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# Always looking': visual and artistic explorations of the living legacies of enslavement in South Africa

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# *'Always looking': visual and artistic explorations of the living legacies of enslavement in South Africa*

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By Amie LH Soudien

August 2024

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# Introduction

Contemporary art practices elucidate important insights about the living legacies of historic slavery in Cape Town, South Africa, in explorations of race, gender, violence, visualities and urban space. Through the analysis of the work of Gabrielle Goliath, Bronwyn Katz, Berni Searle, the District Six Museum and the Prestwich Place Committee, I explore how, to paraphrase Saidiya Hartman, "the relation between slavery and the present [is] open, unfinished" (2022a, p. xx). I place the aforementioned artistic work in dialogue with historiographic and Black feminist research in opposition to the largely marginal place of slavery in South African intellectual and public life. Although some 60 000 people were forcibly brought to the Cape of Good Hope under the conditions of slavery (Shell, 1994g, p. 40), and for a time in the 18th century more enslaved than free people lived in the Cape (Shell, 1994a, p. 4), the subject of slavery and the research thereof is peripheral to dominant narratives about South Africa's history (Shell, 1994d; Cloete, 2016). For historically marginalised descendants of slavery in South Africa, the diminished positioning of slavery has perpetuated their own marginality in the country and produces a sense of loss. The scale of slavery's impact on South African life and the near absence of accountability or acknowledgement of the atrocities of slavery – legally or symbolically – produces a discordant tension and a hierarchised understanding of belonging for slavery's historically marginalised descendants. For these reasons, I see the work of poetic and artistic commemorations of slavery as vital contributions to the study of slavery and the longevity of slave memory in the contemporary moment.

In support of my argument, throughout this dissertation I draw direct corelations between the earliest period of Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, also known in English as the

Dutch East India Company) settler-colonialism in the Cape of Good Hope in the 17th and 18th centuries and contemporary Cape Town, South Africa. These temporal connections between the past and present are explored through examples of tangible, current systemic products of settler-colonialism and slavery, as well as the unquantifiable, affective products of settler-colonialism and slavery in contemporary Cape Town – what Michael Rothberg has termed the "structural and intimate" products of histories of injustice (2019b, p. 60). The geographic focus of my study is primarily within the urban centre of Cape Town, the site of the earliest VOC infrastructure and architecture in the country, and the setting of some of the most expensive real estate in South Africa today. To adequately account for both the enduring structural and affective products of coloniality, my research has traversed diverse interdisciplinary terrain that includes the analysis of contemporary art and public commemoration with the support of the historiographic record, and research produced in memory studies, Black feminist theory, history of art, and visual studies.

As I will explore throughout the thesis, the artworks of Gabrielle Goliath in her ongoing work *Elegy* (2015-), Bronwyn Katz in her debut exhibition 'Groenpunt' (2016), and Berni Searle in her seminal body of work 'Colour Me' (1998), encounter and reveal historical narratives about slavery in early settler-colonial South Africa and simultaneously speak to the experience of living in South Africa today. Throughout the thesis, I focus on the recorded experiences of enslaved women and work with the cultural production of artists such as Goliath, and the work of feminist scholars such as Gabeba Baderoon (Baderoon, 2009, 2011, 2014c), Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010d, 2015b), Yvette Abrahams (1996), Patricia van der Spuy and others (1996; van der Spuy and Clowes, 2007), to examine the historical roots of gendered and sexualised violence in South Africa in the VOC-era slave-holding colony. With the work of artists Searle and Katz, I discuss what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called "oversight" and "the ordering of slavery" (2011a) in developing "colonial technologies of

visuality" (2011, p. 48) in VOC and British colonial era racialisation and apartheid racial classification, through cartography and the origins of the spatial organisation of Cape Town.

Since the emancipation of slavery in 1838, groups of slave descendants in South Africa have consistently commemorated their slave heritage through a variety of artistic and performative methods. With respect to some of these traditions, I look to the innovative memory work of the District Six Museum, in their commemorations of Lydia Williams, a formerly enslaved District Sixer and community figure who died in 1910, and 'A Walk in the Night', the annual commemoration of the emancipation of enslaved people in South Africa organised with the Prestwich Place Committee and St Georges Cathedral. These commemorations evoke the memory of enslavement in the present through collective, public-oriented acts of remembrance that use performance and walking practices to challenge the ongoing colonial technologies of exclusion and marginalisation in Cape Town today.

The artwork I engage with centres slave descendant perspectives and imaginaries, and I examine how the work of the aforementioned artists and cultural organisations eschew colonially-informed practices of commemoration in favour of Black feminist approaches to care, recuperation and repair. For me, working with artistic and poetic expressions of slave memory in contemporary art is a productive means to access, describe and analyse the affective experience of learning about the atrocities of slavery, living with the knowledge of the loss of life, as well as the intergenerational marginalisation and oppression of enslaved people and their descendants. In an attempt to address this complexity, I work with what Jennifer Nash has described as "writing beautifully"; Black feminist theory's "ethical commitment … to move the reader" (2019b, p. 102) and in so doing, "do justice to loss" (2019b, p. 103). Nash's conception of "beautiful writing", like Hartman's theorisation of

critical fabulation (2008), recognises that histories of enslavement and the life worlds lost therein are impossible to access. Whilst recognising that the incommensurable nature of studying slavery is inevitable, to employ Black feminist theory is to operate with an ethic of care towards historically raced, gendered subjects made vulnerable in colonial archives. As I will elaborate upon in this introduction, and at length in Chapter 2, contemporary Black feminist theory has deeply informed the research and writing methodologies that constitute this study.

In seeking "recognition" for the horrors of slavery in its aftermath, following Judith Butler (2009), I am mindful of the multiple, concurrent power dynamics at play in how knowledge concerning histories of violence, such as slavery, are produced. Throughout the thesis, I will return to Michael Rothberg's theorisation of the "implicated subject" (2019c) to insist upon slavery as a collective inheritance. I conceptualise a shared legacy of slavery for those negatively impacted by slavery, for those who have historically benefited from slavery, and those who are descendant of neither victims nor perpetrators, but who nonetheless benefit from the conditions of oppression that slavery wrought – the implicated subjects. Rothberg asks us to think critically of the terms "legacy", "descendant" and "inheritance" (2019b, p. 64), a proposition I take up throughout the thesis. While not the focus of the dissertation, I periodically interrogate how slave descendants, particularly those racialised as Coloured, position themselves in relation to Blackness, whiteness and systems of power, as explored by Zimitri Erasmus (2001), Zoë Wicomb (2018), and others.

Studying slavery in a contemporary South African context – one shaped by successive oppressive regimes – requires a careful cognisance of the dynamics of power. How knowledge about slave histories are produced and how slave memory is generated is constituted in the "push and pull" of academic legitimacy and lived experience. In this thesis,

I attempt to blur the lines between these distinctions through a critical interrogation of knowledge production itself.

## Background to the problem

Despite slavery's duration and the system's contributions to settler-colonial expansion in South Africa, slavery is largely peripheral to understandings of South African history. The widespread lack of acknowledgement of slavery's role in the formation of South African society has far-reaching consequences in the lives of slave descendants, in cultural and heritage work broadly speaking, and in academia. As a result, relatively few monographs have been published that explore the subject of slavery in the historiographic convention and even fewer that explore the subject of slave memory (Gqola, 2010d; Baderoon, 2014c). Extensive, empirical studies of slavery are relatively recent, as evidenced by the "emerging" status of the field in Anglophone historical studies since the 1970s, owing to its associations with Afrikaner nationalism, Eurocentric histories of South Africa, and the widely propagated myth that slavery in the Cape was "mild" (Cuthbertson, 1992; Southey, 1992; Worden, 2007). The relatively small stature of the field of slavery studies within historical studies thus extends towards the marginal place of slavery in other scholarly fields in the academy. In light of this, it is my view that interdisciplinary research methods are necessary in order to account for descendants' experiences of loss and to address the traumas of slavery, seeing that historiography is primarily oriented towards recounting or reappraising the history of slavery as opposed to remembrance, a distinction I elaborate on later in the chapter.

Among Coloured South Africans, as described by Zoë Wicomb, there is a near absence of slavery in South African folklore (2018, p.122), with slave memory, in particular, marked by absence and forgetting (Ibid). Within and outside of slave descendant communities the

commemoration of slavery also occupies a marginal place in the spectrum of South African memorial practices. Commemorations dedicated to slavery are few relative to the scale and influence of VOC and British-colony era slavery in South Africa. Similarly, City of Cape Town (municipal) or state-funded commemorations of slavery are often linked to singular sites such as the Iziko Slave Lodge and the Prestwich Memorial, which perpetuates the impression that slavery was a practice limited in scope, as opposed to a system that encompassed the entirety of the VOC Cape colony and British Cape Colonial region. Events like the *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* (an Afrikaans term that translates to "Second New Year") celebrations, the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival, and 'A Walk in the Night' – which continue long-standing slavery commemoration practices – are among the very few collective, public commemorations of slavery that take place in Cape Town.[1]

Mirroring the diminished place of slavery within the academy and slave descendant communities, the subject of slavery has also been marginal to understandings of South African visual culture and art. There is a dearth of cultural material engaging with the history of slavery in South Africa, particularly in comparison to the transatlantic slave trade, with considerably few artists, filmmakers, theatre practitioners, and writers engaging with histories of slavery. Interestingly, however, a significant portion of the existing creative material produced on the subject resides in the discipline of fiction writing and poetry, as seen in the work of Andre Brink (2012), Dan Sleigh (2004), Yvette Christiansë (2006), and

[1] The Cape Town Minstrel Carnival is a weeklong festival that takes place in Cape Town. According to Nadia Davids: "Between Christmas and New Year's Day the streets of Cape Town are filled with the music and movement of the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival. It is a weeklong season of performance and celebration, the culmination of a year spent rehearsing songs, choreographing dances, and planning costumes in the *klopse kamers* scattered throughout the outlying Cape Flats" (2013, p. 86). Davids further explains: " 'Tweede Nuwe Jaar' refers to both a specific day (2 January) and/or a collection of days and events (the Nagtroepe, the Klopse, the Christmas Bands). 'Tweede Nuwe Jaar' translates to 'Second New Year' (2 January), the day on which slaves were allowed to celebrate the New Year." (Ibid, 96).

Rayda Jacobs (1998). In theatre, the subject has recently been taken up in Lebo Mashile's *Venus vs Modernity* (2019), and Nadia Davids' *What Remains* (2019).

Few contemporary artists have taken up the subject of slavery or the era of VOC rule in South Africa, relative to the subject of British colonialism, for example. From a historical perspective, a considerable number of artworks from the 17th to 19th century depict the Cape of Good Hope under VOC and British colonial rule in the Western tradition that have recorded some aspects of the slavery system, as explored by Gabeba Baderoon in her book *Regarding Muslims: from slavery to post-apartheid* (2014c). Notable contributions of contemporary artworks made in response to slavery in South Africa include Gavin Younge and Wilma Cruise's public sculptural installation *Memorial to the Enslaved* (2008), located in Church Square, Cape Town, within walking distance to the Iziko Slave Lodge and the historic site of the Slave Tree on Spin Street, and Sue Williamson's *One Hundred and Nineteen Deeds of Sale* (2018) and *Messages from the Moat* (1997). While these examples are arguably important for their contributions to the commemoration of enslavement in South Africa, the place of the artists' own positionalities do not appear implicated in the making of the artworks themselves, which is central to my study.

In addition to the works of Searle, Katz, and Goliath, which I explore in this dissertation, there are several other notable examples of contemporary art exploring slavery and VOC-era history in South Africa, which I was not able to address. Among those not included are: Berni Searle's *Com-fort* (1997/2019), originally staged at the Castle in Cape Town in 1997 as part of the Johannesburg Second Biennale programme; Thania Petersen's exhibition 'Garden of Passion Gaps' (2021) at Church Projects in Cape Town, and her *Botanical Imperialism* series that includes the in-situ photograph *God Save Our Hedge* (2015); The Burning Museum Collective's *Straatpraatjies III: A Seat at the table* (2016), which looks at the early history of Afrikaans and Arabic at the Cape; Lady Skollie's exhibition 'Bound'

(2020) at Everard Read in Cape Town; Haroon Gunn-Salie's public installation *Kom Oor Die See* (2014) at the Sea Point Promenade in Cape Town; and South African rapper YoungstaCPT's album *3T* (2019) which includes the song 'VOC'. The growing number of examples in art and popular culture demonstrate, in my view, a desire of historically marginalised descendants to connect with their slave histories, and perhaps more importantly, to explore the living legacies of enslavement in a public forum.

Theoretically speaking, the impact of VOC-era slavery on the shape of visual culture, aesthetics, conceptions of self, and representation as a project of settler-colonialism is significantly under-explored in South African scholarship, largely owing, I would argue, to the emergent nature of the historical field and its Eurocentric associations. Writing in 1998, Andrew Bank and Gary Minkley stated that "there is still very little analysis of visual perceptions of space" and proposed a need to "probe the visual conceptions of space by other groups in different forms" (Bank and Minkley, 1998/1999, p. 16). Taking up the mantle proposed by Bank and Minkley, in this thesis I explore slavery and visual culture, in addition to space. I explore this thematic in conjunction with questions regarding slavery and aesthetics in the Cape introduced by scholars such as Baderoon (2009, 2014b), and conceptions of the visual theorised by scholars of the transatlantic, such as Mirzoeff (2011b, 2011c) and Tiffany Lethabo King (2019a). King and Mirzoeff's work is linked to larger intellectual projects that reckon with the formation of colonial understandings of aesthetics as world-making systems that pervade contemporary society (Mignolo and Vazquez, 2013; Bradley and da Silva, 2021), explored at length in Chapters 4 and 5.

Building upon the work of Gqola (2010d), Baderoon (2014c), Cheryl Hendricks (2001) and others, the links between slavery-era gendered and sexualised violence and South Africa's current gendered and sexualised violence crisis has been taken up by relatively few

scholars. Gqola and Baderoon explore these themes extensively in their books *What is Slavery to me? Postcolonial/slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa* (Gqola, 2010d) and *Regarding Muslims: From slavery to post-apartheid* (Baderoon, 2014c). In historiographic scholarship, feminist historians have addressed the role of violence in the experiences of enslaved women (Abrahams, 1996; van der Spuy, 1996), however, feminist perspectives of the VOC-era Cape remain peripheral in the historiographic literature on the period, as is explored at length in Chapter 1.

## Problem statement, purpose statement, and questions

This dissertation seeks to use a study of contemporary art and public commemoration through an interdisciplinary research approach to address the complexities that arise from the under-researched nature of slavery studies in South Africa. Studying the legacies of slavery in South Africa from a singular disciplinary perspective – be it history or history of art – is, in my view, insufficient in adequately addressing, to borrow Rothberg's phrase, the "structural and intimate" (2019b, p. 60) products of intergenerational trauma and a sense of loss produced by the partial knowledge of unevenly recorded histories.

It is thus my position that an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that values artistic research, Black feminist theory, in addition to historiographic and archival research is essential to account for the raced, gendered experiences of the VOC-era Cape and its afterlives in contemporary Cape Town. In developing my research to address questions of ongoing structural and systemic marginalisation through an examination of art and commemorative practices, my work endeavours to answer the following:

"In what ways do the living legacies of enslavement live on in the present, both "structural and intimate" (Rothberg, 2019b, p. 60)?

How has the diminished place of slavery in the South African imaginary impacted the expression of slave memory?

How do contemporary artists engage with poetic or artistic strategies to connect with histories of enslavement and evoke slave memory?

What is the purpose of poetic and artistic commemorations of slavery in the absence of widespread, national acknowledgement of slavery?

In what ways has the formation of aesthetics and visuality been informed by systems of slavery and settler-coloniality?

The overall study of slavery has been marked by preoccupations with 'absence', 'erasure', and 'silence'. Considering this discursive context, I am interested in the generative possibilities produced by the partial or incomplete archive, and the work undertaken by artists and cultural organisations to address the paucity in the acknowledgement of slavery. The primary aim of my thesis is to demonstrate that the products of slavery are embedded in every facet of society informed by settler-coloniality through a reappraisal of specific aspects of colonial technologies of control. Conversely, it is thus also important that my work demonstrates that such systems are not entirely totalising and that, in the words of King, colonial "cartographic coherence" is "an unsettled project" (2019b, p. 86). Descendants and other groups oriented towards the slave experience counter these systems through activist, theoretical, artistic, and poetic strategies.

## Research design and context

My work is highly interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on a wide range of scholarly texts and research methods when engaging with histories of enslavement and their afterlives. I draw from extensive historiographic research on histories of enslavement in South Africa during the period of the VOC and have also leant upon comparative studies of slave societies in other former VOC colonies, such as Batavia, operating within my period of research. I have engaged with contemporary art performances, exhibitions, and individual artworks, and have developed visual and critical analyses of these works either *in-situ* or via photographic and video documentation. My scholarly research extends to the fields of archival studies, Black feminist studies, memory studies, and visual culture studies. I have also conducted interviews with artists, cultural and heritage practitioners, most importantly in instances where their work has not been documented or written about extensively in scholarly contexts, as in the case of the annual Emancipation Day commemorative event, 'A Walk in the Night'.

As a researcher within the field of history of art and visual culture studies focusing on histories of slavery and slave memory, I have felt it necessary that my work take on a distinctly interdisciplinary approach, as previously mentioned. My research methodology draws from the fields of contemporary art, heritage studies, Black feminist studies, gender studies, Black studies, and visual culture, in addition to history of art, as I will elaborate in further detail later in the introduction and in Chapter 1. It is my view that a capacious, interdisciplinary research approach is essential in grappling with the living legacies of enslavement, and further, in adequately contextualising artwork and public commemorative practice that is engaged with historical trauma and systemic oppression. While the field of

history of art lends itself to interdisciplinarity, for the integrity of my research it has been important to develop a robust understanding of the historiographic terrain concerning the early VOC Cape. Extensive historiographic research serves my study in two pivotal ways. First, it has been necessary to explore the published academic material concerning VOC-era slavery and early VOC history to identify how the history has been assessed and discussed, and to evaluate what aspects of VOC history have been elevated for the purpose of analysis and how this knowledge production has contributed to understandings of slave history in South Africa. Secondly, the knowledge concerning the specificity of my period of historical study thus allows me to discuss the contemporary impact of the historical formation of aesthetics, visuality, race and coloniality, following the work of scholars such as Mirzoeff (2011b), Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vasquez (2013), Rizvana Bradley and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2021), and Baderoon (2014c). Further, working with feminist analytical tools, which call for an interrogation of the construction of race and gender (van der Spuy and Clowes, 2007, p. 216), bolsters this approach.

In addition to being a scholar of slave histories in South Africa, I am a descendant of enslaved people myself. Like many people who are descended from the enslaved, knowledge of my family's lineage is inconsistent. Little is known about whether enslaved people formed part of my mother's family, or who they were. On my father's side, however, there is some accessible scholarly information about our known formerly enslaved ancestor, Frederick Salomo Opperman, who died in 1891 and founded Oppermansgronde, now a small rural town in the Free State (du Pisani, 1984). Since my undergraduate education, I have been interested in the intersection of personal history and macro histories, and in my Honours exhibition and research project 'Special Collection' (2013) at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT, I had conceived of familial history as a means to better understand the relational, interpersonal dynamics of systemic oppression within the context of the post-

emancipation era in the Western Cape. Through ‘Special Collection’, I began the process of archival research at the Western Cape Archives and Records in which I searched the database for family records, using a largely self-taught research methodology. This initial archival experience taught me about the colonial nature of state record keeping; that the official archive is not designed to reflect the full lives of marginalised individuals. Further, I learned that the state archive alone could not provide any comprehensive answers about how people lived and what they may have felt about their circumstances.

Owing to the structures of violence which produce colonial archives and the subsequent neglect of marginalised individuals within the historical record, research of this nature is, as Avery Gordon describes, “very treacherous, very fragile” (2008, p. 6). In accommodating these concerns, the methodology utilised in this project combines several disciplinary approaches, bringing together qualitative analytical methods and assessing the creative methodologies of artists and heritage organisations. In this regard, I am heavily influenced by Abrahams, Hartman, Nash and Gordon in her evocation of the phrase (coined by Patricia J. Williams), “her shape and his hand” to describe the historical figure as it emerges from the archive (2008). I am interested in the productive complexities produced by the tensions between the speculative and historiography, and further, by the risks brought about by poetic and artistic methodologies and creative research. By “risk”, here I refer to the risk of delegitimisation in the academy as well as the ethical risks of interpreting the partial archival record speculatively, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In addition to academic writing and research, I have included what I call “vignettes” in the thesis. These short texts are stand-alone interludes that are both tangential in subject matter and intertwined thematically in relation to the preceding and proceeding chapters. The vignettes demonstrate a shift in tone to allow for a more experimental and reportage writing

approach. These texts stand in contrast to the academic style of the chapters and gesture towards the global scope of the dissertation's terrain. Functionally within the scope of the thesis, I see the vignettes as a way to carry out Nash's insistence on "beautiful writing" expansively. In the vignettes, I analyse and interpret vestiges of slavery that appear in the public realm: the personal experience of a recreation of a VOC-era ship in Amsterdam, a well-publicised instance of racial profiling in New York, and the South African feature film *Krotoa* (2017).

## Conceptual framework

The theoretical scope of my dissertation is wide-ranging, largely owing to my interdisciplinary research methodology. Drawing upon secondary historical research, analysis of contemporary art, as well as select examples from literature and popular media, this works across the disciplines of archival studies, feminist studies, history, history of art, memory studies, performance and comparative literature, and visual culture studies. I am strongly informed by current and ongoing scholarship in the aforementioned fields and am guided by the recuperative and reparative work of Black feminist, interdisciplinary scholarship as seen in the work of Hartman (2008, 2022b), Nash (2019a), Ahmed (Ahmed, 2004a, 2007), Gqola (2010d, 2015b) and Baderoon (Baderoon, 2009, 2011, 2014c). In focusing primarily on narratives concerning women, it is imperative that the research is informed by a rigorous analysis through a feminist lens, as discussed at length in Chapter 1.

As has become evident in my research, it is important for me to underscore the impacts of race, gender, and sexualised and gendered violence that have informed institutionalised structures of oppression. The extent of these violences is enduring and far-reaching. As posited by Gqola (2010b), Baderoon (Baderoon, 2014d) and theorists such as Yvette

Abrahams (1996), Hartman (2008), Hortense Spillers (1987), Wicomb (2018), and numerous others, the “libidinal economy” of slavery (Weheliye, 2014a, pp. 96–97) affects all descendants on a deeply psychological level. In a South African context, as theorised by Wicomb (2018), the legacies of these violent dynamics have manifested, over generations, as inherited shame which has led to widespread ‘forgetting’ of slavery and its histories within collective memory, as will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As previously discussed, my work is orientated towards descendants and the living legacies of enslavement in South Africa. This focus has led me to interrogate the meaning of accountability for slavery in a time where no living person has a memory of slavery, and further, what it means to inherit a history of slavery in Cape Town in the 21st century. Here, I am influenced by the work of Rothberg (2019) and Hartman and Stephen Best (2005), who question stable conceptions of the terms ‘descendants’, ‘descendancy’, and ‘inheritance’. Arising in the Redress Project (“a group of scholars and activists devoted to questions of slavery, fugitive forms of justice, and the role of history in the political present” [2005, p. 3]), Best and Hartman relay the questions: “What is justice for the slave? What is justice for the slave’s descendants? Does the slave even have descendants? Who are the slave’s many descendants?” (2005, p. 3). As Best and Hartman explain, the use of “descendants” in their discussion of transatlantic slavery is “not to indicate the slave’s potential heirs, but to indicate the actual recipients of the slave’s negative inheritance” (2005, p. 13).

If we are to work with two understandings of slave descendants — first, those who are genealogically descendant from enslaved people, and second, those who continue to be negatively impacted by slavery, but are not necessarily genealogically descended from enslaved people (Best and Hartman, 2005, p. 13) — we can quickly recognise that slave descendants do not constitute one unified group. Additionally, many people are descendants

of enslaved people, but not all slave descendants are historically marginalised or continue to be negatively impacted by the existence of slavery. Throughout the thesis, I employ an expansive interpretation of 'descendant' to indicate the diverse, amorphous groupings of people who are descendants of enslaved people and inhabit varying levels of privilege and social access. Some descendants are historically marginalised, and are racialised as Coloured, Black, or self-identify in any number of ways. Other descendants are historically privileged and are racialised as white. As described by Zimitri Erasmus, Coloured identities are creole identities constituted "in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession" (2001, p. 23). Historically marginalised descendants may not actively self-identify as descendants of slavery, owing to various reasons. People may not know about their histories because their families have not discussed them, nor is this genealogical information easily accessible (if it exists at all). Some people may privilege certain facets of their cultural identities over others, a common-place practice that has typically meant that European lineage is venerated (Wicomb, 2018, p. 122) or, a "pure" Khoekhoe or San ethnicity is sought out (Erasmus, 2001, p. 16).

Zoë Wicomb identifies this learned, intergenerational avoidance of the difficult aspects of Coloured histories as a product of shame; a shame produced and internalised by the knowledge of 'miscegenation', and the prevalence of sexualised and gendered violence in the creation of Coloured identity (2018, p.122), covered in Chapter 3. As discussed by Wicomb, the African origins of the enslaved are erased to the point of invisibilisation and outright denial (Wicomb, Ibid). It is my hope to re-coup the diversity of these origin stories to account for a more collective history that is expansive, inclusive, and nuanced. In short, for marginalised descendants, slave histories are not always claimed enthusiastically nor publicly. However, owing to these same histories of sexual relations across hierarchised groups, descendants of enslavement may not only be presently marginalised people.

Like Rothberg, I am interested in the role of white subjectivities and their impact on how slavery is addressed. More specifically, I am interested in how and why white South Africans claim histories of slavery or slave descendance. I will call these descendants historically privileged descendants. In the context of violent histories and their aftermaths, Rothberg prompts the "question of subjectivity" (2019b, p. 59), a theme that recurs throughout this thesis. In contemporary South Africa, as it relates to the subject of slavery, I am led to consider which descendants feel what and why? Whose emotions are validated in which contexts and why? In response to these provocations I am motivated by Sara Ahmed's theorisation around the cultural politics of emotion and recent Black feminist thinking concerning affect within the academy (Ahmed, 2004b; Hartman, 2008; Nash, 2019b). As explored in Chapters 2 and 3, following the emergence of South African democracy in 1994, some white South Africans publicly claimed indigenous or enslaved *stammoeders* as a means to legitimise their presence in South African society, following scandalised denials of slave heritage by "Afrikaner intellectuals and political leaders" in the 1970s (Coetzee, 1998, p. 119).

Considering the many identities entangled in South Africa's early settler colonial history, it is also important for me to make clear that enslavement and the subjugation of indigenous people took place in relation to one another, and that to speak of any one aspect of this subjugation alone is an incomplete conception of the matrix of domination in the settler-colony. Similarly, it is important to consider, as Nicole Ulrich does, the economic and social standing of poor European VOC employees indebted to the Company in the 17th century (2019). Understanding the interconnected nature of oppression in the VOC settler-colony is fundamental to the positioning of Krotoa and Ansla van Bengalen in the thesis, as explored in Chapter 3.

The inclusion of a Critical Race Studies approach and its correlations with Visual Culture Studies is fundamental to the qualitative research in the thesis. Working within this dialectic has informed much of my approach to aesthetics and the visual, more broadly, and I have found it to be a dynamic and challenging paradigm. I look to authors such as Mirzoeff (2011a), Alexander Weheliye (2014), King (2019a), Denise Ferreira da Silva and Rizvana Bradley (2021), Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez (2013), and Leigh Raiford (2020), among others. The location of this theory as it relates to critical histories of enslavement is essential to its application within the thesis. Mirzoeff's conception of colonial "technologies of visuality" (2011, p. 48) takes on a central role in Chapters 4 and 5, in my discussion of the enduring infrastructures produced by the system of slavery in the Cape. I apply Mirzoeff's thinking in considering how artists and cultural organisation grapple with colonial technologies of visuality, and how these same mechanisms produce slavery's diminished place in cultural life.

The question of race itself recurs throughout this dissertation. Discussions of race within this context are not solely aimed at exploring questions of 'Coloured Identity', but rather problematise the construction and maintenance of racial identities among slave descendants in South Africa and examine slavery's relation to racialisation and hierarchised systems of privilege and oppression, as discussed in Chapter 4. Discussing slavery within the context of the history of aesthetics and coloniality has been central to this pursuit. I recognise the complexity of Coloured identities in South Africa and their attending political ramifications and address the recurring contestations that surround it in Chapter 2. Working within this context and socio-political reality, it is thus important for me to state that while my work is indebted to and deeply informed by contributions of Black feminism(s), I recognise that as a racialised Coloured subject my identity is constituted in uneasy relation to Blackness. I acknowledge anti-Black racism within Coloured slave descendant communities and thus I

acknowledge my own implication in anti-Black racism. I also recognise, following the work of Pumla Dineo Gqola and others, a legacy of Black feminism and Black Consciousness in South Africa that is inclusive of Coloured and other identities racialised in distinction from whiteness. My thinking follows Erasmus in contending with the complexities and contradictions of Coloured identity constitution, as this best serves the challenge of addressing a diversely constituted slave descendant population. It also helps me to critically interrogate the formation of "race" and racialising systems. When I employ Black feminist thinking throughout this thesis, it is not to over-identify with Blackness, but to work with an intellectual ethic that recognises how systems of anti-Blackness, racialisation and gendering constitute oppressive social structures and inter-personal relations. When applying theory developed in response to conditions of Black life elsewhere, such as in the United States, I am also mindful that conceptions of Blackness are not always translatable to different contexts, and I aim to not use theory as it relates to lived experience without careful consideration.

Throughout the thesis I refer to slavery using the following terms: the enslaved (i.e. enslaved people lived in Cape Town), enslavement (i.e. system of enslavement), slavery, slave memory, and slave history (or histories). Where possible, I use the form "enslaved" to indicate that people's subjectivities and identities were shaped – but not wholly defined – by their statuses as "slaves". My use of these terms is deliberate and in line with my theoretical commitment to centring the perspectives of enslaved people, their memories, and their descendants. Similarly, 'enslavement' indicates that the system of slavery was mutable, and that the terms and particularities of the system were dynamic over time. When using the term 'slave history' I refer to the knowledge of histories of slavery, which includes historiographic accounts, archival records, and oral histories. When I use the term 'slave memory' I am referring to how slavery is remembered by descendants and in society in

general. Slave memory is shaped by the information that is disseminated at educational institutions, religious institutions, through commemorative programmes, memorials, messaging from the city or state, heritage institutions, art, music, in communities, or within families. Slave memory can be activated through commemorative events and can become dormant if not discussed or actively commemorated. In this thesis I discuss the ebbs and flows of slave memory in relation to the zeitgeist.

While it is my intention to use language that affords dignity wherever possible, there are moments throughout the thesis (and this introduction) where I deliberately use historically pejorative language in inverted commas. I feel it is important for discussions to include terms like 'miscegenation' that refer to colonial or apartheid-era ideas concerning racial purity, 'racial mixing', criminality, and immorality. While such terms are offensive in today's parlance, historically used terms help me to access contemporaneous conceptions of otherness in colonial society.

## Limitations and significance of the study

While I address key aspects of slave memory in contemporary South Africa in this dissertation, naturally there are several important related subjects and themes that fall outside of my research scope and expertise. One major limitation of the study is the absence of discussion pertaining to religion or language. I recognise that religious practice has been central to how coloniality has been shaped and resisted at the Cape, particularly for enslaved people and their descendants. The introduction of Islam to the VOC colony irrevocably altered the cultural landscape of South Africa and Islam remains an essential part of cultural life in Cape Town and South Africa, and serves as the central focus of Baderoon's monograph *Regarding Muslims: from slavery to post-apartheid* (2014c). In my

research, I briefly explored how Christian teachings coincided with moral conceptions concerning the system of slavery, however, this focus drew me away from my central thesis and I did not pursue the investigation further. Similarly, I do not explore the role of language within enslaved people's cultures, or at the Cape, in any substantial way. However, I recognise, too, the pivotal role played by Dutch, Arabic and the plethora of languages spoken by enslaved people owing to their diverse origins, upon the formation of culture in the Cape of Good Hope. Here, I note the important work of historian Saraah Jappie, who explores transnational connections between South Africa and Indonesia in her PhD dissertation *Between Makassars: Site, story, and the transoceanic afterlives of Shaykh Yusuf of Makassar* (2018). Similarly, I do not examine the importance of food culture and cooking to the memory of slavery in my dissertation, although it is briefly discussed in relation to domestic work in Chapter 3 and Berni Searle's artistic practice as it concerns bodily autonomy and trade routes in Chapter 4. Food culture is taken up by both Gqola and Baderoon in their respective books on slavery in South Africa.

Although my thesis' focus concerns artistic expression, I do not discuss the significance of music, dance, or theatre in contemporary slave memory practices. For this reason, I felt it was outside of the ambit of my study to adequately address the role of the Kaapse Klopse, *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* and the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival, because I did not have the scope to research the significance of Kaapse Klopse music and songs, musical style, choreography, and sartorial traditions, not to mention the long-standing, inter-generational organisation of Kaapse Klopse troops across Cape Town. To my mind, the Kaapse Klopse would have required the entirety of my focus to discuss their significance thoroughly and respectfully. John Edwin Mason, whose work I reference in Chapter 3, has completed considerable research in this area, as seen in his book *One Love, Ghoema Beat: Inside the Cape Town New Year's Carnival* (2010).

Fiction about slavery does feature briefly in my discussion of Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1967) and the project 'A Walk in the Night'. However, extensive considerations of a comparative literature nature fell out of the scope of my research. As previously mentioned, a number of South African fiction authors have engaged with the subject of slavery and the early VOC Cape. Fictional accounts of slavery are enormously helpful in provoking questions about the living conditions of slavery and imagining enslaved people's interior lives. Early on in my PhD research, fiction took on a more significant role in my thinking around speculative histories; I dedicated myself to reading a great deal of fiction concerning slavery in South Africa and across the transatlantic. Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2006), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Alex Haley's *Roots* (1978), and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2017) were very influential in my thinking around enslaved people's family and community formations, and the intimacies of the enslaved and free in household settings. This research culminated in Chapter 3, where my artistic examples are centred on performance and contemporary art.

Another limitation of my study is the focus of urban contexts and the under-representation of rural contexts. Historians of VOC-era slavery, in particular, stress the importance of differentiating the nature of enslavement practices in urban centres such as Cape Town and what took place on farms and smallholdings (Shell, 1994f; Mason, 2003a). I recognise that the urban bias within my dissertation is at risk of perpetuating a neglect of rural contexts and their historical significance. Nevertheless, rural contexts do feature in my study such as in the narrative of Louisa van de Caab who lived and died on a farm in the Tygerberg in 1786, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Extensive exploration of the aforementioned topics would constitute many theses. While these gaps are present, my dissertation nevertheless makes substantial contributions to the study of slave memory in my focus on contemporary art and public-oriented commemorations of slavery. I believe that the significance of my study lies in its interdisciplinary research approach and the adaptation of Black feminist-driven research and writing methodologies to produce critical, self-reflexive research on histories of slavery in Cape Town. I have produced new research on contemporary art and commemorative practice that has not yet been documented in scholarly literature and deploy new scholarly literature to interrogate knowledge production and the role of affect in studying slave histories in South Africa.[2]

## Overview of chapters

Chapter 1 functions as the literature review portion of the dissertation in which I examine the study of slavery in South Africa and provide an overview of the major debates concerning the study of slave history since the late 1980s. I work to identify the scale of slavery's marginality within the academy in South Africa and develop an understanding of why slave histories have been under-researched. I focus on methods of history writing and the way slavery has been written about, portrayed, and contextualised by the greater social and political debates of the time. I primarily work with sources pertaining to historiography and memory studies — two of the major disciplinary approaches that define the field. In this chapter, I identify the impact of feminist studies on slave history writing and further identify

[2] In the context of transatlantic slavery, this has previously seen in the work of Hartman (2006, 2008, 2022b), Christina Sharpe (2016), Edouard Glissant (1990), Alexander Weheliye (2014a), Cheryl Finley (2017), among others.

where and how artistic strategies can contribute to understandings of slave history and slave memory in South Africa in the context of an under-researched field.

