

**Artistic Interventions in the Historical Remembering of Cape slavery,
c.1800s.**

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister
Artium in the Department of History, University of the Western Cape.

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Date of Submission: 02 December 2020

DECLARATION

I declare that *Artistic Interventions in the Historical Remembering of Cape slavery, c.1800s* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Mischka Jade Lewis

02 December 2020

Signed:



Dedication

Ma Gertrude and Oom Aby.

Why should we wander bone yards
draped in linen

flesh is the coast we unfasten
and throw off

what need to linger among stones
and monuments

we have risen away from all that
wrapped in understanding¹



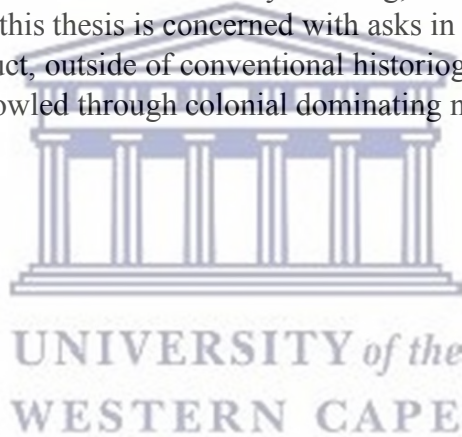
¹ Lucille Clifton, *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (BOA Editions Ltd., 2015).

Keywords: archive, embodiment; pedagogy; affective, sacredness, feminism, collaborative praxis.

Abstract

This mini-thesis thesis intends to grapple with silences by looking the possibilities of reconceptualising archives through notions of “traces,” “absence,” and “fragments.” Examining archives as bodies of knowledge, a window to telling us something about past-present-future representations is to think about navigating archives of colonialism and slavery as sites of historical memory. The aim of this paper is to enter the pedagogical problem of remembering and gendered representational voids by seeking to explore how artistic representations offer insights in the absence of detail in the colonial archives.

In exploring the relationship between bodies, remembering and the historical trauma of slavery and colonisation, specifically in relation to historical corporeal and flesh narratives attached to indigenous black women, and how women negotiate these meanings through embodied interventions in (post-) slavery South Africa. The positioning of the body as an archive probes questions on how the memory of traumatic wounding in a (post-)slavery South Africa body politics are inscribed to convey meaning, memory and identity. The notions of embodiment that this thesis is concerned with asks in what ways can we creatively and imaginatively re-construct, outside of conventional historiographies and knowledge(s), that which has been disembowled through colonial dominating narratives of enslaved subjects?



Acknowledgements

Salutation: I pay my respects to the indigenous people in the territory known as South Africa. I pay my respects to our Khoe and San people, elders past and present, the holders of our futures – who retain a deep connection to this country, as we continue to fight for liberation and freedom. Toa tama !khams ge.

Gratitude to you, my ancestors for holding me in commune and guiding me with the spirit of resilience and understanding.

Thank you to African Warrior Queen, Deidre Jantjies for being a fierce spiritual mama, sharing your stories as pedagogy and centering indigenous artistic interventions, sharing your journey and taking me under the wing. This project would not have been conceived without you. As you always say, Plantasie vir die nasie werk.

To my supervisors, Dr Phindi Mnyaka and Dr Koni Benson immense appreciation and gratitude for giving me the space and mentorship-for encouraging me to dream and imagine beyond the constitutional boundaries. You are amazing, phenomenal women who continue to teach me through your academic work, activism, and creative critical thinking.

Thank you to colleagues at the History Department and CHR who have shared their thoughts when consulted, including convenors Prof Patricia Hayes whom introduced me to the idea of critical fabulation; Dr Paolo Israel and Dr Phindi for extensive notes during the Experimental Writing course; Dr Koni for feminist insights during Oral History course and introducing me to the work of scholar Jacqui Alexander.

I am grateful to you, kinship |aokhoen, for inspiring me every day and loving me with gentleness. Celebrating life and the bits and pieces of what would become this thesis with you. Thank you habiby, my partner, Omsese Hassan for your resilient support, strength, and the provocative questions that you posed to push the limits of my thoughts. My friends for affirming me and supporting me through not only a difficult process but during a pandemic.

I am grateful to my communities of belonging for planting the seed, feminist and queer comrade warriors who continue to fight for our collective liberation.

Queen of Sheba, Dr Ingrid Tufvesson, a Khoi indigenous feminist and scholar for your advice, your committed work as a resistor and your constant assurance. Kai Gangan warrior spirit.

Ms Pam Turvey for generously donating towards wi-fi when the lockdown commenced ensuring I complete this research in time, affirming me of the necessary work.

Infinite thanks to the many activists who continue to restore the language and culture of ancestors, the long emancipation insurgents who continue to fight for indigenous liberation in the unceded South Africa territory. Special thanks to elders Bia Joe Esau, Comrades Chantel and Neville Felix, Kia Bia Hennie van Wyk for your warmth and sharing your knowledge with a young toroboas.

Thank you to the National Research Fund for funding my Master's thesis and making the research project possible.

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Prologue

Scenes of Wounded Flesh: Hou-den-bek 'Hold Your Tongue' Trial²

On the 14th of March 1825 at 10:00 the accused was brought to the stand, Chief of Justice Judge J.A. Truter who presided entered the court room and proceeded with a prayer, reading the act of accusations and a list of witnesses. The sitting commissioner asked briefly whether the accused rebels had any witnesses. Without acknowledgement only P.J de Campher, the white accused, answers yes.

At the trial, Galant accused of being the commander dominates the interrogation of witnesses, with the Court's acquiescence. Other than Galant's Khoi wife, Betje, who speaks out against him, women witnesses are easily silenced as Galant imposes his masculine authority. During her testimony, Roos, a Khoi servant aged forty-one tells Galant, "I am but a woman to you. Therefore, I have nothing to say to you," which Galant ignores and responds, "plaasmeid, jy is niks. I now wish that Antony Ontong would speak". Roos speaks again, "If you did not get victuals-enough that is, then why did you not complain to your master instead of always quarrelling with me at the land?" to which Galant responds "I now wish to speak with Achilles", and Roos was heard no more. Part of the answer to Roos' question is that in complaining to her, and to his wife Betje, Galant was able to project a degree of authority and phallic masculinity, even though this was orchestrated and exploited by officials to create a colonial narrative of 'men in commando', women especially so slave women were relegated to a 'few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.'³

The only woman who joined the rebels who knew the intricacies of the rebellion plan was Pamela, designated as a concubine of Galant in the court records, the silenced 12th prisoner. The colonial authorities charged her with passivity, her crime being her silence during the

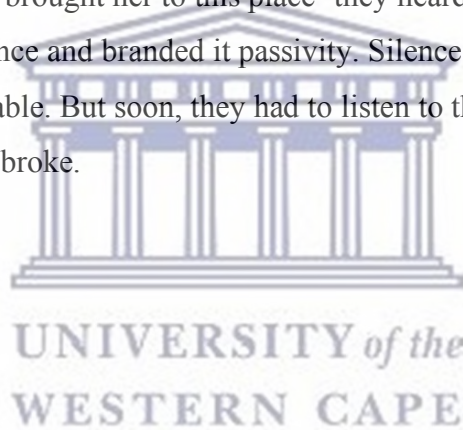
² The houd-den-bek trial is based on the 1825 rebellion in Houdenberg near the Cederberg mountains and lands in Western Cape, the rebellion is also referred to as Kouebokkeveld rebellion and Galant's rebellion. This creative non-fiction text is an accumulation of archival court records and testimonies as well as several secondary sources and imagination. This text refers to the trial specifically and mediates on the silence as a resistance strategy as well as the idea of capitalism's framework to violently silence the oppressed-intentionally silenced. For more, see unpublished Mischka Lewis, *Gendered Motivations?: Koue Bokkeveld Slave Rebellion in Cape Colony, c. 1825* (University of Cape Town, 2018); Patricia Van der Spuy, *A collection of discrete essays with the common theme of gender and slavery at the Cape of Good Hope with a focus on the 1820s* (University of Cape Town, 1993), R.L. Watson, *The slave question: liberty and property in South Africa* (Hanover: University of Press New England, 1990); G.M. Theal's *Records of the Cape Colony* vol. 20 (London, 1904), 20. Including Cape Archives: CJ 633, Case 8, March 1825, 879- and CJ 819, case 9, 134.

³ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008), 2.

murder of her masters. The White Father's Law could not bear the thought that a slave did not sacrifice her body for the protection of the *nooi en baas*.⁴ However, her structural position in the slaveholding is suggestive: she identifies herself as Galant's wife, and refers to him throughout the court proceedings, unlike Betje, who was certainly senior to Pamela. Betje was the 'loyal slave' and the matriarchal figure-enticing in the white imagination-and nestled in the oedipal settler family as the 'beast', other times she is kind figure and expected to show her loyalty to the white master.

Galant and his fellow male rebels were all accused of actively rebelling against their masters, whereas the only female rebel, Pamela, was charged with passivity. What does that mean? Passive. Settlers could never reconcile Pamela's silence and compliance, her act of resistance for freedom envisioned and (im)possible. Did anyone care that Pamela screamed against the system until her voice became hoarse and reached silence? Did anyone remember the end of her dignity and the filth that brought her to this place- they heard but pretended to not hear. Instead, they looked for silence and branded it passivity. Silence made the presence-unavoidable and uncomfortable. But soon, they had to listen to the strange silence, and that was the moment the silence broke.

a universe of silence
within
body
cell
atom
within
word adding search to reach
wind to spool
to twist
of thread along the black
stretch of ever
into Silence
that mocks the again in know
the word discovers
Word



⁴ References to slaveholding household masters.

mirrored
*in Silence*⁵

Reflecting on the edges; I wondered whether the margins of silence constitute sound itself, an act of quotidian resistance, the unsaid, the unspeakable, the abjectness and suppressed? Or is this the set-up for black women in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal world order(s)- an intentional oppressive silencing and invisibilisation? What is the meaning of Hou-den-bek/hold your tongue/ hou jou bek?⁶

Pamela, was jy stil omdat jy omring was deur geweld wat jou mindewaardig gemaak het? Of was jy stil om God se stem te hoor? Hoor my stilte kind/ die taal van God is stilte/ hoor my stilte soos die hoe berge en die asem van engele.⁷ What arises in these spaces of silence, the spaces between the words? Do you listen to the silence?

Unwilling to accept her fate in the white father law, Pamela continues to test the limits and lodges a complaint against the slaveholding van der Merwe family, claiming her freedom and in doing so the memory of Galant sentenced to a public hanging and her unconceived baby. She then sets off on a journey - from the southernmost reaches of the Cape, across a great wilderness, to the far north of the country - to reclaim her soul and continue the fight for freedom.

I attempted to explore with the multiplicity of voice without the desire to synchronize and standardize, to create flow and rhythm. In doing so, I surrendered to the messiness, the disorder and incompleteness that might take place when read. However, in this I find content and a story to tell, not easily articulated and against academic valorisation of making something out of a particular thing. These interjections are the incorporation of authorial voice with imagination- my questions to Pamela in vernacular and an imagined response on the sacredness of silence

This mini-thesis thesis to grapple with silences by exploring the possibilities of reconceptualising archives through notions of “traces,” “absence,” and “fragments.” Examining archives as bodies of knowledge, a window to telling us something about past-

⁵ Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *Looking for Livingstone – an Odyssey of Silence*, (Canada: Mercury Press, 1991), 39.

⁶ Translated: Shut up.

⁷ Translated: Pamela, were you silent because the violence has reduced and negated you? Or were you silent to her the voice of God? *Hear my silence, child. The language of God is silence. Hear my silence like the high mountains and breath of the angels.*

present-future representations is to think about navigating archives of colonialism and slavery as sites of historical memory. The purpose of the thesis is not prescriptive or alternative, but instead a beckoning to center historical experiences of women and ask critical questions, to understand silence and absence differently. To reimagine the empty spaces and footnotes of black indigenous and enslaved women's historical representation. All three chapters are part of a pedagogy of discomfort; critique of the disciplinary formations of historicity, recognising the limits of the archive to challenge scientific objectivity claims.

Aware of the litany of various forms of memory of slavery and colonialism, Chapter 1 "Archival Traces and Memory" explores the issue of archival limits in relation to amnesia, erasure, alienation, and colonialism. The theoretical observations lead me to propose how artistic interventions, through affective modes, provide a different way of articulating the past which traditional archives may fail to do particularly if historians insist on treating it as fact and evidence. An engagement on sacred memory by feminist historian Jacqui Alexander traces ways in which knowledge is embodied, manifested, and evoked through spirit in response to the impossibility of knowing the interior of historical experience and subjectivity through the traditional archive. In narrating archival refusal, I engage Saidiya Hartman's concept of "critical fabulation," to narrate archival fragments and absence of enslavement and captivity.

The collaborative interviews with artist, poet, filmmaker and dancer Deidre Jantjies examines what possibilities sacred memory and spiritual evocations through artistic modalities might offer in challenging colonial narratives within traditional archives and representations enslaved indigenous women's histories. As an artist whose work is immersed in historical and archival material, the creative process by which Jantjies uses her hypervisibility in embodied storytelling looks at the pedagogical problem of remembering and representational voids and asks how artistic representations imaginatively seek to offer insights in the absence or evasiveness of detail in the Cape slavery archive. The chapter proposes looking at the epistemological and pedagogical intent of storytelling and self-reflexivity to generate new vocabularies and meanings for historical articulation and narration of women's lives-beyond more conventional historiography and traditional archives.

Lastly Chapter 3 "Feminism and Oral history," reflects on centering feminism as a methodological and ethical consideration and a necessary intervention to meaningfully engage difficult but urgent histories of indigenous and black women; unresolved legacies of

intergenerational trauma, dislocation, colonisation and enslavement still present today. In recognizing collaborative praxis, I draw on Richa Nagar's concept of reflexivity and radical vulnerability to explore the analytical use of co-authoring with research subjects or narrators.

The thesis endeavours to show how invisibilised histories and sacred memory can be utilised to question meanings of representation and interrogate the notion of "absence" when it comes to slave and indigenous women's historical narratives in South Africa, specifically in the Western Cape locality. The word invisibilised expresses the characterisation of an invisible framework that governs the structure of the archive and the way meanings are re-produced among the traces. I make the distinction from invisible/hidden histories to caution against implying a history of recovery mode. Instead, the project explores ways to move beyond the approach to recover women's histories from patriarchal archives, and beckons us to question what histories do we remember through the assemblages of material embodiments such as written testimonies and artefacts? What impact do archives have in indigenous/black women's displacement - politically, emotionally, and materially? Under these conditions of trauma and violence, how do we listen to echoes and traces of elusive presences such as indigenous/ black women within the archive? And how do we move beyond the limitations of approaches that attempt to re-cover/recover? I do not attempt to answer these questions but instead meditate and reflect on these questions throughout the project.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized building with columns and a pediment.

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Chapter 1: Archival Traces and Memory

Enslaved Women and the Violence of the Archive

In recent years, there has been an outpouring of critical scholarship focused on dissecting the colonial archive, specifically in relation to the difficulties of retrieving the voices of black indigenous enslaved women from archives. Frequently, historians note that traditional archival material is incomplete and written primarily by powered functionaries or dominant groups. However, there remains a paucity of scholarship that looks at archives of slavery in the Cape in order to challenge the meanings within silences and erasures, to be explicit about the archival limits and understand that these limits hold power that potentially make absent multiple possibilities in narrating indigenous black women's lives. An acknowledgement of these limits is not an alternative mode, but instead a proposition to understand absence and fragments contained in archives differently to re-think the empty spaces where enslaved and indigenous women are erased.

In terms of South African historiography, the apartheid era has been the dominant period in which scholars have analysed South African history in terms of race, class, and gender. Patricia van der Spuy reflects on the introduction in the 1980s, a period characterised by the spirit of revisionist history, of a feminist materialist critique and analysis of racial capitalism which saw the insertion of gender whilst maintaining the *foci* of analysis on race or class.⁸

In 1991, feminist academics at the South African Historical Association (SAHA) challenged the lack of recognition and acknowledgement of feminist scholarship. The conference reflections convey an array of articulation around gender and race. In other words, gender was not raised as a subject itself, rather object of study explained through racial and class dynamics. My concern is that race and class as categories of analysis and markers of differentiation, restricts the scope of analysis in a way that gender becomes a subjectless critique/presented through hegemonic representations to construct a race-class hierarchy.

