

**“Have some respect! Black people died here!” The Politics of  
Modern Blackness at Cape Coast Castle**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of  
Political Economy

Carleton University Ottawa, Ontario

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## **Abstract**

My thesis explores the Politics of Modern Blackness at Cape Coast Castle in Ghana by analyzing how identity and belonging can be mapped on to monuments. I critically assess the relationship between dominant anti-black transnational discourses and the diverse way national black identities engage with this transnational anti-blackness through border thinking. I do this by analyzing the dominance of black Americans at the Cape Coast Castle diasporic section of the museum and by presenting the Ghanaian context that this dominance is situated in. My thesis ultimately demonstrates how black heterogeneity and black agency can be sustained in the context of transnational anti-blackness and domination.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Daniel McNeil and Susanne Klausen for reading early versions of my thesis and giving me valuable feedback. I would like to thank my Thesis Supervisor, Augustine Park, for her feedback, encouragement and for advocating for me throughout my long writing process. Her support and kindness made it possible for me to complete my thesis. I can't possibly thank her enough.

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## Introduction

“Have some respect! Black people died here!” our tour guide at Cape Coast Castle chastised the tour group I was with. Upon entering the cell he led us into, the doors abruptly closed, and we found ourselves in almost complete darkness. Bouts of nervous and surprised laughter escaped the mouths of the tour group, and I must admit my voice was part of this unexpected mirth. However, our tour guide found nothing about the tour group’s reaction even remotely amusing. His lack of amusement stemmed from the fact that we had entered the male death cell, where rebellious male captives were taken to die through starvation and suffocation, as a deterrent to other captives who might have harboured hopes of rebellion. His unapologetic defense of black humanity and refusal to prioritise the feelings of the tourists over this defense was admirable. Although our tour group might have charged our tour guide with being uncharitable, and even too harsh towards us for disrupting a moment of comic relief in a place so heavy with sorrow, he remained unwavering in his stance.

Our tour guide’s words were not only admirable, but intriguing, because of the possibilities latent in his use of the term “black” to identity the captives. Due to our location at Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, which is one of the largest and most visited slave castles in West Africa, and that our tour guide referenced blackness in relation to the captives, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the particularity of the black experience he referred to surrounded the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade. The Americas was the destination for most of the captives who survived their brutal ordeal at the castle, while others, as in the case of the captives in the death chamber, did not. Despite this, the captives did not appear at Cape Coast Castle from thin air. They were forcibly brought to the castle from diverse kingdoms and regions of Africa.

Hence, this mixture of diverse African kingdoms, ethnicities and cultures was also presumably part of the blackness our guide referred to when he spoke of the captives.

Nonetheless, our tour guide did not list the names of some the ethnic groups who were known to have been captives at Cape Coast Castle. For example, he did not say, “Ashanti or Ga people died here!” Although there were captives taken from outside the borders of modern day Ghana, from places as far as the Central African Republic, Mali and Niger, the castle was in Ghana and ethnic groups from Ghana were also taken as captives to the castle. Still, our tour guide did not say, “Ghanaian people died here!” Our tour guide could have also used the ubiquitous term, “African,” to identify the captives, since the captives were from the African continent, but he did not say, “African people died here!” Our tour guide could have used other terms such as “captives,” “men” or a more all-encompassing term, and said, “human beings died here!” Instead, he used the term black.

In declaring that “black people died here!” and not mentioning any other option of identifying the captives, our tour guide presented it as a given that the captives were black. Yet, did the captives refer to themselves as black? What made the captives black? When did they become black? Did it even matter what the captives thought about their blackness, so long as their captors at the castle considered them to be black? These questions, and others, remained unanswered and silenced in asserting blackness as a given.

Although this cursory examination of the captives’ blackness demonstrates that “black” was more complex than our tour guide’s statement let on, it was a powerful moment for me to hear our tour guide call the captives “people;” human beings whose memories should be respected, in spite of the dehumanization that led to their deaths. Furthermore, in the midst of commemorating the captives’ suffering at Cape Coast Castle and in the urgency of defending the

humanity of the condemned men in the death cell, it is understandable why extrapolating the nuances of black identity was not high on our tour guide's list of priorities.

Nevertheless, as I encountered black pilgrims and tourists from America, the UK and various parts of Ghana during my tours of Cape Coast Castle, what connected all these diverse groups of people to the black identity, and what their relationships were to the black experience preserved and represented at the castle continued to intrigue me. For instance, in our tour group that day at the death cell, there were around 12 to 15 people, who represented black people from across the black African diaspora, including black Britons of Caribbean and Ghanaian descent, local Ghanaians, and me, a South Sudanese-Kenyan Canadian. What about blackness bounded such a diverse group of people from such disparate origins to the captives who took their last breaths in the death cell?

Were the ties that bound us to blackness steeped in blood, a familial bond that the waters of the Atlantic could not thin? Or, were these ties born of an "African essence," that spirit whose native land is somewhere south of the Sahara, whose stubborn endurance was not impeded by its hosts' voluntary and violent travels across the Sahara, to and from the Middle East, Asia, Europe, through the brutality of the Middle Passage, and across the Atlantic to the Americas? Was it the pull of this "African essence" that inspired a South Sudanese-Kenyan Canadian, like myself, Black Britons, and Ghanaians to commemorate the souls of our valiant and dehumanized black ancestors in that death chamber at Cape Coast Castle? Or, did these captives become our ancestors through forces external to Africa? Was blackness an imposition we were forced to accept as the price of having been enslaved and colonized by Europeans in the modern colonial world? Moreover, what significance, if any, did the location of Cape Coast Castle in Ghana have on our relationship to the captives and their blackness? Did the national history of Ghana impact

this relationship? Or, did blackness transcend African national boundaries and histories, making irrelevant the location of the slave sites, as long as the captives were black and the sites were in Africa?

The questions I've posed above speak to the complexities and tensions of the diasporic and national identities that define modern blackness. For over 25 years, the diasporic model outlined in Paul Gilroy's (1992) book, *The black Atlantic*, has been the seminal model through which modern black diasporic relations have been engaged with academically (Edwards, 2001; Zeleza, 2005; Smithers, 2011; Campt, 2012; Nehl, 2016). Gilroy (1992) proposes the black Atlantic as a transnational, creolised heuristic region (pp. 2-3) that could be taken by cultural historians "as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussion of the modern world," and used "to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (p.15).

Establishing blackness as modern, and consequently, establishing black cultural and intellectual production as a part of modern Western intellectual and cultural history is the impetus for Gilroy's theorization of the black Atlantic (pp. 6-7, 45-48). Although the black Atlantic is a composite of influences from various groups, whose creolization was born from the mixture of African, European, Indigenous American and Asian cultures (pp. 2-3), Gilroy centres his analysis on the inclusion of blacks within Western intellectual history. Gilroy traces modernity to the 18<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment and hinges his conceptualization of blacks as historical agents with an intellectual history to their inclusion within the Enlightenment's intellectual history by Western academia. This is why Gilroy characterizes his reason for writing *the black Atlantic* as follows: "...it is the struggle to have blacks perceived as agents, as people with cognitive capacities and even with an intellectual history— attributes denied by modern racism— that is for me the primary reason for writing this book" (p. 6). As his

book unfolds, the “whom” for which Gilroy seeks to change the perception of blacks and blackness is Western academia.

Gilroy (1992) pinpoints the national focus of cultural analyses as a barrier to including blacks within Western modernity because such analyses prioritise the association between ethnic authenticity and the nation state. A cultural analysis based on the nation excludes the transnational dimensions of the cultural exchanges between nations and the creolization amongst peoples that produce national cultures. Gilroy focuses his critique of a nationally based cultural analysis on Britain, because Cultural Studies began there, and black cultural analysis in the United States, because of its dominant position in theorizing and representing blackness globally. He criticises British cultural studies for constructing authentic Britishness as distinctly white and “mutually exclusive” from blacks, which excludes the contributions of black and other non-white people to British culture (p.7). Constructing Britishness as white is symptomatic of a larger issue of constructing the West and its cultural and intellectual achievements as white, which Gilroy seeks to undercut with his theorization of the black Atlantic.

Gilroy critiques black Americans for their “ethnic particularism and nationalism,” deeming this “an ever present danger” (p. 4). To critique this black American “ethnic particularism and nationalism,” Gilroy uses the experiences of notable black Americans like Frederick Douglas, W.E.B Du Bois, and Richard Wright in Europe to highlight the creolization of modern blackness. He argues that their experiences in Europe acted as a catalyst to their ideological and intellectual growth, which deepened each man’s understanding of the plight of black people in the Americas. However, Gilroy (1992) is quick to make clear that the cultural exchanges and creolization that underlie transnationalism are not created from a mixture between

two “purified essences” but of “two heterogeneous multiplicities” (p. 144). Therefore, neither blackness nor whiteness are natural, neat, “untainted” identities (ibid).

Indeed, in an attempt to avoid black essentialism, Gilroy presents two critiques. The first critique he engages with is the black American Afrocentric notion of a black essence that travelled from Africa to the Americas, which although beleaguered by slavery and colonialism, was unchanged and has endured in its pure state until the present (p. 190). Gilroy pushes back against this idea of an enduring black essence by characterizing it as “doggedly evasive,” because of the inability of Afrocentrics to specify where this “black essence” is located in current “black artistic and political sensibilities” (p. 31). Instead, he highlights slavery as the singular experience that distinguished blacks in the Americas from blacks in Africa, creating a new black modern culture in the Americas informed by Africans but distinct due to its creolization (p. 101). Therefore, it is slavery that brought blacks in the Americas into modernity, and it is the lack of this slave experience that elides black Africans from modernity.

The second critique of essentialism Gilroy presents is an anti anti-essentialist critique. Anti-essentialists argue that since blackness is a social construct, it has no intrinsic social, political and cultural coherence (pp. 32, 80, 100). Gilroy responds by noting that the anti-essentialist critique does not address questions of class, power, and institutionalized political and cultural racism (pp.100-101). Moreover, he argues that although music is often neglected in debates on what characterizes diasporic blackness, its pre-eminence in black Atlantic cultures demonstrates that music is an important aspect of what defines the “essential connectedness” of black Atlantic cultures (pp. 101-102). Music grounds the self-identity, political culture and aesthetic expression that distinguishes blacks as a community (p. 102). Due to the racial terror restricting enslaved Africans from using the written word, music became a central source of

transmitting black consciousness. Black musicians became “organic intellectuals,” operating outside the purview of the modern state and without security within the cultural industries of the day (p.76). But, these musicians represented the consciousness of the enslaved by speaking (or singing) of “the crisis of modernity and modern values” (ibid).

However, the connectedness of blackness based on music is neither natural nor is it fixed. Music and its attendant rituals are not natural but practical activities that give blackness its coherence. By “practical activity,” Gilroy means: “language, gestures, bodily significations, desires” (p. 102). Gilroy conceptualizes music as a “*changing* rather than an unchanging same,” (emphasis in original) which distinguishes it from the fixed essentialism of Afrocentrics, while also noting the consistency that characterizes it (p. 101). Gilroy contends that the feature which unites black Atlantic music is the “radically unfinished” nature of its expression that bears the indelible mark of slavery (p. 105). This is so because the nature of slavery necessitated “the histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation and continual reinscription” (p. 102). As such, black Atlantic music is neither based on a mysterious enduring black essence nor does it lack coherence. Rather, its continuity and connectedness lies in its dynamism and in the practicality imposed by its origin in black Atlantic slavery.

Although Gilroy has contributed much to the discussion of modern blackness, by illuminating the pitfalls of ethno nationalist cultural constructions, by demonstrating the transnational dimensions of modern blackness and the dangers of black essentialism, and by highlighting black American hegemony in black discourses, there have been many critiques waged against him. J. Lorand Matory (2005) critiques Gilroy for denying Africans co-eval development with the black Atlantic, thus making Africa irrelevant in Gilroy’s pursuit of black hybridity, intellectual redemption and agency. Chrisman (1997) critiques Gilroy for prioritizing

the experience of slavery over colonialism in the creation of black modernity. Yet another critique attempts to rectify the elision of Africa from modernity by arguing that both slavery and African colonialism are two separate events that both contributed to the creation of black modernity (Pierre, 2013; Goyal, 2014).

My thesis questions separating the creation of modern blackness in to two different events; slavery for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Americas and colonialism for Africans whose ancestors were not enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade. Instead, I maintain that modern blackness was created by the transatlantic slave trade, due to the relations of power that defined blacks as objects in relations to white males, who were taken to be the universal Self. As a result of the transatlantic slave trade, the continent of Africa was racialized as the home of blacks, where the black enslaved came from (Mignolo, 2005, p. 41), while the enslaved Africans in the Americas were homogenized into a black monolith, irrespective of the diverse cultures and regions of Africa they came from because of their slave status. Thus, both Africans and blacks in the Americas were racialized, objectified, made into capital by the transatlantic slave trade.

However, even when slavery is established as the genesis of modern blackness, the question of black heterogeneity remains. Gilroy argues for a transnational blackness that supersedes national borders because of the common experience of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. Even so, the transnational conception of modern blackness has also been critiqued because of Gilroy's focus on the English speaking part of the Americas, to the neglect of the non-English speaking parts of the Americas (Matory, 2005). His emphasis on black Americans in particular has been admonished for being U.S centric (Zezeza, 2005), despite Gilroy's stated objective of critiquing U.S centric notion of modern blackness.

Questioning the focus on the black Atlantic all together, Tiyambe Zeleza (2005) argues that the hegemony of American imperialism has led to the overemphasis on the black Atlantic diaspora in African diasporic studies. This has resulted in the exclusion of the other African diasporas, which include the intra-Africa, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean diasporas (pp. 37, 44, 63). Zeleza contends that in order to deepen our understanding of African diasporas, the scope of analysis needs to be global. A global comparative analysis will reveal nuances and insights about African diasporic experiences that a singular focus on the black Atlantic obscures (Zeleza, 2005). Yet, analyzing black American dominance in the black world offers fruitful insights on the horizontal and vertical hierarchies within blackness because of the dominance of black Americans in the black world. It is worthwhile to analyze discourses of modern blackness and its hierarchies so as to highlight black agency and assertions of humanity even within a context of dehumanization, domination and oppression.

Historian Gregory D. Smithers (2011) argues that although Gilroy makes important interventions for black diasporic experiences of racism in U.S and in Britain, but he disagrees with Gilroy's transnational conception of modern blackness in the black Atlantic. Instead, Smithers contends that it is the nation and its social, historic, economic and legal context that produces one's lived experience and perspective on one's black identity. In other words, there is no monolith black experience that can be broken up into regional (the Black Atlantic) or continental (black African) blocks irrespective of local contexts. For example, black Americans, black Brazilians, black Brits, black Ghanaian and black Namibians do not have a single culture by virtue of being black. Instead, their local and national histories and cultures define what their black experiences will be. Thus, modern blackness is not a monolith but a heterogeneous experience.

Despite this, sociocultural anthropologist Jemima Pierre (2013) notes that white supremacy is global and so is anti-blackness. Put another way, both white supremacy and anti-blackness are transnational. I maintain that the dehumanization and conception of black inferiority that arose from the relations of power forged between black slaves and white slave masters during the transatlantic slave trade continues to inform modern global anti-black racism. Therefore, the question my thesis seeks to answer is how can the heterogeneity within modern black identity be theorized, while still acknowledging the dominant transnational anti-black discourses that informs the modern black identity? I use Cape Coast Castle in Ghana as a text to answer this question by examining the politics of modern blackness in Cape Coast Castle museum's African diaspora section.

I will use decolonial literature's paradigm of modernity and coloniality as the theoretical framework to analyze the politics of modern blackness at Cape Coast Castle, and specifically Walter Mignolo's writing on border thought. Border thinking is an important aspect of theorizing the relationship between the heterogeneity of national blackness and dominant transnational anti-black discourses because it arises from the violent incorporation of dominant European epistemologies into the local conceptual narratives and knowledge systems of the colonized. Black people in Africa and in the Americas did not come together and agree to name themselves black. Blackness is a European construct imposed onto Africans and slaves in the Americas through disparate power relations formed by the transatlantic slave trade (Manning, 1990). Border thinking helps to theorize the local engagement of the global conception of modern blackness, thereby acknowledging the diverse expressions of local black identities in different nations, while speaking to the coloniality that imposed the modern black identity onto black people globally.

I chose to explore the politics of modern blackness by using Cape Coast Castle as a text for three reasons; it demonstrates the politics in what constitutes a collective historical monument, it is one of the most famous and most visited slave castles in all of Africa, and it is located in Ghana. The significance of a collective historical monument lies in the memories it commemorates and the identities it privileges (Gillis, 1994). John Gillis argues that memory and identity have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories (pp. 4-5). Hence, in relation to its role as a collective historical monument that commemorates the experience of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas, the diasporic section of Cape Coast Castle museum offers important insights about the politics of modern blackness in terms of who is remembered, by whom, how and why. Moreover, making an analysis of modern black identity based on the transatlantic slave trade in Africa instead of in the Americas, disrupts the notion of slavery and modern blackness as the exclusive patrimony of the black Atlantic.

The location of the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana is consequential due to the role of Ghana in Pan-Africanist thought. Ghana was the first black country in Africa to gain independence from colonial rule in 1957, and such, was a symbol of global black freedom. Furthermore, Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was a staunch Pan-Africanist, whose Pan-Africanist legacy set the ground for Ghana's relationship with the black African slave diaspora in the Americas. Thus, I will focus my analysis of modern blackness on Ghanaian blackness because of its aforementioned significance in the black world. I will also focus on black American blackness because of its dominance in discussions of global blackness due to its approximation to American whiteness and because of its dominance in the representation of the diaspora at Cape Coast Castle Museum.

## **Research Methodology**

I spent nine days (September 9<sup>th</sup>-September 17<sup>th</sup>) in Cape Coast and Elmina, Ghana going on tours of Cape Coast and Elmina slave castles in September 2017. I went on the Cape Coast castle tour four times and I went on the Elmina castle tour twice. There were more people at Cape Coast castle and part of the tour at Cape Coast castle involved first going to the castle museum, which offered me a better opportunity to be acquainted with the official discourses the castle puts forth to visitors. I have not included any observations and analysis of the Elmina slave castle museum because it was closed for renovations during the period of my trip. As I discovered, depending on who the tour guide was, the tone and information shared on the tours would differ. However, the information offered in the museum remained standardized and was self-guided, which offered me the opportunity to observe the information that all tourists would be exposed to irrespective of which tour guides they had.

All the information that I will be using for my research is public information gathered from observations of the tours I took, where there was no expectation for confidentiality due to the public nature of tours. I used information from the Cape Coast castle museum, which was publicly accessible. I will use the interpretive paradigm of research, which holds that there is no objective view of social reality but that there are multiple social realities informed by social relationships and standpoints (Baily, 2007, p. 53). I was a participant observer, who participated in the tour by taking part in the tour, asking questions to the tour guides and also observing my surroundings.

## **Thesis Chapters**

In chapter one, I will trace the creation of blackness to the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas, where diverse groups of enslaved Africans were racialized under the monolithic identity of black slaves, and this blackness was projected on to Africa, racializing the continent as black. Since blackness was imposed by Europeans on both blacks in the Americas and onto blacks on the African continent, I will explore how blacks maintained agency in the context of this imposition. I will do this by using decolonial theory, and specifically, border thinking, to theorize the relationship between dominant transnational discourses of anti-blackness and the national ways dominant black discourses are engaged with by examining Gilroy's (1992) conception of modern transnational blackness in the *black Atlantic* and Kwaku LarbuKorang's (2003) analysis of Ghanaian nationalism.

In Chapter two, I will engage with the ontological turn's critique of decolonial theory, which argues that decolonial theory does not go far enough in critiquing Western dominance because it is an epistemological critique. From this view, the issue with an epistemological critique of Western dominance is that it maintains the same ontological assumptions as Western thought, in assuming a singular global ontology that delegitimizes non-Western ontological worlds. I will analyze the validity of this critique by assessing the merits and demerits of the arguments put forth in the debate between Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and David Graeber over the ontological turn. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that the ontological critique is lacking because it does not address its own implication in Western institutional and academic power

structures, and that a decolonial analysis of modern blackness is preferable because of its ability to theorize agency within the context of domination.

In Chapter three, I will apply a border thinking analysis to my discussion of the politics of blackness at Cape Coast Castle. I will examine the black American dominance in the diasporic section of Cape Coast Castle Museum within the context of the Ghanaian tourism industry and Ghanaian conception of blackness. I will do so to demonstrate the hierarchies, contestation and contradictions between the Ghanaian and black American understandings of blackness, and how both types of black identities are still bound by their inception in the transatlantic slave trade. I will conclude by critiquing Hartman's (2007) influential account of her experience as a tourist and as a black American at Cape Coast and Elmina castles in Ghana. Hartman conceives of slavery as a cataclysmic schism in the black world, which has rendered transnational black mobilization against anti-blackness defunct due to the irreconcilable differences between modern black identities. In opposition to Hartman, I argue that the transatlantic slave trade unified the diverse kingdoms, ethnicities, regional identities and linguistic divisions between Africans under a transnational black identity, creating the modern black identity.

## **Chapter 1: Modern Blackness, Coloniality and Border Thinking**

In order to analyze the politics of modern blackness, it is instructive to begin by engaging with dominant discourses on modern blackness. For this, I turn to G.W.F. Hegel (1770 – 1831 CE), who articulated the most authoritative account of modernity (Goldberg, 2002, p.50; Mignolo, 2002, p. 934; Hesse, 2007, pp. 646-647; Tibebu, 2011, pp. xxi, 330-333). Hegel announced that the history of the world travelled from East to West, leaving both Africa and America outside of history (Hoffmeister, 1975, pp.171, 173). The East was the beginning of history and the West was its end. America was the land of the future for Hegel, (p. 171) while Africa was a land with no history (p.173).

Key to Hegel's pronouncement that Africa was a land with no history is his specification of Africa as a black continent. He separated Africa into three, remarking that "one might almost say that Africa consists of three continents which are *entirely separate from one another, and between which there is no contact whatsoever*" (Hegel, 1998, p. 173 in Tibebu, 2011, p. 172 [emphasis added by Tibebu]). Africa, for Hegel, consists of European Africa, Egypt and Africa Proper (Hoffmeister, 1975, pp.171-173). "European Africa," includes "Morocco, Fas (not Fez), Algeria, Tunis, and Tripoli," by which Hegel meant North Africa (Hoffmeister, 1975, p. 173 [brackets in original]). This portion of Africa, "like the Near East, is oriented towards Europe" (ibid). Egypt is not included in North Africa, because unlike North Africa, it was the location of "a great and independent culture" (Hegel, 1998, p. 174). And then there is "Africa Proper." What distinguished "Africa Proper" from "European Africa" and "Egypt" was its blackness; Africa

Proper, which was Africa, south of the Sahara, was the land where black people resided. Hegel's conceptualization of Africa Proper as black homogenized the diverse empires, ethnic groups, histories, traditions and languages in that region of the continent into a black monolith.

Concerning "Africa Proper," Hegel argues that "From the earliest historical times, Africa has remained cut off from all contacts with the rest of the world; it is the land of gold, forever pressing in upon itself, and the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of the night" (Hoffmeister, 1975, p. 174). Teshale Tibebu (2011) observes that although Hegel is infamous for declaring that Africa is a land with no history, he denies history to other groups of people, such as the Native Americans, "whose genocide he welcomed with cheers," Slavic people, European women, peasants, and he even refers to the Orient as "unhistorical" (Tibebu, 2011, p. 179). Hence, Africans were not particularly special when it came to having no history. Africa's particularity arose from Hegel's assertion that Africans were "animal men," a claim he makes of no other group (pp. 178-179). By labelling Africans animal men, Hegel "announces that the African does not belong to the camp of humanity proper" because "human life in Africa is animal existence" (p. 179).

However, Hegel was not a biological racist, he was a "geocultural" racist who believed that African geography prevented Africans from reaching the civilizational heights of Europeans (pp. 181-182). His geo-culturalist racism made room for the European "Western, white, Christian, bourgeois man" (henceforth the European Subject) to "uplift" Africans from their natural animal state to a "European-like" state by enlightening the "Dark Continent" with reason (p. 182). Implicit in Hegel's conceptualization of Africans as animal men is what Johan Fabian (2002) calls the denial of co-evalness, which is the notion that although Europeans and non-Europeans could live in the same geographical space, they inhabited different epochal periods of

civilization. From this perspective, European civilization is constructed as the apex of civilization that all other non-European “backwards” people must “catch up” to.

Even though it is true that the Enlightenment view of civilization was that it progressed in a linear fashion, from the primitive to the sophisticated and civilized, embodied by Europe ( Jones, 2013, p. 58), Barnor Hesse (2007) disagrees with Fabian’s (2002) periodization of the denial of co-evalness with the 19<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment. Instead, Hesse (2007) traces modernity to the “discovery” of the Americas and argues that the denial of co-evalness began within the colonial distinctions that Europeans made between themselves and non-European groups, such as the Indigenous Americans and enslaved Africans. Hesse (2007) notes that by the 1500s there was no overarching coherent European identity apart from belonging to Christendom (p. 647). It was the advent of colonialism that began the development of a coherent modern European identity defined in opposition to an inferior non-European Other. Hesse argues that modernity is therefore racialized because extra-corporal signifiers of European superiority, such as “territory, climate, history, culture, religion” (p. 653) were invoked by Europeans to distinguish themselves as modern in opposition to inferior un-modern non-European Others (pp. 646-651).

Seemingly neutral modern discourses like those on capitalism, secularism, civilization, rationality, freedom and science carry the burden of racialization because underpinning them is the colonially constituted opposition between Europeanness and non-Europeanness (pp. 646-651). Hesse is adamant about stressing that biological racism is just one expression of racism, but that is not the only form. He (2007) writes, “the body was less the ubiquitous metaphor of ‘race’ than its privileged metonym” (p. 653). Extra-corporal racialized discourses referred to the colonial relations of power embedded in the assumptions of superiority and inferiority that 19<sup>th</sup> century

biological racism was a physical referent of (Hesse, 2007, pp. 645-647). Consequently, Hesse (2007) argues that by the time Hegel was writing in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, his ideas of European superiority had already been entrenched and informed by colonial relations of power. Hegel even ties his views on black African inferiority to the slavery, contending that “[t]he only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery” (Hegel, 2001). Therefore, by the time Hegel was calling Africans animal men during the era of European scientific Enlightenment racism, the basis for European superiority and African inferiority had already been firmly established by the relationship of domination between enslaved Africans and Europeans in the Americas.

The transatlantic slave trade was integral to the racialization and homogenization of Africa as black. As Hesse’s argument demonstrated, the transatlantic slave trade is what informed Hegel’s understanding of Africa Proper as black. Enslaved Africans from diverse kingdoms, ethnicities, regions and cultures were homogenized under the category of black when they were brought to the Americas and became slaves. The blackness of the slaves in the Americas distinguished them from their white slave masters and defined the distinction between humanity, monopolized by the European Subject, and chattel, imprinted in the skin of black slaves (Low, 2018). The homogenization and racialization of slaves in the Americas as black was projected back on to Africa, and Africa thus became the land where the slaves were from; Africa became the land of the blacks (Mignolo, 2005, 41).

Even Pierre (2013), who develops a whole argument on the racialization of Africa as a consequence of colonialism, concedes that notions of African inferiority were derived from slavery. She writes, “by the time of the formal colonization of continental Africa, scientific racism and ideas about the African ‘Negro’ had already been consolidated from the early period

of the transatlantic slave trade and establishment of chattel slavery in European colonies in the New World” (p.16). It is curious, then, that Pierre would attempt to establish a modern, mutually reinforcing relationship between the Black Atlantic and Africa through racializing African colonialism, instead of situating the construction of modern blackness on both sides of the Atlantic with the transatlantic slave trade. After all, the above quote demonstrates that she recognizes the racialization of Africa as rooted in ideas of blackness derived from the transatlantic slave trade.

The gap in Hesse’s writing is in his treatment of the category of non-European as a monolithic. If non-European was a monolithic category, there would have been no need for Hegel to specify Africans as the only animal men. The human hierarchy in the modern era constructed all non-Europeans as inferior to Europeans, but within the category of non-European, black African slaves were at the bottom. Walter Mignolo (2005) notes that during the colonial period, European missionaries and men of letters took it upon themselves to write the histories of various Indigenous American groups. The histories of African slaves were not written because they were merely seen as a labour force (p. 4). Elsewhere, Mignolo (2000) discusses the Valladolid debates between Juan Gines de Sepulveda and Bartolome de Las Casas (1550–1551 CE) concerning the degree of humanity of the Indigenous Americans. He writes that Indigenous Americans were “considered vassals of the king and serfs of God, they were assigned a niche above Africans in the chain of being, which meant that, theoretically, they were not to be enslaved” (p. 728). Now, even though the theoretical prohibition against Indigenous American slavery may not have always translated into their lived experience, it is telling of the debased status of enslaved Africans within the colonial world that the Valladolid debate did not put a sanction against the enslavement of Africans.

Furthermore, the designation of enslaved Africans as black was no innocent matter. By the time Hegel was speaking about Africa Proper as black and constructing black Africans as animal men, the inferiority of slaves at the bottom of colonial human hierarchy was firmly established. The blackness that was imposed on slaves summed up their degradation and inferiority well because of the negative tropes associated with blackness in the Western consciousness. The association of black people, both in the black Atlantic and in Africa, with these negative tropes lives on till this very day.

