel Carby (1987), Carol Boyce Davies (2007), Pumla Gqola (2013, 2021), Thozama April (2012), Shireen Hassim (2014)* and *Sisonke Msimang (2018)* to name but a few. All this work arguably remains trapped in two circular logics: first, the biographical project of 'representation' retains intact the structure of histories of black freedom as inclusion into the Human which does not disrupt freedom as a project of the sovereign male (white) subject; and second, this project of 'representation' reduces and relegates histories of black women's intellectual contributions to the sole location of 'feminism' rather than to black thought and politics writ large. Pumla Gqola's work on Miriam Tlali is important for 'including' women in the histories of Black Consciousness thought and politics for example. Shireen Hassim does the same with Winnie Madikizela Mandela. But both mobilise these figures to merely profile 'black feminism' and 'include' black women and gender analytics in histories of black thought. Black feminist scholarship that does this biographical 'recovery' work is consistently constrained by this narrow purpose that, in the end, reiterates the structure of the archive rather than undoes it.

Here I take briefly as a case of this, Carole Boyce Davies and her work on Claudia Jones (2009). In the article-length version of the book project, Davies starts off by stating that Claudia Jones, the only black woman to become a political prisoner because of her membership to the US Communist Party, was meant to be erased (Boyce Davies, 2009, p. 217). This is an important assertion and one that I have been thinking about quite a bit. Here there is the interesting notion of the deliberate, which I think I am attempting to argue too, but I am also aware that stating that it is deliberate is not enough, that perhaps one needs to unpack *why* that is so but also that perhaps that the answer to this deliberate negation needs to go beyond its antonym which is assertion or rather acknowledgement (representation). Carole Davis also notes that a number of scholars have tried to identify the contours of the black radical tradition, and notes Cedric Robinson as key to this. She notes that Robinson in his seminal work *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* illustrates to the reader that there are three main intellectuals who are key to the black radical tradition— mainly DuBois, CLR James and

Richard Wright (Boyce Davies, 2009, p. 218). She argues that from reading the text one would hardly get a sense that women were part of any black radical tradition. She states that "I see this not so much as a conscious omission as one limited by its time, that is, the absence of gender from the framework of analysis in early black or left scholarship" (Boyce Davies, 2009, p. 218). This sentiment is both intriguing and revealing to me. For Davies, if we are to go by DG Kelley's words, that is, that there were several scholars and activists involved in the process of assessing the global implications of a black revolt, then for those who have an intellectual and political interest in 'more complete' representation, the next question to ask would be, "where are the women in this process"?

She asserts that this is one of the larger purposes of a work such as *Claudia Jones: Left of Karl Mar*x (Boyce Davies, 2009) and also why she coins her article *Sisters Outside* (borrowing from Audre Lorde). Again, here this is a key point for me because the question of where are the women has been asked a lot by black women and by black feminists across the black world, but what are the implications of asking this question in this way? What if we are to take it one step further from this question of 'where are the women' (a question I've asked and demanded answers for myself) and ask a different one? What if we were to answer the former, not just by finding and 'recovering' black women in order to 'add' them to the story? What if we were to ask, ***how does the life, politics and thought of various black women contribute to/disrupt/throw into limbo/complicate/illuminate our thinking about blackness, and about the possibilities and limits of black freedom***?' '***How do they provide us with a theory for blackness and ultimately freedom***'? Posing such a question might shift the conversation from the one solely of representation, on black women theorising 'gender', and thus move us away from the two circular logics I highlighted earlier. Finally, it is even more intriguing to me as to why Davies chooses to think about Claudia Jones through the premise of Marx (even if it may simply be by title). This to me inevitably traps her within the logics and structural framework which I think when beginning this work, she sought to critique.

If we are to take just some of the recent efforts to specifically try and understand the intellectual contribution of black women to histories of black radicalism in South Africa, we see the exact same pattern. I may take as a case in point Thozama April's work on Charlotte Maxeke (2012). It is interesting to me how April structures her argument and the language which she elects to use in her thesis "*Theorising Women: the intellectual contributions of Charlotte Maxeke to the*

*liberation struggle in South Africa*" (April 2012). April's work is intriguing and compelling fundamentally because she has chosen to focus her project on Charlotte Maxeke, a figure who appears public however seemingly many of us don't really know much about her life's work and integral political contributions. In it April argues that that she is attempting to focus on Maxeke because she is broadly known as a "mother of the liberation struggle" but is barely recognised as the intellectual, theorist, feminist or the nationalist that she was. April argues that in fact the period of Maxeke's political prominence from 1902 to 1939 "establishes grounds for understanding the links that bind the state, women's political pasts, politics (both public and private) and history. Of immediate concern in this study are layers of inequality which have been erased from accounts of South African history" (April 2012).

It is interesting to me though that even in a project that understands the exclusion of black women and that subsequently wants to reinsert them, April still seemingly relegates Maxeke within the realm of the politics of *women*. Why? It is interesting to note statements like "she epitomised women's struggles against deprivation of basic Human rights such as dignity, happiness, education, employment opportunities and property ownership" (April 2012). That she wants to "reflect on how Charlotte Maxeke and her contemporaries framed oppositional discourse to gender inequality at the beginning of the 20th century and in so doing proposed a different history of nationalism in South Africa" (April 2012). There seems to me at least to be a fundamental issue here from a point of language use and framing as well as a reproduction of the very structures that continue to bind black women like Maxeke solely to the location of *women's* struggles and concerns about *women's* liberation. To expand what I mean here, there seems to be in South African feminism an assertion of gender and race as separate entities. So that when black women are resurrected in the archive it is to service a politics and a theory of gender and womanhood; when in fact these black women provide us with a theory of *blackness*, and they offer us a theory of black freedom. When Maxeke did the work, she did, it is clear to me that she was contributing to the black intellectual archive and not simply or solely to the "politics of women". In the same breath perhaps, April might be in the broader sense be thinking along these lines and that perhaps her project is stating that with the erasure of Maxeke comes the erasure of a gendered analysis, and that Maxeke provided a gendered critique of African nationalist discourse.

Sisonke Msimang in her 2018 book '*The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela'* falls into similar traps. Msimang proclaims in the middle pages of its introduction that she is interested in

"redeeming Ma Winnie", that she is intrigued by how Winnie Madikizela-Mandela accounted for her actions in her own words and on her own terms (Msimang, 2018). This, in the first instance is an intriguing project because of the location that Winnie occupies in our national history and memory and thus offers a good opportunity to truly think through her, but instead Msimang suffers the same pitfalls that other projects that have sought to reinsert and rewrite black women into the histories of black radicalism. It reads like a narrative, an amalgamation of personal and national history; but it is just that, a retelling of Winnie's story that as I had mentioned earlier takes on a biographical project of 'representation,' retaining intact the structure of histories that maligned Winnie to begin with. Here, too, black women's intellectual contributions are relegated to the retained solely in the location of 'feminism' rather than, as I've said, to black thought and politics writ large. In the end Msimang project joins a long list of black women projects that simply appear for a short moment in the archive and then disappear without having interrogated its structure. There are literally libraries of works by especially American black feminists 'recovering' black women radicals, claiming to enrich the archives of black radicalism in doing so. From Barbara Ransby to Imani Perry, there are swollen shelves of these biographical projects of representation: Ransby on Ella Barker (2003); Theoharis on Rosa Parks (2015); Collier Thomas on African American women in the civil rights and black power movement (2001). All - to different degrees and in different ways - reproduce rather than escape the problem I am drawing attention to, and trying to resolve. These texts continue to think through and mobilise black women within the use frameworks and political grammars that unconsciously enable their suffering.

In the general sense, the question of the absence of black women from the histories of the liberation struggle in South Africa is one that I think has come to centre much of the intellectual labours of women in and outside of the academy. It seems to me that this question is not new and that this attempted project of recovery is not new. One would think that perhaps if I were to sit down and read everything there is to read, from the continent and the diaspora about this particular subject I'd abandon this project completely because it seems to have been done before (I won't lie I've thought about it). However I cannot seem to let it go, largely because it nags at me— how is it that the same questions that have been raised before have to be raised today? But it is also because the more I read what is out there, especially the work of 'inclusion' by black feminists, the more I am unconvinced by the answers to this question. Thus I have decided to push on, burdened by my own insecurities, but determined to at least begin to unpack this problem acknowledging that perhaps I might not even reach a desired conclusion.

So then how do we think through black women with regards to their visible illegibility within the archives of black thought? How do we break the problematic circular logics that find black women thinkers seeking to re-insert those who embody them into these histories? My answer in the simplest sense is what I suggested in my engagement with Bogues and Carole Boyce-Davis a few paragraphs earlier. That is to say that we firstly need turn on its head, the ideas we hold of humanity and freedom and as a result disrupt the circulating articulations of black freedom that currently make up the historiography of black thought but also some strands of black feminist thought—to disrupt our understanding of first and foremost the position of the black 'in' the world. Secondly we need to move beyond the foundational question that leads to the projects of recovery and representation—insofar as we have to move beyond asking 'Where are the women?' but rather ask '***How does the life, politics and thought of various black women contribute to/disrupt/throw into limbo/complicate/illuminate our thinking about blackness, and about the possibilities and limits of black freedom***?' '***how do they provide us with a theory for blackness and ultimately freedom***'. These two steps, I argue, shifts the register of the conversation, it allows us to think through the question of blackness and gender differently and at least on some level undoes the violence of the archive, although I am not too sure to what extent. I also want to suggest that there are a number of black women who do this kind of work, with whom I want to think through, with and against in the passages that follow—that they lay the foundations for the arguments I have put forth in this chapter, and in this thesis in general. Here I am referring to Spillers, Hartman, Joy James, Christina Sharpe, Patrice Douglass, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Kara Keeling, Zine Magubane.

I realise that I have backed myself into a bit of a corner here because I have suggested that part of the problem of the apparent disappearance of black women from the archives of black thought is our continued investment in the Human, for which Wilderson's argument is essential. Now I still hold this position, but it doesn't account for someone like Wilderson in relation to questions levelled about the seriousness with which he does or doesn't handle questions of gender and queerness within blackness. What I mean by this is that although much of his work is informed by black women and black feminists—oddly, it is interesting the parts of those texts that Wilderson utilises and those parts he deliberately chooses to omit. Maybe one could argue that this is not the kind of work that Wilderson is trying to do, that he is not concerned with historiography but rather his concern is a question of ontology? But this is not enough of a rationale for me, that although his thinking is foundational to critiquing humanism

and to debunking the position of the black 'in' the world, one would have to probe whether the black is simply the black man? If so, then Wilderson might as well be trapped into similar modes that the historiography of black thought falls into; I am particularly uncomfortable with him relegating gender, queer community struggles as secondary because these, along with my blackness are all the parts that embody me, that embody many other blacks—we cannot afford to have them as an afterthought when black women and queers are dying. It is suspicious to me that although the texts he finds foundational have the question of gender at the very centre of their thinking, he chooses not to engage it, that doing this is in fact anti-blackness.

Thus, I want to return to those black women I identify as undoing the three main critiques I have presented here. Hortense Spillers in the opening passages of the now integral and seminal text '*Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe'(1987)*, states that Dubois predicted as early as 1903 that the 20th century would be the problem of the colour line—she argues that she wants to take this sentiment further and add a layer to this prediction. Hortense suggests: "if the 'black women' can be seen as a particular figuration of the split subject that psychoanalytic theory posits , then this century marks the site of 'its' profoundest revelation" (p. 65)— for Spillers the problem before us is deceptively simple: the names enclosed in quotation marks, this is to say the names that have been bestowed upon black woman in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, are "overdetermined nominative properties" (p. 65) . For her, they demonstrate a coding, they are markers loaded with "mythical prepossession" and subsequently in order to speak a truer word to herself, she must strip down "through the layers of attenuated meanings, made excess in time, over time and assigned by the particular historical order, and there wait whatever marvels of my own inventiveness" (p. 65). Spillers recognises through her engagement with the Moynihan report (which blamed black women for the problems facing the black community in the US) that there has historically been a misnaming of African American women, and she wants to attempt to undo this (Spillers, 1987, p. 65).