Following Chapter 1 is a vignette titled *The Docked Ship*. In this vignette, I reflect on my 2022 visit to the *Amsterdam*, a replica of a VOC ship originally built in 1748, docked at the Het Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I work with my affective encounter with the replica and analyse retellings of VOC-era history in the birthplace of the Dutch East India Company. This text is a personal expression of how slave memory informs how descendants may engage with historical sites pertaining to VOC history, and further, a means to exercise Nash's conception of "beautiful writing" in a poetic form.

In Chapter 2, titled *The pain of others: narrative, speculation and affect,* I work with Michael Rothberg's notion of the "implicated subject" (2019c) to examine how enslaved people in South Africa were afforded or denied "recognition", following the thinking of Judith Butler (Butler, 2009). I then consider Nash's theorisation of Black feminists' commitment to "beautiful writing" as a recuperative practice in "an effort to do justice to loss" (2019, p.103) in the afterlife of slavery, an argument I extend to consider the remembrance work of descendants and artists as "beautiful acts". In this chapter, I make a case for the employment of affective, self-reflexive and ethically-driven approaches to histories of slavery and the interpretation of partial recorded narratives concerning enslaved people. I explore how artists use poetic or artistic strategies to connect with histories of enslavement, and how these strategies are informed by artists' own subjectivities. I also examine what artists can contribute to understandings of slave history and slave memory through a contemporary lens.

In Chapter 3, titled *Legacy and disavowal: slavery, the family and sexual violence,* I examine the slave-owning domestic household as space in which to explore the "enforced proximities" (Macharia, 2019, p. 1) of the 17th and 18th century Cape of Good Hope, and the legacies of enslavement and the conditions of raced, gendered, and sexualised violence in contemporary South Africa. In this chapter I work with raced, gendered, and sexualised violence as an example of a living legacy of slavery in South Africa, and work with some of the feminist texts outlined in Chapter 1. I explore the biographical and speculative details of Krotoa, an indigenous woman and famous figure in South African history and Ansla van Bengalen, an enslaved woman and far less known who lived and laboured in the Fort de Goede Hoop, the Dutch East India Company's first settled military structure built in 1652; I also engage closely with contemporary South African artist Goliath's ongoing performance work *Elegy* (2015-), and the iterations of the performance that commemorate enslaved women Cornelia van Piloane (d. circa 1766) and Louisa van de Caab (d.1786), in collaboration with historian Saarah Jappie. Through the exploration of the lives of these four historical figures, I consider family formations wrought fragile by slavery and imagined kinship both contemporaneously and across time. I analyse the strategies employed by artist Goliath and Jappie to connect with histories of enslavement to evoke slave memory in the present. Working against the amnesia of slavery in South Africa, I delve into the implications of this experimental thinking on questions of historiography, fiction, and nationalist myth-making.

Following Chapter 3 is a vignette titled *Krotoa* (2017). This text is an analysis and reflection on the feature film *Krotoa* (2017) directed by Roberta Durrant about Krotoa, an indigenous woman and interpreter who lived in the Cape upon the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652. As one of the few well-known historical figures from the period and a so-called *stammoeder* (an Afrikaans term that could translate to forebearer or foremother) of South African society,

I am interested in the narration of Krotoa's life story, and what it reveals about contemporary perceptions of the early VOC period. Analysing the film *Krotoa* is a way to reveal how the logics of coloniality inform contemporary artistic products and further, how the absence of slave memory impacts retellings of the creation of the VOC settler-colony, subjects explored extensively in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, titled *In plain sight: visuality and imaging enslavement's violence,* I address the near diminished conception of slavery in the foundation of South Africa's – and in particular Cape Town's – founding. I present an adaptation of Mirzoeff's conception of the "ordering of slavery" and colonial "visual technologies" (Mirzoeff, 2011b), drawing upon Baderoon's theorisation around landscape, the picturesque and its links to the marginalisation of enslavement. I posit that the deployment of colonial visual technologies and the creation of social hierarchy through the construction of raced and gendered subjects is a living legacy of enslavement in South Africa. Following this, I turn to the strategies employed by contemporary artists who grapple with coloniality's visual apparatus and refuse representational modes as seen in Searle's work *Colour Me* (1999), and Katz in her exhibition 'Groenpunt' (2016).

In Chapter 5, titled *Following Ansla van Bengalen and A Walk in the Night: site-specificity and walking commemorative practices,* I engage with collective, walking-oriented commemorations of enslavement in Cape Town that inhabit the city and claim public space in defiance of what King describes as the "cartographic I" (2019a, p. 86). I build upon the arguments made concerning visuality and space in Chapter 4 to discuss the annual Emancipation Day commemoration 'A Walk in the Night', organised by the District Six Museum, the Prestwich Place Committee and St George's Cathedral, and my own work, *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016). These works, I argue, stand in opposition to state-

sanctioned narratives that portray enslavement through a lens of reconciliation and resolution (Cloete, 2016, p. 124), and draw direct connections between ongoing spatial apartheid in Cape Town and the city's history as a slave town. I reflect upon *Following Ansla van Bengalen* and analyse the 'A Walk in the Night' programme to examine the role of poetic and artistic commemorations of slavery in the absence of widespread, national acknowledgement of slavery.

Following Chapter 5 is a vignette titled, *The Descendants*. This vignette is a reflection and analysis of what is called "the Central Park birdwatching incident" that took place in New York City in 2020. I discuss and analyse an encounter between Christian Cooper, a birdwatcher, and Amy Cooper, a woman who called the police on him, during a chance meeting in Central Park. Working with Butler's theorisation of "recognition", I work with the notion of the impossibility of kin in the aftermath of racial slavery, and the impact of a diminished presence of slave memory among living descendants of slavery.

In the conclusion, I consider the impact of a discursive paradigm in South African academia and public culture in which South Africa's history of slavery is centralised through the formation of a recognised collective inheritance of slave history. I discuss the potential application of the theoretical strategies and interdisciplinary, experimental research methodologies proposed in the preceding chapters to the study of slavery in South Africa, issues concerning inequality and belonging in Cape Town, and the disciplines of history of art and visual culture. Based on the discussion and analysis drawn from the arguments made throughout the thesis, I indicate the necessity of further research about slave descendant identity in South Africa.

My work seeks to address how art and commemorative practices work with and in response to archival, historiographic silences, and further, how artistic and poetic practice can contribute to nuanced and expansive perspectives of slavery's living legacies. Ultimately, I endeavour to develop a robust theoretical foundation upon which I am able to assess the role of slave histories and the practice of commemoration in the evocation of slave memory in the present.

# Chapter 1

# Literature review

## Introduction

In reviewing the research for this dissertation, I demonstrate that interdisciplinary, Black feminist research methodologies afford critical, holistic perspectives of early VOC and slave history and slave memory in South Africa. In my view, the tensions produced by the combined use of historiographic, Black feminist and artistic research approaches is productive. Working from a Black feminist vantage point in particular, allows for the use of feminist analytical tools that, for my historical period of study of the 17th and 18th centuries in present-day Cape Town, provide the ideal stage to demonstrate how norms concerning gender, race and social status were constructed and continue to impact society today, specifically as they concern early understandings of race, gender and sexuality in relation to conceptions of the human. I revisit the study of slavery in the historiographic record which offers important insights regarding the "need to correct historiographical neglect" (Southey, 1992, p. 13) of slavery in South Africa. Building upon this, examining the work of key feminist historians in the field further demonstrates how enslaved and marginalised women's stories, lives, and contributions have been chronically misunderstood and therefore not sufficiently valued.

Gendered and feminist analysis has been pivotal to developing my understanding of slavery in South Africa. However, this frame of analysis has remained largely peripheral to historiographic scholarship in South Africa since the late 1970s. Patricia van der Spuy and

Lindsay Clowes note in their article ‘Accidental Feminists? Recent Histories of South African Women’ that while historians have recognised that women “had been ignored and had played important roles historically” and have developed new empirical research on women, this work, “did not overtly claim allegiance to feminism, but sometimes asked feminist questions” (van der Spuy and Clowes, 2007, p. 213). These “feminist questions” seen in the work of Robert Shell – as van der Spuy and Clowes signal – in addition to the overtly feminist tools of analysis as seen in the work of Yvette Abrahams and van der Spuy herself, have propelled this research in critical directions (Abrahams, 1996; van der Spuy, 1996). Further, the imaginative, speculative, and unanswerable provocations that the historical period of early settler-colonial VOC Cape Town elicits are upended, subverted, and expanded through artistic methods, as seen in the work of Gabrielle Goliath, Saarah Jappie, Berni Searle, Bronwyn Katz, and others. This artistic work is well-placed in conversation with contemporary feminist scholars like Sara Ahmed, Jennifer Nash, Saidiya Hartman, Pumla Dineo Gqola and others, for whom theorising around loss, affect and memory is central. My research foci coalesce at the discursive site of contemporary art practice; a nexus at which, in my view, concerns of race, gender, the historical and the visual can be interrogated. It is also my belief that the realm of contemporary art is where affect and historical research in tandem with Black feminist thought can find a “legitimate” home and where the academy, public, and private interests are hinged.

I work with contemporary art material and public cultural programming that engages with the history of slavery and slave memory. In doing so, I primarily engage with contemporary artists and heritage organisations who contribute towards slave memory and prioritise the perspectives of slave descendants. I see my engagement with the works of Gabrielle Goliath, Berni Searle, Bronwyn Katz, the District Six Museum, and the Prestwich Place Committee to be one of the major discursive and art historical contributions of the thesis,

seeing that these particular works that engage slavery have either not been widely theorised or analysed in the context of slavery, or appeared in academic literature at all. While coloniality is frequently addressed in South African contemporary art historical scholarship, the subject of slavery remains largely under-explored. Further, the work of organisations such as the District Six Museum and the Prestwich Place Committee are not frequently discussed in fora concerning contemporary art and curatorship practice, and are more frequently cited in heritage studies, memory studies or historical studies contexts, despite their work, in my view, actively engaging with contemporary artistic and curatorial strategies through exhibition-making and public programming (Soudien, 2019).

As will be addressed at length in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, a great deal of the contemporary artistic work engaging with slave memory is in dialogue with the intergenerational "forgetting" of slavery among slave descendants (Wicomb, 2018). The resurgence of historiographic research in enslavement from the 1970s onwards (Cuthbertson, 1992; Southey, 1992) takes place conterminously. In response, I draw attention to the necessity for a more discipline-inclusive approach that makes room for different modes of 'knowing' and knowledge preservation through creative production and experiential commemorative practices, noting that approaching the memory of slavery from either a singularly historiographic, art historical, or artistic perspective does not sufficiently "do justice to [the] loss" produced by systems of enslavement (Nash, 2019, p. 103). Examined separately, each aforementioned discipline offers important insight into histories of enslavement: historiographic approaches produce analysis based upon empirical research drawn from archival and primary sources; art historical research centres historically appropriate cultural production as a source of analysis; and artistic practice itself allows researchers insight into the artist's subjective motivations for creative research. Employing a combination of these sites of analysis, in conjunction with Black feminist and memory studies approaches, as will be described, thus

provides me with a well-rounded and multi-dimensional exploration of how slave memory is expressed today.

This knowledge gap, I argue, constitutes the urgent need for new scholarly approaches to re-appraise slavery in South Africa. The loss of knowledge and the process of uncovering slavery's realities is a recurring thematic in the work of the artists and organisations I study; these artistic processes are informed by strategies that work to account for the immeasurable catastrophe of sanctioned oppression and the systematic erasure of slavery from public consciousness. My research consistently returns to the historiographic record because of its influence in the field of slavery studies in South Africa and historiographic scholarship constitutes the bulk of empirical work undertaken on the period. Relatively few authors have shaped the prevailing narratives around the VOC period and reappraising the historiographic record through a critical, intersectional feminist lens demonstrates how knowledge is produced and further, how particular women figures emerge from the archive and for what reasons.[3] It is important to note that a significant portion of writing about art and slavery in South Africa has been undertaken by scholars in the disciplines of gender studies and comparative literature (Lewis, 2001; Gqola, 2005, 2010d; Baderoon, 2014c) which drives my impetus to develop interdisciplinary research from an art orientation.

[3] In the spectrum of existing scholarship on slavery in South Africa it is worth noting the significant number of amateur genealogists and hobbyist archivists who are active in online fora and genealogy clubs. These authors, many of whom are not trained in the fields of history or archival studies, are enthusiastic and vocal participants in the study of their own family histories, some of which intersect directly with the areas of my research. I have ventured into this area of publicly accessible information; however, I am cautious regarding its historical accuracy.

In the research process it became apparent that I was primarily using the work of literature and critical theory scholars to discuss visual culture. This approach serves to produce analysis that is grounded in critical race theory, as opposed to the conventions of history of art (it is worth noting, however, that there are a number of history of art scholars in global north contexts who work with histories of slavery, such as Cheryl Finley [2017], Marcus Wood [2002], and others). Working with authors 'peripheral' to history of art also allows me to write across disciplinary boundaries. It is my hope that this method produces new perspectives within the field. In this vein, my methodological approach to the historiographic and the archival is strongly influenced by the work of Abrahams and Hartman's conception of critical fabulation (2008) (as is explored at length in Chapters 2, 3 and 5) which works to critically appraise the inherent power structures in knowledge production.

Considering the scant feminist historiographic writing about VOC-era slavery in South Africa, feminist, interdisciplinary approaches constitute significant interventions within the field at large. Pumla Dineo Gqola's *What is Slavery to Me?* (2010d) and Gabeba Baderoon's *Regarding Muslims: from slavery to post-apartheid* (2014c) constitute the most substantial and influential interdisciplinary contributions to the field, with research that draws together historiographic analysis, memory studies and feminist analysis in addition to literary, artistic and cultural analysis. Both Gqola and Baderoon explore the ongoing, lived consequences of rape culture in South Africa, and draw direct links to colonial-era mass subjugation as sustained considerations of slavery's afterlives in the present. This work forms part of a greater intellectual project concerning the afterlives of slavery that has flourished in the Caribbean and the United States, as seen in the recent work of Hartman (2006, 2008, 2022b), Christina Sharpe (2009, 2016), Alexander Weheliye (2014a), Tiffany Lethabo King (2019a) in dialogue with Hortense Spillers (1987), Sylvia Wynter (McKittrick *et al.*, 2014), and Edouard Glissant (1990) among many others. I strive towards an ongoing self-reflexivity

concerning the overwhelming influence of European, North American, and Caribbean Black feminist scholarship in South African slavery discourse, aware of the temptation to transpose theoretical contributions onto a local context and hold close Greg Cuthbertson's reflection that "the tension between local and wider contexts has to be carefully maintained" (1992, p. 45).

In this thesis, I apply Sara Ahmed's thinking around phenomenology (2007), a theory in which Ahmed critically analyses how orientations towards or away from subjects are informed by ideological biases, learned "norms", and structures of power. In centring Black feminist practice and artistic practice, what "picture" of my research is produced? In what ways can the study of slavery in a South African context be critically and productively expanded with the employment of interdisciplinary and artistic research methodologies? Part of this exploration is the analysis of how historical women figures have been written about, valued, and remembered, and situating these revivals within their contemporaneous social and political contexts. It is my hope that in framing the scope of my research through a feminist analytical lens I can demonstrate the "stakes" of studying slavery in contemporary South Africa and how the confluence of these disciplinary approaches can produce alternative readings of contemporary South African society.

The historiographic record reveals the chasm between practices of remembering slavery (slave memory) and the work to develop a robust slave history in the academy. Slave memory practices have largely been perceived as distinct from the study of slavery within the academy, where working with empirical archival evidence is the primary concern. Examining slave memory produced in the context of artistic practice demonstrates the possibilities of addressing affect, the artist's subjectivity, and questions concerning loss – ideas that fall outside of the ambit of historiographic research. This thesis seeks to find a

middle ground between these two approaches to history. Art and commemorative practice that is developed as a result from historiographic or archival work, as in the case of Gabrielle Goliath's collaboration with historian Saarah Jappie in *Elegy* (2015-) and my own work *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016), serve as important meeting points between these disciplinary methods of research. It is at this interdisciplinary juncture that historiography, memory work, and artistic practice figure as central to my research. Additional complexity is brought to my analysis when the artwork is produced within a feminist paradigm, a space that, according to Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, "demonstrate that the content, sources, and experiences that are recalled, forgotten, or suppressed are of profound political significance" (Hirsch and Smith, 2002, p.12).

## The emergence of South African slavery historiography, debates, and obstacles

Writing in 2007, van der Spuy and Clowes note that "[w]ithin South African historiography, questions concerning the relationship between (South) African feminism/s and women's histories are relatively recent, and the impact of transnational, African, and local, feminist theory and scholarship continues to be felt unevenly" (2007, p. 212). In studying the historiographic record, my research is nonetheless shaped by the commitment to gender as an analytical tool, however "uneven", seeing that my work is strongly influenced by the essential introduction of feminist, gender-oriented analysis of slave society by authors such as van der Spuy (1996) and Yvette Abrahams (1996). According to van der Spuy and Clowes, for feminist historians one of their major issues concerned the "classic struggle between Marxism and feminism": "[a]nalyses of racial capitalism were by definition predicated on race and class; the issue became how to 'add gender' … without leaving the

paradigm" (2007, p. 212). While my own study is certainly invested in issues concerning race, class, and gender, I do not claim to adhere to Marxist theoretical paradigms and thus my work does not formally contend with these tensions.[4]

It is my view that the ongoing re-examination of slavery in South Africa has been significantly shaped (although not entirely) by historians and the academy. While historiographic approaches dominate the study of slavery, ironically, scarcity has largely marked the field in South Africa, with major shifts in historiographic contributions taking place from the 1970s and 1980s onward (Worden, 2007, p. 7). As a result, within the field of history, the study of slavery has been characterised by a state of constant emergence exemplified by Nicholas Southey's article 'From periphery to core: the treatment of Cape Slavery in South African historiography', published in 1992. Historians such as Greg Cuthbertson (1992), Southey (1992), and Nigel Worden (2007) have committed to tracing the trajectory of slavery historiography in South Africa and their insights are essential for understanding the complexities of the field. Worth recounting here are these historians' contextualisation of the political and social dynamics of academia at the time of their writing and their accounts for the dearth of slavery scholarship in South Africa.

As they serve my research interests, I highlight two major insights raised by Cuthbertson and Southey regarding the absence of slavery from historiographic research in the English-speaking academy. The first being that, for a time, English-speaking South African historians associated VOC-era history with Afrikaner white nationalism, "the descendants of white

[4] As van der Spuy and Clowes note, academics that addressed heteronormative historiographic conventions also challenged racism and sexism "within the academy itself" (2007, p. 213) and did so at personal risk (echoing Jennifer Nash's conceptions of foundational "risk" in the Black feminist project from the vantage point of the United States [2019b]). In my chosen interdisciplinary methodological approach, I am aware that I have exposed myself to similar risks professionally.

Afrikaners" (Worden, 2007, p. 6). For Africanists the research area "smacked of Eurocentrism" and thus avoided the subject (Cuthbertson, 1992, p. 33). "Slave studies", as Cuthbertson describes it, comes about in the midst of paradigmatic sea change in the discipline of history in South Africa and Cuthbertson, like Southey, works towards an answer for slavery's noted "paucity" in South African historiography until the 1970s (Southey, 1992, p. 18). According to Cuthbertson's estimation, the study of slavery is not foundational to the development of social history, as it was in the United States (1992, p. 27). This insight is significant for this study in that it confirms the relatively niche nature of the study of slavery in South Africa from a disciplinary perspective. The second insight, as Southey argues, is that the 19th and early 20th century historian George McCall Theal – described by the author as "the prolific amateur" (1992, p. 15) – propagated an enduring notion that slavery was "mild" (Ibid) and in its course, slavery itself was not thoroughly examined as result.

These insights provide important context regarding the social divisions, prejudices, and political motivations of the dominant history establishment in South African universities up until the early 1990s. Cuthbertson, in particular, does the valuable work of demonstrating how social and political change impact what is revisited historically and why. Both Southey and Worden provide distinctions between Anglophone and Afrikaans schools of history in South Africa – an empirical school (Afrikaans) vs. "interpretation and debate" (Anglophone) (Worden, 2007, p. 6). Further, Cuthbertson describes the self-imposed limitations of an English-speaking elite and their reluctance to learn Dutch, a prerequisite to engaging with the VOC-era archives effectively (1992, p. 35). Perhaps contrary to assumption, Worden claims that "little historical writing on the VOC period was central to Afrikaner nationalist historiography, the focus of which rather lay on the era of the 'Great Trek', the 'Anglo-Boer War' and the rise of Afrikanerdom in the twentieth century" (2007, p. 5).

As Cuthbertson articulates, the study of Cape history – in contrast to the "outpourings of the Rand" – struggled to gain a foothold in the national conversation because it was perceived as a parochial study that its authors could not figure through the lens of structural Marxism (1992, p. 34) and further, slavery historiography, Cuthbertson argues, was made the weaker owing to a "paucity of sound Cape historiography" on the region as a whole (1992, p. 37). As both Cuthbertson and Southey allude, there existed associations with the historiographic work of the period and prevailing perception of "absence of barriers" concerning race and social status and "relative fluidity" of the period associated with notions of the "fairest Cape" (Cuthbertson, 1992, p. 37; Southey, 1992, p. 16). Work of this nature was perhaps dismissively associated with "a search for a distinctive 'coloured' history" by some scholars (Worden, 2007, p. 6), undertaken at centres such as Instituut vir Historiese Navorsing (IHN) and UWC, led by Leon Hattingh, Hans Heese, and Henry Bredekamp – who were also founders of the South African historical journal, *Kronos.* Both Southey and Cuthbert credit the importance of Martin Legassick's critical intervention in historiographic practice with his article, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography' (1980), in part or wholly for the re-appraisal of slavery's contributions to modern white supremacy in South Africa.

As I will demonstrate, the shift towards the study of slavery as an active, generative field in the late 1970s into the 2000s, brought about substantial historiographic research that has defined the field. During this period, feminist analysis of historical perspectives in addition to slave descendant-oriented approaches remained marginal in influence and in number.

## Foundational texts and their critiques: Böeseken, Elphick & Giliomee, and Shell

Scholars such as Anna Böeseken whose “pathbreaking” monograph *Slaves and free blacks at the Cape 1658-1700* (1977a) was the first book regarding slavery in the Cape in “almost thirty years” (Southey, 1992, p. 19). Southey credits Böeseken for the advent of a tradition of small-scale historical studies, the likes of which have been published in *Kronos* (1992, p. 20) and Worden states that Böeseken was “one of the only South African VOC historians to use the Jakarta archives” (Worden, 2007, p. 4). In the book’s preface, Böeseken states that the use of the archival information regarding enslaved people was extracted from Deeds Office documents which had never before been used for the purposes of researching slavery (1977a, p. 1).

For my research purposes, the most compelling aspects of Böeseken’s study are the recurring themes of desire, value, and subjugation that emerge in her discussions of van Riebeeck’s apparent preferences for enslaved people of a particular origin, owing to a perceived aptitude for specific skills or perceived common temperaments, according to hearsay or first-hand experience; and in her recounting of the visit of Dutch High Commissioner Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein to the Cape settlement in 1685, and his damning reportage concerning the conditions of slaves living at the Cape (1977b, p. 45). In my view, these two historical accounts have had the most significant impact on my research, and work to demonstrate how conceptions of hierarchised understandings of life came to fruition in this early settler-colonial period. Van Riebeeck’s preferences for a specific “type” of enslaved people were in relation to their “quality” and their capacity for loyalty and hard work – a preference, it must be noted, that changed frequently. At some times Angolan enslaved people were preferred, at other times enslaved people from “the East” were preferred; at one stage he makes reference to “strong and good-looking slaves from the coast of Guinea” (1977c, p. 13). This decision-making demonstrates the fickle nature of early

categorisation and value assigned to enslaved people as a mass and echoes British colonial and apartheid-era racial categorisation in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Boeseken describes in some detail, in the chapter regarding Simon van der Stel's period of command at the Cape, the visit of Dutch High Commissioner Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein in 1685. Van Reede tot Drakenstein was reportedly angered and scandalised by what he had seen and how the enslaved people were living: the state of their accommodations, clothes, and the vulnerability of enslaved women to sexual exploitation and assault by European men, which Böeseken describes as the general acceptance of the sexual exploitation of enslaved women, despite the establishment of laws that prohibited these practices (1977b, p. 45). Following his visit, van Reede tot Drakenstein outlined new rules of obtaining freedom for enslaved people owned by the Company. Here, Böeseken provides an insightful historical account that speaks to an event in which enslaved women's living conditions were accounted for in a period in which their assault – nor their enslavement itself – was not considered a crime.

Two years later, *The Shaping of South African Society 1652-1840* (1979) edited by Richard Elphick and Herman Giliomee, was published. As Cuthbertson notes, the volume "marked something of a turning-point for slave historiography" (1992, p. 36) and speaking to the impact of the publication (and some hubbub concerning its title) Worden stated that "Shaping's title was apt; it was highly influential in shaping new ways of thinking about the VOC past" (2007, p. 7):

> "Influenced by international Anglophone historiographical trends, these contributions focused on 'history from below', the economic and political implications of colonialism and its impact on indigenous populations."

(Worden, 2007, p. 7)

In all, the volume provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of the VOC, as well as a clear articulation of the dynamics between the Khoekhoe, the Dutch, and the newly enslaved people who arrived from 1653 onwards. The authors describe the resistance of the Khoekhoe against the Dutch settlement in considerable detail throughout the period 1652-1840 and analyse the dynamics between free, enslaved, and indentured from VOC-rule until the advent of British colonialism.

In the chapter, 'Intergroup relations: Khoikhoi, settlers, slaves and free blacks, 1652-1795', Elphick and Robert Shell "assess how easy it was for a slave or Khoikhoi to receive the rites of baptism" (1979, p. 118) and in their exploration reflect upon the case of Krotoa and her union with Pieter van Meerhoff – the first Christian marriage between an Indigenous person and a European settler recorded in the colony. Although very brief, the authors' interpretations of Krotoa (Eva) and her life is particularly compelling for analysis and for the scope of my study:

> "Despite the absence of funds for proselytisation a number of early Company officials and predikaten (ministers), influenced by precedents in Portuguese and Dutch spheres of the Indies, hoped that the Khoikhoi would adopt both Christianity and the Dutch language and culture. The first commander at the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck, promoted these ends by raising Khoikhoi children in his own home. One of his protégées, the famous Eva, learned fluent Dutch and Portuguese, wore western clothes, ate western food, and became a practising Christian. After Van Riebeeck's departure in 1662 she married the talented Danish surgeon Pieter van Meerhoff in a Christian wedding blessed and financed by the Company. On her

> husband's death a few years later, Eva became a prostitute and a drunkard, wandering between two cultures in which she felt equally alien. She abandoned her children to the mercies of the Council of Polity. The Council imprisoned her at various times on Robben Island where, in 1674, she died."
> (Elphick and Giliomee, 1979, p. 187)

Elphick and Ross go on to describe the deterioration of Krotoa's life as a "very public tragedy" (Ibid). From the perspective of 2024 the authors' assessment of the circumstances of her existence reads as decidedly callous and reflective of moral judgement. The extenuating circumstances of her existence as the first Indigenous woman to experience a sustained, life-long encounter with settler colonial power is not acknowledged. I argue following the work of Abrahams, that the complexities of Krotoa's life exceed the parameters of what can be achieved through historiography because "we need to tell Eva's history with some idea of how Eva would have viewed her own history" (1996, p. 5). Abrahams' thinking around the partial record and the necessary speculative interpretation of the archive has been deeply informative for this research. As I will illustrate throughout the thesis, the judgement of historians chronicling this era with regards to marginalised subjects is consistent, and quickly upends any assumptions regarding a "scholarly objective distance" from their research. These seemingly minor assertions regarding the character and perspective of figures such as Krotoa are reflective of the biases of historians, their prejudices, and belief systems. These prevailing conceptions and judgements about Krotoa, in particular, which would make their way into the public realm and would become the subject of considerable debate and contestation in the 'New South Africa' among authors such as Abrahams, Meg Samuelson (2007), Carli Coetzee (Coetzee, 1998), and Carine Zaayman (2019). Pointed, risky, insightful interventions made by feminist historians such as

Abrahams, were reflected in the work of van der Spuy, in her challenge of Robert Shell's work, *Children of Bondage* (1994d).

Like *Slaves and Free Blacks* and *Shaping of South African Society*, Robert Shell's expansive monograph *Children of Bondage* (1994d) could be considered a seminal historiographic text on slavery in South Africa. Shell's primary and major contribution to the discourse on slave life in South Africa is his insistence on the slave-owning settler-colonial home as a site of analysis; a space otherwise relegated to the domestic 'realm of women'. In so doing, "feminist questions" inevitably arise in the examination of a historical scene in which, presumably, gendered subjects and their labours are brought to the fore (van der Spuy and Clowes, 2007, p. 213). For this reason, Shell's influence on my own work is considerable. In Chapter 2, I take up the slave-owning household as a 'unit' of analysis in application of the VOC Fort de Goede Hoop as household. In the introduction to the book, Shell addresses the manner in which slavery was hitherto understood to draw the reader's attention to the inter-personal dynamics of the "relationships that most profoundly shaped South African colonial society" (1994d, p. xxix). Shell argues:

> "For the Cape slave society, because of the especially small individual family distributions of slaves, the slave-holding family became a natural theatre for paternalism and patriarchies. One must therefore shift from looking at intergroup or interclass relations to examining interpersonal relations in the household."
>
> (1994d, p. xxix)

In addition to reappraisal of the household as legitimate and indeed, generative site of analysis, Shell's framing of the patriarchal systems of oppression and organisation within

slave-owning settler-colonial society is deeply compelling and in many ways, convincing. It is the feminist-adjacent quality of Shell's inquiry which opened him up to critique, which was thoroughly executed by van der Spuy in her article 'What, then, was the sexual outlet for black males?' (1996), specifically that of the "nanny thesis" which claims that enslaved women's primary role were as wet-nurses to their master's wives, and as a result, their own fertility was greatly reduced (Shell, 1994d, p. xx; van der Spuy, 1996, p. 43).

Van der Spuy's critique, while focused on a single major thesis held by Shell, is wide-ranging and has major implications for the way Shell's research is interpreted. Van der Spuy takes issue not only with the voracity of the quantitative data of Shell's study, as indicated in the essay's title, but the implications of his conclusions regarding enslaved women's relationships to other enslaved people, the enslaving class as a whole (1996, p. 44), as well as Shell's perceptions of enslaved women's labour and contributions to society (1996, p. 53). What is particularly important about this critique is van der Spuy's debunking of the perception of enslaved women's so-called absence from historiography. Van der Spuy is astute in her observation that "it is often only in terms of their scarcity – or even their absence – that slave women have been accorded any historical recognition" (1996, p. 43). What van der Spuy notes is a diminishment of the stress and labour conditions under which enslaved women worked, and this contribution to their low birth rates in the period (1996, p. 54):

> "What is required is that historians recognise the biases within themselves that close their minds to women's perspectives and women's experiences, that reduce slave – and settler – women to factors of fertility."
>
> (van der Spuy, 1996, p. 56)

In his emphasis on the family, Shell, who boldly asserts the household as an analytical site, is not able to grasp the complexities of enslaved women's experiences. Shell's dynamics and the attention paid to "the family" thus remain incomplete because the fertility that enslaved women and indigenous women are or are not able to provide is seen as their primary contribution to society (van der Spuy, 1996, p. 56). In his focus on fertility and motherhood, Shell fails to consider what motherhood might entail under the conditions of enslavement by making assumptions about enslaved women's allegiances and their private commitments to their slave communities.[5]

## Belonging and alienation: studying slavery in the 'New South Africa'

According to Southey, from the late 1970s into the early 1990s, the perception of slavery in the academy shifted from being dismissed as a contributing factor to the stratification of South African society to being acknowledged as profoundly shaping it, as demonstrated by historians like Worden (1992, pp. 21–22), and exemplified by interdisciplinary scholars like Gqola and Baderoon in the mid-2000s. A number of valuable historiographic contributions were made in the late 1990s, which worked to interrogate ideas concerning place and culture with the cumulative research produced in the preceding decades with fresh eyes and the promise of a changing, diversifying social and political landscape. The immediate period following the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 saw the lifting of international sanctions against the country and alongside it, "a site where speaking begins and silencing

[5] This subject is revisited by John Edwin Mason in his chapter 'A State in Miniature', from his book *Social Death and Resurrection*, that explores the slave-owning household at length, and with the use of the Slave Protectorate archives under British rule, discusses what he describes as the "chaotic intimacies" between enslaved women and free women (2003a, p. 92).

ends" (Gqola, 2010a, p. 2). In culture, academia, and public life South Africans preoccupied themselves with questions concerning their 'origins' and wondered aloud whether or not they belonged in this 'new' South Africa.

Through this self-reflection, South Africans' identities and their allegiances were under examination and in searching for origins, van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape in 1652 was revisited yet again. The place and status of slave descendants, as posited by Zoë Wicomb (2018), Zimitri Erasmus (2001) and others were interrogated, and as posited by Coetzee (Coetzee, 1998), Samuelson (2007), Gqola (2010e) and others, the redemptive arc made possible by post-apartheid South Africa Rainbowism allowed white slave descendants to reclaim (or for the first time publicly claim) slave ancestry because of its legitimising capabilities in the national narrative. Figures like Krotoa were revived in public consciousness to serve this purpose. The genealogical nature of origins – *stammoeders* and bloodlines – became intertwined with claims to legitimacy and land itself.

The late 1990s also saw the emergence of a central figure in the South African art landscape, Berni Searle, who became internationally known through her inclusion in the 2nd Johannesburg Biennial and the 49th Venice Biennial in 2001. Searle's work in these years, best characterised by her series 'Colour Me' (1999), actively sought to grapple with race, identity, and belonging in ways that captured the unsettled questioning that had come to define the zeitgeist of the period. Works like *Snow White* (2001) (explored at length in Chapter 3), brought together themes concerning gender, domesticity, and a critical examination of whiteness – a bourgeoning subject matter in intellectual circles. Searle's early practice has, for me at least, come to signify the first major presence of slave memory in South African contemporary art – an assertion confirmed by the work's use on the cover of Pumla Gqola's monograph, *What is slavery to me? Postcolonial/slave memory in post-*

*apartheid South Africa*, published some ten years later in 2010. *What is slavery to me?* constitutes the first book dedicated to slave memory in South Africa and is distinctly shaped by Black feminist theory. Both Searle and Gqola hold significant space throughout this thesis for these foundational reasons.

