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Tracing the Dispossession of the Enslaves Black Woman and A Potential for Resistance.

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Tracing the Dispossession of the Enslaved Black Woman and A Potential for Resistance.

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Introduction

What sparked my interest in the topic of the Black enslaved female was an essay by Angela Davis titled *The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood*. In this historical account of private communities of slaves in plantation life, Davis uncovers that male and female slaves created households that were void of gendered hierarchical labor dynamics. I was blown away by this fact: that in some horrific and tragic consequence of slavery, slaves lived their personal lives free of the gender distinctions that operated to inferiorize women around them. This led me to wonder about how Black enslaved women came to challenge stereotyped sexual divisions of labor within her personal life while under slavery. This led me on an exploration of the ways in which tactics of capitalism operate to create different classes of workers, and specifically how those tactics work to create the class of Black enslaved women. The tactics of capitalist accumulation that I choose to focus on in this essay are defined as primitive accumulation and dispossession, which enduringly establish the needed social relations at work toward the capitalist scheme—with the dynamic of the Black enslaved woman being very important in that.

The structure of this essay is organized into three parts that work together to explain how the role of the Black enslaved woman is realized under slavery in the United States. The first chapter focuses on capitalism as a nonobjective social system that is wholly and absolutely reliant on the relations of production. The relations of production are the whole of the differentiated social dynamics that are relied upon to structure the capitalist system. I then look at the initial mechanism of primitive accumulation that works to outline the social framework of the relations of production through dispossession. The second chapter works to reimagine the

understanding of primitive accumulation to see how it works in its continuation, through various strategies of dispossession. Its continuation works to create all the needed dynamics of the social framework, which are determined by varying strategies and levels of dispossession. The third chapter focuses on how those enduring strategies of dispossession outlined by primitive accumulation work to establish the specific social dynamic of the enslaved Black woman, and why this dynamic is so paramount to the capitalist scheme.

Chapter One

In order to comprehend the nuances of deprivation, which affect individuals differently with regard to categorizations like race and gender, it is necessary to understand two key concepts: “primitive accumulation” and “dispossession.” If one opens a Google browser and types the word “dispossession” into the search bar, the definition that comes up is general and non-specific. What is presented is, “the action of depriving someone of land, property, or other possessions.”¹ Yet the concepts of land, property, and whatever can be referred to as “other possessions” are surely open to interpretation. There is possibility for interpretation because conventions of land, property, and possessions have been constructed historically, and these concepts have changed through time and likely will continue to change. Conventions of differentiation, such as race and gender, have complicated the ontological development of

¹ *Dispossession - Google Search.*

<https://www.google.com/search?q=dispossession&oq=dispossession&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j0i512l5j46i512l3j0i512.4988j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>. Accessed 2 May 2023

'property' and vice versa. In this relationship between property and categorizations of difference, ideas of race and gender have changed through time as well. Contemporary ideas of race and gender are framed into binaries: however it is only a modern phenomenon that those binaries are determined by categorizations of Black and White or male and female.² These developed perceptions of race and gender have relation to ideas of property, which have affected conceptions of race and gender.

Definitions and categorizations that too simply compartmentalize do not account for the fact that these ideas exist through time and in relation to other things. These concepts in their ontological actuality make their definitions indeterminable or rather in need of inferential understanding that is contingent upon time and context.³ These definitions are provisional seeing as though these concepts and categorizations exist in relation to time. For this reason the particular Google definition of dispossession, which paradoxically is both vague and narrow, cannot be so easily surrendered to. In actuality, the complexification of what can be understood as one's "possessions" and the measures that can take them away are not as easily defined.

In the complication of what can be defined as property, or possessions, the understanding of dispossession is subsequently complicated and expanded as well. It is the aim of the following chapters to expand upon how dispossession can function. First, however, I will explain why dispossession is so important for capitalism. Conceptions of dispossession, which regard its nature, mechanics, and scope, are all intertwined with the competitive processes of accumulation.

² In Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* (1983), "Racial Capitalism: The Non Objective Character of Capitalist Development", He provides a historical account of developments of racial categorizations in the European civilizations that predated capitalism, explaining that racial difference was constituted on basis' of religious affiliation, region, language, hair, etc. He explains that these tendencies of differentiation extended through capitalism only operating on different criteria.

³ While the use of the phrase ontological actuality can proffer connotations with being, which the concepts of race, gender, and property are not. Rather I use this to highlight these concepts as constructions that exist with historical geographies, that are determined and affected by many features, such as time, location, causes and each other.

Accumulation is the operation, carried out through various means, that is devised toward the presumed aspiration of the capitalist scheme. Exponential growth is this presumed aspiration. However, the intricate steps taken in attempt to achieve this growth is where capitalism becomes something that extends far beyond an economic system.

In this attempt to widen the scope of what is defined as dispossession, it will become evident that the breadth of what and how one can be dispossessed both underpins and is sustained by capitalism. However, to comprehend this integral device of capitalism it is necessary to reorient our perspectives of capitalism not as an economic system but rather as a social system. And when viewing capitalism as a social system, it can be understood as an epochal phenomenon. Capitalism is the decisive feature of this current historical moment. In its attempts toward growth, it is through accumulation that capitalism becomes “a social system of class domination.”⁴ Its modes, methods, mechanisms, ideologies, perspectives, in short forces, direct and condition all social relations. Understanding capitalism as a social system can be seen not only in its duration, but also in its rise. Capitalism came to fruition because of innovations in the structure of social relations. In *The Brenner Debate*, Robert Brenner outlines a very cohesive argument as to how capitalism developed via the construction of social relations, and not what neoclassical takes have determined as the fault of demographic or commercial forces.⁵ He explains that these other takes on capitalism’s development leave out this social factor:

“General interpretations of the process of long-term economic change in late medieval and early modern Europe have continued to be constructed almost exclusively in terms of

⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson,” *Critical Historical Studies* 3/1 (2016) pp. 165

⁵ Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Economic History Review* 23:1 (1970) “An Economic Theory of the Growth of the Western World,” pp. 1-17

what might loosely be called “objective” economic forces - in particular, demographic fluctuations and the growth of trade and markets. [...] Whether the pressure for change is seen to arise from urbanization and the growth of trade or an autonomous demographic development, a market supply/demand mechanism is usually assumed to provide the elementary theoretical underpinnings. So, the response of the agrarian economy to economic pressure, whatever their source, is more or less taken for granted, viewed as occurring more or less automatically, in a direction economically determined by the ‘laws of supply and demand’.”⁶

The rise of capitalism cannot be explained purely as a consequence of population growth and or growing trade and markets. Rather, it was the organization of class structure through social innovations that came prior to demographic and commercial factors. What Brenner brings to focus is a debate between which mode of production is more important to capitalism’s rise – the forces of production; the factors that determine production, such as the labor force, resources, or the relations of production; the relationship between the owners of the means of production, and those who they employ.

Brenner deduces through a comparative historical analysis that it is in fact the relations of production that are more important in establishing the capitalist system. And that can be seen in the historical effort that took down feudal class relations, in which a new hierarchical system emerged between, landowner, tenant farmer, and wage-laborer. “It is the structure of class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particular demographic and commercial changes will affect long-term trends in the distribution of income

⁶ T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate* (1985), Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” pp.10

and economic growth— and not vice versa.”⁷ Brenner insists that the class structure is paramount, and can emerge because there is a mutually constitutive relationship between the economic infrastructure and what can be defined as the superstructure. The economic infrastructure refers to the modes of production, and the superstructure refers to social and historical implications— laws, religion, state forms, culture, politics, and ideas.⁸ These two elements rely on each other to establish this essential sociality. While alternative explanations used to understand capitalism’s rise focus on factors that cushion capitalism and its dynamics as axiomatically occurring.

To explain capitalism’s development with recourse to exterior factors proselytizes capitalism as an agent, taking away authority from people and the economic infrastructure and sociocultural theater that people direct, which in turn directs capitalist social relations. When commercial and demographic factors are accredited it frames capitalism as objective. Capitalism did not occur via the objective forces of demographic and commercial fluctuations, and accordingly does not operate on an objective basis. It is in fact highly subjective when determining degrees of exploitation towards extraction and accumulation.⁹ This deemed objectivity masquerades in the superstructure, working to justify subjectivity and condemn it when needed. However it is important to clarify that this conceived objectivity does not work only to maintain the capital-relation, which is the relationship between capitalist and wage-laborer. It also works to make subjectivity objective within conditions that make one exploitable

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-63

⁹ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (1983), “Racial Capitalism: The Non Objective Character of Capitalist Development,” pp. 9-28

on levels that go far beyond the capital-relation. Such conditions that make one exploitable in ways that go beyond the exploitation of the wage laborer historically apply most commonly to racialized and gendered subjects. This deemed objectivity also is applied to constructions such as race and gender, working to justify furthered forms of exploitation. Capitalism is carried out through people and the superstructure that people direct: its function works to differentiate and divide in order to structure 'objective' class distinctions to form the relations of production that assist in accumulation.¹⁰

Ellen Wood backs Brenner's argument in her book *The Origin of Capitalism*. She contends that it took very specific means and distinctive social relations for capitalism to rise. Wood argues against the notion that capitalist dynamics existed and were waiting in embryo, only coming to rise once unnatural restraints were lifted. This idea posits capitalism as an external force enacted on to people or a natural outcome of human behavior, which also contributes to the falsified objectivity that is used to confirm this system and the conditions it creates. Instead, Wood explains that capitalism is reliant on a specific framework of social relations that are carried out through the market. All things are made commodified and dependent on the market through this particular setup, and the market is where these social dynamics are sustained.