A fundamental process to undo the misnaming of black women then for Spillers, is to uncover the symbolic paradigm—to return to the moment of rupture and to consider the socio-political order of the new world that alters not only the ontology of black women but of black people in general. Of course, she finds here a scene of "actual mutilation, dismemberment and exile…. that the captive body becomes a scene of political and cultural manoeuvre" (Spillers, 1987, p. 65). But then Spillers does something else, something deemed provocative, that would have some claim that blackness today has no gender and thus black women and queer struggles do

not matter. She posits that the captive body at the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade "loses at least gender difference in the outcome and the female body and male body become territory of cultural and political manoeuvre, not at all gender related or gender specific" (Spillers, 1987, p. 66) —now you'll notice that I used a similar quote to discuss the question of ontology and blackness in the first chapter but purposely left out the parts of the quote on gender because I wanted to discuss it here. If one reads on, Spillers firstly suggest to us that 'in the historical outline of dominance , the respective subject -positions of "female and male" adhere to no symbolic integrity'; secondly she contends that if we undress the conflations of meaning, as they appear under the rule of dominance, we would restore, as a figurative possibility, not only power to the female but also power to the male —"we would gain in short, the potential for *gender differentiation, as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including human biology in its intersection with the project of culture"* (Spillers, 1987, p. 66). Now I argue, what Spillers is ultimately suggesting comes in the lines that follow; insofar as she is interested not in theorising black women through the body, this is to say subject status—as I had suggested when discussing her key distinction in the first chapter— but rather through the flesh, a symbol of total objectification – "that zero degree of social conceptualisation". She argues that it is the flesh that is not recognised by critical discourse, that they do not recognise that under these historical conditions "the African female subject is not only the target of rape - in one sense, an interiorised violation of the body and mind, but also the topic of specifically externalised acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males" (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). Key here for me then, is that Spillers argues, I think correctly, that it is this "materialised scene of unprotected female flesh" that offers us a theory, "a text for the living and the dying and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations" (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). Hortense wants to think through black women without the conflated meanings associated with them as a result of Western modernity, in fact, I contend that Spillers would not be writing back to Daniel Patrick Moynihan if she thought that blackness had no gender. My interpretation is that she attempts in this piece to establish gender and filial difference, to disrupt the structural frameworks through which Moynihan and the white world in general think through blackness, gender and subsequently black women—which presumes the subject status of the black, that presumes the body instead of the flesh. This I contend is what both the histories of black thought and those projects that attempt to re-insert black women into its histories need to undo.

Saidiya Hartman in *'Belly of the world: A Note on Black Woman's Labors' (2016),* articulates clearly the critique levelled against the historiography of black thought when it comes to both their negation of and its problematic mobilisation of black women. She argues that gestational language and the theft, regulation and destruction of black women's sexual and reproductive labour is fundamental to the world making and world breaking capacities of racial slavery. Yet, these accounts are often concealed within the histories of black thought. Hartman contends that this is largely because these histories have used the allegory of the black worker instead of the slave. She argues that using the allegory of the black worker (as done by CRL James, Du Bois, Kelley, Bogues) to describe the black slave is problematic. This is to say, "representing the slave through the figure of the worker obscures us, making it difficult to distinguish the constitutive elements of slavery as a mode of power, violence, dispossession and accumulation or to attend to the forms of gendered and sexual violence that enable these processes" (Hartman, 2016, p. 166). What Hartman is suggesting to us here, is that conceptions of blackness and black freedom that do not dislocate the Human make it difficult to think seriously about blackness and about gender. For example, in black reconstruction, women's sexual and reproductive labour is critical in accounting for the violence and degradation of slavery, yet this labour falls outside of the heroic account of the black worker and the general strike (Hartman, 2016, p.166). This is very similar to what Bogues does with Ida B Wells in his narration of reconstruction.

Hartman argues critically here on this question of the negation of black women—insofar as she proclaims that it has "proven difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate black women's domestic labours and reproductive capacities within narratives of the black worker, slave rebellion, matronage, or black radicalism, even as this labour was critical to the creation of value, the realization of profit and the accumulation of capital" (Hartman, 2016, p. 167). She too wants to account for black women in the histories of labour, but I contend that the manner in which she does it here, avoids the two logics that entrap other black women thinkers who have attempted to do the same thing. She moves beyond the question of "where are the women" and critically asks "How does the character of the slave female's refusal augment the text of black radicalism? Is it possible to imagine her as the paradigmatic slave or as the representative worker? (Hartman, 2016, p. 167)". Utilising Spillers, Hartman articulates a possible theory for blackness through black woman that both troubles the current histories of black radicalism and troubles dominant accounts of gender. She probes us as to why the sexual violence and

reproductive characteristics of the enslaved woman's experience fails to produce a radical politics of liberation.

In a similar vein, Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection (1997),* disrupts the way we have thought about consent, sexuality and gender in relation to blackness and ultimately freedom, precisely because she takes seriously the figure of the black woman slave as well as her sexual violation and reproductive labour—she moves beyond the project of biography and ultimately allows us to use black women to conceptualise the conditions of blackness during slavery and in its afterlife, complicating current articulations of humanity, freedom and gender. In *Seduction and the Ruses of Power (*continuing from the first chapter in which I had suggested that Hartman complicates the idea of humanity and freedom in relation to the black because she argues that both subjection and forms of slave humanity were key to the bondage of slavery), Hartman notes that although under the law rape was in fact a crime, the actual rape or attempted rape of an enslaved woman was neither recognised nor punishable by law — she notes that "not only was rape simply unimaginable because of purported black lasciviousness, but also its repression was essential to the displacement of white culpability that characterised both the recognition of black humanity in slave law and the designation of the black subject as the original locus of transgression and offense" (Hartman, 1997, p. 80). What she is trying to allude to here is that the repression of rape is only PARTLY explained by the inapplicability of common law to the enslaved but that in addition to this fact, the denial and disavowal of rape of the enslaved involved issues of consent, agency and will that are imprisoned by a larger problem concerning the construction and circulation of forms black humanity in slave law (Hartman, 1997, p. 80). So that what Hartman is revealing to us here, is that there existed a tension within slavery and slave law precisely because it deliberately constituted the slave as both property and as person.

This has interesting implications because it seems to me that what she is to a large extent trying to argue here, is that it is not that the enslaved were completely denied parts of humanity under slave law, but that it was the granting of those exact 'humanities' that resulted in further subjection and violence enacted upon the slave. From this then Hartman argues that the law's selective recognition of slave humanity nullified the captive's ability to give consent or act as an agent but at the same time the law only acted to acknowledge and recognise consent only in so far as it assumed forms of criminality—so that to act as the black is to commit a crime (which is still a continued theme in relation to blackness today). This has major implications

because as Hartman notes "the recognition and/or stipulation of agency as criminality served to identify personhood with punishment". Here Hartman clearly demonstrates, through the use of rape and slave law the ways in which '***the life, politics and thought of various black women contribute to/disrupt/throw into limbo/complicate/illuminate our thinking about blackness, and about the possibilities and limits of black freedom'.***

When one reads on, Hartman uses the case of the state of Missouri v. Celia—a slave girl who murdered her Master for raping her—in order to think further about slavery and its afterlife. Celia was denied the right to testify because it had been illegal according to the law to testify against whites. By virtue of this then, Celia's account of her rape was completely unimaginable and illegible (Hartman, 1997, p. 83). What is at issue for Hartman is the difference between the deployment of sexuality in the contexts of white kinship—the proprietorial relation of the patriarch to his wife and children, the making of legitimate heirs and the transmission of property and Black captivity— the reproduction of property, the relations of mastery and subjection and the regularity of sexual violence (Hartman, 1997, p. 84). In other words, for Hartman the construction of race occurs within these different economies of constraint and by way of divergent methods of sexual control. So that it is problematic when the projects that attempt to simply reinsert black women into the histories of black radicalism do so within the vein of women's struggle. For me at least, this is why a black feminism of Hartman's inclination is more compelling because I find that she thinks through black women seriously, and I take as an anecdote, her attempt to think through the category "woman" and "gender". What she is interested in is examining the formation of gender in relation to property and the sexual economy of slavery, more so she is well aware that the treatment of white women in relation to black women demonstrated the inner workings of sexuality, race, accumulation and domination—take as a case in point the idea of motherhood, which for the black woman slave meant something completely different, insofar as it was critical to the reproduction of property, black subjection and the denial of parental rights (think *partus sequitur ventrem*).

By arguing that Hartman in her work takes black woman seriously, I mean she deliberately poses questions like: ***What happens if we assume that the female captive serves as a general case for explicating social death, property relations and the pained and punitive construction of blackness?*** What Hartman is interested in is these mechanisms of sexual domination— "the repression of rape, the negation of kinship and the legal invalidation of slave marriage — act in concert". This kind of generative thinking is what disrupts the archive. At the same time

however, Hartman does warn that the decriminalisation of rape when it comes to the black woman slave must not be understood as the dispossessing the enslaved female of gender, but rather that there is a differential production of gendered identities (Hartman, 1997, p. 97), so that we may question when the category women is used blanketly. It is Hartman and Spiller's along with others within the chorus of black women then, that lay the foundations for how I want to think about how black women may offer us a theory and a text for the state of blackness.

# *Makeba, Blackness and Exile*

I have spent the first part of this dissertation attempting to attend to this question of the negation of black women from the histories of black thought and radicalism. I have contended that a large part of this problem is black histography's investments in the Human and subsequently the notions of freedom that emerge from that investment. What I mean here is that the human is always structured as the white sovereign heterosexual male and thus it will always leave black women and queers especially as illegible—that the general strike or the black worker cannot incorporate black women into its imagination (Hartman, 2016; Stephens, 2005). More so that thinking through the black within the bounds of humanity is problematic. Humanity and freedom, if we are to follow Hartman, is a double bind for the black and the case of the black woman slave provides the allegory for this. If we are to consider Spillers and the body/flesh, this investment incorrectly misleads us into accounting for the objective suffering of black people through the logics and structure of subjectivity. Secondly I have contended that even if we are to look at the enormous canon that attempts to re-insert black women into these histories, it gets trapped within similar structural codes—insofar as these biographical projects of 'representation' retain intact the structure of histories of black freedom as inclusion into the Human which does not disrupt freedom as a project of the sovereign male (white) subject; and second, this project of 'representation' reduces and relegates histories of black women's intellectual contributions to the sole location of 'feminism' rather than to black thought and politics writ large.

I have also suggested and presented my arguments for how we can attempt to undo this—that there is a body of black feminist literature that allows us to disrupt the codes of the archive of black thought and of the archives in the general sense: That is to say that we firstly need turn on their head, the ideas we hold of humanity and freedom and as a result disrupt the circulating

articulations of black freedom that currently make up the historiography of black thought and also some strands of black feminist thought—This requires us to disrupt our understanding of first and foremost the position of the black 'in' the world. Secondly we need to move beyond the foundational question that leads to the projects of recovery and representation—insofar as we have to move beyond asking 'Where are the women?' but rather ask 'How does the life, politics and thought of various black women contribute to/disrupt/throw into limbo/complicate/illuminate our thinking about blackness, and about the possibilities and limits of black freedom?' 'how do they provide us with a theory for blackness and ultimately freedom'. I have suggested that these two steps offer us some possibility to disrupt the archives of black thought and politics writ large.