The acknowledgment of feminist perspectives and women's histories through centering of gender and sexuality only gained momentum in South Africa from 1991 as a result of disruptions from radical historiographical critiques and those relegated to the margins of the

⁸ Patricia van der Spuy, & Lindsay Clowes "Accidental feminists? Recent histories of South African women," *Kronos*, 33(2007), 213.

academe.⁹ Without regurgitating the debates that are raised, to flag a few issues summarised: van der Spuy & Clowes mention the debates around struggles between Marxism and feminism, in particular Belinda Bozzoli's 1983 article of feminist materialist critique of South African history.¹⁰ Helen Bradford's argument on gendered language in articulating modes of production which reveals the uneasy relationship between Marxism and feminism is mentioned, echoing the 'personal is political' shift as necessary to looking at black resistance.¹¹ Desiree Lewis' analysis on gender, identity and difference in writing productions being fixed on national and political boundaries is mentioned, and in turn she offers a critique of androcentric historiography.¹²

An important critique van der Spuy and Lowes mentions briefly still requires critical dialogue, fierce interrogation, and broader intervention in the discipline of historical studies- dominance of white feminist imperatives and the imposition of western hegemonic gender paradigms at the beset, vilification and alienation and suppression of black, afro-centric and indigenous feminist paradigms in Cape slavery historical scholarship.¹³

⁹ Patricia van der Spuy, & Lindsay Clowes "Accidental feminists?," 213-214. More needs to be discussed regarding how whiteness sustains itself and operates to possess/dominate through the racialisation of black indigenous people- potentially illuminating the imposition of blackness as a logic of white epistemology. van der Spuy also notes the critique at the SAHA conference of white women and feminist scholarship solidarities of writing within the academic privilege of whiteness, at no apparent risk, under apartheid required further challenging within western feminist paradigms, on authorial subjectivities and representation of indigenous/black/African women. What lacked was a nuanced gender analysis- such as intersectionality coined by Kimberle Crenshaw to interrogate how representations and identity markers constitute the structural elements of experience under racial capitalism, and the idea of intersectionality to frame the interaction of racism and patriarchy. See more: Kimberlé Crenshaw. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, New York: New Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Belinda Bozzoli, "Feminism. Marxism and Southern African studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 9 (2), 1983.

¹¹ Helen Bradford, 'We are now the men': Women's beer protests in the Natal countryside, 1929 in B. Bozzoli (ed.) *Class, Community and Conflict*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press. 1987), 293.

¹² Desiree Lewis, "Feminism and the radical imagination", *Agenda* Vol. 72, 2007, 18.

¹³ Yvette Abrahams, "Was Eva Raped?" *Kronos, UCT*, 1996.; eds. Wendy Woodward, Patricia Hayes, and Gary Minkley, *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.); Yvette Abrahams, "Colonialism, Dysfunction and Disjuncture: Sarah Baartman's Resistance" *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 58, 2003.; Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire home: Race, class and gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004.); Sharifa Ahjum, "The Law of the (White) Father" in *Women and Slavery*, ed Gwyn Campbell, Miers and Miller, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.); ed. Nomboniso Gasa, *Basus'imbokodo, bawel'imilambo/ They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007.

Chandra Mohanty makes an insightful assessment, when she argues that colonialist discourse continues through western feminist writings that,

discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular “Third World Woman”-an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.¹⁴

Therefore, critical questions of representations and subjectivity are important for indigenous black radical feminists. Who speaks for whom and whose voices are heard? These questions share insights on the deconstructing *Othering* of indigenous black women in western feminist writings. Subjectivities here speak to feminist conceptualisations of identities as fluid, intersectional and multi-layered.¹⁵ Gender is not the sole determinant of indigenous black women’s identity. Oyeronke Oyewumi provides prolific insights on the problematic of white/western feminist approaches located within bodied binaries and exposes the danger of using imposed categories as origin. It is important to state that indigenous feminisms do not necessarily find power imperatives in the biological or corporeal concepts that denote the body as a locus of biological determining social position, instead Oyewumi urges that investigations into gender in African cultures must beyond the biological deterministic discourses.¹⁶



Archive and Traces of the Past

“The document sleeping in the archives is not just silent, it is an orphan.”¹⁷

“All traces are present to our minds. There is no hint of something that is absent.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Chandra, Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse,” *Boundary 2*, 12, 3 (1984), 333-358.

¹⁵ Desiree Lewis, “African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges,” in *African Gender Studies A Reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 381–95.; Njoki Wane, “African Indigenous Feminist Thought,” in *The Politics of Cultural Knowledge*, ed. Njoki Wane, Arlo Kempf, & Marlon Simmons (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 7–21.

¹⁶ Oyeronke, Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies: A Reader* (Springer, 2016), 3–21.

¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 5. print (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 169.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 425.

There exists a plethora of academic scholarship that laments the use of archives as material proof of “what happened.”¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur’s epistemological engagement on questions related to the interpretations of what constitutes archive and memory is in some form a way of thinking about dialogues with the dead pursued through the living. To put it differently, the archive is a tracing amongst many that goes beyond concerns of dates, instead it is about the intentions and perceptions of officially curated records and what they mean for present curations of historical representations.

In *Memory, History and Forgetting* Ricoeur frames the archive through the concept of trace referring to the relation between image(-making) through memory devices and the imprint of the historical event to represent the past. Within this relation, Ricoeur argues that presence and absence are inevitably embedded within the archive as it is entangled with memory and imagination. This argument opens an understanding of the dialectical play between history and memory as representations of pasts.²⁰

The notion of trace is extensively deliberated in terms of variable tropes and utilised in three ways: trace as written to constitute a documentary trace (historiographical operation); trace as an impression of affection on the soul left by markings; trace as corporeal or cerebral incorporation of neurology.²¹ What’s important in highlighting is the relation between the historical condition and memory of interest for the context of the archive. The documentary phase in the study of history as transcribed from testimonies of eyewitness are presented as “documentary proof” in the traditional archive which attempts to break the hearsay of oral testimony.²² Ricoeur refutes this notion and distantiation, his analysis of the descriptive crisis distinguishes documentary trace from the affective trace referring to the imprint of memory and begs the question of what is at stake between the practice of history or historiographical operation and the experience of living memory.

An archive is not only an institution that classifies, consigns and allows for consultation with material objects like documents or artefacts of the past, but also as a “sign-effect of its cause”²³ where history is made up of traces of the past-“vestiges of the past” - and act as a

¹⁹ See example: Premesh Lalu, “The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence,” *History and Theory* 39, no. 4 (December 2000): 45–68. and Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2002), 19–27.

²⁰ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 137–138.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 278.

sign of past actions read in present effect.²⁴ Trace then becomes both dateable and a stretching of time, projected into a public memory which bring alive social and political meanings “in view of establishing probable, plausible narratives.”²⁵

Documentary trace

Thinking through granularity of the archive, as mentioned by Ann Stoler, brings forth her claim that more scholarly attention should be devoted to the “archive-as-subject” instead of only “archive as source,” to place the archive as a site of knowledge production not a minefield of facts. Stoler’s argument is informed by the debates she raises about the archive as a powerful technology for the 19th century imperial state to codify its belief entangled in law and power. Broadly, Stoler engages the epistemic anxieties of colonialism featuring in what constituted the archive, its form, and systems of classification.²⁶

Honing in on the material edifice of the document and the historian’s commitment, Ricoeur reveals a number of questions, of particular interest are his descriptions of archiving as a passage of institution where testimony undergoes multiple constitutional phases to become documentary traces. In return it is conferred the status of an institution.²⁷ Ricoeur questions the methodological and ideological choices behind the collection, production, and selection process and to whom the monumentalisation of past is useful. Trace, here, is critical in the operative because the unfolding of the historiographical operation is not isolated. Reminding us that,

“no one consults an archive apart from some project of explanation, without some hypothesis for understanding. And no one undertakes to explain a course of events without making use of some express literary form of a narrative, rhetorical, or imaginative character.”²⁸

Thinking through the archive as an institution of governance and control also challenges the inherent political and ideological apparatus of the archive. The state’s role as a patriarchal, father of law and political figure frames the systematic organisation of material archives, illuminating tensions on logics of categorization and consigning systems. Ricoeur notes,

²⁴ *Ibid*, 170.

²⁵ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 181.

²⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: University Press, 2009), 92-95.

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 167.

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 117.

Records-in all their forms- enable and leave traces of what governments, corporations and individuals do. They can be created to repress or to free, to nurture or to attack.²⁹

Ricoeur calls for a re-examination of the material dimensions in conceptualising archives as place or physical infrastructure where documents or artefacts are simply located, stored in a specific categorised manner to draw attention to how the archives constitute a trace of historical memory.³⁰

It is the “professional historian,” Ricoeur remarks, who is the inevitable reader sharing in the production of knowledge about the past through archiving and privileging certain groups, texts, stories, events; while erasing and forgetting “Other’s other.”³¹ Sharifa Ahjum in discussing the role of slave women in Cape slavery, uses the notion of “Other’s other” to describe the multiple negations gender undergoes within settler colonial law, fundamentally excluded from humanizing imperatives (marked as property) and positioned in relation to white masculinity and femininity which holds the hegemony of humanness.³²

Succinctly expressed, “ the moment of the archive is the moment of the entry into writing of the historiographical operation.”³³ An institutional formula underpins the archive and lures historians through servitude to the historiographical operation. Historians whose historiographical desires are to recuperate and fact-mine run into the risks of reproducing the institutional logics in their process of writing productions.

What interests me is how colonial and western monopolisation of archives and memory could bring forth severe implications for indigenous black women that speaks to the distortion and fragments of historical representation. What implication arise through the vehicle of enslavement to control, silence and erase variegated narratives of gender, sexuality, and positionality within the political economy of colonialism, not only within the analyses of slavery and gender that focus on the trade and commercial aspects of slavery? It is with this challenge that the archive has come to function as a site of colonial imagination, domination and racialization.³⁴ Tracing the power relations within the colonial archive illuminates the

²⁹ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 167-168

³⁰ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 166.

³¹ Sharifa Ahjum, “The Law of the (White) Father” in *Women and Slavery*, eds. Gwyn Campbell, Miers and Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 83-86.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 166.

³⁴ Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire home: Race, class and gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 129.

production of silences which Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues shows the “differential exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others”.³⁵

In that fashion, my concerns lie not in the post-mortem of archival records but exploring the terrain of traces and absence in relation to the archive. This requires not only reflecting on the relationship and tensions between history and memory, but as Ricoeur’s theory shows, the literary constructions of narrative writing. Weaving social imagination and memory to challenge the notion of scientific and objective histories as legitimate and valid historical contributions because this ignores the varied interpretations of being in the world. The moment memory enters language and is either spoken or written it becomes entangled in a discourse of which the subject engages herself “situated at the crossroads of semantics and pragmatics.”³⁶ But the process of elevating from memory to language contains difficulties and abuses that are taken for granted.³⁷

Affective Trace

“To sensible images and to notions is added the memory of passions of the soul: the memory is, in fact, capable of recalling joy without being joyful, and sadness without being sad.”³⁸

“But it is to true memory, genuine memory, that the invention of writing and its related drugs is opposed as a threat. How then can the debate between memory and history not be affected by this myth?”³⁹

Archives as bodies of knowledge through corporeal and visceral embodiments evokes affective responses to the past. Ricoeur recalls the first presupposition of affective traces in relation to engaging archives consist of persistent first impressions, “an event has struck us, touched us, affected us, and the affective mark remains in our mind.”⁴⁰ The memory of first impressions, Ricoeur explains, lies latent in memory and is revived in search of being recognised and declared. To recognise the personal memory in latent state, images are constituted that relates to the affection expressed, speculative enigmas are at the heart of impression-affection.

³⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “An Unthinkable History,” in *Silencing the Past* (Boston, 1995), 25.

³⁶ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 4.

³⁷ Ricoeur, 129.

³⁸ Ricoeur, 99.

³⁹ Ricoeur, 142.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, 427.

The affective trace is a pronouncement after event, the same way trauma is understood after the event and the survival of images is habituated in memory recollection. The nature of image making recalled in the present moment, is retrieved through sensory modes, and can no longer remain outside of the archival experience.⁴¹ Ricoeur's observations lead me to propose how artistic interventions, through affective modes, provide a different way of articulating the past which the officially curated archive may fail to do particularly if historians insist on treating it as fact and evidence.

Ricoeur notes that "memories belong to the 'world of experience' in contrast to the 'worlds of fantasy,' of irreality."⁴² The world of experience provides an analysis of how subjective memory is performed and what occurs in-between converting the experiences in various forms, whether it be written or through artistic modalities. It also provides a conceptual landscaping to make sense of the abyss of time, space, and history in our lived experiences. What this posits, requires rethinking the notion of time and narrative construction as relative and subjective, and questioning what happens when there is an interplay of memories, projections, and interpretations in the production of stories. The abyss of time cannot be grasped easily because moments are fleeting, and human consciousness depends on historical awareness to give meaning to time-situated projections.

In this context, I am concerned with writing histories of enslaved and indigenous women along and against notions of trace and absence- of which the archive is a "tracing among others"⁴³- located within space and time. The circular dialogue around exploring the archives' epistemological and ontological possibilities, attempts to move beyond the archive's status as marked by power and authority, and instead to closely read the "fragments, traces and absences" that make up archives.

In the next sections, I reflect on what these fragments mean when articulated through notions of "absence", being aware that the traditional/colonial archive's testimony is officiated by being written and processed, and not immediately what is said or thought or embodied in other means. Reading traditional archives in this manner, allows for a broader consideration of materiality and principles that underpin the archive's approach or utilisation as a method to construct, testify about the past through written/text/material.

⁴¹ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 430-432.

⁴² Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Traces of violence from Dismembered archives

The violence of the archive, Saidiya Hartman asserts, is the reduction of history into “simplified, quantified and seemingly objective account[s]”. In this regard, the erasure of history is rooted in biased contents of the archive.⁴⁴ Traces of violence epistemically, reproduce conditions by which narrations of enslaved and indigenous people are regulated and organised in a particular way. In essence, the archive dictates what can be said, and which stories can be told.⁴⁵ It is within this problematic of the archive that Michel Trouillot asks, “how does one write a history of the impossible?”⁴⁶

In response to Trouillot, Hartman considers looking at histories by employing critical fabulation which is an approach that attempts to “imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done...”.⁴⁷ Hartman’s intention is in line with the notion of reading against the grain by excavating at the margins of slave history for the dismembered past to be retrieved, but also considers the approach of reading along the biased grain to narrate traces and silences of historical moments in a manner that would stretch the fabric of the archive to make historical events legible beyond silence/absence/fragments.

Narrating archival fragments, it is necessary to exceed the confinements of the archive as historians have been traditionally trained, to interrogate the limits of the archive not within a footnote but as a subject of study itself. It matters in how historical events, moments and representations are (re)produced and in so illuminating scripted violent reproductions of colonialism.

Indigenous black and enslaved women, in the colonial archive, including the 19th century Cape archive, are already projected through the realm of sexual violability and colonial desire.⁴⁸ Therefore, thinking with the concept of critical fabulation further addresses an ethical issue of historical representation, not only writing against the grain but also poses a challenge to constraints of the given within archives. Hartman evokes imagery to write a narrative of gestures that relay archival refusal. Alluding to spectrum of speculation in *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman asks,

⁴⁴ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008), 2.

⁴⁵ Saidiya Hartman, “Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route,” (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008), 3 & 17.

⁴⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “An Unthinkable History” in *Silencing the Past* (Boston, 1995), 73.

⁴⁷ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008), 11.

⁴⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 11-12.

“is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive? By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that, I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling”⁴⁹

For Hartman, critical fabulation as a mode of storytelling involves critical speculations about the gaps and silences of official archival records and thinks through the subjunctive to open narratives that are within conditions of absence and erasure. Within this fleshing out the historian’s relation to the archive is paradoxical, exposing one to both a site of possibility and impossibility.⁵⁰ Therefore, critical fabulation challenges the assumptions of history, and the invisible framework of the archive that neglects women’s subjectivity or refuses to break from marginalising or disempowering historical representations.

The paucity and *evasiveness* of historical documentation on lives of enslaved women in South Africa, usually provided in court records, slave sales and passing records, requires innovative ways of looking at slave and indigenous women’s presences in history.⁵¹ Pumla Gqola argues that feminist imperatives require an examination of “unconventional” locations that “function as valuable sources of contestatory meanings,”⁵² urging historians to interrogate the notion that traditional archives are the only repository of valuable knowledge.⁵³ It is only through awareness of limitations of traditional archives that a nuanced understanding of slave and indigenous women can occur.

Ann Stoler’s reference to “granularity” of the archive⁵⁴ is particularly helpful to better trace the complex lives of slave women in South Africa. Stoler’s methodological innovation of reading along the grain captures Derrida’s “archival turn” which reflects on the archive as a

⁴⁹ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008), 2.