In line with the West's reliance on binaries to understand reality, (Berg and Mansvelt, 2000, p. 167) Katerina Deliovsy and Tamari Kitossa (2013) argue that the relationship between black and white is the Manicheanism that marks the extremities of racial acceptance and exclusion within Western culture (p. 165). In this Manicheanism, white people are the physical embodiment of positive tropes that come with labelling themselves white. These tropes include goodness, beauty, innocence, and the apex of human aspiration, while tropes associated with black and inscribed on black bodies are negative, invoking qualities such as evil, violence, ugliness and savagery/tradition. The closer a non-Europeans group is approximated to the Europeans, the higher up on the hierarchy of humanity and civilization they are and the closer a group is approximated to blackness the less human and the more savage/traditional they are constructed as being. Other non-European people fall in the middle of the extremities of blackness and whiteness.

However, this does not diminish or devalue the pain and oppression suffered by non-black people of colour (non-European Others) under European domination. It is to say that within the binary nature of Western thinking, blacks and whites are constructed at polar ends of racial acceptance, and non-black Others are constructed within a changing continuum between

these two racial extremities. The black/white Manicheanism can be seen at work when blackness, and not other racial categories, is used to denigrate or dehumanize other non-black groups (Deliofsky and Kitossa, 2013, pp. 166-167). Irish people and Jewish people were represented as black by the English and Nazis respectively to demean or dehumanize them before these group became white (Dyer, 1997, pp. 52-53, 57). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white Quebecois were called “white niggers,” (Deliofsky and Kitossa, 2013, p.166) and in a more recent example, Arabs were referred to as “sand niggers” in the U.S. (Deliofsky and Kitossa, 2013, p. 175).

### **Hegel, Modernity’s Representative?**

Even though Hegel is considered by many as the most authoritative voice on modernity, there have been those, like Frederick Cooper (2005), who have questioned the authoritativeness of Hegel in representing Western modernity. Cooper argues that 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was filled with struggles between diverse universalities within Europe. Hence, a focus on Hegel’s ideas as the representation of all these diverse Enlightenment ideas presents a “flattened” view of the Enlightenment (p. 407). Moreover, Cooper (2005) challenges colonial studies’ (decolonial and post-colonial studies) overemphasis on European colonialism, charging this field of studies with Eurocentrism because it ignores other empires, such as “the Ottoman, the Hapsburg, the Chinese, the Japanese and Russian” empires (pp. 409-410). Cooper (2005) points out that “[l]ike the empires of nineteenth-century Europe, these empires had both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” (p. 410).

However, Cooper fails to note that the disagreements between Europeans were exactly that; disagreements between Europeans. Whether an Enlightenment European thinker believed in

a secular, scientific view of the world or, like Sir Frances Bacon, he believed that scientific practice revealed the glory of God (Brace, 2005, pp. 22-23), it was mainly an intra-European debate. Non-European whites were not even generally seen as residing in the same epochal era of civilization as Europeans, which justified their exclusion from to these debates. Cooper's critique tries to individualize the global structural power of Western dominance by focusing on the differences between individual ideas and not the power structures these ideas were articulated within when he contends that Enlightenment ideas are being "flattened" by decolonial and post-colonial critiques.

Furthermore, Cooper does not explain how bringing up the Ottoman, the Hapsburg, the Chinese, the Japanese and Russian empires negates the position of Europe as the locus of enunciation for the world's dominant discourses in the modern era (Mignolo, 2005) or how these other empires undermine Europeans as the universal standard of humanity –which is what decolonial and post-colonial theorists argue (Prasad, 1997; Mignolo, 2005; Nkomo, 2011; Tibebe, 2011). European empires are critiqued more than the other empires Cooper discusses because European empires have been dominant for over 500 years. Even the fact that Cooper himself is writing in English, and not in the language of one of the other empires, is a consequence of European colonization and the transatlantic slave trade, which underpin the global dominance of European culture (Irobi, 2008; Tibebe, 2011).

When decolonial and post-colonial theorists critique Hegel, they do so because he is a *representative* of European power and domination, and his views have held sway in Western academia and thought at large; he did not *produce* European power and domination. If Hegel had never spoken or written one word, the power structures he represents would still inform European thought, as Hesse (2007) demonstrated. Hegel possesses an authoritative position in

Western academia and he summarizes European chauvinism, which is why he is used to critique it.

As the authoritative voice on modernity, Hegel's writings on black Africa are important in revealing where modern notions of black people came from and how blackness as a modern identity was created. When coupled with the relationship that Hesse (2007) draws between the colonial constitution of racial discourse and the racial ideas Hegel discussed, slavery is shown to be the genesis of modern blackness for both enslaved Africans in the Americas and for the racialization of the continent of Africa as black.

What connects the modern black identity, then, is not an essence or a single cultural identity. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) was correct when he remarked that "whatever...Africans, from Asante to Zulu, share, it is not a single civilization" (p. 40). Appiah's statement gets to the point that there is in fact no African civilization with a common culture, language or identity which accounts for the homogenization of Africa as black. Neither was there a singular culture that enslaved Africans had before they became black slaves. Blackness was an imposition by Europeans. Still, in arguing that blackness was an identity imposed by Europeans, what are we to make of the agency of black Africans and the black Atlantic in being able to signify their own identities? Are modern blacks doomed to simply accept a transnational black identity that arose from the debasement and dehumanization of enslaved Africans, even though there are different national cultures and histories between and within the black Atlantic and Africa? To address the relationship between dominant transnational anti-black discourses and the national heterogeneity of the black experience, I present the decolonial theory as a way to analyze this relationship.

## **Modernity, Coloniality and Border thinking and its critiques**

Before the sixteenth century, some of the names for the land mass presently referred to as the Americas were Tawantinsuyu for what is now named the Andes, Anáhuac for what is now known as the valley of Mexico, and Abya-Yala for what is now called Panama (Mignolo, 2005, p. 2). The Indigenous populations who named and resided in these lands for thousands of years had surely “discovered” the Americas, but it is only with the European “discovery” of the Americas that these lands are dominantly discussed as having *really* been discovered (ibid). It is here, with the “discovery” of the Americas that decolonial theorists argue that modernity began (Escobar, 2004; Mignolo, 2005; Quijano, 2007). Decolonial theorists contend that modernity was not exported to the world from Europe, but began in 1492 with the violent and unequal colonial encounter between Europeans and Native populations in the Americas. They argue that the violent and unequal nature of modernity’s inception reveals its “double register” (Mignolo, 2005, p. 6); which is the reality that modernity has a constitutive underside called coloniality (Escobar, 2004; Quijano, 2007).

In this section, I will answer the question of how to theorize the relationship between the heterogeneity of modern national black experiences and dominant discourses of transnational blackness by proposing that this relationship be analyzed within the paradigm of coloniality and through border thinking. I will primarily focus my engagement with decolonial thought on Walter Mignolo’s writings. This is because of how Mignolo conceptualizes border thought in relation to modernity/coloniality, and the usefulness of this connection to theorizing the

relationship between national and transnational blackness. After presenting arguments for coloniality and border thinking, I will use both to critically assess the defining opposition at the heart of national and transnational blackness, which is the modernity/tradition binary that dehumanizes blacks in both Africa and its Western diaspora. It is important to address the modernity/tradition binary because it is what black leaders in both Americas and Ghana had to contend with in order to establish the bounds of their sovereignty and nationhood. I will argue for going beyond the modernity/tradition binary and embracing the paradigm of coloniality and border thinking to make an analysis of relationship between the monolithic anti-black transnational nature of blackness and the heterogeneous reality of national blackness.

Mignolo's (2002, 2005) writings establish modernity and coloniality as both concepts and paradigms respectfully. As a concept, modernity is entwined in the binary opposition between modernity and tradition (Mignolo, 2002, pp. 927, 933-934) and is associated with notions of "salvation, progress, modernization and being good for everyone" (Mignolo, 2005, p. 6). As a paradigm, modernity is told from the perspective of the white, Christian, European, "Western" male (henceforth the European Subject), and it stabilizes the European Subject as the Universal Self, the human standard (Mignolo, 2005; Hesse, 2007; Tibebu, 2011).

As a concept, coloniality is the logic of domination that underpins colonialism (Mignolo, p. 7). Coloniality is distinct from colonialism because it does not refer to the individual historical periods and places of colonialism, be they Spanish, Dutch or British colonialism (ibid). It refers to the logical structure of domination underlying the control and management of non-European people by European colonialism that is still in operation today (Mignolo, pp. 6-7). As a

paradigm, coloniality is told from the perspective of the colonized and reveals the violence and dehumanization disguised in the discourses of “salvation, progress, modernization and being good for everyone” (Mignolo, p. 6). This is why Mignolo (2005) maintains that “you cannot be modern without being colonial” (ibid).

The 1492 colonial encounter between Europeans and Indigenous Americans is instructive in demonstrating the paradigmatic differences between modernity and coloniality and in illuminating the subjectivities behind their articulation. Mexican historian and philosopher, Edmundo O’Gorman (1961), compellingly argued that the European “discovery” of the Americas was actually an invention. America was an invented idea in the minds of Europeans reflecting the existing Euro-Christian notion of the “known” world. Taking his lead from O’Gorman, Mignolo (2005) explains that before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans had a tripartite understanding of the world which consisted of three continents based on the Biblical the sons of Noah; Ham, Shem and Japheth. Ham, was Africa, Shem was Europe, and Japheth was Asia. The Americas was the “New World” in relation to the “Old Worlds” of Africa, Europe and Asia (pp. 22-24).

Mignolo (2005) builds upon O’Gorman’s argument and points out that viewing the European “discovery” as an “invention” is not merely a different interpretation of the same event but a change of paradigms (p.3). The “discovery” of the Americas is a celebratory and triumphant narrative told from the perspective the European Subject within the paradigm of modernity (ibid). It presents the European Subject’s experience as a universal triumph for humanity, dismissing the subjectivities and conceptual narratives of those at the receiving end of colonization. In contrast, the “invention” of the Americas is enunciated from the perspective of

the colonized and from the paradigm of coloniality (pp. 3-4). This perspective is from those who have undergone “the colonization of being,” which is

the idea that some people do not belong to history—that they are non-beings. Thus, lurking beneath the European story of the discovery are the histories, experiences, and silenced conceptual narratives of those who were disqualified as human beings, as historical actors, and as capable of thinking and understanding. (Mignolo, 2005, p. 4)

The dominance of the “discovery” narrative, coupled with the violent and unequal nature of modernity’s inception reveals that the issue with the European Subject’s position as the Universal Self, and therefore the human standard, is not simply that he possesses the idea that his experiences and epistemologies are the standard for humanity. The indigenous populations Europeans encountered also possessed “histories, experiences, and ...conceptual narratives” (ibid). Indigenous experiences and conceptual narratives could only be silenced if they existed in the first place. Therefore, possessing knowledge about oneself and the world was shared by both Europeans and Indigenous populations they encountered, and was not the site of the unequal power differentials between the two. The issue with the dominance of the European Subject’s epistemologies is the force he has had to silence non-European narratives and to impose himself, his experiences and epistemologies as the human standard through the coloniality of European power.

### **Coloniality and the “discovery” of the Americas**

Allen Taylor (2002) argues that “[t]he colonial enterprise arrived in the Americas in Columbus’s mind” (p. 33). He explains that Columbus’s colonial impulse towards the Taino islanders he encountered on his voyage to the Americas was acquired from the treatment that the Spanish subjected the peoples of the Northwest Atlantic islands to (ibid). During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>

centuries, Iberian mariners “discovered” the Atlantic islands off the coast of Northwest Africa, the Canaries, Azores and Madeiras. The Spanish and the Portuguese eventually enslaved and colonized the inhabitants of those islands (pp. 29, 32). The Spanish learned the colonial tactics they would later deploy against Indigenous Americans from their behaviour towards the inhabitants of these islands, especially from the Guanche peoples of the Canaries. Although the Spanish gained numerous insights from their expeditions in the Canary Islands, some of these insights include the following:

[t]he expeditions successfully tested steel weapons, mounted men, and war dogs on natives on foot armed with stone implements. The invaders [Spaniards and Portuguese] also learned how to exploit rivalries between indigenous peoples as well as their devastation by disease. By turning native peoples into commodities, for sale as slaves, the invaders developed a method for financing the further destruction of their resistance. (p. 32)

Even though Toby Greene (2012) agrees that the Spanish experiences on islands like the Canaries influenced Columbus’ ideas on non-Europeans, in his book, *The Rise of The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589*, Greene contends that Columbus’ experiences in Western Africa also influenced his treatment of the Indigenous Americans he would later encounter (p. 183). Columbus spent “long periods of time” in Western Africa (p. 180) in the 1470s and 1480s, often trading in Senegambia and Upper Guinea (p. 183). The impact of his time in Western Africa is born out by the letters Columbus wrote describing the influences he took from his experiences in Western Africa and the comparisons he made between his experiences in the Americas versus his experiences in Western Africa. These comparisons were in areas such as naming conventions for the “new” lands he was “discovering”, languages, textiles, technological innovations, and slavery (pp. 180-184).

In *American Holocaust*, David E. Stannard (1993) details the gusto with which Europeans went about applying the insights they had gained from the Northwest Atlantic islands and Western Africa against Indigenous Americans. Stannard presents illustrated and photo evidence of the “uninterrupted” genocidal campaigns Europeans exacted against indigenous peoples between the 1490s-1890s (pp. 146-147), from Columbus’ initial slaughter in “fifteenth-century Hispaniola to sixteenth-century Peru to seventeenth-century New England to eighteenth-century Georgia to nineteenth-century California” (p. 150). In Bartolome de Las Casas’ 1598 edition of his eye witness account of the colonization of the Americas called *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, he crystalizes the genocidal attitude the of Spanish. The Spaniards’ attitude would set the tone for the violence that other European groups would join in and continue for the following 400 years. Las Casas’ account is chilling, he writes, “The Spanish treated the Indians with such rigor and inhumanity that they seemed the very ministers of Hell, driving them day and night with beatings, kicks, lashes and blows, and calling them no sweeter names than dogs...” (Las Casas in Stannard, p. 146).

Stannard (1993) expands on some of the tactics the Spanish used in their genocidal campaigns, including “the unleashing of trained and hungry dogs to devour infants, and the burning and hacking to death of inhabitants of entire cities...” (p.151). Stannard estimates that the total and near extermination of Indigenous Americans from European genocides since Columbus cost an estimated 100 million indigenous peoples their lives (ibid). In addition to the physical violence Indigenous Americans suffered at the hands of Europeans, were the diseases they contracted, and the devastating loss of life that ensued as a result. Taylor (2002) notes how “remarkably” one sided the disease exchange between Indigenous Americans and Europeans (p. 40). While Indigenous American populations were decimated by European diseases, such as

“[s]mall pox, typhus, diphtheria, bubonic plague, malaria, yellow fever, cholera, and influenza,” (p.41), European infections from indigenous diseases were negligible in comparison (ibid).

There is controversy in the population estimates of indigenous populations. Although Stannard (1993) estimates that 100 million indigenous peoples died because of European genocide, some estimates place the pre-Columbian population of Indigenous Americans at 100 million, while more moderate estimates place their population at 50 million (Taylor, 2002, p. 40). Because Indigenous Americans still exist today, all indigenous peoples could not have been killed by Europeans, if the highest pre-Columbian estimate of 100 million is to be believed and taken along with Stannard’s estimate of 100 million victims of genocide. Moreover, if the lower pre-Columbian population of 50 million is to be taken, then it means Stannard estimated an extra 50 million dead that did not exist. However, even with the controversy over estimates, there is consensus that there was great loss of life amongst Indigenous Americans as a consequence of European colonization.

Another controversy lies in characterizing the process of the European colonization of the Americas as a genocide against Indigenous Americans. David Abulafia (2008), who Greene (2012) describes as “an illustrious historian of the Mediterranean” (p. 186), challenges the use of the word “genocide” in relation to the homicidal activities Europeans engaged in against Indigenous Americans on the grounds that genocidal murders are planned (Abulafia, 2008, p. 4). But, Greene (2012) pushes back against Abulafia by demonstrating the awareness Europeans had concerning the consequences of their behaviour towards Indigenous Americans by citing the example the Lucayos (p. 186). After almost obliterating the Taino population of Hispaniola, the Spanish went to neighbouring Lucayo (the Bahamas) and obtained 40,000-50,000 slaves to bring back to Hispaniola. Due to ruthless working conditions and their lack immunity to European

diseases, there was a population collapse amongst the imported Lucayos, and the Spanish went back to Lucayo in search for more slaves in 1512. After three years of searching for remaining Lucayos, the Spanish only found eleven.

In 1511 the Spanish went on a slaving voyage to Florida, but first stopped in the Bahamas. After not finding anyone there, they continued to Florida, where they tricked the local Floridians to board their ships, enslaved them, and sailed off. The Spaniards were well aware of the high mortality rates associated with their slave hunting, as the population collapse of the Lucayo demonstrated to them. Greene (2012) therefore argues that it is warranted to name the Spanish behaviour genocide, as they must have known that “most or all” of the Floridians they had stolen would die, but they still stole and enslaved them anyway (p. 186). This is just one of many other examples throughout the course of the colonization of the Americas that point to the awareness and deliberateness of the violence Europeans subjected Indigenous Americans to through their genocidal campaigns.

African slaves were introduced within this colonial context due to the stunning blow Indigenous Americans sustained from European diseases (Eltis, 2000, p. 7). However, even before Africans were enslaved and brought to the Americas, the African influence over slavery in the Americas was present. By the time the trans-Atlantic slave trade began in earnest in the 1510s, Western Africa had been a region of slave procurement for more than sixty years, having been fully integrated in the Iberian slave trade, and providing slaves for Cabo Verde and the Iberian market (Greene, 2012, p. 188). Greene (2012) chronicles how Columbus’ “first thought in the Americas was how to obtain slaves and turn a profit,” which is indicative of the influence of the Spanish pattern of behaviour towards slavery in Western Africa (pp. 183-184). Portuguese colonizers in the Americas were also influenced by the experiences of the Portuguese in Western

Africa, modelling the trade of slaves off the Brazilian coast from their practices in Western Africa (p. 184). When Spaniards enslaved Indigenous Americans, the mixture of brutal working conditions and lack of immunity to European diseases decimated Indigenous American populations and eventually led to importation of slaves from Africa (Greene, 2012, p. 186).

I have written at length about the coloniality of European power to get to my main point, which is to establish the relationship between European violence and epistemological dominance in the modern/colonial era. Columbus expresses this relationship in the following observations he made about the indigenous peoples he encountered in the Americas:

They do not have arms and they [Indigenous Americans] are all naked, and of no skill in arms, and so very cowardly that a thousand would not stand against three [armed Spaniards]. And so they are fit to be ordered about and made to work, plant, and do everything else that may be needed, and build towns and be taught our customs, and to go about clothed. (Taylor, 2002, p. 35)

Note that Columbus stresses how Native Americas do not have arms twice and that the culture of the indigenous people he encounters is inferior. The construction of indigenous peoples and their cultures as inferior, and their lack of arms to adequately defend themselves, go hand in hand. This is because it is the ability of Spaniards to use greater violence over those they colonized that allowed them to enforce their cultural superiority. Thus, it is the coloniality of European power that allowed the dominance of European epistemologies and conceptual narratives over the epistemologies and conceptual narratives of the Indigenous Americans they colonized, despite the fact that both groups possessed epistemologies.

In other words, what the invention of the Americas perspective showcases, right at the beginning of modernity, is that the “colonization of being” was not possible without the coloniality of European power. The European Subject’s force enabled him to construct non-

Europeans at varying levels of inferiority and dehumanization, with black Africans at the bottom, thereby delegitimizing non-European subjectivities and undermining their position as legitimate knowledge producers. Moreover, since the European Subject set the standard of humanity based on himself, he was the only one that could fully live up to such a human standard, which led to disastrous consequences for non-Europeans that started in the Americas in the modern colonial era, and spread to the rest of the world.

Nonetheless, the “discovery” of the Americas is not the only event that has been associated with modernity. Hegel outlined several other key events that exemplified modernity, such as the European transition from feudalism to the consolidation of states, the Reformation, the Renaissance, as well as the European overseas “discovery” of the “New World” (Hesse, 2007; Tibebu, 2011; Winnant, 2001). Despite this, while European state consolidation, the Reformation, and the Renaissance are intra-European developments, representing Europe’s “self-legislation” (Hesse, 2007, p. 648), the “discovery” of the Americas ushered in a new global order, which realigned worldwide power differentials (Abernathy, 2000). Mignolo (2005) observes that the “discovery” of the Americas is not just another forgettable event in the linear progression of time; it is a definitive moment of world history. It established the European Subject as the universal subject whose expansion and lifestyle “served as a model for the achievement of humanity” (p. 6).

In his book, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415-1980*, David B. Abernathy (2000) outlines how European global dominance, ushered in by the invention of the Americas, meant the global supremacy of European ideologies, economic and political systems, religions, languages and values (pp. 6, 32). As a consequence, European

epistemologies became *epistemology*, without the need of a suffix indicating its particularity as European, in a way that non-European epistemologies do not have access to because the subjectivities behind their articulation are not the human standard. Indeed, Anshuman Prasad (1997) observes that white discourse and its universal position has become so “matter of fact,” so obvious and commonsensical that it has simply become the standard by which discourses are expressed (pg. 91). Prasad discusses the impact of “Europe’s confiscation of the universal:”

in which histories, philosophies, epistemologies, analytic categories and strategies, protocols of truth etc...that were mainly produced by ‘white’ Europeans are now employed, by Europeans and non-Europeans alike, for purposes of understanding, analyzing, and representing and theorizing the *whole* world (p.91. Emphasis in the original).

The coloniality of European power and its resultant “confiscation of the universal” has led non-Europeans to experience what historian Teshale Tibebu (2011) calls “negative modernity” (p. xvii). The staggering human toll levied by negative modernity against non-Europeans is embodied in its three pillars, which are the “American holocaust” (the massacre of Indigenous Americans), “New World” slavery and colonialism (Tibebu, 2011, pp. xvi-xvii). Yet within the paradigm of modernity, the inferior status and dehumanization of non-Europeans inherent in these three pillars, if acknowledged, are brushed aside as “bothersome” and “necessary injustice[s] in the name of justice” within the linear march of history led by Europeans (Mignolo, 2005, pp. 4-5).

Although “European” only became a cohesive and coherent identity with the invention of the Americas, Hesse (2007) explains how from the time of the Greeks, the people who now consider themselves European defined themselves against Others to stabilize their identity. These Others included the Persians, Jews and various Islamicate peoples (the Turks, the Moors and Saracens) (pp. 647-648). Europe also had internal Others. In the process of European state

consolidation, Europe's internal Others, women, peasants and workers, had to be internally "civilized," but their Othered status was mitigated by their Christianity and Europeanness when confronted with non-white European, non-Christians Others (Hesse, 2007, p. 646; Winant, 2001, pp. 26, 38-39; Tibebe, 2011, p. xxiv). One may ask, then, if Europe always had Others, what is the difference between the pre and post American invention Others?

Since non-white/Christian/European Others pre and post America's invention embodied a more extreme form of Otherness, I will focus my analysis on them. Winnant (2000) provides a helpful way of understanding the differences between the pre and post "discovery" Others through his discussion on in and out groups. He notes that in-groups and out-groups are a part of all human societies. These groups take many forms, including, "tribal, spatial, linguistic, [and] religious" groups that differentiate between insiders and outsiders, (p. 38). Winnant remarks that perhaps some form of ethnocentrism may even be a feature of all human society (ibid).

However, the "big jump" from ethnocentrism to "modern notions of race" (Winnant, 2000, p. 38) began with the invention of the Americas. Modern racism did not begin with the crusade or the inquisition. The anti-Islamic and anti-Jewish crusade and inquisition were the results of a European Christian in-group in opposition or contention with an Islamic or Jewish out-group. Even the idea of the Jewish "essence" that was passed on in blood, irrespective of conversion to Christianity (ibid), was an expression of a Christian in-group defining the parameters of admission within its group.

At this point in history, the Christian European Self was not the universal Self, there was no overarching universalized definition of humanity based on European Christianity. Islam, Christianity and Judaism all had their conceptions of the good, their epistemological frameworks and parameters of admission and denial into the in-group. There were power differentials, of

course, but nothing compared to the European supremacy that would mark the racism in the modern colonial world. What has defined the relationship between the European Subject and non-Europeans in the modern world is the coloniality of European power, where the European Subject is the standard, ideal, signifier and arbiter of what it means to be human—because he had the force to impose it.

To be clear, when modernity is periodized as starting in 1492, the argument is not that the racial hierarchies, the economic and epistemological systems that define Western global dominance were all created in that fateful year, and neither is it to argue that Western dominance was inevitable. Rather, is to argue that the process of consolidating European global dominance, which took hundreds of years, began in 1492. In fact, the Norse were the first Europeans to have “discovered” the Americas around the year 1000, (Hameloth, 2018) so the violent colonization of the Americas was not the only inevitable outcome European contact with the Americas. Moreover, the incidental nature of European dominance is exemplified by how Christopher Columbus accidentally “discovered” the Americas. Cristopher Columbus misnamed the indigenous peoples he encountered “Indians” as a result of arriving on the wrong continent, (ibid) because the original goal of his journey was to establish new trade routes from Europe to India.

There were certain conditions present in the 15<sup>th</sup> century “discovery” that informed how Europeans perceived themselves and the natives they “discovered,” like the insights Europeans gained from the colonization and enslavement of the peoples of the Northwest Atlantic islands, their experience with slavery in Western Africa, the European diseases that decimated Indigenous American populations and the arms that Europeans had to enforce their epistemologies and idea of their own superiority over those they colonized.

## **The Politics of Modern Blackness: Modernity, Coloniality and Border Thinking**

Mignolo's critique of modernity (2002, 2005, 2006, 2009) is fundamentally an epistemological critique, where he conceptualizes modernity and the politics of knowledge production in terms of geo and bio politics. Taking inspiration from Frantz Fanon (1952), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Saldívar-Hull, (2000) (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p. 213), Mignolo explains how the "geo-politics of knowledge (the local historical grounding of knowledge) goes hand in hand with the body politics of knowledge (i.e., the personal and collective biographical grounding of understanding)" (Mignolo, 2005, p. 10). Put another way, Mignolo argues that the location knowledge arises from (the geo politics) and who can know (the bio politics) are an intrinsic part of knowledge production.

Understanding the geo and bio politics of knowledge is key because as already discussed, the European Subject and the Western knowledge he produces usually presents itself as universal, neutral and objective, thereby obscuring the who, where and why behind the knowledge produced (Mignolo, 2009, p. 160). Mignolo argues that beginning with the invention of the Americas, Europe, and by extension, the Western world, has been at the centre of the world's geo and bio politics of knowledge, stabilizing itself in the position of the "locus of enunciation" for the world's dominant discourses (2005, p. 8). To critique Europe's position as the locus of enunciation in the modern/colonial world, Mignolo (2009) calls for a shift in the geo and bio-politics of knowledge, that not only changes the content but the terms of the conversation behind modernity (p. 162). He proposes this shift through his theorization of border thinking.

Unlike the paradigm of modernity, the paradigm of coloniality is pluri-vocal. Mignolo (2005; Mignolo and Tlostanova , 2006) argues that the paradigm of modernity is univocal because it is told from the perspective of the European Subject, and stabilizes his experiences and epistemologies as the human standard, necessitating the delegitimization of non-European subjectivities and epistemologies by constructing non-Europeans as inferior and/or subhuman. Thus, the direct result of the European Subject establishing himself as the Universal Self is the construction of non-Europeans at varying levels of inferiority and dehumanization. Because if one group is the universal human standard, than all other groups are inferiors in some way, which is why they are not the human standard. In contrast, the paradigm of coloniality is pluri-vocal because it is told from the perspective of the colonized, and has to recognize the subjectivities of the European Subject, whose ideas are dominant and therefore must be dealt with, and the subjectivities of the colonized, who have to experience the underside of modernity. The knowledge produced within the paradigm of coloniality is called border thinking (ibid).

Border thinking recognizes the “double register” of the modernity/coloniality bind because it arises from the violent incorporation of European epistemologies and conceptual narratives within the local knowledge systems of the colonized (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p.211). For instance, Mignolo (2005) discusses how when the Americas were colonized, “the men of wisdom and officers of state” of Anáhuac and Tawantinsuyu had to find a way to incorporate and accommodate European epistemologies and languages into their own knowledge systems and lived experiences because they were living under the political, philosophical, and religious colonial dominance of European power (pp. 9-10). This gave them a double consciousness that was born from the unequal power relations and violence of colonialism that border thinking refers to.

By contrast, Europeans in general did not have to adopt or incorporate the knowledge systems and languages of Anáhuac and Tawantinsuyu into their own epistemic frameworks and self-understanding in the same way (p. 9). Given that the coloniality of European power allowed the European Subject to set the locus of enunciation in Europe, all other cultures were measured by European standards. This meant that although Europeans could incorporate non-Europeans into their conceptual frameworks, like the addition of a “New World” into the Judeo-Christian understanding of the “Old Worlds,” Europeans remained in a position of superiority because they were the arbiters of this incorporation. Whereas, non-Europeans, who were living under the political, philosophical, social and religious European colonial domination, were forced to incorporate European epistemologies into their local epistemic frameworks from a position of subordination.