The edited volume *Cape Town: the Making of a City: an illustrated social history* (Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith, 1998) attends to the origins and establishment of the country's first colonial city and has been useful in establishing an understanding of the precarity of the Dutch settlement during its first decade. Worden's research and analysis is helpful in that it details, amongst numerous other events, the decisions by Jan van Riebeeck to alter the physical landscape of the Cape as a means of excluding the Khoekhoe and claiming land, such as the planting of bitter almond trees in present-day Kirstenbosch (1998, p. 25).[6] On the foundations of these early attempts to demonstrate a VOC dominance over the landscape, captured enslaved people were introduced to the tense and fortified system of power relations already at play. This material speaks directly to questions of land and dispossession that I explore in my work, as will be discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Another key collection of scholarly articles was the 1998/1999 edition of *Kronos,* edited by Andrew Bank and Gary Minkley. This was an important edition of *Kronos* that brought together several important historians invested in the area of the Cape Dutch colony, the greater VOC world, the transition from Dutch to British Colony, and the impact of these major political and economic systems on identity formations in Cape Town. Of particular

[6] I would like to acknowledge the work of contemporary South African artist Thania Petersen with specific reference to her works *God Save Our Hedge 1 (Botanical Imperialism Series)* (2015) in which the artist makes direct reference to van Riebeeck's bitter almond hedges still growing in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden in Cape Town.

interest to me, is Bank and Minkley's emphasis on the legacies of these colonial settlements on Cape Town's spatial planning, spatial experience and place-making, after Henri Lefebvre's analysis of urban space (1999, p. 5). An important intellectual shift that the 1998/1999 "Pre-Millennium issue" of *Kronos* demonstrates is the motivation of historians to draw links between the data found in historiographic research from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and its ongoing, lived legacies in the lives of Capetonians in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

Space in Cape Town has transformed considerably over the course of the 18th, 19th , and 20th centuries to the creation and "sanitisation" of the city centre as an "inner sanctum of white space, its monuments testifying to white history, its [sic]highrise CBD to the power of white business" (Bank and Minkley, 1999, p. 10). As editors, Bank and Minkley demonstrate the whitewashing of Cape Town history by historians, and the constructed façade of Cape Town as an elaborate homage to Englishness (no date, p. 11). Understanding the ramifications of the cumulative transformation of Cape Town into a white space over the course of its existence, is a crucial parallel exploration to the legacies of enslavement within this thesis. Accounting for the loss of the city as 'home'; as a space of belonging; as a space to claim as 'heritage', is deeply motivating for me as a scholar of South African slavery and as a Capetonian.

## Affect and memory work

As my research developed, it became essential to work with scholarship oriented towards slave descendants and slave memory. It was equally important to engage scholarship that grappled with how people in South Africa encounter histories of slavery, particularly in a

place in which slavery as a subject is considered 'niche'. Since the increase in research around slave histories, more self-defined slave descendants have written about and explored their slave ancestry and the implications of slavery upon contemporary South African society in MA theses, PhD theses, and unpublished papers shared in forums such as blogs.[7] That many of these theses have not translated into academic publishing on slavery, is notable and could speak to the hierarchies of knowledge production within the academy in general. As previously mentioned, the work of scholarship attuned to the ongoing mechanisms of spatial segregation, racial categorisation, and gendered violence is central to this thesis. Feminist scholarship in this aspect of my bibliography moves into a central position following its marginality in slavery scholarship up until the early 2000s. As will be demonstrated, placing local slavery scholarship in dialogue with theory from elsewhere becomes an important theoretical intervention in this research.

Gqola's monograph *What is slavery to me? Postcolonial/slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa* (2010d) has had a considerable impact on the shape and nature of my research. There are two major aspects of Gqola's scholarship, within and beyond *What is slavery to me?,* which reflect significantly in this thesis. First are the connections made between historical gendered and sexualised violence and the contemporary gendered and sexualised violence crisis in South Africa, as demonstrated in both *What is slavery to me?* and her following book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015b). This work features most significantly in my discussions around enslaved women's subjectivities in Chapter 3 but undergirds the entirety of my research. I draw connections between this facet of Gqola's

[7] Recent theses centred on slavery include Parbavati Rama's PhD thesis 'A Forgotten Diaspora: Forced Indian Migration to the Cape Colony, 1658 to 1834' (2015) produced at the University of the Western Cape, and Mischka Jade Lewis' MA thesis 'Artistic Interventions in the Historical Remembering of Cape slavery, c.1800s' (2020) also produced at the University of the Western Cape.

scholarship and that of Baderoon as seen in her chapter '"Sexual Geographies of the Cape": Slavery, race, and sexual violence', and Abrahams as previously discussed.

Secondly, Gqola's work has led me to consider questions of guilt, shame and responsibility in relation to slavery and contemporary South African society post democracy and drew my attention to Zoë Wicomb's well-cited essay 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa (1995-1998)' (2018), in which Wicomb laments the absence of slave folklore among Coloured slave descendants – a source referred to frequently throughout the thesis. In this vein, Gqola's interrogation of whiteness and the implications of slavery for white descendants of slavery opened a critical pathway for an examination of slavery's legacies beyond the siloed identity of the historically marginalised slave descendant. It has encouraged, too, an exploration of the post-1994 moment in South Africa and the impact of this national moment upon unstable perceptions of belonging and security in the country, particularly for white South Africans. Throughout the thesis I work with questions of whiteness in dialogue with Ahmed's critical works 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness' (2007), in which Ahmed dissects the role of whiteness as a phenomenological paradigm of perception, and 'The contingency of Pain' in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a), in which Ahmed unpicks how humans are fundamentally unable to grasp another's pain. The work of Michael Rothberg, specifically his book *The Implicated Subject: beyond victims and perpetrators* (2019c), and Judith Butler's book *Frames of War: When is life grievable?* (2009) have further enabled in-depth analysis of how and why slavery has not been sufficiently acknowledged as a major historical event in the broader South African consciousness. Butler's theorisation around frames of "recognition" and "apprehension" discusses who is and is not recognised by hegemonic structures of power, and expounds upon how frames of recognition are constituted (2009). Rothberg's work is important for my research practice in acknowledging how white South Africans associated with enslavement

– either as descendants of the slave owning class, as the descendants of enslaved people, or both – turn away from the difficult work of implication, or the recognition that they benefit from structures that oppress others (2019c). Note that I engage this material not to reify the powerful position of whiteness or coloniality, but rather to identify its mechanisms at work in societal structures. Thinking with Rothberg in the context of enslavement in South Africa has been significant in grappling with Coloured slave descendants' own implication in power structures through their proximity to whiteness and a rejection of African-ness, a subject discussed at length by Wicomb (2018), which will be examined further in Chapter 3.

My consideration of slavery, race, and colonial technologies of visuality (Mirzoeff, 2011b) in this thesis is greatly influenced by the work of Baderoon and her writing concerning how visual perception and slavery function in relation to Cape Town. Her theorisation of 'ambiguous visibility', with specific reference to the position of Cape Malay culture in Cape Town, has instigated major theoretical exploration in the thesis concerning the mechanisations of visuality and the concealment of slavery's violence (2009, p. 90; 2015), which is discussed at length in Chapter 3. This led me to explore art historical conceptions of landscape through the work of Michael Godby (2010), Simon Schama (1995) and others, but ultimately led me to investigate the connections between cartography, land, and coloniality through a wider, visual cultural lens. In this regard, the work of Nicolas Mirzoeff and his book *The Right to Look* (2011b) has been essential and more specifically his theorisation of the 'ordering of slavery' (2011a). I support the thinking of Baderoon and Mirzoeff with the work of Tiffany Lethabo King and her theorisation of the settler-colonial cartography in her book *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (2019a).

In addition to researching the mechanisms that upheld slavery and the mechanisms that conceal its histories, it has been necessary – particularly from a Black feminist perspective

– to imagine other ways of working with slave histories beyond violence and marginality inflicted upon enslaved people. Black feminist practices of recuperation and repair are fundamental in my theorisation of slavery in South Africa, and the work of Black feminist scholars from the United States working with transatlantic histories of slavery have provided productive models from which to learn. The speculative historical work of Abrahams (1996) has been deeply influential for me, as already discussed, as is the work of Hartman's critical fabulation (2008), two working methodologies for critical historical research which offer researchers means to read against the grain of colonial archival resources. Throughout the thesis, particularly demonstrated in Chapters 2, 3 and 5, I employ strategies of speculative historical writing and critical fabulation with the employment of "beautiful writing" as theorised by Jennifer Nash (2019b), a method of Black feminist repair working with and "staying close to loss" (2019b, p. 119). Holding close these political conceptions of writing about the afterlives of slavery has assisted my commitment to the orientations of my research: working with the subjectivities of slave descendants and taking seriously the role of affect when reckoning with violent histories. It is my belief that an interdisciplinary research methodology enables me to reckon with histories of slavery in ways that are self-critical of my role as the researcher, but further, ethically attuned to the incommensurable loss wrought by slavery and its living legacies in South Africa today.

Vignette

# The Docked Ship

*Although I take the slave hold as my point of departure, I dare not linger there.*

(Macharia 2019, 1)

November 2022

The great body of the ship swelled above the water line, like a proud chest. While I knew nothing about this ship, its provenance nor its age, the impact of its physical form was immediate and unsolicited. I stood on the dock and the mass of the floating structure towered over me; the height of the ship's masts exceeded the high-ceilinged five storeys of the National Maritime Museum building. Suddenly – inexplicably – I felt afraid. The vehicle seemed oddly alive; unnervingly poised for something. Perhaps it was the great conglomeration of wood, so unusual for the contemporary eye; or, as I will explain, some internal alarm bell ringing, even without context or specific insight.

Ignoring the conviction of K'eguro Macharia, I indulged my curiosity and boarded the docked *Amsterdam*, a recreation of a VOC ship built in 1748, permanently stationed in the harbour outside the Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. Some historical accounts say that one would be able to smell the stench of slave ships from the harbour as they arrived. I wondered now if this boat ever stank like that, if it ever was a slave ship.

Before entering the ship, the informational board shared that critical members of the public have called for the *Amsterdam*'s sinking since the 1990s, citing its glorification of the VOC. As it was described as a merchant ship, people wanted to know – like I did – if its intended use was to transport enslaved people? If it could have transported human lives under duress? The Het Scheepvaart Museum's website, on a page titled 'History of slavery and the National Maritime Museum' pointedly states: "The *Amsterdam* was not used for the transportation of enslaved people, but for the transportation of goods like spices, porcelain, tea, silk and textiles" (*History of slavery and the National Maritime Museum*, no date).

Still, the Amsterdam never made it to Batavia, nor did it round the tip of Africa and pass the Cape of Good Hope – a well-trodden route – where, by 1748, the VOC had an outpost for almost 100 years. The ship's planned maiden departures were beset by technical problems. Three attempts were made when eventually, the ship departed from Texel to Batavia in 1749. In the English Channel, the ship encountered weather difficulties owing to a storm and its rudder broke off, causing the vessel to run aground in the bay of Bulverhythe, where it sank. The fine sand and sediment along the shoreline preserved the vessel, where it was rediscovered in 1969 at a low spring tide. This discovery formed the basis for the recreation of the *Amsterdam* and the combined efforts of 300 volunteers built the replica between 1985 and 1990. The ship has been moored at Het Scheepvaart Museum for public access since 1991. As reported in the online publication *NL Times*, the ship's restoration in 2020 was estimated at "around a million euros" (*Replica of famous VOC ship Amsterdam moved for restoration*, 2020).

As soon as I stepped foot on the *Amsterdam*, an indeterminate fear flooded my body. I was jumpy, fragile-feeling and to counteract my unsteadiness, I shuffled around delicately as if I might fall over. It was as if I was being haunted. (Or was I doing the haunting?) This visceral

reaction was flummoxing. Knowing so little about the ship itself, I did not come to the experience with any deeper knowledge, besides of course, extensive research on the generalities of the VOC empire. Prior to this visit I was not apprehensive. In fact, I was openly curious – and desperate, I now realise – for some human connection to this past. Perhaps, I thought, being on this ship might unlock something. Stepping inside, just below deck, the ceiling was low, and the interior cluttered with sailing rope, and what seemed like empty crates to offer the impression of a working ship. At one end, a virtual reality experience was advertised; an experience I was not willing to explore. The hold was one floor below.

In the hold, like upstairs, the hall-like room was filled with crates and barrels. The entire space tipped gently from side to side, reminding me that we were indeed on water. At one end, the ship's curved wood swooped dramatically upwards, protected by a pane of Perspex or glass.

Behind this clear barrier were wheels of cheese – plastic casings, most likely – almost comically stacked upon one another. Seeing this, I realised that stencils of rats had been spray-painted on the sides of some crates. My mind flitted briefly between descriptions in *Roots* (Haley, 1978), to Dionne Brand, to *Homegoing* (Gyasi, 2017), to *Venus in Two Acts* (Hartman, 2008). The diagrammatic illustration of human bodies filed beside one another, to capitalise on space. I felt nauseous. The cavernous hold with its hard floors and absence of natural light was no fit place for a crowd of people.

This was made more evident by seeing the sailors' quarters and the captain's cabin, the sailors' mess and surgeon's quarters. There was a dining table for the captain and crew. For the crew: bunk beds, tables, blankets; the cook's kitchen with provision for a coal fire. The

captain's quarters had a small four-poster bed, a kist for personal possessions, and large windows facing the open sea, complete with an en suite toilet. The very structure of the boat reinforced its hierarchies and the amenities (and lack thereof) reflected who was and was not human. Out on the ship's deck, a young father enthusiastically showed his son the wheel and later, they peered together over the ship's edge, overlooking the harbour. It all felt grotesque.

With institutional efforts to reappraise the Dutch legacy of slavery, museum visitors' eyes are directed towards the black figures playing supporting roles to Dutch protagonists in 17th and 18th century paintings. Inside the Het Scheepvaart Museum (much like the Rijksmuseum) short paragraphs beside portraits, nature scenes, and still lifes provide a touch of context for the recurring, far-flung tropical locations; the reasons for seafaring and inferred: the human cost of the operation. The skin upholding the splendour of the so-called Dutch Golden Age is gently, tentatively pulled back; obfuscating its bloodiness under sumptuous silks, crystal, recently shot poultry, barely dead crustaceans, and lemon rinds.

For me, the replica of the *Amsterdam* less effectively conceals old-world carnage. I get the impression that for many Dutch people, however, the VOC ship elicits a sense of pride as opposed to dread. In his research on the attitudes and beliefs conjured up by the so-called Dutch Golden Age, art historian Simon Schama describes the Dutch ship as a symbol of the state and the church " –[t]he superfatted cargo vessel became an emblem of the fatherland itself" (1987a, p. 31), and its skipper, "both prince and bishop, leader and pastor: a true godly captain" (1987a, p. 33). Undergirding this sentiment is the Dutch triumph over the ocean, besieged as they were by catastrophic floods that wiped out entire towns in the 14th and 15th centuries. The memory of these disasters "conditioned the sixteenth-century Dutch

to regard themselves as ordained and blessed survivors of the deluge" (Schama, 1987a, pp. 34–35).

How then, to figure the grandeur and heroism of these ideas alongside and against the accounts of the people chained below the deck of this national symbol of pride?

Chapter 2

# Witnessing the pain of others: narrative, speculation and affect

> “No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain.”
>
> (Sontag, 2003, p. 7)

> “Such stories of pain must be heard. But what are the conditions of possibility for hearing them?”
>
> (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 34)

## Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how enslaved people in South Africa, and the system of enslavement as a whole, are afforded or denied “recognition” following the thinking of Judith Butler (Butler, 2009). Foregrounding my study is the gross injustice of enslavement in South Africa and the reality of ongoing injustice in the aftermath of enslavement – products, I argue, of the living legacies of enslavement. The lack of recourse for slavery’s atrocities and the diminished place of enslavement in popular and state-produced narratives about South African history has meant that the burden of its memory falls upon slave descendants, and more specifically, historically marginalised slave descendants. In the absence of widespread

accountability for, or acknowledgement of, the crimes of slavery, descendants' (and allies) efforts to commemorate slavery constitute a significant contribution to the maintenance of slave memory in South Africa. These commemorations remain at the periphery of nation-wide commemorative or memorialisation practices, even if such actions may be at the centre of descendants' own communities. The ongoing labour of these commemorative practices in the face of indifference and ignorance impacts marginalised descendants and those committed to remembering slavery in profound ways, as I will demonstrate.

In South Africa, where we live with the paradigms of 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation' within the lexicon of the 'New South Africa', the state narration of slavery mirrors most of the historiographic literature which positions slavery and its abolition as a resolved event. As Nicola Cloete has elucidated, in state-funded literature on slavery in Cape Town oriented towards the tourism market, a reconciliatory narrative is posited that suggests that slavery's impact has concluded (2016, p. 124). This position stands in opposition to my understanding of slavery as "open, unfinished", following Saidiya Hartman (2022a, p. xx); a position shared and articulated by the artistic work and scholarship of Gabrielle Goliath, Bronwyn Katz, the District Six Museum, the Prestwich Place Committee, Julian Jonker (2005), Zoë Wicomb (2018), Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010d), Gabeba Baderoon (2014c), and others.

Throughout the course of this research, I have been preoccupied with the disproportionate burden borne by historically marginalised descendants of slavery in its commemoration and remembrance. The work of Michael Rothberg and his incisive theorisation of "implicated subjects" (2019c) read in tandem with Jennifer Nash's conception of "beautiful writing" (2019a), as a practice of Black feminist theory, has assisted me in understanding the crucial place of subjectivity in reckoning with history and loss. In his theory of implication, Rothberg

makes a persuasive argument for a category of accountability that is neither that of “victim” nor “perpetrator”:

> “An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less “actively” involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mould of the “passive” bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present …”
>
> (Rothberg, 2019c, p. 2)

A consideration of the “implicated subject”, in the context of the afterlives of enslavement, helps to articulate the positionalities of those who continue to benefit from historic systems of hierarchised difference, and yet themselves were not directly responsible for acts of enslavement. The theorisation of the “implicated subject” also helps in addressing “different scales and temporalities of injustice” and in response, to develop an ethic of responsibility concerning slavery (Rothberg, 2019a, p. 2). Seeing that implication is itself not static means that one can be descended from historic victims and simultaneously be implicated in the harm of others. In this way, Rothberg’s theory can extend towards particular facets of the slave descendant community, as well. For example, historically marginalised descendants of enslavement, particularly those racialised as Coloured, in some ways benefited from the hierarchies of institutionalised racism during apartheid – a subject I will return to later in the chapter.

In the context of South Africa and its history, recognising slavery's implicated subjects is also to identify how the creation of "strangers" in the settler-colony (2000c) and the "phenomenology of whiteness", as expounded upon by Sara Ahmed (2007), operates to produce white innocence and place slavery's burden with its descendants of colour. As an orientation of hegemonic world-making and knowledge production, in this context, whiteness produces the frame (Butler, 2009) through which we perceive information. What falls inside the frame is incumbent on dominant perceptions of what is or is not considered a tragedy, and more fundamentally, who is or is not considered human (McKittrick *et al.*, 2014; Weheliye, 2014b). As I will describe in Chapters 3 and 4, one could argue that the construction of the Fort de Goede Hoop and the cultivation of the Company's Garden was the beginning of the orientation towards whiteness in the region.

In the context of slavery in South Africa, it is instructive to think with Dori Laub's conception of the "failure to witness" trauma (1992, p. 75). Laub's thinking can help in developing a framework to understand the conditions of enslavement's erasure in the country, building upon what was learned in Chapter 1 concerning slave studies in the academy and slave memory in the country. In the context of transatlantic slavery, Rothberg describes implication as "structural and genealogical" (2019b, p. 60), an insight that is excellently suited to slavery in the South African context, where, as Mason has elucidated, the family unit functioned as a "state in miniature" (2003a) as the historical and archival record demonstrates repeatedly (Böeseken, 1977a; Shell, 1994d; Mason, 2003b). (The nature of the family under the conditions of enslavement will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.) A major part of this research has been a process of identifying the norms that make historical erasure possible, and following Butler, the norms that allow for life to be differentially valued (Butler, 2009). In light of these norms, I ask: how can an orientation toward slave memory be prioritised? And how can a rigorous engagement with affect in conjunction with artistic and

poetic strategies assist in producing nuanced understandings of slave history?

Acts of remembrance through the ongoing practice of artists and activism of heritage groups, I argue, work against the historical erasure of slavery and the dominance of the hegemonic 'frame' that prioritises, directly or indirectly, white hetero-patriarchy. Coupled with this critique, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, is the recognition that historical writing is not objective and that the bias of historians and researchers is unavoidable. The subjective, personal impetus of the artist, researcher, and cultural organiser is central to this thesis, particularly as it concerns the perspectives of historically marginalised descendants who continue to experience the day-to-day afterlives of slavery. Nash theorises around the experience of writing about one's own subject position in relation to histories of violence and marginalisation. She describes "beautiful writing" as a Black feminist act of repair working with and "staying close to loss" (2019b, p. 119) that actively attempts to "move" the reader (2019b, p. 109):

> "What if we refused forms of thinking, writing, and disciplinarity that produce our "annihilation," that discount sensual, spiritual, creative, and corporeal ways of knowing? What if we responded to the fetishization of objective, neutral writing with a commitment to creative form, to experimentation, to writing otherwise, and housed that critique in the parameters of theory, effectively jamming the machinery of conventional theoretical production?"
>
> (Nash, 2019b, p. 105)

Nash, in reference to the work of Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Marisa Fuentes, and others, draws a direct relation between the positionally of the author and their subject matter, centring the subjectivity of the author who is an inheritor of systems and histories of

marginalisation, violence and loss (2019b, p. 106). Particularly relevant to my study is Nash's identification of Hartman's conception of critical fabulation as demonstrative of "beautiful writing" as a Black feminist practice of recuperation and care.

"Writing beautifully" is a method I employ throughout this thesis as an ongoing ethic of care. As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, I propose thinking about "writing beautifully" in relation to the work of Gabrielle Goliath's *Elegy* (2015-) and historian Saarah Jappie's eulogies for *Elegy*'s commemorations of enslaved women Cornelia van Piloane and Louisa van de Caab; the work of the District Six Museum; and my own application of critical fabulation towards the imagined relationality between Krotoa and Ansla van Bengalen, as seen in Chapter 3. The vignettes in this thesis also serve as an application of Nash's thinking. I think about the extension of "beautiful writing" to art and artistic practices as "beautiful acts" that prioritise the affective, speculative "grammar of the subjunctive" (Hartman in Nash, 2019, p. 106) that is grounded in histories of loss. Nash's methodological approach and her theoretical orientation afford full recognition to the experience of enslavement and its legacies in the present without reservation.

Black feminist practice's capaciousness in embracing interdisciplinary modes extends the validity of our sensory perception and the orientation from which we acquire knowledge and understanding, to draw from Sara Ahmed's theorisation of phenomenology (2007). In my consideration of "beautiful writing" and "beautiful acts" I am also mindful of the ways in which artistic and poetic practices – in their nonlinear, non-representational modes, particularly – can allow viewers and listeners to come to understand, as Laub and Shoshanna Felman describe in relation to the Shoah, "how art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*" (1992, p. xx) (emphasis in original).

While it is important to demonstrate how artists work against modes of intellectual and historical erasure, it is also crucial for me to identify the glaring, persistent chasm between historically marginalised descendants of slavery and slavery's implicated subjects, who work with artistic modes to address the historical period of enslavement. To these ends, in this chapter I will analyse and critique the video work *Secretly I love You More* (2007) by Andrew Putter, and touch upon the political messaging of the South African feature film *Krotoa* (2017) directed by Roberta Durrant. (Further analysis of Krotoa appears in the vignette *Krotoa* (2017), which appears after this chapter.) These attempts to connect across the beneficiary–victim chasm (meaning: those who benefit from systems of oppression and those who are victims of systems of oppression, after Rothberg [2019]) primarily operate within the mode of historical revisionism, in which an idiom of aesthetic historicity is used to portray historical authenticity. I look at these examples of artistic and poetic responses to the introduction of settler-colonialism at the Cape of Good Hope as a reflection of the hegemonic frame's orientation towards whiteness and its perpetuation of the myth of white innocence. I examine how modes of artistic practice thus illustrate political dominance and illuminate systems of power.

## Critical fabulation and "beautiful writing"

> If narrating one's trauma is important for its integration into one's sense of being and one's recovery from its debilitating effects, what happens when victims 'suffering is not recognised by others, when victims are silenced?
>
> (Gobodo-Madikizela and van der Merwe, 2007, p. 29)

When working with partial archives and fragmentary collective memory, one can interpret the work of artists and cultural organisations as a belated witness to the memory of enslavement. Black feminist artistic practices that engage with history and the speculative can function as a way to "stay[…] close to loss" (Nash, 2019, p. 119) without forgoing the rigour or criticality of engaging with the historiographic and archival record. As seen in the work of Saarah Jappie, in her written eulogies for *Elegy*, the re-orientation of the enslaved woman's own subjectivity – even imagined – at the centre of Jappie's text is a means of "recognition" of a collective inheritance of slavery, as I call it. I look to Goliath's *Elegy* and Jappie, and to the collective commemoration of the formerly enslaved District Sixer Lydia Williams, to fully explore the recuperative significance of the historically speculative mode in conversation with "beautiful writing", "beautiful acts" and the necessity of witness (Bennett, 2005; Gobodo-Madikizela and van der Merwe, 2007) particularly in the absence of living memory. (*Elegy* will be discussed again at length in Chapter 3.)

Saidiya Hartman's conception of critical fabulation has had an enormous influence on my thinking about the lives of women in servitude and indenture in the 17th and 18th centuries in the Cape of Good Hope. In the mode of critical fabulation, Hartman responds to the historical chronicler of the enslaved woman as a "failed witness" in the archival record (2008, p. 2). (I explore and apply Hartman's methodology in detail in Chapter 3.) Similarly, in the accounts of Louisa van de Caab's death and Cornelia van Piloane's presumed fatal wounding, Jappie struggles with the dead-ends of the official's record and the incomplete, terminal paper trail of their crimes' recording. In both of her written eulogies, Jappie struggles with the knowledge that their stories precede and exceed what is documented in the archive. Here, an excerpt from the eulogy for Cornelia van Piloane:

> “Boom managed to take his own life but somehow failed to end yours. Not even a bullet to the head could kill you, at least not immediately.
>
> How long did you have to endure the pain? And who eventually found you? Cared for you? The record will not reveal these secrets. Time and again I have read through the words, between and around them, hoping for something more. Each time only questions emerge. The most resounding question of all is how you would have told your own story. Where would you choose to begin it? And what form would it take? I imagine you recounting tales in your mother tongue about the faraway Piloane [Pulau Enu? Pulau Ay?], and of your journey to the Cape. I have wondered how you would explain your romantic entanglements with a Dutchman, the chilling events of that March, and how you would have wanted your story to end.”
>
> (Jappie, 2019)

An excerpt from the eulogy for Lousia van de Caab:

> “How would your mother have felt, finding you hours later between the house and the chicken coop? Bent over as if dead. I tried to listen with my eyes, to grasp the pain in her statement. In desperation I foolishly read it aloud, and still the Official Record spat back only facts. Dates, names, times. The trajectory of the knife as it cut through you and took your life – a life of which we will only ever know one brutal, last moment.”
>
> (Jappie, 2018)

It is important to note that Jappie does not explicitly employ Hartman's methodology of critical fabulation but comes to manage the inadequacies of the partial record in her own way. A trained historian, Jappie draws value from the historical record as it is able to shed some light on the women's lost lives, but she is, too, at odds with its inherent inability to account for a life, not least the life of an enslaved person. The frame produced by the VOC court scribe – and the court system itself – refuses recognition. If it captures glimpses of life, the court record does so accidentally, despite itself, and ultimately for the purposes of a trial or legal procedure.

What happens when the 'witness' to the events of the past is retroactive? The Black feminist commitment to an impulse of critical fabulation (even if the methodology is not followed resolutely) is not to rewrite or revise history, but to recognise the conditions of living – its violence and its constraints. The historically speculative, in this mode, builds upon an understanding of the mechanisms of power in the archival record and the act of recording to imagine how one might have lived with and beyond these strictures. In the act of writing and creating about the enslaved, enslaved descendants mourn loss, but also likely reflect on personal experiences produced as a result of the historical injustices of slave systems.

Goliath and Jappie create the conditions for the mourning of Cornelia van Piloane and Lousia van de Caab of the 18th century in the present. It is in this space-time relation between the pain one experiences as a result of present and historical injustice, inter-personal strife – what Rothberg succinctly refers to as the "structural and intimate conditions of possibility for injustice and its propagation in the aftermath" (2019c, p. 60) – and the unknowable, but intimated distress of historical others, that the descendant and the attuned listener reaches for connection. Ahmed conceives of this "contingent attachment" as the sociality of pain (Ahmed, 2004a), as she explains:

> "The impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with me. I want to suggest here, cautiously, and tentatively, that an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel. Such an ethics is, in this sense, bound up with the sociality or the 'contingent attachment' of pain itself. Much of the thinking on pain, however, contrasts the ungraspability of the other's pain with the graspability of my own pain."
>
> (Ahmed, 2004a, p.30)

Ahmed describes this presence through "surfaces" and "impressions"; a process through which "pain surfaces in relationship to others, who bear witness to pain, and authenticate its existence" (2004a, p. 31). As seen in the volume *Trials of Slavery* (Groenewald and Worden, 2005c), for example, the archived story of the historical, enslaved woman, is mediated through the witness to the crime on the scene, the court scribe, and some hundred plus years later, the contemporary volume's editors. As Hartman states starkly: "the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses" (2008, p. 2). The negotiation of this past pain and its supposed "end" is through the captured presence of suffering through the record; the very record that effectively fossilises the historical subject amid pain. The refusal to allow the historical figure to calcify in a perpetual state of pain is central to the Black feminist ethic of the beautiful. While staying with the reality of loss, "beautiful writing" encourages us to think with the generative possibilities produced by the chasm of the present and the past. This, in my view, is a way of making sense of an

unexperienced trauma and importantly, the expansiveness of another's life through "embodied knowledge" (Nash, 2019, p. 119).

Artistic and poetic production is a crucial means of navigating such unknowns and to "[i]magine a world hospitable to beauty's possibilities, arrangements, and touch" (Nash, 2019, p.111). Jappie utilises a poetic writerly mode to pose evocative, impossible-to-answer questions about Cornelia van Piloane and Louisa van de Caab that stir up productive questions that may offer insight into the lives and desires of the deceased. ("What were your final thoughts? Did you ever dream of your mother's Malabar?" [2018]) These are the questions that linger as the performers of *Elegy* draw the audience into urgent reflection created by "sustaining a single haunting tone over the course of an hour" (Goliath, no date). For me, this induction into a contemplative state recalls Jill Bennett's suggestion that "artwork [generates] sensation so as to produce an encounter in the present" (2005, p. 28).

The efforts to "produce an encounter in the present" led me to think towards the collective, public-oriented commemorative work of the District Six Museum, [8] and their evocation of the

[8] As I have discussed elsewhere (2019), the District Six Museum is a deeply influential and innovative institution where artistic practice and what I have termed 'participatory curation' with former residents of District Six has remained fundamental to their programming and exhibition-making methodology. As former District Six Museum trustee Ciraj Rassool explains, the museum has taken on multiple intersecting functions throughout its existence, each of which serve towards the recognition of apartheid's injustices and the restitution of land to former residents of District Six by thinking of "local social history as a means of questioning the teleologies of national history" (2006, 312)" (Soudien, 2019, p.12).

The museum has produced exhibitions, publications, immersive installations, and commissioned artworks that have explored various aspects of District Six life, including sporting and cultural societies, children's playground games, and recently, famed hairdresser and performer Kewpie, with the GALA Queer Archive. The District Six Museum's anti-apartheid origins, and the major contributions to its establishment by activist-artists and cultural workers in the late 1980s is significant in understanding the institution's resistance to replicating historiographic modes that perpetuate and reinscribe colonial violence. Working from within and outside of living memory the organisation promotes District Sixers' multi-vocal, personal connections to Cape

formerly enslaved District Sixer Lydia Williams, who opened her home to the neighbourhood each year to mark Emancipation Day. On Heritage Day, 24 September 2010, the museum commemorated the 100th anniversary of Williams' death with a programme that included a processional visit to the Lydia Williams Centre for Memory (previously the Chapel Street School) and the foundations of her home on Cobern Street. The museum's work was drawn from the work of Rev. Michael Weeder (of St George's Cathedral and the Prestwich Place Committee) who completed significant research on the life of Lydia Williams in 1999.

Williams and her parents were born into slavery; her father was a Mozambieker (an enslaved person from Mozambique or descendant from Mozambiquans) and her mother was a locally born enslaved woman. Every year on the 1 December until her death in 1910, Williams hosted a commemoration of Emancipation Day in which she decorated her cottage with paper flowers and animals and held a "feast of food and delicacies" (Weeder, no date).

Leading up to 2010's event, the museum organised workshops with former residents where they learned about Williams' life and made paper flowers and fish in honour of Williams' annual tradition. A marquee was erected at the site of Williams' home and in celebration of her tradition of hosting *tafel*, or open house, participants brought plates of food to contribute to the feast on the day. In my interview with Tina Smith, Head of Exhibitions at the District Six Museum, she explained:

> "We try not to recreate but create an environment ... Ex-residents made a whole lot of flowers out of paper, fish. All kinds of decorations. They decorated the whole

Town's history that convey what Karen E. Till might call "multi-sensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds" (2008, p. 101).

> place, and then we decorated the tablecloth with paper. People could write on the paper … and so, the tablecloths also became a space of conversation.
>
> …
>
> We had a parade. We had a procession. We knew that the foundations of [Lydia Williams'] house still exist. So, we unearthed the foundations, just to clear the space. And then we had a whole ceremony on the space, and again we got Garth [Erasmus] and Malika [Ndlovu] involved. Malika did the most beautiful poem 'Lydia in the Wind'.
>
> …
>
> We had a band, and we did *langarm* and so forth …"
>
> (Smith, 2023)

The extraordinary fact of Williams' creation of a tradition – a celebration of living and her own commitment to remembering – was that it was revived while introducing her story to the last residents of District Six. Furthermore, the participants in the workshops themselves contributed to a new imagining of Williams' Emancipation Day event.

Smith explained that neither she nor the former residents knew what the flowers and animals Williams created looked like, but that they conceived of these new creations from their own imaginations. Similarly, when discussing the planning and form of 'A Walk in the Night', Chrischené Julius, Head of Collections at the District Six Museum, describes the license to interpret slave history as "freeing" (2023). In this way, history is not "gate kept" but in its reappraisal is open-ended. How each participant engages with this history is not prescribed (Smith, 2023; Julius, 2023). The District Six Museum's curatorial approach echoes Karen E. Till's conception of a "multi-sensual" memory work (2008) in that the revitalisation of

Williams' commemorative event – and many others – intentionally activates sight, sound, smell, taste – and by combination of these, touch by the embodiment of space.

The creatively interpretative elements of the event could be described as speculative and is further affirmed by Smith in her insistence that artistic processes produce productive connections to the unknown and unrecorded aspects of the past (Smith, 2023). While historical reference points provide a central basis for contemporary commemorations, faithful re-creation or historical re-enactment is not a preoccupation for the artists, curators, and participants involved. To my mind, this work demonstrates the conscious interplay between "recorded fact" and the fallacy of objectivity in historiography, as elucidated by Yvette Abrahams (1996) and elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

Writing about Williams' life, Weeder astutely differentiates between knowledge production that produces 'quantifiable' information about her life and instead fixates on her motivations behind her decisions that "informed her cultural practices such as her consistent remembrance of Emancipation Day on 1 December" (Weeder, 2006, p. 26). Echoing the "embodied knowledge" raised by Nash, in such poetic revivals of Williams' own traditions, participants find entryways into Williams' imagined interiority; an act, I argue, that constitutes a means of "witness" and "recognition" even after Williams' death (Butler, 2009). In this way, loss becomes a starting point for highly creative and inventive possibilities (Smith, 2018).