⁵⁰ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 2-3.

⁵¹ Pumla Gqola, “Like three tongues in one mouth,” *Women in South African History*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 37. Also see P. Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press), 1-7.

⁵² Gqola, “Like three tongues in one mouth,” 32. Gabebe Baderoon’s Malay cooking as an alternative archive encodes meanings of Malay traditions and enslaved women is one such example. See Gabebe Baderoon, “Kitchen Language” in *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014), 46-65.

⁵³ Gqola, “Like three tongues in one mouth,” 36- 38.

⁵⁴ Ann Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 92.

subject demonstrating multiple contradictions.⁵⁵ Derrida argue that the archive “is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional”⁵⁶ because it preserves but in an unnatural way which Derrida perceives as an archival violence.

Derrida troubles the archive as a site of power and authority but more importantly the ambiguous and fragmentary nature of its contents – the condition of ‘presentness’ and traces of absence that make up archives to portray a promise of origins. The fact that the archive records only what is objectified, written and processed by authorities reveals dislocations of memory and the work of history. This incompleteness and instability of archives, however, can be overlooked if we focus too much on the archive’s exercise of power and not enough on intimate relations between archive and patriarchal principles of power which underpin its approach to any narrative construction; document, text, artefact, or oral testimony as objects endowed with evidentiary power.⁵⁷

Similarly, Achille Mbembe makes a provocative assertion that the archive is not just data but a status enabling classification, selection and an ordered and hierarchal world of proof of “what happened”.⁵⁸ Thinking through archives as traces and materially as institutional storage or repositories means recognising the incompleteness of the officially curated or documented representations of pasts.

The issue of the archives is fraught with questions related to the paradoxes of memory and remembering. The crossings of memory to history as articulated by Ricoeur and Hartman foreground the problematics of historical representations that unfold during the scriptural/writing phase. In remembering history through interior mappings or affective, memory is asserted as a reflexive practice⁵⁹ and proposes looking inward to bring into fruition invisible enclosures of historical representation.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida and translated by Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25, no.1 (1995), 9.

⁵⁶ Derrida and Prenowitz, “Archive Fever” 7.

⁵⁷ Derrida and Prenowitz, “Archive Fever” 7-8.

⁵⁸ Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, *et al* (Cape Town: Clyson Printers, 2002), 21.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur on reflexivity and worldiness entangled. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 36.

Memory and Remembering

“to burn the archive and to incite amnesia ... aiming to ruin the archive as accumulation and capitalisation of memory on some substrate and in an exterior place”⁶⁰

In this section, I engage Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* to discuss (re)membering as spiritual and linking the past with the present and future.⁶¹ In this context, the historical events and experiences of slavery persists in the present, throughout the project of modernity and disrupt its tidy categorizations and epistemological divisions. A particular interest for this project is the chapter engaged ‘Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible’ which invokes Spirit and in particular the spirit of Kitsimba from the Mayombe region of Central Africa, who partakes in the act of (re)membering the symbolic and real violence of ‘the Crossing’ that brought her to the ‘New World’ and bestowed her plantation slave name ‘Thisbe’. Alexander notes,⁶²

... the cycle of action, reflection, and practice as sacred praxis embodied marks an important reversal of the thinking as knowledge paradigm.

An engagement with sacred memory, associated with ancestral memory, traces ways in which knowledge is embodied, manifested and evoked through spirit.⁶³ Rinaldo Walcott, in applying Cathy Caruth’s post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to the cultural traumas of diasporic black people illuminates how “in the absence of detail” imaginative representations acts as flashbacks which “bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred.”⁶⁴ Walcott’s lens of bearing witness to past trauma in the contemporary opens a sea of inquiries related to how artists may represent the void of absence. What possibilities exist to attempt representations of past that make sense of trauma enslaved endured?

⁶⁰ Derrida & trans.Prenowitz, “Archive Fever” , 12.

⁶¹ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, Perverse Modernities (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005),312-327.

⁶² Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 307.

⁶³ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 14-15.

⁶⁴ Rinaldo Walcott, “Middle Passage: In the absence of detail, presenting and representing a historical void”, *Kronos*, 44 (2018) 63. The artist that I engage in Chapter 2 invokes spirituality in their work through various manifestations which includes honouring ancestors, enabling cultural rootedness to narrate or a story and for many other personal and intimate purposes.

The questions I broadly explore in the project are: what do artistic archives such as storytelling and sacred knowledge have to offer for the narrating of historical discourse? When chronology is disrupted through evasiveness/absences/silences, what negotiations are made to construct a historical discourse? What is the potential or *foci* of critical and reflexive methods and how are these experiences analysed in historical discourse? The project does not intend to answer all the contradictions and limits of archives discussed above, instead it attempts to think through these contradictions and paradoxes as productive tensions that enable the possibilities of plausible courses of action in (re)membering colonialism and slavery.

Archival Refusal: Traces of Sacred Memory

living in sacred memory, overcrowded metropolitan cities surrounded by colonial imperial visions- spatially, architecturally. Peeking through Huri ̄oaxa, wedged in the sacred places of human memory and oral testimony, //Hui !Gaeb. Erratic spirits of Abo Abogan, not easily stuffed and closeted in towered buildings of colonial aesthetics. Secured for imperial desires- and antipathies so deep and enmeshed in neoliberal humanism- for so humanist the hundred and thousands of Khoi Warriors were murdered to prove ownership. Decades and centuries later- private ownership or “you’ll be prosecuted”- our struggles-private ownership: the skies, beaches, the soil. “Water overflows with memory. Emotional Memory. Bodily Memory. sacred Memory.”⁶⁵

In meditating on memory, in context *situ* sacred memory, it is a vast and expansive terrain that refuses the material archival positionality. It is not tied to the limits of earthly time, enclosed in colonial maps or positions, not dependent on the corporeal body, instead it moves in-between spaces of mind-body-soul, refusing to be “imprisoned as exhibit in a museum or archive.”⁶⁶ It is important to note that oral history and traditions are a trace of sacred memory that enables articulation of meanings or glimpses into understanding the past-present-future nexus. Unlike in academic spaces, oral history forms a core of storytelling and as will be later

⁶⁵ Ritual inspired by quotation from Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, Perverse Modernities (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 318.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 314. Alexander’s arguments raised questions for me around how one embodies rituals in written form? And what negotiations are made in terms of the performativity and meanings produced? Dreams, sacred practices, spiritual manifestations are not constituted as a historical study, yet indigenous black histories are informed by the connection of mind-body-soul in contrast to the western Kantian models of scientific enquiry through mind-body binaries.

discussed is a source of a sacred memory with pedagogical intent. Perhaps I must confess upfront then that history books have failed to consider oral history as a source of sacred knowledge, not a folklore tale but valid knowledge.

Acknowledging that dispersion of making meaning stretches beyond the semantic cortex and reductions, admitting that we are mistaken to believe books are authorized sites of wisdom.⁶⁷ There are many sites that goes beyond the material capsule of written literature, such as stories that are histories and memories of entangled pasts-present-futures.

“The dead do not like to be forgotten, especially those whose lives had come to a violent end and had been stacked sometimes ten high in a set of mass graves...”⁶⁸

African cosmological systems are complex and varied- both located and dislocated across geographical boundaries.⁶⁹ The migratory nature of African spirituality comes through in varied contexts of internal crossings, which Alexander refers to as a “pantheon of inheritance.”⁷⁰ This crossing draws from African belief structures and practices; local migratory sensibilities; different consciousness of culture and languages; fauna and flora ecologies; and violent conditions of (dis)possessions. In this light, humans are simultaneously earthly (biological) and spiritual beings.

Fundamentally, who is remembered and how they are remembered goes through continuous webs of interpretations to ground meaning and imagination temporally. If understood in this manner, prescriptive pasts, present and future are not conceptualised as linear. The notion of lost in time comes to mind: a collapsing of present into a past and future combined. What then is the use of present tense? How does the Spirit bring knowledge from the past, present and future- experience now to narrate historical moments?

Linear time does not exist, in this context, because spiritual energies do not obey human idioms such as capitalist notions of time. This Spirit encounter, reflected later, is a search for truth-telling: it is intentional and purposeful. The archives and historical records then would still be important to tell us something about past representations; but they may be utilised differently as a source to consult and not necessarily in a complementary sense.

⁶⁷ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 317.

⁶⁸ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 317-319.

⁶⁹ As will be reflected in Chapter 2, there are various manifestations of being reminded of “locatedness, rootedness, and belonging” that maps out subjectivities in individual and collective relationships to the spiritual.

⁷⁰ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 319.

The notion of time disrupts the desire for written confirmation, it may be going to !Ãb ge(river)-Khoekhoegowab characterised as baptismal waters which draws attention to conceiving how the mind of Spirit works. A daunting demanding task, the suspense of inherited habits of full comprehension and grasp. It is in here and there that the ruptures and fragments of time evoked by the Spirits simultaneously shape-shifts in consciousness, reminding us human beings are not the sole narrators of time- or conforming to dictates of capitalist production time.

A spiritual encounter, Alexander reflects, is a “dangerous memory,” traces of Abo Abogan(ancestors) lives, dreams, shadows or hauntings, vibrations of feelings, a reflection which may even come through inter-sectional manifestations.⁷¹ In order for the Spirit to come into being they require embodied beings, manifested in the quotidian. Therefore, it goes without saying that legal and missionary records give us proximate access into the daily living experiences. They are unable to convey the intimacies of the interior lived experiences which cannot be expressed in colonial ways of recording-remembering. Consequently, African spiritual living is both grounded and expressed in many manifestations. One cannot simply rely on the knowledge of books, not even the analytic compass of self in navigating these terrains.

An awareness of the grounded commands of spirituality required me to scrutinize my own motivations for embarking on this project, intermingled in my own self-discovery, and occupying unstable spaces of not knowing. Further admitting that fancy words mean nothing, perhaps there is something in the nothing-thinking of (de)coding absence and silences in ways I did not even know how to begin. This draws parallels to the idea of archival refusal, a refusal of the Spirit to be consigned in categorical records, defined by state corpus and colonialists or me as a History student. The Spirit moves through multiple mediums and possesses the power of refusal into submission and being captured. Are rituals meant to be written? How do I know self through the Spirit? What labour makes this process intelligible?

Sacred Memory and Subjectivity

I began this project around theoretical contributions, but during the interviews I had to push aside the books and conduct myself in a manner where my living experience becomes bound

⁷¹ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 337. Intersectional manifestations signifies Spirit ability to inhabit vast planes of consciousness.

up with Krotoa, Sara Baartman and Pamela⁷². In other words, I had to open myself to the spiritual muse, knowing self through Spirit and circular movements to attempt making intelligible a spiritual undertaking. I have learnt that stories of living experience are understood through affective modes signifying memory, voice and shaping of identity. Therefore, sacred is to be understood as anchored in consciousness drawing sustenance through shape-shifting or codes of “disembodied consciousness.”⁷³

For many feminists, experience is epistemically valuable in understanding subjectivity. However, what has been missing is, the spiritual nature-shifting from personal to sacred memory. It is within indigenous feminism that the spiritual is political,⁷⁴ in ways that “no longer contest mediating the traffic between the personal and the political.”⁷⁵

The analytical challenge here is considering the spiritual dimensions derived from epistemic frameworks deployed. Another, the rigid hierarchies, and disciplinary regimes within knowledge making projects or as referred historiographical operation⁷⁶, evoking spiritual practices in alterity to unintelligible and subordinate to modernity. If there is the positioning of the spiritual in social, cultural, and political relations, can it be taken to constitute body praxis?

Therefore, I ask the question of what significance is the body in the making of experience, understanding spiritual work as a body praxis or form of embodiment which is concerned with the way people come to inhabit their bodies to becoming habituated.⁷⁷ Explaining spirituality through inscriptions in bodies, memories and stories in particular processes of embodiment; further elucidating markings on the flesh as inscriptions of embodied processes. However, another may be ceremonial rituals through which healers become habituated to the

⁷²I have intentionally just mentioned the names, to not make the focus point historiography but instead look embodied resonances of indigenous black women Krotoa. Cape Khoi perceptions of Krotoa, Sarah Baartman and Pamela (mentioned earlier in prologue) who are sacred ancestral figures that appear in traces of historical archives and in so sacred memory. See also Trudie Bloem, *Krotoa-Eva: The Woman from Robben Island* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2002).; Yvette Abrahams, “Colonialism, Dysfunction and Disjuncture: Sarah Bartman’s Resistance” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 58. (2003)

⁷³ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 323. Patricia van der Spuy. “A Collection of Discrete Essays with the Common Theme of Gender and Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope with a Focus on the 1820s,” University of Cape Town, 1993.

⁷⁴ Oyewumi, *African Gender Studies*, 23, 67 & 381.

⁷⁵ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 323–24.

⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau, “The Historiographical operation,” in *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 87.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 324–25.

spiritual which is transposed onto the body.⁷⁸ In this explanation, Alexander constitutes the body as a site of memory, not for sale as insinuated through colonial power nexus, but a living memory and entanglement that gives insights into the process of spiritual embodiment.

The body acts as an encasement of the soul, medium of spirit, repository of a consciousness that derives from a source of a trans-temporal residing. Thus, spiritual knowledge attained through the process of embodiment is to be understood as a pathway. The intelligibility relies on the social-spiritual connections of a community to decode sacred knowledge; therefore, it is inconceivable to think of Krotoa, Sarah Baartman, Pamela without descending a message to and of collective presence. This reflects the body not tied into dualisms, but a triad of mind, body and spirit.⁷⁹ This is important in understanding how this embodiment provides grounding and anchor for these entangled elements to shape subjectivity. These crossings and pathways of subjectivity and collectivity are sacred.

Alexander reminds us of

“idea[s] of a multiply manifested or multidimensional god, avatars, that make the sacred tangible”⁸⁰

In a mini thesis it is nearly impossible to plummet full depths or grasp mysteries that constitutes spirituality or sacred memory. Therefore, meeting points must occur within engagements that are mystical, elusive, imaginative and practical. The invisibility of Sacred/spiritual constitutes presence: this provokes attention. Alexander calls on us to make tangible the invisible. Just like we may not see wind, but we can hear or feel wind. We know wind through affective means, feeling, seeing, perceiving and affects, in short, what the body experiences. This links to the aesthetic representations that go beyond the trivia and memorabilia known as worshipping of idols.⁸¹ Instead it signifies a grounding for the affective more than anything else.

⁷⁸ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 325.

⁷⁹ The process of embodiment signifies the entanglements of body and memory, moreso it posits the understanding of a sacred memory in action-lived experience.

⁸⁰ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 327.

⁸¹ There is much to contest when one speaks of the phantasmagoric representations of African spirituality through imperial lenses. Many Khoi use for example Catholicism as the subterranean mask to sabotage colonial attempts to annihilate them- walking similar geographies with saints. Not intending to conflate, but instead illuminate ideas around using Spirit knowledge/ways of knowing/bearing witness as a medium through which many women in the world make their lives intelligible.

Concluding Remarks

In crafting a conceptualisation of archive in relation to memory, I have used sacred memory to situate (re)membering through representations of the Spirit evoked in varied embodiments which is in a sense, a way of communication. It therefore comes as no surprise that we find many artists commanding sacred knowledge to creating aesthetic expressions whether it takes place through creative mediums such as storytelling, poetry, rhythm or visual arts and performances, which is of particular interest for this project.

The deep scars and wounding of colonialism, slavery and the various manifestations which asserted racism and heteropatriarchy in indigenous black communities have been state endorsed and mobilised. Consequently, the political monopolisation of memory and (re)membering reflects the scars. The problems of today, the destructiveness of racial capitalism: femicide and gendered violence, inter-relational intimate violence, alcoholism, drug addictions, depression and suicide have long stories.

These stories are entangled in the systemic dehumanization wrapped in capitalism's neoliberal guise, therefore, opening anxieties around indigenous black bodies. Women's and queer bodies wrapped up in an imperial erotic violence, struggling through the post-slavery period to “belong” and reclaim their humanity and find positionality in ethnic-based nationalisms. Women being called to perform agency, buried, and weighed against oppressors. These conflicts arise in trying to carve out understandings through hegemonic epistemologies or theorizing from “absence” which are at odds with those who derive meaning of self through intimate and tangible worlds of invisible, fragments, traces.

Chapter 2: Embodied Self and Representation

Deidre Jantjies and I started our conversations on 14 May 2019, we met for coffee at the Taj Hotel opposite Cape Town Gardens and Iziko slave museum, formerly known as a slave lodge located on Wale street. After catching up and checking in with one another, we got down to the interviews where I again explained the purpose and objectives of the oral history project-careful to not project presumptions based on what I read.