The “border” in border thinking “implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power” (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006, p. 208). Border thinking is a critical epistemology that recognizes the common humanity of all and the power differentials that allowed European epistemological dominance over the past 500 years. Border thinking recognizes the humanity in both Europeans and non-Europeans because it acknowledges the subjectivities of both European and non-European due to its pluri-vocal nature. Further, because border thinking attributes the dominance of European epistemologies to the coloniality of European power, it historicizes European dominance by tracing its inception to the historical period of the invention of the Americas. Hence, it critiques the idea that the dominance of European epistemologies is based on the innate or cultural superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans.

Because border thinking is told from the perspective of the colonized, it engages with how local realities have been impacted by dominant European ideas, and the new ideas and cultures produced as a result. Therefore, border thinking is not a singular and homogenous discourse but a heterogeneous one, taking different forms in different localities. For example, both Nigeria and India were colonized by the British. However, because of the different local histories and cultures present between and within each country, different types of border thinking were produced. Different types of border thinking were produced because of the different local realities that informed these groups' engagements with their British colonizers.

Moreover, border thinking goes beyond the modernity/tradition binary that regularly characterizes discourses of modernity's relationship with its antithesis, tradition (Mignolo, 2002, p. 934). When modernity is associated with progress, civilization and salvation (Mignolo, 2005), its antithesis, tradition, becomes associated with backwardness, primitiveness, a lack of civilization and in need of salvation (Lauer, 2007, 291-292; Mignolo, 2005). Mignolo (2002) argues that the modernity/tradition binary is premised on the denial of co-evality. Since Europeans were the ones who denied co-evality to non-Europeans, this meant that Europeans and non-Europeans could live in the same geographical space but reside in different civilizational epochs, with first Europe, and then the West, at the apex of human civilization. Because the paradigm of modernity is based on the European Subject's perspective, he has the paradigmatic privilege of defining modernity by the culture and achievements of Europeans, constructing himself as the Universal Self, and defining the binary distinctions between modernity and tradition (ibid).

Border thinking goes beyond the modernity/tradition binary because it is based in the paradigm of coloniality (Mignolo, 2002, 2006). Coloniality's two-sidedness undermines the

singular triumphant narrative of modernity that places Europe and the West at the apex of human civilization by revealing the destructive constitutive underside of modernity non-Europeans have had to suffer. When modernity is no longer a single-sided positive phenomenon, discourses of modernity as progress and tradition as backwards are made redundant because of modernity's constitutive destructiveness.

Border thinking allows co-equality between Europeans and non-Europeans because it undermines the notion that European epistemologies and civilization are the neutral and objective goal and standard in the linear march of humanity history. It does so by situating the dominance of European epistemologies and civilizational standards in the coloniality of European power instead of attributing this dominance to the objective universality of European standards. I will therefore use border thinking to analyze the relationship between national and transnational blackness because, firstly, it attributes European epistemological dominance to coloniality instead of the innate, cultural or objective superiority of European culture and civilization. Secondly, border thinking allows for a pluri-vocal analysis on how non-Europeans have engaged with dominance of Europeans epistemologies within their local contexts. As a result, border thought enables me to analyze the relationship between the heterogeneity of modern national black experiences, while also analyzing how these local experiences negotiate with dominant transnational notions of modern blackness.

The relationship between national and transnational modern blackness is deeply implicated in the tradition/modernity binary because of black Africa's position as the West's ultimate Other, and thus, the farthest away from the embodiment of the Western modern ideal. I will engage with Gilroy's writing on black modernity in the black Atlantic and then I will analyze Ghanaian responses to Africa's traditional (nativist) construct through Kwaku Larbi

Korang's (2003) masterful study of Ghanaian nationalism and African modernity, *Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa: Nation and African Modernity*. I will ultimately argue that both Gilroy's presentation of the black Atlantic as a means of conceptualizing black modernity and Korang's understanding of African modernity are lacking because they operate within and modernity/tradition binary. Instead, I will argue for theorizing the relationship between the heterogeneous experiences of national modern blackness and dominant modern transnational black discourses through border thinking.

### **Gilroy and Black Modernity:**

In order to critique the construction of the black Atlantic as a people who lack agency and a modern intellectual history (Gilroy, 1992, p. 6), Gilroy traces modernity to the European Enlightenment, and challenges the Eurocentric universalism, humanism and rationalism of the Enlightenment by situating the racial terror and brutality of slavery at the core of modernity. Indeed, Gilroy approves of Hegel's assessment of slavery as "the natal core of modern sociality" (p. 63). By doing so, Gilroy seeks to disabuse his readers of the universal and linear conception of modern history as a progressive march towards freedom and reason (pp. 43, 53-54). As a result of his attempt at decentring the European Subject from his analysis of modernity, Gilroy counters influential arguments that have worked to exclude transatlantic slavery from modernity. These arguments include presenting slavery as solely a black issue, thus relegating it outside the purview of Western modernity, and constructing slavery as a premodern hang over, that was not only incompatible with the Enlightenment ideals of human freedom and reason, but was an example of a failure of these ideals. In this line of argument, slavery's failure to live up to Enlightenment ideals were rectified with Enlightenment rationality and capitalist industrial production (p. 49).

By contrast, in highlighting the centrality of transatlantic slavery within modernity, Gilroy aims to undermine the Enlightenment's universality, which he argues is based on the perspective of the European Subject. Gilroy conceives of modernity as fractured, impacting diverse groups differently (pp. 46, 48). He therefore views the modern experience as one based on plurality, contradicting the notion that modernity is the exclusive property of the European Subject (ibid). Gilroy shifts the focus away from the European Subject's experiences within modernity to the experiences and analytic perspectives of slaves and their descendants in the black Atlantic. By doing so, he seeks to establish slavery as a central part of modernity, recognizing modernity's complicity in the violence and brutality of slavery. As a result of this shift, Gilroy strives to establish the blacks of the Atlantic world as agents with a modern intellectual history.

Even so, Gilroy does not seek to exchange one universal perspective of modernity, the European Subject's, for another, the slave's. What he seeks to do is to demonstrate the relational nature of the modern subject, and he does this by focusing on the relationship between slaves and their masters, from the perspective of the slave (p. 53). A defining feature of the perspectives of slaves and their descendants, according to Gilroy, is grounded in what W.E.B. DuBois called "double consciousness." Gilroy quotes DuBois' famous explanation of double consciousness in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, to establish his position on the matter: "One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Dubois, 1994, p. 2). Although Dubois is particularly speaking of the black American experience within a post slavery society, Gilroy argues that this double consciousness applies to all those

who are part of the black Atlantic because of their experience of slavery and their position of being both within and outside of the European dominated world of the black Atlantic (pp. 58, 126).

Therefore, when Gilroy (1992) centres the perspective of the slave, the slave's perspective is always in relation to and never separated from the Western world. This is because the European derived culture and ideologies that define Western intellectual history are the foundation upon which the tensions of black double consciousness arise from in the black Atlantic's intellectual history. So that even as the rage of Western anti-blackness is denounced by black Atlantic intellectuals, the ideals of Western rights and freedoms are pursued as self-evident. Gilroy puts it poetically, writing, "The intellectual and cultural achievements of the black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative of Enlightenment and its operational principles. Their [the slaves'] stems have grown strong, supported by a lattice of western politics and letters" (p. 48).

To illustrate how a focus on the black Atlantic's perspective decentres the Enlightenment's Eurocentric universalism, Gilroy analyzes the Hegelian slave/master dialectic through Frederick Douglass' writings on his own experience of slavery. Not only did Frederick Douglass have personal experience with slavery, having been born a slave as the suspected progeny of a white slave master father and a black slave mother, Douglass was a statesman, writer, orator, abolitionist, and tireless advocate for the rights of slaves and other marginalized groups of peoples in America (Stauffer, 2008; Sterngass, 2009). For Gilroy, Douglass' personal experience of slavery and his record of advocacy for the rights of slaves makes him an "exemplary" black modern thinker, imbuing his writings with authoritativeness in detailing the experience of slaves in the plantation system (p. 58).

Whereas in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, told from Hegel's Eurocentric perspective, the struggle between the slave and the master ends with the slave choosing bondage over death, Gilroy uses Douglas' writings of his experience of slavery to demonstrate that from the slave's perspective, bondage was not the only viable outcome for slaves in the slave/master dialectic. Death was preferable to bondage for some slaves, as Douglas' own preference for death over bondage revealed (p.63). Gilroy reads this choice of death over bondage as an example of the individuation of slaves and an assertion of the slave's autonomy, even in a context of domination, because it was "a release from terror and bondage" (ibid). Further, Gilroy argues that his interpretation of the slave/master dialectic from Douglas' perspective is an example of the novel insights that can be revealed, on issues like "the nature of freedom itself," (p. 68) when modernity decentres the European Subject from his position as the universal modern subject to feature a modern non-European perspective, like that of the slave (pp 68-70).

Superficially, Gilroy's conception of modernity seems to be similar to decolonial theory's modernity/coloniality bind, in that it speaks of concepts such as double consciousness, the relationality between European colonists/slave masters and the colonized/slave from the latter's perspective, and in his critique of the linear progressive march of history by situating the racial terror of slavery at the core of modern sociality. However, Gilroy's conception of modernity departs from decolonial theory in at least two fundamental ways. First, Gilroy's critique of Eurocentric universalism is based on expanding the scope of who is included within European universalism without questioning why European culture and intellectual standards are universal. Secondly, because he does not question why European standards are universal, he does not connect the violence meted out to slaves and other non-whites as the basis for the dominance of European "universal" standards in the modern/colonial era like decolonial theorists do.

Gilroy makes the inclusion of blacks within modernity contingent on blacks gaining equality with whites. This standard can be seen in how Gilroy ends his discussion on Douglas by quoting DuBois to indicate the goal of black slaves and their descendants in the West:

This the American black man knows: his fight here [in America] is a fight to the finish. Either he dies or wins...He will enter modern civilisation here in America as a black man on terms of perfect and unlimited equality with any white man, or he will not enter at all. Either extermination root and branch, or absolute equality. There can be no compromise. This is the last great battle of the West. (Dubois, 1977, p. 703).

The equality between blacks and whites Gilroy advocates for is one based on European superiority, despite his protestations against the Eurocentric universalism of the Enlightenment, and by extension, modernity. For Gilroy, the violence and racial terror of slavery was the baptism by fire that sanctified the black Atlantic, making it possible for them to enter modernity. But, this is only because slavery, and its attendant brutality, was the means that allowed blacks to enter the modernity that Europeans already possessed. Therefore, it was the proximity to Europeans, through slavery, that endowed the black Atlantic with modernity.

By contrast, decolonial theorists do not assume that Europeans have a modernity separate from the people they brutalized and conquered. Decolonial theorists argue that modernity was constituted by coloniality, and is thus inseparable from it. Whereas, Gilroy argues that modernity was created by Europeans, and blacks in the Atlantic gained access to modernity through the violence of slavery. It is here that Gilroy reveals the modernity/tradition binary underpinning his assumptions on black modernity. Gilroy (1992) states that his goal is to demonstrate that the black Atlantic has an intellectual history and agency (p. 6). However, he does not explain how and why the black Atlantic was constructed as a people with no intellectual history or agency.

As discussed in previous sections, Africa was racialized as black because of the racialization of African slaves as black in the Americas (Mignolo, 2005, p. 41). Europeans referred to African slaves as black, which is significant because in the binary thinking that dominates Western thought, whiteness and blackness are absolute opposites (Deliovsky and Kitossa, 2013). Whiteness is associated with notions of goodness, purity and holiness, while blackness in the Western imagination is associated with evil, dirt, and savagery (Brooks, 1995; Dyer, 1997; Lauer, 2006). This was an extremely convenient binary for white Europeans because it justified their position at the top of the colonial matrix of power and the position of black slaves at the bottom.

Even so, it was not simply enough to proclaim that Europeans were white and Africans were black. To justify the superiority of Europeans over Africans, the most influential account of Western modernity, put forth by Hegel, announced that Africa was a land with no history and a land of animal men (Tibebu, 2011). Meanwhile, Euro-American thinkers thought of themselves “as heirs to Greece and Rome,” (Okpewho, 1999, p. xiii) even though Europe as a cultural and political entity and identity did not exist in the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Hesse, 2007).

The relationship between the black Atlantic and black Africa did not only flow one way. It was symbiotic, because as much as slavery racialized Africa as black, African inferiority was used as a means to justify the dehumanization of black slaves as property. Europeans maligned the land where slaves came from, black Africa, as the West’s ultimate Other (DeGruy, 2005; Lauer, 2007; Tibebu, 2011). Africa was constructed as a primitive, savage land with no history, which produced uncivilized, tenuously human people, who could justifiably be enslaved, and

later colonized (DeGruy; 2005; Mignolo, Moses, 1978; 2005; Pierre, 2013; Tibebe, 2011; Walter, 1991). Slavery was even viewed by some in the U.S as a gift because it provided slaves, who were thought to have otherwise been destined for a primitive existence in Africa, a civilizational uplift. In this line of thought, slavery gave enslaved Africans a civilization uplift due to the proximity to white civilization slavery afforded them (Walter, 1991).

Modern blackness was therefore created by slavery and the anti-black, dehumanizing discourse of black inferiority that symbiotically impacted both the black Atlantic and black Africa (Manning, 1990). The construction of the black Atlantic as a people with no intellectual history or agency arose from this symbiotic relationship between Africa and its diaspora in the Americas. Instead of critiquing the modern construction of blacks as backwards (traditional) and inferior people with no history, both within Africa and in its diaspora, Gilroy chooses to distance the black Atlantic from black Africa through the experience of slavery. By doing this, Gilroy excludes Africans from modernity, relegating them to the backwards realm of tradition because they were not enslaved. Additionally, Gilroy's conception of the black Atlantic also ties black modernity to the inclusion of black Atlantic within European modernity.

Gilroy (1992) argues that the black Atlantic's identity was made from the creolization of the cultures of black slaves with European, Indigenous and Asian groups in the Americas. Nonetheless, Europe and European culture seem to be the most important of all these cultures for the creation of the modern black Atlantic identity. Gilroy (1992) uses the experiences of notable black Americans like Frederick Douglas, W.E.B Du Bois, and Richard Wright, and to a lesser extent, Martin Delany, in Europe to argue that Europe was the catalyst for black intellectual growth and self-understanding in the black Atlantic world.

Indeed, Gilroy (1992) lays out his position on European superiority in unequivocal terms when he writes that the intellectual impetus spurring the exploration of black social and political thought in the West arose when black slaves “eavesdropped” on “the intellectual obsessions of their enlightened rulers” (p. 39). Further, Gilroy goes on to observe that “western culture” (in this context, European based western culture) is the black Atlantic’s “peculiar step-parent” (p. 49). In presenting the relationship between blacks and whites as a child/parent relationship, where enlightenment flows from the white slave master to the black slave, Gilroy’s construction of slaves and their descendants is reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling’s (1899) half-devil, half children white men are burdened with raising up to the civilizational heights of Europe. Because black slaves are charges who only achieve enlightenment under the (violent) tutelage of their white slave masters, their inclusion within modernity does not make them equals with whites, but subordinates.

Moreover, because black intellectual history is dependent on European culture and thought as the foundation of its existence, black intellectuals are not equal to their white counterparts. Black intellectuals need to be enlightened by Europeans in order to establish a modern intellectual history, whereas, European intellectual history is a given, even without black intervention, according to Gilroy’s argument. The exclusion of black Africa from black modernity is indicative of Gilroy’s stance on Europe as the conveyor of modernity. Recall that because black Africans were not enslaved and given the opportunity to violently intermingle with Europeans in the black Atlantic, they are not modern. However, nowhere in Gilroy’s argument does he contend that Europe was unmodern before black slaves were brought to the Western world—European modernity and intellectual history are a given for Gilroy. Therefore, it

is Europeans that confer modernity to the black Atlantic, and it is the approximation to Europeans that allow the black Atlantic to be modern and excludes Africa from modernity.

Hence, the creolization Gilroy cites as a unique feature of the black Atlantic is one based on a hierarchy, defined by white superiority and black subordination. Blacks have to wait to receive modern culture and intellectualism from their European superiors before they can engage with it (whether in disagreement or agreement) and become modern subjects. For instance, although Gilroy ultimately disagrees with Hegel's conclusion of the slave/master dialectic, he engages with Hegel's slave/master framework to ground his meditation on black consciousness and freedom. Hegel thus sets the terms on which black freedom is theorized from, even if his conclusions are disagreed with. Gilroy would have his readers believe that simply expanding the scope of who is considered modern by including non-Europeans into a European framework of modernity critiques the Eurocentric universalism of the Enlightenment. But what this type of reasoning masks is the embedded Eurocentrism in maintaining Europe as the locus of enunciation for the world's dominant discourses and securing the European Subject as the Universal Self. When the European Subject's position as the Universal Self is not questioned, his standards must be engaged with if one wants to be considered modern.

In his quest to establish the black Atlantic as a people with an intellectual history, Gilroy sought to first establish blacks as modern by placing transatlantic slavery at the centre of modern sociality. He assumed that by widening the scope of who is considered a modern subject, he was critiquing Eurocentric notions of modernity and establishing parity between blacks and whites. With this parity amongst the races established, he strove to theorize a modern black intellectual history to combat racist conceptions of black intellectual inferiority. However, Gilroy's argument for a modern black intellectual history rests on the faulty premise that broadening the scope of

who is considered modern, without questioning the Eurocentric terms defining what it means to be modern, makes blacks equal to whites. This is not the case, because uncritically broadening the scope of a Eurocentric understanding of modernity, as Gilroy does, constructs blacks as cultural and intellectual inferiors waiting to be enlightened and modernized by their European superiors.

When broadening the scope of who is considered modern, Gilroy does not stop to ask why Europe is the locus of enunciation for the world's dominant discourses in the modern era and why the European Subject is the human standard blacks have to be equal to in order to be modern? Is it because Europeans are naturally or culturally more Enlightened than non-Europeans? Gilroy neglects answering these basic questions, and as a result he ends up confusing dominance with neutrality. Put another way, because European standards are dominant in the modern era, Gilroy takes these standards to be the neutral benchmark of modernity that he engages with, measures, approximates and validates black modernity by. This in turn ends up validating white superiority by presenting it as the neutral norm, which brush aside the uncomfortable realities concerned with addressing why European standards are so dominant in the modern era.

Even though both Gilroy and decolonial theorists point to violence as being at the heart of modernity, the crucial difference is that for Gilroy, violence was the means that facilitated the introduction of black slaves to modernity. Presenting violence as the means by which slaves gained entry into modernity leaves out questions concerning why Europeans both embody and create the modern standard, as discussed above. By contrast, for decolonial theorists, violence is not only the means but it is the cause that made European provincialism universal. This means that decolonial theorists actually have a response to why European standards are dominant in the

modern era. Decolonial theorists argue that European standards are dominant because of the coloniality of European power and not because of the innate and/or neutral superiority of European culture and intellectualism.

### **Ghanaian Nationalism and Modernity: The Faustian Bargain**

In Korang's study on Ghanaian nationalism and African modernity, he argues that nationalism in Ghana took three forms. The first form was assimilationist, based on a Faustian bargain between the native middle class and European colonizers, the second was nativist nationalism based on the rejection of European culture and civilization by the native middle class in favour of African culture and the last was based on a Promethean type assimilation of African culture to the mandates of the modern nation state, as exemplified by the first president of post independent Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah.

According to Korang, (2003) the Faustian bargain between the European educated African middle class and the European colonizer was the first iteration of Ghanaian nationalism. One of the leading African nationalists of his time, J.E. Casely Hayford (henceforth Hayford), described the Faustian bargain as the "original sin" that "did open the door for white men" and burdened preceding generations of Africans, especially the middle class, with the imposition of "[European] civilization on African nationality" (Casely Hayford, 1914/1971, p. 101 in Korang, 2003, p. 179 [parenthesis in Korang's version of the quote]). Hayford conceptualizes the "deathly" inheritance of the middle class as "the burden of doubling" (henceforth, doubling) (ibid). Although doubling sounds similar to Dubois' "double consciousness," it takes a different perspective on the mixing of cultures. Doubling is a reference to the middle class subjectivity produced by their abandonment of African culture due to their assimilation into European culture

and civilization (ibid). Because doubling resulted in the middle class' alienation from their African culture and desires, in preference for the culture and desires of their colonizer, Hayford and Korang (2003) refer to doubling as Faustian bargain, where the middle class sold their African soul for a European one.

Ekem Ferguson embodied the paradoxes associated with doubling. Born in 1864 in the Gold Coast (Ghana), to a Fanti family, Ferguson joined the colonial civil service at the age of seventeen (Korang, 2003, p. 181). He would go on to hold the title of “political agent, diplomat, surveyor, geologist, cartographer, draftsman, explorer, historian, linguist, and ethnographer to the colonial administration,” all by the time of his untimely death at the age of thirty-two (p. 182). By the age of twenty, Ferguson had studied astronomical observation and map making, and already “compiled for the colonial government a map of the divisions of the Colony [Gold Coast]” (pp. 181-182). After his return from Britain, where he went to study at the Royal Normal School of Mines, studying surveying, Ferguson return to the Gold Coast by the age of twenty-five and took his first mapping expedition across the Gold Coast (p. 182). Ferguson’s impact on Ghana was monumental. He was the one who mapped out the boundaries of the modern Ghanaian state (ibid).

Not only did Ferguson map out the physical contours of the Ghanaian state, Korang (2003) notes that he “appears to be guilty of furthering the territorial and cultural alienation of a hitherto self-accountable sphere of nativity into a colonialist modernity” (p. 182). In other words, Ferguson was liable in furthering colonial dominion and European modernity by bringing new territory, hitherto outside the purview of colonial rule, and carving out, and thereby capturing the territory of the Gold Coast for the colonial state. He did this all at the expense of the natives’ authority and integrity over their land. Ferguson’s position as a Fanti son, a colonial subject and

colonial administrator make his actions and beliefs paradoxical. Although Ferguson was said to be patriotic in his love for his people, he supported colonial rule (Arhin, 1974). Korang (2003) disentangles these contradictory loyalties by explaining that because Ferguson believed African culture to be empty, barbarous, backwards, and void of any significance to the modern world, it was in need of being filled by European culture and civilization to gain modern relevance (pp. 185, 187, 198, 201-202). Therefore, Ferguson's support for colonial rule, through this logic, was an indication of his love for his people, because it was through European civilization and culture that his people would find modern enlightenment.

Ferguson believed in a "rationalized modernity" that would implement a scientific standardization of the Gold Coast population by unifying the diverse ethnicities and kingdoms that comprised the state (Korang, 2003, pp. 184-185). Ferguson, and other nationalists who held scientific standardization in the same esteem, viewed the middle class as a bridge, as emissaries, who because they had been enlightened by European culture and civilization, could in turn enlighten the diverse masses by creating a unitary nativity within the Gold Coast, free of diversity. This unitary Gold Coast nativity would be held together by the "'civilizing' modernity" of an Eurocentrically understood culture of civilization and progress (p. 185). Ultimately, the Faustian negation of African culture was meant to lead to equality between Africans and their colonizers (p. 201). Once Africans assimilated into their colonizer's modernity, their assimilation would make them become equals in modernity, creating a "transethnic fraternity" (p. 191).

Korang (2003), however, questions an equality based on the complete alienation of African culture, presented as empty, in order to assimilate into a European culture perceived as overflowing with civilization and modernity. Ferguson presents European colonization as a

completely enlightened enterprise without mentioning the liability Africans suffered at its hands. Korang describes this liability as a “substitutive risk,” which refers to the colonial political economy that exported the commercial and bodily risks of Europe onto the natives of their peripheral colonies (p. 190). According to Korang, Ferguson’s views on colonialism are an expression of “*unthought*,” given that Ferguson ignores the liabilities natives incurred because of colonial domination. Because Ferguson remains committed to the “unqualified veneration of a rationalizing, modern European civilization,” Korang charges Ferguson with revealing his endorsement of his “‘own’ Nothingness” (p. 191).

Ferguson endorses his own nothingness because he is wholly dependent on European civilization to bring Africans (and by extension, himself) into modernity. Due to Ferguson’s embrace of his own (and Africa’s) nothingness, he believes that Africa has nothing original to offer modernity (ibid). Hence, Ferguson ends up failing because in his haste to receive modernity, he even ignores its costs to the natives he purports to care for (ibid). Korang concludes by noting that there is no equality between Africans and their colonizers in Ferguson’s version of African modernity and nationalism. There is only African denigration based on the negation of African culture. A Faustian bargain, centred on African nothingness, is the legacy the first Ghanaian nationalists burdened their ideological progeny with. It is this burden that the next phase of Ghanaian nationalism, represented by J. E. Casely Hayford, contended with and attempted to rectify.

### **The Nativist Turn**

Even though nativist nationalism was burdened with Ferguson’s Faustian legacy, nativist proponents chose to rectify the follies of their predecessor in an elitist and self-serving manner.

The nativist turn to Ghanaian nationalism sought to address two major concerns; the colonial state's denial of power to the European educated black African middle class on racial grounds and the revival of native African culture as a force of nationalist cohesion. Although the black middle class of the Gold Coast had the same class interests in administering the colonial state as their white counterparts, due to their race, they were denied an equal share of power in ruling the colonial state (Korang, 2003, p. 268). As a result, the black middle class sought to gain power by undermining the colonial state, and the European domination it stood for. They did this by forwarding a nativist nationalism that rejected European culture and influence within the nation in embrace of African culture.

As a response to the black middle class' threat to colonial rule, the colonial state empowered traditional rulers, through indirect rule, to administer customary law. Colonial rulers enacted indirect rule as a means of undermining the legitimacy of the middle classes' claim to state power (p. 269). Another consequence of codifying customary law was "the invention of tradition," (ibid) where the scope and breadth of traditional chiefs were expanded to "[p]reviously autonomous social domains" in an "uncustomary" fashion, bolstered by the power of the modern colonial state (Mamdani, 1996, p. 110).

The representative figure Korang (2003) uses to analyze the nativist turn in Ghanaian nationalism is Hayford, who his contemporaries described as "the uncrowned king of British West Africa" (p. 205). Hailing from a prominent Fanti (and Euro-African) coastal family, Hayford was educated at the prestigious Cape Coast Wesleyan Boys High School and later Mfatsipim (ibid). He attended Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone and after years of working as a teacher, a principle, as an editor for several local journals, and a law clerk, he discovered an interest for law and went to study law at Cambridge. Upon finishing his

professional training in London, he returned to the Gold Coast and opened up a practice (ibid). As a man of many talents, from 1916, Hayford was a member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council, and used his journalistic prowess to inform both his legal practice and his nationalist politics. He remained the proprietor and editor of *The Gold Coast Leader* up until his death in 1930 (ibid).

Hayford and his Pan-Africanist mentor American, Edward Bylden, believed in “an inalienable African Personality”—found in African culture and expressed through indigenous African languages (pp. 207, 219). Korang engages with Hayford’s ideas by drawing heavily from Hayford’s semi-autobiographical book, *Ethiopia Unbound*. In *Ethiopia Unbound*, Hayford argued that the reason Ethiopians (Hayford uses Ethiopia as a stand in for Africa) succumbed to the humiliation and degradation of colonial domination was because they abandoned their African culture in favour of European culture (pp. 234, 238). He observed that as a consequence of being colonized, Europeans “infantilized Africans,” presenting Africans as children who needed “adult supervision in the political sphere and as... candidat[es] for Christian supervision” (p. 233). Hayford rejected the idea that European colonial rule was a “rationalizing, modernizing civilizing” (p. 229) influence on Africans, referring to “colonialist modernity” as “faux modernization” because it did not represent the natives’ welfare, needs or interests (p. 230). In fact, Hayford critiqued Europe’s “cultural and civilizational monopoly on the Universal” (p. 212) by pointing to the “inhumane and exterminatory character” of European modernity (p.213). Hayford presented African nativity as a corrective to the unsavoury aspects of European modernity (ibid).

A return to African culture would not only benefit Africans, when it came to breaking the shackles of colonial rule and gaining their dignity, but it was also a benefit to the international

community. Hayford believed, like Dubois, that all nations of people in the world, be they white, Asian or Indigenous Americans etc., were endowed with a particular message to contribute to the overall betterment of humanity (pp. 212-213). Colonialism created a situation where Africans, and especially the native middle class, became alienated from their own culture, having their African Personality gutted from them. Because Africans were alienated from their African culture, they lacked the ability to put forth an original modern African message that would allow them the dignity to autonomously and effectively handle their affairs within Africa. The lack of African originality also prevented Africa from delivering a message to the world, which in turn undermined Africa's ability to be equals with the rest of the nations of the world, who all had their own respective messages to share with humanity (ibid). Therefore, it was the duty of Africans to return to their native culture, not only for themselves, but for the world.