“This unique relation between producers and appropriators is of course, mediated by the ‘market’. [...] the market in capitalism has a distinctive, unprecedented function. Virtually everything in a capitalist society is a commodity produced for the market. And even more fundamentally, both capital and labor are utterly dependent on the market for the most

¹⁰ Cedric Robinson says that there was a “tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate into ‘racial ones’” (Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (1983), pp. 26). He explains that there persisted a function to differentiate groupings to permit exploitation.

basic conditions of their own reproduction. Just as workers depend on the market to sell their labor power as a commodity, capitalists depend on it to buy labor power".¹¹

The market is imperative in that it facilitates the commodification of social relations. It is the stage where social relations and class distinctions are carried out. In the market this sociality materializes, and the mutually constitutive relationship between infrastructure and superstructure ushers that materialization. The relationship between infrastructure and superstructure facilitates the insistent dispossession that coerces people to participate in the market. Capitalism becomes a social system on many levels: in its reliance on social dynamics and ordering, as well as in its necessary liaison with the interplay of ideas, motives, and constructions of society to coerce those dynamics.

This social system has developed into a complex procedure that is steeped into all dynamics of social life, and that has changed and adapted through time to persist. William Sewell explains this "social temporality" of capitalism:

"Capitalism, that is, has long-term temporal dynamics that possess a powerful directionality. These complex dynamics, which have been going on in capitalism for at least three centuries, are manifested as sustained economic growth, consistent geographical expansion, and relentless commodification of social relations."¹²

These long term dynamics of capitalism are temporal in that they have a relationship to time, and they have evolved and adapted through time to maintain capitalism. Dispossession is a temporal dynamic that has evolved and adapted through time as a manifestation toward sustained economic growth, geographical expansion, and relentless commodification of social relations.

¹¹ Ellen Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (1999), "The Agrarian Origin of Capitalism," pp. 70

¹² William H. Sewell Jr., "The Capitalist Epoch," *Social Science History* 38:1 (2014), pp.1

This essay focuses on how dispossession works as a temporal dynamic manifested toward the commodification of social relations. Dispossession is both a mechanism and mode of capitalism, meaning that it is both a system that works to create these social dynamics of capitalism, and is the manner in which that is done or experienced. This means that it both presupposes capitalist dynamics and sustains them. Dispossession works in both dimensions of capitalism, the economic infrastructure where these capital dynamics materialize, and in the superstructure that highlights its non-reducibility “to an economic system; [as] it is a complex social whole, with specific political forms, psychologies, social relations, and cultural features.”¹³ Because of this extensive operability, dispossession is a redoubtable device of capitalism.

With this understanding of capitalism in mind, the Google search definition of “dispossession” proves inconclusive: the action of depriving someone of land, property, or other possessions is too ambiguous and limited. It is not productive to define temporal dynamics too narrowly, or even at all. Capitalism, being the leading “economic” system for almost three centuries, has adapted to severe change and transformation. Consequently, this socio-temporal characteristic has made its dynamics incredibly adaptable and incredibly extensive. As a dynamic of capitalism, dispossession holds this temporality which has resulted in its wide-ranging function.

To comprehend this integral device of capitalism in creating capitalist social dynamics, it is necessary to look at its initial mechanisms, which are carried out in the phase that is known as primitive accumulation. According to Marx, primitive accumulation facilitated the emergence of capitalism, which subsequently developed into a series of ongoing dispossession tactics to maintain the system of social dominance. Despite the Google definition's ambiguity, its

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.2

narrowness does highlight early modes of dispossession that were in fact not as wholly pervasive, and were more narrowly deployed. In order to understand dispossession, it is important to look at the initial act of dispossession which relates strictly to land. The dispossession of lands held in common served as the historical process that enabled the rise and continuation of capitalism. In England between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, dispossession was in fact primarily linked to land, and was carried out through enclosure and expropriation. Wood traces back the shifting dynamics and social innovations that changed ideas of land: “enclosure meant the extinction, with or without a physical fencing, of land, of common and customary use rights on which many people depended for their livelihood.”¹⁴ It was through enclosure that the development of a concept of property—capital—came to be. In this sense, dispossession involved separating individuals from land that was simply utilized for its resources. This seizure was an initial instance of dispossession:

“Only in capitalism is the dominant mode of appropriation based on the dispossession of the legally free direct producers, whose surplus labor is appropriated by purely “economic” means. Because direct producers in a fully developed capitalism are propertyless, because their only access to the means of production, to the requirements of their own reproduction, even to the means of their own labor, is the sale of their labor in exchange for a wage, capitalists can appropriate the workers’ surplus labor without direct coercion.”¹⁵

This specific dispossession of common land is the genesis of the capital-relation between a now propertyless worker and the capitalist. Appropriation of labor, the making of an individual's labor

¹⁴ Ellen Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (1999), “The Agrarian Origin of Capitalism,” pp.83

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.70

into a tool for external gain, can only commence if the individual has been dispossessed. The dispossession of land, which withholds the requirements for reproduction and the means of subsistence, drives one to assume a participatory role in the capital-relation.

In Chapter 26 of *Capital* (Volume One), Marx specifies what presupposes the capitalist relation. Marx calls this inaugural act of dispossession “primitive accumulation”, and it is the embryonic mechanism that precedes all eventual capitalist social relations. It is primitive in that it is not the result of existent capitalist modes of production, rather it is the point of their departure.¹⁶ The system of primitive accumulation is the expropriatory effort of brute force that divorces producers from the means of production. Expropriation is the taking away of land via enclosure and privatization. For Marx, this divorce is facilitated through “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force.”¹⁷ The act of divorcing immediate producers from the means of production works to create wage-laborers, who now only have their labor to sell as a marketable commodity. As Marx writes,

“...it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production.”¹⁸

This violent process aims to separate, through the expropriation of land and alienating individuals from the means of subsistence. Primitive accumulation functions to turn everything into commodities: “In themselves money and commodities are not more capital than the means

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867), “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation,” pp. 873

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 874

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 874-875

of production and subsistence are.”¹⁹ Which then can be bought and sold in the market. This separation between the laborer, the conditions of labor, and the fruits of their labor works to objectify and make everything a commodity. Where once labor was a part of a process which then in turn sustained life, after primitive accumulation, labor as well as its realizations become objects to be offered in an exchange. This creates a compulsive and imperative relationship to the market, as this is the only place in which sustainment of life can be sourced. Hence, the wage-laborer emerges in the market to sell his commodity to the appropriator of his labor. The wage-laborer can only come to be via divorce from common land and alienation from the means of subsistence—dispossession. Primitive accumulation is a system of dispossession. However, dispossession can work in ways that are primitive, meaning that it can work violently which anticipates the capital-relation, and it can work in non-violent ways to maintain the capital-relation. But primitive accumulation is the necessary means that take place in order for the capital-relation to form.

“In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch making that act as leveler for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant from the soil, is the basis of the whole process.”²⁰

Although Marx does not use the term dispossession when outlining primitive accumulation, it is this act of expropriation that is the mechanism of these various

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 874

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 876

dispossessions, which are the divorcing of the land, the alienation of the worker from subsistence and the fruits of their labor, and the commodification of his labor. The laborer is no longer a holistic entity who uses his work to sustain his life, but rather a fragmented subject whose labor, and eventual wage, becomes an abstracted accessory to an external gain. According to Marx, there is great importance in the fact that the wage-laborer is only bound in this compulsory relationship, because it is his only means to sustain his own reproduction. While accumulation vis-a-vis dispossession is what achieves growth on behalf of the capitalists, reproduction is what achieves growth on behalf of the proletariat. However, the special position of the proletariat is that his determination toward growth works to sustain his life, but more importantly the capitalist in his surplus value extraction.