I asked Deidre to tell me about herself (who is Deidre?), a complex and dreaded question that I decided on the spot I would ask since who Deidre represents features at the core of her work. It's still odd that I had a list of biographical questions from asking for a full name, age, background experience and many more because interview design is a necessary part of completing ethics applications, yet in the moment of the interview I asked "who is Deidre?" she started with telling me about stories as a source of pedagogy, enabling collective learning experiences for the purpose of communicating ancestral voices and deepen understandings of life histories and experiences. Stories are voices linking us to the universe of deep connections, who we are is at the core of storytelling. Deidre described embodied storytelling as an energy of outer-body experience to awaken the self to becoming an instrument or channel:

*Deidre Jantjies is a line of warrior queens, represents a people who has been oppressed, not acknowledged. A nation of new people- young people speaking out, embracing themselves, who they are and not apologizing. Deidre is a storyteller, a change that is evolving into a new revolution we are going through. Voice of many young-old -old spirits/one body but so many voices needs acknowledgment and given space to talk. Storyteller in a hub, with different titles and roles that society has systematically put in place, but Deidre is the core of storytelling and finding a common goal or purpose to get everyone who has lost their voice, to find their voice within this nation of collectivity that she is creating. That in a nutshell is Deidre.*⁸²

The nutshell contained stories that revealed the complexity of constituting identity of multiple self-representations and destabilizing notions of fixed/reductive identities. After the first interview, I asked Deidre Jantjies to share via email a biographical sketch that she would like to have included in the project. In the next section titled "who is Deidre?" I have decided

⁸² 1st Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, 14 May 2019.

to use Deidre's words to share all her facets, roles, her story and experience that she would like centered. In the first biography, Deidre shares her professional artistic work. In *A Warrior Queen of Africa*, a recognition of writing multiple selves is explored. Lastly, Deidre uses poetry and praise to assert subjectivity, Sacredness and mythical imagery to evoke a sense of Deidre's being; multi, layered, diverse and fluid in the roles she assumes.

Who is Deidre?

Deidre Jantjies, the artist:

Jantjies is a professional flamenco dancer, activist passionate about the historical stories of women. She is the founder of Na Aap Productions, a fully integrated, broad based production company, screening untold stories and history of Southern Africa. Jantjies has a long history of stage performing, she took these skills and started writing her own stories that she is creating into short and feature films. She works extensively on narratives closest to her heart.

Becoming a producer was always an option to her, after she felt her stage career was not challenging her anymore. Taking on stories that includes indigenous heritage and traditions that has been forgotten, is the most important dialogue that she wants to create.

The Sarah Baartman's story became a calling that she could not look away from, as she begun becoming passionate for Sarah Baartman's, as she saw the descendants' image in hers. This will become her first self-written feature length fiction film on a true life event, called 'VENUS'; a young woman that is born with a gift, the spirit of Sarah Baartman gave her on the day that she was born. Her life comes to a stop when she has to use this gift in order to set the ancestors truth free.

The first story she is currently producing/writing is a short fiction film that received development funding from National Film Video Foundation called 'HOK MEISIE' a rebellious teenage girl from Upington who always felt out of place in society. She finds out that her grandmother has been hiding the fact the she is one of the last speakers of the San



Figure 1 Provided by Deidre Jantjies in email labelled biography, 27/05/2019.

N/uu language. The girl goes on a journey of discovering her roots much to the dismay of her mother and mortification of her best friend.

She has also produced and written a 12-minute x 13 Episode Animation Series broadcasted on Youtube channel, called 'STORIES IN THE WIND'⁸³; Magic realism stories from the Natural habitat of Southern Africa, highlights that connects the young and old indigenous people, and cultures. A collection of traditional indigenous stories, landscapes through the /Xam, N/uu and other indigenous stories. Each story gives a deep meaningful message that is a way to communicate and educate. Jantjies believes that she is a custodian for telling stories of indigenous history and knowledge.

” I will win 22 Oscars and keep Africa’s stories on an International level for the next fifty years.”

A Warrior Queen of Africa

My name is Deidré Samantha Jantjies and I am a Warrior Queen of Africa. I do not accept any titles that were given to me in a little box to be ticked. I am African pride, a woman that has endless possibilities to who I am as a being. I descend from the /Xam, N/uu, Nama, West Africa, North Africa, Malaysia, my spirit of indigenous ancestry flows deep so I call myself a Warrior Queen.

I was born in Cape Town, but at 3 months I was separated from my mother & father who lived and worked in Cape Town-in order to live in my hometown Dysselsdorp, Oudtshoorn. They could not find an aftercare for me to stay at as a baby; while both my parents were working. Instead, they then made the decision to send me home. I lived with my aunt and grandparents that gave me the spirit of my identity. I lived and grew up in Dysselsdorp till the age of 9 years old then I moved back to Cape Town again to live with my parents.

I lived in Cape Town District Six (Zonnebloem) most of my life, close to the mountain where I really feel whole. All of my schooling was in close proximity of my home where I lived and



Figure 2 Titled Headshot in email attachment.

⁸³⁸³ *Stories in Die Wind*, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9ZG4RCCXz8>.

so I am now very grounded to this land that I am living on. I feel the same about Dysselsdorp that I grew up in, something magical is in the soil that groomed me as a young woman.

I started dancing as a Flamenco Dancer and become a professional dance instructor in 2011. The art form really showed me the depth of expression and emotion being performed to people. Because I loved the art form so much, I wanted to know why I feel so connected to an art form that does not even come from my land or my people. I then came into contact with storytellers that wanted to know how I can do all the movement with so much meaning and emotional connection to people. This question always haunted me while I was performing, because it was scary at times to take on emotions and characters. These characters that would be performed on stage are existing spirits that lives in your DNA. I then identified a wealth of stories in my body that I can change into as one woman that did not understand herself.

After performing on stage as a flamenco dancer I wanted to know more about my limits, which theatre stage could not give to me? Storytelling was the only thing that I knew and the only crave I had, and then I remembered how much I enjoyed watching movies that made a change in my life. Film was going to be the next step to my storytelling, but not just any films, it must be 'Magic Realism' fictional Historical films that I have to tell, because I just could not see my own image or reflection anywhere in film. So I took on the responsibility to take control of producing my own historical stories that represents my line of people that I descend from.

The Holy Ghost is a Woman

Die Heilige gees is ñ Vrou/ Stof blink liggies/ Son

straal reënboog skyn soos fynkonyn

Sy knyp die kieste van my kiewe/ Die

soutpillar/Hand voel soos ñ blaar/ Jou seisoen verander, lente in jou hart/ Goud raak my vel/

Katolieke kerk krag lietjies/ Lief daarvoor is sy/ Oop is die siel oë/ Kerk bank kruis grill deur

my trane/ Blydskap/ In jou kinnerlike hart/ Erf jou glimlag van Egipte/ Kerk klok koningkryk

is sy/ In die naam van die Vader, die seun en/ Die Heilige gees is ñ Vrou...../ Onthou.

-Deidré Jantjies



Figure 3 Looking towards Table Mountain, Cape Town. Provided by Deidre-credited.

It became important to invoke narrative agency in collaborative praxis and have Deidre speak and write her biographies as she would like represented, recognising that Deidre as an artist is already unapologetic about self-representation in performative art, storytelling, and encouraging speaking truths. When Deidre speaks through the third person voice, she places herself within the omnipresent narration state to reveal of her identity and positionality whether it be Deidre as a storyteller, film producer, performer, collective of indigenous women or spiritual manifestations. As readers or the audience we gain access to moments of the subjective consciousness and how Deidre perceives of her-self and community.

Deidre came to our first meeting with her family's archive, a lineage tree diagram and portraits of her great-grandmother safeguarded by her aunt to show and tell me her family history as well as her experience doing research in the Cape Town repository. Along with these portraits were shared stories of many voices, one being Deidre's great-great grandfather who fought in World War II and in the 1930s returned home to form part of an insurgent group against settler and colonial governance in the Oudshoorn region. Deidre mentioned that before she headed to the archive, she went home to Dysseldorp and found information by "word-of-mouth," a local way of saying oral histories.

The first ancestor's surname was Tarrentaal, changed to Roman and later became Jantjies. I asked about whether Deidre had an idea of how the surnames changed. She noted that she was told their names changed when they became slaves on a farm. This piqued her attention to question "who are these slaves, where do they come from?".

After almost two hours of conversation, Deidre and I left the Taj Hotel to find a space where we could feel comfortable, it is difficult to reconcile critically talking about slavery and colonial histories in luxury hotels. We decided on lunch, Injera-lamb and vegetables, in Long street at a restaurant we both enjoyed. After we ordered I asked Deidre, without expecting a reply, what it might have meant for our ancestors' names to be changed forcefully, what the loss signified in narrating historical memory?

Orlando Patterson indicates the naming process as being defined by the process of natal alienation, which enables the objectification and commodification of the slave body by denying slave history and kinship bonds to the past.⁸⁴ The archive is a place where this is most illuminated; slaves were named randomly by the master based on the calendar, mythical

⁸⁴ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5-8. Also in unpublished Mischka Lewis, *Disposable Bodies*(UCT, 2018).

or godly figures or tongue in cheek names like for example, *Dikbeen*. The naming process was arbitrary and did not take into regard former names or histories because the slave body was already objectified and commodified. In some cases, slaves were identified through owner brands, markings that are associated with their ethnicity; tattoos and ritual scars; filed teeth or simply named after the calendar month in which they were sold. These names did not come without gendered and racialised constructions.⁸⁵

A denial in proper naming ceremonies, Barbara Bush further reminds, was not only a disruption in African (matriarchal) cultures that led to confusions in identity but was intentionally used for the control of the master.⁸⁶ This poses questions around what meanings of maternity and reproduction during slavery were produced when enslaved women's bodies were the threshold of racial slavery. Christina Sharpe eloquently expresses that the “the negation or disfigurement of maternity, turns the womb into a factory reproducing blackness as abjection and turning the birth canal into another domestic middle passage.”⁸⁷

In discussing the condition of postcoloniality in South Africa through the concept of shame, Zoe Wicomb utilises ethnographic textual construction and analyses the historical political constructions of coloured identity in South Africa to examine the literary inscriptions of shame in racialised and sexualised histories. Wicomb in considering the materiality of bodies, marked of miscegenation, and how bodies become a site of shame, reflects how bodies are bound up with politics of location, belonging and nation-building performances.⁸⁸ Through the case and historical iconography of Sarah Baartman, Wicomb reflects on how a pervasive history of shame, entangled with miscegenation and discourses of race signifies degenerate representations which are exploited in apartheid- to name the coloured race and how it recurs in current political discourses:

“The Baartman case also neatly exemplifies some of the central concerns of postmodern thought - the inscription of power in scopic relations; the construction of

⁸⁵ A collection of Slave Office documents in the Cape Town Archive Repository contain details about slave complaints, records include “free blacks” who lodged complaints on behalf of slave women. Documents dates back to the British administration in 1816-1834, a scan will illuminate slave name associations and natal alienation processes. Also see Vertrees C. Malherbe, *Illegitimacy and Family Formation in Colonial Cape Town to c.1850*, *Journal of Social History* 39, 4(2006), 1156.

⁸⁶ Barbara Bush, ‘Sable venus’, ‘she devil’ or ‘drudge’? British slavery and the ‘fabulous fiction’ of black women's identities, c. 1650–1838, *Women's History Review* 9, 4(2000), 768.

⁸⁷ Christine Sharpe, “In the Wake,” *The Black Scholar* 44, 2 (2016), 63.

⁸⁸ Zoe Wicomb “Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa”, in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970– 1995*, eds Derek Attridge & Rosemary Jolly(Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 92.

woman as racialized and sexualized other; the colonization and violation of the body; the role of scientific discourse in bolstering both the modernist and the colonial projects - and is thus a convenient point around which to discuss the contested relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism.”⁸⁹

We, Deidre and I, spoke about Wicomb's analyses and shared stories on experiences where we had to navigate othering of our representation/body within community and journey of reclaiming our identities during adulthood. What really stood out for me was when Deidre spoke to my inquiry around how she represents the complexities of cultural and racial identity and debates in South Africa around Khoen indigenous people, black and coloured positionalities? How does she navigate the erasure of being indigenous in a world that *priori* race and gender identity as markers of difference and essentially naturalised? Deidre responded,

*I don't identify with the black & coloured narrative- it's a colonial creation, we saw each other as co-existing groups, now black is a global conversation, US conversation dispersed globally. I call myself an African warrior queen which is for me stronger than anything else. Since doing my family history, I am trying to identify deeply with African history. I can tell you we are much more than slaves...if you look at me, na die kleur van my lewe,⁹⁰from where I descend... How do we reclaim all that? We do deserve the best because we are great, our stories are important textures of our cultures. The anime series, *Stories in die Wind*, is important because it's about creating magic realism stories, but also a space where we can identify ourselves, that we do come from roots. The first African women in Southern Africa to tell animation stories through indigenous world sense. They don't know who I am? they think I am Coloured...Even though historians say the Nuu, \Xam, bushman stories are extinct and lost-that is a lie. Our great-great grandparents always told us stories. They all have a part of these stories still within their memory if they allow to access it. / We are sitting on a gold mine...yet there is this white structure of how to tell stories, but we have always been telling stories as humanity.*

I quote “Plantasie vir die nasie”⁹¹ because ons is verskillende⁹² breeds of flowers, it is just our environment that is not allowing us to blossom, to bloom and to be extraordinary the way

⁸⁹ Zoe Wicomb, “Shame and Identity,” 93.

⁹⁰ Poem reference, directly translated as colours of my life and quoted by Deidre in conversation on debates around race, culture and indigenous representations.

⁹¹ Translated as Plantation for the nation.

⁹² Translated as we are different.

we deserve to be. So it is about our surrounding, if there is a whole lot of rotten apples.. the good apples are going to become rotten because the environment is negative. I speak about plants/nature a lot because we are all part of nature, we are animals, we are plants, we are everything. and if we do not have a good environment, we perish. Look at places like Manenberg, Hanover Park and Mitchell's plain where we cannot even bring tourism into our spaces because of the violence, nobody wants to go there everyone would prefer the townships like Gugulethu or Khayelitsha-why? There are many townships out here.../ In our communities still very much caged, so if there was not any gang wars, was not any fights, our kids would be thinking like entrepreneurs- where they can uplift themselves. /People coming into the community, they'll go to restaurants, pubs, whatever the community creates and that is how there is an income that goes into the community building, not tikhuise and smokkelyarde where money coming from community, and it's a poor community. I am thinking about it in that way.⁹³

The failures and inabilities to represent folk memory and oral histories of slavery in popular mediums such as history, public media and museums are a consequence of the erasure and amnesia of enslavement. Shame bearing histories and denialism of institutional slavery in South Africa have resulted in a loss of indigenous and ancestral knowledge to witness a fragmentation of coloured and indigenous representation. Deidre, by insisting on the rootedness and finding belonging in multiple ancestry suggests the ways in which identities overlap and the negotiations made in spaces that totalise difference. On the other hand, the disavowal of difference and intersections of historical lived experience imbue a counter-narrative. The resistance against racial identifications of black and coloured or as Deidre puts it not being able to identify with the black/coloured narrative when looked at discursively explores modalities of being that challenges the exorbitant insistence of racialised identity at the expense or expandability of indigenous identity. In other words, to be read as just black becomes baseless and too often attached to epidermal histories. This leads to histories that only reach the surface and foreclose willingness to learn beyond boundaries.

A recurring theme I noticed was voice and storytelling, I asked Deidre what she means when she speaks of voice, were these representations of old or young? What does this voice mean to her and how she represents this voice? Deidre responded,

⁹³ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

How I represent this voice is storytelling, so to me in telling stories there is no right or wrong of being told. In older generations, ancestors sat around a fire and used to imitate themselves in different forms and different kinds of ways to tell stories for e.g. song, rituals, telling a story that is how the older generations can tell their own stories and histories. Different forms and dimensions to storytelling-brings everyone together... storytelling is like the air- we cannot live without it, we cannot see or touch it, but we also cannot live without it. Can be explained but has a deep spiritual connection part of who we are, old and young have a part to play in storytelling.⁹⁴

In the formation of Na Aap Productions, a company founded by Deidre Jantjies, she explains to me that as she was connecting with all ages, listening, feeling, speaking with ancestors like Sarah Baartman and having conversations with elders. During these moments of sharing stories, she found generative relations where elders could relate to her experiences. She also found that young women wanted to tell their stories but wanted ownership of their stories and creative ideas and not to be stripped from rights to own their stories. Deidre shared that,

Na Aap Productions produces films through the company. We want ownership of stories, told in the right way without having a masculine figure that disrupts the vision. We look at how we can collaborate with other productions, still maintaining ownership. Us women, have been abused, exploited, raped for too long. Like the rooibos intellectual property case⁹⁵-most rooibos come from Western Cape and indigenous people do not have ownership. Not giving intellectual property and copyrights- this is why it is important to tell our stories. This is why I teach Business in the Arts-for younger generations to understand intellectual property; how to identify they are being exploited and understanding consent for example sometimes people go into locations, townships and take pictures and use that pictures without people's consent. You will find them putting these pictures in ads or billboards- knowing your rights and standing firm in it. Not going through the dop system⁹⁶ of being paid for our labour. making stories and

⁹⁴ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

⁹⁵ See Rooibos intellectual property case: “Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Bill [B8-2010]: Department of Trade and Industry.; Linda Nordling. “Rooibos Tea Profits Will Be Shared with Indigenous Communities in Landmark Agreement.” *Nature (London)* 575, no. 7781 (November 1, 2019): 19–20.