However, the messengers tasked with delivering the message of a nativist African nationalism was a very select group of people. Hayford argued that it was Africa's sons and not her daughters who were charged with uplifting Africa through its nativity (Korang, 2003, p. 220). Blyden maintained that it was only Africa's sons within Africa who were capable of leading this Pan-African cultural revival, because out of the whole African diaspora, only Africans within Africa had access to their authentic African Personality (ibid). Particularly, Blyden argued that when it came to West African leadership, Gold Coast intellectuals were the most equipped to lead the cause of African nationalism (ibid).

Moreover, it was only the European educated black middle class that could properly represent the people's interests in furthering a native African nationalism. In *Ethiopia Unbound*, Hayford asks, "But for the educated native where would the unsophisticated native be?" (Casely Hayford, 1911/ 1969, p. 193 in Korang, 2003, p. 224). He goes on to declare, "I will be the word

of the people” (Casely Hayford, 1911/ 1969, p. 181 in Korang, 2003, p. 225). Korang (2003) contextualizes Hayford’s statements by explaining that the reason the middle class perceived themselves as the sophisticated representatives of the “unsophisticated” masses was because of their access to European culture and civilization, through their professional credentials, educational attainment and linguistic abilities (pp. 223-224). As such, they thought themselves uniquely equipped to speak against colonial domination because they could represent the people’s interests by combining their knowledge of “popular nativity” with their access to a cosmopolitan audience and culture (ibid).

There are a few glaring contradictions in Hayford’s arguments for nativist nationalist rule and against European culture. Aside from the gendered and geographical restrictions placed on who can speak the nativist nationalist message, one of the issues with Hayford’s arguments is that he possessed a static and monolithic view of African culture. He argued that nothing had changed in African culture since the times of the Egyptians, noting that “the men and women [of Asante] are not changed...It is easy to see that the men and women who walked the banks of the Nile in the days of yore are not far different from...the sons of Efua Kobi (i.e., royal matriarch of Asante [1857-84])” (Casely Hayford, 1911/ 1969, pp 185-186 in Korang, 2003, p. 265). By constructing Ghanaians and Egyptians as basically the same people, Hayford completely disregards the diversity within Africa. Additionally, by making African culture static, he undermines the ability of Africans as agents of change, validating the notion that Africans are backwards people stuck in the past.

Hayford’s idealization of African nativity (tradition) demonstrates the complexities of critiquing the dominant negative constructions of African tradition. Although the more common construction of black Africa’s position as traditional is negative, riddled with images of

backwardness, barbarism, chaos and even evil (Brooks, 1995; Lauer, 2006), there is a less common image of African tradition that presents it as superior to the West because of its imperviousness to the corrupting force of modernity. From this perspective, Africans are constructed as living in a highly romanticized state of nature where modernity is the pollutant that has come to disrupt the “pure” African way of life (Gilbert and Reynolds (2008, p. xix). Africans are viewed as living in a sort of edenic tradition that is close to nature, a way of life which the West has lamentably lost.

Albeit not as extreme, Hayford’s construction of African nativity is a variant of this romanticized version of African tradition because it seeks to establish African authenticity within a static and monolithic African past and it aims to define African modernity by completely rejecting “all symbols of European authority” (p. 267). Even so, by simply redefining European modernity as force of corruption and African tradition as a force for good, Hayford does not go beyond the modernity/tradition binary, like border thinking does. In fact, he maintains the binary because of the denial of co-evality that informs his separation of African tradition from European modernity. The only difference is that African tradition is desirable and European modernity is a force of corruption.

Nevertheless, Hayford’s repudiation of European culture for African nativity is questionable. He uses the very same European culture, which he argued infantilized Africans and destroyed their originality, to justify his sophistication and therefore right to speak the nativist nationalist message. Hayford’s use of his proximity to European culture and civilization to bolster his right to represent the masses demonstrates the difficulties with his advocacy for the complete separation of European culture from Africa. Remaining with the topic of representation, Korang (2003) questions the middle class’ position as the regenerators of African

culture. He asks, if primordial African culture (nativity/tradition) remained the same and was complete within itself, like Hayford argues, why did it need to be developed by the middle class? (p.266)

### **Nkrumah, The African Prometheus**

Korang (2003) argues that Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of the independent Ghanaian state, was the great reconciler. Nkrumah did not completely reject “all symbols of European authority” like Hayford, (p. 267) but he also did not engage in the Faustian pact, confining African nativity into a static barbaric past with no role in the modern state of Ghana. Nkrumah furthered a nationalism based on “the invention of a people who are spatially, rather than linguistically, one” (p. 259). He fought for a future Ghanaian state that harnessed the “forced togetherness” of the diverse kingdoms and ethnicities of the Gold Coast, imposed by the borders of the colonial state, to create a modern Ghanaian nation state. It was his ability to readily accept the boundaries of the European colonial invention, which was the Gold Coast, into his nation building enterprise that leads Korang to cast Nkrumah as the Promethean figure of Ghanaian nationalism. Nkrumah seized the “vessel of colonialist design,” which was the boundaries of the colonial state (and the fire of the Gods from the Promethean myth) and reconstituted it into a “self-actuating nativity” (p. 263) represented by the modern Ghanaian nation state.

Although Nkrumah was a “self-confessed Garveyite,” his nationalism had a racially integrated international dimension (p. 251). In the 1920s, Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey announced that “Africa was for Africans!” but Nkrumah connected black rights to the creation of nation states and the ability of those nations to fight for black rights and equality with other

nations. In his book *Ghana*, Nkrumah proclaims that “[O]nly a free and independent people— a people with a government of their own—can claim equality, racial or otherwise, with another people” (Nkrumah, p. 14 in Korang, 2003, p. 251). Nkrumah’s rationale was practical—since the international realm had an established norm of nation states, Africa’s originality (its contribution to the modern world, including its fight for blacks around the world) had to be reconstituted into nation states that would defend black rights (ibid). Nkrumah believed that it was not enough for only Ghana to be free, in fact Ghana’s freedom could only come about once all other African states were also free. Even so, Africa could only be brought into modernity and nationhood on the colonialist’s ship (p 270). Still, Korang insists that such an African modernity, brought about by European intervention, is not a product of Africa consumption by modernity but consummation with modernity (p. 270).

Born in 1909 (or 1913), (Korang, 2003, p. 252) Nkrumah was an outlier when it came to the usual pedigree of nationalist leaders in the Gold Coast, like Hayford, Sarbah, Sekyi, Danquah, among others, who were part of the “merchant class and/or traditional chiefly ‘aristocracy’” (p. 253). Law was the profession almost exclusively favoured by this elite group of nationalists, and was thus a kind of prerequisite for being a nationalist leader. Nkrumah, in contrast, was the son of “an unlettered rural goldsmith” father and a mother who had “no formal schooling” (ibid). From this background, Nkrumah described himself as a “very ordinary looking African” (Nkrumah, 1971 p. 122 in Korang, 2003, p. 253). His ordinariness would prove useful in combating the elitism present in the nationalist leaders who put forth a restrictive nationalism for a small cohort of the native elite. Nkrumah would advocate for a nationalism centred on “collective emancipation” (Korang, 2003, p. 253)

Nkrumah graduated as a teacher from Achimota School, an “elite government school of the colony” in 1930, and after five year, he went to Pennsylvania to study at the Theological Seminary of Lincoln University (ibid). Nkrumah’s spent ten years in America, where he received an intellectual education which included Jefferson, Pain, Lincoln, Marxism, Jeffersonian democracy and Gandhian non-violence (p. 254). His engagement with these intellectual masters allowed Nkrumah to perform an “incredible stripdown of Britain’s African empire” (p. 254). After his time in America, Nkrumah spent two years in England, and became a protégé of George Padmore, who would later become one of his “closest and trusted advisors in Accra” (ibid). England also saw the intensification of Nkrumah’s activist-political phase (ibid).

In England, Nkumah initiated a Coloured Workers’ Association of Britain, and with the help of students and activists, he formed the West African National Secretariat, which was created in part to lead liberation movements, and where debates on West African nationalism took place (p. 254). Nkrumah’s left England in 1947, but his time in England contributed to his political development, teaching him about “sociopolitical organization and representation” (ibid). The United Gold Coast Convention (U.G.C.C.), which was the elite vanguard of Gold Coast Nationalism, invited Nkrumah to become its general secretary because it was faced with the problem of “how to reconcile the leadership of the intellectual intelligentsia with the broad masses” (Ghana, p. 61) (Korang, p. 254). Nkrumah eventually split from the U.G.C.C. and formed his own party, the Convention People’s Party (C.P.P.), because of his radicalism and populism, which was in conflict with the others members’ more “sedate” style of politics and their reticence on the question of independence (p. 255).

When it comes to representing the people’s interests, Korang (2003) notes that both Nkrumah and Hayford believed that the only way the middle class could become true

representatives of the people was for them to “Africanize” themselves (p. 266). Nevertheless, they had different notions of what African nativity meant in the modern state. Whereas, Nkrumah’s conception of African nativity was based on consent, Hayford’s conception of African nativity was based on descent (pg. 266). Their different leadership styles demonstrate their views on consent and descent. Nkrumah’s consensual leadership style differed from Hayford’s middle class primordial idealism, in that he focused on direct contact with the people, in a two way dialogue where “he had to see and touch the people, and the people could see and touch him” (Hagan, p. 182 in Korang, 2003, p. 267). Korang argues that Nkrumah’s two-way dialogues with the “oppressed ‘underclass,’ created by and in colonial inequality” (p. 267) gave him the ability to represent the people, projecting their nationalist yearning for freedom from colonial rule (pp. 267-268).

Hayford’s fixation with recapturing a primordial African culture as a means of legitimating African nativity in the modern state and his elitism prevented him and other nationalists of his ilk from being able to represent the people. Korang refers to Hayford’s nativist nationalism as an “elitist abstraction” rendered non-operational because it “excessively idealized nativity into a nonnegotiable norm” (p. 268). The non-operational nature of Hayford’s nationalism reveals itself in its inability to incorporate the great diversity present in the Gold Coast, in terms of its “geographical, ethnographical, class, gender, generational, and occupational” variety (Korang, 2003, p. 259) within its monolithic and static notion of African culture.

Yet, in his post-independence assessment of African states, (four and a half decades had elapsed at the time of Korang’s writing) Korang laments the “failed” or “ailing” state of African revolution (p. 272), coming to the conclusion that Prometheus was “perhaps, too brash” (p. 273).

Korang (2003) contends that because Nkrumah was state centric, he viewed the state as the teleological end of the African nationalist struggle. As a result, the native Ghanaian people became “objects of politics...to be emptied or abstracted into the nationalistic pretensions requirements of the political Kingdom.” (p. 272-273). The people’s cultures were subordinated to politics.

Korang (2003) explains that the disconnect between the people’s culture and politics arose because middle class nationalist leaders were put into a multi-ethnic colonial state, as such, they fought for freedom on the basis of the states that they were given. They presented their nationalist fight for freedom as the antithesis to colonial rule because it was a return to self-governance. However, they contained their liberation struggles within the boundaries of the colonial multi-ethnic state. These nationalist leaders, like Nkrumah, consequently prized statehood and political freedom over culture and ethnic differences. This is why culture was subordinate to the dictates of politics (p. 273). Nonetheless, the issue with their characterization of the independent nation state as a *return* to self-governance was that it was based on a notion of the state, a multi-ethnic state, which did not exist prior to colonial intervention (ibid).

Amilcar Cabral, one of Africa’s leading anti-colonial leaders and a Guinea Bissauan nationalist leader, disagreed with Nkrumah and his ideological brethren when it came to culture. Cabral argued that since “imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of *culture*” (Cabral, 1973, p. 13 in Korang, 2003, p. 274 [emphasis in original]). Korang interprets Cabral’s words as meaning that “...liberation begins and ends in culture” (p. 274). With this in mind, Korang argues that excluding the formation of an “endogenous national selfhood” (p. 273) from the priorities of the state centric model of nationalism has contributed to the “convulsions, upheavals, and setbacks”

faced by African states in the preceding post-independence years. Korang concludes by maintaining that liberation is a negotiation of people and power, culture and politics, and not the domination of politics over the people and culture (p. 274).

Although Korang's analysis of African nationalism and modernity in Ghana is nuanced and compellingly argued, he unfortunately maintains the modernity/tradition binary. Of the Promethean nationalism Nkrumah engaged in, Korang writes that it was "...an African difference [nativity] not consumed by, but consummated in modernity..." (p. 270). Korang presents modernity as a European phenomenon that merges with African nativity in an act of consummation, precipitated by Nkrumah's Promethean nationalism. Even when Korang critiques the negation of African culture from Faustian nationalism, Nkrumah's state centred nationalism or the elitism and idealism of the nativist turn, it is always in relation to modernity as an outside force that African tradition (nativism) contends with, and perceives in either favourable or unfavourable terms. The issue with Korang's conceptualization of modernity and tradition is that it maintains the denial of co-evality present in Eurocentric notions of modernity, where Africans and Europeans can reside in the same physical space but live in different civilizational eras—with Africans needing to catch up to European modernity.

Detractors of my argument can point out that just because Korang does not use the word coloniality, does not mean that he is not referring to the concept of coloniality. After all, Korang discusses the concept of "substitutive risk" in relation to European colonization. However, I am not merely highlighting an issue of semantics. Even when Korang discusses the substitutive risk Europeans passed on to their colonial subjects, due to the "unequal colonial encounter," (p.190) Korang does not discuss this inequality in terms of modernity as a double sided concept reflected

in the reality of substitutive risk. He discusses substitutive risk in terms of the exploitative nature of colonial political economy.

Korang (2003) clearly expresses his view on modernity in the introduction of his book, writing the following:

*Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa* models these nationalist intellectuals [the African middle class] as representing *in themselves* the place where ‘Africa’ and ‘modernity,’ native and alien, intersect as an ontological predicament. (p. 13)

Note that Korang does not say where “Africa and Europe intersect,” when he speaks of the middle class subjectivity formed through European colonial domination. He refers to modernity as a stand in for European civilization, and Korang’s readers know this because earlier in the chapter he traces modernity to the European Enlightenment (p. 12). Moreover, in the next sentence after the above quote, he writes, “[a]nd this is the predicament of being the agency by, and subjectivity through, which Enlightenment (indirectly) fastens its grip on native realities” (p. 13). Hence, when Korang (2003) goes on to speak about the ways in which Ghanaian nationalists have negotiated, fought over and understood “African modernity”, he is speaking of the merger or “consummation” of two distinct entities, African culture defined by its nativity (tradition) and modernity defined by European civilization.

Thus, although the violence of colonial domination imposed modernity onto Africans, modernity was a European phenomenon independent of its imposition in Africa, for Korang. While African modernity is only possible because of African contact with Europeans through colonization. Nevertheless, Korang does not specify what about European culture intrinsically puts it at the apex of human civilization and what about African culture makes it reside in an

inferior civilizational epoch, which can only be escaped through its merger with European culture.

Decolonial theory addresses the denial of co-evality present in Korang's conception of modernity and tradition by pointing out that the construction of European civilization as the apex and standard of human civilization was imposed by the coloniality of European power. The ability of the European Subject to define his own civilization as the universal standard cannot be separated from the violence inflicted on non-Europeans. The distinction here is that modernity does not arise from Europe, independently, and then is imposed by colonization (and slavery), like Korang presents it. Decolonial theorists contend that modernity, and the European dominance and European universalisms it imposes, is inextricably co-constituted by the coloniality of European power, because modernity is a double-sided not single sided European phenomenon.

### **The black Atlantic, African nationalism and Border Thinking**

I have argued in this chapter that the transatlantic slave trade created modern blackness, in a symbiotic relationship between the black Atlantic and black Africa. The brutal legacy of the birth of modern blackness in slavery lives on in dominant discourses of transnational blackness that are anti-black because they are centred on black dehumanization, backwardness and "tradition." The anti-blackness associated with dominant discourses of modern blackness can be observed in Gilroy's (1992) discussion on the construction of the black Atlantic as a people with no intellectual history and agency (p. 6), in modern notions of black Africa as a barbaric, traditional wasteland with no history or politics, populated by inferior people (Lauer, 2007; Tibebe, 2001), and in the denial of co-evality in Korang's (2003) discussion of "African

modernity.” Because black Africa and the black Atlantic must both contend with the anti-blackness present in dominant transnational discourses of modern black identity, Gilroy’s exclusion of Africa from his writings on black modernity is misguided.

Furthermore, Gilroy’s construction of the black Atlantic as an insular ideological and cultural space separate from black African modernity is ill-considered as the relationship between American Pan-Africanist Edward Bylden and Hayford, and Nkrumah and Trinidadian Pan-Africanist George Padmore demonstrated. Bylden was Hayford’s mentor and Nkrumah was Padmore protégé. Padmore would go on to become one of Nkrumah’s “closest and trusted advisors” in Ghana (Korang, 2003, p. 254). Jamaican born Black Nationalist, Marcus Garvey, influenced Nkrumah to the extent that Nkrumah “self-confessed” to be a Garveyite (Korang, 2003, p. 251).

These transnational relationships and alliances are important to highlight because of how symbiotic they were. As the first black African state to achieve independence from colonial rule on March 6, 1957, Ghana became a symbol of black independence and liberation, not only to other African states but to all people of African descent, including the black Atlantic (Gaines, 2006, pp. 2-3). Nkrumah would go on to set the standard for Pan-Africanism, having one commenter name him “the leading theorists of Pan-Africanism” (Muchie, 2000, p. 298). In his book, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, Kevin K. Gaines (2006) writes that “Nkrumah provided a haven and a platform [in Ghana] for African American radicals silenced by the combined repressive forces of the Cold War and Jim Crow segregation” (p. 25).

Therefore, although Nkrumah was himself influenced by members of the black Atlantic, his position as the president of the first black African country, gave him the ability to in turn

influence the black Atlantic by opening up Ghana as a place of sanctuary for black American radicals. Nkrumah also invited black Americans to assist in the development process of the new state of Ghana by providing their skills and expertise. This group of experts included black American “engineers, physicians, educators and contractors” (Hartman, 2008, p. 25). The ideological, political, technical and symbolic exchange between the black Atlantic and black Africa influenced both regions and is an important part of modern black history that showcases the participation of Africa in black modernity.

Even when Gilroy’s own Eurocentric standard of making proximity to Europe and European culture the catalyst for black modernity is considered, his exclusion of black Africans from black modernity is still unfounded. As Korang’s writings on Ferguson, Hayford and Nkrumah illustrates, all these nationalists travelled to Europe and America, they were all Western educated, and they all contended with the ideological and political implications of European domination through colonialism. Korang’s analysis of nationalism and African modernity in Ghana demonstrates the nuances not only between national experiences and understandings of modern blackness, which I will discuss in chapter three, but also within an individual country. These internal nationalist differences ranged from the Faustian bargain, Hayford’s nativism to Nkrumah’s Promethean consummation. What Korang’s analysis reveals is that the creolization involved in creating modern blackness is not the exclusive property of the black Atlantic. Africans, and specifically Ghanaians, have had to make sense of their identity in the midst of European domination just as the black Atlantic has had to in the modern era.

Where Korang’s analysis falls short is in his conception of modernity as a European phenomenon which spread to Africa instead of a phenomenon constituted by the coloniality of European power. Ultimately, Gilroy’s conception of the black Atlantic, as well as the Korang’s

analysis of middle class nationalism in Ghana are stuck in the modernity tradition/binary, and as such, they keep Europe as the locus of enunciation for the world's dominant discourses and the European Subject the Universal Self. Consequently both Gilroy and Korang end up undermining the subjectivity of blacks in the modern era, relegating them to the position of listless adherents of European modernity, in need of European enlightenment and salvation in order to enter into modernity. They arrive at this position from different paths but they end up at the same destination.

Analyzing the relation between the national heterogeneity of modern blackness and dominant transnational anti-black discourses through border thinking allows the analysis of modern blackness to go beyond the modernity/tradition binary, and the denial of co-evality that informs it. This is because border thinking is grounded in the subjectivity of those at the receiving end of European coloniality. This shift in the geo-politics of knowledge production establishes co-evality between non-European and Europeans because it is pluri-vocal. Border thinking's pluri-vocal nature provides the opportunity to analyze how diverse black national subjectivities have had to negotiate the violent imposition of dominant anti-black transnational discourses into their local conceptual narratives of themselves and the world.

Because border thinking is grounded in the subjectivities of those who have been colonized (and enslaved), it is structured on the agency of these subjectivities. However, the agency in border thought is not one which seeks the complete repudiation of European/Western modernity to establish the legitimacy of African tradition nor is its agency one that tries to assert its modernity by its proximity to European culture and civilization. Neither does it establish its agency through consummating with an independently European modernity in order to establish itself as modern. The agency of an analysis based in border thinking is based on the

acknowledgement that creolization does not mean equality. The inclusion of non-Europeans into Eurocentric notions of modernity, which maintain Europe as the locus of enunciation, does not mean that non-Europeans and European subjectivities are equals.

Border thinking's agency highlights the way the colonized and enslaved modern blacks have negotiated and engaged with European epistemological domination. It explores the new cultures and epistemologies formed from the inherent inequality that European coloniality has produced in the modern colonial era. Finally, the agency of border thinking does not confuse dominance with neutrality or objectivity because it always recognizes the coloniality that led to the global dominance of European epistemologies. Therefore, I have chosen border thinking to analyze the national heterogeneity of the modern blackness and the anti-black transnational discourses of modern blackness.

Nonetheless, coloniality and border thinking have been critiqued for not going far enough in critiquing Western dominance because of its epistemological basis. Theorists working with the Ontological Turn's (henceforth OT) methodology argue that an epistemological critique of Western dominance still operates within Western ontologies and thereby does not offer non-Westerners the ontological freedom to define their own realities. I will appraise some of the most influential thinkers working with the ontological method, and present critics against it in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 2: The Ontological Turn**

In *Thinking through things*, Henare et al. (2007) lay out one of the most influential articulations of OT (Vigh & Sausdal, 2014, p. 50; Gad et al, 2015, p. 74; Graeber, 2015, p. 16). They noticed an analytic shift taking place between the 1980s and 1990s from questions

concerned with epistemology to questions concerned with ontology in the writings of thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Alfred Gell, Marilyn Strathen, Viveiros de Castro and Roy Wagner (Henare et al., 2007, pp.7-8). The most authoritative thinker in this shift was Viveiros de Castro, who, in the words of Henare et al., provided OT's "clearest statement of distinction" in a series of lectures given at Cambridge University in 1998, while Henare et al., the editors of *Thinking through things*, were still students at Cambridge (p. 8). This shift inspired Henare et al. to theorize an OT methodological framework in what is arguably one of OT's foundational texts, *Thinking through things*. Thus, my engagement with OT in this section will be centred on the OT methodological framework put forth by both Viveiros de Castro and Henare et al.

Although OT's main focus is anthropological methodology, the conclusions OT makes about Western ontological and epistemological dominance have farther reaching implications for academic disciplines beyond the field of anthropology. Viveiros de Castro (2004a) argues, anthropology is the chief culprit and therefore exemplar of the entrenchment of the social sciences in Western ontology and epistemology (p. 483). Because of anthropology's exemplary and notorious position within the social sciences, examining arguments for and against OT will yield important insights for other social sciences when it comes to questions of Western ontological and epistemological dominance.

My goal is not to present an exhaustive list of arguments for and against OT, but to discuss its basic assumptions and tenets and to address the critiques against it, demonstrating that it is an insufficient method for critiquing Western epistemological and ontological dominance in the modern colonial era. I do so by analyzing the main points of contention between Viveiros de Castro, Henare et al. and David Graeber through the politics of translation in anthropology. By answering the questions who defines the terms of translation and what are the terms of

translation, I will argue that both OTers' and Graeber's arguments for and against OT are insufficient in addressing Western ontological and epistemological dominance. I will end this section by arguing that an ontological critique of Western dominance is not possible while working within academic structures and institutions that are based in and dominated by Western ontology. Instead, I argue that decolonial theory, with its epistemologically based critique of Western dominance is the best way to critique Western dominance in academia and analyze both the national heterogeneity and transnational nature of modern blackness.

### **The Case for the Ontological Turn**

The "ontological self-determination of the other" is necessary, Viveiros de Castro (2015) argues, because of the Kantian "crisis of representation" present in anthropology (pp.3-4). Kant introduced the "epistemological turn" in Western philosophy (Viveiros de Castro, p. 3) by declaring that the "world in itself" was unknowable, and could only be accessed through "experiences already formed by human categories" (Gad et al., p. 69). This gave rise to Western philosophy's concern with deploying questions of epistemology as a means of understanding and representing the world, which was a shift away from questions of ontological concern. As a result, ontology has since become the domain of the hard sciences, while epistemology has become the domain of the social sciences (Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p. 3). Despite the epistemological bent of the social sciences in general, Viveiros de Castro (2004a) proclaims that anthropology is "the most Kantian of disciplines," and "plagued since its inception by epistemological angst" (p. 483).

An epistemologically based anthropology is problematic because it furthers the othered and sub human status of subjects of ethnographies (Viveiros de Castro, p.5). Henare et al. (2007)

observe that anthropology has always been thought of as “the episteme of others’ epistememes, which we call cultures,” and as such, anthropology has been thought of as “the various systemic formulations of knowledge (epistemologies) that offer different accounts of that *one* world” (p. 9 [emphasis in original]). In contrast, Viveiros de Castro and Henare et al. argue for an ontologically based anthropology, where one world with different representations/cultures/worldviews is not a given. They argue for an ontological ethnographic methodology that takes seriously the multiple worlds of subjects of ethnography. Henare et al. (2007) define ontology as “the study of the nature of *reality*” (p. 10). However, Viveiros de Castro and Henare et al. use the term ontology synonymously with the words world, nature and reality.

Viveiros de Castro (2015) contends that the outcome of adopting an ontologically based ethnographic method is the ontological self-determination of the other, which has been denied by the imposition of the singular modern Western ontology assumed in an epistemologically based anthropology. Because ontology was relegated to the hard sciences, the West developed a separation between nature and culture (Viveiros de Castro, 2015, pp. 3-4). Since the hard sciences studied nature and the social sciences studied culture, nature was assumed to be singular and universal, while cultures could be plural, offering different representations and possessing multiple *worldviews* of a singular *world* (Henare et al, 2007, pp.10-11; Viveiros de Castro, 2015, pp.3-5). Viveiros de Castro (2015) argues that conventional anthropologists conduct their ethnographies from the singular scientific ontology.

However, not all cultures are equal. Viveiros de Castro (2015) notes that Western modernity has defined non-Europeans as “barbarians,” “non-modern,” and sometimes even “non-human” in opposition to Western scientific modernity. Consequently, this has led to the

delegitimization of non-Western ontologies (p.5). Hence, although there are different worldviews/representations of the world, the only worldview that has been able to empirically and faithfully represent the world, according to the West, is the modern Western scientific one, which makes it the standard for the rest of the world and better than all other perspectives (Henare et al, 2007, P. 13; Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p. 5). This ends up bolstering Western superiority and rendering non-Westerners as inferiors.

In an effort to go beyond this Western scientific singular ontology, Henare et al. (2007) deploy a method of radical constructivism similar to Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp. 7, 35– 6) and distinct from Foucault. For example, although Foucault (1994) argued that discourses created gender, he still maintained that there was a body that was being gendered distinct from the concept of gender. Viveiros de Castro (2015) and Henare et al. (2007, p. 13) argue that there is “no ontological distinction between discourse and reality.” An appraisal of the Foucauldian example from an OT perspective would contend that there is no distinction between the *thing/concept*, the body, and *discourse*, gender. Henare et al. write that “...concepts can bring about things because concepts and things are just one and the same...” (p. 13).

Therefore, unlike the singular Western ontology which assumes that there is one world/reality, and different representations of it, Henere et al. collapse the distinction between things, which they define as appearance and reality (p. 14) and discourse. This makes it possible for different worlds to reside in things, depending on the different world that conceptualizes the thing. Hence, an ethnographer and an interlocutor can be speaking about the same “thing,” but speaking from different ontologies, from different worlds. Henare et al. anticipate the question, “if different worlds exist, then why can we not see them?” by pointing out that different worlds

are a-visual. By a-visual, they mean that in collapsing the distinction between concepts and things, things disclose themselves through conceptions not perceptions (p.14).

The often cited example of Cuban diviners asserting that powder is power is instructive in illustrating Henare et al.'s argument. Henare et al. (2007) argue that when Cuban diviners assert that powder is power, they are not referring to the same conception of powder that an anthropologist hearing this statement is. This is because the concept of powder Cuban diviners are referring to is in a different world, where powder can be power, even when in the world anthropologist live in, this may be nonsensical. Therefore, although the Cuban diviner and the anthropologist are perceiving the same physical thing, powder, Henare et al. speak from the Western anthropologist's perspective when they refer to the Cuban diviner's powder, writing that "it is the *enunciation of a concept* of powder with which we are quite unfamiliar" (p.14 [emphasis in original]).

Viveriros de Castro, Henare et al. and other OTers engage in OT in order to allow for an anthropological methodology that takes serious ontologies that encompass different worlds, *things*, and actors that are not present in the Western scientific ontology. Henare et al. (2007) argue that OT provides the ability of things and human subjects of ethnographies to dictate the terms of their own analysis because the anthropologist does not impose their ontological assumptions onto the ontological worlds of their subjects of ethnographies (pp.5-7). The goal for anthropology, then, is not to decipher what subjects of ethnography think, but to change the way anthropologists think, so that anthropologists can conceive the world in the way their interlocutors do (Henare et al., 2007, p. 15).