The only way the capitalist can achieve growth in his profits is if there is the relationship between him and the exploitable laborer that he appropriates. It is in the necessity of this relationship where capitalism prevails as a social system of domination. An exploitable labor force is required for this relationship to take shape, and the following chapters will explore the nuances embedded within the labor force. When conceptions of primitive accumulation are expanded, we can see that it is the genesis of all capitalist conditions – conditions that go beyond proletarianization of a propertyless wage worker. Furthermore, this specific example of dispossession with regard to land only facilitates appropriated labor with respect to what is referred to as *surplus labor*, which is labor that exceeds the work required to reach subsistence and reproduction. In the capital-relation, surplus labor is the only labor that is being appropriated, and that appropriation is mediated by a wage. However, there are other capitalist social dynamics where appropriated surplus labor is not mediated by a wage. This characteristic of non-compensation is due to an augmented dispossession. Additionally, labor that is not

considered surplus labor but rather labor that is needed solely for subsistence and reproduction is also appropriated and not compensated. It is necessary, then, to look at how primitive accumulation endures in order to see how non-compensated surplus labor remains. Additionally, in the continuation of non-compensated labor we can see how forms of labor that are arguably 'non-surplus-labor' are in fact appropriated, as they constitute the requisite labor for any and all surplus labor to commence.²¹

The labor force can only be sustained if it is cultivated through reproduction, which does not simply refer to the necessity of the means of subsistence, but also to the reproduction of human beings. This should bring under significant consideration the role of reproducing bodies in achieving and maintaining the capital-relation, since people who possess the bodily ability to reproduce are the principal players in the creation of the exploitable labor class.

While in the context of Marx's primitive accumulation, dispossession works to make people compelled to participate in the capital-relation. In its temporality, primitive efforts of dispossession also work to make people subjugated who are altogether excluded from the capital-relation, which includes non-compensated labor and, within that, the essential labor of reproduction. In dispossession's temporality, we will see the breadth of dispossession's function which establishes conditions that exist outside of the capital-relation.

The tactics of dispossession employed to create non-compensated workers do not refer to the violent expropriation of the common land that is explained by primitive accumulation. Rather, illuminating what can be dispossessed can help to navigate how the expropriated worker emerges. Nancy Fraser highlights what she calls *expropriated labor* as opposed to *exploited*

²¹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), "The Origins of the Sexual Divisions of Labor," pp. 44-73

labor, defining expropriated labor as “the crucial role played in capital accumulation by unfree, dependent, and unwaged labor—by which I mean labor that is expropriated, as opposed to exploited, subject to domination unmediated by a wage contract.”²² Fraser expands the idea of what is understood as expropriation as not related specifically to land, explaining that expropriated labor is labor that is stolen, that is, not mediated by a wage. As a temporal mode, dispossession can help to understand how labor can come to be expropriated. There are highly specific procedures that are done in order for labor to be expropriated. These procedures are seen in various temporal strategies of dispossession. People can be expropriated only because they are dispossessed within this sociality, and not just of common land. It is temporally working modes of dispossession that occur in the economic infrastructure that structure class, and the superstructure that guides fabricated ideologies of racialized and gendered classes. People of these different distinctions can be pushed out of the capital-relation, and their labor made expropriated.

In accordance with primitive accumulation as outlined by Marx, expropriation refers to land. However, people come to be expropriated too, only when they are excluded from the capital-relation. Conditions that are excluded from the capital-relation include the classes of slaves and women. Identified qualities of these specific categories of race and gender are made out to be objective truths, categories have been linked to biology in order to make these falsified determinations objective. These fabricated ideologies are created in this dimensional social quality of capitalism, which work to differentiate in order to dispossesses agency, humanity, personhood, and proletarianization, allowing for labor to be expropriated. If one is not subject to proletarianization, one falls outside of the capital-relation. In this exclusion, this violent condition of

²² Nancy Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson,” *Critical Historical Studies* 3/1(2016) pp. 165

the expropriated worker must be justified. This is done by deeming these conditions as a logical result of fabricated objective truths about race and gender.

The following chapters will explore the temporal dynamics of primitive accumulation that function to create the highly specific expropriated condition of the Black enslaved woman. The Black woman who is enslaved comes to be expropriated like the land, because through these fabrications she becomes equatable to land, or to appendages of the land. In this equitability she can become reduced to an object that can be forcibly manipulated, appropriated, and 'improved' for exterior benefit. Where the wage-laborer is appropriated too, he receives compensation for his appropriation: the expropriated individual's appropriation is purportedly justified by making that non-compensated condition 'objective'. It is an objectivity that has been diligently framed and achieved through tactics dispossession. In the dispossessive effort of 'objectivity', one's condition can be equated to the truly objective condition of the land. Once made equivalent to the land via dispossession, one's labor can be expropriated like land is. In this equivalence to land there are varying nuances of dispossession that produce different levels of equivalence. This is exemplary of the intricacies of dispossession's function which bear different effects, according to specific social conditions of construction like race and gender.

If capitalism is understood as a non-objective system that is greatly reliant on various social dynamics that must be created and maintained, we must look at how the mechanism of primitive accumulation endures to create all needed social dynamics of capitalism. While primitive accumulation, which is defined by violent dispossession, is the system that establishes the capital-relation, there are temporal forms of non-violent dispossession that work to maintain that relation. Furthermore, there are temporal forms of the violent dispossession, primitive accumulation, that allow for social dynamics that are not included in the capital-relation. Social

dynamics that are not included in the capital-relation refer to expropriated laborers and expropriated 'non-surplus-laborers'. While the dynamic of expropriated labor remains in a relationship of extraction that is violent, the relationship is justified by making these dynamics out to be objective conditions of particular social classes. The social position of the Black slave operates within a dynamic of expropriated labor, and the Black female slave's labor is both expropriated and considered 'non-surplus-labor'. The next chapter will look at enduring modes of dispossession that work to create these social positions.

Chapter Two

In order to look at dispossession and its specificity with relation to people whose labor is expropriated—including the subject of this project, people who can carry babies—it is important to expand on what is understood as primitive accumulation. As Marx understands primitive accumulation, the expropriation and alienation of the producer is the basis of the whole

process.²³ However, Marx determined that once the compulsory relationship between the capitalist and the wage laborer has been established, the violent character of primitive accumulation ceases and is no longer necessary. This is because it is the first and foremost instance of accumulation. For Marx, “primitive” refers to the chronology, the instance in which this dynamic occurred, and it also is defined by its uncivilized violent quality. Marx sees violence as defining the difference between this initial accumulation and the eventual forms of capitalist accumulation that follow, and therefore distinguishes its place in the timeline.

As explained in the previous chapter, the physical violence that occurs during primitive accumulation is described as “brute force”, which establishes the dispossession of the worker and produces the wage-laborer. It is stated by Marx that “as soon as the capitalist production stands on its own two feet, it only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly exceeding scale.”²⁴ The separation being the dispossession, in this primitive instance, of common land and the means of subsistence. It is understood that once the worker has been violently expropriated and alienated through this dispossession, only then is the use of violence no longer necessary. In the separation a compulsory relationship to the market is created, and in the market the capital-relation transpires.

However, the use of the adjective “primitive” can be misleading in that it has various connotations. This accumulation is primitive because the accumulation it facilitates “is not the result of the capitalist mode of production”²⁵. The word can refer to its instance, to its specificity within the timeline, which signifies it to be the beginning of, or precursor to, capitalist accumulation. However, “primitive” also connotes a sort of uncivilized quality, a primordial

²³ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867), “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation,” pp. 876

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 874

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 873

barbarism that is defined by its violence. There is a lack of sophistication in this violence— in this case a lack of a developed and mediated capital-relation. In this twofold definition “primitive” is also equatable to the absence of a wage or non-compensated labor, seeing that in lack of mediation by a wage it is violence that coerces conditions that are not interiorized in the capital-relation. Both of these connotations are in effect when determining this initial instance of accumulation.

Even so, while it can be accepted that primitive accumulation does in fact exist in a moment before capitalism, the chronology must be modified to understand continual forms of violent dispossession that can be categorized as “uncivilized” in this sense of non-compensation. There is a liminal state in which this violent dispossession does not cease with the formation of the wage-laborer as Marx models. Rather, there is a continuation that breeds social conditions where labor remains uncompensated, even though it is still in support of the capitalist scheme of extraction and accumulation.

Many Marxist theorists have contested the chronological aspect in the use of the term “primitive.” The framework that determines that non-compensated labor extraction that is carried out through violence ends once the capital-relation is established has been substantially challenged. If the strict chronology from Marx were followed, apparent systems of capitalist extraction would not be accounted for as a part of the capitalist ploy. For example, for Marx, slavery is an institution that exists only as a precursor to capitalism, because a slave cannot be included in the capitalist-relation as he receives no wage. However, it is apparent that slavery existed in support of capitalism, as the dominant economic system of Britain and a developing system in the U.S, and was fundamental in sustaining these and other European economies. This is an instance that challenges Marx’s sequencing of primitive accumulation. His historical

chronicling of how capitalism develops with regard to primitive accumulation has been largely reimagined by Rosa Luxemburg. She is one of the prominent theorists that has laid the groundwork for critique of Marx's primitive accumulation. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, she explains that capitalism has a dual character and requires non-capitalist modes of extraction together with the capital-relation. Primitive accumulation continually works to support established capitalist modes of production, even when they have become the dominant mode in specific contexts.