Such investment in the poetic project is not without risk or the inevitability of failure, as both Nash and Hartman are careful to state (Hartman, 2008, p. 12; Nash, 2019, p. 103). In the paradigms of knowledge production within the university, these risks are significant owing to the wilful flouting and disregard of the conventions of colonially produced knowledge production. The risks include the potential to be academically discredited by powerful

decision-makers in the fields of history and perhaps worst of all, being misunderstood. Further, as posited by Rothberg, poetic projects are not a form of material claim (Rothberg, 2019c, p. 68) or constitute, in and of themselves, what can be achieved by legal avenues of justice. Despite this, it is my view that if artistic acts or gestures are poetic, they nonetheless reflect and respond to the absence of legal recourse in efforts towards alternative paradigms for recognition; public-oriented, performative modes that can interface with historically marginalised descendants and other publics in productive ways. Commemorative practices, particularly in light of widespread historical erasure, are necessary and important contributions to public discourse.

## Revisionist histories and nostalgia

As demonstrated, the use of artistic and poetic re-appraisals of the past has the potential to be empowering and enabling for historically marginalised descendants in the absence of widespread recognition of slavery. However, colonial "visual technologies" (Mirzoeff, 2011b) can also be used to re-invent the past in the mode of "historicity" to produce what I call false re-enactments. These modes of representation, widely used in the genre of history painting and period films, replicate historical aesthetic conventions to provide a sense of "authenticity". Whilst these cultural forms are self-consciously re-constructions of the past, they have the potential to "represent history" for viewers and audiences, and in so doing perpetuate and disseminate colonial frames of recognition.

As will be discussed in the vignette *Krotoa* (2017), and briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, Charles Bell's double centenary commemoration painting *Landing at the Cape* (1852) is an important example of the false re-enactment of history, as is Andrew Putter's "singing portrait" *Secretly I Love You More* (2007) which was first shown at Spier Contemporary in

2007. The video work depicts Maria de Quellerie, Jan van Riebeeck's Huguenot wife, in the baroque style of 17th century Dutch portraiture. The aspect ratio of the film replicates that of a portrait painting, replete with gilded frame. An actress portraying Maria de Quellerie appears in the frame from the bust upwards in a dark garment with a white lace-trimmed cap covering her head. A light source, out of frame, illuminates de Quellerie in the mode of baroque painting and Putter has treated the footage with a subtle soft focus that mimics the patina of an oil painting. Enter Putter's primary intervention in his interpretation of the conventions of portraiture from the "Dutch Golden Age": de Quellerie begins to sing in Nama, an indigenous Khoekhoe language still spoken in Namibia. The song is a lullaby to Krotoa who, the artist describes in the accompanying text, is sleeping before de Quellerie out of frame (Putter, 2011, p. 100). The figure maintains eye contact with the viewer throughout the film's duration and gently smiles at the song's conclusion.

Putter, on the occasion of the work's display at the 54th Venice Biennale, described the work: "My artwork at the Venice Biennale draws on the secret utopian potential of the historical encounter between the Hottentots and the Dutch at the Cape in the 1600s" (2011, p. 100). In the catalogue for 'PERSONAL STRUCTURES: TIME SPACE EXISTENCE', the exhibition at the biennale which hosted the work, Putter included the translation for the song, which I have reproduced here:

> Lyric for *Secretly I Will Love You More*
>
> (written by Andrew Putter)
>
> Do not fear me little one –
>
> welcome into our home!
>
> How beautiful you are,

little shiny one, with your woolly hair,

smelling of sweet buchu.

Your differences from me make you so precious!

Your smallness belies your significance.

Meeting you has changed us forever.

I will love you as I love my own children:

Secretly I will love you more.

The warm summer wind blows and it makes me dream.

I dream of your people and my people changing each other.

Welcome into our home precious child.

Nama translation of lyric for Secretly I Will Love You More

(by Pedro Dausab)

Ta !ao ti ǂkhariro –

//Kore //kare-he sida oms !nâ.

Mati koses a exa naparas !abuxa /ûn/kha

ǂkhon buxuba rahâm.

Sa !kharasasib ge.

//n_tikose sasa ra !gom/gausa kai.

Sa !kharisib ge ra sa !gom /gausasiba ra ǂhûmi kai.

Sasa /hau-us ge sida huka-/gui ra /khara/khara.

O ta ni /namsi ti oâna ta /nam khemi:

ǂGan!gâsa se ta ni /namsi !nasase.

/Gamsa //khanab di ǂoab ta !gom tsî ra //habo kai te.

//Hawo tara o ti khoin tsî sa khoin xa ra în /khara.

//Ore //hares sida oms !nâ !gom/gausa /_oa.

(Putter, 2011, p. 102)

In *Secretly I Will Love You More,* Maria de la Quellierie is offered the opportunity to be reframed in history as a loving caregiver to Krotoa. She is recast as a mother figure who affectionately 'welcomes' Krotoa into the Fort de Goede Hoop, the van Riebeeck home at the Cape. Putter explicitly acknowledges that the Khoekhoe and their culture – or the "Hottentots" as he calls them in 2011 – were effectively erased and "forgotten" in the Table Valley region (2011). Yet, the artist posits this historical interpretation as a "secret history" inferring that the depicted loving dynamic between Krotoa and Maria de Quellerie is a newly discovered historical fact. The reproduction of the conventions of 17th-century portraiture in the video work, in my view, further imbues the work with epistemic authority, even in its contemporary material palette.

The impulse to rewrite Maria de Quellerie as a doting mother figure to Krotoa echoes Meg Samuelson's assertion that Krotoa's presence in the "new South Africa" "rainbow nation" narrative is a domesticated one (2007, p. 18). This articulation, published in 2007, is a useful and astute assessment of how Krotoa's life and impact is deemed useful in the years following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. One could interpret Krotoa's 'domestication' from 1990s onward as a way of managing an otherwise 'unruly' or unbounded historical figure into something far more palatable and therefore, exploitable. Through her reading of historical fiction, Samuelson demonstrates how Krotoa's life history is co-opted for the purposes of re-framing or re-narrativising a nationalist conception of South African early colonial history. From Dan Sleigh to André Brink and Trudie Bloem, Samuelson elucidates the deeply entrenched raced and gendered manifestations of this story-telling, and the 'problem' posed by Krotoa's behaviour in the course of her life (2007, p. 46).

Putter's re-narration of Krotoa's presence and purpose in the Fort de Goede Hoop has the power to erase or deny Krotoa's lived experience: it 'makes nice' the reality of kidnapping, of servitude, and indenture that she endured. In the reclamation of Krotoa as a *stammoeder* of South African society, as discussed in Chapter 3, the genealogical appropriation of Krotoa, like Ansla van Bengalen, is not an opportunity to grapple with a settler-colonial history of violence, but a loophole in which one can evade accountability all together (Coetzee, 1998, p. 114; Samuelson, 2007, p. 20). As Carine Zaayman has stated:

> "*Secretly I Will Love You More* offers the promise, or the fantasy, of an escape from the moral implications of the colonial legacy—among the detrimental effects of colonialism, Putter seems to say, prevails a sliver of tenderness, of love. This sliver may not have changed the outcome of events, but it dramatically affects how we can conceive of that period and our inheritance of its legacy."
>
> (Zaayman, 2019, p. 48)

Putter's alternative reality, which stands in contradiction to archival sources (Zaayman, 2019, p. 47), is not rooted in loss but in a desired past. This approach stands in direct contrast to the methodologies proposed by Hartman and Nash, for whom the realities of oppressive societal systems are central. In *Secretly I Love You More*, Putter constructs a past that is retroactively aspirational and hinges upon sentimental, universal ideas about motherhood, care-giving, and cultural harmony. In a post-1994 South African society beset by social and cultural division, and in the context of an active, but waning rainbow nation narrative in 2007, it thus creates the conditions for a unity-driven hope for a past we wished we had rather than the past we actually have. But who stands to benefit from re-imagining

history in a reconciliatory idiom, even if the impulse is – seemingly – to repair?

When gestures are made to revise history to portray a fictional past – a past in which there is mutual kindness and understanding – one must be cognisant of the frames and operations of power at play in revisiting that past. If the unsaid, desired outcome is to allow white South Africans to 'feel good' about their colonial ancestors, the targeted viewer can become open to this version of the past and possibly, to ask: 'was it that bad?' As Butler reminds us, the mere apprehending of life – in the case, Krotoa's – does not mean that "one will resolve to protect that life or secure the conditions for its persistence and flourishing" (Butler, 2009, p. 2).

In a similar manner, the affective atmosphere of Roberta Durant's film *Krotoa* (2017) is designed to instil a sense of pride and hopefulness. The film ends with a montage of prominent South Africans who are descendants of Krotoa, including the Apartheid politicians Paul Kruger, Jan Smuts, and F.W. de Klerk. The goal of this segment appears to be designed to set the white Afrikaans viewership at ease. This conclusion demonstrates, in some way, that the film is not 'about' Krotoa, but about the colonial apparatus around her, and a reification of an Afrikaner-nationalist narrative validated by Krotoa as ancestor. When read in good faith, this aspect of the film is perhaps an attempt to de-stigmatise indigenous ancestors and an attempt to reclaim these ancestors as a point of pride. However, the orientation of the film's message is distinctly directed towards white South Africans' sense of belonging as opposed to the marginalisation of Khoekhoe indigeneity and their genocide, following the thinking of Samuelson. As Ahmed states:

> "As Fiona Nicoll (1998) has argued, reconciliation has a double meaning. It can suggest coming to terms with, but it can also refer to passivity, in which one seeks to

> make the other passive (to reconcile her to her fate). In Australian politics, the narrative of reconciliation – and with it, of hearing the other's pain – is too often bound up with making indigenous others fit into the white nation or community." (Ahmed, 2004a)

Like Ahmed's text, the white viewer is the target of the message of the film, not the indigenous groups from which Krotoa is descended. What, then, is the place of understanding implication when reflecting upon the introduction of settler-colonial hegemony in the 17th century? What is the place of 'white innocence'? Returning to the thinking of Ahmed and the sociality of pain, I am struck by the intensity of grief concerning this period of enslavement, marginalisation and subjugation and stark absence of accountability or acknowledged implication by others. If others are indifferent to the pain of the enslaved and indentured, it is because the enslaved are not recognisable to them, because they are not positioned to becoming affected by "that which one cannot know or feel" (Ahmed, 2004a). Conversely, the work of *Elegy* and the District Six Museum actively invites the public to be moved by the loss of another and to mourn them.

## Coloured identity and the "stranger" descendant

I would like to suggest that the failure to witness slavery or afford it ample recognition is a result of the creation of "strangers" within the settler-colony (Ahmed, 2000c); a marker of perpetual otherness that has followed historically marginalised descendants into the present day. A "stranger", a term Ahmed interchanges with "alien", is described as follows:

> "To be an alien in a particular nation, is to hesitate at a different border: the alien here is the one who does not belong in a nation space, and who is already defined as such by the Law. The alien is hence only a category within a given community of citizens or subjects: as the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land). Aliens allow the demarcation of spaces of belonging: by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains. The techniques for differentiating between citizens and aliens, as well as between humans and aliens, allows the familiar to be established as the familial."
>
> (Ahmed, 2000a, p. 3)

Following the theorisation of Ahmed, the "stranger" and "the colony" are co-produced in the establishment of the settler-colony through the creation of recognised strangers in "bounded spaces" (Ahmed 2000, 22). Ahmed's identification of the "stranger" is synchronous with Baderoon's discussion of the descriptive term "kaffir" as an indigenous-alien marker; a product of the creation of strangers and the settler-colony (2014a, p. 31). Predominant historically marginalised descendant groups such as Coloured identities were constructed "in the contexts of slavery, colonialism, and cultural dispossession" (Erasmus 2001, p.23). If their "dislocation [is] always present" (Ibid), historically marginalised descendants' trouble with belonging and their state-sanctioned unsettlement through the apartheid-era Group Areas Act and the British Colonial-era Land Act is placed in stark contrast to white settlers' assumed belonging, "innocence", and sovereignty (Ahmed, 2015, p.2). For white South Africans, and other implicated subjects who benefit from colonial organisation, a secure, unquestioned, inherited sense of belonging was cultivated over time through the development of infrastructure, cartography, and a gradual control over the landscape and its

meanings. Systems of surveillance and punishment reinscribe(ed) who was (is) a stranger and who was (is) an accepted member of the colonial community. The spatial and environmental conditions shaped by settler-colonial powers were developed to control the fear of slave-led uprisings and to ensure that enslaved people's movements were thoroughly surveilled in the creation of race and racialised subjects in the settler-colony, a subject explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.[9]

One could describe the ignorance and avoidance of the history of slavery by the majority of South Africans as the trivialisation of slavery, following Zimitri Erasmus' conception of the "marginalisation and trivialisation of Coloured identities in relation to processes of building a national identity in post-apartheid South Africa" (2001, p. 16). While Coloured identity is not the primary research concern of this dissertation, Coloured identity is nonetheless an integral aspect of slave descendant discourse in the country. In the edited volume *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place* (2001), Erasmus and others set out to define Coloured identity not as a positionality or cultural formation defined by 'lack' but by creative constitution, creolisation (2001, p. 14). I share Erasmus' view that Coloured identity in South Africa is borne from the "colonial encounter between colonists (Dutch and British), slaves from South and South East India and from East Africa, and conquered indigenous peoples, the Khoi and San. This encounter and the power relations embedded in it have resulted in processes of cultural dispossession, borrowing and transformation" (Erasmus, 2001, p.21).[10] Over time,

[9] In South African society there exists a pervading negative association between Coloured people, and men in particular, with criminality. In contrast to Coloured South Africans' representation in the country, Coloured people are overrepresented in the incarceration figures for the country. According to Africa Check, at the end of 2016, Coloured people comprised 18.2% of inmates in South African prisons (Makou, Skosana and Hopkins, 2017). In 2016, Coloured South Africans made up approximately 10.9% of the population (*Media Release: Community Survey 2016 Results*, 2016).

[10] As the research I have engaged with has showed, the geographic points of origin for enslaved people were even more diverse than Erasmus describes. Enslaved people also came from present-day Indonesia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Angola, among other places. According to Shell: "By 1660, all the major language groups of the world,

diverse slave communities in Cape Town grew even more diverse through relationships – consensual and non-consensual – with local and foreign people and became 'of' Cape Town and the Western Cape and yet remained othered through their statuses as unfree.

As Cheryl Hendricks describes, Coloured identity is "located in the interstice of white and black racialised social identities, … largely dismissed as a social construction of the Apartheid regime" (2001, p. 29). It is precisely because of this noted and inherent contestation and "dislocation" (Erasmus, 2001, p. 23) associated with Colouredness that the subject of Coloured identities brings about contentious debates concerning race, racialisation, culture, and belonging in South Africa in multiple fora that include academic, political, social media and popular media arenas. Coloured South Africans, through their exotification, exceptionalism, and in their embattled statuses as 'South African' groups, may be challenged by South Africans with stronger claims to indigeneity who claim they are 'not real South Africans', or, as Erasmus has described "blacks of a special type" (2001, p. 19). As the manifestation of the colonial encounter, Coloured identities are indelibly linked to early conceptions of whiteness, Blackness, and colonial panic concerning 'miscegenation' and racial purity (Hendricks, 2001, p. 29). Hendricks, like Wicomb, locates a pervading association with shame and 'miscegenation' at the heart of the "ambivalence" associated with Coloured identities (2001, p. 35). In my view, this ambivalence, by extension, accounts for the unstable position of slave histories and slave memory in South African society.

Because of their proximity to whiteness, contemporary Coloured identities – self-defined and racialised – are "entangled" in hierarchised, contingent forms of racial oppression (Erasmus 2001, 24). Returning to Rothberg's theorisation of the implicated subject offers a framework

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African (Bantu and Khoisan), Indo-European, and Malayo-Polynesian were represented … . South Africans began their colonial era with one of the most polyglot populations in the world …" (1994e, p. xxv).

to make sense of contemporary descendants of slavery racialised as Coloured, and their contradictory, conflicting participation in "histories and social formations that generate positions of victim and perpetrator" (2019a, p. 1). As Erasmus explicitly states, Coloured South Africans are also complicit in the "exclusion and subordination of black Africans" and the "discourse of racial hierarchy and its association of blackness with inferiority is mobilised by coloureds against coloureds as much as against black Africans" (Erasmus, 2001, p. 24). While Coloured South Africans did not create systems of oppression, they nonetheless "prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present" (Rothberg, 2019a, p. 1) through their "action or inaction" (Ibid). Their active disassociation – as a group – with Blackness perpetuates ideas concerning Black inferiority, as discussed by Wicomb (2018, p. 122) and Erasmus (2001, p. 16). Through "synchronic and diachronic implication", Coloured slave descendants "find themselves entangled with power and violence in both past and present contexts, the two dimensions or axes are in reality inseparable" (Rothberg, 2019a, p. 9).

More complicated still, is the incorrect and singular conflation of 'Colouredness' with slavery. These long-standing associations allow the majority of white South Africans to disassociate with histories of slavery as parts of their personal or familial histories. Further, because discussion of slavery is not integrated into discourses concerning settler-colonialism many white South Africans, and others who benefit from oppressive systems, do not perceive themselves as implicated in histories of slavery. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, it seems that personal historical associations with slavery in white communities are siloed to '*stammoeder* discourse' that does not account for histories of oppression and instead leans into over-identification with slave ancestry as a means of legitimisation. Such complications illustrate Rothberg's assertion that implication "emerges from the ongoing, uneven, and destabilizing intrusion of irrevocable pasts into an unredeemed present" (2019a, p. 9).

## Conclusion: care and responsibility

As seen in the examples of *Secretly I Will Love You More* and *Krotoa*, what may initially appear as recognition – when posited within the lexicon of reconciliation – can become contorted, manipulated into a reification of whiteness. Such examples demonstrate that frames of recognition and apprehension are not stable as they are "historically constituted" (Butler, 2009, p. 5) and politically motivated. This concerted lack of self-implication eschews the ethic of accountability described in Rothberg's theorisation of implication, and affirms his statement that "forms of implication are difficult to grasp" because "they are frequently rendered obscure by forms of psychic and social denial" (2019c, p. 8). In South Africa as it concerns enslavement, sustained psychic and social denial contributes significantly to a "history of harm" (Ahmed, 2004a).

In the absence of an "ethics of responding to pain" (Ahmed, 2004a) in relation to slavery's implicated subject**,** descendants are left to witness their ancestors' past experiences through strategies of their own making. Because the past's trauma is not resolved and **'**collective responsibility**'** has not been claimed, enslavement in the Cape – and in South Africa more broadly – is framed in historiographic practice as a fact about the past, as opposed to a legacy which people are living with. For South Africa to fully grasp the enormity of slavery, in my view, white South Africans in particular will need to recognise their current roles as "implicated subjects", as described by Rothberg. The depth of their implication reaches beyond apartheid and colonialism to 17th century enslavement, which may account for their lack of accountability in these structures: their implication is extensive and potentially overwhelming. To consider the implicated subject is to lay claim to an ethic of responsibility but also to move towards a collective inheritance of violent, traumatic histories.

What about thinking about enslaved people – particularly in South Africa – as being

descendant from multiple points of origin? Contrary to common perceptions and historiographic conventions, slave descendants are a heterogeneous category, and the history of enslavement is central to the historical formations of race and identity in South Africa. As elaborated upon by Zoë Wicomb, Coloured South Africans have infamously emphasised their European ancestors while ignoring their African ancestors (2018). It is imperative to reflect upon how the denial of Blackness within Coloured descendant community, in particular, has contributed to the historical erasure and invisibilisation of slavery in the South African imaginary. This would mean an interrogation of the racialisation of Coloured people and their simultaneous marginalisation and proximity to whiteness in the South African social hierarchy.

I am motivated by a possible future in which slavery's burden is not placed upon historically marginalised descendants alone but is claimed by all as a collective inheritance. Following Ahmed, I am led to act about that which is impossible to know (Ahmed, 2004a). I am mindful, too, that this 'collective inheritance' is not devised in the idioms of South African reconciliation but founded in the understanding of the impossibility of resolution:

> "It is a call for action, and a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one."
>
> (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 39)

In laying bare the complexity of South Africa's origins, we can begin to "attempt to do justice to loss" (Nash, 2019, p. 103). As Ahmed posits, "each encounter reopens past encounters"

(2000, 8). Thinking about the meeting of the Coopers in Central Park in 2020, as seen in the following Vignette *The Descendants*, each Cooper responds to the other based upon an experience of fear and exclusion: Christian Cooper recognises that Amy Cooper may actively choose to discriminate against him and records their interaction; Amy Cooper recognises Christian Cooper as 'stranger' and a danger, and escalates their encounter by calling the police. Amy Cooper's encounter with Christian Cooper is animated by her societal power over him, which she wields readily. In so doing, Amy Cooper situates the encounter in a "broader relationship… of power and antagonism" (Ahmed, 2000a, p. 8).

Vignette

# The Descendants

> "It was in the Ramble that the two Coopers' lives collided, an encounter that was brief but would reverberate in New York City and beyond, stirring anguished conversations about racism and hypocrisy in one of the nation's most progressive cities."
>
> (Nir, 2020)

On Memorial Day 2020, in New York City, two strangers encountered one another in the Ramble, a 'semi-wild' section of Central Park. Christian Cooper, then 57, and Amy Cooper, then 40, happened upon each other while Christian was birdwatching, and Amy was walking her dog. Christian is Black. Amy is white.

These identifying details are relevant because Amy's dog, a cocker spaniel named Henry, was unleashed in a protected area of the Ramble, a sanctuary for wildlife in the city. Christian asked Amy to leash her dog. Amy refused, and Christian said that "he would give the dog treats to draw the animal away from her" (Nir, 2020). Affronted by Christian's request, and agitated by their conversation, Amy threatened to call the police and shortly thereafter, did. Christian, aware of the possible trajectory of such encounters – and the wilful misinterpretation of a Black man's actions or intentions – video recorded the entire interaction on his cell phone.

As Amy dialled 911, she said: “I’m going to tell them there’s an African American man threatening my life” (Nir, 2020).

The incident happened to fall on the same day as the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by policeman Derek Chauvin. As both stories reached viral and global exposure, commentators would draw direct correlations between them: the continuum of the fatal inhumanity of anti-blackness perpetuated by the American state and the commonplace nature of everyday racism.

Journalists were quick to state that, despite their shared surnames, nothing bound these two individuals together.

> “(Mr. Cooper and Ms. Cooper are not related.)”
> (Bromwich and Shanahan, 2021)

> “Around the same time, Amy Cooper, 40, who is not related to Christian Cooper, left her apartment on the Upper West Side at the edge of the Hudson River.”
> (Nir, 2020)

Cooper is a common surname. According to forebears.io, Cooper is the 27th most common surname in England and the 8th most common in Liberia. A cursory glance at notable Coopers on Wikipedia reveals a vast swathe of individuals across geography, time, and predominantly within the realm of the former Commonwealth. Cooper denotes an occupation, a person who makes or sells barrels, casks, or tubs:

> “The name is also local, from Cupar, a town in Fifeshire, Scotland, which is derived from Cu—pyre, the inclosed fire, or Co, high, a beacon fire, or signal on the coast for ships. Pyre, a beacon fire, on a high place, is the origin of the word pier, a wharf or landing—place for ships; Danish, pyr and fyr, a lantern; πυρ, Greek, a fire; the whole landing—place in time was called the pier.”
>
> An Etymological Dictionary of Family and Christian Names (1857) by William Arthur cited in https://forebears.io/surnames/cooper
>
> (Surname, no date)

Owing to the ubiquity of these items, their making and selling, any number of people may have been given the last name ‘Cooper’, much like other English names like ‘Smith’ or ‘Baker’. But, as the frequency of Cooper in so many different parts of the English-speaking world demonstrates, genealogy is but one way for a family name to live on.

But – what if we were to take seriously the conception of a broad and sprawling genealogy? What if we were to ‘make legitimate’ the shadow family of slavery – and by extension, the possibility of kinship, albeit distant, between Coopers, between people otherwise seen as strangers?

For these purposes, that Amy immigrated to the United States from Canada, that Christian’s family came from Long Island are not obstacles to their connections. Christian and Amy’s stories, their family stories, and *their* histories, the coincidental irony of their shared name, elucidates some link – however tenuous – to a shared ancestry.

But in their meeting at Central Park's Ramble, they *are* strangers. As becomes immediately clear, there is no possibility that Amy, in any way, recognises Christian as kin. In this collapse in time, everything that has led the Coopers' presence to that same section of the park – Amy's life experience, her ancestry, her raced and gendered being; Christian's life experience, his ancestry, his raced and gendered being – results in Amy's denial and disavowal of Christian, her quick disdain, her fear; and then, the weaponisation of that fear. Amy does not see Christian at all, but rather, his race and gender, and overriding every other detail about him (his birdwatching binoculars; the dog treats readily at hand) are her perceptions, her reality.

Chapter 3

# Legacy and disavowal: slavery, the family and sexual violence

## Introduction

The violent intimacies within slave-owning households deeply unsettled colonial and indigenous notions of family, lineage, and kinship in the VOC-era of enslavement at the Cape of Good Hope. The slave-owning household was central to the organisation of the settler colony; a societal shift that began when enslaved people were transported to the Cape following Jan van Riebeeck's arrival in 1652. Historiography focused on enslavement in South Africa from the 1970s onwards reveals a lasting preoccupation with the ideas concerning family and the matter of genealogical legitimacy as it concerns status and rank. This preoccupation is common for several reasons. As Shell has described in detail, the possibilities of manumission for enslaved people were predicated on one's parentage and "social descent" (1994, p.375). Further, the fears concerning 'miscegenation' and 'racial purity' that plagued VOC society would come to define apartheid and contemporary South African society, as will be discussed. The exploration of historical interpersonal relationships in slave-owning households opens a discourse concerning questions of belonging and exclusion, marginality, and power. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 and in the vignette, *The Descendants*, the dynamics of these family formations, free and unfree, continue to reverberate in inter-personal and structural manifestations today.

For scholars invested in the experiences of enslaved women, the domestic milieu is a recurring setting as enslaved women's labour, by and large, was directed towards maintaining settler-colonial domestic life (Mason, 2003a, p. 90). As described by Robert Shell (1994d), Patricia van der Spuy (1996), Kerry Ward (2011; 2012), John Edwin Mason (2003a), and others, the organisational unit of the slave-owning family was an enduring cornerstone of colonial settler society in which patriarchs presided over their kin, land, and holdings as effective "state[s] in miniature" (Lichtenstein in Mason 2008, p. 68). Through an exploration of artistic and imaginative responses to the life experiences of enslaved women within South African history, I contend that the continuation of gendered and sexualised violence in contemporary South Africa is a living legacy of enslavement. I draw correlations, as posited by Zoë Wicomb (2018), Gabeba Baderoon (2014d), and Pumla Dineo Gqola (2015a), between the histories and ongoing legacies of racial-sexual oppression and the overwhelming absence of knowledge and understanding regarding slavery in South Africa in the public imagination.

Speculative and artistic methods, in conjunction with the application of Black feminist theory, offer space to explore the conditions of enslaved women's lives productively. This interdisciplinary approach, as explored in Chapter 1, is best positioned, in my view, to build upon the archival and historiographic record to account for the traumas and losses produced by the system of enslavement. When employing the strategies of speculation in informed and ethically-minded ways, the archival codes that rendered enslaved women and their contributions invisible can be countered sensitively and productively. From this interdisciplinary point of departure, the life stories of well-known historical figures can also be re-appraised.

To these ends, I consider the shared lives of Krotoa and Ansla van Bengalen. Krotoa was an indigenous woman of the Goringhaicona who became famous as a translator and 'cultural broker' following the settlement of the Dutch East India Company; and Ansla van Bengalen, one of the first enslaved and manumitted women at the Cape who inhabited the Fort de Goede Hoop around the same time as Krotoa in the mid-1650s. I discuss the life stories of Krotoa and van Bengalen using Saidiya Hartman's strategy of critical fabulation to re-examine the historiographic record and re-assess the hierarchies of this knowledge from the perspective of the present (2008). In my application of this methodology, I draw together sources and ideas to "loop the strands" left open by absence, silence, non-reportage (2008, p. 12). I also discuss South African contemporary artist Gabrielle Goliath's ongoing performance work *Elegy* (2015-), with specific emphasis on two iterations of *Elegy* that commemorated the lives of Louisa van de Caab (2018) and Cornelia van Piloane (2019). For these iterations, Goliath collaborated with historian Saarah Jappie to commemorate Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane, both of whom were enslaved women murdered by their romantic partners in the 18th century.

Within their roles as integral, yet obscured figures in the domestic familial scene, enslaved women worked within their masters' households to cook and clean, look after their masters' children, and elderly family members. They provided sustenance, nurturing, and comfort for others, while they remained unfree. In recorded cases, the hyper-controlled nature of enslaved women's time and labour was to the detriment of their own children and families (Mason, 2003a, p. 92). What are the implications of the slave-owning household and familial organisation and their frequent collisions with rape and power-laden sexual dynamics? Baderoon links histories of sexual violence during slavery, and the culture of silence around such violence, to the contemporary crisis of rape culture in South Africa (2014d, p. 83). In

her essay ‘Sexual Geographies of the Cape: Slavery, race and sexual violence’, Baderoon asks: “What is the relationship of slavery to sexuality?” (2014d, p. 83)

In responding to these questions, I am invested in how these conditions of “enforced proximity” (Macharia, 2019, p. 1) within slave-owning households produced, in the words of Shell, “[the] relationships that … profoundly shaped South African … society” – a blueprint for interpersonal dynamics of the free and unfree (Shell, 1994d, p. xxvi). Exploring the domestic reality of enslavement is a means to offer specificity to a history that is poorly understood and frequently overlooked, and further, historically contextualises South Africa’s contemporary gendered and sexualised violence crisis in critical ways. I am interested in the ever-present, yet hidden gendered, enslaved individual subject in archival and historical discourse who figures as a recurring disruptive force because their presence troubled colonial anxieties concerning ‘racial purity’, settler security, respectability, and rank (Mason, 2003a; Stoler, 2010).

I take up the mantle posited by Baderoon that “the scale of such violence under the founding social system of slavery in South Africa demands sustained scholarly attention” (2014d, p. 84). It is here, in this articulation of “property … in a thoroughly libidinal economy” that the divergent histories of the “American grammar book of the flesh” and the South African settler colonial story are most closely and deeply aligned (Weheliye, 2014a, pp. 96–97). It is also here, in the early 17th century, that formulations of forcibly, and in some instances voluntarily, culturally blended communities begin their contested relations to the Cape’s arable land, and the beginning of long-standing inter-familial dynamics of disavowal, rejection, and co-dependency in matters of violence, labour, land, and intimacy.

Since the late 1990s, feminist scholars have directly linked white interest in genealogy to claims to land and belonging in post-1994 South Africa. This phenomenon has manifested in staking claims to Krotoa and enslaved women of the same period who are understood as *stammoeders* or "foremothers" of South African society (Coetzee, 1998, p. 115; Samuelson, 2007, p. 19; Gqola, 2010e, p. 111). Purportedly one of the most written about women in South African history (Samuelson, 2007, p. 15), Krotoa lived in service to Commander Jan van Riebeeck and his family at various junctures of van Riebeeck's ten-year tenure at the Cape. Seeing that many other indigenous women and their enslaved counterparts remain largely unknown, I consider on what basis marginalised women – indigenous, enslaved, or indentured – from the historical record are brought into spaces of commemoration. I explore what happens when we begin to imagine other kinds of kinship links to women from the past that are not predicated on our personal investments in belonging or biological genealogy (or, what K'eguro Macharia has termed a "genealogical imperative" [2019, p. 7]). In seeking to elucidate the details of enslaved women's lives, and to connect with histories of enslavement, I argue that *Elegy* (2015-) constitutes an invaluable contribution to contemporary slave memory in South Africa.

## Krotoa and Ansla van Bengalen, *stammoeders* in the 'Mother City'

The Fort de Goede Hoop, built in present-day Cape Town in 1652, serves as a marker of a false 'beginning' of South African colonial history — a socially and politically uncertain period of encounter, conflict, and struggle. It is a site in which both myth-making and mystery are continually reproduced: the myth of the 'start' of European engagement at the Cape of Good Hope, a contested region of colonial conquest since the 16th century, and perhaps more accurately, a place of mystery in that, despite first Cape Commander Jan van Riebeeck's diaries and his recorded letters to Amsterdam and Batavia, no one can know for certain what took

place in those early years outside of a European perspective. These historical experiences are largely unrecoverable, as is the Fort itself, which was demolished in 1674 and replaced in function by the Castle of Good Hope, which still stands today. I propose a reading of the Fort as a de facto *household*. In contradiction to a consideration of the Fort as only a VOC stronghold, or a place of settler-colonial administration, I invite the reader to consider the Fort as a place in which free and enslaved people lived and worked in the process of establishing the European settlement. Within this framework, I return to the lost space of the Fort de Goede Hoop to explore questions of households and kinships within both formally recognised formations and more imaginative, speculative possibilities, drawing upon the work of Hartman (2008), Yvette Abrahams (1996), and others.

While 1652 was not the 'beginning' of South African history, colonial or otherwise, it is nonetheless significant as the start of a set of interpersonal, domestic dynamics produced by the introduction of slavery by the VOC. Robert Shell, in his landmark study of slavery in South Africa *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838,* asserts that the domestic, slave-owning household is a neglected scene in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relations, power, and hierarchy during South Africa's early colonial period (1994d, p. xxix).

Both van Bengalen and Krotoa occupied space within the Fort roughly within the same period, from 1657 into the 1660s. The young girls lived in service to Dutch Commander Jan van Riebeeck and his family at various junctures of van Riebeeck's ten-year tenure at the Cape, and, in the centuries following, each would be claimed by various groups as a "foremother" or "rainbow Mother" of South African society (Samuelson, 2007). As Abrahams states in the opening lines to her important and provocative paper 'Was Eva Raped? An Exercise in Speculative History':

> "I chose to work with Eva's story for a number of reasons. She was aptly 'first woman' because her experience of colonialism was later to be repeated by thousands of Khoisan women. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to begin with her life."
> (Abrahams, 1996, p. 3)

I would like to carefully note that I do not situate van Bengalen and Krotoa together to draw direct points of comparison between them. Rather, their concurrent situating is an opportunity to explore the many concurrent social and legal statuses of women from different backgrounds of the period; to parse through ideas around their parallel experiences and public statuses of exceptionalism (particularly within the tropes of South African exceptionalism), and to reveal the possibility of other modes of relational orientation beyond the interest or scope of the colonial diarist, such as van Riebeeck. In popular conceptions of South African history, Krotoa is generally understood as an important person in indigenous history and a go-between the indigenous Khoekhoe and the VOC delegation, owing to her adept skill with languages. As a central participant in a deeply fraught political conflict, Krotoa's story is frequently characterised as tragic (Elphick and Giliomee, 1979, p. 187). Simplistically, she has been framed as a person who lived 'in-between cultures'; unable to cope with the shifting social circumstances of her life.[11] This mediation of her story has meant that Krotoa has been subjected to seemingly unending scrutiny by her contemporaries, historians, detractors, and admirers – even in death. She is also characterised as a "mother" of early South Africa, a deeply gendered archetype, laden with its own nationalist ideological burdens (Coetzee, 1998; Samuelson, 2007).

[11] This is the primary narrative of the full-length South African feature film *Krotoa* (2017), directed by Roberta Durant. One of the taglines for the film reads: "Caught between two cultures about to collide".