OT therefore makes possible the space for the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnographies because they are the ethnographic authorities of their worlds. Henare et al.

(2007) are quick to mention that anthropologists do not have the ontological upper hand over their informants because they were handicapped by the epistemological way anthropological methods were done before OT, and are in “need to recuperate a facility their informants may already have” (p.16). Hence, it can be inferred that the subjects of ethnography are the ones in the position of ontological power because they have not been handicapped by the epistemological bias of anthropological methodology.

Although OT may appear to be selflessly benevolent in its pursuits, there is also a self-serving reason Henare et al. cite for engaging in OT on the first page of their introduction. Henare et al. (2007) observe that an ontologically based methodology allows for the emergence of “novel theoretical understandings” within the field of anthropology (p. 1). Viveiros de Castro (2015) follows this order for justifying OT, when he too begins his discussion of OT by citing its benefits to the field of anthropology. Hence, there are ultimately two reasons to engage in OT, by order of mention; the first reason is for anthropologists to acquire novel theoretical understandings for their discipline and the second reason is the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnographies.

### **“We’re all in the Same Boat”: Graeber, OT and Critical Realism**

Nevertheless, OT is not without its detractors. I will focus on David Graeber’s (2015) critique of OT because of Viveiros de Castro’s (2005) comments about Graeber in his Marilyn Strathern lecture, *Who’s afraid of the ontological wolf?* and Graeber’s (2015) detailed and thoughtful response. In his lecture, Viveiros de Castro (2015) admits that Graeber is an anthropologist he “greatly admire[s]” (p. 15). However, his great admiration does not prevent him from specifically highlighting one of Graeber’s papers as a modern example of the “ethno-

anthropology” OT is against and that anthropologists should avoid engaging in (ibid). In turn, Graeber (2015) offers a thorough response and critique of OT in his article titled *Radical alterity is just another way of saying “reality”: a reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro*. Given Viveiros de Castro’s position as OT’s “standard bearer” (Graeber, 2015, p.2) and the thoroughness of Graeber’s response, the debate between Viveiros de Castro and Graeber is an informative resource to analyze what is at the heart of arguments for and against OT.

Viveiros de Castro’s critique of Graeber’s paper, *Fetishism as social creativity: or, fetishes are gods in the process of construction*, is that Graeber takes for granted his own ontological superiority when writing about the subjects of his ethnography. He quotes the following passage from Graeber’s paper:

Of course it would also be going too far to say that the fetishistic view is simply true: Lunkanka cannot really tie anyone’s intestines into knots; Ravololona cannot really prevent hail from falling on anyone’s crops. As I have remarked elsewhere, ultimately we are probably just dealing here with the paradox of power, power being something which exists only if other people think it does; a paradox that I have also argued lies also at the core of magic, which always seems to be surrounded by an aura of fraud, showmanship, and chicanery. But one could argue it is not just the paradox of power. It is also the paradox of creativity. (Graeber 2005, p.430; quoted in Viveiros de Castro 2015, p. 15)

Viveiros de Castro argues that Graeber’s paper attempts to reconcile the Merina’s notion of fetishes to Western ontology instead of taking the Merina’s notion seriously on the Merina’s own ontological terms. By deciding that the Merina’s fetishistic view could not be true, Graeber presupposes that his Western understandings of what comprises reality are superior to the ones of the people he studies (Viveiros de Castro 2015: 15-16). Graeber is by no means the only anthropologist guilty of this. He is only one example of the pervasive issue of privileging Western ontology as universal in anthropology, which OT seeks to address.

In response, Graeber (2015) strikes OT at its core by critiquing one of OT's central tenants, which is the argument that the goal of anthropology is the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography. Instead, Graeber contends that the goal of anthropology is discovering insights that can be gleaned about and for all humanity through ethnographies (p. 6). It is not about creating impenetrable ghettos of thought between people, where only people from within a specific culture can speak about the culture they are from (pp. 6-7). Along with his disagreement on the centrality of ontological self-determination in anthropology, are Graeber's concerns with a crucial artery of OT methodology: how OTers define their key terms.

Graeber (2015) discusses how OTers have changed the definition of what ontology and epistemology have traditionally meant in philosophy (p. 14). He explains that traditionally, ontology was not a word that meant “‘being,’ ‘way of being,’ or ‘mode of existence,’” like OTers have come to use it (p. 15). Instead, ontology referred “to a discourse (*logos*) about the nature of being (or alternately, about its essence, or about being as such, or in itself, or about the basic building blocks of reality...)” (ibid. Emphasis in the original). When it comes to epistemology, he notes that it does not mean “knowledge of the world but rather, a discourse concerning the nature and possibility of knowledge about the world” (p. 15). Although Graeber grants that there is nothing wrong with using words in a new way, one should be upfront about it, so that there is no confusion about how it differs from its traditional use, which OTers do not do (ibid).

It is important for Graeber to emphasize the original meanings of ontology and epistemology so as to problematize OTers' arguments surrounding these words. He critiques OTer's monolithic construction of Western ontology by pointing out that if ontology simply means “a discourse about the nature of being,” then there are many examples in Western thought

of this. These Western discourses include, among others, Deleuze's (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) critiques on Western dualistic thinking. Graeber notes that Deleuze never announced that he was operating in any other ontology apart from the Western one he was in, (p. 18) yet OTers often quote him to further their arguments about OT. If Western ontologies were really as homogenous as OTers assert, Graeber asks, then why do OTers use Deleuze in their theorizing of new ontologies? (ibid) In the same vein, Graeber (2015, p. 18) observes that if epistemology simply means, as Henare et al. have started, "the various systemic formulations of knowledge," (Henare et al., 2007, p. 9) then ontology, epistemology, and all branches of philosophy for that matter, are epistemology.

Despite his definitional concerns with the OTer use of ontology and epistemology, Graeber decides to address the OTer definition of ontology on its own terms and to interrogate its implications. Analysing an OTer definition of ontology which defines ontology as "the nature of being 'in itself' and the forms of action and modes of experience these make possible," (Graeber, 2015, p.18) Graeber asks, "[h]ow exactly is it possible to have an experience of 'the nature of being itself?'" (ibid). He (2015) pinpoints the OTer answer to this question by highlighting their assertion that when anthropologists happen upon different ontologies, they should act "as if" it is real (p. 20). Dismissively, Graeber remarks, "[b]ut no one is actually arguing that there are parts of the world where water runs uphill, there are three-headed flying monkeys, or pi calculates to 3.15" (ibid).

Graeber (2015) concludes that for OTers, "ideas create reality," leading him to contend that OTers are basically engaging in "philosophical idealism," which is the concept that it is a person or a group's ideas that make things real (p. 21). For Graeber (2015), OT's "greatest flaw"

is that it is not radical enough because it does not recognize that no one has access to unadulterated reality, whether within or between “cultural worlds” (p. 22). Graeber writes:

There is never any sense that people existing inside other Ontologies<sup>2</sup> have any trouble understanding each other, let alone the world around them; rather, out of respect for their otherness, we are obliged to act as if their command of their environment were so absolute that there were no difference whatever between their ideas about, say, trees, and trees themselves. It strikes me that by doing so, and especially, by framing this attitude as an ethical imperative, OT makes it effectively impossible for us to recognize one of the most important things all humans really do have in common: the fact that we all have to come to grips, to one degree or another, with what we cannot know. (Graeber, 2015, p. 22)

Graeber (2015)<sup>1</sup> goes on to use critical realist Roy Bhaskar’s (1975; 1979; 1986; 1989; 1994) writings to demonstrate how although reality can never fully be known by anyone, scientific knowledge is still useful in understanding the world. Like Bhaskar, Graeber defines reality as “precisely that which we can never know completely; which will never be entirely encompassed in our theoretical descriptions” (p. 24). However, this definition does not undermine the importance of (Western) science and its ability to speak on reality. To address why scientific claims on reality are relevant, Bhaskar asks, “why scientific experiments are possible (why is it possible to contrive situations with regularly predictable results?)” and why “they are necessary (why is it not possible to have predictive knowledge of events *unless* one has devoted enormous labor into creating such contrived situations?)” (Graeber, 2015, p. 24).

Bhaskar answers these two questions by arguing that just because science is constituted to some degree by scientific theory does not mean that reality is entirely constituted by science (Graeber, 2015, pp 24-25). This means that, although scientists can make predictive statements

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<sup>1</sup> Graeber uses multiple books by Bhaskar, which he does not directly cite the page numbers of. This is why I have also not included the page numbers for Bhaskar’s writings, but have used Graeber’s article to cite Bhaskar’s ideas.

about experiments that they have spent a great time contriving, it does not mean that they can make definitive statements of reality in its entirety (Graeber, 2015, p. 27). Bhaskar thus introduces the concept of intransitive reality, “aspects of the world that would remain the same even if science, scientists, or for that matter humans of any sort, were to disappear entirely” (ibid). In this way, Bhaskar makes room for scientific statements to be true but not to be the entire truth of reality. Through his use of Bhaskar’s critical realist (CR) perspective, Graeber attempts to place scientists, the West, subjects of ethnographies and anthropologists “in the same boat,” (p. 31) because as humans, none of them have access to reality in its entirety.

As a response to Viveiros de Castro’s claim that he is imposing his Western ontology on the Merina people, Graeber (2015) notes that the Merina are not a homogenous group. Most of the people who are referred to as Merina, do not even refer to themselves as Merina, but choose to identify themselves by their various status positions or their geographical location in Madagascar (p. 9). Graeber mentions this to get to the point that Merina identity is not univocal, and neither is their idea of fanfoday, which can be translated as medicine, charm or spell (p. 29). Most of the people who Graeber came across had contradictory ways of viewing fanfoday; some viewed it as something that only worked when you believed in it, while others viewed fanfoday as something that did not exist (p. 13). There was no one Merina ontology on fanfoday, but there were multiple and often contradictory views on it. Hence, Viveiros de Castro’s claim that Graeber disregarded the Merina ontology of fanfoday is misleading because there is no monolithic Merina identity or ontology to disregard in the first place.

Moreover, even the most esteemed astrologers and curers agreed that the spirits who animated the ody or “charms” could not be known (Graeber, 2015, p. 29). Thus, powerful ody like the “Ravololona or Ravatomaina” were named after the ingredients they were made of and

not after the spirits who gave them agency (ibid). Because human knowledge could not access unadulterated reality, human beings did not have access to the realm that spirits inhabited, and could therefore not make definitive statements about spirits and their existence. The Malagasy only had access to the realm of possibility, and this is where they expressed their differing views on fanfody (Graeber, 2015, pp. 29-30). This assertion leads Graeber to argue that the ideas the Malagasy had on fanfoday were epistemology and not ontology because they were “reflections on the possibility of knowledge” (ibid).

Graeber (2015) explains that when he wrote that fanfody was not real, it was not some type of “high handed dismissal,” it was because of his strong identification with his informants (p. 10). He writes, “I identified so thoroughly with my informants that I felt I could express myself as one of them might have done” (Graeber, 2015, p. 10). In citing his identification with his informants as the reason for his participation in the Malagasy’s “reflection on the possibility of knowledge,” Graeber justifies his right to make pronouncements on the veracity of fanfody. Graeber goes further, he turns the question back on Viveiros de Castro, asking whether Viveiros de Castro thinks that his ethnographic interlocutors believe they inhabit a different ontological world to everyone else (p. 34). With this question, Graeber suggests that Viveiros de Castro, and OTers for that matter, are imposing their own ontological conceptions onto their subjects of ethnographies.

In conclusion, Graeber (2015) observes that the epistemological process he and the Malagasy are engaged in is really the same process OTers argue for when they advise anthropologists to adopt OT as an ethnographic method. He contends that OTers are arguing for “engaging in an imaginative, poetic process to come to terms with a reality that they know they can never entirely understand,” (p. 30) which is the same process that he and the Malagasy are

engaged in. Throughout his article, Graeber sustains two main arguments, which are that all human beings, no matter what region of the world one finds themselves in, do not have access to understanding reality in its entirety and that neither the West nor the non-Western world are monoliths. Thus, for Graeber, all people are in the “same boat” ontologically (p. 31). By making these observations, Graeber demonstrates his belief that OTers are actually just engaging in an epistemological methodology when they conduct their ethnographies and not in an ontological turn.

### **The Politics of Translation**

Fundamentally, both Viveiros de Castro and Graeber’s arguments are concerned with who has the right to signify reality. For Viveiros de Castro, the dominance and universalism of the singular scientific Western ontology has rendered non-Western, plural ontologies illegitimate, necessitating an ontological turn to address this wanting Western conception of reality. The goal for OT is thus to work as a method for broadening the scope of ontological authority, empowering those whose subjectivities have historically been delegitimized by the West with the right to signify their realities on their own terms. For Graeber, humanity’s common inability to signify reality in its entirety, irrespective of whether one is an indigenous shaman or a Western scientist, unites all people, putting them in the same ontological boat. Therefore, although Graeber’s appraisal of the human ability to signify reality is negative, it is negative for all, making the universal inability to signify reality its entirety the basis for the equality of all people to signify reality with the same human impotence.

However, contrary to Graeber’s position, the right to signify reality in academia, whether in its entirety or partially, does not merely rest on the argument of whether people or groups have

the innate ability to signify reality in its entirety or not. The right to signify reality rests on the institutions that legitimate and discourses that make legible the ontological and epistemological arguments put forth by academics in general, and anthropologists specifically. This is why both OTers and Graeber speak to the contributions ethnographies will have on the field of anthropology. For OTers one of the main impetuses for engaging in OT is the theoretical novelty of multiple ontological worlds, which in turn benefits the discipline of anthropology.

For Graeber, the goal of anthropology is to conduct ethnographies that give insight on the human experience in general. Nonetheless, given that the nature of the debate between Viveiros de Castro and Graeber concerns anthropologists, the methodologies they choose to use for their ethnographies, and the implications these methodologies have for the discipline of anthropology as a whole, it is not unwise to infer that the ethnographies in question are destined for academic consumption. As such, the ethnographies Graeber and Viveiros de Castro discuss will most likely be made into books, published by academic publishing houses or written in academic journals. It is these academically published ethnographies that for Graeber work to give insight on the human experience in general. The gatekeepers for the human insight Graeber discusses and the theoretical novelties OTers pursue are the academic institutions that legitimate the observations and discourses extracted from ethnographic data, whether the methodology guiding that extraction is grounded in OT or not.

Now, before ethnographic data (field notes from observations, interviews, personal reflections...etc.) can be made legible within academic institutions, a process of translation takes place, whereby anthropologists translate the data gleaned from their subjects of ethnography into discourses legible for academic consumption. OTers argue that this process of translation is political. The genesis for OT's stance on the political nature of translation lies in perspectivism.

In a precursor to OT, Viveiros de Castro (2004b) wrote about indigenous perspectivism. He argued that the purpose of anthropology is to compare in order to translate, and although every translation is a betrayal, the betrayal should be to the destination language and not the source language (p. 5). For Viveiros de Castro, a good translation is one that “allows the alien concepts to deform and subvert the translator’s conceptual toolbox so that the *intentio* of the original language can be expressed within the new one” (ibid). From this, he concluded that the goal of a perspectivist translation is to foreground the differences in the ontological assumptions of speakers instead of attempting to reconcile them (p. 7) in a process Viveiros de Castro called a “controlled equivocation” (2004b).

The basic tenets of OT are deeply influenced by Viveiros de Castro’s writings on perspectivist translations. This influence reverberates in OT ideas highlighting disagreements on what comprises reality by discussing multiple ontological worlds and in the need for anthropologists to question their own ontological assumptions by taking their interlocutors’ worlds seriously. OT translations are not neutral, however. They are political because of the conflicts which ensue from the ontological differences they foreground. Viveiros de Castro (2015) explains the political nature of OT when he writes that

...ontological questions are political questions insofar as they come into existence only in the context of friction and divergence between concepts, practices and experiences within or without culturally individuated collectives, *given*, I stress the polysemic value of this word, given the absolute absence of any exterior and superior arbiter. Ontological differences, to get to the point, are political because they imply a situation of war — not a war of *words*, as per the linguistic turn, but an ongoing war of *worlds*... (p.10. Emphasis in original)

Moreover, in a piece from an online discussion dedicated to the politics of ontology, Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pedersen, two editors of *Thinking through things*, and Viveiros de Castro

(2014) expound on what political ontology is, noting that it is a political act to declare alternatives to what “is” and what “should be” (no pagination). In fact, they come to the conclusion that “*to differ is itself a political act*” (2014, [no pagination. Emphasis in original]). Since this is what OT does by challenging the singular scientific Western ontology through its insistence on the existence of multiple ontological worlds, an ontological anthropology is inherently political.

Further, Holbraad et al. conceptualize the politics of ontology as ‘the self-determination of the other,’ which they describe as being “the ontology of politics as decolonization of *all thought in the face of other thought*—to think of thought itself as ‘always-already’ in relation to the thought of others” (2014, [no pagination. Emphasis in original]). Again, anthropologists who deploy OT methodology in their ethnographies demonstrate this “permanent decolonization of thought” through avoiding the seduction of a singular ontology by making comparisons not only between things, but within one thing—recall the different ontological worlds invoked by the “powder is power” example between the Cuban diviner and the anthropologist. Although the Cuban diviner and the anthropologist referred to a single thing, powder, OT methodology allowed the anthropologist to compare the differences within the thing (powder) by foregrounding the different ontological worlds invoked between the Cuban diviner and the anthropologist when referring to powder.

Despite this, Holbraad et al. make sure to admonish anthropologist working within OT to uphold “a fundamental principle of anthropologists’ epistemological ethics” involved in preserving the self-determination of the other, which is to “*always leave a way out for the people you are describing*” (ibid). Putting aside the methodological awkwardness of appealing to an

“epistemological ethics” in anthropology when arguing for the abandonment of epistemological methods in favour of OT’s ontologically based method, Holbraad et al. (2014) argue that “leav[ing] a way out for the people” is accomplished by not explaining too much and taking the interlocutors’ worlds seriously.

Not unexpectedly, Graeber (2015) disagrees with politicizing OT and cautions against its deleterious implications. He does so by pointing to the issues involved in deciding which authorities within a group will define the limits of the group’s cultural universe and by discussing the dangers of disallowing voices from outside of a group to speak on issues concerning groups that they are not a part of (p. 33). Graeber (2015) observes that as a result of delegitimizing outside perspectives, both Western and non-Western authoritative views are protected from reproach in more conservative conceptualizations of OT (p. 33). In addition to this, political OT is particularly dangerous because authorities within a given territory, be they in the West or in the non-Western world, are given authority “over determining the nature of reality itself” (p. 34). Since Graeber (2015) argues that both the Western and the non-Western world are heterogeneous, the matter of who gets to decide which authorities within a given group and who is empowered to define reality for the entire group, is of great concern. What is even more concerning for Graeber (2015) is that OTers do not address these issues within their discussion of political OT.

Even though Graeber and OTers disagree on the impact and usefulness of politicizing OT in anthropology, I will use the OTer definition of the political to analyze their debate. I will do so because OTers defined the political as alternatives to what “is” and “what should be,” as a war between conflicting versions of reality, and even as the act of differing itself. With this definition of the political in mind, even Graeber’s critiques of political OT, which centre on OT’s

ontological insularity, a lack of accountability for authorities within a group, and the difficulties with who gets to decide who ontological authorities are, are political according to the definition put forth by OTers. This is because Graeber is offering alternatives to OT arguments on what “is” and “what should be,” and he is presenting a different and conflicting notion of what comprises reality from what OTers maintain.

Thus far I have argued that the politics of translation consists of the contestations concerning who has the right to signify reality in the process of translating ethnographic data, which is the language of origin in perspectivist terms, into the destination language, which is the academic discipline of anthropology. In order to assess whether OT methodology succeeds in producing translations that secure the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography by decolonizing the single scientific Western ontology or whether OT is unnecessary, because as Graeber argues, subjects of ethnography and anthropologists are in the same ontological boat and the Western and non-Western worlds are heterogenous, I will answer the following questions: who sets the terms of the translations within the discipline of anthropology and what are the terms of translation? I will begin by situating the politics of translation within the historic objectives of the discipline of anthropology, presenting the institutional power structures within the discipline and analyzing whether these institutional structures and their biases have persisted. It is within this institutional and structural context that I will assess OTer’s and Graeber’s arguments.

### **Anthropology’s Historic Objective**

Karen Brodtkin, Sandra Morgen, and Janis Hutchinson (2011) observe that anthropology has had a “contradictory history” (p. 545). It has been actively involved in furthering scientific

racism and colonial projects as well as in challenging them (Brodin, Morgen & Hutchinson, 2011, p. 545; Tilly, 2007). Despite this contradictory history, Diane Lewis (1973) offers insights on what the historic object for anthropology was in her discussion of colonialism and anthropology. Lewis (1973) argues that anthropology's historical goal was to understand the general principles of "mankind" (humanity, in today's language). However, its "immediate" agenda was "to fill in the gaps of Western man's knowledge about himself" (p.582). Lewis contends that the historic perspective of anthropology was based on the perspective of the "Western man," and is what informs anthropology's thoughts on objectivity and the anthropological method. The objectivity of the outsider was an important part of anthropology because studying the "natives" was meant to further the Western man's understanding of himself. It must be clarified that although Lewis does not say it explicitly, when she refers to "the Western man," she is referring to the white Western man.

Consequently, "pure" anthropology could only be done by the Western outsider. By way of Levi-Strauss (1966), "the father of modern anthropology," (Doja, 2010) Lewis notes that "if the natives were to study themselves, they were said to produce history or philology, not anthropology" (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.126 in Lewis, 1973, p. 582). The consequence of framing ethnographies from the perspective of Westerners is that "[t]he questions asked, the problems posed, and the construct of the 'primitive' formulated tended to reflect interests external to the groups studied" (Lewis, 1973, p. 582). Ethnographies were thus conducted for and with the Western gaze, with no accountability to subjects of ethnographies for the knowledge produced about them (Lewis, 1973).

Furthermore, Levi-Straus (1966) argued that the objectiveness deemed necessary to engage in anthropology was an outcome of the relations of power forged by the violence and

dehumanization inherent to European colonialism and slavery, in which non-Europeans were viewed as objects. Anthropology, as the “daughter,” of this violence and dehumanization reproduced these relations of power within the discipline. This is evident in the relationship between the ethnographer and the subject of ethnography because the subject of ethnography is the ethnographer’s *object* of study (p. 126). Among many others, historian, Mario Joaquim Azevedo (2005), highlighted anthropology’s collusion with colonial authorities, in terms of its position as “hand maiden of colonialism,” (pp.11-12) which is a reference to how anthropology facilitated the process of colonization by providing colonial authorities with data on colonial subjects (Azevedo, 2005; Lewis, 1966).

What can be gleaned from Azevedo (2005), Lewis (1973) and Levi-Strauss’ (1966) arguments is that although established as a discipline that seeks to uncover universal human truths, anthropology is told from the Western perspective, with the agenda of attaining Western self-understanding. Anthropology, therefore, represents a hierarchical separation between the world’s peoples, where one group, the West, has given itself the legitimacy and duty to study Others, and make sense of their cultures for them. Even the distinction within the study of human societies between anthropology and sociology reflects the “hierarchal geographies of knowledge” as Zeleza (2006) calls it, where ethnology was for ‘savage’ static societies,” while sociology was for “‘civilized’ ones [societies]” (p.12). Are these power imbalances within the discipline of anthropology a feature of the past or does the historic authoritative whiteness of anthropology continue to define contemporary institutional power structures within the discipline of anthropology?

## **The Institutional and Structural Whiteness of Anthropology and Academia**

In order to contextualize the institutional power structures within anthropology, the academic environment anthropology operates within must be discussed. Walter Mignolo (2005) writes that “racialization is applied not only to people, but to language, religion, knowledge, countries, and continents as well” (p. 17). Although biological notions of racialization are still instructive in informing modern power imbalances between groups, as Mignolo writes, non-biological forms of racialization are just as important. In her research on diversity in Western academic institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, Sara Ahmed (2012) demonstrates the importance of both biological and non-biological notions of whiteness. She argues that Western universities are institutionally white. They are spaces where white bodies are automatically assumed to belong and to inhabit positions of authority. Whereas, the inclusion and authority of non-whites in these institutions is questioned or undermined in areas like hiring practices, in senior academic positions, and in terms of academic rigour and intellectual authority.

Analyzing the racist structures of academic publishing in regards to economic research in America, Major G. Coleman (2005) discusses the racial bias against black academic journals by examining the increase in white editors and researchers publishing and producing articles using black deficiency theories to explain economic disparities. Coleman (2005) acknowledges the far reaching implications of economic research by noting how it attracts the attention of social scientists outside of economics (p. 771). Unsurprised by his findings, Coleman notes that “[i]f race and racism impact every other area of society, it is impossible for academia to be immune” (p.771). Staying on the topic of publishing, Nicole Payer (2017) contends that white men dominate the Canadian academic publishing industry, acting as its privileged and exclusive

gatekeepers. As a consequence, what “we have come to value as literary culture, and what we begin to study in academics, is chosen by a very elite, narrow group” (Payer, 2017, p. 1). In other words, even what it considered academic is biased because white men are the arbiters of what is deemed worthy to be published in academia.

Anthropology is not immune to the omnipresent whiteness of academia. In an American Anthropological Association (AAA) commissioned study on race and racism in anthropology, Brodtkin et al. (2011) found that anthropology departments were “white-owned public spaces” (p. 554). The practices that led to this were “racially divided academic labor, a white-centered canon, and white-reinforced interpretations of behavior and meaning” (pp. 553-554). Moreover, in a response to Holbraad’s assertion that OT is the permanent decolonization of thought, Zoe Todd (2016) notes that there can be no decolonization of thought without a decolonization of the structural and physical white supremacy of academia (pp. 16-17). To illustrate the white supremacy of academia, Todd (2016) highlights the colonial epistemic violence involved in OT and other than human and multiverse theories that deploy indigenous ideas without citing the indigenous originators of those ideas. Instead, white male scholars are usually credited with having discovered ideas indigenous thinkers have already discussed because of the structural authority of whiteness in anthropology and academia at large (Todd, 2016, pp.5-7). Both Ahmed (2014) and Todd (2016, p. 13) observe that one must cite white men to get a head in academia.

Nonetheless, anthropology’s whiteness is not only confined to Western anthropology. Because I am dealing with the politics of modern blackness, and Africa is the homeland of blackness in the modern era, I will focus on the upheaval caused when the whiteness of anthropology in Africa was called out by one of the most prominent African anthropologists. In an article that garnered much controversy and response (Gordon, 2013; Hartnack, 2013; Niehaus,

2013; Osha, 2013; Teppo, 2013), Francis Nyamnjoh (2012), an anthropologist of Cameroonian descent and the chair of the Social Anthropology department at Cape Town University at the time he wrote his article, discussed the racialized and non-reflexive nature of anthropological authority in Africa. Nyamnjoh argued that black African anthropologists are seen as outsiders who are biased, emotional and lacking objectivity by the white gate keepers of anthropology. As a result, black Africans are viewed as legitimate subjects of ethnography but not legitimate authorities in conducting and producing ethnographies. In contrast, white anthropologists are imbued with an objectivity and authoritativeness in anthropology that is a holdover from colonialism, and in the context of South Africa where Nyamnjoh lives and works, apartheid as well.

The overwhelming response to Nyamnjoh's article from white anthropologists working or specializing in South African or African anthropology was negative. Although not an exhaustive list, some of the major critiques waged against Nyamnjoh's article included questioning his outsider status in anthropology given his position as the chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town (Hartnack, 2013, p. 108), "possibly the most prestigious anthropological position on the [African] continent" (Niehaus, 2013, p. 118), calling his understanding of people groups in Africa "essentialist" (Gordon, 2013, p. 120), opposing Nyamnjoh's argument on anthropology's non-reflexivity by declaring that of all the social sciences, anthropology is "unmatched" in the "intensity of its critical and reflective self-examination" (Gordon, 2013, 118), pointing to ethnographies conducted on white South Africans to contradict Nyamnjoh's argument on black objectification (Niehaus, 2013, pp.120-121), and for marginalizing poor whites in South Africa from his analysis, prompting anthropologist Annika Teppo (2013) to proclaim that poor whites matter.

One of the few positive reviews Nyamnjoh's article garnered came from Sanya Osha, (2013)<sup>2</sup> who deemed Nyamnjoh's critique of anthropology to be overly generous, considering the "jaded" and "insufferably intolerant" way the discipline of anthropology comes off (p. 133). According to Osha (2013), anthropology is a white dominated discipline that objectifies black and other non-white people in theatrical and freakish ways to a mainly Western, white and pampered voyeuristic audience (p. 130). In a response to the responses his article generated, Nyamnjoh (2013) reasserts his basic point, which was a critique of the colonial relations of knowledge production on and by Africans. Colonial relations of power uphold white Westerners and their epistemologies as authorities on Africa, as the epistemological standard Africans should operate in and aspire towards; anthropology is no exception to this. Thus, the basic thrust of Nyamnjoh's (2013) article was concerned with "knowledge production, epistemology and power," (p. 129), which are points his critics obscured through their focus on the choice of ethnographic subjects (ibid), comparing anthropology to other disciplines, and individualizing structural power.