Luxemburg describes capitalism's dual characteristic as relying on both the market that facilitates the capital-relation, and the extraction of forces of production through non-capitalist modes. She argues this with the example of capitalism's global intervention within non-capitalist formations and colonial policy:

“One concerns the commodity market [...] Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail, the keen dialectics of scientific analysis were required to reveal how the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people's property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation, and equality becomes class rule. The other aspect of accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist mode of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy [...] Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt of concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stream laws of the economic process.”²⁶

²⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1968) qtd. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (2009), “Accumulation by Dispossession,” pp.137

Luxemburg's conceptualization of this dual characteristic unveils that primitive accumulation—force, fraud, oppression, looting— is in fact ongoing. Although she focuses on the continuation of primitive accumulation in the instance of capitalism's intervention in international contexts, its continuation can also be applied in the context insular to the U.S. This context reinforces this dual quality, as primitive forms of labor extraction that sustain developed capitalist systems can exist both externally and internally from the developed system.

Slavery in the United States and its development is an example in which both external and internal function of primitive accumulation can be seen. Slavery in European colonies of the Americas, produced in support of European industry, is an example of primitive accumulation functioning externally outside of a capitalist system, even while still in support of it. As Luxemburg writes,

“The process of extricating labor-power from primitive social relations and absorbing it into the capitalist wage system is one of the indispensable historical foundations of capitalism. The British cotton industry, which was the first genuinely capitalist branch of production, would have been impossible not only without cotton from the southern states of the American Union, but also without the millions of Black Africans who were transported to America in order to provide labor-power for the plantations.”²⁷

Slavery in the Americas functioned as a system of primitive labor dynamics and primitive modes of extraction, one that took place externally from the capitalist system in Britain by sourcing free labor from the African continent. The establishment of the U.S. as an individual nation, and the rise of U.S. industry, is an instance that can help to frame a dynamic where slavery functioned as

²⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1968) qtd. Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (2018), “Racialized Accumulation by Dispossession in the Age of Finance Capitalism: Notes on the Debt Economy,” pp. 110

an internal accessory to capitalism. Slavery existed as a practice of primitive accumulation in support of the capitalist scheme in which it belonged, it existed in the southern region of the U.S. with accomplice to U.S. industry in the north. Thereby, industry was the place where surplus value was realized with reliance upon the commodity market and the capital-relation, and slavery was the violent non-capitalist mode of production toward accumulation.

In the dual character of the capitalist labor system, primitive accumulation is extended. It allows for forms of labor that would be understood as primitive and be employed in aid of the realization of surplus value, together with the capital labor relation. According to Luxemburg, capitalism needs “to dispose ever more fully over the whole globe in order to have available to it a qualitatively and quantitatively unrestricted range of means of production.”²⁸ This qualitatively and quantitatively unrestricted range is achieved in the expropriation of labor, which is obtained through imperial and colonial efforts, as well as in dynamics of a given capitalist system. The continuation of primitive accumulation structures different relations of production, and these different relations are the circumstances of possibility for capitalism.

It is this conviction that primitive accumulation persists to set up all needed labor dynamics that is beneficial to focus on here. Once it is accepted that primitive accumulation is in fact ongoing, with respect to the established idea that capitalism's systems and methods work as temporal elements, what does primitive accumulation become in its progression? Primitive accumulation's utility is exceptional in its temporality, and in this temporality primitive dispossession efforts do not solely work in physically violent ways, making its use malleable. This degree of plasticity allows for it to be appropriated toward considerably varied effects.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 108

David Harvey is a Marxist geographer who offers an expanded concept of primitive accumulation. His idea of “accumulation by dispossession” speaks to the malleability and applicability of primitive accumulation’s function. Building off the contribution made by Luxemburg, Harvey examines tactics of dispossession that have “shaped the historical geography of capitalism.”²⁹ Going beyond Luxemburg’s register that focuses on international imperial and colonial efforts of primitive extraction, Harvey focuses on capitalism's constant resourcefulness for self sustainment:

“The idea that some sort of ‘outside’ is necessary for the stabilization of capitalism therefore has relevance. But capitalism can either make use of some pre-existing outside (non-capitalist social formations or some sector within capitalism [...]) or it can actively manufacture it.”³⁰

The active manufacturing that he refers to indicates primitive accumulation’s actual *non-*primitivity in the chronological sense. This active manufacturing references the aspect of temporality— the ability for capitalism to change and modify its systems or tools for its own maintenance. Primitive accumulation has remained because efforts of primitive dispossession are needed for capital accumulation, a consequence of its dual character. Conversely, the dual character is why primitive accumulation persists, and in its continuation, adapts through time, lending to its malleable utility. This plasticity is why needed means of production can be actively manufactured, because of this generative malleability that is both a product of its temporality and nurtures its continuation. Harvey refers to this “inside-outside dialectic,” building off of

²⁹ David W. Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (2003), “Accumulation by Dispossession,” pp.142

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141

Luxemburg's concept of the dual character. Although, he shifts the focus to highlight capitalism's ingenuity in creating, not outsourcing, conditions for primitive accumulation.

So what can be determined as this active manufacturing of domains for primitive extraction? Harvey focuses on modern forms of dispossession with relation to neo-imperialism, neoliberalism, and the debt economy. However, his perception of capitalism's ingenuity through "accumulation by dispossession" can help to orient an understanding of primitive accumulation as varying temporal dynamics of dispossession and their range of function. The ingenuity refers to the measures taken in order to create domains that coerce labor extraction and justify methods of primitive labor extraction. These measures are carried out in the superstructure. Despite extraction of any kind being thought of as strictly physical, in the continuation of primitive accumulation its dispossessive efforts also materialize in the superstructure. In this there is a claim that dispossession can work without materializing as a physical intervention, but also as an internal intervention in the psychosocial domain.

There are various ideologies at work which help procure the needed social formations, both the capital-relation and non-capitalist relations (the latter being accordingly primitive). These ideologies can be included in the repertoire of temporally working dispossessive tactics that set up the relations of production, which is the desired aim of primitive accumulation. On this point Harvey argues,

"The process of proletarianization, for example, entails a mix of coercions and of appropriations of pre-capitalist skills, social relations, on the part of those being proletarianized. Kinship structures, familial and household arrangements, gender and authority relations (including those exercised through religion and its institutions) all have their part to play. In some instances the pre-existing structures have to be violently

repressed as inconsistent with labour under capitalism, but multiple accounts now exist to suggest that they are just as likely to be co-opted in an attempt to forge some consensual as opposed to coercive basis for working-class formation.”³¹

While Harvey focuses on the essentiality of dispossession tactics to maintain the capital-relation, which includes a combination of manipulations required for the process of proletarianization. There are also dispossessive manipulations that work in violent ways that justify primitive conditions of expropriation. Manipulations that function to coerce proletarianization and justify the violence of expropriation are both tactics of dispossession, and are carried out in the superstructure.

However, the manipulations that justify expropriation are much more violent. It is important to remember a characteristic that the monopoly of violence is also vitally contingent upon, which are the elements found in the superstructure. The ethos of capitalism's dual character is directed in the superstructure, through ideas, laws, states forms, religion, and culture, all of these elements rely on and confirm each other. Ideologies produced in the superstructure are both confirmed by ideas, politics, law, religion, culture, as well as direct them. In turn these work to coerce and justify the differing capitalist labor dynamics—the economic infrastructure.

There are many registers that could be regarded within the superstructure. Kinship structures, household arrangements, and gender relations are examples of particularized domains that have been appropriated to systematize the needed ethics for preserving hierarchical labor relations. It is not to say that the domains that are at play have been created in order to underpin capitalist dynamics, rather these pre-existing structures have been co-opted and appropriated to support those dynamics. They become tools which entail a mix of coercion and manipulation, which in turn create structures of hierarchy and divisions of being that become generic, accepted,

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 146

and conditioned. These domains are where sociocultural ideological narratives of the superstructure operate, and are active manufacturers of structured social conditions for a needed capitalist formation in the pursuit of accumulation. While there are ideologies that are employed to encourage and coerce proletarianization, others work in more violent ways to justify expropriated labor. Violent ideological narratives that work to justify expropriated labor include racial and patriarchal ideologies, which are implanted and ingrained in effect to open up spaces and conditions of being as domains of primitive extraction.³² In Luxemburg's view there is a necessary "outside" that must be extracted from to obtain expropriated labor. The psychosocial sphere becomes what Harvey would determine as an actively manufactured 'outside' that permits primitive extraction of labor.

However in the customary dual character of primitive accumulation, while the psychosocial sphere is made primitively extractable, being a manufactured 'outside', it is inside as it exists within the given dominant capitalist formation. In another sense it exists inside, or internal, in that the superstructure—the theater of ideas, state forms, laws, religions, and culture which direct ideologies, and are directed by ideologies—guide interiorized reflections of being and personhood. This internal realm is made an 'outside' sphere in which ideologies are prescribed that coerce and justify conditions of labor, both proletarianization and expropriated labor. For capitalism to persist it requires diligently created 'outsides' to have available the qualitatively and quantitatively unrestricted range of means of production. These 'outside' domains of extraction are in fact inside, or internal.

³² Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (1990) pp. 95-118

This perception reveals primitive accumulation as a system that is far more complex than Marx's assertion. Tactics of dispossession are not only physical interferences that take place externally, but interferences that take place internally augmenting the dual characteristic. In these temporal dynamics of dispossession, dispossession assumes its ephemeral quality. This ephemeral quality, its transitory function, is a major asset of dispossession only invigorating its temporality. In this temporality it is established that dispossession tactics are ongoing, and work in varying theaters to sustain the capital-relation. Further, in this temporality it is established that violent tactics of dispossession are ongoing, and work in varying theaters to justify primitive conditions of the relations of production.

However this alteration to primitive accumulations' constitution unveils that its objective is twofold as well. Jackie Wang, a scholar of the political economy of prisons, attributes varying achievements of primitive accumulation. She expands the idea of the dual characteristic to say that primitive accumulation opens two axes, one that homogenizes and one that differentiates. She refers to these two outcomes as the axis of exploitation and the axis of expropriation. The former is characterized by creating a homogenized wage-labor force embedded in the capital-relation, and the latter "relies on a logic of differentiation that reproduces racialized (as well as gendered) subjects."³³ While she extends this argument to understand derivative forms of dispossession—the seizure of assets being the destruction of credit—for the purposes of this essay it is important to highlight what she characterizes as the axis of expropriation. She explains that this axis operates on a basis of differentiation, which works to create racialized and gendered subjects who are typically expropriated. This differentiation takes place through violent

³³ Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (2018), "Racialized Accumulation by Dispossession in the Age of Finance Capitalism: Notes on the Debt Economy," pp. 101

dispossession. Violent dispossession that is realized as both physical tactics of dispossession, and ephemeral tactics of dispossession seen in the justification of expropriation.

To recall Marx's perception, primitive accumulation works to create the capital-relation between capitalist and wage-labor, or proletariat. However in consideration of the dual character of primitive accumulation, the output of its determination also bears a dual effect, albeit still born out of the same dual criterion. Harvey explains, "No matter how universal the process of proletarianization, the result is not the creation of a homogeneous proletariat."³⁴ Wang would describe this discrepancy as the exploitative effect of homogenization versus the expropriative effect of differentiation, where differentiation allows for labor to be extracted upon in a primitive sense, or expropriated. In effect, the aspiration of primitive accumulation is not only the establishment of the proletariat, but also the enduring primitive condition of a non-compensated laborer. This speaks to the dexterity of primitive accumulation, which in its process fabricates all the needed departures of the social formation, not just the capital-relation. Through dispossession the proletariat is created and maintained, subject in the capital-relation. Yet through dispossession, the expropriated worker is created and remains in the continuation of primitivity through a dispossession defined by violence. The dispossession that takes place to give birth to the expropriated worker is much more far reaching. It is more extensive because it is still primitive which allows for it to be blatantly violent. And it is the primitive, unorthodox, non-contractual, relationship of expropriation that allows for capitalism's unlimited inventiveness in creating means of extraction.

Given that capitalism relies on primitive forms of labor extraction that are obtained in its continuation of primitive accumulation, enslavement— non-compensated work—is also a

³⁴ David W. Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (2003), "Accumulation by Dispossession," pp. 147

necessary result of primitive accumulation that can coincide with proletarianization. If differentiation is what establishes the expropriated worker, therefore the worker that is violently robbed of their assets rather than contractually used for their assets must be creatively dispossessed to become differentiated. This dispossession that enables differentiation is seen in the continuation of primitive accumulation and its violence that is both physical and actively manufactured by the superstructure. The differentiation that enables the primitive condition of the expropriated worker has a self-fulfilling confirmation, in that differentiation is confirmed in the primitivity of the non-compensatory dynamic of robbery, as it takes place outside the capital-relation.

Strategies of dispossession employed to differentiate the expropriated laborer are seen in the construction of race and gender— racial and patriarchal ideologies. These operate similarly and exceptionally dissimilarly from each other, and subject to infinite nuances of distinction and paradoxically even more in their intersection. However, in this essay the strategies of dispossession that will be explored focuses on the specific intersection of race and gender within the specific context of slavery in the United States.

There is a dispossession which occurs within this specific substrate of the expropriated worker, which involves the reproducing body. In the particularly specific condition of the reproducing expropriated laborer, there can be seen a dispossession that not only creates, but is then tailored for, this specificity of differentiation. Which differs from the slave who does not possess reproductive capacities. The reproducing slave is subject to a dispossession that goes deeper, which highlights the unlimited extent of interferences that can be carried out in primitive conditions of non-compensation. The system of primitive accumulation in its plasticity bears equally malleable conditions of being, where the dispossessed individual can be homogenized or

differentiated for any purposes of extraction. The expropriated laborer is differentiated from that of the not as easily dispossessed individual, like the wage-laborer, to make the effort of primitive extraction more permissible. At the same time this specific extraction which requires unrestricted modes of dispossession, and produces an individual that can be spliced into varying status' or conditions for whatever outcome of extraction is needed. Hence this differentiation lends itself to fungibility. In the specific dispossession of the reproducing slave that facilitates a specific differentiation, the reproducing slave can become anything she is needed to be for the purposes of her total extraction.

The ability to be, in essence, anything required for extraction, production, and accumulation, is to be land. What is taken, produced, and appropriated from the land are the only and singular means of creating any commodity or any intervention of humanity, let alone capitalism. The dispossession of the slave with reproductive abilities is a specific example of temporal dynamics of primitive accumulation, as the specific dispossession of the reproducing slave is still outlined as such by the initial instance of primitive accumulation which occurred vis-a-vis the seizure of land.

“As in the case of labor supply, capitalism always requires a fund of assets outside of itself [...] If those assets, such as empty land or new raw material sources, do not lie in hand, then capitalism must somehow produce them.”³⁵

As it has been determined, there is needed sourcing of means for extraction. If outside land which holds new raw material sources (and a potential extractable labor force) is not available, there then requires a reproduction of this elemental contributor. Therefore the condition of plasticity that the reproducing slave assumes, in her differentiation by way of various

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.143

dispossessions, creates various domains for extraction which then become the possessors of the means of production which are not limited to her labor, but her reproduction of workers. The slave who withholds reproductive capacities, effectively becomes naturalized, becomes equatable to the earth or the land.

In capitalism's dual character it needs primitive labor dynamics, which requires primitive accumulation to persist. Embedded in that need for primitive forms of labor extraction to continue, capitalism must source realms in which it can extract from in a primitive way. While those realms are sourced, they are also manufactured via violence and violent social constructions that are internalized to justify primitive labor relations. In its continuation, primitive accumulation becomes a system that is highly complex and works in various ways to maintain the needed primitive social dynamics. Consequently, the constructions of primitive accumulation are as follows: proletariat, enslaved worker, and naturalized worker. Where the slave and the naturalized slave are expropriated workers that remain in the continuation of primitive accumulation. All three conditions have severely different limitations and ranges in engendering and substantiating these conditions. The next chapter works to show the specific dispossession that operates to create the Black slave with reproductive capacities. The enslaved Black female body is an example of the lengths to how primitive accumulation can function in the aim of extraction. Her primitive dispossession allows for the inside of her body to be made an 'outside' domain of extraction. This condition of the enslaved Black female is highly particular and it is her primitive dispossession is what establishes this particularity. Her dispossession entails an intense mix of coercions which function on various levels to differentiate her.

Chapter Three

So far, we have understood capitalism as a system of social domination which requires a conditional range of relations of production, and seen primitive accumulation as the system of dispossession that establishes and maintains the conditional relations of production. Our next step is to examine a crucial aspect of property, where private property is the entity where these differentiated social dynamics are carried out through. To recall and simplify Marx's conception, primitive accumulation is the establishment of privatized property via enclosure—the dispossession of common land—which enables proletarianization. So in what way does private property enable the other two outcomes of primitive accumulation? We can see the nuances of capitalism's conditionality, within the established tripartite of the laboring class—the proletariat, the enslaved worker, and the naturalized worker, and their respective differentiation through dispossession of 'property'. Each descending condition requires an additionally specific dispossession that allows for progressively more unrestricted extraction. This chapter will focus on the dispossession that creates the naturalized slave who possess reproductive capacities.

To consider the state of the naturalized slave, we must acknowledge that her condition does come out of the state of the slave in the collective sense of both sexes. And to understand this collective condition of the slave, we must understand how conceptions of property facilitates their utility. An influential justification for private property was originally outlined by John Locke. He determined that there is proper use for the land, which is for man's convenience, benefit, and support. However that convenience can only be attained if the land is improved, via

man's labor. The logic is, in order to have "the best advantage of Life, and convenience"³⁶ one must use one's labor to appropriate nature, or the land, for its desired usage. In doing so the appropriated land, or nature, becomes rightfully one's own. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke explains how property came to be through labor, explaining, "Yet even men has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his."³⁷ Because bodies and hands, and the mechanisms they can perform, belong to a subject they are property. We can understand this quality of property that these extremities hold as having some sort of contagious effect. This essence of property that is held in the body and hands—the tools of one's labor—can be extrapolated onto other things when they, as an extension of the subject, manipulate externalities. "Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*."³⁸ When one works the land, in the state nature has provided it, and removes it from that state by manipulating it through labor of one's properties—body and hands—only then does it become the rightful property of the one who labored it.