Now I realise that simply offering these critiques might not be enough, that perhaps I need to attempt to demonstrate what it might look like to have these critiques taken earnestly, with a level of seriousness and thus I want to turn to one of the black women within the Chorus that constitutes this work: Miriam Makeba. From the onset then, my taking up of Makeba is in way that does not go to her or look to her as a biographical figure. Rather than the biographical project of the inclusion of black women into an archive of black thought, my purpose is to consider how taking black women seriously might "derange" that archive and disrupt the scholarly and historiographical common sense about black conceptions of freedom (Hartman, 2008). This then is at the foundations of why and how I go to her. Miriam Makeba – as she is presented to us – is a figure who is well known and a figure whom history remembers. I have chosen a well-known figure deliberately in order to avoid some of the entrapments of a figure who has been 'forgotten' and must thus be 're-inserted'. When we consider *how* we have come to remember Makeba, the specific position to which the archive has relegated her to, the way it has figured her, and even how at times she is called upon to reinforce the violence of the archive, Makeba is seen as, foremost, a musician who – through her resistant art – contributed to national liberation. Her contributions to black radicalism are aestheticized, nationalised, and de-radicalised. We do not recall Makeba as in fact a major contributor to the *intellectual and political* archive of black radicalism across the Black World – from Africa to the Caribbean, to Europe and in the Americas. But beyond this—what is really at the centre of my attempts here with Makeba—is that I want to consider how her being (non-being) 'in' the world might offer us a theory or rather a poetics of blackness. I read closely her autobiography written in partnership with James Hall and later her music, aesthetics, and political thought. The autobiography is particularly important to me here because firstly it is written by Makeba

herself; secondly that it reveals the ways in which she existed 'in' the world. For me the autobiography alone is enough to leave one unsatisfied with the ways in which Makeba has been written about and remembered both within and outside the archives of black thought.

If we are to go briefly to the subject of her autobiography, from the onset I am struck by the authoritative nature in which Miriam Makeba writes her autobiography, it is as though she demands that her story be told, that her narrative be centred or the least bit listened to—here is a story that is permeated with black suffering and black resistance, yet it has still managed to disappear within the archive. By this I mean that here is a text that is a public documentation of her life, written by Makeba herself together with James Hall, a text that has been reviewed by international press from the moment it was received in 1988 and in fact enjoyed a wide circulation, yet it has been silenced by the structural codes of the archive. In fact, I want to suggest that essential to this code is the mobilisation of Makeba into servicing existing articulations of humanity and freedom within black radical thought. What I am attempting to suggest here, is that I'm not necessarily interested in Makeba's articulations but rather I'm interested in her gesticulations, those moments that are unarticulated through her speech but are emphasised by movement—this is to say that I want to move beyond her speech, she has clearly demonstrated that she is a humanist and so have many black radicals. I want to focus rather on her being out of the world or non-being 'In' it. Put differently, I want to consider what Wilderson might term the unspeakable grammar of 'being' black in the world or what Spillers might plainly put as American grammar or the symbolic grammar. This is to say I want to consider How she moved through the world and how moments in that journey may offer us a theory for blackness. I want to 'derange' how the archive has previously utilised and mobilised Makeba.

She proclaims in the early pages of her autobiography that, "*My life, my career, every song I sing and every appearance I make, are bound up with the plight of my people*" (Makeba and Hall, 1988, 1). What does it mean then to dedicate your entire 'being' to the fight for black freedom? Better yet what does it mean to do the former and have it subsequently completely sanitised both in national memory and in the black archive writ-large? This, in part, is what inspires this project, to think through what are the structural codes that allow this to continuously happen to black women, over and over again. To take it a step further then I want to attempt to undo this violence, to unbind her from the biographical project of representation

and to probe instead…*What does this voice in the chorus of black women lamenting their plight alert us to about blackness as unfreedom, exile and militancy, and intimacy for example?*

Now because Makeba is a figure well known, there does exist a substantial amount of intellectual work on her, and I think it would be important to take a moment to think through a number of these texts in order to suggest that my taking up of Makeba is for a different purpose. Louise Bethlehem, it seems, leads the way in the contemporary (say, the last five years) articulations of the life and times of Miriam Makeba— A professor of English and Cultural Studies – she has two specific texts that are of interest in relation to Makeba. The first, titled *Miriam's Place: South African Jazz, Conviviality and Exile (2017)* and the second, *Restless Itineraries: Anti-Apartheid Expressive Culture and Transnational Historiography (2018)*. In the former piece Bethlehem attempts to argue that Makeba's Life-writing shows that the strategies of the black South African performer in exile are embedded in the conviviality (spirit or liveliness) that shaped South African jazz performance culture during the process of urbanisation (migrant labour) under Apartheid (Bethlehem, 2017). She argues that the type of musical culture that emerged, transcended ethnic identities, and subsequently created a black urban subjectivity that she wants to account for through Miriam Makeba. She offers us a chrono tope , that of a train—this is to say that she wants to read jazz history in South Africa in tandem with the histories of migrant labour and other forms of displacement including exile, similar she states, to how Paul Gilroy uses the slave ship in *The Black Atlantic* (Bethlehem, 2017; Gilroy, 1993). That for Makeba this spirit of conviviality, birthed in South African urban life and subsequently Jazz, "*equips her to negotiate the circumstances of her exile*" (Bethlehem, 2017, 248). That Makeba, across the various phases of her exile, encountered its "threats *to her personhood by marshalling the resources of the distinctive conviviality of her urban South African Formation";* that she copes with the *"wrenching dislocation of exile by turning to tactics of everyday life redolent of those used to cope with black urbanisation in 20$^{th}$ century South Africa*" (Bethlehem, 2017, p. 249).

In essence then Miriam in Bethlehem's work is mobilised for a sense of South African exceptionalism that I am uncomfortable with. In other words, I am suggesting that the notion that the experience of South African modernity equipped Miriam with the tools to navigate and negotiate her circumstance in exile is so easily questionable. I am unsure as to the usefulness of thinking along these lines as though exile suddenly becomes bearable in song and the burdens of blackness are forgotten. When in fact, if we truly observe the grammar of Makeba's

autobiography then this account becomes misleading. Because what Bethlehem misses, that Gilroy does not, is that the making of the black in the world is a global phenomenon that comes to inaugurate modernity as we know it today, so that Makeba is moving through the world as a black woman for whom the experience of exile is unbearable no matter where she is located 'in' the world. Conjuring up the 'resilience' of blacks in the face of suffering whether in South Africa or not, I argue does not assist us, in fact it only reproduces that violence. What will Bethlehem say to those black South Africans who did not survive exile? There are countless. To Makeba's daughter, who is one of those causalities of anti-blackness and exile. What if we are to think of exile and blackness differently with the assistance of both Makeba's spoken and unspoken grammar? This is what I want to return to in a moment.

In Bethlehem's latter piece, she attempts to do something similar with Makeba: she wants to trace the itineraries set in motion by the word and the idea Apartheid, which shaped the history of South Africa in the second half of the 20th century—she argues that the restlessness of Apartheid needs to be considered in relation to cultural production and thus wants to use Miriam Makeba as a performer and political activist. It is the classic argument, insofar as Bethlehem suggests that by understanding that "Black South Africans, in coercive and extractive relations of production under Apartheid, used the resources of expressive culture to negotiate new social forms at the margins of South Africa's white cities, enacting in the process aspirational claims to the urbanity which the Apartheid state had so spectacularly revoked"(Bethlehem, 2018, p. 48). In other words, that Apartheid and its restlessness became an apparatus of transnational cultural production, or that South Africa's expressive cultures of resistance gives rise to a "historiographic leverage". For Bethlehem, Makeba too is restless, by restless she is referring to a system of political semiosis proposed by Wagner-Pacifici which names the interaction between cultural forms on one hand and their circulation on the other (Bethlehem, 2018, p. 48).

In essence what Bethlehem is attempting to do here and, in her piece, earlier, is to instil in Miriam and to black South Africans (particularly those involved in cultural production) in exile, ***agency***—this is to say that despite her gesture to conviviality, she in fact resurrects and reiterates agency. She argues that Makeba's agency derives from the history of jazz as a privileged form of black transnational culture but also from its centrality for South Africa. This for me is problematic, precisely because it is always interesting to observe the desire to confer agency and subjectivity to the black under the conditions of anti-blackness 'in' the world. This

is akin in many ways to Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak? (1988)" to which the answer is of course, no. This desire I contend is part and parcel of the quest for humanity and subsequently the conceptions of freedom that come with that. As Hartman suggests to us both in *Scenes of Subjection* and in *Venus in Two Acts*, going into the archive with the attempts to find the voice and/or agency of the enslaved or in this case of black women is an exercise of failure and disappointment. The archive, for Hartman, is in fact the place of the negation of black women, where they are always relegated to "the position of the unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003). This is why she probes in *Scenes of Subjection*: "how does one tell the story of an elusive emancipation and a travestied freedom?" (Hartman, 1997, p. 10). For Hartman a large part of the solution must entail reconsidering the meaning of freedom and a need to look critically at the production of historical narratives — I think a similar action is required for black women within the archives of black thought writ large.

Beyond Bethlehem, there are a number of intellectual pieces written about Miriam. April Sizemore Barber in her work titled '*The Voice of (which) Africa? Miriam Makeba in America (2012)'* for example attempts to think through Makeba's time in the United States. It is compelling in the sense that Sizemore Barber wants to attempt to think through how Miriam's voice was received by audiences in the United States, she is particularly interested in how Makeba came to figure the most visible representation of Africa available to Americans between 1959 and 1968. She argues that Makeba's voice moved away from her as an individual and came to "represent a sonic stand-in for the continent of Africa" (Sizemore-Barber, 2012, p. 253). That Makeba ultimately became the surface upon which Americans projected narratives about Africa and contemporary American racial relations. This is interesting to think about in relation to blackness, the arts and black social life. What does it mean for someone to be the embodiment of an entire continent? What are the myths and fantasies projected here? What levels of negrophilia are permissible? Sizemore Barber doesn't go this far, which is precisely why thinking differently about Makeba is so important.

Another compelling piece I want to note is Ruth Feldstein's '*Screening Anti-apartheid: Miriam Makeba, Come back Africa and the transnational Circulation of black Culture and politics (2013)',* I find this work particularly productive because of its focus of gender and black women's sexuality, and not so much her desire to speak to the transnational circulation of US and South African culture. Feldstein argues that Makeba's emergence as an international celebrity after her appearance in *Come back Africa* complicates current scholarship on

transnational culture and black politics because gender and black women's sexuality are so inescapable in her story. Makeba's challenging of anti-black racism must be read alongside the challenging of dominant assumptions about black woman subjectivity and sexuality (Feldstein, 2013, p. 15). Feldstein argues that beyond *Come Back Africa*—A film shot by Lionel Rogosin, depicting black life in Apartheid South Africa—being the gateway for Miriam to enter the international stage or speaking to the realities of being black in South Africa, Makeba in fact also intervenes into a film otherwise dominated by black men, making consciously or unconsciously, black woman's sexuality relevant to the film's politics. It is interesting to observe that *Come Back Africa* was done in collaboration with Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba and Bloke Modisane—that the Drum generation is so integral and significant to black transnational circulation. Feldstein demonstrates to us that when Rogosin arrived in South Africa in 1957, he looked to the Drum community of male writer-intellectuals as his point of entry, "*Come back Africa developed a story that was essentially about communities of black men. The women in the film tended to appear in isolation from each other as wife, bartender, the prostitute*" (Feldstein, 2013, p. 18). This use of Makeba as well as other black women in *Come Back Africa,* in my mind is problematic and reflective of the archive's violence, insofar as their use here in 1957 is no different to how Ramadan Suleman and Bheki Peterson's "*By All Means Necessary*" use Makeba in their documentary in 2020— this is to say that she appears in intervals, singing in between the narrations of the lives of African men and their contributions to political and intellectual struggle, silenced by the structural codes.