In contrast, Ansla van Bengalen's story is not widely known amongst the South African public, although she too is considered a foremother of South African society (Gqola, 2010e, p. 126). However, van Bengalen appears frequently in anecdotal fashion within published histories on the early VOC Cape as an exceptional figure of the period; as a landowner and entrepreneur whose children would marry into Cape European society (Böeseken, 1977a; Shell, 1994d; Du Preez, 2008; Schoeman, 2009; Malan, 2012; Newton-King, 2012; Ward, 2012). A.J. Boëseken's commentary on van Bengalen in her landmark book *Slaves and Free Blacks at the Cape* was particularly informative in my reading of her role in the social ecology of the early VOC settlement. Boëseken notes the "perfectly natural way in which she fitted into a white community without disregarding the friends she had made when she was still a slave" (1977b, p. 81). This reading of van Bengalen's seemingly 'successful' adaptation to the tumultuous environment of Cape VOC society brought about the work *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016), which I produced during my fellowship at the Institute for Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town in 2016.

Stitching these anecdotal pieces of her life together from Boëseken and other historians, in combination with archival research, I created a speculative historical walking tour in which I explored van Bengalen's unstable relations to power during her lifetime. The walking tour aimed to complicate ideas concerning self-determination and implication (after Rothberg (2019c)), cognisant that van Bengalen's story, and her family's ascending social mobility in the 17th and 18th centuries, ran parallel to the early years of the VOC settlement at the Cape. In this site-specific performative work, I invited members of the public to join me in a walking tour of historic inner-city Cape Town. (I discuss this work at length in Chapter 5.)

The 'mother city' figures in this historical scene are frequently characterised as pioneers and colonial ancestors to the country as a whole. In post-democratic narratives of South African

history, this ‘start’ is a scene ripe for projection and re-imaginings of the fantasy of origins (Samuelson, 2007, p. 15). It is therefore necessary and, in my view, ethically appropriate to re-evaluate how and why we return to these figures and to establish alternative modes of engagement with their histories that are self-reflexive and transparently constructed, following Hartman’s criticality of the epistemological weight of the colonial archival record and the researchers who interpret it (2008). The audacious thrust of this intellectual pursuit is the opportunity to explore the generative possibilities of Krotoa and van Bengalen’s imagined shared space; their witnessing of and participation in the rapidly changing circumstances of the self-contained, precarious environment of the early VOC settlement, located disruptively in the middle of a long-established grazing route posing a direct and existential affront to the Khoekhoe (Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith, 1998, p. 21).

Van Bengalen and Krotoa’s shared inhabitancy of the Fort have never been placed directly alongside one another in historical accounts. However, in realising van Bengalen’s proximity to Krotoa, van Bengalen became real, the shape of her life came into sharper focus, and the stakes of *their* living were made all the more tangible. Van Bengalen was no longer a singularly anecdotal figure, but rather, something of a fully formed woman living alongside – or at least, physically near to – another woman of public and novel stature. Van Bengalen’s challenges, while not entirely comparable to Krotoa’s, could be contextualised within a more complex system of political domination.

In reflecting upon this critical juncture in South African history, I draw correlations and distinctions between myth-making as revisionist historical propaganda and the work of speculation, fiction, and, artistic interpretation as a feminist tool for the recuperation – however incomplete – of lost histories and unrecorded experiences. I am compelled to explore these speculative dynamics of the Fort as domestic household as a way of asking: what were the

social conditions in which people did or did not survive enslavement? And, in what ways did gender, racial difference, and legal status shape the experience of kinship within the Cape of Good Hope as a slave society?

So let us return to van Bengalen and Krotoa's timeline and, what I would argue, may have been a particularly crucial period of their lives. Their paths could have first crossed in February of 1657, when van Bengalen arrived at the Cape on the ship *Amersfoort*, captained by Pieter Kemp, following her capture off the coast of Bengal (Boëseken, 1977c, p. 9; Upham, 2014, p. 2). Slavery at the Cape was not yet sanctioned by the VOC, but a number of officials obtained enslaved people for their personal use and in the conventions of this practice, van Bengalen was sold from Pieter Kemp to Jan van Riebeeck (Böeseken, 1977a, p. 79).

By this time, some five years into van Riebeeck's role as Commander at the Cape, Krotoa had had extensive engagement with the VOC, although she was likely only 15 or 16 years old. According to V.C Malherbe, in the book titled *Krotoa, called 'Eva'* (1990), Krotoa began working for the van Riebeecks as a young girl, possibly at around the age of ten. Jan van Riebeeck's wife, a French Huguenot woman named Maria de la Queillerie, had recently given birth and Krotoa was brought into the household to help care for the new baby as a diplomatic arrangement between the VOC and the Khoi. This account, however, is challenged by Abrahams who suggests that Krotoa may have been kidnapped in 1652 in a skirmish on the Salt River, and remained at the Fort until 1653 until being rescued by her clan following the murder of a VOC employee by the Khoekhoe, the first recorded murder by the Khoekhoe that century (1996, pp. 13–14).

The Fort was an unusual and singular structure of its kind on the Cape landscape — a lone symbol of van Riebeeck's vision of colonial strength. The VOC's presence was thus a

threatened one, and many of the decisions the VOC officials made were in response to anxieties about their unstable position. Further, the Fort building itself was vulnerable to the harsh Cape elements, and was in constant need of repair (Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith, 1998, p. 19). Slaves, van Riebeeck contended, were needed to grow the settlement (Böeseken, 1977a, p. 5). The VOC's Heeren XVII refused his numerous requests for slaves until 1658, and prohibited the enslavement of the Khoekhoe, who refused to work for the VOC and were needed to maintain access to the area's resources.

Van Bengalen formed part of a very small group of enslaved people held at the Fort, until a large group of around 174 enslaved people arrived on the *Amersfoort* in 1658. Their presence in the Cape was clandestine, as the *Amersfoort* pirated a slave ship en route from Angola to Brazil (Shell, 1994c, p. 78). The 174 people who arrived were part of an original group of 250, of which most survivors were either young children or ill, meaning they could not be put to work immediately. Further, 'the best' enslaved people were ordered to be sent to Batavia, leaving 125 remaining people (Boëseken, 1977c, p. 11). Shortly after the arrival of the Angolan enslaved people, a number of them deserted the settlement. Accused of collusion in the freeing of the enslaved, the Dutch kidnapped Autshumato, Krotoa's uncle (and initially the primary interlocutor between the VOC and Khoekhoe), who would be held hostage at the Fort for over a year.

In this period, Krotoa had since returned to 'work' at the Fort as a diplomatic envoy and was involved in high-stakes negotiations directly with van Riebeeck and others concerning the VOC's growing settlement and permanence in the valley (Malherbe, 1990; Abrahams, 1996). She is noted as speaking Dutch well by van Riebeeck in 1657 (Van Riebeeck in Malherbe 1990, p. 14), and is described by Malherbe as a "cultural broker" during the hostage crisis working across vastly divergent epistemic paradigms (1990, p. 1).

While Krotoa is recorded in reported speech, van Bengalen's record 'goes dark'. Van Bengalen was formally enslaved and had no real legal standing. Krotoa was still technically free, but this status was complicated as her clan's existence was contingent on the success of her negotiations with the VOC, and her continued engagement with them meant that she was increasingly vulnerable to the nature of the VOC's power dynamics. That Krotoa had close and extended contact with the van Riebeeck family and others at the Fort since childhood likely compounded these factors.

All the while, van Bengalen and the other 'household' enslaved people were maintaining the interior Dutch life of the fort in direct service to van Riebeeck and other VOC officials and employees. Although silent in the record, she was presumably privy to intricacies of these cataclysmic social changes surrounding the settlement, whilst adhering to the expectations of an enslaved woman in the Fort.

Employing the tools of critical fabulation, I imagine Krotoa's frequent and noted presence in the Fort; that she was known to everyone who resided there owing to her important role in political life in and around the settlement. Rather cinematically, I imagine that van Bengalen may have worked wordlessly in the background during heated negotiations for Autshumato's release, ignored by van Riebeeck in life, just as she was in his logbooks. It is tempting to imagine that van Bengalen and Krotoa exchanged words or knowing glances as they passed one another in a doorway, or in the courtyard. As Krotoa publicly bartered her knowledge, perhaps van Bengalen was gathering information of her own, plotting her next movements — the ideal course of action under the circumstances. The number of enslaved people, their living conditions, and their roles may have been of great importance to Krotoa and the Khoekhoe; proof of the horror that could befall them should things go badly.

The arrival of the 174 Angolan enslaved, as we know now, escalated the VOC-Khoekhoe conflict (Malherbe, 1990, p. 16; Abrahams, 1996, p. 54), and following the VOC's approval, a steady stream of slave ships would soon arrive. From 1658-1808, Robert Shell estimates that some 60 000 enslaved people would be brought to the Cape, forever changing the social dynamics of the settlement and indeed, South Africa (1994g, p. 40).

## Creating family in the early VOC colony

I wonder how van Bengalen and Krotoa personally negotiated their shared knowledge of others in bondage who ran away, while they both remained so entangled in the affairs of the VOC. These existential, life-altering events in rapid succession, produced shifting points of re-orientation. In caring for the van Riebeeck children and in proximity to the young captured enslaved children from Angola, they undoubtedly had first hand experiences of the discrepancies in the value of life. Did their pregnancies and the birth of their children in this environment produce more acute negotiation with living and survival? (Here I think specifically of what Toni Morrison poses in *Beloved* [1987], and Yvette Christiansë in *Unconfessed* [2006].) What plans and decisions would need to be made to ensure a life made liveable (Macharia, 2019, p. 3)?

Van Bengalen herself would have three children born and freed from slavery, one child following her manumission, and seven children inducted into European society as a result of her marriage to Dutchman Arnoldus Willemsz Basson in 1669 (Robertson, no date). The conflicting accounts of her children's parentage prior to her marriage to Basson – fodder for genealogists online – both obscures the troubling possibilities of how such children may have been conceived and

diminish van Bengalen's personal calculations in her navigation of her situation.[12] In *Following Ansla van Bengalen*, I was intrigued and attentive to the ways in which van Bengalen's presence, life choices and offspring produced social complexity in the early Cape. It felt significant to ask the following questions in a quasi *in situ* imagining of her inhabitance of the city:

> "… I am led to wonder how this family … complicated these very strict ideas of ethnicity, race, or culture. I also wonder about the way that Ansla herself managed to weave through all of this and perhaps even discount some of these ideas."
> (Soudien 2016)

I wondered out loud how exactly these dynamics were negotiated in the mid-seventeenth century knowing what modern South African society would become, and how central race would come to define social relations.

Krotoa would also marry a European associated with the VOC, a Danish surgeon named Pieter van Meerhof in 1664, noted as the first Christian marriage at the Cape of Good Hope between an indigenous person and a European (Malherbe, 1990, p. 48). According to Malherbe, during her marriage to van Meerhof, Krotoa had three children, two born prior to their marriage, and one child following it (1990, p. 44), although accounts on their parentage differs. When Yvette Abrahams asks whether Eva was raped – note that she does not specify by who – she speaks to the vulnerability of Krotoa in the Fort, but equally, the recognised use of rape as a colonial tool for subjugation and control. Rape, as theorised by Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010d, 2015b),

[12] Böeseken describes van Bengalen as arriving with her husband, Domingo, and three children (1977c, p. 9). Mansell G. Upham disputes Domingo's identity as van Bengalen's husband, stating that "[n]othing in the records searched substantiate such a claim" (2014, p. 2). The uncertainty surrounding Domingo's identity brings into question the parentage of her children prior to her marriage to Arnoldus Willemsz Basson.

Gabeba Baderoon (2014d, 2014c) and others, is described as being bound up with the practice of colonialism; a mechanism that exerts and enacts domination upon those rendered most vulnerable. Regarding slavery, Zoë Wicomb has written about the manner in which sexual violence under these conditions – and the progeny of slavery – reproduces and maintains generational shame in its descendants (2018).

I also raise the subject of rape and sexual violence in this context in relation to the limited recognition of family formations under Cape slavery. VOC policy actively disrupted biological family formations in favour of, what Stoler has called, the creation of "white prestige" (2010, p. 54). As an inherited status, slavery was maintained through the maternal line (Shell, 1994d, p. 33). By means of sexual violence or otherwise, sexual relations between enslaved women and free men – primarily European – produced the creation of "shadow families" as described by Hortense Spillers (Spillers, 2017). These families, racialised as other, as not human, sustained the primary, "official" slave-owning family through their labour and produced the primary family's wealth. The shadow families were (and are) disavowed despite shared surnames/family names denoting a cohesive family unit. In South Africa, as a result of this sustained, intergenerational familial rejection, Wicomb has described a near absent slave folklore in the slave descendant imagination (2018, p. 122).

Noting this, and the complexities of the free/unfree dichotomy, historians such as Böeseken have noted the sustained relationships van Bengalen maintained in her life as a free woman (Böeseken, 1977a, p. 23). Following her manumission in 1666 and her departure from the Fort, the colonial record notes her attendance at numerous baptisms of free and unfree individuals. Notably, Anna de Koningh, the most famous of her daughters, would go on to marry Olaf Bergh, inheriting the estate Groot Constantia and, as a result, a great many enslaved people who resided on the property too (*Groot Constantia*, no date).

As it pertains to Krotoa's life, Abrahams asks us to trouble what has been frequently described as a life lived "between" cultures (1996, p. 3). In the literature much is made of the donning and casting off of European and Khoi attire as symbolic of a perceived cultural tension (Malherbe, 1990, p. 8). Krotoa's eventual reliance on alcohol, and the removal of her children from her care later in life is moralised as a sign of her poor state of mind and social alienation from both groups. I, like Abrahams, would argue that these instead reveal to us something far more complex: a response to the catastrophe of her environment. Reconsiderations of Krotoa, van Bengalen, and their life histories, fundamentally concerns what agency could possibly mean in a society in which enslavement could thrive. Further, to what extent both women, in their marriages to European men at strategic junctions in South African colonial history, were their experiences any different from the thousands of enslaved and indentured women throughout the slave-owning period, as Abrahams refers in her aforementioned essay, 'Was Eva Raped?'

Returning to the Fort, as witnesses *and* participants in the changing landscape of the new settler society, I am curious about the impact of these quickly shifting circumstances on the women's psychologies – for Krotoa, as a woman who was born and had lived in the Cape all her life; and for van Bengalen, a woman with the living memory of her home, culture, and the Indian Ocean's middle passage. I remain curious about Krotoa and van Bengalen's decisions about their allegiances; their capacities to have hope for better lives for their children – at great personal cost – and their difficult, seemingly contradictory positioning in proximity to colonial power. In this vein, I problematise questions of 'agency' and 'resistance' to make space for what Alexander Weheliye has described as, "miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life …" (2014a, p. 12).

Questions concerning interiority and subjectivity of enslaved women also preoccupy Goliath and Jappie in *Elegy*. The stories of Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane are introduced through the archival court records of their violent assaults. However, as demonstrated by Goliath and Jappie in *Elegy*, there is deliberate work enacted to refuse violence as the singular, defining moment in the lives of the commemorated. In *Elegy*, the archive is a site of contention and its interpretation a site of generativity, demonstrating that new understandings about enslaved women contribute towards the development of slave memory among the living.

## *Elegy*: Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane

> "And so I ask: could you have seen any of this coming? What were your final thoughts? Did you ever dream of your mother's Malabar? What used to make you smile? And did you ever feel free?"
>
> (Jappie, 2018)

*Elegy* is an ongoing, long-term performance work that commemorates individuals fatally affected by acts of gendered and sexualised violence. In the words of Goliath, the performance is:

> "[s]taged in various locations, each performance calls together a group of female vocal performers who collectively enact a ritual of mourning, sustaining a single haunting tone over the course of an hour."
>
> (Goliath, no date)



Fig. 3.1

Gabrielle Goliath, *Elegy – Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube,* Centre for the Less Good Idea (2018)

Photograph reproduced courtesy of the artist.

Beginning in 2015, *Elegy* focuses on women and LGBTQ+ individuals; people within South African society who are rendered vulnerable to the machinations of rape culture. The work is located within a lexicon of Black feminist praxis that recognises the raced and gendered intersections of Black, brown, female, and genderqueer subjectivities in the matrix of marginalisation; a framework articulated by Gqola's theorisations on rape culture in her book, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015b). *Elegy* is iterative and each staging of the work follows a structure that commemorates a different person, and involves a different group of performers. Each iteration features a dais, which directs the movement of the singers, and a spotlight, as seen in the photographic documentation of *Elegy – Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018) in Fig. 3.1.

Prior to 2018, *Elegy* primarily commemorated contemporary individuals. As was explained to me in a personal interview with historian Saarah Jappie, when the opportunity to stage an iteration of the performance at the Slave Lodge in Cape Town arose, Jappie suggested to Goliath that the performance centre around the story of an enslaved woman (Jappie, 2022). The decision to commemorate an enslaved woman within the context of Elegy's contemporary commemorations powerfully speaks to Saidiya Hartman's reflection upon slavery as "open, unfinished" and effectively places history and the present moment in dialogue (2022a, p. xx). It is important to note that Jappie has slave ancestry, as shared with me in our interview, and the name 'Goliath' itself is a recognisable slave name, much like 'Adonis', 'Appollis' or surnames signifying months of the year (Mason, 2003a, p. 85).

Goliath invited Jappie to collaborate with her on the Slave Lodge staging of the work, which formed part of the 'Under the Cover of Darkness' exhibition, curated by Carine Zaayman. Jappie engaged with both the published historical record and the archival record to identify a person who could be commemorated and based upon this research. Following this search, Jappie

chose Louisa van de Caab, a woman who was murdered by her romantic partner on a farm in the Tygerberg in 1786 (Jappie, 2022). The court documents related to van de Caab's murder were recorded, transcribed, and translated in the volume *Trials of Slavery: Selected Documents Concerning Slaves from the Criminal Records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705-1794* (from here on *Trials of Slavery).* Van de Caab was in a relationship for four years with an enslaved man working on the farm named Ceres van Madagascar. There were rumours circulating that van de Caab "goes with other *jongens*" meaning that she was unfaithful to him with other men. This accusation was posed to van Madagascar by another enslaved man, April van Ceijlon. In the court records the men are described by the terms "first prisoner" – van Madagascar; and "second prisoner" – van Ceijlon. The following is an excerpt from the account of van de Caab's murder as published in *Trials of Slavery*; an account that demonstrates the strange immediacy of the record:

> "That, nonetheless, when they had finished their work in the cellar in the evening, the time being already 8 o'clock, the first prisoner, feeling jealous because of what he had been told, went through the back door into the kitchen, where the second prisoner was already present, and the aforesaid woman slave Louisa was busy preparing tea for her owner's children; and, coming into the kitchen, the first prisoner went directly and with a smile to the said Louisa, without saying a word to either the *meijd* or to the other slaves present in the kitchen and, taking her by the hand, took her thus with him from the kitchen through the back door to the outside …"
>
> (Groenewald and Worden, 2005b)

The court record retains curiously intimate details from van de Caab's last moments with her attacker and lover that are described – frustratingly – in both evocative and threadbare terms.

These are some of the details that Jappie notes in her eulogy for van de Caab; that he took her hand to lead her from the kitchen to talk outside; the description of the shape her lifeless body made on the ground; and their shared physical movements as they moved around the homestead. Such impressions made in the moment of living reach us, the contemporary reader, some 250 years later.

The eulogy text is part of each iteration of *Elegy*. However, when concerning a person who passed away recently, or within the last few years, the text is written by someone who knew the deceased; typically, a family member, or loved one. In the case of van de Caab, Jappie fulfils this role, attending to van de Caab's state of mind in her final moments and the unreachable expanse of her interior life, her life story, and history. As will be discussed, Jappie employs strategies of speculation to signal to the reader and audience member that the horror of van de Caab's end is not the complete or definitive story about her life. Working with the impossible, irreconcilable reality of knowing the bare facts of her demise, yet never knowing the entirety of her story, everyone present is invited to enter into a state of relation with the "absent present" (Goliath, no date); a tethering that appears to be experienced most of all by the participants in the performance itself.

For the singers, the toll of *Elegy* is physically and mentally exhausting. As the work commences, one becomes attuned to the variations in the singers' voices; the resonances and timbres produced by their vocal instruments. The longer the performance continues, their vocal qualities become noticeably strained and, at the very end, almost ragged. Their breathing, which was previously undetectable, interrupts the tonal continuity of the single note held between them. What was an unnerving, seamless ringing becomes distressing to witness as the singers begin to reveal the discomfort of the performance's duration on their faces. Although far less physically consuming, the demand placed upon Elegy's audience members is multi-fold, as

Jappie states in her reflections as an audience member of *Louisa van de Caab*'s commemoration:

> "*Elegy* also requires a level of endurance from its audience: to be present, to hold space, to remember. And mostly, to sit with discomfort: that of the commemorated individual's story and the violence that ended their life (which audience members learn about from the written eulogy circulated in advance), and of bearing witness to this kind of mourning."
> (Jappie, 2022, p. 31)

The single, sustained note enlists the audience members into a meditative state that, over the course of the hour, leads the mind to far-reaching places: the imagined, inaccessible life of the person lost, one's own past, and the immensity of the emotional state of mourning brought on by a crisis that is expansive and seemingly never-ending. What becomes apparent in the duration of the performance is that the audience's temporary discomfort is entirely incommensurate with the experiences of the deceased individual. In the internal negotiation of this fact, audience members are thus drawn into relation with the 'absent presence' of the commemorated person; someone who is very likely a stranger to them. It is within this bounded arena for grief that Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane were commemorated in 2018 and 2019, more than 200 years after the events of their passing.

*Elegy* demands that we consider how we (indeed, who are 'we'?) make sense of the traumas experienced in other people's lives. In her essay 'This song is for… Inhabiting the scratch, performing the rhapsodic', Goliath reflects on another of her works titled *This Song is For…*

(2019-), a work that explores the aftermath of rape through a "return and reperform[ance]" of the dedication song, (2022, p. 45) in which Goliath calls for "an alternative ethics of empathic response" when one encounters another's pain (Ibid, p.49). What does it require, as posited by Jappie, when one is asked to "sit with discomfort" (2022, p. 31), grief, and the pain of another? What does it mean to mourn someone who one doesn't know, or could never have met? Reading *Elegy* within the deeply interconnected contexts of South Africa's history of sexualised and gendered violence *and* slavery is pivotal because, to varying degrees, South African society has struggled – and continues to struggle – to contend with the enormity of their disastrous impact on the psyches of individuals and communities. Very unfortunately, feminist scholars have shouldered the burden of illustrating the temporal and socio-political links between historical gendered and sexualised violence borne from slavery and contemporary rape culture. Because of this, gendered and sexualised violence is not widely understood as a living legacy of enslavement.

As a country with one of the highest rates of rape and sexual violence in the world, the South African government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have launched numerous public health and advocacy programmes to clearly describe the prevalence of the gendered and sexualised violence crisis. The 'One in Nine' campaign, for instance, began in 2006 to support survivors of sexual violence and "develop innovative strategies for mobilisation and mass action" (*One in Nine Campaign*, no date). The phrase "one in nine" references the frequency of women who report cases of rape to the South African police. Of the other commonly (and publicly) used statistics is "every three hours a woman is murdered" (*Gender Based Violence Fact Sheet: South Africa*, 2021). These orders of scale synthesised for the public are designed to help people understand their proximity to risk; or, to help survivors to feel recognised in the sea of statistical data. Such tactics are purposefully shocking for those who struggle to distinguish individuals from the "mass" of numbers and aims to humanise the scale of gendered

and sexualised violence towards a single, seemingly more comprehensible life.

Statistical data has been conducted on several facets of enslavement in South Africa. There is worthwhile data regarding the rate of enslaved people's arrival, their places of origin, and gender among other concerns. However, enslavement's scope and impact remains challenging for the general public to grasp. Thus, the focus on individuals, an emphasis that favours exceptionalism by design, becomes an important method through which the public learns about its collective past. Stories about Krotoa, Louisa van de Caab and others, become a necessary entry point into a vast and overwhelming history. Yet, what about 'ordinary' people? This leads one to question how the efforts to remember exceptional, economically successful, tragic, or spectacularly marginalised people enable the public to consider how the majority of others affected by this history are perceived in their contemporaneous contexts?

## Rape, disavowal, and shame

The struggle to articulate the appropriate positioning of slave histories, and their complexities, has meant that slave memory itself is fragile, tenuous. As a result, descendants of the enslaved themselves encounter institutional and familial barriers in the commemoration of the enslaved. Zoë Wicomb, in her essay 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa', discusses what she believes to be the primary reason for the "erasure of slavery from the folk memory" (2018, p. 122). The awareness of violent, illicit sexual histories in the settler colony and the fraught relationship of these relationships and encounters to the enslaved, Wicomb suggests, has produced widespread inter-generational shame in descendants, particularly. The compounding impact of this shame has far-reaching implications that range from the loss of cultural heritage to a lack of historical understanding:

> "This failure or inability to represent in popular forms, and consequently the total erasure of slavery from the folk memory, has its roots in shame: shame for our origins of slavery, shame for the miscegenation, and shame, as colonial racism become institutionalised, for being black, so that with the help of European names coloureds have lost all knowledge of Xhosa, Indonesian, East African, or Khoikhoi origins."
>
> (Wicomb, 2018, p. 122)

In feminist discourses concerning slavery, both in South Africa and in the United States, there has been significant scholarship on the subject of rape, sexual assault, sex work, and the connected subjects of interracial marriage, concubinage, and a plethora of other intimate and sexual arrangements.[13] In colonial societies throughout the 17th and 18th century, sex and sex acts (as they were perceived contemporaneously) were codified as a means of developing control of settler, Indigenous or 'native' and enslaved populations when they were at the greatest risk of overlapping. As Stoler, Wicomb and others have established, this "risk" was a colonial anxiety around miscegenation and the societal complications or "perversions" these unions would produce (Stoler, 2010; Wicomb, 2018). However, such laws were mutable and subject-position specific, penalising Indigenous or enslaved men and women to different degrees for liaisons with European men and women, while, at various times, permitting or excusing European men's sexual activities with Indigenous and enslaved women. As remarked upon by Stoler, in the Dutch East Indies European men were, at particular periods in the settler colony's history, encouraged to cohabitate with Indigenous women (but not marry them), as this

[13] For colonials in nineteenth century Dutch Indies, Ann Laura Stoler asserts, no other topic was as consuming: "Colonial observers and participants in the imperial enterprise appear to have had unlimited interest in the sexual interface of the colonial encounter. No subject is discussed more than sex in colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster racist stereotypes of European society" (2010, p.43).

promoted stronger roots in the new settlement and may have prevented men from returning to the metropole prematurely (2010, p. 48).

Gqola's theorising around sexual domination operates in tandem with the project of colonial subjugation and is a useful framework through which to consider systems of trauma and memory within the context of slavery in South Africa, and elsewhere. Rape, as Gqola states, "has also been central to the spread of white supremacy, and to the way race and racism have organised the world over the last four hundred years" (2015, p. 21). In this vein, I foreground slavery's role in deploying or tacitly condoning sexualised and gendered violence throughout the colonial era and the ways in which these normative orders have informed institutionalised structures of oppression.

The Slave Lodge, established in 1679, became a beacon of this sanctioned 'blind eye' at the Cape. The Slave Lodge was built to house the VOC's enslaved people or 'Company slaves' who inhabited the building until 1806. Functioning as a public museum today, it is one of the few institutions which expressly and explicitly commemorates the history of slavery in Cape Town. Numerous accounts of the Slave Lodge have noted its overcrowding, the spread of illness, poor living conditions, as well as the development of its own services, such as a school and hospital (Shell, 1994b, p. 251). Located directly next to the Company's Gardens, the first NG Kerk in South Africa, and the town's hospital, the Slave Lodge was at the centre of the Dutch colonial town.

Atrocities took place frequently at the establishment. Imbalanced gender ratios (or "sex ratios" as they are referred to and discussed in Chapter 1) in the Cape meant that there were many men and few women in the settlement, except at the Slave Lodge where there were "many times more adult women than the other slave populations at the Cape" and from 1655-1714 the

lodge housed “the largest number of unattached women in the male-dominated Cape” (Shell, 1994d, p. 71). As a result, the Lodge became the Cape’s “most famous brothel” for an hour each night, when the lodge’s enslaved men were scheduled to transport “the town’s slurry to the beaches” (Ibid).[14] According to Shell, Slave Lodge officials themselves were operating this business (Ibid).

Dutch official High Commissioner van Reede tot Drakenstein visited the Cape in 1684, which was then under the governance of Simon van der Stel. Upon his inspection of the Cape under the instruction of the Heeren XVII, van Reede was reportedly angered and scandalised by enslaved people’s living conditions and the state of enslaved women’s vulnerability to sexual relations with European men:

> “Further investigation brought to light that although there was a law forbidding sexual intercourse between white men and female slaves, the Placcaat was ignored to such an extent that everyone with van Reede had discussed it seemed to think that concubinage with a slave was tolerated by law.”
>
> (Böeseken, 1977a, p. 45).

Following his visit, van Reede outlined new rules for obtaining freedom for the enslaved people owned by the Company (which did not necessarily apply to privately owned enslaved people), stating that no slave should live without the hope that he might one day be free. Enslaved people with white fathers automatically became free after the ‘age of discretion’; for men at age 25 and for women at 22 (Böeseken, 1977a, p. 81).

[14] See my analysis regarding Patricia van der Spuy’s analysis of Shell’s conceptions of gender and power in Chapter 1.

Some one hundred years following van Reede's visit to the Cape, the troubling dynamics between enslaved women and free men continued, seemingly unabated. The Slave Lodge is the scene for the second iteration of *Elegy* to focus on an enslaved woman; a commemoration of Cornelia van Piloane, a woman enslaved by the Dutch East Company and resident of the Slave Lodge. In 1766, van Piloane attempted to end a long-standing relationship with Carel Boom, a Dutch man and "portier" at the Slave Lodge, whose "job it was to remove the key each night as a precaution against arson attempts by the inmates" (Groenewald and Worden, 2005a, p. 423). The account from *Trials of Slavery* appears at first to be entirely engrossed with the fact of Boom's suicide and his punishment:

> "… as an example and deterrent to other God-forsaken scoundrels, that the body of the port of the honourable Company's slave lodge, by the name of Carel Boom, who took his own life miserably with a pistol shot early during the night yesterday, be buried under the gallows by the executioner, since this self-murderer had at first, a moment before killing himself, shot a woman slave of the honourable Company by the name of Cornelia van Piloane …"
> (Groenewald and Worden, 2005a, p. 424)

However, as Groenewald and Worden note, it is unclear whether the outrage from the court was because he had committed suicide, or because he had attacked an enslaved person from the Company. The editors surmise that both crimes likely impacted the severity of his punishment (Ibid). Cornelia van Piloane, although her death was not recorded, very likely passed away after the events of 1766, seeing that the surgeon indicated that her wounds "may well become fatal" (Ibid). A week prior to this violent attack, when van Piloane had tried to end their relationship, Boom struck her hand with a knife. Van Piloane protected Boom

and claimed that the wound was an accident caused by cutting cheese (Groenewald and Worden, 2005a, p. 425).

The iteration of *Elegy* commemorating Cornelia van Piloane took place in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, at the 2019 Afrovibes Festival. Recalling the abject horror of the Slave Lodge, a site of sanctioned sexual violence, in Amsterdam is a powerful and purposefully uncomfortable statement about the ubiquity of gendered and sexualised violence that existed under the gaze of the Dutch East India Company and everyone who lived at the Cape. As shared in our interview, following the confirmation of Amsterdam as the location for this iteration, Jappie chose to focus on Cornelia van Piloane's story because it was important to share an account of violence enacted by a Dutchman as a means of reminding Dutch audiences about their histories of violence in the VOC empire (Jappie, 2022). Traversing the urban and the rural in both women's stories, *Elegy* effectively speaks to two key interrelated environments experienced by enslaved women: the domestic slave-owning household and the domestic life of the Slave Lodge.

## The making of Cape Town and the foundations of violence in South Africa

In the formation of the slave-holding farm or urban homestead, the free and the enslaved lived in close proximity to one another where they occupied, although not necessarily lived, in the same quarters. As Mason clearly explains, in the etymology of the word 'family' is the organisational structure of all those governed by the *paterfamilia* which "originally refer[red] to a household's slaves" (Mason, 2003a, p. 70). The dominance of the family as governing and organisational structure within the era of enslavement in the Cape is well-recognised and has become something of an entry point to discuss patriarchal power relations and

resistance within the period (Shell, 1994d; Mason, 2003a; Samuelson, 2007; Ward, 2011). The family, its longevity, and the question of 'origins' remains an enduring preoccupation (some might say 'obsession') that continues to perpetuate heteronormative conceptions of legitimacy and inheritance in post-1994 and contemporary South Africa.

Through sexual encounters between slave masters, their children, other free settlers, and enslaved women, new families in biological relation to slave owners and the slave-owning class were created. While the archive has noted that not all sexual encounters between enslaved and free people were entirely non-consensual, I am of the view that the conditions created by enslavement could not produce equitable nor reciprocal relations between enslaved and free people, as seen in the previously discussed case of Cornelia van Piloane and Carel Boom. The "chaotic intimacy" developed between enslaved and free people, as termed by Mason, was developed by sustained power imbalance in the extreme (2003a, p. 79). As described by Mason, slave-owning households were marked by conflicting, twin dispositions that of familiarity and deference produced by wanton discipline and punishment (2003a, p. 83).

Baderoon in her book *Regarding Muslims*, describes at length the erotic framing of enslaved women in the eyes of European men (Baderoon, 2014c), and Mason writing in 2003 and Gqola in 2015, [15] come to similar conclusions about the availability of enslaved women and Black women to sexual violence:

[15] I would like to note Danielle Bowler's long form article 'Regarding Lady Skollie's 'Bound'', in which she discusses sexualised and gendered violence and enslavement in relation to Lady Skollie's 2020 exhibition 'Bound' at Everard Read in Cape Town. Bowler insightfully analyses Skollie's work in dialogue with the scholarship of Gqola and Baderoon, in addition to a personal interview with Gqola reflecting on the importance of Baderoon's work (2020).

> "And because they were slaves, they were available as sexual partners. To put it another way, their relative powerlessness made it difficult for them to remain unavailable."
> (Mason, 2003a, p. 94)

> "The same white supremacy that constructed the stereotype of Black man as rapist, created the stereotype of Black women as hypersexual and therefore impossible to rape. Making Black women impossible to rape does not mean making them safe against rape. It means quite the opposite: that Black women are safe to rape, that raping them does not count as harm and is therefore permissible."
> (Gqola, 2015, p. 4)

In *Trials of Slavery*, stories like Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane's recur. As previously discussed, in the VOC Cape, legal measures were established to prevent sexual relations between European men and enslaved women and yet such relationships continued throughout the period of enslavement. While the rape of a European woman by another free man or enslaved man was considered a crime, no laws criminalised the rape of enslaved women (Mason 2003, p. 96). Supporting this, reflecting on the nineteenth century specifically, Mason and others have detailed the ways in which slave owners and their wives openly encouraged European men visitors to have sexual relationships with the enslaved women of their households as a means of furthering their "stock" (2003a, p. 94).

Generationally, as Hortense Spillers describes, the "shadow families" of enslavement are born; families entrapped in bondage without the legal status or claims of the slave-owning family. Within these shadow families – and amongst the living descendants of slavery, I argue – lie the absences and chasms of knowledge, history, and lineage. It is within these

families that the legacies of slavery are either wilfully forgotten from generation to generation, or the tenuous memory of enslavement is kept alive. When histories of enslavement are shrouded in shame, as Wicomb posits (2018), slave descendance is tainted by perceptions of a sordid past; a past which is “shadowy” and clandestine – something not fit for public discussion (Spillers, 2017).