However this idea that "men has a *Property* in his own *Person*"³⁹ is undoubtedly ironic, as the slave does not have ownership of the corporeal tools of his body. And because of this he does not have rightful ownership over that which he has labored. To this Locke says,

³⁶ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (1689) "Of Property," pp. 288

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

“That ‘tis the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state of Nature leaves it in, which *begins the Property*; without which the Common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the Commoners. Thus the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; and there I have digg’d in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, becomes my *Property*.”⁴⁰

Locke explains that what has been taken out of its natural state and appropriated enables ownership, and what can be taken includes other people and animals regardless of their consent. Although Locke references servants, this can be applied to slaves as well. The work of the slave’s body and his hands does not reason his ownership, only that of his master’s, because in his dispossession he becomes property. This dispossession is the seizure of the slave’s property—his body. As Day describes,

“If we extend the frame of primitive accumulation to the question of slavery, it is the dispossession of the slave’s body rather than the proletarianization of labor that both precedes and exceeds the frame of settler colonial and global modernity.”⁴¹

It is the slave’s body that is dispossessed which enables the dynamic of enslavement, rather than the dispossession of common resources through privatization that enables the social process of making the wage-laborer. In dispossessing the body itself, the enslaved person has no initial “property of his own person.”⁴² Which renders a presumed objectivity, and the enslaved body

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 289

⁴¹ Iyko Day, “Beginnings or Nothingness,” *Critical Ethnic Studies Vol. 1, No. 2*, University Press of Minnesota (2015) pp.114

⁴² John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (1689), “Of Property,” pp. 288

can become a mere device or tool. This objectivity imposes similarly false perceptions of animality. As Marx says,

“The slaves stands in absolutely no relation to the objective conditions of his labor; it is rather *labor* itself, in the form of the slave, as of the serf, which is placed in the category of *inorganic condition* of production alongside the other natural beings, e.g. cattle, or regarded as an appendage of the earth.”⁴³

The inorganic conditions of the slave's production implies production that is not of his direction or intention. It is inorganic to him because the direction of his production is of the external direction and intention of his master. The slave becomes an objective tool, like the cow or horse as appendages of the earth, creating his presumed impartiality or even association with the conditions of his labor. The animal who presumably does not work with an intention of improving the land, or manipulating it for benefit, carries out its activity devoid of thought and reflection. Uncritical instinct is what directs the animal, and in this uncritical frame of being there can be no claims to property of its corporeal utilities. Furthermore, in this lack of critical faculties the labor the animal performs is never of thoughtful or reflective intention, so it does not render the fruits of that labor his. The animal operates rather mechanically, and in that the animal's labor can be intentionally redirected and purposefully used making the animal and its labor property of those who directed it. If the animal stands in no objective relation to its body due to its uncritical frame of being, it has no objective relation to its labor.

When the slave is dispossessed of his human body, he can be circumscribed into the same presumed uncritical frame of being of that of an animal's body. This frames him as having no

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie* (1953) qtd. Angela Davis, “Reflection on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves”, *The Massachusetts Review* (1972) pp.84

objective relation to his body and in effect his labor. It is not the slave who is an active and intentional laborer; rather he is a passive entity that labor is conducted through. This aspect of debasing the slave to that of “an appendage of the earth”⁴⁴ is a paramount form of subjugation. Framing the slave’s being to that of an extension of the earth, is a tactic used to frame the slave as being in a perpetual state of unreflective instinct in which that instinct can be prescribed by his master making him a mere tool. This prescription is made possible by the violence of its primitive holding. The prescription of the slave as an appendage of the earth is the dispossessive work of contextual ideologies of race that were at work in the superstructure. This tactic of dispossession, together with physical violence, is what worked to dispossess the slave of his body and his corporeal tools.

The slave's subjugation is important, as its primitivity permits the violent extraction of labor that has no parameters, which we know is needed in shaping the historical geography of capitalism and its perpetuity. But how can the utility of the slave remain unending in its range? This range is made ceaseless in the specified dispossession of the descended stratum of the naturalized slave who withholds reproductive capacities. The enslaved Black female is subject to a complex combination of both forms of her dispossession, as a slave and as a possessor of reproductive capacities. The first relates to the dispossession of her body, that both she and her male counterparts experience. In enslavement they are both alienated from their bodily capacities through physical violence. Their hands and arms become severed from their whole, and used like tools of the master to cultivate the land. In her essay, “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood”, Angela Davis makes the claim that under slavery, labor requirements were considered and expected to be fulfilled equally between the sexes. Davis explains that because

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

male and female slaves alike were expected to fulfill the same type and intensity of labor on the plantation, there was no sexual division of labor.

“For most girls and women, as for most boys and men, it was hard labor in the fields from sunup to sundown. Where work was concerned, strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed consideration of sex. In this sense the oppression of women was identical to the oppression of men.”⁴⁵

The requirements of their bodily capacities for laboring, their hands and arms, were held to the same expectation. Even in the instance of pregnancy and taking care of infant children, Black female slaves were expected to labor on with the same endurance and quality as their male counterparts.⁴⁶ But despite this shared expectation and exploitation of labor, Black female slaves endured a further dispossession. “The demands of exploitation caused slave owners to cast aside their orthodox sexist attitudes except for the purposes of repression.”⁴⁷ Her dispossession was not limited to her body’s external utilities, but her internal utilities as well. “If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated as well as raped.”⁴⁸ It is not that reproductive capacities inform gender and gendered value placed on the enslaved Black female body: it is the extraction of her sexual and reproductive capacities that differentiated her from her male counterparts. Her bodily capacities for childbearing, her possession of this invaluable trait, required a subjugation that was much more intimate and in that intimacy required her dispossession to be much more extensive. The

⁴⁵ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood,” pp.6

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.7

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

enslaved Black female body itself became another domain for primitive extraction, not only of her external labor capacities but of her internal capability. Where both her and her male counterpart's dispossession through subjugation occurred through an external force, it was only in the Black female slave's experience that she too is subjected and dispossessed by a force that was physical on an internal level. However, this internal expropriation goes unrecognized in historical accounts of slavery because of the naturalization of the internal female labor capacities.

While both the male and the female slave are subject to a primitive violence that is both physical and ideological, the nuances of difference in the female slave's dispossession, in both ways, has gone unnoticed by some in the literature. Shatema Threadcraft determines that this is because historical accounts of slavery have typically only focused on practices of subjugation, as well as resistance, that are facilitated through what she refers to as "male-coded-violence"⁴⁹. In her terminology, violence that is coded as male refers to physical force that is inflicted externally. Davis backs this claim highlighting that in historical analyses of life under slavery, "the special situation of the female slave [has] remained unpenetrated."⁵⁰ This is because of the larger obfuscation of biological logic that aims to debase female reproductive capacities. This is the logic of *naturalization*: to be naturalized is to become the land and therefore the means of subsistence.

The demand for the internal reproductive labor capacities to be so adamantly dispossessed is because people are what make up the classes of exploitable laborers and

⁴⁹ Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (2016), "What Free Could Possibly Mean': The Intimate Sphere in Enslaved Women's Visions of Freedom," pp. 34-68

⁵⁰ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," pp.3

expropriated workers. The reproduction of human beings is the basis of the capitalist system. As Maria Mies says,

“general production of life, or subsistence production – mainly performed through the non-wage labour of women and other non-wage labourers as slaves, contract workers and peasants in the colonies – constitutes the perennial basis upon which ‘capitalist productive labour’ can be built up and exploited.”⁵¹

Mies lays down a foundational idea of crucial importance about the sexual division of labor, she outlines the historization of the female labor capacity as ‘natural’. The framing of reproduction, and what follows in child rearing, as a natural process. Because of its ‘natural’ inevitability, it is seen to not directly contribute to productivity, when in reality it is the perennial basis of all labor and labor relations.

Mies focuses on the historical framing of female laboring capacities as unproductive, which renders them ‘natural’. Her account will only be further complicated when applied to slavery. Mies complicates what Marx and Engels understand as productive labor, and highlights that these thinkers have contributed to the falsified biological determinism towards women, in that they define female labor and the procreation of life as not contributing to productivity.

“The instruments of this [productive] labor, or the bodily means of production implicitly referred to in this concept, are the hands and the head, but never the womb of the breasts [...] the human body itself is divided into truly ‘human’ parts (head and hand), and ‘natural’ or purely ‘animal’ parts (genitalia, womb, etc.)”⁵²

⁵¹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), “The Origins of the Sexual Divisions of Labor,” pp. 48

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.46

Backing up the Lockian logic, the historicized 'male' laboring capacities—head, hands, arms, shoulders are human because they are used like tools with the aim of production. The Black male slave's laboring capacities of head, hands, arms, and shoulders are still human, only seized from their rightful body to be externally utilized as a tool for manipulation of the land. In conventional historical accounts of slavery the specificity of reproductive labor of the enslaved Black women is barely even conceptualized, because this specified labor is subject to this naturalization of reproductive capacities. The work of the womb, vagina, and breasts are unacknowledged because they are withheld within nature, not understood as a productive human tool but as nature to be manipulated.