I want to move for the moment to two key texts that are most notable and integral in the South African academy in relation to Miriam Makeba: Nomfundo Xaluva's Masters dissertation titled "*An analysis of the musical style of Miriam Makeba" (2009)* and Lindelwa Dalamba's Masters dissertation titled "*Writing Against Exile: A Chronotopic Reading of Autobiographies of Miriam Makeba, Joe Mogotsi and Hugh Masekela" (2006)*. The former dissertation is a focus on the musical style and sonic contributions of Makeba to the study of South African music and musicians. Its driving motivations derive from her suggested argument that much of the work that has been done on the late Makeba has been historical and political and as such has had little focus on the musical elements of her, that Xaluva wants to explore her music rather than her political and personal life, to which in my mind one would find difficult precisely because it is an arduous if not impossible task to separate these entities. While Xaluva's efforts must be respected in their attentiveness to Makeba's sonic contributions, it is not the kind of project that I am interested in exploring here.

The latter dissertation by Dalamba is of more interest to me particularly because they are focused on Makeba, the autobiography and this idea of exile. Dalamba's thesis in the broadest sense can be interpreted as an attempt at challenging the national narratives of Apartheid and political struggle in South Africa or what she might term the national biography. She goes to the autobiographies of Makeba, Mogotsi and Masekela in order to consider narratives of the re-inscription of South African history or the history of Apartheid in order to dispel the 'truth' of history, that the then President Thabo Mbeki demanded of South African historiographers. Dalamba chooses to focus on these 3 figures because they "have assumed iconic status both in Apartheid and post-Apartheid South African popular music studies and in South African popular culture" (Dalamba, 2006, p. 5), that both in the country and from their different places in exile, they came to be viewed as cultural ambassadors who conscientized the international community to the plight of the marginalised under Apartheid. She articulates to us that historical texts often attempt to give a definitive account of things and thus must subscribe to the demands of narrative (linear, require empirical evidence etc.), more so she suggests that in South Africa, historical accounts have been politically convenient, that they conveniently highlight a specific plot of history as a legitimating narrative for a particular political dispensation (Dalamba, 2006, p. 5). What Dalamba is suggesting above is not controversial and is in fact true, but what she then does which is interesting, is that she wants to trace the musicians' processes of imagining and constructing South Africa from their shifting perspectives of exile and return, by exploring the autobiographical narration of their experiences as a performance of language. This is to say then that she wants read and analyse these texts alongside what she terms 'the national biography's' interpretations of similar political events in South Africa in order to trace how these "exile literatures, as types of histories, narrate and articulate discourses of the nation from positions other than those of national histories. (Dalamba, 2006, p. 7)"

In essence then Dalamba's project is literary, and narrative based and the intriguing or what some might term controversial suggestion in it; is that Dalamba seems to argue that in fact these three autobiographies fall into the same narrative entrapments that make up the national biography. Insofar as Makeba, Masekela and Mogosti in their autobiographies and in their attempts to also narrate political struggle "precariously" insert themselves into the narrative of South Africa's history of exile—this is to say that Dalamba argues that she went to these biographies seeking something different only to find a seamless connection between their

narrations and that of the national biography. More so that this co-ordinance between the two is accomplished "through narrative strategies that turn departure and exile—figures of rapture—into figures of connection ineluctably linked to the workings of the national biography" and as such this construction of South Africa as "home" is essential (Dalamba, 2006, pp. 11-12). Accompanying this foundational critique is a critique of the structure of the autobiography as a literary genre. That she identifies these three texts as different from those usually included under the rubric of the South African autobiography because they are written by (former) exiles. Rather than "classify the texts as about music, exile or South Africa, she takes 'music', 'exile' and 'South Africa' as signifying utterances functioning in a discursive sphere with which the autobiographies engage dialogically" (Dalamba, 2006, p. 12) — which informs this dialectic of time, space and character , following Mikhail Bakhtin and the idea that all discourse is innately dialogic even when some writing tends to suppress or conceal this (Dalamba, 2006, p. 12). She argues that "the national biography exists in the chronological biographical time of history", in other words, the representation of this kind of time in the musicians' autobiographies is achieved by employing the mode of historical realism, however she argues, exile by its very nature signifies departure from the nation's chronotope — that "in their attempt to maintain a link to South Africa, the musicians' autobiographies attempt to assimilate the national biography's chronotope" (Dalamba, 2006, p. 16). In essence then what Dalamba is levelling here is that in the end there exists a (mis)representation of the authors as "fully present and in complete control of their utterances (Dalamba, 2006, p. 15)". But although Dalamba presents a compelling literary and linguistic argument, she only thinks of exile in these terms— this is to say that for her, exile is rupture in the sense that it is meant to be a rupture from the national biography and its historical narrative. For me this argument is inconsequential fundamentally because I am interested in reading Makeba's experience of exile not in narratives terms but by suggesting that the spatial and temporal zone that is exile might offer us a reading of what it means to be black 'in' the world. in other words the rupture reaches far beyond narrative insofar as if one were to actually consider the grammar of Makeba's autobiography, one would not simply think of exile in these terms, particularly given the historical context and nuance involved—in this particular project I want take exile with the assistance of Makeba's account of it and the grammar of that particular suffering and read it alongside the experience of blackness 'in' the world.

***Blackness as Permanent Exile***

What does it mean to be an integral resource of the world but having to exist outside of it? Are there parallels between the state of blackness and exile? — That perhaps one could be in a permanent state of exile, by being severed and alienated from 'home', even if never leaving it. Here is Makeba whom we know left the country in 1959 for Venice, attending the premier of the film *Come Back Africa* depicting black life in South Africa, she then travels to London and later the United States and whom upon the attempts to return home in the hopes of burying her mother, is banned from returning to the country of her birth. I lay out this sequence of events because It is strange to me that the re-inscription of Makeba's time travelling various parts of the world has been classified under the rubric of African cosmopolitanism, that it has largely been proclaimed and suggested that Makeba is and was a figure of the ultimate citizen of the world, of the African continent and the beacon of pan-Africanism, Our Mama Afrika!— that Makeba happily moved through the world in service of the Human cause and struggle. But when one engages with the Makeba text on an authentic level, this is to say on the level of its unspeakable grammar, one soon realises how problematic this assertion and the sanitising of national and political memory is. That if in fact one looks at this grammar, one observes that at almost every turn she is being denied mobility, that she has been denied choice and consent even when she returns to the African continent, so that she travels the world in large parts as a result of circumstance, that this in fact leaves Makeba in a constant state of precariousness, natal alienation and nostalgia— constituent elements that are evident within blackness.

Let's park for a moment Makeba's predicament in relation to the world — in essence then what I am trying to suggest here is that perhaps exile and its tenants may provide us with the appropriate mechanisms to think about the nature of blackness 'in' the world and that Makeba's experience may provide us with the allegory. In actuality Makeba is exiled from South Africa and unable to bury her mother, her sister, her uncles who die at the Sharpeville Massacre. Her records are banned. She is exiled from the United States of America, her concerts and records

are sabotaged, she is kicked out of France and Senegal, her daughter and grandchild die in foreign lands. And it is explicit that these are acts of anti-blackness (Makeba and Hall, 1988). In Makeba's words: "I am in exile on the outside and we are in exile on the inside", this statement alone demands of us to probe exactly what I've asked in the opening lines of this discussion: ***What does it mean to be an integral resource of the world but having to exist outside of it? Are there parallels between the state of blackness and exile? — That perhaps one is in a permanent state of exile, even when one has never really left 'home'***. Makeba's assertion propels us to suggest that perhaps to be black 'in' the world, regardless of your location means that one is in a permanent state of exile. I want to begin then with this idea of exile, how it has been thought of in the past and then return to suggest a different way of reading this phenomenon and *ipso facto* the state of blackness.

The most basic understanding of exile provided to us in the Cambridge English Dictionary is that exile describes the "condition of someone being sent or kept away from their own country, village, etc, especially for political reasons" Cambridge, 2021). Es'kia Mphahlele in his piece titled "*Africa in Exile*" written in 1982, suggests to us that exile is tied to some form of political struggle, that one might possibly have to commit a political act that enforces a suppressive regime to respond with banishment—for Mphahlele at the time "every political upheaval in Africa yields yet another crop of exiles" (Mphahlele, 1982, p. 29). Vera Alexandra, on *Exile (2016)*, proposes that it is the condition of living in geographical dislocation from home—that it is often associated with "pain, loss, nostalgia and trauma" and more so that exile has "become a trope for the violent displacements resulting from imperialism, slavery, indenture migration and decolonisation" (Vera, 2016). Thus, I want to note two consist attributes here in relation to the experience of exile—the first being this element of dislocation (geographically) and the second element being that of political struggle. Es'kia Mphahlele in his piece, looks to Paul Tabori's "*The Anatomy of Exile*" in order to create a lengthy and guided definition of exile in Africa: Tabori describes an exile as a person who is compelled to leave their homeland, whether the forces that send him on his way are political, economic, or purely psychological (Mphahlele, 1982). It does not make an essential difference for Tabori, whether they are expelled by physical force or whether they make the decision to leave without such immediate pressure. Now the interesting suggestion here is that there is the introduction of the psychological as an important constituent element of exile, similar in many ways to parts of Alexandra's definition (pain, loss, nostalgia etc). Mphahlele also suggests this psychological element in his work, essentially suggesting that African exiles have left owing to "immediate

pressure, or out of frustration in the practice of a profession. The frustration may be rooted in considerations of material welfare or spiritual self-fulfilment, or both"—that regardless of what circumstances the exile arrives in, ultimately it is the individual who is left with the burden of exile as ***the condition of the mind*** (Mphahlele, 1982).

Considered by some as one of the great intellectuals of the 20th century, Edward Said, dedicated a large part of his intellectual and political life thinking through this idea of exile. Yinay Lal in '*Enigmas of Exile: Reflections on Edward Said (2005)'*, suggests to us that the idea of those who are 'housed' and 'unhoused' has largely informed the life and work of Said (Lal, 2005, p. 32). Lal proposes that the poet 'Ovid' having been banished from Rome by Augustus in 8AD, famously declared that exile is death, later Victor Hugo by contrast found that exile was rejuvenating—having considered these two extremes then, Lal wants to explore where Said might fall on this spectrum (Lal, 2005, p. 32). Out of this then he provides us with three significant components from which to work from, the first being that there was no doubt that Said came to see Western culture as fundamentally a creation of exiles; the second was that for Said exile was a permanent state, however not in the ways that I consider it to be in this dissertation—this is to say that for Said exile held first and foremost an intellectual significance, that the exilic mind is one that refuses "to habituate itself to academic pieties, to accepted readings of texts , to the satisfactions of power and to the comforts of surrender to some transcendent force" (Lal, 2005, p. 33). In essence then Said's suggestion here is that the experience of exile furnished the intellectual with a foresight not available to others, with the ability to think critically. Lastly that for Said, much, if not all his references to exile are tied to the people of Palestine. John D. Barbour alludes us to something similar in is work "*Edward Said and the space of Exile(2007)*", insofar as Barbour suggests that Said in much of his work defines exile as a political condition that he shows as especially painful and unjust in the case of the Palestinian people—that Said "described the Palestinian people as being in the terrible position of being exiles while living in their own homeland" (Barbour, 2007, p. 293) (This statement in my mind is significant and I will return to it in a moment). Boubour's second suggestion is also not far off form Lal, insofar as he argues that Edward Said used exile as a metaphor to describe his vision of the role of the modern intellectual, who needs a critical, detached perspective from which to examine his culture (Barbour, 2007, p. 293)—Similar in many ways to Antonio Gramsci's organic intellectual or Pierre Bourdieu's public intellectual. Edward Said then falls within a category, that at least from an intellectual perspective wants to think about exile in the positivist sense, as productive. Another such thinker is de-colonial

scholar Walter D. Mignolo and his idea of Border-Thinking (Mignolo, 2000). He contends that in as much as colonial space/exile is subjugating, when in crisis, it is also a location in which a new consciousness can be formed, a border gnosis that emerges as a result of colonial conquest's repression. Both these thinkers find hope and possibility in exile, partly because exile for them, although permanent in the intellectual sense, does not have the ontological quality of black (non-)being as exile.