Nyamnjoh (2013) notes that although Niehaus (2013) presents ethnographies conducted on white South Africans as a critique of Nyamnjoh's argument on black objectification, given that Niehaus does not connect these individual ethnographies to the larger structural issues of power, race and authority in anthropology raised, Niehaus' critique does not succeed in undermining Nyamnjoh's basic argument (pp.130-131). Similarly, despite agreeing with Teppo (2013) that poor whites matter, Nyamnjoh maintains that recognizing the plight of poor whites does not contradict his critique of black objectification and the colonially based structural

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<sup>2</sup> Sanya Osha was a research fellow at the Institute for Economic Research on Innovation (IERI) at the Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa when he wrote his response to Nyamnjoh's article.

imbalances of power and knowledge production in anthropology (pp. 129-131). On the charge of essentialism (Gordon, 2013), Nyamnjoh's (2013, pp. 129, 132) response demonstrates how attempting to study social interactions between people without acknowledging the ways in which their group identities inform the social disparities of power they contend with, both within anthropological knowledge production and in society at large, is not an enlightened, non-essentialist stance. Rather, it is to ignore the structural dimensions of group social stratification both in the production of knowledge and on a societal level.

Furthermore, comparing anthropological reflexivity to other social sciences disciplines does not address the issue of reflexivity within the discipline of anthropology. Just because other disciplines might have an even worse issue with reflexivity than anthropology, does not mean that anthropology does not also have issues with reflexivity. Concerning his position as the head of Social Anthropology at Cape Town University, Nyamnjoh (2013) writes, "[w]ho can be better placed than a black African in such a *high* position (call it tokenism) to understand the overwhelming power of structural violence of Apartheid to put everyone in their place" (p. 132 [emphasis in original]). Nyamnjoh's critics might perceive his elevated position as a sign of progress within anthropology. Instead, as Nyamnjoh writes, it is a sign of tokenism that has allowed him a front row seat in observing the disparities of power within African anthropology and the objectification of black Africans.

Although my review of which authorities hold institutional and structural power in academia, in general, and anthropology, specifically, was not meant to be exhaustive, the fact that academics working on disparate projects and with different groups of people in Africa, Australia, Europe, and North America have pointed to the common issue of the whiteness of anthropology and academia at large should be taken seriously. The white authoritativeness Lewis

(1973) and Levi-Strauss' (1966) discussed within the discipline of anthropology persists, albeit in more covert ways. Overt expressions of white authority and superiority have gone out of fashion. However, the discipline of anthropology has maintained the institutional and structural whiteness of the discipline covertly, which Nyamnjoh is but one example of. Nyamnjoh is a black African, who individually holds one of the most prestigious posts in anthropology on the continent of Africa, while simultaneously expressing how he feels like a token and an outsider.

As Nyamnjoh observes, the structural and institutional power imbalances in the creation of anthropological knowledge, the underlying assumptions of white authoritativeness and black objectification remain irrespective of the black figurehead presiding over the highest post within the discipline in Africa. What Nyamnjoh and other academics in this section have demonstrated is that the European Subject sets the terms of translation within anthropology through the authoritativeness of whiteness in the discipline expressed spatially, canonically, pedagogically, and in terms of the production of academic literature, through publishing, hiring practices, promotions and mentorship. How, then, does Graeber's argument on the redundancy of OT because we are all "in the same ontological boat" hold up within the context of white academia and the European Subject setting the terms of translation for ethnographic data? How does the OTer claim of the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography address this white dominated context of translation within anthropology? I will answer these questions in the next section.

### **Setting the Terms of Translation: Can the West Hear?**

When Graeber's claim that the inherent human incapacity to grasp the full measure of reality renders OT methodology redundant is scrutinized from the vantage point of the

institutional and structural power imbalances within the discipline of anthropology, it is found wanting. The European Subject's position as the academic gatekeeper, arbitrating what gets to count as academic truths by setting the terms of translation for ethnographies in anthropology, unsettles Graeber's claims of ontological equality within anthropology. Although all human beings may or may not lack the innate ability to understanding reality in its entirety, all human beings are certainly not "in the same boat" when it comes to possessing the same institutional and structural power as the European Subject in anthropology. A question that can help disentangle the implications of Graeber's institutional oversight is Gayatri Spivak often quoted question, "can the subaltern speak?"

In analyzing Spivak's question, it must be noted that speech is not only verbal, but structural, encompassing the institutions and the lineage of thought appealed to for speech to be made intelligible to targeted audiences (Spivak, 1988). With this in mind, what Spivak's question is really asking, then, is "can the West hear?" Because, of course, subalterns can speak when taken literally, in terms of creating, possessing, and communicating conceptual narratives about their own cultures and about the world at large amongst themselves. For example, the Merina did not begin to speak about fanfody when Graeber conducted his ethnography on them; their ideas and speech concerning fanfody were present irrespective of whether they captured the attention of anthropologists who sought to research them or not. However, subaltern voices are not always heard in academia due to the institutional and structural whiteness of a globally dominant Western academia, whose epistemologies have been spawned from the paradigm of modernity.

Thus, it is not merely the innate capacity/incapacity of speech or understanding reality in its entirety that matters when it comes to being heard within the institutional power structures of academia. "Can the subaltern speak?" is really about Western recognition and legitimation of the

non-Western/white voices within academia. This is also what the process of translating ethnographic data into academically legible discourses in anthropology is about. The process of Western academic recognition and legitimation comes with power imbalances reflecting the continuation of colonial relations of knowledge production, as Nyamnjoh and others argued in the previous section. Because the terms of translation in anthropology are set by the European Subject, revealing his disproportionate power and dominance in academia, all humans are not in the same institutional and structural boat within the anthropology.

Consequently, Graeber's refrain of all humans innately "being in the same boat" ontologically fails at addressing the institutional disparities of power in anthropology which are steeped in white authority and present spatially, canonically, pedagogically, and in the production of academic literature. Graeber's critique fails because he focuses on the innate science of human ontological ability and ignores the institutional power imbalances involved in setting the terms of translation of ethnographies in anthropology. Hence, when Graeber grounds his critique of OT on the common human inability to grasp reality in its entirety, this does not contradict OT arguments on Western ontological dominance, because Western ontological dominance is expressed by institutional and structural white authority of academia.

As a result of believing that we are in the same ontological boat, Graeber argues that the goal of anthropology is to give insight on the human experience. Again, because he does not speak to the institutional and structural disparities of power with anthropology, he disregards how limited this insight is. When the European Subject sets the standards of what is considered legitimate academic discourse, no matter how diverse the discourses that enter anthropology through this translation are, they are tinged with the European Subject's influence. The power

anthropology has to speak of the human experience from this narrow lens of legitimization is thus an expression of Western dominance, not an egalitarian insight on the human condition.

Graeber's proverbial ontological "same boat" leads him to misunderstand the issue of Western dominance and homogeneity. Graeber asserts that all humans are in the same ontological boat and that the Western world does not have any more claim to ontological authority than the non-Western world. As a consequence of this ontological equality, the different cultural perspectives amongst human beings are born from a difference of epistemology not ontology. These differences in epistemology between groups are present both within and between the Western and non-Western world, therefore, neither the Western nor non-Western world are epistemic monoliths. Since OTers base their critique on how univocal the singular scientific Western ontology is, Graeber interprets the OTer critique of Western dominance as a claim of Western homogeneity. Because of this, he criticises OTers for using Deleuzian theory to help theorize OT and cautions against politicizing OT.

Graeber argues that OTer's use of Deleuze demonstrates the heterogeneity of Western thought, proving that the West is not a singular monolith in need of OT methodological intervention. His equation of Western dominance with Western homogeneity is also at the heart of what drives his concern with politicizing OT. Graeber contends that political OT does not take into consideration the heterogeneous nature of both the Western and non-Western worlds, thereby putting into question who gets the authority to define reality when this heterogeneity is considered.

However, the problem with Graeber's criticism is that the West does not have to be homogenous in order to be globally dominant. There have been many disagreements and diverse perspectives within Western intellectual history, including the conflict between Marxists and

Capitalists, debates on human nature, the role of religion and science in society, and differences between liberals and conservatives, to name a few. Despite these disagreements, the global dominance of Western thought is not based on its singularity, but on the coloniality of Western power that made Europe, and by extension the Western world, the “locus of enunciation” for the world’s dominant discourses (Mignolo, 2005, p. 8).

Europe’s position as the locus of enunciation in the modern/colonial era has made the European Subject not only the arbiter of academic truths, but the arbiter of universal truths, making his ideologies, economic and political systems, religions, languages and values the global standard and ideal (Abernathy, 2000, pp. 6, 32). It is no coincidence that the diverse perspectives and ideologies I have named above were articulated by and centre the experience of white males in Europe or the Americas to construct grand narratives about the human experience as a whole. Therefore, Graeber’s claim that being in the same ontological boat creates a universal human ontological equality, where only epistemological differences matter, does not address the institutional and structural power within the discipline of anthropology when it comes to who has the right to signify reality. The institutional and structural power imbalances within anthropology are based on the coloniality of European power, which Graeber’s arguments do not address.

### **Multiple Ontologies, Theories and Institutions**

OTers do not fare much better than Graeber when it comes to addressing the structural and institutional whiteness of anthropology. The European Subject’s position as the one who sets the terms of translation within anthropology prevents OTer’s from realizing their goal of the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography. This is because it is the discipline of anthropology (the destination language) which ends up subverting the meaning of the language

of origin (ethnographic data), ensuring that ethnographic data fits the standards set by the terms of translation outlined by the European Subject. Recall that the fundamental impetus given for OT, which the other key OT goals of ontological self-determination and theoretical novelty arose from, was the critique of the dominant singular Western scientific ontology. OTers argued that the Western scientific ontology is based on the nature/culture split, which assumes that although there are different epistemologies/ worldviews, there is singular scientific Western ontology that dominates the whole world.

Nonetheless, not all epistemologies/worldviews are equal. Because the singular scientific Western ontology has been considered the most faithful representation of the world, the epistemology/worldview that produced it is superior to all other worldviews (Henare et al., 2007, pp. 10-11; Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p.5). Hence, in a critique of Western ontological dominance, its presumed superiority and the delegitimization non-Western ontologies and subjectivities, OTers pluralize ontologies. However, what OTers do not address when they pluralize ontologies as a critique of Western ontological dominance is the institutional and structural inequalities between ontologies that occur within the discipline of anthropology. If all ontologies are equal, non-Western ontologies would not need to undergo a process of academic legitimization governed by the very Western academic institutional structures which uphold the European Subject as the arbiter of academic truths.

OTers do not explain why, if all ontologies are equal, non-Western ontologies have to be validated and legitimized by Western academic structures which operate from the scientific worldview, as shown by the dominant position of the European Subject in academia. OTer's inattention to the structural and institutional whiteness and power imbalances within anthropology prevents them from realizing that all ontologies are not equal. Western ontology

holds a position of dominance in academia over other ontologies. As a consequence of not addressing the institutional and structural imbalance of power between ontologies in anthropology, OTers pluralize ontologies theoretically and methodologically but not institutionally and structurally. OTers miss the point that Western ontological dominance is buttressed by the academic institutions and structures that undergird it, and not simply by theoretical assumptions.

Western ontological dominance, and the academic institutions and structures that undergird it, are the result of the coloniality of European power in the modern era. Because OTers do not address this the institutional and structural basis of Western ontological dominance, their methodology constructs anthropology as an institutionally neutral environment, which masks the power and biases of the European Subject, making his power seem neutral and therefore inevitable. This is the case because if a phenomenon is neutral, it does not need to be challenged and it therefore becomes inevitable. Treating the discipline of anthropology as a neutral environment prevents OTers from achieving their goal of the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography because it leaves non-Western ontologies in a position of subordination. Non-Western ontologies are in a position of subordination because in order for non-Western ontologies to be granted legitimacy within academia, they need to be arbitrated and by the European Subject, which maintains the dominance of Western ontology over non-Western ontologies.

In such a position of subordination, subjects of ethnographies with non-Western ontologies cannot define the terms of their own translation academically and attain ontological self-determination. As a result, it is the destination language that subverts the meanings of origin language. Ultimately, it is not possible for OTers to argue that OT methodology is operating

within a different ontological world than the Western ontology they critique, while still relying on academic structures and institutions that are grounded in Western ontology to legitimize OT methodology and ethnographies they produce.

### **OTers and The Gift of Self-Determination**

Another consequence of OTer indifference to who defines the terms of translation in anthropology and what the institutional and structural power imbalances within the discipline are is making ontological self-determination dependent on academic legitimation. There are at least two questions that address the troubling implications that come with presenting the discipline of anthropology as the site and conveyor of the ontological self-determination for subjects of ethnography. The first question is why is it that it is only when subjects of ethnography have their ethnographic data arbitrated and legitimated by the discipline of anthropology that they acquire ontological self-determination? The second question is why is it that subjects of ethnography cannot have ontological self-determination when they are out of the Western academic gaze and their discourses are not heard within Western academia?

Seasoned anthropologist Vassos Argyrou (2017) helps to answer these questions with his discussion of the paradox involved in OTers “gifting” self-determination” to the non-Western Other, or in Argyrou’s words, the “world’s people.” Argyrou writes that “[h]aving been given ‘the ontological’, the world’s peoples are now empowered to think for themselves. Yet even if they begin to think for themselves, they would still not be thinking for themselves” (p. 60). This is because, if the “world’s people” were already enlightened, they would not need to be gifted with ontology, and if they reject the gift of ontology, they reject enlightenment (ibid). In other words, “the world’s people” are not capable to think for themselves, they need anthropologists equipped

with the anthropological theory of ontology to make sense of their worlds for them, thereby gifting them with ontological self-determination.

When Agyrou's analysis is used towards addressing the questions of ontological self-determination within anthropology posed above, we can conclude the following about OTer's claims of ontological self-determination: 1.) Subjects of ethnography only gain ontological self-determination when their ethnographic data is translated, arbitrated and validated by the European Subject within anthropology because subjects of ethnography need to be gifted ontological self-determination by anthropologists, who as I shall discuss below, are ontologically enlightened by their access to anthropological theory. 2.) The Western academic gaze is an inextricably important aspect of the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography because the academic theories that make it possible to be ontologically enlightened reside within the discipline of anthropology, whose locus of enunciation is in the West. Hence, the insights and conceptual narratives subjects of ethnography possess, which are outside of academia, do not count as legitimate expressions of ontological self-determination.

Although OTers prize themselves on the emancipatory nature of their methodology, their gift of self-determination is an expression of dominance that confines the ability of subjects of ethnography to express their ontological self-determination within the discipline of anthropology. Expressions of ontological self-determination that fall outside these academic confines are delegitimized by OTers, which contradicts the notion that subjects of ethnography define the terms of their own translation. As already discussed, terms of translation are defined by the European Subject in anthropology, and it is only on the basis of being legitimized by the European Subject's academic standards that OTers deem the non-Western ontologies worthy of self-determination.

## **The Terms of Translation**

The previous section demonstrated the importance of asking who defines the terms of translation when it comes to analyzing the disparate power differentials within the discipline of anthropology. The European Subject was shown to be the one defining the terms of translation because of his position as the academic gatekeeper and arbiter within academia. The ambivalence both OTers and Graeber expressed to the European Subject's position within the power structures of anthropology undermined their respective arguments on the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography and the ontological equality of all in anthropology.

In this section, I will address what the terms of translation are for gaining academic legitimacy for ethnographic data in anthropology. I contend that the terms of translation within anthropology are dependent on the adoption of the "dominant academic language," (Argyrou, 2017, p. 58) which secures Europe as the locus of enunciation for the world's dominant discourses and keeps the European Subject in the position of the Universal Self, and thus the arbiter of truth. Both OTers and Graeber fall prey to translating their ethnographic data by adopting the dominant academic language because they situate their theories within the lineage of Western thought. As a result, the OTer goal of anthropological theoretical novelty entrenches OT within the Western scientific singular ontology and Graeber silences his subjects of ethnography by ignoring the power differentials between himself and them, through his insistence that he is in the "same ontological boat" as his interlocutors.

Argyrou (2017) is once again helpful in explaining the terms of translating ethnographic data into the discipline of anthropology and what impact these translations have on subjects of ethnography. Argyrou (2017) paints a bleak picture when it comes to OT's ability to provide space for subjects of ethnographies to speak and be heard. He argues that OT, like the discipline

of anthropology in general, is ethnocentric, albeit unwittingly so. This is because anthropologists must assume that what the “native” has to say has no intrinsic value in itself; it only gains value when the anthropologist makes sense of it (p. 56). OT is no exception to this. Argyrou aptly observes that there is a certain level of schooling and intellectual pedigree required to be able to articulate cultural inequality in the “dominant academic language,” which is necessary to be “heard, understood and taken seriously” in academia (p.58).

As I discussed in earlier sections, anthropology as a discipline is white and Western in terms of its canon and pedagogy. Therefore, the adoption of the “dominant academic language” governing anthropology is an adoption of white Western thought. Both OTers and Graeber engage in the adoption of “dominant academic language” by situating their theories within Western intellectual history. When Viveiros de Castro (2015) and Henare et al. (2007) present OT methodology as a corrective response to the Kantian epistemological turn, this firmly places OT within the linear progression of Western intellectual history. Kant represented a shift within Western thought that began an epistemological focus in the social sciences which excluded ontological concerns. Anthropology, as Viveiros de Castro observed, is the chief culprit of the error of this Kantian “epistemological turn” and OTers have taken it upon themselves to correct this error (2004a).

However, situating the justification for OT as a corrective to the Kantian turn allows Europe to continue to be the “locus of enunciation” for the world’s dominant discourses (Mignolo, 2005, p. 8) and maintains the European Subject as the Universal Self. This is because Kant, a white European male, writing from Europe gets to set the terms of an ontological debate that all other non-Western ontologies are theorized by in anthropology. It must be remembered that even a disagreement with an idea is an engagement with it, and in the case of the Kantian

turn, an allowance for it to set the boundaries and terrain for the discussion at hand. Since Kant set the terms of the epistemological/ontological debate within Western academia in general and anthropology in particular that OTers continue to engage in, without the Kantian turn, OT would not have a theory to argue against and correct.

Further, if OT was truly operating within a non-Western ontological realm, it would not need to waste time seeking validation from Western academia by justifying its existence and relevance through positioning itself as a corrective to the errors of Western epistemology and ontology. This consistent need to justify OT by pointing to the flaws of the Kantian turn, reveals OT's pursuit of presenting itself as methodological alternative within the institutionally white discipline of anthropology.

By presenting itself as viable methodological alternative to the singular Western ontology dominating the discipline of anthropology, OT seeks to switch methodologies within Western thought, but not to operate outside Western thought. Put another way, OTers do not seek to operate outside the academic institutions and structures that support the dominance of Western thought in academia, they merely seek to change the content of what that thought is. Consequently, the theoretical novelty OTers pursue within the discipline of anthropology, by taking the ontological worlds of their ethnographic interlocutors seriously, is dependent on translating the ethnographic data gleaned from interlocutors by situating it within the lineage of Western thought. The translation process is a process of whitening, whereby non-Western (non-European) ontologies are made legible within the discipline of anthropology through contorting what ethnographic interlocutors say to fit the "dominant academic language."

OTer's contort ethnographic data by allowing the Kantian turn to set the terms of ethnographic analysis through OT methodology. In turn, ethnographic data is legitimized within the discipline of anthropology. The OTer goal of foregrounding differences in the translation process by allowing the intention of the language of origin to subvert the assumptions of the destination language is comprised by OT methodology and its academic process of translation. It is comprised because the original language is whitened in order to be made legible by the ideological, institutional and structural standards of the destination language.

Thus, within the linear history of Western intellectual history, the Kantian turn is one node and the ontological turn is another node responding to the former, and despite disagreeing, both are still operating within Western thought. In fact, OTers take it even farther in their bid to situate OT within Western thought by tracing OT methodology all the way back to ancient Greece. Hanare et al. (2007) proclaim that OT is radical because its conception of the essence of "things" is Aristotelian in nature (p. 3).

Greece's preeminent position in the West's narrative of itself and in the history of modern whiteness is important to note because it reveals how Hanare et al. (2007) situate OT within Western thought when they trace OT's radicalism to the Aristotelian understanding of essence of things. Whiteness is not a monolithic construct but rather has varying degrees of nuances. There have been groups within Europe who have not been considered white, such as Slavic, Russian, and Turkish people (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, p. 211). Whiteness has an internal hierarchy, with Northern Europeans (and their descendants, especially in the U.S.) at its apex, possessing hegemonic whiteness for the last two hundred years (Dyer, 1997, pp. 12-13). Southern Europeans and Eastern Europeans have been "grudgingly accepted into the fold of whiteness" (ibid). Although Southern Europeans have lost their prestige within the internal

hierarchy of the whiteness, their past glories are incorporated into the cumulative discourse of whiteness (Mignolo, 2000).

Mignolo (2000) notes that the Western world has had three overlapping constitutive macronarratives. The first is found in ancient Greece, which is the ideological foundation of Western civilization, which was then proceeded by a northwestern move to the Mediterranean and finally to the North Atlantic (pp. 722, 725). The second constitutive narrative of the West is marked by its designation as the origin of the modern world, with events such as the Renaissance and the European “capitalist Atlantic circuit” expansion (p.722). The third narrative of the Western world is located in Northern Europe and is distinguished by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (p. 722). Mignolo (2000) observes that “[w]hile the first narrative emphasizes the geographical marker *West* as the keyword of its ideological formation, the second and third link the West more strongly with modernity” (p. 722 [emphasis in original]). Mignolo (2000) goes on to argue that we are ushering in a fourth constitutive Western narrative defined by the transnational neoliberal capitalist ideologies of modernization and development (p. 725).

Even though Southern Europeans do not presently hold a hegemonic position within whiteness, the glories of their past civilizations are part of the constitutive narrative of Western modernity and whiteness. Mignolo observes that “in the imaginary of the modern world or, if you prefer, in the macronarrative of Western civilization, everything imaginable began in Greece” (p. 725). However, as discussed in chapter one, there was no overarching European or Western identity before the invention of the Americas (Hesse, 2007). Christianity was what gave Europeans a semblance of a common identity. This is of significance because it was Saint Augustine of Hippo’s (354-430 CE) incorporation of Aristotle’s ideas of progress and development into the cannon of Christian thought (Rist, 2008, pp. 28-34) and the Renaissance

rediscovery of classical Greek and Roman ideas that integrated ancient Greek thought into European and Western intellectual history, making Greece the ideological foundation of Western thought. Despite the fact that Aristotle and other luminaries of ancient Greek thought did not consider themselves “European” or “Western,” because these identities did not exist in the ancient world, the West’s ability to self-signify and the coloniality of European power to impose its discourses as universal, has made it so that Greece is conventionally considered the ideological foundation of Western thought.

Since Henare et al. do not interrogate or critique Greece’s position as the ideological foundation of Western thought, it can be assumed that when they trace OT’s radicalism to Aristotelian conception of the essence of “things,” (p. 3) they do so within the conventional understanding of Greece as the ideological foundation of Western thought. Aristotle is one of the luminaries of Greek, and by extension Western thought. So, it is quite a statement of the “Westernness” of OT to situate its methodology within the Aristotelian understanding of the essence of “things.” Therefore, the ideological, institutional and structural context of OT’s participation in Western intellectual history preclude it from claiming that it is operating within a different ontological world from the Western one it’s methodology is situated in and legitimized by.

### **The Terms of Translation and the Ethnographic Field**

Unlike OTers who attempt, although ultimately fail, to escape Western ontological dominance through OT, Graeber unabashedly situates his arguments against OT within the Western lineage of thought. When Graeber (2015) speaks of the “traditional” definitions of ontology and epistemology (p. 15), he uses ancient Greek definitions, situating his understandings of these concepts within Western intellectual history. Additionally, Graeber

(2015) engages with Cartesian and Kantian theories (pp. 16-18) and uses Bhaskar's writings on Critical Realism (CR) to ground his critique of OT, demonstrating the position of his argument in Western thought. As discussed earlier, both CR and OT begin with the same observation, which is that there has been a shift in Western philosophy from a focus on ontology to a focus on epistemology (p. 24). However, CR reaches different conclusions than OT.

Graeber's justification for situating his arguments in Western thought is that everyone is in "the same boat" ontologically and that neither the Western nor non-Western worlds are monoliths. Even so, Graeber's silences the voices of his ethnographic interlocutors because he ignores how his ability to engage in the "dominant academic language" creates intellectual, institutional and structural power differentials between himself and them.

Although Graeber asserts that he and his Merina interlocutors are in the same ontological boat, he does not explain whether or not the Merina would use CR in order to articulate fanfody. Even though the Merina may not be a homogenous group that possess a singular ontology, Graeber does not explain his need to ground their diverse understandings of fanfody within Western intellectual history. If both the ethnographer and subject of ethnography were in "the same boat," there would be no need for Graeber to appeal to Greek definitions, debates on the Kantian turn and CR to ground his arguments on the diversity of Merina thought. Graeber would simply be able to present what the Merina say as he hears it. However, as Agyrou (2017) notes, what the Merina have to say have no intrinsic value unless an anthropologist/ethnographer, like Graeber, makes sense of it.

Graeber makes sense of fanfody by using the institutional authority arising from his academic credentials as an anthropologist and by adopting the “dominant academic language” to present and legitimate his ethnographic findings. As a result, the ability of the Merina to be heard and be “in the same boat” as their ethnographers is compromised because what they say is devalued within the institutional whiteness of anthropology, unless their speech is whitened to conform with anthropology’s disciplinary standards. Consequently, like OT, Europe remains the “locus of enunciation” and European Subject is still stabilized as the arbiter of universal truths because it is his standards and institutions that are used to legitimate the voices of subjects of ethnography.

What is even more perverse about Graeber (2015) is that not only does he silence his interlocutors’ voices by situating what they have to say within the Western lineage of thought, he even “identifies” with them so much that he feel like he can speak as one of them (p. 10). Recall that Graeber justified his right to make pronouncements on the veracity of fanfody with the following statement: “I identified so thoroughly with my informants that I felt I could express myself as one of them might have done” (Graeber, 2015, p. 10). This statement completely ignores the intellectual, institutional and structural power in academia and in the field that Graeber has over his interlocutors, and is yet another level of silencing his interlocutors. It cannot be forgotten that it is Graeber who is studying the Merina, the Merina are not studying him. Such a dynamic produces an asymmetrical relationship between the two that precludes equality. This is because the ethnographer has the authority over the narrative that gets to be written about the people who are being studied.

The ethnographer’s narrative authority manifests itself in the reality the ethnographer gets to frame the entire narrative of the people who they study from their own perspective, and

because of their institutional power, the ethnographer's narrative becomes the authoritative account of those they study. Both OTers and Graeber are guilty of perpetuating this dynamic. In fact, Gad et al. (2015) contend that ultimately, neither the human nor the non-human subjects of ethnography can solely set the terms of their ethnographies because of the ethnographer's authority within the field. Gad et al. (2015) argue that OT's focus on the discourses of informants as the central entry point to different ontological worlds is an "epistemologization of ontology" (pp. 73-75). Hence, ontology ends up becoming another word for culture because just like a culturalist analysis, alterity is accessed through discourse (Gad et al., 2015, p. 73). Therefore, Henare et al.'s (2007, pp. 3-4) claim that OT allows things to dictate the terms of their own analysis is not possible because things are the passive recipients of the human interlocutors who speak for them (Gad et al. p. 73).

### **A Decolonial Alternative**

It is important to acknowledge that both OTers' and Graeber's ontological and epistemological objectives are laudable. OTers aim to expand the scope of what is considered legitimate academic knowledge by pluralising ontologies within anthropology, and thereby critiquing Western ontological dominance and its assumption of the inferiority of non-European perspectives. By pluralising ontologies, OTers seek to validate the legitimacy of non-Western ontologies, bringing about the ontological self-determination of subjects of ethnography. Graeber's arguments call attention to what all humans have in common ontologically, highlighting the intrinsic equality amongst people irrespective of the profession one has or the region, culture, and creed one's epistemology comes from. As a result, his argument undercuts the idea that certain groups of people are inferior or superior to others, making space for us all to learn from one another as equals. However laudable their objectives, their arguments fall short

due to their inattention to the structural and institutional power structures within anthropology that are dominated by the white authoritativeness of the discipline.

As “the most Kantian” discipline in the social sciences, “plagued since its inception by epistemological angst” (Viveiros de Castro 2004a, p. 483), anthropology, and the OT debate that engaged the discipline, has provided many lessons for other disciplines in the social sciences, like political economy, who are not as mired in “epistemological angst.” The significance of the debate between OTers and Graeber to my analysis of transnational and heterogeneous nature of modern blackness is that it reveals the importance of the institutional and structural imbalances, dominated by the European Subject, that define the social sciences and the politics of including non-European epistemologies within academia.

I propose a decolonial alternative to the arguments presented by both OTers and Graeber, that will address the power imbalance inherent in the intellectual, institutional and structural whiteness of anthropology, while making room for the agency of non-European subjects to speak and be heard within this context of academic domination. Although decolonial theory wages its critique of Western dominance epistemologically, it avoids the pitfalls that comprise Graeber’s conception of epistemology by acknowledging that Western (white/European) dominance does exist within academia. It also avoids declaring a premature victory over Western ontological dominance by pluralizing ontologies theoretically while still operating within academic institutions governed by the authority of Western ontology, like OTers. Decolonial theory accomplishes this because it recognizes the institutional and structural aspect of Western ontological and epistemological dominance and what undergirds it.