⁹⁶ Dop system refers to exploitative labour practice by settlers of giving wine to farm workers at regular intervals during the working day, which was general throughout the Cape winelands by 1890 as form of payment. See Williams, Gavin. “Slaves, Workers, and Wine: The ‘Dop System’ in the

understanding it has value... I work with historians and researchers, a team that support me in terms of producing various series. There is importance in identity, no judgement because we all have different skills and have something good to cover since we all come from the same ancestry-it is like I am connecting with my family. It is about the next generation not to go through this again, sparking new ways of telling stories.

Money is also always an issue, a huge cycle we didn't learn how to get skill of using finance in a systematic way because the system abandoned us. another intergenerational trauma: anger, dop system and drinking- stemming from trauma. about being aware of those things, even when I do drink I become someone else but we don't want to sit and talk about our stuff- that is the one way of healing. people's conversation are skinder conversations, "ooh daai een doen drugs" but we don't understand how drugs came into our communities- the doctors who put it in the system-in order for our people to be killed, gangsterism was used-if you look in each township, every corner there is a smokkel yard, a merchant en nie te ver die kerk. The schools are there, everyone's structures are the same, the gangsters are in charge of specific areas- how does this make sense? it was all put in place, systematically put in place. everyone has sulke klein huises, maar ons is dan mense van die land, wat berge geklim het, - you know what I mean? Our people are not conscious about it. There are 10 people living in a tiny flat and children are being raped, no way in real thought can so many people live on top of each other, of course shit is going to happen. Teenagers should not live in that space- such a headache. Thinking about displacement and how land was taken away from people and forcibly removed from areas they lived-all built up in our DNA, ancestors raped in brothels- all those things in our bodies. Start talking about it, only way for us to get to the problems.⁹⁷

Intergenerational trauma continues to haunt enslaved and indigenous communities, and as Deidre describes it is a cumulative historical trauma of colonialism, shared histories of genocide, displacement and forced assimilations, resource control and deprivations, suppression of language and cultural practices that has left deep wounds across generations. These wounds continue to be experienced in the positionality of racialised othering and silenced histories in South African political landscape.

History of the Cape Wine Industry, 1658-1894." *Journal of southern African studies* 42, 5 (September 2, 2016): 893–909.

⁹⁷ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

Flesh

In thinking through the conceptualisation of flesh, I primarily draw on feminist scholar Hortense Spillers. I am constantly re-reading Spillers' theorisation because there is much to unpack. However, for this project I will be looking at specific distinctions between body and flesh, the latter associations of discursive and visual distinctions that mark the nexus of race-gender-sexuality. Further recognizing the socio-political workings of flesh. To explain the theoretical context, I draw on scholars like Saidiya Hartman and Yvette Abrahams (extraction of flesh through Sarah Baartman) in broader dialogue with Spiller's definition of accentuating flesh as an entry point to explore racial, gendered and sexualised inscriptions of black/indigenous women in archives.

Conversations with artist and performer, Deidre provided insights on themes related to embodiment of Sarah Baartman and memory performance of excessive flesh. Through examining historical flesh narratives attached to indigenous and black women, in part we explore how women negotiate these meanings through embodied interventions in post-slavery South Africa. The artistic embodiment of excessive flesh through Sarah Baartman, positions the body as a site of memory through which both self (pronoun) and collective memory can be transmitted. Simultaneously navigating the terrains of the spectacular violence of being marked as excessive flesh in a society where dominant western beauty standards are centralised, where white supremacist and patriarchal gaze violates. The interior expressions during our conversations spoke to the scientific narrative where flesh is evoked as transgressive/shameful/unacceptable. Using the story/performativity of her own embodiment, Deidre utilises artistic modes to disrupt the distortions of who she is. Her hypervisibility is an opportunity to re-negotiate the meaning of her embodiment.

Writing on the body/flesh distinction Spillers asserts:

I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Hortense Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 17.2 (1987), 67.

Hortense Spillers explains that oppression is inscribed and engendered on flesh of enslaved Africans evoking a dangerous materiality that is situated within a hypersexualised and feminized/masculine body-politic narrative to further produce notions of “blackness that must be tamed and cannot be.”⁹⁹ The engagement on flesh and body is projected through racialised-gendered constructions constituted during racial slavery to enforce a re-inscription of black and indigenous women through the realm of juridical differentiation. Within this racial-gendered nexus is the racist reproduction of indigenous and black women as expandable objects. Even in the absence of written inscriptions there is an epistemology of bodily visibility and ancestral memory that engages the erasures of indigenous and black women's experiences.

The depictions of the enslaved bodies Spillers theorises as “hieroglyphics of flesh”, a process of mutilation and dismemberment, captivity, and enslavement.¹⁰⁰

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually “transfers” from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments?¹⁰¹

The markings on bodies of those in captivity and enslavement relegated them to a (market)place of flesh,¹⁰² the expansion of a libidinal economy where black indigenous women’s sexual difference was used as a justification of abjection and objectifying gazes of commodity property.

Evoking Sarah Baartman in this context is both symbolic and embodied in ways that narrate the conceptualisation of flesh used as a necessary limit case of the human reproduction/sexual difference in 19th century- reduction of people into flesh- raw material to be used, exploited

⁹⁹ Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”, 67-68.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 67. and Saidiya Hartman., “The Belly of the World”, *Souls* 18 no 2(2016), 168

¹⁰¹ Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”, 67.

¹⁰² Hortense Spillers, “Interstices: A small drama of words” in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,2003), 155.

and sold for profit and wealth accumulation, which as later will be explored tears into gender, intimacy and kinship in the African context.

This reminds us that the event and experience of slavery persists in the present through notions of racial-gendered difference throughout the project of modernity, it is an inherited burden. Naming flesh as site of memory embodies entrenched colonial genocide evoking questions around what is the historicity of flesh in this case? How might flesh as a marker of racial-gendered violence transmit from one generation to another?¹⁰³

Flesh as the primary narrative tells of the body as bearing witness to the collective trauma of indigenous and black people encapsulated metaphorically as a “wound [that] remains open.”¹⁰⁴ The collective trauma arises from violent events that have shaped structures of power and governance. This means reliving memories beyond the experience of the physical scars but the internal pain evoked in memories of traumatic experience which are represented through the metaphor of an “open wound,” internal traumatic memories that a survivor experiences.

These *inner bodily memories*, Vilho Shigwedha terms, are concealed by bodily impressions and in communicating enduring agonies of the traumatic experience, visual and oral presentations epitomise memories of trauma, conveying the “visual expressibility,”¹⁰⁵ Shigwedha research looks at remembrance events and official commemorations of the 1978 Cassinga massacre in Namibia. The events are modelled into living testimonies, where survivors would recall their experience, alongside the testimonies visual materials are screened and presented to generate a sense of remembrance. However, Shigwedha argues to look more closely at memory as a “true picture” of the massacre where enduring trauma is relived.¹⁰⁶ Memory-recall evoke visual representations of lived experience and can be mediated by imagery. These visuals which are generated from memories within also make possible remembrance against amnesia.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Rinaldo Walcott, ‘Middle Passage: In the absence of detail, presenting and representing a historical void’, *Kronos*, 44, 2018, 44.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Vilho Shigwedha, ‘Enduring suffering...’ in *Chapter 4: Memory of the wounded body, testimony and the other*, PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2011, 92.

¹⁰⁶ Vilho Shigwedha, 1-25.

¹⁰⁷ Vilho Shigwedha, 90-93.

The political influence in memory through remembrance events shows how images of violence are mediated through unending fuels of political monopolising narratives of oral histories that recount violent events like slavery. In no way am I conflating the Cassinga massacre to slavery, instead I am interested in the questions Shidwedha poses asks around the construction of memory and imagery in remembrance practices; how is it possible that social images can generate a sense of remembrance against forgetfulness of those who did not experience that traumatic event?¹⁰⁸

For instance, Shidwedha discusses how a lack of crystallization of implicit memory, a wounded memory beneath the surface, result in the consequence of survivors enduring suffering in a vicious cycle. Because this memory of trauma is not recognised, the survivors in isolation continue to relive experiences that has become part of their bodies.¹⁰⁹ Shidwedha draws attention to a collusion between violence, memory, silence and an absence of language to articulate the pain and suffering.

In visualising the body through the notion of Sacredness, not limited to the physical pain bearings or markings but through representation of being and flesh, carves out meanings to understanding the ghosts of the pasts. In particular, Sacredness invokes how colonial violence is embedded in the fabric of contemporary conditions; whether it be spatially, legally, materially or through various dimensions that erase a grammar of suffering to articulate indigenous black people's pain and experience in an anti-black world.

Flesh as the primary narrative of embodiment proposes a visceral/corporeal/affective mapping. Rather than being accorded to any gendered-subject positions, it instead draws us in to read more closely socio-political constructedness and cultural territories that rip open flesh. Situating flesh as the expansion of racial slavery violence for reproductive extraction also brings into view a new mode of relation,¹¹⁰ un(making) gendered subjectivity of captive women. Hartman brings into question the discussion of indigenous/black gender as finding itself as both states of ungendered property rendered as commodity yet gendered in the colonial imagination to reduce and reproduce the captive body as nothing but flesh.

¹⁰⁸ Vilho Shigweda, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Vilho Shigweda, 89-92.

¹¹⁰ Saidiya Hartman., "The Belly of the World", *Souls* 18 no 2(2016), 168)

The ungendered “property” of flesh Spillers refers to as “pornotroping,”¹¹¹ tropes of a specific violence that foregrounds linkages between slavery and sexuality enforced on indigenous black women. To illustrate the process of “pornotroping”, womanist historian Yvette Abrahams’ reflections on writing about Sarah Baartman in their personal research diary-starts by asserting that “this diary is about my inability to be a disembodied academic dispassionately analysing some objectified specimen.”¹¹² Abrahams invites readers to witness how Sarah in the year 1815 endured non-consensual medical violence at the hands of European doctors in France. The examination of Sarah’s flesh and body, the exhibition of her genitalia -cut and stored in a jar for the white gaze to objectify her as a specimen- demonstrates evidence of the colonial imagined “Hottentot Apron”¹¹³ reducing Sarah to what Spillers describes as nothing but flesh, her body parts.

Sarah’s body submitted to a violent and shaming examination is connected to the modern gynaecological gaze on the indigenous black body cemented in anti-blackness/scientific racism that speaks to sexualised reproductions of race in captivity.¹¹⁴ Sarah's body in being reduced to flesh reveals a condition of her trafficked captivity as a site of sexual desire/enjoyment for captors. Hartman cautions against this spectacle of violence and suffering¹¹⁵ during racial slavery to attend to the distinctions between witness and spectator. The latter signifies callous indifference to slavery-violence and exploits the interstices of race-gendered-sexual violence by imposing captive flesh as a territory for white possession and neo-liberal humanisms fungibility.

¹¹¹ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe,” 67.

¹¹² Yvette Abrahams, “Ambiguity is my middle name: research diary”, *“in Basus’imbokodo, bawel’imilambo/ They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007, 422.

¹¹³ Abrahams, “Ambiguity is my middle name: research diary”, 422.

¹¹⁴ Abrahams, “Ambiguity is my middle name: research diary”, 422-438.

¹¹⁵ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 19-18; 73-4.

Excessive Flesh

spill (v)¹ cause or allow (liquid) to run over the edge of its container, without intent.

“You’ll spill that coffee if you’re not careful.” | Synonyms: tip over, upset, overturn

spill (v)² (of liquid) flow over the edge of its container.

“Some of the wine spilled onto the floor.” | Synonyms: (over)flow, pour, run, slop, slosh, splash¹¹⁶

In recounting her experience of connecting with her ancestor, Sarah Baartman, Deidre recalls in her childhood being teased because of the excess of her flesh/body. It was during high school in grade nine, when Deidre noticed her body started to change and that it was being pointed out as a difference which made her feel a sense of shame.

Why do I have this big gluteus maximus? And every time you have a big behind, people would say “ooh yirre you look like Saartjie (diminutive form) Baartman” I couldn’t understand why someone would say something like that? My mom would say- “that big bums you must please hide it, it is not nice to look at.” It’s been embedded in my family as well-so I started ‘oooh so this body shouldn’t be accepted-I should rather have a skinny, firm body to be accepted.’ Living in this world, classified as a coloured female in modern society we do not have a lot of information about our ancestors-so I started searching myself, for myself and this is when I discovered Sarah Baartman within my image. I could see her cheekbones were as high as mine, shape of her head, tip of her nose. There was a resemblance to the way that I looked, moved. We as big women should embrace our bodies.¹¹⁷

During 2019, in our conversations Deidre elaborated that her journey in spiritually connecting with Sarah Baartman starts during a search for self-determination,

...finding myself as a woman, indigenous woman and finding myself gradually as a warrior queen. I went through a nervous breakdown...trying to understand who I am, what coloured means, all these questions you ask your parents and they cannot help you because they are not educated on how to handle this- intergenerational trauma-that you feel in your emotions, your body, your mind-set, everything becomes destroyed. I could not figure out where my image belongs. The term coloured could not giving me answers....Hoekom lyk ek soos Sarah? I started seeing my own image in

¹¹⁶ Online dictionary: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/spill>;

¹¹⁷ Deidre Jantjies, *Sarah Baartman Is My Ancestor*, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH9zoWIE18k>.

the image I found of her, started investing in her, having dreams. One dream I am sitting in a wrecked ship, and I am on the beach and the ship crashed, I woke up and she is walking on beach, looking at me and she just walks away-it was like....silence. I have this book where I write all my dreams in. I was just like 'why did she walk away from me?' As soon as you identify, you start seeing yourself, embodying ancestors. She died a very sad death, she is still unhappy, caged in Paris and her own land, on her grave there is a fence- how does that make sense. even me and my strong warrior queen-I am afraid of her, her power spirit because there is a lot of hurt-unresolved hurt.¹¹⁸

In 2015 after being drawn to Sarah Baartman through spiritual evocations whilst completing a film project proposal, Deidre started a journey of self-reflexivity and understanding the complexities of her connection with Sarah Baartman. She remembered that at a young age she experienced depression, battling to understand “*Who I am, what I am and what coloured means.*”¹ In using the story of her own embodiment as a primary source to tell Sarah Baartman’s story, Deidre intends to disrupt the distortions of indigenous and black women’s bodies, I argue flesh, by hegemonic institutions. In doing so she allows her own body, through creative production, to be the archive through which Sarah’s story is illuminated. The embodiment of Sarah was physical/visual, but also an affective mapping:

It took a lot on me to focus on understanding her as a person, who she really was, for me what stems is not the end-product but where does she come from, how did she grow up, in my mind and way I saw/ the image I created for her in a magic realism way-was to understand how she was as a child, what her mother said to her, how she ended up becoming, the nitty-gritty of who she was. She was not just a prostitute but an indigenous women who had culture, morals, laughed/ not an animal-that are even treated better than she was. One night listening to music, sitting at home... in room with light off, the song was so powerful and I could sense her presence in the room, it is scary at times-since 2015 I really started to go “okay, I can do this.” We not guided by our parents or forefathers that are alive, how do we respond to spirits-they so vicious and come like swoosshh. It was hard for me to handle at one night her huge

¹¹⁸ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

*presence. As time went by she became very calm and started opening up- still ongoing.*¹¹⁹

The creative process by which Deidre allows her own body to become the center of a meditation on excessive flesh provides insight into the possibility of indigenous/black women of using their hypervisibility as an opportunity to re-negotiate the meaning of our own embodiment and lay bare the ways in which our embodiment has been conceptualized and historically narrativized through hypersexual/deviant reductions to mark our flesh/bodies.