Now having considered this, I want to (re-)turn to blackness and exile; I want to argue that exile in this sense and in its truest sense is **banishment**, that one is catapulted into what Fanon terms the zone of non-being. I argue that black people, wherever they might find themselves 'in' the world, have been banished from the world—that they have found themselves outside of the bounds of humanity by design and deliberation, that they are in fact an integral resource for Human and global stability. Es'kia Mphahlele, an intellectual great in his own right, allows us in "*Africa in Exile*", to trace back to the foundational moment of this banishment, even though I do not necessarily agree with some of the terminology used and suggestions made, I want to flesh out a particular line of argument in this regard. He argues that the African in the 15th century became the exiled personality, that they figured "the disinherited mind, uprooted from its indigenous African beliefs and ancestral shrines (Mphahlele, 1982, 37)", that this is how Africa entered the history of West—for Mphahlele, " It has become evident during all these centuries of African-European relations, that African humanism was just not morally equipped to deal with European humanism—the former rooted in the essence of being and social relationships, the other rooted in the aggressive, intrinsically colonising and conquering push and thrust and drive peculiar to Renaissance intelligence"(Mphahlele, 1982, p. 37).

It is important to note here that the above sentiments by Mphahlele carry with them elements of Negritude insofar as his reference to the African personality and African humanism—ideas adopted first from Edward Blyden describing the African as being alienated and later Senghor and Cesaire, and thus, by implication they all argued the need to return to one's roots (Mphahlele, 1982). Although Mphahelele himself was a constant critic of Negritude, I concur rightly so, what we must note with urgency is that although one might not necessarily agree with Negritude as a political ideology or Pan-Africanism for that matter, we must acknowledge that these schools of thought had developed precisely because they being-black 'in' the world (ala Manganyi, 1973), entailed operating under the serious conditions of exile, precariousness, nostalgia, and alienation. At the centre of what I'm trying to reveal here is that racial slavery,

colonialism and conquest created the conditions under which the black would find themselves **permanently exiled** from the world and the bounds of humanity, so that this banishment inaugurates modernity as we know it—so that even if Pan-Africanism or the movement of Negritude might suggest a need to return to Africa or African roots, it is inconsequential, if I were to suggest that exile in relation to the black doesn't require one to return to the continent in order to no longer be an exile, because in fact Africans in Africa themselves are exiled—that iterations of this exile might have revealed themselves as underdevelopment or neo-colonialism etc, but really it is exile in the ontological and psychological sense—if we might desire empirical markers they are everywhere. But this exile is of a particular kind, precisely because although the black functions outside of the world and the bounds of humanity, they are an integral resource of the world, their skills are required, their body is required to ensure the corporeal integrity of others, but they can never be fully incorporated. Makeba travelling the world at the time, as a musician, understood that in much of the places to which she travelled, more especially Europe and the Americas, she moved through it as a black women, whose mobility is restricted and for whom the fact of her blackness could not be denied, but there is something that is required of her—her music, what does it mean that almost all of her audiences were white? Where do we draw the line between negrophilla and negrophobia? Between enjoyment and terror? The markers of the closeness of this relationship are encrypted within the following words by Makeba upon her exile: "Here I am once again nothing but a native black without rights, the darling of the American newsmagazines and music industry, the girl who charmed the New York Sophisticates and started a fashion trend with her hair and clothes, here she is just a kaffir who doesn't know her place" (Makeba and Hall, p.98).

The argument that I present here on exile is controversial on one level because it presents a critique to the idea of humanity, but on another level it is a continuation of an argument that persists within a strand of Black Studies—this is to say that the argument that I present here, is similar in many ways to Hortense Spillers and her attempts at the distinguishing between the body and the flesh, insofar as she argues that "The New World (15th century until today), represents for African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment and **exile**"; and the fact that she alludes us to the objective status of the black. More so that Spillers contends that in order to trace the symbolic order of things, one would have to start at the beginning – this is to say to return back to the rupture, that violent formation of a modern African consciousness that takes place on the sub-Saharan continent at the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Spillers, 1987, p. 68)—what Spillers suggests here is a completely

different kind of rupture to the rapture Dalamba suggests in her work. The argument I present here, is perhaps very similar to Wilderson insofar as he suggests to us that the black is the very antithesis of the Human subject, that the black is in a state of paradigmatic exile. Hartman in fact is perhaps the first to warn us to the double edged sword of the Human in relation to the black, and the ways in which it works to banish and supress the black even in the moments of jubilee and freedom. I find in these texts, the consistent use and referral of the word exile in their discussions of the black condition 'In' the world; Wilderson's memoir is in fact titled "Incognero: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid"; however although they all mention it, they do not necessarily take it up as the main apparatus in which to thinking about the being of the black in relation to the world, this is what I am attempting to do here.

Earlier I identified three seemingly foundational components of exile**: 1)** ***dislocation (geographically) from 'home'; 2) political struggle, owing in many cases to suppressive regimes; 3) the psychological element, that exile is many ways may be the condition of the mind.*** I want to contend that these three elements are central to the constituent elements that make up blackness, but do not necessarily fit in as neatly into these boxes. This is to say that **1)** the dislocation and subsequent banishment is not simply about being exiled from one's home, even though this essentially does take place to the African—think the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Berlin Conference and subsequent colonial conquest, Apartheid and land dispossession— I argue that that initial act of displacement and dislocation did not only result in the exiling of the black from 'home', rather it was in fact the banishing of the black from the world and from the bounds of humanity. When Sol Plaatje in *Native Life in South Africa*, describes the African in 1913 as being a Pariah in the land of their own birth, he is revealing to us the natal alienation that is so evident within the permanent state of exile that constitutes blackness. **2)** I suggest that this element of the political is true and was central in the initial rupture, that the suppressive regime in this case was Western political, cultural and economic domination that saw the dislocation of the African; however I contend that this element of the political act/ struggle is not necessarily foundational today in relation to the black insofar as the black today is exiled regardless of having committed any political act or being banished by some political regime, that one is simply exiled by the fact of their blackness. This then introduces this idea of temporality—the state of existing within or having some relationship with time, this relationship is often linear— or rather in the case of black people, the lack thereof. By this I mean that the implications of the black as exiled is that one is often devoid of temporality, this observation is so vivid in the Makeba text, that what looked and seemed to

her as a 'progression' in time in terms of her career and life in fact is completely shattered and thrown into limbo by this single sentence when she realised that she had been banned from return to south Africa "Here I am once again nothing but a native black without rights, the darling of the American newsmagazines and music industry, the girl who charmed the New York Sophisticates and started a fashion trend with her hair and clothes, here she is just a kaffir who doesn't know her place." **3)** I contend that this element of the psychological is so essential to the state of blackness 'in' the world, it is Fanon in *Black Skins White Masks* who truly strikes at the crux of the psychic disruptions of the being of blackness. He states in its introduction, that for him, it is psychoanalytical interpretation that may lay bare the black problem, that in large parts for him the problem lies in the desire for the black to become the white and for the white to prove his superiority to the black (Fanon, 1967).

Now beyond Fanon, I have found through my engagement with the Makeba text and her experience of exile, a particularly striking display and articulation of the psychic disruptions of exile that one might identify within the black condition. It is striking for a number of reasons, Firstly, because she alerts us to something different to a Fanon or a Wilderson for whom these discussions of ontology and 'being' take on a gendered formation. This is to say that they decry the inferiority complex of the black particularly through emphasising the masculine disavowal of the black man by the white. Makeba, on the other hand, provides us with something more textured and complicatedly interwoven; that more than those I have mentioned above, her account, augments the feelings of loss, death, nostalgia and alienation that are tenants of exile but that are also so evident in various shades of black life. Makeba's "*My Story*", if anything is proliferated with an undeniable amount of death, and grief and loss that for Makeba and for the reader is so evidently tied to blackness. In almost every chapter Makeba is mourning a loss — she mourns her mother, sister, uncles whom she is unable to bury; she mourns the loss of her grandson and her daughter whom she must bury in foreign lands. She mourns the loss of "home". This idea of loss and constant mourning is a schema that I sense is constant in various accounts of blackness. One would have to observe from the artistic and literary perspective, the visuals of Arthur Jafa's 'Love is a message, the message is death' or Gregory Maqoma's depiction of the burdens of grief in Cion or Toni Morrison's Beloved and her display of the complexities between blackness, slavery and death**.** This grief is constant and unresolving and loud and accompanied by melancholy—it is a grief that I might contend has been taking place and continues for over 500 years now, not just of death but of corporeal integrity, of spiritual and material loss. Further yet, it seems that for Makeba much of the pain

and grief she feels is attached to her deep desire to return home to South Africa, that although she acknowledges the repression of the Apartheid state, she day dreams of home, interestingly a home that I think she frames and formulates as more desirable than it might have been in actuality— "if not for the great evil, none of us would have had to suffer the years of wondering through foreign lands" (Makeba and Hall, 1988). This desire for 'home', has been so central to the histories of black political struggle, it is central to Garveyism, to pan-Africanism, to negritude, even to a black consciousness. But there is no home to go to 'in' the world for the black, it is why I contend that Africans in Africa are themselves in a permanent state of exile, and it is why Saidiya Hartman pens '*Lose Your Mother' (2006)*. I wonder if finally returning home truly resolved those feelings that Makeba had been battling.

What might end that permanent state of exile? To this difficult question I do not have the answer. But it is Makeba, who has allowed me to think of blackness in this exilic manner, it is her text that offers us the potentiality for thinking about blackness in the world, more so that it is the dislocation of the Human that allows one to have a look at the gesticulations of the Makeba text and her moving through the world.