These limited conceptions of enslaved women and their sex – whether used for violence or reproduction – prevents the conception of enslaved women’s lives in the breadth of their realities, even imaginatively. Mason, in his work with the Protectors’ Office archives, has done considerable work to demonstrate the determination of enslaved people to advocate for themselves, their families, and friends which, consequently, reveal extensive and long-lasting networks of kinship and support. *Elegy* thus offers new life to the narratives of women which are, by virtue of their authors, solely preoccupied by the spectacular aspects of their life stories. Through an ethically engaged method of historical speculation, we are afforded a glimpse into the life that was.

## No Resolution / Conclusion

Evident within Jappie’s eulogies for Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane is ambivalence — a lack of certainty. Jappie’s texts reveal, rather vulnerably, her position and the inaccessibility of each story and the life told within it. As Jappie is a trained historian, this transparency upends how we consider history writing; writing that has the power to influence how people understand the events of the past. As readers, audience members are clued into the decision-making processes faced by researchers in interpreting historical data. Jappie reveals her uncertainty in her own storytelling, speaking to van de Caab directly:

> "I will tell you what they say happened to you. And I will wonder if you find these reports accurate. Or even surprising? It was the 20th of February. Your mother, Sanne, related [in a Malabari accent?] that it was eight o'clock in the evening. You were in the combuijs, warming water in the tea kettle, to bring to the master's children upstairs. Ceres [did you love him?] entered and, without saying a word, [but did his eyes speak to you?] he grabbed your hand and took you outside. [What did it feel like when he grabbed your hand? Was there an urgency? A warmth?] You never returned."
>
> (Jappie, 2018)

Reading the entries from *Trials of Slavery*, I am struck by the affective nature of the documents; what they can and cannot convey through text, as well as the outrage and moral indignation of the chronicler, the judge. It becomes immediately apparent that the heft of the punishment brought upon the accused is understood as proportional to their crimes; that the severity of justice is designed to inflict humiliation and to erode dignity. I am also struck by the presence of the enslaved as the accused, as witness, as victim. Printed, transcribed, and translated here, their 'X' where they have marked their statements revealed that they likely could not read. An affective response to these court proceedings thus makes sense: the *Trials of Slavery* is a compendium of emotive scenes immortalised.

The historically framed individual, as Avery Gordon carefully states, is exceedingly delicate in this fragmentary form. More delicate still, is the process of drawing out details in the midst of archival dead-ends, and unreliable narrators (Gordon, 2008, p. 6). Extensive extrapolation is required on the part of the contemporary researcher to piece together the fractured

biography, which leaves the subject in question vulnerable to the projections and desires of the researcher themselves. In dealing with and managing the mediated perception of these important women, I, the scholar, am at risk of reproducing the colonial chronicler's gaze, and thus centring her presence against the backdrop of hegemonic European confines. Like Hartman, in reassessing the story of Venus from the archival record (2008), I am tempted to conjure a fictional relationship between Krotoa and van Bengalen: perhaps a comforting story of a sister-like bond; a kinship forged from dire circumstances.

Hartman tells us that in "trying to represent what we cannot" (2008, p. 13) we further expose the individuals of history to risk, to harm. And worse, Hartman cautions, if we attempt to devise some fable from these fragmented, historical narratives we belabour the dead and their legacies to our own ends. "[To] loop the strands" should not, as Hartman warns, be an attempt to find resolution (2008, p. 12). It is the perpetual "lack of closure" (Jappie, 2022) in enslaved women's narratives that elicits a desire for an impossible resolution. This commitment to the unresolvable, fragmentary nature of the marginalised historical figure disturbs the conventions of national narrative formation. It is the extractive attitude of 'something to be gained' that contorts historical figures into national symbols; that over-determines their life stories and forecloses meaning. In a post-democratic South Africa where slave history is either unaccommodated in the national narrative, or mythologised to political ends, I wonder what it would mean to make peace with "incommensurability" (Hartman, 2008, p. 12) and allow the dead their right to rest. The work Goliath and Jappie achieve in *Elegy* demonstrates how the "open, unfinished" (Hartman, 2022a, p. xx) nature of loss can be articulated through performance and self-reflective writing and research methods. Perhaps repair then lies within the attendance to Goliath's call for "an alternative ethic of empathic response" (2022, p. 49); one that does not place demands upon the dead, but rather, refuses the conditions of their recording, and indeed, a refusal to forget.

Vulnerability and self-introspection are brought about by the 'beautiful writing' and recuperative work of the project as a whole.

In the following vignette *Krotoa* (2017), I build upon the ideas developed in Chapters 2 and 3 to explore a popular media interpretation of Krotoa's life and interrogate the direct and indirect ideological messaging at the core of the film. I analyse how creative interpretations of the archival record can be weaponised to portray history as factual representations of the past. In Chapter 4, I shift towards colonial "technologies of visuality" (Mirzoeff, 2011a, p. 48) as a living legacy of enslavement and engage with the artistic strategies of Berni Searle and Bronwyn Katz in their contributions to contemporary slave memory.

Vignette

# Krotoa (2017)

Released in theatres in 2017, the feature film *Krotoa* was poised as a landmark moment in contemporary South African filmmaking. A period drama set in the Cape shortly after Jan van Riebeeck's arrival in 1652, and a South African-produced film centred on an indigenous woman and historical figure, no less, it was certainly something of a pioneer. However, the fictionalisation of history by the film's creators belied a greater purpose: the use of Krotoa's story to portray a romanticised version of a fledgling Dutch settlement and to offer a watered-down, colonial-centred narrative for its white audience.

It might be helpful to consider the role of the film's director, Roberta Durrant, and its writers, Kaye Ann Williams and Margaret Goldsmid, as creative conduits for history and history writing. In an interview in South African media trade magazine *ScreenAfrica*, Durrant discusses how she and the writers "created a narrative drama inspired by the facts" and while retaining these facts of Krotoa's life story, took "dramatic license" prompted by the "deductions made by various historians." Here, Durrant goes on record to iterate a commitment to "history", "accuracy", "research", and her right as an artist to interpret these findings. Still, while romantic in idea and noble in practice, not all conduits of history are good or ethical.

As detailed in a pointed and comprehensive critique by heritage activist Patric Tariq Mellet, originally published on Facebook on Women's Day 2017, much of the historical data illustrated by the film is false and misleading (Mellet, 2017). The film's tagline and primary

narrative conflict – “Caught between two worlds about to collide” – is at the heart of Mellet’s critique. So, too, is the fanciful composed representation of van Riebeeck’s VOC contingent set against the “traditional” and “tribal” portrayal of Krotoa and the Goringhaiqua. This overarching binaric thinking is perhaps best demonstrated by a selection of aesthetic choices made by *Krotoa*’s filmmakers.

The famous painting, *Landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652* (1852), by celebrated Cape Colony-era painter, designer, and cartographer Charles Bell, forms the basis of a watershed moment in the film. After six years of working as a servant in the van Riebeeck household since childhood, van Riebeeck offers Krotoa an opportunity to become his personal interpreter amidst ongoing conflict with the Goringhaiqua and disputes with Krotoa’s uncle and previous caregiver, Autshumao. Thus enters the fictionalised vision of Krotoa to find a “middle way” between the settlers and the Goringhaiqua in her role as linguistic expert and proto-diplomat. The role of interpreter, as conveyed in the film, is her choice to take.

After much tension and discussion, Krotoa agrees to become the personal interpreter to van Riebeeck. In her first assignment, the two groups meet — as the actors assemble into the composition of Bell’s painting — standing in opposition to one another. The primary difference in the film’s interpretation, however, is that Krotoa is placed between the parties, although perceptibly closer to her kin. As Mellet articulates, the egregious conflation the filmmakers create by using Bell’s painting in this context, is the 1652 landing of the VOC party and the negotiated meeting of these groups in the film, as if for the first time. Bell’s historical error, wilful or no, marks van Riebeeck’s landing as an initial meeting of indigenes and the VOC when, in reality, seafaring travellers had passed through the Cape for over 50 years prior.

The changing nature of Khoekhoe relations with newcomers is entirely absent from the film, as are the greater impacts of the well-travelled members of Krotoa's community such as Autshumao and Doman, who both spent considerable time in the Batavian Dutch colony. In the film, and the Bell painting, the Goringhaiqua become locked in time, never adapting, or shifting to the social and political forces which threaten their communities and ways of life. In essentially replicating the perspectives of the colonial lens and recreating, as Mellett notes, the trope of the "noble savage", the Goringhaiqua and the plethora of other indigenous groups are merely tragic figures in a storyline that will soon erase them. Their demise is framed as inevitable, even unavoidable, despite the ongoing activism of their descendants.

Van Riebeeck's depiction, too, paints a benign picture of the tactically ruthless, indicted historical figure. His own visage has been disputed, having taken on the image of another man in the public consciousness for over 300 years. In his most well-known *misattributed* portrait, painted by Dirck Craey in 1650, van Riebeeck possesses the seemingly timeless attributes of Western desirability. His hair is parted in the middle, he has a strong brow and large eyes; a clear, healthy complexion. He is also youthful, with an air of self-possession, his left hand gracefully reaching across his chest in a biblical gesture. Although unseen, his right hand appears to be resting on his hip – a power stance matched by his direct gaze.

This portrait was reproduced in numerous areas of public apartheid-era life, including coins, banknotes, and stamps. The portrait is now attributed to Bartholomeus Vermuyden, a fellow Dutch countryman with no known connection to South Africa (Rijksmuseum, no date). Although the mistaken identity of the Craey portrait has been known since at least the late 1980s, the filmmakers of *Krotoa* made a concerted decision to recreate, in moving image,

this desirable portrait of van Riebeeck; the portrait claimed, and mass produced by the white nationalist apartheid government.

Portrayed by Armand Aucamp, the self-assured composure of the filmic van Riebeeck stands in for the settlement of the VOC overall, when the reality was something far more teetering and crude. The VOC settlement in the 1650s was precarious, the VOC employees a motley crew of *de facto* indentured labourers from across Europe, some of whom would conspire to run away from the settlement with enslaved people and indigenous labourers (Ulrich, 2019).

In tandem with the decision to depict a desirable, young van Riebeeck, the filmmakers make the creative decision to develop fluctuating, and at times seemingly mutual feelings of sexual attraction between Krotoa and van Riebeeck, once she has become a woman. This sexual tension culminates in her rape and impregnation by van Riebeeck, a central plot point in the film, and the ultimate reason for her expulsion by the Goringhaiqua.

There is much to say about this fictionalised portrayal of Krotoa's vulnerability to sexualised violence. As articulated by Baderoon, South Africa's legacies of sexualised violence are historically linked to the violence experienced by enslaved women in the early VOC era (Baderoon, 2014d). The socially-accepted use of the slave lodge as a brothel, and the unchecked abuse by slave masters towards the enslaved women in the household, are among these widely-known abuses which were 'tolerated by law' (Boëseken, 1977b, p. 45). Knowing this and reading historiography critically alongside the work of Krotoa's biographer, Yvette Abrahams, leads one to conclude that the rape of Krotoa by van Riebeeck is not altogether impossible.

Abrahams, in her 1996 essay 'Was Eva Raped? An exercise in speculative history', draws upon contemporary understandings of the aftermath of sexual assault to suggest that Krotoa may have been suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These suggestions were made in close reading of van Riebeeck's journals, and his observations of her behaviour over the course of her servitude in the van Riebeeck household. Recognising that these kinds of readings are, as stated, speculative, Abrahams discusses the role of critically reading the archival record which was never designed to document Krotoa's humanity in the first place (1996, p. 4).

I pit this type of critical reading and speculative historical conjecture against the creative decisions made by *Krotoa*'s filmmakers.

In this imaginative retelling of the VOC's first two decades in the Cape, a change in commander leadership, and the re-establishment of VOC headquarters from a roughly constructed fort into the Cape Castle, slavery is but a minor background character – easily missed and otherwise negligible. *Krotoa* places the first enslaved people at the Cape in minor roles of the film, however their real names are used. Mellett raises the arrival of 400 Angolan slaves to the Cape in the early 1650s and the ramifications this had for everyone living in or near the settlement. Of all the major historical events chosen to represent this era, one begins to wonder whether the filmmakers had decided that the addition of slavery into the matrix was simply too complex for the film to hold, or whether the inclusion of slavery was incompatible with South Africa's so-called origin story.

The place of Krotoa as historical personality and 'exceptional woman' in the contemporary South African imaginary is complex, dynamic, and at once over-simplified. Much like the historical figure Sara Baartman, Krotoa's memory is frequently resurrected to satisfy a

national stance or a political theory. There are, however, a few aspects of Krotoa's personality and her skills which are deducible from the record: she was a gifted linguist, a person of tenacious spirit, and someone placed in profoundly life-altering circumstances from a tender age. Krotoa's 'downfall', as it is often referred to in both historical document and popular discourse, was produced by a difficult set of restrictions and punitive measures designed, in effect, to break her. Historians with less than sympathetic motivations have, over many decades, 'weighed in' on Krotoa's capabilities as a mother, the state of her mind, and an imagined sense of her cultural statelessness (Elphick and Giliomee, 1979, p. 187) that echo the VOC's erosion of Krotoa's personal dignity. On this score, the film tries its best to portray a 'complicated woman' beset by 'complicated circumstances'. However, Krotoa in her fall from grace, is still framed as a martyr for the filmmaker's desires. The conclusion of the film, a rather confounding epilogue, is the claim that Krotoa is the ancestor of several prominent white South African figures, including F.W. de Klerk.

Broadly speaking, the role of South African films in South Africa is a curious arena of media consumption to analyse. So few South African films ever get made that the pressures placed upon them are immense, particularly when their subject matter is rooted in a story of national importance. However, this observation does not absolve the film of its very real problems. In a healthier, more productive film industry, this would simply be another poorly realised period film among many others of varying qualities and strengths. Unfortunately, this is not the case. As viewers, historians, and writers, we must learn to accept that we will never truly know Krotoa, nor will we ever produce a document sufficient in representing her. However, there is still room within the discourse of her life for multiple, nuanced, and well-informed perspectives that draw upon both history and fiction. The responsibility of fiction, however, must be taken as seriously as the intricacies of history.

Chapter 4

# ‘In plain sight’: visuality and imaging enslavement’s violence

## Introduction

Slavery introduced extreme social stratification in the VOC-era Cape settlement. The judgment of “oversight” (Mirzoeff, 2011, p.50) in tandem with colonial technologies of visuality, produced all-encompassing schemas of authority. These authoritative modes of perception live on in the present, and yet, contemporary artists like Berni Searle and Bronwyn Katz have developed alternative visual strategies that trouble and refuse colonial visualities to evoke slave memory in the present. The ‘spatial aesthetic’ of the early VOC settlement’s organisation, from its infrastructure and architecture to the organisation and control of its inhabitants, formed the foundations for the successive systems of repression and classification developed by the British colonial and apartheid governments. I contend that these enduring systems constitute colonial “technologies of visuality”, following Nicholas Mirzoeff, and are the living legacies of enslavement that live on in contemporary Cape Town, and indeed, throughout South Africa.

Enslaved people contributed significantly to the development of Cape Town, its physical infrastructures, and its individual households, and yet, despite these major contributions, enslaved people occupy a diminished and near absent place in the Cape Town imaginary. This erasure of enslaved people’s contributions, I argue, is a result of proto and colonial

visualities; mechanisms of the early colonial settlement and later established colony which produced, in the words of Mirzoeff, “oversight” and the “ordering of slavery” (2011b). These regimes of perception, which emerged in the post-enlightenment establishment of aesthetics, as articulated by David Lloyd, produced “regimes of race” (2019b). Understanding these enduring contradictions, or “ambiguous visibilities” (Baderoon, 2014a) of slavery practiced at the Cape is at the heart of uncovering the genealogy of the Cape’s “colonial visualities” at play in the establishment of the settlement. Unpacking Cape Town’s selective historical amnesia becomes particularly salient when one considers, as Worden describes, that all living people in the settlement were aware of slavery, and by virtue of its ubiquity, participated in or interacted with the slave system in some way (Worden, 2016, p. 392).

Working from an interdisciplinary vantage point, I demonstrate how contemporary decolonial and Black feminist theory in dialogue with visual analysis can destabilise historiographic readings/accounts to expose the inner workings of authoritative modes of looking. I draw specifically from Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, and Rizvana Bradley and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s conceptions of modern-colonial aesthetics (2013; 2021), which, to borrow Mignolo and Vázquez’s phrasing (paraphrase) “capture sensory perception” (2013). I claim the stakes presented by both sets of authors in their assertion that modern-colonial regimes of perception shape aesthetics, but further, that aesthetics forms the basis for how the colonial world is organised and how everything (and everyone) within it is assigned value.

In her essay ‘Intimacy and History: the art of difference and identity in South Africa’, Gabeba Baderoon asks: “how we have been trained to look at bodies, their differences and their histories?” (2011, p. 75) Baderoon, as she has posited elsewhere, discusses how enslaved people and later on Muslims in the Cape were represented within the colonial landscape;

their deliberate marginal positioning, and the anaesthetic effects of beauty and the picturesque against the harsh, violent realities of enslavement (Baderoon, 2009). I argue and demonstrate how these nullifying strategies established the terms on which early constructions of race in the 17th and 18th centuries were established, drawing on Mirzoeff's theorisation of visuality and the "training of minds" brought about by persistent, learned modes of perception (2011c, p. 480).

Searle, in her bodies of work 'Colour Me' (1999), *Snow White* (2001), and Katz, in her exhibition 'Groenpunt' (2016), demonstrate how the colonial gaze can be refused and how the act of looking can be questioned altogether. In these works, particularly as they relate to early South African colonial histories of settlement and enslavement, both artists engage with the conundrum of exposing, revealing, or concealing historically produced trauma in distinctly divergent ways. These critical modes of remembering slavery work against and beyond colonial registers of visuality. Katz, for one, distinctly refuses representational modes that attempt to re-enact history and instead embraces alternative interpretations of abstraction to continue a contemporary practice of conceptualism – dubbed by Olu Oguibe and Salah Hassan in 1999 as "African Conceptualism" (2001) – exercised by Searle in the late 1990s.

Through a close reading of 'Colour Me', *Snow White,* and 'Groenpunt' I draw direct correlations between the artists' chosen modes of abstraction/conceptualism/ symbolism and the dearth of slavery commemoration in South Africa. I attempt to grasp and interpret the overwhelming, enduring influence of colonial-modern aesthetics to consider how enslaved descendants navigate the colonial gaze, contestations of personhood, and a sense of belonging in Cape Town in space and over time.

## Visuality as colonial technology

"Genocide, now as before, is an aesthetic project."

(Bradley and da Silva, 2021)

It is necessary to reclaim Cape Town as a 'slave town' or 'slave society' to intentionally reassess the role of enslaved people in the VOC settlement. I feel that it is important to clearly outline the 'terrain' of enslavement to guard against the diminished place of slavery in popular conceptions of South African colonial history. Following the logic of historical erasure, the presence of enslaved people, and the system of slavery could be perceived as marginal in the town, which Nigel Worden pointedly debunks:

> "The overwhelming predominance of colonial employees and settlers in the town, a large proportion of whom owned at least one slave, meant that Cape Town was every bit as much a slave society as its Indian Ocean counterparts."
>
> (Worden, 2016, p. 392)

The Cape of Good Hope, just as Batavia and Ceylon, was a slave society developed in the conventions of VOC settlements across the globe. As a multi-national corporation (not yet state), the VOC imposed its vision of a colonial settlement upon the landscape of the Cape through the construction of two major infrastructural developments: the Fort de Goede Hoop and the Company's Garden. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Fort was built upon Khoekhoe grazing lands and, as a result, disrupted seasonal cattle grazing patterns. Worden's historiographic accounts detail that, shortly following the Fort's construction in the 17th century, the Khoekhoe built dwellings against the walls of the Fort and led their cattle

through the Company's Gardens in acts of defiance; acts that demonstrate the great symbolic significance of these sites and the threat they posed to Khoekhoe life in the valley (1999, p. 75).

Worden has discussed how the structure of the Fort, and later, the Castle would dominate the physical landscape in ways hitherto unseen by the region (1999, p. 72). The permanence of the new Castle structure, and the increased infrastructural and economic investment in the settlement, mirrored the VOC's triumph over the Khoekohe in Table Valley:

> "By the 1670s the VOC was establishing a firmer presence at the Cape. This was marked by the defeat of the Khoi and their exclusion from the Table Bay hinterland, as well as the completion of a new stone fort in 1674 to replace the earlier stockade ... Not that attack was likely to be averted by such a shallow (and ill-constructed) moat, but all self- respecting European castles had to have one and the symbolism of a more permanent colonial presence was clear. … From the sea, the vista in which visitors first encountered Cape Town, the Castle dominated the landscape, a key building which impressed them the most."
>
> (Worden, 1999, pp. 75-76)

The settler transition from occupying land to defined landedness becomes central in VOC attitudes towards labour in the settlements, which was, by and large, supplied by the enslaved and indentured unfree work of various types (some penal, others less formal but de facto indentured labour, as seen in the case of Krotoa). In the period of VOC expansion and development, the very boundaries of the settlements were shifting, which, for VOC

colonials and Free Burghers, invited a plethora of fears around physical safety, racial purity, waning religious piety, and the morality of material excess (Ulrich, 2019; Schoeman, 2013; Böeseken, 1977; Schama, 1987). At the time of van Riebeeck's landing in 1652, the VOC had indeed dominated a great deal of the Indian Ocean world: its presence would become further imbedded in a complex system of seafaring trade that intermingled and built upon existing South and South East Asian systems of commerce and slave-trading, and according to historian Marcus Vink, established links between previously isolated communities and ports (Vink, 2003, p. 139).

For the VOC, settling on the shorelines of present-day South Africa, the Cape was the first frontier; the first obstacle to its interior. Dutch drawings and paintings of the natural world, as seen in genres of the landscape and the still life, were already operating in this period as imagined, real, or partial demonstrations of 'mankind's' domination over nature. Yvonne Brink, in her essay 'Figuring the Cultural Landscape: Land, Identity and Material Culture at the Cape in the Eighteenth Century' egregiously omits slavery from her discussion, but nonetheless provides worthwhile insights into the imagined dominion of the VOC over the Cape landscape and the reality of the settlement's social dynamics through early cartography (1997).

The ordered, geometric imaging of the erven and other land allocations in early 17th and 18th century maps, Brink argues, belied the conflict and chaos that land ownership brought about between the Company and Free Burghers throughout the period, and in the documentation of maps further eliminated "socially disrupted elements increased through time and included gender as well as class" (Brink, 1997, p. 106). Like the "impressive" presence of the Fort (and later, Castle) and the Company's Garden, the land developed by the VOC spanned the areas between the "Castle to the north and the Amsterdam battery to the south" appeared

on maps as the “perfection of the grid” (Ibid). This visual orderliness was only thus achieved through the “persuasive simplification of VOC maps” that excluded the domestic sphere (the realm of women, enslaved and free) and the VOC underclass, by omitting “the warrens of side streets and alleyways” (Hall in Brink, 1997, p. 106) and the eventual disappearance of reference to the “domestic sphere” in maps by 1786 (Ibid).

In many ways, the VOC-era appeared to be deeply preoccupied with the visual, both in its material culture and symbolism, but equally in its attempts to maintain social order through restrictions of material ostentation and expression (Schoeman, 2013). Throughout the VOC world, which extended from the Dutch colonies of India to Brazil, there existed strict sumptuary codes which attempted to control how people, according to their class and status of freedom, were allowed to dress, the vehicles they travelled in, and how many enslaved people were permitted to accompany a free person in public at any time, among numerous other policies and laws (Schoeman, ibid). This era of VOC visuality takes place in the midst of the establishment of an influential Dutch material culture of the so-called Dutch Golden Age, a celebrated artistic and economic period brought about by the successes of Dutch overseas expansion and unfree labour systems, and the subsequent creation of a wealthy mercantile class – what some historians define as the first bourgeois society (Protschky, 2011; Hochstrasser, 2000).

Writing in 1999, Andrew Bank and Gary Minkley comment on the dearth of research around visuality and spatiality in Cape Town, in their editorial ‘Genealogies of Space and Identity in Cape Town’ for *Kronos*:

> “But there is still very little analysis of visual perceptions of space. Town planning, of course, is partly constructed in terms of visual models and metaphors. But beyond

> the province of the technocrats of space, how was the city visualised? Lefebvre's idea of conceived space needs to be extended beyond the scientists of space, to probe the visual conceptions of space by other groups in different forms. … What is the genealogy of the spatial aesthetic of Cape Town created by colonial and modern artists, for example? … Histories of the city need to encounter visuality much more comprehensively and thoroughly …"
>
> (Bank and Minkley, 1999, p. 16)

Taking up the mantle raised by Bank and Minkley requires an exploration of the multi-faceted and didactic nature of slave-era visuality at work throughout the Dutch East India (VOC) settlements in the 17th and 18th centuries, and an interrogation of codified hierarchies of visual (and sensory) perception and organisation. A consideration of the visual, as opposed to the realms of the aesthetic alone, allows one to delve into the power given to visual perception in the organisation of space, movement, and human life. I purposefully use an expansive understanding of "the visual" that is not confined by the strictures of aesthetics, which, as da Silva and Bradley, and Mignolo and Vasquez describe, is entirely shaped by the hegemonic norms of modernity and coloniality (Bradley and da Silva, 2021; Mignolo and Vazquez, 2013). Further, I am acutely aware of the limitations of aesthetics and its discourses within the realm of art.[16] It is thus important to work with a different set of theorisations around the visual that actively engage with the politics of codified, racialised, and gendered recording, in dialogue with the spatial and the artistic.

[16] Discourses concerning aesthetics are limited by the realm of art because historically the study of aesthetics has not been interrogated politically. David Lloyd explores this in his book, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (2019a), in which he argues that the formation of aesthetics is indelibly linked to systems of racialisation.

## "Ordering of slavery"

The application of American visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff's influential text *The Right to Look* (2011c), is useful in considering the psychic effects of successive long-term racial segregation and land occupation practices in South Africa that defined people's social, educational, and spatial experiences. These practices, which were both proto-state (in the case of the VOC settlement) and state-sanctioned (in the case of apartheid), could be understood as contributing to 'national visual culture'. Built upon the foundations of colonial and imperial thinking, a colonial, 'classifying' visuality defined in this way can be considered in Mirzoeff's terms a "complex"; a "training of minds" and a "mental compliance" in which free and unfree people are consistently and relentlessly visually "read" by authority and one another (2011, p. 480).

Mirzoeff theorises visuality and the "ordering of slavery" from the vantage point of the Transatlantic slave trade and the introduction of the plantation system:

> "The visual deployment of visuality and visual technologies as a Western social technique for ordering was decisively shaped by the experience of plantation slavery in the Americas, forming the plantation complex of visuality. If it has often been claimed that modernity was the product of slavery, there has been insufficient attention to the ways in which the modern 'ways of seeing' also emerged from this nexus."
>
> (Mirzoeff, 2011, p.48)

For Mirzoeff, the developments of natural science, cartography, and the presence of the slave labour "overseer" in the sovereign colonies' plantations converge to produce what he terms "oversight" (2011, p.50). Oversight "created a regime of taxonomy, observation, and enforcement to sustain a visualised domain of the social and political that came to be known as 'economy'" (Mirzoeff, 2011a, p. 50). Mirzoeff definitively correlates the colonial 'ordering of things' with the organisation of the enslaved as 'things', and as 'property' (2011, p. 49). Here I draw correlations to Louise Raiford's formulation of "abstract personhood" and the hierarchisation of human life in relation to the presence of Blackness produced by enslavement in the Americas (2020, p. 80).

This wide-reaching and multi-tiered visual technology of surveillance manifested in analogous forms in the VOC's colonies, with distinct and important differences: the VOC colony was not a project of a monarchy but rather, a company and thus the VOC expansion was not formally ideological but from the outset, economic. Further, the enslaved were a culturally and 'ethnically' diverse group, originating from both African and South East Asian regions, producing in the settler-colonial imagination a complex and unstable hierarchy of differences that stemmed from perceptions around appearance, behaviour, inherent 'traits', and skills (Boëseken, 1977c, p. 13). Additionally, the plantation complex described by Mirzoeff is not easily translated to a Cape context. In the academic literature concerning slavery at the Cape, the organisation of the slavery system is rarely described as 'plantation' slavery for its entire duration. There were varying geographic concentrations of enslaved people between urban and rural contexts over the course of slavery's existence. According to Shell:

> "Throughout the period from 1652 to 1770, slaves were concentrated in and around Cape Town and the market centers of the interior. While the absolute number of

> slaves in the port was high, the percentage of Cape slaves living in the port slowly dropped as the Cape slave society changed from the household type of slave society to a more rurally based plantation system. The completion of the metamorphosis was interrupted by the externally imposed political event of emancipation …"
>
> (Shell, 1994f, p. 140)

Despite these challenges posed by the translation of Mirzoeff's theorisation of visuality, his provocation is nonetheless applicable and identifies the mechanisms at work in the Cape insightfully. Following Mirzoeff, it is my view that the presence of enslaved people and unfree labour fundamentally shaped how colonial visuality manifested in the Cape settlement. In my interpretation of the historiographic record, I claim the Fort/Castle, the Company's Garden, and the implementation of the VOC's urban planning among other examples, as early, pivotal examples of these "technologies of visuality", as they enforced systems of social hierarchy (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 48). I use these examples to think through how colonial visualities operated in service of a slavocratic, repressive society and yet simultaneously worked to erase or conceal slavery's mechanisms.

Where Mirzoeff frames the plantation 'overseer' as a surrogate for the sovereign, I find a comparable figure in the patriarch of the household or farm, following John Edwin Mason's thinking around the slave-owning household as a "state in miniature" (2003a) (discussed in Chapter 3). By this logic and on a different scale, officials of the VOC become symbols of the Company itself, who meted out its punishment on the Company's behalf. Indeed, the spectre of the Company within and on the margins of the Cape settlement loomed large. Much like on the North American and Caribbean plantations, spectacular, public violence was common-place and routinely exercised by VOC systems of regulation and justice, and all

inhabitants of the settlement were vulnerable to its judgement. As Nicole Ulrich has expounded, the quality of life for low-ranking VOC employees was akin to indentured servitude, thus troubling the dichotomy of free and unfree in crucial ways (2019).

Historiographic accounts of the VOC-era Cape frequently refer to a wide range of perverse punishments that, in my view, as discussed in Chapter 3, were "designed to inflict humiliation and to erode dignity." Executions took place outside the Castle walls, making plain to all able to see, the punishment capable by the VOC. The following passage, taken again from Worden, is indicative of the extreme, yet commonplace nature of violence to which all inhabitants of the settlement were subjected on a regular basis:

> "The association of this space with VOC authority was most strikingly demonstrated by the execution ground which lay outside the Castle walls, next to the road inland, **where the largest number of people would pass the bodies of those victims** who were left 'exposed to the air and the ravages of the birds' in the formulaic words of their sentences. Lesser offenders were often sentenced to stand on the scaffold, sometimes with a rope around their necks: **the shame of being thus exposed at this site being suitable punishment**. **Deserter soldiers ran the gauntlet of their regiments on the parade ground outside the Castle**. Some offences had other specific places of punishment. Homosexual couples were tied together with leads on their feet and ceremoniously drowned in the harbour, their offending bodies entirely removed from the settlement.
>
> At the upper end of the town lay a different symbol of Company assertion over landscape: the garden."
>
> (Worden, 1999, p. 76) (Emphasis mine)

This relentless, unsolicited exposure to others' suffering was thus institutionalised by the VOC and the sight of others in pain was punishment not only for the offender but by proxy, the public as well. Noting that enslaved people outnumbered free people for a significant period of the VOC settlement (Shell, 1994a, p. 4), this form of public indignity was designed to keep the inhabitants of the town in their designated stations. When the same crimes were perpetrated by enslaved people and so-called free individuals, the violent punishment faced by enslaved people was significantly worse. As seen in particular examples in the edited volume *Trials of Cape Slavery*, for enslaved people public punishment could be followed by incarceration on Robben Island, "hard labour in chains", or continued labour in an enslaved status (Groenewald and Worden, 2005c). This brutal history stands in direct and, according to Baderoon, intentional contrast to the visual logic of the picturesque.

In the latter part of the 18th century, Cape Town's beauty thus becomes a backdrop for a new story; a physical geography upon which the hopes and aspirations for a transplanted European society were projected and manifested, and where its moral quandaries and transgressions could be lost to time. Under these conditions, in avoiding the difficulty of slavery, the Cape could operate as a type of settler colonial paradise. While Baderoon's period of focus dates from the late 18th century into the 19th century, an era somewhat outside of my period of study, this period saw the creation of paintings that retrospectively 'documented' important historical events in the Cape's founding. Well-known 'historical paintings' such as Charles Bell's *Landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope* (1852) combine landscape and the fictional historical reimagining of the exact moment of encounter between van Riebeeck's party and a group of indigenous Khoekhoe negotiators, as discussed in the vignette *Krotoa* (2017).

When discussing the living legacies of European settlement, I am led to consider the role of

fantasy in the colonial conceptions of land and its labouring. It is useful here to return to poet and theorist Baderoon in her descriptions of the mechanism of distraction through the preoccupation with Cape Town's physical beauty and how it operates as an ongoing act of erasure. As Baderoon elaborates:

> "The colonial city represented in such picturesque painting was founded on slave labour, but these views of Cape Town also rendered that labour invisible. … The nineteenth-century panoramas of the Cape painted from Signal Hill directed the gaze away from the sea toward the city with its detailed divisions, the looming height of Table Mountain with its crags and hiding places, and the bodies whose signs of labour or leisure signalled whether they were slaves or slave-owners."
>
> (Baderoon, 2009, p. 90)

These representations correlate directly, as Baderoon suggests, with the perception that slavery at the Cape of Good Hope under the VOC was "not as bad" as elsewhere (Baderoon, 2009), and thus the visual depiction of the slavery era represents a genteel colonial citizenry and a landscape unsullied by the unsightliness of hard labour. The representation of labour is incompatible with the picturesque in that it presents a "problem" within the formulation of the visual logic of the colonised landscape (Baderoon, 2009). The preoccupation with the geography's beauty thus becomes an authoritative mode of looking – a mode of colonial visuality – in which labour is decompartmentalised to successfully produce 'the picturesque'. Because labour (and hard labour, specifically) can be wilfully and selectively divorced from representations of landscape, Cape Town spatially becomes apolitical and therefore unsullied by the unsightliness of slavery.

I argue that the Cape's populace was trained to see violence as normal and seeing that shame itself was used as punishment ("the shame of being thus exposed at this site being suitable punishment" [Worden, 1999, p. 76]), meant that suffering was not spectacular, but over time became an innocuous aspect of daily life. Further, the deployment of the picturesque genre supported the conception of slavery as 'minor', 'marginal', or 'benign' in an environment where the psychological toll of extreme, endless violence was never accounted for. Where enslaved people's personhood was diminished it logically follows that their contribution was diminished, and thus becomes the 'norm' or 'common sense' upon which further harm can be extended, as it was by British colonialism and apartheid (Wynter and McKittrick, 2015, p. 11).

Building on my theorisation of Sara Ahmed's "stranger" in Chapter 2, the body "out of place" (2000b, p. 21) in the colonially demarcated landscape demonstrates the role of sight, seeing, and collective assumptions about the desirable norm in assessing which people belong and do not belong (2000b, p. 30). Looking for the stranger is a mechanism of daily, endless surveillance that, in the context of Cape Town, continues a practice of systemic and inter-personal surveillance and exclusion that has taken place in the city since the 17th century; a colonially produced technology of visuality that illustrates Mirzoeff's phrase "training of minds" (2011, p. 480).