Drawing on flesh/body narratives to archive enable a dialectics of history centered on an ontological being imperative, an important consideration to making the worlds of enslaved/fragmented identities intelligible. It is only through the embracing of sacred memory that meaning and variability in Deidre's narrative performance is constructed. The embodiment of Sacred, the evocation of Spirits and imagination is a repository whereby the intersection of the mind, body and flesh becomes a vehicle to explore intergenerational memory, which form a sacred dimension of self. A presentation of Deidre's narrative of self, opens up this project to a method of self-exploration that cannot be limited to a genre or way of writing that finds authority and authenticity in the strictures of conventional means of validation and legitimacy. Hence, the positing of the body as an archive speaks to the plurality of self and multiple narrative voices that can be utilised to tell a story through the abstractions, silences, absences and fragments of identity and dominant historical narratives.

Entering archive(s) of slavery there is a need to consider meanings within the absences, erasures, silences. I am at pains with the violence of the archives and subsequent writing productions of histories that reproduces violence evoking the unbearable and unspeakable through "simplified, quantified and seemingly objective account[s],"¹²⁰ signifying the vulnerability of enslaved narratives to a voyeuristic writing. As I was lamenting to Deidre about the fragments of Cape archives and narrating a history of the violence her remark stuck till this day: *because you are thinking like a historian*. In relying on historical claims, intended to be evidence for a particular purpose and intention inevitably reproduces violence

¹¹⁹ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

¹²⁰ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, 2 (2008):2.

of silencing and erasure. Again, reflecting on the pedagogical intent of sharing stories and historical truths informed by multiple sources of knowledge.

Body

*The archive is the body, resistant to the standardisation and hierarchy that comes with the process of classification, selection and an ordered world of proof in traditional archival repositories. Legacies of colonial violence stacked in holding cells of 33 000 metres; indigenous/black voices and spirits trapped and buried in a carceral state. Stored memories of white violence and imagination secured in the basement for settler desires and enjoyment.*¹²¹

The traditional archive of historians functions as a site of colonial imagination, domination and racialization illuminating the productions of silences/absence.¹²² Although there exists a rich corpus of critical thought on the power dynamics within colonial archival repositories, the archive remains alluring for History researchers. The historian's erotic desire is to reconstruct, at times to "discover" the past from the fragments of the traditional archive. Positioning archival documents as giving objectified proximate access to the daily functions of the state¹²³ signifies the will to recuperate. I argue it is further the making of objects and marks colonial social science which finds itself fashioned in modern social theory and histories. I am not interested in dwelling on recovery or diagnosis because it subsumes the dislocations of slavery as a commodity/commerce instead of the making of racial identity and representations of history through the white possessive ideology.

My inability during my Honours to write a narrative of indigenous/black women's agency from 1800s Cape archive records sort of resulted in an epistemological impasse. I did not have a grammar of language to easily articulate my experience of reading and writing of archival encounters. Going through court records was exhausting and depressing. It is depleting to witness violent renderings of women as absent. I did not realise I was also bearing witness to the form of the archive itself.¹²⁴ During 2019 the project opened up a search for methodological approaches to navigate the fragments/unrealistic representations of

¹²¹ Meditation inspired by Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossings*.

¹²² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event," in *Silencing the Past: Power, and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 25.

¹²³ See Nigel Worden, "After Race and Class: Recent Trends in the Historiography of Early Colonial Cape Society," *South African Historical Journal* 62, no. 3 (2010): 589–602.

¹²⁴ In unpublished honours thesis, "Disposable bodies" (2018), I discuss spatial, racial and glimpses of operative renderings observed during my archival encounters- since 2018.

my ancestors' histories to convey a *lived* experience. Conventional methodologies, embedded with particular ideological positions, denies the plurality of historical writing and chokes the analytical power in various structures of language and meaning making.

Reading and facing the laments of archival silences to excavate gendered enslaved narratives whilst trying to make sense of it all, I *am* at pains with the difficulty of retrieving the voice of enslaved women from these colonial depositories. Being wedged in a constitutional disciplinary thinking¹²⁵ and making sense of these archival silences whilst trying to express it in a grammar of language that conveys this pain is constrained by a disciplined thinking.

The writing of history, Michel de Certeau argues, can be thought of through the lens of servitude: the writing undergoing multiple distortions and regulations¹²⁶ that enact an epistemic violence. The metaphor of a burial site¹²⁷ is fitting in expressing the role of the writing of history, not only in relation to excavating narratives from the past but in making sense of the ghosts that continue to haunt us. This project is the metamorphosis of becoming undisciplined. This is a necessary intervention, to undo the devaluing of black Indigenous narratives through a “racial calculus and a political arithmetic”¹²⁸ entrenched during colonialism and slavery. This process, Christina Sharpe elucidates, comes “from observing that where one stands is relative to the door of no return and that moment of historical and ongoing rupture.”¹²⁹

In illuminating the deep structural content that lies beyond the superficial level of historical texts, Hayden White positions metahistorical elements as a way for the “historian to gain an explanatory affect in their narratives.”¹³⁰ In thinking through “explanatory affect,” it requires examining the creation of knowledge production and pedagogies in various sites. Mapping the body as an archive speaks to a resistance of the enclosures of dominant colonial resonances. Thus, Jacqui Alexander encourages feminist praxis to be grounded in

¹²⁵ In reference to the traditional Historical disciplinary thinking that considers colonial archival *evidence* to be legitimate.

¹²⁶ Michel de Certeau, “The Historiographical operation,” in *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 87.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 100.

¹²⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose your Mother: A journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008), 6.

¹²⁹ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.

¹³⁰ Hayden White, “The Introduction: The Poetics of History”, *Metahistory: The Universal Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 10.

interrogating the meanings attached to embodiment, recognizing the body as a site of pedagogy given that body is central in mapping the notion of subjectivity.¹³¹

Deidre continued the conversation on being a vessel for the voice of the ancestors; enslaved and oppressed women who appear in dreams, quotidian experiences, and channelling of Spirits. She stops and interjects, “before we continue with any other questions, I wanted to start off with this ritual prayer. This is how I was answered by my ancestors.” Clearing her throat, she starts:

*Ek wil terugkom as wind/ Ek staan in die see spoel water/ Met n rooi rok aan my lyf soos- vel/
Die wind om die draai bring ‘n boodskap/ Met ‘n skool vis flamenco in die lug/ My hande in
my sy is verlos toe die wind my kop raak/ Nat! staan ek op die water/ Trek my kop na die
hemel, beweeg en roer my/ Op die einde van n jaar doop jy my / In die wind speel ‘n lied/Dit
wieg my, hoor die klop in die dak/Die blikdrom kap in die stilte/Hoor jy alles/Luister
mooi.../Ek wil terug kom as wind.*¹³²

Captivated by the modulations of voice, the vibrant imagery of wind, water, air holding ancestral memories is articulated with dramatic breaks, I am drawn in by the calm flow and authoritative declarations. These modulations are “opening[s] that permit us to hear the muse”¹³³ echoed by *luister mooi*. After a short appraisal and dwelling on meanings evoked. Deidre expands, “*that is a true story, something happened to me at the end of the year. On the 31st of December. I went to Papendorp, off the west coast near Vredendal- At that river [2 second pause] there was something so sacred there that I could feel and sense. My hele ligaam word gegril. Net deur die gevoel wat daardie gees my gegee dit. I was going through a trance-It has got a lot to do with the wind. Have you ever heard the wind really crying?*” I search my memory quickly, blurt out and fumble “*y-yes I have heard people use that expression. What does it mean?*” Deidre responds, “*I truly believe that it is the blood and sweat of our ancestors. Still being displaced-for centuries. And there is no voice that they can speak, but they can speak through us...*”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), 316.

¹³² 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

¹³³ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 16

¹³⁴ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019.

Deidre's insistence on knowing your roots and spiritually connecting with your ancestors, is a way of engaging the sacred as an "ever-changing yet permanent condition of the universe"¹³⁵ and a medium to making the world intelligible. For Jacqui Alexander, the sacred resides in quotidian and mundane practices and stories, where the spiritual becomes political. Hence, she articulates, embodying plays a particular role in being a "medium of Spirit."¹³⁶

Em(bodi)ment

In defining what embodiment means, Deidre speaks of various mediums through which she channels and uses her voice; whether through poetry, teaching or in the production of film. For Deidre, voice is storytelling coming forth in different forms and through various kinds of narratives to allow for personal, creative, ancestral, collective, and political connections.

As a vessel for intergenerational knowledge and storytelling, Deidre is aware of her role in doing memory work and uses her body as a sacred pedagogical embodiment.

I started performing when I was sixteen years old, always loved dancing/ I started flamenco dancing-it is a very hard art form because it goes into the depths of emotion, when you sad you literally show in each and every part of your body, when you happy-you show in your body./ Every time I used to perform on stage, I would feel dirty, like I don't have control over my body. /Whenever I speak about it I get shaky, not something anyone would understand but something I could feel/I would question myself why do I feel this way whenever I step on stage-feel? like there is a heaviness to it.¹³⁷

As a trained flamenco dancer, Deidre uses the notion of shape-shifting, the metamorphosis into a form, to tap into sacred self-manifestations, a being or a character. Deidre not only performs this transformation during flamenco performances but channels mediums of spirits to communicate an embodied story.

...shape-shifting- you not in control, someone trying to communicate in their way, you as channel can feel to communicate to a people. when people feel certain parts, it would be a memory triggered, audience would have a memory/feel something in their gut.../it's communication in a very spiritual form, that I have the capability of doing./Because I was trained, I know how to use every tip of my toes, fingers, when to speak and say it- because then you know what message you supposed to get/ As an artist I identified with this presence

¹³⁵ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 295.

¹³⁷ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019

*as performer it bothered me-no value seen it/ busy with human form and spirits, the flesh and you are naked/ people see you/you are revealing a part of yourself, a ugliness yet actually beautiful part of who they are/ I then stopped performing because I could not understand what it was. /That same presence of not knowing, who is communicating, you do not know-it's scary and shaky./Now you go into depth of certain character, you must be careful because they sit on you like clothing.*¹³⁸

Deidre explores affective terrains through modes of shape-shifting, allowing her to channel Spirits and memory, using entry points of flesh/body as a way to bearing witness to the enduring trauma and repossessing spatio-temporal understandings of the present for pedagogical intent. An exploration on artistic interventions to re-member slavery in South Africa, through embodied narratives, could potentially open strands to explore in what ways knowledge(s) are embodied and transmitted through sacred self, performative art, and storytelling.

In reflecting on the artistic mode of Magic Realism¹³⁹ in film and performance, Deidre describes it as a process where she imagines *what she would've done, what she would've looked like* in a spiritual connection to reflect,

*...who she is ,her real voice to become an instrument in her story./This is how I believe we should be telling stories, we do not have anything tangible/archives/full written documents-we can use our imagination and explain those things, the belief systems our ancestors practiced.*¹⁴⁰

Deidre's anime series which explores magic realism stories is not just a space of telling stories, but also a space where you can identify yourself through modes of storytelling by creating an audience that see themselves beyond trajectories of violence, and instead in worlds with endless possibilities.

Thinking about storytelling and recalling memories of how our great-grand parents told us stories, Deidre informed me that,

*The way we told stories, it didn't make sense at first because it was embedded in education-there was a methodology to it-telling the stories...Connected to universe, the universe is connected to us.*¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ 2nd Interview with Deidre Jantjies. Cape Town, May 25, 2019

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

We reflected on our family history. I have always had a desire to know more, how we got to this place and I recall almost often my curiosity was thwarted by grandparents whose tongue tied in speaking on the subject but mentioned geographical points, family members who urged the past to be sleeping dogs-we do not want to go back. Museums who preferred to appease the appetites of tourists. Archival encounters in 2018- where the erasure and almost “non-history,” of enslaved and indigenous people drew me to the silences, raptures of memory and fragments of lives. An absence could not articulate the experience because enslaved and indigenous women (referred to derogatorily as Hottentot), were both everywhere and nowhere: ubiquitously analysed in historiography as loss/absence in archive. It was very clear to me that the interior lives of indigenous/black women could not be found in the Cape archives records of governance because colonial knowledge production during 18th and 19th century was intended to control and erase women's sexuality by portraying indigenous/black bodies as already sexually violatable and transgressive-just as much as consent was a modality that could transcend in court for enslaved indigenous women.

Throughout the interviews, I was reminded by Deidre of *rootedness, locatedness* and *belonging*. Through creative and imaginative inflection, a sense of self is shaped through the “abstraction and remnants in the psyche which ensure that yesterday lives in tomorrow.”¹⁴² In addressing slave memory in South Africa, Pumla Gqola examines “how the South African imagination conceives of, constructs and interprets itself at a time of transition, and how slavery is evoked and remembered as part of negotiating current ways of being”.¹⁴³ Challenging interpretative authority, Gqola notes that a multilayered approach to the fragments is necessary. This necessitates that we trace slave memory in various sites; “where historical consciousness is masked by later generations as a matter of survival.”¹⁴⁴ Gqola’s position is succinctly expressed when she states that,

“...any memorying of slavery needs to be an engagement with the multiple shifts which accompanied enforced, and self-proclaimed, identities under and following on from conditions of enshacklement. Self-definition, and an ongoing attempt to

¹⁴² Pumla Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2010), 2.

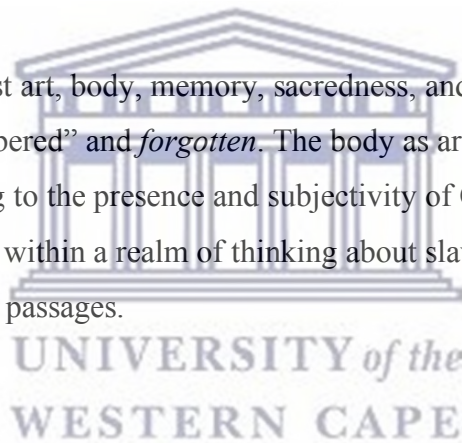
¹⁴³ Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?*, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

refashion ways of dealing with the historical consciousness of the past, remains tricky.”¹⁴⁵

In positing the body as a site of memory through which “our point to view the world”¹⁴⁶ is illuminated opens up a gateway to understanding the personal-political relationship interwoven and intersecting with reflexive examinations of self as a repository of intergenerational collective trauma. This also speaks to constituting a notion of intersubjectivity that recognizes an interconnectedness.¹⁴⁷ In questioning the significance of the body in the making of experience, Alexander explains that bodies inscribe meanings of contestation. Therefore, the preoccupation with Sacredness cannot only be centered on spiritual work as a cultural sedimentation, but an ancestral memory as Deidre reminds us is embedded in our DNA. Thinking through Sacredness as an epistemological praxis is the positioning of the body as a material archive which act as a repository of historical experiences.

Artistic interventions suggest art, body, memory, sacredness, and history are fundamental to negotiating “what is remembered” and *forgotten*. The body as archive, in many ways then is a subversive archive testifying to the presence and subjectivity of Cape enslaved and indigenous women, situated within a realm of thinking about slavery transnationally-Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific passages.



¹⁴⁵ Gqola, *What is Slavery to me?*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Katherine Fobear, ‘Nesting Bodies: Explorations of the Body and Embodiment in LGBT Refugee Oral History and Participatory Photography’, *Social Alternatives*, vol. 35, no. 3(2016), 34.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 323-324.

Chapter 3: Feminism and Oral History

It was October 2018 that I met Deidre for the very first time, a mutual friend and activist Toroga Breda was launching a children's Khoekhoegowab short stories book at the Cape Town Central public library in Parade street. After the book launch, Denver offered to walk me to the Taxi rank/station but after a few minutes of conversation outside the library, they invited me with Deidre in company to join them for *First Thursdays* which is advertised as a monthly arts and culture event that showcases Cape Town's metropolitan art scene.

We explored the evening, meeting fellow artist friends along the way who were living on the streets. Beyonce¹⁴⁸, a trans artist and activist, was the only one who could come along. After a brief conversation and our invite extension, we said goodbye and the four of us walked the streets to experience *First Thursdays*, absorb art and drinks. I remember us laughing a lot, but also reflecting on deep political issues related to the erasure of indigenous Khoi in Cape Town, Denver added "so called coloured" as well because groups of Khoi in 1950 were racially classified as coloured.¹⁴⁹

First Thursdays is not structured, you are able to select from events scheduled or attend it all and most galleries do not charge a fee, so you can absorb as much as you like. We collectively chose the first event of the evening at an architecture gallery in Bo-Kaap. The exhibition was about !haru Oms, known in Afrikaans as *Maatjieshuis* or dome shaped houses in which Khoi lived historically. The presenter was a Khoi man reviving *Maatjieshuis* in Northern Cape for multiple restorative purpose. He informed us that the structure is constructed from dried reed branches, tanned over a fire to remove the bark then carved into shape to form a curve thereafter stuck in ground. After it has set for a few days, woven reed mats are placed on top allowing for light and ventilation, when it rains the stalk absorbs and swell to prevent leakage. A provocative discussion was raised by Toroga when he connected the *Maatjieshuis* beyond aesthetics and architecture to the historical representation of land dispossession of indigenous people. Amongst the four of us, we were reminded of our conversations on "gentrification" in Bo-Kaap as we were coming towards the event. *Gentrification*, another word for urban dispossession. In dialogue with others at the gallery, the challenge of policing and brutal evictions by City of Cape Town, red ants/anti-

¹⁴⁸ A pseudo name for the friend we met along the way who joined us for the first event.