# *Partus: Black Female Flesh and the Violence of Intimacy*

*"The slave ship is a womb/abyss. The plantation is the belly of the world.*
*Partus sequitur ventrem—the child follows the belly.*
*The master dreams* of *future increase. The modern world follows the belly.*
*Gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world- breaking capacities of racial slavery. What it created and what it destroyed has been explicated by way of gendered figures of conception, birth, parturition, and severed or negated maternity.*
*To be a slave is to be "excluded from the prerogatives of birth." The mother's only claim—to transfer her dispossession to the child. The material relations of sexuality and reproduction defined black women's historical experiences as laborers and shaped the character of their refusal of and resistance to slavery*
*The theft, regulation and destruction of black women's sexual and reproductive capacities would also define the afterlife of slavery"*
*-Saidiya Hartman, 'Belly of the world: A note on black women's labour'(2016, p.166)'*

*under these historical conditions the African female subject is not the only target of rape – in one sense, an interiorised violation of the body and mind, but also the topic of specifically externalised acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males...this materialised scene of unprotected female flesh –offers us a theory, a text for the living and the dying and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations*

*- Hortense Spillers "Mama's baby, Papa's baby: An American Grammar Book" (1987, p.68)*

At the age of 16, in 1948, Miriam Makeba was forced to leave school and find work as a domestic worker, one of the few jobs available for black women in the city. My grandmother followed a similar pattern, she had to leave her children and find work as a domestic worker in Johannesburg—my mother, young at the time, could only see her sporadically on school holidays. Christina Sharpe in the introduction to her book '*Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post Slavery Subjects*'(2010) retells the story of Essa Washington-Williams whom at the age of 78 had revealed an open-secret of American society; that she had been the daughter of a white Republican senator and prominent advocate for segregation, James Storm Thurmond—that her

mother, Carrie Butler, then aged 15, worked for Thurmond as a domestic worker/kitchen girl (Sharpe, 2010, p. 14). For Sharpe, Williams at the beginning of the 21st century articulates the "presentness of the awful, intimate and monstrous configurations" that were made evident in Fredrick Douglass's now widely referenced description of the beating of aunt Hester and evident in Harriot Jacobs' Incidents *in the life of a slave girl* and I'd add that it is also evident in Yvette Christiansë's *"Heartsore": The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery (2009)* and its accounting of the life of Sila van den Kaap or Yvette Abraham's *Was Eva Raped: An Exercise of Speculative History (1996).* That the violence experienced by black women and black people generally during slavery moves seamlessly from the plantation into the post-slavery subject under segregation/Apartheid and later independence. Saidiya Hartman in what is 7 pages of intellectual brilliance in "*Belly of the World: A note on Black Women's Labors (2016)*" articulates this transition seamlessly and that the violence that inaugurates and sustains slavery— *Partus* sequitur ventrem, the law, rape etc. – and is integral in the violent making of the blacken body or rather of being black 'out of' the world is only re-inscribed and repeated continuously even today (Hartman, 2016). In this chapter I want to consider how the making and unmaking of the violence of being-black- out-world can be theorised through black women by thinking through the ideas of Partus, intimacy and violence, a continued intimate violence that is also evident within the lives of Sila van den Kaap and Miriam Makeba.

Partus sequitur ventrem—that which is born, follows the status of mother. This was the law that came to define racial and colonial slavery in the Atlantic and in Southern Africa. Jennifer L. Morgan in '*Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery*'(2018), argues crucially that Atlantic slavery rested upon the notion of heritability –of both genetics and property. And if we are to take seriously the centrality of heritability, Jennifer rightly suggests that it would mean that racial slavery heavily relied upon "a reproductive logic that cannot be separated from the explanatory power of race" (Morgan, 2018, p.1). In a similar vein, Hartman in '*Belly of the world*' (2016), alerts us to how gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world-breaking capacities of racial slavery (Hartman, 2016, p.166). By this important acknowledgement of the relationship between slavery, reproduction, and race then, Morgan argues that it would only be fair to conclude that black women and their experiences of enslavement shed critical light on what it meant to be enslaved or free in the early modern Atlantic world (Morgan, 2018, p.1). I would like to expand this argument to suggest that the black women's experience not only sheds light on what it meant to be enslaved then, but rather that it sheds critical light on blackness and what it means to be

black in the world writ large. That, as Spillers suggests, the material scene of "unprotected female flesh, offers us a possible theory and a text for the living and dying" (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). And a large component of beginning to do this kind of work is to take seriously a law like Partus, its relations with reproduction, intimacy and ultimately the functionality of race in the world, which is what I'd like to think through here. It is interesting that Morgan argues fundamentally that Partus, an act passed in 1662, was simply the certifying of racial and structural codes that long existed in relation to the black—I want to take a moment then to think through her ideas as she traces the history of this relationship between reproduction and race through black women.

From the onset then, Morgan suggests to us that the centrality of the logics of reproduction under slavery were not dependant on the rate of reproduction among the enslaved, but rather that its ideological significance was most central. This is to say that she suggests to us that the "ideological solidity of slave societies, needed reproducing women"— that "building a system of racial slavery on the notion of heritability did not require the presence of natural population growth among the enslaved, ***but rather, it required a clear understanding that enslaved women gave birth to enslaved children***" (Morgan, 2018, p. 1). So that what is fundamental here is the need for the Master to be rest assured that any child born to the enslaved mother (even if they are his kin), are themselves a slave and as a result, a number things are established here: **1.** the disruption and alienation of African kinship ties, linage and genealogy; **2.** the production of the enslaved African as property and therefore resulting in the securing of future economic increase **3.** The sexualisation and fetishization of the blackened body and simultaneously its continued subjection and disavowal. **4.** The securing of Human corporeal and symbolic integrity through the process of the exiling of the black.

For Morgan, the first point on kinship, is as a result of the centrality of heritability and the need for an act like Partus within racial slavery. But more than this, the first point is an argument in essences, for and of the natal alienation of the black—an argument seen in the contemporary, particularly within Afropessimist texts most associated with Wilderson, but have their earlier foundations in Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death (1982),* in Hortense Spillers (1987) and in Hartman (1997). I want to take a moment to discuss this idea of natal alienation and perhaps alert to what I think is an often misreading of its articulation. Patterson in 1982, in his book, attempts to provide a global analysis of the institution of slavery—having observed the history of slavery all over the world, Patterson concludes that for him, slavery is defined as

"the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonoured persons" (Patterson, 1982, 13) and that ultimately slavery is social death, that for him simply defining slaves as a form of property was not good enough. Now Wilderson, Sexton etc, take from Patterson and extend this definition to understanding the state of blackness in general insofar as they give animation to the 3 constituent elements of social death and by extension the constituent elements of blackness and Afro pessimism as a critical theory—gratuitous violence, natal alienation and general dishonour. Now I contend that both Patterson and more so Wilderson et alia in relation to the black, miss something integral in their analysis of natal alienation precisely because they negate a law like partus, the logics of reproduction under racial slavery and the figure of the black woman. For Patterson, slaves wherever they were located throughout history differed from other Human beings precisely because "they were not allowed to freely integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their forebears, or to anchor the living in any conscious community of memory" (Patterson, 1982, p. 5) – Wilderson, adopting natal alienation, social death etc, to the condition of the black 'In' the world, takes on natal alienation as a condition experienced by blacks under the structural antagonism of the master/slave relation; insofar as he argues that the black is natally alienated in that "the world does not recognise or incorporate their filial relations into its understanding of the family" (Wilderson, 2015). Now in the context of the black and in relation to racial slavery, Wilderson, I argue negates consciously or unconsciously the logics of reproduction and the position of black women within racial slavery and more so their explanatory power in providing a theory for blackness writ large; so that he thinks through natal alienation outside these boundaries, even though Spillers and Hartman (whom he claims as foregrounding) do not.

Spillers' thinking through natal alienation is different precisely because she takes seriously these logics. Spillers, writing back to the Moynihan Report which claimed that black women and their matriarchal nature were responsible for the problems of the black community; contends that that lack of access of the enslaved to their own body, throws into crisis all aspects of the blood relations (Spillers, 1987, p. 73)—that a law like Partus, integral to the dominant symbolic order and to maintaining the supremacy of race, "forces 'family' to modify itself when it does not mean family of the master or dominant enclave" (Spillers, 1987, p. 73). She argues that it is this rhetorical and symbolic move "that declares primacy over any other Human and social claim, and in that political order of things, 'kin', just as gender formation, has not decisive legal or social efficacy" (Spillers, 1987, p. 74). That the black under these conditions

is denied kin and family as we practice and understand it 'in the west', this is to say the vertical transfer of a bloodline (Spillers, 1987, p. 74). Spillers plays close attention to the logics of reproduction that make up racial slavery and later in relation the black in its afterlife; precisely because she understands that a law like Partus results in "the destructive loss of the natural mother, whose biological/genetic relationships to the child remains unique and unambiguous and opens the enslaved young to social ambiguity and chaos: the ambiguity of his/her fatherhood" (Spillers, 1987, p. 76). And that ultimately, sexuality, reproduction and motherhood are thrown into a crisis that cannot be understood through the subject status of white women or the white family structure in general. That the Moynihan report, along with dominant political culture make a fatal misjudgement by assigning matriarchal value where it does not belong, as Spillers contends, they "misname the power of the female regarding the enslaved community. Such naming is false because the female could not, in fact, **claim her child** and false, once again because 'motherhood' is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as legitimate procedure of the cultural inheritance" (Spillers, 1987, p. 80). Now Spillers' conclusion is important here because she recognises something that a Hartman does, but that a Wilderson and even a Jennifer Morgan does not (I'll expand on why Morgan does not in a moment)—Spillers states:

***"therefore, the female, in this order of things breaks in upon the imagination with the a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an 'illegitimacy' …1) motherhood as female blood-rite is outraged, is denied , at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment, 2) a dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African Father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence. In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother dispossessed. The problematising of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender and it is our task to make place for a different social subject" (Spillers, 1987, p. 80***)

For me this statement is important precisely because it fleshes out a number of critical points that I understand as follows—**1)** It centres the female flesh in understanding a large aspect of being black 'in' the world, something I argue Wilderson ,et al, misses completely in their engagement with the Spillers text and within the context of natal alienation; **2)** Spillers has no desire to assign agency to the female flesh, she understands the violence that turned her body into flesh, her object status—while Jennifer Morgan, for all that is good about her text, still

holds onto this desire that I argue is deeply linked to the interlockings of our desires for humanity and its conceptions of freedom; **3)** following this, Spillers recognises that the black woman is placed, outside of the traditional symbolics of female gender and that it is our task to make place for a different social subject. Now if one were to critique Spillers on some level, although I think this isn't necessarily a critique but rather an expansion over 33 years later, it would perhaps be in the vein of rethinking kinship and blackness in the future, that we might reconstruct what we mean by kin, does it necessarily need to follow the father? Should we be investing in the traditional logics of kin to begin with, how does queerness complicate this structure?

To return to the Morgan text then and to continue thinking about Partus, the question of reproduction and black women, she argues that it was fundamentally integral for the enslaved to be understood as dispossessed and to be framed outside of the normal networks of family and community in order to justify the practice of enslavement (Morgan, 2018)—As a result of this, black women's maternal capacities became a crucial vehicle by which racial meaning was solidified (Morgan, 2018, p. 2). She contends that this was a system of violence in which "economic structure supersedes kinship and enslave-ability displaces maternity" (no different to animality) (Morgan, 2018, p. 2). That in other words, enslaved black women, gave birth to slaves, and were denied the status of the mother just as the enslaved men were denied the status of the father; but more so in many cases enslaved women were raped and had to contend with the violent trauma of its aftermath—Hartman's chapter, *Seduction and Ruses of Powe*r in *Scenes of subjection* alerts us to this. More than just articulating the violation of enslaved black women often at the hands of the Master, Hartman demonstrates to us how the inner workings of rape and the law through the figure of the black women reveals to us the complicated relations of freedom and humanity when it comes to the black; and that ultimately notions of consent and will are thrown into crisis—that both subjection and forms of 'slave humanity' were key to the continued bondage of the enslaved, so that the event of emancipation and its afterlife only allows for the continuation of such subjection. Hartman, like Spillers, is not interested in assigning some form of 'agency' to the enslaved black woman but rather wants to conceptualise and think about blackness through the figure of the black women; something that the histories of black radicalism has negated for some time— and it is precisely why Hartman probes: ***What happens if we assume that the female captive serves as a general case for explicating social death, property relations and the pained and punitive construction of***

***blackness?*** This question here is so important and is a large part of why I have embarked on this project and why I have used the chorus of black women in the ways that I have done.