The products of these visual technologies and strategies have manifested in the contemporary moment in the 'hidden' yet ever present place of enslavement in South Africa. Nearly all traces of 'excess flesh' have been erased, and descendants of the enslaved, such as 'Malay' and 'Coloured' people, are depicted through a new set of tropes that are, in effect, disarming. These de-escalating images undermine the reality of enslavement and acts of violent rebellion in the Cape. From the 19th century onwards 'jolly', docile images of 'Malay'

and ‘Coloured’ people contributed towards the positioning of historically marginalised descendants as strangers in the settler-colony. Seemingly out of place, these figures are thus made exotic in the landscape while European settlers are consciously granted unconditional belonging.

## ‘New’ visual strategies

> “To talk about South African art in the twenty-first century means to talk about colonialism, slavery and apartheid, and about the views of race and sex emerged from them.”
>
> (Baderoon, 2011)

Following the diminished place of slave histories in South African public life and in the South African national narrative, enslavement does not appear very often as subject matter in South African contemporary art. Few artists have dealt directly with the legacies of enslavement,[17] and even fewer have engaged the colonial gaze or unsettled the questions concerning visuality/ies in the modes hitherto discussed. Hence, I draw our attention to the work of Berni Searle and Bronwyn Katz. Searle and Katz, in my view, symbolically represent two nodes in a ‘lineage’ of avant-garde South African art. Again, these two artists are not situated together to figure as points of comparison, but rather, to demonstrate a developing trajectory of conceptual art emanating from South Africa; they form part of what could be described as a ‘wave’ of critically engaged conceptual art practice.

[17] Among these examples include Sue Williamson’s mixed media installation *Messages from the Moat* (1997) and the site-specific public sculpture *Memorial to the Enslaved* (2008) by Gavin Younge and Wilma Cruise, as discussed in the Introduction.

Berni Searle, born in 1964 in Cape Town, is a deeply influential figure in the South African contemporary 'art world' and her exhibition 'Colour Me' (1999) and performance work *Snow White* (2001) could be seen as canonical within performance art practice in the country. Searle's career took off in a 'post-1994' moment, following the lifting of international sanctions which prevented South African artists from participating in exhibitions or programming abroad. South Africa's art communities drew international attention with the staging of 'Trade Routes: History & Geography', the 2nd Johannesburg Biennial curated by the late Okwui Enwezor, in which Searle presented *Com-fort* (1997) in an exhibition titled 'Life's Little Necessities' at the Castle, Cape Town, curated by Kelly Jones. The video and performance work *Snow White* (2001) was shown in the group exhibition 'Authentic Ex-centric, Conceptualism in African Contemporary Art' curated by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe at the 49th Venice Biennale, a prestigious and historic international art event hosted every two years in Venice, Italy.

'Groenpunt' was Katz' first solo exhibition at blank projects, a contemporary art gallery in Cape Town, in 2016 at the age of 23, shortly following her graduation from the Michaelis School of Fine Art (where Searle was also educated and would go on to teach). Katz quickly established herself as a distinctive voice in abstract sculptural practice, in addition to developing performance-oriented video works, in a mode not dissimilar to Searle, with widely exhibited works such as *Grond Herinnering* (2015). Around the time of her public debut, the University of Cape Town, among other South African higher education institutions, were in the throes of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, a national student movement which questioned, among other issues: the legacies of colonialism in university curricula, institutional racism, academic and financial exclusion, and sexual violence on campuses. While I am mindful of potentially circumscribing Katz' practice, the salience of these themes are nonetheless evident throughout her work, which I will explore in greater detail.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Searle participated in the international art scene among very few African contemporary artists when African art in general was not widely exhibited. By the mid-2010s, African art's place within the commercial art market and prestigious art institutions had changed considerably. Since the beginning of her public art career, Katz has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with a great number of African artists from South Africa and elsewhere on the continent, exhibiting frequently in international exhibitions, biennials, art competitions, and art fairs. Most notably, she has staged solo exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris in 2018 and, like Searle, her work was exhibited at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022.

As Black women producing contemporary art, Searle and Katz negotiate the gaze of those outside of their experiences in addition to an international (and local) art audience intent on consuming the trauma and difference of others. Spectacular violence, as theorised by Njabulo Ndebele (2006), is a currency in international art market (and the landscape of media generally). As a result, there is pressure for 'Othered' artists to publicly demonstrate their subject positions in expository, and possibly exploitative fashions. Regarding the use of her own body and image in her work, Searle alluded to the risk of this possibility in an interview with Rory Bester in 2003:

> **[Rory Bester]: How important is the 'performative' aspect in your work?**
>
> **[Berni Searle]:** My works have a definite performative character to the extent that they invoke movement and indeterminacy. But there is an assumption that because it's performative, I perform. I have been asked on a number of occasions to do performances. The problem with 'performing' is that I am more directly and easily consumed or exoticised, which I'm trying to avoid. Mediating the 'performance' through lens-based media provides me with options to reconstruct myself in the

> process. Ana Mendieta describes the 'performative' as actions that are derived from and located within a grid of power relations. It's not just artistic but something that is more embedded in everyday life and culture. This sums up the significant potential of the 'performative' for me.
> (Bester, 2003)

Searle insightfully identifies that the consuming gaze is not isolated to art audiences or the 'art world' but is "embedded in everyday life and culture" (Searle in Bester, 2003). In 'Colour Me' in particular, Searle decisively captures colonial visual preoccupations with surveillance, observation, and sexuality, and does so at the risk of her 'consumption' by audiences. In a sense, Katz 'self-protects' in 'Groenpunt' (2016) in that she, too, resists over-exposure; the pain of history is encoded rather than revealed in her work through abstraction, as I will discuss in detail.

## Body/land: 'Colour Me' (1999), *Snow White* (2001)

Searle's 'Colour Me' (1999) and *Snow White* (2001), although produced two years apart, can be read in dialogue with one another. In both examples, the artist utilises her own body and materials readily associated with domestic activities to explore concerns regarding gender, trade, and the question of 'origins'. In addition to *Snow White* I focus on three components of the 'Colour Me' exhibition: *GIRL* (1999), *CAP-TURE* (1998) and *NUMB-ER* (1998) which best speak to Searle's interrogation of what Desirée Lewis has termed "to be looked-at-ness" (2001, p. 109).

*GIRL* (1999), like *NUMB-ER* (1998), plays with the schemata of ethnographic imaging,

linking these methods to systems of subjugation and control. In *GIRL*, Searle appears three times in a grid of twelve photographs. In each pose, Searle is depicted lying down and photographed from the side. Her eyes face up and out of view of the camera. What appears to be chili powder, cumin and turmeric covers her body in each respective pose. At first glance, her body's image appears to be segmented into four photographs. However, a closer reading of the images reveal that for each pose Searle was photographed at four distinct angles as the camera panned down the length of her body. In this way, Searle demonstrates the availability of her – and/or the historic – body for analysis.

The vials of spice that balance on top of the photographs appear to bear little correspondence to the volumes of sediment layered upon Searle's body. The presence of these vessels ironically speak to the junk science of eugenics and the violent absurdity of the sale and purchase of human beings as 'slaves'. As part of the same series of images, Searle pointedly meets the viewer's gaze in *CAP-TURE* (1998). The artist's penetrating eye contact, which could be interpreted as agentic, lacks triumph when understood in tandem with Searle's concealed mouth, sealed over by spices. This definitive silencing produces a chilling, nightmarish image that purposefully produces discomfort in the viewer.

*NUMB-ER* draws dangerously close to the ethnographic, consumptive use of imaging as data for scientific study. Searle's spice-laden body fills the frame diagonally, her image – akin to *GIRL* – is broken up into a grid of squares that resemble a mathematical matrix. This time, the blocked image is housed in a lidded wooden box, propped open (for now). In the box held ajar *NUMB-ER* feels at danger of being locked away in an archive of samples to be 'kept safe' under the guise of coloniality's paternalism; stacked among other nameless images until found useful.

Unlike in ‘Colour Me’, in *Snow White* Searle is activated, moving but perhaps, more importantly, working. When projected on screens at full scale, Searle’s body appears monumental, statue-like: in *Snow White* Searle makes visible the unseen, gendered labour of nourishment and the unacknowledged labour of domestic care. A two-channel video installation, *Snow White* is filmed from both an aerial and front-facing perspective. Searle appears kneeling in a darkened room and is lit by an overhead spotlight; a stark, bright light that casts shadows over her body. White flour appears to be gently sifted onto Searle’s naked body from above.

For most of the performance’s duration, Searle does not engage the flour, nor the viewer, but allows the white dust to fall upon her. The flour collects in small mounds on her shoulders, her thighs, the top of her head. Eventually, the flour stops falling and Searle dusts off the flour covering her body. The sound in the video seems to engage and water begins pouring, in a near imperceptible stream, from the ceiling. Working the water into the flour, Searle begins to mix a dough for roti. The sounds of Searle’s working hands and the changing state of the mixture – now loud – squelch and smack. The dough is manipulated into a long, thick rope and clumps of dough are sectioned off. Sticky, irregular balls leave Searle’s hands and thwack to the ground.

As viewers we are invited to gaze upon Searle’s body that, despite its nakedness, is not sexualised in this context. Whereas ‘Colour Me’ reveals the vulnerability of the naked body and invites the viewer to imagine the pain and discomfort of covering one’s bare skin in spices. Cultural associations with spices and particular South Asian cultures are inescapable. Gqola on the subject of Searle’s ‘spiced bodies’ importantly builds upon Baderoon’s theorisation of food cultures as talismans of history, and points towards the

creolising continuation of cultural memory through Searle's employment of spice (Gqola, 2010b, p. 183). Speaking to the use of spice in her work, Searle has stated:

> "I am drawn to spice on a number of levels. From its very definite associations: of tactility and smell; what it's used for, and its richness in terms of colour and texture. But I have an ambiguous relationship with these associations, especially in terms of the exotic. I have noticed that the media, for example, often latches onto this aspect of the work. I would like to think that the work resists such limited interpretations. It is ironic because this is specifically what I'm trying to work against, namely simplistic, stereotypical classification."
> (Murinik, 2001, p. 78)

Searle's resistance to being pinned down means that the work is pliable to multiple readings, and through the artist's intentional ambiguity, the process of meaning-making is productive. However, operating within the realm of "indeterminancy" (Murinik) is not without its potential pitfalls. As seen in *NUMB-ER*, the methods employed by Searle are at risk of replicating that which she critiques. In the coded nature of enslavement as a subtext of her work, this history, too, is at danger of being missed altogether. In the accounts of 'Colour Me' and *Snow White* written by Liese van der Watt in 2003 and 2004, and in Tracy Murinik's profile on Searle in 2001, neither author mentions slavery or Searle's connections to histories of enslavement at all. Similarly, when analysed through the prism of contemporary racial logics, the work by virtue of its creator and how she is visually read by viewers, could be simplistically seen as a comment on Coloured identity.

## 'Groenpunt' (2016)

The title of Katz' exhibition 'Groenpunt' (Fig. 4.1) – which could be directly translated from Afrikaans as 'Greenpoint' – relates to the area of Groenpunt, Kimberly, where Katz grew up and the city centre neighbourhood Greenpoint, Cape Town. In this work, Katz draws upon recent and colonial Cape history in recalling the contentious debates surrounding rediscovery of an unmarked burial site in Greenpoint in 2003. In the midst of construction, property developers broke ground and accidentally came upon on an unmarked burial site where a total of some 3000 human remains were found (Jonker, 2005, p. 189). Archaeologists from UCT and experts who engaged with the site, claimed that owing to its location, the nature of the burials, and early examination of what was excavated, the remains were likely that of enslaved people. It was estimated that the remains could have been buried between the years 1700 and 1830 (Schroeder, 2003). Many of the remains were found buried without coffins, some laid to rest according to Islamic rites, and others appeared tightly packed, on top of one another (Ibid). It was found that some of the remains may have been enslaved people, while the other remains likely constituted Free Blacks (formerly enslaved people), servants, and working class Capetonians – the "underclasses" of the period (Jonker, 2005, p. 189).

Following the discovery of the human remains, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) extended an invitation for public participation in determining the future of the site and the fate of the remains (Schroeder, 2003). This process sparked a public debate and mobilised activism from various groups invested in commemorating the lives of the deceased buried at the site. Descendants of the enslaved and advocacy groups such as the Prestwich Place Committee positioned the debate around the 'use' of these human remains in relation to the academy as objects of study, whereas archaeology researchers at UCT advocated for the scientific examination of these remains as they had potential to provide information about the historical period and those buried.

Still, concerned descendant and advocacy groups did not want the human remains to be subjected to exhumation and scientific testing. The Prestwich Place Committee "disputed the priority of archaeology as a body of knowledge and methodology for determining the meaning of the site" (Jonker, 2005, p. 190). Inferred here, is that the deceased had already suffered enough indignity in their lifetimes and in death. Despite extensive discussion and appeals to SAHRA, the remains were nonetheless exhumed, although, owing to the success of advocacy groups' requests, no testing was allowed to be conducted on the human remains (Gosling, 2005). The continued activism of these various stakeholders resulted in the construction of the Prestwich Memorial in 2008 in Cape Town, described as an ossuary, which was designed by architect Lucien le Grange. Today, the site remains burdened by the possibility of historical erasure, as it is currently home to a coffeeshop named 'Truth', which has no association with the Prestwich Place Committee, nor with other slave descendant advocacy groups.

In the exhibition 'Groenpunt' (Fig. 4.1), Katz offers a series of works that are not directly 'representative' of anything, and yet draw upon the visual associations with land lots, erfs, cartography, agriculture, rest, and domestic interiors. Although the links between these associations are never overstated, the work nonetheless, in this way, draws direct relationships between the body, space, territory, and inheritance. The artist utilises a limited pallet of materials: used mattresses, foam used in upholstery, wire, and round bar steel. These discarded materials have no apparent or immediate use and could be perceived as aesthetically unappealing or waste.

*Sand kombers* (2016) (Fig. 4.3) most closely resembles a reconstituted single mattress cobbled together by irregular rectangles of green-blue foam. The foam is 'quilted' (as the

Afrikaans title suggests) together in this way by sewn wire, forming a patchwork of oblong forms. In certain areas, the rectangles vary in texture and colour, indicating the material's different point of origin. Towards the top of the form, the rectangles are smooth, even buoyant. Towards the bottom, the rectangles are constituted by foam that is rough, punctured; the kind of wear and tear produced by exposure to natural elements and deliberate destruction. The mattress material resists manipulation and bursts from its seams. As a whole, the sculpture produces the effect of an aerial view of farmlands as one flies in an aeroplane overhead and for me, the early lots of the Cape of Good Hope.



Fig. 4.1

Bronwyn Katz, 'Groenpunt' (2016)

Installation view at blank projects, Cape Town



Fig. 4.2

Bronwyn Katz, *Kooi* (2016)



Fig. 4.3

Bronwyn Katz, *Sand Kombers* (2016)



Fig. 4.4

Bronwyn Katz, *Untitled (Brief 1)* (2016)

All photographs from 'Groenpunt' reproduced courtesy of the artist.

In *Untitled* (*Brief 1)* (2016) (Fig. 4.4), Katz invites multiple readings of her titles with English/Afrikaans homophones: with brief', as letter in Afrikaans, and 'brief' as legal document in English. Wire is used to create suture between two similarly-sized pieces of foam. Together, the conjoined pieces of foam have folds and creases, not unlike the palm of a hand. Following some folds at irregular intervals are rust stains too. The wire holding the two pieces is imperfectly bound, but the binding recalls the tight gathering of skin to heal a rupture.

Katz continues to sew a sense of dis-ease with *Kooi* (2016) (Fig. 1.2) – or 'cage' in Afrikaans and Dutch, which, in the Afrikaans of Katz' community, translates to 'bed'. The sculpture comprises a symmetrically bent round bar frame resting on its side. 'Groenpunt' is fuelled by

the impressions made by human beings on objects and the seemingly imperceptible traces we leave on domestic objects until they show signs of disrepair. In *Kooi*, however, as a cage or a bed, there is no place for a body or rest. Here, most clearly, Katz toys with rest and disturbance to suggest that Groenpunt/Greenpoint's ghosts may be restless.

The impact of this work is in the employment of the scale of the human body. The mattress materials are suggestive of a grave site or stone, and yet, no body or bodies are present within the work. As a result, the work evokes an un-graspable type of longing that cannot be fulfilled. Katz' work, in conversation with the debates and discussions around the unmarked graves of the Prestwich Memorial site speak directly to Saidiya Hartman's resistance to resolution and insistence towards open-endedness, possibility when faced with partial archives (2008). Using seemingly ordinary household items such as mattresses and the foam from chairs, Katz speaks to questions of belonging and place whilst working within and adjacent to modes of abstraction. Where the lens 'mediates' our view of Searle (Bester, 2003), abstraction strategically mediates our distance from Katz, which is ultimately what makes her work so intriguing and compelling. Opacity *and* moments of lucidity in 'Groenpunt' draw the viewer in, and simultaneously, keep us out.

## Conclusion: "ambiguous visibility"

According to Desiree Lewis, Searle's work "resists entrapment" (Lewis, 2001, p. 112), owing to its resistance to naming or typecasting. I disagree. Searle's work has the capacity to be 'entrapped' because of its employment of ethnographic imaging codes, for the purposes of subversion and critique, and her availability to ambiguity which exposes the work to risk. This does not mean that the work itself, nor its affective qualities, are not productive. Searle decisively captures colonial visual preoccupations with surveillance, assessment, and

sexuality but, I argue, the inclusion of ‘Colour Me’ in the South African art canon performs, once again, the ‘ambiguous visibility’ of slavery within the South African national story. The foundational production of meaning in ‘Colour Me’ provides a provocative evocation of the messy, indeterminate assignment of racial codes over time. In positioning her own body at the centre of her work grants the practice a grounding specificity that, yes, could be understood as encoded, but nonetheless functions explicitly for critical viewers when analysed from the vantage point of a slave-descendant heritage or positionality. These connections made between body, land, and commodity are powerful, in and of themselves.

Katz, in my view, more effectively “resists entrapment” through her outright refusal to conform to conventions of representation. In ‘Groenpunt’, Katz turns away from the gaze completely, echoing the advocacy against the exhumation of the unmarked burial site in Greenpoint and the refusal to participate in colonial-era observation for science (or otherwise). In this refusal, ‘Groenpunt’ is infused by grief, loss, and longing because Katz risks the uncertainly produced by ‘not knowing’ in service of the preservation of personhood, dignity.

Although following a distinctly different methodology, the slave-era history of ‘Colour Me’ remains equally unknown. And like synecdoche, Searle’s body of work is at risk of standing in for history. The wide circulation of ‘Colour Me’ documentation – its ubiquity – has led the work, in my view, to become ironically overlooked. ‘Colour Me’ for many decades remained one of the few artworks by a prominent South African artist to be engaged with slave history or slave memory. Here, I wonder speculatively, about the connections between Baderoon’s “ambiguous visibility” (2014a), and the psychological, long term effects of colonial visuality on how we perceive suffering, and the impressions these images leave on us; what Tina Campt has referred to as “hapticity” (2021).

I look to what Louise Raiford has called “abstract personhood” (2020, p. 80) and the ordering of human life, and the contemporary circulation of video and photographic footage of dead or dying Black individuals manifests in a repeated negation of Black life; where spectacular violence is made common-place. Following the work of Raiford, Leniqua D. Welcome, Deborah Thomas, and others, I conceive of the use of abstraction and ‘encoding’, as seen in Searle’s practice, as a distinct artistic strategy against the perpetuation of violence; either through the process of representational figuration or re-enactment (Raiford, 2020; Welcome and Thomas, 2021). It does bear discussing, however obvious, that the political and visual-cultural context from which this impulse arises in the wake of the Atlantic slave trade is markedly informed by an *excess* of representations of violence. Raiford’s theorisation on the excess of representations of Black pain and Black death charts a succession of political visual strategies used by Black artists and activists to both elucidate the systemic violence of a white supremacist state so as to expose it and in the contemporary inundation to these visual accounts, a turn towards abstraction; a strategy that “moves away from figuration” as a “means of challenging white supremacy” (2020, p. 79).[18]

South African art historians such Liese van der Watt and Murnik have made much of the recurrence of ‘absence’ and ‘trace’ in Searle’s practice; a thematic product of the incomplete, fragmentary archival record common to many descendants of enslaved people. However, I am less interested in ‘absence’ as opposed to what is produced in that open space. What do Searle and Katz choose to show us? How does an artist make sense of materiality and generativity in near total narrative erasure? Searle and Katz show us that enslavement is not

[18] A famous example of the strategy to expose the violence of white supremacy through a purposeful and mass circulated image (and mass-oriented gaze) is that used by Mamie Till-Mobley in the decision to share the photograph of her son, Emmett Till, following his brutal murder by lynching in Drew, Mississippi in the United States in 1955.

in some undetermined space ("anywhere" [Van der Watt, 2003]), but rather that enslaved people's presences are imbued in everything. Enslaved people's traces, their work, their contribution is all around us, and yet because of the workings of colonial visuality and its zenith, apartheid, it is not made explicit. Refusing the violence akin to the VOC-era execution ground, Searle and Katz demand the critical labour of looking that does not willingly produce answers, and thus the artists withhold the use of explicit violence to produce something far more difficult instead.

In Chapter 5, I discuss commemorations of slavery in Cape Town's urban environment to further elucidate slavery's enduring mark on the city. I look to the function of walking practices as entryways into a site-situated evocation of slave memory, further revealing the scale of slavery's contribution to the formation of the settler-colony.

Chapter 5

# ‘A Walk in the Night’ and *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016), site-specificity and walking commemorative practices

‘I hear they’re going to make the beaches so only white people can go there,’ Joe said.

‘Ja. Read it in the papers. Damn sonsabitches.’

‘It’s going to get so’s nobody can go nowhere.’

‘I reckon so,’ Michael Adonis said.

(Alex La Guma, 1967, p. 10)

*A Walk in the Night*

## Introduction

Cape Town’s city bowl – in present-day terms, the area that stretches from the edge of Good Hope Centre to the edge of Green Point Stadium – has remained in contestation since boundaries of the fledgling European settlement were established in the mid-seventeenth century. The city bowl is also where groups invested in maintaining slave memory work disrupt what Tiffany Lethabo King has termed the “cartographic I” (2019a, p. 86); the mechanism of colonial-settler hegemony which attempts to conceal systems of subjugation through infrastructural “norms” imposed upon the landscape (Ibid, p.89). In response to

spatial apartheid and colonial-era city planning which centres “white prestige” (Stoler, 2010), public city space is reclaimed through enduring commemorative practices whereby people occupy and inhabit public space through walking, protest, procession, parade, and performance. In this chapter, I will focus my discussion on walking commemorative practices that directly engage the memory of enslavement such as the annual event ‘A Walk in the Night’ that honours slave Emancipation Day, 1 December 1838, and my public intervention *Following Ansla van Bengalen*, which took place on Heritage Day, 27 September 2016. Through a discussion and an analysis of these examples, I draw correlations between practices of walking as commemoration and subversive anti-colonial forms of memorialisation that stake claim to marginalised histories of enslavement in Cape Town. I argue that these practices function to reveal and upend colonial visualities as living legacies of enslavement, as explored in Chapter 4, and reinscribe belonging for historically marginalised slave descendants.

Colonial imaging and cartography in the 17th and 18th centuries attempted to define the settlement through a narrative of controlled organisation along cartesian planes; a visual picture that belied the heterogenous nature of the settlement itself (Brink, 1997; Baderoon, 2009). From the vantage point of 2023, Cape Town has, in many ways, self-actualised as the “safe home for white and foreign capital” (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 319) as the original European settlement was intended and shaped by the VOC in the 17th century. Yet, as Julian Jonker and Karen E. Till astutely observe, the now near-erased District One, the site of the Prestwich mass burial site, and District Six on the outer-most edges of the historic colonial town of Table Valley “press upon” (King, 2019, p.78) the “sanctuary” of Cape Town’s white-washed central business district (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 316). As physical spectres of the city’s slave-era and apartheid-era histories, these sites of the dead and the evicted continue to apply pressure to the enduring colonial narration of the city. They are the sites of

ongoing contestation regarding the city's habitual systematic exclusion through slavery and apartheid's pass laws, the Group Areas Act, and contemporary gentrification in Cape Town, and raise questions regarding how public space is experienced in the city and by whom. I consider the recurrent, continual work of remembering slavery in Cape Town as 'necessary disturbances' that keep the memory of the city as a slave town alive. Walking practices such as 'A Walk in the Night' and *Following Ansla van Bengalen* purposefully interfere with the "genteel" urban environment of the city in which public, permanent commemorations of slavery are "siloed" to sites such as the Slave Lodge, the 'Memorial to the Enslaved' on Spin Street and the plaque signifying the location of the Old Slave Tree (Cloete, 2016, p.78).

King's conception of "cartographic coherence" as "an unsettled project" in speaking of 18th century North Carolina is well-suited to the VOC Cape (2019, p. 86). King's analysis of the settler map can be transposed onto the VOC cartographic and anxiety-driven logics of "oversight" and "order" (Mirzoeff, 2011b) seen earliest in the planting of van Riebeeck's bitter almond hedges in the 17th century, and as the 18th and 19th centuries progressed, the pressure points of the outlying Districts One and Six. While King primarily focuses on the historical grounding for the "unsettled" territory (2019), I would argue that the unearthing of the Prestwich burial ground and the 'salted earth' of District Six are further evidence of the incompleteness of conquest in the present.

Walking intentionally – and with guidance – in these historic sites is, in my view, a crucial means of embodied research; a way of accessing other ways of knowing. In theorising around walking practices, I discuss 'A Walk in the Night' and *Following Ansla van Bengalen* in dialogue with walking practices locally, globally, and historically. I also locate this work within scholarship engaging with walking, performance, and site. Working with Sarah Pink's thorough theorisation of "sensorial ethnography" (2015) has validated my desire to consider

the historical, sensory experience of a VOC-settled Cape and the experience of existing VOC-era infrastructure in Cape Town as a means of accessing this lost past. As I argue in Chapter 4, VOC authorities in Cape Town "controlled sensory perception" through the visual ordering of slavery. This manifested in the infrastructure of the settlement itself and sumptuary laws, among other mechanisms. Everyone who inhabited the Cape was shaped by the sensory experience informed by their environment and their social experiences. A great deal of the 17th and 18th century infrastructure built by the VOC remains in Cape Town today. I see this historic material, visual and experiential reality of contemporary Cape Town as an important resource for those engaged in histories of slavery and their afterlives.

Saidiya Hartman, with reference to the transatlantic slave trade, describes the slavery as "open, unfinished" (2022a, p. xx) and with reference to the human remains found at Prestwich, Julian Jonker and Karen E. Till posit that the "uncanniness of spectral traces complicates contemporary understandings of time and space, and of the city" (2009, p. 306). Christian Ernsten and Nick Shepherd's reflections on their walking seminar on the Hoerikwaggo Trail in the Table Mountain National Park, and the critical discursive and decolonial conditions enabled by the #RhodesMustFall movement, state that "inscribed ways of being and doing recur through time, often in disguise" (2020, p. 260). To walk in Cape Town among, and in search of, slavery's traces is to enliven an already present temporal collapse through purposeful embodiment. The spatial-temporal tear across history is most notably evoked in 'A Walk in the Night', as the event marks the legal status shift of enslaved people from unfree to free from 30 November into 1 December; a marking that the contemporary event echoes, beginning at approximately 22:00 on 30 November each year.

More well-known are the annual *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* and Cape Town Minstrel Carnival celebrations, which take place in the New Year to commemorate enslaved people's New

Year events which historically took place on 2 January. The *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* events have become a widely attended and publicised event on the city's calendar, however, its meaning is not always readily associated with histories of slavery. The City of Cape Town appears to support these events, which are marketed to the general public and tourists. (An in-depth study of *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* falls out of the scope of this study, although periodic references are made towards this tradition throughout the chapter. See Nadia Davids [2013], John Edwin Mason [2010].) In addition to *Tweede Nuwe Jaar*, I keep in mind, too, publicly programmed art-oriented city interventions which have taken place in Cape Town since the mid-1990s, such as the 'District Six Public Art Festival', 'Infecting the City', and the 'Live Art Festival'. Each of these programmes has worked to activate or agitate public space within the city centre so as to bring attention to Cape Town's prevailing issues of exclusion and erasure (Minty, 2006).

By contrast, 'A Walk in the Night' is a relatively small event that attracts mainly local Capetonians who are themselves slave descendants, and is not framed as an event that can be spectated, but rather as participatory by nature. Similarly, *Following Ansla van Bengalen* was intended to be entirely participatory, although the dynamic of engagement more closely resembled that of teacher and students, a dialectic I will explore further in the chapter. As alternative modes of commemoration, I suggest that 'A Walk in the Night' and *Following Ansla van Bengalen* operate to contribute to what Jonker and Till have described as "memorial cartography" (2009, p. 306) that "encourage new spatial and historical imaginaries of the city" and "thresholds through which citizens can access voices, inheritances and resources that provide for them a language of belonging" (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 307).

## ‘A Walk in the Night’

Following the rediscovery of the Prestwich burial site (discussed in Chapter 4), the Prestwich Place Committee with St George’s Cathedral and the District Six Museum began the annual commemoration of slave Emancipation Day in South Africa in 2006. Taking its name from Cape Town-born and Cuba-exiled author Alex la Guma’s novella *A Walk in the Night* (1967) and following on from a processional event called ‘Walk in the Night’ curated by Claire Tancons in 2009, the event begins in the late evening on 30 November and ends in the early hours of 1 December. Participants in the event embark on an ‘Emancipation Walk’ through the Cape Town city centre following a pre-determined route, stopping at historical sites that bear relation to enslavement in the city. Iterations of the event do not follow the same programme or walking routes (as will be discussed), although performance elements recur in different programmes. Sites visited as part of the event over the years include the Strand Street Quarry, Prestwich Memorial, Greenmarket Square, Church Square, and the Old Slave Tree, among many others. Central to these events has been the participation of poets, musicians, dancers, and the Kaapse Klopse bands, depending on the availability of funding and other resources. Some iterations of the commemoration have been organised around themes, historical figures, or artists such as 2017’s edition which focused on District Sixers Lydia Williams and the artist Lionel Davis (Figs. 5.1 & 5.2). This iteration of the programme was publicised in the Independent Online as follows:

> “HUNDREDS of people are expected to participate in the annual "Walk in the Night" through Cape Town's CBD tonight, commemorating the abolition of slavery 183 years ago.

> The Emancipation Walk will start at the Zonnebloem Estate and move through District Six, to Strand Street Quarry, move on to the Prestwich Memorial site in Green Point and finally make their way through the Bo-Kaap to Church Square.
>
> It will end at the Lydia Williams Centre of Memory in Chapel Street and there will be celebrations and a public picnic running into the anniversary of the freedom of the slaves."
> (No author, 2017)

Artist and art educator Ayesha Price worked with former residents in workshops leading up to the event, in which they created 100 lanterns in honour of Lydia Williams' annual Emancipation Day celebrations (No author, 2017). Davis, who was also a political prisoner on Robben Island, had recently presented his first retrospective exhibition titled 'Gathering Strands' at the Iziko National Gallery with the support of the District Six Museum. 'Masquerade' and the Kaapse Klopse were a recurring theme in Davis' work, which provided a natural link to the memory of enslavement in District Six and the Cape more broadly. The presence of both Williams and Davis, who was then 80 years of age, further provided important intergenerational links, demonstrating the inextricable connections between colonial, apartheid, and present-day Cape Town.

To find out more about 'A Walk in the Night' and the origins of and the motivations behind the annual event, I interviewed Chrischené Julius, Collections Manager at the District Six Museum. Julius has been part of the organisation of 'A Walk in the Night' since its founding and saw herself as part of the "young crowd" at the District Six Museum at the time. She explained that the events and debates around the exhumation of the remains at Prestwich indicated an important need to "mark[sic] spaces as belonging to people in the city" (2023).

Speaking further about the impetus to start a commemoration of slavery in Cape Town, Julius shared:

> "There was a moment when we were meeting the physical anthropologists from UCT. It was in the museum's coffee shop, and it was meant to be a discussion about understanding why scientific examination was necessary on the human remains at Prestwich. And Michael [Weeder] said something, not to me but to the group, that stuck with me. I think it informs everything that marks my involvement with 'A Walk in the Night'. He said something that is quite simple, but quite profound: that we haven't had the time to mourn the dead.
>
> … [B]etween Michael [Weeder] and Bonita [Bennet] and the Prestwich Place committee this idea of 'A Walk in the Night' came about. It came about in order to start occupying spaces in the city that are connected to slavery and to bring attention to it. And they did it off the back of a very, I think, traumatic experience of the Prestwich campaign to prevent the exhumation."
>
> (Julius, 2023)

As discussed in Chapter 4, despite the appeals from advocacy groups such as the Prestwich Place Committee and numerous engagements with the South African Heritage Resources Agency to prevent the exhumation of the human remains, the exhumation continued. As a result of these appeals, however, no scientific testing was conducted and an ossuary, the Prestwich Memorial designed by architect Lucien Le Grange, was opened in 2008 to house the remains. Key figures in the Prestwich Committee and the establishment of 'A Walk in the Night' are Michael Weeder and Bonita Bennet who was the Executive Director of the District Six Museum from 2006-2020.




Fig. 5.1
'A Walk in the Night – Emancipation Day' (2017)
Photographer: Paul Grendon



Fig. 5.2
'A Walk in the Night – Emancipation Day' (2017)
Photographer: Paul Grendon

Photographs of 'A Walk in the Night' reproduced courtesy of Tina Smith.

The District Six Museum, the Prestwich Committee and St Georges Cathedral, as stakeholders in 'A Walk in the Night', deliberately raise questions about rootedness in a city that has seen the introduction of settler-colonialism, enslavement, and the violent erasure of District Six, and subsequently, the ongoing effects of spatial apartheid through gentrification and economic exclusion. In the aftermath of these totalising oppressive and successive mechanisms, coloniality has the propensity to entirely dominate Cape Town and the discourse that surrounds it. Seeking another paradigm, Jonker and Till propose "memorial cartography" (2009, p. 307), a mode through which the city's sites and events of past exclusion can function as nodes for critical, "transgenerational" dialogue:

> "In such a mapping, particular places such as Prestwich can be seen as thresholds through which citizens can access voices, inheritances, and resources that provide for them a language of belonging, even as these phantoms speak of structural exclusions from the city. In this way, sites of displacement have the potential to disrupt established zones of social belonging, allowing the excluded to re-imagine how they might inhabit the urban spaces from which they and their ancestors were displaced. What materialises through such a memorial cartography is a politics of (re) inhabiting the postcolonial city grounded in memory work."
> (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 307)

In my view, 'A Walk in the Night's' programming functions as "memorial cartography" in which participants traverse Cape Town's historic centre to not only "re-imagine how they might inhabit urban spaces" but to enact these possibilities in real time. Walking together as a group at night, the movement of the contemporary 'A Walk in the Night' event attracts the public's gaze and makes itself known to all who pass by. The participants' presence in the streets of Cape Town thus disturbs the "ordering of slavery" (Mirzoeff, 2011b) that attempts

to makes its colonial visual/spatial logic norm and over time 'invisible' as the "cartographic I" (King, 2019a, p. 86). 'A Walk in the Night' encounters and confronts the covert violence of forgetting and urban exclusion through deliberately remembering enslavement publicly. This remembering or 'haunting' functions as a necessary disturbance of the desired norm of amnesia and capital in the city. Further, the event remains independent and outside of the state-sanctioned modes of remembrance, particularly seeing that the City of Cape Town as governing entity itself is not a participant in the event (Julius, 2023).