Marx and Engels understand productive labor as labor that leads to the production of surplus value, for the realization of capital. Mies contests this in what she calls the human object-relation to nature, which is geared toward productivity. Unlike animals and other non-human natural beings, in civilization and in its perpetuation capitalism, the objective is a productive one. Therefore the labor of childbearing and rearing, which requires the womb, vagina, and breast, is productive and in fact is the initial production that needs to take place for all surplus value to be achieved. She says that the female object-relationship to nature is not only the initial productive relationship to nature but more productive, because women can use their whole bodies as productive tools. Through breastfeeding and reproductive knowledge they use nature, both their own biology and external resources, "to let grow [the natural resources] and make grow [from their own biology]."⁵³ Mies goes on to explain that reproductive work historically had been mediated. Women had learned the chronobiological rhythms of their bodies and remedial qualities of natural resources in order to control and appropriate their own reproducing labor

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56

capacities. However, that knowledge was intentionally destroyed for the purpose of appropriating that control.⁵⁴ Mies explains that men, on the other hand, had to come into the understanding that the phallus had a necessary role in reproduction, as this understanding was not always visible:

“They [men] cannot *experience* their own bodies as being productive in the same way as women can. Male bodily productivity cannot *appear* as such without the mediation of external means, of *tools*, whereas woman’s productivity can. Men’s contribution to the production of new life, though necessary at all times, could become *visible* only after a long historical process of men’s actions on external nature by means of tools, and their reflection on this process.”⁵⁵

Male productivity only takes place through external means, where female productivity can take place internally as well as externally. Mies explains that it was only until men had realized their relationship to nature in the limitation of their external means, that they could realize their external role in reproduction. In this chronology of logic, the historical perceptions of the phallus were analogous to “the tool, the plough, the ‘thing’ with which man works upon woman. [...] This symbolism also implies that women have become ‘external nature’ for men.”⁵⁶

If the perceptions of what man’s tools are can be expanded to not only that of the hands, arms, shoulders, and head but also the penis, we can understand Locke’s logic of property with another dimension.

⁵⁴ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), “The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women: Constructing ‘Difference’ in the ‘Transition to Capitalism,’” pp. 61-115.

⁵⁵ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), “The Origins of the Sexual Divisions of Labor,” pp. 56

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57

“The Labour of this Body, and the Work of his Hands we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided, and left in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it is property.”⁵⁷

In this frame of mind the logic of Locke very quickly becomes a sexual innuendo – we can read “penis” for “Hands.” If the use of man’s strictly external productive bodily tools determine his property, and if his tools include his penis, anything he mixes the labor of his penis with becomes his.

If men only operate productively in relationship to nature through external means vis-a-vis extremities of the arms, hands, shoulders, head, and the penis, the logic of extending that relationship through the productive extremities of an external being, the slave’s, makes sense. In this frame the enslaved Black male is closer to ‘human’ or ‘productive’; he is only deemed an appendage of the earth so that productivity can be looted. But man cannot conceptualize an object-relationship to nature that could be internally productive, and this is why the productivity of reproductive capacities has been dispossessed.

The naturalization of female labor functions of reproduction absolves her of any productivity, and has been used to debase the role of the female. Consequently her debased status is a ‘natural’ effect of her nominally ‘natural’, ‘unproductive’, capacities. This obfuscation of biological logic is the historicized ideology that dispossesses the female of her role in productivity, which in turn allows for her recurrent dispossession of her childbearing capacities. This not only allows her to be extracted from, but is also what dismisses her dispossession and extraction altogether, because her reproductive capacities and their labor are not even understood

⁵⁷ John Locke, *The Second Treatise* (1689), “Of Property,” pp. 288

as productive. In her deemed non-productivity she becomes naturalized and thought of like the land, allowing for her to be robbed of her sacred possession— her ability to produce life. Her ability to produce life becomes the ability of the penis which has worked her. In the case of the enslaved Black female, it is either the penis of her master or the penis of another slave who is a tool of the master. In her enslavement she becomes a reification of the land, which allows her to be worked upon, labored, cultivated, and made into property of he who worked her. Her naturalization functions as a coercive tactic of her perpetual primitive accumulation.

However, under slavery reproduction was understood as productive and not understood as having this natural inevitability, and therefore a supplementary incident of the people in its subjugation. According to Threadcraft,

“The planters considered the reproductive capacities of the enslaved woman’s body in particular as an important part of what they were purchasing and selling in any transaction involving female slaves, and therefore the reproductive capacities of the enslaved female body were an express part of their speculative investment in that body.”⁵⁸

Reproduction was very much realized for its importance and appropriated for maintaining the enslaved class. “Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholders’ economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women as workers.”⁵⁹ This is why the Black female slave’s vested labor was so adamantly extracted from. She was internally dispossessed literally though her rape, yet another event of primitive accumulation. Her internal domain was

⁵⁸ Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (2016), “‘What Free Could Possibly Mean’: The Intimate Sphere in Enslaved Women’s Visions of Freedom,” pp. 39

⁵⁹ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood,” pp.7

forcibly entered, looted, extracted, and as a result the child, an extension of herself, was extracted upon and exploited.

However, the realization of her productivity in slavery does cease her naturalization, the logic of naturalization is only expanded and complicated by the condition of the Black female slave. For the Black female slave, her naturalization is not limited to the naturalization of her reproductive capacities, of the womb, vagina, and breasts, but the female slave becomes like that of the land in her totality. If the land is the only and singular means of creating any and all interventions of humanity, to be the land is to be anything needed for producing anything at all. She becomes the earth, she becomes the land, she becomes appendages of the earth, she becomes the means of subsistence. She is literally the means of subsistence in that she physically nourishes the child from her breast, and through this produces the enslaved class, whose fruits nourishes industry which nourishes people and civilization. In this reification, she can be anything she is needed to be. This speaks to the Black female slave's fungibility. To be naturalized in this expanded sense lends itself to fungibility, as she can be manipulated and then appropriated into anything she is required to be. She can be 'male', possessing the determined productive human laboring capacities of hands, arms, shoulders, and be required to use them to the same level and degree of productivity. And she can be female, 'natural' or 'unproductive', and then appropriated for benefit like the earth. The Black male slave is only a tool, but the Black female slave is both tool and land, her vagina and womb are both tools of the master's used for producing more commodities that will produce commodities. But they are also the land, the earth, used for cultivation, production, benefit, and improvement. In this fungibility she can be anything and everything which is needed to produce.

The enslaved Black female is an example of the range of primitive accumulation's function to create an extractable laborer. She is differentiated through various means to permit her violent extraction. She is subjected by both the racialized logic that aims to debase Black slaves and subjected to the physical violence that this logic permits. However, she is also subjected to a violent internal subjugation that opens her body up as a domain of extraction which has been concealed in the ideology that works to naturalize female labor capacities. While her reproductive labor is understood as productive, she must then further be differentiated to be dispossessed, and equated to the land. This functions not only to deem her reproductive capacities as unproductive but dispossess her of her reproductive labor capacity. In the logic of labor and property, if she is the land, it is her master who reproduces life through appropriating her through the act of rape. It is through this that she is dispossessed not just of control over her reproductive capacities, but of her ability to reproduce. Dispossession in its temporality functions in various ways only to recreate its initial and crucial instance of privatizing the land, the Black female slave in her total dispossession becomes the land, and is expropriated from herself and privatized.

However, in the Black female slave's specific dispossession assumes an essential role as she holds anything that is needed for production. This essentiality there is potential for resistance.

Conclusion

There are multiple points of inquiry that this project has led me to think about, which relate to the understood positionalities of the enslaved Black woman in her relationship within the capitalist formation. This understanding of the Black enslaved female can be seen as an example of the Black radical tradition. The Black radical tradition is a concept discussed by Cedric Robinson in his book *Black Marxism* that unveils erased histories of the enduring humanity of people under slavery. He highlights acts of fierce resistance and subversive lived realities that fought back against the contextual societal frameworks.

There is criticism of *Black Marxism*, claiming that it is not a feminist text. For example, H.L.T Quan is a political theorist who has challenged that critique to say that gender can be located in Robinson's mapping of the Black radical tradition as it offers a method and vocabulary that works to reform memory and retell pasts which can be used to retell female histories.⁶⁰ She says,

“Political theory is most powerful not when it dictates to us so-called timeless principles, but when it reforms our understanding of our past and our future. Its task, after all, is less

⁶⁰ H. L. T. Quan, “Geniuses of Resistance: Feminist Consciousness and the Black Radical Tradition,” *Race & Class* 47/2 (2005) pp. 39-53

about reforming our morals and more about our memories. Indeed, in the act of altering our memories and recasting our understanding of our own past and future, political theory can reform our morals.”⁶¹

Quan explains that it provides a method of reexamination that contributes to feminist lineages of resistance and subversion. My project can be seen in a way as an attempt to reform understandings of the operability of capitalist devices of extraction and accumulation, in order to understand how they create so-called timeless principles of memory and understanding about the social formation and the varying groups it creates. I pay special attention to the operability of these so-called timeless principles that work to imagine the Black enslaved woman. Quan explains that, “*Black Marxism* is a threat to the status quo.”⁶² and I see the Black enslaved woman as one of various threats to the status quo.