Now Morgan, I argue, makes a slippage in what is otherwise a key text. She argues that in order to centre the women whose reproductive lives were at issue, she wants to contend "that enslaved people best understood the theory and praxis of racial slavery"(Morgan, 2018, p. 2), and wants to argue that "in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Atlantic world, women navigated the dawning recognition that their reproductive lives would be the evidence of racialized dispossession and that enslaved mothers were enmeshed in the foundational metalanguages of early modern Atlantic ideas of slavery, freedom, and racial colonialism"(Morgan, 2018, p. 2). The fundamental shift that Morgan makes here is interesting and I argue problematic because it is driven by her desires to confer notions of humanity and freedom to enslaved women—notions of freedom and humanity that Hartman demonstrates as in fact being integral to their continued subjection. This investment is further evidenced in a statement that she makes further on in the text:

*"**For women such as Maria, Elizabeth, and Rosa, the intimacy of racial violence was immediately made manifest as they navigated their enslavement and freedom. The scant archival tracing of their hopes and fears around their children's future autonomy signals, I believe, the roots of a conscious oppositional stance that Cedric Robinson labelled the black radical tradition.[54] For Robinson, the African roots of that radicalism are made manifest in early slave revolts; here I would suggest that African-born women giving birth to children in the Americas similarly responded to their enslavement by recasting the terms of racial hierarchy that attempted to position them as irrational, sovereignless, and insentient laborers*** ( Morgan, 2018, p.15)*".*

I argued earlier that Robinson and the like were able to so easily negate black women from the histories and imagination of black thought fundamentally because of their investment in notions of the Human, whom through their conscious or unconscious global imaginary, figures the white sovereign heterosexual male and that subsequently that dictates their notions of black freedom. In addition to this, I argued that the black women who have attempted to embark upon the project of reinserting those that embody them into the histories of black thought, have been trapped within these structural codes fundamentally because their attempts figure

biographical projects of 'representation' that retain intact the structure of the histories of black freedom as inclusion into the Human which does not disrupt freedom as a project of the sovereign male (white) subject. These are the logics that in the end Jennifer Morgan also falls victim to—evidenced by her need to ascribe to the enslaved black woman a black radical tradition that leaves her over-determined, just as violently as the Moynihan report does. That she goes to the archive searching for life, for forms of humanity— to which Spivak, Christiansë and Hartman demonstrate the futility of this exercise.

Yvette Christiansë in *'"Heartsore"*: *The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery' (2009),* also exploring Partus, the logics of reproduction and more so the violence of the archive through the figure of the enslaved black woman, has no such investments. In this foundational text, Christiansë, narrates the story of a slave woman named Sila in the Cape Colony who cut the throat of her 9-year-old son and according to court records, had planned to take her own life shortly after. Christiansë contends that the archives of slavery barely remember or make any references to her, that of Sila's life we know almost nothing (Christiansë, 2009,1). She suggests that in the archive, "she survives only in the fragmented records and palpable silences of criminal proceedings, recognised under various related names, including, most frequently, Sila van de Kaap"— that her visibility to us is as a shadow figure and a repudiation of colonialism's "will-to-power in knowledge" (Christiansë, 2009, p. 1). Christiansë, in acknowledgement of the violence of the archive and its misnaming and the silencing of Sila, understands that the task of tracing Sila's story is a near impossibility. That attempting to do so, leads one to conclude with a certain melancholy that Sila appears neither within slavery nor the legal system that authorized it—It is MELANCHOLY that she finds here, not humanity or freedom. And as an archival figure Christiansë suggests to us, following Spivak, that Sila has been "structurally muted and that although we have words from her, the state never granted her full subjectivity" (Christiansë, 2009, p. 1).

Despite this, Yvette recognises that in the end, we might simply only have the archive and thus in such a scene in which there is almost nothing; she urges that we need to listen to the silences and the echoes of the *unsaid* (Christiansë, 2009, p. 2). That is precisely what she attempts to do with Sila—Akin to Hartman's idea of critical fabulation: that when Hartman asks "how does one tell the story of an elusive emancipation and a travestied freedom?"; she understands that to ask such a question is to comprehend that this kind of work requires what she refers to

as a reconsideration of the meaning of freedom and a need to look critically at the production of historical narratives (Christiansë , 2009, p. 10). I think a similar action is required for black women and black queers within the archives of black radicalism, in fact it is required in order to begin to think differently about figures like Makeba for example. This is to say that one would need to interrogate the structural codes of the archive, that in many ways because of its investments in the Human/freedom not only mobilise Miriam for this very purpose resulting in a misreading of her and of blackness but also result in her disappearance and invisibility precisely because of how black freedom is fashioned and defined. In Hartman's case she interrogates this thing called the archive (the system that governs the appearance of statements and generates social meaning) through a process of what she coins critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008).

Christiansë is concerned with how one might begin to articulate how a slave woman becomes a subject of legal action and punishment? Namely, how does one articulate the violence which led her to kill her own child? For Christiansë, any attempt to speak to Sila's circumstance would require negotiating the Cape archive—she argues essentially that Silla is trapped within a "triple discursive imprisonment: Black Female Slave" (Christiansë, 2019, p. 2); which when held up against the "full and putatively universal subjecthood of free white male" leaves her excluded, structurally foreclosed and banished (Christiansë, 2009, p. 2). Yvette therefore attempts to do two things here, the first is to try where possible to trace and get a sense of the life and conditions Sila lived and the position from which she attempted to speak, and the second is to think through Sila's failed attempt to summon the law (Christiansë, 2009, p. 2).

I want to begin by providing some context into Sila's life and what led to the fatal act: Sila had been a Slave to Hendrina Jansen, whom before she died inscribed in her will that Sila along with other slaves could work for the payment of their manumission. After her death however, Sila had been sold by Jansen's son, Theron, to another Master, Hancke. Sila had thought that she was working/being leased out so that she may obtain her freedom, but soon realised that she had been in fact sold to another slave owner/Master:

*".. **a direct effect of this law, Sila's status vis-à-vis Hancke was revealed, for in June 1816, both Theron and Hancke approached the registry, claiming ownership of her and her children. Sila, it turns out, was not working off the price of her freedom, as stipulated in Hendrina Jansen's will, but had been sold to Hancke by Theron. What followed could be called a comedy of bureaucratic fumbling were it not for the fact that lives were at stake.***

***Hancke registered Sila and her three children as his property on the basis of a deed of sale from Theron dated 1810. However, in a struggle for ownership in 1816, Theron refuted the finality of the 1810 deed by claiming that Hancke had made only a partial payment for Sila. As a result, the sale was not completed. On these grounds, Theron claimed Sila and her children as his property. His claim, it would be revealed, had an older history, one in which he and his mother had been locked in battle over the ownership of Sila and other slave*** *"* (Christiansë, *2009, p. 3)*

I argue, following Christiansë, that the dispute over the ownership of Sila and her subsequent decision to take her on child's life are enmeshed within the monstrous violence that inaugurates a law like Partus Sequitur Ventrem and the logics of reproduction that characterised British colonial racial slavery. As Christiansë contends, Sila as a slave, had to live with the reality that any children born to her would also be slaves and therefore property, and ultimately the dispute over Sila was also a dispute over future increase— "whoever could secure ownership of Sila in 1816 would quadruple his slave holdings"( Christiansë, 2009, p. 3). Christiansë then follows this with a key conceptual point insofar as she suggests to us that Sila's appeal to the courts after she had been charged and convicted with murder and sentenced to death must not be misread to suggest that a slave had recourse to justice, rather that we must understand British slavery and colonial legislation. This is to say that although parts of this legislation was designed to better the conditions of slavery, "the colonial government still regarded slaves as property and, in doing so, protected the property rights of the largely Dutch settler community" (Christiansë, 2009, p. 3). Christiansë does not see agency in Sila's appeal but rather recognises the violence that inaugurates her circumstance.

In the appeal, we finally get a glimpse of why Sila had taken her own son, Baro's, life— that she believed that "her time at Hancke's went toward payment of her manumission bond, as stipulated in Hendrina Jansen's will", worse yet that they had both been subject and subjected to violent beatings while being under the new ownership of Hancke:

***" according to the court records, matters became critical on December 24, 1822, when Sila was ordered by her mistress to clean some linen.[25] She sent Baro to pick lemons for the removal of stains from the linen. On his return to "the wash place," where Sila awaited him, he complained of pain resulting from another beating by Van der Wat. The sentencing document sets out what she allegedly said happened next:. . . she there upon rubbed the child with fat which she had scraped from her bread for the purpose, — [and]***

***while she was so employed the child fell asleep, [and she] through heartsore and grief, cut the child's throat with a knife which she had with her" (***Christiansë, 2009, p. 5)

I argue that the evidence of her son's pained and severed body had been too much for Sila. She had to contend with the realisation that it was she who had birthed Baro and as a result of her status, he too, had been condemned to the social death that is slavery. Through Sila, we are made to see bare the naked violence and brutality that befalls the African and makes the black out the world. What is revealed to us here are the monstrous intimacies that Sharpe thinks through, that constitute blackness and that are evidenced in the life of the enslaved woman – not only must she contend with her own condition as a slave, the rape and brutality, but must now face the conferring of such relations to another. The violence of Sila's life doesn't end here, by the conclusion of the trial Sila was condemned to death by strangulation, more so that the execution did not in fact happen. Sila had been lost in the court and prison system and according to Christiansë was only discovered to have been alive in a prison cell 3 years later—that Sila's case was overlooked because she was pregnant when sentenced to death in March 1823. What is revealed to us is that Sila had been in fact continuously raped in prison and had borne two more children. In the Cape Colony, there were four more cases between 1819 and 1823 in which enslaved women were charged with the act of killing or attempting to kill their own children – another woman named Hester, for example, had tried to drown herself and her children in the ocean (Christiansë, 2009, p. 7).

But what makes a law like Partus unique and what allows us to propose for example that the condition of blackness can be theorised through the female flesh just as it has been previously theorised through the male, is that as Jennifer Morgan contends, the child within slavery did not in fact always follow the condition of the mother. That as early as the 14$^{th}$ century, judicial rulings blocking slaveowners from selling the children they'd fathered with enslaved women in their households had emerged (Morgan, 2018, 4)—these juridical rulings, according to Morgan, emerged along with other practices in an attempt to assimilate Slavic, Berber, Greek and Muslim slaves into Europe (Morgan, 2018, p. 4). Understanding the broader context of the shifts in the practices of inheritance within slave labour in Europe, Morgan rightly urges us to probe the ease with which European settlers deliberately shift the logics of reproduction, inheritance when it comes to the African (Morgan, 2018, p. 5). To me at least it alerts one to the notion that it is the black that cannot be assimilated, who is denied kin and the status of inheritance and whom is banished. Yet one might argue that this is simply an issue of patriarchy, that men have always laid claim to women's bodies whatever the context may be,

that as Morgan points out, the history of state interest in women's reproductive lives in the west has long existed as well as the establishment of the domestic/private and public sphere. But the key distinction here, that makes this more than issue of patriarchy but in fact also an issue of blackness is that "people of African descent have long been positioned as both outside of the household and, as a direct result of their role as productive and reproductive commodities, constitutive of it. For black women, maternity wrenched parenting out of the realm of the domestic and into the marketplace" (Morgan, 2018, p. 12). For Morgan, and I am compelled to agree with her, the children of white women were unquestionably marked free, while the children of black women were marked with the inevitability of slavery.

I've gone back in time, tracing the violence of racial slavery and I do so through the black woman slave because I contend, as Sharpe does, that the legacies of the violence that befall them and constituted blackness, are continuous even in the post-slavery subject or what Hartman terms the Afterlife of slavery. It is why I started with Miriam in 48' and later my grandmother—they are representative of those violent intimacies that evidence being black out the world. Saidiya Hartman in '*Belly of the world: A note on black women's labour*s' marks out that the continuities between slavery and freedom are most evidenced and underwritten within black women's domestic labour (Hartman, 2016, p. 170). That In slavery, black women were forced into domestic labour in white households, having to endure all forms of violence—that the white household served as "a space of violence and brutality for the black women forced to serve as housekeepers, caretakers, nannies, and wet-nurses" (Hartman, 2016, p. 170). This only continued in its afterlife, black women continued to be central to the reproductive labour of white families with many women being forced into low wage domestic work and the violent intimacies that came with it—having to endure sexual and psychical violence, that "black women knew first-hand that they were safer in the streets and the tenements of the ghetto than in white homes" (Hartman, 2016, p. 170). In almost all instances black women in tending to and replenishing white households, did so at the expense of their own families. And it is now that I want to amplify the chorus by placing Sila, alongside Miriam, by returning to 'Mama Afrika'—a figure marked ironically, I contend, by a moniker of maternity, but whose life betrays the indelible operations of Partus and what it means for the impossibility of natality and maternity for black female flesh.