¹⁴⁹ See Patric Tariq Mellet, *Lie of 1652: Decolonised History of Land* (South Africa: Tafelberg, 2020).

land invasion unit and police or as still referred on Cape Flats boere¹⁵⁰ was pointed out by Beyonce in response to Deidre mentioning activists whom were evicted from District six in 2013 and as a symbol of ongoing ancestral land struggle erected a *Maatjieshuis*, which had to be rebuilt every time the City of Cape town policing structures destroyed it. ¹⁵¹The rest of the evening we wandered the streets of Cape Town immersing ourselves in the liveliness of the streets; viewing various artistic expressions; sharing moving conversations over food and drinks; theorising the social conditions and commenting on the spatial arrangements of the city. During our first encounter later in 2019 Deidre and I would refer to that night. The *Maatjieshuis* reference would be a symbolic and connecting point for us when I commented on how on my way to our meeting in a taxi we passed a *Maatjieshuis* structure across District Six flats before Zonnebloem Road.

In 2019, Deidre and I embarked on several projects that would foster a kinship; we started with this thesis research; the Kouebokkeveld 19th century slave rebellion film project and a co-presented a feminist conference paper. The film project re-imagines the voice of Pamela, the only slave rebel women accused of being a “passive rebel” because she did not assist the slave owners and their children to escape.

During those moments of working together, we had conversations and shared stories that extended research and observation methods, our engagements were multi-layered and not a once-off set of interviews to fill in the gaps. They were meaningful to shaping the project with intention. Today I refer to Deidre as Mama, Nation and my spiritual sister. Sharing our stories and becoming radically vulnerable through dialogue, conversations and building relationships of trust opened a muse to (self-)reflexivity and forms of accountability in our creation of feminist knowledges. It is not only in the moments of conducting interviews in a structured format with set questions that we engaged but in those moments of fragments that make up conversations: visiting Deidre's home to chill over a glass of wine; Deidre visiting me on campus; walking streets of District six and Cape Town and meeting strangers- moments of sharing intimate parts of our lives together. When this emotional labour is put

¹⁵⁰ A reference to apartheid police and rural memory of grandparents and families whom migrated/forcefully removed during apartheid to live in ghettos of cities.

¹⁵¹ See: Nontando Mposo and Zodidi Dano, ” Matjieshuis’ erected to honour Khoi past,” 2013. Accessed: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/matjieshuis-erected-to-honour-khoi-past-1546642>

into the project, it becomes difficult to ignore responsibility of foregrounding self-criticism as necessary, opposed to it as an assumption of outward criticism.

The interviews were conversational and self-directed in terms of the questions to allow for a wider interpretative dialogue.¹⁵² These conversations provided an opportunity for Deidre and I to identify with the project and become comfortable or acquainted with the topics of interest and how it relates to the artistic work she does. Moreso, the conversational space¹⁵³ we created was a process of interrogating and assessing the project epistemically; what are the objectives and what sort of representations would we like centred.

Drawing on Walter Mignolo's articulation of conversation as research method to imply,

“people's comments in passing, about an event, a book, an idea, a person. These are documents that cannot be transcribed, knowledge that comes and goes, but remains with you and introduces changes in a given argument.”¹⁵⁴

Further, illuminating crossing of multiple borders through socio-cultural, theoretical, and institutional to narrate the complexities of historical representations; to write embodied memory. I had initially during interview design phase put aside three days, in various locations, for this interview part because I was set that the biographical will determine the form and content of the project and provide a chance for closure. However, I realized that throughout our engagements, conversations, storytelling and working together-that these were not separate/disjointed anecdotal encounters rather enabled arguments that would shape the project.

A conversational approach gathers knowledge from storytelling and re-membering in dialogic participation from both interviewer and interviewee, but certainly extends to a researcher-in relationship/inter-relationship process at the core. In a western construct, relational is viewed as bias and thus an outward reflection. However, to state that conversations are part of the research methodology is to centralise relation and affective moments as means to offer

¹⁵² See open-ended questions Bozzoli, Belinda., and Mmantho. Nkotsoe. *Women of Phokeng : Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann), 1991., visibilising the process of research in a self-critique of editorial voice.

¹⁵³ See Walter Mignolo's. articulation of “conversation as research method.” in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 2000, xi.

¹⁵⁴ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, xi.

knowledge and understanding of complex histories and indigenous knowledge where the spiritual aspect is a relational philosophy.

For instance, during our conversations Deidre and I shared how our grandparents passed along stories when we were younger and how it shaped the core of our being. These were not just stories but invoked with oral traditions and experience(re-remembering) that is a relational process within a wider collective tradition of transmitting knowledge. Therefore, the use of conversations was not just about a means of sharing remembrance, but also a process of where the researcher becomes a participant whether it be in ceremony, community, or intimate sharing of ourselves within the research process. I also found that the deeper the conversation, the richer the insights and this required reciprocal knowledge sharing that is not extractive and one-sided or reducing the subject to data. On the contrary, as I listened to the interviews and transcriptions, I found that the conversations were generating contextual stories that are powerful sources of knowledge that speak for itself.

Throughout the conversations, a praxis of self-reflexivity would be to acknowledge the multi-layered positionalities of feminist research to grapple with intersectional difference, where our bodies are marked and read differently within the various spaces or geopolitical conditions, we find ourselves. Therefore, it was necessary to not impose dominant theories/norms of expertise/ languages that prescribe a formulation for the conversations. It was more useful for Deidre and myself to complicate sites marked as knowledge/dominant ideas of gender representation, culture and political ideas that shape relations of power and reproduces violence through specific racialised and system mechanisms.

Collaboration(s) play an important role in the intergenerative dialogues across social and institutional borders, premising that authorial authority is not exclusive to the researcher. Neither the interviewer nor the interviewee's narrations are privileged because to recognise and acknowledge intersectionality and a plurality of being means kindling the politics of building horizontal comradeship, sharing visions of liberation, dreams and learning together. This means highlighting how meanings are forged through dialogue that hold multiple constructed arguments. This process, Nagar and Benson echoes is "co-determining"¹⁵⁵ dependent on the various aspects of research; writing productions; dialogues that do not

¹⁵⁵ Koni Benson and Richa Nagar, "Collaboration as Resistance? Reconsidering the Processes, Products, and Possibilities of Feminist Oral History and Ethnography," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 5 (October 2006): 584.

impede on self-determined action and where conceptual worldviews may differ from academic paradigms.

Ethical considerations

Reflexivity as feminist praxis

It had become increasingly clear to all of us that traditional oral history methodology did not serve well the interests of women's oral history.¹⁵⁶

An inquiry on feminist methodology poses critical questions related to the authority of research using paradigms and classifications of western constructions to speak to gender, sexuality, class and race. The question to grapple with is how to write against power relations that enact and transcribe violence in knowledge/writing production? The thesis project was an exploration of taking risks involved in rethinking research engagements and storytelling; but also looks towards specific principles that underlie ethics of social change.¹⁵⁷

In reflecting on Susan Geiger's question related to the feminist embrace of oral history, "what's so feminist about women's oral history?"¹⁵⁸ opens up a thread of conversations related to our impositions of certain labels without being critical thereof, realizing at times the disunity of theory and praxis within certain feminist narratives impose "collective sisterhood" of the 1980s without thinking through intersectionality.¹⁵⁹ I found the question a necessary intervention in unsettling the interpretative authority that at times is carried by feminist researchers, not particularly just looking at research intentions/ethics regulations but how an intersecting feminist approach designs a particular project and how it is presented reveals a lot about how meaning is crafted.

It is lamented through rich discussions that traditional historical sources have neglected the lives of women, and that oral histories¹⁶⁰ offers a means for women to contest the reigning definitions of social, economic, and political importance that obscured lives. In terms of the

¹⁵⁶Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

¹⁵⁷ Richa Nagar, *Muddying waters: co-authoring feminisms across scholarship and activism, Dissident Feminisms*. (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 21.

¹⁵⁸ Susan Geiger, "What's so Feminist About Women's Oral History?", *The Journal of Women's History*, 2, 1 (1990), 169.

¹⁵⁹ See Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, (New York: New Press, 1995.)

¹⁶⁰ Terri Barnes and Everjoyce Win, excerpts from *An Oral History of Women in the City of Harare, 1930-1970*, (Zimbabwe: Baobab Books, 1992).

explanatory power of distinguishing women's history from feminist history, I am of the view that a writing of women's history will discuss or be linked in some way to feminist politics. This in no way means that conflation of women's experiences needs to occur if feminist pedagogies are practiced; the tensions of theory and praxis analysed and carefully considered. This approach requires self-reflexivity¹⁶¹; complicating political configurations and historical epistemologies by crossing borders to think about the functioning of systems and an awareness of transnational feminist engagements. During my interviews with Deidre, I never stated that the project was feminist. Instead, we had intimate conversations on feminism and what it means to speak a feminist politics in terms of how we experience life and how it aligns to our poetic ideologies with intent of indigenous liberation.

Equally, I had to challenge the cognitive dissonance: to challenge dominant imperatives that do not speak to how black Indigenous people construct history through various embodied storytelling for a far greater affective reach. The affective cannot be an open space that is not inscribed with dominant ideologies, instead it connects "the visceral sense of social structures, ideologies, histories, policies and bodies that constructs their ongoing vitality, intensity and resonance in social life."¹⁶² This affective is not constrained by the silences and absences, it is utilised to evoke imagination, creativity and asserting multiple intersectional subjectivities where the sacred self is rooted collectively.

Experience and subjectivity are by nature fragmented and composed of multiple differences. When we reflect on the Sarah Baartman and the spectacular violent, gendered and racialised imagery circulated about her as "Venus" we find that in lived experience our social relationships continue to be mediated by these violent imageries. For instance, the association of Deidre's body, particularly her buttocks, to Sarah Baartman to refer reveal that history is not neutral and is utilised as a technology to map settler entitlement onto black indigenous bodies which then in turn is used as a shaming tool. Sarah Baartman's body continues to be circulated through the visual terrains of the settler state. In undoing the spectacle of violence, Deidre's spiritual labouring and expressions through film and cinematic geographies is a form of disrupting the visual terrains of settler colonialism. A labour that holds the affective

¹⁶¹ Reflexivity is referring to the capacity of the self to reflect upon itself as well as on the underlying systems that create it. See Nagar, *Muddying waters*, (2015). For more see Riv-Ellen Prell, "The Double Frame of Life History in the Work of Barbara Myerhoff," (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1989), 251. Intersubjectivity can be defined as the shared perceptions and conceptions of the world held by interacting groups of people.

¹⁶² Nagar quoting Dia Da Costa in *Muddying waters* (2015), 13.

and quotidian conditions of a community's commiseration, despair, but also survival and joy. Much more is needed to critically engage settler aesthetics that mark and monumentalise indigenous black women like Sarah Baartman for destruction.

The intersections of identities are historically, politically, and contextually constructed and continually shifting over time and space.¹⁶³ Thinking through multi layers of narratives informs us of the social, economic, and political landscape; where lives are not able to fit into neat normative social categories as salient, but that there are various historical and social contexts to consider.

Nagar provides insights when she reflects on how,

“personal narratives, strengthened by participant observation, provide insights into the complexities of intersecting social relationships and the manner in which these construct communities and identities in different contexts.”¹⁶⁴

Centralising the methodology of reflexivity means understanding positionalities and the analysis of locations/relationships. Reflexivity as an on-going praxis enables an understanding of the ways in which politics of social identities/positionalities play out in the quotidian influencing the knowledges produced with respect to the communities I write with/speak with/think with.



Constructing with radical vulnerability

When academic truths gain their rigor through conceptual and methodological disciplining and reductionism, it is easy to declare such truths universally replicable and verifiable. The wild, complex, irreducible contexts of lives, struggles, and relationships are often treated as irrelevant or actively shoved into the background in the process of producing such truth claims.¹⁶⁵

The praxis of radical vulnerability returns to question of ethics related to “how and why one comes to a story and to its variable (re)tellings.”¹⁶⁶ Resisting the desire to know what

¹⁶³Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 52-53.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid*, 55.

¹⁶⁵Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 175.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid*, 14.

happened or full disclosure to “lived experiences” because the act of storytelling Deidre reminds has a pedagogical and methodological intent. This is further elucidated by Nagar when she echoes that storytelling, “confront ways in which power circulates and constructs the relationalities within and across various social groups”¹⁶⁷ asserting unavoidable gaps/silences that emerge. However, embracing radical vulnerability as “mode of being” invokes ethical and methodological encounters to recognise that academic knowledge is enriched through creative dialogue and evolves in sites of struggles that form part of the research project.¹⁶⁸

What is foregrounded in praxis-struggles around decentering authorial voice-further complicates meanings around (co-)authorship assembling conversations from various sites, languages, materials, and sources to analyse power functions.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, an interest for the project is how conversations and sharing stories becomes an opening for collaborative praxis, authoring from multiple locations to negotiate marginalised representation and depletions of violent renderings that read women as absent subjects. Nagar refers to the process as “multilocal co-authorship,” fostered by political alliance and a politics of knowledge production that brings forth complications and contradictions of centralising researcher/interviewer to enable a decentering.¹⁷⁰ Questions related to voice and authority in terms of the dynamics between researchers/participants or interviewee/narrator, also raises difficult questions related to who we are writing for/with whom we are co-producing knowledge? The purpose of situating co-authorship, Koni Benson and Nagar articulate, destabilises the grounding of a definitive and universal truth of past/present lives underpinning the importance of multiple truths as meaningful to analysing positions towards and of the communities being studied.¹⁷¹

Multiple stories, languages and silences.

In discussing ethics, I am not referring to the regulation practices of ethics committees to conducting research interviews. To think in terms of a code of practice within a particular discipline limits the possibilities of narrating variegated histories of experiencing colonialism, or as echoed living the enduring trauma. Instead, I foreground reflection on issues of (self)

¹⁶⁷ Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 14.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Katherine Fobear, “Do You Understand? Unsettling Interpretative Authority in Feminist Oral History” 10 (2016): 18.

¹⁷⁰ Nagar, *Muddying waters* (2015), 14.

¹⁷¹ Benson and Nagar, “Collaboration as Resistance?,” 583.

representation and activism to navigating the limits of the archive/grammar of language/memory and authority; this situates questions around positionality of researcher within an ontological engagement whereby we crafted meaning to invoke ideas of how spirituality as a historical representation is not reduced to religious/cultural invocations but rather social formations of everyday experiences.

I have approached the positionality of researcher as ontological embodied by engaging in constant dialogue with Deidre and myself and asking feedback or follow-up which is important in the interpretation of interviews, conversations, and stories. It is during this process that ethical questions around power dynamics and analysis of experience comes forth. Traversing the terrains by paying attention to language and performance gives insight into analyzing the form and structure of interviews. In complicating the grammar of language, Richa Nagar quotes a paper presented by Nuzhat Abbas that resonates with me in terms of thinking about construction of subjectivities in a grammar of language that subverts epistemological impasse:

There are multiple stories here. Multiple languages. And silences. Some that I can decipher, some that I cannot... I write my words in the Colonizer's language that I love and long to claim. The other languages drift in my mind and interrupt me as I read, as I write... She imagines for herself a language that could mirror her constantly dividing selves, her multiplicity of national and cultural identities, without recuperating her for the needs of the centre. She longs for a language that would not automatically erase the dreadful pain of these splittings, a language that would not just celebrate hybridity as choice but would show the cultural struggle of which it is, itself, an after effect.¹⁷²

In November 2019, Deidre and I attended our first conference *Feminist Research Alive in Academia* at the University of Western Cape hosted by Women and Gender studies department. We co-presented a paper titled "Plantasië vir die Nasie: archive of (em)bodying sacredness." The first presentation on the conference schedule concluded with a performance of tense critique¹⁷³ and we sensed many were uncomfortable afterwards. We were afraid that

¹⁷² Nuzhat Abba quoted in Nagar, *Muddying waters* (2015). 70.