In the enslaved Black woman’s challenging of the debasement of reproductive capacities, there is a potential for something. Her understood productivity does not render her powerful, only valuable, and her understood productivity only requires a greater subjugation that is her “intimate bondage.”⁶³ The only way her master can appropriate her ability to produce life, is through the threat of death— which is posed in the violence of rape and enslavement, as well as in her equation to the land which becomes his property. In her bondage she is wholly used which naturalizes her in totality: she becomes a reification of the land itself. This reification lends to her fungibility— to be equatable to anything needed for production. However, in this fungibility there is the potential for two things. The first being that in this highly specific condition of the

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 42

⁶² Ibid., pp. 44

⁶³ Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (2016), “‘What Free Could Possibly Mean’: The Intimate Sphere in Enslaved Women’s Visions of Freedom,” pp. 38

female slave, there is a challenge to perceptions of gender and hierarchical gender relations. This in turn has the potential to challenge hierarchical relations of labor, and capitalist labor dynamics. The second being, in her fungibility there is an essentiality which holds potential for agency and in that agency, resistance.

Before I explore how the Black enslaved female is a threat to the status quo in that she challenges gender norms and has a potential to threaten the whole structure in her essentially, I must acknowledge why her threat to the ideological degradation of reproductive capacities is not wholly resistant to the capitalist scheme.

While the Black female slave challenges the obscurification of biological logic that aims to debase reproductive capacities as unproductive, that objection ceases in manumission. Where the whole of the slave social grouping's productivity is robbed in their status as appendages of the earth, this can be undone in manumission. However, the understanding of her child laboring capacities as productive functions do not come out of enslavement with the Black female. In manumission they assume a perception of 'natural' or 'unproductive' in the capitalist frame of mind. Regardless of her emancipation her reproductive abilities remain enslaved, as her reproductive labor receives no compensation and she is robbed and extracted upon perpetually.

Even if that illumination of reproductive capacities was realized outside of enslavement, this would not render her powerful either. If outside of slavery female reproductive capacities were understood as productive and valuable, like that of the external and 'male' bodily capacities, this would not work to empower her. Even though this would distinguish her labor capacities as productive and elevate her standing in the capitalist framework, it only would work to level her as an esteemed proletariat. If historicized ideological narratives had been employed

to incentivise and coerce her breeding to impose the proletarianization of reproductive capacities, this would still rely on dispossession.

Even so, if the reproductive capacities of all women were understood in that they necessitate all surplus labor production, theoretically this would greatly uplift women's societal role under capitalism as they would be of utmost value as a laborer. It is hard to remove the potential understanding of reproduction as a marketable tool from that of breeding, similar to domesticated animals. All things considered, capitalism goes to extreme lengths to sustain exploitable laborers. Furthermore, it is known there are still many systemic modes of exploiting wage laborers. Additionally, it is known that there is no comparison between the Black lived realities and white lived realities under capitalism. The Black woman is dispossessed to far greater, veiled, and calculated lengths under capitalism than that of the white woman. If the female reproductive capacity was understood as marketable, this too would become subject to all the devastating and depraved systematic forms of racial exploitation.

Although the incentive of earning wages in the capitalist state is fierce, women still have other means of selling their labor that are separate from reproductive labor. It would be difficult to coerce reproduction, as marketable labor, without direct violence. And physical violence is not an active tool of proletarianization, as the proletariat's dispossession is not primitive. This is why the potential for esteemed proletarianization has not occurred, and enslavement and debasement of reproductive bodily capacities persists. The female slave's reproductive capacities become naturalized in manumission to render them not productive, insufficient within capitalism, and strictly adhered to as natural.

Even if she did assume the role of esteemed proletariat in manumission, this circumscription into a productive entity does not enable freedom or empowerment. As Audre

Lorde famously wrote, “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house.”⁶⁴ She would still be an exploited worker, only now embedded in the capital-relation and not in the dynamic of enslavement. The potential realization of her productivity would not challenge the capitalist structure, only reframe her.

However, in the enslaved Black woman’s challenging of the debasement of reproductive capacities, there is a potential for something. In her understood productivity which naturalizes her in totality, she becomes a reification of the land itself. This reification makes her fungible—equatable to anything needed for production. In this fungibility there are two sources of potential. The first being that, in her fungibility, she pushes the limits of gender and hierarchical gender relations, which has potential to challenge hierarchical relations of labor, and capitalist labor dynamics. The second potentiality that is seen in her fungibility is her essentiality.

Black women who were enslaved challenged the bounds of gender. As we have learned, under slavery the male and female labor requirements were considered and expected to be fulfilled equally. Angela Davis substantiates this in two of her essays which provide historical accounts of the lived realities within the private lives of slaves, “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood” and “Reflection on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves”, Davis explains that because male and female slaves alike were expected to fulfill the same type and intensity of labor on the plantation, this rendered them genderless, as there was no division of labor in this sense. “Since women, no less than men, were viewed as profitable labor-units, they might as well have been genderless as far as the slaveholders were concerned.”⁶⁵ Davis explains that in the developing nineteenth century ideology of femininity,

⁶⁴ Audre Lorde, *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s* (2018) qtd. H. L. T. Quan, “Geniuses of Resistance: Feminist Consciousness and the Black Radical Tradition,” *Race & Class* 47/2 (2005) pp. 49

⁶⁵ Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981), “The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood,” pp.5

the woman as a laboring unit was not understood, making the Black female in subjugation more or less of an anomaly.

This regard of being genderless, or rather a combination of both nominally male characteristics and nominally female characteristics, imposed by the planter class was extended in the personal communities of slaves in plantation life. As there was no sexual division of labor in the fields and in the expectation of productivity, there was no sexual division of labor in households of slaves. Davis writes,

“The salient theme emerging from domestic life in the slave quarters is one of sexual equality. The labor that slaves performed for their own sake and not for the aggrandizement of their masters was carried out on terms of equality. Within the confines of their family and community life, therefore, Black people managed to accomplish a magnificent feat. They transformed the negative quality which emanated from the equal oppression they suffered as slaves into a positive equality: the egalitarianism characterizing their social relations.”⁶⁶

Davis explains that this equality not only leveled male and female counterparts, but brought about a sanctity of domestic life in the slave communities, in that the role of domestic work was elevated. “There was no compensation for work in the fields, it served no useful purpose for the slaves. Domestic labor was the only meaningful labor for the slave community.”⁶⁷ In perceptions of womanhood that were tied to white women, domestic work was considered inferior. Mies expands this idea:

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.17

“Women's household and childcare work are seen as an extension of their physiology, of the fact that ‘nature’ has provided them with a uterus. All the labor that goes into the reproduction of life, including the labor of giving birth to a child, is not seen as the conscious interaction of a human being *with* nature.”⁶⁸

However, within slavery domestic work is released from this “myth of femininity.”⁶⁹ Further, ‘feminine’ labor became the only labor of any value within the slave community. A white idea and experience of domesticity debased the female, and provided her labor as unproductive and a product of a natural order. Black domesticity in slave communities, on the other hand, prevailed as the only labor that was of any value and meaningful purpose. Black domesticity and white domesticity were completely opposite in their understandings. One affirmed female inferiority, and the other affirmed the importance and value of nominally feminine labor roles. Domesticity was the only means of producing their own social lives, and homemaking was highly valued because it was one of the few domains in which agency and humanity could endure.

Although this only took place within the limited conditions of slavery, this context of the personal lives of slaves provided an ironic release from imposed gendered ideologies. In this objection of gender there is no division of labor, and in no division of labor no registers of work can be made inferior. While there still remained difference in the experience of enslavement between men and woman, this difference being rape which in some ways could be seen as an attempt to assert this passivity and inferiority that was tied to white womanhood. Within the dynamics of shared labor she challenged this assertion of inferiority.

⁶⁸ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), “The Origins of the Sexual Divisions of Labor”, pp.45

⁶⁹ Angela Davis, “Reflection on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves”, *The Massachusetts Review*. (1972) pp.87

In her 'genderless' state of both nominally male characteristics and nominally female characteristics, this duality possesses all requirements for labor. In this dual character of her labor, her nominally female characteristic was not understood as inferior, both in her personal life, as well as in the eyes of the master. In her reproductive ability to produce life she possesses all the requirements for production. She becomes reified as the land, as she has everything that is needed for making anything at all. In this there is an essentiality: the Black female slave is essential for not only production of the inhuman, but in the production of the human. She produces all things that are needed for production and growth— her dual-labor power and the commodity that is the fruits of her labors, which is both products and people. She is essential to the capitalist scheme, and in this essentiality there is potential for great resistance and subversion.

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