In the opening Chapter, of her autobiography 'My Story', Makeba describes the material scene in which her mother (Christina) gave birth to her—She was alone, she knew what to do, she was a nurse and any how there were no doctors, that in her world doctors were for white people.

Makeba describes that she had been so sickly that after two days of being alive, her poor father had prayed for her death, that she spent her first 6 months alive in jail with her mother whom had been arrested for selling umqombothi (Makeba and Hall, 1988)—the painful truth of the matter was that Miriam had been born into the world of the dead and the dying evidenced by the sustained rituals of anti-black violence that characterised the moment of her birth and that would continue until her death. At the age of 16 and on the eve of Apartheid, she was forced to leave school and find work as a domestic labourer in Johannesburg—Makeba had joined a historical chain-gang in which black people's and in this case black women's labours—the belly of the world—had sustained white reproductive and social life. For Makeba, this is truly the first time in which she enters the white world and in there vividly encounters the corporeality of her blackness; she describes black life in South Africa— the segregation, minimum wages, the master/slave relationship and in fact describes black people as captives and slaves in the land of their own birth. But what captures Christina Sharpe's "presentness of the awful, intimate and monstrous configurations" that characterised slavery and later its afterlife are revealed to us in Makeba's description of her life as a domestic worker. She narrates two vivid memories: On the first occasion she works for a Greek family that after failing to pay her wages for two months call the police on her and accuse her of stealing a watch, it is later revealed to us that this was a ritual of violence that they had been enacted upon other black women who had worked there previously, that they weaponised the ease with which the authorities understood criminality as synonymous with blackness but also that they felt entitled to the free reproductive labours of black women. On another occasion Makeba gets a second job with another family as a domestic worker—she accompanies this new family on vacation to Durban and one day, the madam instructs her to collect seashells from the beach, this of course is a whites only beach and Miriam gets arrested (Makeba and Hall, 1988, pp. 27-30). Upon her arrest the police accuse her of prostitution, she is finally released from jail when her madam is called and in a dramatic display of power, she slaps Miriam across the face. For the journey back home Makeba is forced to take a blacks only train (with the seashells) while the white family drove home. In an act of defiance Makeba abandons the seashells on the train and never returns back to work (Makeba and Hall, 1988, pp. 27-30).

What one sees in an engagement with Makeba and her story, and in observing of its unspeakable grammar; are the complicated configurations of intimacy, of consent and will, of motherhood and daughterhood, that are haunted and shadowed by the pained construction of blackness. It urges one to probe what implications does that have on the relationship between

mothers and daughters, fathers and mothers, sons and mothers, sons and daughters, mothers and mothers, fathers and daughters. What If we are to mark Makeba's exile, as not simply her exile from South Africa but rather, as the allegory for the exiling of the black from the world and from the bounds of humanity as proposed in the previous chapter. So that when one reads her life, we see the implications of not only her physical/political exiling but the ontological exiling of the black writ large. This is to say that we observe her life within a network of the rituals of anti-black violence, so that her pained feelings of loss, of natal alienation—severed kinship, of the complicated violent intimacies provide a theory and text for reading the state of blackness in the world, which is to say that it is be placed outside of the world. That the melancholy and loss of being exiled from South Africa is not simply a matter of geographical dislocation but a continuation of a loss evidenced in the history of modernity in relation to the black. More so the denial of the burial of her mother and of her uncles killed at the Sharpeville Massacre by the Apartheid government, are the symbols of a continued denial of kinship ties insofar as one is not even afforded the dignity of mourning and burial. The complicated violent intimacies that birth her mother and herself, are further signified in the complicated relationship that she holds with her daughter—a complicated relationship that Essa-Washington Williams had with her mother Carrie Butler or that Sila van den Kaap had with Baro that ultimately led to death. Makeba's complicated relationship with her daughter, too, ends in her death in exile, and again her children are denied the opportunity to bury their mother. What are the implications of all of this death, grief and loss? What happens when an entire race has to encounter death and despair every day? This is not what one might immediately see in a Narrative of Makeba populated in National history and in strands of Black thought—by the end of the autobiography I found myself weeping because I could not see an end in sight, the unspeakable grammar had been too much, even though Makeba herself was hopeful, believed in freedom day and the quest for Human, I couldn't help but be left with the following, a short poem to Makeba and to blacks all over:

**The unspeakable grammar of Makeba; the unspeakable grammar of blackness:**

*I was born, alone, laboured and caught by my mother.*

*I fear lightening, my friend died, I fear death, my dad died*

*Fuck a baas, I spent the last of my teenage years slaving away in white people's homes*

*I had sex once, I didn't really want to, but here is Bongi*

*Thank god for music, Thokoza Gogo - Venice, London, America, The world*

*I fear death, my mother died*

*Visa Denied, fuck a baas, I want to bury my mother*

*Exile, death, black, motherhood*

*I miss home*

*"Aluta Continua"*

*Fuck a man*

*I fear death, my grandchild died, I fear death, my daughter died*

*I fear black, death died.*

# *Conclusion*

*How does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects as a counter-history of the human and as a practice of freedom?*
*-Saidiya Hartman, in Venus in two Acts*

So then where do we go from here? What happens next? I ask these questions in closing precisely because what underwrites this project is an assemblage of critical questions that confront the black world and perhaps confront the world over. This is to say, if we are to abandon the Human insofar as it has demonstrated its refusal to incorporate the black into its imagination—more so it has survived and maintained its corporeal integrity at the expense of the black; then where do we go from there? The stakes are incredibly high because such an act, that I think is integral, throws into crisis a lot of the intellectual work that has been done before and that has been historically central to black thought. More so, it throws into crisis the humanities as we know it—sociology, political sciences and anthropology as disciplines—have all been centered on the idea of the Human. Frank Wilderson, in *Afro pessimism and the End of Redemption (2015)* , suggests to us that black people present a crisis for narrative, because their status in the world as socially dead is a double edged sword that bars them from the arch of redemption while simultaneously being required if "redemption is to attain any form of coherence ". Wilderson contends that blackness presents a catastrophe for narrative precisely because the violence that both elaborates and saturates black life is totalizing, and makes narrative inaccessible, that the arch becomes a flatline. More than it presenting a crisis for black people, he argues that it creates a crisis for ***the organizational calculus of the humanities writ large (***Wilderson, 2015***).*** This is because the primary functions of the disciplines that are housed within the humanities is "the belief that all sentient beings can be emplotted as narratives entities, that every sentient subject is imbued with historicity, and this belief is subtended by the idea that all beings can be redeemed. Historicity and redemption are inextricably bound" (Wilderson 2015). More than this, in order for redemption to be plausible, Wilderson suggests that it requires a sentient being who is barred from the beginning, from narrative and, by extension, barred from redemption. That without the black who is barred the arc of redemption would "lack any touchstones of cohesion" … so without the black, the arc

of redemption key to the humanities would not exist, in essence, the dislocation of the Human then reveals to us the anti-blackness that exists within the humanities and throws it in crisis.

But more than this, this dissertation at its foundations is an attempt at revealing the structural codes that govern the histories and the historiographical accounts of black intellectual and political struggle, that have resulted in the illegibility and negation of black women. I have attempted with the assistance of what I identify as a black feminist thought of a particular kind—one that dislocates the Human and the notions of freedom that come with—to suggest a way of undoing the violence of the archive and how we can begin to theorise the state of blackness through the figure of the black woman. But I want to conclude by looking forward, this is to say, to look to those who propose and cement a different praxis. I want to conclude this dissertation with Saidiya Hartman's idea of *waywardness*. In 2008, Hartman, in *Venus in Two Acts*, posed a set of critical questions that were spurred on by her conundrum of attempting to write a narrative of an enslaved girl. Venus is the quintessential enslaved woman, who repeatedly appears in the archives of slavery—but of whom we know all most nothing about. For Hartman, Venus "demonstrates the convergence of terror and pleasure in the libidinal economy of slavery and as well the intimacy of history with the scandal and excess of literature" (Hartman, 2008, p. 1). The conundrum for her, rests upon the difficulty of writing about the unspeakable and the unknown, at doing that, and not reproducing the violence of the archive, while at the same time revealing that which dictated her silence (Hartman, 2008, p. 1). The fate for Venus here, is death, just as it is for all other black women in the Atlantic, that all we know of her, is a register of her encounter with power and all the archive reveals of her is her violated body and her use as property (Hartman, 2008, p. 2). So, like Wilderson earlier, the story of Venus is predicated upon impossibility, an impossibility of narrative for which she is condemned by the archive, but unlike Wilderson, Hartman refuses to end there. This is to say that she wonders what it might look like to attempt to ***"rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human and as the practice of freedom?"*** (Hartman, 2008, p. 3). To listen to the unsaid and refashion disfigured lives.

In this sense, Hartman finds possibility in narrative, that it might be a form of compensation or reparations—she wants to attempt to represent the nameless and the forgotten (Hartman, 2008, 3). For her, what is as difficult as revealing the violence of the archive, is to attempt to uncover

the lives of those buried under the violence. To do this, is to think within what she terms the 'free state' (Hartman, 2008, p. 6).

Now Hartman in *Venus in Two Acts*, reveals something to seriously think about, she argues that we already know that the archives of slavery rests upon a founding violence that creates and organises subjects and objects of power and that it yields not the account of the slave's life but of their death (Hartman, 2008, p. 10). But that the rest of it, is all fiction—Venus, the sulky bitch, the names that enclosed black women in Spiller's text—that "the economy of theft that governed slavery fabricated commodities and corpses" (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). Hartman reveals to us then, that an attempt at narrating those who embody her into history without reproducing the violence that caused their silence may only be possible by advancing a series of speculative argues or through what she terms critical fabulation: " :This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (Hartman, 2008, p. 11).

I have to be honest, this thought scares me, only because it might have serious risks and as a result, serious implications. Yes, the danger might be that on the one hand one might in fact mistakenly reproduce the violence of the archive, but more than this I contend that we may also mistakenly assign agency where there is none. That although Hartman warns us that *critical fabulation* does not intend to "miraculously recover the lives of the enslaved or at redeeming the dead, but rather labouring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible", the risks are still there. However, the reality is, we need to set a precedent, a new praxis that recognises the violent construction of blackness in the world, that dislocates us from the Human, that does not allow us to assign agency where there is none but that at the same time allows us to explore those whom have been negated by the archive. This is to say those whom embody me and have been negated from the histories of black thought, from the histories of thought in general. I wanted to lay those foundations in this research and really, Hartman lays those foundations here and continues them in her latest project, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* although in ways that I have not attempted here. In it, Hartman states that the book wants to recreate the radical imagination and wayward practices of young black women by describing the world through their lives (Hartman, 2019, p. 7). For Hartman the decades between 1890 and 1935 were key in determining black future, yet the archive reveals nothing of them. That their lives are deemed devious, reckless, promiscuous, while in the truest sense

they are waywardness, refusal, free love. Although, I remain slightly sceptical of the risk of such an endeavour, perhaps because narrative literary schema has never really been my forte, it is the beginning.

So whether it is waywardness or whatever term that might follow, it may be the praxis that reshapes not only our encounters with history and its archives but also how we think and meditate upon blackness. That while we contemplate the end of world, this might be all we have in the meantime.

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