Decolonial theory operates from the paradigm of coloniality. Unlike the paradigm of modernity, which is uni-vocal and grounded in the perspective of the European Subject,

stabilizing him as the Universal Self and securing Europe as the locus of enunciation, the paradigm of coloniality is told from the perspective of the colonized. Since the beginning of the modern/colonial era, which began with the invention of the Americas, the colonized have had to suffer the violence of the underside of modernity, making their perspective pluri-vocal. Border thinking is what Mignolo (2006) calls the pluri-vocal perspective of the colonized. Because border thinking was born from the violent incorporation of globally dominant European epistemologies into the local knowledge systems of the colonized, it inherently has to recognize both non-European and European subjectivities that make up this brutally imbalanced epistemological relationship.

Even so, this does not mean that only non-Europeans can theorize from the paradigm of coloniality, no more than only European descended peoples can theorize from the paradigm of modernity. Just like a non-European can theorize from the perspective that the European Subject is the Universal Self and his epistemologies are the ideal and goal for all humanity, a person of European descent can theorize from the perspective that the position of the European Subject as the Universal Self is not neutral or inevitable but a consequence of the coloniality of European power.

Since the social sciences are based in Western ontology and epistemologies, introducing the ideas of non-Europeans and theorizing their experiences within such an academic setting is fraught with questions of assimilation and domination. My theorization of the politics of modern blackness is implicated in these questions of assimilation and domination because I am theorizing modern blackness within the social science discipline of political economy. The issue with theorizing the experiences of non-Europeans within the social sciences is the use of theories and arguments that centre Europe as the locus of enunciation, maintaining the perspective of the

European Subject as the arbiter of universal truths, and the institutional structures that support this dynamic. As both Ahmed (2014) and Todd (2016, p. 13) observed, one must cite white men to get a head in academia. Border thinking addresses the question of introducing non-European perspectives into the social sciences by allowing the ability to theorize agency in the midst of domination.

Border thinking theorizes the violent incorporation of globally dominant European epistemologies into the local knowledge systems of the colonized, and how the colonized engage and negotiate with these dominant epistemologies within their local contexts. Therefore, border thinking does not make agency dependent on purity, like OT methodology seems to, and neither does it assume that inclusion means equality, like Graeber's arguments maintain. Border thinking is able to recognize that because of the coloniality of European power, one must cite white men to get ahead in academia, which produces a power imbalance that prioritizes the ideas of white males over everyone else. However, there is no need for a pure ontology untouched by European ontology to give non-Europeans ontological self-determination in academia. Since border thinking acknowledges that the coloniality of European power created a violent and unequal mixture between Western and non-European epistemologies, it can theorize the agency of non-Europeans (how they engage with Western epistemologies and negotiate their position within academia), even as they have to contend with dominance of the European Subject and his epistemologies within academia.

Consequently, the global dominance of Western epistemologies both within and outside of academia, and the need for non-Europeans/non-Westerners to incorporate dominant Western epistemologies to be able to participate in academic institutions and debates, cannot be blamed on the notion that non-European epistemologies lack insight, imagination and sound analysis.

When the violence underpinning Western epistemological dominance is revealed, discourses arguing that Western epistemologies are dominant simply because they are the best epistemologies and because Europeans are inherently superior thinkers to non-Europeans cannot be sustained. This is the case because it took force to establish European epistemological dominance. It was not a matter of the whole world peacefully assessing the merits and demerits of European and non-European epistemologies, and coming to the conclusion that European epistemologies were universally the best. To be clear, I am not arguing that the European based Western epistemologies have nothing to offer the world. What I am arguing is that the dominance of Western epistemologies is not based on the intrinsic neutrality, objectivity or superiority of Europeans.

Even so, Mignolo, the man who theorized border thinking, is not without his critics. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), a feminist, sociologist, historian and activist of Mestiza Bolivian descent, argues that “there can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice” (p. 100). She singles out decolonial theorist, Walter Mignolo and his ilk, as examples of the depoliticization of decolonial practice that can occur as a consequence of the “political economy of knowledge” within North American academia. Cusicanqui (2012) observes that Mignolo has built an “empire within an empire” in Western academia, “strategically appropriating” insights on colonization and decolonization grounded in Subaltern Studies in India and Latin America-without the decolonial practice to go along with it (p. 98). For Cusicanqui, Mignolo and his ilk engage in a multicultural, depoliticized decolonial discourse that essentializes hybridity and dehistoricizes and exoticizes indigenous struggle, thereby making decolonial discourses palatable to North American academic audiences (pp. 100-102)

Furthermore, Mignolo and his ilk are credited with having originated indigenous ideas within the Western cannon of thought and are given the cultural capital that comes from being recognized by U.S. academic centres (Cusicanqui, 2012, pp. 102). They are a part of the postcolonial North American” political economy of knowledge” that provides “an economy of salaries, perks, and privileges that certifies value through the granting of diplomas, scholarships, and master’s degrees and through teaching and publishing opportunities” (Cusicanqui, 2012, pp. 101-102). Cusicanqui suggests that a genuine “multicolored” and “bilingual” decolonization in Bolivia, for example, must include “culture, theory, epistemology, and state policy and also in new definitions of well-being and development” (p.107). Additionally, South to South links must be strengthen globally to overcome the hierarchies and politics of Northern academia (ibid).

Cusicanqui’s arguments on appropriation, decontextualization and depoliticization are well taken. The originators of concepts should be given credit for the ideas they have developed, within the contexts of their development. However, Cusicanqui does not address who (which authorities) should give credit to these ideas and what impact the white authoritativeness within academic institutions have on indigenous and other non-European ideas, even when credit is given to the indigenous/non-European originators of those ideas.

Although Cusicanqui critiques Mignolo and his ilk for their depoliticization of decolonial theory, she allows her critique to be published by Duke University Press, and Duke University is the same university she notes that Mignolo is cross appointed in Romance Studies and the Program in Literature (p. 101). Since one of her solutions for decolonization is to overcome the hierarchies and politics of Northern academia through South to South links, why is she waging her critique of Northern academia in a Northern academic institution? Does this not reinforce the hierarchies of knowledge production she critiques?

The answer to this question, as Cusicanqui (2012) rightly notes, is that Western academia has worldwide reach and confers privileges and legitimacy because of the coloniality of European power made it the most dominant academic institution in the world. Acknowledging this Western dominance leads us back to the central question of how to theorize agency in the context of dominance. However, I want to note that just because both Cusicanqui and Mignolo are operating within white academic institutions and structures does not mean that Mignolo should be excused for appropriating the knowledge of groups and thinkers he does not properly give credit to. Mignolo should be called out.

In fact, border thinking can be used to critique Mignolo's power and appropriation of non-European discourses by recognizing the power systems and social capital that allow Mignolo to successfully appropriate these ideas in Northern academia and that confer even more social capital on him once he has appropriated these ideas. Ultimately, I believe that coloniality and border thinking are still important analytic tools to reveal the European Subject's authority underneath Western academic dominance and its self-projected objectivity and neutrality. Further, they illuminate how non-Europeans can respond within this context of domination.

Throughout this section I have done my best to demonstrate the importance of institutional and structural power imbalances in impacting the ability of non-Westerners/non-Europeans to be heard within a Western dominated academic context. My analysis of the arguments for and against OT have allowed me to bring to the fore the importance of the structural and institutional power differentials that define the theorization of non-White identities within academia, and situate my analysis of the politics of blackness within these power dynamics. My goal has not been to say that operating within Western academia is futile because of the power imbalances that exist. It would be highly hypocritical of me to make such a

suggestion given that I am writing this thesis in order to obtain a Master's degree in a Western academic institution. I argue that when it comes to theorizing the inclusion of non-European epistemologies within academic disciplines governed by Western ontology and epistemologies, I have chosen to use border thinking because it allows space to theorize agency in the midst of domination.

### **Chapter 3: A Black Castle, Vertically and Horizontally**

The Cape Coast Castle museum is made up of different panels, pictures and artifacts discussing Ghanaian history, slavery and the diaspora. The self-guided museum tour begins with panels discussing the “First Ghanaians” from 3000-2000 B.C.E. The panels then proceed to discuss the early peoples and civilizations of Ghana and their first encounters with non-black Africans, such as Arabs and the Portuguese. Trade and commercial networks between these groups are discussed within these panels. The transatlantic slave trade is first discussed in the panel titled “The Legacy of the European Trading Powers,” which speaks of the “indelible mark” Europeans have had on Ghana. It says:

Today, the history of the slave trade remains a shadow of this contact [between Europeans and Ghanaians], that will never be forgotten, and never should it be dismissed. But many positive cultural, social and political manifestations [from Europe] remain that have been incorporated into the very fabric of Ghana.

The panel goes on to list the ways that European contact benefitted Ghanaians, including bringing about new agricultural crops and animals, formal education, the Christian religion and the “political and judicial system tailored to the needs of the nation,” among many other benefits.

This panel conveys a mind-boggling disregard for black life and suffering. Millions of slaves died crossing the Middle Passage, some estimates put the figure as high as 30,000 000 (Stannard, 1993, p. 151), and slaves were subjected to inhuman, degrading and sinister treatment at Cape Coast Castle. However, these panels minimize the horrific history of the slavery by focusing on slavery's positive impact on Ghanaian agriculture, livestock, politics and judicial systems. It is difficult to imagine a similar type of discourse displayed at concentration camp museums and memorials, speaking of the horrors of the Nazi treatment of Jews but pointing to the beneficial aspects of Nazi rule, like an improved German economy. It is also worth noting that while careful attention is paid towards detailing the benefits Ghanaians gained from European contact, the reverse is not presented. Cape Coast Castle museum does not detail the specifics of how there could be no capitalism without slavery, and the many other social, cultural, and political contributions Europeans gained through the dehumanization and exploitation of enslaved Africans (Inikori, 2002).

The panel titled "Africans, Unwilling Immigrants" discusses how Brazil received one third of all the slaves in the Americas, the Caribbean Islands as a whole received another third, and the remaining slaves were dispersed around the rest of the Americas. Even though other countries in the Americas where slaves were sent were not mentioned by name, the panel writers make a point of explaining that the least number of slaves were taken to North America. This panel includes the following text:

Scholars agree that the smallest number of Africans came to what is now the United States and Canada. Estimates range from 1.5 to 2 million arrived there between 1620-1860.

Although the panel explicitly says that the least number of slaves went to the U.S and Canada, American blacks dominate the representation of the diaspora in the section of the museum

dedicated to the African diaspora. As a justification for this black American dominance, the panel titled “What is the African diaspora in the Americas?” explains that “The full story of the African Diaspora in North and South America and in the Caribbean is too complex to detail in this brief presentation. Consequently, the exhibition focuses on British North America.” In reality, “British North America,” actuality only means the United States of America – there is no mention of slaves in Canada. The next sentence foreshadows the black-American-centric nature of the exhibition, stating “the first successful English colony was Jamestown, built in Virginia (USA) in 1607.”

The exhibit goes on to display information on illustrious members of the black diaspora, including Frederick Douglass, Toussaint Louverture, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, who “represent the slave era,” and Marcus Garvey, Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and W.E.B. Du Bois, who represent “freedom struggles” (Holey, 2008, p. 175). The names outlined showcases a privileging of American figures, with few exceptions. Holsey (2008) mentions these panels in her book, and she even points out that black Americans dominate the section on the African diaspora, observing the exhibition “reduc[es] the diaspora to African Americans” (p. 175). Despite this, she does not give any explanations as to why this is the case and what the implications are for the rest of the diaspora.

It is strange that the panels would explicitly state that the least number of slaves came to North America, and then focus the diasporic section of the exhibit on the U.S. Even if the full story of the diaspora in the Americas is too “complex to detail” in the exhibit, the exhibit did not explain why it chose to focus on the United States. Number-wise, it would have made more sense to focus the diasporic exhibit on Brazil, since Brazil received the largest proportion of slaves in the Americas. Numbers aside, is the exhibit telling visitors that the most significant

accomplishments of the African diaspora in the Americas were those of primarily black Americans? Or does this exhibit tell us about which powers were behind the creation of the exhibit? The American involvement in the Museum's recent history is instructive in offering insights on the dominance of black Americans in the exhibit. It also sheds light on how the relationship between the Americanness of black Americans confers privileges while maintaining anti-blackness.

I will begin my analysis of the black American dominance of the diaspora section by giving an historical overview of the castle, and then I will discuss the black American dominance in the diaspora section of the museum in terms of the American involvement in the Castle's renovation and content creation. I will go on set the black American dominance at Cape Coast Castle's museum within the broader context of the tourism industry and the national discourse on slavery and blackness. I will then end with a discussion of Hartman's influential account of slavery, blackness and belonging as a black American in Ghana.

Cape Coast Castle has performed many functions since it was first built as a fort in 1650 (Holsey, 2008, 30). It has been a trading post, a slave dungeon, a seat of (colonial) government, a post office, a state prison, a law court, and a national museum," to name a few of its functions (Schramm, 2010, p.129; Holsey, 2008, p. 160). Cape Coast Castle first opened its doors as a museum in 1972, when it was named the West African Historical Museum (Holsey, 2008, p. 158). However, Cape Coast Castle's present position as museum and international tourist destination was facilitated by American intervention.

Holsey (2008, pp. 161-162) details how the regional Ghanaian authorities responsible for tourism received 5.6 million dollars US in the late 1980s from USAID, which American institutions like the Smithsonian helped direct towards making the Castle a major tourist site.

Further, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB) explains that the Cape Coast Castle Museum was “given a face-lift in 1994” with funds from USAID and the Smithsonian Institution, among others donors (Ghana Museums and Monuments Board [GMMB]).

Americans did not only provide funds for the museum, but also “leadership” on the part of the Smithsonian in scaling up the museum from a national to an international museum. This American leadership included their heavy involvement in the museum’s content creation and in training museum personal in the 1980s and 1990s (Holsey, 2008, p.174).

Nevertheless, American institutional interventions were not always appreciated. Restoration efforts by American institutions, like the Smithsonian, which assisted in giving the castle a “face lift,” have not always been met positively by the black American expat community in Ghana and tourists who have come to the castle. In fact, charges by some black Americans, like Imahkus Vienna Robinson, against restoration efforts “white washing” and trying to “stabilize” *their* (black American) history are well known (Bruner, 1996, p. 294; Holsey, 2008, p. 164-165). Holsey (2008) observes that having relocated to Ghana as an effort to escape the racism of America, black Americans were suspicious of the American government’s funding and restoration efforts of Cape Coast Castle.

Despite this, black Americans have also played a role in the content creation of the museum. Museum planners had originally planned to juxtapose Ghanaian freedom fighters against colonialism alongside American freedom fighters in the “freedom fighters” section of the museum, with more emphasis on the Ghanaians. However, a group of black Americans pressured exhibit planners to put more emphasis on the diaspora (in other words, black Americans) (Kraemer, 2006, p. 442). Kraemer writes that black Americans now comprise 90 percent of the freedom fighter section (ibid).

The combination of American power and black American proximity to that power has created a strange mix of messages on display in the museum. As discussed earlier, the museum presents the benefits of European contact with Ghana in a former slave castle that was the site of one of the greatest tragedies of human history. The museum curators do not seem to realize how insensitive it is to praise European intervention at the very site where slaves were dehumanized and killed under European authority. This minimization of black suffering is a demonstration of anti-blackness. But, this anti-blackness is also coupled with the dominance of black Americans in the diasporic section. This strange dynamic of anti-blackness and black American dominance is a microcosm of black American power in in the black world in general, as I will discuss below.

### **Dominant Blackness and Anti-Blackness**

One of the most influential accounts of black American tourism to Ghanaian slave castles is in Saidiya Hartman's book, *Lose Your Mother* (2007). Hartman focuses her analysis on black American pain, in regards to a loss of home and kinship ties with Africa. She highlights the ways in which both the Ghanaian government and Ghanaian people use black American pain and a desire for belonging for economic gain. Hartman notes how the Ghanaian government evokes kinship with black Americans as a tourism strategy but not out of a genuine desire to establish a meaningful bond. In relation to Ghanaian people, Hartman observes that they appeal to kinship with black Americans to siphon funds from them and not because they actually view black Americans as kin. Nonetheless, Hartman's analysis lacks nuance because she does not mention the economic and cultural privileges black Americans have over and above the average Ghanaian by virtue of being American. This American privilege affords black Americans the means to travel to Ghana for kinship and tourism.

Despite Hartman's wanting analysis, there are other more nuanced accounts of diasporic/Ghanaian relations such as Richards, 2005, Holsey, 2008, and Pierre, 2013 that discuss the political economy between black Americans and Ghanaians by bringing up the disparity of wealth between the two groups. Nevertheless, these analyses do not make the connection between black American wealth and privilege as a result of their proximity to American whiteness. They deracialize black American dominance in the black world by focusing on capital or the lack thereof, and not on the white American power that underpins its dominance.

Deliofsky and Kitossa's (2013) argument on the relationship between blackness and whiteness in the West is helpful in illuminating the role American whiteness plays in establishing the dominant position of black Americans in the black world. Deliofsky and Kitossa argue that the relationship between black and white is the Manicheanism that marks the extremities of racial acceptance and exclusion within Western culture (p. 165). The closer a non-European group is approximated to the European Subject, the higher up on the hierarchy of humanity and civilization they are deemed to be, and the closer a group is approximated to blacks, the less human and the more savage/traditional they are. While Deliofsky and Kitossa discuss the Manicheanism within the context of anti-blackness in America, I use the Manicheanism to understand global blackness and the dominant position of black Americans within the black world.

I argue that black American blackness possesses such a dominant position within the black world because of its proximity to American whiteness, which is presently the dominant form of whiteness in the world. It is the power of white American imperialism (Escobar, 2004) that globalizes black American culture and discourses, making them dominant in the black

world. In his article, *The African-Americanization of the Black Diaspora in Globalization or the Contemporary Capitalist World-system*, Paul C. Mocombe (2015) speaks to the transnational dominance of black Americans in the global black community by situating it within white American capitalist power.

Macombe (2015) argues that the dominance of black American academic theorizing on blackness and other marginalized and intersectional identities, as well as the cultural imperialism of black Americans in terms of the globalization of black culture through music genres like hip hop, have led to the Americanization of the black diaspora. An example of the “African-Americanization of the black diaspora” is the prominence of the theories of elitist black American academics like DuBois, Cornell West, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks in theorizing the black experience. Their writings on double consciousness and intersectionality are problematic because they are grounded on conceptualizing black and other marginalized identities on white Cartesian bourgeois theories (Macombe, 2005, pp. 469-472).

It is useful here to stop and contextualize what Macombe (2015) means by white Cartesian bourgeois theories. Macombe uses the concept of Cartesian bourgeois theories in a similar manner to Gilroy’s use of the Cartesian thought (1992). Recall that in chapter one, I discussed Gilroy’s (1992) critique of centring non-European subjects as the ideal Universal Self as a means of undercutting the Eurocentric construction of the European Subject as the Universal Self. Gilroy was concerned that merely substituting non-Europeans as the Universal Self would fail at addressing the relational nature of modern subjects, who are both European and non-European.

What I did not discuss in chapter one was that Gilroy makes his argument by analyzing Patricia Hill Collins’ writings on black feminism. He notes her critique of how the human

sciences (social sciences) is grounded on “western traditions of thinking and thinking about thinking” that are based in Cartesian dualistic thinking (p. 52). As a result, Hill Collins argues that the social sciences have regularly attempted to separate thinking from being in its dualistic construction of the world, in areas as diverse as the binaries between “female/male, rational/irrational, nature/culture, light/dark” (ibid).

Hill Collins proposes a feminist epistemology articulated from an individual’s standpoint as a way of addressing experiences that have been marginalized from “truth seeking and interpretive activities” (ibid) within the Cartesian model of thought. By centring ones’ standpoint, knowledge claims of black women are able to be articulated from a “self-defined” position instead of relying on an essentialist category of “woman” or “female” to speak for all women and females. However, Gilroy finds essentialism in Hill Collins’ work when she writes about the category of blackness because she uses the term black as a term for “knowing and being” (p. 52).

Furthermore, Gilroy argues that the “self-defined” knowledge Hill Collins presents as a means of articulating a new consciousness is actually a form of “Leninist” vanguardism (pp. 52-53). This is due to the fact that ordinary black women, who do not possess the critical theories necessary to articulate ones’ standpoint must be equipped by critical theories from “the elite cadre of black female intellectuals” to generate resistance to their marginalization (p. 53). The position of authority elite black female intellectuals possess because of their theoretical prowess and “self-defined standpoint” allows them to be at the forefront of assessing the benefits of “new models of social change,” in both academic and activist circles, and in determining the fruitfulness of alliances with other collectives (ibid). The Leninist and Cartesian nature of Hill Collins’ writings on a “self-defined standpoint” arise from its “embeddedness in Enlightenment

assumptions,” which is revealed in its humanist stance and in the vanguard role of elite black intellectuals. Gilroy observes that Hill Collin’s theory is embedded in Enlightenment assumptions, except for the fact that she switches the European subject for the black female intellectual (p. 53).

Gilroy (1992) presents his relational theory of modernity as a remedy to the pitfalls of Hill Collins’ arguments. Nevertheless, in chapter two, I argued that Gilroy does not succeed in his quest to establish a modern relationship of equality between Europeans and non-Europeans because he denies co-equality between Europeans and non-Europeans, thus constructing non-Europeans as subordinates. Macombe (2015) takes up the critique of white Cartesian based Eurocentric knowledge. He extends his critique to contend that elitist black intellectuals like DuBois, Cornell West, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks, and their writings on double consciousness and intersectionality, are dominant because of American hegemonic power and the bourgeois class these academics inhabit (Macombe, 2005, pp. 469-472). The scholars who espouse these theories demand equality within “the post-industrial relations of production and exploitation” of western power organized under American hegemony (Macombe, 2005, pp. 472-473).

Elitist black American and black American-inspired academics, like Gilroy, want equality with exploitative white capitalist power, instead of seeking to undermine the very exploitative capitalist system that produces or informs the social and racial inequalities in the first place (Macombe, 2015). According to Macombe, given the elitist Cartesian base of their theories, they are out of touch with non-elite black people and the ways in which they conceive of their identities. Although, even marginalized black American culture, represented in hip hop culture, for instance, is globalized by the same white capitalist American hegemonic power

system that makes elitist black American blackness dominant. This is demonstrated by the “financialization of hip-hop culture as an art form and entertainment by record labels such as Sony and others” (Macombe, 2015, 478-479).

There are at least two insights that can be gleaned from the discussion of black American hegemony within the modern black world. The first is that like Macombe discussed and like I discussed in chapter two, equality between whites and blacks based on the Cartesian model is not possible because it constructs blacks as subordinates seeking to catch up to a modernity defined by being Western and white. Moreover, the capitalist system that underpins white American global dominance is inherently based on the oppression of blacks and other marginalized groups. Because of this, the Cartesian standard of the European Subject as the goal that black academic elites strive for equality which reinforces the very racialized, gendered, sexual and capitalistic inequalities their theories purport to argue against.

The second insight from the power of black American elites to export their Cartesian based theories globally is that the dominance of their theories come from white American capitalist hegemonic power. The black American proximity to American whiteness, in general, and not just in the case of elite black academics, is the basis of black American dominance in the black world. This insight is important in explaining the dominance of black Americans at Cape Coast Castle’s diaspora section. For example, the Ghanaian government’s courtship of American funds and the Smithsonian’s involvement with Cape Coast Castle, in terms of the restoration and content creation of the museum, speaks to the American power involved in the establishment of Cape Coast Castle as a museum and tourist destination. With this American power in mind, it is understandable that the black group that the Americans involved with the content creation of the

museum would highlight the achievement of would be the one they are most familiar with, which would be black Americans.

Although black Americans gain privileges from their proximity to American whiteness, such as having their culture and discourses be the global standard of blackness, this hegemony is still a form of anti-blackness. The hegemony of black Americans in the black world showcases the way whiteness operates in sometimes seemingly contradictory ways to maintain its supremacy. The privileges conferred onto black Americans as a consequence of their closer approximation to American whiteness through being American is anti-black because American blackness only gains value through its proximity to whiteness, and not because blackness is valued.

Whiteness remains the standard that confers value, even when it privileges black Americans globally. It is apparent that blackness in America is not valued because of the anti-blackness black Americans face through structural discrimination manifested in police shootings and the prison industrial system in America, which is so normalized that it has become “a mundane affair” (Martinot and Sexton, 2003, p. 174). This speaks to the devaluation and dehumanization of blackness within America that persists irrespective of their global privileges. Even so, the position of black Americans as Americans has led to their dominant position in the black world, revealing the complexities and contradictions of black American dominance in the black world, which is based on both anti-blackness and American power.

Still, Ghanaians have not been passive recipients of American power. Instead, the Ghanaian government has used their agency to pursue their interests within this unequal relationship. The 5.6 million dollars the Ghanaian government received in funding from USAID for developing Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle as tourist sites was initiated in 1989 by

Minister Ato Austin's trip to the U.S. to find donors to help grow the Ghanaian tourism industry (Holsey, 2008, pp.161-162). Minister Ato's trip was sponsored by the Ghanaian Ministry of the Central Region. The Ghanaian government was clearly aware of American power and petitioned it to further their economic agenda of growing their tourism industry. Simply put, they used their agency within unequal global economic relations of power between Ghana and America to pursue their interests.

Further, the Ghanaian government has sought to foster stronger links with the diaspora to increase both their tourist industry and development goals through discourses that use Ghana's history of the slave trade to establish kinship with the diaspora (Richards, 2005; Holsey, 2008; Pierre, 2013). The Ghanaian government uses discourses of the transnational linkages between Africa and its diaspora due to the transatlantic slave trade, the African family and discussions of "coming home" through celebrations such as the Pan-African Historical Festival (PANAFEST) and Emancipation Day (ibid). The increasing realization of the connection between tourism, the diaspora and economic development is apparent in the changing names of the Ministry of Tourism (Pierre, 2013, p. 131). In 2002, the "Ministry of Tourism" became the "Ministry of Tourism and Modernization of the Capital City," and then in 2005 it was changed to the "Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations" (ibid).

After the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism was no longer able to shoulder the financial commitment of funding PANAFEST in 1999, a PANAFEST foundation was created to secure private funds for the celebration (Pierre, 2013, p. 130). Although the government was no longer funding PANAFEST, Pierre (2013) argues that in a bid to mobilize "Pan-Africanism and the politics of diaspora kinship" to meet their development goals, the Ghanaian government instituted the "Joseph Project," as a supplement to PANAFEST/Emancipation Day celebration

(pp. 131-132). This coincided with Ghana's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence (pp. 131). The discourse of familial kinship is present in the "Joseph Project," as "Joseph" is a reference to the Biblical Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers and was later reunited with them in Egypt (Tetteh, Dec. 2018-March 2019).

During his September 2018 visit to Washington, D.C., Ghanaian President, Nana Akufo-Addo formally proclaimed 2019 as "Year of Return, Ghana 2019" for Africans in the Diaspora" in commemoration of 400 year anniversary of the first slaves that were brought to "the English colonies at Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1619" (Tetteh, Dec. 2018-March 2019). Writing on the United Nations Africa Renewal website, Benjamin Tetteh observed that President Akufo-Addo's proclamation gave "fresh impetus to the quest to unite Africans on the continent with their brothers and sisters in the diaspora" (ibid). Again, in Tetteh's words, we find an appeal to familial kinship, in framing the Year of Return as a reunion between siblings. In President Akufo-Addo, September 2018 Washington address he went on to say, "We know of the extraordinary achievements and contributions they [Africans in the diaspora] made to the lives of the Americans, and it is important that this symbolic year—400 years later—we commemorate their existence and their sacrifices" (ibid).

By presenting the Year of Return, 2019 as a commemoration of the experience of slavery in the Americas, and making Ghana the site of this commemoration, President Akufo-Addo positions Ghana as the place where the diaspora can go to in order to connection with their ancestors and pay homage to them. The transatlantic slave trade, discourses of kinship between Ghana and the diaspora and Ghana's economic development goals converge in the President's address. Indeed, according to a BBC News interview with the Ghanaian Minister of Tourism,

Barbara Oteng Gyasi, the Year of Return, Ghana 2019, “injected about \$1.9bn (£1.5bn) into the economy” (Reality Check team, 2020).

Although critics like Hartman (2007) and Bruner (1996) question the Ghanaian government’s intent and sincerity in building kinship ties with the diaspora by pointing to its economic incentives, Pierre (2013) asks her readers to go beyond intent, and to view the Ghanaian government’s behaviour as reflecting, “at least in part,” the country’s marginalization within the global political economy (p. 135). Writing on the Ghanaian economy and wealth disparities within the state, Jasper Abembia Ayelazuno (2014) observes that

The majority of Ghanaians in the subaltern classes – as distinct from a tiny minority in the middle and the top wealthy classes – live in grinding poverty and deprivation, and lack the basic necessities of life like jobs, food, potable water, medicine, decent shelter, sanitation facilities, and so on. (p. 81)

Thus, Ghana’s economic position in the global political economy must also be considered when analyzing the Ghanaian tourism industry and the discourses of kinship and Pan-Africanism it engages in to attract tourist dollars to the country.