¹⁷³ The critiques were around how the author and presenter thought through decolonial psychology as a privileged woman working with working class trauma survivors and centering expert knowledge as

it would impact the message we wanted to convey with our presentation, so on the spot we decided on another sense of introduction. We switched off the lights, only glimmers of light found itself into the room, we quickly did breathing exercises and followed with a poetic ritual called “Die Heilige Gees is 'n vrou” and another unnamed ritual that could claim the space for spiritual invocation, echoing Deidre's words of letting the spirit guide us. In a flared skirt, flamenco shoes and a high-top bun, Deidre stood in front and we could only see her figure, hear her voice and feel the emotion of the performance. Thereafter we started our presentation and together facilitated conversation between ourselves and the participants in the room.

We shared our ideas of collaborative praxis/collective authorship by bringing into question ideas around collaborative praxis with ancestors and spirit evocations. One of the conversation topics with the audience was around labelling the work in a decolonial framework, whereas Deidre saw it within the realm of opening up space for indigenous ways of knowing and I spoke in to hierarchical ways of knowing being disrupted by bringing in multiple selves into the narrating of oral histories. A pertinent topic arose around redefining feminist methodological practice beyond bureaucratic regimes to presenting creative and innovative ways of building accessible bridges between academics and non-academics.

Our presentation was followed by a participant who introduced herself as spiritual healer practitioner and academic who spoke to the dislocations of body and ethnographic practice. It was enriching to see a thread of conversations ensue where all of us in the room were grappling with fragments and our responsibilities as feminist graduate students to making these experiences (il)legible or resisting ethnographical devices of instantiation. This is not to relinquish that there remains in fragments an unwritten/ loss in transcriptions and a “dreadful pain of splittings”¹⁷⁴ that is unavoidable in carving out the interpretative challenges.

In rethinking our collaborative praxis, Deidre and I thought through how we wanted to convey it where both of us are active participants in shaping generative meanings, conceptualising themes related to indigeneity, gender, and restorative justice. This approach enabled us to present the research outcomes in a manner that refused the privileging of

a researcher to speak about intergenerational trauma she studied in group-based interviews. The tension was about defending the work as decolonial, when the praxis was based on western based models. Deidre and I exactly wanted to not have these labels and categories cloud the message we wanted to share about embracing indigeneity.

¹⁷⁴Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 70

academic perspectives as framing the project, and instead situated it within the intermingling of histories, affects and scholarly prose to deepen conversations around topics that arise out of the research. This process also complicated ideas around the “politics of taking on research sites and making expert knowledges, as well as the politics of leaving places alone when one cannot adequately grapple with one’s responsibility to those sites of knowledge making.”¹⁷⁵

Implicating ourselves in a relational process to the research outcomes goes beyond problematizing objectivity which forecloses space for critical reflection on aspects that influence the research process and mutual insights that inform the practice of writing oral histories.¹⁷⁶

The centralization of memory and re-membering in the project means if the body as a site memory is the overarching theme, this requires me to contextualize and situate the project by paying attention to complicated questions of how historical memory is constructed, embodied, and to acknowledge that gender and feminism as defining units of analysis do not assume that silences will not be reproduced in the writing of the project. The critical scholars that I draw on for the project all encourage multiple ways of knowing by questioning the responsibility of researcher in bridging/challenging divergent worldviews across geopolitical positionalities.

Concluding remarks

An engagement with self-reflexivity in collaborative praxis is not only about the sense of the researcher being inserted in politics of identities and categories but enables the terms of interrogating how institutional spaces and geopolitical positions contribute to rendering work marginalised, irrelevant or speculative. Drawing on the perspectives of dominant intellectual practices erases complex questions around grammar of language that makes legible in written form knowledges or ways in which knowledges can be shared and revised across multiple socio-political landscapes. There were many instances during the project where it became evident that institutional thinking was a consequence that went against spirit of research or where story is taking us but we continued to push through drawing from the intentions we set for the project.

¹⁷⁵Nagar, *Muddying waters*, 6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 85. Nagar reflects that little discussion in feminist discourse focus on the operationalise a speaking with approach to navigate negotiations of political productions-signifying reflexivity and positionality as processes.

In recognizing collaborative and accountable research, radical vulnerability is centralised in exploring the analytical use of co-authoring with research subjects/narrators. The poetics of relationality and its entanglements becomes apparent and can be utilised as productive tensions in navigating knowledge productions. In my friendship with Deidre forming kinship and alliance to collectively create a grammar of language to grapple with nuanced and artistic interventions in narrating histories of women was a process of radical vulnerability. Immersing oneself in the labour of unlearning/relearning in ways that resist enclosures to seriously question hegemonic prescriptions about the notions of research-expertise and radical vulnerability is a process of building trust in constant dialogue.



Conclusion

In 2018, whilst studying historical studies and researching the positionality of enslaved women and the paradoxical concept of agency, my first archival encounter in the Cape Repository archives of 1800s left me feeling mentally decapitated by what I was witnessing. I was further perplexed that I could not find a crime of sexual violence located against enslaved women by their masters. Of course, it was not criminalized for enslaved women, only for white women and very discriminately too, but I was searching the archives to find it under other crimes labelled molestation, neglect, ect. When I found the case of a British governor in 1826 who had a complaint lodged against him for molestation the governor's records were missing and the archival administrators could not trace the record. After a few weeks, they could not offer me explanation of the loss and my search continued. In 2019, I would recall to Deidre how this archival encounter still bothered me, the project would later reveal a necessary unease with questions that remain unanswered.

Aside from the immense spectacular violence of mutilations and genocide stories of captivity, were also stories of fugitivity and in some instances there were records of runaways, suicides and resistance where I imagined what took place in the survival of slavery and whilst under the threat of captivity yet still a living being? In other words, I was wondering about the interstices of these violence, the presence of indigenous black women in the social death of slavery. About what we cannot possibly know through court records and the intimate reproductions of violence within the silences. All these were vexed feelings that I didn't understand, at the time colleagues dismissed it as identity politics and laughed at my ideas around an oral history project looking at the intergenerational-trauma of slavery in Cape Town. The issue was datums(slavery was a long time ago or told oral history for Cape slavery doesn't exist) and concerns around the impossibility of any trauma responses to slavery in South Africa because the time period was too great. One critic suggested I make distinctions between oral history and oral traditions and frame the study as folktale. Yet I was aware that the trauma of slavery persisted, and that the histories was inconceivable to be understood as folktale because the term in context of South Africa does not resonate or express the language used for sacred sources of knowledge. Critical feminist scholars gave insights into the grammar of language to articulate a problem not easily articulated to question the depletion of violent renderings of women as absent subjects.

This thesis project has attempted to contribute to debates around the limits of the archive, memory in terms of remembering, and historical representations of indigenous black women in Western Cape, South Africa. The project looks at the pedagogical problem of remembering and representational voids by exploring how artistic representations offer historical practice insights in the absence/ evasiveness of detail in the colonial archives. In that light, this project considers storytelling, the spiritual and the poetic modes used by artist Deidre to illuminate the consciousness of people, and in turn offers insights to the silences, absences and voids encountered in the colonial archive. The portrayed ideas of spirit and cosmos is emphasised in Deidre's work as a source of knowledge and a means to sacred memory that deepen her understanding of indigenous ancestors-not as mere props or fixed in time, but as agents and pioneers of history.

The central concern raised in this mini thesis has been to historicise the personal experiences of remembering slavery through a historical trajectory; how daily experiences and manifestations of violence are located in superstructures that exist. Instead of reproducing the spectacle of violence and historiographical tensions of recuperation, the project asks how do we move beyond the limitations of approaches that attempt to re-cover/recover? One way to look at this question is to look at unconventional sites of archives, using indigenous storytelling and oral traditions; creative and experimental literature and performance-based modes that historicise slave and indigenous women. The attempt is not to re-imagine histories. It is to think anew questions and imagine possible courses of events and ask how counter-histories more broadly may inform the project of decolonising the soul of history, not just in Africa but across the world.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's theory of traces to discuss the limits of the archive, posits the archive as a trace among many others. He refutes debates around objectivity and factual accounts from archives, by explaining how the archive operates through rules and dictates of institutions inevitably framing the form of the archive. Further making germinal contributions are Achille Mbembe and Ann Stoler speaking to the epistemic concerns of the archival turn, supporting the archive as a status and embedded within materiality. The archive is neither true nor false instead it is always resulting from a form of materialisation of representations within spatio-temporal sites, therefore, Ricoeur calls for a careful hermeneutic approach. In dialogue, Jacqui M Alexander shares in the conception of trace, fragments, silence in memory and remembering histories of slavery and colonialism. Traces of memory through the phenomenological experience is a basis to "know something of the past," contra to deeming

to know “what happened” as projected in traditional archives because the fullness/detail can never be retrieved.

This admission reveals absence is always part of the archive, like forgetting to memory, and unlike how enslaved and indigenous black women histories are portrayed as absent. There is much more to reveal in a shift of thinking about the absence of something not an absence of history. I have tried to grapple with my first archival encounters since 2018 asking myself what it means to encounter ancestors in the archives, to be immersed in the experience of the archive? In other words, a subjective experience of the archive, one that does not afford the privilege of distance and being disembodied like the historian engagement. As an artist, Deidre’s engagement with the archive for storytelling does not search for new knowledge of the past neither is it an attempt to discover history. Instead, she considers it a necessary spiritual labour of her work as a storyteller and embodied artist. As a keeper of stories engaging a counter colonial narrative, she is aware its contents are not readily available but utilises the archive to re-inforce counter memory and continue the circulation of connecting kinship ties to gain an understanding of lived experiences.

Again, I am emphasising that it's not a fact-hunt mission, it's not detective work or the fervour of a hopeful discoverer that allows Deidre to restore the figure of an ancestor. It's a person's name, name of a place, a description of a situation that she utilises to form a narrative that allows her to recover the dignity of oppressed ancestors. Echoing Ricoeur's poetics, absence is something. An ontological engagement with pedagogical intent is what Alexander centers as a historian who reached an epistemological impasse working on Caribbean slavery at the archives in Britain. Alexander found herself reproducing the violence of the archive in telling histories of women who appear in fleeting moments. In turn, Alexander like Saidiya Hartman’s employment of critical fabulation, started working against and along the bias grain of the archive; consulting archival material within limits of the rules that governs its access then resisted the colonial imaginative impulses of domination, racialisation and marginalisation. Challenging the archive and using critical speculation is not about telling stories that are imaginary. I caution against the oversimplifications of the role imagination plays in constructing narratives of self. Instead, I would like to highlight how explicit critical scholars are about the limits of the archive and understand how those limits have power in the narratives constructed. This contrasts with apathy about how enslaved,

indigenous and black women histories are “absent,” “fragmented,” or through spectacular violence, signalling to the collusion between image, violence, memory and silence. Or perhaps because of the visible presence of violence, historians read absence of possibility in women’s lives?

Alexander’s historical practice centralises the pedagogic potential of sacred memory in context of living experience and representations of past, present and future. Highlighting the affective process of knowledge and significance of spirituality to undergird interpretations of the material world.

Feminist methodologies reflect and highlight the epistemic violence in systems of thought that dismiss the plurality of knowledge making. Paying attention to ethical considerations, Nagar raises insights in the debate on affective turn in humanities, studying relations of sensory and embodiment to inform social political thought. Her points on the debate being side-lined or still largely segregated from dialogues of ethics and methodological raises important questions for solidarity and the border crossings of knowledge production. Ethical concerns should not be limited to regulations but consider ethical relationships and values of interacting with participants and life stories. For many, this comes as a reflection or becomes apparent after the research, however, Nagar makes an argument that if reflexivity is on-going praxis whilst doing oral histories/life histories then ethical considerations should be centered because it may have impact on the research.

Dominant intellectual thought that foregrounds the archive as evidence above experience or praxis erase complex questions around histories of representation and facilitate a grammar of language that inscribes violence, leaving one trapped in a carceral state or coerced speech to appease institutions. Self-reflexivity as an ethical praxis may be useful to elevate a language of what it means to suffer, to recognise, not recover the language of ruins. How do we represent the splitting of beings and layers of what is unwritten in the processes of transcribing, translating and writing in a research project? Language is an important consideration in the histories we produce and what is remembered for the constructive nature of languages can erase our multiplicity of being which may pose interpretative challenges. In collaborative praxis, this means decentering the authorial voice of researcher who in this case is the historian to open questions around who we are writing for and with whom are we co-producing knowledge.

The archive undergoes many historical mutations, hence entering the archive is fraught with contradictions because for historians it is an entering into historiographical operation. But what if the histories we are telling is an archival refusal? What negotiations are made to highlight this, or do we remain epistemologically deaf to the impasse? In the spirit of praxis, of doing the work, Alexander as a historian explains the utilisation of sacred memory, the memory of ancestors, as a channel to expressing the textures of their lives, beyond the confines of captivity narratives contained within colonial/traditional archives. At what point do we face the reality that the formal conceptualisation of archives through jurisprudence lenses are used as western hegemonic disciplinary mechanisms?

The archive as a site of personal search for self is not total, it is still within the territory of searching. What does it mean to construct an identity from archive, to create histories of fragments using materiality, artistic modes, and spiritual interaction to ground archival experience?

Deidre's insights on artistic interventions and utilising embodied knowledge confront the idea of archives as not simply bearing witness to the past but also bearing witness to the form of the archive; the condensing of lives in judgement summaries and paying attention to the overlapping subjectivities of myself reading the archive. Identities play into artistic work and creations, and in the same way they are reflected in knowledge production: we leave traces of our(self) in the stories we tell. We are not outside observing the world, but within the world, immersed in the story and not distant. This evokes questions around what it means to be inside the narrative and then stop out to allow others to feel, listen, see or read the work to gain their own expressions or place themselves because it speaks to their experiences. It is quite strange how visibility or materiality works, how if you don't show it then it can be erased or manipulated as if nothing ever happened. Only if we were bearing witness in some form would we know.

Our stories are like doors, in Khoekhoegowab expressed as *Oms* meaning an “opening to journey”. An opening for many to express their truths of multiple journeys, or as Alexander calls mediations of crossings. The journey of “I” and “we” Nagar extends, are situated in solidarities (central to collective determination) and critical work that is inseparable from our commitments to history, spatio-temporal surroundings as well as the murky political contingencies our lives are entangled. For artists like Deidre, to see Khoe and San reflected in

African films enables a mirror of reflections where currently the mirror remains distorted and fragmented, thereby continuing the historical violation of unspoken intergenerational trauma affects lives today. We are constituted by story and the significance of the body as an archive, not the body as a limit case but the various histories body and flesh embody. An engagement with stories and embodied practices as an intervention to intergenerational trauma reflects representational negotiations to grapple with discursive contexts and histories of experience

What does it mean to tell a narrative of memories of suffering and still maintain a politics of care when histories become based on oppressive experiences? I echo, that the absolute way archives are viewed in historical practice creates silences bound up violence.

In March 2020 when the coronavirus was announced as a pandemic and the lockdown started in South Africa, I was not able to complete archival work. The project then was shaped differently by circumstances, yet it gave me time to reflect on many things writing during a global existential dread. The questions and concerns within the paper, remains an unresolved issue as much as gender-racial differences of 19th century modern political social thought remains a problem today and continues to be an insufficient language, like the language of chattel slavery to narrate indigenous black women's histories.

Future considerations

This mini-thesis is an introductory conceptual study to further inform PhD studies that could elaborate and delve into richer historical material and life histories. Aside from archival work expanding on the oral histories with indigenous art practitioners and activists widens the scope of project, but the core questions raised remain unresolved and relevant.

Settler colonial aesthetics continue to monumentalise indigenous black women's histories through spectacular violence. For example Sarah Baartman remembrance gets clouded by historical representations of “venus,” little is said about who Sarah Baartman may have been, a biographical mapping that avoids colonial distantiation or voyeurism. The voyeuristic histories continue trends of 19th century social modernist thought that has seeped into socio-cultural and political landscapes and reproduce the colonial ends of violence. If not, we would not see the continued vandalization of Sarah Baartman's memorial in the Eastern Cape. Nor would the return of Sarah Baartman's remains from France in 2003 spark a debate on “what to do with her body” in the national project.

Feminist collaborative praxis as methodology is an enriching field. My enquiry would be around what bridges are made in terms of bureaucracy or institutional barriers in academia for feminist scholars- question raised during a conference which requires extensive readings of how feminists have approached these challenges and what suggestions are made to bridge these gaps or silences.

Inevitably, this project exceeds being a study for academic confines where theory is like a beating practice or where knowledge does not go beyond critique. Accountable to the kitchen table and the organized struggle, I am aware that the destination is not just about a language of what it means to suffer, but also alleviating the suffering and that's going to come from the streets, not the hold of academia.



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