'A Walk in the Night', I would suggest, is primarily oriented towards Capetonians and is not towards the touristic gaze. Further, 'representing slavery' is not a goal of 'A Walk in the Night' because its gaze is not external, nor is the experience prescriptive. Rather, the event evokes what Sara Ahmed has described as "the sociality of emotion" (2004) in which providing a context for affective connection to history, place, and other participants is prioritised. Julius has suggested that a mimicry of archival photography of District Six may influence how people occupy the street – which may bring about a desire for a kind of orderliness. This recollection of peoples' personal attachment to archival images demonstrates that the trappings of aesthetics are, in many ways, unavoidable. However, when the representational impulse is not present, the manifestation of commemoration is unbounded and capacious leaving room for new symbolisms, motifs, and meaning. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the art works of Gabrielle Goliath, Berni Searle, and Bronwyn Katz struggle against the logics of colonial aesthetics. Instead of privileging the visual over any other senses, 'A Walk in the Night' encourages a deliberate and durational focus on *where* and *how* walking takes place within the architecture of contemporary Cape Town, that points towards the inadequacies of commemorative conventions of sculpture, monuments, and historical paintings.

Pink has stated that “human beings are continuously and actively involved in the processes through which not only culture, but rather the total environments in which they live are constituted, experienced, and change continually over time” (2015, p. 32). ‘A Walk in the Night’s’ organisers acutely recognise the dynamic, shifting nature of the urban space and resist fixity by avoiding repetition and remaining open to change, producing an ever-evolving commemorative programme that offers a capacious, shifting engagement with history and memory. The event resists fixture by committing to new walking routes and programming each year. This decision effectively demonstrates that enslavement’s traces are not limited to a particular place – the Old Slave Tree or the Slave Lodge, for instance – but are embedded within the city as a whole. The “ritualised” methodology of return can remain open-ended and purposefully non-prescriptive and as a result, is exceedingly generative (Julius, 2023; Smith, 2023). In this way, this work operates against the historical resolution implied by the City of Cape Town’s Slave Route as discussed by Cloete (Cloete, 2016, p. 104).

In opposition to the colonial aesthetic logics of commemoration in public space, the work of ‘A Walk in the Night’ came about in a time when the District Six Museum was “taking very seriously this idea of an ephemeral practice in District Six” (Julius, 2023) and as Julius describes:

> “… a deep-seated belief that commemoration does not have to be permanent, but [in] how we shape the city, own the city through our narratives to our bodies, through our performance. The performance can be huge, or it can be small and personal. But in that moment, if you’re on the walk, it's not about dictating to you how you engage in the space. It’s about your own meaning-making with others in this space.” (Julius, 2023)

These walking forms of commemoration work in opposition to didactic, static modes of memorialisation such as "state-adopted commemorative practices" that, in the words of Khwezi Gule: "do not speak sufficiently to an embodied knowledge of historical events and our interpretation of these events in the present" (Gule, 2019, p. 267). I share Gule's mistrust of state-adopted commemorative practices as they apply to the near-erased history of the Indian Ocean Slave trade and its legacies in contemporary Cape Town. Like the town of Makhanda which is Gule's focus, the city of Cape Town is littered with colonial and apartheid-era monuments and memorials and yet the history of enslavement is not seen as fundamental to Cape Town's identity.

The subjective, yet collective experience of 'A Walk in the Night' evokes the spirit of its namesake novella, which portrays the meanderings and escapes of District Sixers on one single evening from sunset to sunrise in the 1950s. The novella could be read as a document of life in District Six under apartheid and as described by Abdul R. JanMohamed, the "dialectic opposition between [La Guma's] assumption that each individual has the right to live a decent life and his depiction of the actual deprivation of that right" (no date, p. 274). In the novel, Cape Town's beaches are still open to everyone and the process of forced removals in the district have not yet begun. However, the news of spatial segregation is circulating:

> 'I hear they're going to make the beaches so only white people can go there,' Joe said.
>
> 'Ja. Read it in the papers. Damn sonsabitches.'
>
> 'It's going to get so's nobody can go nowhere.'
>
> 'I reckon so,' Michael Adonis said.

(La Guma, 1967, p. 10)

This sense of impending, cataclysmic change pervades the novel, and a feeling of uneasy restlessness is evident in the residents of District Six who are acutely aware of their surveillance by the police. As stated by literary scholar Uzoechi Nwagbara, "La Guma's literary aesthetics is a response to socio-economic, political and cultural practices that impeded the growth as well as emancipation of black South Africans" (Nwagbara, 2011, p. 121). Mediated through his political commitment to political liberation, La Guma vividly paints a portrait of District Six during this period through a rotating cast of characters who inhabit the District's tenement buildings, pubs, brothels and streets. The characters interact with an equally diverse cast of supporting characters: an alcoholic Irishman, a young homeless man who forages at the seashore for food, American sailors from Louisiana and New York City, and a struggling family of six that is soon to become a family of seven, among them.

The novella's primary protagonist, Michael Adonis, has just been fired from his job for speaking back to a white foreman. I would argue, La Guma's consistent reference to the first protagonist by his full name "Michael Adonis" is highly significant. Although the history of slavery is never explicitly named in the book, its presence is latent throughout the novella in the repeated naming of the protagonist's full name: Michael Adonis – 'Adonis' being an identifiable slave name. In this way, enslavement 'haunts' the novella and colours the events of the narrative with further weight. As *A Walk in the Night*'s District Six characters – Michael Adonis, Joe, Willieboy, and Franky Lorenzo – errantly traverse the neighbourhood at night, they, too, wander and wonder about where they are going and what their lives can offer them. Their walking and wandering are both meandering and deliberate, considering that their movements could attract the attention of police, who are patrolling District Six in a van.

Julius recognises that the connections between VOC-era slavery in Cape Town and the destruction of District Six in the 1950s are not always self-evident (2023). However, the District Six Museum, in addition to the other stakeholders of the Prestwich Committee, are wholly invested in calling attention to the genealogy of spatial violence in Cape Town. District Six itself was established in the late 18th century primarily by formerly enslaved people and grew into a culturally, religiously and economically diverse neighbourhood until it was razed by the apartheid government as a result of the application of the Group Areas Act in 1966.

Like the general associations with slavery, discussion concerning 'A Walk in the Night' and the District Six Museum can become enveloped in a discourse concerning essentialised understandings of identity and race and Coloured identities (Julius, 2023), with pervading perceptions that District Six's history is limited to this, when in reality, the area was incredibly diverse. This highlights the links in discourse between discussion around histories of slavery, Coloured people's place in South African society, and District Six Museum's conversations around the locatedness of slave memory discourse.

Smith speaks about a "methodology of return" in the District Six Museum's work with the site of forced removals, through programming and procession (as will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5). In my interpretation, 'return' refers to the ritualised, physical act of return to the site of loss, and an ongoing commitment to commemoration in a context prone to historical disavowal. Important to recognise is that 'return', particularly in the context of slave descendants, is not merely about the acknowledgement of past trauma and pain, but an attempt to connect with an unknown, inaccessible history that is achieved through the poetic, the speculative, and dynamic engagements with history and the archive.



Fig. 5.3

Amie Soudien

*Following Ansla van Bengalen*

2016

Photographer: Meghan Daniels

## *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016)

My site-specific intervention *Following Ansla van Bengalen* (2016) (Fig. 5.3) took place as part of my National Fellowship with the Institute of Creative Arts (ICA) on Heritage Day in 2016. In this work, I invited members of the public to join me in a walking tour of historic inner-city Cape Town. The tour was centred around the life of Ansla van Bengalen, whose life story is discussed in Chapter 3. I planned the 'stops' of the tour around important historical sites established in the earliest phases of Cape Town's formal city planning and infrastructure. The tour began in Church Square on Spin Street, after which I led the group

around the corner to the entrance of the Slave Lodge on Adderley Street. I then directed the group down Government Avenue in the Company's Garden, where we stopped outside Tuynhuys. Further into the Gardens, I led the group to the recreation of the VOC vegetable garden. From there, together we walked to the Palm Mosque on Long Street. Approximately 40 people joined me for the two iterations of the tour, many of whom had registered to participate through the ICA's Heritage Day programming. I developed the walking tour as a way to invite others to re-inhabit historical sites with an altered and invested interest in connecting with Cape Town's early colonial history and histories of enslavement. I used the story of van Bengalen as an anchoring narrative to discuss the conditions of slavery in the Cape and to introduce a purposefully complex and difficult narrative of enslavement into contemporary space. It was important to me to use an enslaved woman's narrative as an entryway to Cape Town's history, to centralise slavery's orientation in a historical conception of Cape Town. I began to consider the use of pseudo-biographical narrative and Critical Fabulation to engage with greater histories as a rebellious interdisciplinary methodological tool in that it allows for affective experiences of present and historical loss, which is seen in its fully-fledged realisation in Chapter 3.

Naturally, *Following Ansla van Bengalen* did not begin as a fully realised, theoretically substantiated concept. While I was an undergraduate student at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town (UCT) from 2010-2013, I became very familiar with the historic infrastructure of Cape Town's city centre. I commuted by taxi or bus to UCT's Hiddingh Campus where the art school is situated at the end of the Company's Gardens, from my parents' home in Rondebosch East. For almost four years, I walked daily to Hiddingh Campus from the Cape Town Railway Station (an interchange for train, busses, and taxis) and on the way would walk down Adderley Street, past the Slave Lodge, before continuing down the length of Government Avenue through the Company's Gardens. On

these twice daily walks I became deeply invested in the proximity of the Slave Lodge to St Georges Cathedral and Government Avenue. My frequent and repeated experience of this walking route led me to consider historically significant spaces in Cape Town which bear little or no trace of the labour of enslavement. I began to consider the spaces which have been obviously marked by slavery, but where no contemporary acknowledgement of this past exists. In working through this dissonance, I became intent on finding ways to destabilise the colonial-settler narrative by re-inserting the narratives of people who have been effectively wiped out from public consciousness. I wanted to 'ground' this history through walking, and to re-experience frequently visited spaces with a historically informed perspective, noting that this information was not widely known or understood.

It seemed to me almost nonsensical and deeply contradictory to locate the Slave Lodge as a site and symbol of mass oppression within the heart of Cape Town; its presence there confirming colonial violence as normal and banal. Looking back at the intervention now, I recognise my preoccupation with what Mirzoeff describes as "oversight" and the colonial logics of plantation cartography (2011c); and further, what King has described as the invisibilised "cartographic I" after Sylvia Wynter's conception of the "transparent I" of whiteness inscribed into space and knowledge-making (2019a, p. 86). *Following Ansla van Bengalen* was my way of reintroducing awareness of historically-laden surveillance, labour, and the hidden enslaved lives which occupied and tended to the site, and to encourage others to actively develop nuanced and critical readings of Cape Town.

I realised, too, that my impulse to extend my private, personal experience of the city into a public-oriented tour was a means of bringing to the surface "spectral traces" of enslavement (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306) for others, so that they may forge reconnections to the city

space in a new way. Returning to Jonker and Till's conception of "memorial cartography", the authors state:

> "we explore how spectral traces, especially at places marked constitutively by acts of violence and injustice, allow contemporary residents to come into contact with past and future inhabitants of the city."
> (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306).

Upon reflection, I see that developing *Following Ansla van Bengalen* was how I attempted to "come into contact" with van Bengalen as a descendant of enslaved people (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306). In my daily interaction with historic sites, I saw that these connections to the past were readily available and free to access in public, if only people were directed appropriately. Following King, the "unsettled" nature of colonial conquest — its "tenuous" hold over the landscape — makes space for such openings and reconnections with the past (2019a, p. 86). I researched the history of the Company's Gardens, the Slave Lodge, and St George's Cathedral. I found out that my maternal ancestors were married at St George's Cathedral in 1848, some ten years following the abolition of slavery. I discovered that during the period of slavery, sometimes up to 70 people worked in the Company's Gardens at any time. Yet, in my daily walks in the Company's Gardens I never saw any commemoration or acknowledgement of the labour of those who were enslaved, who worked in the gardens, nor of its immediate relation to the Slave Lodge, just next door. I asked: what about the proximity of the Slave Lodge to two places of Christian worship – the NG Kerk and St George's Cathedral – and its proximity to a hospital? What about the Slave Lodge's immediate proximity to what would later be the site of parliament? It became imperative to show others the dissonance between place and history — the lingering presence of enslavement alongside the banality of everyday life among these sites.

Throughout the ‘stops’ on the tour, I posed open-ended questions about Van Bengalen’s life and her relationship to VOC Cape society and her familial and non-familial loved ones, as seen here in an excerpt from the tour’s ‘script’:

> INSIDE COMPANY’S GARDEN, OUTSIDE TUYNHUYS
>
> Like The Cape itself, Ansla had many names that indicate to us the many different roles she played in VOC society. Ansla, Ansiela, Angiela, Engela, and the Anglicised version, Angela, begin to show us what she may have meant to a number of communities in Table Valley, and further, what she may mean for history.
>
> …
>
> Did Ansla find no contradiction in being a freed slave, a slave owner, and the mother to those who would become assimilated into Dutch society and culture? As in her private life, did Ansla manage to keep the presence of her Bengali origins alive within her children’s lives – did she want to?

I posed purposefully provocative and impossible-to-answer questions to participants to serve as ‘sparks’ to imagine van Bengalen’s life on an individual-to-individual basis. Upon later theoretical reflection I realised that these questions also functioned as an affective tool through which a manifestation of historical speculation – and what would develop into an interpretation of Hartman’s Critical Fabulation (2008) – could take place. When confronted with van Bengalen as an individual, and posed questions about her children, her husband, and her role as an entrepreneur, I hoped participants would be able to internalise the scale of her struggles as they would in their own lives. In this way, the speculative conjectures I made would not appear outlandish or farcical, but plausible and true to life. In reflection, I recognise that by asking these questions, I was attempting, too, to identify knowledge

production's hierarchies and biases through my creative reinterpretation of historiographic data, something akin to critical fabulation. I drew out and emphasised historians' observations on van Bengalen's relationships and daily activities and made of these details, a would-be narrative about her life.

However, without knowledge of Hartman's critical fabulation (which I had not yet read) or the conviction of Abrahams' speculative approaches to history writing (which I had read), I clung to the historical facts about slavery I gleaned in my research. As a result, unlike 'A Walk in the Night', *Following Ansla van Bengalen* was significantly concerned with specific colonial logics of enslavement and place. I attempted to 'balance' my conjectures about van Bengalen's life history with the mechanisations and historical details of enslavement in the Cape. Nevertheless, I was influenced and emboldened, too, by the debates arising from #RhodesMustFall which had originated on UCT's campus and had caused ruptures across South Africa's universities. My interest in reappraising Cape Town's colonial history was affirmed but had also given me a sense of urgency. It was therefore important to me that the intervention was somewhat educational in aim, and I hoped that participants would go away having 'learned something'. I was anxious to distinguish my project from a research area that could reify Eurocentrism (as discussed at length in Chapter 1), particularly in the potential confluence with site-seeing tours geared towards tourism.

It was therefore important that *Following Ansla van Bengalen* was about an orientation towards enslaved women's subjectivities in Cape Town, however inaccessible. Prior to my knowledge of Jennifer Nash's conception of 'beautiful writing', it was also important to try to convey the struggles and negotiations of enslaved women, an impulse I now recognise as staying close to loss (Nash, 2019b). The significance of walking the same path as enslaved people led me to the work of Diana Taylor, who looks at the physical work of remembering

with one's body, as an important aspect of managing trauma (2011, p. 271). Walking, in my conception of *Following*, follows Taylor's recognition that coming to knowledge is inscribed by deliberate action (2011, p. 271). The guided walk itself encouraged active listening, observation, and I hope, stimulated an imaginative, personalised connection with slave history. As we moved through space, my intention was to afford participants the chance to internalise the experience of the city centre through the orientation of the enslaved; not "as" an enslaved person or "through their eyes", but from the vantage point of an enslaved person's narrative. Here, I consider, too, Sara Ahmed's assertion of the incommensurable, impossible inhabitation of another's pain (2004a) (explored at length in Chapter 4). Instead, with *Following Ansla van Bengalen*, I hoped to demonstrate Till's suggestion "that places become part of us, even when held in common, through the intimate relationships individuals and groups have with them" (Till, 2008, 108).

## Conclusion

Fundamentally, 'A Walk in the Night' and *Following Ansla van Bengalen* produce experiences whereby "[t]he taken-forgrantedness of urban space shifts" (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306).

As Jonker and Till demonstrate, the dead make themselves known in their haunting and disturbance of contemporary commercial interest (Jonker and Till, 2009, p.316). The marginalisation of the memory of slavery by the state or the city of Cape Town is not an accident. Following Judith Butler, the absence of slave history from the public imagination is a result of the norms that allow such lives to exist in lesser or greater states of precariousness and erasure, and calculated omission forms part of a greater political project of exclusion (Butler, 2009). My applications of David Lloyd's articulations of the racial

regimes of aesthetics (2019b) and Nicholas Mirzoeff's conception of enslavement and 'oversight' (2011b), as discussed in Chapter 4, demonstrate the totalising consequences of these paradigms that figure prominently in the continuation of systematic racial and gender discrimination in present-day Cape Town. This is deeply important for considering the ways in which enslaved lives are disregarded, and how slavery becomes lost in a national narrative or local mythology. By rejecting coloniality's norms, how descendants memorialise the dead and past trauma may not be recognisable within (colonially) conventional 'frames' of remembering, as seen in ephemeral walking practices.

Working against colonial commemorative conventions, 'A Walk in the Night' centres transgenerational slave descendant subjectivities in an insistence on belonging in the city of Cape Town. Walking is a re-inscription of history; an active resistance to erasure, systemic amnesia, the "cartographic I". 'A Walk in the Night' asks participants to question whose presence in Cape Town is important and to keep alive the knowledge of spatial apartheid's genealogy. The event also reminds its participants of the liberatory, joyful experience of collective gathering and for women and femme people, the rare experience of walking across Cape Town's city space on foot at night. For me, conceiving of *Following Ansla van Bengalen* as a slave descendant was a portal to imagining van Bengalen's life on the scale of my own, in moving through the spaces she may have. These walking commemorative practices form a process of "memorial cartography" to allow participants to reconceive of Cape Town's "established zones of belonging" (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 307) in disruptive, liberatory ways.

# Conclusion

> "The past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present. In other words, harm has a history, even though that history is made up of a combination of often surprising elements that are unavailable in the form of a totality. Pain is not simply an effect of a history of harm; it is the bodily life of that history."
>
> (Ahmed, 2004, p. 33-34)

Interrogating my own subjectivity as a researcher has been central to studying slave histories. This self-reflexivity has led me to consider how knowledge about slavery is produced and slave histories are written in South Africa. In establishing the field of slave studies locally, I sought to understand why slave histories were positioned as marginal within the South African academy. Surveying the historiographic record, as seen in Chapter 1, its emergence, and its shortfalls, illustrated the powerful role of contemporaneous socio-political contexts in determining the shape of historical discussions. The research demonstrated to me that the development of the historiographic record, which remains the most plentiful sector of slave history research in South Africa, was slowed by ideological forces which either perceived slavery as a non-event or a subject too closely associated with a Eurocentric conception of South African history (Southey, 1992; Worden, 2007). As historians became cognisant of slavery's importance to the South African narrative in the 1980s, *their* own political motivations and biases determined what and who was written about and how. In the 1990s, feminist historians Patricia van der Spuy and Yvette Abrahams demonstrated the pitfalls of historiographic conventions which analysed class and race, but were unable to accommodate gender (Abrahams, 1996; van der Spuy, 1996).

Working with the historiographic record provided me with important context concerning enslaved people's lived experiences. However, it was the risky, genre-bending work of Yvette Abrahams (1996) that helped me to accept that neither the historiographic record nor the archive alone would be able to reflect the enslaved person's life as they experienced it. In order to attend to this impossibility, I engaged closely with the work of American scholars Jennifer Nash (2019b) and Saidiya Hartman (2006, 2008), to develop an interdisciplinary mode of research that privileged Black feminist methodologies. This research, focused on the transatlantic slave trade, was essential in valuing the role of affect and studying historical trauma. Pumla Gqola (2010d, 2015b) and Gabeba Baderoon (2009, 2014c) are among the very few scholars whose work centres the importance of slave memory in contemporary South Africa. As a result, Gqola and Baderoon have provided recurring points of reference. Gqola and Baderoon's historically grounded research lays bare how societal structures that perpetuate the violence of racism, sexism, and inequality in South Africa were forged in conditions of slavery and coloniality; the ongoing effects of which I call the 'living legacies' of enslavement.

The two major living legacies of enslavement I identified as a result of my research include a culture of gendered and sexualised violence, as explored in Chapter 3, and colonial "technologies of visuality", explored in Chapters 4 and 5. A third, less obvious living legacy of slavery is the recurrence of anger, despair, grief, and longing, experienced as a historically marginalised slave descendant researcher seeking out histories of slavery or slave memory. I explore the role of affect as it relates to histories of slavery in Chapter 2 and the subject recurs throughout the thesis in Chapters 3 and 5, and most notably in the vignette, 'The Docked Ship'. Initially, I did not consider this emotive aspect of the research process as a product of slavery itself. After all, how could such a subjective, personal experience be analysed in an academic forum? However, Nash's theorisation around "risk" and "beautiful

writing" (2019), Hartman's conception of "critical fabulation" (2008), and Sara Ahmed's thinking outlined in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004b) and *Strange Encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality* (2000c) validated my impulse towards the role of affect within academic scholarship in critical and ethically-attuned ways.

Owing to the dynamics of power inscribed in colonial record-keeping and the complete marginality of enslaved people in South Africa, enslaved people's stories will remain largely elusive. I follow Hartman's assertion that histories concerning slavery can never be entirely resolved as a consequence of perpetual incommensurability (2008, p. 12). The partial, intangible, and inaccessible nature of enslaved people's narratives has meant that slave folk lore in South Africa is scant and further, the diminished positioning of slavery has resulted in relatively few efforts to produce or maintain slave memory. As demonstrated through Black feminist theory, the consistent work of evoking slave memory is an affective labour. Slave memory's diminutive stature in South Africa's public imagination, weighed in comparison to its importance and cultural and political impact, amplifies this sense of longing.

Nash's emphasis on "staying close to loss" (2019b, p. 119) as a Black feminist act of recuperation, in addition to Ahmed's thinking around "witness to pain" in order to "authenticate its existence" (2004a, p. 31) has had an immense impact in my pursuit of an ethic of care in studying slave histories. Ahmed's theorisation around the "ungraspability" of pain (2004a, p. 30), whether one's own or another's, compelled me to consider the limits of temporal solidarity with the enslaved and the risks of over-identification with their experiences of violence. The attempt to ethically 'bridge the gap' between the historical and the present has remained an important motivation throughout the dissertation.

In recognising the centrality of affect in engaging with histories of slavery, working with artistic and poetic practices became essential. Gabrielle Goliath's collaboration with historian Saarah Jappie in her performance work *Elegy* (2015-) profoundly encapsulates the role and purpose of artistic commemorations of slavery. *Elegy*'s central action is the "sung cry" (Goliath, 2018); a single note sustained by multiple singers for the entirety of the performance. As described at length in Chapter 3, *Elegy* serves as a commemoration for a person who has died due to gendered and sexualised violence. In 2018 and 2019, *Elegy* commemorated Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane, both of whom were enslaved women who were violently attacked by their romantic partners. The perpetrators of their assaults were tried in court and the proceedings were recorded in the local VOC archives. Louisa van de Caab died immediately from her assault, whereas it is presumed that Cornelia van Piloane died soon afterwards. In her eulogies for Lousia van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane, Jappie is self-reflexive and transparent about her search for answers about their lives and utilises historically-informed speculation to wonder aloud about their subjectivities and their life stories before the tragic events that led to court cases and court scribes (2022). The artwork draws the performers and the audience members into a distinct space for mourning, and thus insists on grief as a valid and appropriate response to the harm of another – even if historical.

In studying the work of Goliath, Bronwyn Katz, and Berni Searle, I have concluded that contemporary art that engages with histories of slavery is an essential practice that keeps slave memory alive. This practice of memory work is especially important in a social and academic context where the study of slavery is considered minor in comparison to other historical periods or events. Similarly, public commemorations of slavery, as seen in 'A Walk in the Night', keeps the practice of remembering slavery alive in urban space, thus actively reinscribing the connections between the past and present. Contemporary art and public

commemorations of slavery are not, in themselves, representative of history, following Marcus Wood (2000, p. 32). Rather, artistic and commemorative practices offer entryways into slave memory, and poetic reflections on histories of slavery assist viewers in articulating affective responses to the grief of slavery. Further, the artists mentioned draw important connections between the historical conditions of enslavement and the living legacies of slavery as seen in Goliath and Jappie's collaboration in *Elegy*, Katz' exhibition 'Groenpunt' (2016), and Berni Searle's exhibition 'Colour Me' (1999), as I will discuss.

In addition to affect, the living legacies of slavery's gendered and sexualised violence and colonial "technologies of visuality" (2011, p. 48) are discussed through the application of theory and demonstrated in the discussion of contemporary art and commemorative practice. As discussed at length in Chapter 3, the "chaotic intimacies" (2003a, p. 92) of enslavement were made possible by the structural, sanctioned conditions of a slave society. The relationships developed between enslaved and free people, enslaved people and their children, enslaved people and free children took place in the parameters of domestic settings, where the majority of enslaved women worked (Mason, 2003a, p. 90). To explore this condition of slave-owning households further, I discuss the imagined shared space of enslaved woman Ansla van Bengalen and famous historical figure Krotoa in Fort de Goede Hoop in the mid 17th century, in addition to the lives of Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane, as previously discussed. Focusing on the stories of enslaved women (and an indentured woman, in the case of Krotoa) offered me entry points into a historical context in which their rape was not a punishable crime, but "permissible" (Gqola, 2015, p. 4) under the conditions of slavery.

As Hortense Spillers has stated in reference to the Americas, the "shadowy" circumstances that bore life in the context of slavery haunts the present (Spillers, 2017). Zoë Wicomb confirms Spillers' assessment in a local context: the humiliation of the intimate forms of

violence inflicted upon enslaved people and the contravention of colonial racial norms in "race mixing" and "miscegenation" among enslaved and free people, has meant that descendants are likely to associate their slave histories with shame (Wicomb, 2018, p. 122). Wicomb and Baderoon attribute this shame as a primary factor in the "forgetting of slavery" among slave descendants (Baderoon, 2014d, p. 417). Concurrent with this self-imposed amnesia, Goliath and Jappie in their collaboration connect a throughline of histories of sexual violence from the era of VOC rule into the gendered and sexualised violence crisis of the present, through the situation of Louisa van de Caab and Cornelia van Piloane within *Elegy'*s commemorations of contemporary slain people due to the same pattern of violence. Michael Rothberg's theorisation of the "implicated subject" (2019c), as demonstrated throughout the dissertation, has complicated my unconscious and conscious conceptions of "legacy" and "inheritance" in pivotal ways to prove that implication is, indeed, both "structural and intimate", even genealogical (2019b, p. 60).

These connections are perceived the most starkly in the living legacies of enslavement of colonial "technologies of visuality" and settler-colonial dispossession in South Africa. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, colonial "technologies of visuality" determine our colonially socialised modes of perception that determine who we perceive as "strangers" or "familial" (Ahmed, 2000a, p. 3) and how space is valued, organised, and defined. Nicholas Mirzoeff identifies the "ordering of slavery" and the organisation of space through cartography, systems of taxonomy, and race as originating in "technologies of visuality" developed towards economy and labour (2011a, p. 50). Through my research, I found that a number of artists and cultural organisations invested in slave memory worked against such technologies of oppression through their rejection of colonial representation, or through an active critique of colonial modes of looking. For example, Bronwyn Katz' 'Groenpunt' utilises non-representational modes of abstraction to signal towards an inaccessible interiority, while

Berni Searle uses the apparatus of the colonial gaze to critique it. I suggest that 'A Walk in the Night' uses collective gathering in public space to disturb the colonial logics of urban cartography in favour of memorial cartography (Jonker and Till, 2009, p. 306), what Julian Jonker and Karen Till describe as, a method of accessing slave memory to "encourage new spatial and historical imaginaries of the city" (2009, p. 307).

The primary conclusion drawn from my analysis and research reiterates a statement made by Rothberg that "synchronic and diachronic injustices are intertwined" (Rothberg, 2019a, p. 20). As Rothberg, Baderoon, and Wicomb illustrate, a society's inheritance of slavery is always present, whether that society or its members are aware of it or not. I agree with Robert Shell in his statement: "[t]he truth is, we are all the descendants of slavery" (1994e, p. xix). One does not need to be a direct descendant of slavery, in a genealogical or biological sense, to be impacted by histories of slavery. By living in Cape Town, or anywhere in South Africa, I argue, life is touched by histories of slavery. Even historically marginalised descendants of slavery – and particularly those who are Coloured – can be implicated in the complex system of oppression that shapes South African life. I believe that reckoning with the direct and indirect inheritances of slavery, termed here as "living legacies", as both structural and intimate consequences of successive systems of colonially-produced rule is the only way inhabitants of South Africa – citizens or not – will accept slavery as a collective inheritance.

## From periphery to centre? Interdisciplinary studies and new research

I see many possibilities for the application of the interdisciplinary, Black feminist-led methodological approach utilised in this dissertation. Building on my argument, there are

numerous opportunities for the application of my research methodology within slave studies and the field of visual culture studies and history of art, more broadly.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a major aspect of my research methodology is the deployment of Ahmed's conception of phenomenology, or an ontology of orientations (2007) in the study of slave memory as a framework to resist the capitulation of the colonial frame of recognition (Butler, 2009) that renders slave memory marginal. Throughout the process of research and thesis writing, I asked myself: what happens when slave history and memory is prioritised in research and artistic production? If the study of slavery and slave memory is continually reinscribed as peripheral, how does the nature of the research change when it is considered central? This impulse to centre slavery is mirrored in the title for Nicholas Southey's article 'From periphery to core: the treatment of Cape Slavery in South African historiography' (1992), as discussed in Chapter 1. In a similar vein, I took up the mantle of Baderoon (2014c), Lindsay Clowes and Patricia van der Spuy (2007), Ahmed (2004b, 2007), and others, who centralise feminist analytical tools to ask: what happens to the nature of research when enslaved women's life stories are centred? This research demonstrates that when feminist and slave memory is centred, we learn more about marginal histories. We are afforded the opportunity to explore enslaved women's experiences and ethically imagine their interiority, as seen in Chapters 2 and 3. This research practice is, in my view, an important form of commemoration and an activation of memory work. Shifting from "periphery to core", as phrased by Southey (1992), requires a paradigmatic shift in thinking; a challenge that is consistently disrupted by the phenomenological pull of whiteness and coloniality, as echoed by Ahmed (2007). The fixation on lack, coupled with the paucity of material and insufficient data concerning slavery, hinders the activation of slave memory and reinscribes the guiding role of the state archive and colonially-produced record.

Secondly, I contend that the exploration of the living legacies of enslavement is a space of knowledge production, as demonstrated in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. The impact of theorisation of slavery, visuality, and coloniality on the field of visual culture studies in South Africa can be mainstreamed and investigated further. Predicated on the acknowledgement of slavery and its wide-reaching influence, an exploration of the living legacies of slavery, such as the colonial "technologies of visuality" in Chapter 3 and 4, produces productive research and discourse concerning race, inequality, dispossession, and belonging in Cape Town. Working within this discursive arena, slavery is more effectively placed within a dialectic with other related forms of oppression in South Africa. This, I believe, will allow the work of artists, cultural organisations, and slave descendants invested in slave memory to work freely without being relegated to the margins. When histories of slavery are centralised to discuss the formation of racialisation, the constructions of 'racial purity', and the governing principles of colonial visualities, we can have more nuanced discussions around race and positionality – and hopefully, less contentious and polarising conversations around Coloured identity. There are many potentially useful applications of these theories – particularly pertaining to the decolonisation of visual culture studies. Once identified, visual culture studies can be oriented towards modes that resist and fall outside of colonial "technologies of visuality".

As it concerns the role of affect theory and the study of slavery, it is important to conceive of a space in which ethically minded affective research and empirical research can be used in dialogue with one another, and respected as equally valid forms of knowledge production. Ahmed's thinking around the cultural politics of emotion, as applied in Chapter 2, can be utilised by researchers in various marginalised historical contexts. The embrace of 'experimental' approaches to studying slave history and slave memory, such as critical fabulation explored in Chapter 2, 3 and 5, can be rigorous and generative in its examination of the 'norms' of knowledge production. These interdisciplinary methodological interventions

work towards an ethic of care within academic research that concerns histories of violence, and further, positively, and self-reflexively centre the positionalities of researchers' descendant of the histories or subjects they are researching.

I believe that slavery's legacies can still become a collective inheritance; a history shared, explored, and valued by all who live in South Africa, and by extension, all who were impacted by the VOC and British Empires. The theoretical approaches discussed in this thesis offer worthwhile, actionable alternatives to colonially-produced modes of commemoration and remembrance. I would like to imagine a reality in which artistic and poetic forms of commemoration are duly acknowledged and supported as important contributions to cultural life and memory work.

## Conclusion: a collective inheritance of slavery

"Those who inherit legacies are descendants, and what they inherit are either the legacies of property, privilege, and right or the negation of those legacies."

(Rothberg, 2019b, p. 64)

Whilst I remain hopeful, I am not naïve about the realities of researching slavery in South Africa or sharing this research with academic and general audiences. There are possibilities – and certainly limits – of envisioning a shared, collective inheritance of slavery. By and large, the onus is on the historically marginalised descendants for maintaining the memory of enslavement and recognising its ongoing legacies in the present. Rothberg states that the

theorisation of the implicated subject assists in “broaden[ing] the focus” in “relation to those not descended from enslaved people” (2019b, p. 59). If we are to take seriously the shared responsibility of remembering slavery, it cannot be the burden of historically marginalised descendants alone.

Following the commitment to centre slave memory in research, what would it mean for slavery to be acknowledged as the catastrophe it was in the public sphere? That being, on the level of the state, the province, the city? How would that knowledge change how people relate to one another – recognise one another? There is still enormous work needed to educate and communicate the catastrophe of slavery to all living in South Africa, and particularly in the Western Cape.

To achieve the imaginary of a collective inheritance of slavery, researchers need to develop a clearer understanding about slave descendants – all of them: both historically marginalised and privileged. During this research, I found that no major study has undertaken the investigation of slave descendants in all their diversity. Important in this research, too, is to keep close Rothberg’s encouragement of a reconsideration of “legacy”, “descent”, and “inheritance” in discussions concerning slavery, as he asks: “what is a legacy, and who is a descendant?” (2019b, p. 64). Future research on slave descendant identity needs to identify who descendants are, how they perceive their histories, how they learned their slave descendant history, and how they constitute their identities in relation to these histories? The greatest challenge will be to negotiate the place and responsibility of the implicated descendants of the slaving class who have not accounted for their family’s participation in slavery.

The maintenance of slave memory is challenging and laborious without due accountability for the atrocities of slavery. I suggest that until sufficient research about descendants has begun in earnest, any action concerning justice or reparations for the atrocities of slavery will struggle to manifest. Who is recognised economically, legally, and culturally translates into the case for reparations and justice. And indeed, what would justice mean for slave descendants in South Africa? Echoing Rothberg's articulation of the "structural and intimate" ramifications of histories of violence (2019b, p. 60), slavery's redress must be felt interpersonally and structurally. Before structural change can be put into effect, expanded research on artistic and poetic practices that commemorate slavery must be honoured and supported.

Slave studies, as Southey articulated in 1992, is indeed still emerging, nascent in its potential (1992). There is still a great deal to discover, interrogate and achieve as it concerns the study of slave history and memory in South Africa. The possibility of a collective inheritance of slavery depends on it.

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