It must also be noted that the Ghanaian government has not only made symbolic gestures towards kinship with the African diaspora in the Americas. It has also taken tangible steps to reach out to the diaspora, like passing the Right of Abode Law in the year 2000. This law allows a person of African descent in the diaspora the right to stay in Ghana indefinitely (Dovi, 2015).

### **Rupture and Transnational Anti-Blackness**

Paradoxically, in spite of the Ghanaian government’s emphasis on kinship with the diaspora or the black American dominance in the diaspora section of Cape Coast Castle, there have been many accounts by black Americans who have travelled “home” to Ghana, only to be

referred to as *oburoni*, or *buronyi* in Fante, (part of the Akan language family) which means foreigner (Holsey, 2008, p. 220). The word *oburoni* has caused controversy between black American tourists and Ghanaians because black Americans were told it means “white man,” which is dismaying to them (ibid). The word *oburoni* is actually a race neutral term that literally means “those who come from over the horizon” (ibid). Still, it is jarring for black Americans, who upon coming to Ghana to reconnect with their homeland and/or to commemorate the enslavement of their ancestors, are referred to as foreigners. Hartman (2007) describes her feelings of pain and despair at not being seen as kin in Ghana. She refers to herself as “non-returnable goods” (p.109) because of the oppression blacks face in America and the alienation she feels at being rejected as kin in Africa.

Despite Hartman’s (2007) overtures in acknowledging the diversity within the African continent and in Ghana, she still relies on familial tropes to describe her relationship with Ghana, even naming her book, *Lose Your Mother*. Hartman recounts an encounter she had with another black American in Elmina, Ghana that is telling about her views on the country. The black American she is with refers to Ghana as a graveyard, a place he has come to heed the calling of his ancestors. Ghana to this man was akin to visiting his grandmother’s grave. Hartman responds to this man by saying that “it feels like a crash to me, not the grave” (p. 108). She goes on to explain that “It’s [Ghana] the place where the car hit the tree and your mother and brother died. And your father survived but becomes an alcoholic, so it’s like he’s dead too or worse. But it’s just a regular street for everyone else” (ibid). It is unclear, in Hartman’s analogy, whether Ghanaians are the alcoholic father, the unbothered passerby on the street or both. But, what is clear is that her analogy expresses the grief and alienation she feels in Ghana, where her pain at losing her mother, her African home and family, is not acknowledged or taken seriously.

Yet, Holsey (2008) points out that it is not only the perspective of Ghanaians that alienates black Americans from their Ghanaian kin. The very nature of tourism discourages the establishment of “meaningful bonds” between diasporic tourists and local Ghanaians (p. 220). This is because many tourists, especially those with “package tours,” arrive to the slave castles on “large tour buses,” they tour the castles, and then return to their buses, without any meaningful interactions with any of the locals outside of the tour guides or anyone else not connected with the tourism industry (ibid). The black American tourists often base their familial ties to Ghana on a shared ancestral lineage, but not on a shared contemporary struggle (p. 216) with Ghanaian political, economic and social realities. And, just like their white counterparts, black American tourists leave Ghana upon finishing their tours, while their Ghanaian “kin” stay behind (p.220). So, although *Oburoni* does not mean “white man,” Holsey (2008) contends that the “Americanness” of black American tourists is a salient aspect of their identity, from the perspective of Ghanaians, because like their white counterparts, they are “privileged foreigners” (p. 220).

Where black American tourists are distinct from their white counterparts is when Pan-African kinship ties are appealed to for tourist dollars. Savvy local adolescents have started standing outside slave castles, shouting, “Welcome to your homeland!” to black tourists, strategically appealing to kinship ties in hopes of increasing their panhandling profits (Holsey, 2008, pg. 220-221). In fact, I also experienced this appeal to Pan-African kinship on my trips to Elmina slave castle, from older locals selling wares outside of the castle. However, Holsey argues that these youths are unaware of “the imagined geography that positions their country as a homeland, a space upon which so many longings and much sadness are placed” (p. 221).

On the matter of “home,” Holsey (2008) views the familial relationship between black Americans and Ghana from a different vantage point than Hartman by questioning the notion that black Americans are “going home” to Ghana to commemorate their ancestors in slave castles such as Cape Coast. Holsey and historian William St Clair note that about 13-15 per cent of the British share of slaves are thought to have come from the Gold Coast (St Claire, 2006, p. 262; Holsey, 2008, p. 157). Furthermore, there are other slave sites in Africa comparable to slave castles like Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, like *Maison des esclaves* on Gorée Island in Senegal and La route de l’esclave in Benin (Holsey, 2008, pp. 156-157). Therefore, Holsey (2008) observes that black Americans chose Ghana as their homeland for incidental reasons, like speaking English and thereby sharing a common language with Ghanaians (as opposed to Francophone countries), Ghana’s relative social and political stability compared to other countries in the region that lack this stability (ibid), and Hartman (2007) and Pierre (2013) note the history of Pan-Africanism in Ghana led by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah as a reason.

Except for the fact that 13-15% of the British share slaves that came from the Gold Coast, and even a fewer percentage went to the U.S., none of the reasons that black Americans choose Ghana as a homeland over other African countries with comparable slave sites have to do with actual kinship ties. Even so, a look at the history and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade gives insights to why this is the case. Most black Americans do not know where in Africa their ancestors came from—black Americans are a mixture of diverse African ethnicities and peoples. This mixture of African ethnicities and their inability to pinpoint one ethnic group and country as kin is part of the context of the incidental nature of their choice of Ghana, and slave castles like Cape Coast Castle as a site for commemoration and kinship.

Although Ghanaians have been racialized by the transatlantic slave trade because of the racialization of Africa as a black continent, they live in a majority black country where ethnic, cultural and regional distinctions remain salient. Thus, when black Americans tie kinship to racial belonging and not ethnic belonging when they come to Ghana, two different but symbiotic processes of black racialization based on the transatlantic slave trade are meeting. Ghanaian blackness is based on the continental construction of Africa as a black monolith, and the national racialization of Ghana as black as a result of belonging to Africa's continental blackness. This is distinct from black American blackness which is based on the consolidation of diverse African ethnicities and cultures within a singular black slave identity. When Hartman (2007) discusses her experiences of alienation and despair because the Ghanaians she encounters seem to have an ambivalent relationship to kinship ties with black Americans, and because of the silence surrounding the transatlantic slave trade, it is within the context of these different processes of racialization.

Dr. Kamari Clarke (2004) asserts that even with the advent of DNA testing, which can trace a person's DNA origins to geographic locations, the transatlantic slave trade has severed kinship ties between black Africans and their diaspora in the Americas. This is because claims to kinship and ethnicity are based on generational, regional, and familial relationships and affiliations, which are key to formulating identity in many African countries (Kamari, 2004, xi-xiii). Therefore, invoking DNA kinship does not reconcile these severed ties. Since black Americans do not have access to African kinship ties, they are not seen as kin.

However, I am not suggesting that ideas of African kinship and ethnicity are static. Simply because kinship and ethnic ties are defined this way at present in many African countries does not mean that these ideas cannot change in the future through the influence of media

(social), resettlement of black diaspora populations to various Africa countries, political and economic alliances between the black Atlantic and Africa, and technological innovations. I bring up DNA testing to demonstrate how the differences in conceptions of kinship and the racialization processes between black continental Africans and its diaspora have produced different ideas and expectations of kinship and ethnicity.

Furthermore, when it comes to the silence around discourses on slavery in Ghana, Holsey (2008) argues that slavery is intentionally sequestered from Ghanaian national and public discourse because of the shame associated with Ghanaian complicity in the slave trade and how Europeans denigrated Ghanaians for their participation in it. (pp. 122-124, 204). Holsey notes that within the national “imagined geography” of the residents of southern coastal Ghana, where Cape Coast Castle is located, northern Ghana is the region of the country slaves are said to have originated from (p. 219). Hence, the region and ethnic groups of northern Ghana are presented as the home and kin of the African diaspora, detaching the rest of Ghana from association with slavery and kinship with the diaspora (ibid).

There are those, like Pierre (2013), who take issue with the inter-African particularity of African ethnicity, viewing it as a barrier to understanding the transnational nature of anti-blackness and white supremacy. Pierre argues that anthropology has conceptualized race as a matter of biology and culture “as a marker of human differences” (p. 201). This has led the field to depoliticize race and overlook the global (transnational) continuities in racialized discourses and inequalities between Africa and its diaspora, which “Jim Crow, colonial exploitation and apartheid” are examples of (ibid).

African ethnicity, culture and “tribal” identity have been constructed in anthropology as Africa’s true and authentic state, (pp. 203-204) and also as the site of Africa’s “radical alterity,”

as Graeber (2015) would put it (Pierre, 2013, p. 204). This is problematic because African ethnicity, according to Pierre, seems to be “about *African-African* relations, *not* European-African relations” (p. 204 [emphasis in original]). Such a paradigm of ethnicization produces a culturalist analysis that reduces African political, social, and economic realities to the tribal and moral failing of Africa’s backwards existence (p. 205). As a result, African culture is constructed as tribal, static, and outside the bounds of modernity (ibid). Further, because African ethnicity is an intra-African issue, it undermines the understanding of Africa’s racialization within the global anti-black hierarchy based on white supremacy.

Additionally, Africa’s ethnicization is a barrier to understanding the transnational black linkages between Africa and its diaspora because it splits Africa and its diaspora theoretically and epistemologically along racial and cultural lines (p. 206). The diaspora becomes racialized as black, but Africa is deracialized by its “cultural traditions” (ibid). In Pierre’s (2013) pursuit of establishing a mutually reinforcing conception of modern transnational blackness between Africa and its diaspora, she argues that modern blackness is composed of two separate but related moments of racialization. Pierre distinguishes the racialization of the African diaspora in the black Atlantic with the transatlantic slave trade and the racialization of Africa with colonization.

What Pierre’s argument against African ethnicity misses is that the negative tropes she associates with African ethnicity did not arise from the racialization of Africa through colonization. They arose from the racialization of Africa through the transatlantic slave trade. For example, the Gold Coast (Ghana) was officially promulgated as a British colony in 1874 (Korang, 146). By the time Africa was colonized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tropes of African backwardness and savagery were already entrenched in the European understanding of the continent, as Hegel’s designation of Africans as animal men in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century indicates.

Therefore, there is no need to negate African ethnicity to gain an understanding of the impact of white supremacy on Africa and the transnational modern anti-blackness that impacts both Africa and its diaspora.

Moreover, Korang (2004) discusses ethnicity as part of an assertion of African agency when Africans engage in “intra-African debate and dialogue” that make sense of the multiplicity of their ethnic, societal, and national identities (pp. 54-55). Hence, engaging with African ethnicity is not simply a misguided act of disunity against blacks in the diaspora, but it is part of the process of negotiating African identities. As I discussed in chapter one (Korang, 2003), creating and consolidating the Ghanaian post-colonial nation state was difficult for Nkrumah and successive Ghanaian leaders because of their attempt to supersede an engagement with the cultural differences of the diverse ethnicities within the country. Nkrumah dealt with the cultural diversity of the “forced togetherness” of the post-colonial Ghanaian state by attempting to establish a nation from a state centric model of unity. However, because he did not address the cultural diversity within the country as part of his nation building process, decades later, the culture question continues to beleaguer the nation. Thus the cultural differences that arise from being an ethnically diverse country is an important part of the history and nature of the Ghanaian nation.

Presenting ethnicity as a barrier to overcome in order to theorize transnational black modernity is not only dismissive of Ghanaian history but misguided. Nkrumah attempted to supersede ethnicity in his nation building process, but as discussed, it did not go well for him. Neither will it be fruitful for Pan-Africanists who attempt to theorize modern transnational blackness by presenting ethnic differences as a barrier to overcome. The ethnic differences between and within the diverse national expressions of black identity both in Africa and in the

diaspora need to be engaged with in order to assess where the political, economic, and social priorities of different black populations converge and diverge, when discussing modern transnational blackness.

Whereas Pierre attempts to theorize a modern transnational black identity that links the African diaspora and Africa through the racialization processes of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, Hartman (2007) theorizes her relationship with Africa through the idea of rupture. A constant theme in *Lose Your Mother* is the rupture. Hartman presents slavery as the event that ruptured the familial ties between Africans and the descendent of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Reflecting on her motivations for coming to Ghana, Hartman (2007) writes the following:

...unlike the scores of black tourists who, motivated by Alex Haley's *Roots*, had traveled to Ghana and other parts of West Africa to reclaim their African patrimony. For me, the rupture was the story. Whatever bridges I might build were as much a reminder of my separation as my connection. The holding cell had supplanted the ancestral village. The slave trade loomed larger for me than any memory of a glorious African past or a sense of belonging. (Pp. 41-42)

Even though Hartman went to Ghana with the goal of rupture as the story, her experience of not being seen as kin and not finding anyone to bear witness to the stories of transatlantic slavery among the people of Gwolu elicited in her feelings of loneliness, disappointment and alienation (pp. 218, 232).

When Hartman (2007) travels to Gwolu at the end of her book, she realizes that there are differences in the experience of slavery between the people in Gwolu and black Americans. Gwolu is located in northern Ghana and is "the heartland of slavery" of the country, so Hartman goes there to find stories of slavery that bear witness to her ancestors' experience (p. 232). Yet, when Hartman arrives there, she discovers that the inhabitants of Gwolu had different slave

stories from the American ones that Hartman was used to. In Gwolu, slaves successfully resisted and eluded capture, thus their “story of slavery was a narrative of victory, a tale of resistance and overcoming” (p. 233). Unlike black American slave stories that were filled with sorrow, “masters and slaves” (ibid).

After gaining this insight, Hartman realizes that what she had in common with the people of Gwolu was not a common struggle but “the aspirations that fuelled flight and the yearning for freedom” (p. 234). Because of this, Hartman chooses to tie her conception of her own African identity to a humanistic solidarity with all those who suffer in the world and seek freedom instead of narrowly defining her African identity on a common black struggle between Ghanaians (Africans) and herself. She expresses that “My future was entangled with it [Africa], just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive” (p. 233).

Commenting on Hartman’s insights at Gwolu, Markus Nehl (2016) writes that Hartman comes to the conclusion that “the struggle against racial oppression” is what “serves as a link between black communities *and* individuals marked by different ethnic origins, languages, traditions, cultural values, experiences and histories” (p. 100 [emphasis added]). Because Hartman does not feel like she can relate to Africans on the basis of a common black struggle, given that slavery ruptured her ethnic kinship ties with Africa, she develops an African identity based on the common struggle of all people who are oppressed and strive for freedom. Not on blackness.

Before I go any further, I must clarify that I believe that Hartman has every right to define her individual black/African identity as she sees fit. So, my following comments are not to argue that she must conceive of her identity in the way that I will argue below. However, since

blackness is also a collective identity and I am analyzing the politics of modern blackness, I engage with Hartman's perspective because of the implications of her conclusion for the politics of modern blackness and because her writings have been influential in theorizing the relationship of the black American diaspora with Africa. Further, Hartman's conclusions about her African identity challenges my own position, and therefore I engage with her perspective to demonstrate rigour of my own arguments in being able to address opposing views.

Establishing solidarity with diverse groups to fight oppression can be laudable. Therefore, I am not arguing against this. The issue with Hartman's conception of a humanistic solidarity, beyond racial lines, is that it is based on obscuring the particularity of modern transnational anti-black discourses because of Hartman's focus on rupture. Hartman's idea of rupture, despite her protest to the contrary, is based on a problematic conception of African belonging centred on familial tropes that homogenize the diversity within the African continent. Although both the racialization processes of the African continent and the black Atlantic were based in the transatlantic slave trade, the nature, experience and understanding of blackness depends on the social, political, economic and historic contexts of the nations black people are from (Smithers, 2011). Hartman seems to reject the particularity of the transnational dynamics of anti-blackness in favour of a general humanistic understanding of oppression because she is unable to accept the heterogeneity of black racialization outside of the context of black familial solidarity.

In opposition to Hartman's perspective, I maintain that modern transnational blackness is not about rupture, it is about unity. This is because Africa did not have a singular familial identity to rupture—there were and are many mothers in Africa, not just one. Before the transatlantic slave trade, Africa did not possess a monolithic continental civilization, culture or

language to rupture (Appiah, 1992). The creation of modern blackness was a unification of diverse ethnicities, kingdoms, histories, cultures, and traditions under the banner of blackness—a black identity that did not exist before the advent of the transatlantic slave trade (Manning, 1990). This unification racialized both the African continent and the African diaspora as black, although, in distinct ways. Blackness was an imposition on blacks in Africa and in the black Atlantic, it was not a choice (Korang, 2003, p. 280). Hence, Hartman cannot simply reject the transnational nature of anti-blackness that connects both Africa and its diaspora because Ghanaian blackness fails to live up to the assumptions and expectations of American blackness.

Korang (2003) reminds us that there is a historical weight to blackness in the modern world, and its load cannot be refused by black people, no matter how diverse or contentious it is. Korang (2003) stresses this point by quoting Fanon's famous words from his classic book *Black Skin, White Masks*, when Fanon writes that "not only must a black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon, 1967, p. 110 in Korang, 2003, p. 280). Continuing Fanon's masculinization of blackness, Korang notes that "His blackness is given as an imposition on him by his powerful opposite" (Korang, 2003, p. 280). Europeans did not ask enslaved Africans in the Americas whether they wanted to take on the mantle of blackness and neither did Africans on the continent come together to agree on a singular African and black identity. Blackness was imposed by the coloniality of European power, on both enslaved Africans in the Americas and onto the African continent.

Although modern blackness was imposed by coloniality, black people have not passively accepted it without negotiation. Korang (2003) writes that even though black people cannot escape blackness, they can reconstruct it. Reconstruction entails engaging with blackness "then and now, here and there" (p. 285). The past and present, as well as the present differences

between black people in Africa and the black Atlantic must be contended with in the reconstruction of modern black identity. Border thinking allows for such a reconstruction. An analysis of the politics of modern blackness at Cape Coast Castle grounded in border thinking enables the acknowledgement of the genesis of modern blackness in the transatlantic slave trade, while also acknowledging the diverse national reconstructions and negotiations blacks have engaged in because of the political, social, economic and historic contexts they were in. When we analyze Hartman's attempt to take away the particularity of modern transnational anti-black racism from her call to fight oppression from a border thinking lens, the inadequacy of her stance is glaring.

For example, although expressed differently, we can see transnational anti-blackness at work in both Africa and in America. Africa's social, political and economic global marginalization is depoliticized and has long been blamed on the moral failings of its traditional, backwards and anomalous mode of existence (Ferguson, 2005; Lauer, 2007; Nkomo, 2011). Helen Lauer (2007) makes a finer point, detailing how the stunning human suffering, "global injustices and material imbalances" experienced by Africans are separated from social tragedies elsewhere because they are explained away by pointing to the idiosyncratic traditional African environment. This idiosyncratic conception of Africa is produced by the idea that Africans are not as modern and civilized as the West, and therefore their humanity is also not equal to the humanity of Westerners. These discourses harken back to Hegel's conception of Africans as animal men, who on their own cannot escape their savage and uncivilized state in Africa Proper.

In her book on implicit racial bias, Stanford professor Jennifer Eberhardt (2019) argues that in America, the association of black people with being animalistic, and specifically the association between blacks and apes, has contributed to the understanding of blacks as less than

human. The consequence of this dehumanization has led to the devaluing of black lives in the justice system, where black defendants on death row are more likely to face the death penalty than white defendants, and murderers of white victims are more likely to be sentenced to death than murderers of black victims. These dynamics were true even when controlling for other non-racial factors that could influence sentencing.

Eberhardt (2019) observed that the jurors who were deciding the cases of black defendants on death row sentenced blacks to death more than whites because jurors assumed that the physical attributes of blacks were a sign of their “internal wickedness” and guilt. The trope of constructing blacks as the missing evolutionary link between apes and humans came from the dehumanization of blacks during slavery, and was codified as a lasting condition of blackness by 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific racism. The discourses devaluing black life in Africa because Africans are constructed as savage animal men are the same discourses used to devalue black American life because they both arise from negative tropes associated with blackness that began with the transatlantic slave trade. As these examples have demonstrated, there is a history to transnational anti-blackness that is particular to the modern black experience. So, although establishing coalitions and solidarity across racial lines to fight oppression can be powerful, it must not be done by negating the particularity of modern transnational anti-blackness.

The politics of modern blackness at Cape Coast Castle reveals that blackness is vertically and horizontally heterogeneous in terms of the black American dominance at Cape Coast Castle museum’s diaspora section and in the different racialization processes between Ghanaian and black American blackness. Even though the diasporic section of the museum showcases the accomplishments of black descendants of slaves, there is a vertical disparity in the representation of the black diaspora, with black Americans dominating the representation of the diaspora,

despite the fact that the least amount of slaves went to U.S. The museum does not explain this over representation by indicating that black Americans possess the most accomplishments out of the whole diaspora in the Americas, so we cannot rely on this reason for their dominant presence in the museum. I have argued in this chapter that it is the proximity to white American power that over privileges the representation of black Americans in the diasporic section of the museum.

However, the Ghanaian tourism industry is not a passive recipient of American dominance. It was the Ghanaian government that invited American influence in the restoration and revitalization process of Cape Coast Castle by courting American funds for the project. It is also the same Ghanaian government that continues forwarding the discourse of black unity based on familial kinship to bolster tourism to the country. This is despite the national tendency to sequester the transatlantic slave trade from the national discourse of Ghanaian identity (Holsey, 2008) and the fact that the racialization process in Ghana bases kinship ties on ethnicity and not on a monolithic understanding of a transnational black family.

When black American tourists arrive in Ghana, they are confronted with a horizontally different notion of blackness to the one that they are accustomed to at home and from the one tourist marketing campaigns run by the Ghanaian government express. The structure of the tourism industry makes it so that although racial kinship is stressed by official discourses, the busing in and out of black American tourists from slave castles, disallows meaningful bonds to form between local Ghanaians and black American tourists. Black American tourists are viewed as privileged foreigners, in this sense, just like their non-black counterparts. Where blackness of black American tourists is distinguished is when Ghanaians, like the savvy adolescents discussed

above, appeal to kinship ties with black Americas, to gain access to the tourist funds black Americans bring to the country.

Pained by the lack of kinship she feels with Ghanaians, Hartman (2008) is unable to reconcile the collision of two different types of black racial expressions based on different national contexts. She thus uses the idea of rupture caused by the transatlantic slave trade to differentiate her understanding of black struggle in America, from the experience of Ghanaians. Ultimately, Hartman's inability to engage with black heterogeneity leads her to negate blackness from her call to fight oppression and pursuit of freedom. Yet, it is possible to theorize transnational blackness, while still acknowledging black heterogeneity.

When the politics of blackness at Cape Coast Castle is analyzed from a border thinking lens, the Ghanaian government's courtship of American funds and their black kinship tourist campaigns, the black American dominance in the diaspora section, the savvy adolescents' appeal to black kinship, the Ghanaian national distance in identifying with the slave trade, the different versions of black identities colliding at Cape Coast Castle because of black visitors from across the African diaspora, black American romantic notions of home, and even Hartman's despair and inability to accept black heterogeneity, are all part of the process of negotiating modern blackness. This process of negotiation is contentious because of the diverse interests and national conceptions of blackness involved when black people with different histories, economic, social and political realities and cultures meet. However, an analysis based on border thinking demonstrates that the black identity is big enough to bind all the contentions, miscommunications, diversity, dreams, alliances, repudiations, disappointments and hopes within the heterogeneity of the modern black experience because modern blackness is bound to the transatlantic slave trade.

## **Conclusion:**

Blackness is not an essence, it is not a singular culture, history or tradition. It is an identity forged by slavery and based on black dehumanization. However, black people have not merely accepted blackness without negotiation. The heterogeneous nature of national expressions, discourses and histories of blackness are a testament to the agency that black people have wielded in developing their identities, even as blackness was imposed by slavery. As a text for analyzing the politics of black modernity, Cape Coast Castle revealed the importance of monuments in expressing political, economic, historic and social discourses on identity and belonging. The black American dominance at Cape Coast Castle Museum's diasporic section demonstrates that blackness is not only horizontally diverse in terms of national culture, history and socio-economic realities, it is also vertically diverse, in terms of proximity and access to power. The black American proximity to white American power has led to the dominance of black Americans at the diasporic section of Cape Coast Castle museum.

In chapter one, I argued that slavery is where modern blackness was born. I demonstrated that the negative stereotypes underpinning dominant transnational notions of modern blackness in both the black Atlantic and of Africa arose from the dehumanization of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade. After establishing where blackness began, I asked whether blacks were destined to simply be defined from the outside, having their agency stripped from them when it comes to defining their own identities. I addressed the topic of black agency by arguing for the use of border thinking when examining the relationship between dominant negative discourses of transnational blackness and heterogeneous national black experiences and discourses. I contended that border thinking would allow blacks to have agency by recognizing the interplay between the dominance of the European epistemologies underpinning transnational

black discourses, and the ways local knowledges have negotiated with this dominance within their local ideological contexts to bring forth new knowledges.

To demonstrate the strength of a decolonial analysis of modern blackness, I analyzed black transnationality in Gilroy's black Atlantic and Korang's arguments on nationality in Ghana. I concluded that both conceptions were lacking in terms of analyzing the relationship between transnational and national blackness because both Gilroy's and Korang's conceptions of modern blackness maintained the denial of co-evalness between blacks and the Europeans. Instead, I argued for a decolonial analysis of modern blackness that would allow for blacks in the black Atlantic and in Africa to be co-eval with the Western world and all of humanity.

In Chapter two, I responded to the OT critique that decolonial theory does not go far enough in critiquing Western thought because it is grounded in the same ontological assumptions as Western thought. Through my engagement with Viveiros de Castro and Graeber's disagreement on the validity of OT, I demonstrated that it is not only the "how" in analyzing blackness that is important. Where blackness is analyzed—the institutions that blackness is analyzed within are an important part of informing the agency that black people have when they want their discourses heard. The academic institutions and power structures that are doing the hearing are therefore also crucial to analyzing black agency.

I critiqued OT on the grounds that because it is working within the institutional, theoretical and structural academic constraints of the same Western ontology it seeks to escape, it does not succeed in critiquing Western ontology. Hence, I based my critique on the Western epistemological dominance underpinning transnational modern black discourses on decolonial theory and border thinking. Border thinking maintains black agency because it recognizes the

disparate power relations between the European Subject and non-Europeans within academia, and it highlights how agency can be expressed in a context of domination.

In chapter three, I applied the insights that I had gained from decolonial theory in order to analyze the over representation of the black Americans in the diasporic section of Cape Coast Castle Museum. I argued that the dominance of black Americans was caused by their proximity to American whiteness. I went on to contextualize the black American dominance at Cape Coast Castle within the tourism industry in Ghana. I pointed out that the Ghanaian tourist industry were not passive recipients of American power. The Ghanaian government actively pursued American funds to reconstruct and renovate Cape Coast Castle, and it continues to pursue black American tourists through transnational black kinship discourses.

Conversely, at the same time the Ghanaian government is engaging in kinship discourses to draw diasporic tourist dollars into Ghana, the national discourse on Ghanaian identity sequesters slavery. When black American tourist come to Ghana, they receive mix messages from the government and from their day to day experience of not receiving a familial reception from Ghanaians. What black American tourists experience when they come to Ghana is the collision of two different processes of racialization based on the transatlantic slave trade. Some black Americans, like Saidiya Hartman, cannot reconcile themselves to this black heterogeneity, and so they negate an analysis of the consequences of slavery on black people transnationally for a general, race neutral understanding of oppression and fight for freedom.

The diasporic tourist industry in Ghana, and Cape Coast Castle, in particular, offers excellent insights on the controversies, hierarchies and negotiation that occur within the modern black identity when black people from different nations and with different histories of racialization meet. The high stakes involved in commemorating the human tragedy of the

transatlantic slave trade, and the discourses of belonging and blackness this commemoration incites, is critical to analyzing what about blackness binds the diaspora, Ghanaians and other Africans to modern blackness.

When we return to the comments of our tour guide from the introduction, using the lens of border thinking, we can see that all the possibilities of the modern black experience were bound in his proclamation, ““Have some respect! Black people died here!” Because we were in the death chamber at Cape Coast Castle, the captives that were killed in that chamber did see the Americas. However, the dehumanization that led to their deaths would be the legacy that would define the transatlantic slave trade and the modern black identity that it created. When a South Sudanese-Kenyan Canadian, like myself, black Britons, Ghanaians, black Americans, and the rest of the black diaspora comes to commemorate the lives of captives at Cape Coast Castle, we, too, are commemorating our black ancestors. Not because of kinship ties, a black essence, or even a common black culture. The captives were our ancestors because of the modern transnational blackness that binds us all came from the brutal journey that African captives, like the ones who survived the Castle, would embark on. No matter where our national black identities came from, like our ancestors who survived or died in at Cape Coast Castle, had we been alive and in the region during the times of the transatlantic slave trade, we too might have been candidates for captivity at Cape Coast Castle.

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